Working with Deaf Students on Professional/Clinical Placement

Brief guidelines for placement providers

Please contact us for further information

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This information can be made available in other formats. Please contact us for details.

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Introduction

This booklet aims to provide guidance for staff and placement providers where deaf students from Sheffield Hallam University are working with you on the professional or clinical placement element of their course. If the suggested guidelines are put into practise, communication will be more effective and more enjoyable.

This guide provides general information only. If the information you need is not included or if you have any specific questions, please contact the Deaf Service Team (phone 0114 225 4778, e-mail deafserviceteam@shu.ac.uk) who will be pleased to help. Ideally, if you are aware a deaf student has a placement with you, then it would be advisable to organise a deaf awareness session particularly for the managers and staff who will be working with the student. Depending on availability of staff the Deaf Service Team at Sheffield Hallam University can offer deaf awareness sessions.
Understanding deafness

The term ‘deaf’ covers a very wide range of hearing loss, a range of communication needs and differing experiences and cultures. Each deaf person has differing hearing loss which includes not only the volume of residual hearing, but also the frequency of sound they can hear – a person may have average levels of hearing at low/deep frequencies, but cannot hear high sounds such as a fire alarm or high voices or visa versa. The range of deafness can be roughly broken down into four main areas:

1. Mild deafness
People with mild deafness may have difficulty understanding speech especially in noisy situations. They may or may not wear hearing aids and may not be able to hear sounds like leaves rustling or people whispering.

2. Moderate deafness
People with moderate deafness will probably wear a hearing aid. Without a hearing aid, they will most likely have difficulty understanding speech even in normal conditions. They may be able to use a voice phone which has an amplifier and/or an inductive coupler if they wear hearing aids.

3. Severe deafness
People with severe deafness will probably wear hearing aids but may find it difficult to understand speech even with these aids. They will rely more on lipreading and some may use sign language. They may find it difficult to use a voice phone even with powerful amplification and may therefore use a textphone or videophone. They probably won’t be able to hear sounds such as lorries.

4. Profound deafness
People with profound deafness may find hearing aids of very little or no benefit and will rely heavily on lipreading. They will probably use sign language and textphones or videophones. They may not be able to hear sounds like a pneumatic drill or aircraft etc.

Communication choices

When considering the communication needs and choices of deaf people, these can be broken down into two broad categories

1. Some deaf people may use English as their first language and use hearing aids and lipreading/some sign language to receive information. They are likely to use their own voice to reply. In formal situations such as meetings and training they may need to use a note-taker or lipspeaker.

If the onset of deafness occurred later in a person’s life, after the acquisition of spoken/written language, then they would most likely fall into this category. If a deaf person communicates in this way it can be easy to forget that they are deaf, and to assume they can follow everything being said. This is not the case, and care should be taken to ensure communication is successful using the guidelines contained within this document.

2. Some deaf people may use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language. BSL is a language in its own right, separate and distinct from English in structure, grammar and vocabulary. People who use BSL may not use their voice when communicating. In formal situations such as meetings and training sessions they may use an interpreter whereas in normal everyday situations they may rely on lipreading and/or written notes.
General guidelines

• approach the student directly (ie not through a hearing friend or interpreter)
• get their attention (eg waving, tapping on the shoulder or moving into their line of vision)
• face the student, speak normally and talk to the student directly (many students will lipread but if they do not understand you they will tell you)
• the student may ask you to
  - write down information
  - repeat spoken information
  - type information on a computer
  - communicate through an interpreter
• be patient and allow extra time to communicate
• only 30-40 per cent of words can be seen on the lips. Rapid or sudden changes of subject make lipreading harder
• remember that a student cannot do two visual tasks at the same time (eg writing and lipreading)
• if you are using handouts and OHPs in training sessions, please give copies discreetly to the student and support staff before or at the start of the session
• if you ask the participants to read something, please do not start to speak again until the deaf person has finished reading

Good communication

Environment

• in group activities/meetings, ensure that participants sit in a circle and speak one at a time with control maintained through a chair-person
• in office-based placements, ensure the student is seated so as to see as much of the office as possible. They should not be seated with their backs to the door or to other members of staff.
• try to minimise background noise. Hearing aids amplify all sound and it can be difficult to pick out speech in a noisy environment.
• do not stand in front of a window or bright light as your face will be silhouetted and the deaf person will not be able to see your face clearly to read your lips

Language

For some deaf students, English is not their first language. It may help if you
• use plain language for notices, instructions etc
• use shorter sentences (but still with full sentence structure)
• repeat or rephrase information if you are not understood.

Face and body expressions

• use natural lip movements, body language and gesture
• don’t shout. Shouting will make you look angry, attract attention and make lipreading difficult
• covering your mouth or eating when speaking will make it difficult to lipread
• moustaches and beards can also make lipreading difficult
• try to maintain eye contact during conversation
Support staff

Deaf students have a range of different communication methods depending on their degree of hearing loss, education, background and personal preference.

The two most widely used methods are sign language or lipreading. To facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people, the following support staff may be required:

- interpreter
- note-taker (electronic or manual)
- lipspeaker

**Working with support staff**

- speak to students directly, not to support staff
- support staff should not take part in discussions or be asked for their own opinion
- be aware that support staff may ask you to repeat or clarify what you have said
- structured sessions will enable support staff to work more effectively
- be aware that both support staff and students will need regular breaks

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Working with interpreters

When a student from Sheffield Hallam University is on a professional or clinical placement as part of their course, it is the University’s responsibility to put support in place when required.

A student who uses British Sign Language may need an interpreter in formal situations such as meetings and training sessions.

Where sign language interpreters are required this should be planned for well in advance wherever possible. Demand for interpreters is extremely high. The chance of locating an interpreter decreases nearer the event. Many interpreters are booked as much as two to three months in advance.

An impromptu, unplanned meeting will therefore put a sign language user at a disadvantage and should be avoided wherever possible. If it is unavoidable, every effort should be made to ensure all information is provided to the student and that the appropriate communication guidelines are followed.

For sessions longer than two hours, it is usually necessary to book two interpreters who will co-work, interpreting in turn for a period of 20-30 minutes each. Research has shown that when an interpreter works alone, their performance may deteriorate due to the strenuous nature of processing and relaying information.

For further information about booking interpreters please contact the Deaf Service Team at Sheffield Hallam University on 0114 225 4778 or email deafserviceteam@shu.ac.uk
Disclosing a disability

All disabled students are encouraged to disclose their disability to placement providers to ensure that staff are aware, that reasonable adjustments can be made and that any possible health and safety issues can be addressed. The Deaf Service Team (0114 225 4778) can be contacted for any advice in this area.

Further information

Much of the above information was taken from the RNID’s Don’t Panic pack and Deaf people and work – a guide for employers. These and many more guides are available, and can be downloaded, free online at www.rnid.org.uk

Other useful sites include

www.ndcs.org.uk
www.bda.org.uk
www.drc-gb.org
www.skill.org.uk

Provision of support staff

Where a student is undertaking the mandatory professional/clinical placement element of their course, the institution to which they belong bears the responsibility of ensuring the required support is put in place. It is also the institution’s responsibility to ensure no student is placed in an environment where they are likely to experience discrimination.

Where sign language interpreters are required for meetings, training etc during the student’s placement, this should be planned for well in advance wherever possible as the likelihood of locating an interpreter decreases nearer the event. An impromptu, unplanned meeting will put a sign language user at a disadvantage and should be avoided where possible. If it is unavoidable, every effort should be made to ensure all information is provided to the student and that the appropriate communication guidelines are followed.

Provision of adapted equipment

Many deaf students will require adapted equipment eg electronic stethoscopes, amplified phones, radio aids to enable them to satisfactorily complete various requirements of their placement. The equipment a student requires will be established at their Assessment of Need interview and paid for out of their Disabled Students’ Allowances. This process is not always complete before the student attends their first placement therefore reasonable adjustments should be made eg allowing some elements of the placement to be tested later if success is reliant on the equipment being available.