The Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD) is the Deaf Sector umbrella organisation and represents members in the Third, Public and Private Sectors. Our full members work with and on behalf of Deaf sign language users, Deafblind, Deafened (Acquired Hearing Loss) and Hard of Hearing people in Scotland. Our associate members are individuals who have an interest in deaf issues or are deaf themselves.

**Background**

SCoD welcomes the short inquiry to consider how the attainment levels of school pupils with a hearing and/or a visual loss can be improved.

SCoD acknowledges the value in focusing on pupils who have a hearing and/or visual loss and do not have any other additional learning support needs or disabilities.

Our members support the inquiry and would like to see this further strengthened with the acknowledgement of the need to ensure that deaf children and young people along with their families, carers, supporters and the organisations that work with and support them are more involved in enabling them to realise their full potential to achieve their education qualifications and skills along with their hearing peers.

SCoD realises that this inquiry reflects the progressive approach that the Scottish Government are taking to improving the educational outcomes for all deaf children and young people, with the increasing focus on effectively implementing Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), a child centred, rights based approach to meeting educational needs for all children. We know that it will take time for this to happen.

We use the term deaf, to include children and young people on the full spectrum of deafness: Deaf sign language users, Deafblind, Deafened (Acquired Hearing Loss) and Hard of Hearing. Children and young people in this context have a very wide range of needs that will be specific to that particular and individual child. As result the potential solutions offered in this submission are focused on strategic interventions thinking. We acknowledge the need to plan a
raft of flexible solutions that will be relevant to the widest range of needs presented by children and young people.

**SCoD’s response**

**Current landscape**

Pupils when they leave school have a tariff score attached to them based on their academic attainment. The latest figures have been published (April 2015) for the academic year 2012/13. Pupils recorded as having a hearing loss evidence a score of 289, as compared to their hearing peers of 439.¹ To emphasis this statistic further those who leave school and are recorded as deaf, 10% have no qualifications, as compared to all school leavers where this statistic is 2%.

The impact of socio economic background in addition to being deaf is also relevant to capture in this review and was highlighted in recent research that compared the outcomes of deaf pupils in Scotland against those in Sweden.² (O’Neill, R. et al 2013) What the implications are for these divergent outcomes when taking into socioeconomic contexts can be considered in all the contexts considered below – data management, language and not a disability, the level of specialism and proficiency of teachers.

From these published figures, it is not possible to disaggregate the data to review those Deaf pupils who use British Sign Language (BSL); or who are bilingual in BSL and English; or Sign Language from their country of origin and English, and review any additional impact this may be having on their attainment. The range of needs within those pupils and learners who are identified as deaf are very wide.

**Potential solutions offered by SCoD**

These are offered below and are informed by research, in particular from the Scottish Sensory Centre in 2012³, feedback from different SCoD members at various events over the last eighteen months, meetings with a range of local authorities, education professionals both in government and within different institutions across Scotland.

¹ [http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/04/5650/7](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/04/5650/7)


and speech, language therapists as well as different medical practitioners.

The solutions are offered within the context of a child centred approach as promoted by the developing educational policy and framework of GIRFEC and the wider Scottish Government strategic objectives that aim to improve the life experiences of all who grow up, live and work in Scotland, (Greener, Healthier, Safer and Stronger, Smarter, Wealthier and Fairer). The overarching aspiration is for Scotland to become the best place in the world for a child to grow up, as stated in the consultation for the Children and Young Person’s Bill by the then Minister, Aileen Campbell MSP. With the introduction of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the progressive approach to educational policy, the intention for education to effectively integrate with health and social services to deliver a child centred approach that improves the outcomes and attainment for all children including those who are deaf is clear.

SCoD are committed to being able to work in collaboration with other organisations and the Scottish Government to be able to realise these improvements.

a.) **Data collection, management and application**

There are appear to be no accurate data sets on the numbers of deaf children and young people in Scotland. In part this is due to the data being held in different places and databases depending on the time and place of the child’s deafness being identified.

To improve attainment of pupils in education, the whole journey of the child, cradle to work, apprenticeship or PhD is important to consider. At what point is the child identified, what assessments are carried out by whom as standard, where is that information held and who is it shared with and when? These are all important questions to consider.

The planning of limited resources to be able meet the diversity of needs for any particular child or young person and be able to be flexible as their needs change and develop is an essential tool in enabling a child to realise their potential and support their attainment. Data collection is necessary to enable this to happen.

There are challenges in the identification of people who are deaf and what this means may be very different for different individuals. There
is a need to be able to collect both quantitative data and qualitative data that supports further investigation of the needs of any individual child. This will become more apparent as GIRFEC becomes more effective and more widely known and implemented.

The Scottish Government’s See Hear: A strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland 4 highlights the need for more concise data collection across all age groups, including children and young people, to ensure sustainable services are available for all people with a hearing and/or visual loss.

**Universal Newborn Hearing Screening**

Preschool – data collection is dependent on the data base used by the NHS.

Under the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS) programme, children are picked up in a hearing test that happens as part of health tests in the first six weeks. This is recorded within the NHS data bases at a local level but our understanding is this information has not always shared effectively across the different services, potentially creating missed opportunities for early interventions and support for the children and families.

NDCS Scotland has been involved in two pilot Local Records of Deaf Children projects. These projects have seen positive outcomes with regards to sharing basic information from UNHS with appropriate local agencies in order to plan services effectively. The recommendation from these pilot projects have been a national roll out in order to ensure public services are able to plan services effectively. NDCS Scotland would welcome the opportunity to provide more information on these pilot projects.

**SEEMiS**

Once a child has begun to access the education system there is a data collection system in place – SEEMiS (Strathclyde Educational Establishments Management Information System). SEEMiS Group LLP is the only managed Education Management Information System (MIS) written specifically to address the requirements of Scottish Local Authorities. It is now the standard MIS within Scottish education, and by March 2015, all of the local

authority student population of Scotland will have their data processed and managed within the fully integrated SEEMiS software.

On the face of it this offers a strong opportunity to be able to collect and collate data that will support each local authority being able to plan long term for those children who are deaf and ensure that their needs are being met consistently across Scotland irrespective of where they are.

However having explored the opportunities within the recent Equality and Access for Deaf People Project as to what SEEMiS may offer, we would highlight the following areas that are relevant to explore further as an important part of the development of national strategic solutions for improving the attainment gap:

- Options for inputting data that identify a child as deaf are restricted by the current menu available on the drop down menu. This could be expanded to be more specific.
- Language options – BSL is offered.
- Lack of quality control in data input.
- Currently no consistent collection of data from nurseries. There is no mandatory element for private nurseries to participate in SEEMiS data system.
- Childcare and those registered to take care of under 3’s.
- No space to include specific information that is more qualitative for any individual child.
- Issue of children living in one local authority and attending schools elsewhere outside Scotland. For example, specialist schools in England.

Both SEEMiS and the collection of data within the context of both the See Hear Strategy (SHS), GIRFEC and the UNHS offers an opportunity to develop consistency and a baseline data set that could be used to track improvement on a local authority basis and national basis, if the quality control issues and options are addressed and consistency can be developed.

And in light of the recent research on the impact of socio economic background, a data system that can highlight where there are homes, schools or nurseries in lower socio economic areas could be cross referenced with identifying deaf children and young people. In doing so this would enable support to be targeted and more
intensive interventions offered pro-actively as part perhaps of a GIRFEC review for a child in early years.

b.) Language not Disability

Within the review, the group of learners who are Deaf and who access their education in BSL, highlight the importance of differentiating linguistic access from the concept of disability. This is relevant in light of the additional barriers that these children and young people experience, and within the context of the Scottish Education policy framework of GIRFEC. For these children who are Deaf, it is not a matter of preference or choice but necessity.

In enabling improved attainment for Deaf learners, it is relevant to consider how equality of opportunity and access generally can be developed in relation to their linguistic access. It may be helpful to consider this from the wider perspective where in general, Deaf BSL users are the only group of people in Scotland who have to use disability legislation to access information in their own language so that they can make informed choices, give informed consent or enjoy being active citizens. No other group of people have to do this.

For example, if a learner is Deafened and Spanish is their first language, they can use the Equality Act and the protected characteristic of “race” to access the necessary information and language / communication support to make informed choices and give informed consent and to help them with their education.

For a Deaf learner whose first language is BSL, the only option they have is to ask for reasonable adjustment under the protected characteristic of disability – their deafness – rather than it being recognised by the education system that they have their own language in the same way that people who have a spoken language do. The present British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill if it becomes enacted, will strengthen the position of Deaf children and young people, as it will broaden the understanding that it is about language, not disability for these children and young people.

With a progressive approach to understanding that for some children who are Deaf and who use BSL it is about language and not about disability, this will create a culture change from those designing and planning the solutions to improve attainment for these pupils.
An example of developing inclusion for Deaf learners, who use sign language, with the potential attainment benefits this offers:

In relation to deaf children and their education, a good example can be found in New Zealand. English is their collective language, but in 1987, the New Zealand Government passed the Māori Language Act and then in 2006, the New Zealand Sign Language Act in recognition that these other two languages are as important as English as first languages.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education included New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) in the National Curriculum.

“Te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) are official languages of New Zealand. English, the medium for teaching and learning in most schools, is a de facto official language by virtue of its widespread use. For these reasons, these three languages have special mention in The New Zealand Curriculum.

All three may be studied as first or additional languages. They may also be the medium of instruction across all learning areas…

For many deaf people, NZSL is essential for effective daily communication and interactions. New Zealand needs more people who are fluent users of the language and who have an appreciation of deaf culture. By learning NZSL, hearing students are able to communicate with their deaf peers and participate in the deaf community. Skilled communicators may find career opportunities that involve working with Deaf people. As deaf people come to have a wider circle to converse with, our society becomes more inclusive.

Learning NZSL can be a positive and enriching experience for both deaf and hearing people of any age. By learning NZSL, deaf children and hearing children of deaf parents gain a sense of belonging in the deaf community.”


When NZSL is taught to deaf and hearing pupils in schools, they not only learn the language, but also about Deaf culture, history,
working with interpreters and general deaf awareness too. There is an online resource – [http://nzsl.tki.org.nz/](http://nzsl.tki.org.nz/) – which gives all the information / lessons that are taught in schools.

In 2010, the New Zealand Government held a review of the NZSL Act. One of the questions asked was “How well was the NZSL Act working?” Not all of the feedback received was as positive as hoped, but what did come back was that more hearing people now know about NZSL and Deaf people said that they feel more confident using NZSL and when asking for an interpreter. The review’s recommendations for action were mainly focused on the government giving NZSL the same importance as English/Maori and raising its profile as well as increasing the opportunities for Deaf children and young people to learn to sign. [wwwodi.govt.nz/documents/nzsl/summary-nzsl-review.doc](http://wwwodi.govt.nz/documents/nzsl/summary-nzsl-review.doc)

The above example of embedding sign language into the curriculum is a good one to consider within the context of GIRFEC and creating an inclusive learning environment that promotes the health and well-being of all learners.

**Promoting Bilingualism**

Considering the development of bilingualism within the context of educational establishments is the focus here and it may be helpful to consider this within the current development of the 1 + 2 language policy and the increasing awareness of the cognitive, educational and health benefits of bilingualism. [http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/)

However, as other organisations will highlight a child and young person spends the majority of their time outside of school with their friends and family and language development begins long before a child is attending any educational establishment. The research states that 90% of deaf children are born into hearing families with no previous experience of deafness. The support necessary for family and friends to be able to enable a home environment where a Deaf child or young person has the same or similar access to a rich language learning may be significant. The impact of this on the improved attainment for Deaf learners may be significant. More research is needed to look at this.

This would also be a relevant consideration for children who are hearing but their parents / family are Deaf.
Within the context of GIRFEC and the integration of health, social and education services, it may be hoped that the support available to enable this to happen will become easier to access and at a much earlier stage in the child’s development.

In summary the potential options offered for thinking the “language not disability” are as follows:

- Embedding BSL into the curriculum so that all pupils have the opportunity to learn BSL. This currently does happen in some schools like Dingwall Academy.
- Enabling more teachers to learn BSL and at a higher level for this to be recognised as an additional skills by being rewarded, either in time to study or financial recognition.
- Enabling friends and family to learn BSL without cost and support a more inclusive environment socially out of school, and from the earliest opportunity pre nursery.
- Nurseries to work with staff that are highly trained in BSL. This does happen in some places already, for example Aberdeen City where a nursery teacher has interpreter level BSL skills.
- In schools for the individual child: communication support, use of registered BSL / English Interpreters (qualified) and/or suitably qualified communication support workers (CSWs) working directly with a Deaf child.

For more information on the above, contact the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) – [www.sasli.co.uk](http://www.sasli.co.uk), the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf Scotland (BATOD Scotland) – [www.batod.org.uk](http://www.batod.org.uk) and the Association of Deaf Education Professionals and Trainees Scotland (ADEPT Scotland) – [http://adeptuk.co.uk/adept_Scotland.asp](http://adeptuk.co.uk/adept_Scotland.asp).