

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work](#)

Evidence from Sense Cymru – AYP 04



Catrin Edwards  
Policy and Campaigns Officer  
Sense Cymru  
[Catrin.Edwards@sense.org.uk](mailto:Catrin.Edwards@sense.org.uk)

1. Sense Cymru would like to give evidence on the following issue as part of the **Enterprise and Business Committee's Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work**
  - What can be done to assist the groups of young people who are more affected by barriers to re-entering the labour market, for example those with disability?
2. Sense Cymru is a national charity that supports and campaigns for children and adults who are deafblind. There are currently around 18,500 deafblind people in Wales.
3. Sense provides specialist information, advice and services to deafblind people, their families, carers and the professionals who work with them.
4. Deafblindness is a combination of both sight and hearing difficulties. People who are deafblind often experience problems with communication, access to information and mobility; children and young people face extra difficulties in their development as a result of deafblindness or Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI). A small number of young people in Wales are completely deaf and blind, but most have some residual sight and/or hearing.
5. Causes of deafblindness include premature birth and exposure to rubella during pregnancy. Some genetic conditions, such as Usher syndrome, can also result in deafblindness which usually manifests during teenage years.
6. As a result, many deafblind young people have challenges in addition to their sensory impairment, such as medical conditions or other physical impairments. Likewise, many have impairments of the other senses; for example, problems with balance, taste or smell.
7. Increasing aspirations, confidence and choice-making

We believe that raising young people's aspirations and confidence is central to enabling young disabled people to choose the right future for them, including the choice to enter the labour market.

8. The Welsh Government's Framework for Action on Independent Living supports the definition of independent living as 'enabl[ing] us as disabled people to achieve our own goals and live our own lives in the way that we choose for ourselves.' This definition places 'choice' at the heart of the framework and central to the achievement of independence, including achieving Outcome 8: increased employment rates for disabled people.
9. Sense Cymru's Being Me! project, funded under the Big Lottery's Bright New Futures stream, launched in 2013 and supports young deafblind people between 14-25 years old in South East Wales to acquire decision-making skills in order to have a greater say in their own futures. The project will also help the young people to develop self-confidence and independence.
10. The project is funded for five years and will support deafblind 14-25 year olds develop the skills and knowledge they need to flourish by providing targeted group and individual support. For example, through independent living skills, support at transition meetings and annual reviews, through visiting specialist colleges to continue with their education, and through events designed to develop confidence and communication skills.
11. One of the project's outcomes is that the deafblind young people involved in the project will develop greater self-confidence and self-determination that will help them to participate in, or make their own decisions about, their future life choices as young adults and become aware of their skills and abilities. In its first year, the project has performed well against this outcome:

'She has shown interaction with peers and adults and shines with confidence which is wonderful to see' (parent)
12. Some young people have taken on additional responsibilities within the group, such as helping in some sessions. Two young people are training to be 'Session Leader's Assistants' at Touch Trust (partner organisation) and one young person plans to volunteer with Sense Cymru.
13. This demonstrates the importance of additional support and interventions beyond traditional education settings to enable young people with complex additional needs, such as deafblindness, to take steps, like volunteering, towards the labour market.

14. Sense Cymru has had requests for involvement from young people outside the project area, demonstrating there is need for such provision at a national level across Wales to support young deafblind people overcome barriers to participation in development and work-related activities.

15. Assistive technology

Young people who are deafblind may need access to a range of assistive technologies and support to enable them to access work. The aids an individual uses will depend on: the amount of sight and hearing he or she has; the cause of deafblindness; and how long they have had a sensory impairment. These factors will also impact on the individual's method of communication.

'New technology helps me to stay independent.' (deafblind person)

16. Sense asked a deafblind person to blog about their morning routine as they prepare for work. The individual lists each form of assistive technology she uses: from the vibrator under her pillow, which acts as her alarm; to the equipment which turns words on her iPad into Braille to enable her to check her email; to her Miniguide, which is a device emitting sonic waves that alerts her to obstructions as she walks to the local train station before her commute to work. Read the full blog here [£5,000 to go to work one morning? | Sense](#)

17. Technologies such as these help to break down some of the barriers that deafblind young people may face entering the labour market. However, such technologies, and other means of support, come at a price.

18. Access to Work

In addition to the technology available to assist with accessing work, deafblind people may require a range of additional support to overcome barriers to entering the workforce.

19. For example, a specialist support worker, such as [Communicator-guides | Sense](#), may be required to support the deafblind young person to make their journey to work, communicating, for example, when it may be safe to cross the road or what others are saying to them. At work, a deafblind person may require particular technologies to enable them to access computers or to engage in meetings.

20. Young deafblind people entering the labour market for the first time might also benefit from communication assistance at an interview.

21. These are all issues that the Department for Work and Pensions 'Access to Work' scheme may be able to support with and it is vital that young people entering the labour market are both aware of this scheme and are supported to access it.