

Recruiting qualified teachers of sensory impaired learners: What do heads of SI services, resource bases and schools say? Survey Results

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Summary

In a workshop with the Department for Education in September, a number of heads of specialist education services for children with sensory impairment identified concerns around the supply of qualified teachers of children with sensory impairment and challenges around recruitment.

In late 2023, The National Sensory Impairment Partnership invited responses to an on-line survey from heads of services and specialist provision, to explore and better understand and evidence these issues and concerns. The survey received 44 responses from across the UK, the majority of which were from within England¹.

Key findings:

- Over 4 in 5 heads had tried to recruit in the previous three years
- 30% had to go through 2 or 3 rounds of recruitment before they could appoint anyone
- 41% said there was a significant delay of more than a term before they could recruit someone
- Only 19% were able to recruit a qualified teacher of sensory impairment (QTSI) with the mandatory qualification. Most are recruiting a teacher and then funding their training for the mandatory qualification
- When asked about the impact of any delays or not being able to recruit a QTSI, heads referred to increased workload/stress for existing staff and reduced support for children with SI
- The main direct costs associated around not being able to recruit a QTSI related to supply cover
- On average, respondents reported 0.5 unfilled QTSI posts in their service or school

NatSIP believes that the above points illustrate systemic issues around the supply of QTSIs, which is having a negative impact on children with SI.

The SEND system fails to provide the necessary incentives for local authorities and specialist settings to fund the training of new QTSI until and unless they have a vacant post. At this point, they are often unable to recruit a QTSI with the mandatory qualification and instead are forced to fund someone to become qualified.

This creates a situation where too many children with SI are being supported by an unqualified TSI. In larger services and schools, this can sometimes be managed through effective cover arrangements, support and mentoring. However, as this document shows, it can still lead to workforce pressures and reduced support even in well-resourced areas. We are particularly concerned about SI children in delegated resource provisions, which are independent of the local authority and in which it is less likely that cover arrangements or effective oversight can be put in place.

The new apprenticeship pathway for QTSIs will help to address some of the issues around supply by providing funding for the training of new QTSIs in the future. However, assuming that progress continues to be made with this, the first apprentices will not qualify until 2027 at the very earliest. It will also not in

¹ 16 of the 44 responses were provided anonymously. Of the remaining 28, all but one appeared to be from a head of service or a head of special school or resource provision in England.

itself resolve the challenges around children being supported by unqualified TSIs for at least two years until the teacher has gained the mandatory qualification.

We recommend and support the development of a clear workforce strategy for QTSIs to increase the pool and supply of QTSIs. Within this, we would recommend a look at providing either bursaries or a specific boost to funding of the new QTSI mandatory qualification to ensure additional places are made available. It is important that any additional recruitment is not just left to the introduction of the apprenticeship for QTSIs.

About NatSIP

NatSIP – the National Sensory Impairment Partnership, is a unique national partnership of professionals and the main voluntary and professional organisations working across the sensory impairment sector to improve outcomes for children and young people with SI and their families.

To contact NatSIP about the content of this paper, please email us at: send-reforms@natsip.org.uk

Survey findings

This section provides a more detailed report of the survey findings.

Notes:

1. The term *QTSI* includes the three different roles:

- Qualified Teacher of Deaf Children and Young People (QTOD)
- Qualified Teacher of Children with Vision Impairment (QTVI)
- Qualified Teacher of Children with Multi-Sensory Impairment (QTMSI).

In all cases, these are qualified teachers who hold an additional qualification (known as the *mandatory qualification* or MQ) in deafness, vision impairment or multi-sensory impairment. The acronyms QTSIs, QTODs, QTVIs, etc. are used

2. By *children*, unless otherwise stated, we mean children and young people of all ages. Many QTSIs will work with children with SI from birth (through their families) up until adulthood.
3. We have included quotes from respondents throughout to show, in their words, the challenges they face. We have made minor edits only to assist with readability or to spell out lesser-known acronyms.

Survey Questions

Q1: Have you tried to recruit a QTSI in the last three years?

Yes 36 (82%)

No 8 (18%)

Q2: Considering only the most recent time you tried to recruit, were you able to appoint someone?

[of the 36 that had tried]

Yes - but they did not have the mandatory qualification 27 (75%)

Yes - someone with the mandatory qualification 7 (19%)

No 2 (6%)

Of the two respondent unable to recruit, one re-advertised and one stated that *funding was pulled for the post*.

Q3: How many rounds of recruitment did you do?

1 round 25 (69%)

2 rounds 4 (11%)

3 rounds 7 (19%)

Q4: Was there any significant delay (beyond a term) in being able to appoint someone?

Yes there was a delay 14 (41%)

No significant delay 20 (59%)

Q5: Were there any effects from the delay?

Impact on children:

Pupils do not have a teacher who understand deafness and associated learning needs. The teacher needs a lot of support and training to be able to offer pupils an adequate learning experience.

Behaviour deteriorates with supply staff as they do not know the children and cannot use British Sign Language fluently.

Pupils were not seen during this time – this had an impact on access to learning, exams and social opportunities for those students affected.

Impact on QTSIs:

Other ToDs have to take on extra mentoring and meetings – impact on workload and mental health. The Head of the Base and Head of Service also have to increase the time spent supporting the teacher, modelling approaches etc – significant impact on workload and health. Those involved in covering the ‘gaps’ over lengthy periods of time suffer from burn out, and absences increase.

Head of Sensory Service covering a TOD (full caseload) - had to reduce NatSIP support levels² and simplify reports and cut special school support, for the term. Whole team taking on more caseload, with no additional capacity to do so.

Q6: You said that you appointed someone who did not have the relevant mandatory qualification. Are you funding part or all of their training?

[of the 27 who indicated in Q2 that they appointed someone without the mandatory qualification]

We are funding the whole cost of the training	26
We are funding part of the cost of the training	0
We are not funding any of cost of the training	1

Q7: Did you incur any additional costs as a result of not being able to appoint someone with the mandatory qualification?

Some respondents spoke of the cost of the mandatory qualification itself and related costs. Others spoke again about the wider indirect costs in terms of the impact of not being able to recruit a QTSI with the mandatory qualification.

Time costs - other QTVIs having to have increased caseload/timetables to facilitate study time, time at residentials, and teaching placement increased levels of support to the person as no experience of VI.

We have had to increase our caseloads for each TVI to accommodate the time taken out of the role for study/lack of qualification.

No - we had to suspend some support.

A number of respondents spoke about costs relating to finding supply QTSIs or cover:

Paid an ex head of service on supply for 2 days a week to help support with caseload

However, some indicated that supply cover was not an option due to lack of budget or availability.

We do not have funding to facilitate supply cover.

Historically we have paid extortionate supply QTSI rates, this time however the said QTSI had retired and no other QTSI are registered with local supply agencies.

² This refers to the NatSIP eligibility framework which provides a framework to help services determine the level of support that different children with SI may need, taking an holistic view of their needs – it can be downloaded from www.natsip.org.uk/eligibility-framework/685-natsip-eligibility-framework-2015

We can't find qualified supply cover locally so that is not an option. We have to try and cover internally and reduce the service offer temporarily as necessary.

There are varied additional costs from not having properly qualified teachers in place and using supply cover. Agency teachers are too expensive to hire. Supply teachers do not offer the same level of involvement or planning or attendance and meetings. This all has to be covered internally, sometimes as staff taking on paid extras.

Others spoke of costs around training staff with key knowledge on SI to enable them to take on a caseload, in advance of them gaining the mandatory qualification.

Yes, additional bespoke training so that they can start working with low needs children and young people
Additional audiology costs for training

Q8: What impact did not being able to appoint a QTSI have on the have on the support you provide to children and young people with sensory impairment and their families?

Many respondents spoke about how not being able to appoint a QTSI with the mandatory qualification led to increased pressures on existing staff and/or reduced support for children.

Impact on support:

The children are not getting the quality they deserve from staff who are trained to meet their unique needs.

3 QTSI caseloads were 'absorbed' into the caseloads of other members of the team resulting in less support for all learners.

We had to contact families and settings with all caseload CYP and tell them there was only advice on request available.

We had to reduce visits to specials schools to once a term for 2 whole days and provide advice and training only.

Reduced support and longer waiting time for new referrals to be allocated.

We have to try and cover internally and reduce the service offer temporarily as necessary.

Unable to provide the provision for all children that is needed. Having to prioritise some pupils over others,

It means that the new appointee has to have a reduced caseload for the 2 years while they are training and can only support low needs children and young people.

Our aim is for the disruption to the children to be as minimal as possible by having other staff involved as required. However, when this is not possible, there is a noticeable slowdown of holistic and specific learning progress. Pupils are working through worksheets whether they are cognitively at that level or have gaps in their knowledge, or not. The mainstream teacher has a different approach and focus. Supporting staff often report concerns with activities used, expectations, retention of information.

Increased pressures on existing staff:

The impact includes a significant proportion of the team who do not have the qualifications and lack experience. This puts pressure on the service to find time to provide peer mentoring and internal training. It is not possible to allocate complex caseloads to staff in training. Staff capacity to deliver services is therefore reduced. This is further exacerbated because the students need study time and time for placements.

More pressure on QTVI caseloads already in the service until new member of staff qualified

Employing someone who is not qualified takes more time from the service to get them up to speed regarding the work we do, the parents, educational settings and most importantly the child or young person is being supported by someone who doesn't have the experience, knowledge base or skills set for the role initially. This then requires other team members and management to support taking away from the other work we do.

Qualified members of the team had to oversee the work of the trainees and sign off any statutory work. This impacted on the time they could allocate to their own caseload. Time has to be allocated for study and other tasks required for the mandatory qualification. Teaching placements take the trainees away from the 'day job' for several weeks at a time and this puts more pressure on the existing team.

As the appointed person did not have a qualification I was unable to give them as many children on their caseload as I would for a QTVI due to lack of experience and allowing time for studying. This impacts on the rest of the team as we try to continue with adhering to the NatSIP visiting levels.

Q9: How many unfilled QTSI posts does your service or school have right now?

13 respondents indicated they currently had an unfilled posts whilst 31 did not.

The sum of the unfilled posts was 21.1 which averaged at 0.5 of those who said they had an unfilled post.

5 respondents stated they had 2 or more unfilled QTSI posts.

Number of unfilled QTSI posts	Number of responses
None	31
Less than 1 fte	1
1	7
2	3
2.5	1
5	1

Q10: If you are a Head of Service, as far as you are aware, have there been any issues with schools (resource provisions, special schools) in your area and their recruitment of QTSIs?

The issues and concerns raised by heads of services were similar to the issues already raised in the survey. There were additional concerns around retention within specialist settings and specialist education services having to backfill for any gaps in QTSIs in specialist provisions (resulting in them being less able to provide the same level of peripatetic support). There was a suggestion that in some cases, classes of children with sensory impairment were not being taught by a QTSI (or someone in training for the role). On the face of it, this would be a breach of statutory regulations³.

As mentioned at the start of this document, we are particularly concerned about SI children in delegated resource provisions, which are independent of the local authority, and in which it is less likely that cover arrangements or effective oversight by the service can be put in place.

All of the devolved funded resource provisions for deaf children and young people in our area have struggled with recruitment of qualified staff. All have had to recruit staff without the mandatory qualifications and then start those staff on the training course.

Recruitment of qualified teachers (SI) has been an issue across the county. We are now offering joint roles where the trainee TOD or TVI works for our service and the RP. This has worked well so far as they have the support from a team of QTSIs. There are 2 other trainees in RPs for Hearing Loss and they are also supported by our service. There was only one applicant shortlisted for these schools as we insist that they have a strong SEN background.

We have sometimes had to appoint staff who do not hold the mandatory qualification. We have then supported them in gaining this while in post. This is not a huge problem in a large service like ours, but it could cause difficulties in a small service if they do not have qualified staff in post.

The difficulty locally in specialist provision is retention of QTSI. Often the fluctuating numbers of learners on role threatens the school's viability of holding on to the more experienced and expensive SI staff, who then seek alternative employment. Subsequently when the numbers of learners increase, there's a shortage of SI staff. Additionally, as the specialist provision is not run by the LA, SI staff openly discuss the problematic competing priorities of heads of school often results in other SEN (SEMH, Autism) taking priority and often finances to fund (from the SI funding).

³ As set out in the *Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003* – www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/1662/contents/made

We provide the TOD for our secondary resource base. This does though impact on team as when short staffed, they have to be covered which means that peri children may get less.

No schools or special schools have their own QTVI anymore (the special schools used to about 5 years ago but when the QTVI left funding was pulled). Now they have a TA who has done the RNIB Partners in Learning course.

Q11: Do you have any wider comments? Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the recruitment of specialist staff?

Final comments from respondents touched on wider funding pressures, marketing the QTSI role and workforce planning.

As a team we have shrunk in terms of numbers of ToDs over the years. We have put forward a case for more ToD but there is no money for this. We have a full time ToD about to go off on maternity leave and no cover for that.

Recruiting for QTODs has been particularly challenging and we had no applicants from fully qualified QTODs for the last three recruitment rounds. Our service lost their Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLR) allowances in a review so the salary may not be as competitive as our neighbouring authorities... Time from leadership and colleagues needs to be invested in coaching and mentoring to ensure that they are able to be successful.

I do really worry about the situation with the staffing in many resource provisions (and specialist schools for the deaf), not just in our area but more widely across London and beyond. These settings are there to educate some of the most vulnerable children and young people with SI, yet they are being taught by the least experienced teachers, many who do not yet hold the mandatory qualification. Even after obtaining the mandatory qualification, it can take years to build up the breadth of experience needed to meet all the diverse needs of children with SI. Newly qualified staff, and those in training, need to work alongside experienced staff before we all retire.

Lack of available funding means that we are reactive in recruitment rather than proactive. Ideally, we would be able to recruit in anticipation of an aging workforce so that we are better able to support new TSIs during their training.

We have just been informed that there is now a recruitment freeze across the council so this is concerning moving forward.

We have spent many years building up our capacity through secure training and mentoring in our service. We call this scheme 'Grow your Own' this came from many of our staff retiring in quick succession and knowing how hard it is to recruit qualified teachers of SI. We are now in the 8th year of this scheme. This however, could only have been done through our local authority supporting this process with the relevant funding.

It is very difficult to recruit qualified Teachers of the Deaf and Educational Audiologists⁴. Not many qualified teachers apply for the specialist posts as it is not marketed effectively enough both at a local and a national level. Need to highlight specialist roles to early career teachers to promote the role, in terms of future career opportunities.

⁴ Education Audiologists are Qualified Teachers of the Deaf who hold an additional qualification in audiology. More information on their role can be found at: www.educationalaudiologists.org.uk/index.php#:~:text=An%20Ed%20Aud%20understands%20the,per%20the%20Code%20of%20Practice