



## **University of Edinburgh Student Disability Service**

### **Deaf Awareness and Good Practice Guide for Staff**

#### **Access strategies**

The majority of British students with limited hearing use spoken English as their first language. They are most likely to use some combination of the following strategies to access learning:

- **Amplification and sound enhancement** (for example: hearing aids, cochlear implants, loop systems, individual wireless-assisted systems etc).
- **Speechreading** (commonly known as lipreading)
- **Reading notes from manual or electronic note-takers**
- **Reading subtitles**

Some students with very limited or no hearing are bilingual users of English and British Sign Language (BSL). See **Appendix 1** for more information. These students will often work with **BSL/English interpreters** to access learning, in combination with one or more of the strategies listed above. A few may also use one or more other sign and/or spoken languages.

**Important: deaf students vary widely in their individual linguistic access and support requirements.** The adjustments on a student's Schedule of Adjustments will match the individual combination of languages/strategies they use.

#### **Language and general knowledge issues**

It is common for significantly deaf individuals of all intellectual abilities to experience some level of on-going reading and writing challenges. This is because they are most unlikely to have learned spoken language in the same way, at the same rate, as hearing peers - and spoken language is the basis of reading and writing development.

Deaf students may also have gaps in general knowledge which hearing students have acquired through incidental hearing.

These situations apply whether the student uses a spoken or sign language as first or preferred<sup>1</sup> language.

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<sup>1</sup> Some students will not have had access to a sign language from birth, but it will now be their main language for effective communication in some situations

## Terminology

For various reasons, students will differ in their terminology preferences.

Terms include:

- 'deaf' (used throughout this guide as a generic term)
- 'Deaf' (used in this guide, mid-sentence, to denote BSL-using students who identify with the Deaf Community)
- hearing impaired
- partially hearing (or partially deaf)
- hard of hearing

**Be guided by the individual student's preference.**

## Access and support strategies: lectures and tutorials

### 1. Subtitles

Deaf students will not be able to fully access information on audio-visual presentations without subtitles. Please contact the Student Disability Service for further information: [disability.service@ed.ac.uk](mailto:disability.service@ed.ac.uk)

Where full subtitling is not possible, please provide a **transcript**.

### 2. Good microphone practice

Good microphone practice is vital to deaf students who need amplified speech to access information. It also applies to note-takers and interpreters who need exceptional quality of speech sound to do their jobs.

- Position the clip microphone centrally and approx 8 inches below your mouth – this makes a **big** difference to accessibility. See **Appendix 2** for further guidance.

“You can have the most sophisticated amplification system, but if the mic is poorly used, you might as well not bother.”

Hearing Technician.

- Pass the microphone to other contributors (eg guest speaker and student responses) or clearly paraphrase their contributions. This can be really hard to get used to at first, but it is essential for inclusion.
- If a student finds **loop system** useful, please try to book a room with a loop system installed or order a portable version for 1:1 situations. See **Appendix 3** for further information. Alternatively, the student may have an **individual wireless-assisted system**. If so they will ask you to use a specific additional microphone.

### 3. Classroom management: lectures

- Be led by the student if they prefer to position themselves in a particular way (eg because they hear better on one side).
- Always try to face students whilst speaking (eg stop speaking when writing on white/black board). This can be really difficult until you're used to it.
- Avoid walking around or covering mouth whilst speaking.
- Don't speak with your back to a window or other main source of light.
- Give time to read visual information (eg Powerpoint slide), as student cannot speechread and read a display at the same time.
- Write down key points.
- Ensure any room changes etc are always confirmed in writing.

#### **4. Classroom management: group discussions**

If possible, have a quiet discussion with the student to check what particular strategies work for them. Also, they may have specialised amplification equipment which would involve positioning a microphone in an appropriate central place.

##### **Acoustics**

Be aware that breaking into small groups in the same room can cause difficulties because of background noise.

##### **Managing inclusion**

Group discussions can be quick-fired and hard to follow. Deaf students can lag behind because it's hard to know who is speaking. People frequently interrupt each other and talk over the top of each other, which makes the situation doubly hard.

Use techniques to include the student without drawing unnecessary attention to them:

- Use horseshoe or circle so that student can see faces of all contributors.
- Allow only one speaker at a time (eg put hand up or 'pass the conch'). It can feel slow and stilted at first, but it actually benefits everyone.
- Clearly repeat contributions which may have been missed (trying not to draw attention to the student).
- Explain jokes or asides you have seen go by quickly.
- Summarise key points on flipchart (including any room changes etc).

## 5. Note-takers (manual, electronic and remote)

Deaf students cannot take notes whilst speechreading or watching interpreter.

Good practice where note-taker is present:

- The note-taker needs as much prior information as possible to prepare for likely vocabulary and context: please provide any information which will help them to prepare.
- The note-taker has a specific professional role: don't ask them to participate in the class or group.
- Remote captioning enables virtually real-time verbatim notes without the presence of a note-taker in class. Technology needs to be well set up in advance; the Student Disability Service will advise in the first instance.

## 6. BSL/English interpreters

Interpreters are used where a student's first or preferred<sup>2</sup> language is BSL.

What BSL/English interpreters can do:

- Translate into BSL what is said in lectures, tutorials etc.
- Translate into spoken English the BSL contributions of Deaf students (eg questions, comments, presentations etc).

Click here for guidance on how to work with BSL/English interpreters:

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2016-10-07\\_working\\_with\\_a\\_bsl-english\\_interpreter\\_final.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2016-10-07_working_with_a_bsl-english_interpreter_final.pdf)

Or

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2016-10-07\\_working\\_with\\_a\\_bsl-english\\_interpreter\\_final.docx](https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2016-10-07_working_with_a_bsl-english_interpreter_final.docx)

NB Classroom strategies in above sections 2-4 are relevant; interpreters need exceptional clarity of sound, and appropriate pacing etc, in order to process and translate information.

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<sup>2</sup> Some students will not have had access to a sign language from birth, but it will now be their main language for effective communication in some situations

## Assessed work

As explained above, students who were born with a significant level of deafness can often have life-long language challenges.

Common issues are:

- Limitations to comprehension and production of full grammatical structures.
- Limitations to vocabulary, awareness of ambiguities, idioms and general knowledge.

Implications:

- Need for wording of assessment tasks etc to be clear and unambiguous.
- Staff should be aware of possible impact on production of assignments.

## Placements

- With student's consent, provide the placement with information about the student's access issues.
- It will be helpful for the student to visit the placement in advance. They can then explore accessibility in that context and negotiate any specific adjustments which may be needed.

**If you require this document in an alternative format please contact the student Disability Service on 0131 650 6828 or email [Disability.Service@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Disability.Service@ed.ac.uk)**

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## Appendix 1

### Some facts about British Sign Language

#### What is British Sign Language (BSL)

'British Sign Language (BSL) is a natural language with its own vocabulary and grammar, which has emerged from Deaf people's communication over centuries, and is not a representation of English on the hands.'<sup>i</sup>

#### Is sign language universal?

There is no universal sign language: each community has its own language but these are not manual versions of the spoken or written language used by the hearing communities around them. Because of Britain's colonial history, closely related languages can be found in Australia (Australian Sign Language or Auslan), New Zealand (NZ Sign Language), Malta (Maltese Sign Language) and in some parts of South Africa, India, and Canada (Maritime Sign Language).'

#### History of British Sign Language

See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/bslhistory> for a brief overall summary.

Moray House (The University's School of Education) has special place in the history of BSL, being one of three places of UK research which proved that BSL is a fully-fledged language. In fact, the name 'British Sign Language' was first published in 1975 in an article by Dr Mary Brennan who led the Moray House team<sup>ii</sup>.

In 2015, the Scottish Parliament passed historic legislation<sup>iii</sup> which formally recognised BSL as a minority language and puts a duty on Scottish Ministers and public bodies, including the University, to promote the use and understanding of BSL.

#### How many people use BSL in Scotland?

In Scotland's Census, 2011<sup>iv</sup>, 12,533 respondents reported using BSL at home.

#### What is Sign Support English?

Sign Supported English is a broad term for the use of sign vocabulary from BSL to supplement spoken English. There are many informal variants, which borrow from both languages in different ways and for various reasons.

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<sup>i</sup> History of British Sign Language (2016) *Deafness and Cognition and Language Research Centre, University College London*. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/bslhistory> [Accessed 14 November 2016]

<sup>ii</sup> British Deaf Association (1975) *Can Deaf Children Acquire Language?: An Evaluation of Linguistic Principles in Deaf Education*. British Deaf Association.

<sup>iii</sup> *The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 (2015)*. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/11/contents?section=4-5> [accessed 14 November 2016]

<sup>iv</sup> Census (2011) *Scotland's Census 2011: Shaping our future: Household Questionnaire*. Available at: [http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/Householdpre-addressed27\\_05\\_10specimen.pdf](http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/Householdpre-addressed27_05_10specimen.pdf) [Accessed 10 October 2014]

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## Appendix 2

### Microphone use: best practice



Ideally the mic should be about 8 inches below the mouth in central position

Attached the mic securely.

Make sure there is no interference from jewellery, lanyards etc.

Make sure the mic is not pointing into clothing (or covered by lab coat), because rubbing will also cause interference.

*'Everything hinges on where the mic is placed: an inch or two here or there makes a huge difference.'*

Specialist technician

*'You can have the most sophisticated radio aid, but if the mic is poorly used, you might as well not bother.'*

Specialist technician

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## **Appendix 3: Induction Loop Good Practice Guide**

### **Booking a room with an Induction Loop**

To find which rooms have loop systems installed:

- Go to MyEd Dashboard/Timetabling/Web Room Booking
- 'Room' section: complete Capacity and Zone/Building and click on Induction Loop in the 'Suitability' box.
- Complete Date and Times sections.

Learning Spaces Technology can also loan out a small number of individual loop systems for short periods. These systems are really only suitable for 1:1 situations.

Please report any loop-related problems immediately (0131 650 4097 or [learningspacestechnology@ed.ac.uk](mailto:learningspacestechnology@ed.ac.uk))