

The National Deaf Children's Society is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We want to work with Government, local authorities, health bodies as well as our third sector partners to ensure they can effectively support deaf children and their families.

Summary

- There are as many as 3850 deaf children in Scotland
- Around 87% of deaf children attend mainstream schools, where they may be the only deaf child. Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs) play a key role in helping all teacher to understand how to differentiate the curriculum and provide effective support
- ToDs are a lifeline for many deaf children but these services are being squeezed with a reduction of nearly a quarter (24%) over the last 7 years and half are due to retire in the next 10 to 15 years

Background

Following the Inquiry findings and recommendations by the Committee, work was undertaken including that by the short-life Working Group on Attainment. The group undertook a survey in 2016 into providing a snapshot of numbers of ToD and QTVI in Scotland and their qualifications. This work marked an extremely important and positive step forward in improving data collection around sensory impairment education in Scotland and we welcomed the commitment and support from the Scottish Government in undertaking this survey. Now with the latest data from the Consortium for Research into Deaf Education showing a declining number of ToDs in Scotland, coupled with an increase in numbers of deaf children being identified, it is important that the findings from both pieces of work are not lost and actions are taken to address the workforce issues.

Context

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.

The latest Scottish Government data shows that last year 9.4% of deaf learners left school with no qualifications (compared with 2.5% of all pupils) and 42.4% obtained Highers or Advanced Highers (compared with 60.3% of all pupils). The gap continues to widen post-school with 25.2% of deaf learners going on to university compared with 47.3% of those with no additional support needs. An increased gap of 9.8% compared with the previous year's cohort.

New data

The Consortium for Research Into Deaf Education (CRIDE) carried out its seventh annual survey on educational staffing and service provision for deaf children.¹ CRIDE is the main and best source for data on numbers of deaf children and their educational provision.

Key findings:

- Nearly **a quarter** (24%) of specialist ToDs in Scotland have been lost over the last seven years.
- At the same time there has been a 26% reported increase in numbers of deaf children being identified across Scotland.
- Nearly **half** (48%) of ToDs are due to retire in the next 10 to 15 years.
- 87% of deaf children attend mainstream schools.

We are extremely concerned 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 (87%) met within mainstream settings, there are implications for the capacity and skill set required by mainstream practitioners.

Teachers of the Deaf can 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.

Key issues

Workforce planning

We are aware of the Scottish Government plans to improve career pathways for ASL teachers. The Scottish Government have stated this will include the career pathway for ToDs. We would welcome the opportunity to feed into this work.

The Scottish Government 2015 survey ascertained numbers of ToDs and their qualification but there have been no recommendations or action taken following the findings of this report. This decline in numbers is further evidenced by the most recent CRIDE data, the number of specialist teaching staff has continued to fall in recent years. We are becoming increasingly aware that services are being affected by restructure and proposed redesign/or budget reduction. As far as we are aware, there has been little in the way of national impact assessments to determine what these changes in support structures might mean for deaf learners. We feel this is an urgent issue which should be addressed.

¹ Reports from previous years can be found on the BATOD website at <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/> or on the National Deaf Children's Society website at www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE.

More promoted posts within Additional Support Needs (ASN) education services would help increase strategic thinking in relation to service delivery as well as incentivise a younger workforce to enter these specialist fields. This should be a Scotland wide exercise. Linking in with the recent education governance review, these could be delivered at an education region level to ensure parity across the country. Continued shortages in specialist practitioners will make it more difficult for deaf learners to achieve positive outcomes and ensure accessibility and inclusion for deaf children in mainstream education.

Whilst we appreciate the significant challenges facing local authorities, we believe these changes are of urgent concern, and will undermine the Scottish Government's ambition to close the attainment gap and ensure every learner reaches their fullest potential. **We recommend a ToD workforce planning exercise is undertaken urgently to include the training and upskilling of professionals working with deaf pupils in the classroom.**

Qualifications of teachers in BSL:

We agree with the Committee's comments during the Inquiry that it is not acceptable that some deaf learners currently have a higher level of BSL than some of the professionals who teach them. We also agree that in more complex subjects it is particularly important that professionals working with deaf pupils have the appropriate level of sign language. A Level 3 qualification is far better than Level 1 in terms of addressing these issues.

We are aware of the Cabinet Secretary's intention to undertake research in 2018/19 to investigate the level of BSL held by support staff working with deaf pupils in schools. However we are concerned that consideration has not been given to the possible implications that raising the minimum qualification could have for the current cohort of ToDs. Unless education authorities fund the costs of the course and training time for teachers, the new minimum could deter practitioners from training to become a ToD.

Ensuring all ToDs, in the first instance, meet the current minimum Level 1 is an important starting point. As is ensuring all services have a ToD with Level 3 (or access to this via reciprocal agreements with other authorities). This is currently not the case for 71% of peripatetic services. **A phased and fully funded introduction of a new minimum Level 3 qualification would be essential** to ensure the policy did not have an unintended consequence on the current specialist workforce.

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 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.

We recommend refreshing the [Count Us In: achieving success for deaf pupils guide](#) (which we produced in partnership with HMIE in 2007) and that a quality framework is established for teachers working with deaf learners, overseen by an external independent body. This would help provide a relevant, consistent framework which would support Education Scotland to achieve the assessment of teaching standards. We recommend a framework would also establish expectations around self-evaluation and peer review amongst peripatetic services to help assess teaching standards.