

Summary

Deafness is not a learning disability and, with the right support, deaf children should be achieving as well as other children. Despite this, Government figures show that too many deaf children are still failing to get the support they need from public services.

This factsheet sets out the key areas where we're calling for action on education, health, welfare and social care from the new Government from June 2017.

In particular, we're calling on the next Government to take action to:

1. **ensure that funding for services for deaf children is sufficient**
2. **inspect the quality of education services for deaf children**
3. **set up a new bursary scheme to recruit Teachers of the Deaf**
4. **establish a new British Sign Language GCSE**
5. **improve data collection so that we know how many deaf children there are and what outcomes they achieve**
6. **ensure deaf young people can access specialist careers advice**
7. **revamp the Access to Work employment support scheme**
8. **make it easier for deaf young people to become apprentices**
9. **ensure children's audiology services are fit for purpose by making it a requirement they accredit under the Improving Quality in Physiological Services (IQIPS) programme**
10. **rule out any cuts or narrowing of eligibility criteria to welfare support for disabled children and young people.**

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Deaf children across the UK face many of the same barriers. However, many of the decisions about key public services that deaf children rely on are devolved. We work across the nations of the UK to influence decision-makers in each of the devolved administrations but this briefing focuses on support for deaf children in England. MPs from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can support us by raising issues within Westminster and working with decision-makers in the nations.

What is deafness?

By deaf, the National Deaf Children's Society means anyone with a permanent or temporary hearing loss. This could be a mild, moderate, severe or profound hearing loss. Every deaf child is different. Deaf children communicate in a variety of ways, including using speech, sign language or a combination.

Deafness can be inherited or caused by childhood illness or other factors such as accidents. Half of deaf children are born deaf and the other half become deaf during childhood. Many children experience temporary hearing loss as a result of conditions such as glue ear.

Over 90% of deaf children are from families with no first-hand experience of deafness.

How many deaf children are there?

We estimate that 1.6 million children experience deafness at any one time in the UK, of which the most common cause is glue ear. Crudely split, each MP will have an average of 2,500 deaf children in their constituency.

Across the UK, we estimate that over 45,000 are permanently deaf. Central and local government does not systematically collect or use the data available on deaf children. We estimate that School Census figures are missing around 40% of deaf children. We're concerned that the lack of reliable data on how many deaf children there are means that children's services are unable to effectively plan and provide for deaf children. It also means that we don't have a complete picture on how well they do at school and their post-16 destinations.

Action needed: We call on the new Government to take steps to improve data collection.

Education – what support do deaf children need?

Deafness is not a learning disability and there is no reason why most deaf children cannot achieve as well as other children, providing they get the right support, right from the start. However, government figures show that in 2016, just 41% of deaf children in England achieved 5 GCSEs (including English and Maths) at grades A* to C, compared to 64% of other children.

Every deaf child is different and will vary in how they are supported. Extra support that deaf children may need include:

- deaf-friendly teachers who been provided with guidance from expert Teachers of the Deaf on how to ensure deaf children can access lessons
- specialist equipment to help them hear in the classroom, such as a radio aid system
- classrooms that go beyond the Government's minimum acoustic standards
- specialist support staff, such as a communication support worker with appropriate skills
- opportunities to learn sign language along with their hearing peers.

There have been a number of significant changes in education over the past seven years.

- Significant funding cuts to local authority education services for deaf children, despite a government commitment that education budgets have and will be protected.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 overhauled the special educational needs system by, for example, including a new requirement for local authorities to publish a Local Offer setting out what provision it expects to be available in each area. Many local authorities are still implementing these changes.
- A 12% decline in the number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf since 2010. Moreover, around half of all existing Teachers of the Deaf are expected to retire in the next 10 to 15 years.

Action needed:

1. The Government to commit to ensure that funding for services for deaf children is sufficient. Whilst the 'High Needs' block has been protected in cash terms, it has not been adjusted to reflect:

- the rising number of children and young people requiring additional support
- greater local authority responsibilities to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities aged over 16 and in the early years
- a trend towards more children being placed in special schools.

2. **Ofsted to specifically inspect the quality of education services for deaf children.** Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission have begun a time-limited inspection programme of local area special educational needs support. However, services for deaf children are still receiving very little scrutiny as part of this.
3. **A new bursary scheme to recruit Teachers of the Deaf** to address the recruitment difficulties experienced in a number of areas.
4. **The Government to set up a new British Sign Language GCSE.** Currently, schools are not able to offer pupils the option to learn British Sign Language, even though it is an official language within the UK. The Department for Education has yet to authorise the creation of a GCSE or set out the subject level conditions under which it can operate.

Post-14 education and training – what support do deaf young people need?

Government figures show that deaf young people do not have the same opportunities to make a successful transition to adulthood. For example, just 44% of deaf young people achieved level 3 standard (2 A-Levels or equivalent) by age 19, compared to 65% of other young people. Deaf people are also twice as likely to be unemployed. We believe that deaf young people should be supported to achieve the same range of outcomes as other young people.

Action needed:

1. **The Government to ensure deaf young people can access specialist careers advice** so that young people receive the information they need on their options, specialist support available and their rights.
2. **The government Access to Work scheme to be revamped** so that deaf young people receive specialist advice from dedicated champions when they apply for the first time, as well as support that's flexible and tailored to their needs.
3. **An improved, simplified funding system for additional support on apprenticeships** so that support can be secured before a young person starts their apprenticeship with just one assessment of needs required.
4. **MPs to ask their local authority what support is in place for deaf young people post-14.** We believe, in particular, that local authorities need to ensure that deaf young people have access to specialist assessments and support in further education, with input from qualified Teachers of the Deaf.

Health - what support do deaf children need?

Good audiology services can make a critical contribution to a deaf child's success in life as they are responsible for ensuring a deaf child is able to use their remaining hearing to the fullest extent possible. However, an NHS report in 2014 found that one third of audiology services were failing to meet critical NHS quality standards. Specifically:

- failing to see a child when deafness is suspected within expected timeframes
- failing to use the most up-to-date tests and interpret results correctly
- failing to ensure hearing aids are set up correctly.

Parents of deaf children have also reported to NDCS that audiology services are seeing too many deaf children in school time and do not have sufficient deaf awareness to meaningfully engage with their child.

Despite the above, the Department for Health decided to stop assessing the quality of these vital services and providing support to help them improve. The scheme that replaced inspections, known as Improving Quality in Physiological Services (IQIPs), is inadequate because:

- it is not mandatory
- there is minimal transparency to parents about which services are taking part and those which have not met the standards
- only 15% of paediatric audiology services have gained accreditation since 2013.

Action needed: We're calling on the Government to make the accreditation process mandatory for all paediatric audiology services in England so that parents can be confident that they are fit for purpose.

Welfare - what support do deaf children need?

Many deaf children and their families rely on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to support them with additional costs associated with their deafness. These costs include travel to audiology appointments and purchasing specialist equipment to support independence.

Since 2010, the Government has replaced DLA with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for those over 16. We are extremely concerned at the high rate of deaf young people who are eligible for PIP but are not being awarded it without appealing. This is due to the poor quality of assessments and decisions. We are calling for guidance for assessors and decision-makers to be updated so that the correct decisions are made and unnecessary and costly appeals are avoided. We are also worried that overreliance on the telephone as a means of communication throughout the claims process makes it inaccessible for many deaf young people.

Action needed: We're calling on the Government to rule out any cuts or narrowing of eligibility criteria to welfare support for disabled children. We're also calling on the Government to ensure that the PIP claim process is fair and fully accessible to deaf young people.

Social care - what support do deaf children need?

90% of deaf children are born to families who have little knowledge of deafness. It is vital that every deaf child and their family has access to high quality social care services to help ensure that they can meet their full potential and are safe from harm. It is already known that deaf children are:

- 60% more likely to experience mental health problems compared to other children
- over twice as likely to be abused as other children.

Our survey in 2014 found that:

- Nearly half of local authorities social care teams (49%) said their eligibility criteria did not include any specific reference to deaf children or sensory impairment.
- 40% of local authority social care teams could not identify the numbers of deaf children receiving social care services. Where data was provided, totals given were found to be very different even between similar sized local authorities.
- Only 16% of local authorities or social care teams had a dedicated social worker for deaf children and 87% of these workers combine these duties with other responsibilities (e.g. support to vision impaired children). Across England, only two social workers were identified who work solely with deaf children and young people.

In too many areas, deaf children and their families are only receiving support once their needs become critical. Even then, support is too often only provided by social workers with no real expertise in deafness. There remains a poor understanding among local authorities of the needs

and vulnerability of deaf children and the importance of early intervention and the support that is needed.

Action needed: We're calling on MPs to ask their local authority what action they are taking to improve social care services for deaf children.

About us

We're the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people, and were established by a group of parents of deaf children in 1944. We help deaf children fulfil their potential by providing impartial practical and emotional support to them and their families. This includes a free membership service, a wide range of events, helpline support, and one-to-one advice from Children and Families Support Officers. We also have a team of Regional Directors who work to influence and challenge commissioners of local services for deaf children.

95% of NDCS's work to help deaf children is funded by the public.