



Consortium for Research in Deaf Education

2024 report for Northern Ireland

Education provision for deaf children in Northern Ireland in 2023/24

Introduction

In 2024, we carried out the 14th Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE) annual survey on educational staffing and service provision for deaf children. This report sets out the results of the survey for Northern Ireland and is intended for heads of services, policy makers in local and central government and anyone with an interest in deaf education.

The survey alternates from year to year between a standard survey and a survey with a mix of core and thematic questions. The 2024 survey was the version with a mix of core and thematic questions, covering the 2023/24 academic year.¹

We would like to thank the head of service in Northern Ireland for responding to the survey.

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¹ Reports from previous years can be found on the National Deaf Children's Society website at www.ndcs.org.uk/cride or on the BATOD website at www.batod.org.uk/information/cride-reports/.

Interpreting the results

There is one service in Northern Ireland covering the five different regions. The service was asked to give figures for the position as of 31st January 2024.

In the survey, we acknowledge that services and children do not always fit into the boxes or options provided. Respondents were able to leave comments or clarify where needed throughout the survey. This report notes particular issues that emerged in relation to some questions.

Caution is also needed due to differences in response rates to individual questions and between surveys over the years, particularly from before 2019 when the survey was completed by five different services and it is believed there were different interpretations of questions and possible double counting.

Please note that percentages in this report have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

Summary of key findings

Deaf children in Northern Ireland

- There were at least 1,603 deaf children. This figure of 1,603 is a reported 12% increase from 1,428 in 2023.

Teachers of Deaf Children and other specialist staff

- There were at least 46.8 fte Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (TOD) posts, of which none were vacant.
- Of the 46.8 fte working as TODs, 61% held the mandatory qualification, whilst 17% were in training and 23% were qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training.
- The number of qualified TODs in employment working in a peripatetic role or in a resource provision has increased by 3% since 2023 and decreased by 38% since we started the survey in 2011.

Resource provisions

- Two resource provisions specifically for deaf children and young people were reported, which is the same as in 2023. Looking at the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, on average, there is one resource provision for every 802 deaf children. This a reported increase from 714 in 2023.

Support following identification of deafness

- The service received 209 referrals during the 2023 calendar year.
- 25% of referrals to the service were for children who had been identified via the newborn hearing screening programme in 2023. Of these, 88% were contacted by a TOD within two working days.
- 17% of referrals to the service were for children who had been identified outside of the newborn hearing screening programme and before a child had started statutory education. Of these, 92% were contacted by a TOD within five working days.
- 58% of referrals to the service were for children who had been identified outside of the newborn hearing screening programme but after a child had started statutory education. Of these, 83% were contacted by a TOD within five working days.
- Regardless of how the referral was made, 51% of families were offered a visit (either face to face or virtual) within ten working days of the referral.

Early identification and early intervention pathways

- All children identified as deaf were referred to the service by audiology services.
- All children referred to the service are routinely accepted.
- The service was not aware if there was a school entry hearing screening programme in the area.

PART 1: Deaf children in Northern Ireland

How many deaf children are there?²

Based on the response from the service covering the five regions across Northern Ireland there were 1,603 deaf children. This figure of 1,603 is a reported increase of 175 (12%) from 1,428 in 2023.

Two factors that may partly explain this increase include:

- the 2023 total did not include figures for children in the school for deaf children in Northern Ireland, whereas the 2024 figure does. 51 children were identified as being in the school for deaf children in 2024
- the service indicated that the above figure may include some children with temporary deafness. They noted that there had been an increase in referrals of children with temporary conductive deafness to the service. Although CRIDE asks for figures for children with permanent deafness, the service reported that it is difficult to determine temporary conductive loss as this information may not be provided by audiology or ENT at referral.

When asked about known issues or gaps with the data, the service also responded that figures were not held for children who had left school.

The following table compares the total number of deaf children living in Northern Ireland with figures from previous years. As set out in the introduction, comparisons with earlier reports should be made with caution.

² The service was asked to include children and young people with a permanent deafness under the age of 20, including as much as possible: all children who have a unilateral or bilateral sensori-neural or permanent conductive deafness, at all levels from mild to profound, using BSA/BATOD descriptors; all deaf children, regardless of whether they receive support from the service; children who attend education provision outside of the area but who normally live in the area. Please also note that we use the term 'permanent deafness' to include those children with a syndrome known to include permanent conductive deafness, microtia/atresia, middle ear malformation, or those who have had middle ear surgery such as mastoidectomy. It also includes those children with glue ear who are not expected to 'grow out' of the condition before the age of 12 years, such as those born with a cleft palate, Down's syndrome, cystic fibrosis, or primary ciliary dyskinesia. Under temporary conductive deafness, we include those children with glue ear who may have been fitted with hearing aids as an alternative to grommet surgery but who are expected to 'grow out' of the condition before the age of 12 years. Please note that for the purpose of these questions we used the term 'children' to include children and young people under the age of 20 (unless otherwise specified).

Table 1: Number of deaf children reported, over successive years

	Number of children reported
CRIDE 2024	1,603
CRIDE 2023	1,428
CRIDE 2022	1,476
CRIDE 2021	1,387
CRIDE 2019	1,417
CRIDE 2018	1,687
CRIDE 2017	1,553
CRIDE 2016	1,497
CRIDE 2015	1,332
CRIDE 2014	1,574
CRIDE 2013	1,481
CRIDE 2012	1,249
CRIDE 2011	1,238

The service was not able to provide figures for the number of children and young people with permanent deafness known to be eligible for free school meals. The service was not able to access this data, but stated that it would be available in future years.

Number of deaf children on the service’s caseload

By caseload, we mean children who receive some form of support **at least once a year**. Examples of support include direct teaching, visits to the family or school, liaison with the family, school and teachers, providing hearing aid checks, etc. We asked the service to include children it supported but who do not live in its geographical area. Children with temporary deafness could be included in the response to this question if they were on the service caseload.

The survey response indicated that 1,324 deaf children with permanent or temporary deafness were on the caseload. This is a 5% increase from 2023 when the service reported that 1,259 deaf children were on its caseload.

We also asked the service to split out how many children on their caseload had a temporary conductive hearing loss; they gave a figure of 131 children.

Children in schools for deaf children and young people

The separate short survey for schools for deaf children and young people asked about the number of children placed in the school, and how many lived in the local authority that the school is located in. The school³ replied that there were 51 children and young people placed at the school, all of whom lived within Northern Ireland.

³ Jordanstown is the Northern Ireland school for children who are deaf or visually impaired.

How do CRIDE's 2024 figures compare to School Census figures?

Because of the differences in how data have been collected and different definitions used, CRIDE recommends the following figures be used as a basis for further debate and analysis, rather than to reach firm conclusions.

School Census data for 2023/24 was not available due to industrial action.

School Census figures for 2022/23⁴ identified 1,420 pupils recorded with a 'hearing impairment' on the medical register. This amounts to 89% of the 1,603 children and young people under the age of 20 identified by CRIDE.

Some of these pupils have been recorded with an SEN for hearing impairment on the SEN register also. 833 children are on the SEN register. Of these, 546 had a mild or moderate hearing impairment and 287 had a severe or profound hearing impairment.

Separately, the School Census reports that 512 deaf children on the SEN register have a statement of SEN. This equates to 36% of the deaf children identified by the School Census. It also equates to 32% of children and young people under the age of 20 identified by CRIDE.

It should be noted that the School Census figure will not include deaf children with other needs where deafness is not the primary need. In addition, not all deaf children will be registered as having an SEN.

⁴ The 2022/23 School Census data is supplied separately to the National Deaf Children's Society by the Department of Education. The data includes pupils aged 2 to 19.

PART 2: Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People and other specialist staff

We asked how many TODs are working in different settings, including those in a peripatetic role, working in resource provisions⁵ and/or working in a special school or college not specifically for deaf children or young people. We also separately asked the school for deaf children in Northern Ireland how many TODs were working in the school. We found that:

- overall, there were at least 46.8 fte people working as TODs in Northern Ireland.
- 61% of these posts were occupied by fully qualified TODs, 17% were occupied by teachers in training for the mandatory qualification, and 23% were occupied by qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training. No posts were reported for people not qualified as Teachers.⁶
- at the time the survey was completed, no vacant posts were reported.

The following table provides a breakdown by type of setting.

Table 2: Number of TOD posts overall⁷

	Working mainly as a peripatetic TOD (total and percentage)	Working mainly in a resource provision (total and percentage)	Working mainly in a special school for deaf children (total and percentage)	TOD posts overall (total and percentage)
TODs with the mandatory qualification	20.6 (81%)	1 (33%)	6.8 (37%)	28.4 (61%)
Teachers in training for the mandatory qualification or intending to train within 3 years	4.8 (19%)	1 (33%)	2 (11%)	7.8 (17%)
Qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	9.6 (52%)	10.6 (23%)
Total – in employment	25.4 (100%)	3 (100%)	18.4 (100%)	46.8 (100%)

No TODs were reported as working mainly in special schools or colleges not specifically for deaf children, or as working flexibly between different roles or settings.

⁵ In the CRIDE survey, we use the term 'resource provision' to include all schools with a resource provision, base or unit specifically for deaf children, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the local authority or by the school.

⁶ The category of People not qualified as Teachers was only asked about in the separate survey for schools for deaf children.

⁷ There were no TODs reported as working mainly in special schools not specifically for deaf children and young people, or as working flexibly as a peripatetic TOD, in a resource provision and/or in a special school or college not specifically for deaf children or young people.

Looking at the response from the separate survey of the special school for deaf children, the number of TODs in the special school for deaf children has increased by 8% from 17 to 18.4 fte. The number of qualified TODs has increased from 6 to 6.8 fte but the number in training has stayed the same as 2 fte.

The following table summarises the above by just showing the numbers of TODs in employment by their role only.

Table 3: Number of TODs in employment overall by role

	Total TODs in post	Percentage
Working mainly as a peripatetic TODs	25.4	54%
Working mainly in a resource provision	3	6%
Working mainly in a special school or college not specifically for deaf children or young people	0	0%
Working flexibly as a peripatetic TOD, in a resource provision and/or in a special school or college not specifically for deaf children or young people	0	0%
Working mainly in a special school for deaf children	18.4	39%
Total of figures given	46.8	100%

Figures for TODs in the Belfast cochlear implant programme were collected in a separate survey. There were no TODs in employment at the time of the survey. The cochlear implant programme commented that there was still resource for one post but that they delivered this work via the education service and felt that this was working well.

Please note that the rest of this section **does not** include TODs working in the special school for deaf children as this information has not been collected consistently by CRIDE over the past decade.

Changes in numbers of TODs

The following table looks at changes in the number of qualified TODs in employment and posts over successive years.

As set out earlier, when making year on year comparisons, anomalies can sometimes appear in the responses. We make every effort to investigate anomalies that appear particularly strange; however, services and schools do not always respond to such queries.

Table 4: Changes in numbers of TODs from year to year

	TODs with the mandatory qualification in employment	Number of teachers working as TODs in employment	Number of vacant posts	Number of TOD posts (including vacancies)
2024	21.6	28.4	0	28.4
2023	21	27	1.4	28.4
2022	22.6	24.4	2	26.4
2021	26.5	26.5	0	26.5
2019	25.2	26	3	29
2018	28.4	29.2	5	34.2
2017	29.3	30.1	1	31.1
2016	32.6	33.4	0	33.4
2015	30.6	34.4	0	34.4
2014	28.6	32.6	0	32.6
2013	30	35	0	35
2012	29.6	34.2	0	34.2
2011	34.9	37.3	1.3	38.6

Table 5: Percentage change in numbers of TODs

	Percentage change over past 13 years (between 2011 and 2024)	Percentage change over past year (between 2023 and 2024)
TODs with the mandatory qualification in employment	-38%	3%
Number of teachers working as TODs in employment	-24%	5%
Number of TOD posts (including vacancies)	-26%	0%

In terms of any changes of TODs in post in specific roles:

- overall, the total of 25.4 fte peripatetic TODs is a 6% increase from 24 in 2023. Over the long-term though, the number of peripatetic TODs has decreased by 7% from 27.2 fte in 2011.
- the total of 3 fte TODs in resource provisions is unchanged from 2023. Over the long-term though, the number of peripatetic TODs has decreased by 70% from 10.1 fte in 2011.

The service reported no difficulties in recruiting for permanent posts over the past 12 months, but they did report difficulties in securing supply cover from a qualified TOD.

Other specialist staff

The service reported no specialist support staff (other than TODs) directly employed by the service. This was also the case in previous years. The service commented that two TODs with the mandatory qualification were also qualified educational audiologists and fulfilled this role in the service.

PART 3: Support provided

Information about the service

The service is managed by a qualified TOD.

Number of resource provisions

In the CRIDE survey, we use the term 'resource provision' to include all schools (mainstream or special) with a resource provision, base or unit specifically for deaf children, regardless of whether staff in the resource provision are employed by the local authority or by the school.

As in 2023, we found that there was one primary resource provision and one secondary resource provision in Northern Ireland. Both of these were managed and delivered by the schools (rather than by the service). One of these resource provisions was managed by a qualified TOD.

We also looked at the number of resource provisions against the overall population of deaf children. This is intended to indicate the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, relative to the overall population of deaf children. We found that, on average, there was one resource provision for every 802 deaf children. This figure was 714 in 2023.⁸

This is **not** a measure of the number of places available in or individual deaf children enrolled at each resource provision; figures for places or deaf children enrolled will vary from provision to provision.

⁸ In 2023 figures for children at the school for deaf children in Northern Ireland were not provided and therefore were not included in the figures used to calculate this in 2023.

PART 4: Support following identification of deafness

We asked the service how many referrals they received over the calendar year of 2023 for children who were newly identified as deaf.

Table 6: Referrals

	Number of referrals	Percentage
For children identified as deaf through the newborn hearing screening programme	52	25%
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme and before they had started statutory education	36	17%
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme and after they had started statutory education	121	58%
Total of figures given	209	100%

The total number of referrals over the calendar year has increased from 130 as reported in 2023.

We then asked how soon families were contacted and visited following the initial referral. These questions were drafted with reference to the [NatSIP Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services in England \(2016\)](#) – in particular, standards A1ii and A1iii.

We recognise there may be a range of reasons why initial contact or the first visit cannot take place within the timescales outlined by the quality standards (e.g. the family is not able to meet). However, we hope that these questions will help to build a national picture of how these quality standards are being met. In response to these questions, we found that:

- of the referrals for children identified through the newborn hearing screening programme, 46 of the families were contacted by a TOD within two working days. This amounts to 88% of the 52 children referred via this route. The corresponding figure was 88% in 2023
- of the referrals for children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing screening programme and before they had started statutory education,⁹ 33 of the families were contacted by a TOD within five working days. This amounts to 92% of the 36 children referred via this route. The corresponding figure was 76% in 2023
- of the referrals for children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing screening programme and after they had started statutory education, 101 of the families were contacted by a TOD within five working days. This amounts to 83% of the 121 children referred via this route. The corresponding figure was 85% in 2023
- 106 families were offered a visit (either face-to-face or virtually) from a TOD within ten working days of any referral. This amounts to 51% of the 209 children referred either through or outside the newborn hearing screening programme. The corresponding figure was 52% in 2023.

⁹ The [Department of Education](#) states “When a child reaches the age of four on or between 1 September and 1 July, the child will usually begin their education at the beginning of the next school year. Where a child reaches the age of four on or between 2 July and 31 August in the same calendar year, the child will start school in the September following their fifth birthday.”

The service commented that there was a new trend of referrals from health before hearing aids are fitted, especially for the temporary conductive losses which the service would not have seen before. They reported that this affects first visits because schools/parents do not want a visit before hearing aids are fitted.

PART 5: Thematic questions: Early identification and early intervention pathways

This year's CRIDE survey included some thematic questions about referrals into and accepted by the education service. We asked these questions as we know that, across the UK, not all deaf children are referred into education services. We were keen to better understand if this is because the referrals are not made by audiology services or because they are not accepted by education (because of any eligibility criteria or policy in place).

When asked if there were any groups of deaf children routinely not referred into the service by audiology services (such as children with unilateral, mild, moderate or temporary deafness, and children without a hearing aid), the service stated that all children identified as deaf were referred to the service.

When asked if there were any groups of deaf children where a referral to the service (if made) would not routinely be accepted, the service stated that all referrals for children identified as deaf (including those with temporary deafness) were accepted.

The service did not know if there was a school entry hearing screening programme in place in the area.

The service was given an opportunity to share any insight or anecdotal views on these topics:

- The service commented that “referrals generally work well across the five Health Trusts. However the increase in referrals for ‘possible temporary conductive loss’ where children are issued with hearing aids has had a significant impact on the service capacity.”
- The service also commented that it is difficult to determine the support required for a child where the referral states 'possible temporary conductive loss'. Provision of at least one visit to try to determine need may have to change due to service capacity.
- The service felt that early identification and early intervention were working well generally. The service stated they were collecting information on early collaboration with speech and language therapy. They felt that there is good practice in existence, but that it relies on informal arrangements, and that they intended to draft an internal document with examples of good practice.
- They also commented that barriers remain in staffing in health trusts.
- The service has also held two in-service staff development days reflecting on good practice in 'Informed Choice' and 'Working in Partnership with parents' with a focus on early years.

We then asked about any other issues or challenges that have emerged since 2020 that have had a significant impact on the support that the service was able to provide to deaf children (e.g. coronavirus, refugee families, NHS, etc.). The service commented on an increase in newcomer families where older children have had no amplification in early years nor any access to a first language such as sign language. They also highlighted a significant increase in children being issued with aids for conductive loss (potentially because of long waiting lists for treatment) with little information provided to the education service on whether the loss is temporary or permanent.

PART 6: Background and methodology

CRIDE is a consortium bringing together a range of organisations and individuals with a common interest in using research to improve the educational outcomes achieved by deaf children. At the time the survey was sent out, representatives included: British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People, British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People Cymru, Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, Longwill School for the Deaf, National Deaf Children's Society, Royal School for the Deaf Derby, UCL, University of Edinburgh, former heads of services or consultants with expertise in deafness, and specialist education services for deaf children in Cambridgeshire, Camden, Kent, and Leeds.

The survey alternates from year to year between a standard survey and a survey with a mix of core and thematic questions. The 2024 survey was the version with a mix of core and thematic questions.

The survey was sent to the Education Authority in February 2024 by National Deaf Children's Society staff on behalf of CRIDE.

Analysis of the results and drafting of this report was largely completed by the National Deaf Children's Society, with guidance and clearance from members of CRIDE.

CRIDE would like to thank the service for taking the time to complete this survey. The results from this survey will be used for research purposes, to influence government policy and to campaign to protect funding and services for deaf children.

If you have any feedback or questions on the results, please contact cride@ndcs.org.uk.