

Restructuring the present and moving on to the future

Dr Emmanouela Terlektsi and **Angie Wootten**, course leaders for the University of Birmingham course provide an update

The University of Birmingham has been offering the 'Teachers of Children with Hearing Impairment' programme since 1989 and it has one of the largest cohorts in the UK.

The course is delivered using a blended learning approach:

- distance-based approaches (students can study from any part of England/UK)
- online interactive materials (including self-directed flexible learning)
- synchronous and asynchronous group activities/tutorials
- activities based upon application to and reflection upon work-based practice
- face-to-face elements (ie study days)
- direct assessment of work-based practice.

The last two years of the pandemic had an enormous effect on our teaching and learning practice. Our study week in January 2022 was a hybrid event and was a huge success according to students' and speakers' experiences. The technology at the University of Birmingham enabled students who were unable to join us in person due to illness, to join our workshops virtually in a way that felt like being in the room! The face-to-face interaction, and especially the face-to-face workshops involving 'hands-on' activities with equipment, cannot be fully replicated online. Therefore, what we have learnt in the last two years is that we should fully utilise our face-to-face time to concentrate on these hands-on, practical skills. For instance, during our study week we deliver hands-on workshops on test boxes and other equipment.

In another development, we introduced and adapted a framework commonly used in the vision impairment world. It assists our students in understanding the balance of support that Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (ToDs) need to provide whilst supporting deaf pupils to become independent learners. The 'access to learning/learning to access' model is now part of our course and is used to provide a framework and vocabulary to address broad issues within the field, towards which different interventions and targeted educational outcomes can be aligned:

- Access to learning: Inclusive practice and differentiation ensuring that the child's environment is structured and modified to promote inclusion and learning, and access to the core curriculum, the culture of the

school, and broader social inclusion.

- Learning to access: Teaching provision that supports the child to learn independence skills and develop agency in order to afford more independent learning and social inclusion.

Linked to the above framework is the notion of practitioners as researchers. Our programme enables trainee teachers to gain a systematic approach to research their own practice including evaluation of its effectiveness. To achieve this goal, during the two years of the programme our students engage in activities (eg discussion groups and visits to different educational settings) that include different approaches to problem solving skills, use of creativity to find new solutions to situations, and sharing experiences with colleagues. The programme ensures that graduates are committed to continued professional development as practitioner-researchers. Our team at the University of Birmingham is heavily engaged in research that is rigorous and meaningful for practitioners.



Figure 1: Workshop on the use of test boxes during our study week

An example of such research is the recently commissioned work by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) that we are currently undertaking. The project will evaluate the impact of peripatetic ToDs on deaf children's outcomes within a participatory research approach employing mixed methods design. The aim is to evaluate the impact that peripatetic ToDs have on several outcomes for deaf children (aged 0–25 in accordance with the Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice). This project is a co-production with the sensory support team from one local authority.


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The course has recently been re-accredited by the Department for Education (DfE) to offer training to qualified teachers who would like to further qualify to teach deaf learners in England from 0–25 (Mandatory Qualification Award). At the moment, the team is busy restructuring the programme to meet the new outcomes and deliver the re-developed course from September 2023. Two main and significant changes are taking place. Firstly, the name of our course has changed from 'Teachers of Children with Hearing Impairment' to 'Deaf Education' www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/distance/edu/deaf-education.aspx

In recognition that the field is moving towards using positive language around deafness, the course now uses the terms 'Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People' and the term 'deaf' to refer to all children with all levels and types of hearing loss. Secondly, we are now able to offer, in addition to the Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Deaf Education (Mandatory Qualification Award), a Master of Arts (MA) in Deaf Education (Mandatory Qualification Award). We hope that the addition of the MA route will enable students to gain funding more easily as a wider recognised qualification. Students on the PGDip route will complete six 20-credited modules whilst students on the MA will complete the same modules

Sensory Impairment Programme

The MA/PGDip sensory programme is a flexible part time blended learning programme designed for those who want to make a difference to the lives of children and young people from 0-25 who are deaf, vision impaired or have multi-sensory (deafblindness) impairment.

DEAF EDUCATION	MULTI-SENSORY IMPAIRMENT (DEAFBLINDNESS)	VISION IMPAIRMENTS
		

and a dissertation in deaf education.

University of Birmingham, Department of Disability Inclusion and Special Needs (DISN) is currently the only provider in England (and the UK and Europe) of all three sensory fields (deaf education, multi-sensory impairment, and vision impairment). Thus, one of the strongest aspects of our provision from September 2023 is the consistency and coherence of the structure and delivery of the three fields, consisting of one programme with three separate and distinct pathways delivering training to specialist teachers. The deaf education course will be a re-developed version of our existing provision to meet the new DfE standards and will consist of two shared sensory modules (across the three sensory pathways) but with special content for deaf education and four specialist modules in deaf education.

Above all, we are restructuring the present and moving on to the future by continuing to ensure that our students are appropriately inducted into postgraduate study; are offered explicit guidance and support with key academic tasks; are taught by expert practitioners and well-established researchers in the field and are offered the academic and pastoral support to ensure they progress through their studies and achieve their potential.

We are looking towards the future based on present strong foundations and a re-developed version of our existing well-established and successful provision.



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Moving on



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