

# Policy Document

**Date** 21 March 2005

## **Ofcom review of the Universal Service Obligation**

**March 2005**

## **A Response by The National Deaf Children's Society**



**THE NATIONAL  
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SOCIETY**

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1. The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading UK charity especially concerned with the needs of deaf<sup>1</sup> children, young people and their families.
2. There are approximately 34,800 children with moderate to profound deafness in the UK<sup>2</sup>. Approximately a further one million children under the age of five can have their lives severely affected by temporary deafness.
3. NDCS is a member of TAG and has been involved in the production of the TAG response to this consultation. Rather than respond in detail separately, we would therefore like to confirm our endorsement of all the important points raised by TAG.
4. In addition, we would like to emphasise a number of points of particular relevance to deaf children and young people:
  - i. Question 11 - Video communications services can be particularly important for deaf young people whose preferred communication method is sign language and also for those young deaf children whose literacy levels mean that text-based services are unsuitable. Any feasibility study for a video relay service should consider carefully the needs of deaf children and young people.
  - ii. Question 12 – The proposed panel should have a brief to consult directly with children and young people who are users (or potential users) of the relay service. Traditional meetings may not be appropriate for these users, but creative measures, including good use of new technology, could be employed to ensure that the views and experiences of children and young people are properly considered. The panel would need appropriate funding and support to facilitate this.
  - iii. Question G1. NDCS agrees that communications providers should be required to consult Ofcom to ensure that the interests of disabled end-users are fully taken into account in the development and provision of services.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this response, NDCS uses the word “deaf” to mean the full range of hearing loss.

<sup>2</sup> Source: ONS and HM Fortnum in BMJ vol 323

However, we wish to highlight the fact that both of the research projects discussed in Annex G, on the results of which many of Ofcom's proposals about relay services are founded, specifically excluded deaf children. The Ofcom/Mori research (section D.4.2) included no participants under 18 and the Research of Text Communication (D.4.3) included no participants under 15.

In the future, if Ofcom is going to be able to appropriately advise communications providers on the needs of all disabled users, it is essential that its ongoing research programme addresses the needs and views of children.

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