

Hearing impairment

Supporting learners with hearing impairments

Resource guide

Introduction

This resource guide follows on from the one day training programme 'Hearing impairment awareness' which aims to give you an understanding of the potential impact of hearing impairment on learning and how to better support learners.

This guide includes:

- A summary of the information from the taster sessions and pre-course workbook
- Top tips from the taught course and accompanying in-course workbook
- Further resources on the topic.

Contents

01	Introduction to hearing impairment	
	➤ Definition of terms	3
	➤ Potential causes	3
	➤ Prevalence in society	4
	➤ Further Education	5
02	Difficulties explored	
	➤ Overview	6
	➤ Language and literacy	6
	➤ Social skills and emotional wellbeing	7
	➤ Listening and attention	8
03	Communication aids	
	➤ British Sign Language and lipreading	9
	➤ Aids and equipment	9
04	Top tips for teaching and training	
	➤ Environment	10
	➤ Visual aids/Handouts/Demonstrations	10
	➤ Group discussion and seminars	10
	➤ Lectures and presentations	10
05	Resources and signposting	11

01

Introduction to hearing impairment

Definition of terms

Hearing impairment, hearing loss or deafness are terms we use to refer to someone who has some level of hearing loss. It is important to note that some people believe the term impairment has negative connotations so may prefer the terms hearing loss or deafness. The level of hearing loss can vary greatly. Hearing loss is usually measured by the quietest sounds someone can hear in decibels (dBHL).

Mild	Moderate	Severe	Profound
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 20-40 dBHL• Quiet background noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 41-70 dBHL• Level of average speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 71-95 dBHL• Alarm clocks• Car engines etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 95+ dBHL• Music concerts• Loud machinery

Potential causes

There are two main types of hearing loss:

Conductive hearing loss is when sounds cannot pass freely to the inner ear, caused by a blocked outer or middle ear, a ruptured eardrum or an abnormally formed ear structure.

Sensorineural hearing loss is caused by damage to hair cells within the cochlea or the hearing nerve, or both. This damage is permanent and can be caused by a number of factors. This type of hearing loss not only affects the volume of sounds but also how clearly the person can hear them – making speech in particular an issue.

Tinnitus is a condition when you hear a sound where there is no external source - the sounds include ringing, whooshing or humming or buzzing in the ear. These can be continuous or they can come and go. The tinnitus might seem like it's in one ear or both, in the middle of the head or even be difficult to pinpoint.

Prevalence in society¹

It is estimated that one sixth of the UK population has hearing loss - which is more than 10 million people - of which 900,000 have severe or profound hearing impairment. By 2031, this is predicted to increase to 14.5 million as the population ages.

From the current total, around 6.4 million are of retirement age (65+) and about 3.7 million are of working age (16–64). There are more than 45,000 deaf children in the UK, half of whom are born deaf; the remainder develop hearing loss in childhood.

Tinnitus is a widespread condition. The British Tinnitus Association estimates that ten per cent of the UK population experiences tinnitus frequently, five per cent experience persistent or troublesome tinnitus and up to one per cent say it affects their quality of life.²

There are around 250,000 people who are deafblind.³

One other interesting statistic to bear in mind is that on average people take ten years to address their hearing loss.



¹ [Facts from Action on Hearing Loss](#)

² [British Tinnitus Association](#)

³ [Centre for Policy on Ageing](#)

Further Education

Further Education (FE) is the most common post-school destination for deaf young people.

According to the Deaf Young People in Further Education report⁴ from Manchester University based on 2011 figures, 60 per cent of deaf young people will leave school and go into FE compared to only around one third of all young people aged 16.

The statistics also reveal that:

- Although the vast majority of deaf young people complete their FE course, nearly one quarter do not achieve any qualification at any level
- The dropout rate for deaf students in FE is twice that of the general population of students in FE
- Around one third of deaf students in FE will follow a course at Level 3.
- Of those who follow an AS level course fewer than four per cent will actually achieve the qualification when they have completed the course.

The research also shows that deaf young people generally enter further education with fewer qualifications and lower levels of academic achievement in comparison with the general population of 16 year olds. But the majority of deaf young people in FE do not make up the qualifications gap they have on leaving school in comparison with other young people of their age.

This means it is really important that FE staff understand the support needs of deaf learners so that they can achieve the best outcomes possible. Entering FE is a big change for learners (new people, environments, teaching methods and social situations) which presents both challenges and opportunities.

There is a huge range of hearing technologies (see later in this guide for examples) which has made it easier than ever for deaf young people to enter further education. Although this may go some way to addressing basic communication needs there are other difficulties that deaf learners could experience that may not be immediately obvious to those working with them.

⁴ [Deaf Young People in Further Education](#)

02

Difficulties explored

Overview

Deafness or hearing impairment will impact on a range of factors that contribute to a learner's ability to learn including:

- Listening skills
- Attention and concentration
- Language development and literacy skills.

It can also affect memory and processing including impact on:

- Working memory - which is when information is retained in order to be assessed, manipulated or stored
- Auditory memory - which is memory for what is heard
- Processing time - which is the time it takes the brain to receive, understand and respond to information.

Other aspects affected include:

- Incidental learning - which is learning from experience and absorbing information from around you
- Learning style - which is how you learn best
- Social skills - including conversational skills and making friendships
- Self-esteem and wellbeing.

Language and literacy

Being deaf from a young age or birth has a huge effect on an individual's ability to learn spoken language - this is because we learn language through hearing and seeing together. Without exposure to spoken or signed language at a young age, both literacy skills and language development can be delayed and not come as naturally as it does for others.

People have mixed experiences of the education system too and they may miss out on information affecting their vocabulary, grammar usage and literacy overall.

For those who are born deaf, British Sign Language may be their first language, with English as a second language. Learning this second language is made more challenging by not being able to hear it.

Issues include:

- Difficulty expressing what they want to say or understand what other people are saying
- More likely to make grammatical errors such as incorrect sentence structure, use of verb tenses, and missing out words
- Reduced vocabulary and difficulty lipreading unfamiliar words
- Struggling to read complex sentences and formal documents
- Limited general knowledge due to reduced opportunity for incidental learning.

There are a number of factors which can affect how much language development is impacted:

- The age at which their hearing loss was discovered or diagnosed
- How well it is managed and the support they receive from parents and professionals
- Underlying cognitive ability/personality characteristics eg. determination and confidence
- How well any hearing technology works and if it is used consistently.

Advances in hearing technology, screening and testing does mean that many more people are able to use spoken language but this does not mean that they don't have language and literacy needs.

Social skills and emotional wellbeing

Deaf people may find it hard to converse with their peers if those people don't know how to communicate with deaf people. Deaf people who lipread may manage individual conversations but group discussions are much more difficult. They may not have been able to pick up on the unwritten rules of social situations and conversations either. This can mean that hearing impaired individuals become isolated and tend to socialise mainly with other deaf people or family members. This can present an additional challenge educationally too as they may struggle with pairs or group work in a learning environment.

The impact of losing your hearing can be traumatic for people leading to grief, anger and anxiety. Not only do they experience the loss of a sense, they have to find new ways of communicating. There can be a worry over losing their independence too. They can lose the ability to socialise with friends and family and become isolated. They may deliberately isolate themselves to avoid awkward situations around communication. Some people feel that their options are limited both in education and employment - fearing they won't be given opportunities and responsibilities. Their confidence can take a massive hit as well.

Listening and attention

If your hearing is limited it takes a lot more effort to listen and understand - especially in a group or noisy environment. Hearing impaired people report increased concentration effort, attention and focus, compared to individuals without hearing loss. The brain must work harder to make sense of the information it receives.

For most of us, the three areas of the brain that relate to hearing work well together making communication natural and effortless. Broca's area works on producing speech, Wernicke's area works on speech comprehension and the Temporal lobe manages hearing. When there is hearing loss the extra effort required in listening, concentrating and thinking makes it more difficult for these areas to work well together. This makes communication harder and takes a lot more effort.

The increased tiredness caused by this is called listening fatigue - this is likely to occur even with a mild hearing loss and may not even be noticed by the individual themselves. It's not surprising that communication is more tiring for hearing impaired people. If you think about the extra energy it takes to:

- Focus on lipreading or signing
- Trying to figure out what people have said when you have gaps in communication
- Having to respond appropriately and in a timely fashion.

Simple tips like taking a break from noise, shutting out background noise, taking a walk, relaxation techniques or even having a nap can make a huge difference to listening fatigue.

Listen to what a normal classroom can sound like to someone with mild hearing loss:

www.ndcs.org.uk/media/standardclassroomHFHLnoise.mp3

Visit this website to listen to simulations of hearing loss:

www.audioservice.com/en/good-hearing/hearing-deterioration/online-hearing-simulation.html

03

Communication aids

British Sign Language and lipreading

British Sign Language (BSL) is the predominant sign language used in the UK and it is classed as a separate language. It has very different grammar and structure from English – for example in a sentence you start with the subject or topic then refer back to it.

BSL interpreters take many years to qualify and different levels are required for different activities. Signers qualify at levels one, two, three and six before they register as trainee interpreters. It is effective practice to use a qualified interpreter for 'official' meetings such as interviews, disciplinary meetings. A Communication Support Worker (CSW) who is qualified to a lower level (level 2 or 3) can be used to support other activities.

All of us use some degree of lipreading when we are trying to understand what other people are saying. However, some people who have hearing impairments rely on lipreading rather than using BSL. The way we form our words can lead to confusion for the person who is lipreading. Therefore the lipreader depends heavily on environmental clues and understanding the context of the conversation.

Group discussions can be difficult for someone who is lipreading, especially when multiple people are talking in quick succession. The challenge here is to know where to look. If someone uses an unusual tone or rhythm of speech this can also be challenging.

Aids and equipment

Here are a few examples of hearing technologies and equipment that individuals may need to use:

A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted electronic device which gives a sense of sound to some people with severe hearing loss.

Hearing aids don't give the person perfect hearing but are designed to make speech and everyday sounds louder and clearer. Many types also now reduce certain dull background noise as well making it easier for people to hear the sound they are focusing on and there should be less straining to hear.

Hearing loop systems isolate the sound heard to within the confines of the loop – helping to reduce the impact of background noise. Someone wearing a hearing aid can link with

the loop by turning the hearing aid to the 'T' setting (if available). There are three main types of hearing loop systems: room loops, counter loops and portable loops. You can find out more here:

www.hearinglink.org/living/loops-equipment/hearing-loops/what-is-a-hearing-loop/

Conversation listeners work by making sounds louder and clearer to hear as well as reducing background noise. There is also a function to make tone adjustments to suit the individual.

Watch this video to see the effects of conversation listeners:

<https://youtu.be/1l37IzLlgQU?t=180>

A hearing dog is an assistance dog which is trained to help people who are deaf or hearing impaired. They alert their handler to a variety of sounds.

04

Top tips for teaching and training

Environment

- Consider the room lighting. Is it bright enough? Is the speaker well lit?
- Review the room's acoustics. Thicker pile carpet is the best type of flooring. Adding extra soft furnishings such as curtains, fabric panels can help. Would partitions help?
- Monitor the impact of background noise – from other rooms, fans and equipment etc.
- Think carefully about where the individual is seated – should be close to speaker in a classroom setting or in the middle of group discussions.

Group discussion and seminars

- Encourage use of plain spoken language
- Check understanding regularly
- Ask everyone to raise hands before speaking – one at a time
- Give the individual eye contact when it's their turn to speak
- Offer deaf awareness for peers
- Provide topic and guidance notes in advance
- Produce a glossary of terms
- Suggest pre and post tutorials.

Visual aids/Handouts/ Demonstrations

- Ensure there are subtitles and don't talk over videos
- Don't make the room too dark or provide a lamp to the individual
- Allow time to read slides before or after you talk
- Make sure handouts have gaps to make notes
- Provide copies of slides in advance
- Don't talk over demonstrations and face audience when speaking
- Use visual or written steps on handouts.

Lectures and presentations

- Implement pre-lecture and post-lecture tutorials
- Provide handouts or slides in advance
- Produce a glossary of terms
- Permit the use of a notetaker, lipspeaker or interpreter
- Use good questioning to check understanding
- Don't talk with your back to the audience
- Use plain spoken and written language.

05

Resources and signposting

Please visit the SEND specialist area on the ETF Excellence Gateway which has a range of resources to support people working with learners with SEND:


<https://send.excellencegateway.org.uk/>

There is a dedicated area for specific needs and wellbeing, which can be found at:

<https://send.excellencegateway.org.uk/teaching-and-learning/specific-needs-and-wellbeing>



The National Deaf Children's Society

 www.ndcs.org.uk

 Helpline 0808 800 8880



The National Deaf Children's Society is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people, with offices in London, Birmingham, Belfast, Cardiff and Glasgow.

-  Information
-  Family support.

Resources for education

 www.ndcs.org.uk/professional_support/our_resources/education_resources.html

E-flyers for education professionals - both updated regularly

Includes links to free information resources and information on how NDCS can support education professionals.

 [Education professionals e-flyer \(375 kb\)](#)

Includes links to free information resources on meeting the Special Educational Needs of deaf children and young people.

 [Education professionals SEN e-flyer \(375 kb\)](#)



Quality Standards: Resource provisions for deaf children and young people

This booklet from NDCS and the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) sets out standards for the operation of resource provisions for deaf children and young people in primary and secondary schools throughout the UK. A self-evaluation tool has also been produced to accompany this resource.

 [Download the resources](#)

<p>National Sensory Impairment Partnership</p> <p> www.natsip.org.uk</p> <p>Document library  www.natsip.org.uk/doc-library-login</p> 	<p>NatSIP is a partnership of organisations working together to improve outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairment.</p> <p>The NatSIP website offers access to a wealth of sensory impairment resources, most of which are freely available. Register on the site for full access to everything on offer.</p>
<p>Action on Hearing Loss</p> <p> www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk</p> 	<p>Information and advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Hearing health > Services and assistive technology > Research and campaigning.
<p>British Deaf Society</p> <p> www.bda.org.uk</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advocacy > Early intervention with children and families > BSL Charter > Raising awareness > Policy work > Information provision.
<p>Royal Deaf Association</p> <p> www.royaldeaf.org.uk</p> 	<p>Range of user-led services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Employment > Communication services > Information, advice and guidance > Advocacy > Children and families > Community support service > Youth and transition.

Other organisations include

-  www.tinnitus.org.uk
-  www.signhealth.org.uk
-  www.deafplus.org
-  www.hearinglink.org

(T)

British Tinnitus
Association



Remploy

Putting ability first

Supported Internships

- This scheme helps young people aged 16 to 24 with complex learning difficulties or disabilities to find work
- As part of a full-time study programme, we provide on-the-job training with expert onsite job coaches responsible for supporting both you and your interns
- The programme can also give interns the opportunity to take courses to develop other relevant skills, such as effective communication or understanding money
- [Contact us](#) to find out more.

Access to Work Mental Health Support Service

- The service delivered by Remploy, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, provides confidential support for stress, anxiety, depression and much more, to help your staff, at no cost, to stay in their job
- Get in touch on 0300 456 8114, email a2wmhss@remploy.co.uk or visit www.remploy.co.uk/mentalhealth.

Training

- We specialise in helping both employers and employees to develop the knowledge, confidence and capacity to support colleagues, and to manage their own wellbeing
- All of our training is delivered by a team of experienced consultants who have extensive knowledge and a practical understanding of workplace issues. Here's a selection of the workshops we offer:
 - [Disability and health awareness](#)
 - [Mental wellbeing in the workplace](#)
 - [Resilience](#)
 - [Mental Health First Aid](#)
 - [Training in Systematic Instruction](#)
- Our training can be adjusted to suit your organisation. Just get [in touch](#) and we can discuss your requirements.

Notes

Our other training courses

We offer a range of courses to help staff within the Further Education sector, and those responsible for post-16 learner programmes, to increase their awareness and improve support for learners with dyslexia and autism.

These courses include:

Dyslexia awareness



Autism awareness



These one day courses explore the signs, symptoms, behaviours and impact of dyslexia or autism for learners. They help you to increase your knowledge, confidence and skills to embed effective practice into the support you provide.

We look at the condition and how you may adapt your communication, teaching strategies and environment to enable your learners to achieve their full potential. To book please go to bit.ly/2OhQDwR

Contact us if you would like further information about our training:

 0800 0 831 830

 bookingsupport@etfoundation.co.uk

 <https://booking.etfoundation.co.uk/go/SEND>

Ref.R309-Nov18