



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Sign Language Review: DCAL Briefing

13 November 2014

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Sign Language Review: DCAL Briefing

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Gordon Dunne (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr William Humphrey  
Ms Rosaleen McCorley  
Mr Basil McCrea  
Mrs Karen McKeivitt  
Mr Oliver McMullan  
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

**Witnesses:**

Ms Martina Campbell	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Tommy McAuley	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** We now have a briefing from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) on the progress on the sign language review. The witnesses are Martina Campbell, who is the head of the languages and Waterways Ireland branch, and Tommy McAuley, who is the manager of the sign language partnership group. Good morning. You are very welcome.

**Ms Martina Campbell (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** Thank you.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Make yourselves at home and comfortable. We appreciate that that is not easy when you are under pressure. I advise members that, when asking questions, they should speak slowly. We very much welcome those in the Public Gallery and the interpreters. We appreciate the excellent job that you do, and you are most welcome to the Assembly. Martina, do you want to lead off and do the introduction?

**Ms M Campbell:** Good morning, and thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to update members on the review of the sign language partnership group report, which is better known as the road map. I introduce my colleague Tommy McAuley. Tommy is the manager of the sign language partnership group and the day-to-day contact for all the groups and other Departments.

With your agreement, I will briefly outline the background to the 2010 road map and the current review being carried out by Damian Barry of Deaf Answers. We will then be more than happy to take any questions.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** That is great. Thank you.

**Ms M Campbell:** In June 2009, a subgroup of the sign language partnership group was formed to consider strategic direction and positioning. It recommended that research and consultation be carried out among stakeholders to develop a road map setting out the strategic aims of the partnership group and its positioning across Departments. As a result, in May 2010, Damian Barry produced the consultation report on the sign language partnership group's strategic direction and positioning, which included a 10-year road map outlining the way forward. The report, therefore, became known as the road map and identified six key strategic priorities. Those were: increasing the supply of qualified interpreters and sign language teachers; providing future generations of deaf children with accessible education; providing development programmes to help to redress the educational and academic underachievement of deaf people; enabling all services to become accessible to sign language users; raising the profile of sign languages as a linguistic and cultural minority language and a language of need for deaf people; and enabling British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) to be recognised as linguistic and cultural minority languages. The road map also reported consensus among deaf professionals, deaf organisations and sensory support teams that the sign language partnership group should remain with DCAL, under our remit, to promote indigenous minority languages. In chairing the group, I am working to influence and encourage other Departments to contribute to and implement the road map.

The purpose of the review of the road map is to examine the views of the key stakeholders on the level of progress and identify possible solutions to implement its objectives further and to build the infrastructure necessary for equitable accessibility to services for sign language users. The interim review report has been provided, and, at this stage, we thought that we would have been in a position to brief the Committee on the final report. However, for a number of reasons, there has been some slippage. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) is funding the training of 11 British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language interpreters at Queen's and 15 British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language deaf tutors at Jordanstown. That is an excellent example of partnership and building the infrastructure and capacity to support sign language users under the interpreters and teachers priority heading. Although, as I said, we await the final review, we have been working in parallel with Damian Barry and stakeholders to support and promote the infrastructure. Our briefing paper outlines three key themes: prevention, correction, and care and protection. Our funding in DCAL has increasingly been directed at one of those themes: prevention.

The key to the delivery of the road map is obviously in getting other Departments to play their part. We can only encourage cross-departmental cooperation. Through our limited budget, we provide models of good practice and fund various sign language projects.

Thank you. That concludes my opening remarks. We are now happy to take any detailed questions, which Tommy will probably handle.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Are you getting the difficult bit, Tommy?

**Mr Tommy McAuley (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** I am.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Thanks very much. Do you have clear evidence of an increase in the number of sign language users in Northern Ireland?

**Ms M Campbell:** No. I think that a figure of around 18,000 is used, and we are working with our statisticians to get a more robust handle on the number. That will be very important to get clear evidence of the actual number of sign language users. Tommy, do you want to say anything more about that?

**Mr McAuley:** We have looked at that issue. As Martina said, we recently consulted with our statisticians with a view to looking into the various surveys that may be available to us to extrapolate the current numbers. We have been working off a figure of 4,500 deaf sign language users, of which 3,000 are BSL users, and 1,500 are ISL users. As Martina said, once friends and families and other sign language users are added, the figure goes up to 18,000.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** I am also a member of the Health Committee. What about the health trusts? Do they make an input for the support of sign language interpreters?

**Mr McAuley:** As I understand it, each trust has a contract to provide interpreter support that they can draw down for people who need it. At the level of speech and therapy, when a baby is diagnosed with profound deafness, the trusts' remit is to discuss the available options for that child with the family.

Increasingly, as a result of various conferences, an emphasis has been placed on the trusts to signpost BSL and ISL more and to use it to support deaf children. There is increasing research that the key years for the development of language are between nought and two. In some quarters — it is fair to say, among the deaf sector — it is felt that that is being missed in some cases.

We are working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to address that. It funded an early years conference in March that was attended by audiologists, health professionals who work with deaf children and even educational support specialists. One of the recommendations from the conference is that family sign language courses should be used across the health and social care sector. We await an update from colleagues in DHSSPS on that.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Thanks very much. Over to members.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** You are very welcome to the Committee. Thanks very much for your presentation. As a parent who is looking out from this Committee, I have noticed an increase in awareness of children with hearing difficulties through TV programmes, such as those presented by Mr Tumble. I have seen that as someone who is involved with a playgroup and as a school governor.

Do you think that there has been an increase in awareness of deafness through such TV programmes? Classroom assistants are now doing sign language courses and are able to pass that talent and experience on to pupils who are in mainstream schools with other pupils with hearing difficulties.

**Mr McAuley:** Mr Tumble is very popular, and my two-year-old is very much into him. He has raised awareness, with the distinction that he uses Makaton, which is distinct from BSL and ISL.

On your point about childcare professionals showing more interest in classrooms and playgroups, last year we funded the National Deaf Children's Society to undertake family sign language courses, which are aimed at families to learn early intervention and communication with their children. Part of that was a module for childcare professionals. They opened their courses to 60 professionals and were oversubscribed. So there is a demand for sign language among childcare professionals and providers.

As Martina mentioned, we are also funding the University of Ulster to undertake the training of deaf tutors, right through to professional teacher qualifications, at Jordanstown. We are providing funding to make the learning environment more acceptable to deaf people through increased deaf awareness for those students and also to go into schools with those deaf tutors on placements to offer a link between the university and our schools. There has been a massive uptake of that, and they are also oversubscribed.

To answer your question in short: there seems to be a groundswell of increased awareness. We have also provided funding streams over the years for the voluntary and community sector, and some 600 staff have gone through courses that we have funded in the last three years. So the demand is there.

**Ms M Campbell:** I will add to that. Given that some people view sign language as a disability rather than a language of need, it is part of public authorities' duties under section 75 and, of course, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

**Mrs McKeivitt:** That was my next question, and you have answered it.

So, £116,000 comes from DCAL to support your three main objectives of prevention, correction, and care and protection. You spoke about cross-departmental work and your contribution to that. Will you give us an idea of how contributions from other Departments, like Education, would help you to achieve what you want in those three areas?

**Ms M Campbell:** That is a key point. We have a budget that we have tried to use to the best of our ability to implement the road map. However, we rely on other Departments to pick up and run with the relevant recommendations that belong to them.

I do not have any detail to hand about other Departments' funding. However, the key Department is DEL. It has provided a huge amount of money — £1.1 million — for the courses for deaf tutors and interpreters.

Education is a big factor for parents of deaf children who are trying to access help. They tend to be sent down the statementing route, which is a time-consuming and difficult process, and children often miss the basic fundamental elements of their early education. Tommy, do you want to add anything to that?

**Mr McAuley:** Sure. I will give you a bit of background. By and large, a child does not acquire sign language through the schooling system. There are no formal classes for sign language, and it is not on the curriculum. As Martina mentioned, some teachers with special education needs certificates provide some communication support, but, largely speaking, deaf children whose parents wish them to learn sign language will do so through outside groups like those that are represented on the sign language partnership group. We fund some of that through the Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association and the National Deaf Children's Society. We also fund courses for older people through organisations such as Hands That Talk, but not so much through the British Deaf Association. Basically, deaf people learn sign language through the deaf sector. It is not provided for through the education system.

In fact, I spoke to a deaf person the other day who is now a deaf tutor. He explained to me that he had been sent to Mary Hare School in England. That is a school for deaf children, but it is an oral school in which the use of sign language is not permitted. They had an underground system of signing to each other under the table. The whole purpose of that school was to teach them to speak English.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** Would you like sign language to be on the curriculum? What advantage would that have for communities?

**Mr McAuley:** Though the road map, we are looking to lay down an infrastructure from cradle to grave. We know that the key years for the acquisition of communication skills is nought to two, so it is important to get in there at that age. Obviously, a child in that category cannot be taught to sign, and parents' voices are vital.

Children then go into the education system, and statistics show that deaf children do not do as well as their hearing counterparts. The World Congress on Mental Health and Deafness that was held in Belfast in September, and psychiatrists, psychologists and educational support experts from around the world attended that. An interesting statistic that came out from that is that 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents. The other 10% who are born to deaf parents generally do better in education because sign language is there from the start. The evidence is there that we need to get in early, and schools are crucial in that.

Signature, which is one of the qualification boards for British Sign Language, wants to pilot a GCSE in British Sign Language. It is a live issue, and, through the review, the Department of Education will be involved.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** Thank you very much.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Tommy and Martina, thanks for your presentation. Martina, you said that the final departmental review has not yet been completed. When do you expect that to be completed, and is there anything in it that would have been useful for our discussions today?

**Ms M Campbell:** We expect to get the review report from Damian Barry next week. We will then have to look at it and make recommendations to the Minister. As it is cross-cutting, we will need to bring it to the Executive. We hope that that process will raise the profile of sign language and the needs of sign language users across all Departments.

The review concentrated on three themes and was like a progress check. It highlighted the fact that a lot of work needs to be done to build the infrastructure and capacity. Tommy, do you want to add anything to that?

**Mr McAuley:** Sure. Members will have received the interim report. Categories highlighted in that report included the need to maintain a sustainable supply of interpreters and sign language teachers, education, personal and social development programmes, access to public information, BSL and ISL recognition, and raising awareness and profiles. The final report will deal with those categories in more detail, look at what the blockages are and make suggestions about how they can be unblocked.

The key thing is that we have made good ground in building an infrastructure, mainly through DCAL and DEL funding. The trick now is in maintaining sustainable infrastructure.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** There are 26 interpreters across the North. Nobody is being trained in interpreting in the North as such. We have a deaf population of 18,000, and there is an increasing need for interpreters in public services like the courts and so on. From personal experience of looking for interpreters, I know that it is very difficult to get them and that you have to book well ahead and perhaps build an event around their availability. You said that you are building up an infrastructure, and I think that Martina said that there are 11 students at Queen's.

**Mr McAuley:** Eleven have graduated from Queen's and are now in the system.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** So there is nobody at Queen's at the moment.

**Mr McAuley:** No.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Fifteen teachers are being trained at Jordanstown, and they will graduate in 2016.

**Mr McAuley:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** The interpreters will not graduate for a further two years after that. There is quite a gap in that provision. What options have been looked at to try to provide a postgraduate interpretation course?

**Mr McAuley:** You are correct. I used the word "sustainable" on a couple of occasions, and we think that that is key.

When the sign language group was set up in 2004, there were four interpreters, and we are now up to, I think, 27. Early on, it was recognised that, even if Departments bought into providing all those services for the deaf population, we would need relevant numbers of interpreters and the deaf tutors to teach them. That has taken time to build, and the big injection was DEL's one-off funding for those interpreters and tutors.

You asked what can be done now. There is an issue about how deaf people, as deaf tutors, and hearing people, as interpreters, can acquire level 6 qualifications. One of our funding streams this year is to the Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association. It is running a condensed level 6 course for deaf young people and adults, and that will contribute to the sustainability of students going through to deaf tutor professional teaching. On the other side, there is no provision for additional funding for people who want to become level 6 interpreters, which is vital if they want to gain a master's in interpreting. I take your point about that. Damian Barry's interim report suggests a postgraduate course at Queen's that people with level 3 could take and so acquire the necessary level 6 while doing their interpretative course. Again, it is a timing issue.

We will flag that issue up as part of the whole process. That is why we commissioned the road map and the review. We are aware of the gaps, and we are also aware that some people are keen to fund themselves with a little bit of additional support. However, we do not have funding for that in our budget this year.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Finally, because of the nature of the requirement and the shortcomings, is there a possibility of trying to draw down resources on a cross-departmental basis? The DCAL budget is quite restricted. Is there a possibility of looking elsewhere?

**Ms M Campbell:** We will discuss that with the Minister. We will discuss how, in bringing a paper to the Executive, we can create a central pot of funds that Departments can draw on. Colleagues in the branch are at an EU funding seminar today, and we will see whether we can help the groups or the Departments to draw down money through the EU funding route.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** Thank you. Rosie, you are next.

**Ms McCorley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirigh. Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much for the presentation. I want to raise a couple of points. The information that was given to the Committee showed that, according to the deaf and hearing-impaired sector, some of the questions on the census

that were used to gather information on the number of sign language users were open to misunderstanding. They were critical of that. Given that they are the people whom you want to reach out to and cater for, how do you respond to that criticism?

**Ms M Campbell:** Tommy will keep me right, but I think that the purpose of that census question was not to establish the number of deaf people but to find out the number of immigrants. The purpose behind the question caused some confusion. I think that the question was, "What is your first language?". Some people answered that as sign language, because they did not understand the question. One of the things that we are looking at with our statisticians is whether we can get questions into another survey, like the continuous household survey. I think that the Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitation and Disability (NISALD) might be useful, and I can write to you about that. OFMDFM is thinking of rerunning that survey, so we are looking to see whether we can get some specific questions into it and, in cooperation with the sign language groups, look at the wording so that questions are not open to misinterpretation.

**Mr McAuley:** I would like to add a bit of insight to that. Some of the deaf professionals in the sector who are profoundly deaf and use sign language explained it to me. They have been through the education system, but sign language was not taught there. They were taught English through that route. So, even at their level, they asked, "What is this trying to ask me? Does it want me to say that, because I have been through the mainstream system and have been taught English, English is my first language?". In the end, there were two of the 339 who said that they had BSL as their first language. That gives you an insight into their thought processes, what was going on and how that question was misinterpreted.

With hindsight, I would also say that there probably should be better support for the deaf community in such surveys and polls. At my first meeting with Hands That Talk back in October 2012, I remember being told that they were having a community meeting where the pharmacist was going to come in and speak to the deaf people in the town about prescriptions and that sort of thing. It struck me then that such community gatherings, with sign language interpretive support, would be useful for such public polls or surveys. That is a lesson learnt, and it may be one for all Departments.

**Ms McCorley:** You say that OFMDFM is thinking of re-running the survey. How certain can we be that that will happen?

**Ms M Campbell:** It is thinking of re-running it.

**Ms McCorley:** That sounds a bit vague.

**Ms M Campbell:** It is only in the early stages of discussion. We had a meeting with our statisticians and asked them to liaise with the statisticians in OFMDFM to make sure that, if that survey is being re-run, questions are framed appropriately to get us the right answer, if you like. If OFMDFM is not re-running the survey, we will look at putting specific questions into other surveys that are run more frequently. We will work with the partnership group to make sure that the question is framed appropriately.

**Ms McCorley:** How you are going to be sure that those measures will meet the requirements of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community so that future confusion can be avoided?

**Mr McAuley:** The sign language partnership group is a partnership between the Departments and the key deaf organisations. The deaf sector will be involved in that debate as a matter of course. Anyone on the group can place any item that they feel is relevant on the agenda, and if it is on the agenda, it will have to be discussed and addressed. There will be a big input from the sign language community to that debate.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** OK, Rosie?

**Ms McCorley:** I am not finished.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** OK.

**Ms McCorley:** Tommy and I have been in touch regularly since the last time that he was before the Committee. I appreciate your assistance, Tommy. You know the constituent of mine who is keen to

raise the profile of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, and I think that he has done that extremely well. That constituent also wants to make it clear that the services for deaf and hard-of-hearing people and life in general are way below standard. I believe that it is a health issue, and it should be dealt with more comprehensively and not left in one Department, like DCAL. DCAL has a role, but I see the problem as one of quality of life, mental health, exclusion and isolation and failure to reach potential. That is all because someone has a hearing condition that I think should be dealt with through the health service. My question is this: how can we ensure that people with hearing issues, problems and deafness will be able to access a sustainable and accessible infrastructure for their needs? How do you see that coming into place, and when are we likely to see it?

**Ms M Campbell:** We share your views on all the points that you raised, and we see the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Education and the Department of Health as our key partners. One of the difficulties is that, when sign language was assigned to DCAL, it never actually got to the Executive because we were under direct rule. The sign language partnership group was set up under direct rule. Once we get the review report, we will get the Minister to bring it to the Executive. I think that that will raise the profile and put greater onus on those Departments to step up and deliver on the recommendations that are appropriate to them.

**Ms McCorley:** I am asking about specific actions, like access to the level of classes that are required. My constituent has been trying in vain to access level 3 classes, which he needs to be able to communicate properly, because communication is a big issue for him. That would allow him to progress and to reach his full potential. He is a very active person who has been volunteering in the sector and highlighting preventing hearing damage and so on to young people. This is a person who is out there, but he feels that he is not being given equality of opportunity to access the classes that he needs.

I know that you have been working on this but to no avail, Tommy. Why should he be left without a class?

**Mr McAuley:** I take your point entirely. Since you contacted me, I have been trying to source various courses, and, indeed, we managed to acquire a small funding pot from DCAL so that your constituent and other deaf people can attend courses. Your constituent was actually going to have to travel from Belfast to go to Hands That Talk in Dungiven. Unfortunately, because the numbers were not there for Hands That Talk, the course was not financially viable. It can be an expensive course, and it becomes more so, depending on the level that you go to. There is a problem with access. It goes right back to what I referred to with provision from cradle to grave. There is a clear distinction, as you know, between our remit to promote and provide these services, but we have nonetheless provided funding to the Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association. Unfortunately, your constituent did not fit within its age range, and we had to look elsewhere.

As Martina said, we share your view that we should work in partnership with other key Departments, such as the Department of Health, for early years health and social care, and with the Department of Education, for looking after the needs of the deaf child to third-level education or further education colleges for people with acquired deafness. However, there is the issue of who funds the classes and whether they can be provided with economy of scale when we know that the numbers are there.

The road map was set up as an attempt to address those issues, and the review was meant to kick-start that and to take stock of how far we have come. We have done some good work, but this is an example of where there are gaps. We are trying to plug those gaps, but it is a cross-departmental issue, and we can do it only in partnership with other Departments.

**Ms McCorley:** How sure are you that those gaps can be filled?

**Mr McAuley:** As Martina said, we see it as cross-cutting, and, as such, it may go to the Executive. It will be at that level that those decisions will perhaps be made. We cannot compel other Departments to provide such free courses, regardless of our views on the matter and regardless of the fact that we are funding them for limited numbers through our sign language partnership group fund. The review is meant to take us to a point where we push through the glass ceiling that we have and look at access across the whole spectrum of cradle to grave provision and at all Departments.

**Mr McMullan:** Thank you for your presentation. I am shocked to hear the information that you gave us this morning. I am chairman of a local disability group, and I have never heard that information about deaf people before. For my daughter, I got as far as Makaton in the schools. However, the

information that you gave us today, I never heard before. It is shocking to think that the public are not aware of that. I was reading the submission, and I think that it really places that section of the community at risk in quite a lot of ways, including their health and well-being, etc. I think that you deserve all the help that you can get. I am sure that help will be given to you. However, more of that information should get out to the public, as there are a lot of misconceptions.

I listened with interest to what you said about children who were statemented and how that is sometimes not the answer. It is the handy way of dealing with the issue. Those children are then put into big boarding schools and taken away. Any time that you talk about disability, the first thing that you get is statements. There is a waiting list to get statemented, and a lot of those children fall between two stools. I have still not got over the amount of information that you came out with today. I thought that I had heard a good bit of it, but compared with what I heard today, I had heard nothing.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** They were waiting for a question there, Oliver.

**Mr McMullan:** It was more of an observation than a question. However, I want to know why some of the statutory agencies have not put out the information that Tommy and Martina gave us today.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** That is a good point.

**Mr McMullan:** Why have we heard it here only today? Those agencies have a lot of that information, and they are not giving it out. I am not going to say it is wrong, but it beggars belief.

**Mr B McCrea:** Have I picked you up right in thinking that maybe DCAL is not the right place for your remit?

**Ms M Campbell:** We are responsible for promoting indigenous languages, and Irish and British Sign Language have been recognised as indigenous languages. We are very proactive in trying to fulfil our obligations, but as other members said, there is a responsibility on other Departments. There is the difficulty of whether it is seen and recognised as a disability, or whether it is seen as something on promoting social inclusion.

**Mr B McCrea:** If you were advising the Executive, where would you place responsibility for sign language throughout government?

**Ms M Campbell:** I think that DCAL is a very good fit for it, and that Department has been a great champion of sign language.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am sure that it has, but are we not saying here that the budget is £116,000? I am not sure whether I have got that figure right.

**Ms M Campbell:** It was £116,000.

**Mr McAuley:** The budget is £85,000. We acquired additional resources in the past couple of years to take it above that.

**Mr B McCrea:** So it is up to £116,000. That seems to be a bit of a challenge in DCAL, but nothing to DHSSPS. I am interested in the semantics and the language. I have to say that I think that it is a health issue so should be in the Health Department, which has the resources to deal properly with this.

**Mr McAuley:** The original road map report in 2010 dealt with that. The deaf sector came to the consensus that DCAL was the right Department. The reason for that is that the majority of profoundly deaf sign language users see themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority. A question I remember being put to me by a member of the British Deaf Association is this: "Why is it the only language for which people have to declare themselves disabled to gain access to their language?" They are very passionate that they are a cultural and linguistic minority. I think that that is the problem for those of us speaking from a hearing perspective. If we cannot get our heads around the fact that deaf people see themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority, we just view it as a disability. The sign language partnership group is just that — a partnership. All partnerships need to bring something to the table.

We have a limited and modest budget, which we think we have done good things with. There are good models that other Departments can help with, such as the DEL one-off funding.

I hope that that maybe addresses to some degree why this is with DCAL.

**Mr B McCrea:** Let me move on and ask you a couple of quick questions; I do not want to take up too much of your time. Is the need for sign language growing or waning, given the technology that might be around, such as voice-to-text and all those sorts of things? Is there an impetus behind the languages?

**Mr McAuley:** That assumes that all profoundly deaf people have a good grasp of English, but that is not the case. Some of the findings are that a lot of deaf people leave school with the average reading age of a nine-year-old. From a hearing perspective, when I took up the post, I wondered why a leaflet could not just be put in front of them. However, not all deaf people would be able to follow that in English. That is why we keep going back to the point that sign language is their first and preferred language.

**Mr B McCrea:** That is interesting. I notice that in your briefing you talked about the literacy challenges. That is news to me. We have two signers here, but that is the exception rather than the rule. Do you think that we ought to look at having signing for at least some of the Assembly plenary sessions, including Question Time? I do not know what the resource implications of that would be, but I think that it would send an interesting message.

**Mr McAuley:** That is an interesting and good point. I agree with it, but I would go further. This year, we are funding the British Deaf Association's deaf active citizenship project, which has various models and is about empowerment and access to human rights, training and access to social and international events for deaf sign language users. One of the modules in this year's project is to approach Assembly Members with a view to having a consultation, with signers there, to learn more about democracy and its workings. As we encourage matters through the sign language partnership group, that empowers those people to effect change in policy. That is ongoing through our funding.

**Mr B McCrea:** Chair, it might be worth writing to the Business Committee.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** We are going to have actions later, Basil.

**Mr B McCrea:** I take your point, Chair. It is just that it has come up. I think we should try to at least move that forward.

My last question is this: given that you are in DCAL, how have you been able to exploit the links with culture, arts and leisure? I say that because two of my nieces swam in the Commonwealth Games. They are profoundly deaf and managed to do good things. There is a link between sport and communication. However, when I look at the Commonwealth Games and all the other recent events, I see that not that much was done on reaching out to other people and other community events that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure might be looking at. Have you been able to leverage any of the benefits of being in DCAL?

**Mr McAuley:** Last year, we provided funding to train four profoundly deaf sign language users to become tour guides for the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Prior to that, we had a project where leisure centre and sports coaches had access to deaf awareness and basic sign to encourage deaf people to take up more leisure activities. There are various other themes going on in the arts. I do not know the detail of funding, but I believe that there are some projects to improve access to the arts sector through DCAL. It is certainly something that we are looking at.

**Ms M Campbell:** I think that that is a good point. Obviously, DCAL has had it tough — or will have it tough with the Budget in coming years. We need to be sure that we lever and use resources to the most effect. Because of the nature of the review report and the different themes, our focus has really been on trying to deliver on priorities that are identified under the three themes.

**Mr B McCrea:** I appreciate that you have to do as much as you can with what you have.

**Ms M Campbell:** With very little money.

**Mr B McCrea:** I have to say that I am surprised by how little that sum is.

**Ms M Campbell:** And how far it has gone.

**Mr B McCrea:** And how far it has gone. I will also just say to encourage you — maybe we will pick up on this — that, where money is tight, there are other things that you can do for relations. So, when people are running culture, arts or leisure activities, particularly if DCAL funds them, we need to make sure that those things are done. I do not want to say anything wrong here, but sign language would seem to me to be the exception rather than the rule in a lot of our public things.

**Ms M Campbell:** As part of DCAL's drive to make sure that there are connections across the DCAL family, Tommy will do a presentation on sign language to colleagues across the Department. We hope that through it, we will raise awareness in the Department, obviously, make greater connections and try to make sure, as you say, that there are connections right across the DCAL family, whether they are in arts, sport or leisure.

**Mr B McCrea:** Super.

**Mr McAuley:** I know that our friends from Hands that Talk are behind me. I feel their eyes on the back of my head. I just want to say quickly that, as part of their project last year that we funded, they provided deaf awareness and basic sign language to some leisure centre and lifeguarding personnel in the north-west.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** That is pretty good.

**Mr Humphrey:** Thanks very much for your presentation. Martina, twice — in your presentation and in answer to Mr McCrea — you talked about cross-cutting across government and in the DCAL family. How effective is that cross-cutting approach in the Executive?

**Ms M Campbell:** I think the honest answer is that partnerships and cross-cutting work only when there is a pot of money. We can encourage, persuade and influence, but that is all that we can do. When you do not have any kind of stick or the incentive of a pot of money that Departments can access, it is a difficult task.

**Mr McAuley:** The process that we are involved in now with the road map review is just that — a process. As I mentioned, when the partnership group was set up in 2004, the infrastructure was not there. We have arrived at a stage where it is a lot better, but now we are stocktaking to see how we can improve this and how we can invite or encourage other Departments so that we can bring them into more of a partnership and, in addition to DCAL's resources, bring more resources to the table.

**Mr Humphrey:** DCAL is obviously a small Department. You have a limited budget. All budgets are under pressure at the moment, so there is a huge challenge there. With issues like this — in fact, with all issues in government — we need to do cross-cutting much better. That is not just in regional government but in local government. Do the RPA and the 11 new councils, with the greater resource that they have, also provide you with an opportunity?

**Ms M Campbell:** I think that that probably is an avenue we need to look at, and we will certainly take that away and see whether we can make any connections through it.

**Mr Humphrey:** You have money at your disposal, which is in a very limited budget. We have groups represented here that are more localised, but working with such groups, and also the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, the British Deaf Association and the Northern Ireland Deaf Youth Association through consultation, is there more that they can do? I do not want either of you to take this personally, but is a Department the best tool and mechanism through which to actually do what you want to do? Would it be better coordinated if it was handed to one of those organisations, for example, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People? I am just playing devil's advocate when I say that.

**Mr McAuley:** As part of this process, and from early on, it became apparent that we have referred to the partnership in what other Departments can and should bring to the table. However, one of the points that we have been making to the sector is that we would like to see more consensus and

cohesion within the deaf sector. Bear in mind that there are nine organisations represented on the partnership group. They all have their constitutions, and they all have their views on various parts of deafness. For example, the National Deaf Children's Society deals with very young children, up to the age of six. Action on Hearing Loss deals with deaf with a small "d" right across the spectrum. We would like to see more consensus amongst the deaf community, and we have asked them for that. It is addressed within the road map, to some degree, and one of the suggestions is for a deaf hub. We have asked the author of the report to take that a bit further.

**Mr Humphrey:** Yes, because if money is tight and resource limited, economies of scale are vital. There should not be duplication; I am not saying that there is, but it is important that there is not duplication and that money is really focused.

This was mentioned earlier. Is there an opportunity, and has it been explored, with the Open University, for example?

**Mr McAuley:** There has been no contact that I am aware of — certainly not locally — with the Open University. I am on the steering group of the University of Ulster for its project at the moment for deaf tutors going through their teacher training. The bulk of that funding came from DEL, as we discussed, but we are also providing funding for deaf awareness schemes within schools and the university. So, we see an important aspect where there could be a link-up between universities and local schools. What we are trying to do is stretch the partnership from where it originally started, which was Departments and some small deaf sector organisations. We are now bringing in universities and schools, if we can, because deafness is across society.

**Mr Humphrey:** But you see the point I am making about the Open University. It is simply because it has a track record of people not actually having to travel as much to a campus or whatever, and it can be more self-taught in terms of modules in their own home or their own locality.

**Ms M Campbell:** Clearly, third-level education is a matter for DEL, and we will feed the points raised by this Committee to the partnership group. We hope, obviously, that as members have suggested, you have a role to play as well in raising awareness and bringing —

**Mr Humphrey:** That is why the cross-cutting is so important: your budget is limited, and it will affect a number and have potential input from a number of Departments.

**Ms M Campbell:** Yes.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Maybe I should have declared an interest, because I have worked with the Hands That Talk group before. I think that perhaps, if today shows anything, it is that there is a distinct lack of deaf awareness sometimes on a number of issues. It is something that we may need to address as legislators in our own right. Maybe we should have that as work in hand.

Getting back to the level 6 training, I think the costings on that were somewhere just short of £3,000 per student per year. Is that right? It is a minimal sum, according to my —

**Mr McAuley:** I do not have the breakdown for the DEL fund. I know that some students who have looked to fund themselves, for example, to go to Lancaster —

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I am not even taking that into account. I am just saying.

**Mr McAuley:** I have heard figures of £4,500.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** It is a minimal sum.

**Mr McAuley:** If you travel, your travel costs and accommodation have to be added in, so it can rise substantially.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** OK, that is great. Martina and Tommy, thank you very much.

**Ms M Campbell:** Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** I hope that you found that a positive engagement.

**Ms M Campbell:** We have, and we have some food for thought, which we will obviously feed into our analysis of the final review.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** You have done a good job.

**Ms M Campbell:** We would be very happy to come back.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** You have done well in raising awareness here today, and obviously the engagement has shown that members are concerned. It might be good to run an event sometime in the Long Gallery through some of your groups.

**Ms M Campbell:** Certainly. We would be happy to.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Dunne):** We are continuously lobbied by such groups, but it is an area that we have not had a lot of feedback on, so maybe that is an opportunity. Tuesday, when we get the long lunch, is a good day for it so that we can go and meet such groups.

Thank you very much to you for your contribution and to everyone in the Public Gallery. We appreciate you coming along this morning, and we certainly will do what we can to support your organisation.

**Ms M Campbell:** Thank you very much.