

## Summary

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Deafness is not a learning disability and, with the right support, deaf children should be achieving as well as other children. Despite this, Government figures show that too many deaf children are still failing to get the support they need from public services.

This factsheet sets out the key areas where NDCS is calling for action on education, health, welfare and social care from the new Government from May 2015.

### Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Deaf children across the UK face many of the same barriers. However, many of the decisions about key public services that deaf children rely on are devolved. NDCS works across the nations of the UK to influence decision-makers in each of the devolved administrations but this briefing focuses on support for deaf children in England. MPs from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can support us by raising issues within Westminster and working with decision-makers in the nations.

## What is deafness?

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By deaf, the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) means anyone with a permanent or temporary hearing loss. This could be a mild, moderate, severe or profound hearing loss. Every deaf child is different. Deaf children communicate in a variety of ways, including using speech, sign language or a combination.

Deafness can be inherited or caused by childhood illness or other factors such as accidents. Half of deaf children are born deaf and the other half become deaf during childhood. Many children experience temporary hearing loss as a result of conditions such as glue ear.

Over 90% of deaf children are from families with no first-hand experience of deafness.

## How many deaf children are there?

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NDCS estimates that 1.6 million children experience deafness at any one time in the UK, of which the most common cause is glue ear. Crudely split, each MP will have an average of 2,500 deaf children in their constituency.

Across the UK, NDCS estimates that over 45,000 are permanently deaf. Central and local government does not systematically collect or use the data available on deaf children. NDCS is concerned that the lack of reliable data on how many deaf children there are means that children's services are unable to effectively plan and provide for deaf children.

**Action needed: NDCS calls on the new Government to take steps to improve data collection.**

## **Education – what support do deaf children need?**

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Deafness is not a learning disability and there is no reason why most deaf children cannot achieve as well as other children, providing they get the right support. However, government figures show that in 2014, just 36% of deaf children achieved 5 GCSEs (including English and Maths) at grades A\* to C, compared to 65% of other children. We also know that:

- Around 15% of deaf children have a statement of special educational needs or an Education, Health and Care plan.
- 76% of deaf children attend mainstream schools where there is no specialist provision.
- Around 87% of deaf children communicate using spoken English within education.

Every deaf child is different and will vary in how they are supported. Extra support that deaf children may need include:

- Specialist equipment to help them hear in the classroom, such as a radio aid system
- Classrooms that go beyond the Government's minimum acoustic standards
- Teachers who have been provided with guidance from expert Teachers of the Deaf on how to ensure deaf children can access lessons
- Specialist support staff, such as a communication support worker with appropriate skills

There have been a number of significant changes over the past five years, including:

- Significant funding cuts to local authority education services for deaf children, despite a government commitment that education budgets had been protected.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced significant changes to the special educational needs system including a new requirement for local authorities to publish a Local Offer setting out what provision it expects to be available in each area.
- A decline in the number of Teachers of the Deaf. A 2014 survey found a 3% annual decline and a decline of 6% since 2011. Moreover, around half of all existing Teachers of the Deaf are expected to retire in the next 10 to 15 years.

### **Action needed:**

- **The Government to commit to protecting the 'High Needs' block and to taking action against local authorities that do not protect spending.**
- **Ofsted to begin inspecting local authority education services to ensure they are meeting the needs of deaf children and achieving value for money.** Ofsted are currently considering how they might do this but, at the time of writing, their current proposals do not go far enough.
- **A new bursary scheme to recruit Teachers of the Deaf.**
- **MPs to scrutinise the quality of Local Offers in their own areas and to challenge local authorities that do not publish enough detailed information on provision for deaf children.**

## Health - what support do deaf children need?

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Good audiology services can make a critical contribution to a deaf child's success in life as they are responsible for ensuring a deaf child is able to use their remaining hearing to the fullest extent possible. However, a NHS report in 2014 found that one third of audiology services were failing to meet critical NHS quality standards.

Parents of deaf children have also reported to NDCS that too many audiology services are:

- Failing to see a child when deafness is suspected within expected timeframes
- Failing to use the most up-to-date tests and interpret results correctly
- Failing to ensure hearing aids are set up correctly
- Seeing too many deaf children in school time
- Lacking deaf awareness

Despite the above, in 2014, the Department for Health plans to stop assessing the quality of these vital services and providing support to help them improve. An expected replacement – known as Improving Quality in Physiological Services (IQIPs) – is an inadequate replacement because:

- It is not mandatory
- There is minimal transparency to parents

### Action needed:

- **NDCS calls on the Government to introduce a target for all audiology services to be accredited by 2017 and ensure full transparency over which audiology services are undergoing accreditation or have failed.**
- **NDCS calls on MPs to promote the importance of deaf awareness in their local health settings, using the NDCS My Life, My Health resources.**

## Welfare - what support do deaf children need?

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Many deaf children and their families rely on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to support them with additional costs associated with their deafness. These costs include travel to audiology appointments and purchasing specialist equipment to support independence.

Since 2010, the Government has replaced DLA with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for those over 16. NDCS remains extremely concerned that many deaf young people will see the financial support they receive cut when they turn 16, once PIP is fully rolled out. This is because the eligibility criteria for PIP fails to fully recognise the impact of deafness on everyday life. To add insult to injury, the PIP claim process is inaccessible to many deaf young people because it largely relies on disabled people being able to use a telephone before they can make an application.

Any cuts to DLA for deaf children under 16 would have a significant and detrimental impact on their independence and the life chances of some of the most vulnerable children in society. NDCS would strongly oppose any such proposals to restrict the eligibility criteria for DLA.

**Action needed: NDCS is calling on the Government to rule out any cuts or narrowing of eligibility criteria to welfare support for disabled children. NDCS is also calling on the Government to ensure that the PIP claim process is fully accessible to deaf young people.**

## **Social care - what support do deaf children need?**

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90% of deaf children are born to families who have little knowledge of deafness. It is vital that every deaf child and their family has access to high quality social care services to help ensure that they can meet their full potential and are safe from harm. It is already known that:

- Deaf children are 60% more likely to experience mental health problems compared to other children
- Deaf children are over twice as likely to be abused as other children

Good services for deaf children encompass the whole family and should provide, for example:

- Protection from abuse and harm, with expert and specialist support where the needs of a deaf child become critical.
- An assessment of what the family needs in order to support the deaf child and the whole family, with follow up support as needed. This could include, for example, helping the family communicate with the deaf child.
- Guidance for deaf children, presented in an accessible way, on how to stay safe.
- Provision of specialist equipment. This could include flashing fire alarms and door alerts.

However, a 2014 NDCS survey found that:

- Nearly half of local authorities social care teams (49%) said their eligibility criteria did not include any specific reference to deaf children or sensory impairment.
- 40% of local authority social care teams could not identify the numbers of deaf children receiving social care services. Where data was provided, totals given were found to be very different even between similar sized local authorities.
- Only 16% of local authorities or social care teams had a dedicated social worker for deaf children and 87% of these workers combine these duties with other responsibilities (e.g. support to vision impaired children). Across England, only 2 social workers in England were identified who work solely with deaf children and young people.

In too many areas, deaf children and their families are only receiving support once their needs become critical. Even then, support is too often provided by social workers with no real expertise in deafness. There remains a poor understanding among local authorities of the needs and vulnerability of deaf children and the importance of early intervention and the support that is needed.

**Action needed: NDCS is calling on MPs to ask their local authority what action they are taking to improve social care services for deaf children.**

## **About NDCS**

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NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people, and was established by a group of parents of deaf children in 1944. NDCS helps deaf children fulfil their potential by providing impartial practical and emotional support to them and their families. This includes a free membership service, a wide range of events, helpline support, and one-to-one advice from Children and Families Support Officers. NDCS also has a team of Regional Directors who work to influence and challenge local commissioners.

95% of NDCS's work to help deaf children is funded by the public.