



# Sign Language Framework Response

Northern Ireland  
BSL/ISL Framework



**DEAF ASSOCIATION  
NORTHERN IRELAND**

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This paper responds to the Department Of Communities Sign Language Framework

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# Part I: Sign Language Framework

## 1a Do you agree with the need for a Sign Language Framework that includes proposals for an Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language bill?

### AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below:

The British Deaf Association Northern Ireland (BDA NI) strongly agrees with the need for an ISL/BSL Bill; this position is based on a number of issues. The organisation believes that this bill would directly result in:

- Deaf people becoming enabled to participate as equals in an inclusive economy
- Deaf culture and heritage becoming promoted and safeguarded
- Protection of the UK's threatened sign language
- Sign Language would experience a revival within both sign language community and the wider community
- Social exclusion experienced by Deaf people and their families being addressed as a higher priority.

The BDA NI also believes that current legislation – the Disability Discrimination Act and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998– are limited in their scope for change. Today's legislation still allows for discrimination against sign language users and as an organisation we are frequently faced with the same day to day discrimination faced by Deaf people, in every aspect of their lives.

## 1b Do you agree with the proposed objectives in the Sign Language Framework?

### AGREE x9 items

Please provide any comments you may have below:

1. As Sign Language becomes recognised as an official language in its' own right, on par with spoken languages, Deaf people will gain more respect, recognition and inclusion.
2. It is important that plans are developed with input from the Deaf community and the department should include Deaf representation.
3. As Deaf people have greater access to services, become more empowered and more confident to take up roles and activities in wider society, the need for registered qualified interpreters and translators will increase. This will also increase public service providers'

awareness and as they begin to offer access via signed websites with translations or having interpreters present at meetings, the demand for language and communication professionals will also increase.

4. These will play a crucial role in the social wellbeing of Deaf people, giving them a base, from which they can develop skills for life in the broader community. A Deaf hub, gathering all Deaf organisations under one roof, will allow for better services to Deaf people; with easy signposting and support when necessary, The 'hub' would provide similar services as Deaf Village Ireland; employment opportunities, support structures etc, which has had significant positive impact to many Deaf lives.
5. Many studies have shown that Deaf people are still disadvantaged through poor access to important information such as health or financial matters. For an inclusive society, Deaf people need to be able to access these services directly and with no cost implications to themselves. Lack of access to information is best described as information poverty, affecting every aspect of a Deaf person's life including education, civic rights and health. Media broadcasts often lack sign language interpreters at major national events, including those of strategic importance such as; general elections, major political announcements or adverse weather reporting. The Department for Communities' plan to include a signed version of the 'Welfare Reforms' on their website, is a prime example of what needs to be widely available across all types of services and public information.
6. There is no doubt that access to 'communication' is vital for any child but there are too many Deaf children who are left without adequate communication skills from an early age. When a hearing child shows delays in acquiring speech, social services are quickly involved, the matter investigated and remedial actions put in place such as speech therapy. Currently, Deaf children often fall behind on their development due to the lack of communication skills; 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents who do not have the knowledge or skills to communicate effectively with their child. Any parents and the wider family circle of newly diagnosed Deaf babies should have an automatic right to access sign classes without any cost to themselves. The demand for and success of the BDA NI's ("Family Signing in the Home") pilot project has only further evidenced the need for this service. Giving Deaf babies/children the opportunity for easy communication will open the world up to them, give them a means by which they can learn, grow and develop to become as healthy and balanced as their hearing peers.
7. Respect for Deaf people's choice of communication method is vital; If a Deaf person finds sign language to be the most easily accessible, comfortable and appropriate method, that Deaf person should have the right to access all of their educational experiences through that medium. The medical model is still too prevalent; rather than being accepted as being Deaf, children are pushed through the oral route. This model suppresses a child's natural language (Sign Language) and imposes many laborious hours of speech therapy, which has been shown to have a negative impact on schooling, all with the aim of getting a square peg to fit in a round hole. If a child is deaf, this should be acknowledged, accepted and the most appropriate communication method sought rather than trying to force them to function as

## Part 2: Official Status of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language

hearing person. If the most appropriate method is sign language, there must be provision at all levels of the child's education. Statistics show that deaf children are still leaving school with a much poorer reading age than their hearing peers and are much more likely to be out of work. Because of inadequate support and access, Deaf children are unable to access higher education and leave school with very few qualifications or none at all. This trend can be countermanded; if children are given the support they need from an early age and have access to quality education through sign language, things will improve.

The transitions that Deaf young people go through; moving from primary to secondary, from secondary to further education or from education to employment, are often ignored and can cause significant issues in later life; additional support is often required through those times. The BDA have evidenced this first hand through their 'Deaf Roots and Pride' Project and identified a significant gap in services which, they believe, should become statutory provision.

8. Much progress has been made for the Deaf community and this in a large part is due to the research and development from Deaf studies units around the country e.g. the official recognition that BSL/ISL is a language in its own right, with its own syntax and grammatical structure. However there is still a long way to go before Deaf people experience full equality with their hearing counterparts. Having access to a cache of expertise, knowledge, research, innovation and teaching of BSL/ISL will undoubtedly have a significant and positive impact on the community at large and the Deaf community in particular. Enabling our local universities to access the appropriate EU funding streams will have a direct impact on everyday access for Deaf people, to their local communities, by providing increased supply. The current situation is such, even when service providers want to create access, they are limited by the lack of appropriately trained and qualified teachers or interpreters; having adequate supply will only be facilitated by a strategic approach developed in partnership with the relevant academic institutions. Underpinning the development of these services requires ongoing, sustained research at an academic level, this is currently lacking in NI.
9. Deaf people are still playing 'catch-up' to wider society due to the historical discrimination and disadvantages that they have experienced. Deaf sign language users face widespread linguistic exclusion that has resulted in underperformance in education (Powers 2003), inadequate access to health care (NDCS 2014, Sign Health forthcoming) and underemployment (Kyle and Woll 1988, Swinbourne 2011); Precisely the factors that have led to the "sunken prospects (Largarde, 2014) of NI's Deaf community. If the Deaf community are to become fully fledged and contributing members of wider society, it is vital that they have the opportunity to fill the gaps in their personal and social development.

- 2 **It is proposed that Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language be recognised and defined as Official Languages in the north in such a way as to guarantee services through Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language on a par with those available through English.**

**Do you agree with this proposal?**

### **AGREE**

Comments:

The BDA NI welcomed the official recognition in March 2004 of BSL/ISL as minority languages by the then Secretary of State, Paul Murphy MP as a step forward; however, this did not go far enough as it offered no legal status. BSL/ISL was also not included in the UK government's list of six indigenous languages offered protected status in 2002 (Welsh, Scots, Ulster Scots, Scottish, Irish Gaelic and Cornish). Gaelic has since received the Gaelic Language Act in 2005 which requires a national Gaelic plan, national strategy for Gaelic education, television channel etc and which has benefited from grant-in-aid budgets. The Welsh Language Act (1993) has also put Welsh on an equal basis with English in public life yet there has been no other progression or inclusion of BSL/ ISL.

Many services, e.g. Emergency Departments, have minority (spoken) language information available for immigrant communities yet have no inclusion of the indigenous Deaf Community; a situation that is unjust, unfair and does not offer equality for Sign Language users. One key change that could have a far reaching impact on the status of sign language is for schools to offer BSL or ISL as one of their language subjects. Students could have taster opportunities to learn sign language with the option of GCSE & A Levels in Sign Language, this would also have a significant impact on the cost and time involved in becoming a fully qualified interpreter or teacher of the Deaf; students could gain up to level 3 before they leave school and attend university for further training.

These situations, BDA NI believes, could be addressed with the right legislation behind Sign Language, leading to improved services on an equal level with those available in English.

# Part 3: Minister with special responsibility for Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language

It is proposed that the Minister with responsibility for the promotion of the indigenous languages of the north; being the Minister for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, shall be assigned special responsibility in relation to the oversight, and exercise, of the functions under this legislation.

**3a** Do you agree that there should be a Minister assigned with special responsibility for Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language?

## AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below:

The BDA NI would welcome a Minister with special responsibility for BSL/ISL as this would ensure that the issues affecting Deaf people would remain high on the department's agenda and be more widely spread throughout all government departments, with due responsibility placed on each department to meet set standards. However, we also would advocate that this person would have input directly from Deaf people, having Deaf representatives on any steering groups or advisory panels.

**3b** Do you agree that the Minister with special responsibility for Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language should be the Minister with responsibility for Culture?

## AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below.

Too often society and service providers' perception of Deafness aligns with the medical model; the belief that deafness is a disability is widespread. It is important that it is recognised that Deaf people do not consider themselves disabled but members of a linguistic and cultural minority. For this reason, it would seem highly appropriate that the minister with responsibility for these minority languages should be the culture minister.

The term 'Deaf culture' can be defined as a 'way of life' and summarises the centrality of sign language, shared histories, beliefs and social practices. Padden and Humphries state:

*[Deaf Culture] offers the possibility of making Deaf people whole.... It allows them to think of themselves not as unfinished hearing people but as cultural and linguistic beings in a collective world with one another (ibid 2005;161).*

Deaf culture is recognised under article 30, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states that "Persons with disability shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including Sign Language and Deaf Culture."

# Part 4: Functions of Executive Ministers in relations to Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language

**It is proposed that the functions of Executive Ministers in relations to ISL and BSL will include the requirement:**

- **To set down principles to guide the operations of public bodies; making provision for the preparation, publication and implementation of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language Plans.**
- **To promote, facilitate the promotion of, and protect the use and understanding of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language in the exercise of their functions.**

**4a Do you agree with the inclusion of provisions for Executive Ministers to prepare, publish and implement Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language Plans for their departments?**

**AGREE**

Please provide any comments you may have below:

Agree yes, but BDA NI would add the same stipulation as at question 3a – that it is imperative the minister involves Deaf people in the planning, development and implementation of services and the decision making process.

It is also important they engage in an effective dialogue with the BDA; the democratically elected organisation representing culturally Deaf people and the Sign Language Community. This will give them the opportunity to reframe and re-think ways to include Deaf people, the sign language communities and determining policies that affect them, including an ISL/BSL national plan for public government services. BDA NI would like to see the Executive Ministers and wider government ensure that Deaf people are given full citizenship through legalisation that protects their cultural, social and political choices.

**4b Do you agree with the inclusion of provisions for Executive Ministers to promote and protect the use and understanding of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language Plans for their departments?**

**AGREE**

Please provide any comments you may have below:

As the lead Deaf organisation representing the Sign Language community, BDA NI would be very keen to see the use and understanding of Sign Language become a higher priority for the executive ministers. Our work through the BSL/ISL Charter has shown that there is still a distinct lack of understanding of its value among service providers and wider hearing society. The Charter seeks to overcome the disadvantages that Deaf people using sign language face by having public services sign up to five pledges:

- 1.** Ensure access for Deaf people to information and services
- 2.** Promote learning and high quality teaching of British & Irish Sign Language
- 3.** Support Deaf children and families
- 4.** Ensure staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively in Sign Language
- 5.** Consult with the local Deaf community on a regular basis

Again, BDA NI would be keen to ensure that Deaf people are able to feed into the plans and decisions made on their behalf and that ministers take advisement from Deaf people.

## Part 5: To provide for free classes for parents, siblings and grandparents of deaf children

5 It is proposed to provide a scheme to ensure free Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language classes to:

- Parents, siblings, grandparents of a child who is deaf, and
- Other people who serve in loco parentis or as a guardian to a child who is deaf.

Do you agree with this proposal?

**AGREE**

Please provide any comments you may have below.

The BDA NI believes this is one of the most fundamental principles that will have a very direct and positive impact on the lives of Deaf children. Language proficiency leading to good communication skills is vital if they are to function effectively in society and it is widely accepted that the years from birth to the age of five are critical in developing linguistics skills for life.

Although Deaf children of Deaf parents account for only 10% of the deaf child population, studies have shown they perform consistently better than deaf children of hearing parents and suffer fewer incidences of mental health issues. Much of this is attributed to the Deaf child having full access to a rich and fluent language environment with Deaf parents providing rich, natural conversational interaction and communication!

The importance of early language acquisition cannot be underestimated; language (and therefore communication) is the key tool used by individuals to manage their lives, hence an early start to meaningful and accessible communication is vital for all Deaf children.

However, BDA NI believe there are other sections of society that also need to be considered in this way including 'Children of a Deaf Adult' (CODA's); the provision of classes needs to be flexible to encompass these groups. There can be circumstances where the child is in a vulnerable situation such as having one hearing parent and one Deaf parent who are separated; if the child lives with the hearing parent then they will grow up using English and not sign language. In this case, how will communication happen with the other parent? It would be crucial that the hearing child had access to sign language classes in order to be able to develop and maintain their relationship with their Deaf parent.

## Part 6: To provide for free classes for deafened individuals and their immediate family members

6 It is proposed to establish a scheme for the provision of free Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language classes to:

- Children, parents, siblings, grandparents of an individual who becomes deafened, and
- Other people who serve in loco parentis or as a guardian to an individual who becomes deafened.

Do you agree with this proposal?

**AGREE**

Please provide any comments you may have below.

The BDA NI would support this provision as for those individuals it becomes a language of need.

# Part 7: Use of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language in legal proceedings

**7** It is proposed that in legal proceedings an Irish Sign Language and/or British Sign Language interpretation service be provided for Deaf people, where ISL or BSL is their primary or preferred language of use, at no inconvenience or additional expense to the individual.

**Do you agree with this proposal?**

## **AGREE**

Please provide any comments you may have below.

Deaf people should have the same access to the justice system as the wider hearing society. Through the BDA NI's advocacy service, issues surrounding access have repeatedly been raised with a particular emphasis on solicitors. The fact that they operate within the private sector means that they regularly charge clients for interpreter costs unless the Deaf person can qualify under Legal Aid, unlike the court system - which being in the public domain - do provide interpreters. Other factors are detrimental to access, including interpreters without specific legal training and a misunderstanding, of the court service, the remit and role of the interpreter. This results in an unfair financial burden to a Deaf person that a hearing person would not normally have to incur, for a large number of everyday situations such as; making a will, signing deeds of a house, child welfare incidents etc.

As a result of findings and feedback from the BDA NI's Access & Inclusion team, the BDA NI recently undertook a consultation process looking at 'Access to Justice in Northern Ireland' indicating that this was an area of concern for Deaf Sign Language Users. The consultation process focused on four main areas:

- Accessing solicitors and barristers
- The use of BSL/ISL Sign Language Interpreters in Legal Settings
- Access issues faced by Deaf people in court and prison
- Deaf people's experiences of accessing and using the legal system

The results indicated a strong need for Deaf people to have full access, from start to finish, of the legal process; this includes, having interpreted explanations of the processes and working of the justice system, interpreters at all meetings and access to translations of all legal documents and letters received etc.

A report has been compiled from the finding of the consultation and a full copy of this is available upon request. In summary, it found that barriers still exist today for Sign Language users in accessing areas of the justice system and case studies evidenced this:

*A solicitor failed to cover interpreter costs to enable a Deaf person to access their professional service during consultations. The client's right to accessible information is denied. Consultations continue without interpretations and this results in the Solicitor misunderstanding the client's instructions and is instrumental in leading to a family custody case.*

*A Deaf Sign Language user is removed from court after sentencing to be detained. While the Court Service makes provision for interpreters during the hearing there is no such provision made for the person's communication needs once they are taken from the court room. This is felt to be a denial of the person's right to understand procedural information.*



## Part 8: Provision of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language interpreting

- 8** It is proposed that Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language interpreters be provided, where necessary, in accessing public services at no inconvenience or additional expense to the Deaf individual.

Do you agree with this proposal?

### AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below.

It was expected that the onus on public services to provide interpreters would have been felt through the mechanism of the Disability Discrimination Act; however, BDA NI have had many reports from Deaf people, unhappy with a service who try to make a 'reasonable adjustment' that does not include sign language interpreters. Other options such as speech to text do not suit Deaf people as it still relies too heavily on English (their second or even third language). There is also many examples of a conflict with the Data Protection Act which often proves to be a stumbling block e.g. banks will not speak to a Deaf person via an interpreter because of the rules of the Data Protection Act. The Deaf person either has to write a letter naming another person allowed to make phone calls on their behalf, or go the bank themselves. This situation is commonplace across many organisations, mobile phone companies and the Inland Revenue etc. This needs to be resolved through statutory regulation and recognition of the interpreting profession. BDA NI would welcome legislation that makes it compulsory for all service providers to provide BSL/ISL interpreters, if requested by the service user, in the way that minority languages e.g. Polish are now regularly provided. This may include the use of Video Relay Services in the future as this method of interpreting is becoming increasingly popular.

## Part 9: Regulation of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language interpreters and teachers

- 9a** It is proposed that legislation may provide for the regulation of Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language interpreters in the north.

Do you agree with this proposal?

### AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below.

It is vital that Deaf people have access to fully trained, qualified, registered interpreters that can provide a quality service to the Deaf community. BDA NI fully believes it is vitally important for the interpreters to be regulated and monitored to ensure that standards are met; however, BDA NI cannot comment on the effectiveness of the existing provision and whether or not there is a need, under new legislation, for a new system here locally rather than the national one currently used.

- 9b** It is proposed that legislation may require registered Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language interpreters and teachers to demonstrate and maintain professional competence.

Do you agree with this proposal?

### AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below.

As with any profession, it is crucial that interpreters or tutors are fully trained and qualified to carry out their role and that they also maintain their standard of work. Currently Sign Language Interpreters have to work towards their CPD (Continuous Professional Development) on an annual basis and this overseen by their professional organisation. As above, BDA NI cannot comment on the effectiveness of the current mechanism and whether this should be included in new legislation; the BDA NI can categorically state the need for a mechanism or system to be put in place for the current tutors, who often work on a freelance basis with no support structure.

# Part 10: Education

- 10** It is proposed that there will be provision for the continuing educational requirements of deaf children and young people through Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language and to provide for related matters.

## Do you agree with this proposal?

### AGREE

Please provide any comments you may have below.

Many schools cannot offer full inclusion nor adequate access to teaching and learning. There needs to be a total reconstruction of Deaf education through a national plan which puts access to Deaf teachers, BSL/ISL education and positive Deaf role models at its' core.

While it is promoted that parents have the choice when it comes to language and communication methods, in practice, it is not possible for parents to choose BSL as medium for education. Almost all Deaf children are disadvantaged by being denied access to native BSL but Deaf schools have been repeatedly closed down and replaced with mainstream provision. 'Reasonable Adjustment' is currently a weak and inadequate response to a genuine requirement for equal access to teaching and learning. Pupils and students often do not know how to invoke their rights or how to complain, they are not getting the support they need to access mainstream education nor to cope with the encompassing isolation of being in an inaccessible school environment.

BDA NI are aware that 75% of deaf children in Northern Ireland are now educated within a mainstream education setting where there is no specialist provision (CRIDE 2015). CRIDE 2015 also reports that less than 5 children (represented as 0%) use sign language within school, whereas 20 children (2%) use Spoken English together with signed support ie not British or Irish Sign Language. Deaf children typically report that their Teachers of the Deaf and speech & language therapists focus on improving their aural and oral skills, rather than actual education, which means they have failed to provide these deaf children with a fair and balanced opportunity to receive their education, in a meaningful way, to ensure full understanding. The fact that; at primary level, over half of D/deaf children (51%) are still failing to achieve the expected level for reading, writing and mathematics (NDCS, 2013) and that there is a large gap between D/deaf children achieving 5 or more GCSEs (43%) and other children (70%) (NDCS 2013) is valid evidence that these deaf children are not achieving their full potential. Current education provision in Northern Ireland tends to be directed by a policy which focuses on an oral/aural approach to language acquisition for deaf children; as such, the professionals within this field have been reluctant to incorporate sign language, unlike educational establishments elsewhere within the UK.

BDA NI, in partnership with the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), hosted an 'Early Years Intervention for Deaf Children in Northern Ireland' in 2014; in an effort to receive funding for this vital conference BDA NI arranged for a local parent of a deaf child to meet with the then Minister of Health, Edwin Poots. The parent told Minister Poots:

"Everybody we came up against told us not to sign with him and of course we listened to the 'professionals'. It was only when he reached 6 or 7 that we began to sign with him as we had no decent method of communication. It was awful because we could all tell he was an intelligent child and he wasn't being given access to information."

Although it is generally accepted that deaf children of Deaf parents account for only 10% of the deaf child population, studies have shown that these children perform consistently better than deaf children with hearing parents.

BDA NI believe that deaf children should be placed in an environment where they have access to both spoken and signed languages from as early an age as possible, including nursery schools, as this will promote the opportunity for a deaf child to acquire a strong language base and grow up bilingual.

There are a few studies that show the learning achievements of students in specific bilingual contexts and, as such, provide useful programme valuation information and some evidence of attainment against national benchmarks. Lange et al. (2013) and Nover et al. (2002) are both examples of longitudinal studies of cohorts of pupils in bilingual schools for the deaf in the US. Lange et al. (2013) demonstrate that after 4 years 'immersion' in a bilingual programme 66% achieve average or above average scores in maths and reading, comparable to the nationally normed group of deaf and hearing children. Nover et al. (2002) also found reading comprehension levels above the reported norms for deaf children after at least 3 years in the programme.

Within the UNRCPD, Clause 3 of Article 24 specifically refers to sign languages and the Deaf community. It requires States to facilitate:

***"(b) ...the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;" and, ensure***

***"(c)... that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development." (UN 2007:17)***

The fact that this right is neither recognised nor achieved has been highlighted by Sir Malcolm Bruce MP when he raised the issue of education for deaf children in the House of Commons. This followed an investigation that found a third of local authorities in England had cut services for D/deaf children since 2010 (NDCS 2012). O'Brien (2013) and Knights (2010) outline the negative psychological consequences of the current situation for D/deaf children and young people, who are isolated in oral mainstream schools. Deaf people consistently report teachers

not knowing how to teach D/deaf pupils, missing most of what is going on around them in the classroom, being unable to take part in conversations during school breaks and general neglect by teachers.

Article 24, clause 4 requires States to: “take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education”, but there are currently very few Deaf teachers employed within the UK.

In the case of teaching staff, currently Teachers of the Deaf (ToD) must achieve a minimum basic Level 1 qualification in BSL. This level of qualification only enables a person to communicate with a Deaf person at a very basic level and is entirely unsuitable to use when a child's education is at stake. Teachers unable to communicate fluently with Deaf children/young people should not be working with them. It should be compulsory that ALL teachers will need to achieve a higher required level of sign language and communication before being able to work with Deaf children and young people; after all, a French teacher would not be allowed to teach without first being fluent in French.

BDA NI believes that within mainstream settings teachers should be appropriately qualified, if not, the use of qualified (Level 6 NVQ) interpreters and/or a Deaf role model should be employed to foster the natural acquisition of sign language and Deaf culture. There should also be support for parents throughout the whole educational process including access to sign language classes and unbiased information regarding educational outcomes of D/deaf children.

In Further and Higher education, interpreters are usually provided when requested but it is essential that the appropriate level of interpreter support is provided. Deaf students attending courses to further their educational achievements need to receive information through an interpreter that has received a similar, if not higher, level of education as this ensures full understanding and exchange of meaningful, relevant information.

BDA NI hopes that a BSL/ISL Act will ensure relevant changes to the education system which puts access to Deaf teachers, BSL/ISL education and positive Deaf role models at the core. It is imperative that parents are given full information on choices available to them in order to make informed decisions about their child's education. Deaf children should be able to access their whole educational life via the means that suits them best, giving them the best opportunities for development and success. Only then can the under achievement of Deaf people be addressed and overcome.

# The British Deaf Association – BDA

## The BDA stands for **Deaf Equality, Access and Freedom of choice**

### **Vision**

Our vision is Deaf people fully participating and contributing as equal and valued citizens in wider society.

### **Mission**

Our Mission is to ensure a world in which the language, culture, community, diversity and heritage of Deaf people in the UK is respected and fully protected, ensuring that Deaf people can participate and contribute as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. This will be achieved through:

- Improving the quality of life by empowering Deaf individuals and groups;
- Enhancing freedom, equality and diversity;
- Protecting and promoting BSL.

### **Values**

The BDA is a Deaf people's organisation representing a diverse, vibrant and ever-changing community of Deaf people. Our activities, promotions, and partnerships with other organisations aim to empower our community towards full participation and contribution as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. We also aim to act as guardians of BSL.

- 1. Protecting our Deaf culture and Identity** – we value Deaf peoples' sense of Deaf culture and identity derived from belonging to a cultural and linguistic group, sharing similar beliefs and experiences with a sense of belonging.
- 2. Asserting our linguistic rights** – we value the use of BSL as a human right. As such, BSL must be preserved, protected and promoted because we also value the right of Deaf people to use their first or preferred language.
- 3. Fostering our community** – we value Deaf people with diverse perspectives, experiences and abilities. We are committed to equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination with a special focus on those affecting Deaf people and their language.
- 4. Achieving equality in legal, civil and human rights** – we value universal human rights such as the right to receive education and access to information in sign language, and freedom from political restrictions on our opportunities to become full citizens.
- 5. Developing our alliance** – we value those who support us and are our allies because they share our vision and mission, and support our BSL community.



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