Call for evidence: Review of Mandatory Qualifications for specialist teachers of children and young people with sensory impairment

A response from the National Deaf Children's Society

December 2014

Introduction

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for every deaf child and young person. We were established in 1944 by parents of deaf children with concerns about national education provision. Our work to influence and challenge decision-makers to ensure that deaf children achieve their potential continues to this day.

NDCS strongly believes that Teachers of the Deaf have a vital role to play in ensuring that deaf children achieve their potential. Given that deafness is a low incidence disability, most families or education professionals are unlikely to be familiar with the specialist needs of deaf children or to be in a position to support their language and communication needs. Teachers of the Deaf therefore have a vital role to play in providing specialist advice and support to families and education professionals.

The retention of the mandatory qualification (MQ) is vital. Parents and education professionals must be able to have confidence that the advice and support they are receiving is from someone who has relevant specialist knowledge and expertise in deafness. We were pleased to see that the importance of the MQ was recognised in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEN and Disability Code of Practice.

1 What is working well in the current provision of Mandatory Qualifications?

It is clear that our members value the support they receive from Teachers of the Deaf. In our membership survey, parents gave Teachers of the Deaf a satisfaction score of 4.12 (with 4 being satisfied and 5 extremely satisfied). Their expertise and specialism is highly valued.

Ofsted's Communication is the Key report from 2012 on good practice in services for deaf children affirms the role of Teachers of the Deaf.

2 What are the challenges and opportunities for improvement in the Mandatory Qualification in the context of a changing educational landscape?

Whilst the majority of parents who responded our membership survey were happy with the support they were receiving from their Teacher of the Deaf, a large minority – 12% or over 1 in 10 – were not and reported feeling unsatisfied or extremely unsatisfied.

The limited consultation window meant that NDCS did not have the time to consult parents of deaf children on the reasons for this. However, based on our contact with families, we suspect that some of the reasons for this relate to:

- Lack of emotional support following diagnosis
- Wanting more support to building self-esteem and resilience within deaf children
- Low expectations for deaf children among some Teachers of the Deaf
- Teachers of the Deaf not usually being able to support deaf young people once they have left school
- Teachers of the Deaf not always keeping up to date with technological developments

- Teachers of the Deaf seemingly not working closely with other colleagues working with the deaf child.

Based on NDCS's own contact with Teachers of the Deaf, we feel that some Teachers of the Deaf are not as familiar with specialist assessments for deaf children as they could be nor feel confident in using these to improve outcomes in deaf children.

In terms of significant challenges, one key area is the **lack of co-ordination or focus on workforce planning** to ensure there is an adequate supply of Teachers of the Deaf in the future. Currently, it is left to local authorities to determine their own recruitment needs. Given that deafness is a low incidence need, and that many local authorities may only employ two or three Teachers of the Deaf, this is not likely to lead to a steady supply of Teachers of the Deaf in coming years.

In addition, figures from the Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) 2014 survey of local authorities suggests around half of Teachers of the Deaf likely to retire within the next 10 years[1]. This is likely to result in a situation where local authorities cannot recruit Teachers of the Deaf. In light of this, NDCS believes that the College and the Department for Education should consider a national model of recruitment and funding for Teachers of the Deaf.

A further challenge, related to the above, is the **spending constraints** that many local authorities are subject to. NDCS's Stolen Futures campaign has identified that 37% local authorities have or intend to cut education services for deaf children in 2014/15. NDCS is concerned that this will result in declining numbers of Teachers of the Deaf being recruited and/or local authorities seeking 'cheaper' alternatives, such as teachers without the MQ or teaching assistants.

In terms of the role itself, NDCS feels that there should be greater recognition of the fact that Teachers of the Deaf, unlike many other teaching roles, are **required to work across all settings with children of different ages.** Where teachers have qualified as primary or secondary teachers, this can be particularly challenging. There is a risk that this can lead to their expertise being relatively shallow or superficial across specific age ranges.

In terms of **significant opportunities**, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the move to a new 0 to 25 integrated framework offers the potential for a workforce that is better able to support deaf young people post 16 and also to work more closely with colleagues in health and social care. The extent to which this can be achieved will obviously depend on resourcing but also on whether the specification for the MQ gives specific emphasis to these areas.

In the following sections, we set out comments on the content of the qualification before going on to comment on delivery approaches.

Comments on the structure of the qualification and the content of the specification

Our comments below refer to Annex A of the specification which sets out the minimum MQ outcomes.

1. *Professional qualities and attributes*

We would like to see a stronger emphasis on the importance of Teachers of the Deaf having strong skills in **empathy** and being able to work with and empower families from very different backgrounds and who may have different emotional responses to their child being deaf, particularly following diagnosis. This requires them to have a good understanding of how deafness can impact children and their families in many different ways.

[1] 44.5% of Teachers of the Deaf are aged between 50 and 59. Nearly 7% are aged over 60. See www.ndcs.org.uk/cride for more information.

We would also like to see emphasis on being able to work directly with deaf children and young people. Members of the NDCS Young People's Advisory Board have said it's particularly important that Teachers of the Deaf:

- Get to know the deaf person
- Form a relationship with each individual assigned
- Be caring, patient
- Try to communicate to the deaf young person in a way that they understand (e.g. visually, learning by doing, etc.)

We believe that this section would be strengthened by referring more explicitly to the importance of co-production and section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014, as well as the Equality Act 2010.

We are pleased that paragraph 1.6 recognises that Teachers of the Deaf have a role to play in working with multi-agency teams. We would suggest the specification highlight that Teachers of the Deaf should have skills in being assertive and advocating for deaf children and their families as part of this.

2. *The current legislative and educational framework*

As set out just now, we believe that this specification would be strengthened by referring more explicitly to the importance of co-production and section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014. It is the government's intention that this ethos underpins the entire SEN framework.

3. *Audiology in practice*

We believe that the specification should recognise that Teachers of the Deaf should know how to keep up to date with technological developments and be able to individually maintain and develop their knowledge of changing technology on an ongoing basis, maintaining their understanding of the implications of changing technology for deaf children.

NDCS suggests that this section also include a requirement to be aware of the prevalence of additional disabilities in children with deafness and be confident / knowledgeable in meeting the audiology needs of deaf children with additional needs. Research has suggested that these needs can be 'over-shadowed' particularly in deaf children with additional complex needs.

4. *Language, communication and interaction*

We feel that there is a lack of emphasis in this section on the ability of Teachers of the Deaf to **work <u>with</u> the family** to promote language, communication and interaction within deaf children. Whilst it is right that Teachers of the Deaf should be able to directly teach deaf children, we also strongly believe that, especially for deaf children in the early years, Teachers of the Deaf should also be support families so that they can directly develop their child's language and communication skills, including within a home environment.

Footnote 16 states that Teachers of the Deaf working with deaf children and young people in settings that use sign are strongly advised to have a level 2 qualification in sign language. Level 2 is roughly equivalent to a GCSE. A level 2 qualification is therefore wholly inadequate for teaching deaf children directly in sign language and we strongly believe that it should be **<u>at least</u>** level 3.

5. *Teaching and learning*

NDCS suggests that the section on teaching should include a specific recognition that Teachers of the Deaf working with deaf children in early years / primary school should be able to specifically

advise on the teaching of phonics to deaf children, in light of the emphasis given to this by the Department for Education.

We suggest that, in terms of learning environments, Teachers of the Deaf have the skills necessary to be able to advise on accessibility strategies for education settings.

NDCS also feels that this section would benefit from a recognition and an understanding of the implications of deafness on the ability of deaf children to process information, sometimes known as "concentration fatigue", and be able to advise on strategies to overcome this.

6. Social and emotional development and well-being

NDCS believes that this section would be strengthened by requiring Teachers of the Deaf to be able to promote self-advocacy within deaf children and promote social independence.

NDCS also believes there needs to be stronger emphasis on the role of Teachers of the Deaf in promoting deaf awareness. This point was strongly made by members of the NDCS Young People's Advisory Board who have identified poor deaf awareness as a key concern[2]. Currently, the specification states that Teachers of the Deaf should be able to "use effective strategies to raise awareness of deafness among hearing peers" though this is expressed in a way which implies that this is just for the purpose of combating bullying, rather than to promote good communication and relations with peers more widely. NDCS recommends there be a stronger emphasis on the need for Teachers of the Deaf to confidently lead classes to promote deaf awareness among hearing peers and to closely monitor this on an ongoing basis.

We felt that section 6.18 could be more explicit that Teachers of the Deaf may have a role to play in **directly** supporting deaf children and young people in activities that promote positive self-esteem, etc. This should include activities outside of the classroom, such as playtimes and after-school clubs. The specification currently implies that Teachers of the Deaf should just "provide opportunities".

7. Supporting transition / transfer

NDCS feels that this section is very short and weak and vague on what Teachers of the Deaf are required to know in supporting transitions, particularly in relation to post-16 transitions. Given that the Children and Families Act 2014 now establishes a 0 to 25 framework and given that many Teachers of the Deaf have not traditionally worked in post 16 environments, we feel this section needs to be more detailed about the skills required to support deaf young people post-16.

We would like to see something more explicit that recognises that Teachers of the Deaf should be working to:

- Ensure that the deaf young person is at the heart of the transition process, with the Teacher of the Deaf playing an active role in empowering them to participate in decisions about their future, whilst liaising with the wider family
- Ensure deaf young person has high expectations for what they can achieve
- Ensure careers advisors and other key staff also have high expectations and advise on the implications of deafness for their future career choices
- Liaise with staff in a range of different settings including colleges, apprenticeships, HEIs and employers to ensure successful transition – providing in-depth information on child's needs and providing deaf awareness training as needed. This requires Teachers of the Deaf to be familiar with these different settings.

[2] It was this concern that prompted the Board to develop the Look, Smile, Chat resources to promote deaf awareness in the classroom.

- Provide information about support available post-16, including on Access to Work, access to any disability benefits, etc.
- Signpost to information about independence and promote self-advocacy
- Ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place so that deaf children can access at exams at key transition points

8. Partnership working

We feel that this section would benefit from something more explicit about understanding that families come from different backgrounds and that Teachers of the Deaf need to be adept in adopting a parent-centred approach that best meets their needs. This involves having strong skills in emotional support and empathy.

We felt that this section could be more explicit that Teachers of the Deaf have a key role to play in terms of liaising with mainstream teachers and special educational needs co-ordinators. Teachers only seem to be referenced once within this section in paragraph 8.15.

We also felt that the section would benefit from a recognition that Teachers of the Deaf should be able to recognise when they need to draw on specialist support from other staff, such as a speech and language therapist, educational psychologist, social workers or to meet a deaf child's additional needs.

In a number of places, this section acknowledges that Teachers of the Deaf will be working with a team. However, there doesn't seem to be an explicit recognition that Teachers of the Deaf may sometimes be a lead professional for a child, and that, as part of this, they need to have skills in leadership and assertiveness and also be able to advocate for a child or family on their behalf to ensure that other professionals meet their needs.

Comments on delivery approaches

NDCS is extremely concerned about the lack of oversight on if and how successful course providers are in producing Teachers of the Deaf that meet the specification. Our perception is that some course providers are much better than others but we have no reliable or objective way in assessing this.

We would like to see the College and Ofsted pay much closer scrutiny to the quality of course providers to ensure that the MQ retains its integrity. For example, as set out earlier, we feel that many Teachers of the Deaf are weak on specialist assessments. The MQ does reference the importance of this – so continued weakness in this area, unless there are greater checks and scrutiny suggests a possible weakness in course delivery in some areas.

Separately, there is a perception that the current delivery model incentivises course providers to accept applicants, without a full and proper consideration of their suitability for the course. This incentive potentially comes about because of the need to maintain numbers and preserve the viability of the course. NDCS is concerned that the criterion may inadvertently encourage this approach. For example, the criterion for course providers refers to "matching individual needs" of teachers throughout and "tailoring the course". NDCS believes that the need for flexibility should be balanced against the need for courses of consistent quality. NDCS therefore suggests that the College consider if the entry criteria for courses should be looked at in more detail to ascertain if it as rigorous as it should be. This might include considering how teachers were graded / evaluated before they applied to the course.

We are disappointed that continuing professional development is outside the scope of this consultation document. As set out earlier, over half of all Teachers of the Deaf in England and within ten years of retirement age. This indicates that some Teachers of the Deaf are working from

a specification that is considerably dated, from a time when newborn hearing screening, digital hearing aids and cochlear implants, for example, were not in place. We note that audiologists and speech and language therapists are both subject to CPD requirements. That Teachers of the Deaf are not has the potential to undermine the status of the profession.

In the absence of any proposals on continuing professional development, we would also like to see the College consider if there is more that can be done to provide ongoing support to Teachers of the Deaf, particularly those in a peripatetic role, who may be working in relative isolation. Establishing or supporting a "community of good practice" may be one way of achieving this.

We also feel that it's important for delivery centres to recognise that Teachers of the Deaf from Wales and Northern Ireland may also be gaining their MQ within England, as there are no course providers in those nations. These Teachers of the Deaf obviously need to be familiar with the legislative framework for their respective nations.

The consultation process

NDCS regrets the limited time available of one month for this consultation. Whilst we recognise that work has been carried out in advance of the consultation, we would have liked to have seen more time available to seek the views of parents of deaf children and deaf young people themselves. One month did not provide us with sufficient time to engage with these groups. Given the emphasis on co-production within the Children and Families Act, this short consultation timeframe is extremely disappointing.

We also felt that the consultation events were poorly promoted and advertised. As far as we could see, the only information about them was contained within the consultation document itself and was limited to dates and venues. No addresses or times were provided. There was also no information about whether childcare or communication support would be available.

The lack of consultation time has also inhibited more fundamental thinking about the structure of the qualification and the role of Teachers of the Deaf. Earlier in our response, we highlighted the challenge that Teachers of the Deaf are expected to support deaf children across all settings and of different ages. We would like to have had the time to consider and consult on whether there should be a move towards developing 'specialisms' within the MQ to address this concern and challenge, for example. Instead, the limited consultation window means that it feels as if we are restricted to a "more of the same" approach to the qualification. NDCS feels that this is a missed opportunity which may not be in the best interests of deaf children over the long-term.

NDCS would be happy to discuss or elaborate further on any of the points raised in our response.

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