
Rights in Transition: The Experiences of Young Deaf People

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Abstract

Young deaf people have the right to access education, employment and training on the same basis as their peers, to express their views in decision-making processes, and to be provided with the necessary support. These rights have been reaffirmed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Moreover, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has recently produced a draft General Comment on the right to inclusive education (2015). How well these rights are being met in practice however can be indicative of the efficacy and/or challenges of implementing human rights discourse.

This paper will explore the disjuncture between rights discourse and rights practice through the lens of educational transitions. It will draw on findings from a recent research project which aimed to identify the difficulties that deaf and hard of hearing young people experience in accessing post-16 education, training and employment opportunities. Using a rights based approach, encompassing a young people's advisory group, interviews with young people and interviews with professionals, the paper will provide insight into the hidden contradictions that can emerge.

The paper will suggest that, despite the oft-cited commitment to 'disability rights' and 'inclusive education' in policy discourse, the experiential reality of young people's transitions is characterised by complex practices of discrimination and exclusion. These concerns are being exacerbated by broader transitions in social policy and the impact of austerity on support provisions for young people. The paper will ultimately argue that there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of rights implementation if young people's rights to education, employment and training are to be effectively realized.

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