

**FEAPDA statement on the need for
qualified specialist Teachers of the Deaf across Europe**

The early identification of deaf children has had a huge impact in recent years on the education of deaf children and young people. Across Europe babies are being fitted with high powered digital hearing aids and cochlear implants within a few days or weeks of birth. Specialist support for language and other development can begin immediately and a realistic aim is for deaf children to start school at a similar level to their normally hearing peers. However this can only happen with the appropriate support – cochlear implants, efficient hearing aids and sign language interpretation do not cure deafness. Remove them and the child is as deaf as before. Place the children in a noisy environment and they need significant support. Specialist support from Teachers of the Deaf is essential to ensure access to the curriculum and linguistic and educational development. Modern technology and changing educational philosophy has led in recent years to a marked move from educating deaf children in special schools to educating them in mainstream schools. Educating deaf children in mainstream schools will only be successful if specialist support is available. New challenges come with inclusive education – class teachers and classmates need to understand the needs of the deaf child. The curriculum will need differentiation – the conditions in the classroom need to be optimal. The complexity of the needs of deaf children, whether or not they have high powered hearing aids or cochlear implants, demands support from a Teacher of the Deaf, trained and qualified at post-graduate level to understand the social, emotional, educational, audiological and linguistic implications of deafness.

Deaf children and their families have a right to highly qualified specialist Teachers of the Deaf whether they are educated in special schools or mainstream schools. The fact that they are provided with hearing aids or cochlear implants and/or taught bilingually in a spoken and a sign language does not diminish that in any way. Failure to provide the specialist support they need will discriminate against those children and will preclude them from reaching their potential. High quality specialist training is essential to ensure that Teachers of the Deaf are qualified for this role. FEAPDA strongly supports the role of the qualified specialist Teacher of the Deaf and to this end is working across Europe to develop a set of minimum competencies for all Teachers of the Deaf.

Failure to ensure that deaf children are supported by highly qualified specialist Teachers of the Deaf will increase their isolation from society which many deaf children and their families experience when left without support.