THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Student Disability Service

Deaf Awareness Information for Staff

Access strategies

The majority of British students with limited hearing use spoken English as their first language. They are most likely to use some combination of the following strategies to access learning:

- **Amplification and sound enhancement** (for example: hearing aids, cochlear implants, loop systems, individual wireless-assisted systems).
- **Speechreading** (commonly known as lipreading)
- **Reading notes from manual or electronic note-takers**
- **Reading subtitles/captions**

Some students with limited or no hearing are bilingual users of English and British Sign Language (BSL). See **Appendix** for more information. These students will often work with **BSL/English interpreters** to access learning, in combination with one or more of the strategies listed above. A few may also use one or more other sign language and/or spoken languages.

Important: deaf students vary widely in their individual linguistic access and support requirements. The adjustments on a student's Schedule of Adjustments will match the individual combination of languages/strategies they use.

Deaf Awareness Training

Student Disability Service provides training on access and support for deaf students. The general content provides detail on the issues and resources covered in this document, and includes feedback from students themselves. We welcome requests to provide bespoke sessions for individual staff teams working with (or about to work with) specific students.

Language and general knowledge issues

It is common for deaf individuals who were born with significant deafness to experience some level of on-going reading and writing challenges. This is because they are most unlikely to have learned spoken language in the same way, at the same rate, as hearing peers - and spoken language is the basis of reading and writing development.

They may also have gaps in general knowledge which hearing students have acquired through incidental hearing.

These situations are regardless of intellectual abilities – and they apply whether the student uses a spoken or a sign language as first or preferred[1] language.

Terminology

For various reasons, students will differ in their terminology preferences. Terms include:
- 'deaf' (used throughout this guide as a generic term)
- 'Deaf' (used in this guide, mid-sentence, to denote BSL-using students who identify with the Deaf Community)
- hearing impaired
- partially hearing (or partially deaf)
- hard of hearing

Be guided by the individual student's preference.

Access and support strategies: lectures and tutorials

The goal is to enable students who are deaf, or have a hearing loss, to:
- access the same information, at the same time, as fellow students
- ask questions and contribute fully to discussions

The **Schedule of Adjustments profile** gives essential guidance to teaching staff on how to optimise this goal for an individual student.

The student will have a Named Advisor within the Student Disability Service. Staff are welcome to contact the Advisor directly with any queries.

1. Remote situations

Adjustments in the following topic areas include specific guidance on procedures and good practice:

- Optimising accessibility of online spoken content
- Accuracy of captioning of recorded lecture
- Working with Remote Live Captioners for live (synchronous) sessions
- Making 'Learn' resources accessible in advance to interpreters, note-taker and captioners
- Working with BSL/English interpreters online

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[1] Some students will not have had access to a sign language from birth, but it will now be their main language for effective communication in some situations

2. Face-to-face situations

Adjustments in the following topic areas include specific guidance on procedures and good practice:

- Optimising accessibility of spoken content in both lectures and groups discussions
- Good practice in using microphones
- The need to wear additional microphone where a student is using a personal wireless 'FM' system
- Booking rooms with induction loop facility
- Providing subtitles for videos shown in class
- Working with Remote Live Captioning in classroom situations
- Working with a notetaker in classroom situations
- Working with BSL/English interpreters in the classroom

Assessed work

As explained above, students who were born with a significant level of deafness can often have life-long language challenges.

Common issues are:
- Limitations to comprehension and production of full grammatical structures.
- Limitations to vocabulary, awareness of ambiguities, idioms and general knowledge.

Implications:
- Need for wording of assessment tasks etc to be clear and unambiguous.
- Staff should be aware of possible impact on production of assignments.

Placements

- With student's consent, provide the placement with information about the student's access issues.

- It will be helpful for the student to visit the placement in advance. They can then explore accessibility in that context and negotiate any specific adjustments which may be needed.

  If you require this document in an alternative format please contact the student Disability Service Disability.Service@ed.ac.uk

Some facts about British Sign Language (BSL)

What is BSL
'British Sign Language (BSL) is a natural language with its own vocabulary and grammar, which has emerged from Deaf people's communication over centuries, and is not a representation of English on the hands.'[i]

Is sign language universal?
There is no universal sign language: each community has its own language but these are not manual versions of the spoken or written language used by the hearing communities around them. Because of Britain's colonial history, closely related languages can be found in Australia (Australian Sign Language or Auslan), New Zealand (NZ Sign Language), Malta (Maltese Sign Language) and in some parts of South Africa, India, and Canada (Maritime Sign Language).'

History of British Sign Language
For a brief summary, see https://www.ucl.ac.uk/british-sign-language-history

Moray House (The University's School of Education) has special place in the history of BSL, being one of three places of UK research which proved that BSL is a fully-fledged language. In fact, the name 'British Sign Language' was first published in 1975 in an article by Dr Mary Brennan who led the Moray House team[ii].

In 2015, the Scottish Parliament passed historic legislation[iii] which formally recognised BSL as a minority language and puts a duty on Scottish Ministers and public bodies, including the University, to promote the use and understanding of BSL through organisational 'BSL Plans'

The University of Edinburgh was the first university to appoint a BSL Officer to oversee the implementation of its BSL Plan: https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/british-sign-language-plan

How many people use BSL in Scotland?
In Scotland's Census, 2011[iv], 12,533 respondents reported using BSL at home.

What is Sign Support English?
Sign Supported English is a broad term for the use of sign vocabulary from BSL to supplement spoken English. There are many informal variants, which borrow from both languages in different ways and for various reasons.

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[i] History of British Sign Language (2016) *Deafness and Cognition and Language Research Centre, University College London.* http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/bslhistory [Accessed 14 November 2016]

[ii] British Deaf Association (1975) *Can Deaf Children Acquire Language?: An Evaluation of Linguistic Principles in Deaf Education.* British Deaf Association.

[iii] *The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 (2015).* Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/11/contents?section-4-5 [accessed 14 November 2016]

[iv] Census (2011) *Scotland's Census 2011: Shaping our future: Household Questionnaire.* Availableat:http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/Householdpre -addressed27_05_10specimen.pdf [Accessed 10 October 2016