

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

Meeting | 4.30pm 25 January 2016

Committee Room 21, Palace of Westminster

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Updates
 - a. Action Plan on Hearing Loss (Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance)
 - b. Cuts to hearing aid funding (Action on Hearing Loss)
3. Lipreading classes (Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults)
4. Adult education (Signature)
5. Any other business

Lipreading classes

1. The [Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults](#) (ATLA) proposes the APPG on Deafness supports their efforts to increase and raise awareness of 'lipreading and managing hearing loss' classes.

About ATLA

2. ATLA is a registered charity and professional association. It aims to raise the profile and priority of lipreading, and those who are qualified to teach it, throughout the UK and beyond. The ATLA contact is Molly Berry, Vice-chair and Classes Information Officer.

The issue

3. Over 95 per cent of people with hearing loss have spoken English as their first language. They struggle to stay in touch with friends, family and work colleagues. Hearing loss has been shown to be a major cause of social isolation, poor health and poor employment prospects.
4. ATLA is therefore pleased hearing screening and provision of hearing aids are on the Group's agenda. However, hearing aids are only part of the solution. Hearing aids do not fully restore hearing, and many find it difficult to adjust to them. That can lead to hearing aids living in a drawer or not being used optimally.

The solution

5. Lipreading prevents social isolation, increases confidence and independence, and helps keep people in work. It is a key part of the rehabilitation process for hearing loss.
6. The best way to learn to lipread is to attend regular classes run by a qualified teacher. Lipreading and managing hearing loss classes provide practical help to adjust to hearing loss and hearing aids. Their benefit has been highlighted in reports such as '[Not just lip service](#)' by Action on Hearing Loss and '[Lipreading classes in Scotland – the way forward](#)' by the Scottish Lipreading Strategy Group.

7. As well as teaching lipreading, classes provide peer support, and teach tactics for dealing with difficult social and work situations. They also provide information about support available, and other aids and adaptations.

Current provision

8. Only about six thousand of the ten million people with hearing loss in the UK attend lipreading classes. The cost of classes ranges from free to over £130 per term. In some areas there are many classes, in others none.
9. The problem is most acute in England, where there are only two lipreading teacher training courses. They are not able to train enough tutors to replace the number who retire each year; we need at least two more.
10. The Scottish Parliament (£200,000), and Welsh (£200,000) and Northern Ireland (£25,000) Assemblies recently invested in courses to train lipreading tutors. The number of classes is increasing in those parts of the UK.

What needs to happen

11. Hearing screening, the provision of hearing aids and the provision of lipreading classes should be treated as elements of a single issue.
12. The UK Government should follow the example of the Scottish Parliament, and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies, and invest in increasing the number of lipreading tutors.
13. Clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) should make lipreading classes a priority. There are examples of good practice. In Milton Keynes, audiologists working at the hospital give people vouchers that cover half the cost of lipreading classes. There is only one class there, but it is full and has a waiting list.
14. Lipreading should be included in the Skills Funding Agency community learning aims catalogue so the government makes a contribution to the cost of delivering lipreading classes. That will encourage education providers to deliver the classes and make them more affordable for learners.

Adult education

1. At the first meeting of the Group in this Parliament, we agreed adult education and employment should be one element of our work programme. It can be divided into two issues:
 - a. adult education for deaf people, helping them to improve their employment prospects; and
 - b. adult education for hearing people, equipping them with the skills to communicate with deaf people and ensuring the future supply of sign language interpreters and other communication and language professionals.

Adult education for deaf people

2. There is a need for adult education for deaf people because
 - a. economically active people with difficulty hearing are around 50 per cent more likely to be unemployed, and if those not economically active are taken into account, people with a hearing loss are around 75 per cent more likely to be unemployed;
 - b. in 2012-13, 43 per cent of deaf children achieved 5 GCSEs (including English and Maths) at grades A* to C compared to 70 per cent of children with no identified special educational needs;
 - c. at Key Stage 1, 66 per cent of deaf children reached the expected level in reading, compared to 96 per cent of children with no identified special educational needs, writing was 60 per cent compared to 94 per cent, mathematics 73 per cent compared to 97 per cent and science 69 per cent compared to 96 per cent; and
 - d. the [Equality in higher education: statistical report 2015](#) showed only 0.2 per cent of students were deaf or had a serious hearing impairment (2.4 per cent of all disabled students). The number of students who are deaf or have a serious hearing impairment fell from 6,940 in 2007/8 to 5,555 in 2014/14.

Adult education for hearing people

3. There is a need for focus on adult education in communication for hearing people because
 - a. City Lit - one of the main providers of adult education in teaching with and for deaf people, BSL and courses for deaf people – has had to cut its entire communication professional training programme due to funding cuts;
 - b. Signature, the main awarding body for qualifications in communication with deaf people, has seen a consistent and significant drop in candidates in recent years; and
 - c. the National Aims Report 2013 shows the number of people achieving a further education qualification in sign language dropped from 19,160 in 2005/6 to 6,230 in 2011/12, an average fall of almost 17 per cent a year.
4. This will translate into less people progressing to a sign language interpreting qualification. Currently around 26 qualify each year.
5. The availability of other types of communication professional is even less. NRCPD has registered 306 lipspeakers, 27 speech to text reporters, 9 electronic notetakers, 10 manual notetakers and 15 interpreters for deafblind people. Whilst not all communication professionals register with NRCPD, these figures are indicative of the state of the profession.

Proposal

6. Funding for education and training is being cut. From 2012-13 to 2015-16, the Adult Skills budget has been reduced by 26 per cent. Skills policy is being devolved in England, and skills which are of national importance may not be identified as a local priority.
7. The Group should ask the government what assessment it has made of the impact of skills policy on
 - a. the education and employment of deaf and deafblind people; and
 - b. the learning of skills in communication with deaf and deafblind people.