

**National Deaf Children’s Society Written Evidence  
Education and Culture Committee Call for Evidence  
Student Support**



September 2015

**1. Background**

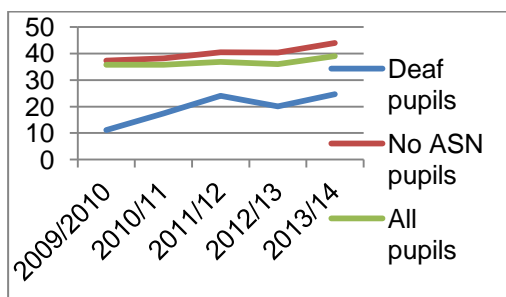
- 1.1. The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) is the leading charity in Scotland dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. In Scotland, we have a dedicated team based in Glasgow and led by Heather Gray, Director.
- 1.2. NDCS provides a dedicated Family Support Service across the country. Our early year’s project, Your Child, Your Choices, delivers family sign language courses across specific geographical locations. NDCS also commissions research to inform the sector and engages in policy and campaigning activity to help make deaf children and their families a political priority.
- 1.3. Our response is primarily in relation to the student support available to disabled students, including those who are deaf, in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE).

Please note that NDCS uses the term “deaf” to mean all types and levels of deafness

**2. Access to HE and FE for deaf school leavers**

- 2.1. *Deaf school leavers access to Higher Education as initial destination (Scottish Government data)*

	Deaf pupils	No ASN pupils	All pupils
<b>2009/2010</b>	11.1	37.3	35.7
<b>2010/11</b>	17.4	38.2	35.8
<b>2011/12</b>	24	40.4	36.8
<b>2012/13</b>	20.1	40.3	36
<b>2013/14</b>	24.7	43.9	39



**Percentage point change between initial and follow up destinations in 2013/14:**

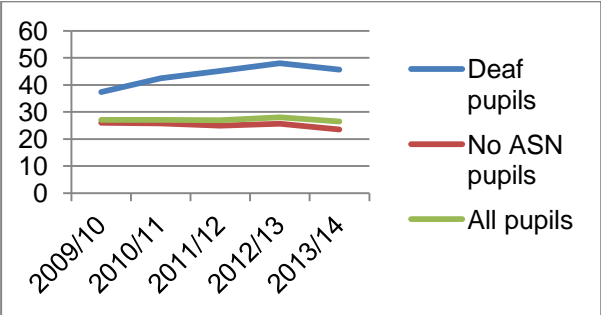
	<b>Deaf pupils</b>	<b>No ASN pupils</b>	<b>All pupils</b>
<b>HE</b>	0.7	-0.8	-0.3

It is positive that access to HE has improved for deaf school leavers in line with improved access for all pupils and pupils with no ASN. It is also positive that deaf leavers have illustrated sustained positive destinations into HE, with an increase of 0.7% between initial and follow up destinations.

However, as the graph shows there continues to be a significant gap in access for deaf school leavers compared with their hearing peers. This gap continues to be of concern.

*2.2. Deaf school leavers access to Further Education as initial destination (Scottish Government data)*

	<b>Deaf pupils</b>	<b>No ASN pupils</b>	<b>All pupils</b>
<b>2009/10</b>	37.4	26	27.1
<b>2010/11</b>	42.4	25.8	27.1
<b>2011/12</b>	45.2	24.9	27
<b>2012/13</b>	48	25.7	28
<b>2013/14</b>	45.7	23.5	26.5



**Percentage Point change between initial and follow up destination in 2013/14:**

	<b>Deaf pupils</b>	<b>No ASN pupils</b>	<b>All pupils</b>
<b>FE</b>	-3.7	-1.7	-2.1

Access to college has decreased for deaf school leavers as it has for all pupils and those with no ASN. As this is the preferred post-school destination by the majority of deaf school leavers this reduction in access is of concern. Deaf school leavers continue to be over-represented at college and under-represented at university.

The data illustrates a 3.7% drop off in numbers of deaf young people in FE between initial destination and follow up contact. This is higher than the drop off for all pupils and pupils with no ASN and is of concern.

There continues to be a lack of data available about the experiences of deaf young people at college, how they are supported, and the longer term outcomes they achieve. This initial snapshot illustrating a lack of retention paints a worrying picture.

### **3. Support for deaf students**

#### *3.1. Disabled Students Allowance:*

Deaf students in higher education (HE) are entitled to Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), a non-means tested allowance which can be used to meet extra costs arising from a disability. DSA can be used to pay for specialist equipment and support workers (such as interpreters, notetakers and readers and proofreaders). The grant depends on the assessed needs of each individual student and is paid directly to students by the Scottish Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) to assist with the additional costs of studying for a degree. While there are some challenges with the current application processes, overall it is effective and DSA money is linked to specific disabled students. This means that DSA is effectively ring fenced as it only arrives alongside a student with assessed needs.

Research from the University of Edinburgh illustrates<sup>1</sup> a clear benefit to students who received DSA. Students in the study reported being generally satisfied with the support they received which overall they described as high. The study showed that disabled students who did not have the DSA had higher non-continuation rates than disabled students in receipt of DSA and their non-disabled peers.<sup>1</sup> The evidence obtained from the research suggests that DSA acts as a protective factor against the drop-out of deaf learners in higher education.

NDCS believes DSA has a positive influence in narrowing the attainment gap that exists for deaf learners. The latest Scottish Government attainment follow up data for HE shows that deaf school leavers have illustrated sustained positive destinations into HE, with an increase of 0.7% between initial and follow up destinations.

#### *Challenges*

The DSA application and administration process does convey some challenges. An NUS/LEAD survey in 2013 highlighted issues around lengthy application timescales, challenging logistics such as sending away receipts, and the need for improved information about the DSA. NDCS is particularly concerned around the consistency of support offered by Disability Offices at different institutions. For example, the aforementioned study showed that:-

- some students were contacted by Disability Advisors as soon as they were made an offer whilst others had their first meetings just before lectures started;
- students from some universities were given communication support and equipment before they received the DSA, while others had to wait for the DSA funding to come in before they could have notetakers or laptops;

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<sup>1</sup> University of Edinburgh, October 2013, *Post-school transitions of people who are deaf and hard of hearing*

- there was also variation in the continuity of support. Some participants reported that they had catch-up meetings with the Disability Office every year. Others were expected to take responsibility for organising their support after the first year. It is interesting to note here that students in the second category stopped seeking note-taking support after their first year.

### 3.2. *Extended learning support*

NDCS understands that FE Colleges in Scotland are funded through the Scottish Funding Council to meet the additional support needs of their learners. The Extended Learning Support funds amount to £50 million across all colleges. This fund supports colleges to provide additional support and services for learners on FE courses. As such unlike the DSA approach, individuals in FE do not receive these funds directly. Rather, the college is expected to use this funding to put appropriate support in place.

NDCS understands that this funding mechanism is currently under review and we are keen to learn more about the objectives of this review. Our understanding is also that until the review is complete the funds received by a college is based on historical need at that college. There is an implication for colleges that budgets could be very tight for a college if, for example, a student arrived who required a British Sign Language interpreter which is very expensive support to put in place.

It can be challenging for colleges to meet the needs of students with low incidence needs like deafness. There are some colleges that build a strong reputation for supporting deaf students however, in terms of equality of selecting courses and geography, a student should get the support they need at any college. The regionalisation of colleges also presents opportunities in Scotland to pool resources in order to put in place the specialist support deaf students may require.

#### *Challenges*

There continues to be a lack of data available about the experiences on deaf young people at college, how they are supported, and the longer term outcomes they achieve. However the University of Edinburgh research suggests variation in the quality of support offered by colleges. Among those taking part in the research, deaf students in FE were less satisfied with the support they receive than those in HE. Problems cited by students that they had experienced included lack of consistency of support, lack of specialist equipment, no extra allowances for printing credits and the need to rely heavily on peers for informal support. This may be a consequence of the different levels of funding for higher and further education<sup>ii</sup>.

Further research from the University of Manchester on the experiences of deaf students in FE found that:

- There was not an equality of opportunity for deaf young people across the different FE provisions;
- Uptake of learning support by deaf young people can be affected by its availability rather than by best fit to the learner's needs;
- There were no minimum standards or best practice guidelines against which FE environments could benchmark their provision;
- While there was a drive towards ensuring Communication Support Workers had at least British Sign Language Level 3 (approx a Higher), some colleges had Communication Support Workers with Level 1 or 2.

- Although the vast majority of deaf young people completed their FE course, nearly one quarter did not achieve any qualification at any level;
- The drop out rate for deaf students in FE was twice that of the general population of students in FE<sup>iii</sup>.

While these findings relate to experiences in England, NDCS believes the picture for deaf college students would be similar in Scotland.

This is further exemplified in the latest Scottish Government attainment follow up data for 2013/14. This illustrates a 3.7% drop off in numbers of deaf young people in FE in the six month period between initial destination being recorded and follow up contact being made. This is higher than the drop off for all pupils and pupils with no ASN. This latest data illustrating a lack of retention is concerning.

NDCS would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information on these research projects as required.

**For further information**  
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<sup>i</sup> University of Edinburgh (2013) *Post school transitions and destination of people who are deaf and hard of hearing*

<sup>ii</sup> University of Edinburgh (2013) *Post-school transitions of people who are deaf and hard of hearing*

<sup>iii</sup> University of Manchester (2015) *Identifying effective practice in the provision and education support services for 16 – 19 year old deaf young people in Further Education in England*