

Advisory Services Good Practice Guide



Working together for an equal and better future for all Deaf, deafened, deafblind and hard of hearing people



Introduction

Deaf Action (www.deafaction.org) delivers a range of services to the estimated 950,000 people in Scotland with sensory support needs - including those who are deaf. Throughout this guide the term 'deaf' should be taken to mean those who identify themselves as culturally Deaf and who use British Sign Language, and those who are deafened, deafblind or hard of hearing.

Deaf Action recognises that mainstream services and providers may lack the knowledge, understanding and skills to effectively engage with deaf people, and therefore become inaccessible. This guide attempts to improve the accessibility of mainstream advice and information services across Scotland by touching upon the needs of particular groups of deaf people and how best to communicate and work with them. This guide also makes suggestions as to how services can try to embed effective practice in working with deaf people in the work they do.

While not a substitute for in-depth training and experience, it is hoped that this basic knowledge will be a useful starting point to improve the experience of accessing mainstream information and advice provision for deaf people. It may also encourage advisors and other front-line staff to seek further training and support in order to enhance their skills and knowledge. The over-arching aim is to enable advisors and front line staff to engage with anyone who is deaf and respond appropriately to the communication needs of that particular person. To support this, the guide is split into sections that focus on the specific groups of deafness and what they may need. This offers guidance on the questions and thinking that an advisor would be encouraged to make for each person who is deaf.

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The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010

There are several drivers and reasons for ensuring the accessibility of services to everyone who requires them. However, the main piece of legislation in the United Kingdom legislating for the accessibility of services is the Equality Act 2010. The Act ensures that individuals with protected characteristics – including disability - should not be discriminated against.

The Equality Act defines disability as being a physical and mental impairment that has a substantial and long term effect on the individual and their ability to carry out normal day to day activities; deafness falls under this scope and therefore is covered under the Equality Act. It should be noted that some deaf people - especially those who see themselves as culturally Deaf and who use British Sign Language - do not see themselves as disabled but rather as a linguistic and cultural minority.

Reasonable adjustments

There is a duty on service providers under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that the service is accessible and equitable for all. Such reasonable adjustments may take the form of:

- Changing the way things are done
- Making changes to the environment
- Ensuring the provision of aids and services

Examples of possible reasonable adjustments that can be made for deaf people will be outlined under the relevant sections in this guide. The Act states that the cost of making reasonable adjustments should not be passed on to the individual.

Discrimination

Discrimination can occur both directly and indirectly, and it is important to appreciate how individuals can be discriminated against - even unintentionally.

- **Direct discrimination.** If somebody with a protected characteristic is treated less favourably than somebody else who does not have the characteristic, this is direct discrimination. This includes receiving an inferior quality of service, or no service at all due to communication barriers.
- **Indirect discrimination.** This occurs when an organisation's practices, policies or procedures have the effect of disadvantaging people who share certain protected characteristics. For deaf people, an example of this may be when services are only accessible by telephone, which is only accessible if individuals have good hearing.
- **Deafness is not an immediately obvious characteristic and often at first glance it is not often immediately apparent that somebody is deaf and therefore reasonable adjustments may not be made from the outset and indirect discrimination occurs frequently.** This is exacerbated by a general lack of awareness of the differing needs of the various groups of deaf people.



Working with Deaf clients

Deaf people, with a capitalised D, identify themselves as part of a linguistic and cultural minority, and take great pride in being part of the Deaf community, a community with a rich heritage and identity. British Sign Language will usually be their first language and some may simply identify themselves as British Sign Language (BSL) users or speakers, as opposed to using the term Deaf. Such individuals often do not feel they are disabled, but experience barriers on an everyday basis due to a lack of understanding and lack of services delivered in their own first language, BSL. The non-capitalised use of 'deaf' usually encompasses the whole range of deafness – from someone who is mildly hard of hearing to someone who is profoundly deaf. Other sections of this guide will address such other groups.

It is important to ensure the correct terminology is used – this is respectful and avoids offence. Some terms are completely unacceptable today and are considered offensive, such as “deaf and dumb” or “deaf mute.” If in doubt, ask. There are several organisations working with deaf people that can offer advice and guidance. A list of these organisations is included at the back of this guide.

British Sign Language (BSL)

BSL is a visual-gestural language, with its own grammar and principles, and is completely different from the grammatical structure of English. The language makes use of space and involves movement of the hands, body, face and head. Many thousands of people who are not deaf also use BSL, as hearing relatives of deaf people, sign



language interpreters or as a result of other contact with the British deaf community. It was recognised as a language in its own right by the UK Government in 2003. Subsequently, the Scottish Parliament passed the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act in 2015 legislating for the promotion of, and access to, BSL by public authorities across Scotland.

Barriers to access

Often Deaf people find it difficult to access services as the providers are not aware of how best to communicate with them, or do not understand that aids to communication should be arranged and how this can be done. There are also some assumptions and misconceptions about Deaf people. For example, writing things down is not always effective as English is often not a Deaf person's first language (BSL is) and they may struggle to understand. Lipreading is not always effective, nor is it a skill that many Deaf people have. Even if somebody is able to lipread well, many words have similar lip patterns and misunderstandings often occur. If Deaf people think a service is inaccessible then it is unlikely that they will contact the service. This lack of demand may lead providers to mistakenly think there is no issue with the service they offer.

As many Deaf people are not comfortable with written English, they may not understand letters from agencies and therefore fail to take any necessary action. Even if they are able to understand letters they may struggle to respond as many agencies rely on telephone contact, which is inaccessible for deaf people. Often, this means

that situations may deteriorate significantly before any remedial action can be taken and deaf clients may present with complex issues, sometimes with very short deadlines. The client may also feel more stressed and anxious than if the situation had been dealt with earlier on.

Contacting and engaging with clients

There are various considerations to think about when contacting your client. Some may prefer email, while others prefer SMS text messaging or letter, although these are all dependent on written English, which may be in itself be a barrier for somebody whose first language is BSL and create further confusion and misunderstandings. When using written English, try to be as plain, simple and straightforward as possible. Bullet points and short summaries can be effective. Written documents can be translated into BSL, and vice versa through an appropriate agency or company. Deaf Action has a Multimedia department which can help with all aspects of translation – contact details are at the back of the document.

The Next Generation Text Relay service (www.ngts.org.uk) is a service that connects a hearing person using a normal telephone with a deaf person using a textphone (a special telephone with a keyboard and display). An operator acts as an intermediary and will type what is spoken, and speak what is typed. Again, this is dependent on written English and may not be suitable for all deaf people. Online interpreting may be an alternative, which is touched upon later on in this section

Aids to communication

Information should always be provided in a format that is accessible and aids to communication should be offered and arranged for meetings and appointments, if necessary. In the case of somebody who is Deaf and uses BSL, this will often mean that information needs to be provided in BSL and therefore BSL/English interpreters may need to be booked. However, the client should always be asked about what they prefer as individuals will have their own preferences. Other aids to communication that may be preferred by a Deaf person are outlined in subsequent sections. It should not be assumed that a Deaf person will always want a BSL/English interpreter.

BSL/English interpreters

It is imperative that only qualified and registered interpreters are used as this ensures accountability and ethical, professional standards of interpreting. It is inappropriate for others to assist with communication, such as family members or somebody who has been to basic BSL classes. Generally, it is taken that arranging for an interpreter is a reasonable adjustment although this inevitably carries a cost. There are currently issues around the availability of interpreters in Scotland. Therefore it is advised that as much advance notice as possible is made in arranging interpreters as it may be problematic to find an interpreter at short notice. However, this does not mean that people should not bother to try and find an interpreter at short notice. Interpreters facilitate communication between BSL and spoken English, but are not there to offer any other form of support for the deaf person.



Their focus is on language, cultural mediation and generally ensuring that all parties understand each other. A BSL/English interpreter is not an advocate or a social worker and is not permitted to offer personal advice or opinions. If somebody appears to need further support then the appropriate avenues should be pursued – e.g. social work, advocacy, input from an organisation working with deaf people and so on.

In Scotland, the registering and membership body for BSL/English interpreters is the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI, www.sasli.co.uk). Their website provides a list of currently qualified and registered interpreters in Scotland, along with agencies that have received the SASLI chartermark. All interpreters and agencies registered with SASLI adhere to a code of professional conduct that includes confidentiality and impartiality. Deaf Action only uses SASLI registered interpreters.

Working with an interpreter

- Providing prior information and materials for BSL/English interpreters allows them to work more effectively and prepare for the booking in advance. Prior information may include minutes of previous meetings, presentations, notes or theatre scripts.
- Simultaneous interpreting of dialogue between two languages is very demanding and becomes tiring after prolonged periods. Some assignments may require more than one interpreter; all day events and conferences may require a team of interpreters.
- BSL/English interpreters listen to the spoken English and interpret it into Sign Language, or will watch the Sign Language and translate it into spoken English. The interpreter has to listen and watch before they can interpret so there may be a short time delay.
- Occasionally interpreters will need to clarify what has been said or signed to ensure a correct translation can be given. This is an important part of interpretation and contributes to better communication and understanding.

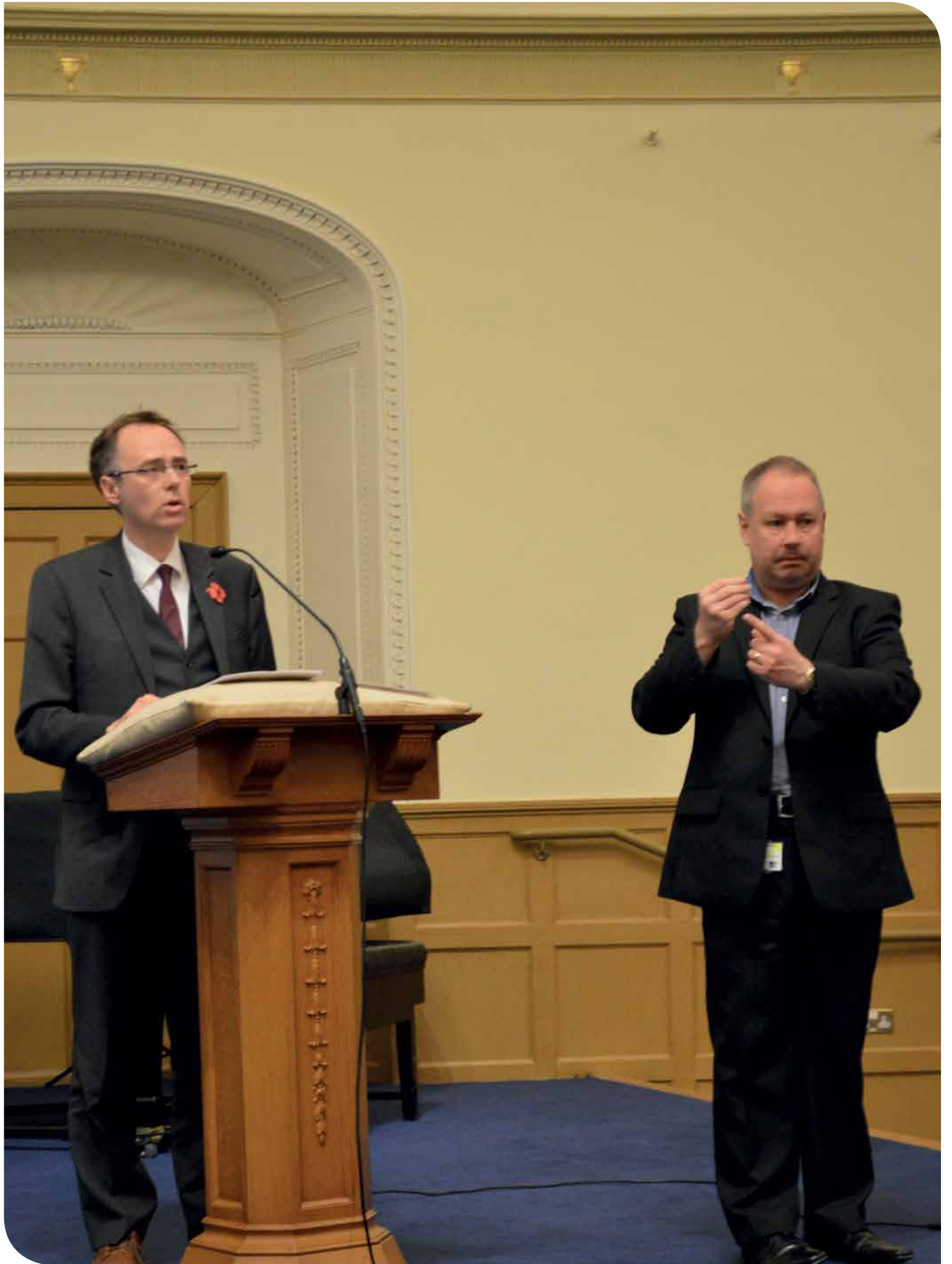
- When working with a BSL/English interpreter:
 - Ensure the deaf person is seated with a clear view of both the interpreter and the speaker.
 - Sign or speak clearly and at your normal pace.
 - Ensure that only one person signs or speaks at a time – In larger meetings It may be useful to raise your hand when you want to speak as this also indicates to the deaf person who is speaking.
 - Address the person directly and avoid phrases such as “tell him or “ask her.”
 - Allow regular breaks for the interpreter.
- Please do not:
 - Ask the interpreter for an opinion.
 - Attempt to engage the interpreter in conversation whilst working.

Online interpreting

A recent and growing development is the use of online interpreting, and at the time of writing the Scottish Government has invested in a Video Relay Service (VRS) that public authorities and registered charities in Scotland can utilise at no charge (www.contactscotland-bsl.org). This is an example of a service that can be used to make contact with clients provided both parties have the appropriate equipment and an internet connection. The hearing person uses a normal telephone while the Deaf person uses a computer, mobile or tablet device with a camera and screen. Both will be connected to an interpreter acting as an intermediary. The interpreter will speak with the hearing person via the telephone, and sign with the deaf person via the camera and screen.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) follows a similar principle, but in this case both the hearing person and the deaf person are in the same room, making use of a computer, mobile or tablet device with a camera and screen. The device must be connected to the internet, and upon connecting to the VRI service a remote interpreter will become involved and pick up spoken English via the device's microphone, signing to the deaf person via the device's screen and the device's camera will capture the deaf person's signing.

Online interpreting is still relatively new and its uptake in Scotland has been slow at the time of writing, with many Deaf people preferring face-to-face interpreting although the technology continues to be developed. Ultimately, the client should always be offered a choice.



Working with clients who are deafened or hard of hearing

Being deafened or becoming hard of hearing through age is the most common form of deafness. With more people living longer, the incidence of deafness is growing in Scotland, with an estimated 1 in 5 people having some form of deafness. Different people experience and live with deafness in different ways, and no assumptions should be made. There are many different terms to describe deafness and individuals will have their own favoured terms. The following generic descriptions may be helpful:

Mild deafness – people with mild deafness tend to find lots of background noise difficult to deal with but manage with one-to-one situations.

Moderate deafness – often people with moderate deafness will find hearing aids useful.

Profound deafness – this can apply to people with severe deafness who rely on hearing aids, sometimes combined with lipreading, or people who are Deaf and use/speak British Sign Language.

Deafened – people who were born with hearing but who have become deaf either gradually or suddenly.

Identifying when somebody is deaf

Some deaf people will be open and indicate that they are deaf. While others may not be comfortable with this and avoid disclosing that they are deaf, perhaps pretending to hear and understand things that they actually have not. Others may not have a full understanding of their deafness and be unaware of how best to help themselves.

Hearing aids are not always worn, and even so they are not always a solution. Deafness is not simply a matter of volume, but of frequency as well. Some may hear certain frequencies better than others, while others may not hear those frequencies at all. Speech can vary in tone and pitch and differ between individuals, and this is why some deaf people may hear certain people better than others. If the individuals have not identified themselves as deaf, the following indicators may assist in identifying where deafness may be a factor:

- Age may be a helpful indicator - 40% of people over fifty have some form of hearing loss, this figure increases with increasing age. By the age of 80, the majority will have some form of deafness.
- If the client does not respond when you call out their name.
- If the client does not react to sounds from behind them or out of their sight.
- When the client responds inappropriately – e.g. smiling and nodding when a sympathetic reaction was expected.
- Confusion may be an indicator due to missing out parts of conversations. Rephrasing or reframing things may help but check the clients' understanding of what has been said.
- If the client's gaze appears fixed on your lips, it may be that they are attempting to lipread you.
- The client may lean towards you in an attempt to be closer to the source of the sound (perhaps subconsciously).

Barriers to access

There can be a number of barriers preventing deaf people from receiving a quality service. Often, this can be down to two key elements – the immediate environment and communication skills.

Environment

Rooms where there is a lot of background noise, e.g. radio, other people talking or moving about, are often not suitable for deaf people. This is often true of reception and waiting areas, which means deaf individuals may miss their name being called. This can be avoided by perhaps alerting reception staff so they are aware and the deaf person may be approached directly. Visual aids can be useful – such as electronic signage that displays names or allocated numbers as they are called.

When considering rooms, the following key considerations should be taken into account:

- Use a quiet room with no, or absolute minimum, background noise. Background noise is distracting and makes it difficult for deaf individuals to concentrate.
- Good lighting is important so that faces can be seen clearly. Do not sit in front of light sources (including windows) as this will create a silhouette effect.
- Try to ensure that the background is as plain as possible – patterned walls or posters can be distracting and create excessive visual “noise” for somebody relying on visual information.
- A room with soft furnishing and carpets absorb sound, improving the acoustics of the room and makes it easier to hear speech.
- If there is a desk or table between individuals, ensure there is a clear line of sight between people and that there are no obstructions such as cups or computers.
- If utilising aids to communication, make time to ensure appropriate seating arrangements. An interpreter or lipspeaker, for example, will need to sit next to the hearing person and both need to be clearly visible to the deaf person.

Communication

Some deaf people develop their lipreading skills and combine this with their hearing to improve access to spoken information. When working with somebody who lipreads, the following points will greatly assist with communication:

- Ensure you have the client's attention before you begin speaking.
 - Face the person, ensuring you are between 3 and 6 feet apart
 - Maintain face-to-face contact at all times. Do not turn your head away to do things. If you need to turn your head away at any point, let the client know what you are going to be doing (perhaps typing something up on the computer or finding something in a drawer for example) and do not speak as you do this. Only resume speaking when face-to-face contact is restored.
 - Check the client is able to hear you comfortably.
 - Keep your hands away from your face.
 - Speak clearly and at a gentle pace.
 - Do not exaggerate lip patterns or face expressions, nor slow down considerably.
 - Do not shout.
 - Be prepared to repeat what you have said, rephrasing and reframing things if repetition does not work. Do not give up even if it is frustrating – it is frustrating for the deaf individual as well.
- Try to use simple, clear language and avoid technical jargon. Drawing diagrams or using visual aids will help where appropriate.
 - Try not to go off on tangents, and inform the deaf individual when you are going to change topic. Knowing the topic is essential for the deaf individual to be able to anticipate vocabulary, terms and contexts.
 - Do not rely on telephone communication. Be prepared to offer other forms of communication such as email, SMS text messaging, TextDirect or online interpreting (please see page x for explanations of TextDirect and online interpreting).
 - If you are making use of aids to communication, speak directly to the client and not the communication professional.
 - Working with deaf people tends to take longer as communication can take up more time. Ensure there is adequate time allocated to appointments and meetings – this is a reasonable adjustment.
 - Offer breaks at regular intervals if possible, as the deaf client may need time to rest their eyes due to processing a lot of visual information.
 - Offer a summary of discussions, either verbally or written in the way of bullet points.

Aids to communication

There is a range of aids to communication available, as outlined below. It is important to ask the client if aids to communication are required, and if so, which is preferred.

Loop systems

Loop systems are only suitable for those wearing hearing aids. The loop system makes use of a microphone to capture the speaker's voice, feeding this into an amplifier and subsequently a wire coil that creates a magnetic field. This magnetic field is picked up by the hearing aid wearer provided the hearing aid has been tuned to the correct setting, often called the T – telecoil – setting. The hearing aid will only pick up sounds that are picked up by the microphone and therefore other noise is eliminated. This is effective at cutting out background noise, but not all hearing aids have a T setting.

Electronic Notetakers

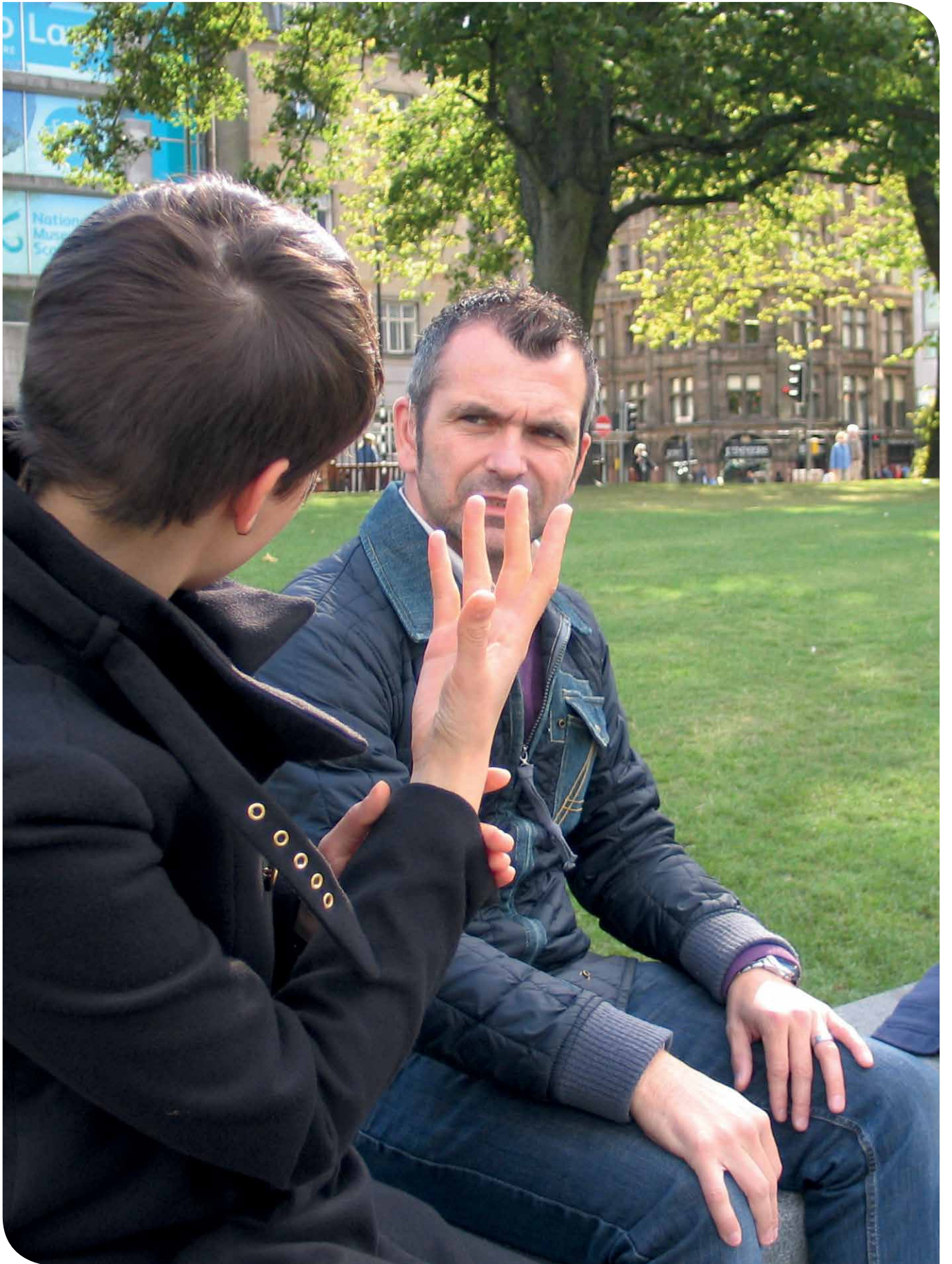
Notetakers will write or type up what is being said. Currently, it is more common for professional notetakers to utilise laptops and type. The typed notes are displayed on a screen for the client to read, and a transcript can be produced at the end.

Speech to Text Reporters

The Speech to Text Reporter types up what is being said on to a phonetic keyboard. The phonetic transcript is automatically converted into English by specialist software, and this method is often quicker and more accurate than notetaking. However, Speech to Text Reporting is less common than notetaking and can be difficult and expensive to source, especially in Scotland.

Lipspeakers

Lipspeakers repeat what is being said without voice so that the speech is conveyed in clear lip patterns. The lipspeaker will add facial expressions and supporting gestures to assist the lipreader.



Working with deafblind clients

Deafblindness is where an individual has a combination of deafness and blindness or partial sightedness. It does not signify that the individual has no hearing and no sight whatsoever. There are several types and the onset can vary. For instance, a deafblind person may:

- be born both deaf and blind
- become deaf and blind later on in life
- be born deaf and become blind later on in life
- be born blind and become deaf later on in life

As such, the level of hearing and sight a person has will vary, and one individual may have better hearing than sight, while another person may have more vision and less hearing. Deafblindness can affect an individual's mobility and communication, and working with deafblind people can be a highly specialist area. This guide will only very briefly touch upon some basic considerations. It is recommended that an organisation working with deaf and/or deafblind people is contacted for further advice and support when required.

Communication

Methods of communication will vary from one deafblind individual to another, as it will depend on the nature of the individual's deafblindness and experience. Because of this, there are a variety of options and methods that may be used but it is always important to ask what the individual likes best. They include:

- Lipspeakers (see page 16).
- Tadoma – the deafblind person puts their thumb on the speaker's lips and spreads the rest of their fingers across the speaker's face and neck. This allows the deafblind person to feel the vibrations, facial expressions and jaw movements.
- British Sign Language, BSL (see page 6).
- Sign Supported English – sign language that follows the grammatical structure of English. This is not the same as BSL.
- Visual Frame Signing – the use of BSL, but signing within a specific visual frame/space to suit the deafblind individual. They may have restricted vision and be unable to see outwith a specific area of vision.
- Hands on Signing – the deafblind person places their hands over the hands of the signer so that the deafblind individual can feel the signing.

- Social-Haptic Communication – information is conveyed through various touch and tactile cues. Such information could include emotions, directions and layouts. This provides further information for the deafblind person within interactions.
- Makaton – a very basic and flexible language programme designed as a means of communication for people who cannot easily communicate through either speaking or signing. It is not a proper sign language, despite a common misconception that it is similar to BSL and other sign languages.
- Deafblind Manual – an alphabet communicated through touch on the hands. It is similar to fingerspelling in BSL except that one hand belongs to the speaker and the other belongs to the deafblind individual.



- Block – an alphabet communicated through tracing letters on the palm or the back of the hand, similar to how the alphabet is written.
- Large Print – information is printed in large font to make it easier to read.
- Braille – information is “printed” through combinations of raised dots, which are traced by the deafblind person’s fingers.
- Moon – information is conveyed through raised, embossed shapes that are simplified derivations of the written alphabet.
- Audio recording – a recording is made of dialogue, so that the client can listen to the information again at a later date in lieu of making notes or trying to retain information in memory.



Barriers to access

Deafblind people experience significant barriers to accessing services. This is partly because their needs can be very diverse and blanket solutions are not possible, thus individuals should always be asked as to how their own needs can be accommodated. If a deafblind individual is visiting a new location or building, it will not be familiar to the person and guiding may need to be offered.

Guiding

A deafblind individual may need to be guided to rooms and places where meetings are to take place, especially if the location is unfamiliar. When guiding a deafblind person, take into account the following guidelines:

- Ask the individual how best to guide them.
- Stand next to the person on their chosen side.
- The person will make physical contact with you in any of the following manners:
 - Holding your arm above your elbow.
 - Linking arms with you.
 - Placing their hand on your shoulder.
- Try to walk slightly ahead of them, by about half a step.
- Match the walking speed of the person you are guiding.
- Inform them when there are any upcoming hazards, such as stairs, doorways or chairs.

Environment & communication

The same basic considerations for environment and communication as for deaf people (page 14) apply for deafblind people although it may be even more important. Bear in mind that deafblind people may have difficulty in retaining information and making notes, therefore do try to break down information into simple, manageable chunks.

Aids to communication

Deafblind people may use the aids to communication outlined on page 16, but may make use of deafblind communicators or interpreters. These are professionals that work similarly to BSL/English interpreters but who will convey information to the deafblind person in a tactile form of communication (e.g. hands on signing or deafblind manual for example). Because of this, the communicator or interpreter will need to be seated next to, or directly opposite, the deafblind person. Generally speaking, the same considerations as for BSL/English interpreters (page 8) apply. However, bear in mind that deafblind interpreting can be more intense, tiring and physically demanding due to the nature of tactile communication and there may need to be more breaks or more professionals booked.

Your service and ensuring good practice

There are some straightforward ways in which services can try to work towards improved provision of good quality advice for deaf people.

Monitoring

Deaf and deafblind people are frequently overlooked when monitoring the quality of service and advice provision, such as recording the number of deaf and deafblind people accessing the service. It is also important to consider whether the service is equipped with the necessary awareness, knowledge and skills to effectively work with deaf and deafblind people. Working with local deaf organisations, charities, Deaf clubs and groups can assist services immensely in better understanding the challenges and needs of such groups. Inviting representatives from various groups can be an excellent way to gather feedback and monitoring information.

Monitoring case example

A deaf organisation received a number of concerns from members of the deaf community that a particular service was not deaf aware nor was it routinely booking interpreters. The organisation made contact with the service, which was under the impression that there were not many deaf people trying to access the service. The service did not maintain records on the number of deaf people making contact and was thus not aware of an issue. The service undertook to improve its recording and was able to subsequently identify improvements such as organising a regular drop-in surgery specifically for deaf people.



Deaf Awareness & BSL training

Regular and up-to-date training is fundamental for the provision of a quality service that meets the needs of clients. Basic deaf awareness training will contribute towards improving the experience that deaf people have when interacting with the service, and especially at the first point of contact. Learning BSL allows staff to communicate directly with Deaf people. Even learning basic BSL may make staff feel more confident, and clients may feel more respected. Improved awareness has the potential to reduce the likelihood of difficult situations and negative experiences due to a lack of understanding.

Policies and procedures

Policies and procedures should include up to date information and steps you need to take in the event of having a deaf or deafblind client, including information on arranging for aids to communication. Training in the use of equipment that aids communication, such as loop systems, should be provided so that equipment can be checked regularly and used properly by designated personnel. Often equipment is not maintained or used regularly until somebody requests to use it, only to find that staff doesn't know how it works, it is broken or not charged up.

Policy and procedure *case example*

An agency entered into a contract with a local deaf organisation for a regular audit of its equipment on an annual basis and ensured staff received regular refresher training on how to operate the equipment. The agency later received an appreciative letter from a customer who was impressed with the level of access and functioning equipment.



Guidelines and protocol

It may be that a service has strict guidelines and protocol for client meetings, for example. There should be flexibility to adjust these for deaf and deafblind clients as this would fall under the reasonable adjustments proviso of the Equality Act. Such adjustments may be allowing extra time for meetings, taking breaks or meeting in another room that is not designated for meetings. Certain rooms may be more appropriate than others, and there should be scope to prioritise such rooms when needed.

Funding applications

When applying for funding, it is advisable to ensure costs for aids to communication are included in the application. This ensures that those costs are covered when the need arises and it does not become a resource issue later on and cause significant delays in arranging meetings with aids to communication.

Changing the physical environment

Arranging for building audits and assessments from a local organisation can be a useful way to check the suitability of the physical environment for certain groups of people, including those who are deaf or deafblind. It would be highly advisable for such advice to be sought before any routine works are undertaken – e.g. redecoration or renovations – so that any changes can be integrated in such works, avoiding extra work and higher costs at a later time.

Providing accessible information

Consideration should be given to providing general information in suitable, accessible formats. Accessible formats may include large print or BSL translations, and includes websites. It is important that such information is meaningful and presented well with the target audience in mind, that this does not become tokenism or a checklist exercise.

Contact details

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Head office Scotland
Empire House
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Tel 0141 341 5330
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British Deaf Association Scotland

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Connevans

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Next Generation Text Service

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