Guidance for Staff Working with Hearing Impaired Students

Deafness is a term used to cover the whole range of hearing loss. The RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf people) uses the term to cover people who are: deaf, partially deaf/partially hearing, deafened, deaf/blind, hard of hearing, and tinnitus sufferers.

A Deaf student is likely to be one whose first language is British Sign Language and for whom English will be a second language. These students will primarily communicate via sign language and will usually require the support of a Sign Language Interpreter. They will also likely lip-read as part of their means of communication, but this should not be relied upon.

A student who is deaf or hard of hearing will be likely to have hearing aids and will use those as well as lip-reading to communicate. Students who use hearing aids may also use induction loops to access sound, for example in lecture theatres.

How does being d/Deaf or hard of hearing impact on study?

Support required will vary depending on the student’s individual circumstances. However, students who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing may need support in the following areas:

- Accessing and participating in spoken teaching, such as lectures
- Accessing film and TV resources
- Participating in group discussions

Supporting students who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing

- Written feedback is useful as it avoids the student needing to record feedback while discussing matters of relevance
- Provision of lecture and supervision handouts in advance in a written format
- Provide an overview of what the lecture or supervision will cover to assist with lip-reading
- All information (such as feedback, supervision reports) and all relevant materials should be provided in written format to avoid inaccuracies
- Permission to record lectures so that notes can be taken later, if no notetaker available
- Reserved seating in lectures to ensure the student can sit in the best position relative to the speaker and any equipment, such as an induction loop
- Ground rules should be established for group work as it may be difficult for the student to interact and see from body language when it might be their turn to contribute if they are lip-reading
A student who is lip-reading can only gather information visually from one source at a time, so will not be able to read slides and lip-read simultaneously

Reasonable Adjustments

Regular meetings with tutors should be coordinated to review adjustments and ensure that a student’s support requirements are being met

- If TV or other visual materials are shown, subtitling will be required
- 24 hours’ notice of change of venue whenever possible to ensure the student can arrange human support if necessary
- Indicate when the topic is changing in lectures or other teaching sessions so that the student who is lip-reading understands to expect new vocabulary
- Provide glossary and/or vocabulary lists as it is very difficult to lip-read a word that is not known

The Equality Act (2010)

If a student is d/Deaf or hard of hearing, they will be likely to meet the definition of a disabled person under the Equality Act (2010). In such cases, there will be a legal obligation for the University to make reasonable adjustments and not treat the individual less favourably for reasons relating to their impairment.

Key Support Actions

- Make use of any technology, e.g. an induction loop, or human support, e.g. a sign language interpreter
- Provide handouts, PowerPoint slides and any other materials in advance
- Provide all information e.g. feedback, schedules, essay titles, contact details in written formats
- Keep timetables and venues consistent so that any support workers will be able to attend as agreed and it can be ensured that the correct equipment is available
- Instigate strong ground rules to ensure everyone can participate in discussions even if they are unable to hear cues to join any discussion