

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i gymorth iechydd meddwl mewn addysg uwch](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Mental Health support in Higher Education](#)

**MHHE 6**

**Ymateb gan: Y Gymdeithas Genedlaethol i Blant Byddar Cymru**

**Response from: National Deaf Children's Society Cymru**

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**Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.**

**National Deaf Children's Society Cymru response to Mental Health support in Higher Education inquiry**

## **About Us**

The National Deaf Children's Society seeks to create a world without barriers for deaf children, young people and their families. Our work covers deaf children and young people aged 0-25.

In referring to deafness, we include all levels of hearing loss from mild through to profound, unilateral, bilateral and temporary.

## **Deafness and Emotional Wellbeing**

Deafness itself does not increase the risk of mental health difficulties, but rather the impact of being deaf in a hearing-orientated world and the challenges deaf young people face can increase the incidence. Without appropriate support, deaf young people can be vulnerable to isolation, abuse, bullying, poor self-esteem and lower levels of achievement; all factors that can contribute to problems with anxiety and emotional wellbeing.

UK government [research](#) suggests that the mental health incidence rate is likely to be higher for deaf young people than it is for their hearing peers. Around 40% of deaf people will experience a mental health problem; double that of the general

population.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this, 60% of deaf young people surveyed told us that their experiences of Covid, lockdowns and online learning worsened their mental health.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that deaf learners at university are particularly vulnerable to negative impacts on their mental health.

## **Mental Health at University**

At university, the majority of deaf students surveyed found the pandemic worsened their mental health, left them feeling lonelier and that online lectures were inaccessible in many cases.<sup>3</sup>

### **What we would like to see from the Welsh Government:**

1. We would like to see the Welsh Government reinstate designated leads/champions on deafness and mental health in each of the health boards across Wales. Each health board in Wales used to have an identified professional lead to highlight the specific needs of deaf young people and assist with access to specialist support. It is our understanding that this has fallen by the wayside.
2. We would like to see the Welsh Government ensure there are clear pathways in place for deaf young people in Wales to access specialist deaf CAMHS and transition to adult deaf mental health support, where appropriate.

### **What we would like to see from Higher Education providers:**

1. We would also like to see that mental health support services in universities across Wales are encouraged to undertake deaf awareness training. For example, deaf awareness [training modules](#) can be found on the National Deaf Children's Society website.
2. We would like to see that higher education providers such as universities are reminded of the need to carefully consult with deaf individuals whenever considering moving to remote service delivery. Where services are remote, they must meet individual access needs. For example, over 40% of our university

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<sup>1</sup> Terry, J., Redfern, P., Bond, J., Fowler-Powe, M., Booth, C. (2021). *Deaf People Wales: Hidden Inequality*. All Wales Deaf Mental Health & Well-Being Group. June 2021.

<sup>2</sup> National Deaf Children's Society. (2020). *Are You Okay survey*.

<sup>3</sup> National Deaf Children's Society. (2021). *Impact of pandemic on deaf higher education students*.

respondents said they did not find online lectures accessible due to the lack of captions and communication support.<sup>4</sup>

3. We would like to see that universities are encouraged to ensure emotional wellbeing support is accessible for deaf people. Staff should confirm with the deaf learner on their preferred method of communication. This could include options such as: face-to-face appointments, the use of a qualified and registered British Sign Language interpreter, the use of captions or lip reading. Each deaf individual will have their own preference.
4. We would like to see that in all general initiatives to improve emotional wellbeing, the access needs of deaf people are emphasised and considered.
5. We would like to see that the implementation of the Tertiary Education Act and the Learner Engagement Code sees universities engage with deaf students in an accessible format. Deaf students should be asked about their preferred communication format for engagement. Disabled students are not one homogenous group with the same needs. For example, some disabled students may find lecture capture technology to be very useful. However, others, including many deaf students, may face barriers with this technology due to issues around lip reading on a low-resolution screen and audio quality. Seeking a wide range of views is vital.

### **More information**

If you would like to discuss this with us further, then please do not hesitate to contact us at [campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk) for further information. Many thanks for taking the time to read our response. We have attached our briefing to universities for additional information.

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<sup>4</sup> National Deaf Children's Society. (2021). *Impact of pandemic on deaf higher education students*.