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## INSIDE TRACK: We must address attainment gap of deaf children



**Stephen Naysmith**  
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**Just over 900 of Scotland's deaf young people can expect to go to university.**

If they were hearing, that figure would be nearly 1400. That's the attainment gap facing Scottish deaf children, one which significantly affects their chances of going to further or higher education and their chances of a job afterwards.

The National Deaf Children's Society will warn this week that deaf young people are underrepresented in a number of post-16 destinations and that more needs to be done about it.

In fact, the society will argue that, until now, we didn't even have a handle on the problem. "We didn't have the evidence," explains the NDCS's Scottish director Heather Gray. "This will be the first clear evidence that this gap exists."

The phenomenon is already recognised in England and Wales, the NCDS points out, where systems are now in place to monitor the difference between the number of deaf young people who progress to university or employment and those who do so in the hearing population. In each case the gap is more than 10%.

Barriers include problems with the transition and planning process when young people reach university or college. Some still find the facilities they need such as technologies to aid hearing in lectures are not in place and they have to fight to get them.

There is also a concern about a reduction in the number of people qualified to teach deaf pupils.

But south of the Border, policies are being put in place to tackle the hurdles which hold deaf children back and measure every year whether the outcomes for such young people are changing. Scottish campaigners want to see similar measures to gauge the extent of the problem and monitor improvements.

Controversially, some want to see deaf young people treated as a separate group with specific needs in schools and fear that they are not helped by the movement to "mainstream" all children rather than identify individual groups.

Mainstreaming policies were designed to stop the ghettoisation effect of special schools and have

widespread support in the educational community. Although there is an argument to be made that the needs of deaf children are specific, it seems far from assured that hiving many off from the mainstream would make it easier to meet university entrance requirements or receive the services and support they need.

One factor in all this is the rising numbers of deaf young people. The figures at the top of this piece are based on the fact that there are more than 3500 deaf children in Scotland, however, estimates suggest the real number could be more than 3800. The figures have steadily increased, partly due to a higher incidence of deafness within some migrant populations, but also due to a push to identify children with hearing problems at an earlier age. A universal newborn screening programme has contributed to this.

NCDS points out that as well as an attainment gap between the hearing and non-hearing population, there are significant geographical differences in Scotland. But there is no obvious reason why these gaps should so large, they say, and it is time Scotland started addressing the problem.