



Identifying effective practice in the provision of education and education support services for 16 – 19 year old deaf young people in Further Education in England

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Identifying effective practice in the provision of education and education support services for 16 – 19 year old deaf young people in Further Education in England

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A research study commissioned by the National Deaf Children's Society

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1. Introduction and Aims and Objectives

Background

This study was commissioned in 2012 by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) who sought to generate a better evidence base concerning the quality and suitability of post-16 educational provision and educational support services for deaf young people with a specific focus on Further Education for 16 to 19 year olds. The intended research commission was to inform the organisation's policy, planning and campaigning strategies with regard to Further Education in England¹. It would also contribute to the national and international literature on Further Education and deaf young people. This focus was timely because of the ongoing process of reform to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system in England at the time. This has recently culminated in the passing of the Children and Families Act, 2014 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>) which is intended, amongst other things, to improve the support available to young people with SEN in post-16 settings. For the first time, Further Education Colleges and Specialist colleges will be part of the SEN system and will engage with local authority processes on the same basis as schools. The timing also coincided with preparations for the raising of the education participation age in England to 18 as well as an increasing focus on vocational options such as apprenticeships. In addition, NDCS's monitoring of the educational attainment of deaf young people at age 16 had revealed some significant concerns about under-achievement in comparison with hearing peers (http://www.ndcs.org.uk/news/ndcs_news/data_2008.html) and an absence of data on deaf young people within Further Education according to the CRIDE (Consortium for Research into Deaf Education) 2013 statistics (http://www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/national_data/uk_education_.html).

At the start of the research, four key concerns were identified about which evidence was sparse and which would need to be addressed in the design of the study. These were:

- **A need to identify, rather than specify, the population of deaf young people in Further Education provision** e.g. what proportion of deaf young people enter FE? What differentiates the deaf FE population from the deaf non-FE population? In what ways are deaf young people in FE similar to or different from hearing young people in FE?
- **A concern to map the trajectories of deaf young people in FE** - why is FE considered appropriate provision and what influences that decision? What are the objectives of an FE experience and how are these identified? What is the typical (or atypical)

¹ Parallel studies have been commissioned by NDCS in Scotland with a slight difference in emphasis to focus more on transitional arrangements for deaf young people leaving school including transitions into Higher Education and employment. Fordyce et al., 2013: http://www.ndcs.org.uk/applications/site_search/search.rm?term=Fordyce&x=0&y=0&old_term=fe+scotland&old_instance_id=375271&count=4

journey of a deaf young person through FE (i.e. are there many changes of course? What influences drop out?)

- **A measurement of impact of FE for deaf young people** – this is in part an issue of educational attainment, but it also encompasses issues of personal/social development, identity transition and preparation for adulthood.
- **The effectiveness of FE environments, education support services and other support provision for 16-19 year olds** – this involves analysis of not just what is available, but whether it delivers what it intends, how it operates for deaf young people, how to maximise its effectiveness, including issues of support.

Research Aim

With these issues in mind, the overall research aim of this study was:

- To identify and explore the factors and associated processes which support effective post-16 education and training for deaf young people.

Research Objective

Its objective in terms of a deliverable to the research commissioner was:

- To derive an evidence-based description and definition of an effective package of support for deaf young people in post-16 Further Education.

This could be used to inform any developments that NDCS might seek to take forward such as a benchmarking tool for quality FE provision, or a FE provider quality check list. [The development of such a tool lay outside the scope of the actual research study].

Scope of the study and its definitions

The study only refers to deaf young people in **England**.

Further Education is defined as education delivered outside of the maintained schools sector as part of the statutory entitlement of all 16-19 year olds. It includes apprenticeships provided by general Further Education Colleges as well as independent training providers and Independent Specialist Providers.

Deaf young people is an inclusive term which is not confined to those with a S139a assessment. It incorporates deaf young people who will use a wide variety of communication methods and languages and deaf young people with disabilities. However it excludes any individual who does not have capacity to consent within the terms of the research provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. We do not use terms such as 'hard of hearing' to draw a distinction between those young people who may be culturally Deaf and

those who are not, nor to indicate differing degrees of hearing or preferred language use. (If participants use terms other than 'deaf' we will retain their preferred language in direct quotation).

The study does not focus on deaf young people in Higher Education but where HE is factor in the data shared with us and when relevant to the research aim, it is reported.

All data collection took place between February and November 2013.

2. Data collection methods and description of the sample

Research Design

Phase One: Literature review and secondary data analysis.

The purpose of phase one was to establish the pre-existing evidence concerning deaf young people and Further Education both in its own right and to inform the design of the next phase of direct data collection from young people, parents and professionals. There were two parts:

Part One: Secondary data analysis of official government statistics concerning deaf young people's engagement with post-16 education and their attainment.

The official statistics used were the government's analysis of the National Pupil Database (2013) which is freely available and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) (2013) for which special permission was sought for data extraction. The variables requested and allowed with data management specifications were rather limited and to some extent constrained the subsequent analysis (see Chapter 3). The NPD records the attainment of young people enrolled within school and sixth form environments; the ILR concerns young people in non-school/sixth form educational environments. Neither of these data sources record statistics on deaf young people who might be NEET (not in employment, education or training).

Part Two: literature search and review of published research studies and grey literature (including policy statements, web sites, practice literature) on an international basis.

The objectives of the combination of the literature review and secondary data analysis were to:

- assist in a clear definition of the characteristics of the population(s) of deaf young people in FE and therefore by corollary those who are not
- establish where official statistics fail to identify, or identify in ways which are not highly useable, the population of deaf young people who fall within their purview
- analyse any useable data on attainment, outcomes and the effectiveness of FE provision for this population
- provide a base line for what is known about the processes leading to the choice/provision/support of FE for deaf young people and their trajectories to, through and out of FE
- Identify what is assumed to be effective practice in the support of deaf young people in post-16 provision and the strength of evidence for the factors identified

Phase 2: Case studies of FE college- based provision and local authority practice

In order to understand what is effective in post-16 provision for deaf young people it is important to study both the specific FE environment (within and through college) and the wider influences affecting a young person's decision making, opportunities, support and destinations (within local authority policy and practice). These two foci are integrated, rather than separated, in the following design.

Case Studies

Data were collected by means of 6 case studies (where case study implies multiple sources of data from a range of informants as well as a specific locality and provision); a 'case' is not an individual person or FE college. A matrix approach informed the identification of the 'cases' driven by 'types' of FE provision identified, diversity of population and variations in local authority support arrangements and practices with regard to deaf young people. From the perspective of type of FE college provision we sought to identify two examples of each of the following 'ideal' types. In characterising types of provision in this way no prior judgement is made concerning quality or suitability:

- A. Specialist FE provision whose population is only or mainly deaf pupils i.e. *FE for deaf young people* (for example, specialist residential colleges)
- B. FE provision which includes specialist expertise in relation to deaf young people's involvement i.e. *FE including deaf young people* (for example a mainstream FE college with a resource base for deaf learners)
- C. FE provision where deaf young people may be present but which does not claim a specialist expertise but attempts to provide support in line with SEN requirements i.e. *FE where deaf young people may be found* (for example a FE college that is not used to taking deaf learners but seeks to meet their needs appropriately).

Selection

Based on an extensive review of available information (such as college web sites and prospectuses) professional contacts as well as the theoretical framework outlined, we identified 16 potential FE colleges (in England) who might fit our criteria within the wider local authority context in which they are located. We prepared a short questionnaire on attainment and destination of deaf learners over the past 5 years and sent it to the 16 colleges. No personal data was requested, only aggregated and anonymised information. We received 10 returns after follow up reminders.

We then supplemented our knowledge of the college from the survey with further information about the diversity of the population in the locality where the colleges were, geographical differences (e.g. urban, semi urban, rural), relative affluence of location, size of

local Deaf community. The local authorities who participated were located in northern, central and southern areas of England.

Area	Total population	Description	Indices of multiple deprivation: rank average score by decile*
A	1,176,000	Large rural County	1 st 10% (most deprived)
B	753,200	Small semi-rural county	5 th 10%
C	184,900	Medium sized county	10 th 10% (least deprived)
D	432,500	City	3 rd 10%
E	270,900	Metropolitan borough	8 th 10%
F	302,700	Metropolitan borough	8 th 10%

Table 2.1: Profile of local authorities in the sample

* Department for Communities and Local Government use 326 output areas (that do not map on to local authorities but rather local super output areas (LSOAs) in their indices of multiple deprivation <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/mar/29/indices-multiple-deprivation-poverty-england>. Some of the local authorities sampled straddle more than one LSOA. Also the average rankings published make the areas easily identifiable. Therefore we have taken the most deprived LSOA in the local authority in our sample and then split the rankings into deciles (i.e. Top 10%, second 10% etc. to place them in a broad order of deprivation with 1st 10% being the most deprived and the 10th 10% being the least deprived).

Colleges were drawn from large cities, medium sized cities and rural/semi-rural locations. Although our original intention had also been to profile local authorities by their NEET statistics in relation to deaf young people this was not possible because of lack of access to the relevant data sets and also the problem of NEET statistics not being broken down by 'disability type' which would enable identification of deaf young people. Also BSL does not feature in the language categories within the data set.

We used this combination of sources to identify which 6 colleges and associated local authorities would best meet the criteria for involvement in the study and asked them to take part. All accepted our invitation.

Data collection within each 'case study'

Interviews with staff at the 6 FE colleges on the challenges experienced in provision, good practice and drivers for effective outcomes.

Once a college had consented to take part in the research the nominated liaison in each college recommended who should be interviewed based on who was likely to have the most

direct experience and knowledge to contribute to the research study given its aims and objectives. All participated in a semi-structured interview lasting between one and one and half hours. All interviews were done face to face with the exception of one that was carried out face to face but through a video link. All data were video and audio recorded as appropriate. Participants were invited to take part in interviews in whichever language they felt most comfortable and were offered sign language interpreters, given that all participants were hearing and the two interviewers were Deaf. All but one preferred to respond directly themselves without an interpreter using either BSL or SSE.

We had intended to analyse also the attainment of deaf young people in each college site over the past 5 years, however complete data were not routinely available within all of the colleges, nor in some instances accurate figures on how many deaf learners had passed through the college over the past 5 years. This aspect of the data collection was not therefore pursued. We return to the issue of lack of data on progress through FE (as well as attainment) in our analysis of background literature (Chapter 3.) and presentation of findings from key informants and college staff (Chapters 4 and 5). The lack of accurate data on deaf young people concerning ongoing progress, achievements and destinations on leaving FE was a recurring problem reflected throughout all aspects of this study.

Interviews with deaf learners at the 6 FE colleges. Staff at the colleges recommended anonymously a diverse range of deaf learners in each location who they felt would offer differing insights into their educational experiences in college and who were dissimilar in their backgrounds. These learners were approached first by college staff to see whether they would be interested and available to be interviewed then they were provided with information and consent materials (available in BSL and in English) before finally meeting one of the researchers who would then double check their understanding and consent before proceeding. All interviews were carried out on college premises. Deaf young people were offered the possibility of doing the interview in spoken English, SSE or BSL and were provided with an interpreter if appropriate. All data were audio/video recorded as appropriate for later analysis.

Interviews with key informants in the wider related context in each local authority e.g. Connexions workers, social care staff, parents, service leads (Education) for deaf young people, on the challenges experienced in provision, support and good practice for deaf young people transitioning to post – 16 provision. These key informants were found by asking college staff to direct us to others in the local authority (whether they worked directly with college students or not) or by direct contact with relevant agencies. The individuals were then approached directly by the research team and provided with information and consent materials (available in BSL and English). If they were interested in proceeding a suitable time for an interview at a location of their choice was set up. In some cases telephone interviews took place. All interviewees were offered the opportunity to participate in spoken English BSL or SSE and interpreters provided as required.

Workshops with young deaf people in the locality who might be in FE colleges, apprenticeships, 6th forms within schools, 6th forms colleges, or without education or employment (NEET), on their experiences, expectations, frustrations and achievements (including support and transition). Young people were recruited by contacting the relevant youth worker in the local authority area, through key informant contacts that had already been established and through the colleges who participated in the study. Throughout the workshop a fictional story about a deaf young person was signed (and/or voiced-over by an interpreter) and this was used as the trigger for subsequent discussion around a series of key areas of interest (see appendix for copy of scenario and areas of interest explored). Some role play was also used to progress the fictional story and encourage greater engagement with the issues. The young people were free to participate in any language or medium they felt comfortable to do so and to switch between them if they preferred and/or depending on who they were communicating with in the workshop. Interpreters were provided and locations were chosen to be acoustically favourable and in good light/conditions for lipreading. Data were audio/video recorded for later analysis.

Ethical approval

The research study was granted ethical approval by the University of Manchester research ethics committee.

The Sample

In order to protect confidentiality we have been careful in how we have described features of the sample(s) who make up this study; in some cases we have chosen not to report characteristics that would make a person or location more identifiable, in others we have been non-specific about gender, age or role. Whilst maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality all participants were aware when they consented to be in the study that we could not necessarily guarantee anonymity as the world of deaf education in general, associated professionals and provisions, and the Deaf community specifically is very small.

Total number of participants

Within each of the 6 LAs, data were collected from staff and deaf learners within a FE college; from key informants in the wider local authority such as educational lead officers, social workers, Connexions workers and parents. Additionally workshops for deaf young people, whether they were in FE or not, were held in 3 out of the 6 local authority areas. Fifty nine participants provided data overall, but in one case the video recording became corrupted and two other the participants withdrew from the study², therefore qualitative analysis is based on 56 participants. Semi-structured individual interviews were held with 12 college staff, 4 education professionals, 4 social workers, 5 people involved in employment/training support related roles including connexions workers, advocates and a

² The terms of our ethical approval mean that we are unable to investigate or offer a reason for this withdrawal.

leader of a specialist social enterprise as well as with 5 parents [Total = 30]. In addition, 12 Deaf learners, 2 at each of the 6 FE colleges were also interviewed and a further 15 deaf young people participated in group based workshops [Total = 27].

The profile of participation by local authority is:

	LA1	LA2	LA3	LA4	LA5	LA6
College staff	2	2	2	2	2	2 (*)
Deaf learners in FE	2	2	2	2	2	2
Specialist education professional	1	1	1	1	0	
Social worker	1		1	1	1	
Workers dealing with employment/training/careers advice		1	1	1	0	2 (*)
Parent	1 (*)		1	1 (*)	1	1
Young deaf people 16+	7			6	2	

It should be noted that two of the participants in official roles were also themselves parents of deaf children (these are marked with a * above). However they responded to the interviews in their professional role and are counted for purposes of sample description in those roles. Their comments as parents as well as in their professional capacity are noted in the analysis of the interview data. Conversely, of the five parents who participated, two had taken on additional service provider roles such as being a classroom support assistant to younger deaf children but they responded to the interview as parents.

Profile of key Informants drawn from the local authorities

The Parents

Of the 5 parents who participated, all were mothers and four out of the five were hearing. Of the parents' deaf children, two were primarily BSL users, two had cochlear implants in each case using speech and also signing, and the rest (some parents had more than one deaf child) used a mixture of signing, speaking, lipreading, depending on context and person. Parents had varied experiences of post-16 education for their deaf children. The profile of their children's experiences are:

- Deaf young person attends both a mainstream local sixth form college and a specialist deaf college with the greatest number of hours being in the mainstream provision
- Deaf young person attends a specialist FE college (i.e. one with specific expertise and provision with respect to deaf young people) but out of the family's local authority area
- Deaf young person attends a mainstream FE college outside of his home area but with signing support

- Deaf young person has transitioned successfully from FE into an HE environment
- Deaf young person is now in an HE environment having previously attended a residential college for deaf children/young people up to the age of 16 and remained there through the sixth form
- Deaf young person attended a mainstream school up to the age of 16 then transferred to a specialist deaf school for his sixth form studies
- Deaf young person dropped out of mainstream FE college in their 2nd year of studies and at time of interview with parent was without an educational or training placement, nor employment.

Social Care Professionals

Three of the four people interviewed were social workers in specialist sensory teams all of which were within the adult services directorate, however they also all described on occasions co-working into children's services teams and transition teams, although these were either general children's teams or disabled children's teams i.e. There was no specialist sensory service which spanned both deaf children and deaf adults. Between the three of them, they had 44 years' experience of working with deaf children and adults (10 years, 18 years and 16 years respectively). The other participant was a qualified advocate who took on a range of work including specifically transitions work with deaf young people leaving school. All four were fluent BSL users, one was Deaf.

Education professionals

Four education professionals who took part in interviews: a teacher of the deaf and educational audiologist combined; the principal of a specialist college; a teacher of the deaf in a secondary education role within a mainstream school; a peripatetic teacher of the deaf working with primary age children who was now also working with secondary age children in mainstream settings. All were very experienced in working with deaf children/young people.

Connexions/careers/employment support workers

Of the 6 people interviewed, three were careers advisors all of whom had direct experience working with deaf young people over several years (the least experienced had 5 years direct work); one was a parent of deaf children herself and had previously worked within a social work sensory/deaf team; two were fluent BSL users. All were hearing.

Profile of deaf young people who participated in the research overall

Twenty seven deaf young people participated in the research, twelve were deaf learners in the FE colleges sampled, and a further fifteen attended workshops designed to include young people who might not currently be in college or who were being educated or in employment elsewhere in the local authority. In actuality all workshop participants were in some form of further education. Nine men and eighteen women participated overall. All

but one were aged 16-19 years (the other was 21 and still in Further Education). The group of deaf learners included some whose secondary education had been in mainstream schools, with or without deaf resource bases, and a minority who had attended special (deaf) schools for their secondary education.

Young people's descriptions of their preferred communication and language relate to their current situations and contexts. They do not necessarily reflect the language(s) in which they were educated at school nor do they necessarily reflect their competence across languages and modalities. They were asked to state their 'preferred' language use now.³ This was important because it is well recognised that many deaf young people are still exploring their identity on leaving school with many making transitions to sign language use and/or to a greater emphasis on functional communication in spoken language⁴. Eleven participants said they only used BSL to communicate. A further fifteen used BSL and other languages/communication preferences such as SSE and/or spoken language as well; in effect they presented themselves as young people with bilingual competence. Only one participant in our sample said that they exclusively used spoken language. Four of the young people had a cochlear implant. Of the 15 young people who took part none were in apprenticeships, employment or were NEET.

Profile of the colleges and college staff

Staff from 6 FE colleges contributed to the data collection, 2 from each college, with an additional 12 deaf learners also providing data from the same colleges (see above).

All of the 12 participants had worked in the college environments for many years. On average, the participants had 12 years' experience (the least was the 8 years, and the most 20). This was a sample, therefore, with a broad and deep experience of working alongside deaf young people in post-16 education. One was a senior interpreter and a further three were communication support workers (2 of them senior CSWs). The sample also included an assistant principle of a college, a qualified teacher of the deaf, a team manager and a (deaf students) curriculum manager. There were also three 'tutors' for different subject specific pathways. Finally the sample also included someone in the specifically designated role of 'deaf co-ordinator' within a FE college with a deaf resource base. All but three worked on a full time basis.

All of the 12 interviewees had some BSL skills: two were native signers (one Deaf one a CODA); two had a degree in sign language interpreting; the rest had BSL qualifications ranging from level 3 to level 6.

³ For discussion of the distinction between asking about language competence and asking about preferred language use see Young & Hunt (2011) <http://sscr.nihr.ac.uk/PDF/MR/MR9.pdf>

⁴ Skelton, T. and G. Valentine (2003). "It feels like being Deaf is normal: an exploration into the complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people's identities." *The Canadian Geographer* 47(4): 451-466.

Valentine, G. and T. Skelton (2007). "Re-defining norms: D/deaf young people's transitions to independence." *The Sociological Review* 55(1): 104-123.

Gregory, S., J. Bishop, et al. (1995). *Deaf young people and their families: developing understanding*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

The six colleges

College 1

This is a specialist college with 160 students on site, around 70 of whom are deaf. Some of the students are BSL users, many are not. It also caters for hearing students with special educational needs.

College 2

This is a mainstream FE college but that has a long established deaf resource base within the college. It usually has around 50 students in the college at any one time, generally split between first and second year students. Some of the deaf students are in this college to improve basic skills in numeracy and literacy rather than pursuing any additional courses. Some students in general at the college are mature students (over the age of 25). It also caters for a steady stream of returning deaf students who might have left previously, tried to get employment and have chosen to return for more qualifications, or those in employment who wish to work further on their literacy and numeracy.

College 3

This is a mainstream FE college which currently has 23 deaf students, 8 of whom are BSL users. Over the past 5 years the college has catered for about 40 deaf students.

College 4

This is a specialist deaf college. There are 57 students at the moment, two thirds of whom are residential students. Some of the deaf students only pursue studies within the college, others access general FE provision in the locality pursuing their studies in part within mainstream environments.

College 5

This is a mainstream FE provision with a deaf resource base within the college. It currently has between 35 and 40 deaf students but the vast majority are over the age of 19.

College 6

This is a large mainstream college split across several sites. On average there are 10 deaf students enrolled in the college at any one time meaning that often there might be only one deaf student in any given part of the college.

Concluding comments

The approach to data collection sought to include multiple perspectives not just in terms of profession but also role in post-16 education and FE. It draws on a range of diverse experience by setting with the six colleges representing very different kinds of provision and structures of provision for deaf young people. The inclusion of many deaf young people themselves adds an important perspective. The sample of deaf young people may seem biased toward BSL users, however our approach to recruitment in multiple languages/outlets was designed to avoid this. Also the language and communication

profiles of the young people reflect a minority (11 out of 27) who would claim to be monolingual users of BSL with the majority demonstrating the range of mixing of languages, modalities and communication preferences. Forty percent of the sample being primarily BSL users may seem disproportionate to figures from the 2013 CRIDE survey which reports only 2% as BSL users, however that survey does not break down language use by age or educational setting and the numbers in FE within that survey are tiny in comparison with the overall population reported. There is no evidence to suggest that the proportion of children/young people who use BSL is stable across the age range e.g. it would not be surprising to find a minority of BSL users in younger age groups for example when spoken language is most hearing parents' first choice for their children. Also the *proportion* of BSL users by given educational setting e.g. FE in comparison with secondary is not reported in Cride figures. There are no reliable data in England on the language preferences overall of the population of deaf young people in FE specifically and therefore no way of making a judgement whether the sample who took part in this study was representative of language preferences or not.

3. Main findings from the literature review and the analysis of secondary data⁵

Introduction

Both the literature review and the secondary analysis of official Government statistics (England) was undertaken in order to establish baseline evidence on deaf young people in post-secondary education and specifically in relation to Further Education. In the context of England there was, at the start of the project, no available statistical analysis that had addressed this issue nor one that had disaggregated deaf young people from the wider population of learners with additional needs/Special Educational Needs. On an international basis there was no comprehensive study which had sought to bring together the evidence from different countries on post-16 education for deaf young people with regard to the FE sector (rather than Higher Education) or attainment more generally following compulsory education. Furthermore, little attention had been paid to FE as a destination specifically and whether and how it was effective for deaf young people leaving school.

The detailed findings from the literature review will be available in a journal article, currently under review with *Deafness and Education International*. In what follows, we summarise the main issues to emerge from the review and the analysis of secondary data rather than reproduce the fine details of the review itself.

Aim and scope of the literature review

- *To summarise and critique relevant literature concerning further education as a post-16 destination for deaf young people, in order to evaluate current evidence, identify gaps in knowledge and inform the empirical study of which this was the first step.*

Specifically the review set out to address:

- (i) the size and characteristics of the deaf learner population within the FE sector
- (ii) the perceived functions of FE for deaf young people
- (iii) the trends, progress and achievements of deaf learners within FE provision.

It was not primarily concerned with the fine detail of learning support within FE, nor whether that was evaluated as effective or appropriate. In many respects, those questions

⁵ The full literature review that incorporates the analysis of the two secondary sources of educational attainment and progression data is currently under review with the journal *Deafness and Education International*. [Young, A., Squires, G., Hartley, R., Oram, R., Sutherland, H. (2014 under review). Further education as a post-secondary destination for deaf and hard of hearing young people: A review of the literature and analysis of official statistics in England]. We re-produce here the main points in that review but refer readers to the publication for full details.

were ones which the empirical study was setting out to address against the background that the literature review would establish.

For purposes of the literature review, Further Education was defined as educational experiences and outcomes associated with learning environments which provide education, training and qualifications, whether part-time or full-time, for learners not enrolled in a school or sixth form college, who are older than the statutory school leaving age and who are not undertaking Higher Education. In Australia and New Zealand this sector is referred to as TAFE (Technical and Further Education). In the US it may be referred to as Trade School, Vocational School or Community College. Foundation courses in the UK and 'associate degrees' in the US are broadly similar (Saunders, 2012) and are generally classified as Higher Education at a pre-Bachelors level, sometimes referred to as 'Year 0'. Although not technically Further Education we included some reference to these courses as they form an important bridge for some deaf young people between FE and degree level achievement. Internationally they have been a focus of some research relevant to deaf learners in FE.

Relevant literature was identified through a systematic search of the online data bases: OVID, PsychInfo and ERIC between 1995 and 2013 using the search terms deaf*, hearing*, AND post-secondary OR further education OR college OR school-leaver. In addition a hand-search was done of the contents pages, for the same dates, of the key journals: Deafness and Education International, Disability and Society, Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, American Annals of the Deaf. Grey literature from third sector and professional organisations associated with deaf young people in the UK were also consulted, as well as UK and the devolved countries' respective government policy and guidance documents. Identified literature was scrutinised for relevance to the aims of the review and included or excluded accordingly. Only publications available in English or British Sign Language were used. 'Publications' includes books, chapters in books, peer reviewed journal articles, unpublished dissertations, web-published reports, policy documents and official guidance.

We reproduce in the appendix a list of references to literature that formed the basis of the review.

Aims and scope of the secondary data analysis

- *To identify the baseline characteristics of deaf learners in England aged 16 – 19 in terms of the location of their educational study, their attainment, the characteristics of the courses in which they were engaged.*

We had also initially hoped to include an analysis of deaf learners' destinations on leaving further education and/or sixth form college but it became clear that this evidence was not available; a conclusion supported by a more general review of post-16 education and SEN published by Ofsted (2010).

A formal request was made to the Government (England) Data Service for access to the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) (ADLS, 2013) which covers Further Education students. For analysis purposes we combined these data with those publicly available via the National Pupil Data Based (DfE, 2013a). A specific and limited set of variables was requested with respect to the ILR, following the advice of the Data Service. The sample was defined as young people aged 16 to 19 who had the classification of “hearing impairment” as their primary disability. The variables requested in the Individualised Learner Record were: Disability (Hearing Impaired only), Learning Difficulty, Learner’s Age (16-25 only), Learner’s mode of attendance, Notional NVQ Level of the Learner, Additional Learning Support, Additional Learning Support costs, Prior Attainment Level, Destination, Programme Type, Framework Code, Completion Status, Learning Outcome. The National Pupil Database employs a different definition relying on teacher/SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) assessment and identification of pupils as deaf and in need of SEN (Special Educational Needs) support identified through School Action/School Action Plus or through a statement of special educational needs. In total, the data analysis is based on records of 6758 individual learners.

Findings from the secondary data analysis of official statistics

Location of post-16 study

We compared the data for full time study only and found that deaf students were more likely to go to FE colleges while hearing students were more likely to stay at school or go to sixth form colleges. Results showed that 59.9% of pupils defined as having a ‘hearing impairment’ as their primary disability were enrolled in Further Education colleges in comparison with 39.6% of all pupils aged 16 to 18. Furthermore, whilst 49.8% of pupils were staying on at school post-16 or going to sixth form college, only 20.8% of hearing impaired pupils did this.

	Hearing impaired learners n=6758	All pupils aged 16-18 in 2011 (DfE, 2013c) ⁶ n=1,016,900
Further Education Colleges	59.9%	36.9%
State Schools & Independent Schools	14.2%	38.7%
Sixth Form Colleges	6.6%	11.1%
All other providers	18.8%	13.9%

Table 3.1: Percentages of pupils in full-time education by establishment

The location of post-16 study for the deaf learner population is therefore very different from that of the general population with far fewer attending 6th form colleges which might be seen as the more usual preparation for progressing to Higher Education in due course and FE being a far more common option than amongst hearing learners of the same age.

⁶ Pro-rated to show the percentage of the 67.7% in full time education

Mode of Study

We compared mode of study between the general population of learners aged 16 to 18 and learners of the same age classified as hearing impaired. For the wider population of 16-18 year olds, 67.7% are in full time education and 6% are in part time education⁷, the remainder are in work-based learning or NEET (DfE, 2013b). Although the majority of hearing impaired learners undertake full- time study, they are more likely than peers to undertake part-time study (see Table 3.2). There is a statistically significant association between hearing impairment and mode of study (p=0.001).

	Full time study	Part time study
All learners (N=1 079 558)	89%	11%
Hearing impaired learners (N=5828)	69%	31%

Table 3.2: Mode of study and type of learner

Drop out and course completion

In the wider population, level of engagement with learning is measured by seeing how many pupils continue on a course or in employment for more than two terms and approximately 8% drop out (DfE, 2013d). Our analysis shows a higher rate of drop out amongst deaf young people with around 17% withdrawn from their courses or transferred to a different course. This may be explicable by factors such as course suitability, available support, the deaf learner changing their mind about what they wanted to do. The statistics cannot explain the underlying reasons but this is an issue we explore in phase 2 of the research study.

The extent to which deaf learners complete the activities presented to them to help them achieve the learning aim suggests that the majority of deaf young people are nonetheless completing courses (see Table 3.3). Course completion, however, does not imply attainment; a learner may complete the course but not achieve the standard or qualification the course sought to deliver (see below).

Description	HI learners
Completed the activities leading to a learning aim	73.1%
Continuing with activities leading to a learning aim	9.8%
Withdrawn from activities	13.8%
Transferred to a new learning aim	2.8%

Table 3.3: Percentage completing courses

Achievement of learning goals

Level of engagement with learning can be estimated by analysing achievement of comparable learning goals between different populations of students. The majority (82.5%) of 16-18 year olds in the wider population are following a Level 3 qualification such as an AS Level, A Level or equivalent (DfE, 2013b). This compares with only 33.6% of deaf young people.

⁷ For those in education this equates to 91.8% full time and 8.1% part time

It could be argued that a high number of deaf young people have additional needs and this might account for lower achievement. Indeed those with additional needs are more likely to be following lower level courses than those without additional needs. Of those deaf young people who have additional needs, around 5% have severe learning difficulties and 37% have moderate learning difficulties, so the provision of lower level courses seems to make sense. However, deaf young people with no additional needs still underperform as a group when compared to hearing counterparts (see Table 3.4 for a comparison).

Level of qualification	% of all DHH young people (N=5796)	% of full time students who have additional needs (N=2422)	% of full time students with no additional needs (N=3333)
Not applicable or not known	1.2	0.6	0.4
Entry Level	9.2	16.6	3.9
Level 1	21.1	25.0	18.5
Level 2	29.1	27.9	30.3
Level 3	33.6	24.0	40.3
Level 4	0.5	0.3	0.6
Level 5	0	0	0
Higher	0.3	0.2	0.4
Other	5.0	5.5	5.6

Table 3.4: Level of study⁸

Course completion and attainment

If course completion is taken into consideration (see Table 5), our analysis shows that only 3.7% of DHH young people completed their courses and achieved AS Levels with 60.5% completing their courses and achieving a non-AS qualification. Some of this number achieving 'non-AS qualifications' may be learners who are doing other level 3 qualifications including A levels and GNVQs, the data extracted originally does not permit us to be sure. However as previously reported above only one third of DHH learners embark on level 3 qualifications in the first place, far below that in the general population. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that 23.2% showed no achievement in any recognised qualification. In other words, almost a quarter of DHH young people are failing to achieve a qualification despite having the motivation to complete their learning activities. There seems to be a large gap between those who enrol on Level 3 courses and those that achieve an AS Level qualification or continue in studies. It is not clear from the data whether it is this group of students who are contributing to the high number of deaf students that achieve no qualification or whether the data on achievement excludes other Level 3 type courses (such as GNVQs or apprenticeships).

⁸ There were 41 deaf young people for whom no data was available on whether they had additional needs or not.

Qualification	Deaf learners (N=2410)
Achieved AS Level qualifications	3.7%
Achieved non-AS Level qualifications	60.5%
Partial achievement	1.6%
No achievement (qualification)	23.2%
Exam taken but result unknown	1.1%
Study continuing	9.8%

Table 3.5: Percentage achieving qualifications on course completion

Summary Conclusion

These data suggest a massive underachievement compared to hearing peers both in terms of the level of qualification achieved overall and the number who complete learning activities but then do not achieve any qualification. These differences cannot be accounted for by additional needs alone. In part, they may be the result of lower achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 (the end of secondary education). They may also be influenced by other factors to do with the educational environment such as mode of study, availability and quality of communication support, and personal/social maturity. Data collected through phase 2 of the project will assist in understanding these connections. Deaf young people are far less likely than their hearing peers to go to 6th form colleges with FE being the most common destination. A far greater proportion of deaf young people attend FE in comparison with hearing children of the same age.

Key findings from the literature review

FE as a post-16 destination for deaf young people

In advanced industrialised countries throughout the world the proportion of deaf young people entering post-secondary education has risen in line with post-secondary education participation expanding more generally (Lang, 2002; O'Neill, Mowat, Gallagher, & Atkins, 2002; Winn, 2007). However, top line figures of participation in post-secondary education conceal some marked differences for deaf young people in comparison with their hearing peers or with other young people who might be termed disabled or having special educational needs.

Several studies (e.g. Fordyce, Ridell, O'Neill, & Weedon, 2013; Polat, Kalambouka, & Boyle, 2004) have demonstrated that deaf young people are far more likely to transition to Further Education, rather than any other alternative options at the end of statutory school leaving age in comparison with the general population of learners of their age. They are also far less likely to transition to Higher Education at age 18 or above (the usual next point of transition out of the school education system). Current data for England, although not

disaggregated by disability or type of educational support need, shows that while 39% of students without SEN progress to Higher Education only 6% of pupils who had a Statement of SEN, 9% at School Action Plus and 12% at School Action manage to get accepted into Higher Education (DfE, 2012b).

Why might more deaf learners transition to FE?

The literature suggests a number of possibilities:

- 1.** It is the default recommendation for Connexions workers, careers officers and other guidance workers involved in the post-16 transitions for young people with SEN (Bason, 2012). Other options are seen as an exception to the usual rule.
- 2.** It reflects common deficits in educational attainment, particularly in regard to literacy and numeracy meaning that deaf young people lack the qualifications to continue to study in a school environment, gain employment or enter specific vocational qualifying courses (Appelman, Ottren Callahan, Mayer, & Luetke, 2012; Bowe, 2003; Luft & Huff, 2011; Punch et al., 2004; Wheeler-Skruggs, 2002). Overall levels of attainment at age 16 are poor in comparison with the general population of learners, although some studies indicate they are higher in some subject areas in comparison with the population of disabled children more generally (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, Garza, Gonzalez, 2006).
 - In England, young people with ‘hearing impairment’ do better in terms of achievement at GCSE than other groups of pupils with SEN at age 16 and at age 19 (DfE, 2012a).
 - However, at age 16 they score less well than the wider population in which 81.8% of children achieved 5 GCSE grades A* to C (DfE, 2013e) compared to just under 40% of pupils defined as hearing impaired (DfE, 2012a).
 - Even when a lower standard is used such as achieving a single Level 2 qualification, the picture remains the same: 37 % of children with a hearing impairment requiring support at School Action Plus or through a Statement achieve a Level 2 qualification at age 16 (DfE, 2012b). This compares to 44.8% for pupils with a visual impairment or 94.2% of children more generally (DfE, 2012b, 2013f).

FE, therefore, represents an important opportunity to try again and/or improve on key academic skills as well as to access qualifications that would not routinely be available within schools such as those associated with vocational courses and apprenticeships.

- 3.** Deaf DHH young people are ill-prepared at the end of compulsory education to make the transition from school to adult life (Punch et al., 2004). Deficits in life skills, interpersonal social skills and cognitive skills mean that they are less ready to enter the world of work than their hearing counterparts and/or less able to lead independent lives and assume autonomous responsibility for their future (Bonds, 2003; Bowe, 2003; Luckner, 2002; Luft and Huff, 2011; Wheeler-Skruggs, 2002; Winn 2007). FE therefore represents an

opportunity to make up for slower maturity as well as specifically, in some cases, providing a curriculum to encourage employment readiness and life-long learning skills.

Progress and trends for deaf learners within FE

The vast majority of available data concerns FE as an educational destination at the end of secondary education. Very little data concerns the progress of deaf learners within FE, whether they have multiple experiences of more than one FE placement, their attainment within the FE sector, or what their destinations might be on leaving FE. This is a major gap in the evidence base as it is not possible to track the effectiveness of education and support practices within FE or to monitor outcomes for deaf young people of FE participation (Fordyce et al., 2013; Schroedel, Watson & Ashmore, 2003). Without surveillance of this kind, it is not possible to track patterns, trends and improvements in provision (Ofsted, 2011).

Concluding discussion (taken from the full literature review paper)

The review overall demonstrated that in comparison with their hearing peers, deaf young people are far more likely to progress to FE provision rather than remain at school to gain further qualifications or to embark upon Higher Education level courses. In one sense this result is easily explained by deaf pupils' poor levels of educational attainment at the end of compulsory school age. They are less likely than the same age school population to have acquired the necessary qualifications to remain at school or go to sixth form college and progress to courses which may lead to higher education or other opportunities. Indeed raising the attainment levels amongst deaf young people, particularly in relation to mathematics and English (or whatever the principal language of the country) is a strong focus of many initiatives on an international basis.

However, deficits in social maturity and lack of readiness for employment, adult life and autonomous decision making are also identified as key drivers determining FE as a destination for deaf young people. Whilst this might seem a reasonable justification, it side-steps the issue of whether such deficits in social maturity and skills in transition to adulthood are consequences of the challenges of growing up deaf or are more correctly identified as consequences of school environments which have failed to prepare deaf young people adequately. The disproportionately large number of deaf learners in FE could be seen as a structural failing of the secondary education system to appropriately accommodate their needs rather than an inevitable consequence of being a deaf learner. This is an important consideration in responding to emphases of government policies such as those in England which would seek to place time and resources into raising attainment in mathematics and English as the central priority perhaps at the expense of other priorities for deaf learners.

Although deaf people generally are participating more in post-secondary education than previously, this top line picture belies some underlying trends. Generally, there is very poor

data internationally on the progress of deaf learners within FE and outcomes. In relation specifically to England, our analysis has demonstrated that deaf young people in FE provision have significantly lower attainment than the general population of learners within FE colleges, despite a good completion rate of the courses undertaken. The lower attainment of deaf young people in post-secondary education in England in comparison with the wider population cannot be accounted for the higher proportion of deaf learners with additional needs. Also deaf learners are twice as likely to drop out of FE courses, defined as failure to complete a course and/or move provision, in comparison with the wider FE population. These key findings deserve closer attention in order to understand why these outcomes occur and how and why deaf learners may not be being well served by the most common post-16 destination in which they find themselves i.e. FE

Of particular concern, in the context of the analysis of data in England, are the data concerning Level 3 qualifications i.e. AS and A levels that are taken by over 80% of the wider population and only 36% of deaf learners. Furthermore of the 36%, fewer than 4% actually attain their qualification and over one quarter who are undertaking a Level 3 course do not achieve any recognisable qualification whatsoever despite completing their course. These data may point toward a significant mismatch in suitability of courses, or failure to meet learning needs, or a lack of engagement by deaf learners within the FE environment. It is not possible to discern the underlying mechanisms, but further research is indicated to understand this result at Level 3 which is the most frequently taken level of course by DHH young people as it is in the general population. Once again, the extent to which the FE sector successfully engages with DHH young people's social and emotional needs associated with maturity and transitions to adulthood might well be significant. Further facets of the study for which this review has been a preparation, will start to address this issue.

Although the majority of deaf learners undertake full time courses, the finding that deaf learners in England are more likely than the wider FE population to be engaged in part-time courses is curious. One possible explanation is that some learners are on part time courses in order to prepare them for full time learning, although there is little hard evidence to demonstrate this is the case. Another reason may be linked to challenges faced by colleges in terms of funding levels for additional learning support. This funding for most deaf students is not attached to budgets for individual students but rather is aggregated and based on proxy indicators for each college, including the levels of deprivation and prior attainment in English and Maths. A part-time programme might necessitate lower support costs and greater flexibility in use of limited resources from the college's perspective.

However, the introduction of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) in England will change this picture of pattern of study and bring new challenges in terms of meeting support needs. From September 2014 everyone entering post-16 education will be required to participate in full time education or training (unless employed in which case they will be undertaking part time training). Given that deaf young people's low rates of participation in

apprenticeship schemes is a cause for concern (Deaf Apprentice, 2014; Signature, 2013) and that deaf adults in general are four times more likely to be unemployed than the general population (AoHL, 2011, p.7), it is unlikely many deaf learners will be taking part-time courses. The majority of deaf young people will be in FE environments on a full-time basis up until the age of 18 at least.

The implications for FE of greater numbers of full-time deaf learners is yet to be evident both in terms of learning support to the individual and distribution of funding to the institution. Not all deaf young people will be eligible for “high needs funding” which will be available for all learners aged 16 to 18 regardless of educational environment but defined as required additional support costing over £6,000 per annum (DfE, 2013g). The impact of changes in mode of study and funding for the vast majority of deaf learners who will be in FE environments after the age of 16 remains unknown.

4. Presentation of findings: Key informant data

The following presentation of data refers to the key informants in the six local authorities who were a mixture of education, careers and social work professionals as well as parents. In what follows we present an organisation of the key themes from the interviews. Their implications and interpretation are left to Chapter 7 where they will be combined with reflections on the data from the two other sources: college staff and deaf learners. Here their views and experience is presented in its own right.

Preparation and options

Preparation was identified as a key issue in ensuring a good post-16 transition for the deaf young person. There were 5 aspects: (i) starting early; (ii) understanding, not just knowing about options; (iii) expectations and being realistic; (iv) preparing others; (v) constraints on available options.

Starting early

Processes of transition that were identified as having been successful all shared the characteristic of having started early, that is from Year 9 onwards, and conversely those regarded as more problematic had not had this lead-in time. From key informants' perspectives, there were a number of reasons for starting the process early and continuing it over two or three years. The first was that the time enabled the young person gradually to get used to the range of questions to consider, options to explore and decisions they would have to make. Second, the time was helpful in assisting them to acquire skills and experiences that would support them in making those choices later.

For example, some informants described a gradual process of person-centred planning which began with scoping what was of importance and interest to the young person in its own right rather than choices being led or restricted by resources or availability. In this respect time of itself was important because it enabled the young person to reflect and revisit their priorities and wishes in light of experience. One young person developed their person centred plan to cover their aims and wishes up to the age of 25, extending it to a life plan for early adulthood:

And those things are her kind of stepping stones of what she wants, they've been on the transition plan because she wasn't happy with her transition plan kind of ending at kind of eighteen. She wants it to go on, so dog, housemate, then finishing college, get a job, get a husband and have kids. That's her plan...and I think a lot of it will be achievable, maybe not in the order she wants, but I think a lot of it...!

In the examples of best practice that were shared with us, young people had planned visits or taster sessions on various occasions with potential post-16 destinations, whether FE colleges, 6th forms/6th form colleges, or specialist colleges. In respect of out of authority or specialist college placements some informants highlighted the significance of being seen to

have investigated and visited a range of potential destinations, rather than just the specialist college. The reason given was that it would strengthen the case put to the local authority that the specialist and out of authority placement was really the most appropriate option if the young person and their parents could demonstrate that serious consideration had been given to other options. Of itself, visiting a range of provision would also assist in decision making and challenging first assumptions of best fit.

However, practice varied in how well this gradual process over time might have been managed. Two of the parents who provided us with interviews were adamant that it would not have happened to the same extent, even though the transition process started early, if they had not done a lot of the leg work themselves, arranged visits, and advocated for their child. In a number of instances, professionals told us of examples where the process might have been clear in principle, but in practice was rather more ad hoc with a lack of clarity over who was *leading* the process with the young person. One teacher of the deaf honestly explained they were unsure whether they were a particular young person's 'key worker' or not. In another, a parent told us that to fill the vacuum they had just assumed that role themselves but nobody ever had made it clear who was co-ordinating the process for their child.

One of our informants, talking more generally about other parents of deaf children, also made the point that she felt that many parents did not actually grasp that they and their son/daughter were involved in a 'transition' process in which technically a range of options might be considered such as looking for a job or doing an apprenticeship. Rather these parents saw it as more like an end of school meeting the purpose of which was to choose a FE college placement.

Starting early and taking time was also identified as important in terms of the young person needing to acquire new skills or strengthen pre-existing ones in order to be able to cope after leaving the school environment. Some of these skills were identified as connected with different training or educational settings for example, needing to learn how to make it clear if they did not understand something, because in the past the young person's teaching assistant would have done that or filled in the missing information. Other skills to be acquired in preparation for life after school were more associated with general life skills. The examples we were provided with suggested in some cases significant gaps in general maturity and a severely reduced capacity for independence in comparison with other children of comparable ages (see below, Maturity).

The best practice transition planning examples we were given assumed a three stage process over Years 9, 10 and 11 starting with a person centred planning session, followed by or in parallel with a transition review meeting and culminating in an action plan. However it seemed that this process only applied to those students with a statement of special educational needs and/or for whom a section 139a learning assessment would be written at the point of transition.

In the case of two local authorities, best practice was also evidenced by the implementation of an evaluation questionnaire/survey that was targeted at young people after they had made their post-16 transition which explored what had been helpful, what were the barriers and the extent to which they felt they had the opportunity to be listened to and their views taken into account. In one instance this was initiated by the local authority, in another by the private agency who was commissioned by the local authority to provide careers advice and support.

Understanding, not just knowing about options

Many of the participants, whether teachers, social workers, careers officers or parents, in different ways emphasised the significance of the young person building up their understanding of what particular choices might imply, rather than just knowing there were a range of options. For example, thinking through the implications of 6th form college versus FE from the point of view of class sizes and the pace of teaching. Experiencing what employment might entail by having a work placement or doing voluntary work, or attending an interview with a prospective college. Options were not usually properly engaged with unless there was something experiential or exploratory that made them real for the deaf young person.

In the best examples of how this understanding had been developed, schools and potential colleges had worked together from quite early in the young person's transition process to offer taster experiences that could assist in making choices feel real to them, rather than abstract. In other examples, parents had stepped in to do this on behalf of their children if it seemed that the local authority or education service was not offering these opportunities. Given that the parents who spoke to us were highly motivated and very able to arrange these opportunities themselves in light of gaps in local provision, it begs the question what happens in other cases where parents might be less able and the local authorities less proactive?

Another element of making potential choices feel real, rather than only a list of options available, was offering the possibility of advocacy for the young person (see below). Although on the whole informants were of the view that the young people made their own choices, were encouraged to do so and had the appropriate information to do so, they also were aware of subtle pressures that could exist. For example, parents or teachers of the deaf who might be strongly recommending a certain 6th form college or discouraging a potential course, where the deaf young person would have preferred an alternative. Our data from young people themselves (see Chapter 6) also suggests that there were choices they were unaware of at the time of transition, whether in terms of available courses, college options or alternatives to college such as apprenticeships. They report only discovering these further possibilities later once at college. It is not clear/ it is debateable whether this results from genuinely not having been offered choices; the young person's

inability at the time to fully understand the range of choices; or their reluctance and lack of confidence to make their 'voice heard' in the absence of appropriate advocacy

Expectations and being realistic

Several key informants commented that the other side to preparation for post-16 options was whether the young person was being realistic or not in relation to their plans and preferences. One described how it was quite usual to support young people to do their preferred courses in college but to direct them to do it at a lower level than they had intended because they were unrealistic about what they could manage. Another discussed the role they played in diverting young people's ambitions away from goals that were not realistic into ones that were more appropriate e.g. many young people had ambitions to join the army or navy and needed to be told that they could not; another wanted to become a medical practitioner but did not realise that their academic achievements thus far would indicate that they would not be able to do this.

The informants who spoke with us were all confident and experienced professionals and/or parents who felt that they had appropriate expectations for deaf young people. However, most of them also told us about numerous examples of where they had seen other professionals, who were less skilled and experienced displaying inappropriate and low expectations of deaf young people which was damaging. For example, a Connexions worker with little or no experience of deaf people who would routinely rule out potential career ambitions such as becoming a car mechanic, because in his view deaf people could not do that. We were given an example of 6th form college staff who influenced a deaf young person to change their AS/A level courses to ones that were seen as less academically demanding once they had arrived in the 6th form college. In this case, the informant was clear that such a change was not a result of the young person displaying they could not keep up, but rather more a reflection on what the staff thought was a reasonable expectation for someone who was deaf. A parent remarking on her son's sporting prowess commented that his ambitions were probably unrealistic not because he lacked talent but because others could not see past the fact he was deaf and therefore did not treat him equally.

Preparing others

There were a small number of observations about the significance of preparing others, rather than preparing the deaf young person, if a successful transition were to be achieved. These comments went beyond acknowledgment that learning assessment plans would be written and passed on to the transition destination. For example, one participant described with hindsight how he should have prepared a college in advance for the appearance of one of the deaf young people he took to look round, because she had severe facial abnormalities and he felt that this got in the way of the college being able to consider fairly whether they could have met her educational needs. They rejected her application. One of the parents who was interviewed talked knowledgeably about having to educate the environment in

which her daughter would be going about the range of equipment and other resources that it would be helpful for them to have in place if her daughter were to optimally thrive there.

However these comments about the need to prepare the destination not just prepare the young person were in the minority. The onus was firmly on ensuring that the deaf young person was adequately prepared with little overt acknowledgement that this was a bipartite situation in which young person and destination both had a role to play in preparation.

Constraints on available options

Generally, all informants were of the view that deaf young people were aware of all available options open to them on leaving school, were prepared to consider them and were encouraged to make their own choices and follow these through. Nobody painted a picture of overtly imposed choices with little consideration of alternatives and most felt that the key to making informed choices was for the young people to be well prepared in advance (see above), have all relevant information and the opportunity to visit/try out potential destinations. However, it was also clear that underneath this positive picture there was an awareness of some constraints on seemingly open choices and some choices that simply were ruled out or did not exist as a result of custom and practice. These effects worried informants to different degrees.

For example, employment and apprenticeships as one option at the age 16 transition point was largely dismissed by informants because it just did not happen. One of the Connexions workers who was interviewed could not recall any experience of ever having supported a young person to explore employment or apprenticeships at all, not just in relation to the post-16 transition point but later on as well. Whilst some informants knew of successful examples of apprenticeships linked to some FE college courses, only one had any direct experience of this. Given the importance of making options real not abstract for deaf young people, this lack of experience by professionals themselves is of concern.

Only one of our informants discussed explicitly issues of financial rationing and the local authority seeking to direct young people toward options that would be more financially expedient for them. The professional concerned spoke at length about their discomfort with the direction they were given in working alongside young people and their families. Essentially they were told not to present the full range of possibilities and to exclude those would require an out of local authority placement or be more costly, to emphasise first and foremost the range of options available locally and then only if needs be to mention other possibilities. This professional felt that they were unable to support a young person's truly informed choice because they were de-emphasising some potentially appropriate options and forcing the informed choice within the boundaries of a local offer that was not fully inclusive of all available options.

Maturity

The vast majority of deaf young people do not continue in the same school after the age of 16; they transition to a different educational, training or work environment. Few experience a continuity of educational placement in attending a sixth form attached to their previous school. Their age is also a time when naturally a young person would be developing greater independence, maturity and looking to the future as an autonomous adult. We were interested, therefore, to understand perspectives on deaf young people's maturity as influenced by the impact of transitions to college, sixth form, work or apprenticeships.

Impact of the changed conditions of the educational environment

The size and scale of the educational environment into which deaf young people moved brought its own effects, both positive and negative. For some young people it was seen as liberating because in comparison with a small specialist deaf school or deaf resource base within a mainstream school, there were far more social opportunities in the form of clubs, activities and interests through which it was possible to make friends. For other young people, these same conditions were seen as producing the opposite effect particularly if the deaf learner was the only deaf person in the college. They could experience more intensively a sense of difference and isolation and not fitting in. They had to work so hard to keep up that there was no time to take part in the social activities available.

However, being one of several young deaf people in the same college and therefore having a deaf peer group was not necessarily the answer. Informants told us of examples whereby the college had insisted that the deaf young person mixed primarily with other learners with special needs or with the other deaf learners. In one case the college had facilitated a support group to that effect resulting in disabled students having reduced opportunities to develop friends outside of this circle. In another, the college had insisted that the deaf learners sat together and were mostly taught together. Consequently their peer group became each other rather than their classmates as a whole. In another, there was specialist support and a deaf resource base within college that encouraged deaf learners to both meet together for peer support as a means of encouraging autonomy in more challenging hearing environments within the college. However, this deaf resource base only supported BSL users and was largely inaccessible and alien to deaf learners who used spoken language or had hearing needs. In one 6th form college there were three deaf young people but they were actively forbidden from sitting with each other, even if doing the same course in the same class, because it would draw attention to them as 'different' rather than as 'normal'. The informant who recounted this story was clear that the wishes of the young people had not been considered in being told to do this and did not reflect what they wanted.

There were other examples shared with us that were the opposite of these experiences. Namely, young people who previously had been in mainstream settings and who for their post-16 education had transitioned into specialist deaf education colleges and/or residential

environments. For some of them, this transition had significantly positive effects on their personal maturity. One mother described for example, how her child had rapidly learned to take responsibility for herself, and no longer needed to be prompted to do things such as take a shower. She felt this was the result of positive peer pressure and being in company she could identify with.

I was quite pleasantly shocked, even when she came home she was tidy, she even has a shower on her own before I had to keep reminding her it's time for shower now over and over again because she was so slow before so when she went and came back it was like as if she was a different person which so good to see.

In another case, however, an informant discussed his concerns that specialist colleges for 16 to 19 year olds, particularly those that were residential, created a false environment for deaf young people which actually diminished their growing independence because they were not treated in the same way as young hearing people of the same age. For example there were strict curfews and their social lives were monitored and managed.

Personal choices and communication transitions

Informants identified that the general effects of young people growing up and transitioning to new post-16 or post-18 learning environments combined to cause young people to reconsider some of their hearing/communication support choices and preferences. A common issue concerned the use of radio aids and FM systems with informants commenting that many young people gradually sought in their final years at school to reduce their use of these devices in readiness for not continuing to use them in college. Yet this time of seeking to withdraw from their use also coincided with school work becoming more complex and preparing for examinations. The reasons given were usually about how the FM systems meant that the young person looked different, and was a more obvious marker of not fitting in. One of the teachers of the deaf interviewed described his approach to challenging the young person's conclusion that they no longer 'needed' the FM system whilst seeking to respect their wishes as developing autonomous adult. He sought to steer them away from an all or nothing approach, to one that took a more measured consideration of usefulness:

...from my experience, they're beginning to say, usually at the start of Year 11, end of Year 10, 'I don't need my FM system anymore, I can hear'. And I say 'oh praise the Lord, hallelujah', but...what I try and stress is I just try and say embrace everything, get any help that you can and then after a few months if you feel you don't need, it, knock it off then rather say 'I don't need anything' and feel that you're thinking that you do need it.

Other changes in communication and language support were also seen as impacting on issues of personal maturity. For example, one teacher of the deaf described how some young people were used to highly individualised communication support worker or teaching

assistant support. She emphasised that moving to an environment where there was less one to one support could be problematic because of the reduced potential matching individualised learning needs foracing the curriculum. It was also suggested that managing one's own learning needs could come as a shock. There was nobody who was advocating on your behalf when something had not been understood, or you needed the teacher to repeat it, or the classroom to be arranged in a better way to make it communicatively more accessible, for example. Rather, it was pointed out, that the young person needed to do this largely themselves and that required a confidence and assertiveness that some did not yet possess.

Although a minority view, one informant conversely described their real concerns about an extensively resourced 6th form educational environment in which deaf learners had the use of many communication support workers and highly trained teachers sensitive to the learning needs of deaf people. His concern was not about access but rather that such an environment worked to the detriment of a young person's maturity and rights of independence because they had no choice other than to have to pay attention, to look and to learn. The option of not being bothered, ignoring, preferring to do something else instead which might be considered natural for some young people of that age, was simply not open to them. The support forced their attention and reduced their right to choose.

More advanced levels of courses, larger class sizes and the extent to which relevant staff were deaf aware and communicatively competent also affected the choices young people made with regard to their communication support. For example, lectures in which there was a great deal of new or technical language used was the prompt for one young person to consider whether the addition of a notetaker to their usual language support of just an interpreter would be helpful. The level of skills of communication support workers became an issue for some students when in the past it had not. Communication support workers with level two qualifications in sign language were simply unable to communicate the complexity of the information with enough precision not to disadvantage some of the young people that informants told us about.

I think that people supporting deaf students must at least have a level 3 [BSL qualification]. They should have some expertise of the course they are supporting in, or an interest in it themselves. Sometimes it is really hard to translate something if you are not understanding it yourself. For the first couple of weeks, [name] had signing support and his tutor said that he would benefit from having a notetaker as well because it was really hard for him on some really heavy lectures because it is difficult to take note and watch the signer, so I think having a notetaker has made all the difference... not all colleges will offer that.

In some settings, the *style* of education and learning methods relied heavily on group work and peer to peer engagement. These were highly challenging conditions for some young people who could cope easily on a one to on basis or when teaching was more traditionally

didactic, but found it very hard to follow fast flowing, group based interactions that were nonetheless an essential part of the learning process. This was true whether using spoken language or accessing group discussions through an interpreter.

Many of these kinds of communication effects resulting from personal choices of courses and/or particular educational settings were largely unpredictable for the young person. They required adaptations in thinking about the best way to be supported to access the curriculum as events and challenges emerged, rather than in advance. This was not a problem if there was flexibility in the system to reassess learning support needs and to make changes but some of our informants suggested that changes in available provision were not always easy to effect. Furthermore there were other variables that might be hard to influence such as the inflexibility of particular tutors or teachers.

One informant gave the example of a deaf young person enrolled on a performing arts course who asked to be excused from the requirement to sing in public and do a solo performance of four songs. She offered to replace the activity with an alternative, such as signing songs or drumming. This request was refused (whether by the college itself or the awarding body for the qualification was unknown) and the resultant experience was influential in her choosing to exit the course all together. In another example, lack of deaf awareness by the instructor resulted in the young person being severely disadvantaged in their learning:

But she had to drop media studies after a year because the media department refused to do the adjustments that were necessary or required for a deaf person i.e. they would show film in a dark room so the interpreter couldn't interpret it.

It is worth noting with regard this latter example, not only was this evidently bad practice but could also be regarded as illegal with respect to the educational provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and subsequently Public Sector Equality Duty.

Life skills

All of our key informants drew attention to the fact that deaf young people in different ways and to varied degrees lacked many of the life skills that would be usually expected of a young person of their age.

I think it's imperative to support a deaf young person, to meet every need, I don't think it's just about them being able to succeed in a qualification. I think it's bigger than that and I think quite often our deaf young people need support for their social skills and their independence and understanding the world around them. And I think it's that full package of support that enables these young people to achieve in the future. It's not just about getting through a qualification; it's about everything else that goes alongside supporting them.

Some informants described how in some educational settings potential deficits in life skills were acknowledged and worked on before the post-16 transition. For example:

If a student has not been on a bus before as we've had in the past, then before they leave school we try and do some training that area where we get them used to getting on public transport.

In another example a school provided some life skills classes from Year 10 onwards which included such items as how to buy something from a catalogue and how to use a phone directory. In another, it was not so much life skills that were worked on but life skills associated with being deaf:

...in Year 11...we talk about hearing dogs for the deaf, Access to Work...discrimination, environment aids...and just to make them a bit more aware of their hearing loss really and you know how they can help themselves once they leave home even.

However, most informants saw the opportunity of deaf young people moving to a new educational environment after the age of 16 as crucial in making up these life skills and maturity deficits. In part this was because some post-16 placements offered deliberate programmes of education designed to enhance life skills. This mainly happened in specialist college environments rather than mainstream FE colleges:

...she has a timetable which is identified at assessment where she has things like managing her money, she does individualised cooking for herself, she does travel and out and about in the community, so she does all those things alongside her academic qualification of photography and hairdressing.

For others transition from school was seen as a means of releasing dormant maturity that the greater freedom and opportunities of the college or sixth form environment would create. This distinction is important because it indicates not just diversity in the needs of deaf young people but also differences in approach of those who work with them or parent them: personal maturity as a problem requiring specific interventions to manage deficits in the person AND/OR personal maturity as a process requiring the provisions of the conditions in which it can develop.

Emotional support

Informants drew our attention to the significance of emotional support for deaf learners age 16 to 19 and how this could be a particularly vulnerable time for them because of the new challenges resulting from the combination of developmental stage (late adolescence) and the impact of new learning environments and the challenges those brought. The examples of good practice in this respect that we were given included:

(i) the provision of mentors for deaf young people, preferably who were deaf themselves and not too distant in age from the young people (in one example, a college operated a buddy system of student mentors)

(ii) easy access to counselling service that was deaf aware and in the case of sign language users, able to provide a service directly in BSL

(iii) in one specialist college there were specific emotional literacy classes which young people attended

(iv) the availability of advocacy, preferably from a deaf-led service, which could enable the young person to make their wishes known more effectively (see section on advocacy)

There were also some indirect effects on emotional support which arose, for example, from a stronger and more extensive peer group than had previously been available to the young person. Emotional support did not necessarily have to be deliberately provided or be furnished by adults.

Tracking Progression and Outcomes

All of the education professional key informants expressed a wish to have firmer knowledge about what happened next to the deaf young people who they had worked with at the point of transition, whether at 16 or later, when they were making decisions about college, work and their future life. However, all of them also said that there were no official means for them to track the young people's progress, to find out whether the choices they had made on leaving school had been carried through or whether placements in particular courses, or choices of subjects to study and at what level had proved suitable. In all instances, professionals said that there simply was no way for them prospectively to track either the progress or outcomes of the decisions that they had been party to or the support they had put in place. Some picked up bits of information informally through bumping into parents, siblings or through the occasional email from the young person themselves, but this was the extent of their knowledge.

The specialist social workers in our sample also described a similar picture of lack of follow through knowledge. They would not routinely be involved in progression decisions with 16 year olds but described examples of when they would become involved in cases of vulnerability, complexity or safeguarding concern. Yet, unless their remit extended to adult social care then they would not be involved with a young person after the age of 18 even if they had worked closely with them up until that point as responsibility would transfer to a different team within the local authority. Even in the case of a young person who from age 16 had been supported to live independently from their family, continuity of involvement could not be guaranteed.

Opinion differed on whether and why it might matter that professionals did not know what happened next to the young people they worked with. Some saw it as of little consequence because their job was done but for reasons of personal satisfaction it might be good to know. Others felt frustrated that they did not know because they cared about the young people and were curious to find out whether they had achieved their ambitions. This was of particular significance for those informants who had emphasised person centred planning as part of the transition process because of its strong roots in an outcomes perspective for the young person. A few informants drew attention to success stories and how important it was to acknowledge those successes and see that potential can be achieved and possibilities can become real.

I've got another student who has just graduated, he did set design for films...that's from [name of university]...I've got other students...[name of student] is a model now, a male model! I know it's very diverse, isn't it, but you know if I'm being honest they are my most able students I have ever had.

However, none of the professional informants identified that tracking progress against expectations, or outcomes against goals, might provide an important means of feedback on their own involvement as professionals. Its potential as a form of critical reflection was not identified, through which professional roles in assessment, decision-making, empowerment and support might be examined and issues of effectiveness might be considered. There was in reality no feedback loop back to those professionals who were most involved at the crucial points of transition. The significance of tracking progress and outcomes as one element in a consideration of the quality of service structures in general to support transitions post-16, or as a means to raise attainment, was also not considered.

The one concern that was raised with regard to outcomes for deaf young people was what happened *after* their years in college/6th form were over. In this respect three of the professional informants identified that the most pressing issue concerning progression was not about routes into college (whether 6th form or FE) nor progress whilst there, but progression *from* those environments into work (see below).

Employment and preparing for work

There were three main issues that arose from key informants' data concerning employment which were interconnected: (i) employment readiness; (ii) lack of support for transitions to employment; (iii) experiences of employment and work-based training.

Employment readiness had several aspects. Informants suggested that for the majority of deaf young people they worked with, getting a job was not really on their agenda at the first point of transition from school after the age of 16. The vast majority saw it as something to consider after they had completed their college years, whether those were in 6th form, FE college or University. None could recall any deaf young person who had set about finding a

job when their years in compulsory education finished. Therefore a goal, even if not explicitly stated, was for the college years to prepare the young person to be ready to seek employment, whatever that entailed. In some respects, it concerned gaining appropriate qualifications. These might be ones specifically connected with the young person's aspirations such as courses in child care, or the arts. In other cases it was about securing basic levels of literacy and numeracy alongside their other subject choices. The lack of level 2 equivalent qualifications in English and in mathematics was seen as a significant barrier to future employment. The extent to which a college might be flexible in waiving these qualifications as *entry* requirements onto subject specific courses was seen as good practice provided that the young person was also improving their literacy and numeracy alongside their other options:

...photography is a passion and luckily because this college doesn't look at their GCSE levels before they do photography [and] the language is broken down to a level that she can understand, that she been able to access and that's really positive for her because she's good at the practical skills of that. And it would have been a real shame if she couldn't have done it because of her literacy and numeracy levels.

Another aspect of employment readiness concerned specifically having acquired skills that would be vital in seeking employment and maintaining that employment. Key informants, whilst giving us some examples of good practice in supporting the acquisition of these skills, were also quite clear that practice varied greatly across the country and by setting. Not all deaf young people would be fortunate enough to have the support to acquire employment readiness skills. It was viewed as a significant gap and hindrance to deaf young people acquiring employment.

The examples of good practice identified included classes in which young people learnt about how to put a CV together, what was required in filling in forms at the Job Centre, what to expect of an interpreter in the workplace.

...here at the college we often provide role plays and training for the students about what interpreters are and how they are different to CSWs (Communication Support Workers) but also the variety of things for employment. Office support is something that people don't think about, sending emails and making phone calls, so we do try here for the students to know about things.

Other issues that were identified as helpful included more social skills related issues such as work etiquette and developing greater awareness of hearing people's culture and more specifically workplace culture(s):

We have a, part of one project, involves the public speaking skills but also interview skills that has developed a guide to the hearing world of work. That explains hearing etiquette, and information about how they can fit in more easily....the young people

also developed a DVD about support, what kind of support is possible and informing employers how to behave. We have also in the past run interview skills, like developing your cv, dressing appropriately, arriving on time, what employers need to know, how to fit in with rules.

Taster experiences of job placements were also seen as important steps to employment readiness, but informants knew that these were not readily available to deaf young people and highly dependent on the arrangements in place in 6th form, FE and specialist colleges. Two concrete examples were offered but these were regarded as exceptional and good practice rather than reflective of the usual situation. One informant from a specialist college described an array of options including work experience, voluntary work, apprenticeships and internships that were built into their approach to developing deaf young people who came to their college in order to strengthen CVs, build up experience of the world of work, and help the young person identify their future career path. The college was actively working with other mainstream colleges in the area to see how further funding could be accessed from new government schemes to extend further the range of employment and apprenticeship related activities that could be on offer.

Another informant from a deaf-led organisation that supported deaf young people described employing deaf apprentices in the past and how they tried to provide as many work experience related opportunities as possible. However, funding was a concern for such activities and there was a capacity issue in how many opportunities could be provided given the size of the organisation.

The new 'supported internship' programmes were also discussed, specifically in relation to their implementation in one of the specialist college and whilst there was little evidence so far as to how these would work and their effects, they were seen as a positive step especially for the more able students.

Finally, there was general concern about the lack of specialist employment support for deaf young people on leaving college. This was in part linked with changes in local authority responsibility nationally including no longer being *required* to fund a Connexions service and the variable nature of specialist support that had taken its place (see below). It was also more generally discussed in terms of not being recognised as enough of a priority by stakeholders and local authorities in general. As one social work informant put it:

...the most things that I'm worried about and why is what I've said, there isn't any specialist provision for young deaf people searching for employment

Job Centre Plus was not seen as deaf aware or facilitative of the particular needs of deaf young people. Many young deaf people who have left colleges were seen to lack the support or structures to tackle the challenges of finding a job and in the majority of cases there was nobody who was designated with responsibility to ensure this. For example,

social workers would only get involved usually if there were a complexity over and above being deaf and unemployed. The degree of local authority involvement varied in part depending on whether a young person had a Learning Difficulty Assessment which implied responsibility up to the age of 25 years. Colleges themselves did not routinely follow up their graduating students with further advice and support. As one key informant remarked:

They could benefit from a person like a key worker who could be with them to help them to find a job and then gradually allow them to be more independent later on when ready.

Problems with systems and structures

Data were collected from key informants at a time of change in the requirements, government policies and new initiatives concerning post-16 education. These included the extension of the legislative rights associated with Statements of SEN currently limited to young people in school settings to young people in colleges and 6th form colleges, potentially to the age of 25 and separate reforms including the raising the participation age (RPA) and changes to the way in which funding is provided for learners with disabilities/additional educational needs. However, the frustrations and observations of our informants concerning how the system currently operated with regard to funding and support are important to record because they highlight difficulties which the new initiatives in part seek to resolve but evidence of whether this will actually occur is yet to be established. These observations therefore represent a good 'before' picture against which the 'after' effects might be judged. The examples provided are highly specific to deaf learners and their experiences currently of how the system of support and funding can create unintended barriers to informed choice and optimal provision.

Changes in Connexions services and careers advice provision

Several informants remarked on the changes that had taken place in local authority advice duties and also careers advice available to deaf young people. The national system of advisors who also held transitions duties (under the Connexions service) had largely been dissolved, although it was retained in some areas as a local authority commissioned but independently delivered service. This change has had several effects that were regarded by informants as detrimental. These included:

(i) highly variable provision between different local authorities with not all the fulfilment of transitions guidance and careers advice as necessarily a priority for funding or quality provision

Before when Connexions was national I could work with all students, regardless of where they were from. I could liaise with the connexions advisor for their home area, so there was information sharing...to make sure they had the right support and the home area knew what that young person was thinking and what the difficulties were

so things could be put in place....Then the funding change. I am only allowed to work with students from [this area]... which means if the student comes from [different named area], unless they pay for me to see them I can't... So that is a massive issue.

(ii) careers guidance being vested with schools and colleges could create a conflict of interests with advice favouring some options over others and excluding some possibilities which might be regarded as too expensive or outside of the local authority's 'offer';

(iii) young people fundamentally now lacked an independent specialist careers advice and guidance service to which they could turn, one that was independent of schools, parents or the local authority;

(iv) whilst in some cases there were staff within the schools with appropriate qualifications in careers guidance, in others the task was delegated to a teacher and more often than not in the case of deaf learners to a specialist teacher of the deaf who was seen as having expertise in deaf young people even if no specific expertise in careers advice or guidance.

Current funding arrangements

Whilst all informants were of the view that the structure of funding for support should not be regarded as a key driver in decision making about post-16 educational placements, in reality it did have an effect that had to be taken into consideration and which impacted on young people's choices. For example, in choosing between 6th form in school or an FE college or 6th form college for a similar course/qualification, some young people would be guided to the 6th form school option, regardless of other factors (such as location, benefits of college atmosphere or structure). This was because teacher of the deaf provision was allowed to continue within 6th form school provision but at the time of data collection both 6th form college and FE college provision lay outside the current SEN system. If the young person transitioned into a college, support in that environment from a teacher of the deaf was much more unlikely (or locally conventionally no provided). That said some 6th form colleges did seek to buy in teacher of the deaf expertise and in specialist colleges with 6th form provision it was present in any case.

The costs of transport to and from post-16 provision was also a hidden decision maker for some young people. Even if a more appropriate placement existed for educational reasons, it would not necessarily be chosen in comparison with another because there was a cap on the allowance that could be paid for transport to and from the college. Furthermore, the amount of money available for transport costs had been cut which has affected choices in some cases.

But additionally, transport funding has been cut so one of the major issues is that she's now...when she was weighing up her options, you know, there was funding available for transport and now they don't get any funding for transport so that's a massive chunk out of her weekly income, so she's having to kind of ...she's having to

review her option now in light of this current funding. [name of provision] is not her first choice, but it [depends on] if she can get funding together.

The costs of transport were also a factor brought to our attention at the point of choosing between available post-16 options for a different reason; some parents were unable to afford the costs of visiting prospective college placements, particularly if they were specialist out of county residential environments. Consequently they were not counted in by parents as on the list of potential options for their children.

The structure of social work provision

Not all deaf young people would have a social worker. Generally a social worker would be allocated if there were issues of family breakdown, safeguarding, vulnerability including mental health problems, or risk (including child protection). Also a deaf young person with complex needs on account of the co-incidence of physical and/or learning disabilities or chronic long term illness/conditions might also have a named social worker. Informants were concerned about the impact after the age of 18 of changes in social work provision associated with moving from children's services to adult services responsibility. These impacts could vary but a key issue was whether the social worker who would be allocated the case had any understanding or experience of deaf young people and the language skills to work with them:

...one of the [young people] had a (social) worker but the signing expertise was not at a level as proficient as the level is within the adult workers in the Sensory Team because their work, it covers children with many different needs, so they haven't got the expertise with working with deaf people, in particular communication and understanding of Deaf culture.

In one scenario, the specialist social worker with deaf people had worked alongside a children and families social worker when the young person was under the age of 18 but at the point they transferred to adult social care, her involvement was disallowed. In another, the opposite was true. The social worker who had been allocated when the young person was a 'child' had little or no understanding of the strengths and needs of deaf children/young people but the situation would be different when they transferred to adult social care because there was a specialist team of social workers with expertise in working with deaf adults/young adults.

There was also a more generic issue of social work support for deaf children/young people which concerned thresholds for service provision in the first place. One of our social work informants made it clear that for them the key issue was not whether a young person 'should' have a social worker because of some additional complexity in their life. It was whether the fact they met the criteria for social work intervention would actually be *recognised*. Furthermore, if it were recognised it would still not necessarily be prioritised in

comparison with other young people whose circumstances meet the threshold for intervention and support.

I think the threshold for supporting is very high compared to what it was from before perhaps only five years ago. The different types of referrals we are having to scrap or use signposting but we do not know if these have been followed up; this has presented elements of risks too...it is quite possible that a lot of them would have slipped through the nets. Also I have a manager who decided if the referral is appropriate for our intervention but they are not always aware of the potential deaf issues; that can be a problem too.

Availability of advocacy

In some of the local authorities from which informants were drawn, advocacy was a provision that was available to deaf young people and we were given many examples of good practice in how it had been used. In the majority of cases the advocacy service was led by and provided by deaf people. For example, advocates helped deaf young people to explore their wishes prior to and during engagement with transition process and to “find their voice” during meetings that involved them, or to consider their options at age 19 and the end of their current educational provision. However, the involvement of advocates does not always go well:

There was myself (the advocate) and the deaf student and one hearing person really took over the meeting and the poor parent was trying to be supporting but the deaf student was relying on the parent. I was really pressurised and put down by this hearing professional. I just thought what’s going on here. You should be listening to her views. It was an horrendous meeting and I hated it. At the end of the day, the student had misinformation on which she based her next move which was dropping out of college.

More broadly we were given an example of an advocacy service that worked from a *participatory* model. This approach facilitates young people’s participation in activities and discussions which build their social skills and confidence and provides the space for self-exploration which in turn enables them to take part in structures and decisions that concern them and to identify their wishes. The participation model used by the advocacy service in the research project was compared with another they had seen from a national organisation:

We have found the NDCS⁹ participation team has an interesting view on participation and it’s quite different compared to ours. It is more youth involvement not

⁹ We have chosen to include this comment that refers specifically to the funders of this research study because the participant wanted their views recorded and to exclude it would appear to be exercising a degree of censorship. However, in doing so we are neither endorsing nor disagreeing with the comment – merely representing it.

participation. They are two very different things. We need to have a discussion with NDCS about this.

The distinction drawn by this participant is between involvement which is characterised by including deaf young people which may be passive and participation which emphasises the active role and power of deaf young people to shape priorities and to learn and develop skills through 'doing' rather than contributing to a pre-existing agenda.

Informants suggested that in the case of examples of advocacy services and youth participation services which are funded directly by local authorities, cuts to funding and/or uncertainty about funding priorities place these services in jeopardy or make their continued involvement with deaf young people uncertain. Those who spoke about advocacy services were also all too aware that there were inequities in access to such provision across the country for deaf young people meaning that many who might want such support and could benefit from it had little chance of its provision. In one case the deaf-led advocacy service was bought into a college provision that had a very wide catchment area. The advocate did not work for the college but was paid for on an individual basis by the home local authorities of the young people she worked with. Therefore whilst the college strongly supported and endorsed the service for the deaf young people there, it could only be made available to those whose home local authorities were prepared to pay for it. Also whilst some social workers could, and regularly did, take on an advocacy role in their involvement with deaf young people, they only worked with very few (see above) and so this was not a viable alternative to bought in advocacy services.

Other systems effects

In addition to these main topics of system effects which could impact on choice and quality of post-16 provision, there were a few other quirks in the current arrangements which were brought to our attention. For example, whether the location of post-16 education (FE or 6th form provision) had an effect on transitions for a young person from paediatric to adult audiology provision. Local authorities/health authority custom and practice varied. It was suggested that there were, for many deaf young people, benefits in remaining within children's audiology services because of continuity of care and in some cases lack of readiness for independence (see above, section on Maturity) which meant they were less able to cope with a service provision that was expecting greater individual autonomy from the patient.

Variability in how careers advice was provided between local authorities was also highlighted, as well as differences in provision for those young people with Learning Difficulties Assessments and those without. As one informant explained, the lack of a structure which routinely follows up deaf young people up to the age of 25 who are eligible for continued careers support means that contact is rather ad hoc and largely dependent on the young person exercising their right for support:

[It] doesn't get taken up very often, there have been a couple I have worked with beyond college, I do say I am available to work with you and give them my contact details but the onus is on them to ask me for support, but it doesn't happen much. I'm not sure why. It might be that the support they are getting is good enough, or maybe they are just not confident enough to ask me for that support. I'm not sure why that is.

In another example we were given, the local Connexions worker was only contracted to work with deaf students in the specialist college and was never referred any deaf students in mainstream FE provision. As he has good communication skills and expertise in working with deaf young people he felt it was a missed opportunity.

Concluding summary

The key informants, drawn from varied professional backgrounds and some with personal experience of parenting a deaf child/young person have highlighted some key issues in effective provision including:

- the significance of transition as a process not as an event and the need to prepare young people in order optimally to participate;
- building deaf young people's knowledge of available options in such a way as to reach realistic decisions which are founded in a good understanding of what might be available. This might require experiential learning not just explanation in theory.
- the importance of FE as a context for the development of life skills and employment readiness but these require specific and deliberate attention (they will not necessarily occur simply through being in an environment requiring greater autonomy and maturity than that at school);
- the importance of attending to the emotional support needs of deaf young people in this phase in their life;
- the role of advocacy in assisting deaf young people with decision making and participation;
- the variable nature and quality of careers support and guidance;
- for those young people who need it, the constraints on the appropriate execution of social work provision created by the organisation of the system between children's and adult social work teams and its effects on specialist practice with respect to deaf people.

5. Presentation of findings: College staff data

Progress through post-16 education and outcomes

Participants universally reported that dropping out of college was quite rare for deaf students, accounting for perhaps only 5% of deaf students in their experience. [This contrasts markedly with evidence from our analysis of official statistics, see Chapter 3, in which we identified a dropout rate of 17% in comparison with 8% in the general population]. Participants told us that reasons for dropping out were usually health-related or changes in personal circumstances (such as moving house) and only extremely rarely because the young person had found employment as an alternative to college. A far more common picture was one in which deaf students were facilitated to stay within the college environment even when initial choices of courses proved inappropriate or too hard. In such cases the students were re-assessed and encouraged to do a different course, or to study at a lower level.

We do everything we can and keep student stay in education to achieve. I should imagine that [drop out] is less that in hearing college environments.

...here we give students alternative options rather than leaving college.

There was a student who wants to do level 3 in catering this year but had not been offered a place because they were not skilled enough. Instead they were encouraged to stay on Level 2 but in a different subject...

For students who made good progress, there were incremental plans for their continued study from pre-level 1, to level 1, level 2 and then in some cases level 3 courses. This could mean that a student arriving at age 16 might study for 5 years within the college. For students who were struggling to achieve at pre-level 1 courses, college staff reported finding multiple courses for them to do at the same lower levels of achievement because of the perceived benefits of them remaining within FE regardless of an upward trajectory of academic attainment. These benefits included acquisition of social skills, greater maturity and opportunities for socialisation. Common examples were transferring students to access courses with a purpose of confidence building or training for independence; courses that a student might repeat more than once. Only one participant in one college disagreed with this approach and was of the view that students should not be permitted to collect multiple courses at the same low level without and evidence of progress to higher levels of achievement.

There were also students at the opposite end of the attainment spectrum who went on to higher education, whether directly or through a foundation level HE course first. In some examples, this was a straightforward picture of progressing to HE. In others, the college environment had provided additional years to reach the level 3 grade and the platform for

progression to HE e.g. a student might take 4 years rather than 2 years to achieve that after the age of 16.

For students of all abilities, the specialist colleges in our sample felt it was important to work towards students being able to access general further education courses and not just courses within the specialist environment. One college explicitly drew the distinction between foundation learning and general further education. Therefore they saw it as a sign of real progress when students became able and confident enough, with support, to carry out some or all of their studies in mainstream colleges within the locality whilst benefitting from the specialist support back in their own colleges. Many students' individual learning plans had such access as a key goal.

When students first arrive in college, even if there have been detailed processes of transition, it is not uncommon for students to be unsure what courses they want to do, or to discover that they are doing courses they do not like, or that they are ill-prepared to study at the level of the course they are enrolled on because of the level of English or numeracy expected. Even in those cases where prospective students visit colleges beforehand, or do taster days, or have a detailed assessment as part of the transition process, change within the first few months of arrival is not unusual. In cases where the college might not routinely permit such late changes of course, participants told us that they were usually able to argue successfully for changes on grounds of the student being 'deaf'.

In part, these early changes in courses are explained by students being aware in theory, but not necessarily through experience/in practice, what a subject actually means or what a course might entail. Participants remarked that students have quite limited awareness and experience and there are always some who start off doing a course because that is what their parents/school wanted them to do rather than it being their choice founded on their understanding of what might be involved.

Participants remarked that often students arrive with completely unrealistic or ill thought through expectations which are founded on limited understanding. For example, a student who wanted to be a GP but had no idea that a high level of English and mathematics would be essential; or a student who wanted to be a professional sportsperson but had never considered that they may face unequal opportunities because they were deaf; or a student who wanted to join one of the emergency services and was unaware that they would need to have a good level of general qualifications to do so. In these circumstances, participants described various strategies to ensure the young person remained motivated but their false expectations were not colluded with. For example, a young person who wanted to be a vet and did not have the ability to study at the level that would be required was supported by their personal tutor to opt for a course in animal care instead.

It was also pointed out that sometimes changes in course options also resulted from failure to have *high enough expectations* of the young person. We were given examples of deaf

students who were BSL users who had initially been enrolled in courses that were considerably below their level of ability because of their poor levels of English and/or lack of access in BSL to learning at school. When provided with interpreter support and a more tailored approach to English support, they were able to succeed at a higher level than indicated on entry into college.

All colleges emphasised the importance of on-going assessment of deaf students. This was not necessarily assessment in the formal sense of measuring attainment but also in the sense of ensuring 'fit' and responding quickly when it seemed the course the student was enrolled on was not working for them. For example a student studying at A level and struggling with the course work might be encouraged to continue with the subject but to study it as a BTec instead. Where deficits in literacy and numeracy were greater than had previously been recognised, a student might be assigned extra coaching.

However, the flexibility to meet emerging support needs was to some extent constrained by finance. The average amount of English tutoring for example, in colleges which were not specialist was reported to be around 2 hours a week for most students. However, the key issue is not whether such an amount of tutoring was appropriate or not, or whether more (or less) might be available elsewhere. It was whether the learning environment had the resources to increase or decrease that which might be available to meet emerging needs, or had limited flexibility with resource constraining flexibility. Some packages of support had to be negotiated with the home local authority of a student placed out of authority and success was not guaranteed. Also funding cuts more generally had affected the range of support that some colleges felt they could offer. For example, with regard to deafblind students in a college with a resource based, one participant remarked:

Due to funding cuts we have had no deafblind students and this college has to prove what is achievable and this affects their attainment statistics – not worth the risk if they don't think that person will pass.

With regard to employment, most of the participants had little idea about whether graduation from the college resulted in employment for the deaf students they had worked with. All were quite clear that was the goal toward which they were working – employment regardless of the level of qualifications on leaving college. There were not, however, easily available data on destinations of the young people leaving college. One participant estimated that she thought around 30% found employment with a further 10% to 15% progressing to HE. Some deaf young people left seeking employment then when they were unsuccessful returned to the same college of a further few years study. However, generally speaking all of the participants we spoke to did not have any clear ideas or accurate figures on the destinations and attainments of students once they left their college environment.

Preparation for transitions from the college environment

All participants were, to differing extents, focused on the future of the deaf young people they had contact with at college. The difference was that in some of the environments we sampled, this future-focused orientation meant that there were extensive structures and systems in place which helped young people engage with the world of employment (or Higher Education) to which they would transition. Deaf learners were provided with comprehensive preparation to support that transition. This was evident in the two specialist college environments and one of the deaf resource bases within a FE college that had a tailor made programme. In the other environments, arrangements and preparation for transition from the college were far less systematic and more dependent on the skills and experience of an individual who might be working with a deaf learner (such as a CSW) rather than the college as a whole executing a specific plan.

Within those environments that planned well for the needs of deaf young people when they left college, there were some recurring features.

(i) Preparation for transition from college starts from the first point of entry into college and builds incrementally throughout the young person's college career. Some of the learning is implicit but designed to be transferable into the workplace, such as how to use an interpreter (rather than a communication support worker); or how to address people in various roles with different degrees of authority (e.g. why it's not appropriate to call lecturers in college 'Miss' but then how to decide what is the appropriate form of address). Some of the learning is much more explicit, with special classes and activities about preparation for work that are timetabled e.g. in one college there is a foundation level qualification in 'employability' in another there is a parallel curriculum that runs through the year on independence skills, some of which concern directly employment; in another students do a "skills for work life" course. In one college there were staff with designated responsibility exclusively for supporting transitions from the college such as an "Employment liaison officer" (who organises work placements and liaises with the job centre).

The whole theory of this college is to prepare students for work so they know from day one that there are a lot of activities happening in each term in this college that can support them career wise (e.g. students union, job fair, employment week...).

(ii) classes and activities are designed to give young people knowledge and experience of some of the practicalities of employment. Examples given included classes in CV writing, visiting the local job centre, learning about pensions, National Insurance contributions, interview skills, dress code.

We have a job club and employment liaison staff on site. In class, we do CV, application form, budget management and independent living skills preparation too for when they leave.

For those likely to go on to Higher Education, the colleges provided mock interviews, visits to likely HE colleges, support in completing UCAS forms.

(iii) Specific education is provided about deaf-related aspects of employment such as how to apply for and use Access to Work, how to use a note taker, how to book an interpreter. One participant emphasised the importance of deaf-led opportunities for learning about the world of work:

...we have an induction week and a leaver week, we invite deaf speakers to come to talk about different things in the workshops. We have Deafax coming in regularly, all sorts of different deaf people coming to talk about their life experiences.

(iv) Life skills are deliberately developed and taught in readiness for independence.

We have support in different departments e.g. residential care and counselling. We share the work to help students for when they live independently- laundry, transport, cooking, shopping, money management.

(v) experiential placements, whether work placements or taster days in HE colleges are made available or built in to some courses to run alongside college learning (e.g. in child care courses, or car mechanic courses this blended learning was quite common).

In college environments lacking such deliberate structures to support post-college transitions, participants nonetheless described many of the same needs that deaf young people had in preparation for their future on leaving college. However, planning to meet those needs was more episodic and dependent on their recognition by individual support workers or tutors, rather than a comprehensive curriculum which addressed them from the start. Also, whilst the college in general might support all of their students to plan for the future and life after college, how they did so was not necessarily suited to the needs of deaf students. For example, toward the end of their course, it was usual practice in one college for an advisor to furnish students with a 'Future/progression form' that listed options such as other courses, apprenticeships and so forth. But no further support was provided to assist students to think through the options, or to check if they fully understood the implications of them. Also the process was not well staffed for any of the students in the college let alone deaf students who might need further assistance.

Some of the more implicit features of college life which enhanced maturity such as being more independent and having greater personal control over learning support needs were the same as elsewhere and the opportunities presented through these to support deaf young people's autonomy were exploited.

...it is very different from being at school. The school is more 'do this, do that' but when they are here it is more of asking where would you want to sit and where you would want me to sit, more of asking them of what they would want. It is more

about their time to learn to take control, it is about giving them some control, not full control obviously, otherwise they would go off, but given them some control; it is their support.

However, participants were aware that more could be done in preparation for young people leaving college and becoming independent learners, independent employees and citizens, than usually happened.

Nonetheless, individuals gave examples of good practice which were strongly led by them, at times in spite of rather than because of, the provisions of the colleges in which they worked.

... well my aim is prepare them for life, to prepare them to mix more in the hearing world, so they can go between deaf and hearing worlds, and to be able to jump in either of the two worlds. Students will be here for special education. My aim is to encourage them and to give them skills or some tools to be in the real world...and to get used to being and talking with hearing people more and not be less reluctant and feel [they] do not like hearing people, and being passive. We would continuously keep trying to encourage them to get to mix more with hearing people more.

Personal and emotional support

College can represent a variety of differing experiences for deaf young people in comparison with their previous learning environments. For some, they transition from being the only deaf person (or one of a few) in school, to having an extensive deaf peer group; for some the experience is the opposite. For some, college may represent the possibility of accessing the curriculum differently e.g. no longer using a FM system, or having an interpreter and notetaker. For others, communication support continues as usual. However, for all students, college marks a growing trajectory of independence and young adulthood with the new and different challenges and problems that might bring. We therefore asked all participants to comment on the structures and processes available to deaf young people for personal and emotional support in the college environment.

All participants emphasised that whilst emotional and personal support was an important and a common issue for the deaf young people they worked with, it was not possible to generalise. Each young person was different and required varying degrees of personal and emotional support and the nature of that could vary widely with circumstances and over time. Nobody labelled deaf young people as 'typically' or 'usually' needing any specific kind of emotional support. The approach was highly individualised. Once again, however, there were significant variations in how this support was provided and the structures and processes of its delivery depending on the college environment sampled.

At one end of the spectrum was the specialist college who in effect operated an emotional curriculum for all of its deaf students. This was both pro-active and tailored. Depending on

the year and stream of study, students had classes in emotional well-being, strategies to support positive mental health and a system of top up one to one tutorials if a specific issue needed to be addressed. This contrasts with one of the mainstream FE colleges with a resource base who bought in occasional sessions from outside organisations such as 'Signhealth', to deliver specific days of education and training to support positive well-being.

At the other end of the continuum was a mainstream FE college that did not provide any pro-active, preventative mental health/emotional well-being work but who would respond if a student had a problem. However, in this particular college there was a degree of denial that deaf students might need something additional to hearing students in dealing with a personal or emotional difficulty. There was a strong emphasis on the deaf students understanding that the problems they were experiencing were similar to those all young people of that age might experience. This realisation was on its own thought of as helpful:

Interviewer: If they are struggling, their self esteem would be affected so how would you cope with that situation?

Participant: I would explain that they would not be the only person that is struggling with this course as there would be others too. It would be same as others.

The role of the tutor or support worker (including CSWs) also varied between college environments in terms of the degree of involvement and responsibility to support a deaf student that might be expected if the student were experiencing emotional problems. At one end of the spectrum, in the two specialist colleges and one of the FE colleges with a resource base, the expectation was that the tutor (personal tutor, or course tutor) might reasonably be the first port of call for the student. Students spoke freely to them and understood that this support fell within their role and remit. Sometimes, it could be difficult for a staff member to fully understand what a student was saying if they were a BSL user and signing quickly or in a more disorientated way as a result of distress. If this happened then deaf tutors usually dealt with the student.

One of our participants made it clear that they thought that deaf signing students would naturally gravitate toward deaf tutors who were BSL users to discuss emotional or sensitive issues because they could be assured of direct communication (no interpreter needed) and felt more comfortable as they were having the conversation with another deaf person. Whilst this was not felt to be the case so strongly in the other specialist college and resource base, the principle of tutors carrying out routine support work in engaging with deaf students' emotional distress held true. This approach contrasts markedly with a comment from a participant working in a large mainstream college environment in which there was only a handful of deaf students and less on site expertise. The participant explained that he saw a young person's preference for signing as an indicator that an external specialist was needed if there were emotional problems:

...if a girl is having difficulties at home, we can't give counselling here, we would have to ask someone to come in from outside to use sign language with her, things like that...

In two of the other college environments it was more usual practice that the deaf young person went to their communication support worker for personal and emotional support because this was someone they were used to and with whom they felt able to communicate. Whilst participants were uneasy about this practice from the perspective of reinforcing dependency on the CSW at a time when the young person should be experiencing greater autonomy, nobody actually thought that this custom and practice was inappropriate. It was just not ideal. The alternative was described as the young person having to use an interpreter to engage with a tutor about what was worrying them and this was not seen as helpful because it introduced an element of mediated rather than direct communication. Yet only two people remarked on the potential conflicts that might arise from the CSW becoming the repository of the deaf young persons' problems or distress. One participant felt that crossing that boundary could create difficulties later because their role with the young person became blurred and there was no incentive for the young person to learn about who it might be appropriate to seek support from as an alternative. It was not empowering.

In examples of more serious difficulties that a young person might have, there were very different responses that were more indicative of how the college usually responded rather than any particular variations between the nature of the young person's problem. In the specialist colleges there were structures of in-house expertise, such as counsellors, guidance officers, benefits advisors and family liaison officers. In the other colleges, participants discussed the possibilities of referring to social services, educational psychologists or external counselling services. Preferred counsellors were those who were deaf aware, or deaf themselves if possible (not necessarily BSL users). Some mainstream colleges had their own in-house counsellors available to all students. In these cases good practice was described as booking the same interpreter every time the young person saw the college counsellor. Nobody remarked on whether using a college counsellor might be disadvantageous if they were not used to working with a deaf young person. Practice also varied about the extent to which college staff would see it as their responsibility to try to engage with a young person's difficulties first prior to seeking a specialist referral.

College environments that were residential also made use of additional possibilities to impact positively on the well being of deaf young people and also to respond to emotional problems they might have. These additional possibilities consisted of having more and also different staff to whom young people could go, such as counsellors associated with the residences. Also because the boundaries between what was the college learning day and what was the college outside of the formal learning environment were strictly adhered to,

young people had the opportunity to say things at 'home' that they felt less comfortable discussing in 'school'. The dual environments for support were important.

Peer groups were also identified as potentially important sources of support for deaf young people but they had varying impacts depending on the kind of college environment. A deaf majority environment in college created new peer groups and new support resources that had been lacking for deaf young people who had entered college from mainstream or educational environments with small numbers of deaf pupils. In the case of residential colleges, having other deaf people 'at home' not just in the classroom was also seen as advantageous for peer to peer support. By contrast, a minority of deaf students within a resource base in a large college were seen as potentially creating an unhelpful peer support environment if young people as a result kept to their clique and did not explore peer friendships on a wider basis.

Some participants reported that they were aware of deaf young people (mainly those who might be termed hard of hearing) in large mainstream college environments who sought deliberately to hide their deafness in classes in order to try to build new friendships. This tended to happen particularly in situations where they might be the only deaf person on a campus in a split-site college situation. Participants generally felt frustrated when they learned about these examples because they felt they might be able to assist but at the same time tried to respect the young person's decision not to reveal their deafness.

Finally, two kinds of particular personal problems were brought to our attention. One was regarded as specific (although not necessarily rare), the other as increasingly common for this age group. The first concerned deaf young people of Asian heritage who had been educated in English and/or BSL but whose parents and wider family were not fluent English user and/or did not use BSL. Growing up brought familial expectations such as marriage and future employment that they were ill-equipped to understand or influence because they were unable to discuss them at home. The second issue perceived as increasingly common was financial problems that young people were experiencing. Changes to the benefit system and alterations in allowances e.g. for travel, had hit some young people hard and left them with little financial independence and in some cases debts which were a source of anxiety.

Students can visit other services like Finance if they have money problems. The demand has gone up because of the benefit cuts last year – some may be living independently and need money for food. They also provide advice on benefits if student are entitled...

Language and communication support

Between the six colleges sampled there were some differences in emphasis and approach with regard to language and communication support for their deaf students. Rather than

painting a pen picture of each of the six colleges we have chosen to draw out some recurring issues across all of them and demonstrate the diversity and commonalities in how these were treated in the different educational environments.

We make the distinction between 'language' and 'communication' to draw attention to the complexities of young people's strengths and needs. For example, communication support might be required in situations where all parties use the same language but for varying reasons may not access each other's communication optimally. Language support may be required because of modality (the difference between speaking and reading) or as a result of multiple language use (BSL and English), or to improve and support understanding in situations where only one language might be used e.g. if terms are unfamiliar or the content complex. Language and communication are not used synonymously and we were given many complex examples of different configurations of both for young people dependent on context as well as the young person's language strengths or communication preferences.

Guiding philosophy

Only two of our sample described any overarching guiding philosophy with regard to language and communication for deaf students; these were the two specialist colleges. In one case, the approach was Total Communication which in their terms meant that all means of accessing and utilising language and communication were available to all students and supported whether this was signing, lip-reading, speaking, BSL, lip-speaking, writing, reading and so forth. Also a total communication environment implied that close attention was paid to the benefits and use of texting, social media, subtitling and IT skills more generally. Any students who arrived at the college with no signing skills were specifically encouraged to acquire some both to extend their personal repertoire of communication access and to encourage mixing with other students in the college. By contrast, the other specialist college took a more explicitly sign bilingual approach with an emphasis on BSL (rather than signing to support speech/English), the availability of speech and language therapy, a strong emphasis on audiology and management of acoustical conditions for learning, and making the English curriculum accessible in translation (into BSL).

...all students have BSL as part of their curriculum and ...they would be matched with right level for them. Some students will have some additional speech and language therapy or one to one audiological support, this would depend on each of their communication needs...three students have come here this year with no BSL but have very good English so they were able to pick up quite quickly the sign language...

Whilst in both cases the two colleges were clear that they were led by the strengths and areas of support of individual learners, the overarching philosophies moulded the support packages available.

In the case of the other 4 colleges, whilst again there was a strong emphasis on individually tailored packages of support, they adopted a much more laissez-faire approach with no

overt philosophical emphasis. They did seek to influence their students' learning support through the introduction of new aspects of support (if appropriate) that the student might not have tried before e.g. notetakers, but generally were led by the recommendations of the school from which the student transferred, supplemented with their own assessments and observations once the student was in the college.

Continuity or diversity of support personnel

Opinions varied between colleges about the desirability, or not, of deaf students experiencing continuity of those who supported them, whether as a communication support worker (CSW), notetaker, or interpreter. On the one hand, some colleges were against the same person following the student through their classes because the one-to-one relationship could create a dependency, which was not regarded as helpful. The relationship became about the person not about the language support they provided to access the curriculum.

We don't provide the same interpreter for each student year by year because they would rely on that person too much [and become] attached/close. We feel it is better to have them to have a mixture of support staff based on communication style, signing level, personality as they will not have the same interpreter when they go to university or work. I hope we have prepared them well for when they are in real world. We have students come and ask for the same person but they know it is not healthy for either of us.

In other cases continuity was seen as the more preferable option because the support person would get to know the course themselves, build up a certain expertise in its content and therefore be better able to support the young person's access to learning. One of the specialist colleges described how they encouraged some of their students (when ready) to take responsibility for booking their own communication support, whether CSWs, notetakers or interpreters from the pool available. This was both to get the young person used to taking responsibility for their own learning support and to mirror the reality outside the college environment as a preparation for the world of work. All of these approaches, however, were to some extent constrained by influences outside of immediate control, such as a shortage of CSWs which reduced available choice, or curriculum clashes or different course requiring different kinds of skills from the communication and language support worker therefore different people.

Interpreters or CSWs?¹⁰

In the two specialist colleges and one of the colleges with a resource base, participants made a distinction in their discussions between interpreters and CSWs. That is to say that some students for some courses might use an interpreter and their skills were seen as those needed to translate the curriculum/the course content/the theoretical work/the assignments into BSL or from BSL into English. CSWs were used and available to act more as a bridge between the individual learner and the course content, maximising the accessibility of the curriculum and the participation of the student within the course. An individual student might use both or either depending on their needs and the course demands. It was not simply that interpreters were used for the higher achieving students who might be doing A levels and had their eye on going to university. One of the colleges with a deaf resource base also described how important interpreters could be as the main language support for deaf students with learning disabilities whose first language was nonetheless BSL.

In the other colleges, there was not really any demarcation expressed between interpreters and CSWs with CSWs regarded as the normative expectation. Even in those examples where an individual CSW might be qualified to interpreter level, their role was as a CSW. The vast majority of CSWs were not, however, qualified to this level (see below).

Qualifications of language and communication support staff

Participants across all colleges we sampled were confident that they had appropriately high expectations of the qualifications and experience of the language and communication support staff they employed. There was considerable emphasis on raising the standards of qualifications, for example notetakers were sent on recognised courses to improve the standard of their work. Communication support workers were generally expected to acquire level 3 signing skills but participants in some colleges admitted that they did have some CSWs with level 1 and level 2 signing skills working there. In one of the sampled specialist colleges the seven strong workforce of CSWs were all qualified *above* level 3. One participant mentioned that the cost of sign language training through Signature was seen as a barrier in encouraging more CSWs to become more qualified once in post. Nobody who discussed the provision of CSWs questioned whether the expectation of level 3 signing skills might nonetheless be too low for the complexity of some of the courses that some of the

¹⁰ ADEPT (The Association of Deaf Education Professionals and Trainees) defines: "A Communication Support Worker (CSW) enables access to communication, using a variety of support strategies and communication modes to match individuals' needs and preferences. CSWs liaise with other professionals such as: Teachers of the Deaf, audiologists, teachers, lecturers, other CSWs and team leaders. This support generally involves a two-way exchange of information, through BSL, written notes or clear speech, and provides access to information and opportunities within the educational institution. Many learners require more than one form of support at the same time and therefore may need the services of more than one professional within the same session. The CSW facilitates access to the curriculum and the wider learning environment in schools, universities, colleges of further education, adult education centres and other learning environments, and meets the needs of the individual deaf learner wherever possible."

http://adeptuk.co.uk/GalleryEntries/Adept_Documents/Documents/CSW_Code_of_Practice.pdf

A sign language interpreter is a trained professional who works between 2 languages British Sign language and English and is registered in accordance with the national occupational standards in interpreting <http://www.asli.org.uk/asli-documents-and-guidance-p119.aspx>

students might access, particularly in those cases where it was not considered usual to employ an interpreter instead of a CSW.

The role of qualified teachers of the deaf as part of the students' language support package (rather than as those who taught the curriculum) was only rarely mentioned. In two of the four non-specialist colleges, they had recently advertised or appointed a teacher of the deaf. This person would be the only one in the support team for deaf students in those locations. In the specialist colleges teachers of the deaf were much more common and among the varied staff mix who delivered the curriculum and/or supported deaf students' education. They were not regarded as additional support that had to be arranged in advance or which might cost additional resources, or whose availability might be constrained. All of these issues were brought up as potential problems with respect to teachers of the deaf working in mainstream FE provision.

English literacy was routinely seen as its own subject and sometimes delivered by teachers of the deaf (in the specialist colleges) and sometimes delivered by 'tutors'. In some cases English was the subject of additional coaching/tutoring running alongside the other courses a student would take as a means of supporting success in those courses rather than as its own qualification. What marked out college environments as different in those cases where English was specifically taught, was whether teaching was delivered directly, or through an interpreter or CSW. There were a variety of configurations. These included: Deaf tutors using BSL who taught English directly to BSL using students; CSWs who taught English directly to deaf students in whatever language and modality but who did not necessarily possess teaching qualifications or training; CSWs or interpreters who provided language support for students who were being taught English by qualified teachers but not teachers of the deaf; and finally, CSWs and interpreters who provided communication support/translation for classes which were taught by English language tutors (not qualified teachers) and who could not communicate directly with deaf students. Additionally, CSWs played roles as experts in language modification to ensure better access to materials for students and would check and correct students' written English. More rarely, and from our evidence only in the two specialist colleges and one of the colleges with a deaf resource base, BSL interpreters would provide an English to BSL or vice versa translation of materials and assignments as permitted.

In drawing attention to this variation in support for English literacy we make no judgements about what configuration might be better, as to some extent the strengths and needs of the deaf learner should predominate. However it was clear that the variations noted were not just a result of different learning needs, they were also a result of variation in available resources and custom and practice, rather than necessarily a tailored approach or one based on evidence of best practice.

One participant from a specialist college talking about deaf students who follow courses in a neighbouring mainstream college emphasised the importance of direct tutoring within the

specialist college by qualified educational experts in addition to the communication support that might be available to access the curriculum in the mainstream college. She presented a model of competence in the mainstream FE provision being facilitated by additional support and teaching within the specialist provision:

I am sorry but deaf students have to work harder than hearing students if we were to make comparison between the two. Deaf would have a normal timetable at mainstream college and then I would add in almost 150% into their timetable. So for mainstream courses they are supported by CSWs there, but here in this college, they have their own tutors for Maths, English, BSL...all are taught directly without any CSWs and these would be tailored to match their specific needs.

Notetakers

The availability of notetakers for college students was strongly regarded as important because of the practical difficulties in having to watch (whether lip reading or watching an interpreter) meant that it was not possible to shift visual attention in order to take notes simultaneously. One participant, however, was of the view that notetakers were only really relevant for those students who did not sign (rather than those who did)- missing the issue of divided attention all together. Also for courses that were theory-heavy, notes were an important resource as they would be for any student. Many of the young people entering college had little or no experience of the use of notetakers and understanding their utility was seen as important in its own right. However the provision of notetakers alongside a CSW or an interpreter could be very expensive and participants described having to make the case for an increase in the support allowance available to individual students to ensure this happened, particularly if in the school environment this provision had not been used and therefore was not mentioned on the transition statement of support needs.

Cost-saving measures were also mentioned such as withdrawing notetaking support during practical elements of classes when the provision of a CSW was seen as sufficing. In two of the colleges, participants described how it was quite usual practice for the CSW to act also as a notetaker or to act as a lip-speaker as well as a notetaker, because it could be difficult to find the funds to pay for separate support provision. They did add that CSWs who found themselves doing this were encouraged to acquire additional qualifications in lip-speaking and notetakeing. Elsewhere participants were adamant that CSWs should not be expected to fulfil such multiple support roles because it reduced the quality of the support available to students.

Oral/speech access and the acoustic environment

Overall there was very little discussion from college staff about making the curriculum accessible for those who relied predominantly on listening and speaking. As researchers we did not introduce this bias and we did not choose locations where only sign language was used/promoted. In theory, all college environments we sampled were ones inclusive of learning through spoken language too (see college descriptions Chapter 3). Yet in

participants' responses very little specific attention was given to communication support associated with the spoken word or acoustic access/listening. The provision of lip-speakers was seen as rare and not a usual provision. Whilst the specialist colleges were set up well with teaching environments which were designed to promote best auditory access, elsewhere this was much more difficult to achieve within large mainstream FE college environments. One said that they were thinking of trialling a sound field system as some young people were now starting college and had been used to it in school and liked it but this had yet to happen. College staff told us that in their experience FM devices were not commonly used in mainstream colleges. There was practically nothing said at all about meeting the needs of cochlear implant users with regard to hearing and speech, although some students with CIs were discussed in terms of their use of sign language as well.

There are a number of possible explanations for this apparent bias away from discussions of oral/aural curriculum access. First, some of the staff we interviewed felt that those deaf learners who preferred spoken language as the medium of education rarely came to their attention. We were also provided with several examples of the deafness of some young people only coming to light much later in the young person's FE career because they had sought to hide it. Second, whilst the emphasis on English skills was present in all the learning environments sampled, it was more usually literacy that was discussed, rather than speaking or listening. Third, all interviews were carried out by researchers with high level post graduate qualifications and specific research expertise who were also deaf. This is not common in research studies i.e. for deaf researchers to interview hearing professionals (and the minority of deaf professionals). Despite the openness and breadth of discussion encouraged by the interviewers, it may be the case that some hearing participants' responses were influenced by the fact they were discussing the issues with a deaf person who was either using BSL or using SSE. Fourth, issues of oral/aural access to curriculum and learning might have been regarded as unproblematic and therefore not noteworthy.

Concluding summary

The picture that emerges overall from the staff who participated across the six different colleges is one of highly variable provision. Whilst the same issues recurred as important, such as support for the emotional well being of students, access to the curriculum, language and communication support, the approach to these needs were very different. In one sense this might not be regarded as a problem because different learning environments and different approaches suit different young people. Choice and variety is important in meeting the full range of needs. However, some of the differences that emerged were not a result of tailoring provision to meet individual strengths and needs; they were a result of variations in available resources, differences in underpinning philosophy, custom and practice within particular colleges, and differences in emphases in what is required or how much of something is required to provide an effective provision. Yet this picture of variable

provision is hard to interpret with any certainty. There are no deaf learner specific benchmarks or standards against which to consider the relative differences in provision.

6. Presentation of findings: Deaf learner data

Transition processes and preparation for leaving school

The concept of 'transition' between school and college was mostly unknown to the participants. Many could not recall being involved in any formal process, regardless of whether they had a statement or not. Most learners thought of 'transition' as referring to the process of leaving college to move on to higher education or work. Looking back, one learner could recall a meeting around the time of his exams but was not sure at the time of its purpose. Others remembered meetings attended by their parents, Teacher of the Deaf, careers advisor, and a representative from the council, but they did not link this meeting at the time with making choices about their future or what kind of support they might need. One student recalled a social worker being present at her meeting. When the learners were asked who their key worker or lead professional might be, none were familiar with the term and could not identify who might have had a co-ordinating function other than the Teacher of the Deaf or the careers adviser who was seen usually to complete the paperwork.

Several young people looking back told us how naive they now realised they had been and how little understanding they had of what actually would happen after they left school, let alone whether they had options and choices to make:

I think I was naïve then as I assumed people just go out to work after they leave school, I was surprised when various college routes with options for courses was explained to me. I didn't understand then and when I was 16, I was happy when I was offered a college place.

An important issue in preparation for leaving school was whether the young people had experiences of annual review meetings and/or transition meetings that were *accessible* to them. Accessibility included both the practical issue of communication and language (did they know what was going on?) and also the issue of being prepared for contribution to the meeting (did they have enough understanding of the meeting to take a meaningful part in it?). One learner had a CSW in the meeting and another two had a notetaker and an interpreter was booked for one meeting. The rest in our sample said that they did not have any formal communication support to assist them to access the meeting or to make their views known (although at the time they had little understanding that they had a right to make their views known).

Really, I didn't have a clue and watched my mum talking. I felt left out as it went along.

Another learner, looking back, told us that because the meeting was not communicatively accessible to him, his view at the time was simply that it was pointless. He did not understand its significance.

I felt they didn't listen to me and I felt that it was a waste of time but that just happened.

Another, reflecting with hindsight, suggested the key problem was both that he did not know he had any choices and furthermore did not know how to exercise those choices, and that this was true of many young deaf people leaving school:

We did not know what was available in the future, we do not know what we can do. To be informed about choices so that you can be prepared with confidence and to be assertive to say what you want for your future, that would have been a great help.

For a few young people in our sample, the meetings they attended with so many people present, combined with little understanding of what was going on, resulted in them feeling intimidated. A few of our deaf learner participants suggested that instead, a one to one meeting would have been more useful, even if before it others had been involved. The direct and personalised communication of a face to face meeting would have felt more effective for them:

I didn't like having too many people in a meeting – too intimidating. I prefer just a one-to-one-discussion, face-to-face.

That is what actually happened in the case of two of the deaf learners; a discussion with their teacher alone.

Only one young person described a process of being actively involved in meetings and feeling included. In this case the school prepared the draft transition plan and invited people including an Employment Advisor who could sign to participate. He had found this supportive as he was able to discuss options during the meeting linked to leaving school.

I was involved in the transition planning and thought it was useful for when I leave school. The teacher helped me to prepare myself better and I felt confident in knowing what to do before I leave school.

In another case, the young person recalled having had a transition manager who was deaf and stated that she had been very helpful but during the actual transition meeting she had not actually been invited to participate. These two deaf learners, unlike the rest, described feeling better prepared for leaving college because they understood what was at stake and felt they had made an active contribution to the process.

The vast majority, however, had not been formally prepared for the process of transition and the contribution that they could make. Many described rather informal and ad hoc means of acquiring information about options when they left school such as looking on the internet themselves, asking friends for advice, word of mouth/sign of hand information and in some cases asking parents what to do.

I knew some information already through friends from college and also from the internet. I feel I learned more from friends – more visual.

The young people involved in this research had mixed views about the careers advice they had received, or in many cases not received, as part of the process of transition from school and considering options about what to do next. For example a few had been offered assistance with careers advice and help with applying for college, jobs and writing a CV. However with hindsight, some felt that this attention had resulted in raising their expectations, leading them to believe that securing a job would be easy which had not turned out to be the case. One participant mentioned using their local deaf organisation for careers advice as they said that they were involved in advocating for participant to get adequate support in college within a mainstream setting. Some had access to the Connexions service but felt that the Connexions workers had inadequate knowledge about their needs as a deaf learner. Many described parents having to be highly proactive in sourcing appropriate college provision for their son/daughter. This placed an additional burden on them and their parents. In essence, there was a view that guidance from external sources of support is limited particularly as only two of the local authorities in our sample now have a contract with an independent careers agency.

I thought the information from the adviser was very useful however there was no guidance on how I can find out more about what each college offers and which course would suit what career and put it in perspective. I had to do my own research at home.

Overall the young people perceived that there were three main factors behind how decisions were made in transition meetings:

- (i) budget constraints which limited the options available to young deaf people
- (ii) low expectations of deaf learners and therefore restricted choices considered
- (iii) the control exercised by some professionals who think they know what is best for the deaf learners and therefore seek to impose those views.

Participants were given the opportunity to share what they think could have benefited them had they known more about the process in advance, its purpose and its significance. They told us that:

- they would have liked to have been offered informed choices so that they could have been better prepared in advance
- they would have liked the opportunity to discuss options with their parents and prepare a list of questions to bring up in the meeting
- communication support was vital for transition meetings, should be prioritised and arranged in advance

- a few suggested having a DVD with a BSL version or a ‘transition’ information sheet aimed at deaf young people before the process starts.

Available options on leaving school

The young people in our sample felt that there were limited options available to them at school leaving age. They seemed to be under the impression that the *only* option available for them is “college” and there was a general lack of awareness about other options available such as apprenticeship schemes or vocational training. A couple of participants mentioned 6th form college but had assumed that this is the same provision as FE college.

Ermm.. they explained to me what happens when I leave school, so I moved to college, that’s why I’m here today, moving to college to learn and study more. That’s all I think.

They saw college as the next academic step to gaining qualifications particularly as many did not expect themselves to reach high levels of attainment within school. Some learners told us that they had decided to go to one college as a step mentally to prepare and develop their confidence before moving on to the course or college they really wanted. Decisions about which college to attend were also based on other factors such as what support is available or where their friends were going. These were often far more influential than which courses might be on offer at which colleges.

When the apprenticeship scheme was explained to the learners as an example of one option on leaving school and that might be combined in some cases with FE, they were not fully aware that such a scheme existed. However, on balance they were not enthusiastic because they thought that option might be quite challenging as it would involve going to work, meaning less time in college and therefore, in their view, fewer qualifications.

When asked about why they felt FE was preferable for them in comparison to staying on at school or attending 6th form college, participants said that they preferred FE college because they perceived that this would allow them greater independence, the opportunity to meet new people and to be involved in a different cultural environment. However how these factors were understood (independence, opportunity and new cultural environment) largely depended on the deaf learner’s previous educational history. For example, participants who had attended mainstream secondary school education who had subsequently chosen to go to a specialist college or a college with a deaf base had done so because they perceived that there would be greater ease of communication, both in terms of a more guaranteed support within the classroom and also with their peers. Frustration was expressed at the limited choices because they had to leave home to go to their preferred college. However, they believed that was the best option for them and that being in a deaf/signing environment would ensure their communication and social needs are met both in and out of college.

I objected to going to my local college [name] because it is mainstream, full of hearing learners.

In contrast, many of those who had been taught in a deaf resource-base or a deaf school had deliberately chosen to go to a mainstream college as they considered that it would give them more independence and the experience of a different kind of educational environment where they would be allowed more freedom. They had assumed they would still receive same level of support as they had had at school but were surprised that this did not always happen automatically.

I visited the 6th form at [deaf school] and didn't feel it would suit me as I need to integrate more in the mainstream to make new friends. Then I chose to come here as I heard it has a good reputation and it is not far from home.

On the whole, participants thought it was a big change when they moved from school to college but it was a change for the better because they felt more grown up and more independent although it took a while to adapt. The size of the college, the number of adults on site, getting around in college and independently using public transport were all big changes. The timetable too was at first challenging because it was not a full timetable like at school but had free periods and personal study times which at first they were not sure how to use.

There were also adaptations to make in terms of language and communication which varied depending on educational background and the kind of college being attended. Some were not used to using BSL to such a large extent and they reported that it felt strange at first. Some were pleasantly surprised to see students signing with different regional dialects. Other students had the opposite experience all together:

Oh I was really nervous, my heart was beating fast, because I have grown up as deaf in a deaf environment but also in the hearing world as my family are hearing... here it is full 100% hearing and I had to put away my signing a little bit and have had to use my speech. I felt petrified but luckily I had a teacher who was already deaf aware, she was good and she has already taught others about me and my problem so I felt comfortable with the group. There are some lovely people in the group. I was so relieved.

For others, not having a CSW around all the time was beneficial because they felt they had the space and do their own things out of class which in turn leads to them feeling more independent, in keeping with their age. For others, the provision of a notetaker was a novel addition to their communication support.

Overall, the deaf learners in our sample felt that the college environment is more accepting of a variety of communication choices than in some cases their previous schools had been.

Many of the participants felt that their sign language skills improved once they were in the college environment and one student was proud that he had almost reached NVQ Level 3 in BSL in a very short space of time. They felt that the opportunity to mix with others and to develop their signing skills had increased their confidence both socially and in the learning environment. They also valued the opportunity to support each other as deaf peers in class and outside college.

I'm on Level Two Childcare with two students who are my friends. I feel lucky as I can work hard with them and help in group (work). That's good.

I do sometimes struggle because there's a lot of work to do and it can be quite stressful. But you've still got the freedom to talk to your [deaf] friends about things as well as they care about people.

Although college was seen as the only route after leaving school, most of the learners in our sample had experiences of choice *within* that one option. On average, they had visited two or three colleges before making a decision.

I looked around three local colleges to find out what they have – an interesting experience for me.

Some had already decided which college they wanted to attend but felt they were forced to visit several local colleges to seem to make comparisons and reach a balanced judgement because then they could use this process as part of the argument about why they should attend the college of their choice. Having to 'fight' for their preferred college was not a rare experience. Two participants described how difficult this had been for them (and their parents) as it had been necessary to challenge the decision made by the local authority about which college was best for them. They saw the decision reached by the local authority as essentially based on funding and resources, not the best fit for them as a deaf learner and in contradiction to their preference.

Even in those cases where a direct challenge was not made to a local authority judgement, experiencing a period of uncertainty about college destination was common and found particularly difficult.

When school finished ... the teacher did tell me that I need to find a college but I was worried if they would accept me and if they didn't accept me what would I do next? And when I knew got a place, I felt very relieved.

One participant only had her place confirmed in the summer (before she was due to start in September), two others said that they started college late and another participant said that she had to wait for a lengthy time as her first choice was to accept a place she had been offered at a specialist college but she was made to attend a local college for a couple of years first despite the fact that she felt that this was not the most suitable place for her. As

a result she spent a longer period studying than she felt was necessary and she blamed this on the professionals who had ignored her wishes.

I explained that I wanted to go to a different college as I felt the college that I went to had made me go downhill, I was missing conversations and not understanding the work. Frustrating for me so my mum had to fight for me to move to a different college and now I am here. Look at me, where I am – I am happy and am working hard, I can understand what is being said and am making some deaf friends...I found this college and it gave me confidence but I had to put up a fight to get a place here.

Furthermore, it appears that a certain amount of negotiation and compromise seems to be required in order for students to get their preferred choice of college. We were given an example of parents who agreed to fund the costs of transport to and from the learner's college of choice if that meant s/he could attend when the local authority had preferred an alternative on grounds of costs. Also in a few cases, where deaf learners and their families had argued with the local authority's preferences, professionals had told deaf young people that they may attend the college but on the understanding that it is on a "trial basis" and they must prove themselves by making adequate progress on their course. If they did not, then their placement would revert to that originally recommended.

The young people said that they had learned that it is important to know what support to ask for at the application stage (not later). They were often assisted with filling in the application form by the Teacher of the Deaf who provided advice. Those that requested support at the application stage were on the whole successful in receiving the support they required in college.

I asked for an interpreter, note taker and one-to-one language tutor and all were provided which I felt better about and I was happy to have enough support to help me through the course which is good.

Some people had the opportunity to be involved in the college before they started e.g. attending taster days and going through the initial assessment process. Those that had this opportunity said that they thought it was valuable as it helped them to prepare for starting college and they felt reassured knowing that the support they require was in place before they started college. This also enabled them to ask questions and to meet some of the staff that would be involved in providing support in college. Participants also found induction useful as it helped them to get to know the other students and helped them to feel more confident in the new college environment by taking part in ice-breaker activities or going on a tour within the college.

Choices of courses

For the majority of non-deaf students, examination results in school and future career aspirations are common influences on choice of course to follow in college. This does not

seem to be the case for many deaf young people. Evidence from the deaf learners in this study show that they are often directed onto more generic courses before they can move onto the course that they would actually like. For example, students often spend the first year on an Access course which gives them a flavour of what they want to do in the future, and some started part-time courses in order to get used to college, and to have time to take on board what they had learnt and to do their course work. This extends the length of time that they spend in FE considerably. Of course, such a trajectory may be entirely appropriate to lay foundations for future achievements but that was not the impression given by the learners in our sample because more than half of them did not have a clear direction through FE nor a career pathway or specific aspirations. Consequently, access and foundation learning seemed to be for little purpose rather than as something to do at first.

Furthermore, some participants reported being steered in a different direction to the course of their choice. This was not because their aspirations in terms of the level of their study had necessarily been unrealistic. For example, two learners said that had wished to pursue Art after GCSE but had been channelled into hairdressing/animal care, instead. Another said that she had been placed in a class to make up the numbers for the group and she had accepted this, even though it was not the course that she wanted. Another student wanted to pursue a course in fashion design but had been directed into childcare and then Art before being allowed to access this course. It was not clear to the participants why exactly these changes had taken place, but all felt it was for others' benefit (i.e. the college) rather than for their own, and/or that low expectations of what a deaf learner could achieve were influential, and/or custom and practice with respect to what was appropriate for a deaf learner. Some participants felt that they were encouraged to pursue the NVQ route (through the various levels) and were directed onto non-academic courses such as car maintenance, hairdressing or the caring professions rather than more academic courses (such as GCSEs and A Levels) meaning that it might take longer to achieve aspirations than by following a more traditionally academic route.

Participants also felt that some colleges had low expectations of them, for example, one learner was asked to do a course at a level lower than she had already achieved in school. In the end she decided she was happy with this arrangement because she felt the college had higher standards than her school but it was still a course below the level of her previous achievements. Another said he was initially placed in a group below his academic ability but as a result he progressed rapidly through two levels. Nonetheless, the original judgement about his abilities was incorrect.

Overall, participants said that they felt that more pressure was placed on them as deaf learners than their hearing counterparts to remain on the same course and not to change their mind about the subject they were taking or the level in which they were pursuing their studies. One of the key reasons concerned their language and communication support.

They said that they felt restricted to staying on their course because the support was already in place and it would be difficult to change it or transfer it.

If I change my mind, I know this will be a waste of staff time in sorting out paperwork.

One person said that they had to wait a whole year before they could change course because of the effect on the support worker's timetable. Another was forced to change course because the acoustic interference on his catering course when in the practice kitchen was too disruptive for him; he still wanted to do catering.

Language and communication support¹¹

Our participants' experiences of language and communication support varied considerably, both in terms of their own preferences/needs and also in terms of the availability of resources for learning in the particular colleges where they were studying. Learners told us that they felt comfortable asking for assistance when resources were readily available such as those provided in a deaf resource base or specialist college.

Without these resources available, I think I wouldn't be as comfortable and I wouldn't know what I need to do.

Some young people said that once they started college, they realised that they needed additional support to that which they had initially requested. One young person who thought he would be able to manage without any adaptations told us he had requested a radio aid and a loop system and these had been provided. Some of these young people had accessed the curriculum and lessons in school primarily through listening and speaking, with additional support provided through FM systems. Now in college, they experienced both additional challenges in the level of the courses they were undertaking and also a range of further possibilities to enable them to access the curriculum, such as notetakers and CSWs.

From the young people's descriptions it is clear that the role of the CSW varies from one college to another. Some of the young people described CSW's taking on additional responsibilities such as note taking, classroom support/teaching assistance and accompanying students to appointments. In other cases the role of the CSW was much more bounded. Some of the deaf learners said that they were provided with notetakers for lectures only. Notetakers are not routinely provided for all classes, group work and practical learning. All notetakers, except one, used handwritten notes rather than electronic note taking. One learner appreciated the notetaker's neat writing so they can read the notes

¹¹ NB throughout this report we use the phrase 'language and communication' to draw attention to the fact that in some cases communication between people is the key issue rather than the language(s) that may be used and in others language itself is an issue (such as in literacy, or in BSL use), in some instances both aspects are of importance. Language and communication are not treated as synonyms.

easily and another learner described how he used an iPad to take photos of the slides on the white board to read after class. This was used as an alternative to having a notetaker.

One particular issue that recurred in our discussions with deaf learners concerned the skill levels of CSWs and their ability to match both the learner's needs and also the level of the courses undertaken. This matching appears to be rather ad hoc. Some learners were pleased with the CSW that they had been allocated and felt they were able to access the curriculum effectively as a result. For others, they felt that the CSW was not a good match either because they did not have adequate communication skills or they did not have the background knowledge of the subject necessary to communicate. Some participants even stated that they had to teach the CSW the "correct signs" related to the subject matter. Incorrect or limited signing could have implications for learning and can affect concentration levels.

It has to be a CSW for me. Depending on their signing level, those of a high level suit me. If their skills are of a lower level, I'm not keen on using them.

I'm behind those hearing students and they seem to have their work done quicker. I have to try to keep up and they know and understand why I am slower than they are. How to speed this up, I don't know.

The other principal issue concerning CSWs was whether the deaf learner felt they had a rapport with them. We were told that anxiety about what the CSW would be like was a common concern for deaf young people first entering FE or starting on a new course. The relationship between deaf learner and CSW was identified as one of the major factors that influences whether the young person's placement at the college is positive or not from their point of view. An example of how easily this can go wrong was given by a young person who was already anxious and then felt let down waiting for their CSW to arrive on her first day. Unfortunately their CSW arrived late thus causing this student extra stress on their first day and meaning that they missed some vital information at the start of the course. This was not a good start and affected how much the learner felt they could trust the CSW.

Ermm I think I was most worried about where to meet my CSW. The lecture started and I needed a CSW and they were lost in the beginning. Communication support was my main worry, just this.

Interestingly, many of the deaf learners we interviewed did not discriminate between a CSW and an interpreter, seeing them as fulfilling the same role and not necessarily appreciating the difference in training, level and skills associated with an interpreter or the different focus on learning support that is built into CSW training.

Many of our deaf learner sample who did use an interpreter, preferred to have the same one working with them throughout their course but this was not always possible due to availability, sickness, changes in staffing or because the college had a policy to use a pool of

interpreters for each student which the college perceived as being more 'healthy'. As a result, it is sometimes necessary to reshuffle the communication support and this in turn can mean that the student is left without any support at all for a period of time and so may get behind with coursework. The participants described this experience as stressful but thought the strain can be alleviated if they were kept informed in advance of any staffing changes.

In terms of good practice, one college in particular had a policy of employing interpreters with a specialist interest in education (rather than CSWs) as they valued the importance of ensuring a high quality of communication support in the classroom to enable learning. In another instance, the college adopted a 'booking system' for students to book interpreters for events or on-site services. This enables students to have the confidence to book interpreters independently in the future and also ensures that they have access to all aspects of college life, exercising an open-door policy.

I have support to help me to feel more confident to talk with someone who I do not know, like work experience.

I don't need any of these for my own needs but I know who to ask if I need any assistance.

At more than one college some of the support staff have signing skills, negating the need for an interpreter for students who prefer to use sign language. This works well as it means that students can access a service (e.g. counselling) directly and confidentially but it is dependent on the level of proficiency in sign language of the person providing the support matching the language and communication preferences of the young person (which may, for example, be more SSE than BSL). This was not presented as a problem in either of the specialist colleges as most staff on site are deaf aware, have good signing skills for communication with those students who were also signers, or are deaf themselves.

The young people said that they would like their course tutors to have some deaf awareness which would enhance their learning experience, whether they were accessing the curriculum through speech or sign. Also some basic sign language skills would be helpful so that learners who signed could at least have a basic conversation with tutors, particularly if they arrive for lessons before the CSW. There were also variable experiences of how helpful course tutors had been in making materials available in advance, or on request:

Asking for help from the course tutor has not been easy as they are always busy which doesn't help. I find the deaf base very helpful.

Learners gave praise to the staff who had awareness of the needs of deaf students. They thought these members of staff were supportive and helpful, encouraging the students to speak out or to ask questions, which made them feel included and more confident. Often they felt reassured to have these members of staff around when they needed to discuss

something personal as they felt they could easily communicate with them because of their understanding around issues concerning deafness and deaf people. They felt that such staff can often tell when they needed assistance as a deaf learner or needed someone to talk to.

It is them that has made me who I am and getting through one year with their support, that's good.

Across the college provisions that the learners in our sample had experienced there were considerable variations in the amount of additional support available to develop literacy and numeracy skills as well as more general support in language modification (e.g. turning English text into plain English) and checking of English (e.g. in written assignments). In some colleges qualified teachers are available who are deaf aware and/or have signing skills to provide additional structured tutorial support. In other cases, colleges are using CSWs to teach English to students despite the fact that they are not qualified to do so. On average, learners told us that they received 2-4 hours tutorials per week and most of them said they appreciated this kind of tutorial as it helps to build their confidence. One participant thought that one tutorial a week was not sufficient to assist her learning. Another said he would have preferred group tutorials to learn English rather than one-to-one because he perceived there would be greater benefits.

For some, an additional problem was created through the study periods that were assigned to their courses. In these part of the time they needed to fulfil their coursework was being used instead as the time when they would be taught English or maths rather than it being used to support for their coursework. This, in turn, meant that they needed to do additional work in their own time in order to complete their coursework. They felt this could have an impact on their ability to get involved in social and leisure pursuits, either in college or in their local community, and increased the workload and pressure they felt as a college student.

Some participants described difficulties in understanding written text or expressing themselves in written English. They understand the content of lectures and tutorials, and know what they want to write or say, but find a barrier in either expressing their thoughts in appropriate and correct English, or translating what they want to say from their understanding in BSL into English. As the young people's language preferences and language competencies varied between languages and modalities, the nature of the challenges experienced also varied¹². No students mentioned having the opportunity to submit their work as a signed video (if their first and preferred language was BSL) rather than written English.

In relation to these and other difficulties they experienced in their college work, the young people were keen to emphasise that from their perspective being deaf is not an issue. The

¹² E.g. the learning support needs with regard to writing in English, of a student primarily using English (whether spoken and/or Sign Supported English) are likely to be different from those of a student primarily working in BSL who then is required to write in English. The complexities are those of language(s) (English and BSL) and modality (spoken Vs written; signed Vs written).

problem lies in the additional burden of ensuring communication support is there; having to attend additional English and maths sessions; reading notes again after lectures and keeping up with assignments. The challenge was a language issue, rather than an issue of deafness itself. This perspective was not confined simply to those young people who only used BSL who were in the minority in our sample. For the majority of the young people who took part, and who were either bilingual (BSL and English) and/or bimodal (signed and/or spoken) users of English, linguistic access and competence was still perceived as the key barrier.

Social life and college

Learners who attend non-specialist (mainstream) colleges said that they did not tend to get involved in the extra-curricular activities that are on offer within the college. This is in comparison to learners who attend specialist colleges where learners are expected to attend clubs as this is viewed as an essential aspect to their learning in order to promote their independence and social skills. Some learners who attended non-specialist colleges chose to attend clubs that are external to the college – often where they can meet and socialise with other deaf people or where they know that people have some deaf awareness. This is due to a perceived ease of communication that they would experience in settings with other young deaf people in comparison with clubs within a mainstream environment.

I don't go to any of them [activities]. I just get on with my course work. I know deaf people should go but I never do.

Whilst learners who attend non-specialist colleges do not tend to get involved in the extra-curricular activities in the college, some said that they nonetheless access more formal services that are on offer such as Careers, Finance and Welfare etc. This may be with or without the assistance of BSL/English interpreters.

I use other services. I needed advice for my CV and they are quite an expert! That made me feel good by knowing what I can add to my CV,

Hopes and aspirations

The deaf young people who took part in this study were, in many ways, were no different from their hearing counterparts aged between 16 and 19; they had hopes, dreams and aspirations and saw their years in FE college being seen as part of achieving those. We met them only once and it is not our place to suggest whether what they told us of their hopes was realistic or not. Nor could we judge how much their hopes at 16+ plus were influenced by the ideas of others around them such as parents or teachers, or whether they were deep-rooted aspirations that they had come to themselves. However, in one sense this does not matter because what the deaf learners shared with us was just how enthusiastic

they were about their futures, how expansive their thoughts were about what it was they wanted to achieve, and how much they saw their time in FE as part of that plan.

In many respects there was a dislocation between this positive approach and other aspects of what they told us such as experiencing restrictions in choice, lack of flexibility in changing courses, variable quality of communication support and little sense of incremental progress towards a goal (see previous sections). But the young people we met did not really see the contradictions. Their hopes and aspirations were paramount and many of them displayed a strong self-belief. We are choosing to cite several examples below to convey the flavour of their enthusiasm and its diversity.

I want to be the boss in the car body shop like the manager. I want to be able to tell people what to do, sort out wages and pay invoices. I know it's going to be difficult so ... but who knows, maybe one day.

For the future, I wanted to do floristry, because I like flowers, I like being creative, just being interested and being with people. I like meeting people so this is my future for this.

Health and social care, then I will finish (name of specialised college) next week and then go to (name of the local college) to do level 2 and 3 then to university to do a nursing degree.

I'd like to focus on college and maybe find work to earn some money. Once I have enough money, then I can maybe think about going to university when I'm actually ready for it I think because I don't want to rush to university like my brother did. It's just me that I'm soft. I may be like (pointing to another person in the workshop group) that I find work first and go to university to get a diploma and progress from there if possible.

There were of course some young people we met who had no idea what they wanted to do in the future with any degree of specificity, but they did see college as providing them with more qualifications that were likely to be useful and also some space to consider their options before making decisions. In this respect, some young people remarked that the opportunity to try out jobs in work placements would be really helpful. Participating in the research workshops gave the young people the opportunity to look back on the transformations they had experienced between school and college with the following being typical of the kind of reflections that were shared with us:

A lot of things have changed since school and I wasn't sure then what I wanted to do but once I am at college, I know what I wanted to be. I think I have achieved a lot since; non-stop all down to determination.

Some of the young people had gained experience through college that meant their initial aspirations were being challenged; either because they realised the course they were studying was not right for them, or they found the level they were studying to be too demanding, or in some cases not demanding enough.

I soon realised this course doesn't match what I wanted to do in the future.

One young person, for example, applied to do a child care course but later changed to a health and social care course. The reason for the change was because she thought that working in health and social care would mean that she could teach those around her to communicate with her in sign language and so there would be more opportunity to do something she valued.

I thought I would want to work with children but I have changed my mind and thought I would want to work with older people or with disabled people, so it would be better to work with them as can teach them sign or use sign with.

Some of the young people told us they had agreed to do courses at college that felt like a 'safe option' such as hairdressing or working with animals, then to their surprise had discovered that they really enjoyed the subject and were doing well with it.

A few of the young people we met told us how helpful it had been to have people around them who were able to provide them with information and wider knowledge than they had so that they were able either to modify their aspirations or have their ambitions reinforced as being realistic. For example, one deaf young person was hoping to become a qualified nurse and her social worker was able to inform her that there are some deaf nurses working in this country. When asked if she thought her deafness would impact on her chances of achieving this job, she said that did not think that it would cause a problem based on the information her social worker had given her. Another deaf learner told us how college had helped him realise what he could do and what he could not do:

Well, before I wanted to be like a pilot ... on aeroplanes, but I know with me being deaf I cannot achieve that, but I'm happy doing what I'm doing as I'm very comfortable in this path. At the moment I know finding a job can be difficult but I need to achieve these qualifications first.

Conversely, however, we came across young people with aspirations but little knowledge about what might be required to achieve them, who had not benefited from advice and guidance about careers and how to work towards ambitions or who had never been challenged to think through what might be required if they were to achieve their goals. Consequently, they had little opportunity to reconsider their options if inappropriate or to concentrate their efforts in the most beneficial manner. The following enthusiastic example when probed further showed that the young person had little understanding of the requirements behind any of these ambitions:

My next step would be to go to university which is important for when finding work. I would like to stay in public services and go up level by level and also hopefully go travelling. This will be either with the police or volunteers. If I get a job I would like to be in America because I know they have 50 fire fighters and hopefully that can expand in England and other countries.

At the other end of the spectrum we met deaf young people who were very focussed on what might be realistic for them in the future, were aware of the steps they needed to take and had been supported to think through contingency plans should they not be able to achieve the requirements for the career they wanted. For example, one young person who wanted to become a teacher had discussed this with one of her tutors at college who had asked her whether she wanted to teach deaf or hearing children. This led to her to consider whether it would be too difficult to work with hearing children. However she realised that at the same time she would perhaps need to improve her signing skills so that she could teach deaf children. Also she told us that, should teaching work with deaf children fail to materialise then, she thought she could teach sign language to hearing people as a backup plan. This same young person also mentioned that she saw going to college as part of her long term plans and she could see herself remaining at college for a further four or five years before going on to university.

Concluding Summary

The deaf learners who participated in this research were on the whole valued their experiences in FE and had a good sense of how through such experiences, they were maturing as individuals. They encountered frustrations along the way, including in some cases the perceived inflexibility of communication support arrangements to enable them to make different choices once enrolled; their lack of understanding with hindsight of the choices they could have made when leaving school; and the inaccessibility in some cases of the decisions making processes that had occurred. Many of the young people in our sample were making different choices about how to communicate and which language(s) to use as young learners in comparison with their linguistic experiences in school; this was true both of signers who were now using spoken language more and those educated exclusively in an oral/aural medium who were now adding signs to their spoken language or using BSL. The challenges of written English (reading and writing) were particularly difficult for our sample albeit for differing reasons depending on their language profiles and competencies. The available resources to support this varied between college locations. Nonetheless the young people had expansive hopes and aspirations. For some, their FE experience was serving to modify these as more knowledge became available for young people to consider/reconsider how realistic their ambitions were. The conclusions from our analysis of official statistics and the key informant and college staff data had raised concerns that there was not enough emphasis on outcomes for deaf learners, the tracking of their progress against aims within FE environments and a bias toward keeping young people in FE

as a priority regardless of discernable progress or attainment. None of these concerns were reflected in how the young people presented their experiences which may be because of their limited experience and understanding at that point in their lives or just reflective of a very different focus. Nonetheless we were surprised by the scarcity of comments from the young people which reflected on their progress against specified expectations or targets. Most things were discussed in the short term (e.g. finishing this course; getting this qualification) rather than seeing those as building blocks towards specific aims of their FE experience. For the vast majority, longer term aims with regard to careers were seen as aspirational rather than as requiring incremental achievements for them to be reached. This raises again the issue of whether careers guidance and support is being effective for these young people and whether they have access to appropriate mentoring and guidance to enable them actively to shape their futures.

7. Synthesis of key findings

Introduction

The overarching aim of this research project was:

- To identify and explore the factors and associated processes which support effective post-16 education and training for deaf young people.

Within that overall aim, there was a specific focus on **Further Education**. This was because there has been a significant lack of attention both nationally and internationally on Further Education as a destination for school leavers who are deaf. Whilst attainment at point of school leaving and progression to Higher Education for deaf young people have both been an important focus of interest, by comparison little was known about the Further Education landscape. In addition, this landscape was undergoing rapid and significant change in England, with the raising of the participation age meaning that from September 2013 all young people were required to stay in education or training until the age of 17 (increasing to 18 from September 2015); the expansion of opportunities afforded under apprenticeship schemes for young people; and changes in the financial support available to post-16 destinations - which amongst other impacts, would put FE and 6th form colleges on equal footing with regard to available resources and common rules of allocation of that resource. The impact of these changes were unknown for deaf learners at the point at which this study was undertaken, and it was important to map the current trends in post-16 education and training in order to achieve a perspective on what might happen next in light of educational reforms. If we do not know where we have been, it is difficult to make judgements about the suitability of where we have arrived.

Having examined official statistics for England, reviewed the literature internationally and presented our findings from the perspectives of deaf learners, their parents, further education college staff and other professionals such as careers guidance workers and social workers, in this chapter we will synthesise the diverse analyses. From this we will draw out the significant issues for identifying effective post-16 provision and in particular good Further Education provision for deaf young people. This speaks to the overall objective of this research study, namely:

- To derive an evidence-based description and definition of an effective package of support for deaf young people in post-16 Further Education.

The difficulty with pursuing such an objective is, of course, that every young person will be unique with their own histories, strengths and needs. Therefore merely identifying 'factors' that support effectiveness is not enough without an examination of *how* such factors might work (i.e. their processes) and their responsiveness to diversity and context. That said, there is a danger in being led by diversity alone. If neither a minimum standard is set, nor a

highest expectation ever articulated, then a swathe of mediocrity might be justified under the banner of meeting personal needs within individual circumstances. Therefore in synthesising our findings in this chapter we will also ensure we move beyond the identification of what is required, to how best it might work, for whom, and in which circumstances. The aim is not to be prescriptive but rather to be nuanced, whilst maintaining a focus on best practice and quality processes and outcomes.

Key finding 1: Further Education as the destination for the majority

Deaf young people's educational journeys are very different from those of their hearing peers. Whereas for hearing young people, Further Education might be best regarded as a one of a suite of options available to them at the end of compulsory education, and in some cases the one best suited to their needs and ambitions, for deaf young people it is the single most likely destination on leaving school. In some local authorities it was regarded as the default position with other options being an exception, rather than being regarded as one of a range of potential possibilities for a deaf young person.

Most deaf learners progress to Further Education and not to school sixth form, a sixth form college, private training provider or employment. This raises the question of whether proportionate and appropriate attention is paid (within local authorities) to the quality, effectiveness and resources available to FE serving the vast majority of deaf young people in its area.

Key Finding 2: Further Education as a place for maturity

A recurrent justification for the suitability of Further Education for the vast majority of deaf young people is that it provides the opportunity and in some cases (not all), the infrastructure to support personal and social maturity and to teach key life skills which a great many young deaf people lack on transitioning from school. Although our findings support this proposition, and it is a common discussion in the international literature and also amongst deaf learners themselves, the question remains why were some of these life skills deficits not addressed during the school years rather than several years in Further Education being the default position for their achievement?

Our findings suggest that if it were possible to attend to social skills and life skills issues more systematically through the school age years, then some deaf young people would be more personally ready to take up a broader choice of options on leaving school such as entering 6th form or undertaking apprenticeships.

Key finding 3: Deaf young people, through Further Education, are not making up the deficit in attainment experienced on leaving school

Attainment data on school leaving demonstrates a clear gap in achievement between deaf young people and the broader population. Furthermore a recurring justification for the majority of deaf young people attending Further Education is that it provides the opportunity to make up for deficits in numeracy and literacy, and that it provides support for accessing training and qualifications that might not be offered in school, and/or to access the curriculum in a different way that might be more effective than e.g. a traditional 6th form/college environment.

Our analysis of official statistics clearly demonstrates that:

- **despite good course completion, deaf young people fail to acquire qualifications that are comparable with those of hearing young people and/or other learners with SEN within Further Education.**

Of particular concern were:

- how **few deaf young people undertook level 3 courses** in comparison with the general population (one third rather than two fifths);
- of those who did, how **very few actually passed AS Level courses**, despite completing the courses (fewer than 5% passed);
- the large number of deaf young people who despite undertaking courses at lesser levels nonetheless acquired **no recognisable qualification** at all (nearly one quarter).
- The **dropout rate** for deaf learners in FE which is double that of the general population

Key finding 4: There is no routine tracking of deaf young people's progress and outcomes through Further Education with FE fulfilling a containment function rather than acting as a means of progression for many deaf learners.

Although across the provision we sampled there was a strong focus everywhere on the individuality of the deaf learner and genuine attempts to tailor a service to support personal needs, **there was very little sense of an outcomes focus for deaf learners in FE**. This was true both from the perspective of providers and also from the perspective of many (not all) of the young people we interviewed. The exception to this picture was the two specialist colleges in the sample whose review processes were detailed with respect to learning, support and outcomes, perhaps in part motivated by the necessity of justifying costs to the home local authorities of the students. Elsewhere, the picture was much more varied with some informants maintaining an outcome focus in considering whether the college was meeting the learners' needs, but the majority of those involved in provision being more

concerned with a learner's personal progress in the holistic sense of maturity, and decision making in the present, rather than with an eye to the end educational goal.

There were many examples of deaf young people doing multiple courses without discernible progress toward a specified outcome, or for little purpose other than to remain occupied and benefit from opportunities for social maturity. In some cases deaf learners were unsure themselves of the point of the work they were undertaking and what its contribution might be to their career, other than to acquire some qualifications. However as our review of attainment data has demonstrated, whilst the vast majority of deaf learners complete their courses of study, this is far from synonymous with acquiring a recognised qualification (at any level).

For those informants who were instrumental in young people's transitions to FE, nearly all had no idea what were ultimately the outcomes for the young people they supported to transition into Further Education and therefore **little means of feedback on their professional practice and decision making from the perspective of achieved outcomes in relation to initial plan.** No mechanism existed for this feedback.

Although our analysis of official statistics demonstrates a dropout rate amongst deaf learners (age 16 to 19) that is double that of hearing peers, there was little awareness of this trend amongst college staff and key informants involved in post-16 educational support and advice. The assumption that deaf young people would and should be supported to remain in education (regardless in some cases of any discernible academic or vocational progress) made the greater trend toward drop out harder to identify. Also, for deaf learners it would appear that drop out from a course at one FE college might simply imply starting another course elsewhere in order to remain in FE. Consequently **dropout rates were generally not regarded as significant.**

We would suggest that without a stronger outcomes-focus culture through Further Education then there is little means of understanding whether the provider is doing a good job and if not how to improve that for the deaf learner.

Without a stronger outcomes orientation, the deaf learner misses out on a key resource to support motivation, ambition and achievement with FE effectively filling a stop gap function for deaf young people rather than one of incremental progress to a desired goal.

Key finding 5: There are 8 factors which support a good process of post-16 transition

These factors were identified as:

1. **Starting the transition process early** (ideally in Year 9 onwards)

2. **Adopting a person-centred, goal orientated process** that engages the young person in identifying their preferences, strengths and needs, rather than a process that is resource-led.
3. **Ensuring and checking that a deaf young person actually understands what the transition process is**, its significance and that they have choices within it.
4. **Providing communication and language access to the process**; in young people's experience this was rarely provided or prioritised.
5. **Scaffolding the young person's skills**, where needed, to ensure they can fully participate in a process of considering options, weighing up advantages and disadvantages, identifying own needs and wants, building confidence and ultimately participating in decision making. These skills cannot be taken for granted and require preparation and development too.
6. **Providing experiential opportunities to transform options in theory to options in reality** i.e. enabling the young person to explore and understand what is involved in different decisions at points of transition on leaving school, what each might imply, how it might work in practice and ultimately whether it is for them.
7. **Paying due attention to the full range of options for deaf young people on leaving school** rather than seeing FE as a default position from which other options might be exceptions.
8. **Remaining open minded to a range of course options for deaf young people.** We came across examples of some professionals and also some parents ruling out some potential career choices 'because deaf people did not do that'. Equally we found bias toward some courses that deaf young people were commonly directed towards because these were seen as 'suitable' or the best chance of a qualification. Both of these points of view led potentially to a reduced range of possibilities both within and/or outside of Further Education options.

Key finding 6: The realisation of the factors supporting good post-16 transition is affected by other underlying processes which require attention.

We found examples of transition processes that on the surface seemed to follow good practice incorporating the factors we have identified above but which had nonetheless proven less than optimally successful for a range of reasons. From this, the following were identified:

1. It is important to ensure **that parents understand what ‘transition’ actually means** and are supported so they can take an active part in enabling the young person’s involvement. ‘Starting early’ does not just apply to young people.
2. **Time and resources need to be put in place to ensure the young person has a ‘voice’ in transition process.** It might include, for example, using the services of a young person’s advocate to ensure that the decisions reached do not simply reflect the wishes of the teacher or parent and/or challenges where appropriate whether they know best. It might include the involvement of an external organisation in supporting young people’s confidence and participation over time. The key issue is that a resource is required to enable it.
3. In **complex situations** which might include, for example, the young person no longer living with their parents and/or transition from school implies transition to independent or supported living, it is important to ensure that there is **a key worker** who can co-ordinate the various aspects of a multi-dimensional transition process.
4. **Ensuring a parent/family has sufficient financial resources to be able to explore a range of options and possibilities for their son/daughter.** (We found examples where lack of money meant that some options were simply discounted because the parent/young person was unable to visit to see what they were like). Without additional support, the good practice of exploring options is implicitly blocked.
5. **Being aware of, and seeking to combat, bias, discrimination and inequality in how deaf young people are treated by others.** We were given examples of situations where the deaf young person and those who supported him/her were following a reasoned option (whether a course choice, an educational provider choice, or a training scheme) but which had not been successfully carried through because of the attitudinal or practical barriers put in the young person’s way, e.g. assumptions about what a deaf person can or cannot do; failure to consider adaptations to course content to enable participation. Taking an active stance to promote equality, rather than to identify discrimination is an enabling process.
6. **Recognising that deaf young people commonly experience anxiety about the transition process and require support with this,** such as support for coping with the uncertainty of whether desired outcomes will be realised e.g. will they be able to attend the college they want?

Key finding 7: there are systems-related/structural barriers which influence post-16 transition and cannot easily be overcome through individualised good practice.

Regardless of how good individual professional practice might be with regard to post-16 transitions, how involved and informed a parent might be, or how motivated a young person might be, we found that there were other factors which had an influence on the decisions made during post-16 transition processes, whether overtly or implicitly. These were not easily overcome or controllable through good practice on an individual basis. They were largely related to 'how the system works' or inbuilt biases exercised through the system. The following were the main examples we identified and they are important in considering whether the reforms to post-16 education and training currently being introduced might affect them positively.

Constraints on financial resources available to young people staying in education/training after leaving school have meant that some young people and their families simply rule out some options because the indirect costs such as travel are too great to make the course/location realistic.

Some local authorities exercise deliberate (although not necessarily overt) financial rationing with respect to out of authority placement options for education. Some professionals told us they were encouraged to ensure that young people and their parents considered options within the local authority first to see if needs can be met then only later (if at all) those outside of the local authority. This was some parents' experience also. This is not a person-centred, needs-led approach that remains open to all possibilities; it is a resource-led approach that acknowledges person-centred preferences. The lack of access to information and knowledge about all available options contravenes a key principle of informed choice.

At the moment, **the sector and provider of post-16 education determines other facets of support** such as those consequent on the continuation of the statement of special educational needs (it continues if in school 6th form but not on transfer to college), local arrangements whether audiological care transfers to adult service or not on leaving school, availability of teacher of the deaf support and resource to fund it can be affected by location of education and so forth. In some examples we were given such **secondary consequences of where post-16 education was provided were influential in determining choices.**

Key finding 8: both the resources to support deaf learners and the expectations of what should be an appropriate resource varied considerably across provisions

It was noticeable that the range of support options, not just in terms of communication and language support but also in terms of the numbers and qualifications of staff, the extra-

curricular activities available, the emotional support structures, and the range of access to qualifications and training varied widely across providers. In one sense, variation in provision should not be a cause for concern; the same is true for the general population of post-16 learners and to some extent post-16 provision is a market from which choices are made to best suit learning needs and ambitions. However, **for deaf learners variations in available support for learning should be a cause for concern if there is no accountability for minimum standards of provision or major inequalities of opportunity arising from the variation in availability of support.**

For example, in our sample of 6 FE colleges for a deaf learner who might require additional English support, *the availability* of provision varied from a maximum of 2 hours a week (which was not routine), to access every day to a tutor of English and a qualified teacher of the deaf who tailored additional English support specifically to the courses that were being undertaken. Whilst every learner will have different strengths and not everyone will make use of or need the minimum or maximum provision, the key point is that **there is not an equivalence of availability, regardless of actual uptake.** It could be argued that differences between the structure of FE provisions account for differences in availability of support i.e. specialist (residential) provision versus mainstream FE college with or without a deaf resource base, therefore to compare availability of support is spurious because like is not being compared with like. However, even **within non-residential, non-specialist FE provision we found a very wide variation in availability of support and ‘the offer’ to deaf learners. This variation was about resources, priorities and structures of provision, not a reflection merely of different deaf learners requiring different kinds of support.**

Deaf learners also recognised that **availability of support for learning and additional resources they required could have undue influence on the choice of courses made available to them in the first place and the lack of flexibility in being able to change courses** should the initial choice prove unsuitable.

Key finding 9: addressing the emotional support needs of deaf learners is vital but there are significant differences in approach and investment between varying FE provisions

The importance of addressing young deaf people’s personal and emotional support needs was universally acknowledged by the adults we interviewed, in whatever roles and locations. **Personal and emotional support was variously defined as:**

- Counteracting deficits in social skills and personal confidence,
- supporting emerging adulthood through fostering greater autonomy and life skills,
- responding to specific problems associated with families and relationships,
- fostering personal well-being,
- identifying and responding to more serious mental health difficulties.

There were key parameters in addressing these needs along which different provision could be characterised.

(1) Deliberate curricula and structures to address emotional support vs. implied acquisition of skills and experiences to foster emotional support. For example, in one location deaf learners had classes which were aimed at building personal confidence and resilience and there was timetabled tutoring to address emotional support needs. In other locations, issues such as personal independence and social skills development were addressed through how the college learning environment operated, rather than through any deliberate curricula or active learning approach.

(2) Meeting emotional support needs is part of the usual package of responding to deaf learners Vs meeting emotional support needs of deaf learners is highly specialist and outside of usual activity. We found examples of both ends of this continuum amongst the data provided by participants. The differentiation between within or outside the usual package of support was not primarily about the seriousness or scale of the emotional support need. It was fundamentally attitudinal; whether this was the business of learning support in the FE environment or required external support. It was also about resources, in some locations there was counselling support available, for example, in others there was not.

(3) Direct communication and provision for deaf young people Vs indirect communication and routine provision. Some FE providers emphasised the significance of deaf young people being able to communicate directly (without an interpreter or other third party) about their problems and needs. Ideally this was to a member of staff who was deaf themselves and with whom there was a rapport arising from a perception of 'sameness'. Other FE providers did not emphasise the significance of either direct communication or rapport. Rather the qualifications and skills of the professional who was addressing the emotional problems were more significant e.g. a counsellor or a mental health professional provided that communication was accessible. There were also differences in the significance afforded to whether the helping professional should be experienced or not with deaf young people. In some cases the usual provision available to all students in the FE college was regarded as sufficient, regardless of whether that person had any experience of the ways in which deaf young people are the same as all young people *and* different. In relation to provision that used the usual FE support services available to all, it was clear that little thought had been given to suitability rather than it being an issue of resources constraining what could be used.

(4) The importance of peers in contributing to personal/emotional support Vs regarding support as something that was provided by staff/professionals to learners. From deaf young people's perspectives having a peer group was identified as very important in helping them through their FE college experiences and was personally valued. It was not recognised as significant to such a great extent by the professionals who participated in this study.

Key finding 10: language and communication support provision was of variable quality across FE provisions

In Key finding 8 above, we discussed the wide variation in the *availability* of language and communication support between provisions. Here we emphasise the variations in the *quality* of that support. To some extent, quality is linked the point we made earlier about availability, but there are additional factors that we identified against which provision could be characterised.

(1) The levels of qualification and skills of communication support workers. We identified many good examples of well qualified communication support workers and colleges with active policies and commitment to increase the level of skills of their CSWs. However, several informants, including parents, raised with us concerns that deaf young people were being supported by CSWs whose qualifications did not match the complexity of the young person's needs. This might be because, in an absolute sense, the CSW's qualifications were quite low. Or it might be that a CSW was being used when in fact an interpreter would be more appropriate (see below). Or it might be that the CSW was being asked to support a young person in accessing a course that they had insufficient academic or vocational knowledge to do a quality job. It was unclear from the data we collected how such issues of skills, qualifications and suitability were *monitored* with respect to individual students, and *who might be accountable* for ensuring that best standards to promote learning in specific circumstances were being met.

(2) Interpreter or CSW? In some of the FE environments we sampled, there was a clear understanding of when and in which circumstances it was appropriate for a deaf learner to be supported by an interpreter and when by a CSW. This was not always about the complexity of the course with higher level qualifications attracting interpreters over CSWs. It was also about the complexity of the learner, with interpreters being recognised as better qualified and more experienced in some cases to match the learning needs of the individual student because of their greater flexibility in the use of language and emphasis on interpretation, rather than communication per se. It should also be noted that many deaf learners did not understand the difference between CSWs and interpreters and did not differentiate between them or their roles.

(3) Resource constraints forcing compromises. Some of the FE providers described a range of examples in which the quality and availability of communication and language provision was sub-optimal because of problems arising from cost. The main issue concerned the use of notetakers which is not as common in the school environment and therefore not always recognised as important in transition plans and assessments of learning needs. Yet in the college environment it is a very useful additional support so that the deaf learner can concentrate on the lecturer or teacher if using an interpreter or lipspeaker without shifting their eye gaze to take notes and missing vital information. It was also seen as helpful in building up technical or specialist vocabulary in English through producing a written record

of such through the course. In situations of resource constraint, CSWs are asked to double up as notetakers, or CSWs are provided rather than interpreters so that a notetaker might be afforded. It is notable that when we were given these examples by various participants, their attitude was one of doing the best they could in the circumstances (which they were) yet nobody questioned the impact of such compromises on the educational attainment of the deaf learner. Some deaf learners, however, were very aware of having to make compromises in order to maintain some kind of communication support in the face of resourcing problems. These included continuing with courses rather than seeking to change because no communication support could be guaranteed, and being asked to make up numbers on a course they did not want to do because that is where the communication support resources were being concentrated. Curriculum access compromises in the face of resource constraints were not flagged as of serious concern with serious consequences by professionals/staff but were of concern to deaf young people.

(4) English support. We have already remarked above (key finding 8) on the differences in availability and extent of English support for deaf learners in the various environments we sampled. There were however other parameters potentially affecting the *quality of English support* also apparent:

- the extent to which improving English is seen as a subject in its own right or regarded as a consequence of what happens through the role of CSWs or interpreters. In essence **a difference between a focus on literacy and a focus on correcting/improving English.**
- **the availability or not of qualified teachers and/or specialist tutors for English.** Not all environments had this resource routinely available whilst in some teachers of the deaf focussing on English and literacy were common and easily accessible. Also in some provision, there was a tutor for English available but s/he was not experienced in working with deaf learners, only hearing learners for whom English was not first language. There were also examples of CSWs being used to teach English when they were not qualified to do so.

Key finding 11: the loss of an independent national careers guidance and support service is seen as having had a negative impact on deaf young people

A wide range of informants, including some young people, drew our attention to **the impact of the loss of an independent national careers guidance and support/transition service (Connexions)**. Authorities have dealt with the issue differently with some commissioning independent agencies, some still using a local version of Connexions on a commissioned basis, some vesting responsibility in individual schools to nominate a staff member with responsibility for careers guidance. Although Connexions as a national service was not necessarily universally regarded as offering the best, most informed and most experienced

service for meeting the needs of deaf young people, it was nonetheless an independent service. Its passing has **reduced, in some informants' eyes, the degree of independent advice that is available to deaf young people and their families** i.e. advice that is not rooted in the school or college from which, or to, the young person is transitioning. Concerns were also expressed about the qualifications and experience of some of the people who were now individually designated with a careers guidance role; although experienced with deaf young people they may not be qualified in careers guidance. We did, however, identify some good practice from an independent young people's participation organisation who had been commissioned to explore careers options and transition in non-traditional ways through activities and group work with deaf young people.

The overall picture was of patchy quality of careers guidance and transition support. There was a lack of guidance that was specialist enough to understand the strengths and needs of deaf young people, rather than of young people with SEN in general and which could provide an independent and young person-centred perspective.

Key finding 12: deaf young people are ambitious to succeed and many are highly motivated

The deaf learners who engaged with this study displayed a dazzling array of ambitions, hopes and aspirations. **Very few assumed that *being deaf* would hold them back. Rather from their point of view the difficulties they might encounter would be about language, access and whether they could be appropriately supported.** This was a very positive outlook and one that is a long way from internalised negative assumptions that being deaf is a problem.

That said, it was also clear that **many lacked the knowledge and information they might need appropriately to calibrate their ambitions and aspirations**; for example knowing what kinds of qualifications might be needed to achieve a career goal or recognising when not being able to *hear*¹³ might be a barrier to some professions and when it is not.

Where deaf young people have had the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience that helps them assess how realistic their ambitions might be, then this is helpful in modifying those or reinforcing their legitimacy; in both cases this can have a positive effect on motivation and contingency planning because the reality check supports informed decision making. However, we also found that some young deaf people were being sheltered from considering the consequences of their stated aspirations, or not challenged, or not given access to further knowledge to help them contextualise their ambitions. This resulted in false expectations, unrealistic hopes and lack of opportunity to make changes themselves to how they saw their futures.

¹³ We make a distinction between difficulties with hearing and being deaf because in some cases auditory access is a legitimate priority for some professions and roles; in other cases whether one is deaf or not (in terms of identity, language or disability) is of no consequence.

In supporting deaf young people to form realistic goals and fulfil ambitions and aspirations the following were identified as important:

- provision of **additional knowledge** about professions and their implications which expands young people's horizons
- **challenges** to young people's assumptions about personal ambitions that are either too high or too low
- **first hand work experience** and work placements to promote experiential knowledge acquisition
- **good quality information** about the practicalities and requirements for potential jobs and further study (such as within Higher Education)
- **motivation and can-do support** from staff, parents and peers
- **a well resourced and knowledgeable careers guidance structure** that is effective during post-16 education and supports young people's pathways on leaving college

Conclusions for effective provision and recommendations for good practice

It is outside the scope of this report to develop an audit tool, checklist, or best practice self evaluation document that might assist local authorities or FE providers in recognising or raising the quality of FE provision for deaf learners. However, the following is an indicative list, drawn from the study, which begins to characterise what might constitute effective educational and educational support provision for deaf learners in FE and good practice. In summary:

- Processes of transition on leaving school should not a priori assume Further Education as the default option from which all other choices are exceptions
- Processes of transition should engage the deaf young person early to ensure a gradual process of knowledge acquisition and understanding about choices on leaving school. The use of advocacy, experiential events based on participatory processes to build confidence to contribute ideas and wishes are helpful.
- Person centred, outcomes focussed plans to support transitional work is preferable to resource-led decision making. In this respect perceiving the future as potentially 'plural' is helpful and decisions as potentially 'provisional' so that exploration of multiple options and possibilities is encouraged.
- Deaf young people's communicative access to processes of planning and decision making including annual reviews and transition plans must be prioritised. This does not just include meeting language and communication needs as defined by the young person's strengths and preferences but also ensuring that others involved, particularly in formal meetings, accept their part to play in ensuring optimal access.

- Preparing young people to participate in plans and decisions about what to do on leaving school requires the provision of knowledge about the full range of possibilities, experiences which make options real not abstract, supporting the development of personal skills effectively to take part, being realistic (neither too low nor too high expectations), and personalised scaffolding of understanding in order effectively to participate
- FE plays a central role in personal development, emotional maturity, life skills acquisition and growing independence. For some deaf learners this is its primary rather than subsidiary function. If these issues were more effectively attended to during school years, some deaf young people would have potentially a greater range of choices on leaving school rather than using years in FE to acquire this readiness for the next stage of their lives.
- A more effective and routinized system of tracking deaf young people's progress on leaving school, within their FE career and on leaving FE would have many benefits including:
 - critical reflection on professional practice (do the recommendations made on leaving school turn out to be effective, for which young people and why?)
 - monitoring of the quality of FE provision whilst young people are within it (are young people achieving their goals or merely participating in courses with little discernible outcomes?)
 - assessing the quality and appropriateness of support to access the curriculum over time (deaf young people's language strengths and communication preferences will develop and may change as the context and level of their learning changes)
 - learning from the impact of young people's FE experiences on what happens subsequently is a valuable source of additional input to achieve better processes and outcomes for FE for deaf young people but they are rarely if ever asked to provide feedback or their future achievements and needs tracked.
- There is a need for a sustained focus on learning outcomes rather than course participation with a concern to monitor and raise standards as part of ongoing quality assurance of educational provision for deaf learners within FE. The analysis of official statistics demonstrates considerable under-achievement by deaf young people in FE, in comparison with other learners in FE with SEN and with those without. The attainment gap in achieving basic qualifications in English and Mathematics at the end of school is not effectively made up for those deaf young in FE.

- It is helpful to adopt an individualised approach that does not seek to characterise deaf learners as typically anything as a group and therefore avoids default assumptions that this is the type of course deaf young people do, or the kind of level that deaf young people should study at.
- An approach that prioritises incremental progress against a set of discernible goals (that may be revised) is preferable to one that prioritises the preservation of deaf young people within FE colleges, regardless of any vocational or academic progress because of the secondary social/emotional developmental benefits.
- Language and communication support should be delivered by practitioners qualified in the role they fulfil (rather than being asked to cover a range of tasks for which they are not necessarily qualified).
- Language and communication support is required that matches both the complexity of the end learning goal and the complexity of the learner (one without the other is no sufficient).
- To assess on an ongoing basis whether learners' needs are appropriately met requires both individualised assessment from the perspective of learners' strengths and needs, and monitoring the appropriateness of language and communication support. Both are required to ensure quality and both are components of accountability.
- Addressing learning support as an issue of individual matching of needs is not enough without addressing the influence of the extent of available resource to ensure that resource constraints do not unduly curtail the range of learning opportunities available to deaf young people
- Emotional and psychological needs of deaf learners in FE are best met by services and professionals that are deaf aware, have specific knowledge of the ways in which deaf young people are the same and different from other learners of the same age, are able to recognise concerns that might challenge optimal wellbeing, and can provide a service in language (s) and modality(ies) that young people feel most comfortable to express themselves and be understood. Whether provided in-house within usual college provision or externally from specialist providers, these best practice issues are the same.
- Given that many deaf young people who enter FE have delays in personal maturity and emotional needs, provision that addresses these routinely, rather than only reactively if something goes wrong, is most helpful. Good practice examples include emotional curricula, a regular focus on well-being within personal tutoring, life skills lessons and supported skills development opportunities, employability foundation courses and work placements and internships. Least helpful are educational provision that assumes that the college environment, greater demands on

independence and peer groups will of themselves enhance maturity and meet emotional needs without processes that in different ways might deliberately address these needs. Informal and unintended learning opportunities are not necessarily enough.

- Deaf young people require a learning environment that provides a constant stream of new knowledge and experiential learning opportunities about the wider world, the demands of jobs and further studies so that they are able appropriately to calibrate their expectations and aspirations based on good quality information and personal experience that support informed choices.
- Opportunities at different levels, different intensities and at different times in the FE college career of deaf learners to gain work experience and/or vocational training is valued.
- For learners who use BSL the availability of staff/professionals with whom direct communication is possible, rather than indirect through an interpreter is regarded as helpful.
- The continued engagement of deaf learners in feedback on their experiences of post-16 transition and Further Education with the aims of identifying potential problems, highlighting good practice and raising quality by means of recognising the value of young people's perspectives and acting on their shared knowledge is an underutilised resource.

8. Appendices

List of steering group members

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Andy Owen: Qualified CSW, acting vice-chair of ACSW and author on Deaf issues

Christopher Kang-Mullen: Social Care Policy Adviser

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One to one interview schedule for college learners

Use the demographic questionnaire first as part of warming up

A) Before starting at college/apprenticeship/or looking for a job

- 1) When you were about 14, what did you want to do after you left school?
- 2) Have you seen this before? (*Show a copy of a transition plan*)
- 3) If yes, can you remember what you wrote on this at the time when you filled it in?
- 4) If not, how would you want to be more involved in the process?
- 5) Were you able to clearly explain what you wanted to do?
- 6) Did you feel you were listened to?
- 7) Did you know who was in the transition meeting discussing the information on your transition form?
- 8) Were you aware that there were different options for you when you left school?
- 9) What options did you have at the time?
- 10) Do you know who your key worker was? What did they do to help you? Did you feel that this was helpful?
- 11) Did you visit any FE colleges? If so, which ones?

B) First day at college/apprenticeship or job seeking

- 1) How did you feel on your first day?
- 2) What things were you most worried about?
- 3) What did you enjoy on your first day?
- 4) What did you not enjoy on your first day?
- 5) What was it like to meet other learners on the same course as you?
- 6) Did you find the staff helpful?
- 7) Were the staff easy to communicate with?
- 8) What do you think could be done to help improve things for deaf people on their first day of college/ an apprenticeship/ job seeking?
- 9) Was the course what you wanted to do?
- 10) Was the college easy to get to?
- 11) Did they ask you what support/equipment you would need?

12) Were you able to have the support that you wanted?

C) What is happening now?

- 1) How many years have you been here now?
- 2) Are you on the same course as when you first started?
- 3) If not, please explain further
- 4) How good do you think the support has been for you?
- 5) What was the most useful support you have had? *(Prepare a list of different types of support)*
- 6) Please explain why?
- 7) Do you feel happy with what you are doing now?
- 8) How could this be improved for you?
- 9) How well do you get on with other learners?
- 10) Are you able to keep up with others in classes?
- 11) Have you had other support e.g. emotional support and if so, where from?
- 12) Have you been able to make use of other facilities at college etc?
- 13) If yes, what are the other facilities?
- 14) Have you joined any clubs outside of college time?
- 15) Do you receive any benefits or grants that are helping you?

D) Your future plans

- 1) Do you know what you would like to do in the future?
- 2) If so, please explain
- 3) Do you know how you will be able to achieve this?
- 4) What is your advice for others wishing to do the same course as you?
- 5) Do you think you will want to change your course at some point?
- 6) If so, please explain why and what you would like to do instead.
- 7) What has helped you to be where you are now?
- 8) What would you like to see change and why?

Thank you for your time

One to one interview schedule for college staff

Thank you for agreeing to take part today

A) About your role

- 1) What is your role?
- 2) How long have you worked here for?
- 3) How many deaf learners have you supported in the past 5 years?
- 4) How many deaf learners do you now have in the college here?

B) Training and experiences

- 1) What training or experience did you have prior to starting work here?
- 2) What professional qualification(s) do you have for this role?
- 3) Can you tell us about your experience getting to where you are now?
- 4) Can you explain why you wanted to work with deaf young people?

C) The support structure

- 1) What support is currently available for deaf learners?
- 2) How are decisions about support made?
- 3) How are these support options explained to them?
- 4) How easy has it been to manage/provide the support that is necessary for deaf learners?
- 5) Do you have to prioritise according to their needs or does it depend on resources available?
- 6) If so, please explain how this is decided?

D) Other support services

- 1) What other support is available for deaf learners? (i.e. English support/ proof-reading etc.)
- 2) How easy has it been to obtain this support, if needed?

- 3) Have deaf learners been able to give feedback about the support that they are receiving from the college?
- 4) Do you have appraisals with them?
- 5) Can deaf learners have emotional support at the college when needed and if so, who usually provides this kind of support?

E) Your experiences of working with deaf young people

- 1) Are you involved with some of the young people's transition plans and if so, how?
- 2) What are your experiences when working with new deaf learners, when they first arrive at the college?
- 3) Do you think they are mentally ready for college life?
- 4) How easy do you think it has been for them to make the transition from school to college?
- 5) Do you feel deaf learners have clear expectations of what they hope to achieve when starting at the college?
- 6) What do you think would have helped them to be better prepared for college life?
- 7) How often have you had to deal with learners when they decide that they feel they are not on the right course?
- 8) If this happens, what usually happens next?
- 9) Have you had to deal with some issues with learners that are not connected to their college life (i.e. some personal issues/transport issues etc.)?
- 10) How long do you expect to support the deaf learners when starting their college placements?
- 11) How many dropouts are there per year? Do you think this is higher than with other learners at the college?
- 12) How do you think these learners can be encouraged to stay on and complete their courses?

F) Coming to the end of their college placement

- 1) What preparation work is done for them to move on after they have completed their study at your college?
- 2) What usually happens to the deaf learners when they have finished at the college?
- 3) What do you think could be in place that would help deaf learners to be better prepared to start working life?
- 4) What kind of support or careers advice is available at the college and have deaf learners been able to make good use of these facilities?

Thank you for your time

One to one interview schedule for key informants

Thank you for agreeing to take part.

Can you please tell us about a little about yourself and how you have come to be involved as a key informant OR

Are you a parent/ teacher of the deaf / social worker / Connexions or other?

A) Transition review process

- 1) How involved were you with the deaf young person for the transition review? Please explain?
- 2) Were you allocated as their key worker?
- 3) If so, can you explain your understanding of your role?
- 4) If not, who was appointed and how they supported the deaf young person?
- 5) Did you feel the deaf young person had a good understanding of the transition review process?
- 6) Do you feel the deaf young person were aware of the possible options that could be made available?
- 7) What options were discussed at the review?
- 8) Who were the people involved at the review?
- 9) How were the decisions reached?
- 10) Did you feel the deaf young person were being listened to and having their views taken on board?
- 11) What would have helped to make them feel more involved in this process?
- 12) Did they have the opportunity to visit different colleges or workplaces prior to coming to a decision about their future?
- 13) Can you tell us what was agreed at the transition review and what has happened since?

B) Their first day at college/apprenticeship or looking for a job

- 1) How did you think they coped on their first day?
- 2) What things were you most worried about and why?
- 3) Did they have the opportunity to meet other people like themselves, for example, doing the same course or going to the job club etc.?

- 4) Did you think the staff were helpful?
- 5) Did you think the staff were easy to communicate with?
- 6) What do you think could be done that would help improve the first day at college for the specific person you were supporting or young deaf learners generally?
- 7) Was the course or other position their first choice of what they wanted to do?
- 8) If not, please explain further?
- 9) Was the college or workplace easy to get to for them?
- 10) Did you have to help them out with transport issues?
- 11) Do you think they were aware of what support/equipment they were entitled to?
- 12) Did things happen as you expected them to? Please explain further.
- 13) Since starting at college, doing an apprenticeship, or looking for work, what have things been like for them?
- 14) Please explain if the transition from school to whatever they are doing now was easy or difficult?

C) What is happening now

- 1) How many years has this person been here now?
- 2) Are they doing the same course now as they were when they started? If not, please explain further
- 3) What do you think of the support that has been available for this person? Is there anything that could have been made better for the deaf person?
- 4) What kind of support has this person got at the moment? Please list and add comments about how useful each of these have been for this person?
- 5) How well do you think this person is doing now? Is he/she able to keep up with others?
- 6) How well do you think this person is getting on with the other people around them?
- 7) What other support do you think this person would benefit from having in addition to the support they are already receiving? (e.g., emotional support) and if so, where from?
- 8) Do you know if this person has been able to make use of other facilities either at college or at their workplace? (i.e. joining in some clubs or extra classes)
- 9) What are your present concerns, if you have any?

D) The deaf young person's future plan

- 1) Do you know what their plans are for the future? If so, explain?
- 2) Do you feel this would be achievable? Please explain further?
- 3) What is your advice for others wishing to support deaf young people in a similar situation to the one that you have been in?
- 4) If you were to do anything differently next time, what would it be and how would this better support a deaf young person?
- 5) What would you like to see happen in the future that would help people like yourself so that you can better prepare a deaf young person for life after school?

Thank you for your time

Workshop Plan

Structure of the workshop – see flowchart (below)

On arrival, participants will be given a short questionnaire (see below) to fill in at the beginning of the workshop for demographic data. Interviewers will be able to give assistance if required.

Participants will be asked to work in pairs/small groups and in the full group. The workshop will be conducted in 4 parts. Participants will be reminded the purpose of the live recordings.

Each of them will be given a rating card. Participants will be asked to choose a number using a Likert Scale in answer to each of the questions that is being put to them. This will be completed during the pairs exercise.

Structure of the workshop

Introduction (10 minutes)

Housekeeping rules

Explain about the project and how the workshop will be run

Warm up exercise - give names in turns

Part One (20 minutes)

a) Scenario (Lorna's transition stage) – work in pairs/groups

The Transition Stage - the amount of involvement and understanding of the process that they had when they were at school

Part Two (20 minutes)

b) Scenario (Lorna's first week) – work in pairs/groups

What was it like for them at the beginning, how did they feel and what were their main concerns at that time

Part Three (20 minutes)

c) Scenario (Lorna's current position) – work in pairs/groups

What is it like for them now, what is helpful and not helpful, what is still difficult in the home, with the school, with staff

Part Four (20 minutes)

Open discussion: 'Hopes & Aspirations'

To explore the reasons why they are there now and what do they hope to achieve for their future (this would include trying to establish if the course was their choice and do they have a specific aim that they hope to achieve)

Closing time (10 minutes)

Thanking them for their time and to check if there is anything else to wish to add.

Scenario (Lorna's case study)

Part One – 'Lorna's transition stage'

Lorna is 14 years of age. She has severe hearing loss and has been attending local hearing school since she was 4 and half. The school did not let her know that she was having a transition review meeting and that she needed to make a decision about what she wants to do when she leaves school. What do you think would have helped her?

- To ask if this has happened to any of them in the group.
- To check what choices has been made available to them.

Part Two – 'Lorna's first week'

Lorna has decided that she wanted to look for a job. She applied Connexions for their help. They have been helping her to fill in an application form and to prepare her C.V. She is not sure about what she wants to do but is interested in doing an apprenticeship with some local firms. What challenges do you think will be for Lorna and what she can try/should do?

- What things were you most worried about when looking at/for options for school leavers?
- What was your first week like when you first started? (e.g. college or training)

Part Three – 'Lorna's current position'

Whilst on her apprenticeship programme, Lorna has now decided to enrol at a deaf college for a NVQ course in fashion design. She has found this strange at first. Why do you think she felt strange and what should she do next?

- Are you happy with what you are doing now?
- What kind of support do you have and how good is it?

Part Four – ‘Lorna’s future plan/Hopes & Aspirations’ (optional – time-permitting)

Time has come for Lorna to think about what to do next. She’d like to go on a further course (Fashion & Textiles) and to go to University in the future.

What plans do you think she needs to make to reach her goals? What advice would you give if she asked you?

- Do you feel you are clear about what you would want to do in the future?
- What are your hopes?

Short Questionnaire (background information)

Gender: Female Male

Age (years): 16 17 18 19

How would you describe your hearing loss?

What is your main method of communication?

.....

Are you: a student on vocational training looking for a job

Are you: Full-time Part-time

- School education: Hearing school (with no resource-based unit)
- Hearing school (with resource-based unit)
- Deaf school

What support did you have at school? Please circle as many

- Teacher of the deaf Communication support worker Notetaker SENCO
- None Other (please state)

Please return this questionnaire to one of the interviewers today

Thank you for your time

Rating card (deaf young people)

Please note this will be used for the workshop and for one to one interviews with deaf young people.

Ratings: 1 – very poor/difficult 2- fairly poor/quite difficult 3 – OK/quite easy
 4 – good/easy 5 – very good/very easy

Please choose one of the ratings above that best describes your experience as follows;

When you were around 14 years old?

How well did you understand about the transition process (preparation for leaving school)?

1 2 3 4 5

How helpful was the school with you when supporting you with what you wanted to do in the future?

1 2 3 4 5

Your first week at college, apprenticeship or looking for work

How helpful were the staff when you were shown around in college or in training place or to meet the staff in finding work?

1 2 3 4 5

How good were the staff when they explained about the support (i.e. interpreter or a notetaker) that you could have?

1 2 3 4 5

How easy was it to communicate with the staff?

1 2 3 4 5

Now that you are in college, or at work or looking for work

How do you find the work at college or in training or finding a job?

1 2 3 4 5

How good has the support (e.g. interpreter /note-taker) been for you?

1 2 3 4 5

How confident do you feel when you are with other people now?

1 2 3 4 5

