

The crisis will impact differently on different groups in society, and on different parts of the labour market; and, has already revealed some thorny issues about relative wages across key occupations.

What will the implications of the recovery be for different groups, unemployment and on the nature of work? How is the recovery likely to impact on socio-economic inequality as a whole?

Employment support

There is a high level of economic inactivity among deaf people. Only 36% of deaf adults are in employment compared with 80% of hearing. Research shows that deaf young people perceive a number of barriers preventing them from gaining employment.¹ Some young people felt that their hearing loss was met with negative views from employers and some felt that disclosing their deafness on job applications limited the likelihood of them being invited to interview. As well as issues around confidence and disclosure, many deaf young people do not consider themselves disabled.

There is currently a lack of tailored support available for deaf young people to prepare for and find employment. Given the current economic climate, this presents a double barrier for this group – scarcity of jobs and discrimination due to lack of awareness. We would like to see the development of pathways to employment for disabled young people that includes the wider soft skills needed to find work. These are identified as important by researchers on deafness.²

With the right support put in place, deaf young people can work in almost any job role. Some deaf people rely on communication support or assistive technology in order to be able to do their jobs. This support can be funded by the Access to Work grant scheme which is run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The scheme is highly valued by deaf people because it covers the costs of support, above what might normally be expected of an employer to provide through reasonable adjustments. However, we estimate that less than 5% of deaf young adults are benefitting from the scheme and believe it could work better for young deaf people who are moving from education into work.

We lack confidence in the AtW scheme to be quickly responsive to changing needs in the workplace (e.g someone must now work from home or needs to follow social distancing procedures). The current application and delivery process is lengthy and bureaucratic.

¹ University of Edinburgh, 2013, [Post school transitions of people who are deaf and hard of hearing](#)

² <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/agbell/vr/2018/00000117/f0020001/art00003>

Without Access to Work funding deaf young people will be unable to cover cost of communication support at work. Webchats or video conferencing should be used when carrying out assessments for deaf young people.

Raising awareness amongst employers:

There is a need for employers to promote equality and diversity by increasing their own understanding of the additional barriers some groups face and how they can help these to be overcome. While some employers are well informed about deafness and how to support deaf colleagues there is much work to be done in sharing this good practice and dispelling negative attitudes about deafness among employers. For example, in relation to deaf young people, there is a need to raise awareness among employers about how to support deaf young people on those placements, and a need to support employers in order to be able to do so. There can be a lack of deaf awareness among employers and so there is a need to dispel any negative attitudes or uncertainties employers hold and share good practice. This will support young people feel like they are able to disclose disability without fear of negative implications.

We recommend the sharing of best practice employers and case studies to increase understanding of employers. We would welcome the opportunity to collect and share these with the Advisory Group. We also have a number of [inspirational videos](#) as part of our Deaf Works Everywhere campaign showing what deaf young people can do.

We have delivered bespoke deaf awareness training for organisations taking deaf young people on for work experiences and would welcome the opportunity to roll this out more consistently. We also have a number of video resources with tips on how to support deaf young people on work placement which we would welcome the opportunity to share.³

Facemasks in the workplace

Face masks and coverings present a number of significant challenges for deaf children and young people. Whilst we recognise the public health considerations underlying this, there is still an urgent need to ensure that Scottish Government guidance reflects the communication needs of deaf children and young people in this area.

Where guidance applies in a workplace setting, we encourage employers to be flexible and creative in how they communicate with deaf employees, depending on the resources they have to hand and the situation they find themselves in. Options might include:

- using alternative forms of communication – such as writing things down or via text messages, depending on the individual needs of the employee

³ http://www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/leaving_school/employment/breaking_down.html

- dictation or translation apps can sometimes provide a speech to text option when out and about – they do not always work perfectly, particularly if someone has a strong accent or if speech is muffled
- using face masks with clear panels where the mouth can be seen or, better still, using face visors/shields. Our website includes information about how to make [DIY clear face masks](#) at home for those that would like to do so. Such DIY face masks would be for use by the general public, and not for use in health settings
- ensuring the listening environment is as quiet as possible and making use of any other hearing technology used by a deaf employee (such as a radio aid)
- communicating via a window/glass panel
- considering the need for face-to-face meeting, and whether a video call could work as an alternative for individual employees
- temporarily removing the face mask and communicating within the current safety guidance (e.g. ensuring hand washing before and after, not touching the face when the mask is removed, remaining within the social distancing guidelines of staying 2 metres apart)

These would mitigate the disadvantage against deaf employees and we are recommending these are included within any future Scottish Government guidance around wearing of face coverings within the workplace.

Transitions:

Research shows that deaf young people already have worse outcomes than their peers in terms of securing employment. For example, O'Neill et al (2014) found that 31% of deaf 16-24 year old were working compared to 53% of all the workforce of that age. Research by the University of Manchester into further education pathways for deaf young people (2015)⁴ also found that deaf young people experienced barriers created by patchy careers guidance and a lack of effective support for transition. This undermines access to HE and FE. This is despite the statutory requirement for education authorities to provide this under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 Code of Practice. As a result, deaf young people are less likely to receive accessible information about their support options and rights and are more likely to experience delays in support being put in place at their chosen destination.

There is a need for tailored careers advice in schools and colleges and access to specialist employment support for deaf school/college leavers. Effective transitional planning is critical to increasing the employment of deaf young people.

There is scope to improve the provision of accessible information and advice for deaf and disabled learners about existing employment support services, as well as other systems such as the Access to Work scheme and rights under the Equality Act.

Deaf young people who need support with transitions and moving into the next phase of education or employment may be affected and not be receiving the support required at this time. Practice is likely to vary in terms of the support provided to deaf young people in transitions and

⁴ Available from: http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/external_research/#contentblock5

moving into employment. For example, ensuring deaf young people have access to Teacher of the Deaf support, transition meetings and communication support.

Deaf young people have already significant challenges in receiving specialist and tailored careers advice. There is therefore a risk that the crisis will make a bad situation worse, resulting in many deaf young people falling through the net and significant future disadvantage for this cohort.

The coronavirus pandemic could create additional barriers for deaf young people as they leave school to pursue further learning or their next career. For instance they may face additional barriers to attainment in school, tailored transitions planning may not take place, in colleges and universities there may be additional barriers to communication where learning is to take place at home, they may struggle to utilise Access to Work support and employers may be unsure how to support a deaf young person in a role during this crisis.

We recommend Skills Development Scotland develops a specific plan for deaf young people's employability support. This should be tailored to the needs of each individual.

Cancellation of examinations:

This year's National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams have been cancelled with schools and colleges required to calculate student grades. We are concerned that deaf young people may be disadvantaged by this due to reliance on evidence that may have been collected for situations where deaf students did not have fair access.

For some vocational qualifications, calculated grades will also be used and the above concerns will apply. We are concerned that in the haste to create adapted, online/remote assessments awarding bodies will not consider the accessibility of these for all learners. Any video materials will need to be subtitled and some students will require additional time.

There is a risk that this group will be disadvantaged at this time resulting in less deaf young people accessing the workforce due to their skills not accurately being demonstrated.

Recommendations:

There should be a meaningful and timely appeals process for students with disabilities.

Data should be collected by the SQA which evaluates the calculated grades given to deaf candidates and compares those with outcomes from previous years. If there is disparity in outcomes then we believe remedial action must be taken.

Clear guidance should be published for vocational qualification awarding bodies on developing adapted assessments which outlines practical steps that they should take to avoid disadvantaging groups at risk.

Issues in higher education:

We are aware that many universities are still continuing remote lessons (e.g. online lectures). There is a concern around the accessibility of any online teaching. Deaf students are likely to be disadvantaged by any online teaching unless proactive reasonable adjustments are made. Some

students may require more communication support from Disabled Students Allowance. It is unclear how flexible and responsive this will be.

A similar issue applies with the accessibility of any online assessments or exams. Whilst exams have been cancelled for schools and colleges, we understand that some universities are continuing some remote assessments in a way which isn't accessible for deaf young people. This presents them at a significant disadvantage – we believe it should be seen as unlawful under the Equality Act.

“I had a young deaf person on a chat last week about problems with her dissertation advisor. No communicating, no organising meetings...She told me she received an email from said dissertation advisor, telling her that she was going to have a facetime or skype assessment conversation (counting towards her dissertation). The young person told him that she can't hear properly via skype or facetime, but he insisted that they have to do it this way due to corona virus.” (Staff member at the National Deaf Children's Society)

Recommendations:

The Scottish Government should also publish guidance on support for disabled students in higher education. This should remind higher education institutions of their duties under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments, including in any online teaching or remote assessments

The Scottish Government should make clear that additional funding can be provided through Disabled Students Allowance if additional communication support, beyond what is normally provided, is required.