

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Cefnogi pobl sydd â chyflyrau cronig](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [supporting people with chronic conditions](#).

CC8: Ymateb gan: | Response from: Auditory Verbal UK



Written submission to the Welsh Health and Social Care Committee from charity Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK)

Introduction

Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK) is pleased to provide evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee as part of the inquiry into supporting people with chronic conditions, also known as 'long term conditions' or 'longstanding illnesses'.

The evidence below focusses on deaf babies and children, and why early and effective support is needed to enable them to have the same opportunities in life as their hearing peers.

The current situation for deaf children in Wales

All children, including children with long term conditions or disabilities, such as hearing loss, have the right to develop language and communication so that they can achieve their potential in life. For children who are born deaf, especially into hearing families with no experience of hearing loss, skilled and sensitive early support is vital if they are to develop the language and communication skills they need to be ready to start school alongside their hearing peers.

There are at least 2,329 deaf children in Wales¹. They are currently falling behind their hearing peers, facing the prospect of lower academic achievement and employment prospects, and are at higher risk of social exclusion, bullying and poor mental health.

Specifically for educational outcomes, analysis of Welsh Government figures by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) in 2019 revealed concerning attainment gaps across Key Stages²:

- Deaf learners in Key Stage 4 were 10.7% less likely to achieve A*-C grades in the core subjects of English/Welsh language and Maths in comparison to their hearing peers.
- The attainment gap at Key Stage 3 has been widening over the past few years, with the relative gap between deaf children and their peers currently standing at 10.3%.
- There is a 7.3% attainment gap between deaf children and their peers at Key Stage 2.
- There is a huge 20.8% attainment gap between deaf children and their peers at the Foundation Phase and the percentage of deaf children attaining a Foundation Phase Indicator is at its lowest since records started in 2012.

Deaf babies and children in Wales face a lifetime of disadvantage without access to early and effective support.

Early and effective support is vital

But it doesn't have to be this way. When children and families have access to effective, early support, deaf children can get an equal start at school and opportunities are transformed.

Early and effective support should be available for all deaf children whether their families choose to communicate with spoken language, sign language or both.

Auditory Verbal therapy

Most deaf babies and children have the potential to learn to talk as well as a hearing child. But many people are unaware that deaf children can learn to talk just as well as a child with typical hearing; only

¹ Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRDE) (2022), 2022 Report for Wales. Retrieved from <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/8416/cride-2022-wales-report-final-english.pdf> (Accessed 15 September 2023)

² National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) (2019), National Deaf Children Society Cymru note on Welsh Government figures on educational attainment data in 2019 (Wales). Retrieved from <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/media/6112/updated-attainment-data-2019-published-08-20.pdf> (Accessed 15 September 2023)

41% of adults in Wales believe it is possible for a child born profoundly deaf today to learn to speak as well as a child without hearing loss according to a 2023 YouGov poll.

For deaf children, whose parents or caregivers want them to learn to listen and speak, Auditory Verbal therapy offers a robust early intervention, which equips parents and caregivers with the tools to support the development of their child's listening and speaking before they start school. It is a family centred coaching programme, delivered by qualified Auditory Verbal Therapists, which has a strong peer-reviewed evidence base and consistently delivers excellent outcomes. Crucially Auditory Verbal therapy maximises the investment already being made in the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme and hearing technology, including hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK) is the only charity in Wales that provides Auditory Verbal therapy directly to a small number of deaf children under 5 in Wales. There are currently no specialist Auditory Verbal therapists employed in public services in Wales and investment is needed in the workforce in Wales to ensure families can access this specialist approach.

The outcomes of Auditory Verbal therapy are clear. Approximately 80% of children who attend an Auditory Verbal programme for at least two years achieve the same level of spoken language as their hearing peers, and the majority attend mainstream schools. This rises to 97% of children without additional needs. Deaf children with additional needs, on average, double their rate of language development whilst following an Auditory Verbal therapy programme at the charity Auditory Verbal UK and one in two reach age-appropriate spoken language at the end of their programme. These outcomes are consistent with international evidence from countries where Auditory Verbal therapy is part of mainstream provision – such as Australia and New Zealand.

Auditory Verbal UK's 2022 report, [Stepping Stones to Literacy](#), shows that deaf children on its specialist family programme are attaining educational outcomes on a par with hearing children. These children are getting an equal start at school and the health, education and social benefits are lifelong.

Lily and Grace's stories

Lily (name changed), from South Glamorgan, is deaf and joined an Auditory Verbal therapy programme at the age of 3. Her first Pre-School Language Scale assessment upon joining the programme showed Lily was scoring with a language age of 2 years and 1 month. By implication, with each passing the month, the gap between Lily and her typically hearing peers would have widened. With Auditory Verbal therapy, Lily's parents were able to support accelerating Lily's spoken language development such that by 4 years old, she had a language age of 4 years and nine months – showing that Lily's averaged rate of language development while on the programme was more than 2 and a half times the rate of a typically hearing child. Her spoken language competency was in advance of a typically hearing child of her own age thanks to early and effective support before she started school.

Grace, who is now 4 years old and from Cardiff, joined our Auditory Verbal family programme in March 2022. She was born with moderate to profound hearing loss and had bilateral cochlear implant surgery in January 2021. Her mum, Rhian, said; "It was a complete shock at first. I have an older child, and I guess a mother's instinct led me to know instantly that I thought Grace was deaf within a few days of her being born. She was unwell so there were other complications, but she wasn't reacting to sounds, not flinching at loud noises...that kind of thing. The team at the hospital were amazing. They acted quickly and we were seen within a month at the Children's Audiology unit, University Hospital of Wales. I think that was the most difficult experience to go through. When you're told your child is severely deaf, and you feel completely helpless. Her language and speech development weren't progressing at it should, and that's when we came to the decision that she should have cochlear implants. Without funding, we wouldn't have been able to offer Auditory Verbal therapy to our daughter. We feel that the progress Grace has made with AV therapy, and her understanding of language, has greatly improved. And I feel this has been helped by receiving this service via AVUK. She's more expressive, and confident, and will really try and communicate. She's come a long way. Grace has started her first year of school and is now understanding her world around her because she now has that level of language development."



Limited provision of Auditory Verbal therapy currently

However, at present over 90% of deaf children that could benefit from Auditory Verbal therapy are unable to access it, and there are no qualified Auditory Verbal Therapists in Wales.

With little to no provision of Auditory Verbal therapy in Wales, urgent action is needed to address this shortfall and ensure all families of deaf children have the option to access Auditory Verbal therapy via publicly funded services close to where they live or in their homes via telepractice – and more deaf children can be supported to have an equal start at school and life.

A YouGov poll Auditory Verbal UK conducted earlier this year found strong public support for this, with three in four adults in Wales (76%) believing that Auditory Verbal therapy should be available to all deaf children via publicly funded services.

Economic analysis has shown that this would only require a £800,000 investment over the next 10 years to train a small proportion of the current public sector workforce of speech and language therapists, teachers of the deaf and audiologists to embed 12 Auditory Verbal Therapists in the NHS and local services in Wales, whilst supporting some of the most vulnerable children directly. This would enable all deaf children under the age of 5 in Wales the opportunity to access this specialist early support.

Furthermore, analysis has shown that, across the UK, investing in Auditory Verbal therapy and professional training would deliver £152 million of economic benefit over 10 years, rising to £11.7 billion within the next 50 years, through improved quality of life, employment prospects, lower costs of schooling and avoided injuries. Other developed countries like Australia, New Zealand and Denmark already provide state funding for this therapy, and Wales should strive to match this.

AVUK is pleased to already be engaging on a local and regional level with local authorities and health boards in Wales to increase the number of qualified Auditory Verbal practitioners supporting deaf children. For example, two Teachers of the Deaf based in North Wales are currently undertaking AVUK's foundation course in the Auditory Verbal approach. However, operating solely on a local level will not effectively address the postcode lottery of support, opportunities, and outcomes that deaf children currently face across the country.

Urgent national action is needed

National action from The Senedd is essential to close the inequalities seen across Wales to enable more deaf children to have the same opportunities in life as their hearing peers.

AUDITORY VERBAL^{UK}

Creating a sound future for deaf children

AVUK is proactively working with the Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd to enable families of deaf children under the age of five in Wales to have the opportunity to access Auditory Verbal therapy.

However, with deaf babies and children across Wales falling behind their hearing peers and not currently achieving the outcomes we know are possible, urgent action is needed. Wales has the opportunity to set the standard for the rest of the UK in supporting disabled children and young people, including deaf children, by supporting and investing in early and effective specialist support.

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