



Scottish Council on Deafness

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Press Release

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration Report and Recommendations

As has been reported in the press and on the media, the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration has published a report that described

“speaking English as ‘the key to full participation in our society and economy’ and a ‘prerequisite for meaningful engagement with most British people’.”

The Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD) disagrees with this statement as there are many people in the UK who do not speak English for a number of reasons, including deafness, and some who never will, but they are still participating effectively in our society and economy. Others struggle due to the fact that few organisations and public bodies embrace the “Principles of Inclusive Communication” and so their language/communication support needs are not considered and appropriate support is not provided. We have to commend the Scottish Government for producing the “Principles of Inclusive Communication” in co-production with Independent Living in Scotland (ILiS).

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 (Sign Language users) people and their families. People do not have to be able to speak to achieve integration or to participate fully in society and with other British

people.

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.

We are particularly aware that immigrants to the UK who have any degree of deafness will struggle to learn English and indeed, may not have any spoken language. By its very nature, the recommendation under Principle Four of the “Interim Report into Integration of Immigrants” 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. British 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 are deaf.

Janis McDonald, Chief Officer of SCoD

“If the Scottish Government can lead the way with the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 and begin to look at what it means to be an ‘Inclusive Communication Nation’, what could the Westminster Government do to celebrate the diversity of language and communication used across the UK?

BSL as the alternative language for all, including immigrants who might struggle to learn English, and for all those with a hearing loss who come to the UK without English.”

SCoD does not agree with the “one-size-fits-all approach” that is in place at the present time; but we also see this proposed approach as being discriminatory for people who might have an existing language/communication support need, more especially for anyone who wants to come to the UK who is deaf or is a sign language user. We also find it discriminatory in the fact that it does not recognise that there are people who do not use a spoken language but do use a recognised signed one.

We are interested in what people think about this issue. Please contact us on admin@scod.org.uk.

Editor Notes:

1. For more information about this press release and the letter to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (letter attached below), please contact Janis McDonald, Chief Officer, at janis@scod.org.uk or on 0141 248 2474 or on 07815 311479
2. The Interim Report into Integration of Immigrants is available here: http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/570513f1b504f500db000001/attachments/original/1483608320/APPG_Interim_Report_Screen.pdf?1483608320
3. 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. <http://www.scod.org.uk/information/position-statements/definitions-of-deafness/>
Information on the social model of disability can be found here: <http://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/our-brand/social-model-of-disability>

Our membership provides an effective partnership working across all sectors in Scotland - the Third Sector, the Public Sector, the Private Sector and Scottish Government.

To find out more about SCoD, go to www.scod.org.uk

4. The Principles of Inclusive Communication can be accessed at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/09/14082209/0>
5. Independent Living in Scotland: <http://www.ilis.co.uk/>
6. The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 is available here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/11/introduction>
7. Information about how work on the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 is progressing can be found here: <http://www.scod.org.uk/about/bsl/>



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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 to 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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janis McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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.