



Batting for BATOD

In an update to her May 2014 article, [Ann Underwood](#) reflects on her life in BATOD

As a supply teacher in the new city of Milton Keynes in 1981, I was asked to go and 'see if you can help Gatehouse School for the deaf'. They needed a science teacher who knew the setup on Stantonbury Campus, with two schools, Bridgewater Hall and Brindley school and a forward thinking head teacher, Geoff Cooksey ... Bridgewater Hall was almost fully carpeted as Geoff felt that the carpets made the school quieter and produced a better working environment. It certainly helped when our deaf students were included in the mainstream classes. And so began my career as a ToD, although it was a few years before I became a disciple of Brian Fraser at Birmingham University and earned a BPhil in deaf education and QToD status.

Gatehouse School was an oral/aural boarding school with a catchment primarily from Buckinghamshire. So I soon learnt about the deep divide in deaf education at that time – to sign or not to sign. I battled with the vocabulary of science finding that the paucity of language meant that idea of a hinge on a door (what is a hinge?) could not be compared to the elbow joint in the arm – and there was heaps of explaining to do that I hadn't expected. As our pupils became regular pupils in the mainstream school their language and speech improved by leaps and bounds even, though one or two Gatehouse staff were struck dumb by the more colourful and colloquial language that became de rigueur with our deaf pupils!

Several of the Gatehouse staff were BATOD members and it seemed that there was an expectation that I would sign up – to find out more about deaf education. So I joined up, naively believing that all ToDs belonged to BATOD. In 1987, although a fairly green ToD, I found myself elected onto the NEC – Well, I thought I was standing for the BATOD South committee!

I understood that the organisation represented the interests of ToDs and those young people with whom they work. Somehow I was volunteered and stood as BATOD Assistant and then National Secretary. Although the many issues that arose from government actions meant that for a while BATOD became reactive rather than pro-active, the voice of ToDs was raised high. As National Secretary I tried to encourage a growth in membership and ensure that the membership of BATOD was fully informed about all those aspects which affect the daily working life of a ToD. Today NEC is determinedly building up the BATOD membership as numbers of ToDs decrease, explaining the value of membership for professional development and stability,

creating opportunities to share knowledge and skills. Importantly it is also working alongside other organisations (NDCS, NatSIP, The Communication Trust etc) to strengthen the position of Teachers of the Deaf and the young people that they are working with, and is influential at Government levels.

As 'Ann of BATOD' I became a clearing house for all sorts of information, both general and specific and my study was bursting with information and files about current issues. I then shared that information via the Association Magazine (not the Journal) when I started acting as editor. It became an exciting project, with the Magazine changing format and subsequently including colour. I invented the Action Briefs which kept members in touch with major (P)olitical issues and provided suggested courses of action for our membership. Today Paul Simpson, the current Magazine editor and National Executive Officer, draws together the modern equivalent – the e-newsletter.



The move towards technology was not an easy path but it did lead me to head up the development of the bespoke BATOD website – which has also become an archive of many BATOD papers, responses, advice and resources. The BATOD display boards travelled to various conferences and meetings providing current information and leaflets at events. Sharing information and instances of good practice are, I believe, the keynotes for strengthening our particular area of the teaching profession.

Now information is far more accessible and our BATOD website, especially in the resource area, provides materials ready to use with deaf students. With the support of Becta (now long gone!) we set up an email forum so that a question to the ToD email list attracts a range of helpful conversations from





placements more accessible.

The rapid development of hearing aids, FM systems and cochlear implants has given many deaf people better access to spoken language and improved communications. The bitter battles over whether cochlear implants were acceptable or threatened the deaf culture have lessened as the achievements of deaf young people have increased. Education is available locally instead of being delivered great

around the UK. With today's social media we can contact colleagues via Facebook and Twitter. Information is much more accessible today as our media is so much faster – instantaneous – but throughout Conference evaluations we find that 'Networking' is one of the most valued attributes of conferences. For me, meeting ToDs and sharing my knowledge and information with them in all formats has been all important.

Primarily a secondary Science teacher and form tutor, the movement towards work experience through the government TVEI (Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative) captured my interest as I attempted to find work placements for deaf students. The TVEI offered the chance to set up mini enterprises and one spin off from this was getting the pupils at RSD Cheadle to take on the mailing of the BATOD Magazine. Head teacher Bev McCracken and his deputy John Shaw took up the idea of a 'business' and the pupils began to apply for jobs associated with packing and mailing the Magazine, duplicating the inserts and putting everything into labelled envelopes. All aspects of this provided valuable work place experience.

Placing students in work situations was an eye-opener. Today's culture would cringe at the attitudes then to disability and the reasons presented as to why it was not a good thing to have a deaf person in a particular workplace. Fire alarms were the first reason! Frequent visits to, and support of, those who were persuaded, did result in some employment being offered – but this happened rarely. Today the Equality Act, Access to Work and the celebration of disability at such events as the Paralympic Games show that people 'CAN DO' if given appropriate support and this has certainly made work

distances from home in boarding schools with lengthy travel times. Attitudes towards signing and probably foremost, the knowledge and attitudes of Teachers of the Deaf, have changed greatly over the years with trainee ToDs now expected to have some signing competence before becoming a QToD. There is more emphasis on research and putting the findings into practice improving the educational and life chances of deaf children and young people.

My move to Humberside in January 1988 allowed me to focus more on the transition from school into the workplace with apprenticeships and training courses. As more of our older pupils followed FE courses and some attended college and university the potential job pool expanded. Funding has offered the opportunity to buy in support and equipment that has helped to move the life chances of deaf students forward.

Retirement is not giving up work – it is a change in lifestyle and the freedom to choose what to do whenever you want to do it. Sitting still has never been an option for me and in my current role as Chair of Trustees of the BATOD Foundation (BF) I have the opportunity to continue to share information as BF develops MESHGuides which will draw together research, information and good practice in an on-line format that will be accessible 24/7. I hope that this work will enhance the life chances of deaf children and those who work with them.

Ann Underwood has held BATOD posts for many years as Assistant and National Secretary, Magazine Editor, website manager and conference organiser. She was President between 2008 and 2010. She is now the BATOD Foundation Chair of Trustees.