Guidelines for working with deaf students in the teaching environment

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Introduction
This booklet aims to provide guidance for lecturers teaching deaf students at Sheffield Hallam University. If the guidelines are followed, communication will be more effective and deaf students will have access to their course on an equal basis to their hearing peers, as far as is practically possible. The information will not only give a better understanding of some of the difficulties faced by deaf students but also strategies to implement in the classroom. A CPD session entitled ‘Teaching Deaf Students’ is advertised and promoted by the LTI. These sessions will include deaf awareness and can be arranged upon request.

Visit https://staff.shu.ac.uk/lti/internal.asp for further details.

Assessment of need and learning contracts
Deaf students attending Sheffield Hallam University will undergo an Assessment of Need. The assessment will be done by a qualified assessor to determine any support requirements. Recommendations will be made and stated in a learning contract. This details the support they have been recommended to enable them to access their course on an equal basis to their peers, as far as is practically possible. Where a deaf student will be attending your class, you should have been made aware of this and you should also have a copy of their learning contract. Please make sure you read this to be aware of your responsibilities.
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 a different hearing loss which includes not only the volume of residual hearing, but also the frequency of sound they can hear. A person with a high frequency loss will usually be better able to hear men’s voices and consonants whilst a person with a low frequency loss will be better able to hear women’s voices and vowel sounds. Very few people experience absolute silence.

Range of deafness

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 telephone 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 their aids. They will rely more on lip-reading and some may use sign language. They may find it difficult to use a telephone even with powerful amplification and may therefore use a text phone 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 text phones 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 lipspeaker or note-taker.
   If the onset of deafness occurred later in a person’s life, after the acquisition of spoken or 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. In this case, access to lectures etc will normally be by the use of an interpreter. 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 every day situations they may rely on lip-reading and/or written notes.
Lipreading

Lipreading is the art of understanding speech from observation of the lips, tongue and jaw movement using all available clues such as the topic of conversation, rhythm of speech, facial expression and other non-verbal clues.

Therefore the term ‘lipreading’ is a little misleading. The Americans call it ‘speech reading’ which appears to be a more appropriate and explanatory term.

For the severely or profoundly deaf, and especially people who have become deaf later in life, this may be their only means of communicating in everyday life.

Limitations of lipreading

- at best only about 30–40 per cent of all words can be seen and therefore lipread by even the best lipreaders
- many groups of consonants have the same lip-pattern eg m,p,b. It is impossible to distinguish between the words meat, beat and peat so this is why the topic and context are so important to the lipreader
- beards and moustaches can obscure the mouth making lipreading impossible
- unfamiliar accents have unfamiliar lip-patterns and can take a great deal of getting used to
- people who do not speak clearly or speak too quickly are difficult to read
- lipreading requires intense concentration as lipreaders have to watch the speaker at all times, and this can be very tiring

Communication guidelines when meeting deaf people

- attract their attention – make sure they are looking at you. Attract attention by gentle tapping, waving or using lights as appropriate.
- maintain eye contact both when you are speaking and when the deaf person is speaking
- try to keep background noise to a minimum. Hearing aids amplify all sounds not just your voice. The deaf person may not be able to distinguish your voice from all the other sounds around.
- don’t stand in front of a window or bright light. Your face will be silhouetted or in shadow, therefore the deaf person will not be able to see your face clearly to read your lips.
- don’t cover your mouth or eat when speaking
- speak a little slower than normal but maintain a natural rhythm. Don’t exaggerate mouth movements.
- make sure that, if you change the topic of conversation, the deaf person is aware of it. Only 30–40 per cent of all words can actually be seen on the lips. 60–70 per cent is rather like guesswork, trying to fit in what they think you might be saying about a particular topic using any residual hearing they might have, patterns on the lips and gestures so it is very important they know the topic of conversation.
- don’t shout. Shouting distorts the face and makes you look angry. Also, others will turn round drawing attention to the deaf person. Shouting may also hurt the ears.
- for a sign language user, gesture is very important but, again, don’t exaggerate this. It is useful to point to things or show examples (forms etc) rather than trying to explain things with the written word.
- if the deaf person doesn’t seem to understand what you are saying, try to re-phrase it. If you do have to write things down, please remember that, for sign language users, English is usually their second language so their English may not be well formed or structured. Keep your English plain and use short, clear sentences.
- please don’t become impatient or give up
Deafness and language

The main barrier experienced by deaf students is that of a language barrier.

We learn languages mainly through hearing them – being exposed to plentiful, meaningful, linguistic interaction during childhood. For those people who are born deaf, or who are pre-lingually deaf (ie if the onset of deafness occurred before the age of two), the quality and quantity of this linguistic input is severely reduced and they therefore do not acquire spoken/written languages naturally.

Because of this, language learning for deaf people is a very slow, laborious process. All new words have to be taught, even simple concrete words have to be individually taught. When trying to understand the spoken word, they will rely on lipreading and any residual hearing they might have. Therefore, from a sentence ‘The boy is throwing the ball’, at best, they may pick up ‘boy throw ball’.

Hearing people learn to read languages they can already speak. Deaf people do not have this advantage. Research shows that the reading age of deaf students leaving school is below the national average. Clearly, deaf people reaching higher education are functioning at a relatively advanced level but reading can still be a laborious task for some deaf students. Their vocabulary and general knowledge can be considerably restricted compared to their hearing peers as they will not be able to absorb information in the same way ie through TV, radio, classroom chatter etc. Unfamiliar words, or words which haven’t been specifically introduced to the student, cannot be lipread hence deaf students have to research not only the technical jargon of their subject but also language that is commonplace for their hearing peers.

It is not surprising then that deafness can lead to linguistic problems and the deaf student’s written work may appear to be lacking in depth and maturity.

Students who do experience linguistic problems will often have several recommendations made at their Assessment of Need, such as

- language modification of exam papers, see page 10
- work marked for content and context and not standard written English, see page 9
- extra time in exams to compensate for longer reading and production times
- interpreter presence throughout exams to translate questions into BSL where necessary

Possible effects relating to language difficulties

Some students in higher education may exhibit some or all of the following traits

- written work may appear immature and lack depth due to limited vocabulary and general knowledge
- difficulty extracting meaning from text, including lecture notes, assignments and reference materials
- restricted vocabulary shown by the acceptance of particular words as having a fixed meaning relating only to previous experience
- difficulty absorbing and using new technical terminology
- difficulty using everyday words in specific technical contexts
- misinterpretation of information, especially where there is some ambiguity
- incorrect verb endings and spelling mistakes in written work
- syntactical errors eg incorrect word order, words missed out or extra words included etc
- difficulty producing discussion elements of an assignment, particularly where they depend on abstract thinking rather than practical observation
- take longer to read, understand and absorb information
- rely heavily on dictionaries, references and tutors to check their understanding
- take longer to plan and produce written work than the average student
- have low self confidence regarding their academic work

These effects are completely independent of the intellectual ability or potential of a deaf student.
Guidelines for marking deaf students’ work

Some deaf students have a clause in their learning contract which states that their scripts should be marked for content and context and not for standard written English. This reflects the fact that English is either the second language of students, whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL), or is their first language but in a less developed form compared to their hearing peers.

The following should be seen as a means of awarding marks that reflect the student’s understanding of the subject rather than the level of their linguistic skills. However, deaf students should benefit from appropriate comments from tutors:

- if possible, mark the work using two different coloured pens, one for comments about the material and the use of ideas, the other for comments about spelling, grammar etc.
- the mark given for the piece of work should be the mark awarded on the basis of the material, argument, analysis etc.
- do not mark down for spelling mistakes or poor use of grammar and punctuation etc.
- it may be difficult to disentangle meaning from seemingly unstructured script and tutors may contact a sign language interpreter for advice. It may be necessary to discuss the piece of work with the student themselves where there is particular ambiguity in the language.

Examples of deaf people’s written English

The following passages were written by four different deaf people:

1. My first hobby about fishpond my garden. We went take out fish of pond and put pool in the water. But old pond take out and the new pond in it. Dad and I will be acid take out soil the new pond was in it and the water was in pool and fish was in the pool for winter.

2. He work Mark till he go store room the firm supplied builders and DIY stores he work finished could be painted onto wood or store floors he had bad face eye and hand go hospital.

3. My full name is James Idris George Thomas. These name come from Welsh, because of my father is Welsh. I live in Evesham for a nearly one year. I am currently student at Dorset College do the BTEC National diploma in Business Finance. I am the first year of my course. I am really enjoying my studying. I am profoundly deaf when I was born because my mum had rubella when she was pregnant.

4. Experimental procedure For each one of them we start to use the machine and test them on range of the temperature. For each different temperature there will be using vary of different things. So for each temperature the ways that the test used oven +100C, heated water bath +50C, room temperature, Melting Ice 0C and solid ice -78C (CO2)

When taking out the materials need to check the temperature before machine, need to be quick, this because the temperature can change. By low temp can increase to room temp or the high temp can drop to room temp in number of minutes. This would affect the results, mean won’t be accurate.
**Language modification explained**

Where a student’s first language is British Sign Language (BSL), or where their acquisition of language has been severely impaired, it will usually be necessary to modify the language of their examination/phase test papers and, in some cases, assignment briefs. The aim of language modification is to make the English as clear as possible and to ensure no time is spent decoding what is often a student’s second language.

When modifying text, only the non-technical carrier language is changed and, very importantly, the meaning and intent of the question should not be altered. This is ensured by asking the author or tutor to thoroughly check the modifications and, should any suggested modification be unacceptable, agreeing a mutually agreeable alternative with the deaf service team.

Language modification is always carried out with a particular student’s access to English in mind therefore the same paper may be modified differently for different students. Very often, tutors use the modified version for all students – this is their choice.

Generally, language modification involves

- the shortening of long sentences
- replacing high level carrier language with lower level alternatives
- replacing passive verbs with active verbs
- removing superfluous language
- removing ambiguity
- re-formatting eg using bullets, spacing

The following examples, although fairly basic, may illustrate the points more clearly. Try them yourself. Suggested modifications follow.

1. If you were provided with three black painted metal rods, one of which is known to be made of brass, one of magnetised steel and one of unmagnetised steel, describe how, without scratching the black paint, you would identify each of the rods.

2. Name and describe a modern resin-based finish stating the correct method of application.

**Suggested modifications**

1. You have three metal rods.
   
   Each rod is painted black.
   
   One rod is made of brass, one is made of magnetised steel and one is made of unmagnetised steel.

   Describe how you would find out what each rod is made of. You must not scratch the black paint.

2. a) Name a modern resin-based finish.
   
   b) Describe the finish.
   
   c) State how to apply the finish.


**Language modification of examination/phase test papers**

- Designated faculty contacts should forward exam papers/phase tests for language modification in accordance with the students’ learning contracts to the deaf service team.

- The deaf service team will then modify and return the papers to the faculty contact.

- The contact should then forward the modified version, with all changes visible, to the author/tutor for checking to ensure the meaning and intent of all questions remain unaltered.

- If the author has any queries, they should negotiate with the deaf service team to find a mutually agreeable alternative – no modification should be ignored as this might disadvantage the student. Such changes can then be actioned by the faculty.

- When all the modifications have been approved the papers can then be processed.
Working with sign language interpreters

- the interpreter should introduce themselves to you and find out the nature of the task in advance. They may have questions, requests or recommendations that will improve access to communication.
- background materials and preparation time are needed to enable the sign language interpreter to familiarise themselves with the content of the session and clarify any technical vocabulary if necessary.
- speak directly to the deaf person, not to the sign language interpreter (or note-taker) but do not feel uncomfortable if the deaf person is looking at the interpreter and not at you.
- make sure the deaf person can see the interpreter clearly. The deaf person and interpreter can inform you of the best position for them. Things to consider are lighting, where windows are situated, layout of the room and where visual aids are positioned.
- allow appropriate breaks for interpreters. This will vary depending on the nature and length of the task, discuss this with the interpreter before you start.
- be aware of when a deaf person has something to contribute, there will be a time-lag between them signing and the interpreter voicing-over the signed communication.
- it is impossible for a sign language interpreter to interpret when more than one person is talking at the same time. Therefore, control of discussions, debates and meetings must be taken by the tutor or the chair to ensure only one person is talking at a time.
- sign language interpreters are impartial. They are not permitted to give advice or offer opinions.
- sign language interpreters operate within a strict professional code of ethics. Everything that is discussed will be kept confidential.
- sign language interpreters will communicate everything that is said or signed (including audible asides).

British Sign Language

British Sign Language (BSL) is the first or preferred language of nearly 70,000 deaf people in the United Kingdom. It is a language of space and movement using the hands, body, face and head.

BSL is a language in its own right, separate and distinct from English in structure, grammar and vocabulary. Many thousands of hearing people also use BSL. More people (deaf and hearing) use BSL than speak Welsh or Gaelic.

Contrary to popular belief, sign language is not international. Wherever communities of deaf people exist, sign languages develop. As with spoken languages, these vary from country to country. They are not based on the spoken language in the country of origin.

Deaf children who are exposed to sign language can develop linguistically at the same rate and level as hearing children. This early access to language opens the gateway to lifelong learning.

Human aids to communication

Human aids to communication such as sign language interpreters or note-takers (manual and electronic) provide specialist support to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people.

Note-takers

Note-takers work with individuals and adapt to their needs. They are trained people who are skilled in summarising and taking notes in various situations such as lectures. Note-takers are very useful as deaf people cannot watch a lecturer or interpreter and write notes at the same time.

Sign language interpreters

Sign language interpreters are highly skilled, trained professionals who are fluent in both English and British Sign Language (BSL). Interpreters will convey accurately the meaning and intention of the spoken word to the deaf person in BSL or Sign Supported English (SSE) using appropriate linguistic and cultural conventions.
Classroom guidelines

Deaf students rely on being able to receive information visually (in varying degrees), therefore

• **face the class** and make sure the student can see your lips at all times
• **do not write** on the board and **talk** at the same time
• **do not walk around** the classroom whilst talking as this makes it very difficult for the student to maintain visual contact, making lip-reading impossible
• **do not stand in front of a bright light or window** as your face will be silhouetted and therefore it will be more difficult to lip-read
• if you have asked the class to read something, please wait until the deaf person has finished before continuing to speak – deaf students cannot read and lipread or watch the interpreter at the same time

**English may not be the first language of all deaf students.** They may use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language therefore they may take a little longer to read than other students. Handouts should therefore be clear and visual.

• **handouts** are extremely useful to deaf students. These, together with hard copies of OHTs or Powerpoint slides, should be given to the student or posted on Blackboard at least 24 hours before the lecture wherever possible to enable them to prepare beforehand. A copy of handouts and OHTs or slides should be given to the note-taker at the start of the lecture to facilitate annotation and referencing of the slides. Please remember to use **plain English**.

• **preparation material.** Interpreters are expected to interpret a wide range of subjects at any level across the University. It is therefore necessary to be as fully prepared as possible hence interpreters will request lecture material several days before the lecture for preparation and clarification of new terminology.

• **try to give glossaries of terminology and write new terms on the board wherever possible**

• **avoid idioms** and jokes or play on words especially with sign language users. These will be lost on deaf students and, as they will understandably be curious why their peers are laughing, will require an explanation from the interpreter which puts unnecessary pressure on them in an already demanding role.

• **try to structure sessions clearly.** Rapid changes of topic will defeat most lip-readers. If you change the topic of conversation, make sure that the deaf person is aware of it. Only 30–40 per cent of all words can actually be seen on the lips. The student will be using contextual clues relating to the topic whilst making use of any residual hearing they might have together with lipreading to access the message.

• **be explicit.** When describing diagrams or graphs etc, **do not use ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘here’, ‘there’** – the support worker will not know what is meant.

• **allow more time to make communication effective.** Interpreters and note-takers work, by necessity, several seconds behind the speaker. This means deaf students often ‘see’ a question start as hearing students hear it end. As a result it can be very difficult for a deaf student to fully participate on an even basis without careful management by the tutor. When demonstrating experiments or explaining computer software, please be aware of this time delay and allow the student to actually see the activity before moving on.

• **group discussions** are notoriously difficult for deaf students as people often speak over one another. If deaf students are not given the opportunity to locate the speaker, they will miss some or all of the discussion and will therefore either not contribute or be very reluctant to do so for fear of repeating previously voiced comments. Try to control group situations allowing **one person to speak at once** (remember, an interpreter can only interpret one person at a time) and allow time for contributions from the deaf student. Contributions from the floor should be repeated especially in situations where interpreters are not used.

• **video summaries** should be given to the student and interpreter in advance. If you are planning to show a video to a group including a deaf student, it will need to be **summarised before screening.** Please send the video (or a copy) to the Support Worker Team, Student and Learning Services (ssc-comsupport@shu.ac.uk), at least one week before the intended date of screening. Transcriptions will then be given to the student and interpreter as required.

• **induction loops** are fitted in most lecture theatres. Hearing aid users can switch their aids to a special setting which cuts out background noise allowing them to receive the speaker’s voice more clearly. Where loops are unavailable, deaf students may choose to use their own personal loop system. This will involve the member of staff wearing a microphone and the student wearing a receiver. If another person in the room asks a question or makes a comment, it will be necessary to repeat it.

• **changes to time tables** mean changes to support requirements. It is the student’s responsibility to book the support they need. Support is booked at the start of each semester for the duration of the semester. If there is to be a room change or cancellation, for example, the student will need to be **informed as early as possible** so they can tell the co-ordinator, who will try to accommodate these changes.
Assessing deaf students’ presentations

Deaf students are often required to give oral presentations as part of their course and this should be encouraged except in exceptional cases where a student’s wellbeing might be adversely affected – if this were the case it would normally be listed in the recommendations on their learning contract in which case a recommendation for an alternative form of assessment would be made.

Generally, deaf students’ presentations should be assessed in a similar manner to their hearing peers taking into account the following points.

Sign language users
- students will sign their presentations and the interpreter will voice-over ie translate the signed production into English
- the interpreter will faithfully reflect the style, intention and content of the signed presentation. The interpreter will not correct a student’s mistakes nor compensate in any way for lack of knowledge.
- due to the myriad of sign language variations (reflective of our regional dialects), the interpreter may have to ask for clarification of signs or meaning. The interpreter will usually explain to the member of staff what they have said to the student during clarification and the student should not lose marks as a result of this normal interaction.
- it must be noted that, whilst hearing students are expected to vary eye contact amongst their audience, sign language users usually maintain eye contact with the interpreter to ensure a mutual understanding and a regulating of pace in order to give as smooth a production as possible
- the interpreter will interpret any questions from the floor at the end of the presentation
- it is therefore inevitable that an interpreted presentation will require more time (up to 50 per cent) and this should be considered when planning the presentation time-table
- if the student’s learning contract states that their work should be marked for content and context and not for standard written English, then the student should not be penalised for any grammatical spelling errors contained in handouts or slides

Oral deaf students
Deaf students who do not use sign language will present in the same way as their hearing peers. However, the following points should be taken into account when awarding marks
- some deaf students may not have a clear voice. Their voice may be monotonal and lack expression and the student may feel very embarrassed or lack confidence because of this.
- depending on the type of deafness the student has, they might or might not be able to hear their own voice and this may result in their voice being too loud or too soft
- in extreme cases the student might be adversely affected by the prospect of giving an oral presentation and it would therefore be beneficial to consider an alternative form of assessment
Support for students on work placement

The deaf service team works closely with students, faculty placement staff and placement providers to ensure a student’s placement experience is both beneficial and positive.

There are two distinctly different types of work placement elements, from a support perspective, that a student at Sheffield Hallam undertakes.

**Year long paid placements**

This type of placement is usually a non-mandatory element of the student’s course.

The placement provider (employer) is responsible for organising and providing support, and for making any reasonable adjustments required under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) during this time. Students and/or the employer should apply for Access to Work by contacting the disability employment adviser based at the local job centre. Access to Work is a government funded scheme and can provide advice, assessments and funding for various support which can include:

- Communication support at work
- Equipment solutions
- Deaf awareness training for staff

The University does, however, have a responsibility to ensure no student is placed in an environment where they are likely to experience discrimination.

Guidelines for working with deaf students on work placement have been drawn up by the deaf service team and are issued at the student’s request and at a time in the recruitment process decided by the student. It is extremely important students have autonomy in this matter.

Contacts with, or visits to, the placement provider by members of the deaf service team can be made, again in consultation with the student, to deliver deaf awareness to prospective colleagues thus making the transition into work a little less daunting. Many students, of course, prefer to promote deaf awareness themselves and this is encouraged.

Should an interpreter be needed for placement tutor visits, the deaf service team will endeavor to arrange one. Please note, as much notice as possible should be given as the chance of booking an interpreter decreases nearer the event.

**Professional or clinical placement**

These placements are a mandatory element of the course (e.g., nursing, social work), and must be successfully completed in order to qualify for their chosen profession. Students are encouraged to declare their disability to placement providers to ensure staff are aware and reasonable adjustments can be made.

Unlike year long placements, responsibility for providing the support a student has had recommended at their Assessment of Need interview remains with the University. For example, if a student requires an interpreter to access meetings, training etc., the University should try to arrange that provision bearing in mind the notice needed.

Deaf students on professional or clinical placements often require adapted equipment (e.g., electronic stethoscopes, amplified telephones), to enable them to satisfactorily complete various requirements of their placement. Any such equipment will be discussed and recommended as a result of the student’s Assessment of Need interview. It is therefore vital that students are encouraged to book their assessment as soon as possible, if they have not already done so, in an attempt to have the necessary equipment available to them before the commencement of their first work placement.

As with year long placements, the deaf service team can contact or visit the placement provider for deaf awareness purposes in liaison with the faculty placement team and student.

Guidelines for working with deaf students on professional or clinical placement have been drawn up by the deaf service team and can be distributed to placement providers with the agreement of the student.
Resources

Books

*Sign Language: The Study of Deaf People and Their Language*
J Kyle and B Wolf

*Being Deaf: The Experience of Deafness*
George Taylor and Juliet Bishop, OU Press/Pinter 1997

*Constructing Deafness*
Susan Gregory and Gillian Hartley, OU Press 1991

*Cruel Legacy 2nd Edition*
A F Dimmock 2000

*Seeing Voices*
Oliver Sachs, University of California Press 1989

*Dictionary of BSL/English*
British Deaf Association 1992

Magazines

*One in Seven*
RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People)

*SIGN Matters*
BDA (British Deaf Association)

Websites

www.forestbooks.com
www.bda.org.uk
www.rnid.org.uk
www.bbc.co.uk/see_hear
www.ndcs.org.uk
www.royaldeaf.org
www.BritishSignLanguage.com

Numerous factsheets are available from many of the above sites.