

# Deaf children wait almost two years for hearing assessment

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**Exclusive by Rebecca McCurdy** Deputy Political Editor

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**The longest wait for pre-school children was 90 weeks - a year and eight months. (Image: Pixabay)**  
**Deaf children in Scotland are facing ‘irreparable and dangerous’ language delays, experts have warned, as new figures reveal waits of up to almost two years for audiology assessments.**

The National Deaf Children’s Society has warned that the system in Scotland is “failing” children at the most vulnerable times of their lives.

Of the 11 health boards that responded to The Herald’s freedom of information (FOI) requests, NHS Ayrshire and Arran had the longest waiting times from pre-school and school-aged children, of 90 and 98 weeks respectively.

Lanarkshire’s longest waits were 68 weeks for pre-school children and 78 for school children, followed by Greater Glasgow and Clyde of 65 and 49 weeks respectively.

Children assessed by NHS Lothian waited the longest on average, with 67 and 71 weeks respectively, followed by 48 and 51 weeks in Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Despite the long wait in Lanarkshire, most pre-schoolers only waited four weeks to be assessed – but school-aged children had to wait an average of 30 weeks.

The **Scottish Government**’s target from GP referral to treatment is 18 weeks – or 126 days.

Michael Heggie, head of policy and influencing in Scotland at the National Deaf Children’s Society, told The Herald that the most important language and communication windows were being missed for the youngest children who require an audiology assessment.

He said: “These audiology waiting times for children and young people are deeply concerning.

“Delays in receiving an audiology assessment can have significant consequences for all children and young people.

“For children in the early years, long delays are even more concerning as this period is a once in a lifetime window for language and communication development, and delays of many months – in some cases over a year – can have lifelong consequences for a child’s education and wellbeing.”

In 2023, an **independent review of audiology services** in Scotland identified “multiple systemic problems” in **NHS Scotland**’s hearing services.

Concerns were raised in particular over staff access and the quality of testing to identify deafness in very young children.

The review was ordered following a series of mistakes in identifying deafness in 155 children at NHS Lothian between 2009 and 2018.

Mr Heggie said some progress had been made since the independent review.

He said: “Families were told lessons have been learned, yet children are still facing the same dangerous delays.

“We hear constantly from exhausted parents fighting to be listened to while watching their child struggle to hear and keep up at school.

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“No family should be left in that position. When children who should be seen within weeks are waiting months or longer, the system is failing them. Every delay is time a child cannot get back.”

More than 50 recommendations were made in 2023, however around half have since been completed.

The most urgent of recommendations were around the quality of auditory brainstem response (ABR) testing, carried out to identify deafness in very young children.

Issues were identified in the quality of ABR testing at every single health board in Scotland, with experts warning delays and inaccuracies could result in lifelong impacts.

In August, to mark two years since the review, a coalition of deaf charities wrote the Scottish Government to warn progress was too slow, leaving many children “falling through the cracks”.

The only health boards not to respond to The Herald’s FOI requests were **Shetland** and Highland.

In Grampian, average waits were six weeks for both pre-school and school-aged children, while the longest wait was 45 and 33 weeks.

**NHS Fife**’s longest wait in 2025 was 26 weeks for pre-school children and 52 for school children. Average waits were 20 and 12 weeks.

Forth Valley only provided average waits, which were eight weeks in both categories, while the Borders provided one figure for all children – an average of nine weeks and the longest wait of 24 weeks.

The Scottish Government accepted health boards were facing “sustained pressure” on audiology care, and said lengthy waits were “not acceptable”.

The Herald contacted **NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde** for comment.

Michelle Carr, chief officer of acute services, NHS Lothian, said: “We know how distressing it can be, and we apologise to patients who have waited too long for an audiology outpatient appointment.

“NHS Lothian, like many other health boards in Scotland, is experiencing a shortage of trained audiologists which limits the numbers of appointments we can provide. However, our teams are working hard to boost our capacity from within by increasing the hours of part-time staff, providing overtime and employing external locums as part of a move to reduce waiting times.

“We are also in early discussions to establish a training pathway in Scotland and exploring the possibility of employing external providers.”

Jacqueline Nicol, director of site operations at NHS Ayrshire and Arran, said the health board’s audiology service was “working hard to reduce waiting times for audiology assessments for pre-school and school-aged children”.

She added: “We recognise that patients are waiting significantly longer than we would want and we apologise for the distress that this may cause them and their families.

“The longest waiting figures represent a snapshot of a moment in time. The longest waits usually relate to unique, patient-specific circumstances, which can place some individuals far beyond the average waiting time.”

A spokesman for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said: "As is the case across the country, NHSGGC is facing pressure on many of its services, as we continue to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We apologise to anyone who has had to wait longer than they may have expected for an audiology appointment and any distress this has caused. We are continuing to prioritise patients with the most urgent clinical need.

"We would also once again like to thank our staff who are working extremely hard to address these challenges with the utmost professionalism and commitment."