

Briefing

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

This briefing is not an authoritative statement of the law. While we have made every effort to ensure that the information we have provided is correct, Business Disability Forum cannot accept any responsibility or liability.

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Introduction

What is hearing loss?

One in six people (11 million people) live with a degree of hearing loss in the UK.[1]

Hearing loss occurs when sound signals do not reach the brain. There are different types of hearing loss depending on where the damage to the auditory system is located. It can be a sensorineural hearing loss (inner ear), conductive hearing loss (outer ear to the middle ear) or mixed loss.

Some people are born with hearing loss, others inherit a condition and some lose their hearing as a result of an accident, after illness, or through age. The incidence of deafness increases with age, for example, according to Action on Hearing loss more than 40% of over 50 year olds and more than 70% of over 70 year olds have hearing loss.

It is important to ask the person with hearing loss what their language/communication support needs are, as there are ways of minimising the barriers and improving communications generally.

Cochlear implant

Some Deaf, Deafblind or Deafened people benefit from a cochlear implant. The majority of people who receive one or two cochlear implants are children who receive their implants before they start school so that the implant can help with spoken and signed language acquisition. The cochlear implant does not remove the person's deafness but it can provide a useful sensation of hearing sound. Some deaf people with a cochlear implant can hear enough to use a regular telephone and take part in conversations; others still require language/communication support and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

[1] Action on hearingloss - Hearing matters report

Terminology

To understand the barriers and possible solutions for people who have hearing loss, it is important to know what level of hearing loss the person has and some of the language used to describe people with hearing loss. There are several terms that refer to people with hearing loss and to different degrees of hearing loss.

Deaf

The term “deaf” refers to everyone who has hearing loss no matter their level of hearing loss or language preference.

Hard of hearing

The term ‘hard of hearing’ is used for the largest group of people with hearing loss. People who are ‘hard of hearing’ will, in general, lose their hearing gradually over time and as they age.

Deafened

People who were born hearing and become profoundly deaf after learning to speak are often described as ‘deafened’ or as having an acquired profound hearing loss (APHL).

Deaf blind

Deafblindness is sometimes called dual sensory impairment. This is because 'deafblind' people will have both some hearing loss and some sight loss.

People who refer to themselves as deafblind are usually people who are born deaf and use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first or preferred language and who lose their sight as they get older, for example, if they have Usher's Syndrome. Some people who are born with deafblindness may also have physical and/or learning disabilities. Many deafblind people may not be totally deaf and totally blind. It is therefore important to ask the deafblind person what their preferred communication methods are.

Tinnitus

Tinnitus is the perception of noises in the person's head and/or ear which have no external source.

Those living with the condition may have to endure a ringing, buzzing, hissing, whistling or other noise. The sensation can be constant or intermittent and it can vary in volume. It is not a disease or illness; it is a symptom generated within the person's hearing system and usually caused by an underlying condition. The noise may be in one or both ears, or it may feel like it is inside the person's head. It is difficult to pinpoint its exact location. It may be low, medium or high pitched and can be heard as a single noise or as multiple components. Tinnitus is more common in people who have hearing loss but those with full hearing can have tinnitus too.

Deaf and deafblind BSL users can have tinnitus without ever hearing sounds. The British Tinnitus Association (BTA) can offer support and advice on adjustments for people who have tinnitus.

Hearing loss and language

The language used by people who have hearing loss varies depending on when they acquired their loss, its severity and the presence of associated conditions (deafblindness).

Some people with hearing loss will have English (or any other native oral tongue) as their first language whilst others, often people described as 'profoundly deaf', may be sign language users. Some deafened people may use Sign Supported English (SSE) to help them communicate. SSE borrows signs from BSL and follows the spoken English grammatical structure.

Deaf British Sign Language users sometimes refer to themselves as "Big D" Deaf and members of the "Deaf Community". Deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) do not see themselves as disabled, but as a linguistic minority who need to use equality legislation to access their right to use their own language and to access goods and services in their language.

In the UK, Deaf BSL users may be taught bilingually – in English and in BSL from pre-school/nursery onwards. Alternatively, they may be taught solely in BSL or solely in English and then learn BSL when they move to secondary school which may impact on their fluency in English, their second language.

Employment and people with hearing loss

According to recent research, there are 5 million people of working age with hearing loss.[2]

Employers often regard people with hearing loss as particularly hard to employ. Misconceptions include the belief that they are restricted to certain jobs yet there are very few jobs which deaf people cannot do, given training and adjustments. Hearing loss can cause employees to feel isolated in the workplace which is why making adjustments and providing appropriate communication support is vital.

People with hearing loss may well be protected under the Equality Act 2010 even if they do not think of themselves as disabled. Nevertheless employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and not to discriminate against employees who might be facing barriers at work because of a disability or long-term condition – even if it has not been diagnosed as a disability or accepted as such by the individual.

Employers should be aware that non-visible disabilities, such as hearing loss, mean that barriers can be less obvious. This means reasonable adjustments may be harder for employers to determine and put in place. Employers can seek advice from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers at Jobcentre Plus who refer people with hearing loss for positions. There are also organisations which offer specialist advice and disability awareness training to help employers ensure that their recruitment processes are barrier-free for those with hearing loss – **see page 35 for further details.**

[2] Action on Hearing Loss

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

It is important that employers have an open and honest conversation with new employees and their support staff about the barriers that may be present in the workplace and what simple measures might help remove the barriers. The best practice approach is to make adjustments for anyone who needs them in order to work effectively and contribute fully to your organisation.

Most employers will want to know what is 'reasonable'. Doing what seems fair for the individual, and others who work for you, given the size and resources of your organisation is a good place to start.

This guidance will help you deliver best practice.

- You might need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly.
- Don't make assumptions about what people can and cannot do.
- Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for doing what and when it must be done.
- Involve the individual in generating solutions and respect their right to confidentiality.

For more detail on the law and making reasonable adjustments contact **Business Disability Forum's Advice Service** on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or see the Briefing on The Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments and best practice

As the incidence of people who become deaf increases with age (and the UK has an ageing population), even if you do not currently employ someone who is deaf, it is likely that you will have to manage the retention of an employee who becomes deaf in the future.

By regularly talking to employees about their work, for example in performance appraisals, you may be able to identify difficulties that could be attributable to an employee losing their hearing. This will then give you an opportunity to talk about adjustments that may enable the employee to work more effectively.

Do not make assumptions about what someone can or cannot do. A person with hearing loss will often have particular talents as well as difficulties. Most people, once they understand their disability, are inventive in developing coping strategies that enable them not only to learn and work effectively but also to adopt a fresh approach to problem solving.

Consider the skills, abilities and aspirations of each individual and implement appropriate and reasonable support so that everyone can maximise their potential; this can have a positive effect on an organisation as it unlocks different ways of tackling problems and making decisions.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

The severity and impact of hearing loss varies, as do the strategies that help people with hearing loss overcome problems in employment

Adjustments may well be simple and inexpensive and they make good business sense: without adjustments, good candidates may not apply for jobs and good employees could be lost. Precise requirements vary from one individual to another, so you should always ask the person what they need. By talking to employees both at the beginning of employment but also regularly about their work going forward, employers are better able to identify difficulties that could be attributable to an employee having hearing loss.

Language support professionals

People who have hearing loss will use a range of communication methods depending on factors such as their degree of hearing loss and personal preference.

There are a number of Language Support Professionals who work with deaf people.

When booking a Language Support Professional, always book someone who is qualified and registered as the professional will be covered by their Code of Practice and a Complaints Procedure.

In the UK, the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPP) holds the registers of Interpreters for Deafblind people, Lipspeakers, Electronic Note takers, British Sign Language/English Interpreters, Sign Language Translators and Speech-To-Text-Reporters.

In Scotland, BSL/English Interpreters can also be registered with the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI).

Interpreters for deafblind people

Interpreters for deafblind people will use Tactile or Hands-On Sign Language to interpret for a deafblind person or the Deafblind Manual, which involves drawing individual letters on a deafblind person's palm.

Lip speakers

Lip speakers soundlessly repeat what is being said, using clear lip patterns.

Electronic note takers

Electronic note takers provide a typed note of what is being said as it is said, using special software. This is not a verbatim note but will be as near to what is said as possible. The person with hearing loss then reads what is written on the computer screen or on projected notes.

Sign language interpreters, video relay services and sign language translators

Sign Language Interpreters interpret what is said into sign language, for example, into British Sign Language and then interprets what is signed into a spoken language, for example, English.

The sign language the person uses will be determined by where they learned the language. Each country has its own sign language in the same way as it has its own spoken language. British Sign Language has its own grammar which is different to that of English, but has regional dialects/signs in a similar way to English.

There are Video Relay Services available throughout the UK. Contact Business Disability Forum if you require more information.

Sign Language Translators can be hearing or deaf and translate written or spoken material into sign language. For example, Health and Safety information from a written leaflet into a BSL film clip. This is easier now due to digital developments and many organisations now find it easier to make BSL versions of information leaflets at the same time as they are producing them in written formats.

Speech-to-text reporters

Speech-To-Text Reporters produce verbatim text at the speed of ordinary speech through a computer-based system and special keyboard. As with the Electronic Note taker's notes, the deaf person reads the text from a screen.

Speech-To-Text Reporters and Electronic Note takers both provide a note of the meeting/appointment that then belongs to whoever books the service. Both services are becoming easier to access online so that the communication professionals do not have to be in the room where the meeting is taking place but can listen through a conference call. This service is not yet UK-wide.

Graphic facilitation or mind-mapping can also help as both give a visual account of what is being discussed at meetings, training or conferences.

Communication support workers

Some deaf people do not require or want Language Support Professionals to support them in their daily work activities with the exception of formal meetings and supervision sessions. The person may want a Communication Support Worker.

Communication Support Workers should have at least BSL Level Two or BSL Level Three and clear written and spoken English. The Communication Support Worker should have Level 3 qualifications in "Communication Support for Deaf Learners" and "Modifying Written English Texts for Deaf People".

Recruitment and selection

Candidates who are deaf may be prevented from demonstrating their abilities and potential by conventional recruitment processes.

You need to make sure that you do not discriminate against a job applicant who has hearing loss during the recruitment process. You may also have to make reasonable adjustments. It is important not to make assumptions about what the applicant can or cannot do. If you use external recruitment agencies, ask for evidence that they make reasonable adjustments for applicants with hearing loss and work to the standards that underpin this guidance.

Language Support Professionals in the UK and most BSL/English Interpreters, Electronic Note takers, Palantypists and Speech-To-Text Reporters are booked up to two to four weeks in advance. It is therefore recommended that you leave sufficient time between informing interview candidates and the interview day. It is essential to book the required support as soon as you are informed about a candidate's preferred method of communication. If you do not arrange this support in advance, there is a risk that you will not be able to book the needed support for your selected interview day; in that case, be flexible and make sure to rearrange your interview day to allow all candidates to participate fully.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

Employers should be aware that some potential employees with hearing loss may have in place or need to put in place effective support from a specialist job coach. Local employment support providers can be contracted by Jobcentre Plus staff to support people before, during and after recruitment. Access to Work might be able to help with assessments and contribute to the cost of some adjustments.

For more information about who can use Access to Work, visit:
GOV.UK - Looking for work if you're disabled

Further information on best practice for recruitment and selection is also available from the Government's Disability Confident scheme, visit: disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk or contact **Business Disability Forum's Advice Service** on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.

Remember that it is unlawful to ask questions about health or a disability prior to a job offer under the Equality Act 2010 unless the question relates directly to an intrinsic aspect of the role for which the person is applying, or is for the purpose of making reasonable adjustments to the application or interview process. Questions about disability can still be asked on equal opportunities monitoring forms.

Job descriptions

Job descriptions can inadvertently place unnecessary barriers in the way of people with hearing loss. When drawing up job descriptions and candidate specifications:

- Be specific about what skills are needed and what the job involves.
- Distinguish between essential and desirable requirements and ensure you present an accurate picture of the job and key skills actually required, e.g. the essential criteria of a receptionist is to answer the telephone and meet and greet visitors; a desirable skill may be to take notes of meetings.
- Be flexible. Very often minor changes can make a significant difference.
- Do not ask for educational qualifications that do not relate to the position. This will exclude people with hearing loss who have not been successful in education.
- Do not needlessly exclude a candidate with hearing loss. Concentrate on what is to be achieved in a job rather than on how it is achieved. A deaf person may simply do things differently, e.g. communicate externally using email, in writing, by using a BSL Interpreting Video Relay Service or by the Next Generation Text Service.^[3]
- Accept completed application forms in alternative formats and appreciate that a written application may have been completed with support.

There is no requirement to alter the fundamental nature of a job so that a candidate with a disability can do it.

[3] Next Generation Text (NGT) Service

Advertising and attracting applicants

When advertising a job:

- Use positive wording like “we welcome disabled applicants” or “being part of Business Disability Forum’s membership highlights our commitment to becoming a disability-smart organisation”.
- Be clear that you are willing to make reasonable adjustments.
- Display or mention the Disability Confident symbol if you are a symbol holder.
- Make contact with your local deaf organisations or national organisations who can put you in touch with appropriate organisations, for example, UKCoD^[4] or the Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD).^[5]
- Advertise in more than one place.
- Consider targeted advertising through specialist organisations that work for people with hearing loss.
- Consult with your local Jobcentre Plus.
- Provide a point of contact for people who are concerned about the recruitment process, using a range of contact methods e.g. email, SMS contact number, Next Generation Text Service, or a BSL Interpreting Video Relay Service.
- State that applications will be accepted in alternative formats, e.g. by email or on USB stick.

[4] UK Council on Deafness

[5] Scottish Council on Deafness

Application forms

Adjustments may need to be made to the shortlisting process, because an applicant may:

- Apply for a job for which they are over qualified because they need to regain confidence.
- Have gaps in their CV due to their disability.
- Have gained experience outside of paid employment, e.g. work experience and voluntary work.

Application forms should be clear, easy to fill in and as straight forward as possible to improve accessibility. Where possible, an easy read version should also be made available.

Interviews and tests

Ensure that candidates who have hearing loss are able to demonstrate their ability to do the job and what they can contribute to your organisation.

Focus on the person's abilities, not on the person's hearing loss. If you have any doubts about a person's ability to do an intrinsic function of the job simply ask how they would do it.

When you invite applicants for an interview, make sure to ask the candidate if they require any adjustments to be made for the interview.

For example, does the candidate require a loop system, an Electronic Note taker or a BSL/English Interpreter? If you are using Language Support Professionals at the interviews, then they will require some preparation and this should be built in. For example, an explanation of any technical, business or professional terms you might use in the interview. The BSL/English Interpreter might like to have a few minutes with the deaf candidate to ensure they both understand possible dialects.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

Remember that different people will have different adjustments requirements. Not everyone will need all or even any of these adjustments. If the candidate attends the interview with their assistance dog, prepare a dog space with a water bowl.

- Consider how the candidate will reach the interview venue. If public transport could prove difficult, offer to reimburse the taxi fare.
- Ensure that reception and security staff know how to welcome and assist visitors who have hearing loss.
- Ensure colleagues know that induction loops are available and that they make this known to visitors. Make sure that there are appropriate signs to alert visitors that induction loops are available. Equipment should be tested regularly and staff trained on how to use it.
- Make sure the room is set up so that there is no lighting glare (you should not sit with your back to a window or with a strong light at your back) in case the person lip reads. Ensure and that the room has a working loop system. In some situations, a portable loop system may be useful. Ideally the room should have soft furnishings, for example, a carpet instead of linoleum or wooden floor and curtains instead of blinds, as this makes it easier to hear if the person is hard of hearing or deafened and still has a degree of hearing.
- Allow the candidate time to adjust to unfamiliar lip patterns and tune-in to the interviewer(s).
- Look directly at the candidate, maintaining eye contact. Do not speak to the Language Support Professional. The Language Support Professional's role is to facilitate communication, not to participate in the interview. Language Support Professionals observe strict confidentiality.
- Don't cover your mouth.
- Don't shout – just speak at your normal pace and don't unnaturally exaggerate your lip movements.
- Be patient if not immediately understood. Rephrase what you said rather than just repeating yourself. Some people have difficulty in lip reading certain words.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

All candidates can be asked a question about language/communication requirements at interview. The focus is not on disability but on how everyone communicates so that the organisation can function at its optimum level.

If selection normally involves a test, be sure that it does not discriminate against someone who has hearing loss:

- Discuss the test with the test publisher and seek guidance on possible adjustments including alternative languages or formats.
- Consult candidates in advance so that necessary adjustments can be made.
- Allow extra time for explanation of the test requirements and administration.
- Be prepared to waive the test. There are often other equally satisfactory ways of getting the information.
- Information or instructions normally presented orally may need to be given in writing or through a Language Support Professional.
- Group tests may not be accessible if more than one is taking place at a time. If there is to be a group test, ensure that candidates speak one at a time and into a microphone.
- Remember that testing verbal communication skills may be discriminatory if such skills are not a necessary component of the job.
- Provide comprehensive, clear accessible instructions, which could be written or in BSL on a screen and ensure that they are understood.
- Offer the candidate an alternative to providing written answers if this is not essential. For example, if the person will be carrying out manual tasks where there is no need to use written English, you could consider allowing a deaf BSL user to respond to the tasks in BSL with a BSL/English Interpreter rather than in written English.

Post job-offer

Once someone has been offered a job, you may need to make adjustments to ensure they can perform to their highest capability. Start getting the adjustments in place as soon as practicable after you have made an appointment – it may take time to set up reasonable adjustments. When applicable, support the person to apply for Access to Work.

Consult the individual and make sure that the employee's manager or supervisor understands the agreed adjustments. If the appointed candidate has not had a reasonable adjustment made before or is new to your particular industry, offer suggestions of what the adjustment could be.

Most deaf people say that what helps them most at work is colleagues who have a basic awareness of deafness and how it affects communication.

Deaf awareness training helps colleagues learn how to make themselves more easily understood. For example, where to stand or sit in meetings to ease lip reading, the importance of passing on key information and why having a loop system that is tested and always in working order is important. If possible, the deaf person should be involved in the communication tactics part of the training.

In-house sign language classes may be useful for the team if the person's first preferred language is BSL. Do not expect the BSL user to teach their colleagues how to sign as this may not be a skill they have.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

At the end of the probationary period, in supervisory sessions and performance appraisals, build a mechanism for identifying and resolving disability-related problems, for example a standard question asking if any working arrangements are causing the employee problems. It will ensure that adjustments are still effective. Ensure that you take the same approach to adjustments when an employee with hearing loss applies for promotion, again not making assumptions about what the employee can or cannot do.

Completing a 'tailored adjustment plan' with new employees who have a disability or with an employee who develops a disability is a good way of recording and reviewing adjustments that have been agreed and actions that will be taken if the employee is absent due to ill-health.

To see an example of a tailored adjustment agreement and to download a template, visit **Business Disability Forum's** website at **businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or contact Business Disability Forum's Advice Service on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk**.

Working arrangements to retain employees

A reasonable adjustment for team meetings and support/supervision/performance appraisal meetings would be to provide the same level of language/communication support as was provided at the interview stage.

This ensures the employee with hearing loss receives the same messages and support as their hearing colleagues and that you can show that they did receive the messages/support.

Further adjustments to ensure the employee can work effectively might include:

- Ensuring the office and/or work environment is well lit and has good acoustics with visible alarms.
- Locating the employee where background noise is minimised. This should not exclude the deaf employee from the work environment.
- Arranging the workplace so that the employee can see when someone enters their area and also so that it is easier for the deaf person to communicate with colleagues and vice-versa.

Adjustments will also help you to retain employees who experience hearing loss. By making the adjustments you might retain an employee's skills and experiences and save the cost of recruiting and training a replacement, and possibly the cost of early retirement.

It may be difficult for employees to realise and sometimes to accept how newly acquired hearing loss affects their day-to-day activities, including their performance at work.

Assistance dogs

Deaf people might have assistance dogs in the same way people who have sight loss do. Deafblind people may have an assistance dog to give them support with their reduced eyesight, but might also have an assistance dog to support them with their lack of hearing.

Deaf BSL users and deafened people may have an assistance dog, called a “hearing dog”^[6] who acts as the person’s ears in their own home (to alert the person to a ringing telephone, or the doorbell or to the smoke alarm/CO monitor) and when out and about to alert the person to dangerous situations.

An employee with hearing loss may want to bring their hearing dog to work. The dog would need a “dog station” where it can have a water bowl and food bowl. The deaf person will need space by their desk/work station for their dog. Colleagues will need to know the rules of having an assistance dog in the workplace. The deaf person will also need a grassy area to walk and allow their dog to go to the toilet.

In some cases the team around the employee may benefit from greater awareness of how to treat an assistance dog if it is used by the employee.

[6] Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

Sickness absence and disability leave

An employee may well need a period of disability leave to adjust to changes caused by becoming deaf, for example to obtain an assistance dog and/or develop new ways of working and living independently. The person may need extra support to cope with the transition from hearing to deaf, especially if this is a sudden process.

Becoming deaf in a hearing world can, for some people, cause anxiety, stress or other mental health conditions. You might want to refer the deaf employee to a local deaf organisation for additional support.

To find out where your local deaf support organisation is, contact UKCoD or SCoD or - details **on page 35 onwards**.

For more information, see the 'Managing sickness absence' briefing and the 'Attendance management – Line manager guide'.

Assistive technology

People with disabilities, including people with hearing loss, may find it beneficial to use Assistive Technology (AT).

This can be a piece of equipment or software that alleviates part or all of the difficulties they have in a certain area.

New pieces of software and equipment are developed regularly but we have compiled below a short list of AT that can be considered for people with hearing loss. For more information, the national deaf organisations^[7] can point you in the right direction to companies who offer technological solutions.

Meetings and appointments

- “Older technology” that can be used to support people with hearing loss include the use of Microsoft PowerPoint and of microphones at meetings.
- Someone who uses hearing aids will benefit from a hearing loop/induction loop for any conversation, meeting or appointment to enable them to better take part. Induction loops enable people to directly tune in their hearing aids to speakers and so filter out background noise that could be distracting – portable loops are also available. Other amplification options include FM radio and infra-red systems.
- Live or pre-recorded captioning systems^[8] that enable deaf people to take part in spoken meetings and conversations at work. They transcribe everything that is said by each speaker into captions that can be instantly read by the deaf person, usually using a laptop.

[7] SCoD and UKCoD

[8] For example, SoftNi - Live subtitling or Red Bee Media - Captioning

Telephone

- Next Generation Text Service.[9] By using a smartphone, tablet, or computer and making a telephone call you can type to the relay assistant who will speak your words to the person you're calling; the relay assistant will type their reply so you can read it on your display. They can be used with a textphone[10] if that is what the deaf person feels comfortable with.
- Telephones with controllable amplification.
- Smartphones and tablets have replaced video phones and deaf BSL users and deaf people who lip read prefer Facetime (iOS only), Skype and "ooVoo" as they can see the person they are contacting so that they can sign directly to another BSL user or lip read what the other person is saying.
- SMS/text messaging can be particularly useful. Allowing deaf employees to use email, instant messaging (example: WhatsApp, Skype messaging, Viber) or SMS to communicate with colleagues can be considered a reasonable adjustment even in situations where the employee, if they were not deaf, would not be able to use their mobile phone at work. Those who may have to travel between different sites should have access to mobile technology with the ability to text and/or email to ensure their safety. Access to work may pay for a mobile phone contract or a tablet with internet access as a reasonable adjustment.

Hearing aids

Digital hearing aids process sounds more accurately than analogue hearing aids and can be adjusted to reflect an individual's needs.

The NHS often provides digital hearing aids at no cost to the user. If the employee will otherwise be placed at a substantial disadvantage in the workplace, it might be reasonable for an employer to provide a digital hearing aid as a reasonable adjustment. This should be arranged through a registered professional audiologist.

[9] Next Generation Text (NGT) Service

[10] Examples of textphones

Induction and training

Deafness, communications and the need to make adjustments should be embedded into all policies, for example, policies on sickness absence, training, and performance appraisals.

All new recruits should be made aware of these policies during the induction process, and all employees reminded of them on a regular basis.

New recruits should be made aware of these policies during the induction procedure. People with hearing loss should be made aware that they can ask about any problems they may have, particularly at the beginning of a new job.

It is important that your standard induction and training programme is accessible, so that someone with hearing loss can gain the same information as everyone else. You may also want to provide a workplace mentor to ensure supportive training. This can provide another employee with valuable personal development.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

Ensure employees with hearing loss also have equal access to further in-house and external training, meetings and career development opportunities.

- Allow more time and greater flexibility for induction and training.
- Brief the group on what language/communication support is and what communication tactics the deaf employee wants to be used. The appropriate registered language/communication support should be booked for training sessions – ask the employee what they need. This will ensure the person with hearing loss can participate fully in any training. It should also generally improve communication between colleagues.
- Make sure training videos are subtitled for people who are deafened or hard of hearing in English and are interpreted into BSL too. Otherwise, the videos can be interpreted by the BSL/English interpreter if present. Transcription is not enough for the deaf person to be included fully in a training session using videos. Other arrangements may need to be made for employees who are deafblind, for example, to have someone give a one-to-one voiceover of what is happening on the screen.

Employment adjustments for people who have hearing loss

Inform course tutors or trainers when they have deaf participants on a programme, and ensure that they know how to make their training accessible. They should:

- Meet deaf participants in advance, to determine individual requirements.
- Be aware of communication needs (see 'interviews and tests' on page 18).
- Be informed that Language Support Professionals need to be booked well in advance, if they are unaware of this.
- Ensure the room(s) used are suitable for deaf people. Ensure that it has: a working loop system; good acoustics and soft furnishings to deaden background noise; good lighting so that the deaf person can lip read or see the language/communication support; a separate room if there is to be small group discussion to prevent sensory overload; and language/communication support throughout any breaks (remembering the Language Support Professionals are entitled to breaks too) when networking opportunities may take place.
- Provide handouts, a reading list and written notes introducing any new vocabulary before the training session so that the deaf person has a chance to prepare and think of questions.
- Establish a collaborative relationship with Language Support Professionals and provide them with course materials at least seven working days in advance.

Health and safety

With reasonable adjustments there is no reason why people who have hearing loss should pose a greater health and safety risk than anyone else.

In limited circumstances, for example where an employee has acquired a new hearing impairment through an accident or degenerative condition, it may be necessary to conduct an individual risk assessment.

A risk assessment will help an employer to determine whether the individual's hearing loss presents any increased risks either to themselves or others. Such risk assessments must always be specific to the particular individual, job-role and working environment concerned.

For more information about health and safety and how to carry out an individual and competent risk assessment, see the 'Health and safety' and the 'Equality Act' briefings.

While the risks are often overestimated, some straightforward precautions are sensible.

Premises

The design of premises can place someone with hearing loss at a substantial disadvantage in accessing employer's premises. Simple adjustments can enable an employee with hearing loss, as well as others, to navigate a building more easily. These include:

- Door entries should have flashing red and green lights and video screens where possible. If this is not possible, there should always be someone on the door to let people in and out.
- Car parks should have an entry system that does not require the employee to speak to and answer through an intercom system. Card systems are more inclusive. If the car park is located over a distance or on several floors, the safety system should be fully accessible to employees with hearing loss. If not, then other provisions such as issuing mobile phones linked to the emergency services should be considered.
- A visual floor announcer, to indicate the arrival of a lift.
- The emergency button in a lift should have a light showing when it has been activated and where possible there should be a number that a deaf person can text.

Equipment

- Machinery with safety alarms can be converted to produce accompanying flashing lights.

Emergency

All employees, including those with hearing loss, must know about emergency evacuation procedures.

- If the person is to be out and about, then access to a mobile telephone and someone who is the nominated person to text if there are problems or issues as well as registering the number to the Text 999^[11] service means that the deaf person is safer when out on their own.
- Health and safety information is provided in a language that the deaf person understands or in an accessible format, for example in BSL and with subtitles on a DVD.
- Health and safety training follows the good practice guidance for training in this booklet.

Fire alarms and drills

Fire alarms should have accompanying flashing lights and the person with hearing loss should have a vibrating personal fire alarm; this applies to all areas of the building, including toilets and break areas. If this is not possible, then a vibrating alarm linked to the smoke detector/fire alarm system provides the same protection.

Deaf employees must know about emergency exits and fire drills. Sometimes a 'buddy' is assigned to help in an evacuation.

^[11] SMS to the emergency services

Harassment

A person who has hearing loss may be particularly vulnerable to harassment from their colleagues.

As an employer, you must take all reasonable steps to deal with harassment. Harassment includes not only physical or verbal abuse but also anything which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading humiliating or offensive environment.

Harassment stems from stereotyping, lack of understanding, intolerance of difference and fear. To prevent the bullying and harassment of anyone you should:

- Ensure your organisation has clear policies on workplace bullying and harassment and that complaints are investigated promptly and effectively. Ensure these policies are communicated across the organisation through campaigns and awareness raising initiatives.
- Make it clear that any harassment, including on grounds of disability, will not be tolerated and that perpetrators will be dealt with through the organisation's disciplinary procedures.
- Ensure management understands that people who have hearing loss experience increased risk of harassment and provide training for line managers to help them to identify and manage incidents connected to bullying and harassment in the workplace.
- Make the employee aware of their right to equal treatment, their entitlement to make a complaint and to initiate a grievance.
- Allow employees access to support networks internally or externally from work. If possible, ensure employees who have experienced bullying or harassment have access to professional and confidential counselling.
- Ensure disability awareness training is implemented across your workforce to challenge stereotyping.

Further sources of reference

Useful organisations

Business Disability Forum

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street,
London SE1 2NY

Tel: +44-(0)20-7403-3020

Website: businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Business Disability Forum (BDF) is a not-for-profit membership organisation that supports businesses to recruit and retain disabled employees and serve disabled customers.

Business Disability Forum provides pragmatic support, expertise, advice, training and networking opportunities between businesses. Our aim is to transform the life chances – and experience – of disabled people as employees and consumers.

Action on Hearing Loss

1-3 Highbury Station Road,
London, N1 1SE

Tel: +44-(0)808-808-0123

Email: informationline@hearingloss.org.uk

SMS: +44-(0)7800-000-360

The largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

Action on Hearing Loss runs an information line which provides free, confidential information about anything related to hearing loss or tinnitus.

The charity's 'Working for Change' campaign aims to change attitudes to hearing loss in the workplace and provides dedicated materials for employers: **Action on Hearing Loss - Working for change.**

UK Council on Deafness

4 & 5, The Cedars,
12 Old Ipswich Rd,
Ipswich, Colchester,
CO7 7QR

SMS: +44-(0)7903-560-037

Email: info@deafcouncil.org.uk

Website: deafcouncil.org.uk

UKCoD has represented the deaf sector across England, Wales and Northern Ireland on many policy issues, hosted conferences, and continued to be an interface with government. It also coordinates national Deaf Awareness Week.

Scottish Council on Deafness

Venlaw,
349 Bath St,
Glasgow,
G2 4AA

Tel: +44-(0)141-248-2474

SMS: +44-(0)7925-41 7-338

Email: admin@scod.org.uk

Website: scod.org.uk

The Scottish Council on Deafness is the membership organisation for the deaf sector in Scotland. It can advise employers on deafness and can signpost deaf employees to where they can get support, information and services.

British Sign Language (BSL) and deaf awareness training

Signature

Merse House,
Mandale Business Park,
Belmont, Durham DH1 1TH

Tel: +44-(0)191-383-1155

SMS: +44-(0)7974-121-594

Email: lynn.vest@signature.org.uk

Website: signature.org.uk

Provide accredited training courses in BSL, deaf awareness and communications with deaf people.

Next Generation Text Service

NGT Team,
c/o Internal Box 14, Telephone House,
170–175 Moor Lane, Preston,
Lancashire, PR1 1BA

Tel: +44-(0)800-7311-888

SMS or NGT Life app: +44-(0)800-500-888

Website: ngts.org.uk

If on telephone calls you can't hear the other person's voice or don't catch all that they're saying, or they can't understand what you're saying, the Next Generation Text (NGT) Service can help.

By using a smartphone, tablet, or computer and making a phone call you can type to our relay assistant who will speak your words to the person you're calling, and the relay assistant will type their reply so you can read it on your display. Whether you use NGT at home, in your office, or on the move you can order takeaways, book taxis, use phone banking, order goods, or just chat by typing and/or reading your phone conversation.

How to work with and book Sign Language Interpreters outside the UK

All Sign Language Interpreters work to a Code of Practice and need to be qualified and registered. For more information on who to contact locally (in each country), contact the following organisations in the first instance:

European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI)

EFSLI is the European membership led organisation of Sign Language Interpreters consisting of national and regional associations, individual & associate members.

Email: secretariat@efsli.org (Minke Salomé, EFSLI administrative support)

Website: efsli.org

National organisations: [efsli - Members](#)

World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)

WASLI Office,
7/211 Wellington Street,
Collingwood,
Victoria 3066,
Australia

Website: wasli.org

Australia and Oceania: austoceania.wasli@gmail.com

Asia: asiamonica.wasli@gmail.com

Africa: wasliarr@gmail.com

North America: northamerica.wasli@gmail.com

Transcaucasia and Central Asia: transcaucasia.wasli@gmail.com

The Balkans: Balkans.wasli@gmail.com

Latin America and the Caribbean: latinoamerica.wasli@gmail.com

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