

*This short article appeared in the BATOD Magazine in November 2018. It provides a brief introductory description of the READY study, its aims and approach.*

## Deaf young people's futures: a longitudinal research study

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A great deal of research effort has focused on the early development of deaf children and their school years, whether in terms of language acquisition, pedagogical practices, family support, literacy or socio-emotional development. Far less attention has been paid to the years following compulsory education and the diverse pathways deaf children may take into young adulthood. We understand very little about which features in deaf children's early life and school age years may influence not just their educational and vocational outcomes but also their social developmental outcomes as young adults. This is important because if we can understand more about what enables deaf young people to achieve the key developmental milestones of young, autonomous adulthood we are better able to tailor support and resources earlier on in their developmental journeys.

There is not one future for a child who is deaf, there are many. Furthermore deaf children are highly heterogeneous in their characteristics, backgrounds and the many and complex factors associated with being deaf. Consequently researching into what may support good outcomes in young adulthood is highly complex. One way to learn more is to study a group of deaf young people over a period of time – a prospective, longitudinal study. This is exactly what is going to happen through a research project funded by National Deaf Children's Society. Over a 6 year period, 500+ deaf young people will be followed on an annual basis with them contributing data to the research team on a wide range of subjects. Some of these will relate to what they are doing after the age 16 whether in employment, education, training, or without those opportunities. Some will relate to how their social networks change over time and their language use. We will also be assessing health and wellbeing, autonomy and social factors associated with their wider contributions to society. Detailed profiles of the young people provided at point of entry into the study will enable relationships to be explored between factors in early life and education and later features of young adulthood on an individual and a cohort basis.

The sample of young people will be carefully balanced to take into account the influence of such factors as degrees of deafness, school level achievement, socio-economic background, mono/bi/multi-lingual family backgrounds. The age of the young people at point of entry into the study will also be staggered to see how trajectories may differ amongst those who go straight into employment and those who do further study at further/higher education.

The research is led by the University of Manchester (Social Research with Deaf People group) in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh (Scottish Sensory Centre) and begins in October 2018. We initially will be recruiting 625 deaf young people aged 16 to 18 years and will be contacting teacher of the deaf networks, amongst others, to assist in passing on information and encouraging deaf young people to contact us if they are interested in joining in. We will provide updates on how to do this once the study is open to recruitment in early 2019. In the meantime, for further information please contact either [alys.young@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:alys.young@manchester.ac.uk) or [Rachel.oneill@edinburgh.ac.uk](mailto:Rachel.oneill@edinburgh.ac.uk)

It is the National Deaf Children's Society's vision that has driven the desire to have a study such as this and to generate learning that is of value to deaf young people themselves, their families and all of us who in different ways contribute to shaping deaf young people's futures.