‘Pretty Words on a Page’:

Disappointment in Sign Language Laws in Ireland, Finland and the UK

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Abstract

Sign language laws, or laws which in some way provide recognition to signed languages have been an *en vogue* trend in recent years across the world. Such laws have come into force in many countries, including Finland, Ireland and in the UK. Often such laws are met with great fanfare about how they will improve the lives of Deaf people living under the new laws. There are often celebrations among the Deaf community, who may have spent years advocating and lobbying for such laws. However, it is important to investigate to what extent these laws, after their passing, have indeed impacted the lives of the Deaf people whom they purport to serve. The research presented in this paper investigated how Deaf people in Finland, Ireland and the UK felt about their respective sign language laws, and how those laws impacted Deaf people. Through interviews in each jurisdiction, the paper shows disappointment from the Deaf communities ranging from initial optimism about the law turning to disappointment, the lack of rights flowing from the law, and the tokenism in the laws, in that they were merely ‘pretty words on a page’.

Keywords: deaf, deaf studies, sign language, minority languages

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a visible push towards recognising signed languages (SLs) in law. This often comes as the culmination of efforts by deaf activists and advocacy groups who strive for equality for deaf people. Many of these laws are the result of hard-fought, hard-won campaigns over decades by deaf communities and deaf activists. The passing of these laws is often initially a joyous event in deaf communities, where there is excitement at the potential for new rights and entitlements for deaf people to make their lives and participation in society easier. It is also true that the passing of these laws is often the result of persistent compromise and efforts to water down rights by legislatures until the law is a shadow of the initial Bill proposed.

This paper explores how deaf people in Ireland, the UK and Finland feel about the laws which have passed to recognise sign languages and how the laws have impacted – or failed to impact – their lives. From this data we can garner an understanding of what might be expected from deaf communities when legislating for sign language recognition and how to better meet the needs and wants of deaf people through law in the future.

In this data, the overwhelming experience was that people were disappointed with how the laws had materialised and that the laws had failed to make meaningful changes in their day-to-day lives. The main reasons for their disappointment have been detailed in this paper and can be summarised as follows: initial optimism after the passing of the law turns to disappointment when reality sets in; the lack of rights flowing from the law; the laws are merely symbolic tokens, rather than realisable and enforceable norms to protect SL users.

In Finland, SL was recognised under the Constitution of Finland in 1995. Twenty years later the Sign Language Act 2015 was passed which specifically recognised Finland Sign Language ('*suomalainen viittomakieli*' SVK) and Finland Swedish Sign Language ('*finlandssvenskt teckenspråk'* FSTS). In Ireland, after years of advocacy, the Irish Sign Language Act (ISL Act) was passed in 2017, where Irish Sign Language (ISL) was recognised in law. In the UK, British Sign Language (BSL) has been legislated for under the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act passed in 2015 (BSL Scotland Act). In 2022, the Westminster Parliament passed the British Sign Language Act (BSL Act).[1]

This paper presents some of the data findings ascertained through interviews with members of deaf communities in Ireland, Finland and the UK. Interviewees were questioned about their experiences with SL laws in their jurisdictions. Again, it was clear that there was an overall disappointment amongst participants regarding the laws recognising SL in their

[1] Note that many of the interviews in this paper were conducted during the time when the Bill was becoming law, or soon thereafter. It is also notable, that the BSL Act recognises BSL in England, Scotland and Wales, but not in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, two SLs are used, BSL and ISL. As of the time of writing, no law has yet been passed in Northern Ireland which recognises BSL or ISL.

jurisdictions. There was disappointment that the law had not matched expectations from deaf communities, that there was confusion in deaf communities but also in public bodies about the law, and that the law was weak. The disappointment was present across all three countries. Firstly, it is important to understand what laws are in place in each territory, the process of passing these laws, and what they purport to provide for deaf communities.

Finland

Sign language was first recognised in Finland in law under the constitution in 1995. Section 17, which relates to the right to language and culture recognised Finnish and Swedish as national languages and goes on to acknowledge a right of Sami and Roma people to "maintain and develop their own language and culture". The provision also states that "The rights of persons using sign language and of persons in need of interpretation or translation aid owing to disability shall be guaranteed by an Act." There are a number of issues to note here. Firstly, while it is commendable that the right to use SL has been included in the section on language and culture, the right of SL usage has an inherent connection to disability (Katsui et al. 2021). While this is not necessarily a negative, the provision relating to SL usage lacks the same acknowledgement of culture that is present in the provision on Sámi, Roma, Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking communities (Takkinen et al. 2015; De Meulder 2017).

In this same vein, the guarantee of interpretation and translation is linked to "need", "owing to a disability." This link means that whether a person is granted interpretation or translation depends on whether they have been found to have a disability, and whether that disability is severe enough that they need interpretation and translation (Katsui et al. 2021). It is conceivable then, that through this wording, individuals would be deemed 'not deaf enough' to warrant interpretation, or that they do not need an interpreter or translator. This is

notable, because for the other language communities mentioned, there is no qualification of need, or assessment of whether or not they are sufficient members of the linguistic and cultural community in order to use the language and avail of services in that language.

A dedicated piece of legislation relating to SL passed through the Finnish Parliament 20 years after the initial inclusion of SL in the constitution. The Sign Language Act 2015 [*Viittomakielilaki 359/2015* in Finnish and *Teckenspråkslag 359/2015* in Swedish] states that "[t]he objective of this Act is to promote the linguistic rights of sign language users" wherein "sign language user means a person whose own language is sign language" and wherein "sign language means Finnish and Finnish-Swedish sign language". The acknowledgement of both SVK and FSTS is an improvement on the generic reference to SL found in the Constitution and there is the explicit positioning of SL-users having linguistic rights. However the Act does not grant additional rights to deaf people and only makes reference to other laws already in existence. While Finland remains one of the only countries to have both constitutional and legislative provisions for SL, the laws do not give rise to meaningful rights for deaf people.

Ireland

ISL was recognised in legislation in Ireland in 2017 after many years of advocacy from deaf communities and the Irish Deaf Society (IDS). An initial attempt was made to legislate for ISL recognition in 2013, brought forward by Senator Mark Daly. That Bill was defeated, but it is worth considering the content of the Bill and the legislative discourse surrounding the Bill. The Bill itself included an itemised breakdown of interpreter hours available to deaf people in Section 7, and the establishment of an Irish Sign Language Council in Part 5. Ultimately, the Bill was defeated.

After the initial failure of the 2013 Bill, the ISL Act came into being after thirty years of activism from deaf communities (Conama 2019). Irish deaf communities collaborated again with Senator Mark Daly in the first major moves to introduce an ISL Act. Conama notes that "Senator Daly engaged a legislative draftsman to draw up the Bill, in consultation with [Irish Deaf Society] representatives" (2019).

The ISL Act recognises ISL, provides for the use of ISL in legal proceedings, provides for the establishment of supports for the education of deaf children, places certain obligations on public bodies to provide for ISL usage, and requires that the Act be reviewed regularly after its enactment. All in all, the Act is a positive step forward for Irish deaf people. However, there are a number of caveats in the Act which ought to be discussed. While the right to use ISL in courts is guaranteed under Section 4.2, the duty on courts is to do "all that is reasonable" to ensure that a person may use ISL when they cannot "hear or understand English or Irish". The same caveat is used in Section 6 related to a duty for public bodies to provide for ISL usage. Firstly, there is no indication as to what is 'reasonable' in either context. In both instances, interpreter usage is likely to be fundamental. However, there is a limited number of interpreters available in Ireland, and particularly for legal contexts, not all interpreters work in these areas. The pool of available interpreters may well impact what can be deemed 'reasonable'.

Secondly, both Section 4 and Section 6 also rely on the caveat that a person "cannot hear or understand English or Irish". There are many people who are deaf, but who can also hear some sound, and/or can understand English or Irish. Just because a person's preferred method of communication is ISL does not mean that they cannot hear or understand another spoken language. Yet these caveats mean that it is reasonable to remove the right if a person can be shown to "understand". What is means to 'understand' a language is not explained here in the legislation. Research shows that 'understanding' is complex, varied and situational

(McEvoy 2023). Fluency is not a static way of being, consistent in all areas of life (Berk-Seligson 1998).

United Kingdom

As noted above, in the UK, there are two laws which recognise BSL: the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 (BSL Scotland Act) and the British Sign Language Act 2022 (BSL Act). The BSL Scotland Act mainly revolves around the creation of BSL plans by various institutions. The BSL Scotland Act promises to "promote" and to "facilitate" the "use and understanding" of BSL. In this sense, it remains aspirational. There are no concrete requirements to use the language or to provide for the language, and no rights for BSL users flowing from the BSL Scotland Act. Under Section 1, the Scottish Ministers must produce a National Plan for the "promotion and facilitation of promotion" of BSL in Scotland, and "may include" other issues related to BSL which the ministers "consider appropriate". In the creation of such a plan, ministers are to consult with "persons who use British Sign Language" and "persons who represent users of British Sign Language". Lawson et al state that although the BSL (Scotland) Act is a "significant leap forward" for deaf people in Scotland, it is not without issue (2019). The BSL Scotland Act lacks enforcement, rigorous oversight and there is a complete lack of any rights for BSL users flowing from the Act.

The BSL Act is the most recently passed piece of legislation of those discussed herein. It was passed by the Westminster Parliament in 2022, beginning as a Private Member's Bill. The Act recognises BSL as a language in England, Wales and Scotland in Section 1.1. Notably, Northern Ireland is absent from the parameters of the Bill, as language concerns are a devolved matter for the Northern Irish Assembly. Section 1.2 of the Act states that such a recognition of BSL "does not affect the operation of any enactment or rule of law". It is arguable that this provision undermines the object and purpose of the Act, potentially

rendering it impossible to have effect on the lives of deaf people and BSL users. Research produced by the British Deaf Association demonstrates that existing legislation falls short of having actual impact on deaf people and BSL users (British Deaf Association 2015).Without having the ability to impact existing and future legislation then, the BSL Act is not capable of addressing legislative shortcomings and making change for deaf people.

Overall, the BSL Act lacks any enforcement mechanisms. It lacks any binding duties on public authorities, is without an enforcement mechanism and does not provide for any enforceable right for deaf people or BSL users. In fact, deaf people are entirely absent from the BSL Act. It makes no reference to deaf communities, or to deaf people. BSL has thrived and persevered as a language for centuries because of deaf communities. The language and its people are inherently linked (Ladd 2003), and yet the Act does not reflect this. It remains to be seen what the long-term impact of the BSL Act will be, or whether it will be amended to have greater impact on deaf communities, but based on the construction of the Act alone, the potential for major changes flowing from the law is extremely limited.

Methodology

Hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the methodology for this research project. Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as it is:

> concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding. (Dibley et al. 2020)

The data collected consisted of semi-structured interviews. Prior to the commencement of interviews, ethics approval was sought and granted by the host institution and verified by the funding body. Interviews were conducted between May and November 2022. Interviewees were recruited through a series of video calls for participation in ISL, BSL, SVK and FSTS

posted on social media and online, and sent to various deaf advocacy groups. The goal was to interview people who could attest to experiences within deaf communities under sign language recognition laws, who were themselves deaf. This meant interviewing those who had been involved in the advocacy for introducing laws, worked with deaf organisations or representative bodies for deaf people, deaf charities or other groups who had a particular understanding of general experiences of deaf people in their respective jurisdiction, as well as understanding this same issues personally. Twenty-nine interviews were eventually conducted: Ten with Irish participants, twelve with participants from across the UK and seven with Finnish participants. One Irish participant was excluded for concerns about their consent to participate. As such, the dataset stands at 28 participant interviews.

Demographically, there were a mix of ages of participants, from early 20s to mid-60s. All participants were deaf and at least one participant was deafblind. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds, with some having grown up in deaf households with deaf parents and/or siblings, some growing up as the only deaf person in their family, some people growing up with an SL and others learning an SL only later in life. Eleven women and 17 men participated in the research. Four participants (two from Ireland, one from UK and one from Finland) were happy to be interviewed in spoken English, without the use of an interpreter. While I have some ISL, it was deemed that in order to ensure the highest level of understanding in interviews an interpreter of the interviewee's choice would be used. Interviewees discussed their experiences with the sign language acts in their jurisdiction. In the case of Northern Irish participants, where there is yet no law on sign language, participants discussed the proposed law, their perspectives on the law in other jurisdictions and what they would like to see from the law.

All names used in the illustrated data below are pseudonyms which reflect the presented gender of each participant. All identifying information about participants (such as

place or type of work, specific location, etc.) was removed in order to protect their identity. Interviews were transcribed and analysed in NVivo, again with hermeneutic phenomenology as the guiding principle in observing patterns and themes from the data. Many participants referenced disappointment in the law, across all three jurisdictions.

Findings

One of the major findings from the data was that people were disappointed with the laws for sign language recognition. Twenty-three participants referenced being disappointed in the law in some form. The disappointment referenced fell into a number of categories; initial optimism in the law turning to disappointment; a lack of rights flowing from the laws; and finally, that the laws represented 'pretty words on a page' but not actual concrete mechanisms for improving the lives of deaf people.

Initial Optimism Turns to Disappointment

Finnish participants had lived under the Finnish Sign Language Act 2015 for seven years when interviews were conducted and so had longer time than participants in Ireland and the UK to experience the law. Many participants showed that they had initially being optimistic about the passing of the law but had grown to be disappointed over time. There was a sense that after the passing of the Sign Language Act, things would be better for deaf people, but that this had not materialised:

> *Juha: But so far, the effects of the [Finnish] Sign Language Act itself has been—have been quite minimal, I would say.*
>
> *Kerttu: I had the feeling that the deaf community was kind of disappointed in the law. It felt like we are still not noticed and we were expecting, and deaf people were expecting a lot when the Sign Language Act was about to pass because of the experiences with the Constitution*.

Aino: And I have the feeling that we have been lied to, because it has been presented that the Sign Language Act is something great but in reality, it isn't…People didn't really have great knowledge about what [the law] actually meant for the common people and how it would be seen in their everyday lives. And it hasn't had the effect that we hoped on other legislations

Here Aino notes an important point, whereby the people to be impacted by the law often did not understand what the law would mean for them. That lack of knowledge could then give rise to misunderstandings, or false expectations, as demonstrated by Mikko:

Mikko: Well, when the [Finnish] Sign Language Act was passed I remember everybody being very excited and thinking that now all the authorities will be using sign language and sign language will be visible everywhere, and there will be more subtitles in television and children's programs on television in sign language, and everybody thought it was really great thing that the law came into effect… Everybody thought that this will change everything and we will get everything that we have always dreamed of. But if I'm being a bit cruel, that didn't come true.

Clarity at the time of passing, perhaps by way of plain language explainers and signed summaries of the law would help to manage expectations and ensure clarity among the target population.

Tiina describes how the eventual Act which passed was a lesser form of that which was initially sought:

Tiina: But there was a little bit of disappointment because the Finnish Deaf Association wanted additional things added to the law. But it wasn't successful. So it became a slightly weaker law than they had hoped for.

This can also be seen in Ireland and the UK, where earlier drafts of the ISL Act and the BSL Act were stronger than the eventual Act which passed. In the UK, there was a sentiment that

the potential from the BSL Act was unknown and possibly people would be disappointed in the future because deaf people expected more than the BSL Act can give:

> *Vivienne: [Note that Vivienne worked for an organisation which provides services to the deaf community] But the problem really is I don't know actually what the [BSL] Act will link to. So, I can't really explain it to them [deaf people who ask].*
>
> *Sarah: At the final reading of the [BSL] Bill, when that was passed, there was a lot of older deaf people who celebrated. And they thought, "Yeah, finally, we've got the Act now. Our rights are being recognised." And I thought, well, are they?*

This was shared by one Irish participant looking back on the passing of the ISL Act

> *Gráinne: [Deaf people] don't realise how much red tape you have to go through, and how many hoops you have to jump through, to actually get something in place and get approval for recruitments and [shakes head] every year, you know, so. It was very tough, yeah*

Gráinne was referencing a lack of understanding in deaf communities about how provisions in the ISL Act came to pass. Again, the specifics of the Act were largely not known to the public served by the Act.

The general sentiment was that there was great disappointment in how the laws had played out since passing, and that they had had no significant impact on deaf communities:

> *Frances: Well, I wouldn't have seen a huge amount of improvement [since the introduction of the ISL Act].*

Additionally in Ireland, there was disappointment that the ISL Act had not become widely understood by public bodies, minimising its effect:

> *Cathal: implementation by public bodies has been extremely slow. And a lot of that is because they don't have the awareness, you know. Well, it could be also bothered, not bothered to implement, you know.*

Martin: Bodies like county councils and hospitals and so on, quite often they don't know even that the Act, I mean they might know that the [ISL] Act has passed, or they may not.

Participants across all three countries shared the sentiment that the laws were initially met with optimism, but that optimism had dissipated after the law became operational. Part of the initial optimism came from the expectation of concrete rights which did not ultimately flow from the laws.

Rights Flowing from the Law

There was a distinct frustration about the lack of rights under the laws. In Ireland, Gráinne was aware that the rights therein were not absolute. Referencing the right to use ISL in court, she noted:

Gráinne: I could be very well denied my right to an ISL interpreter, because I can hear English.

Gráinne could communicate using spoken English, but ISL was her preferred language. As such, her right to use ISL in court was not absolute. She was fearful that her ability in English might undermine her right to use ISL if she was ever in court because of the wording of the law.

Participants in the UK expressed some level of disappointment that the BSL Act would not guarantee any specific rights at all:

Sarah: [Deaf people] talk about, "Finally we've got our rights. We've got our legal rights that are now going to be met." But they say—if you address it—so what do you mean, you have a legal right now? What does that mean? If you try to address that, when they say, "I've got legal rights." If you try to pick a bit further, do they really understand it?

Charles: You don't have individual rights with language [under the BSL Act]. We have to give due regard. But you don't have individual rights…but even if you call it an official language it doesn't it doesn't confer on an individual their individual rights.

The BSL Act places an obligation on state bodies to provide information in BSL, and to promote and facilitate the use of BSL. But as Charles and Sarah note, there are not rights for deaf people. Recall that the BSL Act specifically prohibits the law from having impact on preexisting or future laws under its section 1.2. As such, existing laws cannot be read in conjunction with the BSL Act to bolster deaf rights, for example.

The fact that the laws did not introduce specific rights to education for deaf children was a source of disappointment in all three jurisdictions. Alan compared the status of BSL flowing from legislation and the corresponding status of other spoken minority languages:

Alan: When you compare Gaelic with Welsh...English and Welsh have equal status in Wales throughout education. Children are taught bilingually...In Scotland, they have that BSL [Scotland] Act, which now means that schools have to start thinking about British Sign Language, but they don't have to provide education in BSL. There's no requirement in the Act for them to do so. In Wales it's the same, there's no legal requirement.

As such, there is a visible difference to how Welsh is treated compared to how BSL is treated. Alan did noted that changes to include BSL in the curriculum were on the horizon in Wales, but that they were nevertheless without a legal foundation and not rooted in a right to have education in BSL.

In Finland Aino noted:

Aino: So, the Sign Language Act should have changed legislation eventually, but it hasn't so far. So, the children's linguistic needs and rights have not been, you know, met correctly, even – even if that was what was wanted to be done.

The Sign Language Act has not resulted in changes for deaf children in terms of a right to be educated in SVK or FSTS. In fact, since the passing of the Sign Language Act in Finland, dedicated schools for deaf children, where SL is the medium of instruction have now closed (Barish 2024; "Viittomakielen Verkkovälitteinen Opetus" 2020).

Gráinne was also disappointed with the lack of a provision in the ISL Act for ISL in education:

> *Gráinne: [Under the Act] recognition of ISL, so there is a [quoting Section 3 of the ISL Act] 'corresponding duty on all public bodies to provide ISL users with free interpretation when availing or accessing statutory entitlements or services'. If schools were defined as a public body in the Act, then it would mean that parents of – if deaf parents of hearing children would be able to request the school provide an interpreter [when they interact with the school]. But school is very much, it's not a right, it's not a given right. It very much depends on the schools and their budget and their attitude.*

The right to an interpreter when interacting with a public body excludes schools and can pose difficulty for deaf parents who might need interpretation to interact with their child's school. When the topic of rights arose, generally participants felt that they laws did not provide enough rights, or that the rights provided were limited. In particular, participants spoke of a disappointment in the lack of a concrete and enforceable right to education in an SL, or rights to services around education.

Pretty Words on a Page

Finally, a common theme in interviews from Finland, Ireland and the UK was that these laws represented nice, aspirational sentiment, but could never bring meaningful change. Specifically, a large number of participants made some reference to the laws being merely

‘words’ on a ‘page’. It was indeed surprising that such a turn of phrase arose so frequently, across three countries and made for a poignant depiction of the core problem that participants had with the laws:

> *Mikko: [Sign Language laws] are like pretty words on paper and they get passed, but they don’t change anything on the practical level.*
>
> *Paul: The BSL Act itself, I looked at it and well, yeah, it’s something and nothing really. It was just a piece of paper with words on it.*
>
> *Vivienne: I suppose on paper it looks great, you know, we've got it in black and white, they're great. But the actual content of the [BSL Act], what it actually says I'm not entirely sure how it will work.*
>
> *Anna: It is a very weak act [ISL Act.] The wording is airy-fairy. There’s no clarity. There is nothing there that is mandatory.*
>
> *Meghan: [The BSL Act] it’s crap…So, if you look at the law as it is now, yes, we can say there is a British sign language law but, but it's on paper.*
>
> *Alan: I think a general view is [that the BSL Act is] a little bit tokenistic, still at the moment. And I think they're using it to shut everybody up, to be honest.*
>
> *Aino: [The Finnish law is] just some nice words in paper but no real practical implications. And it hasn’t made municipalities or governments, or anyone do anything about the things that should have been done something.*
>
> *Tiina: And since then [the passing of the Finnish law], we feel really there has improved our lives? Not really. So, you know, it's nice words. It's nice. But when you actually point to it and say, “This law exists,” there's no power behind those words.*

Participants felt jaded because the laws failed to provide meaningful changes in the lives of deaf people. Connected to this was the overall belief that the laws were weak:

Tiina: I am concerned that maybe because the [Finnish] law is weak, the court will just point to that and say, "There's no power here."

Andy: Well, I feel that it's [the BSL Act] weak myself because it's a declaration and that's it there's no substance to it. So that's one point.

Anna: …there's no sanctions. There's no punishment [for failure to comply with the Act]. Now, you know, with other laws, there is sanctions. Not in the ISL Act.

Paul: So, I'm just—really, I'm quite cynical about the whole process that's come to a Bill, which I'm very cynical about. So, the headline was fantastic, you know? "This has been achieved." But—and if there's anything that's underpinning it has just been sadly lacking…

Aino: One of the problems with the Finnish Sign Language Act is that it's more of a… symbol – symbolic Act, a gesture but it doesn't actually… it's not obligatory, or it doesn't obligate anything, and it doesn't have any real implications because it's more of a gesture than anything else.

Participants were palpably disappointed that sign language laws were weak, symbolic gestures, rather than tangible or enforceable rights and obligations. Clearly, people wanted more from their laws and were greatly disappointed when the culmination of years of activism gave rise to mere legislative symbolism generally.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, participants showed that they were disappointed in how the laws had materialised. Often those interviewed had advocated for introduction of the laws or been involved in campaigns to acquire rights for deaf people and recognition for their respective SL. Often the laws themselves had passed with great fanfare and celebration, both from politicians and from deaf communities themselves. Often that passing of the law felt the successful

conclusion of years of advocacy and campaigning. But subsequent to the initial fanfare, the laws had been a source of disappointment for interviewees to this research.

We can see from research elsewhere that the implementation of the ISL Act, for example, has been poor, with many agencies and organisations unaware of their obligations flowing from the ISL Act (*Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017* 2021). Evidence of ineffectiveness in the implementation of norms brought in as a result of the Sign Language Act in Finland are also evidenced in research (Rainò 2025). There is also research noting that the BSL (Scotland) Act is incapable of effecting major change (De Meulder 2015). The BSL Act itself was acknowledged by legislators at the time as being only an initial step and not a 'silver bullet' (*British Sign Language Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament* 2023b).

There are of course positives which flow from the acts in each jurisdiction. A voucher scheme which deaf people to have the cost of interpreting covered by the state for private jobs in Ireland is generally to be seen as a success. The UK acts, the BSL Act and the BSL (Scotland) Act provide for the use of BSL in state announcements and for the promotion of BSL respectively. In Finland, the Sign Language Act gives equal status to both FSTS and SVK, which is significant for FSTS given that it is used by less than 100 people. However, De Meulder and Murray note that often SL recognition campaigns have focused on gaining inclusion for deaf people through the introduction of new rights (De Meulder and Murray 2017). As has been shown, the laws have either failed to introduce concrete rights, or the rights they have brought in are not enough to meaningfully assure full inclusion in society for deaf people.

Disappointment amongst participants can be said to come from two main sources: misunderstandings about the content of the law and the true content of the law. In tackling the first source of disappointment, better communication with deaf communities ought to be

considered as part of any future legislation. This can be by way of inclusion and access during initial consultation but also producing accessible explainers and signed versions of the law.

In addressing the latter source of disappointment, it is not only sufficient to communicate effectively the parameters of a finalised Act, when that Act does not meet the needs of the community it alleges to serve. What is clear from this data is that the participants to the research expected more from their laws. The laws assessed contain no protection of deaf culture. There is no provision for the protection and maintenance of deaf schools (where SL is the medium of instruction, rather than education via an interpreter or assisted communication methods). Without dedicated schools where deaf communities can thrive, deaf communities are in decline. The laws provide for no establishment of standards in SL teaching. It is through SL teaching that SLs are typically passed on and preserved within deaf communities. They do not provide for the inclusion of SLs on national curricula, nor do they provide for an unqualified right to use SL in public spaces or mandate any recourse if a person is denied access to a service in a SL. In legislating for recognition of SL, or amending legislation recognising SL already in place, there must be meaningful engagement with, and understanding of deaf communities, an understanding of their needs and expectations and genuine efforts to ensure those needs are reflected and realised in the final law.

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