



Consortium for Research in Deaf Education

2021 report for Northern Ireland

Education provision for deaf children in Northern Ireland

Introduction

In 2021, we carried out the 11th Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) annual survey on educational staffing and service provision for deaf children.¹ This report sets out the results of the survey for Northern Ireland and is intended for policy makers in local and anyone with an interest in deaf education.

The survey alternates from year to year between a full survey and a short survey, with the short survey including thematic questions. The 2021 survey was a full survey, covering the 2020/21 academic year.²

After 10 years, we made a number of changes to the survey in 2021. We have highlighted those changes in this report, setting out where comparisons between this and previous reports should be undertaken with caution.

We would like to thank the head of service in Northern Ireland for responding to the survey and for her ongoing feedback and clarification.

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¹ For the purpose of this section of the survey, unless otherwise stated, we use the term 'deaf children' to include children and young people up to the age of 19 years, 11 months with sensori-neural or permanent conductive deafness. See footnote on page 4 for more detail.

² Reports from previous years can be found on the National Deaf Children's Society website at www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE or on the BATOD website at <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/>.

Interpreting the results

There is one service in Northern Ireland covering the five different regions. The service was asked to give figures for the position as of 31st January 2021.

In the survey, we acknowledge that services and children do not always fit into the boxes or options provided. Respondents were able to leave comments or clarify where needed throughout the survey. This report notes particular issues that emerged in some areas.

Caution is also needed due to differences in response rates to individual questions and potential mistakes in data provision between surveys over the years, particularly from before 2019 when the survey was completed by five different services and it is believed there were different interpretations of questions and possible double counting.

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, there was no response to the 2020 survey, so comparisons in this report have been made with 2019, when the last full response to the survey was received.

Please note that all percentages in this report have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

Summary of key findings

Numbers of deaf children

- There are at least 1,387 deaf children in Northern Ireland - a reported decrease of 2% since 2019.
- 78% of school-aged deaf children attend mainstream schools. 2% attend mainstream schools with resource provisions, 3% attend special schools for deaf children whilst 17% attend special schools not specifically for deaf children. None are home educated.
- 27% of deaf children are recorded as having an additional special educational need (other than deafness).
- 5% of deaf children use an additional spoken language other than English in the home.
- 93% of deaf children communicate using spoken English as their main language in school or other education settings as their main language, 3% mainly use spoken English together with signed support whilst 1% mainly use British Sign Language. 4% were reported to be using some other combination of languages in education.
- 44% of school aged deaf children identified by CRIDE have a statement of special educational needs.

Teachers of the Deaf and other specialist staff

- There are a reported 30.5 Teacher of the Deaf posts in Northern Ireland, all of which are held by fully qualified Teachers of the Deaf. There were no vacant posts reported.
- The number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf in employment has fallen by 5% since 2019 and by 24% since we started the survey in 2011.
- Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf have an average theoretical caseload of 56 deaf children, this figure stood at 58 in 2019.
- 40% of peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf are over the age of 50 and thus are likely to retire in the next 10 to 15 years.

Resource provisions

- There are a reported 3 resource provisions across Northern Ireland, unchanged from 2019. Looking at the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, on average, there is one resource provision for every 462 deaf children.

Referrals

- 27% of referrals to services came from the newborn hearing screening programme in 2020. Of these, 75% were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 2 working days.
- 73% of referrals to services came from outside the newborn hearing screening programme. Of these, 52% were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 5 working days.
- The service did not hold any data on how many families were offered a visit (either face to face or virtual) within 10 working days of any referral.

PART 1: Deaf children in Northern Ireland

How many deaf children are there?³

Based on the response from the service covering the five regions across Northern Ireland and information from the special school for deaf children in Northern Ireland, there are 1,387 deaf children⁴. This is a reduction from 1,417 in 2019, a reported reduction of 2%.

The service fed back in 2019 that, since the service was merged from five into one service, work to improve the quality and consistency of the data on deaf children continues.

When asked about known issues or gaps with the data, the service responded that it only had figures for children receiving support from the service, and that figures were not held for children who had left school.

The following table compares the total number of deaf children living in Northern Ireland with figures from previous years. As set out in the introduction, comparisons with earlier reports should be made with caution.⁵

Table 1: Number of deaf children reported, over successive years

	Number of children reported
CRIDE 2021	1,387
CRIDE 2019	1,417
CRIDE 2018	1,687
CRIDE 2017	1,553
CRIDE 2016	1,497
CRIDE 2015	1,332
CRIDE 2014	1,574
CRIDE 2013	1,481
CRIDE 2012	1,249
CRIDE 2011	1,238

³ The service was asked to include all children with permanent deafness who live in the geographical area covered by their service, including all children up to the age of 19 years, 11 months who have a unilateral or bilateral sensori-neural or permanent conductive deafness, at all levels from mild to profound, using BSA/BATOD descriptors, regardless of whether they receive support from the service. Services were also asked to include children who attended education provision outside of their area but who normally lived in their area. Under the definition of permanent deafness used in the survey, children with a syndrome known to include permanent conductive deafness, microtia/atresia, middle ear malformation, or those who have had middle ear surgery such as mastoidectomy were to be included. Our definition also included those children with glue ear who are not expected to 'grow out' of the condition before the age of 10 years, such as those born with a cleft palate, Down's syndrome, cystic fibrosis, or primary ciliary dyskinesia. Otherwise, services were asked not to include children with temporary deafness, including those children with glue ear who may have been fitted with hearing aids as an alternative to grommet surgery but who are expected to 'grow out' of the condition before the age of 10 years.

⁴ The service originally gave a figure of 1,356, stating that this included an estimated 10 children that recently moved to the Jordanstown special school for deaf children. We were later informed that there are 41 deaf children educated at Jordanstown. Allowing for a duplication of 10 deaf children, this has generated a total of 1,387.

⁵ In particular, it appears that children in special schools for deaf children were included in the total number of deaf children in 2019 and 2021 but were not included in previous years.

What the survey tells us about the population of deaf children in Northern Ireland

The tables below provide breakdowns by age, level of deafness, and education setting. Please note that, except in table 4, the figures in this section include an estimated ten children at Jordanstown school for deaf children, but not the remaining deaf children at the school (who were reported to us separately).

Table 2: Number of children living in the area, by age

Age group	Number of deaf children reported	Percentage of total
Early years/pre-school	189	14%
Primary-aged	532	39%
Secondary-aged	497	37%
Post-16 up to the age of 19	138	10%
Total	1,356	100%

This report is the first time that the service has been able to report on deaf young people over the age of 16.

Table 3: Number of children living in the area, by level of deafness

Level of deafness	Number of deaf children reported	Percentage of total
Unilateral	348	26%
Mild	317	23%
Moderate	399	29%
Severe	131	10%
Profound	161	12%
Total	1,356	

Looking at changes in the proportion of deaf children in different groups since 2019:

- the proportion of deaf children with unilateral loss has increased by two percentage points
- mild and moderate hearing loss groups have both fallen by one percentage point each
- other proportions remain unchanged.

Table 4: Number of children, living in the area, by educational setting

Type of setting	Number	Percentage of total	Percentage of total school-aged children (i.e. excluding pre-school children and young people post-16)
Supported only at home – pre-school children	134	10%	
Early years setting – pre-school children	56	4%	
Supported at home – of school age and home educated	0	0%	0%
Mainstream state-funded schools	920	66%	77%
Mainstream independent (non-state-funded) schools	9	1%	1%
Resource provision in mainstream schools ⁶	27	2%	2%
Special schools for deaf pupils (whether state funded or non-maintained) ⁷	41	3%	3%
Other special schools, not specifically for deaf children (whether state funded or non-maintained)	200	14%	17%
All other post-16 provision (not including school sixth form colleges)	0	0%	
Total	1,387		
Total (excluding pre-school children and other post-16 provision and ‘other’)	1,197		

Figures for children in special schools for deaf children have not been included in previous years in the broken down figures.

Incidence of Auditory Neuropathy Spectrum Disorder (ANSD)

The service reported that there are 22 deaf children in Northern Ireland with ANSD, 2% of all deaf children.

Due to newborn hearing screening protocols, ANSD is only reliably diagnosed in babies following test procedures undertaken in those who have spent time in Neonatal Intensive Care Units and is not diagnosed following the screen used in the ‘well baby’ population. Universal newborn hearing screening has been in place across the UK since 2006. Figures provided through the newborn hearing screening programme indicate that around 1 in 10 congenitally deaf children have ANSD. This suggests therefore some under-reporting by the service. This is probably due to under-identification of ANSD in older deaf children – those who did not receive newborn screening because they were born before the roll-out of universal screening in 2006, those ‘well babies’ who passed screening and were identified later, and those with acquired/progressive deafness who have not been tested for ANSD.

Incidence of additional special educational needs (SEN)

The service reported that the number of deaf children with an additional SEN is 380. This is 27% of the adjusted total of deaf children, which is a slight increase from 26% in 2019.

⁶ In the CRIDE survey, we use the term ‘resource provision’ to include all schools with a resource provision, base or unit, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the Education Authority or by the school.

⁷ Table 4 includes the 41 deaf children and young people at Jordanstown school separately reported to us.

Deaf children with cochlear implants and bone conduction hearing devices

138 children (10% of deaf children) have at least one cochlear implant, down from 11% in 2019.

Children with a severe to profound hearing loss are eligible for cochlear implants. We saw earlier in table three that there are 292 children with a severe or profound hearing loss. Whilst this can only be a rough approximation, it can be estimated that 47% of children with severe or profound hearing loss have at least one cochlear implant. If one were to make an assumption that nearly all children with cochlear implants are those with a profound hearing loss, this percentage would rise to 86%.

The service also reported that 42 children (3% of deaf children) have a bone conduction device. This is an increase from 2019 when 2% of children were reported to have a bone conduction device.

Additional languages

There were 73 children known to have English as an additional spoken language (5% of deaf children reported). This is an increase from 4% when this question was last asked.

We then asked the service to provide a breakdown of the total number of children living in the area, according to which languages are mainly used at school/other education setting.

Table 5: Number of severely/profoundly deaf children, by languages mainly used at school/other educational setting

Language	Total	Percentage of responses (where known)
Spoken English	1,211	93%
British Sign Language	8	1%
Irish Sign Language	None reported	0%
Spoken English together with signed support	40	3%
Other combination	47	4%
Total known	1,306	
Not known	50	
Total including not known	1,356	

In surveys before 2017, this question asked about languages used by **all deaf children** in education. In the surveys for 2017 and 2019, the question was changed to focus on languages used by **children with severe or profound deafness** only. For the 2021 survey, we reverted to asking about all deaf children.

Going back to the data from 2015 when we last asked about languages used in education by all deaf children:

- the proportion using spoken English has fallen from 96% to 93%
- the proportion using British Sign Language has risen from 0% to 1%
- the proportion using spoken English with signed support has risen by one percentage point to 3%
- there has been an increase in those citing other combinations of languages, from 1% to 4%.

Deaf children who are new to the country

There were 13 deaf children known to be 'newly arrived', having arrived at their service from outside of the UK in the past year. This is just under 1% of deaf children.

Number of deaf children on services' caseloads

By caseload, we mean children who receive some form of support **at least once a year**. Examples of support included direct teaching, visits to the family or school, liaison with the family, school and teachers, providing hearing aid checks, etc. We asked services to include children supported by the service but who do not live in the same geographical area as that service. Services could also include children with temporary deafness in their response to this question if they were on the service caseload.

The survey response indicated that at least 1,508 deaf children with permanent or temporary deafness were on the caseload. In 2019, the service reported that 1,662 deaf children were on their caseload.

We also asked the service to split out how many children on their 2021 caseload had a temporary conductive hearing loss; they gave a figure of 262 children.

How do CRIDE's 2021 figures compare to School Census figures?

Because of the differences in how data have been collected and different definitions used, CRIDE recommends the following figures be used as a basis for further debate and analysis, rather than to reach firm conclusions.

School Census figures for 2020/21 identify 1,169 pupils recorded with a hearing impairment on the medical register. Some of these pupils have been recorded with an SEN for hearing impairment on the SEN register also. 943 children are on the SEN register. Of these, 637 had a mild or moderate hearing loss and 306 had a severe or profound hearing loss. The CRIDE survey has identified 1,166 deaf children of school-age in education.

Separately, the School Census reports that 524 deaf children on the SEN register have a statement of SEN. This equates to 45% of the deaf children identified by the School Census. It also equates to 44% of school-age children identified by CRIDE. It should be noted that the School Census figure will not include deaf children with other needs where deafness is not the primary need. In addition, not all deaf children will be registered as having an SEN.

PART 2: Teachers of the Deaf and other specialist staff

We asked how many Teachers of the Deaf are working in different settings, including those in a peripatetic role and working in resource provisions.⁸ Figures for numbers of Teachers of the Deaf in special schools for deaf children were collected separately.

We asked services to provide 'Full Time Equivalent' (fte) figures for staffing. For example, an 0.5 figure for a Teacher of the Deaf would indicate they spent half of the standard 'working week' as a Teacher of the Deaf. We found that:

- overall, there are at least 30.5 fte teachers working as Teachers of the Deaf in Northern Ireland
- 100% of these posts are occupied by a fully qualified Teacher of the Deaf; no teachers were reported to be in training for the mandatory qualification
- there were also no vacant posts reported.

The following table provides a breakdown of Teachers of the Deaf in employment by type of setting.

Table 6: Number of Teachers of the Deaf in employment overall

	Working mainly as a peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf (total and percentage)	Working mainly in a resource provision (total and percentage)	Working mainly in a special school for deaf children (total and percentage)	Teacher of the Deaf posts overall (total and percentage)
Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification	23.5 (77%)	3 (10%)	4 (13%)	30.5 (100%)

Please note that the rest of this section **does not** include Teachers of the Deaf working in special schools for deaf children as this information has not been collected consistently by CRIDE over the past decade.

The service reported that one fte Teacher of the Deaf posts, in a peripatetic role, had an additional qualification as an educational audiologist. No Teachers of the Deaf with an additional post-graduate qualification in early years support for deaf children were identified.

The following table looks at changes in the reported number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf in employment and posts over successive years.

⁸ In the CRIDE survey, we use the term 'resource provision' to include all schools with a resource provision, base or unit, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the Education Authority or by the school.

We also asked about Teachers of the Deaf who work mainly in a special school or college not specifically for deaf children or young people. The service in Northern Ireland did not identify any Teachers of the Deaf who fell into this category. Nor did the service identify any Teachers of the Deaf who worked flexibly between a peripatetic role and other settings.

Table 7: Changes in numbers of Teachers of the Deaf from year to year

	Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification in employment	Number of teachers working as Teachers of the Deaf in employment	Number of vacant posts	Number of Teacher of the Deaf posts (including vacancies)
2021	26.5	26.5	0	26.5
2019	25.2	26	3	29
2018	28.4	29.2	5	34.2
2017	29.3	30.1	1	31.1
2016	32.6	33.4	0	33.4
2015	30.6	34.4	0	34.4
2014	28.6	32.6	0	32.6
2013	30	35	0	35
2012	29.6	34.2	0	34.2
2011	34.9	37.3	1.3	38.6

Table 8: Percentage change in numbers of Teachers of the Deaf

	Percentage change over past 9 years (between 2010/11 and 2020/21)	Percentage change over past 2 years (between 2018/19 and 2020/21)
Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification in employment	-24%	5%
Number of teachers working as Teachers of the Deaf in employment	-29%	2%
Number of Teacher of the Deaf posts (including vacant posts)	-31%	-9%

When asked if the service had experienced difficulties in recruiting Teachers of the Deaf to either permanent posts or for supply cover over the past 12 months, they reported no difficulties in recruiting for permanent posts whilst the question around securing supply cover was not applicable.

Age profile of peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf

We asked about the age profile of Teachers of the Deaf. This was in response to continuing concerns that the number of newly recruited Teachers of the Deaf is significantly lower than the number of Teachers of the Deaf retiring from the profession.

The following table indicates that 40% of peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf are over the age of 49 and, hence likely to retire in the next 10 to 15 years. In 2019, this figure stood at 34%.

Table 9: Age profile of peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf

	Number of peripatetic teachers	Percentage of total
Aged 49 or under	15	60%
Aged between 50 and 59	8	32%
Aged between 60 and 64	2	8%
Aged 65 or over	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf caseloads

This section looks at the theoretical caseloads of each visiting Teacher of the Deaf by looking at the number of deaf children living in the area who are not already in specialist provision (regardless of whether they are receiving support or not). There is a range of views on both the usefulness of this and how best to calculate this ratio. Points to consider include:

- areas that are large or rural may, by necessity, have more visiting Teachers of the Deaf than areas that are small and urban because of the need to allow for travel time
- areas in which there are specialist units or special schools may have fewer visiting Teachers of the Deaf because it has been assumed that deaf children with most need are already in specialist provision
- services that are better able to reliably record and identify how many deaf children, including those over 16, are in their area may appear to have heavier caseloads than services which have only given a figure for the number of deaf children they 'know' about
- the theoretical caseload does not tell us about the outcomes achieved by deaf children in the area.

In simple terms and for consistency across all parts of the UK, we calculate the theoretical caseloads by dividing the number of permanently deaf children living in any given area and in non-specialist provision⁹ by the number of visiting Teachers of the Deaf who are qualified or in training for the mandatory qualification¹⁰. This will include some deaf children in some areas who are not being actively supported by the service.

The CRIDE survey results show that each visiting (peripatetic) Teacher of the Deaf has a theoretical average caseload of 56 deaf children. In 2019, this figure stood at 58.

Other specialist staff

The service indicated that they did not employ any specialist staff, other than Teachers of the Deaf.

⁹ This includes deaf children reported as being: supported at home (e.g. home educated or pre-school), in early years settings, in mainstream state funded schools, in mainstream independent schools, other special schools (i.e. those for disabled children more generally) or in post-16 provision. This excludes deaf children reported as being in mainstream schools with resource provision or special schools for deaf children.

¹⁰ This excludes any teachers who are working as Teachers of the Deaf but who are not qualified nor in training.

PART 3: Post-16 support

Young people who have left school

There were 22 deaf young people reported to have left school at the end of the 2019/20 academic year. Of these, 11 (50%) had a transition plan that was informed by a Teacher of the Deaf.

The service reported that it does not provide support to deaf young people in further education or other post-school destinations.

Careers advice

We asked what support was provided by peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf in relation to careers advice and moving into employment. Of the options provided, the service answered yes to:

- engaging with careers advisors in schools on careers advice to deaf young people
- provision of advice on the accessibility of work placements being undertaken by deaf young people
- provision of information to deaf young people about the support available through the Access to Work scheme for employment support
- provision of information to deaf young people about their rights under Disability Discrimination Act to reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

The only option provided which the service does not tick yes to was engaging with careers advisors in colleges on careers advice to deaf young people.

Post-19 support

When asking about numbers of deaf children, we ask services for numbers of deaf children aged 0 to 19. We introduced a new question in the 2021 survey to give services the option to indicate if they provide support to deaf young people over the age of 19.

The Northern Ireland service reported that it did not, but commented that: “support for careers is a service currently being developed, and is provided in some areas but is not yet consistently available throughout Northern Ireland”.

PART 4: Support provided

Information about the service

In the final section of the survey, we ask some broader questions about how the service operates and how support is provided. We found that:

- The service is managed by a qualified Teacher of the Deaf.
- There have been no changes to how support is allocated between the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years.
- The service does not collect data on educational outcomes achieved by deaf children at the end of Key Stage 4. The service commented that this information was held by schools and the Department for Education, and that it was difficult for the service to access it. The service added that it was looking into ways to address this.
- The service uses the following quality standards and resources to review service development:
 - NatSIP: Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services in England
 - NDCS Quality Standards: Early years support for children with a hearing loss, aged 0 to 5 (England)
 - Newborn hearing screening programme quality standards
 - NatSIP Quality Improvement Support Pack.

Number of resource provisions

In the CRIDE survey, we use the term 'resource provision' to include all schools with a resource provision, base or unit, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the Education Authority or by the school.

We found that there are two primary resource provisions and one secondary resource provision in Northern Ireland. This is unchanged from 2019.

We also looked at the number of resource provisions against the overall population of deaf children. This is intended to indicate the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, relative to the overall population of deaf children. We found that, on average, there is one resource provision for every 462 deaf children.

This is **not** a measure of the number of places available in or individual deaf children enrolled at each resource provision; figures for places or deaf children enrolled will vary from provision to provision.

Support following identification of deafness

In the 2021 survey, we introduced a new question to ask services how many referrals they received over the calendar year of 2020.

Table 10: Referrals

	Number and percentage of referrals
For children identified as deaf through the newborn hearing screening programme	20 (27%)
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme	54 (73%)
Total	74 (100%)

We also found that:

- of the referrals for children identified through the newborn hearing screening programme, 15 families were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within two working days.¹¹ This amounts to 75% of the 20 children referred via this route
- of the referrals for children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing screening programme, 28 families were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within five working days.¹² This amounts to 52% of the 54 children referred outside of the newborn hearing screening programme
- the service was not able to provide accurate information when asked how many families were offered a visit (either face-to-face or virtually) from a Teacher of the Deaf within ten working days¹³ of any referral.

¹¹ In line with expectations set by NatSIP quality standards for sensory support services in England (2016).

¹² In line with expectations set by NatSIP quality standards for sensory support services in England (2016).

¹³ In line with expectations set by NatSIP quality standards for sensory support services in England (2016).

PART 5: Background and methodology

CRIDE is a consortium bringing together a range of organisations and individuals with a common interest in using research to improve the educational outcomes achieved by deaf children. At the time the survey was sent out, representatives included: BATOD, Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, Mary Hare, National Deaf Children's Society, National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP), UCL, University of Edinburgh, consultants with expertise in deafness, and specialist education services for deaf children in Cambridgeshire, Camden, Kent, and Leeds.

The survey was designed and created by members of CRIDE. The CRIDE survey alternates between a full and a shorter survey from year to year. In 2021, a full survey was issued.

The survey was sent to the Education Authority in February 2021 by National Deaf Children's Society staff on behalf of CRIDE.

Analysis of the results and drafting of this report was largely completed by the National Deaf Children's Society, with guidance and clearance from members of CRIDE.

CRIDE would like to thank the service for taking the time to complete this survey. The results from this survey will be used for research purposes, to influence government policy and to campaign to protect funding and services for deaf children.

If you have any feedback or questions on the results, please contact cride@ndcs.org.uk.