



Supporting staff with Hearing Impairment

What is Hearing Impairment?

Hearing impairment is a partial or complete loss of hearing in one or both ears, and can include tinnitus. Many hearing impairments develop over time, and age-related hearing loss is the most common cause of hearing impairment in the UK.

Common challenges associated with Hearing Impairment

The challenges encountered by individuals with hearing impairment will depend on the degree and nature of the impairment. However, the most common challenges include:

- Difficulty picking out sounds in noisy environments
- Finding it hard to keep up with a conversation
- Difficulty accessing necessary equipment and software
- Difficulty accessing work-related materials in a suitable format e.g subtitled/captioned or in British Sign Language (BSL)

How can staff get assessed?

Formal diagnostic assessments are usually carried out by audiologists and a GP referral is required for this. Some pharmacies and opticians also offer hearing tests. It is strongly recommended that individuals with hearing impairment receive a workplace assessment from Access to Work, or Louder than Words (part of Action on Hearing Loss).

Reasonable adjustments at work

Effective adjustments will be specific to individuals. Ask the person what they find harder to do and what has helped previously. Adjustments to be considered include:

- Locating the individual's desk in an area where background noise is minimised

- Adjusting the layout and lighting of the office and meeting rooms to help everybody see each other clearly (important for lipreading)
- Providing in advance any material for meetings and training programmes
- Providing specialist equipment such as amplified telephones, or reassigning tasks to colleagues where appropriate
- Providing a portable listening device, such as the Roger Pen, for use when away from the office
- Supporting the use of an assistance dog in the workplace
- Scheduling regular breaks to avoid eye strain and fatigue
- Providing BSL interpreters, lipspeakers, or speech-to-text reporters, where required (see Deaf Action below), or assigning a note-taker to record meeting discussions and decisions.

Health and safety considerations

Where an individual requires assistance during an emergency evacuation, a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) must be put in place (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/fire-safety/fire-safety-provision/disabled-evacuation>).

External support:

Access to Work – <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Action on Hearing Loss – <https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/>

Louder Than Words – <https://louderthanwords.org.uk/>

Deaf Action Interpretation Services – <http://www.deafaction.org/communication-interpretating-agency/>