

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad: [A oes gan blant a phobl ifanc anabl fynediad cyfartal at addysg a gofal plant?](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for the inquiry: [Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?](#)**

**AEC 23**

**Ymateb gan: Y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol i Blant Byddar Cymru**

**Response from: National Deaf Children's Society Cymru**

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## **Executive summary**

Deaf children and their families in Wales can face many barriers to an equal access to education and childcare. In our inquiry response below, we outline three key areas where deaf children face barriers to education.

These three areas include:

- The reduction in the number of Qualified Teachers of the Deaf in Wales.
- Unequal access to early years education and childcare for deaf children.
- Barriers for deaf children receiving British Sign Language education in the early years.

We are calling for:

- A Welsh Government workforce plan to increase the number of Teachers of the Deaf.
- Welsh Government and service areas to review the early years offer for deaf children.
- Boost the number of British Sign Language tutors and support commissioning services.

## **Introduction**

National Deaf Children's Society gave evidence to the committee regarding this inquiry on Wednesday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, alongside the Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance (TSANA).

We are providing a detailed consultation response to add to the points we raised and to further highlight other key areas where deaf children face barriers in education and childcare.

The National Deaf Children's Society seeks to create a world without barriers for deaf children, young people and their families. We support children and young people with all levels of deafness, from mild through to profound, including those with temporary hearing loss and a unilateral loss. We use the term deafness to refer to all levels of hearing loss.

Deafness is not a learning disability, and, with appropriate support, deaf learners should achieve on a par with their hearing peers.

## **Teachers of the Deaf**

### **Teachers of the Deaf, the role they play**

Teachers of the Deaf are qualified teachers who have taken further training and qualified to teach children with a hearing loss. They provide support to deaf children, their parents and family, and to other professionals who are involved with a child's education from the early years all the way through to further education.

For many families, the child's Teacher of the Deaf may be the main person responsible for coordinating the early years support service for the family. More than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents with no prior experience of deafness. Teachers of the Deaf provide an essential role in

coordinating support for the deaf child and their family as soon as their child is identified as deaf. For many families, this can be in the first weeks of their child's life if deafness is identified through a newborn hearing screening.

Teachers of the Deaf working with deaf children in the early years may visit the family at home on a regular basis and monitor and assess development of the deaf child with their listening and language skills. They will also support early years practitioners with advice and guidance as many will not have a detailed knowledge of deafness as they will only occasionally have a permanently deaf child in their care.

Teachers of the Deaf then play an important role in working with the deaf child and their family in supporting them with deaf technology such as hearing aids, working with the deaf child in classroom settings, coordinating speech and language support, working with audiology and passing information on to Additional Learning Need Coordinators. Depending on the deaf child's needs, this type of support may be in place all throughout their education.

The role of a Teacher of the Deaf can be essential in the foundational stages of a deaf child's early years development. With the right support in place, deaf children should achieve on a par with their hearing peers.

### **Teachers of the Deaf in Wales, where we are**

Teacher of the Deaf numbers in Wales have reduced by 1 in 5 (20%) since 2011. A further one-third of Teachers of the Deaf are set to retire in the next decade or so. With the current educational attainment gap between deaf learners and their hearing peers, in addition to the essential support Teachers of the Deaf provide deaf children and their families in the early years, developing a robust plan for a sustainable Teacher of the Deaf workforce is now more important than ever.

Teachers of the Deaf are teachers who have taken on a [postgraduate level course](#) which is either self-funded or funded by the local authority or school. These courses are run by universities located in either England or Scotland. Under the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code (Chapter 7), local authorities are responsible for planning their ALN workforce and are required to keep this under review. However, the current Teacher of the Deaf provision across Wales is patchy and inconsistent. The current service is not future-proofed. Any staff absences, even if temporary, can have a dramatic effect on workforce numbers.

### **Teachers of the Deaf, the solutions**

1. We are calling on the Welsh Government to **develop a Wales-wide Teacher of the Deaf workforce strategy**.

Compared with other types of ALN, deafness is a low incidence yet high needs disability. The nature of this likely means that commissioners do not fully understand what support deaf children may require. This is demonstrated in the CRIDE 2022 data which shows there is an inequitable level of Teacher of the Deaf service provision across local authorities in Wales (CRIDE 2022).

For example, services in Wales have a range of commissioning models in place, with some very small services and a couple of larger consortium models in place. These larger services include the Sensory and Communication Support Service in south east Wales and the North East Wales Sensory Support Service. However, many deaf children will be covered by smaller

services meaning access to a comprehensive and stable deaf education offer can be variable across Wales.

Therefore, a Wales-wide workforce strategy would be limited in scope compared to other areas of the education workforce as there are only 62.8 full-time Teachers of the Deaf in Wales, but it would be essential in terms of bringing parity to the system across Wales.

**2. Make changes to enhance the supply of Teachers of the Deaf:**

- bursary funding.
- funding for Continuing Professional Development, including to develop specialisms in early years support and in education audiology.
- develop an additional route to becoming a Qualified Teacher of the Deaf such as an apprenticeship scheme as is being developed in England with access to the apprenticeship levy.

**3. Make changes to strengthen the demand for Teachers of the Deaf:**

- incentivise commissioners and services to recruit Teachers of the Deaf through education, training or a political steer from Welsh Government, making clear their duties under the ALN Code (Chapter 7).
- use any newly developed workforce strategy to carry out an assessment of need across the deaf 0–25-year age range and to review sufficiency of provision in numbers of Teachers of the Deaf.
- create incentives and levers for smaller services to work cross border and develop cross border commissioning akin to the Sensory and Communication Support Service (SENCOM) in south east Wales.

**4. Welsh Government to contact local authorities to set out expectations and standards on what services should be doing about increasing Teacher of the Deaf service provision.**

**5. Request Estyn to take a specialist interest in services for deaf children as a way of driving up demand and incentivising local authorities to focus on specialist support for deaf children and their families.**

## **Access to early years education and childcare**

Access to early years education and childcare is very important to deaf children and their families. We want to see them receive equitable access to specialist education support, to early years settings and to communication support no matter where they live in Wales.

The general service offer to deaf children across Wales varies and this is often related to different sizes of particular services and integration of the workforce. We would like to see a model in Wales where resourcing meets deaf children's needs, rather than need being provided for based on the resourcing available. This includes access to early years education and childcare.

Thus, access to the right support in the early years is essential to ensure deaf children are enabled to pick up the key building blocks of language and communication, whether through speech, sign language or a mixture of both. Late identification of need and delays to intervention can have a

severely detrimental impact upon deaf children's learning, attainment, life-chances, and wellbeing. In the worst cases, the ramifications can be felt for the rest of their lives.

In February 2022, we issued a Freedom of Information request to all specialist education services supporting deaf children in Wales. We received responses from all 14 services/consortium of services which highlighted some limiting factors on a deaf child's early education and childcare experiences.

- Four Early Years Hearing Impairment services have a mainstream nursery school setting that includes deaf young children. This means most deaf preschool children attend mainstream settings, where barriers to access and inclusion must be identified and removed.
- There are variations in the Early Years offer, with just five services offering a targeted language and communications support offer which is based on individual development profiles as opposed to levels of deafness. This means deaf children with a mild or moderate level of hearing loss may not be able to access targeted language and communication support to meet their need.
- There are variations in access to specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) support for deaf children. 10 services indicated they provide support for deaf children with severe/profound hearing loss, 8 provide for those with a moderate hearing loss, with only 5 services providing access to specialist SaLT for deaf children with a mild loss.
- Whilst thirteen services provide hearing assistive radio aid access in early years settings, only eight services provide such equipment in the home. This means the home learning environment may be compromised for many deaf pre-schoolers, including those deaf children accessing childminder childcare, which is based in the home environment.
- Teachers of the Deaf from just seven services are engaged in Early Years development checks. We would like to see Teachers of the Deaf from all 14 services engaged with early years assessments and working directly with early practitioners involved with deaf children and their families.

We would like to see the Welsh Government and service areas across Wales review the early years offer for deaf children and provide the right level of support to meet their needs and support education progress, in line with Chapter 7 of the Additional Learning Needs Code. We are keen to work with the Welsh Government and service areas to identify suitable provision.

## **British Sign Language for early years**

British Sign Language (BSL) is a language used by many deaf children and young people in Wales. The Welsh Government formally recognised BSL as a language in its own right in 2004. Despite this, many deaf children do not have their rights recognised in being able to access this language.

Deaf children and their families should be able to have access to British Sign Language education, particularly in the Early Years.

Deaf children need access to language and communication to participate in education, play and importantly, family life. More than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents and families with no prior experience of deafness. Communication is a primary fear and barrier for these families.

However, 80% (12/15) of services in Wales do not fund or commission courses to families to enable them to learn British Sign Language (CRIDE 2022). In 2017 the Children's Commissioner for Wales [called](#) this insufficient for families (Independent review of British Sign Language (BSL) provision for adults in Wales, 2020).

This lack of provision and therefore access for deaf children denies them their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Particularly related are Articles 2, 18 (2), 23, 30 and 31, which relate to the State Parties' obligations towards disabled children and their families in terms of access and participation in education, language and culture ([UNCRC](#)).

We want to work with the Welsh Government on ensuring these rights are delivered in conjunction with commissioning services. We need to see an increase in the number of qualified BSL tutors in service areas – this could also have positive implications in boosting the delivery infrastructure of BSL in the Curriculum for Wales and a Welsh-made BSL GCSE.

### **More information**

National Deaf Children's Society Cymru would welcome the opportunity to discuss these points further, including a Wales-wide workforce plan to increase the number of Teachers of the Deaf, a plan for the Welsh Government and service areas to review the early years offer for deaf children and to boost the number of British Sign Language tutors and support commissioning services. Please do not hesitate to contact us at [campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk) for further information. Many thanks for taking the time to read our response.