

SEND review: right support, right place, right time.

Consultation response: feedback from deaf young people

22 July 2022

Summary

This response to the SEND review has been informed by the views of deaf young people who attended two focus groups on the SEND review and also draws on views from a report by our Young People's Advisory Board (YAB). The YAB report ¹details the results of a survey they created to collect deaf young people's views and experiences of deaf awareness at school. The survey was completed by 168 deaf young people across the UK. The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) have supported the YAB in collating the feedback of deaf young people on the SEND Review.

There were several issues raised by deaf young people. A lack of deaf awareness in education and the importance of Teachers of the Deaf were raised as key themes in the confidence, wellbeing, and development of deaf young people. Education Health and Care (EHC) plans, post-16 support and the transition from education into work were also raised as areas of concern.

This response highlights the real-life issues that deaf young people experience, have discussed, are concerned about, and want to see addressed in the SEND Review.

¹ The YAB Report is due for publication later this year.

1. Lack of deaf awareness in education settings

A strong key theme was the lack of deaf awareness in education settings.

Deaf young people consistently told us they experienced poor deaf awareness in the classroom. In fact, only 20% of deaf young people surveyed across the UK believed all their teachers showed good deaf awareness in the classroom, meaning that around 4/5 of deaf young people are regularly exposed to teaching environments with a poor understanding of deaf awareness.

"It has taken five years for my school to have deaf awareness training. During covid times, my mum had to send in two formal complaints to the school for disability discrimination because the school wasn't providing access. I would prefer my support to change and provide actual help for me because I don't just have a hearing impairment. I have ADHD as well and I find that the school only tend to focus on one or the other. I also don't have an EHCP which means they have the freedom to not provide support."

Young people wanted to see deaf awareness training in place for all teachers, other school staff and pupils.

Some young people felt that teachers or schools made assumptions about their ability or potential because of their deafness, and felt that there are lower expectations of them as a result.

"I would like schools - when they find out that you have a disability or a learning need - to not automatically put you into lower sets or in classes for people who struggle; our disability doesn't always mean that our intelligence or what we know is limited ... actually, put us in the classroom where we will be challenged instead of being put in a lower-class. [Don't assume] 'they are disabled, they are deaf, we don't really want them to be challenged because they might not be able to hear'."

Experiences of poor deaf awareness in the classroom also included but were not limited to:

- Teachers talking while facing away from the class, for example, while writing on the interactive whiteboard
- Noisy classrooms including constant, low-level background off-task chat, or noise from corridors or playground
- Teachers not putting on captions when they show videos in class (or not checking the captions are accurate first)
- Teachers do not know, or forget, that they have deaf pupil(s) in the class
- Teachers do not understand the advantages and limitations of technology such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, or radio aids.

"Teachers don't face me when talking so I can't read their lips."

"If I could change one thing about my school, it would be that teachers remember to put captions on videos/films"

"My teachers forget that I am deaf most of the time since I am the only deaf person that I know of in my school and I don't have hearing aids or other technology"

Good deaf awareness in the classroom should support deaf pupils to access all elements of the lesson and to feel included. Where good deaf awareness and appropriate support was provided deaf pupils felt they learnt more and were less tired at the end of the day.

Currently, deaf awareness is not routinely included in initial teacher training (that we are aware of), or in ongoing CPD.

Our Young People's Advisory Board (YAB) recommended that **all teachers have training which equips them with basic deaf awareness and the knowledge of where to get further support when a deaf child joins their class.** The YAB created a petition to introduce compulsory deaf awareness training for all teachers, which had 84,578 signatures at the time this paper was written; clearly highlighting how strong the support is for deaf awareness to be a key part of teacher training².

2. Teachers of the Deaf

All of the young people thought that Teachers of the Deaf are really important. Young people felt that their Teachers of the Deaf were able to help them get additional support and provided consistency during transition times.

"I have two Teachers of the Deaf and I have known them a long time. One of them is profoundly deaf and a British Sign Language (BSL) user. I have two BSL interpreters as well. They are really supportive."

As well as bringing expertise, Teachers of the Deaf can raise things with schools that a deaf child might not feel confident raising or may not know that they are entitled to.

We also heard from young people that they would like to see their Teacher of the Deaf more often.

"The Teachers of the Deaf in my area, they are actually really good, however I find that they don't come to visit me often. I don't know whether that's because [they think] I have more hearing and I need less support from them in their eyes. But I also find that they have a lot of deaf children to go and visit. So, I think that they don't

² <https://www.change.org/p/makedeafawarenesscompulsory-introduce-compulsory-deaf-awareness-training-for-all-teachers>

have enough time to go visit everyone, even though they know that they really should."

A lot of young people said that more Teacher of the Deaf support is needed at secondary school and college.

"At secondary school I had some decent Teachers of the Deaf but since I moved into college, I'm not entitled to one, as I don't have an EHCP."

Young people also discussed the importance of Teacher of the Deaf support continuing when transitioning to secondary school, to facilitate a smoother transition.

"My Teacher of the Deaf is coming in a bit more recently to help with moving to secondary school. I think she is going to stay with me for a bit in secondary school but then swap. I've had her since I was three weeks old. I don't really want to be in a new school and not have her to help, if I need it, especially because I've known her for so long."

The frequency and level of specialist support were inconsistent from one deaf young person to the next.

Those who had a Teacher of the Deaf were surprised and concerned to discover that other deaf young people did not have one. They are also concerned about the declining number of Teachers of the Deaf.

- In England, data from the Consortium for Research into Deaf Education shows there are now just 887 who are fully qualified, compared to 1062 in 2011, a fall of 17%.

Our Young People's Advisory Board recommended that **more teachers of the deaf need to be trained so that every deaf child in the UK has regular support from a teacher of the deaf.**

3. Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities Coordinators (SENCOs)

There were mixed responses to SENCOs with some young people getting good support from them while others felt that the SENCO doesn't fully understand their needs. Some of the feedback from the focus groups of deaf young people included;

- A common theme of concern was that SENCOs are often not that supportive – or think that deaf young people don't need much support.
- SENCOs are often not felt to be deaf aware – more training is needed.
- Young people felt that regular meetings with SENCOs would be helpful – involving parents and Teachers of the Deaf too.

SENCOs seem very busy – there is a feeling that they have too much going on to really appreciate individual young people with SEND and their needs – more personal, tailored support is needed.

“Unfortunately, my school didn’t have a SENCO for a long time. They did have one when I was 12 or 13. But I didn’t meet with them because they were like oh, she doesn’t need any help. And then that SENCO left, and they just introduced one this year in Year 11 which isn’t great because I really need the support. Worst of all, I didn’t have any support during the introduction of face coverings in schools. So, really, my entire school experience has just been me navigating my way through with not much support from anyone else.”

“My SENCO at my secondary school, they knew one year before when they were going to be leaving. And when it came to that point, they started not taking everything as seriously. They didn’t want to have lots of stuff to do before they were leaving. And that was in the time of covid, so it was even harder to get online learning to be sorted out. But now at my secondary school this year, my PE teacher is training to become a SENCO. They have been more helpful than the previous SENCO. For my GCSE exams this year she has managed to get me rest breaks and extra time, and all that stuff I didn’t really have until now.”

4. Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans

A large number of young people talked about the challenges they had in getting support. They felt that EHC plans are important to get the right support, but that there isn’t enough information about EHC plans and young people are not involved enough in annual review meetings. One young person mentioned that parents had to fight to get their EHC plan, and they had to take a year off school while waiting for this to be put in place.

“I think there were annual meetings, and I was like what is going on here? Why am I here in the meeting when other people are speaking for me? I could only speak when it was my turn, it was only one or two sentences. It wasn’t very direct communication. Maybe they thought I was too young – but I clearly knew what I needed. At the time I felt like it was much more the adults organising it, not me.”

5. Other support

The groups discussed a range of support that they receive including note takers, teaching assistants and communication support workers. There were a lot of positive stories but also some difficulties when non-specialist staff were used.

“ Fortunately I had LSAs who did note taking for me. Helped me with basic subjects, knowledge. But when it came to A-Levels that is when it became downhill all the way. Because it’s like A-Levels are much more complicated than GCSEs. When you make that jump, you clearly can see they don’t know what is going on in the class.

And they would just copy/paste or copy and write down what was on the PowerPoint, literally, word-for-word"

There were mixed responses around support at school – some young people were happy with their current support, others feel that it could be better. Some young people didn't receive any support at school.

"My entire school experience has just been me navigating my way through with not much support from anyone else."

Several young people talked about supportive friends who help when something's been missed. On the whole, they spoke positively about their peers but one young person talked about a lack of deaf awareness and acceptance from other students, and described how much of an affect this had on them.

"I think it's worth mentioning that it's not just teachers and staff that are making school difficult. It's also the lack of awareness and acceptance from peers and students. This can make the experience even worse on top of all the stressfulness of having to advocate to teachers and getting all the assistance you need. If peers were willing and understood how everyone might need a bit more help, maybe this could make the experience a bit easier."

Other areas of concern raised by young people included:

- Equality of access to a radio aid or other technology. Some of the young people felt that they do not have access to the full range of assistive technology that is available.
- Some of the young people stated that they felt they could have benefitted from more access to speech and language therapy.
- More one-to-one support is needed. For example, one-to-one or small group sessions to learn sign language.

"There's a few things I think the school could probably change. They could do things like more one-to-one support, that has never happened."

6. Apprenticeships

Numerous young people did not feel they had enough information about apprenticeships. They would like to be given more information about:

- Sign language interpreters and BSL support in the workplace.
- Information about the support and benefits that are available – and information about rights and reasonable adjustments.
- Information about how communication needs are going to be met.

"Deaf people should be informed of their rights. I didn't know about my rights. I just went online and figured out what rights I have. Obviously, if deaf people are informed of their rights and there was more information, maybe making it a requirement for schools to inform them and help them understand – and then when they encounter a situation, they can go for it and make the most of it."

Some were concerned about having the confidence to go and do this. They didn't feel they were being told by teachers and other adults (eg. careers advisors) that this is an option.

"Some deaf people may feel that they do have the courage to go to university or do an apprenticeship. But some of them may feel that they are being discouraged not to go, because of their deafness. And especially in my experience, sometimes from teachers."

Young people stated that trial days for an apprenticeship could be helpful and that work experience can also be good preparation for an apprenticeship.

7. Moving into Adulthood

The young people talked about going to university, workplace adjustments and communication support.

"I will have to have [work] placements for example in a hospital or surgery. And I already talked about adjustments made. I struggle with background noise and also with masks. Those are two things that probably will be in place when I go to work. My concerns are how will my communication needs be met not only in the workplace but in the future. And what can be done so I can access all of the information that hearing people will be accessing."

There were some practical concerns around support with being independent.

"Well, I am just thinking if I want to go to uni. I am worried about how I wake up. I struggle to wake up a lot of time and I have vibrating alarm clocks stronger than the others. I have to get a fitted fire alarm for me. Then I think you can get disability to fund you for those, that stuff. I think that's right."

"I found it stressful because I had to find all the information out myself. Like at college I'm allowed to have a fire pager, but no-one told me I could get one until I asked about the support I could get."

There were mixed views about the information they had been given about going to university or into work.

"Regarding the disability student allowance, I don't think there is much information about that online. Obviously when you move to university, you will need a lot of

staff to help you adjust because you will not have your note takers from secondary school going to university. Regarding that I think there should be more information”

“More information about rights, for example. Deaf people should be informed of their rights. I didn't know about my rights. I just went online and figured out what rights I have”.

“Being disabled, the living allowance... I really don't know very much about it, even though I am going to university.”

“I have been to Open Days and that has given me the chance to talk to them about how they would benefit me if I went to university, and talk about funds they could give me and help me benefit in the classroom. With maybe radio mic and stuff like that. So, university Open Days might be helpful because it might give deaf people to get the courage to get up and ask them themselves.”

“My school, work experience, that gives the opportunity to see whether going into the workplace, what your work is like.”

More information

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