



I-Sign

Recommendations on future developments
March 2011

I-Sign and the need for a continuing focus on language acquisition by deaf children, supported by their families and professionals.

Summary

I-Sign was developed in response to the recognition that there is a weak infrastructure and no consistent support, to ensure that deaf children born to hearing families can easily acquire full and confident language ability. The issue can effectively be addressed through supporting parents and professionals within the school system to increase their skills in British Sign Language (BSL.) This requires addressing family needs and securing better training and support of professionals within the school and further and higher education systems. As a result of the geographical spread of BSL use and high level of language skills needed, we must ensure that there is a developed infrastructure of language support and tutor training to deliver BSL capacity. This is not currently available across the UK. I-Sign has been very successful in piloting programmes and work practices that have tackled these issues.

I-Sign was a pilot to develop BSL capacity in two contrasting regions (North West and South West England), the summary outputs from the project were:

- 116 families accessed family sign language courses
- 73 people achieved full BSL qualifications at Levels 3 or 4
- 6 people achieved part qualification at Levels 3 and 4
- 16 new interpreters achieved registered status
- 2 existing interpreters achieved the intermediate status
- 5 existing interpreters achieved full qualification and 'member' registration status
- 1 existing interpreter achieved part qualification
- 18 deaf people undertook professional development via formal teacher training
- 10 existing deaf teachers undertook professional development via a course specific programme
- 114 existing deaf teachers accessed continual professional development events
- 12 interpreters and deaf teachers achieved qualifications that enable them to deliver NVQs

Web and DVD based family sign language resources were created with 7951 unique visitors to the website and 741 DVDs sent out (by February 2011).

A new qualification of Level 3 Certificate in Learning Support (Communication Support Worker) was developed and is currently being piloted.

The challenge which remains is how to ensure the long term viability of language support, without long-term central government investment.

The importance of the work done by I-Sign and the need for this to continue, reflects the compelling evidence that without better support for language acquisition by deaf children, through helping to support their hearing parents and professionals, these children will continue to fail. This failure is not only in terms of educational outcomes but also wider social and emotional development, leading to poor qualifications, poor employment prospects, increased mental health problems during the school years, and increased risk of committing crime in later life. Moreover, support to gain language is a human rights issue, recognised in International Conventions to which the UK Government is a signatory. Work to address this is expected by International and UK law around discrimination, which forms part of the underpinning for the Department for Education to meet its aims to improve outcomes for children with SEN.

In order to address these issues there is a continuing need to invest in the development of national capacity to ensure that the current gains of the programme are not lost. This is particularly relevant at the current time given the rearrangement of funding vehicles with an ever smaller geographical focus. The actions that we suggest need to be taken are summarised as;

Recommendation 1

There is a need to provide language support for children and young people who are deaf, both within the family and in educational settings, to facilitate effective language acquisition. This foundation is necessary for full access, and equality of potential attainment.

This need is already supported by international conventions on the rights of the child, and in UK Equalities, Education and Health legislation. However, to support this in practice Government should;

- a. Consider establishing specific statutory guidance on the requirement to provide adequate language support in family services, early years settings, schools and further and higher education. This could be achieved through either revision of existing legislation or the creation of new regulations flowing from the Green Paper reforms,

- b. Ensure that specific guidance is developed to supplement existing early support and Sure Start provision for families.
- c. Concurrently to the considerations on statutory guidance; make clearer to schools their specific responsibilities to provide high quality language support. This could be achieved through guidance which supports the implementation of existing legislation and would also help guide how the new extension of Auxiliary Aids will be addressed;

Recommendation 2

That the Department of Education explores with I-Sign the creation of a nationally funded language support resource. The resource would act as the support and catalyst for the development of local capacity and underpin local training. This framework will ensure the delivery of a minimum standard of language support for deaf children and young people, and advise and support families and professionals through best practice. Whilst this would need some initial funding; the goal would be that this national resource would duly become self-supporting through fees from local agencies, schools and local training income.

Recommendation 3

That as part of the review of the integration of pre and post 16 entitlements and provision, including the establishment of a new education plan, the Department reviews language support provision for young learners. The current system, as shown by lack of attainment, is failing them.

The I-Sign Consortium would like to meet with the Department to explore how these ideas could continue the progress made through the project to date, to establish a national framework of guidance with the capacity to become self-funding over time.

Context

Numbers of deaf children.

In the UK, there are about 20,000 children aged 0-15 who are moderately to profoundly deaf. About 12,000 of these were born deaf, with about one in every 1,000 children being deaf at three years of age. This rises to two in every 1,000 children aged nine to 16. Of these, an estimated 840 children are born in the UK every year with moderate to profound deafness. Causes include genetic factors (50%), intrauterine (8%), perinatal (12%), and postnatal (30%). There is no definite, known aetiology for 20-30% of deaf children.¹ Deaf children are also at increased risk of additional disabilities; as well as dual sensory disorders, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities. As a consequence of being deaf in a hearing orientated world deaf children and adults are also at an increased risk from mental health problems.

Deaf Children in Education.

Figures from the School Census

According to 2009 figures from the Department for Education, there are 15,520 deaf children in England. Of these:

- * 6,420 have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) under the SEN Code of Practice (41%)
- * 9,100 have been placed at School Action Plus under the SEN Code of Practice (59%)

However, these figures do not include deaf children who are at School Action only under the SEN Code of Practice or who have not been formally recorded as having a SEN. The figures also exclude children where deafness is not the primary type of SEN (i.e. those who have more severe needs, such as learning disabilities).

Figures from local authorities

¹See for example Fortnum, H.M., Summerfield A.Q., Marshall D.H., Davis A.C. and Bamford J.M. (2001) Prevalence of permanent childhood hearing impairment in the United Kingdom and implications for universal neonatal hearing screening: questionnaire based ascertainment study. British Medical Journal, 323:536-539. <http://www.bmj.com/content/323/7312/536.full>

According to an NDCS survey of local authorities in 2009 (which received responses from 144 local authorities), there are at least 27,800 deaf children of school age in England. This suggests that the Department's figures underestimate the number of deaf children by around half.

The Importance of Communication

'language is what makes thought possible' (Joseph Church).

Language acquisition is something that is often taken for granted but is, in essence, fundamental to the functioning of a person and the ability to gain language must therefore be seen as a fundamental human right. We take language acquisition for granted in most children but for children whose first language is not spoken English but British Sign Language we cannot assume the normal pattern of language acquisition within the family will happen. Further, this is then compounded by the lack of professional understanding and support within the early years and schools context.

New research has highlighted the importance of learning a language, whether signed or spoken, early in life. "Early acquisition of a first language is critical not only for processing that language, but also appears to form a base on which subsequently learned languages can successfully build."²

Behavioural studies have demonstrated the importance of ensuring that a first language (whether spoken or signed) is developed at the age appropriate time. Skills in communication have been shown by various studies to correlate highly with positive outcomes, including language development, reading skills, and social-emotional development.

Most profoundly deaf children are born into a unique linguistic situation according to Mitchell and Karchmer³. Hearing loss prevents them from acquiring the naturally-occurring, spoken language of their parents with nine out of every ten deaf children born to hearing parents. Without access to language, they are unable to fully participate in the family interactions that are so crucial to language development. Work by Gregory et al. and

² Woll, B. (2008) Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century State-of-Science Review: SR-D5 Deafness and Hearing Impairment.

³ Mitchell RE, Karchmer MA (2004) Chasing the Mythical Ten Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States. Sign Language Studies. Washington: Winter 2004. Vol. 4, Iss. 2, p.138-163,216-217

Ratna⁴ also estimated that 81% of parents of deaf children never learn how to communicate with their deaf child. Calderon⁵ examined outcomes for deaf children in an early intervention programme in terms of what were good predictors of successful language acquisition. Factors included: level of the child's hearing loss; mother's educational level; mother's current communication skills with her child; and maternal use of additional services beyond those offered by the intervention programme. Thus pointing to the crucial role played by additional support and development of communication skills in language acquisition.

Children who are deaf are at a high risk for delays in communication and language development, poor academic achievement, delays in critical thinking skills, and problems with social and emotional development due to the central role that language plays in these essential areas as argued by Rall⁶. They are also more at risk of ending up in the criminal justice system in part due to communication issues developed during parental socialisation.⁷ Gregory, Bishop and Sheldon⁸ also paint a depressing picture of families under stress, where deaf young people, unable to hear the conversation of the family, are not fully participating in society or family life. It is not surprising in these circumstances that deaf children then face a multiplicity of problems that impact on education and life skills.

Children whose parents had poor communication skills have also been shown to have greater behaviour problems.

This suggests that parents who focus efforts on developing strong communication skills reduce the risk of having children with social and emotional difficulties, as well as improving reading skills and language development.

⁴ Deaf Young People and their Families, (1995) Gregory S, Bishop S, Sheldon J, and Counselling Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clients, the BAC Counselling Reader, 1996. Ratna, H.

⁵ Calderon, R. (2000). Parental involvement in deaf children's education programs as a predictor of child's language, early reading, and social-emotional development. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 5:140-155.

⁶ Rall, E. (2007) Psychosocial Development of Children with Hearing Loss. *The ASHA Leader*. September 25.

⁷ Glasner, Aviva Twersky *Western Criminology Review* : July 1, (2010).

⁸ Gregory S, Bishop J, Sheldon L (1995) *Deaf Young People and their families*. Cambridge University Press.

Poor communication between deaf children and their parents also leads to greater mental health problems; this was acknowledged in the 1970s through the work of the John Denmark Centre. Wallis⁹ specifically defined effective communication as one in which parents and children share the same communication mode (both using English, or both using sign language). Using adolescent self-reports, they found that mismatch between language modes was a significant correlate of mental health functioning. Those with sign mismatch (an adolescent using sign language, parents using spoken language) had the lowest mental health functioning. Those with spoken match (adolescent and parents both using spoken language) had higher ratings, while deaf adolescents of deaf parents showed the healthiest functioning of all categories. For the UK, Hindley et al., report prevalence rates of 31% in deaf children, in comparison to an estimated prevalence of 20% for hearing peers.¹⁰

Impact on Attainment.

*“It has been recognised for over 30 years that deaf children of deaf parents generally have improved educational outcomes compared to deaf children of hearing parents.”*¹¹ In that context, ensuring that there is adequate language support for children born into hearing families and that professionals can then further their language acquisition and properly support their access to the curriculum, is crucial. Further studies show that parental involvement and good language support are the two key determinates of what helps deaf children become successful.¹²

There continues to be a serious lack of good research about the attainment outcomes for deaf children whose first language is BSL. More generally we know that the overall performance of deaf and hard of hearing

⁹ Wallis, D., Musselman, C. and MacKay, S. 2004. Hearing mothers and their deaf children: the relationship between early, on-going mode match and subsequent mental health functioning in adolescents. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 9:2-14. Also Department of Health. 2005. *Towards Equity and Access Report*.

¹⁰ Hindley, P.A., Hill, P.D., McGuigan, S. and Kitson, N. (1994) Psychiatric disorders in deaf and hard of hearing young people. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 34:917-934. Hindley, P.A. and Kitson, N., eds. 2000. *Mental health and deafness*. London: Whurr.

¹¹ Woll, B. (2008) *Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century* State-of-Science Review: SR-D5 Deafness and Hearing Impairment.

¹² Powers, S. (2006) *Learning from Success. High achieving Deaf Pupils*. RNID and University of Birmingham.

children falls significantly behind their hearing peers.¹³ However this figure is an aggregate of the whole range of hearing loss and it is likely therefore that deaf children dependant on BSL as their first language will be performing below this level.

Studies over the years have shown the marked delays in the language, educational and reading attainments of profoundly deaf children (Conrad, Blamey et al.).¹⁴ It is well established that the teaching of children with BSL as their first language needs not only specialist methods but also good language skills from support staff. Moreover we know from all studies of parental involvement that parents being involved in the education of their children has a significant impact on the commitment and achievements of their children, generally, but especially where SEN is concerned.¹⁵

The issues for deaf children and young people continue within their post 16 education. LSC data indicates that deaf students were underrepresented on all but level one courses. In the 2007/8 academic year there were 39% fewer deaf students on level three courses than on level one courses. For those with visual impairment the decrease was only 7%.¹⁶ For non-disabled students the numbers actually increased by 180%. Deaf students from BME backgrounds face additional challenges. There were 86% fewer deaf students from Afro and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds on level 3 than level 1 courses.

The impact of this situation cannot be underestimated both in human and economic terms. Some studies estimate that every extra year in education beyond 16 is worth an 8% increase in annual pay as well as benefits associated with improved mental and physical health and wellbeing for the young person and their family. RNID research shows that 63% of deaf people are currently in employment¹⁷ compared to 75% of the

¹³ Special Educational Needs 2010: an analysis 19 October 2010 Department for Education. Only 35.5% of deaf children are achieving 5 GCSE's (including English and Maths) grade A to C, despite a recent narrowing of the gap, compared to 66% of children with no identified SEN.

¹⁴ Conrad R (1979) *The Deaf School Child*. London: Harper Row, Blamey PJ, Sarant, J. Paatsch, L. Barry J, Wales C, Wright M, P, Sarros C, Rattigan K, Tooher, R (2001) Relationships among speech perception, production, language, hearing loss, and age in children with impaired hearing. *Journal Speech Language and Hearing Research* . 44, (2) 264-285

¹⁵ Lamb, B. (2009) *Inquiry into Parental Confidence and Special Educational Needs*. Department for Education.

¹⁶ Research Findings North West Partnership Bridging the Access Gap Conference 22 November 2008. Learning and Skills Council.

¹⁷ RNID, (2006) *Opportunity Blocked*, the December 2006 Labour Force Survey.

general population.¹⁸ 57% of deaf people had been looking for work for more than 12 months, this compared to only 20% of the total of unemployed people at the time.¹⁹

Deaf Children's Views

Within education, deaf children also reflect that the quality of the support they receive is directly related to their educational achievement. NDCS conducted an online poll of deaf children and young people on "The Buzz", their youth website. 70 deaf children responded, and:

- 94% say that it is easier to do well at school when they get special help BUT
- Nearly 60% say that they only get some help or that the help they get is not enough.

National Service Context.

I-Sign has had some notable successes through piloting a range of different delivery models. It has also highlighted some striking deficiencies in the provision for deaf children. As such, it is in a good place to make recommendations on how we can address the shortcomings in existing services for deaf children. Despite a number of improvements since the 2002 report, commissioned by the then Department for Work and Pensions,²⁰ to the overall provision and professional structure of BSL interpreting services, these are still patchy, often not provided to the appropriate standard, especially in school settings and training and opportunities to learn are still focused in centres of excellence and some adult learning centres.

I-Sign has sought to address some of these shortfalls; its successes have been built on the foundations of public sector services for deaf children and these are being eroded. HE cuts are leading to universities rejecting deaf students as they are too expensive. LA cuts are reducing the specialist support staff available to support deaf children in mainstream education, and the ones that remain have no CPD budget to pay for their training needs. Cuts to early years provision are significantly threatening the possibility of any funding to support the family sign language curriculum courses. There is a real danger that the investment made in I-Sign

¹⁸ Labour Force Survey, March 2008.

¹⁹ Extrapolation from the Labour Force Survey, March 2006.

²⁰ Brien, D. Brown, R. and Collins, J. (2002) The Organisation and Provision of British Sign Language/English Interpreters in England, Scotland and Wales A study carried out on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions By University of Durham. <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/IH102.pdf>

may be wasted because the public sector cuts will mean the programmes, courses, qualifications and services developed will not be funded by schools, colleges, universities and other public sector bodies. Further we are aware that much language support within the classroom is already not at the level necessary to support children accessing the curriculum in an adequate way even when it is available.

The national service context is also complex with very significant changes taking place in the overall structure of educational provision with the introduction of Academies and Free Schools with delegated SEN budgets to those schools, more power and decision making being devolved to head teachers and a major revision of the SEN Framework. The major concern for such a low incidence group as children with BSL as their first language will be that with delegation of resources and responsibility there will be even less incentives in the system for a co-ordinated approach for such a low incidence group. Language users' needs are already a low priority within the system and the danger is that they slip further.

Building on the I-Sign investment – potential for future developments

Children have a fundamental right to be able to access education. This is well established in international and domestic legislation. Without parents having the language support and skills to communicate with their children, and without schools and support staff having the ability to communicate with children who have BSL as their first language, then this fundamental right is effectively being denied.

The Need to Create a Core Offer for Children with BSL as their first language

There are a number of legislative requirements and policy developments around the provision of SEN and disability that suggest now is a good time to consider establishing a core offer with minimum standards in provision for children with BSL as their first language.

International Law



There are a number of articles from the UN Convention on Human Rights, to which the UK is a signatory, which are relevant to this issue; including Article 9 on Accessibility, Article 23 on the Family and especially Article 24 on Education which states;

“States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;

Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.

In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.”

The UK Government is a signatory to this agreement but the requirements of the Act are not specifically encapsulated within legislation directly, though there are a number of areas of UK legislation that are key to delivery of these obligations, especially the Equality Act 2010 where, subject to the requirements of reasonable accommodation, service providers, including schools and further and high education would have responsibilities to ensure that BSL support is provided to access services.

UK Legislation

SEND Framework

The 1966 Education Act and the resulting SEN framework, supplemented by the Equality Act 2010, provide the framework for educational provision for children whose first language is BSL. Children with BSL as their first language would fall under both the SEN and Disability definitions.



The SEN Framework makes clear that children who are identified as having a special educational need by being placed on school action, school action plus or are the subject of a Statement of Special Educational Needs should then be provided with the support necessary for their educational needs to be met. Most of this group of children are likely to be statemented or identified through the SEN framework. Where language support is identified as part of the statement, this should be provided.

However, with only 25 % of deaf children having a statement, we cannot rely on simply the assessment process to identify and deliver all the necessary language support and even when children are being statemented and language support provided; it may often not be to the standard necessary to support adequate communication and learning.

Children Act 1989

This Act requires LAs to identify the extent to which children are in need in their area and provide services designed to minimise the effect of their disabilities and to give them the opportunity to lead as normal lives as possible. One of the main assessment mechanisms is the Common Assessment Framework which is designed to help professional staff across a range of services to record and share assessments plans and recommendations. Guidance requires that such assessments should focus on the particular needs of the child including educational and language needs. Deaf children are children in need as defined by the Children Act 1989.

Equality Act 2010

As well as the general duty to provide reasonable accommodations in respect of education services and the public duty on schools in relation to promoting Equality, the Act extends the requirement to provide auxiliary aids to education services, following from a recommendation in the Lamb Inquiry which will come into force in Autumn 2011. The draft guidance clearly states that schools will be responsible for auxiliary aids including;

“7.15 A school must take such steps as it is reasonable for them to have to take, to provide auxiliary aids so as to avoid the disadvantage experienced by disabled pupils.

What is an auxiliary aid?

7.16 An auxiliary aid includes an auxiliary service and is anything which provides additional support or assistance to a disabled pupil. Examples include:

- *a piece of equipment;*
- *the provision of a sign language interpreter, lip-speaker or deaf-blind communicator*
- *extra staff assistance for disabled pupils*
- *an electronic or manual note-taking service*
- *an induction loop or infrared broadcast system*
- *videophones*
- *audio-visual fire alarms”*

The new Green Paper proposals. ²¹

The Green Paper envisages a number of reforms that impact on the future provision of language support for families and professionals. The main areas are;

- Assessment and early intervention from birth
- Integrated Health and Education Plan to replace the Statement
- Development of professional expertise on SEN with teachers and support staff
- Parents having much greater say over the way in which budgets related to special education provision are controlled by parents.
- The expansion of Achievement for All as the main mechanism within mainstream education for addressing outcome issues
- A ‘Local Offer’ of provision which make clear what the entitlements at local level would be, with clearer information and greater transparency
- More unified provision between pre and post 16 years.

²¹ Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability. Department for Education. (2011)

Many of these objectives will not be realisable for deaf children without the language support and infrastructure that the I-Sign project has begun to put in place. For example, it is difficult to see how the aim of allowing parents to purchase vital support for their children's development would work for language support unless there is a developed market of trained communication support workers and interpreters with the required level of qualifications. The Local Offer will not work for this group of parents if authorities do not focus on the language issue; they will need support in doing this given the very low incidence but high level of needs of this group. Further, the development of teacher expertise and specialist support in classrooms and other settings will not take place at the appropriate standard, nor will there be the necessary expertise available, without further development.

While in time, a viable market may appear in some areas as authorities and schools focus on this, the fact that responsibility is being dispersed over the next few years as a consequence of the devolution of budgets and responsibilities to Heads, development of academies and free schools and great freedoms locally all suggest the need for some initial pump priming of expertise and a national framework to allow this to take place.

A Core Offer with minimum standards.

Both existing legislative requirements and the development of the new duty around auxiliary aids create a powerful set of obligations for early years services, schools, colleges and higher education to support pupils whose first language is not English. Further there is an appropriate emphasis on bringing the knowledge and expertise of parents more into the system and Achievement for All depends on the ability of parents as part of the structured conversation.

We know that both parents and professionals will struggle unless there are some clearer guidelines about what is good practice in this area, how to go about acquiring language skills for yourself and your child if you are a parent and how to ensure that you are providing the appropriate support, advice and correct level of communication support if you are a teacher or related professional. It is clear there are major issues in the delivery of sign language support due to a lack of well qualified interpreters, lack of awareness of the

appropriate qualification of those providing sign language support and lack of support for parents to acquire the necessary language skills.

Further with a more devolved system, and the very low incidence nature of BSL usage, it is very unlikely local services will be in a position to respond well, without additional support and guidance. By building on the work of I-Sign we believe that local capacity can be supported to the standard required for schools to address the duty.

Recommendation 1.

There is a need to provide language support for children and young people who are deaf, both within the family and in educational settings, to facilitate effective language acquisition. This foundation is necessary for full access, and equality of potential attainment. To achieve this Government should;

- a. Consider if it is necessary to establish more specific statutory guidance either through revision of existing legislation or the creation of new regulations flowing from the Green Paper reforms on the requirement to provide adequate language support in family services, early years setting, schools and further and higher education,
- b. Ensure that specific guidance is developed, supplementing existing early support and Sure Start provision for families.
- c. While considering the long term need for new legislation, make clearer to schools their specific responsibilities to provide high quality language support through specific through guidance which supports the implementation of existing legislation and also helps guide how the new extension of Auxiliary Aids will be addressed;

Guidance could both summarise existing legislative requirements and also reflect best practice standards. It could form a very helpful addition to the guidance on reasonable accommodation and the new requirements

in the Equality Act 2010 on provision of Auxiliary Aids where, out of necessity, the standard guidance will be brief.

This would provide the overall context for delivery of support and be a helpful resource for providers and also guide parents who are thinking of commissioning their own support under the new arrangements. This would be especially relevant given the devolution of commissioning of specialist support services in the case of Academies and Free Schools.

As part of a national guidance it would be important to align this with the development of professional skills in the workforce as envisaged in the Green Paper on SEN and Disabled Children. There are a number of levels this would be relevant to but in the light of the I-Sign work, it would especially be worth examining a specialist training module for Learning Support Assistants and teaching assistants to support the implementation of this approach.

It would also be worth looking at how the lessons learnt from integrating the I-Sign approach with early years settings could be developed further, not least by ensuring that the support that is developed at this stage could be taken up the age range with the children as they progress. Again there are some analogies here as to how Early Support Programme model has been moved up the age range in some LA's practice with disabled and SEN children. This early intervention approach is also entirely consistent with the approach outlined in the Green Paper and could be combined with the early assessment which is now envisaged, providing support for the language acquisition component. One option is to look at how the joint plan which replaces the statement could look at a more joined up approach across children's and education services and it may well be worth considering how this could be piloted as one of the proposed Government pilots of the new assessment.

The I-Sign consortium would value an opportunity to discuss these possible models further with the department.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Education explores with I-Sign the setting up of a nationally funded resource to support the delivery of a minimum standard of language support and best practice with families and professionals, to act as the support and catalyst for the development of local capacity, and also to support training and advice to parents and professionals. The aim would be that this resource would eventually become self-supporting through fees from local agencies and schools and local training resources.

Supporting local delivery

While establishing a clearer national framework there also needs to be provision for a central or regional resource which can effect some economies of scale in providing central resources, bridges the gaps in current practice between Department of Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills around support issues, and becomes a catalyst for better provision and the development of local services and support in line with minimum standards.

The core elements that the national resource could deliver would include;

- Supporting the development of local expertise and centres of excellence, that in turn support capacity growth in sign language support, along the lines pioneered by the I-Sign project,
- Support the development and delivery of specialist training courses in sign language at different levels to support the growth of sign language capacity within schools and the community including interpreter training,
- Support the development of family support workers and family sign courses to ensure that language acquisition can be supported within the family. Support families coming to terms with the language and culture issues involved and help create improved links between families and schools, enabling parents to better support children in education.
- Continue to develop and support national standards of excellence and be a central resource for Government and local agencies to help support the raising of standards and the profile of the issue to service providers and support the involvement of parents and driving up outcomes for deaf children.

In time, in each region, the aim would be to ensure that service providers could demonstrate competence in supporting language acquisition in a number of settings. This work would ideally also bring together different agencies across education and health as envisaged by the Green Paper for children who are statemented under the new assessment plan.

What is important, is to establish the principles that such a resource is needed, rather than trying to be too prescriptive about the precise form of the models for delivery. However there are a number of examples where the department has worked closely with the sector to effect supported change in some key areas, without being too prescriptive about the means. One of the most obvious examples being the Early Support Programme which used a central resource of producing specialist advice and standards linked to enhancing training capacity and local support. A step further could be to create a national centre (virtual or physical) to promote the development of nationally consistent standards but be the catalyst for local development of capacity and support as described above and we have illustrated how this might be developed in Appendix 1.

Recommendation 3.

That as part of the Department's review of the integration of pre and post 16 entitlements and provision, including the establishment of a new education plan to replace the statement and access to training, further and higher education, the department reviews the functioning of language support for young learners which is currently failing them.

While in theory, post 16 provision has a number of statutory entitlements which should ensure deaf learners have the language support they need, we know in practice that this is often lacking due to poor infrastructure, lack of funds and access to suitably qualified interpreters, even where funds are available. As part of the Department's review of post 16 provision flagged in the Green Paper we would want to explore how we better embed language support in any new arrangements.

The I-Sign Consortium would like to meet with the department to explore how these ideas could continue the progress made through the project to date and establish a national framework of guidance and capacity to support its delivery, with capacity to become self-funding over time.



Conclusion

I-Sign has provided a solid basis to explore and develop approaches towards language acquisition for children whose first language is BSL ensuring that they are able to participate better in school and improve social and academic functioning by ensuring both parents and schools and colleges have the expertise and support to help children acquire language and all that goes with this. However, without a sustained and continuing focus on this issue, with some central support and infrastructure support, it is highly likely that the developments and innovations that have been supported through the programme will end. Worse, with the sustained cut backs now taking place across early years, schools, college and higher education, children and young adults' participation is likely to decline not increase.

We do not envisage large additional investment from central government but without some additional financial support that would allow a co-ordinated approach and for the voluntary sector to have the capacity to leverage further funding through local sources, it is difficult to see how the gains of the last two years will not go to waste.

Appendix 1

One possible Model-National Centre

Development of a National social enterprise model to deliver the type of service that I-Sign has been piloting. An answer is to create a National Centre for Sign Language Education. This will have a responsibility for ensuring that each region has the capacity to deliver the key services, courses and qualification for those who work and live with deaf children and so enable deaf children to fulfil their potential.

Part of its remit is therefore to audit existing providers and to identify where new agencies are needed. Each region would need:

- ≈ FSLC capability
- ≈ BSL teaching centre for staff who work with deaf children
- ≈ ECSW teaching centre for staff who work with deaf children (0-19)
- ≈ Teaching qualifications delivered for deaf people to ensure enough BSL tutors are trained to meet the demand for BSL courses

There would also need to be a minimum entitlement for deaf children (ECSW with BSL L3 and ECSW qualification for example). This would need to be funded through a national funding stream, rather than expecting schools, colleges, LAs, HE to fund the necessary support for students through existing funding, as that doesn't work. This could be established as a Social Enterprise, established by I-Sign partners, which is pump primed by the Departments of Education, Health and Business Innovation and Skills.

If constructed as a social enterprise this would lock any assets to the further development of the service, and enable it to trade. The centre needs to facilitate the establishment of social enterprises to develop new projects (regional ECSW services for example), which should be self-funding as they could deliver higher quality service than current LA/FE provision and thus can win contracts from LAs etc, who will hire them in preference to running the service themselves. The Centre's job would be to identify agencies that can deliver programmes, or develop capacity of regions to do the same.

Creating a centre provides a visual signal that there is a dedicated education resource for sign language using deaf children. One of the learning outcomes of I-Sign is that the needs of deaf student can get lost in big organisations, because there aren't enough of them to get noticed. A specialist social enterprise ensures that won't happen. Further, by making this independent and delivered from within the voluntary sector it is meeting the department's desire to bring the voluntary sector more centrally into the co-ordination of assessment as envisaged by the White Paper and there may be possibilities of using this to pilot some of the ideas around joint assessment as envisaged in the Green Paper.

Funding could be based on similar model to National Deaf CAMHS service – national centre with regional hubs. It could administer tenders for work to enable the minimum entitlement to be offered, or the minimum entitlement could be done through personalised budgets and the role of the centre would be to make sure there are the services and support available for deaf students to buy.