



## Scottish Council on Deafness

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All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration  
C/o Chuka Ummuna MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

05/01/2017

Ref: The cross party report on regional immigration system and compulsory English classes for immigrants.

Dear Mr Ummuna,

I read with interest the “Interim Report on the Integration of Immigrants” and especially Principle Four which makes the recommendation that

“All immigrants should be expected to have either learned English before coming to the UK or be enrolled in compulsory ESOL classes upon arrival.”

The Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD) sees a society where deaf people have equal access, equal rights and equal citizenship with their hearing peers. Deaf people have the right to be included, involved and active citizens in the UK. SCoD believes this is a human rights issue.

People whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) have had their rights to access information and services and citizenship in their own language recognised in Scotland with the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. This is particularly relevant to Deaf and Deafblind people and their families.

As a result of the work done to promote BSL across all public bodies including the Scottish Government, people will be more aware of the barriers that all deaf people face on a day to day basis.

In the UK as a whole, deaf people are not able to access their rights as active citizens due the communication barriers that they face every day. There is little equality with their hearing peers.

Immigrants to the UK who have any degree of hearing loss will struggle to learn English and

indeed, may not have any spoken language. By its very nature, the recommendation under Principle Four is discriminatory towards deaf people and a breach of a basic human right which is the ability to communicate in the best way for the persons involved. Deaf Sign Language users in the UK struggle with the English language as it is a spoken language; what disadvantage will a compulsory enrolment into ESOL place on Deaf Sign Language users or indeed others who cannot hear.

SCoD would ask that you reconsider the wording of Principle Four and the recommendation

“All immigrants should be expected to have either learned English before coming to the UK or be enrolled in compulsory ESOL classes upon arrival.”

And concentrate on an Inclusive Communication policy across government, nationally and locally, that looks at everyone's communication needs and the best way to achieve integration of all citizens, those born here and those who want to come to live in the UK. As an alternative to learning English, it could be that British Sign Language is included as an alternative for both hearing and deaf immigrants.

Yours sincerely

Janis McDonald  
Chief Officer

Cc'ed to all Scottish MPs

The Scottish Council on Deafness is the membership organisation for organisations working with and on behalf of deaf people in Scotland. Our work is based on the social model of disability and we take a person-centred, rights-based approach across the four pillars of deafness: Deaf/Sign Language users, Deafblind, Deafened and Hard of Hearing. Our membership provides an effective partnership working across all sectors in Scotland - the Third Sector, the Public Sector, the Private Sector and Scottish Government.