



FPH Response to the Northern Ireland Sign Language Bill

This response is submitted on behalf of the UK [Faculty of Public Health \(FPH\)](#), as developed by the [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee](#). The FPH, as part of the medical Royal College arrangements, is the standard-setting body for public health in the UK and professional home for over 5,000 members of the public health workforce. We advocate on key public health issues and have a strong mandate and responsibility to ensure that the essential functions, standards and resources of a robust public health system are maintained. Our role is to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and national populations. We do this by supporting the training and development of the public health workforce and improving public health policy and practice in partnership with local and national governments in the UK and globally.

The Faculty of Public Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee welcomes and supports the Sign Language Bill introduced to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

This Bill presents a clear opportunity to further the equity of treatment and experiences of BSL and ISL users, which would support wider actions to address societal disparities in support in accessing key services and experiences, such as education and healthcare.

We would encourage the Committee to consider the following in its report to the Assembly:

The Bill makes note of the challenge in accurately estimating the number of BSL and ISL language users. We would support the inclusion of these language options as options in the future for census purposes, as well as encouraging consideration of these language options to be recorded systematically in BSL and ISL users' healthcare records. This would support the purpose of the Bill in ensuring those who use BSL and ISL are systematically identified and their language needs considered.

Aligning with clause 5 of the Bill there may be a need for specific action plans for implementation across a range of social and employment settings, including education and healthcare settings (for both staff and service users). It may be helpful for this to include examples of what factors may be at play in the decision making around what is considered a reasonable step for a prescribed organisation to take, and timelines for organisations to demonstrate their alignment with the legislation resulting from this Bill.

Clause 10 supports the accreditation of teachers and interpreters of BSL and ISL. We are supportive of this specific clause as it presents an opportunity to ensure that BSL and ISL users are less vulnerable to significant variation in the degree and quality of language support they have access to. We would encourage the assembly to consider inclusion of what level of qualification may be required to support BSL and ISL users in specific settings, such as healthcare and education settings, due to the specific language, safeguarding considerations and clear need for accurate communication to avoid detrimental impacts on the BSL or ISL user.