



Paying lip service

The state of lipreading classes in England and Wales



council on **deafness**



Changing the world for deaf
and hard of hearing people



“ Learning to lipread is all about practice. Classes are valuable for rebuilding self esteem, so often eroded by the communication problems associated with hearing loss. ”

Sue, lipreading tutor, London

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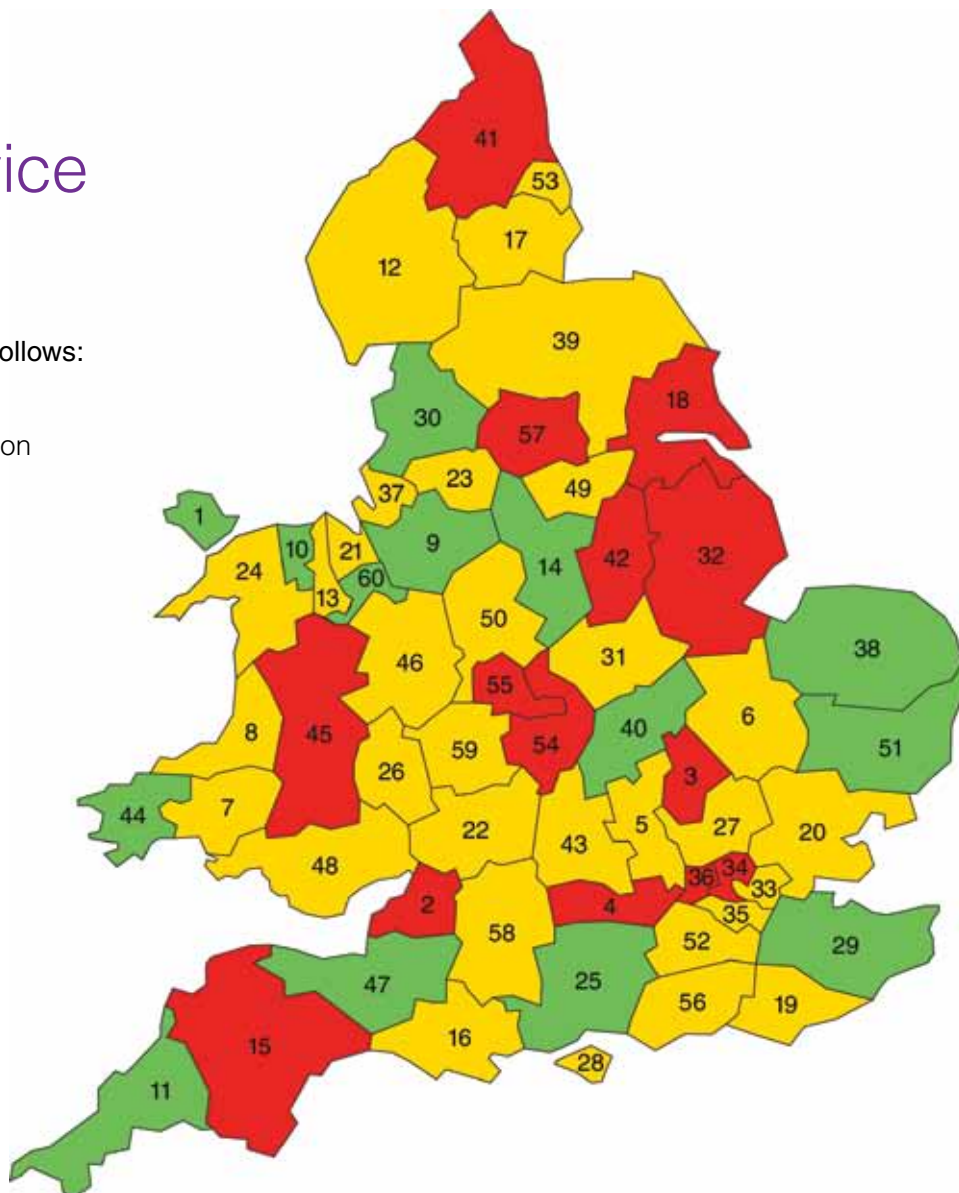
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Paying lip service

The regions have been coded as follows:

- Good provision
- Needs improvement to provision
- Poor provision

- 1 Anglesey
- 2 Avon (Bristol)
- 3 Bedfordshire
- 4 Berkshire
- 5 Buckinghamshire
- 6 Cambridgeshire
- 7 Carmarthenshire
- 8 Ceredigion
- 9 Cheshire
- 10 Conwy
- 11 Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
- 12 Cumbria
- 13 Denbighshire
- 14 Derbyshire
- 15 Devon
- 16 Dorset
- 17 Durham
- 18 East Riding of Yorkshire
- 19 East Sussex
- 20 Essex
- 21 Flintshire
- 22 Gloucestershire
- 23 Greater Manchester
- 24 Gwynedd
- 25 Hampshire
- 26 Herefordshire
- 27 Hertfordshire
- 28 Isle of Wight
- 29 Kent
- 30 Lancashire



- 31 Leicestershire
- 32 Lincolnshire
- 33 London – East
- 34 London – North and Central
- 35 London – South
- 36 London – West
- 37 Merseyside
- 38 Norfolk
- 39 North Yorkshire
- 40 Northamptonshire
- 41 Northumberland
- 42 Nottinghamshire
- 43 Oxfordshire
- 44 Pembrokeshire
- 45 Powys
- 46 Shropshire
- 47 Somerset
- 48 South Wales
- 49 South Yorkshire
- 50 Staffordshire
- 51 Suffolk
- 52 Surrey
- 53 Tyne & Wear
- 54 Warwickshire
- 55 West Midlands
- 56 West Sussex
- 57 West Yorkshire
- 58 Wiltshire
- 59 Worcestershire
- 60 Wrexham

Executive summary

The state of lipreading classes in England and Wales

Executive summary

- There are an estimated 9 million people in the UK who are deaf or hard of hearing: one in seven of the population.¹
- For many of these people, lipreading is a vital communication skill. It prevents social isolation, increases confidence and independence, and helps keep people in work. It is a key part of the rehabilitation process for hearing loss.
- While we all lipread to some extent, learning to a good standard is very difficult. The best way to learn to lipread is by attending regular classes run by a qualified teacher. It can take several years of classes to learn adequate lipreading skills.
- There are approximately 450 lipreading classes in England and Wales, meaning that there are less than 5,000 people who are currently able to attend a lipreading class. This is despite there being millions of people who are deaf or hard of hearing who could benefit from learning to lipread.
- In some regions there are very few lipreading classes available – or even none at all. In others, fees for the classes are expensive and prevent many people from attending.



“ Being able to lipread would make me more confident and transform my life. ”

Nicola, Lincolnshire

“ Lip reading classes are essential for the hard of hearing to enable us to be valuable members of society in spite of our disability ”

Gina, Essex

- One in five lipreading classes is under threat of closure within the next year. This is mainly due to lack of funding or low demand due to high fees and poor awareness of local classes.
- The Learning and Skills Council classified lipreading as a ‘leisure’ activity, which resulted in many of the problems currently facing lipreading classes. This classification must change; lipreading is an ‘essential’ life skill and should be recognised as such. This will enable more funding to be available.
- In regions with few classes or high fees, local authorities should increase the number of classes and lower the fees. Regions with better provision should also recognise that there is scope for improvement. In the current economic climate, it is vitally important that current funding for classes is not cut.

¹ Figure from Medical Research Council National Study of Hearing.

Introduction

There are an estimated 9 million people in the UK who are deaf or hard of hearing: one in seven of the population. For many of these people, lipreading is a vital skill for communication, with or without hearing aids. Learning the shapes that lips make for different sounds and how to help fill in missed words can be incredibly useful for someone who has hearing loss, especially in noisy environments.

Anecdotal evidence shows just how much of an impact lipreading can have on someone's life. It prevents social isolation and improves confidence and independence. It keeps people in work and has even been known to save marriages. It also provides opportunities for people to learn more about their own hearing loss from the experiences of others and find out tips about how to manage it effectively. Lipreading is a key part of the rehabilitation process for hearing loss, so lipreading classes are essential for many people whose hearing has deteriorated.

“ I discovered I was not alone. As a group we were able to discuss our difficulties and share our experiences. Most of all we realised there were others in our sensory loss situation and we no longer felt on the fringe of society. ”

Gina, Essex

The ability to lipread means that people enjoy the full benefit of their hearing aids and other equipment; the combination of lipreading,

hearing aids and other equipment maximises peoples' ability to communicate. If people are not able to learn to lipread, they may not make the most of their hearing aids. Ultimately, this represents poor value for money for the NHS.

We all lipread to some extent, but the best way to learn effectively is by attending regular classes run by a qualified tutor. It can take several years of classes to develop lipreading skills to an adequate standard, so it is very important that classes are widely available at little or no cost to the learner.

“ The classes are important to learn and improve one's skills, keep in practice and get information from our teacher on new aids and equipment to enhance what hearing I have. A further benefit is the exchange of ideas and companionship between students, many of whom are elderly and live alone. ”

Gillian, Dorset

From surveys of lipreading tutors, desk-based research and Freedom of Information Act requests, we found that in June 2010, there were just **451 classes** running in England and Wales with an estimated **4,739 people learning to lipread**. Given there are millions of people who could benefit from a lipreading class, this shows that current provision of lipreading classes is extremely poor and too many people are being denied the opportunity to maximise their communication with others.

“ I would love to have the opportunity to go to a lipreading class and be able to lipread. I am a school governor and a parish councillor and it has crossed my mind on occasion that I may need to resign from these posts, as I have problems understanding what is being said in meetings. I also find it difficult in social situations and have all but given up going out as I can't hear what people are saying to me and refuse to ask them to keep repeating themselves. It gets very frustrating and embarrassing. ”

Nicola, Lincolnshire

The situation is likely to worsen dramatically in the near future, which is a serious cause for concern. One in five of the lipreading classes we identified is at risk of closure within the next year – almost 1,000 people will lose out as a result.

The decision taken by the Learning and Skills Council in 2005 to change the way lipreading provision is funded has played a significant role in the problems facing lipreading classes today. Since 2005, lipreading has been classified as a 'leisure' activity, in the same category as informal learning such as cake decorating or balloon modelling. This means that there is less funding available for classes and an expectation that the learner will contribute towards the cost. While some

learning providers continued to offer classes free or at a low cost despite the change in classification, economic pressures mean that many others have raised prices.

This report examines the state of lipreading class provision throughout England and Wales, looking at the number of classes available and how much they cost. Each region is rated using a traffic light system. Regions rated as red have particularly poor class provision and need significant improvement. The best regions in terms of class provision and affordability of fees are rated green.

This report is a joint venture between RNID, the UK Council on Deafness, the Association of Teachers of Lipreading for Adults (ATLA) and Hearing Concern LINK.

“ In classes students learn basic communication strategies and gain information about the ear, hearing aids and implants, assistive equipment, and agencies that provide advice and support. In short, classes can provide practice, information, mutual support, increased confidence and enhance quality of life. ”

Sue, lipreading tutor, London

Provision of lipreading classes

Some regions in the UK have very few, if any, lipreading classes. In these areas, it can be virtually impossible for someone with hearing loss to learn to lipread.

“ There was a lipreading class near me that closed a couple of years ago due to funding issues. I have tried to find another class but have since given up. There are none in my area and the nearest class is 30 miles away. This makes it impossible for me to go. ”

Nicola, Lincolnshire

These regions have been highlighted as having the lowest number of lipreading classes in comparison to the size of the population aged over 60;³ the ratio of available classes to people over the age of 60 is particularly low.⁴

Most people who attend lipreading classes are older and often retired, although this is not always the case. It is therefore essential that there are classes available locally, because there may be potential issues with mobility and access to transport. In this report we have not taken into account the physical size of a region. This means that even in areas shown to have better provision of classes, some people may still face significant barriers in reaching a class.

Worst regions for number of lipreading classes²

- Northumberland
- Powys
- Lincolnshire
- West Midlands
- Berkshire
- West Yorkshire

“ I have contacted local authorities, picked up adult learning leaflets, contacted various organisations – and sadly come to the conclusion that there are none within reach, both in distance or cost. The nearest one is about a one-and-a-half hour drive away. ”

Viv, Devon

2 There are no lipreading classes in Northumberland, Powys and Lincolnshire, although we understand that Lincolnshire County Council are looking into setting up lipreading classes soon. West Midlands has six classes, but has a higher population than other regions with less classes, hence its red rating. Berkshire has just one class and West Yorkshire has three classes but it should be noted that the classes are free.

3 We compared the number of classes with the number of older people in each area. RNID figures show that 55% of people over the age of 60 have hearing loss and so may benefit from a lipreading class. The majority of lipreading students are likely to be older, although it should be stressed that this is not always the case.

4 A fuller explanation of the traffic light system can be found at the end of this report.

Classes in any given region may be concentrated in a relatively small area. For example, in West Yorkshire, an area highlighted red for having a low number of classes, the three available lipreading classes are all in Leeds or Wakefield. This leaves a large part of the region with no accessible classes at all. It is very important, even in areas with a good level of lipreading class provision, that classes are widely dispersed so that people across the region can access them.

One of the biggest factors for the low numbers of classes is the lack of trained lipreading tutors available to run the classes. The only location in the UK for training lipreading tutors is in London: the training course is expensive and only runs once every two years. There were training courses available in Manchester and Scotland but these both closed in the last two years, largely as a result of financial pressures. To compound the problem further, lipreading tutors are beginning to retire and in some cases no other teacher can be found to replace them. This is a serious issue; for example, in Lincolnshire the local authority has agreed to fund a class and demand has been demonstrated, but there is no one available to teach.

“ Training to be a lipreading teacher is vastly expensive and takes a long time and dedication. London is the nearest training centre. It is not something to be undertaken lightly. ”

Viv, Devon



Cost of lipreading classes

Even where lipreading classes are available, many are not free. This is largely the result of the Learning and Skills Council's⁵ decision in 2005 to change the way lipreading is funded. This resulted in less funding available for learning providers to run lipreading classes and an expectation that the learner should contribute towards the cost.

While many learning providers have tried to maintain affordable fees for lipreading classes since the change, current economic pressure has seen fees increase substantially. In some cases, the fees are prohibitively expensive. This can lead to lower demand for the classes and result in closure of the class.

“ In the present economic climate, fees are being introduced or increased to an unacceptable level. As one student said to me ‘I feel as if I’m being punished for having hearing loss’. ”

Sue, lipreading tutor, London



“ Classes cost around the £75 mark for ten meetings plus fuel and parking. This makes it out of the question. ”

Viv, Devon

Most expensive regions	Average cost per term ⁶
London – west	£105.96
Warwickshire	£89.83
London – north and central	£59.80
Devon	£59.51
Bristol	£54.30

In total, 14 out of 60 regions charge fees of over £30 for a ten week term. As a high proportion of lipreading students are likely to be older and retired, it is clear that these fees are too high. People will not be able to attend classes if they become a luxury that they cannot afford.

High class fees can also lead to additional pressure for those people who need a lipreading class because their hearing loss may be leading to issues at work. The financial insecurity this can lead to may mean that expensive lipreading classes are not an option for them, which can make a bad situation worse.

5 The Learning and Skills Council closed in 2010 and the remit for funding adult learning has since been taken on by the Skills Funding Agency.

6 Average taken from all classes in the region for each term, or equivalent to ten weeks of classes. In some areas, classes have a uniform price: in Warwickshire all classes cost £89.83 per term, and in Bedfordshire the only available class costs £42.50.

Classes under threat

In compiling the information for this report, we asked lipreading tutors and learning providers if they anticipated that their classes were under threat of closure for any reason within the next year. Worryingly, out of the 451 classes in England and Wales, 92 were identified as being under threat.⁷ This means that one in every five classes is expected to close this year, affecting 1,000 lipreading students.

There were a number of reasons given for why classes might be under threat of closure. The most common reasons were lack of funding or fears that there may not be enough students.

Reason for classes being under threat	Number of classes
Lack of funding	39
Low demand	27
No reason given	13
Poor organisation or facilities	5
No tutor available to take over classes	3

The seemingly low demand in some areas may not be an accurate picture of the actual need for lipreading classes. For example, demand may fall as a result of increased fees that make lipreading classes too expensive for many people to afford. It is a fairly common occurrence for a class to close soon after fees have been increased. In other cases, demand

may be low because there is little awareness that the class is running, or because people do not realise the benefits of lipreading. More should be done by local authorities and learning providers to ensure that lipreading classes, and the benefits of learning to lipread, are properly advertised in the community.

“ Often people are unaware that classes exist or where to look for them. They are unaware of what goes on in a class and how they might benefit by attending. ”

Sue, lipreading tutor, London

These issues have been emerging for some time, particularly the reduction in funding following the classification as a ‘leisure’ activity by the Learning and Skills Council and the shortage of tutors. Some of these issues are linked and it is easy to see how factors such as high fees, lack of publicity and the resulting low uptake of lipreading classes could come together to result in the withdrawal of classes, even where there is still an underlying demand.

The fact that such a large proportion of classes are under threat illustrates that some of the factors described above have real consequences in terms of service provision for people with hearing loss.

⁷ Five of these classes are already scheduled to close in September 2010.

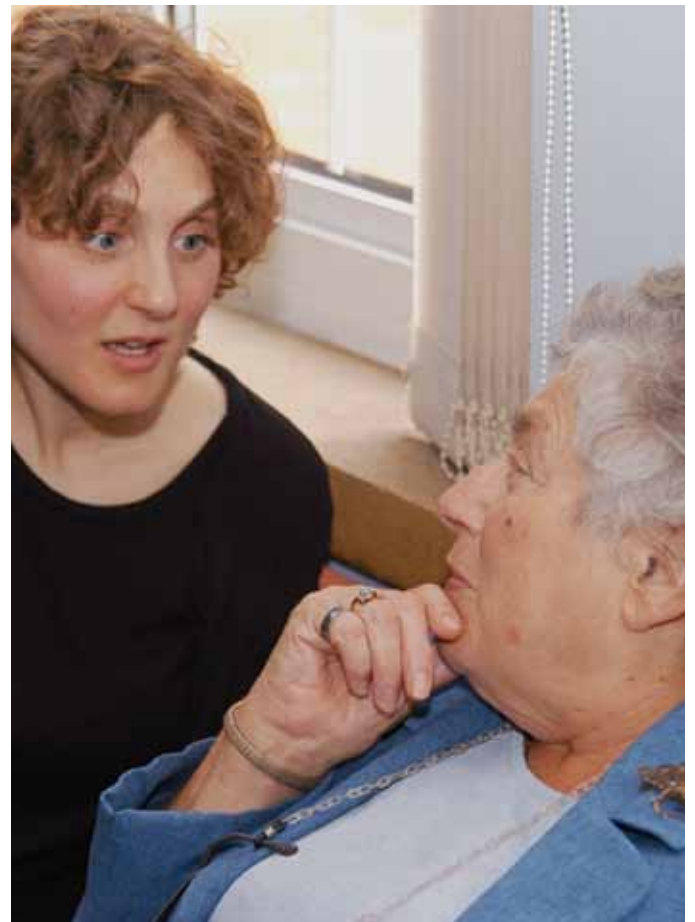
Regions with the best provision

We recognise that the provision of lipreading classes in some regions is much better than in others. In these areas there is a higher number of classes in proportion to the number of people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and the classes are either free or reasonably priced. In some of them the local authority provides all the classes, while in others there is a mix of provision by local authorities, voluntary organisations and private classes.

Furthermore, at a time when many local authorities and learning providers will need to make savings and cuts, it is crucial that lipreading classes are not seen as an opportunity to reduce spending. Current provision, even in some of the better regions like Kent, is still leaving millions unable to learn to lipread. Any further cuts as a result of the economic climate will only make this situation much worse.

Best regions for lipreading classes	Number of classes ⁸	Average cost per term
Kent	31	Free
Derbyshire	19	Free
Suffolk	15	Free
Pembrokeshire	4	Free
Anglesey	2	Free

However, it is important to note that even in these areas, the situation could be improved. There are 31 classes throughout Kent, but the average size of a lipreading class suggests that fewer than 300 people are learning to lipread in the region. On average one in seven of Kent's population is deaf or hard of hearing and many of them could benefit from attending a lipreading class, so there is much more that can and should be done to increase the number of classes available.



⁸ While Pembrokeshire and Anglesey have fewer classes than other regions such as Norfolk, which has 12 classes, these regions have relatively small population, so they have better provision per head.

Conclusion and recommendations

This report highlights the problems faced by people who wish to learn to lipread. There are not enough classes in England and Wales: of the 9 million people in the UK who are deaf or hard of hearing, fewer than 5,000 attend a lipreading class. This means that there are a significant number of people who could benefit from learning to lipread.

In some regions fees for classes are prohibitively expensive, especially for the over-60s who make up the majority of lipreading students. Given the tremendous benefits that learning to lipread can provide to someone with hearing loss, it is important that classes are widely available at little or no cost to the learner.

The number of classes under threat of closure over the course of the next year suggests that the situation will worsen considerably unless something is done. Even those areas highlighted as having comparatively good provision of classes could benefit from increased provision. If the trend of closures continues at the rate suggested here, thousands more will join the millions already missing out on learning to lipread.



In order to improve the current state of lipreading classes, we have the following recommendations:

1. The Skills Funding Agency must reclassify lipreading as an 'essential' skill, so there is more funding available for learning providers to run classes at little or no cost to the learners. This would mean more classes at a more affordable price, and would allow more people to benefit from learning to lipread.
2. In regions where there are not enough classes – or none at all – funding should be provided to the local authority so they can set up new classes. If there is no tutor immediately available to teach a class, the local authority should sponsor a trainee lipreading tutor.
3. In regions where there are classes, local authorities and learning providers should ensure that their classes are better advertised so people who are deaf or hard of hearing are aware of the benefits of learning to lipread and how to access local classes.
4. ATLA should investigate new ways to train lipreading tutors in order to increase the number of tutors. They should also do more to encourage people to consider teaching lipreading as a profession.

Methodology

How we rated each region

The regions

We grouped the information for England by county, with the exception of London. As London boroughs are smaller than counties, we grouped these into four areas, north and central, south, east, and west. Wales has been split into counties with a number of the smaller counties in South Wales grouped together. For a list of the areas covered within the grouped regions, see page 15.

The traffic light system

The traffic light system allows us to highlight good and bad regions for lipreading class provision in an easy and visual way. The parameters for deciding which regions are based on the following:

Green ■ (good),

Amber ■ (need improvements) and

Red ■ (poor),

• Number of classes in the region for the population aged over 60

For each region we looked at the population of people aged over 60. While this does not necessarily cover all lipreading students, it represents the group of people most likely to use lipreading classes and, as such, provides an indication of potential demand for classes in each region. We then divided this population by the number of classes available.

• Fees for the classes

In each region, we calculated the average cost of a ten-week term of lipreading lessons, or equivalent.

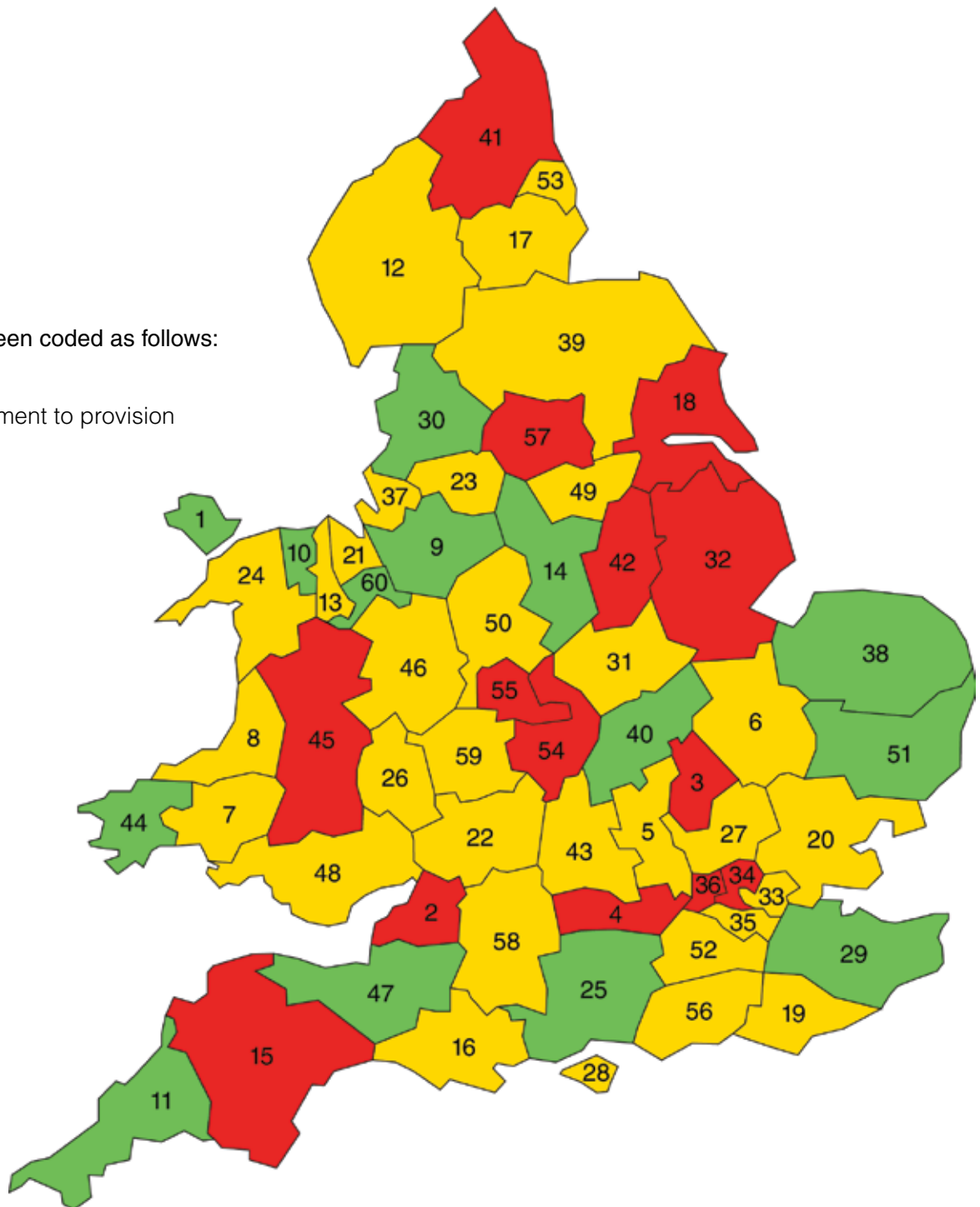
The first measure is to enable us to adjust for the relative population size of particular regions. For instance, Kent is better served with one lipreading class for 13,000 people aged over 60. In comparison, there is one lipreading class for almost 160,000 people in Berkshire, so we can see that the overall provision is much worse. This estimation does not take into account the distribution of lipreading classes or the physical size of the regions. However, it does provide a straightforward overview and directs our attention to the regions where urgent action is required.

The regions have been coded as follows:

- At least one class per 18,000 inhabitants over 60 and a cost per term of £30 or less – the regions have to meet both of these criteria to be rated green.
- Where an area does not meet both the above criteria; for example, they may have more than one class per 18,000 inhabitants aged over 60, but the cost per term is over £30. However, if the cost per term is over £50 or there is fewer than one class per 85,000 inhabitants aged over 60, they will be rated red.
- No classes or fewer than one class per 85,000 inhabitants aged over 60, or where the cost per term is over £50.

The regions have been coded as follows:

- Good provision
- Needs improvement to provision
- Poor provision



London – East: Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest

London – North and Central: Barnet, Camden, City, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster

London – South: Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Southwark, Sutton, Wandsworth

London – West: Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kingston, Richmond

South Wales: Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Swansea, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan

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