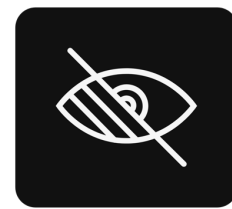


Co-Producing the Deaf Legal Theory Model

Final Report

Rob Wilks



**DEAF LEGAL
THEORY**

EXPOSING INCOMPLETE ASSUMPTIONS

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1 Introduction

The Deaf Legal Theory (DLT) framework represents a novel approach to understanding and addressing the unique position that deaf individuals find themselves in the world over when navigating the legal systems of their respective nations. Rooted in the recognition of intersectionality, the Co-Producing DLT Model project sought to provide a structured yet flexible model to assist researchers, legal and non-legal professionals, and individual members of the deaf community, with a tool or lens to analyse the legal systems or areas of law that is the focus of their enquiry or experience. This report documents the co-production of the DLT model, from its inception to the creation of the final hybrid framework, offering a comprehensive overview of its development and application.

The need for such a model arises from the often-overlooked challenges faced by deaf individuals within legal systems, including the persistent inequalities, barriers to participation, marginalisation, and misconceived attitudes about what it means to be deaf. By offering a consistent framework, the DLT model aims to support deaf individuals, governments, policymakers, legal professionals, and advocates in creating or navigating legal systems that take into account the deaf perspective.

The foundation of the DLT model was established through the BIG Survey, which gathered insights from a broad range of stakeholders. This survey identified nine key themes that informed subsequent workshops and discussions. During the Brainstorming Workshops attended by the Working Group, these themes were refined, and three proposed models – Models A, B, and C – were developed. Each model offered distinct strengths, reflecting different priorities.

The Development Workshop served as a pivotal stage in the project, bringing together survey respondents and members of the Working Group to evaluate the proposed models. Feedback from this workshop led to the creation of the final hybrid model, which integrates the strengths of all three proposals. This process involved extensive reflection on the themes, terminology, and structure of the framework to ensure it is both theoretically robust and practically adaptable.

The final hybrid model is presented in this report as a comprehensive framework built around three pillars – Collective Engagement, Rights, and Progress – supported by universal foundations and adaptable features. These elements collectively address the diverse needs of deaf individuals across legal systems and cultural contexts. The reflections on the modelling process further explore how various theoretical frameworks, such as rights-based, intersectional, and restorative justice models, have been embedded within the DLT framework.

This report not only showcases the final model but also captures the journey of its co-production. From the initial identification of key themes to the synthesis of theoretical frameworks and stakeholder feedback, the DLT model has been shaped by a collaborative and inclusive process. The following sections delve deeper into each stage of the project, illustrating how the final model has emerged as a dynamic tool for fostering equality and justice for deaf communities worldwide.

2 What is Deaf Legal Theory?

By way of an introduction, DLT is a new concept in the field of study known as 'jurisprudence,' that is, various critical approaches to law through which a critical examination of a legal system or area of law can be made.

In order to apply DLT to a legal system or area of law, a method needs to be engaged in order to determine the extent of 'hearing-subjectiveness' (Bryan & Emery, 2014). Wilks (2022) devised the following model based on Bryan and Emery's chapter, which is also displayed in graphic form at Figure 1:

1. The *frame* of understanding within society in relation to deaf people (e.g. deaf people, the health and medical profession, charities, hearing people).
2. What *assumptions* have been made regarding deaf people in the shaping of the law (e.g. using the medical or social model of disability, or the language minority model)?

- The *participation* of deaf people in the shaping of the law and/or policy (e.g. was there meaningful consultation with the deaf community on their own terms).



Figure 1: The original DLT model

- To what extent has society imposed its *cultural order* on deaf people in relation to the law (e.g. hearing culture, other cultures)?
- The *application* of the law to deaf people (e.g. the relevant legal principles and how they or should be applied to deaf people)?
- The *impact* the law has on deaf people and their allies.
- Do deaf people experience further *oppression* rather than liberation or are they afforded rights (e.g. does the law reinforce the status quo or does it portray deaf people on their own terms)?
- What do we *learn* about how the law can and should bring deaf people within its purview?

When this process is applied to a legal system or area of law, the result should be that incomplete assumptions are exposed, and 'Deaf jurisprudence' is further expanded.

3 The project

However, while the DLT model that was developed by Wilks (2022) appears to be a workable model, Wilks was conscious that this model had been developed without any input from the global deaf community, and in the spirit of *participation*, one of the tenets of the original model, he applied for funding in order to remedy this.

The aim of this project therefore was to scale up the impact of DLT utilising the co-production method by working with three sources of expertise: citizens (people with lived experience), practitioners (for application(s)), and academics (for rigour) to revise and refine the DLT Model. The co-production approach ensured that representative perspectives, experiences, needs and viewpoints of deaf people fed into the revised DLT model, all the while ensuring community empowerment. After all, as the saying goes: "nothing about us, without us."

The project consisted of seven specific activities.

- (1) Developing a website at www.deaflegaltheory.com, used to host blog/vlogs, exposés, webinars, and publications.
- (2) A Working Group of eight members, representing diverse perspectives within the deaf community, was formed.
- (3) An initial survey in English and International Sign was deployed to gather 200 responses, utilising Non-Government Organisations (NGO) partnerships and social media outreach.
- (4) A 1.5-day Zoom workshop, conducted in International Sign, involving eight participants, analysed the survey results to ascertain the most important themes from the survey to be used as part of the DLT model, resulting in this interim report.

- (5) A one-day Development Workshop with 18 participants, including the Working Group and 10 respondents identified through the initial survey, to refine the model, leading to a final report.
- (6) This final report, translated into International Sign, will be disseminated through the website and social media, accompanied by a feedback survey.
- (7) A webinar will be conducted via Zoom to share final report results, reaching out to survey respondents, NGO members and academic networks.

The intended impact of the project is as follows:

- (1) To empower the international deaf community, deaf NGOs, deaf lawyers and deaf (legal) academics to shape and influence the immersion of DLT within legal jurisprudence.
- (2) To establish a resilient conceptual and methodological framework that lays the groundwork for future studies and practical applications of DLT, furnishing both academic and non-academic stakeholders with the tools necessary to examine, explore, or comprehend how deaf people are framed within their respective legal systems and in different areas of law.
- (3) To create and maintain a centralised resource hub dedicated to DLT, serving as a comprehensive repository of information, insights, and resources for the benefit of the international deaf community, researchers, and students.
- (4) To provide the foundational elements necessary for the submission of large-scale funding applications.

4 Why do we need a model?

A model for DLT is necessary for several reasons. First, it would provide a clear framework to clarify what legal rights deaf individuals need to have, ensuring that their specific needs are fully recognised within the law. By offering a consistent approach across different legal systems, the model would help prevent disparities in the application of DLT and focus law- and policymakers on how to address the systemic barriers to justice that deaf people often face, such as the lack of access to

sign language interpreters and inaccessible processes and serve as a reminder to ensure full participation by deaf individuals.

A key focus of the model would be to balance disability and language rights, recognising both the cultural and linguistic aspects of deaf identity alongside disability frameworks. It would work to protect the cultural and linguistic identity of deaf individuals by ensuring that sign languages are included, given their important role in deaf lives. Additionally, the model would guide legal reforms, ensuring that deaf individuals' needs are accounted for in law-making processes.

For policymakers and legal professionals, the model would provide a roadmap to support their efforts in implementing inclusive legal frameworks. It would also foster accountability by ensuring that legal systems are responsible for providing equitable access to justice for deaf individuals. By emphasising adaptation to global and cultural differences, the model would ensure flexibility and relevance across diverse legal contexts. Ultimately, the model would empower deaf communities, enabling them to advocate for their rights and participate fully in society.

There are a variety of models that can be used, including the rights-based model, which emphasises legal protections and advocacy within human rights frameworks, with individuals given the right to be treated 'like everyone else' (Glicksman et al., 2017); the social inclusion model, which focuses on full and fair access to community-based resources and activities, and having a sense of belonging to a group (Cobigo et al., 2012); and the process-oriented model, which focuses on the relations between tasks, processes, resources and other organisational concepts (Popova & Sharpanskykh, 2008).

Other influential approaches include the co-production model, which prioritises collaboration and lived experience (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2022), and the intersectional model, which recognises the overlapping identities and diverse experiences of individuals within marginalised communities (Crenshaw, 1991). Additionally, the community empowerment model emphasises self-representation and grassroots advocacy (Ahmad et al., 2013), while the restorative justice model

addresses harm through accountability and dialogue (Ashworth, 2002). Each of these models offers unique strengths and principles that can inform the application of DLT to various legal systems or areas of law.

5 The BIG Survey results

The BIG Survey, conducted between 14 June 2024 and 31 August 2024, gathered 243 responses from diverse participants. Deployed through a targeted social media campaign, the survey aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives on key issues relevant to the development of DLT. The results provided valuable insights into lived experiences, professional practices, and the academic community, helping to shape the foundational themes for the proposed models.

5.1 Category

The survey results indicate a varied distribution across respondent categories, with the majority of participants coming from those with lived experience as deaf individuals, totalling 127 respondents (see Figure 2). This is a good representation of firsthand perspectives, ensuring that the experiences of deaf individuals themselves are central to the development of the DLT model. Practitioners follow, with 58 responses, reflecting the views of those working directly within the legal, advocacy, or related fields. Finally, 54 responses were provided by academics, adding an important theoretical and research-driven dimension to the survey. This balance between lived experience, practitioner insight, and academic expertise ensures a holistic foundation for the DLT model, which will inform the creation of the final model.

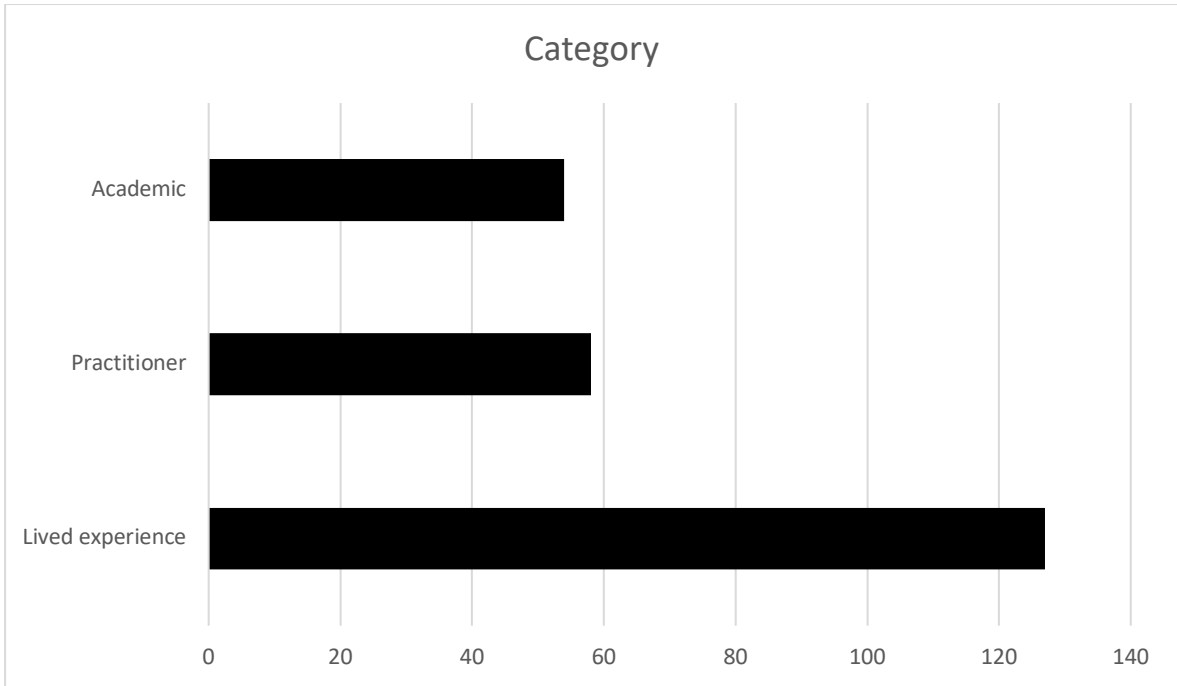


Figure 2: BIG Survey respondents by Category

5.2 Regions

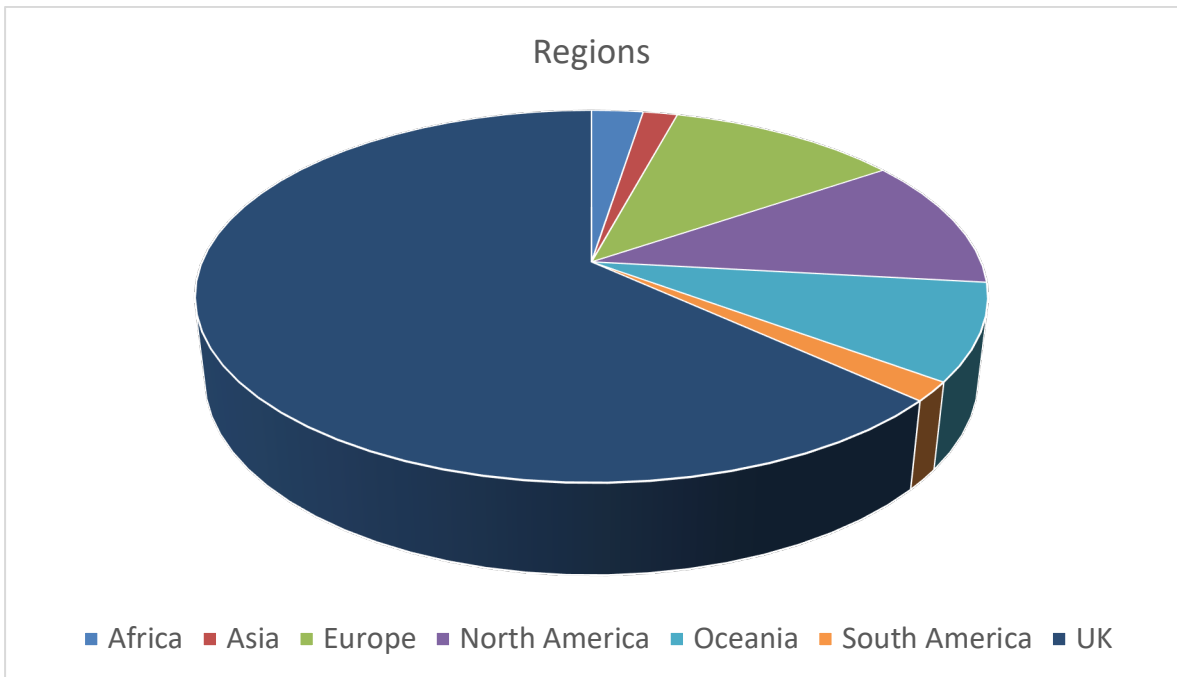


Figure 3: BIG Survey respondents by Region

The geographic distribution of responses from the BIG Survey reveals a significant concentration of participants from the UK, with 151 responses, representing the overwhelming majority of the data (see Figure 3). In comparison, Europe (excluding the UK) and North America both contributed 27 participants each, followed by Oceania with 20 participants. Regions such as Africa and Asia are underrepresented, with only 6 and 4 participants, respectively, as is South America with 4 participants. This distribution highlights the need for broader engagement from the Global South to ensure the global applicability of the DLT model. While the UK's dominance in the data may reflect successful outreach or heightened relevance in that region, future efforts should aim for a more balanced global representation.

5.3 Label

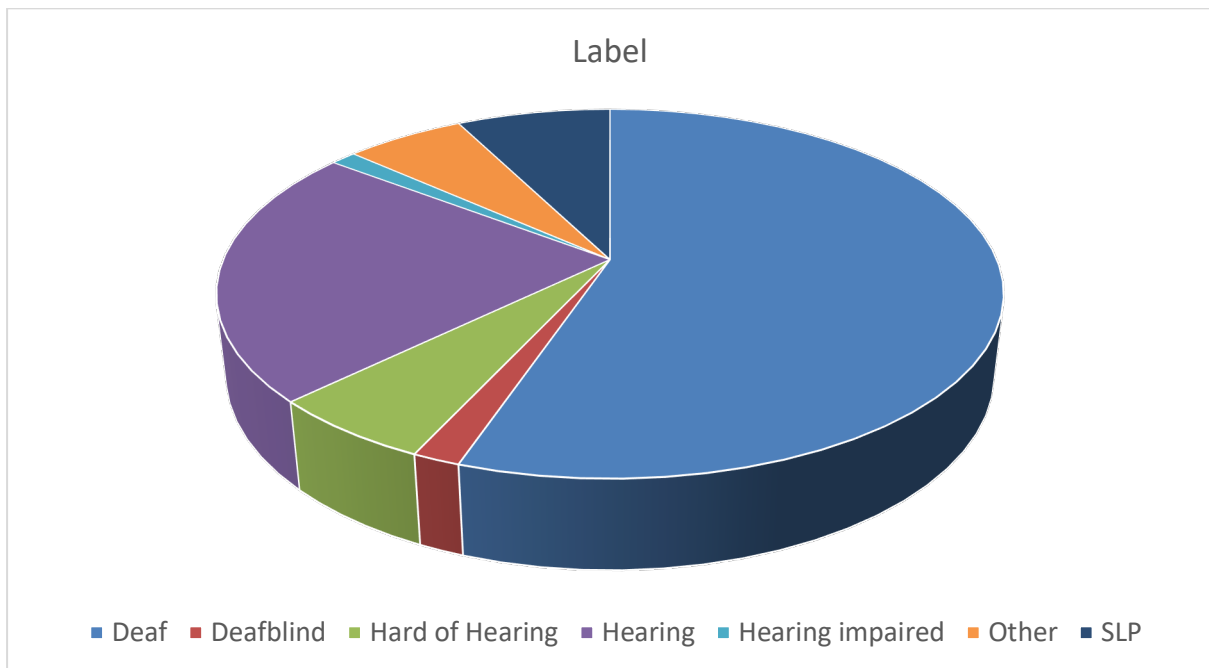


Figure 4: BIG Survey respondents by Label

In Figure 4, the BIG Survey responses by label indicate that the majority of participants identified as deaf, with 132 respondents, demonstrating the significant representation of the deaf community. This strong presence ensures that deaf perspectives are central to the development of DLT. A smaller portion of respondents identified as Hard of Hearing (14) and Other (14), while hearing individuals accounted for 54 responses,

providing an external viewpoint. There were also 18 responses from Sign Language Persons (SLP), 4 deafblind individuals, and 3 hearing impaired.

5.4 Gender

Survey responses show a significant gender imbalance, with 160 participants identifying as female, making up the majority of the respondents (see Figure 5). In comparison, 75 participants identified as male, followed by 2 non-binary participants and 1 gender-fluid participant. Additionally, 1 respondent chose to prefer not to say. This distribution reflects a strong female representation in the data, with relatively fewer responses from other gender identities.

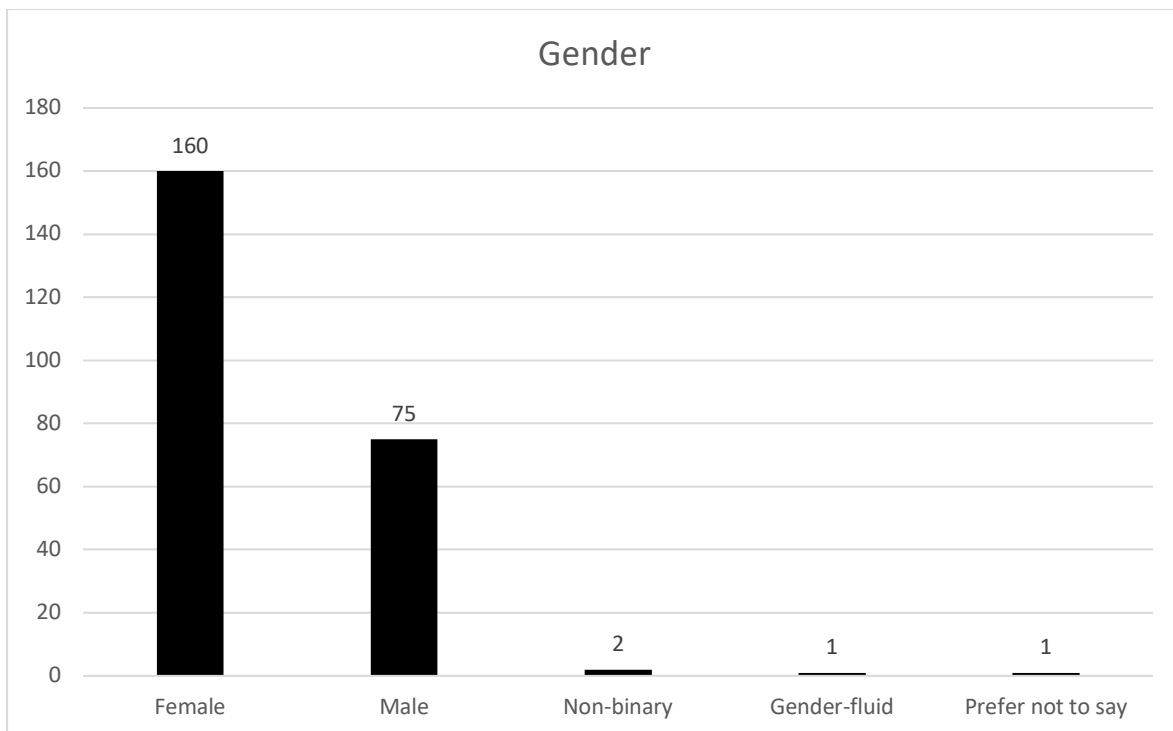


Figure 5: BIG Survey respondents by Gender

5.5 Age

The survey responses by age group (see Figure 6) show a strong representation from middle-aged participants. The majority of respondents fall between 40–49 years old (73 participants) and 50–59 years old (66 participants), with a significant portion also aged 60+ (40 participants). There is lower representation from younger age groups,

with only 11 respondents in the 22–29 range, 4 respondents aged 18–21, and 45 respondents aged 30–39. This age distribution indicates that the perspectives of older adults are dominant, while younger generations are underrepresented in the data. This could influence the overall focus of the model, and the needs and priorities identified for DLT.

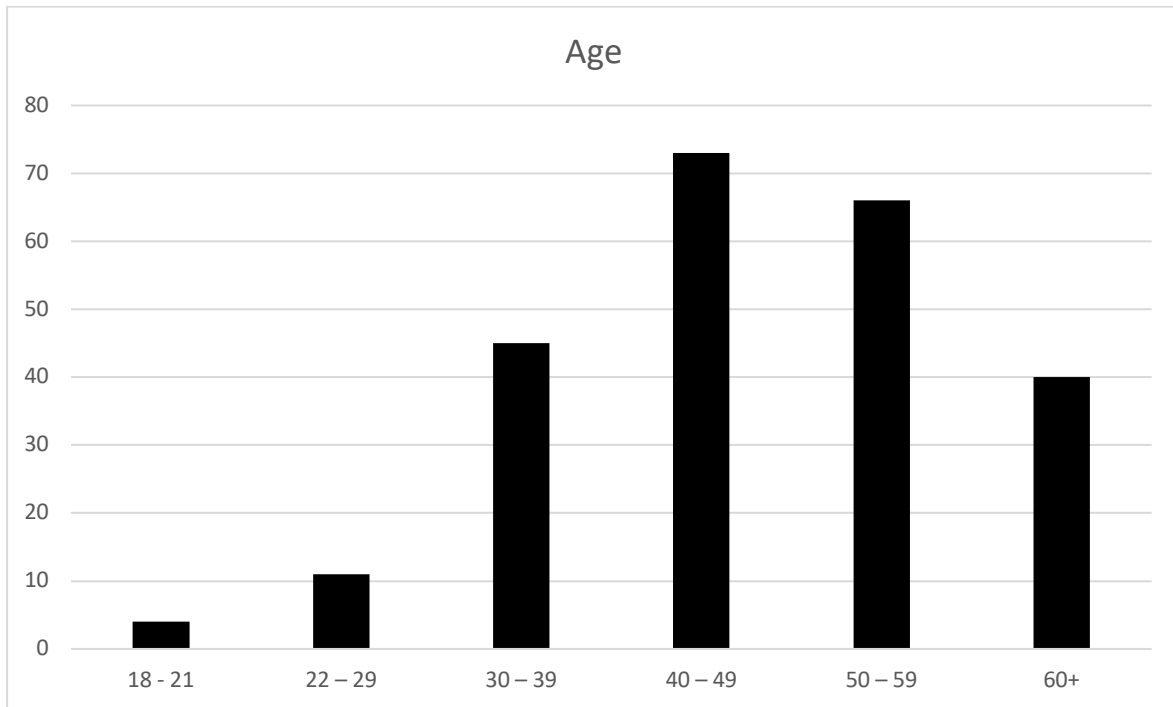


Figure 6: BIG Survey respondents by Age

5.6 Global Majority

The ethnicity data from the BIG Survey (see Figure 7) reveals a significant underrepresentation of the Global Majority, with White respondents making up 66.2% of the total sample (158 respondents). Black respondents accounted for 4.6% (11 responses), and Asian respondents represented 4.2% (10 responses). The Mixed and Other categories each comprised 4.2% (10 responses and 5 responses, respectively), while Arab respondents had no recorded responses, accounting for 0%. Additionally, 18.8% of the responses were classified as Not Known (45 responses). This disproportionate representation of White perspectives skews the overall survey results and highlights the need for more inclusive data collection. Moving forward, it is

essential to ensure that the experiences and perspectives of the Global Majority are adequately represented.

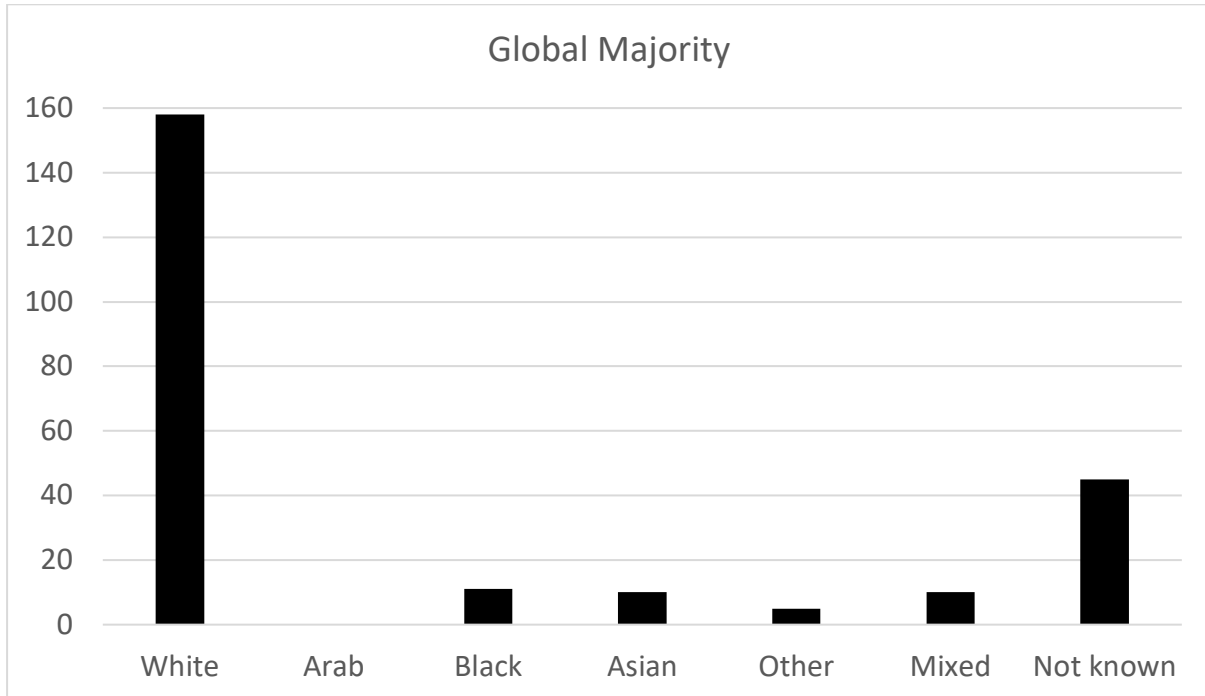


Figure 7: Global Majority representation in the BIG Survey

5.7 Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis process for the BIG Survey involved several key stages. Initially, NVivo was used to analyse and code the survey responses, leading to the identification of 21 themes (see Figure 8, Column A). These themes emerged from responses across various categories, including those with lived experience, practitioners, and academics.

Part 1 of the Brainstorming Workshop was a critical step in developing the final themes for the DLT model. The Working Group engaged in a dynamic process of discussion, polling, and interviews to determine the most relevant aspects of the BIG Survey. Throughout the workshop, participants completed polls to indicate their preferences on key issues, helping to narrow down the essential components of the model (see

Figure 8, Column B). These polls were a vital tool in building consensus and guiding the group toward unified decisions.

In addition to the group discussions (see Figure 8, Column C), a series of individual interviews were conducted with Working Group members. These interviews, based on questions agreed upon by the group, explored four main areas: who is DLT for, should the focus be on linguistic or disabled rights, should access be central to or even part of DLT, and what principles should we include in DLT? The feedback from these interviews provided deeper insights into the group's perspectives (see Figure 8, Column D), which were then integrated into the final stages of the model's development. Through this process, the group refined the list of key themes from the BIG Survey into the final list of themes to be used to develop the DLT model (see Figure 8, Column E).

Through this collaborative and multi-layered process, the group arrived at a set of nine core themes – access and accessibility, community representation, co-creation, participation and inclusion, recognition of sign languages, the framing of deaf people as disabled or a linguistic minority, awareness and training, adaptability and flexibility, intersectionality, and advocacy – which were to shape the structure of the DLT model moving forward.

A BIG Survey	B Poll results	C Working Group Discussions	D Interviews	E Final list
Redress Access Lack of awareness Information acquisition DLT framework Attitudes Negative impact Importance of advocacy Positive impact Co-production Monolingual services Audism Deaf leadership Access to legal advice Stereotypes assumptions Deaf disabled dichotomy Service provision Weak law Capacity Deaf culture Miscarriage	Inclusive policies and legal rights Recognition of sign languages Access to legal info Understanding legal texts Access Accessibility and interpreters Ignorance of deaf needs Access to legal advice (more than 3) Awareness Deaf awareness and training (x 2) Awareness of sign languages Understanding deaf culture (x2) Need for education Lack of understanding (attitudes) Prejudiced attitudes Impact Discrimination and inequality Barriers to justice Impact on legal outcomes Influence of advocacy on policy Importance of advocacy Role of advocacy groups Need for increased efforts DLT framework Integration of deaf perspectives Inclusive legal framework	Tension viewing deaf individuals through disability lens versus linguistic minority lens Access/accessibility Need for a clear legal framework What principles should inform DLT CRPD, constitutional rights Language rights separate or alongside disability rights Challenges of global application Balancing legal and academic definitions E.g. deaf, SLP Lack of representation and geographic gaps Different national contexts E.g. some focus on disability, some on language Other emerging themes Co-creation, participation and inclusion Legal system should involve deaf individuals in shaping policies and frameworks that affect them Sign language as human right Without sign language, all other rights are compromised Sign language ratification in law is key Global and cultural variations Stark differences between regions of the world Can't have one-size-fits-all approach	Who is DLT for? Everyone! Deaf individuals As a linguistic minority Legal professionals and policy makers/politicians Should the focus be on linguistic or disabled rights? Need to focus on both disability and linguistic rights But should emphasise language rights over disability as do not have equal status Deaf people as an ethnic group Should access be central to or even part of DLT? "Language access" is core to accessibility Access is only one way to break down barriers, so need to go wider Should focus on sign language rights Paternalistic framework What principles should we include in DLT? Human rights and language rights should be primary principles Dignity Anti-oppression Intersectionality	Access and accessibility Community representation Co-creation, participation and inclusion Recognition of sign languages Framing of deaf people as disabled or language minority Awareness and training Adaptability and flexibility (global and cultural variations) Intersectionality Advocacy

Figure 8: Themes Progression Table

6 Proposed models

As the Brainstorming Workshop progressed into Part 2, the Working Group examined a variety of model types to find the most appropriate structure for DLT. These included the rights-based model, social inclusion model, process-oriented model, co-production model, intersectional model, community empowerment model, and restorative justice model. After thorough discussion, the group expressed a desire to create a model that encapsulates elements from most of these frameworks.

6.1 Model A

Model A

01 - Access and Accessibility

Universal Design, Physical and Digital Access, Resource Availability

Access and accessibility, Adaptability and flexibility (global and cultural variations), Awareness and training

05 - Framing and Identity

Language and Disability Perspectives, Self-Identification, Social Models of Disability

Framing of deaf people as disabled or language minority, Intersectionality

06 - Awareness and Training

Education, Capacity Building, Deaf Awareness Training

Awareness and training, Advocacy, Empowerment

02 - Community Representation

Diverse Voices, Cultural Identity, Social Justice

Community representation, Intersectionality, Advocacy

03 - Co-Creation and Participation

Collaboration, Shared Decision-Making, Empowerment

Co-creation, participation and inclusion, Community engagement

04 - Recognition of Sign Languages

Language Rights, Cultural Respect, Affirmation of Identity

Recognition of sign languages, Framing of deaf people as disabled or language minority

07 - Intersectionality and Inclusion

Diverse Perspectives, Holistic Approaches, Cultural Sensitivity

Intersectionality, Community representation, Co-creation and participation

08 - Advocacy

Legal Support, Policy Change, Awareness Campaigns

Advocacy, Rights framework, Recognition of sign languages

09 - Adaptation and Flexibility

Responsive Practices, Innovation, Continuous Improvement

Adaptability and flexibility (global and cultural variations), Co-creation and participation

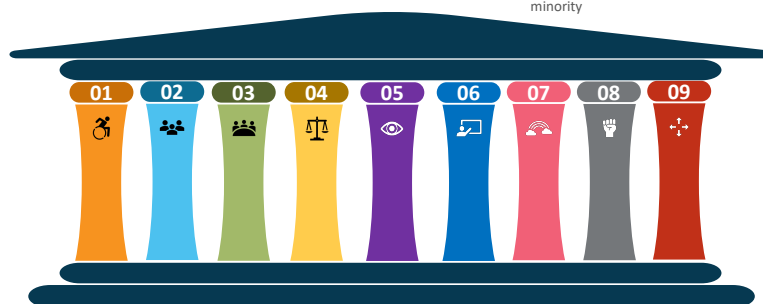


Figure 9: Model A

Model A presents a comprehensive framework with nine pillars that focus on various aspects of DLT. Each pillar represents the nine key themes that were developed through the Brainstorming Workshops by the Working Group:

- (1) **Access and accessibility** - focuses on sign language interpreters, information, legal texts and legal advice, and awareness of these.
- (2) **Community representation** - highlights the importance of diverse voices, cultural identity, and collective efforts within the deaf community.

- (3) **Co-creation and participation** - advocates for collaborative and shared decision-making processes, with a focus on inclusion and community engagement in legal contexts.
- (4) **Recognition of sign languages** - stresses the need for legal recognition of sign languages, framing deaf people as part of a language minority group.
- (5) **Cultural and Legal Perceptions** - addresses language and disability perspectives, acknowledging the intersection of social, medical, and linguistic framings of deaf people.
- (6) **Awareness and training** - focuses on awareness programmes, and the importance of training for various stakeholders, particularly law- and policymakers, to foster understanding of deaf issues.
- (7) **Intersectionality and inclusion** - incorporates the experiences of deaf individuals across race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity, ensuring full community participation and recognition of intersecting identities.
- (8) **Advocacy** - centres on legal and policy change and systemic reforms, particularly in the context of human rights frameworks and the recognition of sign languages.
- (9) **Adaptation and flexibility** - encourages continuous improvement in practices, policies, and cultural relevance across different global and legal systems, fostering adaptability to ensure inclusion.

6.2 Model B

Model B

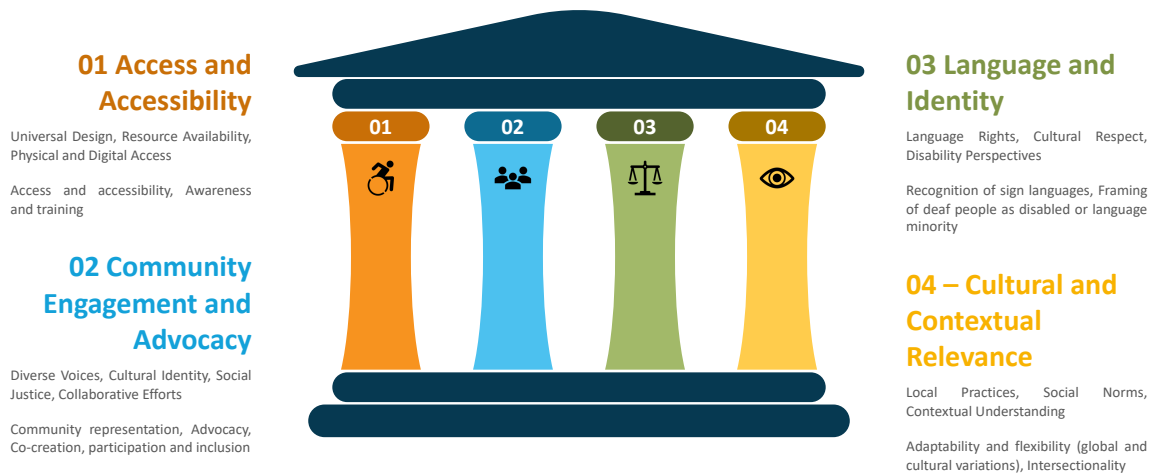


Figure 10: Model B

Model B is a streamlined approach of Model A with four key pillars, each of which represents broader themes in DLT.

- (1) **Access and accessibility** – emphasis is on sign language interpreters, information, legal texts and legal advice, and awareness of these.
- (2) **Community engagement and advocacy** - supports co-creation and participatory approaches, ensuring that the deaf community is actively engaged in legal advocacy and decision-making processes.
- (3) **Language and identity** - focuses on language rights, cultural respect, and balancing the perspectives of deaf individuals as part of a language minority and/or disabled community. It also highlights the recognition of sign languages in legal frameworks.
- (4) **Cultural and contextual relevance** - this pillar addresses the need for local, regional, and national practices, social norms, and contextual understanding. It encourages flexibility and adaptability to account for global

and cultural variations in legal systems and deaf communities, while also recognising intersectionality.

6.3 Model C

Model C

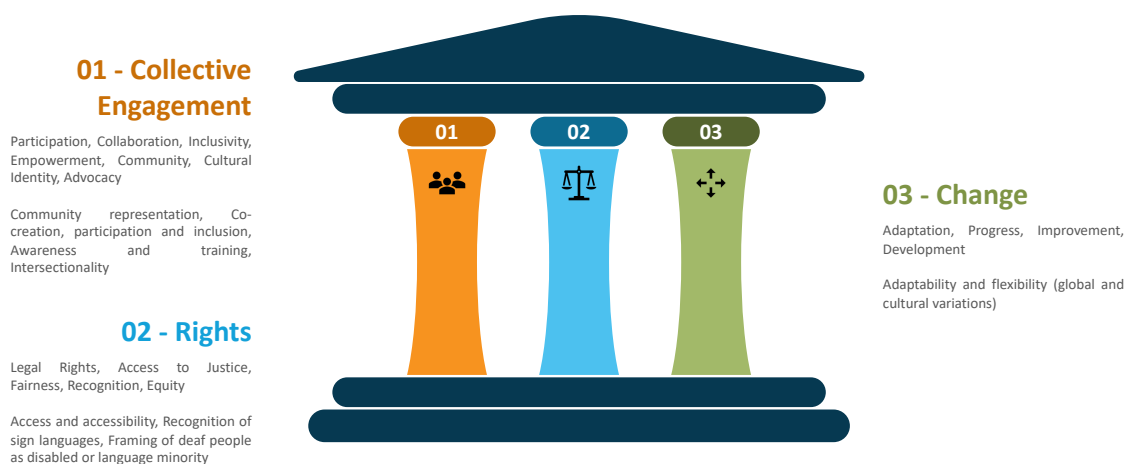


Figure 11: Model C

Model C attempts to reduce the number of pillars from four to three key pillars: Collective Engagement, Rights, and Change.

- (1) **Collective engagement** - this pillar emphasises the importance of participation, collaboration, inclusion, and empowerment. It involves various stakeholders in community representation, co-creation, and advocacy, and encourages training, awareness, and the consideration of intersectionality to foster more inclusive environments.
- (2) **Rights** - focuses on legal rights, access to justice, fairness, and recognition of equality. It addresses accessibility in various sectors, including the recognition of sign languages and the status of deaf people as both a linguistic and cultural minority.
- (3) **Change** - centred around adaptability, progress, and improvement. It emphasises the need for development through flexibility, considering both

global and cultural variations. The model promotes continuous improvement and the ability to adapt to different contexts.

7 The Development Workshop

The Development Workshop involved members of the Working Group and a select group of survey respondents. Prior to the workshop, participants completed a 5-question survey prior to the workshop, designed to capture their preferences and thoughts on the proposed models. The results from this survey were shared with attendees at the beginning of the workshop, and these insights helped shape the discussions. The workshop was organised into three breakout sessions, led by two participants, with each session focused on gathering input and providing clarity on the models.

The 5-question survey revealed a strong preference for Model B, with many respondents noting that it was easier to understand and more suited to professional use: 'Model B is easier to understand and apply. It's perfect for professionals who need something straightforward and practical.' This model was appreciated for its compactness and clarity, making it particularly effective for advocacy and awareness-raising: 'For raising awareness among policymakers, Model B is the best fit, as it is more straightforward and compact.'

Model A also received significant support, especially from those who valued its depth and pedagogical approach: 'Model A adequately represents the perspective of DLT, while also addressing each of the 9 core themes facilitating the identification of actions following those pillars.' However, some respondents found Model A too complex: 'Model A is very detailed, and it might overwhelm those who are not familiar with legal theory. It's more suitable for academia.'

Model C, while favoured for its simplicity, faced criticism for being too general, particularly for those working in legal contexts: 'Model C is the most concise and easier to understand, but it feels too simplistic. It's a good starting point but lacks depth for legal applications.' Others highlighted the importance of flexibility, with comments

such as, 'Model C lacks flexibility, which is crucial for adapting to different legal and cultural contexts.'

The survey also prompted feedback about the audience suitability of the models. Model A was deemed most suitable for academics: 'Model A provides a solid theoretical framework, making it ideal for academic discussions and legal research.' Model B was considered ideal for professionals, especially in policymaking and advocacy: 'Model B is great for professionals working in the field, as it offers practical steps that can be immediately applied in advocacy and legal systems.' Finally, Model C was recognised as best for deaf community members: 'Model C is clear and easy for deaf community members to understand, making it a useful tool for grassroots activism.'

Following the breakout sessions, a vote was conducted, and over 80% of the respondents favoured a hybrid model, which would combine elements from all three models. This was seen as the most adaptable approach, as it would cater to a variety of audiences, including academics, professionals, and the deaf community. As one participant remarked, 'the hybrid model allows us to integrate the clarity of Model B with the depth of Model A, making it versatile for multiple audiences.'

The workshop discussions also emphasised key themes identified from the survey, such as cultural and contextual relevance. Participants agreed that the model should be flexible enough to be applied across different legal systems and societal contexts: 'We can't create a model that fits one country or one legal system; it needs to adapt to different regions and cultures while maintaining core principles.'

Intersectionality was another prominent theme. Many participants expressed that the model should better reflect the diversity of the deaf community, particularly the experiences of deaf+ individuals and those from marginalised backgrounds: 'We can't ignore the intersections of deaf identity with other aspects like gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. This model must reflect those complexities.'

The discussion also reinforced the importance of flexibility in the model. Several participants emphasised that the model should not be rigid but should allow for adaptation depending on the legal and cultural context: 'The model should provide

core principles but allow for adjustments based on the specific needs of each jurisdiction and community.'

The Development Workshop highlighted a preference for a hybrid model, which integrates the strengths of all three models while maintaining flexibility for practical application. This model is seen as offering a balance between theoretical depth and practical clarity, making it relevant and adaptable across different audiences and legal systems. The key themes discussed during the workshop, such as intersectionality, cultural relevance, and cultural and legal contexts, are to be integral in refining the final model.

The chronological nature of Model C was a key consideration in its selection as the overarching structure for the hybrid model. During the Development Workshop, the progression of ideas from Collective Engagement to Rights and ultimately to Change was seen as a logical and effective way to represent the stages of applying the DLT model. This chronological flow allows for a clear depiction of how legal systems evolve and adapt over time, starting with community involvement and engagement, progressing to the establishment and recognition of rights, and ultimately achieving continuous improvement and progress in legal frameworks. An important refinement was also made to the terminology of the third pillar. The original term Change, which was initially favoured in the workshop, was revised to Progress to better reflect the forward-moving, continuous nature of legal and social development.

8 Finalising the DLT model

The development of the final DLT model was a reflective process, involving thoughtful reflection following the feedback from key stakeholders at all stages of the co-production process. As a starting point, we produced an overview of all three proposed models to assist in the identification of commonalities and overlaps, to begin the process of streamlining, merging and combining elements (see Figure 12). A colour-coding method was employed to clearly distinguish which model each element originally belonged to, with Model A in dark blue, Model B in red, and Model C in green.

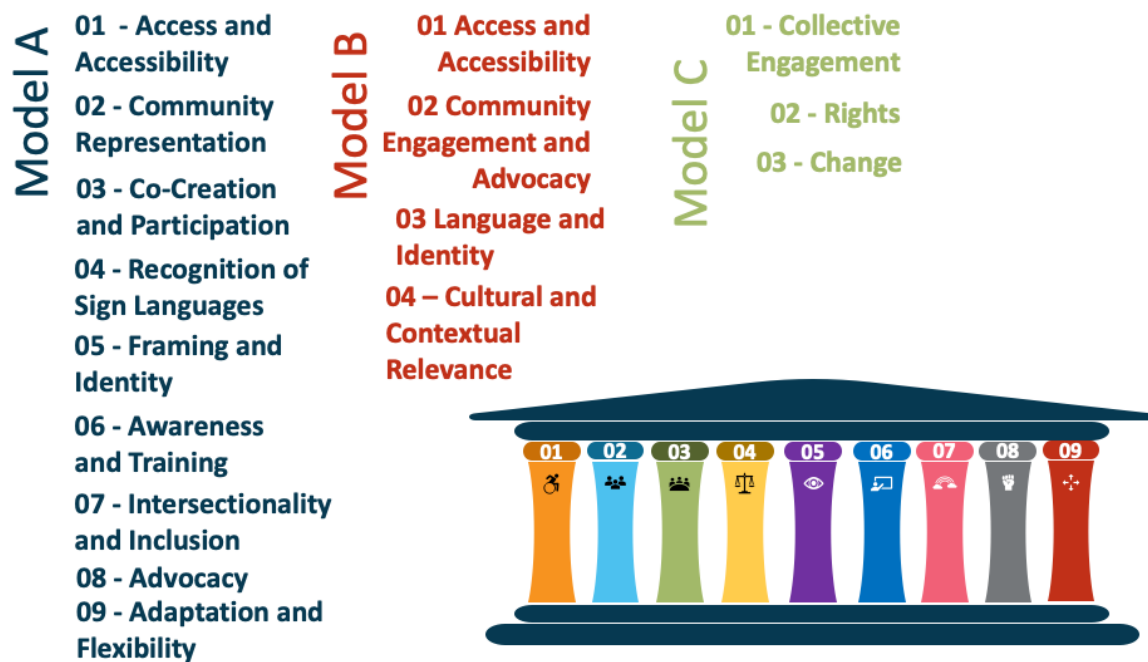


Figure 12: Overview of the three proposed models

In the early stages, there was significant reflection on how to best categorise the elements of the model. This stage was essential in structuring the framework to ensure that it was both practical and adaptable to diverse legal systems and cultural contexts. The process of arriving at these components involved considerable thought, particularly around the terminology to use. There was a deliberate effort to ensure the model’s structure was clear, intuitive, and immediately understandable, both for academics, for practitioners and for deaf community members.

Initially, we considered various terms, such as principles, drivers, and themes, but these terms felt either too vague or did not fully encapsulate the specific role each element played in the framework. After careful deliberation, the decision was made to use pillars, foundations, and features, as these terms clearly communicated their respective functions within the model.

The pillars were understood to be the principles that guide the framework, and they form the core structure of the DLT model. The foundations, on the other hand, represent the universal building blocks that apply across all pillars, ensuring the

model's consistency and relevance across different contexts. Lastly, the features provide the flexible, adaptable components that enable the model's practical application. Once the framework components were outlined, the themes were reviewed to determine whether they should be classified as foundations or features.

Next, the titles of each foundation and feature were carefully examined to ensure that they were self-explanatory and clear. Where necessary, common denominators were merged to simplify the model. For example, 'Cultural and Contextual Relevance' was relabelled to 'Global and Local Realities,' and 'Adaptation and Flexibility' was renamed 'Cultural and Legal Contexts.' These refinements ensure that the framework is not only easier to understand but also more directly aligned with the model's core principles of flexibility and relevance across various legal contexts.



Figure 13: The pillars, foundations and features

A graphic representation was created to visually illustrate these groupings (see Figure 13), with the colour-coding system intact to enable us to see which elements originally belonged to which of the three proposed models.

9 The final model

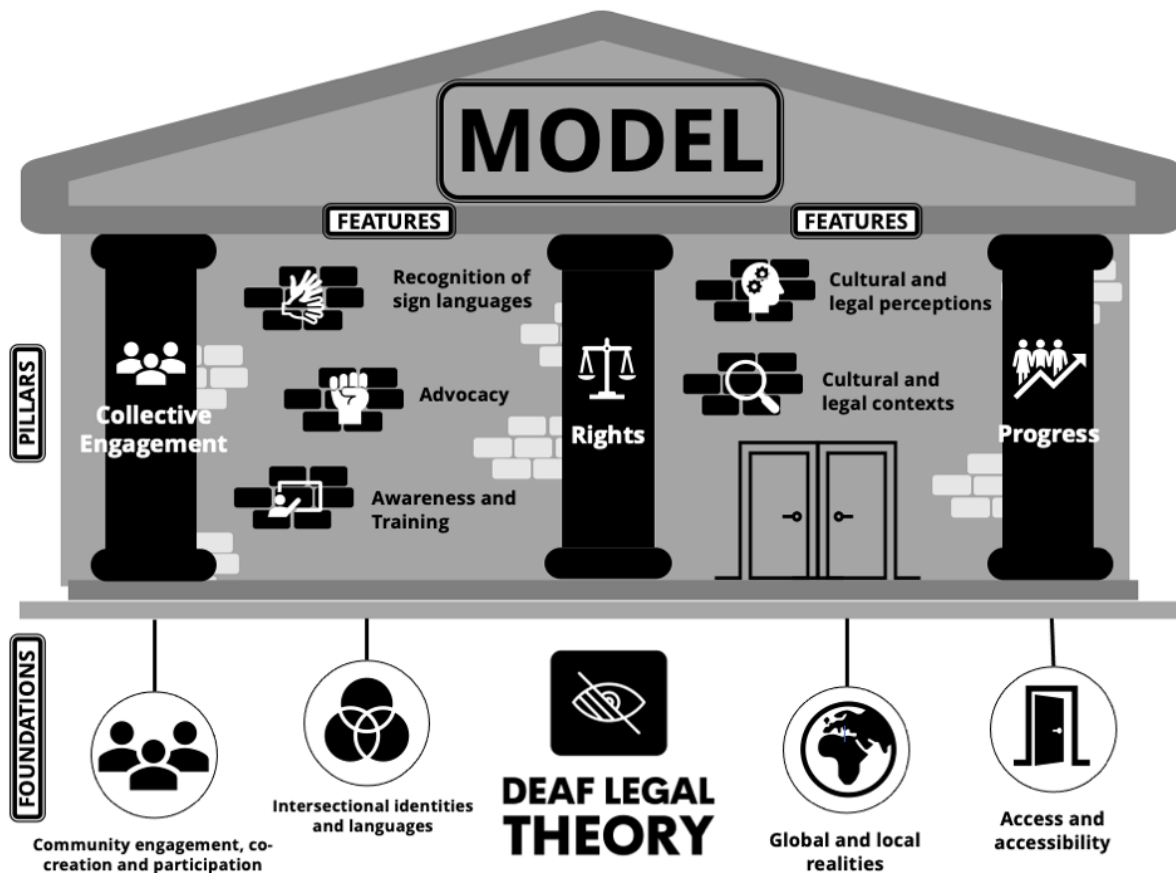


Figure 14: The final DLT model

The final model (see Figure 14) features the pillars as the core structural elements of the model – Collective Engagement, Rights, and Progress – which serve as the main supports for the framework.

The foundations apply universally across all pillars, ensuring that the DLT model remains coherent and applicable in different legal contexts while reflecting the diverse experiences of the deaf community. These include Community Engagement, Co-Creation and Participation, which stresses the importance of involving deaf individuals in all aspects of legal development, and Access and Accessibility, which ensures that any use of the DLT framework – whether by governments, policymakers, researchers, or practitioners – must be designed with accessibility at its core. This foundation

stresses the need to ensure that legal processes, research, and tools are accessible to all deaf individuals, regardless of their specific circumstances or location. Another foundation, Intersectional Identities and Languages, acknowledges the complexity of deaf identities and the need to account for the intersection of deaf+, disability, ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, and other marginalised groups, while ensuring that the model supports the diverse linguistic needs of the community, including signed and spoken languages. The Global and Local Realities foundation emphasises the need for the model to be adaptable, accounting for the varied legal systems and cultural contexts across the world. Lastly, Cultural and Legal Contexts ensures that the model is flexible enough to evolve and adjust in response to changing legal and social contexts.

The features of the model provide the practical tools and mechanisms necessary for implementation. These feature Cultural and Legal Perceptions, Recognition of Sign Languages, Advocacy, Awareness and Training, and Cultural and Legal Contexts. They serve as concrete actions that bring the pillars and foundations to life. Cultural and Legal Perceptions addresses the way deaf people are perceived and recognised within legal systems, helping to understand why they are dealt with a particular way by various legal systems. This framing goes further to recognise that deaf people's experiences are shaped by a variety of intersectional identities. This term replaces the earlier label, Framing and Identity, to provide greater clarity and immediately convey the focus on how cultural and legal frameworks shape perceptions of deaf people. Similarly, Responsive Design has been renamed Cultural and Legal Contexts to better capture its intended meaning. This feature emphasises the flexibility of the model, ensuring it can be tailored to the specific needs of deaf people and communities within different legal systems and social contexts.

Recognition of Sign Languages advocates for the formal acknowledgment of signed languages in legal contexts. Beyond legal settings, the recognition of sign languages is crucial for the social, cognitive, and educational development of deaf individuals. Acquiring a signed language is not only a matter of communication, but it also facilitates access to education, employment opportunities, and social integration.

When national sign languages are formally recognised, it can ensure that deaf individuals have access to the necessary resources, such as sign language interpreters, essential for success in both academic and professional spheres. Advocacy focuses on the importance of continuous efforts to influence legal and policy changes, empowering the deaf community to take an active role in advocating for their rights. The Awareness and Training feature emphasises the need for legal professionals, policymakers, and the public to be educated and made aware of deaf perspectives. Finally, Cultural and Legal Contexts ensures that the model remains adaptable and can be tailored to the specific needs of deaf people within each legal system or community.

This final DLT model is not only a theoretical framework but also a practical guide for implementation. It is designed to be inclusive, actionable, and flexible, ensuring that it can be applied across diverse legal systems, cultures, and communities. The pillars provide the core principles, the foundations offer the universal building blocks to ensure consistency and adaptability, and the features present the actionable components that make the model functional and relevant.

10 Reflections on the modelling

Various types of models were discussed during the Part 2 Brainstorming Workshop, with each emphasising different priorities and principles, offering unique insights into how the DLT model could be structured. The purpose of this section of the report is to discuss how these have been embedded into the three proposed models and in the final model.

The rights-based model formed a critical foundation for the DLT framework, as it emphasises legal protections, human rights frameworks, and advocacy efforts. Similarly, the social inclusion model influenced the framework by focusing on removing barriers to access and fostering a sense of belonging. The process-oriented model also played a significant role by emphasising the importance of accessibility and responsiveness. Additionally, the co-production model was integral due to the collaborative nature of the DLT model's development and as a foundation in the final

model. Another important influence was the intersectional model, which highlights the intersection of deaf individuals' cultural, linguistic, and social identities, as well as other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The community empowerment model further shaped the framework by emphasising advocacy and community engagement and participation. Finally, the restorative justice model contributed to the DLT models by addressing harm through accountability, dialogue, and reconciliation through the Rights pillar, but was considered a low priority by the Working Group, who preferred to focus on the future and not the past.

The proposed models - Models A, B, and C - reflected the types of models in different ways. For instance, the rights-based model and process-oriented model were central to Model A, which focused on formal legal protections and procedural rigour. Model B drew heavily on the social inclusion and co-production models, emphasising practical applications and collaborative approaches. Model C, in turn, reflected the community empowerment and intersectional models, prioritising advocacy, cultural relevance, and linguistic diversity.

The final hybrid DLT model integrates the strengths of these proposed models. The pillars – Collective Engagement, Rights, and Progress – reflect the influence of the rights-based model, community empowerment model, and process-oriented model. The foundations embody principles from the intersectional model, social inclusion model, and co-production model. Finally, the features, such as Recognition of Sign Languages and Cultural and Legal Perceptions, incorporate elements of the restorative justice model, promoting recognition, healing, and accountability.

11 Conclusion and next steps

The DLT model represents the culmination of a global co-produced effort, developed through an ongoing collaboration between deaf community members, legal professionals and advocates, and academics. From the very beginning, the model has been shaped by the input and insights of those who directly engage with legal systems and those who are impacted by it. The BIG Survey, Brainstorming Workshops, and subsequent Development Workshop served as key moments in the co-production

process, allowing for continuous dialogue and refinement. The input from the survey respondents and Working Group, played a crucial role in identifying the framework elements of the model, ensuring that it was not only theoretically sound but also practical, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of the community.

The process of co-production was integral in developing the hybrid model. Through the collaborative workshops and ongoing feedback loops, we moved from initial drafts and proposed models - Model A, B, and C – to the final, refined structure that integrates the best aspects of each. This was an iterative process, where each element of the model, from the pillars to the foundations and features, was continuously shaped by the contributions of the Working Group and survey respondents. The emphasis on community engagement, co-creation, and participation ensured that every voice was heard, and each decision was made with a focus on collaboration.

The following actions outline the priorities for next steps:

- **Global Majority engagement** – the next phase will involve actively engaging deaf communities from underrepresented regions, particularly those in and from the Global South, through future co-production projects.
- **Deaf+ perspectives** – the next phase will also actively engage individuals who identify as deaf and who also have additional intersecting identities or experiences through future co-production projects.
- **Deaf Legal Theory Foundation** – we will establish the DLT Foundation as a dedicated entity to support the continued development, application, and refinement of the DLT model. The Foundation will facilitate pilot projects, provide resources for research, and serve as a hub for advocacy, collaboration, and training.
- **Testing and application** – we will continue to co-produce the model by testing its practical application across different legal systems, producing case studies and examples to demonstrate its applicability. This will include further collaboration with NGOs, professionals, academics, and policymakers to gather feedback on its real-world relevance and identify areas for refinement.

- **Ongoing co-production and refinement** – the DLT model is a living framework, and co-production remains at its core. We will continue to refine the model, ensuring it is adaptable and evolves in response to new insights, emerging challenges, and the changing needs of the deaf community.
- **Educational outreach** – we will expand efforts to raise awareness of the DLT model through training programmes, educational resources, and advocacy initiatives. These will engage a broad range of stakeholders, from legal professionals to policy advocates, ensuring that the model is used effectively in driving deaf-inclusive legal reform.

The co-production process will continue to drive the DLT model forward, ensuring that it remains inclusive, responsive, and adaptable. By actively involving the global deaf community at every stage, we are creating a model that is not only universally relevant but also capable of effecting real change in deaf empowerment within the various legal systems of the world.

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