

Rónán Lowry, Foreword to the

### **Evaluation of SLIS National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) actions**

The Minister of State with special responsibility for Disability Issues, Finian McGrath T.D., launched the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) in July 2017. Among the first issues he identified were four measures tasked to Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) to enhance the access for Deaf citizens to interpreting services. He asserted *“the initiatives, when they have moved off the pages of a document and become the established way of doing things, have the capacity to significantly impact on the way in which services support people with disabilities”*.

This *Evaluation Report of the SLIS NDIS Actions* evidences progress to those goals, namely:

- Irish Remote Interpretation Service (IRIS) has been expanded to evenings and weekends, with more interpreters employed to enhance access of the deaf and hearing communities to everyday services;
- SLIS researched, consulted and supported the establishment of a quality-assurance and registration scheme for interpreters, set up under a separate company known as Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI), and a register of sign language interpreters was published on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, in time for the implementation of the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act 2017.
- The success of the *Social Inclusion Voucher Scheme pilot phase* shines a light on the way to establish a permanent scheme, which has unfortunately yet to take shape to meet the requirements of the ISL Act section 9.
- The action to increase the availability of sign language interpreters was more challenging. The training and certification of Deaf interpreters through Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS) in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) resulted in an increase in the number of Deaf interpreters to 22 of the 112 sign language interpreters on the register. However, the availability of ISL / English Sign language interpreters remains insufficient to meet the daily needs of Irelands Deaf and hearing communities. SLIS commissioned research to identify actions needed and accepted them in a position paper, but progress requires a level of collaboration and planning that is not currently present. This Evaluation recommends that a multi-partner approach should be a goal in the coming years.
- Another concern is the resourcing of SLIS to provide *“ongoing professional training and development”*. The funding and provision of a calendar of CPD short courses in 2021 was very successful. The absence of such a programme of supports in 2022 raises risks about supporting quality of the levels of interpreting that are available. This Evaluation Report clearly recommends to *“Resource provision of a structured programme of CPD delivered by SLIS”*.

I thank the evaluators, Tom Martin and Ann Clarke, for their diligent analysis in outlining the context for the study, their consultative methodology, and robust work in detailing the challenges, as well as evidencing the successes on the difficult journey of turning policy statements on a page into an everyday reality for Ireland's Deaf community.

Thanks are also due to the Citizens Information Board (CIB) and the Department of Social Protection (DSP) as the main funders and to the CIB staff. However, there were some complex challenges during the NDIS phase as there is much more work to do, particularly in terms of implementation of policies and legislation. We hope to see these challenges reflected in the strategic plans and emerging governance arrangements in the coming year(s).

I work closely with a committed Board of SLIS Directors and the team of the SLIS. Special thanks are due to them, as well as our stakeholders, including the Irish Deaf Society (IDS), CDS TCD, Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (CISLI), Chime, National Disability Authority (NDA), and all interpreters, service providers and especially the Deaf users of SLIS Services.

I fully agree with the evaluation findings that a change in the funding model of service provision is needed, and this should move from a welfare basis to an equality model, as recognised by the funders of SLIS in the Periodic Critical Review (PCR) of CIB (May 22) by the DSP.

The new structure would facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach, based on the value of **'Nothing about us, without us'**, to address priorities highlighted in the evidence base. I list these as

- The establishment of a permanent Social Inclusion Voucher Scheme is urgently needed.
- Consistent resourcing of the national remote interpreting service IRIS, to introduce new technology and an IRIS App to allow for on-demand interpreting access.
- Security of staff working in the provision of interpreting services, including IRIS and the SLIS referral services (GP access scheme, funerals, 24/7 emergency service, referrals and access supports).
- A commitment to equality for Deaf citizens and to supporting Deaf-led responses.

Finally, the evaluation reflects that SLIS has a committed, flexible and dynamic team. I would like to acknowledge their contribution to reducing the inequalities Deaf people continue to face in Ireland today.

Rónán Lowry,

Chairperson, Sign Language Interpreting Service

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