

Note: Deaf, written with a capital D, describes a person who defines themselves as part of Deaf culture, separate to other disability cultures. They interact and communicate mostly with other Deaf people using BSL. The majority of Deaf people were born with little or no hearing. People who lose their hearing tend to use the term deaf without a capital d.

Working with and managing d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing Colleagues

What is deafness?

There are 4 areas to take into consideration when describing deafness. They are:

The degree

The onset

The clinical measurement and;

The functionality.

There are four main categories of people who could be described as d/Deaf:

1. People who are hard of hearing
2. People who are deafened
3. People who are Deaf
4. People who are deafblind

People who are d/Deaf may be able to communicate through a variety of methods such as speech, Sign Language, written word, lip reading, hearing aids and hearing loops or a combination of these.

Deaf Statistics

- **One in six people in the UK are affected by deafness.**
- **There are approximately 123,000 deafened people in the UK. These are people who have become deaf as adults.**
- **Approximately 100,000 deaf people in the UK use Sign Language as their first or preferred language.**
- **356,000 people in the UK have combined sight and hearing loss.**
- **90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents.**
- **Hearing loss increases with age. 40% of people over 50 and 70% of people over 70 have some degree of hearing loss.**

Methods of communications

Lipreading

- Lipreading is extremely difficult
- 70% of lipreading is guesswork
- Only 30% of lip patterns are visible
- d/Deaf people can't use lipreading alone to understand

Sign Language

- Not all d/Deaf people can use sign language
- There are 2 main languages in sign; British Sign Language known as BSL and International Sign Language
- Some Deaf people will consider BSL to be their first language and may not have a good command of English

Hearing aids & Cochlear Implants

- A hearing aid makes sounds louder
- They may not make sounds any clearer
- A hearing aid would never make hearing worse but they do not work for everyone
- A Cochlear Implant is a surgically implanted device which enables a greater range of hearing

Hearing Loops

- A hearing aid user can use their 'T' setting to access a loop system
- The system amplifies sound being picked up by the microphone and sends it down the loop to the hearing aid. Allowing the d/Deaf person to hear the person speaking more clearly
- Often hearing loops pick up background noise which also gets amplified making it worst for the d/Deaf person to hear so it's important to check the quality of the loop

Inductive couplers

- A mini loop system which reduces background noise

Vibrotactile devices

- A vibrating pad or pager which alerts the person of any alarms or bells

Visual alerters

- A system of flashing lights which alerts a d/Deaf person to anything from a door bell to a fire alarm

Minicoms, Textphones & Text Relay

- Equipment which allows d/Deaf people to make phone calls
- Minicoms allow the person to dial the number and then type what they want to say
- Minicoms only work with other minicoms
- Text Relay can be used with a receiver who does not have a minicom, as it uses a third party operator

Employers should consider

Recruitment

Can d/Deaf people access information about working for your organisation? Not all d/Deaf people will have written English as their first language so relying on a d/Deaf person being able to read the website may not be enough to make the site accessible. Information on websites should actively encourage people from a diverse range of backgrounds and encourage those with access needs to disclose them, so adjustments can be made to get the best out of the person at the interview.

Whether you are conducting group interviews or individual interviews, do not presume that a d/Deaf person wants a BSL interpreter or does not want to be involved in a group process. It is very easy for organisations to make assumptions about what a person needs. Always arrange to speak to the d/Deaf candidate and discuss their options. Make it clear to them that you want to get the best out of them, so they should choose the option that will enable them do to this.

Retention

If the workspace is flexible ask the employee where they would like to sit, as a quieter, well-lit space that faces towards people is usually preferable. Have a detailed conversation with the employee about what communication methods they would like to use and in what situations. For example, they may not want an interpreter day to day but may want one in meetings or training.

Consider what equipment or support may be needed for them to do their job effectively. This may include awareness training for the rest of the person's team or those teams they will be in regular contact with.

Always provide written information about any meeting, event or training beforehand so the d/Deaf person knows what topics will be covered and the likely vocabulary that will be used. This will help them to lipread most effectively. Follow up any meetings or training with key points in case the d/Deaf person missed any information.

In team meetings ask colleagues to indicate when they are going to speak and not to interrupt each other; this will help the d/Deaf person follow the conversation.

When communicating face to face with a d/Deaf colleague always get their attention before you start speaking, consider the persons communication preferences, use clear speech and slow down slightly, maintain eye contact, and use gestures and expressions to add meaning.

Helpful resources

Aids to communication

- A Lipspeaker
- A Notetaker
- A Speech to Text Reporter (STT)
- Interpreters (BSL)
- Hearing loops
- Minicoms & Text Relay

Organisations

- National Register of Communications Professionals with Deaf and Deafblind people (www.nrcpd.org.uk)
- Remote online interpreters and speech to Text Reporters. Such as (www.signtranslate.com or www.sttrsdirect.co.uk)
- Action of Hearing Loss (www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People (www.hearingdogs.org.uk)

N.B. Statistics in this document were provided by HearFirst, www.hearfirst.org.uk