

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 59

Ymateb gan: Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK)

Response from: Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK)

Accompanying subtitled video: linked [here](#)

Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

All children, including children with disabilities such as hearing loss, have the right to develop language and communication so that they can achieve their potential in life. For children who are born deaf, especially into hearing families with no experience of hearing loss, skilled and sensitive early support is vital if they are to develop the language and communication skills they need to be ready to start school alongside their hearing peers.

The current situation for deaf children

There are at least 2,329 deaf children in Wales¹. They are currently falling behind their hearing peers, facing the prospect of lower academic achievement and employment prospects, and are at higher risk of social exclusion, bullying and poor mental health.

A study in 2017 funded by the Nuffield Foundation reported that 48% of oral deaf children aged between 10 and 11 years were reading below age level². Similarly, analysis of Welsh Government figures by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) in 2019 revealed concerning attainment gaps across Key Stages³:

- Deaf learners in Key Stage 4 were 10.7% less likely to achieve A*-C grades in the core subjects of English/Welsh language and Maths in comparison to their hearing peers.
- The attainment gap at Key Stage 3 has been widening over the past few years, with the relative gap between deaf children and their peers currently standing at 10.3%.
- There is a 7.3% attainment gap between deaf children and their peers at Key Stage 2.
- There is a huge 20.8% attainment gap between deaf children and their peers at the Foundation Phase and the percentage of deaf children attaining a Foundation Phase Indicator is at its lowest since records started in 2012.

¹ Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRDE) (2022), 2022 Report for Wales. Retrieved from <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/8416/cride-2022-wales-report-final-english.pdf> (Accessed 15 September 2023)

² Herman, R., Roy, P., & Kyle, F. E. (2017) Reading and Dyslexia in Deaf Children [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://www.city.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/382529/Reading-and-Dyslexia-in-Deaf-Children-Herman-Roy-Kyle-2017-FINAL.pdf (Accessed 23 November 2021)

³ National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) (2019), National Deaf Children Society Cymru note on Welsh Government figures on educational attainment data in 2019 (Wales). Retrieved from <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6112/updated-attainment-data-2019-published-08-20.pdf> (Accessed 15 September 2023)

This is extremely worrying and shows that, at present, deaf children and young people do not have equal access to education.

Early and effective support is vital

But it doesn't have to be this way. Deafness is not a learning disability. Most children with hearing loss have the potential to reach the same educational outcomes as hearing children if they have early appropriate support. When children and families have access to effective, early support, deaf children can get an equal start at school and opportunities are transformed. Early and effective support should be available for all deaf children whether their families choose to communicate with spoken language, sign language or both.

Auditory Verbal therapy

For deaf children, whose parents or caregivers want them to learn to listen and speak, Auditory Verbal therapy offers a robust early intervention, which equips parents and caregivers with the tools to support the development of their child's listening and speaking before they start school. It is a family centred coaching programme, delivered by qualified Auditory Verbal Therapists, which has a strong peer-reviewed evidence base and consistently delivers excellent outcomes. Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK) is the only charity in Wales that provides Auditory Verbal therapy directly to a small number of deaf children under 5 in Wales. There are currently no specialist Auditory Verbal therapists employed in public services in Wales.

The outcomes of Auditory Verbal therapy are clear. Approximately 80% of children who attend an Auditory Verbal programme for at least two years achieve the same level of spoken language as their hearing peers, and the majority attend mainstream schools. This rises to 97% of children without additional needs. Deaf children with additional needs, on average, double their rate of language development whilst on the Auditory Verbal UK programme, and one in two reach age-appropriate spoken language at the end of their programme.

Auditory Verbal UK's 2022 report, [Stepping Stones to Literacy](#), shows that deaf children on its specialist early intervention programme are attaining educational outcomes on a par with hearing children. These children are getting an equal start at school and the education benefits are lifelong.

Lily and Naasir's stories

Lily (name changed), from South Glamorgan, is deaf and joined an Auditory Verbal therapy programme at the age of 3. Her first Pre-School Language Scale assessment upon joining the programme showed Lily was scoring with a language age of 2 years and 1 month. By implication, with each passing month, the gap between Lily and her typically hearing peers would have widened. With Auditory Verbal therapy, Lily's parents were able to support accelerating Lily's spoken language development such that by 4 years old, she had a language age of 4 years and nine months – showing that Lily's averaged rate of language development while on the programme was more than 2 and a half times the rate of a typically hearing child.

Her spoken language competency was in advance of a typically hearing child of her own age thanks to early and effective support before she started school.

Naasir (name changed) was on an Auditory Verbal programme at AVUK between 2016 and 2020. Naasir has additional needs associated with executive functioning, emotional regulation, self-monitoring, organisational and planning skills. During Naasir's time on the programme, he began to close the gap between his language age and chronological age and his final Pre-School Language Scales assessment showed he had made 10 months' total language progress over the previous 6 months. Naasir's Mum said: "AVUK is extremely knowledgeable and helpful to parents to look outside of the box... we had full care with AVUK. I really felt supported."

Limited provision of Auditory Verbal therapy currently

However, at present over 90% of deaf children that could benefit from Auditory Verbal therapy are unable to access it, and there are no qualified Auditory Verbal Therapists in Wales.

With little to no provision of Auditory Verbal therapy in Wales, urgent action is needed to address this shortfall and ensure all families of deaf children have the option to access Auditory Verbal therapy via publicly funded services close to where they live or in their homes via telepractice – and more deaf children can be supported to have an equal start at school and life.

A YouGov poll Auditory Verbal UK conducted earlier this year found strong public support for this, with three in four adults in Wales (76%) believing that Auditory Verbal therapy should be available to all deaf children via publicly funded services.

Economic analysis has shown that this would only require a £800,000 investment over the next 10 years to train a small proportion of the current public sector workforce of speech and language therapists, teachers of the deaf and audiologists to embed 12 Auditory Verbal Therapists in the NHS and local services in Wales. This would enable all deaf children under the age of 5 the opportunity to access this specialist early support.

Furthermore, analysis has shown that, across the UK, investing in Auditory Verbal therapy and professional training would deliver £152 million of economic benefit over 10 years, rising to £11.7 billion within the next 50 years, through improved quality of life, employment prospects, lower costs of schooling and avoided injuries. Crucially Auditory Verbal therapy maximises the investment already being made in the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme and hearing technology, including hearing aids and cochlear implants. Other developed countries like Australia, New Zealand and Denmark already provide state funding for this therapy, and Wales should strive to match this.

AVUK is pleased to already be engaging on a local and regional level with local authorities and health boards in Wales to increase the number of qualified Auditory Verbal practitioners supporting deaf children. For example, two Teachers of the Deaf based in North Wales are currently undertaking AVUK's foundation course in the Auditory Verbal approach.

Urgent national action is needed

However, operating solely on a local level will not effectively address the postcode lottery of support, opportunities, and outcomes that deaf children currently face across the country. National action from The Senedd is therefore essential to close the inequalities seen across Wales and the UK to enable more deaf children to have an equal start at school.

AVUK is proactively working with the Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd to enable families of deaf children under the age of five in Wales to have the opportunity to access Auditory Verbal therapy. In the past year, AVUK has met with Julie Morgan (Welsh Deputy Minister for Social Services); Mark Isherwood (Chair of the Cross-Party Groups on Deaf Issues and Disability); Sioned Williams (Chair of the Cross-Party Group for Learning Disability); Mabon ap Gwynfor (Member of Health and Social Care Committee) and numerous other Welsh parliamentarians.

However, with deaf babies and children across Wales falling behind their hearing peers and not currently achieving the educational outcomes we know are possible, urgent action is needed. Wales has the opportunity to set the standard for the rest of the UK in supporting disabled children and young people, including deaf children, by supporting and investing in early and effective specialist support.

As it currently stands, deaf children and young people do not have equal access to education. By investing in Auditory Verbal therapy, The Senedd can support more deaf children have an equal start at school and to their education and have the same opportunities in life as their hearing peers.