

Teacher of the deaf: Hear! Hear!

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I'm a Teacher of the Deaf, which means I've got a Mandatory Qualification in Sensory Impairment. There are two other specialist teachers who have a Mandatory Qualification: those who are qualified to teach blind children, and those who are qualified to teach dual sensory impaired children, both blind and deaf. It's actually a bit of a weird title, because I'm not really a teacher in the conventional sense and I don't solely work with people who have *no* hearing.

So I thought I had better just unpack what my title is: when I use the word 'deaf' as a description, I'm talking about anybody who has a hearing loss of 20 decibels or above, and according to the UN, deafness is classed as a disability. There are lots of people who are culturally deaf and that would be deaf with a capital D, those who would see themselves not as disabled, but just different and their communication is different. Deafness is a very low incidence disability, there are only 41,000 deaf children in England at the moment, as it was measured last year, so it's quite a niche specialism to be in, but it's a really exciting area as a biologist to go into.

By the end of the talk, I hope you will know where I have come from, a bit about the aspects of the role, because it smashes every preconception that you've got about teaching, it's really different and it's not as long a pathway as dentistry [the previous talk in same session]. It's probably not as lucrative, but it actually is really rewarding and, very much like the dentistry, it's a whole family occupation.

How did I get here? I did my Biological Sciences degree here at Leicester and I did a project about newt lampbrush chromosomes and telomeres, which you would think is a million miles away from teaching children who have difficulty accessing education, but it's not. I found it incredibly rewarding to have a science background and its really informed my practice now as a Teacher of the Deaf, both in terms of understanding some of the medical diagnoses that the children come to me with, and also being able to explain and analyse some of the data that we are given. A degree in Biological Science has been a really beneficial background.

When I was doing my Biology degree, I really didn't know what to do. I wondered about doing a Masters but decided to go into teaching. I applied really late and got a place at Loughborough. I trained to do primary teaching, which a lot of people questioned. I know that my tutor at Leicester questioned my decision to do primary, because he felt I was much better suited to be a secondary teacher and using my science to have the biggest impact upon children's lives. I wanted to get into teaching before the children were big and scary, and also before they were all put off wanting to do Science, because 'we've done it before', which is something teachers hear all the time. Particularly with the National Curriculum, children revisit topics, you probably will have year after year, and I wanted to make science exciting. Primary offered me that and it offered me a bit of a different pathway from what you might imagine secondary teaching would have been.

I worked within mainstream teaching right from nursery up to 11 year olds at school for fifteen years and I only ever came across one deaf child in that whole time, so becoming a teacher of the deaf wasn't a natural pathway, but I just saw a job advertised in the

Leicester Mercury, the local paper, which said 'Teacher of the Deaf'. I thought I didn't have a chance because it said you had to be qualified and I wasn't; it said you had to have lots of experience of additional needs teaching and I didn't; but I took a gamble and it's been the best decision I ever made.

I got the job at Leicestershire County Council and fortunately they paid for my training. I went to Birmingham University as a part-time student, however, I was working full time at the same time, so it was actually quite a hard juggling act. I thought the PGCE was very hard, but doing that Postgraduate Diploma for two years whilst working full time, when I had a family, that was really very difficult, but I think that all of those steps and training along the way prepare you for what comes next.

I'm actually still a student. I am, and have been for ages, registered at Birmingham University. I'm supposed to be finishing off my Masters, so many years on I'm still learning. I think learning keeps you fresh and it keeps you excited about what you are hearing and it keeps your practice relevant, so hopefully this year I will finish my Masters.

Where do I work? I'm actually not based in a school. Lots of Teachers of the Deaf are based purely in schools and work only with children who are deaf. There are Teachers of the Deaf who are based in units attached to mainstream schools. In Leicestershire and Leicester, there are only secondary units that are attached to mainstream, there's no specialist deaf provision. Elsewhere in the country, there can be so if you were looking to do work specifically within a school, you would have to look elsewhere geographically.

I have none of those roles. I'm a peripatetic teacher and so my classrooms are the lovely views of Leicestershire. I'm really lucky. You have to really like driving to do my job: I do an awful lot of miles, working with all of the children who are deaf in the North of Leicestershire and the whole of Rutland, so I get to see quite a lot of nice things. One of the other things is I see children from the age of zero, only a few weeks old, right up to being 19 years old, which if I had been a secondary teacher or just a primary teacher, I would never of had that opportunity.

I do have a base, but I'm classed as a mobile and flexible worker, which means my employer doesn't have a desk for me, so we hot desk. The reality is that my mobile phone and my car are actually my workplace; I am set to go and see these children and support them where they are.

What actually is it like? What do I do? What's my day to day life like? This is where it is slightly different to being a normal mainstream teacher, because it really is about family and teams. We are basically part of a team around a child, a child who might have been diagnosed as deaf at birth, because, as you may know, all babies now who are born in Britain, have their hearing tested within a couple of days of being born. If there is a suspicion that they might be deaf, they'll be retested and then, within England, there is a right for them to be supported by a Teacher of the Deaf from the point of diagnosis. Which is why we get to work with some really tiny little babies and their parents and that's one of the biggest privileges that I get to have, is to go into homes, where they've got these tiny little babies and they've just had a diagnosis of some level of deafness.

95% of deaf children born each year, are born into families who have no experience of having deafness within their family, so that can really be a massive shock for those parents. They've been expecting this baby and then suddenly all of their plans and hopes and dreams have changed, so my job is quite often then about supporting parents

emotionally, which is probably something you wouldn't get if you just worked in a classroom situation, so being a peripatetic has that advantage.

Most of the families who I work with are hearing families and because they are experts in talking, they would like their children to also have an access to speech and to have their education through listening and talking and so the main way that they are going to do that is by maximising the little bit of audition that their children have. 99% of people who are classed as deaf have some useable hearing. It might be very tiny, but either with cochlear implants or with hearing aids, they can get access to speech and develop speech and language, so a huge aspect of my role is to support the families in coming to terms with the technical aspects of deafness, whether it is getting their child who may be running around their nursery ripping off their equipment, getting it back on them, so that they can hear and they can develop their speech in the normal pattern of hearing children.

Obviously, I said it was a team effort. There are a lot of other professionals who I work with and probably the biggest [part of the] team who I have lots and lots to do with, are my NHS colleagues in Audiology. I'm really fortunate in Leicestershire, because we've got a really strong tradition of using hearing aids for children to access speech. There's a really huge breadth of experience both in Audiology and the Teaching of Deaf Service in promoting, listening and hearing for children to learn speech. We are taught how to make the ear moulds. We are taught how to maintain hearing aids. So different aspects of being a teacher which you wouldn't normally get. Being a teacher of the deaf is quite allied to our Medical Audiology colleagues and we spend quite a lot time in the clinic, particularly with babies, and that's really important because we are seeing first-hand the hearing loss and the impact it could have on them in education, on their language and we are able to pave the way for families to understand that information. So your analytical minds doing Biology degrees, and the fact that you are used to working with data, and data from lots of different places, you're ideally suited to being able to juggle the kinds of information you're going to have to bring to a simplified picture for parents to understand what's going on with their children, and to empower the parents in supporting their child.

Of course, once the deaf children are into nursery, you've actually got to put another person into the mix, and that's their teacher. I spend a considerable amount of my time working in schools. So today, for example, I've already been out to a special school, a mainstream school and made loads and loads of phone calls to parents about how the children can make progress and enjoy their school.

I said I'm not really a teacher, but I am really fortunate, because I do lots of normal teaching things like assessment, monitoring, reading documents from the Government (and reading the next lot because it's all changed), but actually we do do some teaching, and for me it's the most exciting bit.

Teaching is slightly different as a Teacher of the Deaf, because we are really looking at language; we are thinking of creative ways to encourage youngsters to use their equipment. We are all about making language and learning fun, using a variety of resources, quite a few of which involve food. We do loads of things with iPads and other technology to make language learning visual and support listening. We spend loads of time pimping hearing aids and making it exciting to wear them.

Deafness itself is not a special educational need. It's not a learning difficulty. It's a problem accessing communication and it's a problem being able to access education, and that can

have a huge impact upon the outcome of your life, so really those things are what we are there to do.

One of the really massive things in my job is monitoring linguistic progress of children, so if you really like language and you find the essay writing side of science is something you really like doing, reports, making information accessible to others, sharing your analysis of what's going on, being a teacher of the deaf would be a really good pathway for you. You have to be really good at working as a team, so if you are a people person, it would be a job for you. If you are a kind of the person who likes to lock yourself away, then this probably isn't a job for you. It's a chance to change life chances of so many children, that's my main motivation. I've got one of my A-level students at the moment who is currently applying to do Food Technology and she's just got a huge clutch of A's and B's at her GCSE and she's done really well and part of my job is to celebrate those massive successes and to encourage others to do the same.

If you can answer 'yes' to some of those things, that you think would be a thing for you that you would enjoy doing, then I would encourage you to have a look at being a Teacher of the Deaf. No day is the same: it is definitely not a boring job. I might be crawling around on the floor playing drums one moment, to sitting in an A level exam in another. If you have different life experiences that you've got to work around, one of the real advantages is it is a really flexible job: there are lots of different contracts [available]. Lots of my colleagues work as job shares; there are people who work term time only contracts, so if you have families, it will fit around them.

There are just over, I think, 1000 teachers of the deaf in England at the moment who are employed, but the interesting thing is that the vast majority of them are within ten years of retiring, so there is a time bomb about to go off! So, for you guys, it's really good news, because there are going to be lots of jobs in this field and because technology is moving on a pace and we've got to keep up with it. Particularly things like cochlear implants, the nearest cochlear implant centre is in Nottingham, at the Nottingham Auditory Implant Centre and they are really good at keeping us up to date and continuing our professional development and that's one of the real benefits of being a Teacher of the Deaf. Unlike classroom teachers where it's really difficult to get out and do additional training, it's one of the things which you just have to do as a Teacher of the Deaf, because technology changes week on week. Financially, you won't be as rich as some folks, however it is, in terms of teaching, well rewarded. You can move up the normal teacher's pay scale which currently the top of the pay scale is mid £30,000. Once you get there, you can go into the upper pay scale. I'm on the upper pay scale on three, which is top of the upper pay scales without being management. On top of that, if you have the qualification, you're also eligible to get different allowances, so I have two additional allowances, so if you work full time as a Teacher of the Deaf you could be earning in the mid-forties. If you take on a managerial role, then you would be talking £60,000 plus: so if the financial bits are important to you, that's worth knowing.

If you want to be a Teacher of the Deaf, what do you have to do? First thing, it may be a shorter path way than some other post-biology degree careers, but there are things you have to do before. You have to have a degree in whatever subject would allow you to go on and get Qualified Teacher Status, which if you are doing Biology, you are lucky, as it ticks one of the boxes for QTS, so you should be able to go into a route to become a teacher. At the moment there are [loads of routes to become a teacher](#), some school

based, some University based, so the best thing for you is to have a look at the Government website, which I will put up on the next slide.

Once you have qualified as a teacher, get at least two years post qualified experience and I don't just mean teaching for two years. If you think you would like to be Teacher of the Deaf or Teacher of the Blind, or any other special educational needs for which you would need additional qualification, try and widen your opportunities to work with children or families who have those difficulties. There are lots of voluntary organisations who work with children who are deaf and there are lots of youth clubs. Leicester City Football Club have one which, even as a student you can get involved in, see if it is something that you would be interested in.

I mentioned that in Leicestershire most people choose to follow an oral route for education of their children, but obviously there is a small percentage who are Sign users, either pure BSL, which is British Sign Language, or talking and signing as well. You have to do an element of BSL training to be a Teacher of the Deaf, but I'm absolutely appalling, I find it really difficult, but its compulsory and it's really difficult to do that training alongside doing your Mandatory Qualification for Teacher of the Deaf. I recommend if you're wanting to do some BSL, which is a really good thing to do, do it before you go into training to be a Teacher of the Deaf. You can do one year of evening courses, less than 100 hours and it will cost just over £100 to get a first level in BSL. If you wanted to go on further, I'm on level two, that takes another year. It's slightly more expensive, (its £300), but it's worth doing. You may think you're busy right now, and I know University is busier now than when I studied, but that sense of busyness will get worse whatever you do, so take these opportunities whenever you can. I would say it's also good experience to go and get some other work with kids. If you're thinking about doing teacher training, it's a requirement, you have to have had experience of working with children, because how else are you going to explain to somebody that you know you want to do it if you've never actually seen somebody younger than yourself?

I was really fortunate because I was able to secure a job as a TOD and as part of that they gave me the funding. Now it's not terribly expensive to do either the Diploma or a Masters. It's an additional £10,000 a year to do the Diploma. Legally, you have to have the Diploma if which you are going to teach in a Specialist school for the deaf. However Teachers of the Deaf in the community, like myself, don't actually require that qualification.

There's another option, which is you can self-fund your Diploma and there are a couple of bursaries available, so you have to be really dedicated to want to do it and you have to be able to prove to them that you have gone and found some experience either working with deaf children or families who have a deaf member, or you might have someone who is deaf in your family: all of those things would add up to support your case.

There are only five training courses in Britain that do Teacher of the Deaf training. [Birmingham](#), where I've been studying. There's a huge course at [Manchester](#), doing an awful lot of research, very active with the Physiology and Psychology departments, lots and lots of research, so if that's your bent, have a look there. Leeds are massively into bilingual education, so if you are a signer with English or additional spoken languages, [Leeds](#) would be a really good place. They have bursaries specific for their course. There is also a course in Berkshire, which is linked to [Mary Hare](#), which is a Grammar School, not state funded and its outside of the state sector, but local authorities pay for children who are deaf to go there and they [Mary Hare] run a course which is accredited by Oxford

Brookes University. The fifth course is at [Moray House](#) in Edinburgh, which is quite a long way from here, but if you're Scottish and would like to work in the Scottish Education System, obviously that would be a really good place to look at.

Finally, I have just put up some websites which are really good contact for anything to find out further. If you think "well actually I'm not really interested in being a Teacher of the Deaf, but I would really like to be a teacher" then have a look at the top one. It changes all the time and it's really worth having a look at that. [NASEN](#) is a fantastic organisation if you are interested in any Special Educational Needs Education, you would get loads of resources from there, so if you were going to be a mainstream teacher and if you fancied finding a little bit more out about the Special Educational needs, that's where to look. The Mandatory Teacher of the Deaf, Teacher of the Visually impaired, Dual Sensory impaired, is changing and the new regulations and specialisms have just been published, if you wanted to look there.

If you would like to train to do your BSL, just because you want to (and it would be a really good thing and I would recommend that you do it), [Signature](#) is the organisation and they've actually got loads of resources and videos on the web, which you can teach yourself basic signs, see if it's something you've got passion for that you could do, but you can't do it alone it is a relationship, so you've got to find a partner to be able to sign with.

I'm a member of [BATOD](#), the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf. It's not a teaching union as such because we are members of teaching unions, it's a professional body. Just as other professions have their professional bodies, they set standards for the minimum of what we should be doing, the kind of way we should be working with families, expectations and I would recommend, unless you actually join them you can't see everything, but just to have a look, how to train to be a Teacher of the Deaf is on there, lots of other written resources which you can download.

[NatSIP](#), the National Sensory Impairment Partnership, is a national organisation which is whispering in government's ear at all moments. They have contracts for providing support for government on any sensory impairment, so if you're interested in other sensory impairments, I would recommend that you have a look at NatSIP. For all of you, look at the [NDCS](#). It's free, they will send you out a monthly brochure, it's got lots of articles in about how to support families, but on there, there's absolutely loads and loads of free resources aimed at families, deaf children themselves and professionals, so there's lots of things which you can have a look at.

I'm going to have a little advert now. As part of my Teacher of the Deaf role, I have to look at some of my little people (whom I work with) and there's quite a portion of them who have their deafness caused by an infectious agent called CMV, which is [Cytomegalovirus](#). Could you put your hand up if you have heard of it? So, three. If you think you might have children in the next thirty years, can you prick your ears up now? It's estimated that 25% of people who are deaf, are deaf because of a Cytomegalovirus infection in the womb while their mum was pregnant. There's lots of stuff about zika virus in South America at the moment and yet actually CMV is here in the uk, [now](#). The mums might get a mild case of the flu, they don't really think they are particularly poorly, but the impact upon the developing foetus can be absolutely catastrophic and profound deafness is one consequence. It would be such an easy thing for you to spread the message of how we can keep people safe from CMV and it's just washing your hands, particularly if you work with small children, not sharing cups or cutlery or any other eating implement or mouthing

things like dummies and putting them back in their mouths, because CMV is having a huge impact upon little people and it could be slowed down if people knew about it. And actually there is *no vaccine* at the moment, so if any of you are in vaccine development have a look at CMV. Can I recommend that you look at 'CMV action' website for telling your other friends who might not know about CMV and it's just a tiny little chink of keeping people safer.

Thank you.

Questions and answers

Q: You mentioned CMV, is it 95% of parents that the child is the first deaf person in their family?

A: Obviously of some of the people who are deaf, we've got a proportion who have been diagnosed because they've got a chromosome abnormality; Meningitis, so they may well not deaf at birth, but may be deaf through infection of Meningitis at a later date. A lot of children who have Meningitis will subsequently have cochlear implants and that's to do with the way the cochlear forms. If you're going to have an Implant you have to have it very quickly after the infection of meningitis, because the cochlear ossifies. And then there are people who have mothers who have had first contact with CMV *in utero* and again, some of those children are born hearing, but then very quickly lose their hearing. Finally there are still children who are coming, maybe from outside of the EU, deafened by [rubella](#), so actually there are lots of other causes of deafness in the 95%.

Q: How much do you get to use your biological background? If not a lot, do you miss it?

A: I do miss it a bit and that's why when I did my 'how I've got here', I didn't end it, because I'm still thinking where I might go from here and I'm not really ruling out doing a PhD in some aspect of deaf education in which links more closely into either brain activity or infectious agents. There are several MRC units within Great Britain which are looking into deafness. So even as a biologist, you could work in those areas without being a Teacher of the Deaf and that's real life impact science. I do miss Biology, but I enjoy the clinical work and looking at that and I enjoy when I get reports and things from paediatricians and various medical reports. As a result of studying Biology I will probably have a better grasp of what's written there and the impact upon the person.

Q: You gave examples of the kind of resources you use. Do you teach children that are older and what kind of resources do you use? Do you teach up to the age of 19?

A: It's changing and it depends upon which part of the country you work in, because there are different models of working as a teacher of the deaf. Some geographical areas are much more based on having children who are taught in deaf units and therefore they will have secondary teachers who are trained in that subject. My support for children who are in secondary is more supporting the subject base. It's more looking at the language of a subject and trying to fill gaps, still further to support essay writing, where their language will let them express their understanding of the subject because they want to be assessed on their understanding, [their] cognition of that subject, and not held back because their language isn't adequate. So we are working more on the language aspects of subjects.

But having scientific knowledge is really good, because actually that is where some of my colleagues just run away frightened, but actually if you have a background in Biology it's fairly straightforward: you look at the syllabus and can run with that.