



BATOD Policy note – QToD staffing ratio in deaf resource provisions

The British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (BATOD) is the United Kingdom (UK)'s only professional association dedicated to Qualified Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (QToDs).

The Association advocates for the interests of QToDs¹ and the deaf² babies, children, and young people they support, engaging with governments and key agencies at both national and regional levels. BATOD provides sustained professional support through a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development (CPD), alongside national and regional meetings. These initiatives ensure that members have access to up-to-date information, high-quality resources, and best-practice guidance.

This document presents professional guidance, a working benchmark for BATOD members across the UK. BATOD recognises the guidance is not statutory and does not offer legal advice.

Working benchmark (ratio)

BATOD retains a benchmark staffing ratio of 1.0 full time equivalent (fte) QToD per six deaf pupils (1:6) in deaf resource provisions as a practical starting point for workforce planning, where pupils typically require frequent and targeted QToD input. This benchmark must not be used as a ceiling.

Normally local/education authority commissioning and school leadership decisions should record an auditable line from cohort profile → required specialist provision → hours → fte → timetable deliverability. If the required provision cannot be delivered regardless of whether a nominal ratio is met.

¹Statutory instrument 2003 No.1662. The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003: "A qualified teacher may be employed to teach a class of pupils who are hearing impaired, visually impaired, or both hearing and visually impaired if the head teacher is satisfied that the person in question is in the process of obtaining the relevant MQ and provided that the aggregate period for which the teacher teaches a class of pupils does not exceed three years."

Code of Practice (England) 2015 includes this: "Those teaching classes of children with sensory impairment must hold an appropriate qualification approved by the Secretary of State. Teachers working in an advisory role to support such pupils should also hold the appropriate qualification." (Section 6.61)

² Throughout this document, the term 'deaf' covers the full range of deafness to be found in the population.

Why 1:6 remains a sensible working ratio

BATOD's benchmark is best understood as a deliverability condition for access and specialist teaching, grounded in established educational and psychological mechanisms:

- Historic continuity: aligns with the earlier ~0.18 teachers per pupil reference point (approximately 1:6) used in the (now withdrawn) Circular 11/90 framework for comparable specialist contexts.
- Cohort complexity ('deaf plus'): the presenting profile in many provisions is now more complex; earlier BATOD ratio statements treated the benchmark as a minimum where there were significant additional needs.
- Access is predictably challenging in larger groups and there is a greater risk of isolation and emotional vulnerability due to feeling 'very different' in relation to the ability of other peers, impact of missed incidental learning from peers, and lack of two-way meaningful communication and engagement opportunities. There is an increased risk of communication breakdown:
 - Classroom noise and multi-talker interaction reduce speech intelligibility.
 - Busy group-work focused learning spaces and multiple 'information sources' eg pupil and adult speakers plus communication support staff, table-top resources, white-board content increase concentration demands and visual distractions and for pupils who may lipread and/or use sign language.
- UK practice guidance notes that younger children may need around +15 decibels (dB) signal-to-noise ratio to understand and process speech, with deaf pupils often requiring more favourable conditions.
- Concentration effort from receptive intake of signed communication and/or listening effort with constant mental demand required to filter out background noise and visual distractions, and cognitive fatigue are credible learning risks: research links perceived listening difficulty in classrooms to fatigue (including for deaf children). Smaller groups

are one practical way to reduce interactional load and increase checking/repair and responsive feedback.

- Language learning and joint attention: many deaf pupils require more explicit support to establish and sustain *joint visual attention* (watching the speaker (and/or communication support worker)/material at the right moment), manage turn-taking, and access incidental language; smaller groups make it more feasible to secure shared attention, provide rapid clarification/repair, and increase high-quality language interaction time.
- Many deaf children and young people are at increased risk of delayed language development, particularly where early access to a fully accessible language input has been inconsistent (for example, due to late identification, fluctuating hearing, variable benefit from technology, or limited access to signed and/or spoken language models). Even where hearing technology is working well, the day-to-day conditions of school communication (distance, noise, multiple speakers, rapid turn-taking, and reduced visual access) can reduce the amount and quality of language that is reliably perceived. Over time, this can constrain vocabulary growth, grammatical development, and narrative skills and comprehension, with knock-on effects for literacy and curriculum access. Small-group specialist teaching supports higher intensity language interaction, structured opportunities for practice and feedback, and rapid clarification when meaning is missed, thereby addressing language learning needs as part of equitable access to education.

The QToD role³ is wider than direct teaching: the ratio must reflect programme-lead responsibilities (statutory processes, liaison, access/technology oversight, staff coaching and quality assurance) that underpin consistency and safety of provision.

Legal context across the United Kingdom

This policy summarises the legal backdrop to support accurate planning and recording of decisions.

³ BATOD Articulating the Specialism 'The role of the QToD' series www.batod.org.uk/information/batod-publication-articulating-the-specialism-series/



- Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland): the Equality Act 2010 applies to schools, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils to avoid substantial disadvantage.
- Northern Ireland: the Equality Act 2010 does not apply. Disability discrimination duties in education are covered by separate Northern Ireland legislation, including the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDO).
- Across the UK: statutory planning routes differ (eg EHCP, IDP, ASN/CSP, Statement), but staffing decisions should be recorded in terms of deliverability of required/specified provision and removal of access barriers, not mere compliance with a headline ratio.

Implementation and toolkit

BATOD recommends that local decisions use the 1:6 benchmark as a starting point and then adjust staffing upward where cohort need, support staff/other specialist role structure, delivery model, geography/travel time, recruitment constraints, or access/technology demands increase the intensity of specialist input.

A supporting toolkit is being planned and will set out a practical method for QToDs and managers to:

1. Describe cohort profile and required provision
2. Translate provision into time allocations
3. Evidence timetable deliverability
4. Document risks, mitigations, and escalation where capacity is insufficient.

BATOD cannot offer legal advice to members. If members feel the ratio in their environment is excessive, they should contact their union for individual advice.

Published in March 2026. To be reviewed in March 2027

BATOD welcomes feedback on this publication. Contact BATOD National Executive Officer, Teresa Quail, via exec@batod.org.uk. Other BATOD documentation can be found on the BATOD website – [BATOD papers: policies and statements](#).