

A learning disability (LD) happens when a person’s brain development is affected, either before they are born, during their birth or in early childhood. This affects the way a person understands information and how they communicate. Around 2% (1.1 million) of people in the UK are estimated to have one. This means they can have difficulty:

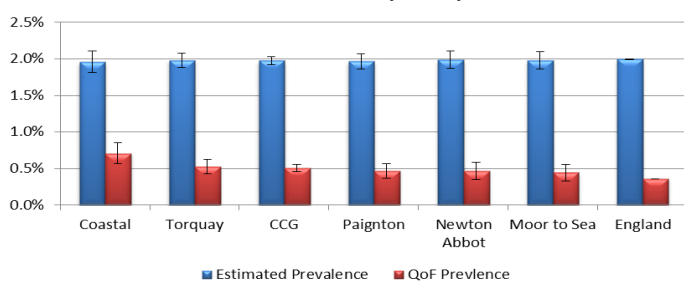
- understanding new or complex information;
- learning new skills;
- coping independently.

Around a third of people with a LD have autism. Autism is a lifelong, spectrum condition with varying degrees of severity. Those living with autism tend to share difficulty with social communication, interaction and imagination.

Many people with LDs prefer to use the term ‘learning difficulty’. The two terms are interchangeable when used in the context of health, social care and in reference to this profile.

**Estimated prevalence** - In the UK, research suggests that less than a quarter of people with a LD are known to local health and social services; particularly those with less severe disabilities. Estimates of prevalence which includes *hidden* numbers of people with milder LDs suggest significant levels of unmet need. As reflected nationally, the estimated prevalence of LDs in South Devon is around 2% (5,700); however around 0.5% are known to their GP (Fig 1).

Figure 1: Percentage with a learning disability  
Percentage of the population with learning disabilities in South Devon by locality



Source: Emerson & Hatton, 2004, QoF 2011/12

**Known prevalence** - The Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) captures around 25% of the estimated prevalence in South Devon (Fig

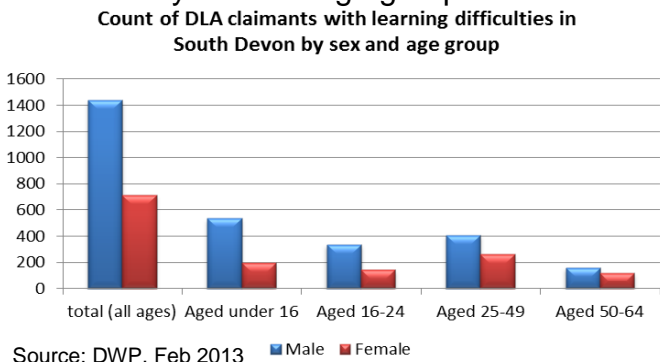
1). The difficulty identifying patients with less severe disability may, in part, be due to individuals not seeing themselves as having a learning disability or not wishing to label themselves as ‘disabled’. From a GP patient survey, 1.4% of patients in South Devon would identify themselves as having a learning difficulty (MORI, 2012/13).

**Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – Around 2,250 (0.8%) of residents under the age of 65 years in South Devon claim DLA due to a severe learning difficulty. Using DLA claimants (for a learning difficulty) as a proxy measure for a LD; there are more men than woman under the age of 65 years with a LD in South Devon (Fig 2 over the page).

**Age** – Nationally, the median age of death for people with a LD is around 25 years younger than those without (DoH). In the UK there is a sharp reduction in mortality after the age of 49 years. This is mirrored by the smaller

number of DLA claimants in the 50-64 age group in South Devon (Fig 2). Locally, 3.8% of short-term care *Supporting People* clients, over 65, have a LD in Torbay localities.

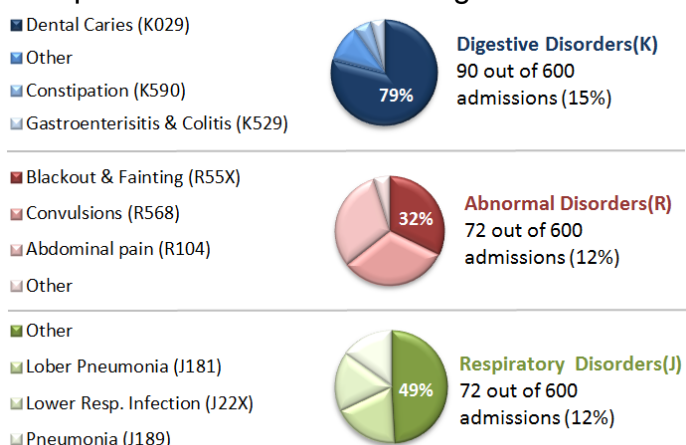
**Figure 2 Count of learning difficulty DLA claimants by sex and age group**



**Life expectancy** – In Torbay localities, life expectancy at 18 has risen from 42 years to 50 years for persons with a LD from 2006/08 to 2008/10. Consistently high coverage of GP health checks across South Devon (79%, 2012/13) for patients with a LD, could be contributing to this increased life expectancy.

**Hospital admissions** – In South Devon, there are around 600 emergency inpatient admissions per year where people have a LD related diagnosis code. This is more than 10 admissions a week. Almost 40% of these are

**Figure 3: The three main causes/conditions of hospital admissions for learning disabilities\***

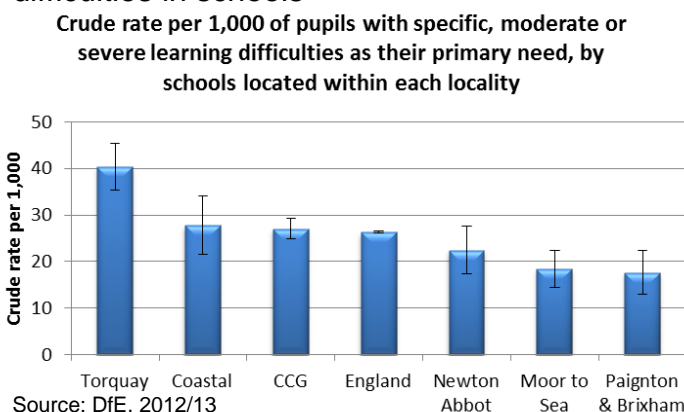


Source: SUS, 2010-2012; \*see Public Health Team

attributed to *digestive, abnormal and respiratory* disorders (Fig 3 previous). The blue pie chart shows that a large proportion (79%) of digestive disorder admissions are due to dental caries (Fig 3).

**Pupils** – Torquay has significantly more pupils with learning difficulties compared to both the CCG and England average; however this might be explained by a higher proportion of special schools in Torquay (Fig 4).

**Figure 4: Rate of pupils with learning difficulties in schools**



**Autism** – Using estimated prevalence, we would expect around 1,900 people with a LD to have autism in South Devon. School records show significantly less pupils with autism compared to England (Fig 5); however this may reflect poorer recognition of the condition, which can be difficult to diagnose.

**Figure 5: Rate of pupils with autism in schools**

