



EUROPEAN UNION OF THE DEAF

A European Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with
European Parliament, European Commission and the Council of Europe

EUD Position Paper Inclusive Education for Deaf Children

Education for deaf children has always been a matter of debate. Discussions revolve around the type of school, the language of communication, and the support systems utilised. Not only with the advent of cochlear implantation the aim has often shifted towards providing access to spoken language rather than assessing the children's educational outcomes and an accessible curriculum suited to the individual needs of the child.

EUD advocates a human rights approach to equal access to education. For children who are deaf this must include access in a national sign language, including - where appropriate - access to the written and spoken national language(s). Fluency in a language (namely sign language) is key to accessing any form of information, including the national curriculum. Early intervention programmes must facilitate the learning of sign language, even for children with hearing aids or cochlear implants. Studies have proven that - even if children do choose to use spoken language as a means of communication later sign language is in no way harmful for the child's development; on the contrary: bilingualism is usually seen as an asset in today's competitive world.

Inclusive education that fosters the needs of every deaf child should be the standard and must be the primary aim of all educational settings. It has to be noted that a large number of deaf children (even with cochlear implants) still experience difficulties in noisy environments, such as a busy mainstream classroom, missing out on group discussions if not facilitated by additional support, such as sign language interpreters. If deaf children are educated in a mainstream setting, all measures should gear towards the education of several children in one class, using sign language interpreters, and/or a Deaf role model to foster the natural acquisition of sign language. Parents must be supported throughout the whole educational process, giving them access to sign language classes and unbiased information regarding educational outcomes of deaf children.

Education as a fundamental right is mentioned not only in Preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) that was ratified by the EU as a whole in January 2011 but also in a dedicated article on education (article 24). This article wants to ensure that education is 'delivered in the most appropriate language' and also mentions the employment of disabled teachers (e.g. Deaf teachers) and those who are qualified in sign language.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education ('Salamanca Declaration') that was drawn up already in 1994 by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality) specifically stresses the importance of sign language as a medium of communication in its article 21. The article further asks to take into account the

individual differences and situations of children, including stipulating the possible more suitable education of Deaf and (Deaf)blind in special classes and units in mainstream schools.

Access to education is crucial for all deaf children, especially in view of the current ageing population. Children need to be able to become fully-fledged citizens who are employed and contribute to society by becoming taxpayers rather than beneficiaries. The shrinking workforce is a phenomenon that can only be tackled by countermeasures such as the education and training of all members of society, including those who are deaf. Well-educated deaf children and young adults are the key to a smooth transition into working life and are needed to fulfil the EU2020 Strategy under the flagship initiatives of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth.

EUD wants education for deaf children that is accessible, targeted at the individual child, and at the same level as that of their hearing peers. This can be provided in a separate residential Deaf school, a unit within a mainstream school or with appropriate support in a mainstream classroom. Investment in children now is a key contributor to a healthy and prosperous society then.

Further Links:

Full text UNCPRD: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>
Salamanca Declaration

(1994): http://www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/Bildung/Salamanca_Declaration.pdf

EU2020 Strategy: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

References and Further Reading:

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UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2003). Education in a multilingual world: UNESCO Education Position Paper. Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf> (Accessed on 30 March 2012).

World Health Organization WHO (2011). World Report on Disability. WHO: Geneva. Available at: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf (Accessed on 30 March 2012).