



Consortium for Research in Deaf Education

2022 report for Northern Ireland

Education provision for deaf children in Northern Ireland in 2021/22

Introduction

In 2022, we carried out the 12th Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) annual survey on educational staffing and service provision for deaf children.¹ This report sets out the results of the survey for Northern Ireland and is intended for policy makers and anyone with an interest in deaf education.

The survey alternates from year to year between a standard survey and a survey with a mix of core and thematic questions. The 2022 survey was the version with thematic questions, covering the 2021/22 academic year.² Thematic questions covered support to families to learn sign language and free school meals.

We would like to thank the head of service in Northern Ireland for responding to the survey and for their ongoing feedback and clarification.

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Interpreting the results

There is one service in Northern Ireland covering the five different regions. The service was asked to give figures for the position as of 31st January 2022.

In the survey, we acknowledge that services and children do not always fit into the boxes or options provided. Respondents were able to leave comments or clarify where needed throughout the survey. This report notes particular issues that emerged in relation to some questions.

¹ For the purpose of this section of the survey, unless otherwise stated, we use the term 'deaf children' to include children and young people up to the age of 19 years, 11 months with sensori-neural or permanent conductive deafness. See footnote 4 for more detail.

² Reports from previous years can be found on the National Deaf Children's Society website at www.ndcs.org.uk/CRIDE or on the BATOD website at <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/>.

Caution is also needed due to differences in response rates to individual questions and between surveys over the years, particularly from before 2019 when the survey was completed by five different services and it is believed there were different interpretations of questions and possible double counting.

Please note that all percentages in this report have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

Summary of key findings

Numbers of deaf children

- There are at least 1,476 deaf children in Northern Ireland.
- 73% of school-aged deaf children attend mainstream schools. 2% attend mainstream schools with resource provisions, 3% attend special schools for deaf children whilst 21% attend special schools not specifically for deaf children.

Teachers of the Deaf and other specialist staff

- There are at least 45 Teacher of the Deaf posts, of which 4% were vacant. Of the 43 fte working as Teachers of the Deaf, 64% held the mandatory qualification whilst 16% were in training, and 21% were qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and no immediate plans to begin training for this.
- The number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf in employment working in a peripatetic role, in a resource provision and/or in a special school or college not specifically for deaf children has fallen by 15% since 2021 and by 35% since we started the survey in 2011.
- Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf have an average theoretical caseload of 66 deaf children, up from 56 in 2021.

Resource provisions

- There are a reported two resource provisions. This is down from three in 2021. Looking at the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, on average, there is one resource provision for every 738 deaf children. This is up from one for every 462 deaf children in 2021. This change is influenced by the closure of one resource provision.

Referrals

- 27% of referrals to services came from the newborn hearing screening programme in 2021. Of these, 77% were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 2 working days.
- 16% of referrals to services came from outside the newborn hearing screening programme and before a child had started statutory education. Of these, 61% were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 5 working days.
- 57% of referrals to services came from outside the newborn hearing screening programme and after a child had started statutory education. Of these, 75% were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 5 working days.
- Regardless of how the referral was made, 45% of families were offered a visit (either face to face or virtual) within 10 working days of the referral.

Family sign language

- The service does not directly provide any support (informal or formal) to families to learn sign language.

PART 1: Deaf children in Northern Ireland

How many deaf children are there?³

Based on the response from the service covering the five regions across Northern Ireland and information from the special school for deaf children in Northern Ireland, there are 1,476 deaf children.⁴ This is a reported 6% increase from 1,387 in 2021.

When asked about known issues or gaps with the data, the service responded that it only had figures for children receiving support from the service, and that figures were not held for children who had left school. The service stated that work to improve the data on deaf children continues.

The following table compares the total number of deaf children living in Northern Ireland with figures from previous years. As set out in the introduction, comparisons with earlier reports should be made with caution.⁵

Table 1: Number of deaf children reported, over successive years

	Number of children reported
CRIDE 2022	1,476
CRIDE 2021	1,387
CRIDE 2019	1,417
CRIDE 2018	1,687
CRIDE 2017	1,553
CRIDE 2016	1,497
CRIDE 2015	1,332
CRIDE 2014	1,574
CRIDE 2013	1,481
CRIDE 2012	1,249
CRIDE 2011	1,238

³ The service was asked to include all children with permanent deafness who live in the geographical area covered by their service, including all children up to the age of 19 years, 11 months who have a unilateral or bilateral sensori-neural or permanent conductive deafness, at all levels from mild to profound, using BSA/BATOD descriptors, regardless of whether they receive support from the service. Services were also asked to include children who attended education provision outside of your area but who normally lived in their area. Under the definition of permanent deafness used in the survey, children with a syndrome known to include permanent conductive deafness, microtia/atresia, middle ear malformation, or those who have had middle ear surgery such as mastoidectomy were to be included. Our definition also included those children with glue ear who are not expected to 'grow out' of the condition before the age of 10 years, such as those born with a cleft palate, Down's syndrome, cystic fibrosis, or primary ciliary dyskinesia. Otherwise, services were asked not to include children with temporary deafness, including those children with glue ear who may have been fitted with hearing aids as an alternative to grommet surgery but who are expected to 'grow out' of the condition before the age of 10 years.

⁴ The service originally gave a figure of 1,433 not including children in Jordanstown, the special school for deaf children in Northern Ireland. We obtained information stating that there are 43 deaf children educated at Jordanstown. Adding these figures together gives a total of 1,476.

⁵ In particular, it appears that children in special schools for deaf children were not included in years previous to 2019.

Table 2: Number of children, living in the area, by educational setting

Type of setting	Number	Percentage of total	Percentage of total school-aged children (i.e. excluding pre-school children and young people post-16)
Supported only at home – pre-school children	108	7%	
Early years setting – pre-school children	47	3%	
Supported at home – of school age and home educated	5	0%	0%
Mainstream state-funded schools (including academies and free schools)	966	65%	73%
Mainstream independent (non-state-funded) schools	no response	no response	no response
Resource provision in mainstream schools ⁶	23	2%	2%
Special schools for deaf pupils (whether state funded or non-maintained) ⁷	43	3%	3%
Other special schools, not specifically for deaf children (whether state funded or non-maintained)	284	19%	21%
All other post-16 provision (not including school sixth form colleges)	no response	no response	
NEET (Not in Education, Employment or in Training) (post-16 only)	no response	no response	
Other (e.g. Pupil referral units)	no response	no response	
Not known	no response	no response	
Total	1,476	100%	
Total school-aged children (excluding pre-school children and other post-16 provision and ‘other’)	1,321		

No children were reported as living in the area covered by the service but educated in settings outside of the education authority.

Comparing figures with 2021:

- The proportion of school-aged deaf children and young people in mainstream state-funded schools has fallen from 77% to 73% since 2021.
- In 2021, 1% of school-aged deaf children and young people were reported as being educated in mainstream independent schools, this year none were reported to be in these settings.
- The proportion of school-aged deaf children and young people in other special schools, not specifically for deaf children and young people has risen from 17% to 21% since 2021.

Number of deaf children on services’ caseloads

By caseload, we mean children who receive some form of support **at least once a year**. Examples of support included direct teaching, visits to the family or school, liaison with the family, school and teachers, providing hearing aid checks, etc. We asked services to include children supported by the service but who do not live in the same geographical area as that service. Services could also include children with temporary deafness in their response to this question if they were on the service caseload.

⁶ In the CRIDE survey, we use the term ‘resource provision’ to include all schools with a resource provision, base or unit, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the Education Authority or by the school.

⁷ This table includes the 43 deaf children and young people at Jordanstown school separately reported to us.

The survey response indicated that at least 1,430 deaf children with permanent or temporary deafness were on the caseload. In 2021, the service reported that 1,508 deaf children were on their caseload. The service commented that they are working with a data team to improve the quality and consistency of data regionally, and that data is continuing to be more reliable.

We also asked the service to split out how many children on their 2022 caseload had a temporary conductive hearing loss; they gave a figure of 146 children.

The service stated that they do not provide support to deaf young people over the age of 19.

How do CRIDE's 2022 figures compare to School Census figures?

Because of the differences in how data have been collected and different definitions used, CRIDE recommends the following figures be used as a basis for further debate and analysis, rather than to reach firm conclusions.

School Census figures for 2021/22⁸ identify 1,291 pupils recorded with a 'hearing impairment' on the medical register. This amounts to 87% of the 1,476 children identified by CRIDE.

Some of these pupils have been recorded with an SEN for hearing impairment on the SEN register also. 843 children are on the SEN register. Of these, 551 had a mild or moderate hearing loss and 292 had a severe or profound hearing loss.

Separately, the School Census reports that 514 deaf children on the SEN register have a statement of SEN. This equates to 40% of the 1,291 deaf children identified by the School Census on the medical register and 35% of the 1,476 children identified by CRIDE. It should be noted that the School Census figure will not include deaf children with other needs where deafness is not the primary need. In addition, not all deaf children will be registered as having an SEN.⁹

We recognise that School Census figures include all children enrolled in schools and voluntary and private pre-school settings, nursery schools and units and reception classes, whilst CRIDE figures are for children aged 0 to 19. In this report, we are not able to provide a comparison against CRIDE figures for school-aged children as this is only possible in the year that CRIDE runs the full survey.

⁸ The School Census data is supplied separately to the National Deaf Children's Society by the Department of Education.

⁹ SEN and Medical Categories - Guidance for Schools, at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sen-and-medical-categories-guidance-schools>

PART 2: Teachers of the Deaf and other specialist staff

In the 2022 survey, we used the terminology ‘Teachers of the Deaf’. For completeness, we have used the same language when reporting on the findings from this survey. For the 2023 survey and going forward, we plan to use the terminology ‘Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (TODs)’ instead.

We asked how many Teachers of the Deaf are working in different settings, including those in a peripatetic role and working in resource provisions.¹⁰ Figures for numbers of Teachers of the Deaf in special schools for deaf children were collected separately.

We asked services to provide ‘Full Time Equivalent’ (fte) figures for staffing. For example, an 0.5 figure for a Teacher of the Deaf would indicate they spent half of the standard ‘working week’ as a Teacher of the Deaf. We found that:

- overall, there are at least 43 fte teachers working as Teachers of the Deaf in Northern Ireland
- 64% of these posts are occupied by a fully qualified Teacher of the Deaf, 16% are occupied by teachers in training for the mandatory qualification or intending to train within three years, and 21% are qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training.
- there were 2 fte vacant posts reported, if the vacant posts are added to the total number of Teachers of the deaf in employment, this would indicate that there are at least 45 fte Teacher of the deaf posts, of which 4% are vacant.

The following table provides a breakdown of Teachers of the Deaf in employment by type of setting.

Table 3: Number of Teachers of the Deaf in employment overall

	Working mainly as a peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf (total and percentage)	Working mainly in a resource provision (total and percentage)	Working mainly in a special school for deaf children (total and percentage)	Teacher of the Deaf posts overall (total and percentage)
Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification	19.6 (92%)	3 (100%)	5 (26%)	27.6 (64%)
Teachers in training for the mandatory qualification within 3 years	1.8 (8%)	0 (0%)	5 (26%)	6.8 (16%)
Qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (47%)	9 (21%)
Total of figures given	21.4 (100%)	3 (100%)	19 (100%)	43.4 (100%)

The following table summarises the above by just showing the numbers of Teachers of the Deaf in employment by their role only.

¹⁰ In the CRIDE survey, we use the term ‘resource provision’ to include all schools with a resource provision, base or unit, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the Education Authority or by the school.

Table 4: Number of Teachers of the Deaf in employment overall by role

	Total Teachers of the Deaf in post	Percentage
Working mainly as a peripatetic Teacher of the Deaf	21.4	49%
Working mainly in a resource provision	3	7%
Working mainly in a specialist school for deaf children	19	44%
Total of figures given	43.4	100%

In terms of differences over the past year:

- the total of 21.4 fte peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf in employment has decreased from 23.5 in 2021. However, the 23.4 fte Teacher of the Deaf posts including vacancies this year remains similar to the 23.5 reported in in 2021
- in 2021 there were 4 fte Teachers of the Deaf reported as working in the special school for deaf children, whereas this year there are 19 teachers reported as working as Teachers of the Deaf in the special school for deaf children and young people.¹¹

Figures for Teachers of the Deaf in the cochlear implant programme in Northern Ireland were collected in a separate survey. There were no Teachers of the Deaf in post reported, and there were 2 fte vacancies reported. The programme reported that, while the post of coordinator is not filled, the audiology leads co-ordinate the audiology staff and the service is overseen by the Trust Assistant Service Manager for ENT.

No Teachers of the Deaf were reported as working mainly in special schools or colleges not specifically for deaf children, or as working flexibly between different roles or settings.

Please note that the rest of this section **does not** include Teachers of the Deaf working in the special school for deaf children as this information has not been collected consistently by CRIDE over the past decade.

The following table looks at changes in the reported number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf in employment and posts over successive years.

Table 5: Changes in numbers of Teachers of the Deaf from year to year

	Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification in employment	Number of teachers working as Teachers of the Deaf in employment	Number of vacant posts	Number of Teacher of the Deaf posts (including vacancies)
2022	22.6	24.4	2	26.4
2021	26.5	26.5	0	26.5
2019	25.2	26	3	29
2018	28.4	29.2	5	34.2
2017	29.3	30.1	1	31.1
2016	32.6	33.4	0	33.4
2015	30.6	34.4	0	34.4
2014	28.6	32.6	0	32.6
2013	30	35	0	35
2012	29.6	34.2	0	34.2
2011	34.9	37.3	1.3	38.6

¹¹ It is possible that only Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification were reported in 2021, however this has not been confirmed by the school.

Table 6: Percentage change in numbers of Teachers of the Deaf

	Percentage change over past 11 years (between 2011 and 2022)	Percentage change over past year (between 2021 and 2022)
Teachers of the Deaf with the mandatory qualification in employment	-35%	-15%
Number of teachers working as Teachers of the Deaf in employment	-35%	-8%
Number of Teacher of the Deaf posts (including vacancies)	-32%	0%

The service reported no difficulties in recruiting for permanent posts over the past 12 months, but they did report difficulties in securing supply cover from a qualified Teacher of the Deaf. The service commented that there is a lack of qualified applicants in Northern Ireland. They also commented that as elsewhere in the UK, they sometimes have to recruit unqualified Teachers of the Deaf and commit to funding their training, which puts pressure on the service.

Peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf caseloads

This section looks at the theoretical caseloads of each visiting Teacher of the Deaf by looking at the number of deaf children living in the area who are not already in specialist provision (regardless of whether they are receiving support or not). There is a range of views on both the usefulness of this and how best to calculate this ratio. Points to consider include:

- areas that are large or rural may, by necessity, have more visiting Teachers of the Deaf than areas that are small and urban because of the need to allow for travel time
- areas in which there are specialist units or special schools may have fewer visiting Teachers of the Deaf because it has been assumed that deaf children with most need are already in specialist provision
- services that are better able to reliably record and identify how many deaf children, including those over 16, are in their area may appear to have heavier caseloads than services which have only given a figure for the number of deaf children they 'know' about
- the theoretical caseload does not tell us about the outcomes achieved by deaf children in the area.

In simple terms and for consistency across all parts of the UK, we calculate the theoretical caseloads by dividing the number of permanently deaf children living in any given area and in non-specialist provision¹² by the number of visiting Teachers of the Deaf who are qualified or in training for the mandatory qualification¹³. This will include some deaf children in some areas who are not being actively supported by the service.

The CRIDE survey results show that each visiting (peripatetic) Teacher of the Deaf has a theoretical average caseload of 66 deaf children. In 2021, this figure stood at 56. Comments from the service on their work to improve the quality of their data over time, as well as the number of vacant posts at the time of the survey, should be taken into account.

¹² This includes deaf children reported as being: supported at home (e.g. home educated or pre-school), in early years settings, in mainstream state funded schools, in mainstream independent schools, other special schools (i.e. those for disabled children more generally) or in post-16 provision. This excludes deaf children reported as being in mainstream schools with resource provision or special schools for deaf children.

¹³ This excludes any teachers who are working as Teachers of the Deaf but who are not qualified nor in training.

Other specialist staff

The service reported no specialist support staff (other than Teachers of the Deaf). This was also the case in 2021.

PART 3: Support provided

Number of resource provisions

In the CRIDE survey, we use the term 'resource provision' to include all schools (mainstream or special) with a resource provision, base or unit specifically for deaf children, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the local authority or by the school.

We found that there is one primary resource provision and one secondary resource provision in Northern Ireland.¹⁴ The service reported that another resource provision, for primary-aged children, had closed since 2021, due to there being no pupils.

We also looked at the number of resource provisions against the overall population of deaf children. This is intended to indicate the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, relative to the overall population of deaf children. We found that, on average, there is one resource provision for every 738 deaf children. Due to the closure of the primary resource provision, this is up from 462 in 2021.

This is **not** a measure of the number of places available in or individual deaf children enrolled at each resource provision; figures for places or deaf children enrolled will vary from provision to provision.

Family sign language

The service stated that it did not:

- directly provide any informal opportunities (e.g. family groups or coffee mornings etc) for families to practise sign language
- directly provide any courses or 'training' in sign language to families¹⁵
- commission or provide courses to families to enable them to learn sign language on a course delivered by an external provider.

The service commented that it is in the early stages of reviewing their offer for sign language, and they have increased the number of Teachers of the Deaf with level 3 or 4 BSL, but there is a capacity issue in taking this work forward.

Free school meals

The service stated that it did not record whether a school-aged child is eligible for free school meals. They also stated that Teachers of the Deaf are not involved in discussions on how any additional funding related to levels of free school meals is used for deaf children. They stated that this is recorded on the education authority information management system and that services do not have access to this.

Post-16 support

In terms of support to deaf young people around careers advice and moving into employment, the service said they provide the following support:

¹⁴ Separately, we understand that the two resource provisions are both located in the Greater Belfast area.

¹⁵ By directly provide, we mean something that a service directly employs someone to provide.

- engaging with careers advisors in schools on careers advice to deaf young people
- provision of advice on the accessibility of work placements being undertaken by deaf young people
- provision of information to deaf young people about the support available through the Access to Work scheme for employment support
- provision of information to deaf young people about their rights under equality legislation to reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

However, the service reported they do not provide support in terms of engaging with careers advisors in colleges on careers advice to deaf young people.

The service stated that it is in the early stages of providing information to young people, and this is an area of development.

PART 4: Support following the identification of deafness

We asked the service how many referrals they received over the calendar year of 2021.

Table 8: Referrals

	Number and percentage of referrals	Percentage
For children identified as deaf through the newborn hearing screening programme	30	27%
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme and before they had started statutory education	18	16%
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme and after they had started statutory education	63	57%
Total of figures given	111	100%

We then asked how soon families were contacted and visited following the initial referral. These questions were drafted with reference to the [NatSIP Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services in England \(2016\)](#) – in particular, standards A1ii and A1iii.

We recognise there may be a range of reasons why initial contact or the first visit cannot take place within the timescales outlined by the quality standards (e.g. the family is not able to meet). However, we hope that these questions will help to build a national picture of how these quality standards are being met.

In response to these questions, we found that:

- of the referrals for children identified through the newborn hearing screening programme, 23 of the families were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 2 working days. This amounts to 77% of the 30 children referred via this route
- of the referrals for children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing screening programme and before they had started statutory education, 11 of the families were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 5 working days. This amounts to 61% of the 18 children referred via this route
- of the referrals for children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing screening programme and after they had started statutory education, 47 of the families were contacted by a Teacher of the Deaf within 5 working days. This amounts to 75% of the 63 children referred via this route
- 50 families were offered a visit (either face-to-face or virtually) from a Teacher of the Deaf within 10 working days of any referral. This amounts to 45% of the 111 children referred either through or outside the newborn hearing screening programme.

We asked what arrangements are made in terms of the first Teacher of the Deaf visit to the family where referrals are made during the summer holidays. The service stated that cover arrangements are in place to enable a Teacher of the Deaf to make first contact at least by phone. The service also commented that they have recently put in place new guidance to support compliance with timescales for response, and that the pandemic had had an effect on dates of first visits.

PART 5: Background and methodology

CRIDE is a consortium bringing together a range of organisations and individuals with a common interest in using research to improve the educational outcomes achieved by deaf children. At the time the survey was sent out, representatives included: BATOD, Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, Mary Hare, National Deaf Children's Society, National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP), UCL, University of Edinburgh, consultants with expertise in deafness, and specialist education services for deaf children in Cambridgeshire, Camden, Kent, and Leeds.

The survey alternates from year to year between a standard survey and a survey with a mix of core and thematic questions. The 2022 survey was the version with thematic questions.

The survey was sent to the Education Authority in February 2022 by National Deaf Children's Society staff on behalf of CRIDE.

Analysis of the results and drafting of this report was largely completed by the National Deaf Children's Society, with guidance and clearance from members of CRIDE.

CRIDE would like to thank the service for taking the time to complete this survey. The results from this survey will be used for research purposes, to influence government policy and to campaign to protect funding and services for deaf children.

If you have any feedback or questions on the results, please contact cride@ndcs.org.uk.