

# Communication Support for Deaf/deaf/hard of hearing learners

## City Lit



City Lit is a Specially Designated Institute with particular expertise in deafness and D/deaf<sup>1</sup> issues. The Centre for Deaf Education (CfDE) has been an important part of City Lit for over 30 years. CfDE consists of three departments: Deaf Skills for Life (DSfL), Deaf and Disabled Support (DDS) and Deafness, Skills and Professional Training (DSPT).

DDS provides access and communication support to D/deaf Adults studying at City Lit in a wide range of subjects, for example Fine Art, Drama, Spanish and Violin. We also provide support to learners at 15 different colleges and universities around London. Learners in these institutions are studying from pre-entry courses to Post-graduate qualifications in subjects ranging from Bricklaying to Teacher Training. This support includes language tutorials, interpreters, communicators, and notetakers (manual and electronic).

Within CfDE specialist courses are available for D/deaf Adults in British Sign Language (BSL), English, Maths, IT and Teacher Training. All these courses are taught by qualified Deaf teachers or hearing teachers. All teachers must be assessed as having a minimum of Level 3 BSL skills. There are also three levels of Lip-Reading courses, professional courses for people who work, or wish to work, with D/deaf people, and a full programme of BSL from introductory level to Level 6.

As an institute we recognise the importance of working in partnerships. We work closely with CHES (Consortium of Higher Education Support Services for Deaf Students) local SKILL HE network, NMH (non medical helpers) co-ordinators network, NATED (National Association of Tertiary Education for Deaf People), NADP (National Association of Disability Practitioners), dis-forum, ASLI (Association of Sign Language Interpreters) and ACSW (Association of Communication Support Workers)

### **Providing opportunities for knowledge awareness for non-deaf specialist teachers and staff:**

Within City Lit: There is a rolling programme of 'Deaf Awareness' training for all staff at City Lit. Due to the number of D/deaf staff and learners, D/deaf awareness is seen as important training throughout the college. This starts at the Initial Induction, which includes D/deaf awareness. All staff are encouraged to build on this initial awareness by attending a 5 hour course co-taught by qualified Deaf and hearing tutors. Bespoke Deaf Awareness packages are created as needed for departments, ranging from one-hour to one-day courses. A BSL introduction course (18 hours) is also offered to all staff. Tailor-made tuition is available to any person or area that may

<sup>1</sup> At City Lit we use D/deaf to recognise the difference between different groups of people who have a hearing loss. 'Deaf' is used for those who use a Sign Language as a first/preferred language and identify with the Deaf Community; 'deaf' is used for people who prefer to use a spoken language as their first/preferred language and do not identify with the Deaf Community. D/deaf is used when referring to both groups.

benefit from it; for example Enrolment and Reception have annual sessions which include specific situational vocabulary.

Whenever a D/deaf student is enrolled in a mainstream course, the Learning Support team contacts the teacher concerned and offers advice and guidance, including email exchange, face to face discussion and a link to guidance documents on the City Lit intranet.

External Learners: General and tailor-made D/deaf awareness sessions are encouraged for teachers and also for peer groups at colleges and universities where DDS support students. Depending on the individual colleges, sessions are available for non-teaching staff. Each D/deaf student will have a Support Tutor who can be contacted to provide advice and support to the student's teachers, Exams Officer and Disability Officer.

### **Promoting inclusion; thinking beyond access**

All administrators within CfDE are expected to study BSL to level 2 minimum. A number of other support staff including Reception, Enrolments, Supported Learning Centre and advice staff have level 1 or 2 BSL. Minicom (textphone) is available to all departments via computers. All CfDE departments have virtual SMS numbers to contact learners and staff. This is being rolled out to other departments outside CfDE.

Noticeboards in the CfDE area provide sources of up-to-date information on events around London which are accessible in BSL and/or subtitled. Sometime staff within CfDE are involved in providing BSL/English interpreting for these events, in which case learners also tend to be informed face to face. Notices will also include local council and NHS information on meetings for BSL users, D/deaf parent groups, etc.

CfDE has a specialist Information and Advice Officer for D/deaf learners who sign. She can offer advice on benefits, housing and where to find specialist information. This includes referring to Signing Counsellors and ensuring learners know how to access interpreter support for health care etc.

As an adult education college, we do not have traditional extra curricula activities. If learners wish to attend any master class or activity, they can liaise with DDS about the possibility of communication support. Personal radio loops are always available where the room does not have a permanent loop system.

Every spring CfDE runs 'Deaf Day' which is a large-scale national showcase for D/deaf-related organisations and services as well as cultural information and taster experiences relating to deafness and Deaf culture. Learners are encouraged to become directly involved. Deaf Day is regularly attended by over 3,000 D/deaf and Hearing people.

'Watch You Language', also organised by CfDE, is an annual conference for BSL interpreters and communicators, providing valuable workshops and opportunities for professional networking.

### **Appropriate qualifications and career development:**

City Lit recognises that the support given by Communicators is different from Learning Assistants as it is primarily for linguistic access through signing, lipspeaking or notetaking. Until now there has been no replacement for the redundant EdExcel CSW course. There are national pilots with the new Signature level 3 LSA/CSW course. At present, there is no anticipation that

the new qualification will become compulsory nationwide. At City Lit, we recognise that a variety of qualifications are useful for communicators. These include Deaf Studies degrees, PGCEs, HLTA's and interpreter qualifications alongside appropriate signing, communication, notetaking and support skills. The different qualifications and roles for Communicators and other LSPs (Language Service Providers) are recognised in different levels of pay and titles (5 for hourly pay and 6 for established staff).

- All our communicators have a level 2 qualification in English and Maths. Most have BSL NVQ 3 and are working towards Level 4/6.
- 64% of our communicators have a degree
- 11% have post graduate qualifications
- 22% have BSL NVQ 4
- All our notetakers have a degree, 39% have an MA
- All our support tutors sign, with 80% having Level 3 BSL.

All Language Support Tutors are expected to gain a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) or a PGCE qualification plus the Level 7 Literacy or ESOL specialism. In addition, they are expected to have Level 3 BSL if they are teaching Deaf people. Access to the DTLLS poses a problem for specialists delivering 1:1 support as there is a requirement to teach groups in order to be accepted on a course and achieve. Tutors teaching any Deaf classes need to have Level 3 BSL.

Staff have the opportunity to attend a range of accredited and non-accredited courses provided by DSPT. These courses include BSL NVQ 3 and 6, OCNLR Notetaking (manual or electronic), Voice-over, Upper-Limb Disorder / RSI awareness, BSL specific subject vocabulary and language modification. From September 2011, Level 3 in Learning Support (Communication Support Worker) will be available. Depending on circumstances (and staff contracts) places can be free or subsidised.

Communicators are welcome to attend any training offered to our teaching and support staff, including teaching, literacy, maths and ILT courses. Most prospectus courses can be attended either free or with a discount of 85% depending on the course and staff member's contract. This allows staff to widen their knowledge of different subjects or pursue purely personal interests.

Specialist training for DDS staff is funded by Staff Development in recognition of the specific needs of the department.

Attendance at professional meetings and networks, such as NATED and ACSW is either funded in monetary terms or can be counted as working time (depending on contract).

### **Involving D/deaf staff and learners:**

City Lit has a number of D/deaf staff and managers. Most of these work within CfDE. There are also a number of tutors with an acquired loss working in LSP training and lip-reading. One of our communicators uses a hearing-aid. All BSL classes are taught by qualified Deaf BSL tutors and through total immersion without interpreters present. (This is the same for all our spoken language classes at City Lit.)

We have a number of staff outside the Centre for Deaf Education who use hearing-aids or are Deaf. Access and support are negotiated as required.

All D/deaf staff are expected to participate in City Lit staff communication (e.g. various levels of meetings) and staff development opportunities. It is standard practice for staff to be asked whether LSPs (BSL/English interpretation, note-takers, etc) and/or amplification (radio aids/loop system) should be provided for access at meetings and events. We aim to ensure that staff who chair meetings and make presentations at training events are fully aware of how best to ensure that D/deaf participants (as well as participants with other needs) are fully included. All D/deaf and disabled staff are encouraged to apply for Access to Work (ATW) funding. Even when ATW has been difficult to obtain, our executive team have always been supportive in making sure that equal access through interpreters was provided.

At present there are no D/deaf learners on the student council. In previous years, individual D/deaf learners have volunteered, and there has also been a separate council for D/deaf learners, in response to demand. We will continue to encourage D/deaf learners to engage in the consultation process.

### **Induction:**

Every new member of staff attends two induction sessions during which D/deaf awareness is one element. (We emphasise the need to respond to each learners' individual needs which includes mental health problems, learning difficulties, blindness and many others.) Staff training in Deaf Awareness and BSL is regularly offered and is targeted to all service and teaching areas. This includes out-sourced services such as catering, security and IT staff. At City Lit we pride ourselves with the diversity of our student population, and virtually all members of staff regularly encounter a variety of learners in or outside the classroom.

Because the vast majority of our courses are part-time (some lasting only one or two sessions), deaf awareness is not included systematically in any student induction. We don't have cross-college student induction or formalised induction sessions.

### **Supporting transition:**

DDS work with a number of colleges and universities throughout London to provide communicators in mainstream classes. Often this means supporting transition from one institution to another. We encourage D/deaf learners studying here at City Lit to move on to other colleges or to university as is appropriate. Support with applying for Student Loans and Disabled Students Allowance is usually provided by our specialist Information and Advice Officer for D/deaf learners.

D/deaf learners will be referred to specialist counselling, job advisors and organisations as required.

We can continue communication support into work, if this is the student's preference.

### **Links to organisations mentioned:**

CHESS: Consortium of Higher Education Support Service with Deaf Students  
[http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/education\\_social\\_sciences/CHESS.php](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/education_social_sciences/CHESS.php)

ACSW: Association of Communication Support Workers [www.acsw.org.uk](http://www.acsw.org.uk)

NATED: National Association for Tertiary Education for Deaf People [www.nated.org.uk](http://www.nated.org.uk)

SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

ASLI: Association of Sign Language Interpreters [www.asli.org.uk](http://www.asli.org.uk)

NADP: National Association of Disability Practitioners [www.nadp-uk.org.uk](http://www.nadp-uk.org.uk)

Dis-forum: open email group on jisc mail [www.jiscmail.ac.uk](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk)

NMH co-ordinators: a group for Non-Medical Helpers co-ordinators facilitated by NADP. Non-Medical Helpers (NMH) is a term used by the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) for people who provide support to access studies e.g. readers, notetakers, BSL communicators etc.)