D/deaf and hard of hearing fact sheet
Guidance for Staff working with D/deaf and hard of hearing students

Hearing Impairment as a Disability
A hearing impairment may mean a person has no hearing at all, or has hearing loss at a particular range of frequencies, or may have tinnitus (noise in the ears). It may be congenital or acquired and may have an effect on speech and language development if it occurs early in life.

A Deaf person may use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language. This is a language with its own grammar constructions that are different from English. An individual may have some difficulties communicating effectively in written language but may be a very good communicator in BSL. If a D/deaf person is accompanied by an interpreter you should speak directly to the D/deaf person. However, not all D/deaf people will know or use sign language.

Some students may use Sign Support English (SSE) rather than BSL. SSE is not a language in its own right, but more a kind of English with signs.

Hearing impairment etiquette

- When talking to a person who is D/deaf/hard of hearing ensure that you speak clearly, slightly slower than usual, but using the same pitch and tone as you would to any other person.
- Do not exaggerate your lip movements and be careful not to cover your mouth while talking, as this makes lip reading almost impossible. Remember that shouting distorts your lip patterns and makes it more difficult for a deaf/hard of hearing person to understand you.
- Always face the person you are talking to and stand between one and three metres away from them. This is the optimum distance for lip reading.
- Try not to stand with the light directly behind you, such as in front of a window, as this casts your face in shadow and makes it difficult to lip read.
- Ensure you have the person’s attention before starting to speak to them. You may need to wave, move into their line of sight or touch them gently on the arm.
- If the deaf person is using an interpreter, remember to look at and speak to the deaf person and not the interpreter. The interpreter is only there to facilitate communication, not to talk to you directly.
- If the deaf/hard of hearing person does not understand you, try to rephrase what you have said, as they may pick up the words in a different lip pattern. Always try and start with saying what you what to talk about such as the key point. This makes understanding easier, as there is immediately a context.
- If necessary, write down what you are trying to say.
- If the person uses an assistance dog, do not touch or feed the dog without first gaining the permission of the owner.
- If you are wondering whether a deaf/hard of hearing person needs some help, approach them and ask before doing anything. Then listen to how they want you to help them.
General issues

- Would it help the student if there were an induction loop at the reception/School office? This is a small device that sits on the desk and enables people who use hearing aids to hear you better.
- Do staff know how to communicate appropriately with a D/deaf/hard of hearing person? If not, perhaps they would benefit from a brief workshop (contact the Student Wellbeing Service for further details).
- Are there fax, e-mail or text messaging facilities (SMS) in hall reception and School office? People who are D/deaf or hard of hearing may find it easier to communicate via fax, e-mail or SMS rather than face to face or over the telephone. Most people with hearing loss have access either to a fax, e-mail or SMS.

Physical access

- Are there contrasting edges on the steps throughout the School/Faculty? People who are D/deaf/hard of hearing use their central vision to lip read; they often rely on their peripheral vision when they are moving about and talking at the same time. Highlighting steps with a contrasting strip makes it easier for someone doing this to see the step.
- Is there adequate lighting around reception and communal areas of the School/Faculty, for example in Reception, School office, common rooms or common areas, lecture theatres, libraries, tutorial rooms and dining hall? It is also important that the student has adequate lighting in their room. Good lighting is important as it makes lip reading, signing and other forms of non-verbal communication easier to see.
- Large, open areas with little furniture or hard floors can emphasise noise levels and reverberation. This can make it more difficult since hearing aids will amplify everything and make it difficult to distinguish speech.
- To improve acoustics, consider using carpet in some areas, hanging curtains or blinds, hang soft materials such as corkboard/pinboard for notices on the walls. Use furniture to interfere with pathways of sound and to absorb noise.
- Turn off noisy equipment when it is not in use, replace noisy light fittings and keep doors closed if possible.

Accommodation/Building Managers

- Is there a flashing/vibrating fire alarm in the student’s room? Students who are D/deaf/hard of hearing may not be able to hear the fire alarm and therefore need a visual or tactile signal to alert them to a fire (the tactile signal is sometimes used when a person is asleep).
- Is there an effective fire alarm system installed within the building to alter the hearing in case of an evacuation? Is an emergency evacuation plan necessary
and in place for the student? Ensure that all staff and students are aware of the evacuation plan.

- Is there an emergency vibrating pager system to alert hearing impaired students to the fire alarm or other emergencies?
- Does the student require a telephone with built in amplification? There are telephones available with amplification and flashing lights to help those with high frequency hearing loss.
- Does the student need a quiet room away from background noise? Hearing aids amplify all sound, so a room with a lot of background noise may make it difficult for a student with a hearing loss to concentrate on conversations.

Dining Area

- Is there a flashing fire alarm in the dining room? A person with a hearing loss may not be able to hear a fire alarm, and may need a visual signal to indicate that they must evacuate the room.
- Are menu choices displayed in writing/print? This will make it easier for a person with a hearing loss to know what is being served.

Useful Contacts
Previous publications, particularly those produced by the University of Sheffield, Cambridge, Leeds and the Open University are gratefully acknowledged.

- Action for hearing loss previously known as Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)
- British Deaf Association (BDA)
- Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD)