



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Careers Education, Information,
Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland:
Action on Hearing Loss Briefing

13 March 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Employment and Learning

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Ms Coleen Agnew	Action on Hearing Loss
Ms Claire Lavery	Action on Hearing Loss
Mr Alan McClure	Action on Hearing Loss
Ms Roisin McGonagle	Action on Hearing Loss
Mrs Jackie Orr	Action on Hearing Loss

The Chairperson: I welcome you to this evidence session for the Committee for Employment and Learning's inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome from Action on Hearing Loss Mr Alan McClure, Ms Roisin McGonagle, Ms Claire Lavery, Ms Coleen Agnew and Mrs Jackie Orr. You are very welcome to the meeting. I think that staff briefed you. Our usual time frame for questions is around 20 minutes. We have received your submission, which I hope and assume that all members have read. Who is taking the lead? Alan, are you?

Mr Alan McClure (Action on Hearing Loss): Claire will take the lead.

The Chairperson: Claire, do you want to make a few opening comments, after which we will move to questions?

Ms Claire Lavery (Action on Hearing Loss): OK. I just want to set the scene, really. We are from Action on Hearing Loss. Our vision is of a world where deafness and hearing loss do not limit or determine opportunity. That is really the gist of what you are asking us to present on today.

We have a number of services and activities, as well as three main aims. The first aim is to ensure that deaf and hard-of-hearing people lead a full and enriched life. The second is to raise awareness of and to campaign on and create change in issues that affect deaf people. The third aim is to, ultimately, find treatments and a cure for deafness.

One of the services that we provide here in Belfast and across Northern Ireland is a specialist careers advice and guidance service for deaf and hard-of-hearing people, and Roísín staffs that service. She will tell you a bit about the work that she does. Coleen has benefited from the service and is also a volunteer with us. She can explain to you how we have benefited her, the problems that she had when she was leaving school and how they affected the rest of her life.

That just sets the scene for you. I will pass to Roísín.

Ms Roísín McGonagle (Action on Hearing Loss): Thank you. I am a guidance adviser for a Big Lottery Fund healthier lives project. Basically, I give careers and educational guidance to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

One of the key issues for our clients, which I want to explain to you today, is a lack of accessible careers information and guidance. Deaf people generally do not access the Careers Service, and there could be a number of reasons for that. They may be unsure about how to access it and do not know about the support that is available for them. There is no information on what happens after people leave school. Quite recently, we met with teachers of the deaf across Northern Ireland and with parents of deaf children. People are really concerned about what happens after the children leave school. They are worried that they will fall through the net and that no support will be available. There is also a lowering of expectations, which is, sadly, a common feature of careers guidance that is provided to deaf people. Expectations should be more realistic. We try to work with our clients through our specialist careers guidance to show them that, really, the only thing that they cannot do is hear.

The negative attitude about deaf people's ability to succeed in employment can carry on throughout a deaf person's life. That is why early intervention is essential. It is essential that we target young people. I will quote one of our young clients, who accessed the Careers Service in school. She was not happy with the service that it provided, and she went on to engage with us afterwards. She said that the careers adviser told her that she had to do hairdressing but that she did not want that. She thought that she was not clever enough to do anything and was going to fail at all things. She felt lost and did not know about help. That shows how she was not satisfied with the service that she received from the Careers Service, and it gives you an example of how there is a lowering of expectations. The service felt the need to box her into a specific category. However, we try to work with clients to raise their expectations to show them that they can achieve what they want to.

We also set up a book club for students who attend essential skills literacy classes. When I say "book club", I meant that it is really a literacy support class for adults who do not have a basic grasp of the English language. Many of the people who attend the book club are over 40 and are learning basic literacy skills. We are working with adults who have fallen through the net. So, we really need to get to young people now so that the same does not happen to them. Twenty years down the line, we do not want to have a book club for the young people now who cannot read or write. We need to make changes now.

Advocacy is also an important part of the work that I do. I work a lot with further education (FE) colleges to try to improve their access arrangements, increase their deaf awareness and help them to prepare for new students. Through my work with FE colleges, I was asked to organise awareness training across Northern Ireland for teachers, academic staff and people who work in colleges. I asked two of my young clients, one who is deaf and one who is hard of hearing, to deliver that awareness training. It means that FE colleges feel better equipped to engage with young deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Since I started my role, 82% of the people I have worked with have attended an education course. I believe confidently that they would not have taken up those courses had it not been for the support of our service. I spend a lot of time working with clients to try to improve their confidence and raise their aspirations, because they may have had negative experiences in the past, which is often the case. It is also really important that I engage in that advocacy work, because I do not want to raise my clients' expectations only for them to start a course in September and for there to be no interpreter or note taker and for it to be another negative experience for them. So, it is really important to have a bit of both.

We also provide interpreters and note takers at our client meetings. I have level 2 sign language, which is important, because it helps my clients to feel at ease and to build a rapport with me. We also provide short training courses to help them to build their confidence and prepare for their next step.

So, I really believe that the service that we provide is unique and extremely successful. We would like to continue to provide our service in partnership with the Careers Service. Thank you for listening to me. I will now pass you to Coleen, one of our service users, who will talk a bit more about her experience and the issues that face deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Ms Coleen Agnew (Action on Hearing Loss): After I left school 26 years ago, services for me were very poor. There was not enough education, and I did not have sufficient qualifications to get into a professional job. I was just a student at that time. I had no aspirations about what would happen after school. What plans could I have for a career? I did not have any, and I was not given anything. I did not have any qualifications. In those days, there were no note takers or interpreters. You were basically just pushed out to find any sort of job. I had no dreams, and I took on jobs that I did not want. Basically, I just went out to get a job to bring in some money. I then became a full-time mother. I had been to the jobcentre and looked for some careers guidance, but there was no service to help deaf people. There was no communication access, and, basically, there was nothing available. I had to resort to writing down the information that I needed, because no interpreters were brought in for me. They wrote back to me in English, which is a second language to me, and I did not understand what they were writing. That really affected my confidence.

So, I was at home as a full-time mother for 14 years until I heard about Action on Hearing Loss and its services. I thought that that was just the right place for me. The people there helped me, gave me advice and guidance and got me into educational courses. I applied for and was successfully accepted on to a counselling course. I am also a teacher of sign language, and I can deliver deaf awareness training. So, Action on Hearing Loss has really helped me to build up my qualifications and confidence.

A lot of deaf people are very vulnerable due to the lack of access to services. When I look at my life in the past, I see that I was lost and extremely vulnerable. I did not know where my path to success was, but Action on Hearing Loss has really changed my life. It has pointed me in the right direction. I suffered a lot of emotional problems, although not necessarily abuse, when I was younger. There was no direction for me, and I was at home for such a long time with no dreams or aspirations, because of the lack of access. I also had no qualifications. If it were not for Roísín and the service that Action on Hearing Loss provided, I would not be where I am today.

Now is the right time for reasonable adjustments to be made so that deaf people have access that is on a par with that of their hearing peers. There have been so many barriers in the past. Now is also the time for attitudes to change. I am a deaf person, but attitudes need to change so that I am seen not just as a deaf person. I am human being; I am the same as everybody else, and the only difference is that I cannot hear. I can do everything that a hearing person can, apart from hear. So, I really think that it is now time for attitudes to change towards hard-of-hearing and deaf people. Thank you.

The Chairperson: OK, folks. Thank you very much.

Mr McClure: Just to add to that, it has been demonstrated that three out of every four people who are deaf or hard of hearing are out of work. If you look at the continuum of how that process runs through people's lives, you will see that it starts with education in the statutory sector and becomes a career aspiration when they are given careers advice. So, if those two things are not accessible or effective, those people will remain unemployed a few years down the line. If the intervention is made in the initial stages after a person's school life and is effective and appropriately delivered in partnership with other statutory organisations, we believe that those people will have equality of opportunity as they go forward with their lives.

The Chairperson: OK, folks. Thank you very much.

Roísín, you said that your post is lottery funded. What sort of term is that for? How long have you got to go?

Ms McGonagle: Until August 2014.

The Chairperson: Will there be any extension after that?

Mr McClure: I am looking at our options. The project is about to be evaluated, and there will also be an end-of-project evaluation. I hope that both evaluations will demonstrate other options. They will also give us very tangible information on the outputs of the five-year project. For example, our target was to engage with 750 people and to help some of them educationally. In reality, we have engaged with almost 2,000 people, and, as Roísín said, 82% of her clients have engaged in education. Some, such as Coleen, have gone on into employment or volunteering opportunities.

The Chairperson: Coleen, you mentioned that you are a sign language teacher. From my constituency work, which I am not meant to raise here, I know that there is trouble accessing level 2 and 3 training courses in our FE sector.

Ms C Agnew: That is right.

The Chairperson: How do you see more courses and more access having benefit?

Ms C Agnew: It would help. It would mean that more hearing people could communicate with deaf people, and, if that generated through the whole of Northern Ireland, it would reduce the frustrations for deaf people when they meet hearing people who cannot communicate with them. It would mean that there would be more of a rapport with work colleagues, in shops and with businesses. It would just make life experiences that bit more comfortable. If I go into the shop, the attitude of the people there can sometimes be quite bad, because they are not deaf aware and do not understand the issues that I have. That might sometimes be just because of a lack of knowledge or ignorance, and they do not understand what it is like to be deaf. If more people got involved in level 2 and level 3 sign language classes, that would definitely help relations between deaf and hearing people and would make them realise that we are just the same. They do not know the background, what I have had to deal with and what deaf people have to deal with on a daily basis. If more hearing people got access to level 2 and level 3 sign language classes, I think that it would make the relationship between the two communities better.

Mr McClure: With more opportunities for classes, there are more opportunities to employ deaf people who use sign language and who are very supportive of the train the trainers model. That is an example of opportunity. Roísín has been involved in money management with some deaf clients in train the trainers.

Ms McGonagle: We had clients trained, because deaf people miss so much information, given that sign language is their first language and they struggle with literacy. They miss out on information that we take for granted. It is particularly important at this time that they get correct financial information. We had three deaf people, including Coleen, who trained at a level 3 course so that they could teach financial capability to other deaf people. They did a course to learn all the information first so that they could pass it on, and they did a facilitation course afterwards.

I mentioned awareness training in FE colleges, and we had two clients whom we worked with and developed so that they could deliver awareness training themselves. So, it is all about empowering people and training our clients so that there is a legacy after the project.

Mr Buchanan: Throughout the Committee's inquiry, we have heard from a number of agencies and organisations. At the end of this process, we want careers guidance that will be inclusive, meet the needs and bridge the gaps, and so forth. Can you advise the Committee of what you would like to see in the new careers strategy and what changes you want it to make to benefit those who have either partial or complete hearing loss? It is important to the Committee that the inquiry be focused in a way that will benefit all sections of the community, irrespective of what disabilities they have.

Ms C Agnew: I can answer that. We appreciate that, as a deaf organisation, we have built up a level of expertise and knowledge and can provide a specialist service. However, we believe that the generic Careers Service can also improve what it is offering to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. We suggest that careers advisers all be trained in deaf awareness as a basic requirement and that perhaps someone could specialise in sign language to at least level 1 so that deaf people can feel comfortable in that initial approach. If you were to get into an in-depth interview with a careers adviser, you would need to have a qualified interpreter with you. That means that a protocol should be established to book interpreters and to make sure that they are all registered and qualified.

In a more generic sense, we believe that careers advisers and the Careers Service generally should operate within a social model of disability, not a medical model. So, there should be a "can do" approach as opposed to a "can't do" one. It is not that the deafness is a barrier; it is that the world has created barriers for deaf people. It is about looking at it in a completely different way, and that needs to happen throughout the service. We need to look at people's rights and have a rights-based approach to guidance and support.

We feel that the careers advice service should work in partnership with other specialists such as us and establish some kind of formal referral procedure so that, if it comes across a client who requires that specialist support, they know that we are there and where they can turn to. We also feel that it should ring-fence a budget for the provision of registered communication support so that interpreters are available. It is also about ensuring that its service is accessible and that people can feel that they can contact it, perhaps by SMS, which is a very common way for deaf people to contact organisations. All those accessibility arrangements should also be publicised so that people know that they will be able to get an answer if they approach the Careers Service. So, we have a number of recommendations. We would be happy to submit something a bit more concrete to you if that would be helpful.

Mr Buchanan: You said that all careers advisers should have level 1 training in sign language. Are there any courses for that? Are courses available if teachers want to do that type of work?

Ms Lavery: FE colleges across the country provide courses, but we can also work with discrete groups like that and run one-off courses for them. We provide a number of training courses in deaf awareness and basic communication tips, and we can help to arrange sign language courses. So, it is all there for the having, and we can help with that.

Mr McClure: Tom, if I could add to that. Doubtless, Minister Farry has invested financial backing to access for all in the FE sector, the careers sector, and so on. That is not to be argued with; it is a fact. However, I would contest the quality of those services for everyone.

Having worked with Roísín and moulded the hybrid model, I suggest that nothing can be done in isolation these days. Indeed, working in partnership is the way forward in every walk of life. Through Roísín's role, we have found that that works very well for deaf and hard-of-hearing people who are in transition. I think that, if there were opportunities to have some form of mainstreaming, whereby the post that Roísín operates could be partnered with the statutory Careers Service, that would be a win for everyone.

Mr Allister: I have a few questions to ask that will allow me to get a better overview. In your paper, you told us that there are 483 people with hearing loss in post-primary and post-secondary education. How many of those people have made it to university?

Ms Lavery: We have a bit of a gap in our knowledge, so we intend to do some more in-depth research to find out all those facts and figures. I was going to ask the Committee to ask the Minister whether the Department keeps those kind of records and tracks whether those people succeed once they leave education. That is an unknown quantity at the moment. We have a lot of anecdotal evidence; people come to us to tell us their experiences.

Mr Allister: Even in anecdotal terms, do the universities make any provision?

Ms Lavery: They all have budgets and support staff who try to make arrangements for disabled students. However, the reality of that is that it is not always effective, which we find with the people who come back to us.

Mr McClure: Roísín and I meet annually with the learning support teams in the University of Ulster (UU). We met with them last year, and, with a view to looking ahead to this academic year, we found that there was one profoundly deaf student at UU. My understanding is that there is none at Queen's.

Historically, there was a model called the Joint Universities Deaf Education Centre, which was a partnership between Queen's and UU. That ran during the 1990s up to 2000, and it was funded for years. At that stage, Queen's had 19 profoundly deaf students. I will leave it to you to make a summary from those figures. There were 19, and now there is none, I think.

Mr Allister: Do we know the total number of deaf people in the wider community?

Mr McClure: Our figures suggest that there are —

Ms Lavery: If you take it in the round, there are 300,000. So, statistically, one in six of the population has a hearing loss of some degree.

Mr Allister: There are degrees, but how many are profoundly deaf?

Ms Lavery: There are no hard facts on that, but we estimate that around 5,000 people use sign language as their first language.

Mr Allister: Obviously, that is a fair indication.

Ms Lavery: Yes, that is an educated estimate.

Mr Allister: I do not want this to come across as unduly harsh or harsh at all, but is it, inevitably, a more expensive exercise for an employer to employ a profoundly deaf person?

Ms Lavery: The employer can access a system called Access to Work, and that helps them to make arrangements and to make their employment environment much more accessible. It belongs to the deaf person. They own the Access to Work, so they can use it as they wish to assist them in their employment. We employ a number of deaf staff, and we use the Access to Work budget to buy in interpreters and note takers.

Mr Allister: Does that mean that it is a form of subsidy?

Ms Lavery: Yes, there is assistance.

Mr McClure: Although you could determine it as a subsidy, it is a recognised government scheme through the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Mr Allister: So, Access to Work assists the employer to take on the extra expense of someone who is deaf. Does that equate to the actual extra cost?

Ms Lavery: The issue is more that employers do not know about Access to Work. It is a well-kept secret, unfortunately. Quite often, deaf people do not know about Access to Work, so there is a need for the Department to start to promote that this is available and, alongside that, that deaf people can do an awful lot of things. It is not about what they cannot do but about what they can do. If they are given the right support and assistance and the employer has the right attitude on training and support, there is no reason why they cannot.

Mr Allister: Yes, but my question was: is it enough? Are there employers saying that that is very good but that there is still a shortfall?

Ms Lavery: Every deaf person has an assessment to determine the level of support that they need to do their job effectively. Our experience of the people who we employ is that there is no issue there.

Mr Allister: In what form does that support manifest itself?

Ms Lavery: One member of staff has an assistant who helps him with e-mails and phone calls and does some basic interpreting and provides communication support. We have others who use interpreters for meetings and help the staff to make phone calls in their day-to-day work. They sit with the staff at the desk at work with them daily. They can use it in whatever form they feel is most appropriate.

Mr McClure: If there is an interpreter, that is covered 100% by the Access to Work scheme.

Mr Allister: Is there a cash payment to the employer?

Mr McClure: The payment process happens through invoices. For example, someone such as Jackie invoices the employer, and that is then paid. It goes through to Access to Work, which then reimburses.

Mr Allister: Is that a finite budget?

Mr McClure: It is very much determined on an initial assessment. Each assessment is unique, because each deaf person is unique.

Mr Allister: Do you have any idea how many people are taking advantage of that?

Mr McClure: I know for a fact that, in Northern Ireland, 97 deaf people are using Access to Work.

Mr Allister: Only 97?

Mr McClure: Only 97.

Mr Allister: Out of 5,000?

Mr McClure: That is correct.

Ms McGonagle: Employers' attitudes are also a big barrier. Even though there is Access to Work, as Claire said, employers do not know about it and have their preconceived ideas about what deaf people can or cannot do.

The Chairperson: Alan, you mentioned an assessment. Who does that assessment?

Mr McClure: The assessment goes to the disability employment service (DES) in DEL. It is then referred to the people who won the tender, and you may or may not be surprised to hear that Action on Hearing Loss has that tender. We have specialist staff with sign language skills but who, equally, are trained in assessing it. That report is then composed and submitted to DES, which takes its observations from that report. That is followed by its decision of offer of support, which is then signed off by the grade 7 in that Department.

Mr Allister: How many jobs have been generated in the profoundly deaf section of the community for interpreters, such as this lady? How many people are employed in that capacity?

Mr McClure: Historically, until recently, there were 11 fully qualified interpreters such as Jackie. Now, because there has been an investment in some training, we have, I think, 17 interpreters. I can assure you that the majority of the 17 have weekly diaries that are full of repetitive week-on-week appointments that occur at the same time and in the same place. They also have people to support them in the workplace.

Mr Allister: Is 17 interpreters enough? Are they coping? Is it demand-led?

Mr McClure: It follows a course to be fully qualified, which takes about seven years, although, for some people, it will take longer. I would suggest that there is a requirement for interpreters in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister: Is there any disparity between the way in which profoundly deaf people and visually impaired people are treated and provided for?

Ms Lavery: I would not like to draw direct comparisons. We work very closely with our colleagues in the blind sector, for want of a better expression. We have a joint sensory approach and we work in partnership with the RNIB. It has experience of similar issues, but as far as we are aware, it is better provided for because it is registered. As a blind person, you go on a register and you can access a range of services and equipment, finance, benefits, etc. There is no similar register for deaf people, and unless —

Mr Allister: Should there be?

Ms Lavery: Ideally, yes; we need some kind of record, but it is a very individual thing. Some people may not wish to register themselves and become labelled as deaf. Some people are hard of hearing and manage reasonably well in life. There are many varying degrees; there is no cut-off point at which you become registered as deaf unless you seek help and approach social services and you go on its register.

It is all a bit of a grey area. We cannot make direct comparisons, but we are aware that, probably, visually impaired people and blind people get slightly better provision. They are much smaller in number as well, but I do not know whether that has any impact.

Mr F McCann: Thank you for your presentation. When we started this inquiry, we were probably as guilty as anybody else, because when you start to look into the careers thing, you find that organisations for deaf people such as that which you represent, and others, have been completely overlooked.

Some of the questions that I was going to ask have been asked and answered. We have been trying to get to the bottom of the difficulties that people have faced in trying to move forward in a career. Obviously, with yourselves, it is much more difficult. How do you find it when you approach primary and post-primary schools, colleges and universities to tell them that there is a problem here for which they are not providing?

Ms McGonagle: Do you mean how they respond?

Mr F McCann: Yes; how do they respond to it?

Ms McGonagle: It depends very much on who you are approaching and which college it is. We have had issues with clients, and, as I said, I have to get involved in a lot of advocacy work. The need for awareness training has been highlighted.

Deaf people are limited in their opportunities because of the way in which private organisations regard the notion of a reasonable adjustment. A lot of the time, private organisations refuse to pay for interpreters or note-takers. A private training course, for example, is not an option for them. For a lot of my clients, it is just the FE sector and, hopefully, if they go on to university, it is available for them. It is crucial that the FE sector is more open to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. At the moment, a lot of challenges remain in making colleges aware that students need qualified interpreters and that there is a certain level of support that they require to do their course successfully. We have definitely had issues with that.

Mr McClure: At times, Roísín's role has become one in which she is brought in almost as someone to resolve a dispute and to negotiate as a broker. The reality is that the provision for and the attitude towards our client group, particularly in the FE sector, varies from regional college to regional college. We have had some success in those partnerships, but there are others that would, I suggest, leave an awful lot to be desired; so much so that it resulted in one 10-week course having, I think, three different tutors, because the tutors refused to teach them.

Ms McGonagle: There is a big drop-out rate of people leaving courses. So, there is a real need for people to be aware that students need qualified interpreters and teachers need deaf-awareness training. That is what we work to support, as much as we can. We really try our best to support the colleges and work with them, rather than against them.

Mr F McCann: That is important. It is especially important that all those points and difficulties come through in the report at the end of this inquiry.

The other aspect of careers is people being trained up. There are quite a number of schemes out there. Has any of that been tailored to try to meet the needs of a deaf person or somebody who has suffered hearing loss?

Mr McClure: We are involved in some of those, but not all. Occasionally, we will get calls from the ones that we are not formally involved in to provide, as an agency, guidance. As far as I am aware, the ones that we are involved in will directly refer to us, because they realise that the support we give is specialist.

Mr F McCann: I have one more question. Again, it is on the level of training. You have Steps 2 Success and all that has gone before that. Along with that, quite a number of people, on maybe different degrees of benefits, will, under the Welfare Reform Bill, be directly impacted. A lot of people who may be in receipt of certain benefits will be migrated across to different elements and work-related schemes. Is there anything in DEL that would allow people to plead their case?

Mr McClure: Currently, we have another project within the team that Roísín was part of. We foresaw that need. We have partnered with Advice NI to deliver direct, face-to-face, accessible, key points of information; for example, on the personal independence payment and the welfare reform changes. We have held four workshops already. One, for example, was on a Friday night in the centre of Belfast. We had over 40 deaf people at it. It is, as you are suggesting, a very sensitive time. For those people, it may well threaten their livelihood, as in, their everyday existence and where they are going to get a pound from.

Mr Douglas: Thank you for the presentation. Jim mentioned the number of young people at post-primary school and the small numbers going on to university. I want to ask you about what I would call mature adults; people who embark on lifelong learning. Certainly, in my constituency, I know a number of people who worked in, say, the Harland and Wolff shipyard and have major hearing loss. I know members of the security forces who have, because of their training — or lack of training — ended up with very severe hearing loss. They would maybe want to go on to further education. Can you tell us whether that is a major problem for that section of society? Can they get help and support?

Mr McClure: Historically and currently, yes, it is a problem. It is aligned with the fact that some people view our services as purely for people who are deaf and use their hands to talk. So, part of it is that we need to do promotional activity to raise the profile of what we are here to deliver. The reality is that those people who have come forward have resounding case studies to feed back to us. A few years ago, for example, and to touch on one of the categories of people you mentioned, I worked with a man who was in the police. As happens, he was attacked, kicked, and so on, whilst on duty. The result of that is that he is profoundly deaf in one ear and has lost his hearing in another. He was alone at home and totally unmotivated and depressed. Through our work with him, his life changed, and he was a much different person at the end. That is still there.

Roísín deals with many people who have put rivets in bolts or lost their hearing in some other working environment. In recent years, we have been brought in to offer a level of service to people who are being made redundant. Roísín has picked up that role.

Ms Lavery: I will add to that. We are hoping to build on a relationship that we have begun with the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust — the PRRT. Many of its members have hearing loss. It has undertaken significant work to make its services accessible, and it has received our charter mark. That is the beginning of a relationship with that trust. We hope to develop more partnership working, because we recognise that there are huge numbers of people out there who have lost their hearing through their working life.

Mr Douglas: Thanks very much.

The Chairperson: There are no more questions. Thank you very much for coming to the Committee meeting and presenting your evidence today. You have offered to give us more concrete recommendations.

Ms Lavery: I will. I will send you through more concrete things. The last thing I want to say is that you are very welcome if you want to come along to view any of our services. We do a number of interesting things with deaf people, and you would be very welcome to come along and view those at any time.

The Chairperson: Thank you.