



**Submission to the Scottish Parliament**

# **Attainment of school pupils with a sensory impairment**

**To the Scottish Parliament's  
Education and Culture Committee**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

This report from the BDA Scotland explores the reasons why deaf children are not attaining the same exam results as hearing children (Section 4) using existing data. In Section 5 we analyse new data provided by 21 Deaf and hearing people in response to our call for evidence; eight of these contributors are Deaf pupils. Three case studies from educational contexts across Scotland are provided in Section 6 along with three examples of good practice provided by our members. In Section 7, Key issues and Gaps, we propose three areas which the Scottish Government should urgently prioritise to improve deaf children's attainment. We discuss the implications of these proposals in terms of funding and support in Section 8.

## **2. Background**

Since the BDA was founded in 1890, its primary purpose has been the status and recognition of the Deaf Community and British Sign Language (BSL) in the United Kingdom. The cornerstones of the BDA are: valuing and promoting our language, BSL, and asserting our linguistic rights; working with and supporting the UK-wide community of BSL users; fostering a strong and positive Deaf identity, especially amongst young people; preserving our Deaf heritage and representing the needs, aspirations, rights and responsibilities of Deaf people.

As a member-led organisation, our work is focused on achieving equality for Deaf people through community empowerment, membership and campaigning. Working with local Deaf and BSL Communities is crucial to the success of BDA campaigns and creates opportunities for Deaf people to develop, participate and contribute to wider society.

The BDA is a high profile national 'Deaf People's Organisation' with a strong presence throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We operate in a fast-paced, politicised environment dealing with complex and often controversial social issues with multiple stakeholders.

The BDA has always had a strong interest in educational issues; in the 1980s we pioneered the use of interpreters in youth and community education courses run for our members. Our education policies have consistently supported a bilingual educational approach.

We have most recently produced a Supplementary Report to the UK Shadow report to the UN committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (BDA, 2014). In this report we outline our views on issues affecting BSL users in the education system and point out ways in which the UK State report to the UN glosses over serious issues which affect Deaf children and impact on their achievement at school.

### **3. Introduction**

We discuss here those deaf children who might learn through BSL, many of whom currently don't. We believe that this proportion is decided by the attitudes of the health service, educational services, the government, the media, parents and voluntary organisations. The policy background in Scotland is not favourable to the maintenance of sign language for deaf children. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000) made it clear that the local school was presumed to be the best place for all children. While the BDA Scotland supports the principles behind inclusive education, in the sense it means justice for all children to achieve their full potential, we don't support isolation of BSL users in their local school. Physically being in the local school is often not linguistic inclusion at all. Where parents choose this option, we believe local authorities should support it with properly qualified interpreters. But we believe more important are the following priorities for each local authority in Scotland:

- Provision of larger resource base nurseries, schools and colleges with large numbers of signing deaf young people to allow signing communities to flourish
- Maintenance of the existing deaf schools with more emphasis on an academic education through BSL

Recently the Scottish Parliament has been considering the BSL (Scotland) Bill. We applaud this initiative and look forward to its passage through Parliament. If the Bill becomes law, we expect to see the role of Deaf people and fluent BSL users become much more prominent in schools and local authority services across Scotland. Section 7 below sets out ways we think this can be achieved.

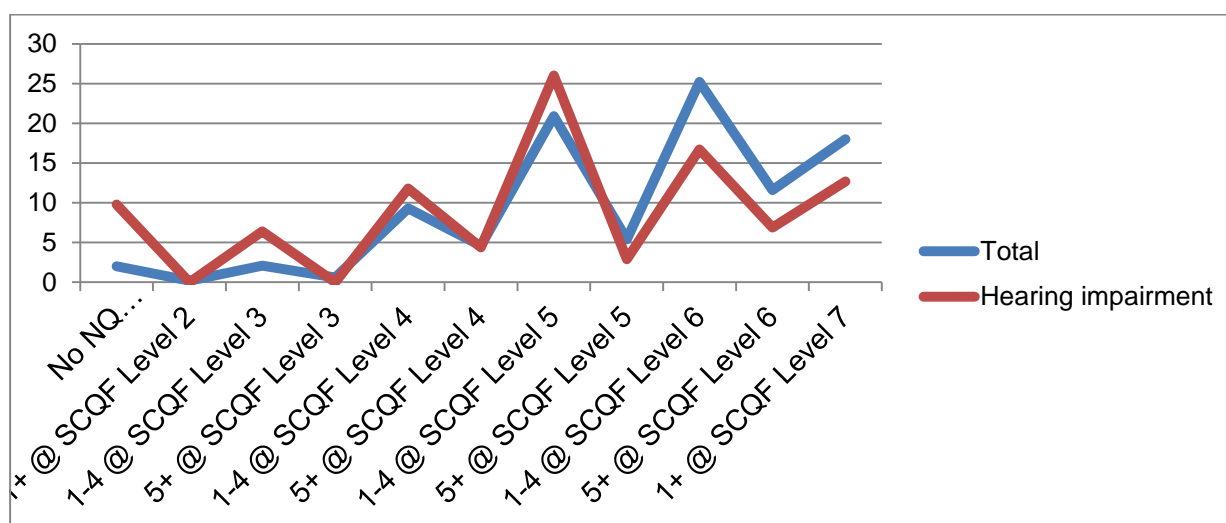
Currently we believe the rhetoric around informed choice is not reflected in reality – largely because the funding tied up in deaf education is currently too weighted in favour of teachers of deaf children who can't sign, and not enough towards Deaf or fluent BSL using teachers and qualified interpreters.

### **4. Achievement and deaf children in Scotland**

#### **4.1 Exam results**

Government statistics show that deaf children are falling behind at school compared to other children at the age of 16. For school leavers and those recorded as hearing impaired a higher proportion of deaf young people leave with no qualifications. The modal leaving level is Level 5 for deaf school leavers, not Level 6, which is the most common qualification for all school leavers. Level 6 gives expected access to university and better quality jobs.

**Figure 1: Comparison of highest qualification on leaving school for deaf pupils compared to all pupils in Scotland for 2012/13**



(Scottish Government, 2015, from table A.3.2)

Underachievement is a serious problem in Scottish education. For all children there are 4.8% of school leavers who have qualifications of SCQF Level 3 or below, but 16.2% of deaf school leavers are in this category (from table A.3.2, 2015). Level 3 or below means that these deaf young people leave school unable to get onto a high quality college course and definitely unable to progress to Higher Education. The BDA Scotland would like to find out from the Scottish Government more about this low attaining group, and in particular what is their level of deafness and whether they use some sort of sign language. Currently in the annual pupil census it is noted that a child is deaf, but not the level of deafness or their language use (Scottish Government, 2014).

Recent research from the University of Edinburgh has shown that deaf school leavers have a lower tariff score at 16 when taking account of all exams to S4 (Marschark et al., 2014). The average tariff score for all Scottish pupils at the age of 16 in S4 was 173 while for severely deaf students it was 125 and for profoundly deaf students 128. The CI group had a much better average tariff score of 166, partly because they were entered for more exams.<sup>1</sup>

The BDA Scotland has great concern about the current approaches used with deaf children, lower expectations for those who are deafer and the very varying levels of support in BSL across Scotland between and even within local authorities. Our call for evidence (see Section 5 below) has revealed many of these anomalies. Although there are examples of good practice, shown in Sections 5 and 6 below, most educational provision using sign language is poor. We investigate below why this is, and in Section 7 below point out ways in which the inspectorate (HMIE) and the Scottish Government can prepare new guidelines for inspecting and noticing good and poor practice in settings where sign language is being used.

<sup>1</sup> This study separated out the profoundly deaf group from the cochlear implanted (CI) group.

## 4.2 Children's use of sign language

The CRIDE survey produces a useful annual overview of deaf education in the UK, although unfortunately Deaf BSL users and Deaf people's organisations are not represented in the planning group. The survey asks local authorities to report every two years about communication approaches used with deaf children. The table below shows the results from 2013/14 (NDCS, 2014).

**Table 1: Any type of sign language use at school from CRIDE surveys 2013/14**

	<b>BSL</b>	<b>Other Sign Language</b>	<b>Spoken English with sign</b>	<b>Other spoken language with sign</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Scotland (2013)</b>	3.0	0.6	11.3	0.2	15.1
<b>N. Ireland (2013)</b>	1.4	1.6	0.9	0.2	4.1
<b>Wales (2013)</b>	1.4	0.5	4.3	0.5	6.7
<b>England (2014)</b>	1.8	0.4	7.0	0.2	9.4
<b>Average</b>					8.8%

The amount of any sign language use is considerably higher in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. We believe this is because in Scotland there has been a more positive attitude towards sign bilingualism in education over the past 35 years than in other areas. British Sign Language (BSL) was first investigated in Scotland at Moray House in the early 1980s and sign bilingual schools started from that time in schools such as Garvel, Aberdeen, Donaldson's and St Vincent's.

The range of deaf children supported by services and schools for deaf children is very broad. The profoundly deaf group is 18% and the severely deaf group is 14% of this wide group of supported deaf and hard of hearing children (CRIDE, Scotland, 2013). We know from the 2011 CRIDE Scotland survey that 11% of all deaf children are Cochlear Implant (CI) users and these are likely to be nearly all children who were born in the profoundly deaf group. It would be interesting to find out how many CI users are being taught using some form of sign language; we suspect this may be quite a large proportion in Scotland.

Across the UK we can see from Table 1 that most deaf children using any form of sign language in education are using speech with sign. The BDA Scotland suggests this is the case because there are very few teachers of deaf children who can sign using fluent BSL. The use of sign with speech may suit some implanted deaf children better, but it could also mask the fact that teachers can't explain complex ideas using fluent sign and neither can they interpret between BSL and English. Signing with speech is also a response to a policy environment which is overwhelmingly in favour of speech and sees sign as a prop for deaf children who have not made good progress with the spoken language approach. In language policy terms, we see this

as an example of *linguicism*, where 'ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate.. an unequal division of power and resources .. between groups which are defined on the basis of language (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996: 437).

We believe this environment will change with the passage of the BSL Act and the support of the Scottish Government so that parents of deaf children will have more opportunities to learn BSL intensively while their deaf child is young, and continuously as their child grows up. This Act will create a cultural shift in attitudes about Deaf people which we hope will influence the education system too, so that BSL is accepted and valued in families across Scotland.

If the Scottish Government follows our proposals (see Section 7) then we can expect to see the proportion of deaf children using speech with sign probably declining, and the overall proportion of deaf children using any sort of sign increasing to about 20% over the next five years. This is a change which the BDA Scotland supports and we believe as a Deaf-run organisation we should be centrally involved in the development of new courses for advanced signing teachers of deaf children and educational interpreters to work in Scottish schools.

#### **4.3 Teachers of deaf children and their signing skills**

We have found two sources of statistical information about the signing skills of teachers of deaf children in Scotland: a survey carried out by Marian Grimes for the BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group (Scottish Government, 2009), and the CRIDE survey 2014 (NDCS, 2014). Both conclude with very similar results: around **8% to 10% of teachers of deaf children in Scotland have signing skills at level 3 or above.**

This level is not an SCQF level but an SVQ equivalent, so it represents a Higher in a language or SCQF level 6. We do not think this is a high level of fluency in a language; most people with a Higher in Spanish or French would not be able to teach or interpret in that language. We have gathered further qualitative data from Deaf young people and parents about the signing skills of teachers of deaf children, which is reported below in Section 5. This evidence shows the effect on deaf children of teachers of the deaf having such weak signing skills.

We recognise that in the UK teachers of deaf children support a very wide range of deaf children, and most of these supported children who are deaf in one ear, mildly deaf and moderately deaf are likely to prefer to use speech than any form of sign language. This group now includes many deaf children who have cochlear implants (CI). However, we also recognise that teachers of the deaf spend most of their time with the deaf children. This includes the 15% who currently use some sort of sign language. Therefore in terms of teachers' workloads, they are likely to be spending more than 15% of their time with children who sign.

This concerns the BDA Scotland because we think that as most deaf children are being taught in mainstream settings, it is often teachers of deaf children who are taking on interpreting roles without having received any training in this skill. We know of only one qualified teacher of deaf children in Scotland who is also on the Scottish

Association of Sign Language Interpreter (SASLI) register as qualified BSL / English interpreter (SASLI, 2015). One of the main findings from our call for evidence (see Section 5 below) is that large numbers of teachers of deaf children are attempting to interpret without being qualified to do so.

From the CRIDE 2014 survey (NDCS, 2014) we can see that only 8 local authority services in Scotland have staff with level 3 BSL or above. This means that in the 24 other local authorities there is no specialist teacher with this level of BSL available. This problem is most likely to affect rural areas and those local authorities which don't have a resource base school or deaf school available.

Recent University of Edinburgh research (O'Neill et al, 2014: 66) notes that 20 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland do not have a resource base school. Young people in their study who had been to a deaf school or resource base school were much more likely to use BSL or speech with sign than children who attended their local school.

The Equality Act (2010) expects schools to be ready to support deaf children in an anticipatory way, i.e. local authorities should have staff ready to work with deaf children who sign fluently who may move into the area. This would mean every local authority in Scotland should have staff available who can sign fluently in BSL. In rural and small local authorities we know at present that local authorities are not fulfilling this anticipatory duty (see Case Study A in Section 6 below). In part this is due to the extremely vague guidance from the Scottish Government about the level of skill needed by teachers of the deaf: they must have,

***'a minimum level of competence in BSL, at least to BSL Stage 1, and a requirement to upgrade skills to meet pupil support needs.'***  
(Scottish Government, 2007, p. 3).

We hope that if the BSL (Scotland) Bill is passed that the Scottish Government will review this guidance to state that all teachers of deaf children should have level 3 BSL as a minimum with a commitment to upgrade within 2 years to a level 6 interpreting qualification if they are taking on that role in class. Furthermore we believe that all teachers of deaf children working with the under 5s and parents of this age group should have this minimum level of fluency in BSL so that they are able to work with parents to properly advise them about the options available. If the parents choose to use BSL the teachers will then be ready to start introducing the language in the early years. The BDA Scotland would like to see many more Deaf people and fluent BSL users in these early years roles, further discussed below.

The recent primary 1 + 2 Languages strategy (Scottish Government, 2012) is a very welcome move, which could see hearing and deaf children learning BSL as a modern language throughout primary school. Teaching sign language to children, however, is a specific skill, not one mentioned in the Scottish Government competences for teachers of the deaf (Scottish Government, 2007) and as far as we know modern language teaching approaches are not part of the course to train teachers of the deaf. In one particular location, Dingwall Academy, a successful project at secondary level has seen a teacher of the deaf who is also a qualified BSL / English interpreter

working with a Deaf tutor qualified to teach BSL to advanced levels (Kinsman, 2014). Deaf Studies resources and activities are used with d/Deaf and hearing pupils in this mainstream school. The BDA Scotland endorses such an approach because it uses staff who are truly fluent in BSL, but also points out that at present this situation is only available in very few locations in Scotland.

#### **4.4 Communication support workers and other signing classroom assistants**

There is very little information available about the qualification level in BSL of non-teaching staff working with deaf children in Scottish schools. The CRIDE survey (2014) state that there are 10.4 full time equivalent posts working as 'communication support workers / interpreters / communicators' for the whole of Scotland (NDCS, 2014: 15). This figure is shockingly low given that 15% of all deaf children in Scotland use some sort of sign language, suggesting that teachers of the deaf are taking on an 'interpreting' role more than support staff. There are 364.6 FTE in this role in England, which has ten times the population. If the same proportion of staff were employed in Scotland we would see at least 36.

Neither is there any official Government guidance on the skill levels needed by these members of staff. The BDA insists that these support staff are all qualified to interpreter level, i.e. hold a Level 6 BSL / English interpreting qualification or the Heriot Watt BSL / English degree in interpreting and be registered with SASLI or ASLI, the Scottish and UK interpreting associations, so that their regular updating and professional development is logged. Evidence from Deaf and hearing participants (see Section 5 below) show the many ways in which poor interpreting skill and lack of understanding of the professional role of the interpreter, impacts on deaf children's school achievement and confidence.

#### **4.5 Deaf role models**

The CRIDE survey asks (2014) about deaf role models, deaf instructors or sign language instructors and reports 8.5 FTE working in peripatetic and resource base provision. There is no information about the qualification level of these members of staff or what communication approaches they use. The numbers in this role in England are 93.4, so proportionately slightly more, given the tenfold larger population. Significantly, none of the children and young people who responded to our Call for Evidence mentioned having Deaf role models.

The BDA Scotland demands that there should be many more Deaf role models in schools in Scotland, and in every role. For example more Deaf people could be encouraged to train as teachers of deaf children, as BSL teachers, as pupil support workers and as BSL / English interpreters and translators. This will increase the possibility of a sign intensive environment being available in every area of Scotland so that deaf children and their family who choose sign language have the real possibility of using it to support their learning (BDA, 2014). There is currently very little data available about the proportion of qualified teachers, teachers of deaf children or other support staff who are Deaf. We propose a stepped programme to ensure that deaf children in all areas and types of provision can have regular contact with Deaf qualified adults. This includes deaf children in urban and rural authorities, and those in mainstream, resource base and deaf schools. To achieve this in



Scotland we need a positive recruitment strategy, based on the model of recruiting teachers who can work in Gaelic Medium Education settings (HMIE, 2011).

There are very few Deaf teachers in the UK. Figures indicate approximately 10% of all ToDs have declared a hearing loss (Batterbury 2012:256). However not all of these are Deaf teachers with BSL or ISL skills. We need more qualified teachers who are Deaf and use BSL. The UN CRPD (article 24.4) specifies the need for more Deaf and disabled teachers (see Appendix Two). It requires the UK to "take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education". To facilitate this, Deaf trainee teachers should be offered the possibility of obtaining their qualifications with their placement and teaching practice in a Deaf school or accessible BSL setting with deaf children. This would cost the government nothing and would enable more Deaf trainee teachers to gain qualified teacher status.

#### **4.6 Mental health and identity**

Research from the UK and other countries where there has been a similar degree of mainstreaming, for example Cyprus, has shown that deaf children often feel very isolated in mainstream settings and unclear about how they can fit in with hearing classmates and the adult Deaf community (O'Brien, 2011; Angelides & Aravi, 2006).

From our Call for Evidence (see Section 5 below) we found a major theme was the boredom and social isolation of Deaf children, even when they were in resource bases because of a very small signing peer group. On the other hand we also found an example of one school in Scotland where all the hearing children were taught BSL and communicating effectively in work and social situations with deaf children (see Section 5.3 below). It is possible for schools to encourage resilience and a healthy respect for difference and diversity; to do so, deaf children must have contact with each other and with Deaf role models fluent in BSL.

### **5. Key Findings from Call for Evidence**

The BDA Scotland has asked its members and other interested people to respond with their experience of deaf education in Scotland. The call was put out in BSL on the BDA website on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and also posted on the Scottish Parliament Facebook site (BDA, 2015).

There have been 16 responses in BSL over a very short timeframe of 12 days from 13 different people, all Deaf. These have been collected from the Scottish Parliament Facebook site because they appeared after the 2<sup>nd</sup> April call from the BDA. Five were parents of Deaf children (4 from 2 families). Six Deaf pupils made responses on the video contributions, some with their parents. Three young people contributed with their recent experiences in the school system. The BDA has also received a written response from a Deaf pupil at school. One Deaf tutor responded discussing his work in BSL. Furthermore these Facebook videos generated many other written comments, two of them from hearing people working as Communication Support Workers in Scotland, one of whom was also the parent of a Deaf child. The BDA Scotland also collected video evidence from five more people which were not

uploaded to the Facebook site; three of these people had already contributed through Facebook, but were able to add more detail. The total number of respondents is 21.

**Table 2: Summary of the 21 respondents to BDA Scotland's call for evidence, including significant Facebook comments**

	Deaf	Hearing
Parents of deaf children	6	1
Deaf pupils	8	0
Deaf young people	2	0
Work with deaf children in Scottish schools	1	1
Work in deaf related organisation	1	0
Deaf community member	1	0

We have summarised the themes which emerged from each group, using quotations to support the main viewpoints. The themes have been listed in the frequency with which they have been mentioned by the contributors. We have given representative quotations to show majority and minority opinions within each theme.

## 5.1 BSL skills of staff

The strongest finding from this call for evidence was the serious concern about the weak signing skills of teachers of deaf children: fourteen of the participants mentioned this, and only three of them commented favourably on signing levels in the profession. The general very low levels of signing skills amongst these teachers was discussed in a great deal of detail: there are many inaccuracies when they sign; there is a lack of knowledge of Scottish signs; the discrepancy between some Deaf pupils' good levels of signing and the high level of their academic course and the teachers' low signing levels; the fact there are no targets for improvement so teachers remain at the same poor level for many years; the effects on pupils as they miss classroom information which has not been interpreted by the teacher of the deaf; using Deaf children from Deaf families as child language brokers, i.e. unethically asking them to interpret for other deaf pupils; teachers having to ask Deaf children to repeat because they have poor comprehension skills; not being able to accurately work out which children would benefit from signing or speech; and the training courses for teachers of deaf children being biased towards audiology and away from signing skills.

*'I have seen very poor signing from 'experienced ToDs'. My son was really frustrated in school. It's disgusting and it needs to change now. He is fluent in BSL and was studying National 5 level qualifications with support from a ToD at level 1. In the end he told her to go away as he was better writing notes to the class teacher without her. I'd also like to say he had another ToD who had BSL 4, and the difference was huge.'* Hearing parent

*'My son said "I feel as if I'm an interpreter because they are always asking me, 'What's he sign for this?' ". And he's interpreting for the other pupils. It's just not appropriate for a child to do that in school.'* Deaf parent

*'When I'm in class the teacher won't tell me what the other children are saying, like a joke or in groups. She says 'I can't' or 'no', or 'I don't know what they're saying.' She just tells me to get on with my work. That's what it's like and I'm not happy about it. I have to repeat myself all the time because they don't understand me when I sign. I try to get the teacher of the deaf to ask the teacher for help, but they won't.'* Deaf pupil

Eight participants also commented on the skill levels of support staff, who go by various names such as CSW (Communication Support Worker), support worker, interpreter. Here the positions were more mixed but again there was serious concern about the weak signing and interpreting skills of this group. It was pointed out that support staff having poor interpreting skills affected the speed of learning for Deaf children; that full time support was essential; with poor interpreting skills from this group of staff there was the serious effect on confidence of not being understood in class, waiting for staff to arrive and unethical behaviour such as doing the work instead of encouraging pupil independence. More positive comments raised the issue that some Deaf pupils did not need a teacher of the deaf if the interpreting skills of other staff were good; and that staff with level 6 BSL skills and an interpreting qualification, gave pupils confidence in learning. Six of the participants commenting on these issues were children currently at school, i.e. they have recent first-hand experience of the issue.

*'The level 2s in primary didn't really help me, like I wasn't as confident in making an effort to give a response in class as I am now. I was constantly worried that they wouldn't understand me as they had poor receptive skills. Now I don't have that problem any more and I'm much more confident. I have three level 6 CSWs.'* Deaf pupil

*'I only had signed support 1 – 2 times a month at primary school. I have achieved a lot more at secondary school. I am top of my English class and have a certificate in science after passing exams.'* Deaf pupil

*'I got to a mainstream primary school and I'm in P6. The best support worker has level 6 and signs well. The next is level 4 who is not so good, like a bumpy engine. The level 1 person is just no good at all.'* Deaf pupil

*'I would get to class and found myself waiting ages for the interpreter to arrive. The others would be getting on with the work and I would still be waiting. When the interpreter arrived they always had an excuse like they were in a meeting. My education was affected every time they were late.'* Deaf young adult.

## 5.2 Provision available

Equally important as this last theme were many comments about the provision available to deaf children or more often the lack of a real choice. Contributors discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of deaf schools in terms of learning and social confidence. From adults looking back on their time at school (even though most were young adults) there was concern at the way speech was often compulsory and not a choice. Mainstream schools were also viewed in both positive and negative terms. When there was full interpreting support and a reasonable sized peer group there was support for the better academic standards available in mainstream. But there were also deep concerns about the variability of support, with managers deciding not to cover certain classes, or suddenly reducing the amount of support. The amount of time teachers of the deaf can give was also often very limited in mainstream settings. This led to unfair decisions, from the pupils' perspective, such as being moved back to base, constantly waiting for interpreting support to arrive, catching up and a lack of confidence in being an ordinary school pupil. The signing skills of staff in these different settings were commented on, including the fact that in some mainstream settings there is no BSL available, just gesture and a bit of sign with speech; that children who have cochlear implants often do not benefit from them and would do better with BSL, and that, in contrast, in one setting hearing children were learning BSL so well that deaf children really benefitted socially and academically. One Deaf young person discussed his workplace where, unlike at school, he was able to take the initiative and teach his workmates BSL to improve his social experience at work, and his participation in a work team.

*'The teacher of the deaf was trying to teach Primary 1, P4 and P7 one after another, dividing out her time. My children were waiting around again all the time. The teacher was trying to do all different levels of work with a really wide range of ages'* Deaf parent

*'In the past some Scottish pupils have been allowed to go to England but now there are cuts in the budget and they have to stay in Scotland. There should be more flexible choices for them. Children moving away from their family could be an issue but they also have a stronger education, and improve their own Deaf identity and become more independent'* Worker in Deaf organisation

*'We would learn so much more if their signing skills were better, like maths and science. And also, where is BSL on the curriculum? It isn't there. So that means deaf children are really struggling. They have had to wait a long time.'* Deaf young adult

### 5.3 Rights of children and parents

Twelve participants made points related to this theme which included the right of the deaf child to have a say in their communication support; the way Deaf parents' views are often ignored by education officials; issues about the law and lack of real choices; and how management of deaf education often leads to unfair decisions or delays which risk the deaf child's education and future prospects. One serious issue reported on was a family being told they had to pay for interpreter support in school or it would not be provided. There were a number of constructive suggestions given by these contributors such as realigning the deaf education budget in favour of qualified interpreters and reducing the need for so many teachers of the deaf; and listening more to the voice of experience from Deaf parents and Deaf professionals.

*'In Wales I was provided with a free interpreter. They were brilliant. They would use speech and sign. I am a really good lipreader and this type of support was really good for me. I then moved back to Scotland and was told I would have to pay for an interpreter. I was very angry with this and told my mum it wasn't fair.'* Deaf pupil

*'Some get cochlear implants and go on to use good speech but some have cochlear implants which fail. They often go on to sign – that's who they are. Deaf children should have that option, and I repeat, teachers should be able to work out which child is likely to benefit from signing.'* Deaf parent

*'We need to improve schools – both mainstream and deaf schools. Because parents can then decide which matches their children's needs.'* Deaf parent

*'In primary school I felt they were forcing me to be oral. In High School you have the option of using speech or sign language.... Now I'm improving. I'm top of the class in five subjects.'* Deaf pupil

*'I asked the school if all the children in this mainstream primary could learn BSL and they accepted it. I also work for the High School, where I asked the headteacher and my arguments were also accepted there. So in S5 and S6 they do BSL level 1 and 2. It's wonderful for me to see BSL on the school curriculum.'* Deaf BSL teacher

#### **5.4 Friendships and social / emotional development**

Seven participants discussed the social and emotional effects of attending a deaf school, a mainstream school or having hearing parents, so less contact with the Deaf community. Young adults and parents reflected on their own attendance at a school for the deaf positively in terms of having a large peer group and the opportunity to communicate in depth with friends, fall out, make new friends and exist in a complete social context. In contrast younger contributors explained about their social isolation and boredom in school, the lack of a signing peer group and in one case bullying. There was a link back to the first theme where teachers of the deaf unable to interpret would exclude Deaf children from the social life of the classroom.

*'So my children won't grow up with that experience of friendship which I had at deaf school – the opportunity to fall out with other children, change best friends, make new ones etc. That's how children develop, but they won't have that experience.'* Deaf parent

*'Sometimes there are people who bully me or I get into trouble with other boys. The teachers always say they will deal with it but they don't. I am stressed out by it. They say things like you're deaf and you're stupid. So I fight back.'* Deaf pupil

*'I don't have any friends. A year ago when I started at this new school things went on and really nobody made friends. All the hearing children were friends with each other. It's boring just being with the support worker.... when I go home I feel bored too because nobody invites me to their house.'* Deaf pupil

*'At break time and lunch-time I found I couldn't speak to the hearing children because my speech was poor. I had been in a signing environment for a long time. I would hang around with 4 deaf pals... but it was boring. It was the same thing every day, Monday to Friday, month by month, year by year. If I wanted to meet my friends... they often weren't allowed out on a school night or they lived too far away to meet up.'* Deaf young adult

This evidence has been very valuable to the BDA Scotland in drawing up proposals for action in Section 7 below.

## **6. Examples of good and poor practice**

### **6.1 Case studies**

These case studies are taken from our members who have knowledge of them from across Scotland. The information has been anonymised. These are examples of good practice and also of grave concern to the BDA Scotland as an organisation.

#### **Child A**

is a profoundly deaf girl aged 10 who has an additional disability, cerebral palsy, although this is not severe. She has hearing aids and attends her local primary school which is in a rural area. In the past a child like her would have been offered a place at a nearby deaf school, with the local authority paying for the transport. Because of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000) her local school is now regarded as her first and best choice. Child A has not developed fluent spoken English, although she can hold a very simple conversation one to one. She has very delayed English vocabulary and grammar and she can only read simple words. She receives a visit from a teacher of the deaf twice a week. She has a sign language lesson once a week from a Deaf tutor. There is no other contact with signing children or adults. Her parents do not sign at home. Her signing is extremely delayed, almost non-existent. This child, in the BDA Scotland's view, is experiencing linguistic exclusion which will of course impact on her educational achievement at school.

#### **Young person B**

has recently left school having been through a Deaf school for most of his school career. He started at the Deaf school at the age of 3 and became fluent in BSL because there were a large number of fluent BSL users in the school, including some Deaf members of staff. This pupil had a Deaf teacher at school for science and maths, and these were areas of academic strength for him. He made good use of the Scottish Sensory Centre's BSL Glossary in his time at secondary school. Because SQA allows deaf candidates in Scotland to take exams using BSL, he was able to do this and achieved Highers in Maths and a science subject. He left school recently and gained an apprenticeship. He is hoping to work using BSL in the future. Academically and socially he is a confident young person, although his English skills are unfortunately far below the level of his other subjects.

### **Child C**

is 3 and was born without a cochlea, which means hearing aids or a cochlear implant would not work. He was identified at birth through newborn screening. Unusually, his family was offered BSL classes paid for by the NHS. These were held in a local community centre, taught by a Deaf tutor, and were open to Child C's extended family and neighbours. This meant that Child C was surrounded by children who could sign, at least at a basic level. His family also has access to a drop-in club for parents and sensory impaired toddlers run by the local authority service for deaf children. At these sessions his mother can meet other parents with deaf children and also meet the BSL tutor who will teach her son more BSL when he starts school. The child is developing BSL fairly well. We think it is positive that the NHS has taken responsibility to provide BSL as a language, but they have only done this when there is physically no cochlea.

These case studies have also contributed towards Section 7 where we propose improvements in the deaf education system.

## **6.2 Good Practice Models: Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools**

These examples of good practice have been reported to us by our members and supporters from across Scotland. We would like to see many more such examples when the BSL (Scotland) Bill is passed so that Deaf children can receive a full and ambitious bilingual education in BSL and English, and that parents are offered real choices and support.

### **Early Years**

One local authority service employs a qualified BSL / English interpreter to visit families of newly diagnosed deaf children with the teacher of the deaf. This interpreter takes on a role of giving advice to parents about BSL and providing introductory tuition to the family in the language. Also when interacting with Deaf parents, the same worker interprets for the teacher of the deaf. Parents therefore receive advice and information about a range of real options and communication choices available in the local authority.

The BDA Scotland would also like to see this teacher of the deaf having Level 6 BSL skills as a minimum, and to see Deaf teachers of deaf children in this role to visit families.

### **Primary**

One Deaf School for primary age children works very closely with a mainstream primary school on the same site. There is a resource base secondary school, and the primary is one of eight feeder schools. The authority employs a Deaf BSL tutor who teaches parents and deaf children at the deaf school. The tutor works across all primary schools in the cluster teaching a taster course in BSL to the Primary 7 hearing children who are going to move to the resourced secondary school. This



means that all the children at the secondary resource base have had an introduction to BSL. The local authority is now investigating how the same tutor can introduce BSL from lower down in the primary schools in the cluster as part of the Authority's 1 + 2 languages strategy, i.e. as the third language introduced in upper primary.

The BDA Scotland would also like to see plans where BSL can be language 1 for deaf children and language 2 for other primary age children where there is a resource base in that school.

## **Secondary**

A mainstream secondary school in one local authority happens to have several families with Deaf children living in the catchment area. The authority has employed Communication Support Workers who have BSL Level 6 language units to act as interpreters for a group of Deaf pupils who have good BSL skills, although the authority has not yet agreed to fund the Level 6 interpreting units. One of the CSWs has paid for this course herself and is nearly a qualified BSL / English interpreter. The Deaf pupils are making good academic progress, and in some cases have better English skills than their hearing peers. The local authority employs a teacher of the deaf who has fluent BSL skills and she maintains close relationships with the Deaf families of this group of Deaf children, including regular home visits.

The BDA Scotland would like to see this authority pay to train the CSWs to become fully qualified interpreters. Otherwise the approach is working well.

## **7. Key Issues and Gaps in relation to Deaf Children's Attainment**

Not having a fluent language by the time a child starts school leads to many other learning issues which are often mistaken for the deaf child having learning disabilities: a weaker working memory, emotional and behavioural issues, poor reading comprehension, and difficulties understanding the viewpoints of other people are all related to lack of exposure to a fluent language in the most important period of 0 – 5 (Wauters & de Klerk, 2014). Here we examine key issues and gaps in provision which the BDA Scotland believe would ensure that deaf and hearing children achieved similar educational results to hearing children.

### **7.1 Setting up a network of Sign Intensive Early Years bilingual language environments**

The BDA Scotland believes that an improvement in Early Years settings will lead to gains in attainment for deaf children later in the education system. A sign intensive environment would ensure a strong foundation in both BSL and spoken / written English in the Early Years (BDA, 2014). To achieve this is quite a complex activity, and local authorities may have to share resources across boundaries. Some practical ideas about what would be involved are set out in Appendix 1.

Although it is easier to set up an intensive sign environment in a Deaf school, we suggest they could also be successful in a resource base primary school. The model for this approach comes from Early Years environments in Gaelic schools, which has led to good educational results later on in primary school. In comparing the

achievements of primary age children in Gaelic medium and English medium schools O'Hanlon, Paterson and McLeod (2013), controlling for social deprivation, found that most children in Gaelic medium education were achieving at the level expected in Gaelic, but a larger proportion were achieving in English. So the Gaelic immersion setting has led to successful bilingualism.

Gaelic is an interesting comparison to make with BSL users in Scotland because most Gaelic medium education takes place alongside English medium classes in the same school, just as most deaf children are educated currently in mainstream schools or resource bases. In addition, most parents who send their children to Gaelic medium schools don't use Gaelic in the home, and hearing parents of deaf children also often don't use BSL in the home as they have usually had no contact with the language before their child is born deaf. The BDA Scotland believe that the experience of successful Gaelic medium education in Scotland could be usefully considered by local authorities in planning deaf education.

If Sign Intensive Early Years provision is successful, a next step could be the establishment of a BSL-medium school which is not connected with Additional Support for Learning, open to both deaf and hearing children. This initiative could draw from the many worldwide examples of co-enrolment schools where equal numbers of Deaf and hearing children work together using both languages to learn and two teachers in each class (e.g. Madrid & Hong Kong in Marshark, Knoors & Tang, 2014; Albuquerque Sign Language Academy, 2012).

It is particularly challenging to establish a Sign Intensive Early Years setting in remote rural areas. Currently many parents of deaf children may not value this sort of environment; but its advantage is that it will enable deaf children to acquire at least one fluent language in the early years. We believe parents will understand the value of bilingualism when they can see the results of what their child can actually do with more than one language: the wide range of social interactions their deaf child can achieve using both BSL and English.

## **7.2 Monitoring the low achievers in much more detail**

The BDA Scotland would like to see the Scottish Government pay much more attention to the 16% of deaf children who are leaving school with low level or no qualifications. In particular, better monitoring using the pupil census could establish:

- **Which of these children have an additional disability?**
- **What is their level of deafness?**
- **What language(s) are used with these children?**
- **What language(s) were they exposed to from birth?**

From the 2014 CRIDE survey we can start to see some detail about how the signing skills of deaf children are being monitored. Fifteen out of the 30 authorities surveyed didn't do any assessment of the BSL skills of their pupils. Crucially, the productive skills assessment was used by only 4 out of 30 authorities. If school authorities

employed more Deaf teachers of deaf children, this sort of assessment would be a normal part of their work, as the monitoring of spoken English development already is.

In effect, society has given these low achieving deaf children a learning difficulty by not providing access for them to a fluent language in the early years. By monitoring language development carefully through the pre-school and school years, school services for deaf children will be better able to set appropriate language targets and provide the right sort of linguistic environment and interactions. We would also like to know the destinations of these low achieving deaf school leavers, because many of them will be at risk for social exclusion and a life of poverty.

### **7.3 Establishing strong sign bilingual practice in Scottish schools with higher expectations for signing pupils**

The BDA Scotland proposes that a language plan should be in place in each local authority area of Scotland so that children who use any form of sign language can have access to a high quality sign bilingual education. This might involve collaboration between local authorities. In some cases these collaborative arrangements are already in place, but the quality of the sign bilingual education on offer is not at all strong. Inspectors need to recognise the features of a successful sign bilingual education by learning from and drawing on the expertise of Deaf teachers of deaf children. This would mean for:

#### **Signing pupils**

- Time on the school timetable to learn BSL as a language in its own right, and to study the cultural as well as linguistic aspects of the language, for example BSL poetry. The chance to study the language and Deaf culture at N4, N5 and Higher levels.
- In mainstream settings, qualified interpreters to allow deaf pupils to have full involvement in the life of the class and school
- Teachers of deaf children with fluency in BSL (level 3 as a minimum) who can use bilingual resources as they teach, for example to give detailed and accurate explanations about subjects, know how to build meta-language so deaf pupils can think about language and the subjects they are learning in both of their languages
- Pupils should not have a teacher of the deaf 'interpreting' for them unless this member of staff is a qualified BSL / English interpreter.
- Work experience placements, clubs and school trips supported by bilingual staff
- Clear planning meetings involving the deaf young people to improve knowledge about possible career pathways and give guidance about the best qualifications and levels to aim for to maximise achievement (Young et al., 2015).

#### **And for teachers of the deaf:**

- High expectations from teachers for Deaf children's progress at school
- Entry for the same number of exams as hearing children

- Access to high quality bilingual resources to help develop concepts in school subjects, such as a much-expanded Scottish Sensory Centre glossary (SSC, 2015).
- Access to centrally translated BSL exam papers from SQA so that pupils could be guaranteed a standard high quality of question paper (Cameron et al, 2011)
- Arranging subtitles to be provided for all videos shown to deaf children in school.
- Using Deaf community resources and pacing presentation better in class to include Deaf learners (Marschark, Knoors & Tang, 2014).
- Collaborating across Scotland to produce a Deaf Studies curriculum led by Deaf teachers
- Better understanding during the training course for teachers of the deaf of Deaf and hearing parents' experiences and the rights of Deaf children to high quality bilingual provision.

Local authorities may need to collaborate across boundaries in order to be able to provide this high quality service. If deaf children have access to fluent BSL from a young age, and exposure to English being mapped onto sign through fingerspelling and sign discussion, then their English skills should develop well at the same time.

This high quality sign bilingual infrastructure is possible because of the support of the Scottish Government for BSL over the past decade. Deaf BSL tutors from the Government sponsored Training of the Trainers (TOTs) course are now teaching BSL at levels 3 and 6 in Scotland, so provision of advanced BSL courses in the central belt is improving. Some Deaf people have trained to teach and are becoming qualified to teach deaf children. The Heriot Watt BSL / English interpreting degree will produce graduates by July 2016, many of whom could work in educational settings. The BSL (Scotland) Bill would lead to much greater support for BSL as a language so it could become a language taught in schools using modern language teaching methods. These positive developments could lead to a much better quality sign bilingual educational environments becoming within travel distance for any deaf child in Scotland.

The serious concerns of the Deaf parents, pupils and young people who responded to the BDA Scotland's call for evidence would be alleviated if this type of high quality sign bilingual provision were put in place. The setting may be a deaf school or a resource base – the key components of a high quality sign bilingual education are similar. We hope this section of the report will assist HMIE in noticing and recording examples of good practice. Currently school services receive excellent inspection reports on provision for deaf pupils when they have no or only one teacher with advanced level signing skills working with a large group of deaf pupils (Education Scotland, 2013).

## **8. Funding and Support**

There needs to be a financial commitment towards deaf children if their educational attainment is to rise. This will mean considering higher salaries for staff fluent in sign, and local authorities starting to see interpreters and bilingual teachers as highly valuable assets whom they must retain. Here we summarise some of the principles which the BDA Scotland believes will lead to better provision and improvements in attainment.

## 8.1 Deaf children's rights

Everyone should be able to develop a first language. This principle was agreed internationally by the UN in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). The *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* emphasises the significance of sign language as a medium of communication in article 21:

*“Educational policies should take full account of individual differences and situations. The importance of sign language as the medium of communication among the deaf, for example, should be recognized and provision made to ensure that all deaf persons have access to education in their national sign language. Owing to the particular communication needs of deaf and deaf/blind persons, their education may be more suitably provided in special schools or special classes and units in mainstream schools” (Article 21 of the Salamanca Statement, UNESCO 1994)*

In Scotland the ‘presumption of mainstreaming’ (Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000) should not override children’s rights to a fluent language. This may involve additional costs, such as transport, but children’s linguistic rights to a fluent first language must be prioritised.

## 8.2 Teachers

Teachers of deaf children should not interpret unless they are qualified to do so, i.e. they hold Level 6 language and interpreting units.

Their BSL skills should be a minimum of level 6 BSL.

There should be a positive recruitment strategy for teachers of deaf children from fluent BSL users, and especially more Deaf teachers of deaf children. The Scottish Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently promoted similar approaches for positive action of underrepresented groups in recruitment (Robison, M., 2015).

## 8.3 BSL / English Interpreters

Scotland needs properly qualified interpreters working in schools and colleges – this requires more funding for Local Authorities to pay graduate salaries. Current support staff are often on very badly paid contracts (Unison Highland, 2014). Interpreters need job descriptions devised for working with different age groups, and supervision from more senior qualified interpreters (Association of Deaf Education Professionals and Trainees, 2015).

After achieving interpreter status, these staff should attend a further postgraduate course in educational interpreting so that they can work effectively and ethically as part of an education support team. They also need subject knowledge (eg. science and maths) so they can support to Advanced Higher level – another reason to recruit graduates to the interpreter role.

## **8.4 Early years and rights to a fluent language**

Establishing fluent BSL in the early years is a complex task but possible with good inter agency planning.

There is a need for more nursery staff with BSL fluency (Level 6 level or above) including Deaf qualified nursery workers and teachers (EUD, 2012).

Sign bilingual early years resource bases can develop both BSL and spoken / written English (see Appendix; Deaf Australia, 2013).

## **8.5 Sign bilingual best practice**

Deaf children who use BSL should be able to have a large signing peer group, which means resource base schools or deaf schools may be shared between authorities.

BSL should be on offer as a modern language in Scottish schools, particularly in schools with resource bases or deaf schools attached.

BSL teachers in schools should be very fluent in BSL and their initial teacher education should be in language teaching.

The SSC glossary should be extended to all subjects and levels, because most school terminology is still not recorded in BSL (SSC, 2015).

Scottish school children can take exams in BSL, but interpreters experienced in education and the school subject should provide the translation, or centrally produced exams with Deaf translators (Cameron et al., 2011).

## **8.6 Managing change to raise standards**

Local authorities should share resources more and cross boundaries – more challenging in a time of cuts, but also more cost effective (Herald Scotland 16.3.15). The balance of funds allocated for deaf education should shift from teacher of the deaf to qualified interpreters to better support signing pupils in mainstream classes. HMIE should visit good practice throughout the UK to see more examples of good quality sign bilingual provision, and involve BDA Scotland members in inspection teams.

## **9. Concluding ideas for action to improve Deaf children's achievement**

We have outlined in this submission a number of practical steps (see Section 7 above) which we think will lead to much better educational outcomes for deaf children:

- Setting up a network of Sign Intensive Early Years bilingual language environments so that all deaf children can have access to a fluent first language before they start school
- Monitoring the low achievers in much more detail so that it is clear which deaf pupils are disproportionately being failed by the education system

- Establishing strong sign bilingual practice in Scottish schools with higher expectations for signing pupils and minimum signing levels for staff supporting them

We believe that a much greater proportion of hard of hearing and deaf children would benefit from a sign bilingual education, whether that is in a mainstream or a deaf school. Certainly this should be larger than the 15% of deaf children who currently have some sign while they are at school. Too often this is only a smattering of Sign Supported English because of the almost non-existent interpreting skills of teachers of the deaf.

We don't think that academic achievement is the only measure of a successful schooling; just as important is self-confidence, resilience, friendships with a wide range of people, and having the personal resources to solve problems and make decisions about moving to work and adult relationships.

Our vision for deaf education in Scotland is that the Scottish Government is able to build on the support it has already shown towards BSL, to at last provide high quality sign bilingual educational settings where deaf children can flourish learning both languages (BSL and written/read English). As an organisation our members would be very willing to advise and work with the Scottish Government to make these plans become a reality.

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## **Appendix One**

### **What would a Sign Intensive Early Years Environment look like?**

- Deaf and hearing qualified nursery staff and Early Years teachers to work in the nursery base. An absolute minimum of two staff, preferably more qualified to a minimum of Level 6 BSL.
- High quality outreach programme to the hearing parents of Deaf children to teach BSL in the home from birth or diagnosis, including Deaf teachers of the deaf and BSL / English interpreters.
- Parents should be able to attend free BSL classes and continue to any level, level, as in Sweden, Finland and Norway (Timmermans, 2005).
- A welcoming approach in the resource base or school so that parents are always welcome and other vetted volunteer members of the Deaf community regularly drop in.
- Deaf children will see BSL being used around them in a range of styles and between different people. They therefore have the opportunity to acquire BSL.
- Many deaf children would also have amplification and hear spoken English round them, again seeing adults and children interacting in a range of ways. So they have the opportunity to acquire spoken English, although it may not be accessible to some children.
- Transport provided for children and some parents to the resource base or deaf school. In rural areas this could be quite expensive – but crucial.
- Deaf cultural materials available and used imaginatively in the sign intensive environment, particularly ideas which link BSL and English. For example use of video cameras, video clips with sign and subtitles, handshape displays with associated signs, internet resources, bank of signed children's TV programmes and stories, with matching books in English, storytelling sessions in BSL, drama which is filmed then reflected on, BSL poetry.
- A regular programme of support for parents, both Deaf and hearing, so that teachers of the deaf can discuss and model ways in which links can be made between BSL and English in the home, explain the Curriculum, give examples of home activities which support early maths and science development. Workshops led by parents too.
- Intensive sign therapy and speech therapy both available, with parents coming to regular videoed sessions.
- Creative play opportunities in both languages, both inside and outside, and facilitated by well-trained Deaf and hearing nursery staff.
- Contact with other Early Years centres through trips and internet video contact.
- Parents' evenings with BSL / English interpreters available.
- Careful monitoring of the language skills of deaf children in BSL and spoken English.
- There may be a mixture of deaf and hearing children, not just a deaf school. Some of the bilingual activities may take place in an ordinary nursery setting. Hearing children of Deaf families may also like to attend.

## **Appendix Two**

### **Article 24: Education (part of the BDA Supplementary Report UNCRPD, 2014)**

Clause 3 of Article 24 specifically refers to sign languages and the Deaf community. It requires States to facilitate:

"(b) ...the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;"

and, ensure

"(c)... that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, *and in environments which maximize academic and social development.*" (UN 2007:17) (italics: our emphasis)

The evidence does not support these statements.

Article 21 of the Salamanca Statement (1994) stresses the importance of sign language and the need to acknowledge the individual differences and situations of children, including stipulating the possible more suitable education of d/Deaf and (Deaf)blind in special classes and units in mainstream schools. This view was supported by Sir Malcolm Bruce MP in the House of Commons<sup>2</sup> following an investigation that found a third of local authorities in England have cut services for d/Deaf children since 2010 (NDCS 2012). There are just 21 specialist Deaf schools in the UK, 50 years ago there were 75, and the remaining schools are increasingly under threat of closure.<sup>3</sup>

Mainstream education has not been inclusive for d/Deaf children, it has been exclusive denying them opportunities for peer to peer learning and strong language role models; O'Brien (2013) and Knights (2010) outline the negative psychological consequences of the current situation for d/Deaf children and young people who are isolated in oral mainstream schools. *Deaf people consistently report teachers not knowing how to teach d/Deaf pupils, missing most of what is going on around them in the classroom, being unable to take part in conversations during school breaks, and general neglect by teachers. These are not isolated examples. Young people who are the only d/Deaf child in the class and attain high educational achievements report being desperately unhappy, and equally desperate for a d/Deaf peer group to make friends.*

At primary level over half of d/Deaf children (51%) are still failing to achieve the expected level for reading, writing and mathematics (NDCS, 2013). There is a large gap between d/Deaf children achieving 5 or more GCSEs (43%) and other children (70%) (NDCS 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> Hansard Volume No. 568, Part No. 57, 17 Oct 2013 : Column 964 'Deaf Children and Young People'. As a result of this debate Parliament resolved to ask Ofsted to carry out an investigation but this has yet to be undertaken (see Appendix 2).

<sup>3</sup> Dilemmas in the deaf community, by Kerra Maddern, *TES Newspaper*, 23 August 2010

The UK State Report observes that "Deaf or hearing impaired pupils, whether educated in mainstream classes, specialist units in mainstream schools or in special schools, will have access to the means of communication they, their parents and the local authority or school consider the most appropriate" (paragraph 233).

However it is currently not possible for a family to choose sign bilingual-bicultural BSL-medium education for their child because there is virtually no provision in the UK. The government is claiming there is a choice when this is very far from the reality.

Article 24, clause 4 requires States to:

"take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education".

In the case of **teaching staff**, currently Teachers of the Deaf (ToD) must achieve a minimum basic Level 1 qualification in BSL. This level of qualification only enables a person to communicate with a Deaf person at a basic level. Research in Scotland showed that of the 205 teachers interviewed in 2007 only 8% held BSL qualifications at level 3 or above (Grimes 2009).

There are very few **Deaf teachers** in the UK. Figures indicate approximately 10% of all TODs have declared a hearing loss (Batterbury 2012:256). However not all of these are Deaf teachers with BSL or ISL skills. Despite Article 24 Clause 4, there is no reference to the possibility of disabled or Deaf people working as teachers in the UK State Report.

In recent years there has been a surge in numbers of Deaf students attending **higher education**. Fordyce et al (2013) have shown that Deaf graduates have as good employment outcomes as all other graduates; this is due to their being socially advantaged demographically and the fact that Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) exists. However, Deaf students are under threat from cuts in their DSA<sup>4</sup>.

The BDA agrees that for many disabled children inclusion is the appropriate context for education, but inclusion does not necessarily mean that mainstreaming is the most appropriate form of education for d/Deaf children. While the BDA shares issues relating to access, visibility, exclusion, and human rights with disabled people in the UK, Deaf people also face linguistic barriers, cultural deprivation and discrimination.

The UK entered a reservation on inclusive education (for Article 24, clauses 2(a) and 2(b)). While we support the view that this reservation is inappropriate for disabled children, the situation of d/Deaf children is a distinctive case. Kauppinen and Jokinen (leaders of the World Federation for the Deaf) write "education of the deaf is not special education but education in one's own language and culture" (2014:136).

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<sup>4</sup> 'Degrees of Discrimination', was a survey carried out by the National Union of Students in May 2014 into the governments restriction of specialist IT equipment and assistive software provided to disabled students. <<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/asset/News/6040/Degreesofdiscrimination-researchbrief.pdf>> (accessed 13 June 2014). However, cuts to DSA also put Deaf students at severe risk (see Appendix 1).

The BDA calls on the Committee to demand the government supports a human rights approach to the development and education of d/Deaf children; in particular:

- that children have the right to be fluent in a language, including BSL, by the age of 5;
- an intensive and early signing environment is therefore necessary for d/Deaf children from hearing families (Lieberman et al 2014);
- very early interactions are necessary with a native BSL adult who can provide the 'maternal cues' needed to establish joint attention (Baines et al 2009); these features could be modelled by a Deaf adult for hearing parents;

Following on from the pre-school intervention and in line with the European Union of the Deaf position paper<sup>5</sup> the BDA calls on the Committee to recommend that the government ensures:

- access in a national sign language, including - where appropriate - access to the written and spoken national language(s), and Deaf culture;
- Fluency in a language (namely sign language) to access the national curriculum, including Deaf culture;
- the learning of sign language and Deaf culture in early intervention programmes, including for children with hearing aids or cochlear implants.

and in mainstream settings:

- the education of several d/Deaf children in one class, to create a sign-intensive environment, and encourage the development of Deaf culture;
- using qualified (Level 6 NVQ) interpreters and/or a Deaf role model to foster the natural acquisition of sign language and Deaf culture;
- support for parents throughout the whole educational process, including access to sign language classes and unbiased information regarding educational outcomes of d/Deaf children.

The BDA further calls on the Committee to recommend the government takes measures to ensure that there are no further Deaf school closures. The cultural-linguistic nature of the Deaf community means Deaf schools should be modelled similarly to Welsh-medium and Gaelic-medium schools that are available to spoken language minority communities. This would mean a bilingual-bicultural approach to education, whereby Deaf schools become 'BSL-medium schools' where peer to peer learning, Deaf cultural development and sign language modelling takes centre stage (see for example Teruggi 2003, Kushalnagar et al 2010, ASLA 2012).

We further call on the Committee to recommend to the government that Deaf teachers should be offered the choice of achieving their qualification in a Deaf school.

Finally we call on the Committee to recommend to the government that Disabled Students' Allowance must not be cut or reduced for Deaf or disabled students in further and higher education.

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<sup>5</sup> <[http://www.eud.eu/Education\\_Position\\_Paper-i-559.html](http://www.eud.eu/Education_Position_Paper-i-559.html)> accessed 13 June 2014

# The British Deaf Association – BDA

## Vision

Our vision is Deaf people fully participating and contributing as equal and valued citizens in wider society.

## Mission

Our Mission is to ensure a world in which the language, culture, community, diversity and heritage of Deaf people in the UK is respected and fully protected, ensuring that Deaf people can participate and contribute as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. This will be achieved through:

- Improving the quality of life by empowering Deaf individuals and groups;
- Enhancing freedom, equality and diversity;
- Protecting and promoting BSL.

## Values

The BDA is a Deaf people's organisation representing a diverse, vibrant and ever changing community of Deaf people. Our activities, promotions, and partnerships with other organisations aim to empower our community towards full participation and contribution as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. We also aim to act as guardians of BSL.

- 1. Protecting our Deaf culture and Identity** – we value Deaf peoples' sense of Deaf culture and identity derived from belonging to a cultural and linguistic group, sharing similar beliefs and experiences with a sense of belonging.
- 2. Asserting our linguistic rights** – we value the use of BSL as a human right. As such, BSL must be preserved, protected and promoted because we also value the right of Deaf people to use their first or preferred language.
- 3. Fostering our community** – we value Deaf people with diverse perspectives, experiences and abilities. We are committed to equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination with a special focus on those affecting Deaf people and their language.
- 4. Achieving equality in legal, civil and human rights** – we value universal human rights such as the right to receive education and access to information in sign language, and freedom from political restrictions on our opportunities to become full citizens.
- 5. Developing our alliance** – we value those who support us and are our allies because they share our vision and mission, and support our BSL community.

*Campaigning for Equal Rights for Deaf people*

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