

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

2 February 2017

Re: Response from NDCS Cymru

National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We support and represent the interests of deaf children and young people from birth through to independence. In referring to "deaf" we refer to all levels of hearing loss, including mild, moderate, severe, profound and temporary hearing loss.

We estimate that there are approximately 3,000 deaf children in Wales, 90 percent of whom are born to hearing parents who will have little or no experience of deafness. As referenced in the WG's *'Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan'* the family is the most important influence on a child's early development. It is, therefore, clear that specific investment in support of deaf children and their families in the first 1000 days of life will be required if the Welsh Government's ambition of a 'flying start' is to be achieved for this specific group.

Evidence shows that when early years education and childcare is of high quality, it is associated with a positive impact on children's social and cognitive development in both the short and long term (1). Children who attend high quality provision are more likely to demonstrate school-readiness, having acquired the cognitive, linguistic and self-regulation skills that create the foundation for their future learning and development (2). Therefore, investment in early years is crucial to help close the attainment gap for deaf children, and help improve children's short- and long-term outcomes, from making them more school-ready to improving long-term educational attainment and consequential outcomes.

Welsh Government education attainment data (2015) demonstrates significant attainment gaps at every Key Stage between deaf pupils and their hearing peers. Figures for Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 have widened since 2014 eg: at Key Stage 2, 16.4% of deaf children failed to achieve the Core Subject Indicator compared with just 2% of children with no SEN. Deafness is not a learning disability – with appropriate support deaf children can achieve the same as hearing children.

Since 50% of deaf children are identified post newborn hearing screening, it is vital that professionals have an understanding of the impact of childhood deafness; are able to recognise signs and symptoms of childhood deafness; and are able to provide effective advice, support and signposting for families by the use of provision pathways. The key interactions identified within *Healthy Child Wales Programme* provide a framework for intervention which will only be effective for deaf children if health professionals are trained appropriately.

Families need clear and balanced information to make informed choices, as well as access to specialist support services to ensure they are fully equipped to support their child. Access to speech and language services is essential for deaf children to develop effective language and communication skills.

NDCS Cymru is pleased that the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Bill will encompass early years (0-5) and provide valuable opportunities to strengthen service responses to the needs of deaf children, giving them the best start in life.

- 1 Nuffield Foundation. 2015. Early years education and childcare Lessons from evidence and future priorities: Apps, Mendolia and Walker (2012); Phillips and Lowenstein (2011); Sammons (2010); Sylva and others (2010); Mathers and others (2014); Smith and others (2009); Maisey and others (2013).
- 2 Nuffield Foundation. 2015. Early years education and childcare Lessons from evidence and future priorities: Gambaro, Stewart and Waldfogel (2014); Sammons (2010); Sammons and others (2007); Sylva and others (2010); Sylva and others (2012a); Sylva and others (2012b); Parker (2013).

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the consultation. Please do not hesitate to contact me as NDCS Cymru would welcome further engagement on this issue.

Yours sincerely

Armon Williams
Policy and Campaigns Officer (Wales)