

# Local authority support for deaf children and young people

David Couch describes the features of effective services

In 2021 David Couch on BATOD's behalf commenced updating BATOD's 'Features of effective services' document to reflect changes which have occurred during the number of years since it was first published. BATOD drew on the experience of current UK heads of service in updating it. (The archived version is here on the BATOD website: <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/features-of-effective-services/>)

The purpose of the document is to bring into one place the key features of an effective service to reflect the roles and activities of services across the UK and in all types and sizes of local authority. The document should be useful for all heads of service and should provide particular support for heads of service who are not from a deaf education background.

## Introduction

This document seeks to provide guidance on the elements a local (education) authority should provide to support the development and education of deaf children and young people (CYP). This document deals with education services only and does not make any direct recommendations for health or social services. These services will be working within their own protocols and guidelines.

Local (education) authorities periodically review their services as part of a review or restructure. This will include services for CYP, particularly those learners with special educational needs and disabilities, for whom they have a statutory responsibility. Throughout the UK, educational provision for deaf CYP can vary according to local provision already in place and population differences. Many services are guided by their historic practice, and this should be considered when reviewing the service. Some local authorities have a special school for deaf education provision, an 'in-county' or an out-of-authority school (eg non-maintained), and may choose to use this where transport costs are low. In some authorities, specialist provision is 'out of county' and travel costs will need to be considered in deciding whether the placement is accessed. Many authorities offer a provision where a number of CYP are accommodated in one local school. This can provide the deaf CYP with a 'peer group' and is useful in allocating staff. BATOD considers that all placements, whether an in-county or an out-of-authority school, should be viewed as a continuum of the local authority offer.

## Qualified Teacher of Deaf Children and Young People

A Qualified Teacher of Deaf Children and Young People (QToD) is a qualified teacher with the additional skills, knowledge, and expertise required to provide quality teaching to deaf CYP in mainstream settings and in specialist provisions. They should have trained or be in training to achieve an additional mandatory qualification

for teaching deaf learners. This should be completed within a fixed number of years of appointment (it varies from country to country).

## Visiting teacher provision

Services for CYP who are deaf may be centrally retained in a discrete team, part of a larger sensory or specialist teaching and advisory service, or be part of more generic multi-disciplinary structures. Regardless of their organisation, there are a number of common features that BATOD regards as significant when reviewing and organising services.

A basic statutory requirement of all local authorities is the provision of an educational place at a local school. Visiting teacher services are put in place to support the child in their local school wherever possible. The decision on whether the chosen school is suitable is not the topic of this guidance. However, most schools, with appropriate support, accept deaf CYP. To meet the need of 'mainstream education' in a local school, deaf education services should have a visiting teacher service capable of providing adequate support to maintain the child's placement. A team of QToDs provide this support and the provision of a 'Qualified Teacher of the Deaf' is a statutory requirement. The number of visiting teachers allocated to support local needs is a complex decision and can lead to disagreement. In order to give some structure to the decision, National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) has published an 'Eligibility Framework' document (co-written with BATOD and other NatSIP partners). This document is a tool that enables services to provide an equitable allocation of their resources, particularly staff allocation. The Eligibility Framework allows managers and staff to determine the number of staff they may require in their authority. This is guidance only and should not be used in any definitive way. However, its widespread use and acceptance across the UK has led to greater clarity in staff allocation nationally. In Scotland, the services have an additional publication 'How good is our Sensory Service? – A Framework for Auditing and Evaluating the Quality of our Sensory Services' – [www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/resources/hgjooss/](http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/resources/hgjooss/)

Economics provide a powerful influence in the allocation of resources for deaf CYP. A local (education) authority may choose to use an out-of-authority school (eg non-maintained) school, which is located within their area and involves minimal travel costs. In some cases, travel costs can be as much as the placement itself and the LA may choose to develop their own specialist provision in-county. Where there are a number of deaf CYP attending the same school, or where the LA feels it beneficial to provide a deaf peer group, a 'resource provision' can be provided.

In the past, these provisions have been called 'units' and include QToDs and teaching assistants with training in supporting deaf pupils. The number of teachers and teaching assistants required can vary depending on the number of pupils year on year. This needs to be considered when allocating staff, and relocation of staff may be required. Allocation of staff should be a responsibility of the head of provision (usually a QToD), head of deaf education services, and the host school.

### Pre-school support

Local authorities are required to provide 'early intervention' to children and families. This is to support children prior to entering school and determining the best school provision for them. Crucial to this support is the support of the parents and helping them navigate the often-complex educational route their child/young person may follow.

Through the national newborn hearing screening programme (NHSP), children are identified as deaf as early as seven weeks after birth. Babies are fitted with hearing aids soon after diagnosis and may be referred for cochlear implants before their first birthday. The vast majority of babies born deaf are born to hearing parents. In common with other disabilities, this diagnosis inevitably comes as a shock to parents. At the point of diagnosis, audiology services refer the baby to the Education Sensory Support Service. The NHSP quality standard requirement is that the baby and parents are contacted, by a QToD, within 48 hours of referral. Although this is not directly an educational standard requirement, all UK hearing services aim to provide this intervention. Supporting parents at this stage is the responsibility of the sensory support service and often requires a high level of input by a QToD. The allocation of time to a new identification is often difficult to assess. Some parents prefer to be left alone at first whilst others request a good deal of support. A great deal of sensitivity needs to be applied when determining visit allocation in these cases. Again, the Eligibility Framework gives guidance on visit frequency for this client group and provides a useful starting point.

### Support staff

Currently, a number of centrally held services retain their own stock of specialist support staff. These are usually deployed in resource provisions. The advantage of a deaf education service employing their own support staff is that they can provide training and management. Support staff can be allocated to areas of need when numbers change and are a valuable resource when trained and experienced. Some support staff are employed by the school and managed by the head. This is most often the case when a single child is placed in a local school. This enables a school to allocate flexibly, redeploying the support staff when the CYP is absent. However, there are limitations to redeployment when a child leaves school and this resource can be lost. Centrally employed support staff can often be redeployed within the service and retained.

### Additional staff: Educational audiologist

An educational audiologist is a QToD who has undergone

training in audiology. This training in the diagnosis and management of deafness can be useful within the context of a service for deaf CYP. Many services employ, or train, an educational audiologist, and they can be a useful link with local audiology services and implant centres. An educational audiologist can also be involved in acoustic measurement and maintenance, and allocation of personal assistive listening devices (radio aids). A QToD is also trained in the use and allocation of assistive listening devices and some services do not see the need in employing an educational audiologist. However, an educational audiologist is often a valuable resource, being able to take on a QToD role with additional skills.

### Equipment and resources

The provision of hearing aids is the responsibility of the Health Service Audiology Department. Hearing aids that malfunction or are damaged will be replaced by the health service. The QToD is responsible for ensuring the child's hearing aids are working. QToDs are trained in hearing aid maintenance and report any faults to the parents and audiology departments. In order to test hearing aids according to manufacturer's standards, the QToD uses a 'test box'. This device is capable of testing hearing aids and determining the site of the fault. Some aids can be repaired 'in the field' by the QToD, but most faults require returning the aids to the audiology department for replacement. Some services hold replacement hearing aids, although given the wide variety of aids and settings, this is rare.

Many deaf CYP are provided with assistive listening devices. Personal FM (radio) systems are allocated to many deaf CYP and their use is invaluable in maintaining local school placement. These systems allow the deaf listener to overcome the detrimental effects of background noise and receive a clearer sound from the teacher. A number of systems can be supplied to a school, and each has its own individual channel (frequency). School staff require training in their use, and this is a responsibility of the QToD. The use and allocation of FM systems is decided by the deaf education service, usually in consultation with the educational audiologist. These systems are usually purchased by the deaf education service who is responsible for their maintenance and renewal. These systems cost around £1,600 each and a stock of maintenance materials should be held centrally.

An educational audiologist has training in carrying out hearing assessments. This can be helpful in reducing the number of appointments the child has to make at the audiology department. Some QToDs, usually educational audiologists, may have undertaken additional training and are therefore experienced in carrying out hearing assessments. Where staff in a deaf education service carry out hearing assessments, they require the calibrated equipment to do so. Audiometers are often purchased by deaf education services.

All educational audiologists and some QToDs can take impressions for new earmoulds. This may be a useful service as it prevents the CYP taking time off school to

attend the audiology department for new moulds. In this case, the deaf education service would keep a stock of materials to make moulds. Making moulds should be agreed with the local audiology department beforehand.

The following checklist is intended to highlight factors of service provision that may be relevant to discussions on service provision and staffing. This is not intended to be a hierarchical or exhaustive list, but a starting point for any informed and evidence-based discussion. Heads of services and team leaders involved in such reviews may benefit from the support of an external specialist consultant in the field.

- **Local context:** Size and geography of local authority. A large authority, sparsely populated, may incur greater travel times. The actual number of children on the caseload and the referral rate of new cases, including newborns. Nature of population, eg a high number of CYP with English as an additional language (EAL).
- **National context:** Comparisons with other authorities, specifically statistical neighbours.
- **Data:** Pupil population by age and degree of hearing loss. Number of CYP with cochlear implants.
- **Additional difficulties:** The number of CYP on the caseload who have an additional difficulty. The number of CYP requiring alternative provision.

- **Further education (FE) support:** The intention, or not, to support in FE provision.
- **Voluntary sector:** Time allocation working with the voluntary sector. The National Deaf Children's Society can be a useful link.
- **BATOD:** There is a great deal of useful advice and information on the BATOD website. This includes exam access and language modification training.



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### Further information

There is an additional document available on the BATOD website which includes a comprehensive list of list of acronyms and abbreviations related to deaf education plus information about the variation across the UK of curriculum standards and the bodies relating to each nation of the UK.

Link: <https://www.batod.org.uk/information-category/publications/magazine/>

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# BATOD Magazine

This article was published in the December 2022 issue.

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British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People

MAGAZINE • Dec 2022 • ISSN 1336-0799 • [www.batod.org.uk](http://www.batod.org.uk)

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