

Hearing Impairment Fact sheet



Guidance for Staff working with hearing impaired students

Definition of a Disability

The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

More information on the Act can be found at

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068

▶ Hearing Impairment as a Disability

A hearing impairment may mean a person has no hearing at all, or has hearing loss at a particular range of frequencies, or may have tinnitus (noise in the ears). It may be congenital or acquired and may have an effect on speech and language development if it occurs early.

A deaf person may use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language. This is a language with its own grammar constructions that are different from English. An individual may have some difficulties communicating effectively in written language but may be a very good communicator in BSL. If a deaf person is accompanied by an interpreter you should speak directly to the deaf person. However, not all deaf people will know or use sign language.

Some hearing impaired students may use Sign Support English (SSE) rather than BSL. SSE is not a language in its own right, but more a kind of English with signs. For guidance on lip-reading, see the *‘Lip-reading and note-taking’* factsheet.

▶ General issues

- Would it help the student if there were an induction loop at the reception/porters lodge/college office? This is a small device that sits on the desk and enables people who use hearing aids to hear you better.
- Do staff know how to communicate appropriately with a hearing-impaired person? If not, perhaps they would benefit from a brief workshop (contact the Disability Office for further details).
- Do the porters always slide back the glass and talk directly to the students/visitors? The glass puts a sound barrier in between the porter and the student/visitor and will impede hearing.
- Are there fax, e-mail or text messaging facilities (SMS) in the porter's lodge and college office? People with hearing impairments may find it easier to communicate via fax, e-mail or SMS rather than face to face or over the telephone. Most people with hearing impairments have access either to a fax, e-mail or SMS.

Physical access

- Are there contrasting edge () on the steps throughout the college/department? People with hearing impairments use their central vision to lip read; they often rely on their peripheral vision when they are moving about and talking at the same time. Highlighting steps with a contrasting strip makes it easier for someone doing this to see the step. Temporary tape could be placed on key stepped areas.
- Is there adequate lighting around reception and communal areas of the college/ department, for example in the porter's lodge, college office, JCR, lecture theatres, libraries, tutorial rooms and dining hall? It is also important that the student has adequate lighting in their room. Good lighting is important as it makes lip reading, signing and other forms of non-verbal communication easier to see.

Access to printed materials

- Some deaf people who communicate in BSL may find written English more difficult to understand, as the two languages are very different. Therefore, printed materials may need to be in plain English to assist deaf people to access these.

Access to technology

- Most deaf and hearing-impaired students will use the same technology as their non-disabled peers. However, many may benefit from having a personal computer with e-mail, which is a good communication tool.

Accommodation managers

- Is there a flashing/vibrating fire alarm in the student's room? Students with hearing impairments may not be able to hear the fire alarm and therefore need a visual or tactile signal to alert them to a fire (the tactile signal is sometimes used when a person is asleep). **Is there an effective fire alarm system installed within the department to alert the hearing in case of an evacuation.**
- Is an emergency evacuation plan necessary and in place for the student? Ensure that all staff and students are aware of the evacuation plan.
- Is there an emergency vibrating pager system to alert hearing impaired students to the fire alarm or other emergencies?
- Can the student have a fax or e-mail in their room for communication purposes? Many people with hearing impairments find it difficult to communicate by telephone so a fax or e-mail system means they can have contact for college work and with their friends.
- Does the student require a telephone with built in amplification? There are telephones available with amplification and flashing lights to help those with high frequency hearing loss.
- Does the student need a quiet room away from background noise? Hearing aids amplify all sound, so a room with a lot of background noise may make it difficult for a student with a hearing impairment to concentrate on conversations.

Dining hall

- Is there a flashing fire alarm in the dining room? A person with a hearing impairment may not be able to hear a fire alarm, and may need a visual signal to indicate that they must evacuate the room.

- Are menu choices displayed in writing/print? This will make it easier for a person with a hearing impairment to know what is being served.

Access to medical services

- Ensure that students who are deaf or hearing impaired have understood the instructions you have given them about medication. These may need to be clearly written down for them.

▶ Teaching hearing-impaired students

As each student is different, individually centred solutions need to be considered. However, a student with a hearing impairment may benefit from the following:

- That the speaker wear a microphone provided by the student to amplify speech via a radio aid. In small groups it may be appropriate to pass around the microphone so that the student knows who is speaking and can hear them. This will enable the student to participate in group work. Also it may be preferable to arrange seating in a circle so that everyone's face is visible. Remember that one of the biggest difficulties for people with hearing impairments is communicating with people in a group situation, where the conversation flows very quickly and many people may be talking at once.
- It is good practice to repeat questions asked by other students, to ensure that all students have heard the question before you give the answer.
- Ensure that students receive important information such as assignment details and changes in class times. Remember that deaf or hearing-impaired students may miss it if it is only advertised verbally so back it up with an email or written note for everyone.
- If the lecture room has an induction loop it is important that it is turned on and that the microphone is used as the sound will transmit to the student's hearing aid. Remember to keep the microphone below your mouth so students can still lip-read.
- If using a video, subtitles or providing a written transcript of the video will be useful; alternatively an interpreter may interpret the

video if the student uses BSL, but it will be useful if they have seen the video in advance.

- It is generally considered good practice to provide all students with a copy of OHTs and slides. It is also good practice to provide a glossary of unfamiliar terminology in advance; this will ensure students are familiar with it and have a sign for new terminology, if they are working with an interpreter.
- Always make sure the student can see your face; standing with your back to the light casts your face in shadow. Talking while facing the board means that a student will not be able to lip read.
- If a sign language interpreter is present in tutorials, lectures or social events, ensure you speak to the deaf person directly, not the interpreter. The interpreter's role is to facilitate communication, not to participate. The interpreter will need rest breaks every half hour or so (depending on the individual), so try to plan breaks into your classes.
- A deaf or hearing-impaired student may require the use of a computer in tutorials, lectures and for personal study.
- A deaf or hearing-impaired student may need a recording device in lectures or tutorials so that this recording can be transcribed onto paper or disk.
- A deaf or hearing-impaired student may use a note-taker, scribe or computer operator to write in lectures, tutorials or social events. This may be required in addition to an interpreter.
- A deaf or hearing-impaired student may require extra time and / or the use of a word processor and / or sign language interpreter in examinations (requests to be made via college to the Proctors, with appropriate evidence required).
- Beware of dimming the lights as the student may not be able to see the interpreter or your face. Having a moveable task light is a solution to this problem.
- There may be other specific requirements requested and / or required.

▶ **Hearing impairment etiquette**

- When talking to a person who is deaf/hearing impaired ensure that you speak clearly, slightly slower than usual, but using the same pitch and tone as you would to any other person.
- Do not exaggerate your lip movements and be careful not to cover your mouth while talking, as this makes lip reading almost impossible.
- Remember that shouting distorts your lip patterns and makes it more difficult for a person who is deaf/hearing impaired to understand you.
- Always face the person you are talking to and stand between one and three metres away from them. This is the optimum distance for lip reading.
- Try not to stand with the light directly behind you, such as in front of a window, as this casts your face in shadow and makes it difficult to lip read.
- Ensure you have the person's attention before starting to speak to them. You may need to wave, move into their line of sight or touch them gently on the arm.
- If the deaf person is using an interpreter, remember to look at and speak to the deaf person and not the interpreter. The interpreter is only there to facilitate communication, not to talk to you directly.
- If the deaf/hearing-impaired person does not understand you, try to rephrase what you have said, as they may pick up the words in a different lip pattern. Always try and start with saying what you want to talk about such as the key point. This makes understanding easier, as there is immediately a context.
- If necessary, write down what you are trying to say.
- If the person uses an assistance dog, do not touch or feed the dog without first gaining the permission of the owner.
- If you are wondering whether a deaf/hearing-impaired person needs some help, approach them and ask before doing anything. Then listen to how they want you to help them.

- Refer also to *Lip-reading and Note-taking guidelines* for further information on these topics. Refer students seeking guidance to the '*Information pack for students*'.

▶ Useful Contacts

The Disability Advisory Service

C/O University Offices

Wellington Square

Oxford OX1 2JD

www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das

Email: disability@admin.ox.ac.uk

Tel: (01865) (2)80459

RNID

John McCormack

RNID South West

Ernest English House Square

Buckwell Street

Plymouth, PL 1 2DA

(tel) 01752 228657

(text) 01752 604862

john.mccormack@rnid.org.uk

information.southwest@mid.org.uk

CONNEVANS

54 Albert Road North

Reigate

Surrey, RH2 9YR

Tel: 01737 247 571

Text: 01737 243 134

Website: www.connevans.com

Lexicom Interpreting

Lexicom: Cherwell Business
Village, Southam Road, Banbury,
Oxon, OX16 2FP

Tel: 01295 758515

Fax: 01295 758517

Textphone: 01295 758516

SMS: 077 16233310

RNID

RNID South West

Berkley House

The Lower Bristol Road

Bath, BA2 3BH

(tel) 01225 485 765

(text) 01225 485 765

Disability Advisory Service

E-mail: disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das

Tel: +44 (0)1865 280 459

Fax: +44 (0)1865 289 830