



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The Ear Foundation

Hearing and Communicating in a Technological Era



APPG on Deafness: Briefing Paper for parliamentarians: 22 March 2011 The success of neo-natal hearing screening and the potential for adult hearing screening

The Ear Foundation: having introduced cochlear implants for children to the UK, we now provide services to ensure that all hearing technologies can be used to maximum benefit at home, school and work. We provide Family and User Support and Information; a Continuing Education Programme; Advice services on using the technologies and a User and Family focussed Research Programme providing evidence for policy and practice.

There have been dramatic developments in hearing technologies over the last twenty years – particularly the advent of digital hearing aids and cochlear implants, providing access to spoken language for even the totally deaf. Newborn hearing screening has ensured early access of deaf babies and their families to the services they need, and particularly to these new hearing technologies.

- Since April 2006: over 5,000 babies have been diagnosed with deafness – for most this has been a hugely positive development, enabling them to access support services early. For families it gives the opportunity to learn communication skills, and to benefit from early fitting of aids and cochlear implants:
 - *“At the time (of diagnosis) it’s very hard but the opportunities it opens up to be proactive and learn with her quicker are worth the heartache.”*
- But..... for some it’s not straight-forward: it’s only as good as the services which follow, including health, education and social care:
 - *“The test is brilliant – but it’s just the start – you don’t know what you don’t know...”*
- For those with a progressive hearing loss or complex needs, their hearing loss may be missed by newborn screening and it may be assumed that all is well.....leading to later, rather than earlier, access to services:
 - *“At 8-10 months I began to think “Are you sure she can hear? “but I was falsely reassured because the screen (result) was normal.”*
 - *“the hospital never told us about the process, about the cochlear implant centre. They brushed us off said wait until she is old enough.” (The Ear Foundation research: publication in preparation)*

In spite of the successful introduction of newborn hearing screening, much needs to be done:

- Continued hearing surveillance following screening, particularly for those with needs in addition to deafness to ensure this vulnerable group, most in need of services, are not missed or have delayed access to services and technology they need
- Increased emphasis on joined up services, including health, education and social care; increasingly vulnerable with the current funding cuts

**See our services and research forum at www.earfoundation.org.uk
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Members of Cochlear Implant European and UK User Groups; incorporating BUSK (Bone Anchored Hearing Aid Users)