



Consortium for Research in Deaf Education

2025 report for Northern Ireland

Education provision for deaf children in Northern Ireland in 2024/25

Introduction

In 2025, we carried out the 15th Consortium for Research in Deaf Education (CRIDE) annual survey on educational staffing and service provision for deaf children.¹ 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 2025 survey was the standard version, covering the 2024/25 academic year.² A number of changes were made to the standard survey in 2025 to streamline and reduce the number of questions³.

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

¹ For the purpose of this section of the survey, unless otherwise stated, we use the term 'deaf children' to include children and young people under the age of 20 with sensori-neural or permanent conductive deafness.

² 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/.

³ For example, questions about deaf children with cochlear implants, bone conduction devices, who use English as an additional spoken language at home, who are new to the country, and post-16 support have been removed. A reference document that summarises this data from previous years has been produced and is available via the links shown in the above footnote.

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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 2025.

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. Please also note that where there is a reported cohort of less than five children in any of the tables in this report, we have replaced the figure with a '<5' and suppressed the actual figure to zero when calculating the totals in that table unless otherwise stated. This is indicated by an asterisk against the total.

Summary of key findings

Deaf children in Northern Ireland

- There were at least 1,527 deaf children. This figure of 1,527 is a reported 5% decrease from 1,603 in 2024.

Teachers of Deaf Children and other specialist staff

- There were at least 47.2 fte Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (TOD) posts, of which none were vacant.
- Of the 47.2 fte working as TODs, 69% held the mandatory qualification, whilst 10% were in training and 21% were qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training.

Resource provisions

- There are a reported two resource provisions specifically for deaf children and young people were reported, which is the same as in 2024. Looking at the spread of resource provisions across Northern Ireland, on average, there is one resource provision for every 764 deaf children. In 2024 there was one resource provision for every 802 deaf children.

Support following identification of deafness

- The service received 121 referrals during the 2024 calendar year, a decrease from 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.
- 16% 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.
- 60% 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.

PART 1: Deaf children in Northern Ireland

How many deaf children are there?⁴

Based on the response from the service covering the five regions across Northern Ireland there were 1,527 deaf children. This figure of 1,527 is a reported decrease of 76 (5%) from 1,603 in 2024.

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 service also responded that they have a small cohort of children who are listed as having a conductive deafness, but it is unknown whether this is permanent or temporary, due to the need to follow up information with ENT and Audiology where it was not provided.

It should be noted that CRIDE asks only for numbers of permanently deaf children. For context, the service has reported separately to the National Deaf Children's Society⁵ that they have a caseload of 1,753 children with permanent or temporary deafness.

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.

⁴ 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).

⁵ www.ndcs.org.uk/about-us/campaigns/our-campaigns/developing-specialist-education-support-deaf-children-northern-ireland

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

	Number of children reported
CRIDE 2025	1,527
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

There were 544 deaf children and young people reported as receiving free school meals – however the service reported that this included deaf children and young people with temporary hearing loss as this data could not be separated. With this caveat in mind, the 544 figure is 36% of the adjusted total of 1,527 permanently deaf children reported earlier.

What the survey tells us about the population of deaf children in Northern Ireland

The tables below provide breakdowns by age, level of deafness, and education setting.

Table 2: Number of children living in the area, by age

Age group	Number of deaf children reported	Percentage of total
Early years/pre-school	172	11%
Primary-aged	600	39%
Secondary-aged	570	37%
Post-16 and under the age of 20	185	12%
Total	1,527	100%

Since 2023 the proportion of deaf children in different age categories has changed as follows:

- early years/pre-school age – no change
- primary-aged – increased by one percentage point
- secondary-aged – no change
- post-16 category – decreased by two percentage points.

Table 3: Number of children living in the area, by level of deafness

Level of deafness	Number of deaf children reported	Percentage of total (where known)
Unilateral	419	27%
Mild	404	26%
Moderate	437	29%
Severe	93	6%
Profound	172	11%
Total (excluding 'not known')	1,525	100%
Not known	<5*	
Total (including 'not known')	1,525*	

Since the 2023 survey, the proportion of children and young people with a:

- unilateral deafness has remained unchanged
- mild level of deafness has decreased by three percentage points
- moderate level of deafness has increased by one percentage point
- severe level of deafness has increased by one percentage points
- profound level of deafness has remained unchanged.

Table 4: Number of children, living in the area, by educational setting⁶

Type of setting	Number	Percentage of total	Percentage of total school-aged children (i.e. excluding pre-school children and young people post-16)
Supported only at home – pre-school children	126	8%	
Early years setting – pre-school children who have not yet started their official nursery year ⁷	<5*	0%	
Early years setting – pre-school children who are in their official nursery year	42	3%	
Supported at home – of school age and home educated	6	0%	0%
Mainstream state-funded schools	999	66%	74%
Mainstream independent (non-state-funded) schools	0	0%	0%
Resource provision (specifically for deaf children) in mainstream schools	13	1%	1%
Resource provision (not specifically for deaf children) in mainstream schools	0	0%	0%
Special schools for deaf pupils (whether state funded or non-maintained)	58	4%	4%
Other special schools, not specifically for deaf children (whether state funded or non-maintained)	277	18%	20%
All other post-16 provision (not including school sixth form colleges)	0	0%	
Other: (e.g. Pupil referral units, NEET, not known)	<5*	0%	
Total	1,521*	100%	
Total (excluding pre-school children and other post-16 provision and 'other')	1,353*		100%

Incidence of additional special educational needs (SEN)

There were a reported 590 deaf children with an additional SEN.⁸ This is 39% of the adjusted total of deaf children, which is an increase from 36% in 2023.

⁶ No children were reported as educated outside of the education authority.

⁷ Department of Education funded pre-school year

⁸ Defined as any other special educational need apart from deafness, regardless of whether this need is recognised as a 'primary' or 'secondary' need.

Additional languages

We asked the service to provide a breakdown of the total number of children living in the area, according to which languages are mainly used at school/other education setting.

Table 5: Number of deaf children, by languages mainly used at school/other educational setting

Language	Total	Percentage of responses (where known)
Spoken English	1,317	87%
British Sign Language (BSL)/Irish Sign Language (ISL) ⁹	34	2%
Spoken English together with signed support	38	2%
Other combination	132	9%
Total known	1,521	100%
Not known	6	
Total including not known	1,527	

Comparing with data from the 2023 survey when this question was last asked, the proportions of children and young people using:

- spoken English has decreased from 89% to 87%
- BSL or ISL remained increased from 1% to 2%
- spoken English together with signed support remained at 2%
- other combination – increase from 8% to 9%.

We saw earlier in table 3 that there were 265 children with severe or profound deafness. If it is assumed that children with severe or profound deafness are more likely to use sign language, it can be estimated that 13% of children with severe/profound deafness used BSL or ISL in education whilst 14% used signed support with spoken English. Combined, 27% of children with severe/profound deafness used some form of sign language in education. It should be stressed that this is a very rough approximation made for illustration purposes only.

How do CRIDE's 2025 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.

⁹ The service was asked to report on BSL and ISL separately. We have merged these figures in this report.

School Census figures for 2024/25¹⁰ identified 1,570 pupils recorded with a 'hearing impairment' on the medical register. This amounts to 103% of the 1,527 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. 807 children are on the SEN register. Of these, 516 had a mild or moderate hearing impairment and 291 had a severe or profound hearing impairment.

The School Census reports that 520 deaf children on the SEN register have a statement of SEN. This equates to 33% of the deaf children identified by the School Census. It also equates to 34% 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.

¹⁰ The 2024/25 School Census data is supplied separately to the National Deaf Children's Society by the Department of Education. Figures include funded children in voluntary and private preschools, nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools. Figures include pupils at new stages 1 – 3 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need as recorded by the school. Data is based on pupils enrolled on Census day i.e. The Friday of the first full week in October (In 2024/25 this was the 11 October 2024).

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

We asked how many Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (TODs) were working in different settings, including those in a peripatetic role, working in resource provisions¹¹ 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 47.2 fte people working as TODs in Northern Ireland.
- 69% of these posts were occupied by fully qualified TODs, 10% were occupied by teachers in training for the mandatory qualification, and 21% were occupied by qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training. No posts were reported for people not qualified as Teachers.¹²
- at the time the survey was completed, no vacant posts were reported.

The following table provides a breakdown by type of setting.

¹¹ 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.

¹² The category of People not qualified as Teachers was only asked about in the separate survey for schools for deaf children.

Table 6: Number of TOD posts overall¹³

	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	24 (93%)	2 (67%)	6.6 (36%)	32.6 (69%)
Teachers in training for the mandatory qualification or intending to train within 3 years	1.8 (7%)	1 (33%)	2 (11%)	4.8 (10%)
Qualified teachers without the mandatory qualification and not in training	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9.8 (53%)	9.8 (21%)
Total – in employment	25.8 (100%)	3 (100%)	18.4 (100%)	47.2 (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.

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

¹³ 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.

Table 7: Number of TODs in employment overall by role

	Total TODs in post	Percentage
Working mainly as a peripatetic TODs	25.8	55%
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	47.2	100%

The Belfast cochlear implant programme was asked in a separate short survey about the number of TODs working in the programme. We did not receive a response to this survey. In their 2024 response, the Belfast cochlear implant programme reported no TODs in employment, and commented that there was at the time 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 8: 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)
2025	26	28.8	0	28.8
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 9: Percentage change in numbers of TODs

	Percentage change over past 13 years (between 2011 and 2025)	Percentage change over past year (between 2024 and 2025)
TODs with the mandatory qualification in employment	-26%	20%
Number of teachers working as TODs in employment	-23%	1%
Number of TOD posts (including vacancies)	-25%	1%

Within the peripatetic service, the data shows that there has been a decrease in the number of trainee TODs and an increase in the number of qualified TODs. This means that the number of qualified TODs has increased while the number of TOD post has increased less significantly.

In terms of any changes of TODs in post in specific roles:¹⁴

¹⁴ Caution is needed when making comparisons between 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.

- overall, the total of 25.8 fte peripatetic TODs is a 2% increase from 25.4 in 2024. Over the long-term though, the number of peripatetic TODs has decreased by 5% from 27.2 fte in 2011.
- the total of 3 fte TODs in resource provisions is unchanged from 2024. Over the long-term though, the number of TODs in resource provisions has decreased by 70% from 10.1 fte reported in 2011.

Additional qualifications held by TODs

The service reported that:

- no TODs held an additional post-graduate specialist qualification in early years support for deaf children
- 2 fte TODs, working in a peripatetic role, held an additional specialist qualification as an educational audiologist. This amounts to 8% of all peripatetic TODs in post, and 7% of all TODs in employment
- Overall, 9 fte TODs used BSL or ISL as a first language OR had a level 3 qualification (or equivalent) or above. This amounts to 31% of all TODs in employment
 - Of the TODs working in a peripatetic role, 31% used BSL or ISL as a first language OR had a level 3 qualification (or equivalent) or above
 - Of the TODs working in resource provisions, 33% used BSL or ISL as a first language OR had a level 3 qualification (or equivalent) or above
- 5 fte TODs, all working in the peripatetic service, were deaf themselves. This amounts to 19% of TODs working in a peripatetic role, and 17% of all TODs in employment.

Recruitment of TODs

The service reported that they had sought to recruit a TOD over the past year, that they had recruited to all roles, and that all TODs appointed were qualified TODs.

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.

PART 3: Support provided

Wider policy changes

The service reported that over the past year there had been no wider policy changes to how the service determines support allocations to deaf children.

Issues and challenges

We asked the service if there were any issues or challenges that had emerged over the past year that had had a significant impact on the support that it was able to provide to deaf children. The service reported workforce challenges in recruiting assistants with appropriate sign language skills.

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 2024, 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).

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 764 deaf children. This figure was 802 in 2024.

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.

PART 4: Support following identification of deafness

We asked the service how many referrals they received over the calendar year of 2024 for children who were newly identified as deaf.

Table 10: Referrals

	Number of referrals	Percentage
For children identified as deaf through the newborn hearing screening programme	30	25%
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme and before they had started statutory education	19	16%
For children identified as deaf outside of the newborn hearing programme and after they had started statutory education	72	60%
Total of figures given	121	100%

The total number of referrals over the calendar year has decreased from 209 reported as received during the calendar year of 2023.

We asked the service about arrangements for the first TOD visit where referrals are made during the summer holidays. The service reported that cover arrangements were in place to enable a TOD to provide a visit during the summer holidays within the normal timescales as if referred during term time for referrals for pre-school children only.

PART 5: 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, Leeds and STARS Sensory Support Service (Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland).

The survey alternates from year to year between a standard survey and a survey with a mix of core and thematic questions. The 2025 survey was the version with a standard survey.

The survey was sent to the Education Authority in February 2025 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.