

Overview - Deafness

One in six adults in the UK experience deafness, which can range from mild to profound. Profoundly and severely deaf students rely mostly on lip-reading and/or sign language and may not be able to communicate orally. Hearing aids may be used to improve hearing, but can distort background noise too.

One in ten people in the UK experience tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in the ears). For some, it will have a major impact on studies and daily life. As with all conditions, the best guide is the student him/herself.

Students with deafness may experience the following issues:

- Difficulty hearing and note taking in lectures and seminars.
- Gaps in knowledge and understanding due to missing out on information picked up incidentally by hearing students.
- Language barriers (especially for those whose first language is British Sign Language) including: poor reading fluency and comprehension, delay in assimilating subject-related vocabulary, difficulty expressing themselves in writing, problems understanding speakers with strong accents.
- Unfamiliarity with English grammar, due to BSL having a different structure and syntax.
- Difficulty following group conversations.
- Isolation from peers caused by difficulties in communicating.
- Tiredness, due to the intense effort involved in lip-reading.
- Physical discomfort of technical devices such as hearing aids.
- Related medical difficulties (e.g. loss of balance, tinnitus-induced headaches).



Top tips for academic staff:

- Have conversations with the student about their strategies, preferences and challenges so you know how best to support them.
- Face the student when speaking and check there is enough light on your face to allow lip-reading. Avoid standing with your back to the light.
- Allow the student to sit where they want in the room.
- Allow the student to record lectures and use any other specialist equipment they may require.
- Keep background noise to a minimum.
- Speak clearly and naturally, using appropriate gestures, facial expressions and eye contact to enhance understanding.
- Repeat questions from other students before answering.
- Regularly check comprehension by asking questions.
- Make use of visual material such as handouts, images, diagrams, written instructions and glossaries.
- Write new vocabulary and names up on the board.
- Ensure any videos have captions/subtitles or provide a transcript.
- In seminars, ask other students to raise their hands before speaking and only allow one speaker at a time.
- Be aware that the student cannot read or take notes whilst lip-reading so allow time for each stage.
- Build in regular breaks.

Useful links

- <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/accessability/staff/supporting-students-with-disabilities/information-for-staff-working-with-deaf-or-hearing-impaired-students>
- <http://www.thepostathens.com/article/2016/09/students-who-are-deaf-at-ohio-university-face-challenges>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tinnitus/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

