

***IncludeAll* – Enhancing Practice d/Deaf and hearing impaired students**

What are the key issues?

The Deaf community views deafness as a communication issue and not a disability. The term d/Deaf respects this. Many people use sign language as their first language and there are 121 different sign languages worldwide, each with its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary. BSL (British Sign Language) has regional variations. It is not the same language as English.

Some people are born deaf so will not have heard sounds and some people become hearing impaired before they have acquired fluency in their first language. This can affect decoding of words phonetically when reading. Some people learn sign language while some learn to lip read, often people use some of each. Children are being diagnosed much earlier now and the use of Cochlea implants more routine.

Some people may become hearing impaired later on as a result of illness or injury and hearing does degrade with age. Older students may describe themselves as hard of hearing. Some people have tinnitus which is often described as a ringing or roaring in one or both ears. It is not a disease, but a symptom that can result from a number of underlying causes. It is distressing and tiring nonetheless, eroding the ability to concentrate and thus learn.

With hearing impairment there is not necessarily a reduction in sound volume but a reduction in sound quality. Often it is the top and/or bottom of the range of sound that is lost, or certain types of sounds including certain letters or phonemes.

Hearing aids and loops only increase the volume not the clarity and amplify all sounds equally, including background noise. However the newer digital systems are better at reducing noise and amplifying speech sounds.

Lip reading is not straightforward but complex and difficult, taking years to perfect. It needs knowledge of language, understanding of context, good lighting, good acoustics and a quiet environment. It also needs clear but not exaggerated speech at a natural pace. Exaggerating or shouting aggravates problems is offensive.

Deafness is hidden and not always apparent to others. Isolation from peers can result from difficulties in communicating and lack of interaction. There is danger of lower self-esteem especially if needs are not understood or tutors and fellow students do not take time to involve or communicate.

What are the implications for teaching and learning?

For younger students there may be a steeper jump from school to university especially if they have been at a specialist school for the d/Deaf.

English is a second language for BSL users so their needs and experiences will be similar to those of many international students. This, and the differences in vocabulary, will affect written work. Some discipline specific terms may not translate well into BSL. Unknown vocabulary is hard to lip read so it is important to be open to students checking they have got information down correctly, although they may well ask friends rather than the lecturer.

There are a range of potential consequences of students not hearing tutors or catching all the words. Pedagogically students may be left with gaps in their knowledge and understanding of important facts and concepts. If they rely on their peers to fill in the gaps they may be affected by misinformation, especially important for assignments and in situations such as labs. They might also harbour a fear that tutors think they are less able because they don't communicate as fluently (Nicholson, 2008).

If a student's range of sounds heard is affected, their experiences may differ depending on whether the lecturer is male or female – men generally sit in low frequency range with lower voices and women in the higher range. There may also be difficulty with regional accents using different lip patterns, phraseology and intonation.

There are practical difficulties in finding the optimum place to sit, listening/watching and taking notes at the same time or using signers/interpreters. There may be difficulties with background noise – obvious things such as building works but also fellow students chatting or all talking at once; communal learning spaces too can be difficult and distracting. A student may need to be quite close to the speaker's face – within a couple of metres – which may be difficult with big lecture theatres, labs, activities, or fieldwork.

d/Deaf or hearing impaired students will not experience or practice collaborative working as effectively or be able to deal with overlapping conversations. Tinnitus also makes group-work difficult and there may be difficulty concentrating in exams.

What students say:

'I don't like to go up to a lecturer and tell them I am deaf because I am a bit shy. I don't know them; I don't want to be treated differently; I don't want to be treated differently; I don't want to have a lot of attention focused on me and in any case I don't know what difference it would really make anyway'
(Student with hearing loss, Nicholson 2008)

Anyone marking assessments will need to know this is a second language and in common with many international students there may be more grammatical errors and /or a narrower vocabulary.

Overall it is very tiring to concentrate on a signer, lip read, try and catch sounds or listen through tinnitus. In addition a student may not be able to 'just pop in' and see someone if no BSL interpreter is around – they may only be funded for main sessions. If placements/fieldtrips are not a compulsory part of the course then it will also be difficult to get funding for an interpreter meaning the student misses out on important learning and work experience.

What works really well?

Getting some of the practicalities right:

- not standing against a window or a bright screen
- using the microphone in a lecture theatre, if there is one, and not moving away from the microphone
- repeating questions if there is no roving microphone and summarising the main points of a discussion from the front
- having good lighting
- directing the presentation to the student who is hearing impaired
- stopping talking when turning away to write on a white or smart board/flipchart
- writing up questions on a board/flipchart
- if using PowerPoint[®], reveal the bullets one at a time or use a laser pointer if available – students will find it easier to see where you are and follow what is happening
- allowing students to place themselves for optimal hearing – some may only have difficulties on one side
- a BSL interpreter will need a break every 20 minutes or so.

Do not alter or exaggerate way you speak as this will make it more difficult to lip read and try not to put your hands near your mouth or obscure your face. Use a slightly slower, more relaxed delivery with pauses, as the student may have more difficulty in note taking as they cannot write and look.

Providing materials beforehand so the student has some idea of what to expect and can follow up later if necessary and allow recording of lectures where possible.

Use film clips with subtitles and provide transcripts if possible

Managing group-work and having ground rules such as speaking one at a time and indicating who is speaking; sitting in a circle will enable a hearing impaired student to see everyone's faces. Discussions may need to be paced to ensure time for signing or lip reading.

Synchronous and Asynchronous discussion forums are good as they do not rely of oral communication. Digital technology is now very good so make use of email, mobiles, PDAs and so on as well as BlackBoard.

Further hints, tips and/or background reading:

- ECU (2009) *Sensory access in HE*. London: Equality Challenge Unit.
- Nicolson, D. (2008). Inclusive Learning and Assessment Practice: Feedback from d/Deaf and hard of hearing Students. *Learning and Teaching in Action*. Vol 7, Issue 2; summer 2008; p34-43.
- Royal National Institute for the Deaf (2002) *Deaf Students in Higher Education: How Inclusive are you? A Self-assessment Tool*. London: Action on Hearing Loss.

Checklist for reflection

In respect of hearing impaired sheets:



	✓
Do I deliver my lectures and seminars in a way that would be accessible to a hearing impaired student?	
Do I communicate with my students in a way that would be accessible to a hearing impaired student?	
Do I manage activities and groups in a way that would be accessible to a hearing impaired student?	
Do I use subtitles on film clips or provide transcripts?	
Can I make more use of technology for engagement or discussion?	

Reflection into action



Having reflected on the above, my key priorities for making my teaching more inclusive are:

Changes I would like to introduce	By when	Indicators that it has made my practice more inclusive

This document is part of an inclusive practice 'toolkit' - *IncludeAll*. The whole Toolkit, as one complete document or as separate documents, can be found on the University website at www.staffs.ac.uk/inclusivepractice .

It is split into four sections: Core Concepts; Inclusive by Design; Enhancing Practice; Checklists for Self-reflection.

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