

BIAP Recommendation 15/5:

Education / Inclusivity: some thoughts on legislative changes for the deaf and hard of hearing

General foreword

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Introduction

Recommendation 15/4 highlighted the needs of pupils/students with a hearing deficit in mainstream education. These needs can be considered as “additional care”.

Meeting these needs falls within the scope of [...the will to include people with a disability in all areas of social life, without either denying differences or glossing over them, and rejecting all forms of exclusion and segregation ...]¹ Taking these needs into account also means giving them the chance to increase [...their autonomy,... including the freedom to make their own choices]²

Recommendation

Stemming from the European interpretation of the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, adopted in 1975, legislation and professional associations recently introduced in a number of countries (Belgium, France, Germany, ...) defines new procedures in the education of people with a hearing deficit:

- for France: law of 11 February 2005/2010-2012 programme intended for deaf or hearing-impaired people
- for Germany: Position Paper by German Professional Association of Teachers for the deaf on article 24 of the UN Convention
- For Belgium: draft decree on the inclusion of disabled people (September 2010), draft decree on provisions concerning specialist teaching and the acceptance of children and adolescents with special needs into compulsory education (Parliament of the French Community, Belgium, 3 February 2009). All schools are invited to include in their mission statement the educational choices and priority actions taken to facilitate the integration of pupils with special needs. [... every mainstream educational institution should set out in its mission statement its priorities with regard to integration...]³

In the light of these above mentioned papers, BIAP recommends taking into consideration the following points:

- **the specific and global nature** of deaf children's needs must remain a key element in the structural planning of supervisory bodies. This global* strategy is necessary in order to trigger general points for discussion and to ensure that financial resources are distributed consistently among the accepting institutions.
- **specialist support** is essential. This support must be **quantitatively and qualitatively** sufficient and beneficial:
 - **Quantitatively** sufficient means that it must meet specific needs in terms of the hours allocated within the framework of a personalised project. To do this, the budget allocated must, in order to ensure the proper implementation of projects, take into account time spent in consultation and in developing projects, and travel time for specialist staff, as well as the issue of a having sufficient number of specific supervisory/support posts (interpreters, educational and therapeutic assistants, ...).
 In fact, if the child is educated in a mainstream school, he/she should have the maximum hours of support and care as dictated by his/her needs.
 - **Qualitatively sufficient and beneficial** should be linked to the degree of training of the supervisory staff. To allow the support staff member to "manage the difference" rather than "gloss over the difference", he or she needs to have substantial and continuing awareness of and training in the field of hearing deficit. This will enable him or her to assess both educational and therapeutic needs and to be well prepared to meet these needs with practical solutions, while also implementing the necessary adjustment strategies.
 This training concerns the specialist team as much as school and extra-school staff. More specifically, it is essential that the training of professionals at third level (university and non-university) includes a module on deficit.
- **A personalised project** for each hearing-impaired pupil should be put in place by the various partners in order to determine specific needs and the necessary assistance and adaptation. A mainstream school's decision to take a pupil with special needs involves input by the medical-social team as much as by the teaching staff. Within the framework of current European decrees, this is imposed; we feel, however that it would be wiser and more realistic to achieve this educational inclusion by a process of negotiation involving the schools, the teams of experts supporting the family, and the parents and/or the deaf person. The exchange of ideas inherent in this process will promote the best interests of the pupil and his/her family, as enshrined in the following law [in all decisions affecting disabled children, the paramount consideration must be the best interests of the child]⁴

This also means that every parent must be properly informed about the possible options, in order to make an informed choice – a choice that will bring both opportunities and restrictions for each party and for the inclusivity project itself.

It is essential that teachers have a forum to express their support and training needs. This is where co-operation and partnership with the teams of experts will be crucially important.

Under current legislation, education in mainstream schools will inevitably bring about the transfer of numerous responsibilities from the medical-social sphere to the educational sphere. We must not forget the diverse nature of a deaf person's needs: these needs remain medical-social as much as educational.

In developing the project, it is important to respect the method of communication chosen by the pupil and his/her family, which will be facilitated by the appropriate support.⁵

- **The overall assessment** of the operation and/or project should be conducted on a multidisciplinary basis, with the assessment team including the deaf child and its parents, the mainstream school, specialist services/school, support teams, psychological-medical-social centres, This involvement of multiples parties will ensure an open debate that takes into account the needs, abilities and limitations of each person.

References

¹Office of Minister Evelyne Huytebroek, "Inclusivity" Decree – Statement of intent, 8 September 2010. Brussels

²European Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons

³Decree of 3 February 2009. Federation of Basic Catholic Education. Belgium

⁴Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons – disabled children-

⁵Law of 5 February 2005 on the Equality of Rights and Chances – heading IV, chapter I, article 19 – France-

This recommendation was created and approved in a multidisciplinary cooperation between professionals of all audiophonologic disciplines, which are medicine, pedagogy, speech therapy, psychology and hearing instrument audiology.

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