

# Close the Gap

Promoting positive post-school transitions  
for deaf young people in Scotland

April 2014



»» close the gap ««

National Deaf Children's Society Scotland

**ndcs**  
every deaf child  
Scotland

Our vision is of world  
without barriers for  
every deaf child

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## Endorsement

This report and its recommendations have been endorsed by the following organisations.



# Summary

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

We know that with the right support, deaf children can do anything that other children can. However, our new research, commissioned from the University of Edinburgh<sup>1</sup>, has revealed significant gaps in outcomes for deaf young people across education, training and employment.

Post-school transitions are crucial for all of Scotland's young people, enabling them to flourish as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Transitions are key to fulfilling the objectives of Getting It Right for Every Child and the senior phase of the Curriculum for Excellence, ensuring that all our young people have the best start in life and are ready to succeed. The Scottish Government's forthcoming *See Hear* strategy has highlighted the importance of transitions that meet the unique needs of those with a sensory impairment.

It is crucial that all sectors work together to ensure that all our young people achieve the best possible post-school outcomes. NDCS is committed to working in partnership with the Scottish Government and others to build on existing policy and best practice to ensure we are making progress on closing the unacceptable gap that persists for deaf young people.



The research has raised key concerns around:

## Academic attainment

- If the right support is not in place from the early years, the challenges deaf children face can contribute to ongoing academic underachievement.
- As a group, the academic attainment of deaf children continues to trail behind their hearing peers. According to Scottish Government data<sup>2</sup> in 2011/12, in comparison to school leavers with no additional support needs, deaf school leavers who received support for learning:
  - (i) were more likely to leave school with no qualifications (8.9% vs. 1%)
  - (ii) were more likely to leave school with Standard Grades at 3-4 (14.4% vs. 7.5%)
  - (iii) were less likely to qualify for entry into higher education (36.4% had Highers and Advanced Highers, as opposed to 60.2% of school leavers who did not have additional support needs).

## Access to post-16 destinations

- Scottish Government data<sup>3</sup> shows that deaf school leavers are less likely to go on to higher education (26% in comparison to 39% of hearing school leavers).
- More positively, 38% of deaf school leavers successfully enter further education after school<sup>4</sup>. However, the research revealed there are concerns around how deaf young people are supported and funded to achieve their full potential within these further education settings.

## Employability

- Deaf young people face barriers to employment with national data highlighting that only 15.2% find work within three months of finishing school compared to 24.6% of school leavers with no additional support needs<sup>5</sup>.

The research reveals a number of contributing factors to the gap in post-school outcomes that exists for this group:

### **Provision of specialist additional support within school**

- According to the research, there is variation in the consistency and quality of support that deaf young people receive in schools across Scotland. Some young deaf people accessed a wide range of support, including academic and peer support, others reported they received no support at all throughout their school career.
- A recent national survey illustrated that numbers of Teachers of the Deaf in Scotland have reduced over the last two years.<sup>6</sup> Further investigation is required to understand the local context around this figure, however, given the attainment gap deaf young people face, any overall reduction in specialist provision is a serious concern.

### **Transitional planning and guidance**

- Researchers found that most deaf young people did not receive support for transition planning, despite the statutory requirement in the Additional Support for Learning Act's Code of Practice for education authorities to provide such support.
- As a result, deaf young people were less likely to receive accessible support about their options and rights and more likely to experience delays in support being put in place at their chosen post-16 destination.
- The accessibility of information, support and guidance around post-school transitions was found to be inconsistent and challenging to navigate by young deaf people.

### **Support in post-school destinations**

- Many deaf school leavers were positive about the support they received at university. Students clearly benefited from accessing the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), which the research concluded was a protective factor against dropping out of higher education.
- However, researchers found support to be particularly lacking within the college sector, which is concerning given that this is the

chosen post-16 destination for 38% of deaf school leavers in Scotland.

- The research revealed a marked difference in support available for deaf students between the college and university sectors. This raises concerns about disparities in funding across sectors, and particularly how colleges are resourced to address student support needs.

### **Emotional health and well-being**

- As a result of social attitudes and communication barriers deaf young people often experience bullying and social isolation and these experiences were reflected in the research.
- Two thirds of the young people in the research case studies mentioned they had been bullied or felt socially isolated in school because they were deaf. They described how this affected their confidence and ultimately their post school transitions.

### **Socio-economic status**

- Evidence shows that socio-economic status can have more significant impact on learning for deaf children compared to hearing children. This is because the poorest hearing children may still be able to benefit from incidental learning that comes from listening to the environment around them, compared with poor deaf children who may be at risk of not being exposed to accessible language from an early age due to communication challenges.<sup>7</sup>
- Socio-economic status has been found to be a predictor of deaf children's reading attainment, with those from poor backgrounds failing to achieve the same reading levels as those deaf children from higher socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>8</sup>
- Researchers also found that parents from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to make informed choices about schooling or transitions and were less likely to have good advocacy skills or help their children into employment.

## Taking national action – NDCS recommendations

National and local action is required to close the unacceptable gap in post-16 outcomes that persists for deaf young people. NDCS has consulted widely with key stakeholders in establishing national and local recommendations which have been endorsed by the Centre for Research in Education, Diversity and Inclusion, the Scottish Transitions Forum and the Scottish Council on Deafness.

- 1** NDCS recommends that the Scottish Government formally recognises and commits to closing the gap in school attainment that persists for deaf learners in Scotland.
- 2** As part of a national commitment to close the gap for deaf children, NDCS recommends that a national review of educational provision for deaf learners in Scotland should be commissioned. This review should aim to determine whether current education and support systems are achieving the best possible outcomes for deaf learners.
- 3** The Scottish Government should take steps to improve the incomplete data sets that exist for deaf children in Scotland, including rolling out local records of deaf children.
- 4** Scottish Government statutory guidance accompanying the Children and Young People Bill (Scotland) and Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) should be used to improve transitions planning practices for young people with additional support needs.
- 5** The Scottish Government should endorse the NDCS Statement of Intent approach, which encourages local authorities to commit to three key principles to promote positive transitions for deaf school leavers.

## Taking local action – NDCS Statement of Intent

By sharing our resources and expertise, NDCS is committed to supporting local authorities to effect real change for young deaf people. The NDCS Statement of Intent is a vehicle through which local authorities, with the support of NDCS, can pursue a pragmatic approach to supporting deaf young people locally. The three principles of promoting positive post-school transitions below are intended to support deaf young people to support deaf young people to reach their full potential in their local communities.

The Statement of Intent consists of three strands:

### Strand One: Promoting positive emotional health and well-being and peer support

Local authority commits to working with NDCS to provide opportunities for deaf young people to build positive emotional health and well-being and explore any impact their deafness has on their self-identity. These opportunities would also support deaf young people to build relationships and benefit from deaf peer groups such as local deaf groups and informal friendship circles.

### Strand Two: Supporting effective transitional planning

Local authorities commit to delivering person-centred planning to deaf young people locally to increase the provision of accessible information, support and guidance. NDCS is committed to supporting this planning by rolling out the *Template for Success* resource.

### Strand Three: Facilitating effective partnership working

In partnership with NDCS, local authorities commit to facilitating a local transitions forum which includes Teachers of the Deaf and other relevant professionals working with deaf young people. This forum will be vital in bringing together key stakeholders in the area, sharing knowledge, building relationships and addressing specific challenges.

### Rolling out the NDCS Statement of Intent

East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire have committed to implementing the Statement of Intent in 2014. NDCS will be working in partnership with the three authorities to implement real change for deaf young people. Learning and outcomes from this pilot will be crucial in rolling out the Statement of Intent across other local authorities going forward.

## Introduction

*“It’s quite hard because everything stops before they’re nineteen... their respite changed, their school changed, their audiologist changed, their hospital changed. You lose all your support all at the one time and... end up in a black hole.”*

Mother of Oliver, a further education student

Leaving school and finding the right post-16 destination is difficult for any young person. However, new research by the University of Edinburgh has highlighted that for deaf young people, this is even more challenging.

There is no complete data on the total number of deaf children and young people in Scotland or in Scottish schools. However, based on prevalence rates, NDCS estimates that there could be as many as 3,850 deaf children and young people in Scotland<sup>9</sup>.

NDCS is concerned that many deaf young people in Scotland are being left behind in their post-school transitions. The research reveals serious gaps between deaf young people and their hearing peers in achieving positive post-16 experiences. In particular there is a need to address the challenges around academic attainment, employability, the provision of specialist support, person-centred planning and emotional health and well-being.

With the right support, deaf children and young people can achieve anything they want. All young people in Scotland deserve an equal opportunity to become successful learners, confident individuals effective contributors and responsible citizens. Achievable solutions exist to address these issues and NDCS Scotland is committed to working in partnership with national and local decision-makers and professionals to deliver real change for deaf young people across Scotland.

\*NDCS uses the word deaf to describe all levels of hearing loss.

## Policy context

The Scottish Government guarantees an offer of education or training for every 16 to 19-year-old in Scotland not in education, employment or training<sup>10</sup> and a number of policies have been put in place to promote positive transitions for young people, as outlined in the 16+ Learning Choices and the Post-16 Policy and Practice Framework.

However, recent reviews suggest that there is a significant gap between transitions policy and practice in Scotland. Both the Doran Review<sup>11</sup> and the Scottish Transitions Forum<sup>12</sup> have highlighted the challenges facing young people and their families. Those reviews have recommended that a number of key issues are addressed, particularly around full involvement of child and family, coordination and partnership working among professionals and ensuring adequate time is available for planning and preparing for transitions. This report supports and builds on these policy recommendations. It is crucial that the current policy framework meets the needs of all young people, including those who are deaf.

This report also comes at a timely juncture when the Scottish Government is making its own assessments on the progress being made in the implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004). At the time of writing, a Report to Parliament is being prepared with a particular focus on the area of transitions. This NDCS report will contribute to the dialogue and consider what is required to promote positive post-school transitions for young people with additional support needs, such as those who are deaf.

## Research methods

The University of Edinburgh was commissioned in 2012 to undertake a study to explore the post-16 transition process for young deaf people. The research team undertook a wide analysis of policy, legislation and Scottish Government statistics. Interviews also took place with 30 young deaf people aged 18 to 24. They were asked about their experiences of school, transitional planning arrangements, further and higher education, training and employment.

Wider research and information has also been included in this report and is referenced where appropriate.



# Statistics: deaf young people in post-school transition

## Attainment

➤➤ **Gap:** Deaf young people in Scotland leave school with lower qualifications than their hearing counterparts.

Deaf children may face particular barriers in acquiring literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills due to a number of challenges they face. These include limited language fluency at the onset of formal schooling, inadequate literacy experiences in early childhood and delayed acquisition of vocabulary<sup>13</sup>. Deafness is not a learning disability and given the right support, there is no reason why any deaf children should achieve any less at school than a hearing child with similar abilities.

Despite this, gaps in academic attainment persist for this group. The forthcoming Deaf Achievement in Scotland<sup>14</sup> project has found that deafness across all categories (including mild, moderate and pupils with a cochlear implant) has a negative effect on academic achievement, including English grades and overall tariff scores.

Scottish Government data<sup>15</sup> illustrates this gap in school leaver attainment, a key determinant of post-school destinations. In 2011/12, compared with school leavers with no additional support needs, deaf school leavers who received support for learning:

- were more likely to leave school with no qualifications in (8.9% vs. 1%)
- were more likely to leave school with Standard Grades at 3-4 (14.4% vs. 7.5%)
- were less likely to qualify for entry into higher education (36.4% had Highers and Advanced Highers, as opposed to 60.2% of school leavers with no additional support needs).

**NDCS recommends that the Scottish Government formally recognises and commits to closing the gap in school attainment that persists for deaf learners in Scotland.**

## School leaver destinations

➤➤ **Gap:** Compared to their hearing peers, deaf young people are under-represented in a number of post-16 destinations.

The research illustrates that in 2011/12 deaf young people were under-represented in higher education, training and employment.<sup>16</sup> Only 26% of deaf school leavers entered higher education, compared with 39% of school leavers with no additional support needs. However, deaf young people were over-represented within further education compared to those with no additional support needs, with 38% of deaf school leavers successfully entering further education.

While data on access to further education is positive, as discussed later in the report, NDCS is concerned about how deaf young people are supported to reach their full potential at college and their level of employability upon leaving.

## Employment

➤➤ **Gap:** As a group, deaf school leavers are less likely to be employed than their hearing peers.

15% of deaf school leavers were employed in 2011/12 compared to 25% of school leavers with no additional support needs<sup>17</sup>. This shows that there is a significant employability gap for deaf school leavers. However, the research also showed that deaf young university graduates had similar employment destinations to hearing graduates. This suggests that if the under-achievement of deaf pupils in schools was addressed resulting in more deaf young people in higher education, much more could be done to enhance employment prospects for deaf young people in Scotland.

Research participants spoke of the fear of discrimination in recruitment and lack of deaf awareness in the work place. Those with lower qualifications also described further barriers such as limited social networks, lack of work experience and lack of support in employment.

## Behind the statistics: getting transitions right for deaf young people



### Specialist support at school

*“A couple of times my teacher was shocked when he asked how much I actually understood and I said you know ‘at best maybe 15% and then it’s mostly ‘the’, ‘a’ words like that.”*

Jack, jobseeker

Under Additional Support for Learning, deaf pupils are entitled to have their needs identified and met, and to have their arrangements for support reviewed regularly. Not all deaf pupils require intensive specialist support at school but they may still require their progress to be monitored. Other deaf pupils may require in-depth planning and support to achieve positive outcomes at school. To promote academic progress and person-centred planning it is crucial for all deaf children to be able to access specialist support when they need to, such as Teachers of the Deaf, educational audiologists or communication support workers.

However, the research highlighted that there is much variation in how often deaf young people accessed this kind of support, with some benefiting from full-time teaching support and others having brief one-to-one sessions a few times a year. There were also inconsistencies in the type and depth of support offered by local education authorities, for example some deaf young people received academic support and benefited from additional supports such as organised deaf peer groups. Other young people reported they had no support at various stages of their school career.

There is a need to better understand how the shift towards educating pupils with additional support needs in mainstream schools has impacted on the consistency of additional support across Scotland. According to the Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE) almost 80% of deaf children in Scotland are taught in mainstream schools compared to roughly 10% in both mainstream schools with a hearing impairment resource base and specialist schools respectively<sup>18</sup>. The support available to deaf pupils in each of these settings varies considerably.

CRIDE data suggests that in the past two years the number of full-time equivalent Teacher of the Deaf posts in Scotland has decreased<sup>19</sup>. While further investigation is required to understand the local context around these figures, any overall reduction in specialist provision is of concern given the underachievement of deaf pupils.



NDCS is also concerned about the status and recognition afforded to professionals supporting deaf pupils in Scotland. According to statutory guidance teachers working wholly or mainly with deaf children should obtain a mandatory qualification within five years of working within this role. However CRIDE data suggests that the number of Teachers of the Deaf who are fully qualified in Scotland has declined in the past two years. Again, more investigation is required to fully understand these figures but any reduction in qualifications held by professionals raises serious concerns about how they are being supported to continue to develop in order to deliver effective services for deaf children.

We know that there are excellent examples of best practice in supporting deaf children across the country. Education Scotland have for example, recently highlighted the very high quality of resource provision for deaf children at both Windsor Park and Grange Academy schools<sup>20</sup>.

This was reflected in the research, where some participants like Chloe were positive about the support they received at school:

*“In fifth year when I was finding higher maths really difficult they set up... one class a week on a Thursday with a different teacher... I would just go to [Teacher of the Deaf]. And she would help me with what I was finding difficult which was good.”*

Chloe, higher education student

In 2007, NDCS worked with Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education to develop a resource for education authorities and practitioners working to support the education of deaf children. The *Count us in: Achieving success for deaf pupils* document outlined best practice across the sector as well as providing guidance on how to deliver improved services to meet the needs of this group. This resource is widely used across services and as well as supporting services to become more personalised, much in the document can help prepare services for inspection. The uptake and success of the *Count us in* document owes much to the collaborative approach between Education Scotland, practitioners and organisations like NDCS. However, there is much scope to review this resource with a view to update its content, expand its remit and reflect developments and changes in the Scottish education framework since its inception in 2007.

**NDCS recommends a national review of educational provision for deaf learners in Scotland should be commissioned, this should aim to determine whether current education and support systems are achieving the best possible outcomes for deaf learners.**

## A case study, Ellie (name has been changed). Provided by Teacher of the Deaf

Ellie is a profoundly deaf 17-year-old girl who has a unilateral cochlear implant.

At her mainstream school Ellie was supported throughout secondary school by a Teacher of the Deaf who delivered one-to-one tutorials. In class, Ellie struggled in group discussions and found it difficult to listen to the teacher and write at the same time.

The early years of secondary school were manageable, but as subject demands increased, Ellie became exhausted when trying to concentrate and listen. Ellie had been expected to achieve an A in Higher English and a B in Higher Maths. However as her struggles increased Ellie lost confidence and did not speak to her teachers about the issues she was experiencing.

Eventually Ellie began taking time off school, failed her exams and left school with Standard Grade qualifications. She is now looking at college courses.

## Transitional arrangements

*“It was really difficult because there was not much information available for deaf people... I didn’t know what to expect.”*

James, further education student

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and its accompanying Code of Practice, acknowledge the particular importance of transitional planning for those with additional support needs. Transitional duties apply to all young people who:

- have a co-ordinated support plan
- are in a specialist placement such as a specialist unit or a day or residential special school
- have additional support needs arising from a disability within the meaning of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- are otherwise at risk of not making a successful transition.

This means that all deaf young people should be offered detailed transitional planning no later than 12 months before they are due to leave school. However, the research indicates that many deaf young people in Scotland currently do not benefit from this. Out of the 30 research participants, only four had a transitions plan in place. Three of the four had learning difficulties and were in specialist education provision.

Researchers recognised that some deaf young people, while not having a formal transitions plan, did receive some information from Teachers of Deaf. However overall, the research suggests that deaf young people are regularly missing out on the benefits of transitional planning and accessible information, advice and guidance. Given the unique needs of deaf young people it is crucial that they have access to information in appropriate formats, that the deaf young person is involved in the planning process and that there is a multi-agency approach to ensure their needs and aspirations are fully understood and met.

In cases of poor transitional planning deaf young people cited the frustration of having to explain their support needs again on arrival at their post-school destination. Many experienced subsequent



delays in support being put in place and in some cases this was serious enough to prevent them from continuing in the destination. However, where planning did happen for deaf young people, they shared positive experiences such as the opportunity to attend regular meetings and having their views taken into account:

*“It was like, ‘what can we do for you?’. And that, I thought, was a good way of doing it trying to make some practice fit me rather than me fit the practice.”*

Lucy, higher education graduate

*“It was quite hard going from such a supportive environment and then going to Uni where they sort of expect you to be more independent... throwing you in at the deep end.”*

Lucy, higher education Graduate

## Kieran, a Higher Education student

I was nervous about leaving school because I had always been comfortable there. I had the most amazing teachers. I always had someone to talk to if I had problems. I was able to achieve my potential: six As and two Bs in my Highers.

I didn't really have a transitional plan when I left. I did have a summer assessment of support I needed at university, but at the time I wanted to go without support to see how I did. I realise now that I should have asked for all support to be put in place.

I now have various forms of support. Lecture PowerPoints are uploaded online. Audio and video clips are supposed to be subtitled. I have a radio system which transmits sound directly to my hearing aids. I also have a note-taker, who types on a laptop screen what people are saying. A disability coordinator oversees my university life - I can contact her with any problems. Deaf awareness training has been given to lecturers and tutors, so they are aware of my needs.

It was quite stressful trying to get the support in place. I only got my note-taker booked in January, and there were a lot of technical problems with my hearing aids. I would urge any deaf person thinking of going to college or university to trial equipment beforehand, and make sure all the support they require is in place.

Without support in university, I would have dropped out before I'd even finished the first semester.

Kieran, higher education student

**Emerging Question** – how can we ensure that existing and forthcoming statutory frameworks for transitions are implemented in a way that enables deaf learners to make an informed choice about their post-school options and ensures their needs are met and resourced throughout the planning process and their chosen destination?

## Support within other destinations

*“I have a note taker and interpreter. I need a note taker for my lectures because I can't watch the interpreter and write notes at the same time...”*

Adam, higher education student

### Higher education

The research highlighted that the general level of support in higher education was good, although there was some variation between institutions. Researchers found that receiving the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) was a protective factor against deaf students dropping out of higher education. However, the research also suggests that receiving the DSA alone was not guaranteed to ensure appropriate support and not all deaf young people applied for this funding. Good advocacy skills, pastoral support from the institution and in some cases, direct parent involvement also played key roles in ensuring that young people secured the support they needed at university.

## Further education

*“I was a bit out of my depth in College, not in terms of the work... but just the new people this new world around me, I didn’t do very well.”*

Logan, higher education student

Despite nearly 40% of deaf school leavers moving into further education, little is known about their outcomes, and administrative data in this area is scarce. However, the research’s qualitative data revealed that overall support within further education was often of a lower standard than in higher education and less consistent. Those undertaking further education college courses were less positive about the quality of support received, with fewer mentions of specialist equipment and use of disability services.

There seemed to be much variation among colleges in terms of support standards: some colleges seemed to offer appropriate levels of support, while others offered no support at all. Out of the 12 research participants who entered post-16 education, two reportedly dropped out of college because of lack of support and one participant with cochlear implants and significant communication difficulties received no support from his college.

The lack of accessible information, advice and guidance for deaf learners in further education settings was a key theme emerging from the research. They described barriers to obtaining information in appropriate formats and being unaware of what support was available. One participant described the difficulty of accessing support even after going through an assessment at their college’s student support centre.

*“I decided I’d go and see the support centre in the College... I talked about what support I need, but they’ve done nothing from that point. They’ve just let it pass.”*

Tyler, further education student

The findings suggest a marked difference between the quality of support offered by universities and colleges. There is a need to further understand the impact of different models of funding between these sectors and the impact of any inequities on students with additional support needs. Students on further education courses are for example, clearly not benefiting from the control and choice

afforded by DSA. There is also a need to consider how the regionalisation of colleges has presented both risks and opportunities to the provision of student support services and the impact this has had on disabled students.

**Emerging question** – what changes are needed to national and local policy and practice to ensure deaf learners are supported to make academic progress and attain appropriate qualifications?

## A case study from the research, Juzar

Juzar was born with profound hearing loss. He lives with his hearing family and he does not use sign language. He used hearing aids between the ages of two and five and received a cochlear implant at the age of five. His speech is clear, but he has difficulties understanding questions and expressing ideas.

He went to mainstream schools with deaf resource bases. He had full-time communication support when he was in mainstream classes, as well as one-to-one tutorials three times a week. He was one of the few young people in the study who had a post-school transition plan. With the help of his transition team, he decided to go on to college to study digital media and computing.

Before the start of course, he went to the student support centre of the college to enquire about support, but was not given any communication support. Six months into the course, he stopped going to college, as he believed he would fail the tests he was supposed to sit at the end of the month. He started working as a cook in a relative’s restaurant, and a few months later enrolled on an evening course in catering and hospitality at a different college. This time he was happy with the support: he had manual note-takers, as well as daily one-to-one tuition from a learning support worker.

## Emotional health and well-being

*“I’ve been very lonely, lonely at school pretty much.”*

Tyler, further education student

Research illustrates that deaf children and young people are more likely than their hearing peers to experience mental health problems due to language development, communication barriers and social isolation. According to NHS data, 40% of deaf children are likely to experience mental health problems compared to 25% of their hearing counterparts<sup>21</sup>.

Two thirds of the young people in the research case studies mentioned they had been bullied or felt socially isolated in school because of their deafness, and described how this affected their confidence. A key theme which emerged from the research was the link between positive emotional health and well-being and positive post-school transitions. It highlighted that socially included and resilient young deaf people were more likely to achieve positive transitions than those who lacked confidence, were socially excluded and unable to cope with change. As one young person described:

*“You’ve got this wall, the ‘hearies’ and the ‘deafies’ and there’s the wall of the hearing world and the deaf world... So I’m a bit in conflict between the two. I do identify as that socially deaf person, but I don’t like saying that is all of me and the rest of the world doesn’t understand me because of that.”*

Logan, higher education student



## Socio-economic status

Evidence shows that socio-economic status may have a more significant impact on deaf children than hearing children. This is because the poorest hearing children may still be able to benefit from incidental learning that comes from listening to the environment around them, whereas poor deaf children may be at risk of not being exposed to accessible language from an early age due to communication challenges.<sup>22</sup> In addition, socio-economic status has been found to be a predictor of deaf children’s reading attainment, with those from poor backgrounds failing to achieve the same reading levels as those deaf children from higher socio-economic backgrounds<sup>23</sup>.

The research has reflected this, illustrating that socio-economic status plays a significant role in shaping deaf young people’s post-school destinations. It showed that deaf young people from a higher socio-economic background were more likely to experience parental advocacy and higher academic attainment. They were also more likely to go on to attend higher education and receive appropriate support within post-school destinations. Deaf young people of a higher socio-economic status were also more likely to benefit from work experience and higher employment rates.

Conversely, deaf school leavers of a lower socio-economic status were less likely to receive parental support and advocacy and more likely to achieve lower academic attainment. They also received less consistent or no support within their chosen post-school destinations. This group also had fewer work experience opportunities and experienced more overt discrimination and lower employment rates.

**Emerging question:** How can we ensure that all deaf young people and their parents and carers have access to support and accessible information in order to address these disparities?

# Taking national action – NDCS recommendations

National and local action is required to close the unacceptable gap in post-16 outcomes that persists for deaf young people.

## 1. NDCS recommends that the Scottish Government formally recognises and commits to closing the gap in school attainment that persists for deaf learners in Scotland.

While deaf children and young people make up a small incidence group, the potential impact of meeting their unique needs is significant. National recognition is needed to support the key message that more can and should be done to improve the attainment of this group. Other parts of the UK have already formally recognised the need to close the attainment gap and NDCS is keen to work in partnership with the Scottish Government, in order to effect real change for deaf children.

## 2. As part of a national commitment to close the gap for deaf children, NDCS recommends a national review of educational provision for deaf learners in Scotland should be commissioned.

With much new evidence available about the educational experiences of deaf children, it would be timely to conduct a national review, tasked with establishing a set of recommendations to make progress in improving outcomes for this group. NDCS is committed to offering its expertise to support the facilitation of such a review, drawing together the contributions of skilled stakeholders from across the sector.

A review should address crucial emerging questions for the future of the education of deaf children and young people, from the early years through to further education, including the following

- How can we improve the learning opportunities of deaf children in the early years to ensure they are supported to attain age-appropriate language and communication skills upon starting school?

- How does the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence meet the needs of deaf learners?
- What are the opportunities and risks posed by each of the settings in which deaf children are currently educated, including mainstream schools with and without resource bases and specialist schools? How is best practice in supporting deaf learners being shared across these settings?
- What are the criteria by which education authorities plan and evaluate their services for deaf learners and how can we improve the consistency of services across the country?
- How are practitioners supported to deliver the best possible education services for deaf children through available professional development opportunities and current inspection protocols?
- How does the current provision of support in the college sector meet the needs of deaf learners and what are the key challenges and opportunities for deaf learners presented by the recent shift towards regional colleges?

## 3. The Scottish Government should take steps to improve the incomplete data sets that exist for deaf children in Scotland, including rolling out the local record of deaf children pilot.

This research has clearly illustrated that in many areas, there is a lack of knowledge about the numbers of deaf children, creating serious challenges in the planning of service delivery for this group.

NDCS welcomed the Scottish Government's pilot programme of setting up local data collection systems for deaf children, which commenced in 2010. NDCS recommends that these local data collection systems are rolled out nationally to improve both the understanding and awareness of numbers of deaf children at a local level.

Changes in 2010 to the way information was collected about pupils with additional support needs has helped improve data held about deaf



children in Scotland's schools. However, there is still much scope to improve how data is collected for pupils with additional support needs who do not have a formal plan or support in place to meet their needs - in particular linking to a local record of deaf children could have a real impact.

#### **4. Scottish Government statutory guidance accompanying the Children and Young People Bill (Scotland) and Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 should be used to improve transitions planning for young people with additional support needs.**

Through the development and revision of these sets of guidance, the Scottish Government have an opportunity to ensure that their policy aspirations around information provision and transitions planning are being met on the ground. The Scottish Government should ensure that each local authority provides information to young people with additional support needs about their entitlements and support available during post-school transitions, including accessing advocacy services if required. The Scottish Government should ensure that formal planning starts at least 12 months before a young person is due to leave school, however, it should be made clear that best practice sees this start in the first two years of secondary school.

NDCS is committed to supporting this improvement of transitions practice for deaf young people by working in partnership with local authorities, as outlined in the next recommendation.

#### **5. The Scottish Government should endorse the NDCS Statement of Intent approach, which encourages local authorities to commit to three key principles to promote positive transitions for deaf school leavers.**

The Statement of Intent will frame the collaborative approach between NDCS and local authorities as we work towards the three key strands. NDCS recommends that the Scottish Government endorses these positive principles,

as outlined below, sending a positive message about the importance of working in partnership to achieve the best possible outcomes and life chances for all young people in Scotland.

## **Taking local action – NDCS Statement of Intent**

### *Strand One: Promoting positive emotional health and well-being and peer support*

Deaf young people should be able to access a structured programme to allow them to develop a positive sense of self and emotional health and well-being. After extensive research and consultation, NDCS has developed the Healthy Minds programme, a resource for professionals working with deaf young people aged 8 to 18 years which allows these themes to be addressed.

Through the Statement of Intent NDCS is keen to support local authorities to roll out Healthy Minds training to deaf young people. This will involve:

- NDCS training local authority educational professionals to deliver Healthy Minds training
- the local authority establishing an appropriate programme for rolling out Healthy Minds training to deaf young people in the area, with support from NDCS if required.
- the local authority, with support from NDCS if required, establishing ongoing peer support opportunities for deaf young people in the area.

### *Strand Two: Supporting effective transitional planning*

It is crucial that deaf young people benefit from person-centred transitional planning which starts early and allows access to accessible information, guidance and support. NDCS, in partnership with Skills Development Scotland and Donaldson's School, has developed the *Template for Success* resource, to support professionals working with deaf young people throughout their post-school transition including those in schools, Job Centre Plus and other careers advisory roles. In addition NDCS welcomes NHS Scotland's forthcoming *Quality Standards for Transitions in Audiology*.

Through the Statement of Intent NDCS is keen to support local authorities and health boards to roll out use of the *Template for Success* and NHS Scotland's *Quality Standards for Transitions in Audiology*. This will involve:

- professionals in a range of settings adopting the *Template for Success* into their practice when working with deaf young people
- health boards implementing the NHS Scotland *Quality Standards for Transitions in Audiology*
- NDCS working towards a transitions resource for young people to accompany the *Quality Standards for Transitions in Audiology* as well as some of the wider issues around transitions.

### *Strand three: Facilitating effective partnership working*

NDCS Scotland endorses the Scottish Transition Forum's recommendation that local transition forums should be set up in local authorities to facilitate networking and partnership working among relevant professionals.

As part of the Statement of Intent, NDCS is keen to support the set up of these forums and the need to include Teachers of the Deaf and other professionals working with deaf young people. This will involve:

- the local authority identifying professionals to be part of a local transitions forum, with support from NDCS if required
- establishing terms of reference and objectives for the forum which are relevant to the specific local area
- the sharing of knowledge, best practice and building relationships across the forum
- addressing specific challenges pertinent to the local area such as deaf awareness or work experience opportunities.

### **Rolling out the NDCS Statement of Intent**

East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire have committed to implementing the Statement of Intent in 2014. NDCS will be working in partnership with the three authorities on a pilot basis to implement real change for deaf young people.

Learning and outcomes from this pilot will be crucial in rolling out the Statement of Intent across other local authorities later this year.

### **For further information**

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**NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.**

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