

## **How ASL works in practice**

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### **Context**

- There are at least 3,363 deaf children in Scotland
- Nearly a third (29%) of Teachers of the Deaf in Scotland have been lost over the last seven years
- It appears that 30% of Teachers of the Deaf in employment do not hold the mandatory qualification
- 46% of Teachers of the Deaf are likely to retire in the next 10 to 15 years
- 67% of services say they do not provide families of pre-school deaf children with radio aids/assistive listening devices to use at home

### **Attainment**

Deafness is not a learning disability and with the right support, there is no reason why deaf young people should be achieving any less than their hearing peers. However Scottish Government data shows that there is a wide attainment gap for hearing impaired school leavers, and the attainment of this group is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland. This was explored in 2015 by the [Education and Culture Committee during their Inquiry into the attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment](#).

The latest Scottish Government data shows that last year 8.2% of deaf learners left school with no qualifications (compared with 2.6% of all pupils) and 42.6% obtained Highers or Advanced Highers (compared with 61.3% of all pupils). The gap continues to widen post-school with 26.8% of deaf learners going on to university compared with 48.1% of those with no additional support needs.

A key issue in measuring the attainment of deaf young people is the lack of baseline data collected on the numbers, needs and characteristics of this group in Scotland which will hamper mainstream practitioners assessment of assessment of ability and aptitude and the needs of deaf learners.

### **CRIDE**

The latest figures from the Consortium for Research Into Deaf Education (CRIDE) show there are at least 3,363 deaf children in Scotland. Nearly a third (29%) of Teachers of the Deaf in Scotland have been lost since 2011 and it appears that 30% of Teachers of the Deaf in employment do not hold the mandatory qualification. Additionally, 46% of Teachers of the Deaf are likely to retire in the next 10 to 15 years. CRIDE is the main and best source for data on numbers of deaf children and their educational provision.

It is extremely concerning that ToD provision in Scotland is further declining. Ensuring deaf learners have access to the additional support they require is critical to ensuring they reach their full potential and in closing the attainment gap experienced by this group. Given the diverse

needs of deaf learners are predominantly met within mainstream settings, there are implications for the capacity and skill set required by mainstream practitioners. Lack of specialist expertise also puts teachers under pressure as they cannot access the support they need to teach pupils effectively.

Teachers of the Deaf provide support to deaf children in the classroom as well as to their parents and family, and to other professionals who are involved with a child's education. They make the curriculum accessible to deaf learners and advise mainstream teachers on deaf awareness and communicating with deaf pupils. They also work with deaf pupils on a one to one basis and help with specialist technology. Specialist support within these settings is therefore crucial to the life of a deaf child.

## **Where deaf children and young people learn**

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Around 87% of deaf learners are educated in mainstream settings, around 5% are in mainstream schools with attached HI resource bases and around another 7% are within special schools (CRIDE 2017). However when it comes to choosing the most appropriate provision the reality of the situation is that not every local authority has these options and placing requests are not always successful. The support in each of these settings varies considerably, with the majority of deaf learners in mainstream settings relying on peripatetic HI Services whose ToDs or other specialist staff visit mainstream schools to support their learning.

Resource provision Hearing Impairment Units attached to mainstream schools and peripatetic sensory support services offering a visiting service to deaf children and support for mainstream teachers. Resource bases offer the benefit of specialist staff on-site, developing curriculum materials and delivering teaching to deaf children. They also offer deaf children the opportunity to have access to a deaf peer group, whilst also having access to elements of a mainstream education as far as possible.

The reality in Scotland is that only about half of local authorities have a resource base. All deaf young people should have an option to access this kind of specialist support if the expectation of best meeting their needs is to be met.

Furthermore, there is disparity in the availability and quality of specialist support in mainstream settings. Delivering specialist support through Communication Support Workers (CSWs) and Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs) can be expensive and, particularly for smaller authorities, can be a pressure on education budgets. This type of support, however, is high impact as it can help remove significant barriers to the curriculum for deaf learners. We would welcome further consideration on increasing the number of resource bases in mainstream schools for those who require a high level of support and/or alternative communication and peer support from other deaf learners.

## **Quality of learning and support**

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### **Specialist support for deaf learners**

Ensuring deaf learners have access to the additional support they require is critical to ensuring they reach their full potential and in closing the attainment gap experienced by this group. The diverse needs of deaf learners are predominantly met within mainstream settings, with

implications for the capacity and skill set required by mainstream practitioners. Specialist support within these settings is therefore crucial.

The shift towards inclusion is increasing in pace with regards to the reduced role of specialist services and in many instances an increased focus on these specialists acting as consultants for mainstream practitioners.

The previous [Education Committee Inquiry into the attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment](#) revealed mixed views about the presumption of mainstream education for deaf learners. Evidence was highlighted illustrating the difficulties deaf learners can encounter in mainstream school such as communicating with peers, being involved in class discussion, social isolation and mental health issues.

The Committee addressed our recommendation for a **review of deaf education** in their final report, suggesting that some who gave evidence agreed this was required while others said that it is action that is needed. The report also discussed the benefits of the resource provision approach and highlighted best practice at Windsor Park School and Craigie High School. Decision-making in relation to where a child is educated should focus on the best interests of the child and be child-centred in its approach. This was echoed during the Inquiry proceedings.

We agree that the decision about where a child attends school should be child-centred and based on their needs.

Access to BSL support for children who use BSL as their first language is another primary motivating factor in many placing requests in Scotland at the moment. We are aware of many cases where the BSL skill of a deaf pupil is of a higher level than the teacher and/or CSW responsible for educating them. This is something that has been brought up with the advent of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. Parents rightly feel this is an additional barrier to learning, and further hinders the deaf child's ability to communicate their own learning needs in class.

### **Inspection of HI education services**

The inspection of these services for deaf learners is crucial to observing practice and experiences directly, focusing on outcomes and impact. We understand that while Education Scotland has inspected peripatetic services in the past, this does not happen routinely and there is scope to develop this practice. We are not aware of any recent inspections to peripatetic hearing services. We await a response from Education Scotland on this issue. A lack of information on how these services are being run, undermines their quality and value. We would welcome further information if this assessment is inaccurate. **We recommend that peripatetic Hearing Impairment education services should be subject to routine inspection by Education Scotland.**

The absence of any national standards or expectations around delivering peripatetic services can also lead to local disparity. An example of inconsistent practice in Scotland that we are aware of is around eligibility criteria for support from peripatetic services. Some services directly support all levels of hearing loss, while some services do not support children with unilateral or mild hearing loss. There is also disparity when it comes to the criteria used to help determine the level of support for deaf children across Scotland, with 76% using locally developed frameworks.

### **Assistive technology**

Radio aids help deaf children hear speech by transmitting what people are saying direct to the child's hearing aid or cochlear implant, above any background noise. Radio aids are commonly used in schools to help children understand their teacher. Research has shown that the use of radio aids in the early years can have a big impact in terms of parent-child communication.

The 2018 survey asked if local authorities provided parents of deaf children aged 0 to 4 with radio aids/assistive listening devices for use within the home. 67% of services answered no. This was for a range of reasons including lack of funding and insurance arrangements.

The survey also asked if parents of deaf children aged 0 to 4 provided with radio aids/assistive listening devices for use within any early years settings. 77% of services answered yes.

We believe that wider use of radio aids in the early years, by providing deaf children with additional amplification so that they can hear their parents clearly, could have a dramatic impact on deaf children's later outcomes in language and communication. For example, our research found that use of radio aids led to 144% more conversations between the parent and the child when in the car and 88% when outdoors.

## **Roles and responsibilities**

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### **Delivering inclusion**

High quality deaf awareness training for mainstream teachers is fundamental to improving inclusive environments for deaf learners. A lack of deaf awareness also creates challenges with supportive technology with pupils describing experiences of teachers being unable to use the FM systems/radio aids either consistently or at all; "if the teacher doesn't wear the microphone properly it can be very noisy"; "new or supply teachers don't know how to use it."

Similarly, a lack of deaf awareness at strategic level is likely to result in an insufficient budget to meet the needs of deaf learners. Each local authority or new education region requires a qualified and highly experienced educationalist with the ability to make such effective strategic decisions.

*"I get a notetaker in one subject and this support only started in 5th year.. before I had no support. Some teachers are more deaf aware than others. Some teachers forget I have a hearing loss due to lip reading which is frustrating."* **Mainstream educated deaf pupil**

*"Only getting ToD support in one subject because they don't have enough time to help you in more classes – have to decide what subject you have that support."* **Mainstream educated deaf pupil**

We would welcome the opportunity to provide support and resources on deaf awareness training for professionals.

The consistency of support received by deaf pupils differs across Scotland, with the level of BSL and qualifications held by ToDs and support workers not being monitored. There is a need to improve the consistency of the quality of support received by deaf learners across the country to ensure all services are able to meet service users' needs by having appropriately qualified members of staff.

There are no minimum standards for delivering support to deaf learners, and while Education Scotland can inspect peripatetic HI services, this does not happen routinely. As such there is often much disparity across local authorities in terms of how they deliver education support to deaf learners and access to specialist support is patchy across Scotland. The inclusion agenda must be directed to improve outcomes for all deaf children in Scotland in any setting with ongoing quality improvement of local provision.

For those deaf young people who use BSL as their preferred method of communication require high quality of fluency in their support, which, given the lack of qualification framework for support staff, is not always available. Ensuring CSWs in schools have a minimum level of BSL qualification so that they can effectively fulfil this role is fundamental.

Deaf young people have expressed concerns to us around some support staff not hold the proficiency of signing required to communicate particular school subjects, such as science or maths.

The absence of any national standards or expectations around delivering peripatetic service can also lead to local disparity. We recommend refreshing the Count Us In: achieving success for deaf pupils guide (produced in partnership between NDCS and HMIE in 2007). This could help provide a relevant, consistent, framework which would support Education Scotland to achieve the assessment of teaching standards. We recommend that this framework would also establish expectations around self-evaluation and peer review among peripatetic services to help assess teaching standards.

An example of inconsistent practice in Scotland that we are aware of is around eligibility criteria for support from peripatetic services. Some services directly support all levels of hearing loss, while some services do not support children with unilateral or mild hearing loss.

An example of effective practice in Scotland that we are aware of is regional commissioning across three authorities which allows the peripatetic service to ensure an even spread of support across a very rural region. This service is able to provide direct support to a very high proportion of deaf children who belong to that area.

Similarly, for those pupils who use BSL, services will require to address the issue of BSL qualification level creatively, meeting the needs of their service users whilst effectively making use of available resources. We have suggested that local authorities consider possibilities such as the regional commissioning of communication support and other specialist staff such as educational audiologists. This would sit nicely within the new regions under Governance Plans in Scottish Education.

These issues have been reflected in the first BSL National Plan for Scotland and we recommend is mirrored within local authority plans which require to be in place by October 2018.

### **Parental and carer engagement**

Parents simply want what is best for their child. They want them to be nurtured and achieving, within an educational establishment where there is a culture of high expectations for deaf children.

All too often, we find that parents are not fully aware of the range of learning provisions potentially available to their child. Parents of deaf children are often torn between the value of having access to a local peer group within their community, or sending their child out with their local authority to access their education within an environment where their child will have access to a deaf peer group and specialist staff.

Sadly, in many cases, parents will consider a placing request to resource provision only once they feel that their child is not progressing, or where there is a difference of opinion from the parents and the professionals on what support and progress their child is accessing.

Support and information for parents and carers will be critical to them taking up an active and engaged role in their child's education. In the case of parents of deaf children, they require targeted specialist support to understand how their child learns, the approaches that work best for deaf children, and the challenges and barriers that exist for their deaf child in learning environments. We would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership to achieve this.

### **Early intervention, prevention and strong relationships**

There is currently very little provision in place in early years and childcare settings for deaf children. Investment into shaping a fit for purpose workforce in ELCC for deaf children is also essential.

Some further suggestions to improve the provision of support in the early years for deaf children include:

- Targets on number of early years workers with BSL qualifications
- National pool of specialist workers
- Every HI service to have specialist early years workers/ToDs with BSL skills
- A BSL qualification aimed at working with deaf children

### **Case in point: Family D**

Child D uses hearing aids and was recently offered a pre-3 place at their local mainstream nursery. Child D's parents are Deaf BSL users, who use BSL as their primary communication method with Child D. No staff at the local nursery have BSL skills appropriate for use with a young child and Family D have also experienced communication difficulties with them, e.g. interpreters not being booked, letters continually sent to the family home requesting that Family D phone the nursery despite the family being unable to do this.

The Local Authority has not provided any training for nursery staff to learn BSL. NDCS has delivered a short three-session course for Child Development Workers at the nursery. Six months later, Family D reported that the nursery are still not using sign language to support Child D, who is becoming isolated within his nursery group as he is not able to participate in activities in the same way as his hearing peers can.

Early intervention is critical to ensure parents/carers have access to timely, impartial information and the service they need in terms of communication choice for their deaf child and the access to the services and support they need. We are currently working on the development of early years standards with the Scottish Government to address minimum expectations of early years provision in local authorities.

### **Removing barriers to learning**

The optimal range of hearing that hearing technologies can typically offer a deaf child is approximately three metres in a good listening environment. This both reduces their ability to access spoken language beyond this range and limits their access to incidental learning, naturally accessed by their peers, that would enable them to acquire and absorb new language and information from listening to the world around them.

It is therefore of concern that there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to adhere to the recognised best practice guidance on acoustics, Buildings Bulletin 93. In Scotland this is recognised as good practice only and there is no monitoring of compliance. Comments to us from deaf pupils on open plan areas include; “can’t hear conversations” and “felt really left out and stressed”.

While we understand that school builds are complex, we strongly feel that acoustics should be considered as a fundamental aspect of any school build. Good acoustic environments support the learning of all children, not just those who are deaf. Making the appropriate adjustments at the earliest stage of a school build also prevents more costly and disruptive adaptations from being required later on. We would urge the Scottish Government to consider following best practice in other parts of the UK by making the Buildings Bulletin statutory in Scotland so that future schools in Scotland will have sound acoustic environments for all children to learn.

**We recommend all new school builds undergo pre-completion testing to ensure compliance with Buildings Bulletin 93.**

### **Emotional wellbeing**

Bullying and low self-esteem for many deaf children, particularly in mainstream settings, is a considerable barrier to learning. As one profoundly deaf young person recently told NDCS: “I went to a mainstream primary and secondary school, and loved it right up to fourth year. But then I was bullied and felt really excluded, and down on myself. I told my mum, and she was able to get me a place at a specialist unit for deaf children in a nearby area, and although there was more travelling, I enjoyed it better, the teachers were lovely, I made new deaf friends, and got my head down to get my highers. If I hadn’t moved school, I would have probably just left school altogether.”

### **Recommendations**

- Investment into the specialism by the Scottish Government and to urgently undertake a workforce planning exercise into ToDs to include the training and upskilling of professionals working with deaf pupils in the classroom
- Full implementation of the recommendations by the 2015 Scottish Parliament report into the attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment
- Peripatetic Hearing Impairment education services should be subject to routine inspection by Education Scotland
- Pre-completion testing of new build schools to ensure good acoustics
- All local authorities and Education Scotland to ensure that every child who could benefit from a radio aid is given access to one at the earliest possible opportunity