The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this call for written evidence by the Committee on the issue of the third sector and the private sector in improving attainment and achievement for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

1. Background

1.1. The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity in Scotland dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. In Scotland, we have a dedicated team based in Glasgow led by Heather Gray, Director. The team has a strong focus on addressing the attainment gap that exists for deaf learners. This includes the work we do with our Young Campaigners who are a group of deaf young people aged 14-20 years old. They call for better services and campaign on issues affecting deaf children in Scotland.

1.2. Please refer to our submission dated 27 February for further background information about NDCS.

2. Context

2.1. Scottish Government data shows that there is a significant attainment gap for hearing impaired school leavers, and the attainment of this group is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland.

2.2. In the 2012/14 year, the average tariff score of deaf school leavers was 289, while the average score for leavers with no additional support needs was 439. In the same year, almost 10% of deaf school leavers left with no school qualifications.

2.3. Deaf school leavers face a significant attainment gap in terms of their post school destinations and employability. According to Scottish Government data, 19% of deaf school leavers found employment upon leaving school last year compared with 25.5% of those leavers with no additional support needs. UK wide employment figures also suggest that only 58% of deaf adults are employed compared with 80% of the hearing adult population. As such, NDCS has worked in schools in ways to help raise employability of deaf young people.

2.4. The role of third sector organisations in understanding and meeting the unique needs of groups of pupils with additional support needs such as those who are
deaf can be valuable and their input can help make progress towards closing gaps in attainment and achievement.

3. The scale of the third and private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities; whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, whether their methods could be more embedded in the curriculum;

3.1. The third sector may support schools and education settings to improve attainment and achievement by delivering a number of projects, services and programmes. The third sector can be particularly valuable with regards to delivering these kinds of projects in relation to learners with additional support needs, or where specialist knowledge or skills are required to meet their needs.

3.2. The National Deaf Children’s Society has worked closely with schools in a number of areas on projects that contribute in different ways to improving attainment and achievement for deaf learners. NDCS has worked with schools to deliver work experience opportunities for deaf young people at organisations such as the Glasgow Science Centre and BBC Scotland. This has involved NDCS staff supporting and preparing young people to attend, supporting travel and offering organisations deaf awareness training so they gain basic information and understand of the needs of young people on placement prior to their arrival. The input of the third sector here increases opportunities for deaf young people that may not have been possible otherwise and enhances their employability.

3.3. NDCS has also worked with schools to support post-school transitional planning. In partnership with Skills Development Scotland and Donaldson’s School NDCS developed the Template for Success Resource which is a toolkit for professionals across sectors who are supporting deaf young people at the stage of their post school transition. Professionals who have used this document have given positive feedback about its value, however embedding the use of this document consistently across schools is challenging and as a third sector organisation it is difficult to ensure awareness of the document is raised. Promoting this resource through formal channels such as Head Teachers Forums or staff in-service days can be challenging. This is particularly the case given the raft of resources and the competing priorities that teachers and schools are regularly faced with.

NDCS has sought a number of ways of engaging with schools such as building relationships with teachers and professionals and packaging NDCS offers of support through our Statement of Intent approach as previously outlined in our evidence response dated 27.2.15. NDCS has sought endorsement of the Statement of Intent at the highest level within local authorities in order to raise awareness of the needs of deaf school leavers and embed good practice. The impact of this endorsement can be very positive and there is scope to improve how consistently this is achieved across Scotland.

3.4. Peer mentoring is an area where third sector organisations and schools could work more closely together to support young people and help them achieve their
full potential. In terms of engaging with young people with additional support needs such as deafness, third sector organisations often possess the skills and expertise to take on peer mentoring roles, as well as facilitating opportunities for young deaf people to come together from across local authorities. This can offer young people a rare opportunity to develop a deaf peer group, which is particularly valuable given that many experience a level of social isolation within their own schools where they may be the only deaf young person. However, again, it can be challenging to develop and formalise opportunities to deliver peer mentoring opportunities. Where NDCS have been able to do so, for example through staff involvement in the MCR Pathways Programme for mentoring looked after young people, there are benefits for all involved including the schools and young people. There is scope to consider how to roll out programmes such as this one to other groups of disadvantaged young people.

3.5. The role of the third sector is valuable in offering education practitioners specialist training and information. NDCS offers teachers and practitioners a range of resources and training opportunities to help better support deaf learners. These include a range of quality standards in delivering deaf education in various education settings, an acoustics toolkit, a guide to assessments, phonics guidance, information about bullying as well as deaf awareness resources among others. NDCS also runs education workshops for education professionals on specialist topics such as morphology. Given their specialist nature these kinds of training opportunities and resources may not be available to education practitioners without the input of the third sector.

3.6. Another useful example of specialist training opportunities offered through the third sector is the NDCS Healthy Minds training programme. This programme was established in 2008 and aims to encourage young deaf people to use positive strategies for managing their deafness and developing their self-esteem and confidence. Since the resource was developed, over 3000 professionals and teachers have been trained. This is an excellent resource which when delivered to young people can enhance their emotional health and wellbeing. Those schools and teachers working with deaf young people have found this to be a useful training programme. However there is still much scope to embed the programme consistently into schools where there are deaf learners to ensure an equity of access of opportunity for deaf young people across Scotland. While the Healthy Minds programme has reached a large number of young people, there have been barriers in embedding the programme consistently across Scotland. In particular, it is difficult to include new material into an already full curriculum and where activities are extra-curricular, it is challenging to ensure young people are available and supported to engage.

3.7. The third sector can also provide impartial information and advice to schools, parents and young people which can promote better attainment and achievement. Through the NDCS support and advice services our support officers work regularly with families and young people to ensure they are informed and equipped to make the best decisions about their education. They can also work with education practitioners to consult of deaf awareness and distribute specialist education resources and guidance.
4. Whether the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children's attainment and achievement is being realised;

4.1. As outlined above, there is much potential within the third sector to support the work of schools particularly in meeting the needs of groups of learners with additional support needs. There is a need to improve how schools work with third sector organisations in order to fully benefit from the services and programmes they have to offer young people and staff. In relation to recommendations within the Wood Report, NDCS recommends that schools are not only encouraged to develop ongoing partnership with private sector organisations an increased move towards more joined up working and partnership between schools and employers, it is logical to include third sector organisations within this recommendation from the Wood Report. This should be seen as part of a wider culture shift among schools where they are working in closer partnership across all sectors, drawing in the benefits these sectors can offer pupils in improving attainment and achievement.

4.2. Currently the structures by which third sector organisations can connect into local authorities are variable and could be strengthened. For example, Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) are engagement platforms but the focus of their membership can often be on local organisations, as opposed to national organisations that deliver services locally. The extent to which education authorities engage is TSIs is also a variable picture across Scotland therefore they are not always the ideal engagement mechanism for the third sector to work consistently with schools and education services.

Children’s Hearing Services Working Groups are multi-sector groups which exist in every local authority to promote the best possible outcomes for deaf children. While these groups are recognised and endorsed by the Scottish Government they are inconsistent in their structures and membership across Scotland which makes them a variable planning and engagement tool for the third sector. Education Scotland’s Glow TV may offer opportunities in the future for the third sector to engage directly with schools however currently the understanding and opportunities to engage in this system are inconsistent. In order to maximise the partnership working and benefits the third sector can offer education services, it is critical that planning and engagement structures are strengthened so that clear pathways are understood and utilised by all partners.

4.3. The third sector can also play a valuable consultancy role whereby organisations can act independently and draw together best practice from across Scotland. NDCS is currently working in partnership with West Lothian Council through the re-design of its hearing impairment service. NDCS is able to contribute to this process by facilitating independent review of the service and collating best practice in the delivery of hearing impairment services from across Scotland to inform the Council’s decisions. The overall objective of this work is to ensure service delivery is meeting the best possible outcomes for deaf children and young people. This independent consultancy role of the third sector is one that could be further explored and embedded by education services in a way that will improve the attainment and achievement of pupils.
5. How successful schools have been in reporting on pupils’ wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver.

5.1. Records of pupils’ wider achievements are not consistently developed and monitored locally and nationally. The achievement of learners focus on exam results and qualification attainment – this is reflected at both national and local level. The only nationally comparative school attainment or achievement data that is routinely published is from S4 to S6. At any other level across school age children there are no comparative indicators consistently used across all local authorities or on a national level to monitor levels of attainment or progress being made on closing attainment gaps. This issue should be addressed on a national level as the data that is currently missing is critical to inform the national approach of Scottish Government in closing the attainment gap across all ages of learners. It will also be critical information for forthcoming Attainment Advisors in order to understand the progress being achieved in their local area in comparison to the national picture.

6. Whether such achievements are valued by parents, employers and learning providers as much as formal qualifications;

No comments

7. Given the strong policy focus on the early years, whether the third and private sectors have been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages.

The strong policy focus in early years and early intervention can impact on the delivery of services in terms of education support being focused in those years. This is positive given the vital importance of support in the early years in promoting positive outcomes in a child’s life. In terms of support for deaf learners, NDCS has recognised that in some incidences hearing impairment services have to make difficult decisions with regards to allocating support within the context of limited budgets. In the context of a strong policy focus in the early years, support for deaf children and young people may be increasingly allocated in the early years, with less focus on for example post school transitions – which is another critical stage in the learner’s journey.

As outlined in the previous evidence submission dated 27.2.15, NDCS offers the Statement of Intent approach to local authorities to support better post school transitions for deaf young people. The Statement of Intent involves specific offers of NDCS support around three strands: promoting positive emotional health and wellbeing, improving post school transitional planning and facilitating effective partnership working. Not all schools and local authorities may have capacity and resource to work with NDCS to embed the Statement of Intent approach due to the allocation of resources at other stages in pupils’ progress through school. However, given the importance of post school transitions, and the current gap that exists for deaf learners in achieving positive post school destinations, this is clearly an vital area that requires further attention and increased partnership between education services and the third and private sectors.

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