

Youth employment, education and training Government consultation

This is a submission from The British Association for Deaf Children and Young People (BATOD). BATOD is the only professional association for Qualified Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (QToDs) in the United Kingdom.

The Association advocates for the interests of QToDs and the babies, children and young people they support, engaging with governments and key agencies at national and regional levels. BATOD provides ongoing professional support through continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, as well as national and regional meetings. These initiatives ensure members have access to current information, resources, and best practice guidance.

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Throughout this submission we use the term deaf to describe all types and levels of hearing loss and to acknowledge that deaf learners may be using a range of communication approaches including British Sign Language (BSL), to access teaching and learning.

Barriers to further/higher education, employment or training experienced by some deaf young people (YP) include

- The transition from secondary education to further education (FE) or training schemes often overlooks the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Education, Health and Care plan, the detailed information it contains, and the valuable advice provided by school or Local Authority (LA) professionals.
- Similarly, FE and training schemes often overlook detailed information and the valuable advice offered by parents.
- Due to resource allocation challenges, lack of rooming, etc, some FE settings may attempt to remove established examination access arrangements that have been the 'normal way of working' throughout secondary school. If the local service does not provide FE support, the FE setting may not 'buy in' adequate support from traded services offered by some LAs.
- Secondary schools may have a designated careers advisor; however, there may be a lack of awareness of the rights of deaf or disabled people in the workplace. For example: Access to Work (AtW), and modifications that can support deaf learners' access to employment and training.
- Local employment training courses designed to support YP securing employment may not have staff experienced in supporting the needs of deaf YP.
- There is a lack of consistency with AtW assessments and outcomes.

- There is a recognised delay in the processing of AtW applications.
- There is a need for outreach work by experienced, trained professionals in deafness to support employment agencies and employers in employing deaf YP.

In higher education (HE), several issues have been raised regarding the Disability Support Allowance (DSA) scheme.

- Students at HE report being told to select an interpreter or a notetaker opposed to accessing a package that fits their needs.
- A lack of integration between DSA funded support and the support provided by the students' higher education provider (HEP).
- Confusion arises because students often receive non-medical help (NMH) support from both their HEP and DSA.
- In some cases, DSA support is provided to students without the involvement or even the awareness of the student's HEP (it is the student's decision whether to disclose a disability to their HEP or share information about DSA with their HEP).
- The closure of specialist agencies during the academic year has meant that students have needed to contact Student Loan's Company (SLC) to organise transfers to other agencies. The agencies may offer lower rates of pay, which has impacted deaf students' access to specialist staff, such as note-takers, interpreters, and QToDs in the Specialist Support Professional (SSP) role. At the end of 2025, following the closure of TerpTree, some students were without support at the start of term, as alternative agencies were only offering staff (note takers, interpreters, and specialist support professionals (QToDs/Qualified Communication Support Workers) a lower rate that they were unwilling to accept.
- Reported administrative inefficiencies included having multiple British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters or specialist note-takers in the same lecture to support different students, when one would have sufficed.
- Under the current process, an NMH supplier does not know they have been selected to provide support for a particular student until the student contacts them, which can also delay putting a student's support in place.
- If a supplier cannot put support in place within 14 days of the student contacting them, then they are expected to refer the student back to the SLC to be allocated to another supplier; however, for students who are already in study by the time they have reached this point of their DSA application any delay in support can hamper their ability to access their studies.
- Often, SSPs are not provided with the contact details for the university's Disability Service or the senior tutor of the course, which makes it harder to assist deaf students with classroom, assignment, and examination adjustments. This is especially difficult for remote-working SSPs.

Whilst there is an increase in the number of deaf YP achieving academic grades that allow them to consider higher education options, other deaf YP are experiencing restricted pathway options. There is a lack of opportunities to support some deaf YP to achieve BSL level 3, which equates to UCAS points.

The [2024 BATOD/NDCS Curriculum and assessment review response](#) indicates that some deaf YP

- are being channelled into inappropriate or inaccessible qualification pathways and/or being incorrectly placed, or the school is reluctant to provide alternative pathways.
- are unable to progress to the desired level of study in college, carouseling through a number of different level 1/level 2, in a loop of failure in adult learning, whilst they try to achieve the required English and/or Maths grades, which evidently impacts on self of worth, emotional wellbeing.
- will continue to need access to basic English skills, even when accessing college courses; however, there may be no option for that.

BATOD members feel that entry-level and level 1 courses are more accessible to some deaf YP because they do not require GCSE English. This also enables the YP to develop the essential academic and vocational skills and confidence needed for future employment.

The 2024 statement indicated

"In 2023, the national average Attainment 8 score for deaf children in 2023 was 40.8. This means their average score per subject is just under 4.1. This compares to 46.2 and 4.6, respectively, for all children. 36.1% of deaf children in England achieved at least a grade 5 in both English and Maths in 2023, compared to 45% of all children. Further education colleges continue to be the most common destination for deaf young people at 16."

"Functional skills, Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQs) and Digital Functional Skills Qualifications (DFSQs) in FE are aimed to be relevant for the workplace, real-world, and everyday life. The content and teaching materials need to be age related. With the input from a QToD to ensure correct assessment and agreement of the learner needs, support provision, social needs, and communication preferences, the Digital Functional Skills Qualifications should offer a deaf learner the opportunity to excel and exhibit their knowledge and skills in technology and so obtaining a qualification and building confidence for future progression."

"The threshold of Level 4 English and maths to accessing qualification pathways can cause deaf learners who have BSL as a preferred language or have challenges with accessing English to be misplaced on inappropriate pathways or not having access to the broader curriculum that might be on offer in the college."

Transition to employment

For some deaf YP:

- They may not have had a positive work experience or a work placement during secondary school, college, or university.
- There are limits to apprenticeships and vocational subject choices.
- There may be pressure on the YP themselves to 'train' the workforce or work peers.
- Poor planning could cause the YP to feel 'different' because of adjustments needed in an environment unfamiliar with deaf staff or unaware that the needs of deaf people differ.
- There is a lack of understanding of their needs when they have co-occurring conditions, such as deafness and dyslexia, deafness and autism, or deafness and physical disabilities.
- The transition to employment can be overwhelming for YP when it coincides with the transition to adult services, especially in a new locality.
- Adult audiology services may not be connected to paediatric services and might not be familiar with the assistive listening technology used during secondary education. If it is a different health board, the hearing aid contract may be with a different manufacturer.
- The YP may need time to adjust to the change in sound, experience additional listening and concentration fatigue, and may lack confidence to advocate for a different hearing aid model to be provided.
- The YP using sign language may take time to adjust to regional variations, and interpreter provision may be inconsistent.
- The YP using sign language, an ill-prepared interpreter, with limited knowledge of a specific field of employment or study, can be limiting.
- The YP requiring assistive technology may be provided with unsuitable equipment because purchasing decisions are influenced by budget rather than the specifications needed to meet their needs.
- Challenges are faced when accessing the necessary support through AtW.

The impact on mental health is a key long-term consequence for young people who are NEET for an extended period. There is a shortage of specialist Deaf Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) services, and for those that exist, there is often a long waiting list.

The Government and the DWP should engage directly with a diverse range of YP with lived experience to inform their decision making.

There are some examples of good practice in supporting YP as they transition from school to college, further education, and higher education.

The specialist deaf schools, not only the LA support services but also mainstream secondary settings, should be engaged for examples of good practice.

The DWP could engage with national and local deaf children's charities and the health sector to reach YP who are not in contact with the benefits system.