A programme of studies including assessment of diagnostic accuracy of school hearing screening tests and a cost-effectiveness model of school entry hearing screening programmes


Record Status
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Citation

Authors' objectives
Identification of permanent hearing impairment at the earliest possible age is crucial to maximise the development of speech and language. Universal newborn hearing screening identifies the majority of the 1 in 1000 children born with a hearing impairment, but later onset can occur at any time and there is no optimum time for further screening. A universal but non-standardised school entry screening (SES) programme is in place in many parts of the UK but its value is questioned. The objective was to evaluate the diagnostic accuracy of hearing screening tests and the cost-effectiveness of the SES programme in the UK.

Authors' conclusions
A SES programme using the PTS or HC screener is unlikely to be effective in increasing the identified number of cases with hearing impairment and lowering the average age at identification and is therefore unlikely to represent good value for money. This finding is, however, critically dependent on the results of the observational study comparing Nottingham and Cambridge, which has limitations. The following are suggested: systematic reviews of the accuracy of devices used to measure hearing at school entry; characterisation and measurement of the cost-effectiveness of different approaches to the ad-hoc referral system; examination of programme specificity as opposed to test specificity; further observational comparative studies of different programmes; and opportunistic trials of withdrawal of SES programmes.

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Address for correspondence
NETSCC, Health Technology Assessment, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton, SO16 7NS UK Tel: +44 23 8059 5586 Email: hta@hta.ac.uk

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