

Scotland

Why urgent action is needed on deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss across Scotland

Hearing Matters

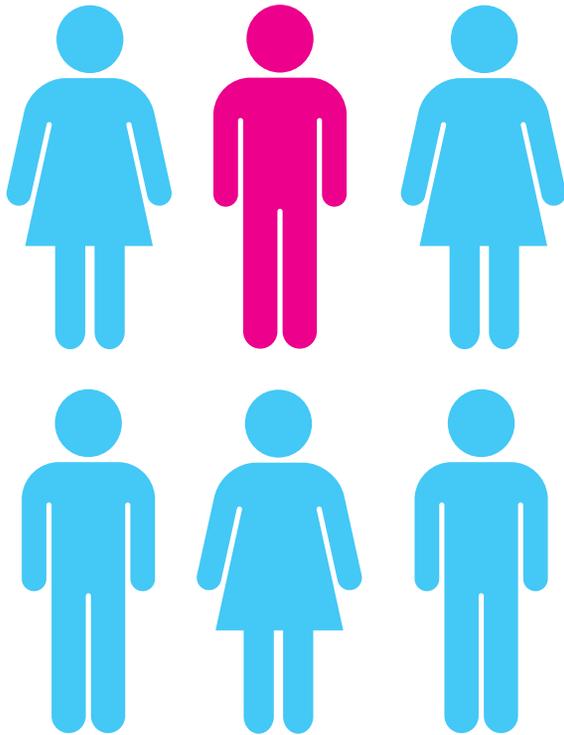


**ACTION ON
HEARING
LOSS**

SCOTLAND

A national charity since 1911





945,000
people are
deaf or have
hearing loss in
Scotland

That's one in six of us

Foreword



There are now an estimated 945,000 people in Scotland who are deaf or have hearing loss and, with our ageing population, this number is set to increase. So it's more important than ever that the Scottish and UK governments, NHS health boards and local councils take urgent action to make sure that health (including audiology), social care, employment support and other public services meet individual needs – and deliver genuine equality for people who are deaf or have hearing loss or tinnitus across the country.

In Scotland we have been leading the way across the UK in several policy developments which have an impact on the everyday lives of people who are deaf or have hearing loss – from designing national quality standards for audiology services; to increasing the provision of lipreading classes and the Scottish Government's recognition that learning to lipread plays an important role in improving communication, health and wellbeing; to launching the national joint sensory strategy; and passing the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill.

We welcome these important national policies, but people who are deaf or have hearing loss across Scotland now want redesigned and improved services in their own communities, so that they can get support with their NHS hearing aids or treatments for tinnitus without needing to travel; so that they can attend local lipreading classes and make informed decisions about the support they use; and so that they can easily access services or employment opportunities, because appropriate communication support – such as sign language interpreters – is always provided. We want to see all barriers removed to enable people who are deaf or have hearing loss or tinnitus to live the life they choose and access their rights as full and equal citizens. If you share our vision, we'd welcome your support!

Delia Henry, Director, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland

Agenda for change

What action needs to be taken...

Support and care

Public health

- The UK's National Screening Committee should introduce hearing screening for all people aged over 65 in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should fund research into improving early intervention for people with hearing loss – and commit to implementing and evaluating a hearing screening pilot in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should recognise and increase awareness of the growing prevalence of hearing loss – and the significant impact it has on people's physical and mental health, employment, social participation and quality of life.

Hearing support services

- The Scottish Government should make sure that every NHS audiology department complies with the quality standards – including working with third sector services – through independent, annual monitoring and consultations with patients in every NHS health board area. Each board should publish their findings every year, together with specific plans to improve or redesign services to meet the quality standards.
- NHS audiology departments should provide services for hearing aid users which take account of their psychological response to hearing loss and their social and occupational circumstances – including the development and measurement of Individual Management Plans for patients – as part of the audiology pathway.

In Scotland we've led the way in several policy developments which have an impact on the lives of people who are deaf or have hearing loss

- NHS health boards should work in partnership with the third sector to make sure high-quality hearing services – that meet the individual needs of people of hearing loss in sheltered housing, nursing homes and care homes, as well as people who are housebound or have mobility difficulties – are sustainably funded in every community across Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should make sure that third sector organisations can operate as equal decision-making partners within local strategic partnerships, along with NHS health boards and local councils; and have equal access to mainstream funding opportunities to deliver sustainable, cost-effective, person-centred services to support people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

Tinnitus support services

- NHS health boards should deliver consistently high-quality support services for people suffering with tinnitus, and GPs and other health service staff should provide clear information about how to access these services.

Lipreading

- The Scottish Government should set up and fund a Scottish Lipreading Working Group to continue and develop the work started by the Scottish Lipreading Strategy Group to improve access to lipreading classes for adults with hearing loss – including people living in remote and rural areas.
- The Scottish Government and NHS audiology departments should support the development of the full range of lipreading services – including taster sessions, classes, support groups and self-help groups – in every community across Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should raise awareness of the benefits of lipreading classes, including among the families and friends of adults with hearing loss.

Technology and treatments

- Hearing loss research should be a strategic priority for Scotland.
- The Scottish Funding Council should increase the Charity Support fund in line with increased spending on research by charities.
- Funding for the Institute of Hearing Research should be protected in the 2015-16 Chief Scientist Office strategic review.

Equality

Access to public services

- The Scottish Government should conduct an analysis of supply and demand for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters in Scotland – and provide funding to increase the number of BSL interpreters to meet demand.
- Scottish Government departments should contribute to the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) 'Market Review of BSL and Communications Provision for People who are Deaf or have Hearing Loss'.
- The Scottish Government and the UK Government should work with NHS health boards, and local government partners and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland to monitor the accessibility performance of public services – and share and implement best practice guidelines such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland's 'Interpretation and translation services improvement plan'. The Equality Act 2010 should be enforced to make sure services are fully accessible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- The Scottish Government should work in partnership with third-sector organisations to raise public service awareness of the range of adjustments needed by people who are deaf or have hearing loss. This includes installing loop systems, training staff to be deaf aware, and offering a range of contact methods.

Employability support services

- The Scottish Government should monitor provision of teachers of the deaf, and make sure they are all fully qualified, to a minimum of a NVQ level three certificate in BSL, if they are teaching students whose first language is BSL.
- The DWP should make sure that all Jobcentre Plus staff are trained in deaf awareness. Jobcentre Plus offices should have processes in place to provide appropriate communication support to clients who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- The Scottish Government should make sure that the Work Programme and Work Choice services – when they are devolved – take into account individual communication needs. A consistently high level of support should be provided for people across Scotland who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- The Scottish Government should provide sustainable funding to third sector partners who have a successful track record of specialist employability support. This will help make sure that all young people who are deaf or have hearing loss across Scotland are supported into training and employment.
- The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland should set ambitious participation targets for more young people who are deaf or have hearing loss to take up Modern Apprenticeship opportunities – and make sure that appropriate support is provided.

Access to transport

- The Scottish Government should commit to auditing all rail and bus stations in Scotland by May 2017 to provide data about the provision and performance of hearing loops, real-time text displays and the number of public-facing staff who have received deaf awareness and introductory BSL training.
- The Scottish Government should make sure that all transport is fully accessible for people with hearing loss – including providing real-time visual displays and key information in BSL.

Access to television

- The Scottish Government should make representations to Ofcom to ensure regional and local television services are required to provide subtitles on all programmes and BSL interpretation on major, televised political debates.

Support and care

Public health

There are 945,000 people in Scotland with hearing loss¹. The prevalence of hearing loss increases with age. It is estimated that 71% of over-70s have some form of hearing loss (Davis, 1995). About one in 10 people in Scotland are also affected by tinnitus (Davis, 1989).

People in Scotland with hearing loss

Age band	Number
17-29	15,500
30-39	18,500
40-49	62,500
50-59	142,500
60-69	221,500
70-79	251,000
80+	232,000
All ages²	945,000

¹ The estimates of prevalence of hearing loss in this section are based on the most robust and best available data for prevalence at each age group (Davis, 1995), updated with population estimates for 2014 (ONS, 2015), and rounded to the nearest 500.

² This estimate includes those under the age of 17.

People in Scotland who need hearing aids

Age band	Number
17-29	3,500
30-39	9,000
40-49	30,500
50-59	59,000
60-69	95,000
70-79	166,500
80+	202,500
All ages²	567,500

People in Scotland with severe/profound hearing loss

Age band	Number
17-29	1,000
30-39	500
40-49	2,500
50-59	5,500
60-69	11,000
70-79	13,500
80+	42,000
All ages²	76,000

GPs fail to refer
45%
of those reporting hearing loss to NHS hearing services

Low levels of diagnosis for hearing loss mean that many people in Scotland are not getting the support they need. Research shows that people wait, on average, 10 years before they seek help for their hearing loss. When they do seek help, GPs fail to refer 45% of people with hearing loss to audiology services (Davis et al, 2007).

If untreated, hearing loss affects the ability of people to communicate with others and can lead to social isolation (Gopinath et al, 2012; Pronk et al, 2011). People with hearing loss have an increased risk of developing anxiety and depression (Saito et al, 2010), and there is now strong evidence of a link between hearing loss and dementia (Lin et al, 2011; Lin et al, 2013; Gurgel et al, 2013; Albers et al, 2015). Evidence suggests that the timely provision of hearing aids can reduce these risks (National Council on Aging, 2000; Acar et al, 2011; Deal et al, 2015).

In Scotland, you have less opportunity to get your hearing tested – and access life-changing rehabilitation services on the high street and in your community – than if you have problems with your eyesight.

This is despite the Scottish Government’s See Hear strategy (Scottish Government, 2014), which highlights the need for “early diagnosis and intervention (assisted by screening programmes) and the provision of information, emotional support and signposting to people and their parents/carers around the time of diagnosis” – and which calls for “screening for sensory impairment at key times” to be included in the development of care pathways (people’s anticipated care, placed in an appropriate timeframe).

Action on Hearing Loss believes that more conveniently located, ‘visible’ hearing services would not only make it much easier for people to get earlier interventions to manage their hearing loss, but also help tackle the issue of hearing loss remaining a ‘hidden health condition’.

With the ageing population, many more people in Scotland will be affected by hearing loss in the years to come.

Both the Scottish and UK governments need to take urgent action to make sure that the NHS, community support services, employment support services and research funding meet the growing level of need. They must also make public services, employment, transport, television, streamed movies and cinemas fully accessible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

What action needs to be taken...

- The UK's National Screening Committee should introduce hearing screening for all people aged over 65 in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should fund research into improving early intervention for people with hearing loss – and commit to implementing and evaluating a hearing screening pilot in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should recognise and increase awareness of the growing prevalence of hearing loss – and the significant impact it has on people's physical and mental health, employment, social participation and quality of life.

Hearing support services

Scotland was the first country in the UK to develop quality standards for audiology services (NHS Scotland, 2008). The standards – which cover making services accessible, assessing a person’s hearing, how audiologists communicate with patients, and multi-agency working, as well as the development and implementation of Individual Management Plans – were developed so that the expectations of people who use audiology services are met.

Scotland’s
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hearing loss

The quality standards were reviewed in 2012 and, in 2014, we surveyed, and held workshops with people with hearing loss to glean their views on the standards criteria. As Scotland’s Audiology Services Advisory Group hasn’t met since 2012, it’s not clear how NHS audiology services will be monitored to ensure they are delivering on the revised audiology standards to fully meet the needs and expectations of people with hearing loss.

NHS audiology services must become more strategic and multi-disciplinary in their approach to delivering high-quality, patient-centred services. They must be properly resourced if they are to fulfil their obligations under the quality standards.

So that people with hearing loss can make informed decisions about using the range of available local support, it is vital that each NHS health board monitors the progress of their audiology department towards meeting the quality standards – and publishes this data.

Our report, *Under Pressure* (Lowe, 2015), shows that NHS audiology services in Scotland are being affected by budget cuts and increasing demand. People in some areas are not getting the support they need. Five NHS health boards have increased waiting times, four have increased the amount of time people have to wait to be reassessed, and three have stopped providing follow-up appointments. This can lead to people not using their hearing aids.

Only four health boards provide aftercare hearing aid support for people living in care homes

After being fitted with hearing aids, two-thirds of people (66%) have difficulties using them (RNID Cymru, 2009). People should have access to free, basic, aftercare support in every community across Scotland. But NHS audiology services in Scotland offer significantly less community aftercare compared to other parts of the UK – only six health board areas provide aftercare hearing aid support in people’s homes; and only four provide the service in care homes (Lowe, 2015).

We run community-based Hear to Help hearing aid support services in the NHS Tayside, Ayrshire and Arran and Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board areas. They’re delivered by volunteers, trained by NHS audiologists.

More than 5,000 people are supported by Hear to Help every year but the services are under threat due to lack of sustainable funding from health or social service budgets. If our Hear to Help services close, hospital-based NHS audiology departments will need to deal with many more patients, while people currently supported in their own homes may give up using their hearing aids altogether.

We welcomed the Scottish Government’s *See Hear: A strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2014). It is the first, national, joint-sensory strategy in the UK, and recognises that the key to success will be “person-centred local partnership working between statutory and third sector agencies.”

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 also places a statutory responsibility upon health boards, local authorities and integration authorities to actively involve the third sector in the planning and design of integrated health and social care services. But we are very concerned about the barriers the third sector continues to face in participating in local, joint-sensory, strategic decision-making processes. We agree with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) that “Strategic planning must include the third sector because of its knowledge and expertise and, more importantly, its connection to people who use health and social care services.”

The Scottish Government should play a proactive role in monitoring and evaluating the opportunities for the third sector to fully participate in the planning and designing of local, integrated health and social care services.

What action needs to be taken...

- The Scottish Government should make sure that every NHS audiology department complies with the quality standards – including working with third sector services – through independent, annual monitoring and consultations with patients in every health board area. Each board should publish their findings every year, together with specific plans to improve or redesign services to meet the standards.
- NHS audiology departments should provide services for hearing aid users which take account of their psychological response to hearing loss and their social and occupational circumstances – including the development and measurement of Individual Management Plans for patients – as part of the audiology pathway.
- NHS health boards should work in partnership with the third sector to make sure high-quality hearing services – that meet the individual needs of people of hearing loss in sheltered housing, nursing homes and care homes, as well as people who are housebound or have mobility difficulties – are sustainably funded in every community across Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should make sure that third sector organisations can operate as equal decision-making partners within local strategic partnerships, along with NHS health boards and local councils; and have equal access to mainstream funding opportunities to deliver sustainable, cost-effective, person-centred services to support people who are deaf or have hearing loss.



When my hearing was tested, the audiologist didn't ask about my work or lifestyle so that my hearing aids could be tailored to meet my individual needs.

Being fitted with just one hearing aid was useless for my sound engineering work and I was also told I didn't need a loop function to reduce background noise.

I was later fitted with a second aid and personally used audiology software to install a programme for loops and set my attenuation levels.

Scotland's audiology standards say I should have had an Individual Management Plan worked up with me so I could make informed decisions about managing my hearing loss.

My experience of audiology has been a real eye-opener and I hope they start redesigning their services to meet people's needs.

[Dr John Riley, 61, North Lanarkshire](#)

Tinnitus support services

Around one in 10 people in the UK is affected by tinnitus (Davis, 1989). Tinnitus is a ringing or buzzing sound in the ear or head that cannot be attributed to an external source, usually caused by a problem in the auditory pathway. Evidence suggests that tinnitus is linked to depression, which can worsen the perception of the condition (Dobie, 2003).

People struggling with tinnitus in Scotland are often unaware about where to access life-changing support. Worryingly, our research (Action on Hearing Loss, 2015) shows that these services are inconsistent across Scotland – and one NHS audiology department is failing to provide any tinnitus support services.

People with tinnitus should be able to make informed choices about how they manage the condition and have access to support services – including clinical specialists and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – in every NHS health board area.

What action needs to be taken...

- NHS health boards should deliver consistently high-quality support services for people suffering with tinnitus, and GPs and other health service staff should provide clear information about how to access these services.

Lipreading

Lipreading is a vital communication skill that can help people with hearing loss to identify lip shapes, patterns and facial gestures. This helps them fill in the gaps of conversations they haven't heard clearly.

Learning to lipread plays an important role in improving communication, health and wellbeing

In funding the work of the Scottish Lipreading Strategy Group between 2012-14 (Scottish Lipreading Strategy Group, 2015), the Scottish Government acknowledged that learning to lipread plays an important role in helping people to better manage their hearing loss, as well as improving communication, health and wellbeing. People who go to lipreading classes meet, and gain support from, others in a similar, often frustrating situation.

Although the sharp decline in lipreading tutors was reversed – when the Scottish Course to Train Tutors of Lipreading (SCTTL) trained 16 between 2013 and 2015 – as we go to press there are only 46 classes in the whole of Scotland, with availability varying from region to region.

Urgent action needs to be taken to deliver the estimated 279 additional classes required to meet the needs of people with hearing loss in communities across Scotland.

What action needs to be taken...

- The Scottish Government should set up and fund a Scottish Lipreading Working Group, to continue and develop the work started by the Scottish Lipreading Strategy Group, to improve access to lipreading classes for adults with hearing loss – including people living in remote and rural areas.
- The Scottish Government and NHS audiology departments should support the development of the full range of lipreading services – including taster sessions, classes, support groups and self-help groups – in every community across Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should raise awareness of the benefits of lipreading classes, including among the families and friends of adults with hearing loss.

Technology and treatments



Hearing aid technology is improving, including new advances that can help improve sound quality and reduce background noise

The Chief Scientist Office (CSO) in Scotland has an annual budget of around £69m to spend on health services, public health and translational medical research. It's currently funding the valuable work of the Institute of Hearing Research, which focuses on understanding how hearing losses in older adults affect their health and quality of life and their auditory perception – in particular, in relation to spatial perception and speech intelligibility. The Institute also researches the benefits of hearing aids.

Universities in Scotland have strengths in hearing research across a range of areas: from investigating the genetic basis of hearing loss at the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh, and computer modelling of the auditory system at the University of Strathclyde, to developing new approaches to processing sound to improve hearing aid technology at the University of Stirling.

The Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) should build on this vital work by making hearing loss research a strategic priority for Scotland. This would attract inward investment – and secure Scotland's place as a leader in the field. The CSO should also increase funding for the Institute of Hearing Research.

What action needs to be taken...

- Hearing loss research should be a strategic priority for Scotland.
- The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) should increase the Charity Support fund in line with increased spending on research by charities.
- Funding for the Institute of Hearing Research should be protected in the 2015-16 Chief Scientist Office strategic review.

Equality

Access to public services

In Scotland, urgent action is required to make sure there are enough interpreters to provide communication support for people who are deaf

Scotland is leading the UK in taking steps to improve access to public services for people from the Deaf community who communicate using British Sign Language (BSL).

Funded by the Scottish Government, the contactSCOTLAND-BSL service, which launched in March 2015, enables BSL users to communicate with a range of public authorities - including NHS health boards and local councils.

Although there are ongoing difficulties faced by patients who are deaf or have hearing loss in accessing health services - exemplified by NHS Tayside failing to provide BSL interpreters for patients who are Deaf - the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has produced an 'Interpretation and translation services improvement plan' for the health board. This plan needs to be implemented and replicated by health boards across the country.

In September 2015, the Scottish Parliament passed the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, introduced by Mark Griffin MSP. This requires the Scottish Government to draft a National Plan by autumn 2017; and more than 120 listed public bodies, including NHS health boards, are also required to draft their own plans or statements by autumn 2018 to show how their services will be accessible for BSL users.

This legislation highlights the need to improve the Deaf community's accessibility to information and services, but currently there aren't enough BSL interpreters to meet demand. According to the 2011 census, 13,000 people across Scotland use BSL at

home, but there are only 56 interpreters registered with the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters.

In Finland, a similar-sized country, 750 registered sign language interpreters support 5,000 people who use sign language – a ratio of 1:6 (European Union of the Deaf, 2009). In Scotland, urgent action is required to make sure there are enough interpreters to provide communication support for people who are Deaf.



Only
29%
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hearing loops
at reception

Services – from shops to cinemas – are required to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ under the Equality Act 2010 so that they’re accessible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. Many people in Scotland who use hearing aids would benefit from the availability of working induction loops at customer tills/reception desks, as well as in meeting or consultation rooms and other areas where clear communication is important.

Hearing loops work by picking up the voice of someone speaking into a microphone. The sound is processed by an amplifier and output through a metal coil (or loop) as a magnetic signal to hearing aids. A loop is particularly useful in noisy environments: hearing aid users can choose to listen only to what the microphone picks up.

‘Mystery visitor’ campaign actions by our volunteers continue to find that far too many services have not fitted hearing loops – or there are loops, but they’re not working or staff don’t know how to use them. For example, our volunteers found that only three of Scotland’s 21 best-known tourist attractions had working loops in 2013 – although this figure improved to nine out of 31 venues in 2014 – and only 29% of 268 hotels in Scotland said they had hearing loops at reception (Action on Hearing Loss Scotland, 2015).

All public-facing services should regularly audit their accessibility. And they should put robust processes in place to make sure staff are aware of how to communicate with people who are deaf or have hearing loss, and can use assistive technology such as hearing loops.

What action needs to be taken...

- The Scottish Government should conduct an analysis of supply and demand for BSL interpreters in Scotland – and provide funding to increase the number of BSL interpreters to meet demand.
- Scottish Government departments should contribute to the UK Government’s Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP) ‘Market Review of BSL and Communications Provision for People who are Deaf or have Hearing Loss’.
- The Scottish Government and the UK Government should work with NHS health boards and local government to monitor the accessibility performance of public services – and share and implement best practice guidelines such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland’s ‘Interpretation and translation services improvement plan’. The Equality Act 2010 should be enforced to make sure services are fully accessible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- The Scottish Government should work in partnership with third-sector organisations to raise public service awareness of the range of adjustments needed by people who are deaf or have hearing loss. This includes installing loop systems, training staff to be deaf aware, and offering a range of contact methods.

Employability support services

Young people in Scotland who are deaf (including BSL users) or have hearing loss often face great difficulty in accessing their first training, apprenticeship or employment opportunities. Many have not had the right support to reach their full potential at primary and secondary school.

**More than
60%
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transitions
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Many teachers of deaf children are not as well-qualified as they should be in order to communicate effectively with students whose first language is BSL. According to the Consortium for Research in Deaf Education's (CRIDE) 2014 Report for Scotland, around a third of the 200 teachers of the deaf in Scotland are not qualified, and only 10% of peripatetic teachers of the deaf hold at least a level three qualification in BSL (CRIDE, 2014).

Scottish Government figures for 2011/12 show that 36.4% of deaf pupils attain Highers or Advanced Highers, compared with 60.2% of hearing pupils. Scottish Government data also shows that, at 26%, deaf school leavers are less likely to go on to higher education than hearing school leavers at 39% (Scottish Government, 2013).

As literacy levels are significantly lower amongst young deaf people, many need to be supported to attend college classes to improve their literacy and understanding of English – as it's often a requirement for entry into further and higher education.

To tackle this, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland runs a 'transitions' service, funded by The Big Lottery Fund Scotland, called Moving On (formerly On the Move). This provides specialist support for 16 to 25-year olds across central Scotland who are deaf or have a hearing loss. As each young person has their own interests,

Our
employment
advisers
give each 16
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personalised
support

capabilities and goals, the service's employment advisers, who each have a high level of BSL, provide a personalised approach to support the individual needs of each client. An independent evaluation showed that, between 2009-14, more than 60% of the service's 206 clients progressed to further education, training or employment. Our service is also a partner in the Open Doors Scotland consortium's Employer Recruitment Incentive Programme.

Obtaining support into work is vital for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. But evidence suggests that they can find it difficult to access support from Jobcentre Plus and Specialist Employment Agencies. Jobcentre Plus staff aren't always able to provide the appropriate support, and there is little awareness of Specialist Employment Agencies and the support they can provide (Boyce, 2015).

In October 2015, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on how future-employability services - including the current Work Programme and Work Choice services - should work after they are devolved to the Scottish Parliament in April 2017. We said that the communication needs of people who are deaf or have hearing loss should be taken into account in the design and delivery of these services. We also want to see specialist, third-sector employability services given partnership opportunities. In this way, we can help make sure that people who are deaf or have hearing loss get the support they need to fulfil their potential.

Young people who are deaf or have hearing loss also have trouble accessing apprenticeship opportunities. The number of people taking up Modern Apprenticeships each year through Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) programme will increase to 30,000 by 2020. Out of 25,691 Modern Apprenticeship 'starts' in 2012/13, only 63 (0.2%) were taken up by people with a declared disability (Scottish Government, 2014b).

People who are deaf or have hearing loss should be able to access the support they need, throughout their working life

We don't know the true scale of the barriers faced by people who are deaf or have hearing loss because SDS doesn't record details of apprentices who have a disability. Action on Hearing Loss Scotland looks forward to seeing the completion and delivery of SDS's equalities action plan for Modern Apprenticeships, which was announced in May 2015. We want to see ambitious improvement targets for participation by people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

Employers must make 'reasonable adjustments' and support staff with age-related or noise-induced hearing loss, so that people can remain employed for as long as they want – or need – to work. With an ageing workforce and rising retirement age, it is likely that increasing numbers of people will experience the onset of hearing loss while they're still at work.

Action on Hearing Loss's *Hidden Disadvantage* research, published in 2014, found that two-thirds (70%) of respondents said their hearing loss sometimes prevented them from fulfilling their potential at work, and a similar proportion (68%) reported feeling isolated at work because of their hearing loss (Arrowsmith, 2014). We have consistently found, when asking people with hearing loss about the barriers to employment, that the attitude of employers is the most significant challenge (Arrowsmith, 2014; Baker, 2006).

People who are deaf or have hearing loss should be able to access the support that they need during their education, when seeking their first apprenticeship, training or employment opportunity, and throughout their working life.

What action needs to be taken...

- The Scottish Government should monitor provision of teachers of the deaf, and make sure they are all fully qualified, to a minimum of a NVQ level three certificate in BSL, if they are teaching students whose first language is BSL.
- The DWP should make sure that all Jobcentre Plus staff are trained in deaf awareness. Jobcentre Plus offices should have processes in place to provide appropriate communication support to clients who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- The Scottish Government should make sure that the Work Programme and Work Choice services – when they are devolved – take into account individual communication needs. A consistently high level of support should be provided for people across Scotland who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- The Scottish Government should provide sustainable funding to third-sector partners who have a successful track record of specialist employability support. This will help make sure that all young people who are deaf or have hearing loss across Scotland are supported into training and employment.
- The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland should set ambitious participation targets for more young people who are deaf or have hearing loss to take up Modern Apprenticeship opportunities – and make sure that appropriate support is provided.



Communication at jobcentres was often difficult as English isn't my first language and they wouldn't book British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters.

In my experience, too many jobcentre staff and employers have a poor level of deaf awareness, don't understand the communication needs of deaf people and aren't aware of Access to Work. As a result, many deaf friends have given up their searches for employment.

Thankfully, Action on Hearing Loss Scotland's Employment Advisers use BSL and ensure potential employers adapt their recruitment processes for applicants who are deaf. Their support has helped me become a charity support worker and I'm aiming to become a social worker!

If jobcentre staff and employers learned deaf awareness, it would make a massive difference to our chances of finding work and starting a career.

Abigail Matheson, 25, South Lanarkshire

Access to transport

People who are deaf or have hearing loss still face barriers – such as the absence of, or faults with real-time visual display screens in stations or on trains and buses. Our members tell us these can cause confusion, frustration and major inconvenience.

The lack of deaf awareness and basic BSL among customer-facing staff working on transport services also continues to be a concern.

All transport services across Scotland should be fully accessible so that people who are deaf or have hearing loss can make informed choices about how to travel.

What action needs to be taken...

- The Scottish Government should commit to auditing all rail and bus stations in Scotland by May 2017. This will provide data about the provision and performance of hearing loops, real-time text displays and the number of public-facing staff who have received deaf awareness and introductory BSL training.
- The Scottish Government should make sure that all transport is fully accessible for people with hearing loss – this includes providing real-time visual displays and key information in BSL.

Access to television

Access to television, for people in Scotland who are deaf or have hearing loss, has substantially improved in recent years. But there are too many programmes that remain inaccessible because of the lack – or poor quality – of subtitles, or no BSL interpretation.

Our successful campaign persuaded the BBC to provide BSL interpretation on their main head-to-head debate during Scotland's independence referendum. All major televised political debates should have BSL interpretation to enable deaf people to follow and participate in the discussions.

As Ofcom does not require local TV channels to provide subtitles, viewers with hearing loss in Scotland, who rely on subtitles to follow broadcasts, are unable to access news and features about their communities.

What action needs to be taken...

- The Scottish Government should make representations to Ofcom to ensure regional and local television services are required to provide subtitles on all programmes and BSL interpretation on major televised political debates.

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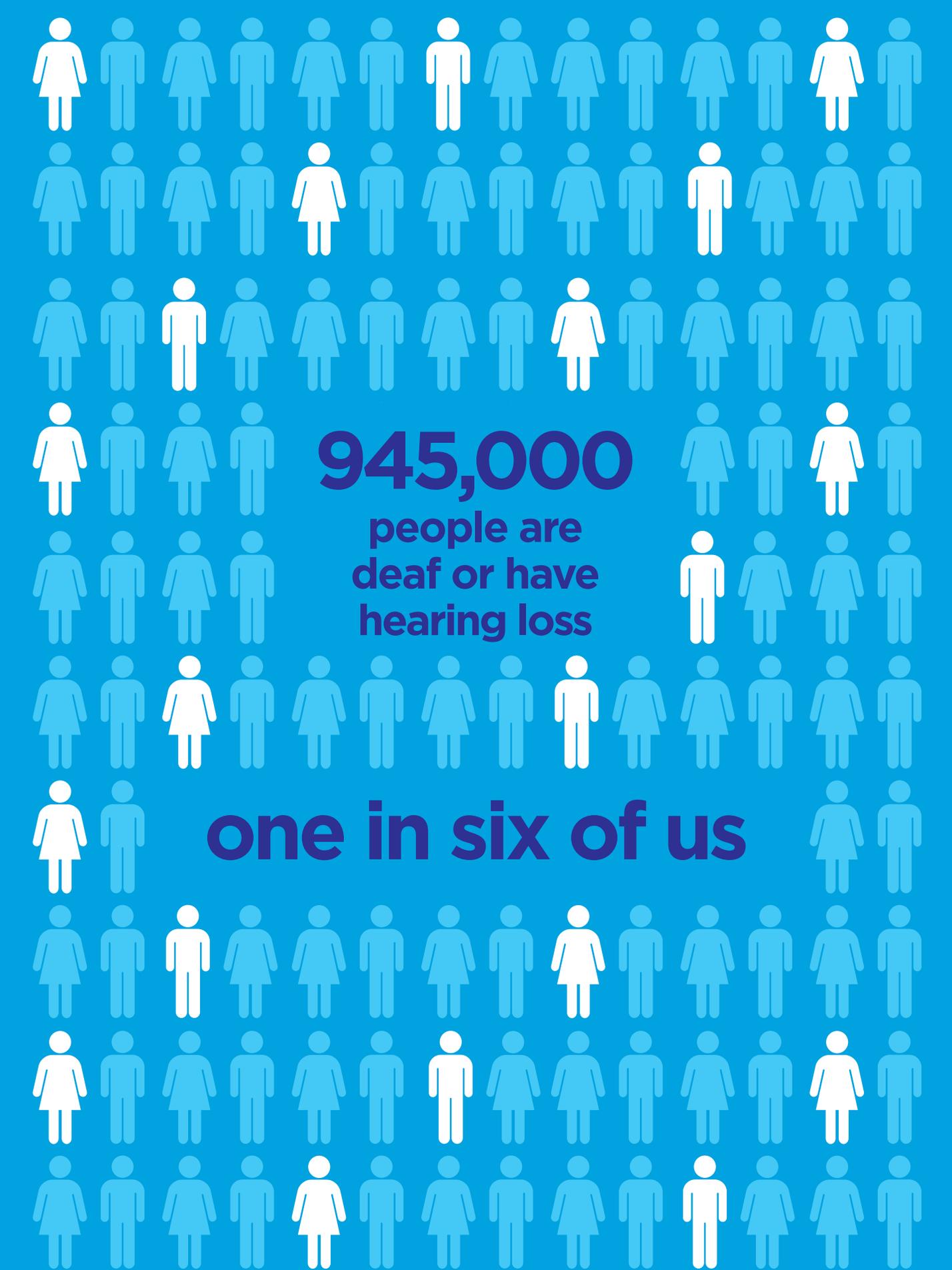
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