

One of the problems facing information services is that of communicating essential information about their services and plans effectively where deaf people are concerned. Deaf people have the same right to accessible information as other people. Information service planners and providers have a responsibility to make this happen.

One in five of the population has a hearing loss. This means there are over one million people in Scotland with a hearing loss, from the profoundly deaf to those who are hard of hearing. They have different communication needs.

There are approximately 6,000 deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL).

SCoD is concerned that because deaf people's communication needs are not always met, they do not have equal access to information and are therefore often unable to participate fully and make informed choices.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, it is unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against deaf people by offering a lower standard of service or less favourable treatment in the provision of services and information.

## good practice

The Scottish Council on Deafness recommends that the following good practice be implemented:

Information should be provided freely, be comprehensive and timely.

Information should be available in a variety of accessible formats such as: BSL with subtitles, braille, moon, large print, simple English with graphics, via email and through accessible websites.

Print information should be produced in a sans serif font such as Arial, minimum point size 12.

For meetings, communication services should be provided, such as: BSL/English interpreters, lipspeakers, electronic notetakers and loop systems.

Deaf people should receive complete sets of meeting papers in an appropriate format five working days before the meeting.

Meeting rooms should be well lit and equipped with working loop systems. Wall decor should be plain, keeping background visual noise to a minimum.

Where contact details such as a telephone number is provided, textphone, fax numbers and email addresses should also be offered. Staff should be trained in textphone use and have an awareness of Typetalk.

In addition to following the W3C accessibility guidelines, websites should offer video clips in BSL where possible.

Public information material should be produced in BSL with subtitles.

All staff should receive deaf, deafblind and deafened awareness training at induction. Staff working with deaf people should have communication skills training and an awareness of communication support services.

Deaf people should be involved in the planning, priority setting, provision and monitoring of information services.

Equal opportunities legislation should be applied in all employment procedures.



# defining deafness

When we use the term 'deaf', we mean it to include people on the full spectrum of deafness: Deaf sign language users, deafened, deafblind and hard of hearing people.

## People who are deafblind

Deafblindness is sometimes called dual sensory impairment. This is because deafblind people will have some degree of both deafness and blindness.

A person can be born deafblind (congenital deafblindness) or lose their hearing and their sight in later life. Some people who are born with deafblindness may also have physical and/or learning disabilities.

A person born deaf who later loses their sight will most likely be a sign language user. Other deafblind people may be born blind and lose their hearing in later life. These people will most likely use a spoken language and may also use braille for written documents. It is important to remember that many deafblind people may not be totally deaf and totally blind.

Professionals should always find out exactly what form of communication support the person needs. It could be the person needs a guide/communicator, or has to have written information in braille. The person may have more complex support needs that will need to be addressed.

## Deaf sign language users

These are people whose preferred or only language is British Sign Language (BSL).

Typically, they will have been born deaf or have become deaf early in life.

People with this level of deafness are often described as being profoundly deaf.

Deaf BSL users usually see themselves as part of a linguistic and cultural minority known as the Deaf Community.

A hearing professional not proficient in BSL must book a BSL/English interpreter for meetings and appointments with a Deaf sign language user in order to communicate effectively with the person.

## People who are hard of hearing

This is a term used to describe people with a mild to moderate hearing loss.

People who are hard of hearing will, in general, lose their hearing gradually and the majority of hard of hearing people become so in later life. A person with a mild hearing loss might wear a hearing aid and have some difficulty following conversations in noisy situations. A person with a moderate hearing loss might have one or two hearing aids and will have difficulty following normal speech without the aid.

If the person coming to a meeting or appointment uses a hearing aid, then a loop system will enable them to take part.

## People who are deafened

People who were born hearing and became severely or profoundly deaf after learning to speak are often described as deafened. People who have had full hearing and become deaf may be described as having Acquired Profound Hearing Loss (APHL). This hearing loss may be due to disease or illness or there may not be an identified reason for the hearing loss. Deafened people may rely on lipreading to follow a conversation or need to have things written down for them.

If arranging a meeting or appointment with a person who is deafened, you must find out what support they need, for example, an electronic notetaker.