

Correspondence

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The Deaf community and Irish sign language

Dear Editor,

The Deaf community and Irish sign language (ISL) users celebrated in December 2017 when the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 was signed into law by our President Michael D. Higgins. On the 20th of July 2016 the Irish Sign Language Act 2016 was initiated. It has been making its journey through the Oireachtas since. This Act will make a huge difference to the lives of Deaf people in Ireland. It states that ISL will be recognised by the state which may surprise some that this was not already the case. It recognises the right of a Deaf person to use ISL and places a duty on public bodies to provide free interpretation by a verified competent ISL interpreter. It states that public bodies must do 'all that is reasonable' to ensure that ISL is available on request to Deaf people when they are accessing public services. This will have an impact on our hospitals and clinics. Working as a trainee psychiatrist previously in Emergency Departments, I have been unable to assess Deaf patients when they present in crisis. This was due to the lack of access to an interpreter (no funding or not available). This Act will ensure that the funding is available and hopefully encourage more to be ISL trained interpreters.

The Act also requires Richard Bruton, the Minister for Education and Skills to provide ISL classes to family members of Deaf children. It ensures that there will be sufficient higher education placements offering training in ISL to teachers of children who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Furthermore the Act gives Deaf people the right to use ISL in legal proceedings. This will allow Deaf citizens the use of ISL in any pleading in court and to have an interpretation in ISL. An important section of the Act is support for access to events, services and activities for users of ISL. The Act recognises that Deaf citizens are disadvantaged when accessing personal, social and cultural services. Support will be given so Deaf people enjoy the same cultural activities as other Irish citizens.

As public service providers, we have a duty to be aware of the ISL Act 2017. This is a leap when it comes to service provision for Deaf people; however there is still a way to go before Deaf citizen's experience the same rights as their hearing counterparts.

'An Act to provide for the recognition of Irish Sign Language, its use in legal proceedings and the provision of interpretation into Irish Sign Language by public bodies and to provide for related matters.'
(Irish Sign Language Act, 24th December, 2017;
T. B. O'Sullivan)

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare that there no conflicts of interest.

Reference

Irish Sign Language Act 2017, Number 40 of 2017.

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