



Four Winds House
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Call for Action

25/03/2020

We, the undersigned, call on the British Government to provide a British Sign Language Interpreter for all major announcements and updates relating to the coronavirus on television.

This provision is required so that more than 80,000 Deaf people living in the United Kingdom, who use British Sign Language, are aware of the evolving situation and what is expected of them to protect themselves and others. Interpreting should be accessible not only via internet connection but also on national television, so to reach those who are less able to use alternate, modern technologies.

In many other countries, including Scotland, this has been achieved by positioning the interpreter next to the speaker so that they can be filmed at the same time, removing the need for a separate studio and technicians which may be difficult to achieve at short notice.

British Sign Language users cannot always access the English language, so even if subtitles are available (which have not been consistently across the media) they may not fully understand the information provided by the Prime Minister and his advisers, subsequently posing a risk to themselves and others as they are not aware of the instructions and proposed guidelines for behaviours.

We implore the Government to keep Deaf citizens informed in British Sign Language and meet its obligations under the following:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

Article 11 – Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies:

Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.

Equality Act 2010

Section 20: Duty to make adjustments



(1) Where this Act imposes a duty to make reasonable adjustments on a person, this section, sections 21 and 22 and the applicable Schedule apply; and for those purposes, a person on whom the duty is imposed is referred to as A.

(2) The duty comprises the following three requirements.

(3) The first requirement is a requirement, where a provision, criterion or practice of A's puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled, to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the disadvantage.

C .15, Part 11.1 Public Sector Equality Duty

(1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The statement on Monday 23rd March 2020 announcing strict measures for social distancing by the Prime Minister was not made accessible for Deaf sign language users and this was a breach of the afore-mentioned. Social media today features many expressions of outrage, shock and disbelief at this lack of regard for the needs of this vibrant British community.

Please ensure BSL interpretation, as well as accurate and timely subtitles are available for all public announcements linked to this global health crisis, so that Deaf people have equal opportunities to keep themselves and others safe.

Signed: The Association of Sign Language Interpreters' Board of Directors

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