



deafscotland
equality & integration through communication for all

5th November 2020

FAO Peter Wishart MP
Chair of Scottish Affairs Committee
UK Parliament

Dear Peter,

I am writing firstly to thank you and the committee for selecting our topic to present at the meeting yesterday and the interest shown for Inclusive Communication. It is a short time to try and do justice to a complex topic and I hope we succeeded to some degree. I noted the questions and interest from a range of members.

Secondly, I attach my notes for the presentation which may be helpful for record purposes.

The deafscotland membership and I would be very willing to follow up any relevant items and we will certainly take your advice and contribute to the Social Security Review. Inclusive Communication is enshrined in the Scottish Social Security legislation and we have been working across the teams to inform and improve a number of areas around the themes of access, process and participation.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank all the support staff involved to provide and pre-test my communication inclusion for the meeting.

Finally, these are the most difficult times experienced for generations and we wish you and the Committee well in your activities. We do hope our topic can assist a "better recovery".

Yours Sincerely,

Janis McDonald
Chief Officer



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Inclusive Communication –

turning the exceptional into ordinary to address communication poverty.

There are 1 million deaf people in Scotland so loss of hearing is common not just here but across the UK too.

My focus today is to propose the solution of mainstreaming inclusive communication and to urge the Committee to hold an inquiry with the purpose of drilling down where to act and to recommend workable solutions to support and protect individuals and families in Scotland.

I believe we share the same ambition which is to enable everyone of the 1 million to achieve their social and economic potential and to do that we must acknowledge the extent of communication poverty and the reason it exists.

Currently people are overlooked, they cannot hear or communicate well, they cannot engage with each other and with the State or with employers, education and training or community activities. Communication includes but is not restricted to either spoken or visual language.

Some examples of daily experiences include: functionality of white goods and domestic activities, door entry systems and telephone access. A constant low level stress and anxiety underpinned daily life before COVID-19 and is worsened now due to mitigating actions.

We need to change society, culture and practice to make the solutions routine and commonplace.



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We have lots of evidence to prove the problem and in an aging population the scale will increase, but what I want to focus on today is what you can do given the range of Westminster's reserved powers.

1. Work

Activate access to work benefits (reserved) with the consequent 'whole organisation' benefit. The benefit exists to address unmet need but we seek that you examine why take up is so poor and why it won't cover access to volunteering especially during COVID response. Boost take up and identify how that should happen.

2. Business

Companies large and small can explain how they have used technology inclusively during COVID-19 and that opens up the jobs market for those with hearing loss. Their learning, building on digital literacy as well as connectivity can offer a roadmap on including those with hearing loss in building a vibrant economy.

3. Investment Projects

Enterprise can flourish around the infrastructure and tools we need for rooms, buildings and public spaces to reduce noise and amplify sound. It is an industry, like green energy, that makes sense, innovates, deals with real need and can employ people, make money and make us an Inclusive Communication Nation. It will create the equipment, which can be exported.

4. Scotland in the UK:



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Use the model of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act to provide a framework which promotes inclusive communication as well as addresses confusion with accessible information: establish a Board on Inclusive Communication, require the adopting and roll out of language and communication plans across the public, private and Third sectors and increase education at all levels from HE to play group and across the UK so there is no postcode lottery on accessible information or inclusive communication learning.

5. Future Proof

Finally, whilst deafness can be from birth or acquired I want to highlight a growing source of hearing loss in younger people which is due to the use of modern technology and how they listen to music and engage in leisure activities. It may be something you want to take up with tech companies on how we can stop the problem exploding with consequent impacts across the UK.

Deafness needs to be mainstreamed if we are to achieve an inclusive communication society. Please give inclusive communication wings.

ENDs