

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness Meeting | 9th December 2020 | Minutes

Meeting held via Zoom (details circulated via Whips papers in advance)

Present

- Lilian Greenwood MP (Chair)
- Rosie Cooper MP
- Ian Mearns MP
- Lawrence Stewart, Office of Marion Fellows MP
- Holm Stine, Office of Liz Twist MP

Apologies

- Debbie Abrahams MP
- Peter Aldous MP

In attendance

- Martin McLean, National Deaf Children's Society
- Robert (Rob) Geaney, RNID
- Lindsey Valkenborgs, National Deaf Children's Society
- David Buxton, UKCoD Special Interest Group BSL Act
- Francesca (Franki) Oliver, RNID
- Beccy Forrow, National Deaf Children's Society
- Simon Pearse, UK Council on Deafness
- Ralph Natress, UK Council on Deafness
- Jill Jones, UK Council on Deafness
- Linda Richards, British Deaf Association
- Essie Mac Eyeson, RNID (Minutes)

1. The impact of Covid-19 on deaf students

Lindsey Valkenborgs, Campaigns Officer at the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) gave an overview of key findings of 2 recent surveys conducted by NDCS. These surveys sought to identify the experiences of deaf children and young people in education amid Covid-19. The surveys received 1,000 respondents across both and found that:

Educational support

- Specialist support for deaf children has reduced

- One-to-one support in classrooms has also decreased.
- 51% of parents stated that their child had less access to teachers of the deaf. There was also general concerns about children having less or no additional support
- Children being unable to leave their support bubble and teachers also being unable to move between support bubbles.
- 1/3 of parents stating that their child was unable to see to receive the same support that they received prior to Covid-19.

Face coverings

The surveys also revealed concerns over face coverings. It found that:

- 39% teachers still wear face coverings some or all of the time.
- For post -16, 61% of young people were taught by teachers wearing face coverings some or all of the time.
- 69% of parents said that this had a negative impact on their child's learning.
- Concerns were also raised over the wearing of face coverings in communal areas and the impact that this could have on social interactions.

Accessibility of online learning

Lindsey highlighted the difficulties that can arise when using online resources. It was stated that 63% of deaf young people found it very difficult or difficult to follow along with online learning.

Deaf children not in school

Lindsey stated there is a group of deaf children and young people who have been unable to return to school because they themselves are at risk, or someone in their household is.

It was suggested that 7% of deaf children have not returned to school or college. It was noted that no being in school, coupled with no or less additional support could impact deaf young people and children's attainment.

Recommendations - Lindsey asked if MPs could:

- Share deaf awareness in educational settings guidance produced by the NDCS.
- Write a letter to the Minister for Education on the need for sufficient and targeted catch-up support and tuition for deaf young people. This should

include appropriate input from Teachers of the Deaf. NDCS stated that a template letter can be provided.

- Write to the Minister for Education on anticipated guidance on the use of face coverings in educational settings. NDCS stated that a template letter can be provided.
- Table parliamentary questions on the issues highlighted.

Lilian Greenwood MP and Rosie Cooper MP both agreed to write to the Minister of Education on the issues raised and Rosie Cooper MP also stated that she would consider tabling draft parliamentary questions. Holm Stine indicated that Liz Twist MP would also be interested to see any letter sent out from the APPG.

Action - Lindsey to follow-up with Lilian Greenwood MP, Rosie Cooper MP and Liz Twist MP.

2. The impact of Covid-19 on people who are deaf and those with hearing loss in employment

Martin McLean, Post -14 Policy Adviser at the National Deaf Children's Society discussed the Government's *'A Plan for Jobs'* noting that young people are more likely to fall into unemployment. He also noted the long-term consequences that this could have on a young person's mental health and ability to earn.

Martin also provided an overview of the Government's *Kickstart scheme*, recognising that according to research, disabled people are at greater risk in an economic downturn. He notes that the NDCS have been working with Leonard Cheshire and other organisations to make the following calls to the Department for Work and Pensions:

- The inclusion of an equality impact assessment of *Kickstart*.
- Extending *Kickstart* to young people who had Education Health and Care Plans or claim Employment Support Allowance.
- Doubling the number of Disability Employment Advisors
- Supported interventions that offer specialist training to young people and promote the scheme to employers.

Martin also noted that unless you have specific interventions in place for disabled people, you can have a lower take-up amongst disabled people. He referenced the Maynard Taskforce in 2017 which provided

recommendations on the accessibility of apprenticeships. He noted that this support is needed given that data published by the Office for National Statistics in September 2020 revealed an increase in employment among disabled young people from 16% to 23.4%.

Recommendation - Martin asked if MPs could:

- Write a letter to the Minister of State for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson MP on the issues raised.
- Table parliamentary questions on the equality impact assessment.

Action – Martin to draft letter and parliamentary questions for Ian Mearns MP and/or Lilian Greenwood MP to send.

Rob Geaney, Head of Campaigns and Public Affairs, RNID began by highlighting that Action on Hearing Loss has changed its name back to RNID. He highlighted the fact that disabled people are less likely to be in employment and went on to note key finding from RNID's *Working for Change* campaign which found that:

- 35% of business leaders questioned said that they were not confident employing someone with hearing loss before the pandemic.
- Over two-fifths (42%) of GB business leaders say they lack confidence when it comes to knowing how to communicate with a person with hearing loss in their organisation.

Rob noted that these challenges existed before the pandemic, but that Covid-19 has only exacerbated the problem. He stated that for deaf employees and employees with hearing loss that were still required to go in to work – the use of face coverings; Perspex screens and sitting back-to-back created new barriers.

Rob noted that anecdotal evidence from RNID's information line showed how some individuals in the retail sector with hearing loss were more likely to be furloughed, perhaps because the employer wasn't sure how to accommodate needs. He stated that the Government can help employers by creating an Employers' Disability Information Hub as recommended by RNID in the Department for Work and Pension and Department of Health's Health is Everyone's Business' consultation. Rob notes that since the consultation, the Equalities Hub, which sits in the Cabinet Office has been

created and so not sure if this is what is causing the delay with the consultation.

Ian Mearns MP suggested that drafting an early day motion and delivering a campaign around these issues could be the way forward. Lilian Greenwood MP asked for a suite of materials that MPs could use, noting that not all MP sign early day motions.

Action - Rob to send Lilian Greenwood MP and Ian Mearns MP a range of parliamentary questions to table.

3. Wax removal services within the NHS

Franki Oliver, Audiology Specialist, RNID began her presentation by explaining what wax is and what can happen if it is left untreated. She noted that RNID have recently come across a lack of NHS wax removal services. Franki stated that electronic irrigation is suitable for primary care use, but many are being advised to seek ear wax removal services from private providers. For those that cannot afford to do so, they risk removing the wax themselves and potentially damaging the ear drum.

Franki noted that in response to a question on this issue from Andrew Rosindell MP, Health Minister, Ed Argar MP stated that individuals could be referred on to audiology, if they are struggling with their hearing (because of wax). Franki stated that at a time where many audiology services are unable to run at normal capacity due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is even more essential that these appointments are not wasted.

She also highlighted that RNID will be gather evidence from its communities and other stakeholders to see if this is a local problem or if it is more widespread.

Ian Mearns MP stated that he would be willing to table parliamentary questions to see if we can get data showing whether this is a localised problem or a countywide issue.

Lilian Greenwood MP asked if RNID would welcome support in publicising this information via social media channels.

Action - Essie to provide the link to RNID's wax webpage for members when available, enabling them to share campaign via social media.

Action – Essie to draft Ian Mearns MP parliamentary question on the issue.

4. A British Sign Language (BSL) Bill

David Buxton, Chief Executive of Action on Disability and Chair of the British Sign Language Special Interest Group, UK Council on Deafness provided an update on the possibilities of a British Sign Language Bill. He clarified that any potential British Sign Language Bill would apply to the whole of the UK not just England, noting that the BSL Act in Scotland is not a Human Rights Act and that is why this Bill is being proposed.

David talked through the specifics of the Bill - including, what it would introduce such as a new BSL Council similar to what occurs in Scotland.

He also highlighted new developments in Northern Ireland – noting the Northern Ireland Assembly’s information and research paper on BSL and ISL legislation.

He states that we plan to mobilise local BSL supporters to meet with backbench MPs to ask them to ballot and have this as a Private Members Bill. He notes that members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness could also support this Bill.

Recommendations – David asked if MPs could:

- Offer to take up a BSL Bill if their name is in the top 5 drawn out of the PMB ballot.
- Put their name down for a Presentation Bill or Ten Minute Rule Bill on these issues.

Ian Mearns MP stated that it is some way away to be considering a Private Member’s Bill, but would be happy put his name down for a Presentation or Ten-Minute Rule Bill.

Action – David to follow up with Ian Mearns MP.

Ian Mearns MP also asked for an update on BSL as a GCSE.

BSL GCSE Update

Becky Forrow, NDCS suggested that the last she had heard the Department for Education had put experts in place to develop a curriculum.

Ian Mearns MP stated that he is on the Education Select Committee and would be happy to chase this with the Department via a letter.

Action – Becky Forrow to follow-up with Ian Mearns MP.

Access to GP appointments

Discussion was also had on the accessibility of GP appointments and the lack of face-to-face appointments. Lilian Greenwood MP agreed that this could be another agenda item in the New Year and indicated that she would be happy to write to the Department of Health and Social Care about the challenges experienced by deaf people and those with hearing loss when accessing appointments.

Action – Rob to send RNID briefing on this issue to Lilian Greenwood MP.

Action – Essie to include the accessibility of GP appointments in future agenda items.

5. Any other business

No matters were raised.