

Jane Bryant MS
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Dear Ms Bryant,

I am writing to you as the Chief Executive of Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK), a leading and award-winning charity supporting deaf children to have the same opportunities as their hearing peers to request the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to improve outcomes for deaf children in Wales.

As a supporter of young children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, I know that you appreciate the value of early intervention programmes in providing improved outcomes for children.

By way of an introduction, AVUK supports deaf babies and children to learn to listen and speak through a highly specialist, evidence-based, early intervention programme called Auditory Verbal therapy. AVUK is the only charity in Wales that provides this family centred approach and supports parents and carers with the tools to support the development of their deaf child's speech and language. We are proud to deliver Auditory Verbal therapy directly to a small number of deaf children under 5 in Wales.

But with the majority of deaf children falling behind their hearing peers and at high risk of social exclusion, bullying, poor mental health and lower employment prospects, there has never been a more important time to invest in effective and early support to tackle the root cause of disadvantage.

While Wales has one of the best Newborn Hearing Screening Programmes in the world and state of the art hearing technology (hearing aids and cochlear implants) available to babies and young people on the NHS, deaf children are not reaching their full potential and we are not currently maximising the investment being made in screening and technology. But it does

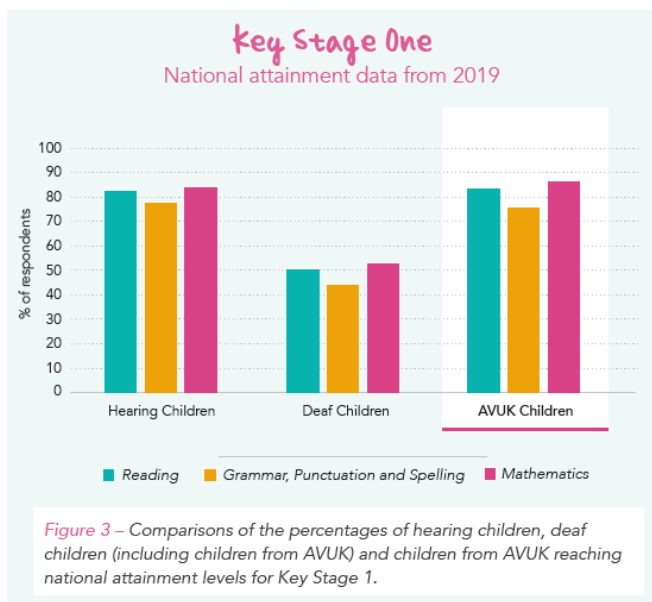


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Auditory Verbal UK is a registered charity
(charity no: 1095133 in England & Wales and charity no: SC052499 in Scotland).
Registered company number: 4569764.
Auditory Verbal UK is the operating name of the Auditory Verbal Centre

not have to be this way. When deaf children have access to early and effective support, following early diagnosis and access to technology, outcomes are transformed.

The benefits of Auditory Verbal therapy are clear. Approximately 80% of children who attend our Auditory Verbal programme for at least two years achieve the same level of spoken language as their hearing peers, rising to 97% of children without additional needs. The majority attend mainstream school and are attaining educational outcomes on a par with hearing children. The full return on investment in diagnosis and hearing technology is being realised for these children. They are getting an equal start at school and the health and education benefits are lifelong.



However, at present, over 92% of deaf children under the age 5 that could benefit from Auditory Verbal therapy are unable to access it. There are no qualified Auditory Verbal therapists working in the NHS and local services in Wales.

But with support and investment from the Welsh Government, we can change this. With an investment of only £800,000 over the next years we can train a small proportion of the current public sector workforce of speech and language therapists, audiologists and teachers of the deaf to embed 12 specialist therapists in the NHS and local services in Wales. We are

currently working with a small number of speech and language therapists and teachers of the deaf across Wales who have begun their training in this specialist approach. Two teachers of the deaf, based in North Wales are about to complete our foundation level training specialist approach but we need to expand the numbers in training to support all those who could benefit, across Wales.

By enabling all deaf children under the age of 5 to have the opportunity to access an Auditory Verbal programme, we can help transform outcomes for deaf children and unlock £152 million of economic benefit, rising to £11.7 billion within the next 50 years across the UK, 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 of AV therapy and Wales should strive to match this investment.

Recognising that healthcare is a devolved issue, AVUK is proactively working with the Welsh Government and Assembly Members to enable all deaf children in Wales to have the opportunity to access Auditory Verbal therapy. I would therefore welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to achieve this. Please let me know when a suitable time would be to arrange a meeting.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Kindest regards,

Anita Grover
Chief Executive
Auditory Verbal UK

Auditory Verbal therapy: Transforming outcomes for deaf children in Wales



What is Auditory Verbal therapy? A specialist early intervention that supports deaf babies and children to learn to listen and talk.

What are the benefits? Deaf children can achieve the same level of spoken language and education outcomes as their hearing peers.

Can everyone access Auditory Verbal therapy? No, unfortunately 92% of deaf children in the UK who could benefit are currently unable to access Auditory Verbal therapy.

Who is Auditory Verbal UK?

- We are an award-winning charity that supports deaf babies and children to learn to listen and speak through Auditory Verbal therapy.
- We are the only charity in Wales that provides this specialist, family centred, approach and equips parents/carers with the tools to support the development of their deaf child's speech and language.
- We are currently campaigning for the Welsh Government to enable all deaf children to have the option to access Auditory Verbal therapy.

What is the HearUsNow campaign?

Our **HearUsNow** campaign is calling for the Welsh Government to:

- Ensure Auditory Verbal therapy can be accessed via publicly funded services. Recently public research showed that almost 4 in 5 (76%) adults in Wales believe Auditory Verbal therapy should be available to all children via publicly funded services like the NHS.
- Train a small proportion of the current public sector workforce of speech and language therapists, teachers of the deaf and audiologist to embed 12 specialist Auditory Verbal Therapists in the NHS and local services.
- **It is estimated that £800,000 over the next 10 years is needed to train the required number of Auditory Verbal therapists** so all deaf children in Wales have the option to access an Auditory Verbal programme and for Auditory Verbal UK to support the most vulnerable children in Wales direct, whilst the specialist workforces is being trained.

What is the situation in Wales?

- There are around **270 deaf children under 5 in Wales**. These children are currently falling behind their hearing peers and are at high risk of social exclusion, bullying, poor mental health and lower employment prospects.
- **There are currently no certified Auditory Verbal therapists in Wales**. To ensure that every deaf child has the opportunity to access an Auditory Verbal programme close to where they live or via telepractice, **there needs to be 12 specialist therapists in Wales**.
- AVUK provides the internationally accredited training programme in this approach and has a proven track record of training practitioners across the UK and internationally.
- AVUK is currently working with a small number of speech and language therapists and teachers of the deaf across Wales who have begun their training in this specialist approach.

It takes 3- 5 years to train in this specialist approach whilst working with deaf children. Two professionals from South Wales recently completed our foundation course (the first six months of training) and two Teachers of the Deaf based in North Wales completed our foundation course last year.

How can I help support deaf babies and children today?

1. Meeting with us

There is a strong chance that there are deaf children in your constituency who are not achieving the outcomes that we know are possible and whose lives could be transformed by Auditory Verbal therapy.

- We would be keen to meet with you to discuss the need in your local area and how we can expand the availability of Auditory Verbal therapy so that deaf children in your constituency can have the opportunity to access it through publicly funded services.

2. Urging the Welsh Government to Hear Us Now

Please help us raise awareness of Auditory Verbal therapy and rally our cause in Parliament by;

- Writing to the Minister for Health and Social Services to request they meet with AVUK and the children and families they support.
- Submitting written or oral questions asking the Welsh Government to urgently increase access to Auditory Verbal therapy to ensure it is an option on the patient pathway for all deaf children under 5.
- Enter the ballot to try and secure a short debate entitled 'That This House Has Considered the Provision of Auditory Verbal therapy Across the UK'.

AVUK is able to support you with the above through providing draft letters, parliamentary questions, and sharing our expertise.

3. Writing to NHS Wales and NICE

- To raise the issue of lack of access to Auditory Verbal therapy through public services and to work with NHS Wales to influence the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to amend the guidelines to include the provision of Auditory Verbal therapy. Template letters can be found on our website for [NHS Wales](#).
- To raise with NICE why there has been a delay in their review on cochlear implants which was due in 2022. The review was undertaken as a result of a recommendation from NHS England in 2009 as part of its work to assess the cost-effectiveness of cochlear implants. NICE recommendations also apply to NHS Wales.

4. Sharing our campaign

- Please consider sharing the draft tweet below on social media to increase support and awareness:
 - *"I am delighted to spotlight @AuditoryVerbal who are helping create a sound future for deaf children. All deaf children should have the opportunity to access Auditory Verbal therapy through publicly funded services. #HearUsNow www.avuk.org"*



Deaf children and their families being supported in Wales

Auditory Verbal UK currently supports three children (two families) in Wales.

Jed and Zach*, twins from Porthcawl, are almost three years old and are both on an Auditory Verbal programme thanks to a bursary from The Moondance Foundation. Jed and Zach have profound bilateral hearing loss, which was diagnosed at birth after the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme, as well as a rare genetic condition which affects their heart. The boys were fitted with bilateral cochlear implants at the age of two, with surgery delayed by a year because of the global pandemic. Their family joined an Auditory Verbal programme at AVUK in February 2022 and are currently having monthly appointments to support the development of their listening and spoken language, and together with our Family Support Manager, we have been supporting them to access the statutory services that are available to them.

Greta* joined an Auditory Verbal programme in early 2022, with her place also being funded by The Moondance Foundation. Greta, who is 3 and a half years old and lives in Cardiff, has profound hearing loss and had bilateral Cochlear Implant surgery in 2021 at Cardiff hospital. Since February 2022, Greta's family have been working with a certified Auditory Verbal therapist in monthly appointment to support Greta to use her technology to learn to listen and speak.

Auditory Verbal UK has supported a number of children from Wales who have now graduated from the programme.

Naasir* from South Glamorgan was on an Auditory Verbal programme at AVUK between 2016 and 2020. Naasir has additional needs associated with executive functioning, emotional regulation, self-monitoring, organisational and planning skills. During Naasir's time on the programme, he began to close the gap between his language age and chronological age and his final Pre-School Language Scales (PLS) assessment showed he had made 10 months' total language progress over the previous 6 months. Naasir's Mum said: "AVUK is extremely knowledgeable and helpful to parents to look outside of the box... we had full care with AVUK. I really felt supported."

Lily*, who also lived in South Glamorgan, was on the programme for 20 months between 2010 and 2011. Her first assessment on joining AVUK's family programme at the age of 3 years, showed Lily had spoken language equivalent to a child aged 2 years and 1 month. With each passing the month, the gap between Lily and her typically hearing peers would have widened. However 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, supporting her to have the same opportunities in life as her hearing peers.

*Names have been changed.

The situation

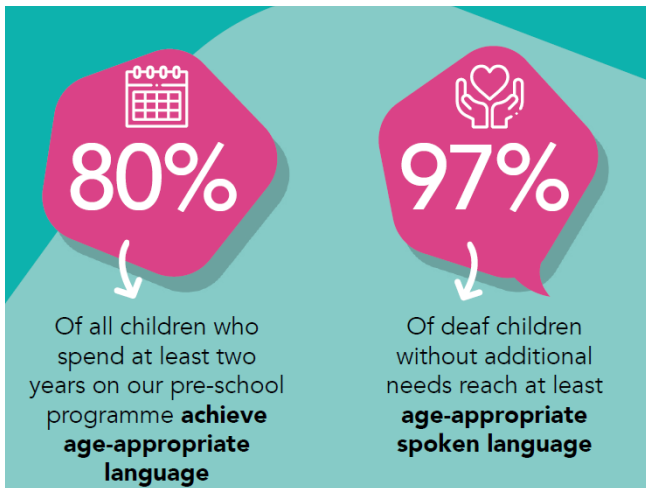
Deaf children in Wales currently face the prospect of lower academic achievement, lower employment, and are at higher risk of poor mental health, bullying and social exclusion.

But it doesn't have to be this way. When deaf children and their families have access to early and effective support opportunities are transformed. Early support should be available to all deaf children, whether their parents choose to communicate with spoken language, sign language or both.

For deaf children whose families want them to learn to listen and talk, early and effective support is vital to achieving the outcomes that we know are possible and maximise the investment already being made in newborn hearing screening and hearing technology.

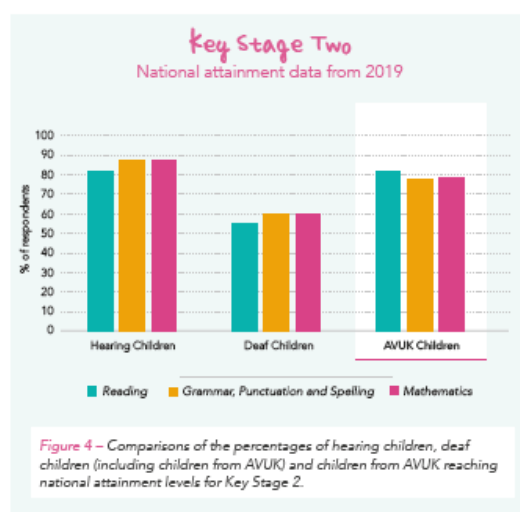
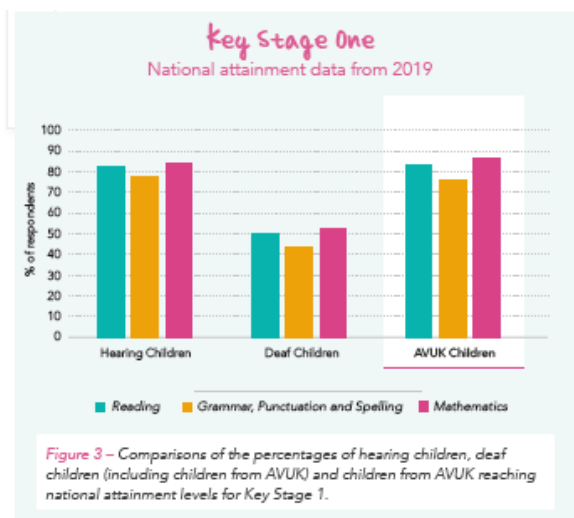
Auditory Verbal therapy

Auditory Verbal therapy is an early intervention, family-centred coaching programme which equips parents and caregivers with the tools to support the development of their child's listening and speaking. The evidence-based specialist therapy supports deaf children process the sound they get from their hearing technology, like cochlear implants and hearing aids, to develop language so they can learn to talk like their hearing friends.



The benefits 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, rising to **97%** of children without additional needs. The majority of these children attend mainstream schools and are attaining educational outcomes on a par with hearing children (as show in graphs below). The full return on government investment in diagnosis and hearing technology is being realised for these children. They are getting an equal start at school

and the health and education benefits are lifelong.



Watch the '[Power of Speech](#)' event in the House of Commons, celebrating what deaf children can achieve.

The mission: it's time to end the postcode lottery for Auditory Verbal therapy and ensure it is an option for all deaf children.

Contact us: To read more about AVUK, please visit: www.avuk.org. If you are interested in contributing to our campaign or would like any further information, please contact Victoria Bishop-Rowe, Head of Communications and Engagement at Auditory Verbal UK, on victoria.bishop-rowe@avuk.org or call 0203 763 6490.