

RESEARCH REPORT

Reaching Deaf Minds In the Workplace

Written by Susan Grant



Sign 

Promoting Deaf Wellness
and Independent Lives

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RESEARCH REPORT

Reaching Deaf Minds – *In the Workplace*

Sign's research into the everyday work experiences of deaf people

Written by Susan Grant

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*Promoting Deaf Wellness
and Independent Lives*

Charity No. 1011056



www.reachingdeafminds.org.uk



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Acknowledgements

“The loss of one person’s contribution is a loss to society as a whole. The great objective of our society is to be truly inclusive, to give every citizen a decent life and a productive role to play.”
[Flynn 1999].

I would like to thank

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for recognising the great need for this research to take place and for funding and supporting it throughout.

Deep thanks I owe to all the contributors towards this research piece, who gave of their precious time freely and willingly, to discuss and impart their knowledge, experience and the many difficulties they have faced in their working lives. Some of the issues discussed were highly sensitive and emotive and given in the hope of creating a better awareness of the inequality and prejudice deaf people live with every day.

All the employers who agreed to these interviews taking place during the working day.

My Project Leader, Matthew James, Deputy Chief Executive, for his input and guidance.

Finally to all the people who made contact with *Sign’s* Reaching Deaf Minds Team, to offer their views, support and endorsement of the project.

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1 Foreword

I am delighted to have been asked to conduct this small but necessary piece of research for *Sign*. Undoubtedly the findings are timely for employers wishing to review their support of deaf people in the workplace, and empower them to make improvements appropriate to individual needs.

This report will serve to inform government of the measures necessary to promote Deaf Wellness in the workplace and hopefully be creative in setting up supportive initiatives which employers can take advantage of.

The creation of a Deaf Employment Charter would serve to inform employers and employees how to prepare for a deaf person joining the workplace and once there, how to ensure they are fully included.

I hope this publication will be widely read and used by both organisations and the deaf community.

Susan Grant

Researcher and Qualified Sign Language Interpreter
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2 Executive Summary

Until now, there has been little consideration given to the emotional needs of Deaf people in employment. The Disability Discrimination Act has focused attention on barriers to employment. This has been welcome, and has drawn attention to many of the physical aspects of discrimination.

However, little thought has been given to the day-to-day experiences of a Deaf employee. Providing a Minicom is not enough of an 'adjustment' to make a Deaf employee feel a valued member of the workforce.

By drawing on the experiences of 12 Deaf employees, the study explores how Deaf employees feel about their working life.

The research suggests that further, very straightforward physical 'adjustments' need to be made. In many cases the deaf employee has the knowledge and skills to know what needs to be done – but they are either not asked, or their suggestions are ignored. This can be something as simple as positioning a desk so that a deaf employee can have their back to the wall; but this can have a huge impact on an employee every working day.

Currently, the commitment of employers to access appears to be a largely superficial. Many old-fashioned assumptions persist and psychological barriers remain. The workplace may now have a Minicom, but staff think it is the job of deaf staff to answer it.

Similarly, the research suggests that employers make little effort to actively include deaf employees. Because the deaf staff miss out on office 'small talk', they are not included in office life: they do not know the 'gossip', or the unwritten rules, or even when somebody has a birthday coming up.

Although some employers have made use of Deaf Awareness training, or Communication Tactics training, it is clear that this needs to be extended further. The initial few weeks of employment are crucial to getting an understanding of the job, and yet the training is often not provided until the employee has been in post for some time. This also means the initial welcome is not as warm as it

could be. There was also a feeling that the training needs to go into more detail than it normally does.

Of concern is the high incidence of bullying which seems to be occurring (five of the 12 described being bullied). In addition, two-thirds of the research group have taken time off work because of stress – a higher figure than in the hearing population. This highlights again the economic loss to employers which could so easily be rectified.

The research suggests that basic good employment practice is not being followed. Seven of the 12 participants have never had an appraisal. Something as simple as an appraisal is particularly of benefit to deaf employees – who may miss more informal methods of feedback and career planning.

The findings most certainly highlight the grave need for supportive measures to be taken in today's workplace. These measures should ensure the safeguarding of deaf people's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. By doing this, organisations, and ultimately the country, can enjoy the benefit of deaf employees contributing fully. They, in turn, will benefit from environments which embrace all the knowledge, skills and talents they have to offer as deaf people.

This research, **Reaching Deaf Minds – In the Workplace**, led by *Sign*'s Deputy Chief Executive, Matthew James and researcher Susan Grant, will become the start of a positive process for employers to go beyond the Disability Discrimination Act and lend their expertise to creating a Deaf-friendly workplace. Ultimately, *Sign* wish to see a Deaf Employment Charter created to support its findings. With this in mind we are supporting this report by creating a pamphlet entitled '**Creating a Deaf-friendly Workplace**'. This will serve to support employers and employees alike, until such time as new government guidelines are established.

Steve Powell
Chief Executive

3 Introduction

Sign is the National Society for Mental Health and Deafness, a registered charity founded in 1985. It is the only charity in the UK dedicated to the field of mental health and deafness. Currently it is actively involved in providing supported living, advocacy, outreach services, day services and training activities to all deaf people in need of mental health services and emotional support through centres in Manchester, London and Leeds.

The charity's work aids deaf people to develop their skills and confidence, improve their quality of life and supports them in maximising their potential. Additionally it has now developed a preventative approach to mental health for deaf people via its Reaching Deaf Minds initiative. This campaign works with statutory bodies, health and deaf organisations and generic mental health charities, to reduce the proportion of deaf people developing preventable mental health problems. Many organisations have already endorsed the campaign to show the relevance this has for today's deaf community.

Promoting deaf wellness was the reason behind seeking funding to enable this vital piece of research to take place. The concept of wellness implies absence of stress, opportunities for self-realisation and satisfying life experiences.

Deaf wellness starts with good communication, positive attitudes and access. Within employment this means a Deaf-friendly workplace. One where deaf people/employees are not excluded and therefore isolated, but positively encouraged to be involved and become positive contributors and leaders within organisations.

Reaching Deaf Minds – In the Workplace was commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and its findings were launched at the House of Commons in February 2005.

The project is the first of its kind and takes a snapshot of what the current experience is for deaf people in work and what attitudes and access issues they face on a daily basis. It also shows examples of good and bad practices in the workplace.

4 Research Rationale

The scope of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has now been expanded to include mental health within its definitions of disability. It requires providers to anticipate some of the needs of disabled people. In the context of employment, employers are expected to have more of a reactive duty [DDA 1995: www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm].

To strengthen the government's resolve to reduce mental ill health and keep people in work, the Health and Safety Commission are putting more onus on employers to take joint responsibility with medical practitioners to aid people to stay in work and return to work quickly, should they require a spell away from the workplace to recuperate [www.hse.gov.uk. 2004].

These requirements are in place to avoid disabled people suffering less favourable treatment for reasons related to their disability by taking positive action to address the difficulties, or barriers, they face [Department for Work and Pensions 2004].

We already know that there is high incidence of mental ill health amongst the deaf community. Currently this is measured as 40% of deaf people will, at some stage, develop a mental health problem serious enough to incapacitate them [Hindley and Kitson 2000]. This Reaching Deaf Minds study, although small, will demonstrate that figure to be correct. These findings show a great need for suitable working environments for deaf people, to support their emotional needs and be valued for their contribution to work. With this in mind, encouraging employers to become exemplar models where the rights of deaf people are mainstreamed, is one of the main aims of this research. The urgency of critical preventative measures being put in place, will become clearly evident throughout this report.

There are currently approximately seven million people in Britain with some form of hearing loss. The Leonard Cheshire Foundation currently

estimate that of the 6.6 million disabled people in the UK, 4 – 5% express communication difficulties, which equates to around 264,000 – 333,000 people. All those people included in this grouping will experience barriers in the workplace. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) estimates 1.4 million d/Deaf people will require adjustments in the workplace under the DDA in order to enable them to work safely and efficiently. [RNID 2002].

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has highlighted the reasons for low retention of employees in the workplace. These have included:

- not being valued
- lack of development and progression
- unrealistic or overwhelming workloads
- low staff morale
- low pay
- poor conditions
- poor levels of job satisfaction
- lack of flexibility
- constant organisation or policy practise changes

Of those demoralised people who go on to develop a mental health problem, 77% become an unemployment statistic [National Statistics, London Workforce Survey 2003].

The literary review of current research findings and thinking produced little evidence of proven emotional support needs of deaf people in the workplace. No studies were found to focus specifically on the mainstream employment experience of d/Deaf people.

Traditionally, public policy has put the obligation on disabled people to 'make do' as best they can in the mainstream and when that fails they can seek compensation for their non-participation in society [Flynn 1999]. The DDA should now firmly encourage a change of attitude from waiting until situations become unbearable for people to cope with, towards a more proactive stance. Having appropriate and relevant guidance will aid

employers to become more knowledgeable about disability issues and in this case Deaf issues specifically. For employers to understand and take on board that all citizens have the right to play a full and meaningful productive part in a truly inclusive society. 'Accommodation is not a courtesy, it is the law!' [www.sparesomechange.com].

Current legislation also states that employers must conduct a risk assessment of every workplace [Health and Safety Executive 2004 www.hse.gov.uk]. The guidance notes accompanying this report will enable a more accurate risk assessment to take place and aid prevention of illness developing through interactional barriers, isolation and stress. Therefore it makes good business sense for employers to recognise and understand the needs of deaf people in order to increase productivity and develop a healthier and a more Deaf-friendly workforce.

5 Case for a Paradigm Shift in Current Thinking

Until now, government has centred much of its work on support and treatment after the onset of a mental health problem and few initiatives focusing on prevention. "Mental health problems are estimated to cost this country £77 billion a year largely going towards the cost of care, economic losses and premature death. Early intervention to keep people in work and maintain social contacts can significantly reduce these costs." [Mental Health and Social Exclusion Report 2004].

Currently approximately 40% of deaf people will experience at least one episode of mental illness during their lifetime, compared to 25% of the hearing population. Additionally 30% of deaf people have mental health problems, diagnosed as primarily mood and anxiety disorders, key factors associated with stress related illnesses and depression [Hindley and Kitson 2000]. In real terms this equates to 1.2 million deaf people who are at risk of suffering from a preventable mental health problem.

Sign historically has been unique in its support of deaf people with mental health problems. Providing them with appropriately tailored living accommodation, deaf and hearing skilled and trained signing staff and support in their everyday lives, whether inside or outside of the workplace.

Its research initiatives have looked at the European social exclusion picture across the Member States. Working alongside the British and European Societies for Mental Health and Deafness incalculable evidential material was gathered during 1999-2000 [Grant 2000].

Prior research looking at deaf people in work has highlighted the numerous barriers to equality that deaf people face every day of their lives [Kyle, Thomas, and Pullen 1989] and [Kyle J. 2004]. Most, not all, of these barriers are based on their ability to 'naturally' interact and converse with their fellow working colleagues and vice-versa. Most importantly the freedom to 'be themselves' and show their true self and their full range of skills.

Everyone needs regular quality interaction with people we come across each and every day. Without it our mental condition, emotional state and behaviour can suffer quite drastically. Deaf people are seriously hampered in achieving this when working in the mainstream.

A profound gap in comparative research has been the ability to demonstrate the concept of deaf people's 'wellbeing' in the workplace and how the emotional needs of deaf people can be met, to sustain and enhance their contribution in work, and equally sustain their ability to carry on working and contributing to society as a whole. In plain terms, to be and feel included and to enjoy good mental health.

It is with *Sign's* new preventative arm, Reaching Deaf Minds, that funding was sought to research what does good mental health in work mean to deaf people and how 'Deaf Wellbeing' can be supported in the workplace for the benefit of employers and employees alike.

6 Aims and Methods of this Research Project

The research firstly needed to comply with the objectives of the Reaching Deaf Minds Campaign into looking at preventative paths leading to good Deaf mental health. The critical aim of this study was to explore and attempt to determine the concept of 'Deaf Wellbeing' in the workplace from a deaf perspective.

Equally important, the second aim was to show to what degree this group of deaf people are integrated and supported into mainstream employment and how that affected their productivity, contribution and mental health.

The option of a national survey via questionnaire was ruled out, as it can be both unreliable in achieving responses and would not fit with the need for Deaf people to access information in their first, or preferred, language, namely British Sign Language (BSL). It was therefore deemed more qualitative and revealing to conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews with a small group of d/Deaf people, via a Member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters, with experience as a researcher. Twelve deaf volunteers were sought to participate via the Deaf Media, Magazines, Websites, Deaf Clubs and Organisations.

Of the many deaf people who volunteered for the project, twelve were chosen in and around the London area. Additionally, one of the twelve also took part in a case study making a comparison of the workplace experience with a hearing colleague.

The reasoning behind the geographical restriction was based on the supposition that, if from the findings this was the experience of several deaf people, in and around the London area, then most certainly it would be similar for deaf people living and working in other parts of the country. London and the surrounding areas are known to be well resourced for the deaf community in work, outside of work, and socially.

The report will use the term 'deaf' to refer to all

interview participants involved in the research. The term 'Deaf' will be used to distinguish the cultural identity of the contributor.

The deaf contributors (listed randomly) included:

- A co-ordinator and tutor of Deaf students within a mainstream college
- A youth worker
- An NHS Trust Adviser
- A forensic fingerprint examiner
- An in-vision television signing presenter
- A clerical assistant
- A social worker
- An access consultant
- A project worker
- A development worker
- An interactive designer for television

The hearing contributor is also an interactive designer for television.

They were chosen on the basis of giving the best possible mix of people within the numbers. The choice was made to achieve diversity by gender, age, ethnicity, and disability. Eleven members of the group were Deaf, one was deaf and one was hearing. Of the twelve, five were men and seven were women, with one wheelchair user.

The case study came about by the discovery that one Deaf member of the group had joined their company, along with a hearing colleague, at a similar time, being of a similar age, holding the same role and working within the same team. It was therefore an invaluable opportunity to explore and compare contrasting experiential perspectives.

The interview questionnaire was compiled using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs [Maslow 1954], research findings conducted by Wendy Macdonald PhD into Workload, Stress and 'Psychosocial' Factors [La Trobe University 2002] and aspects of emotional

intelligence. These theories were then adapted to create an instrument suitable for a work-based environment.

Using a face-to-face research tool such as this, where questions are asked in an appropriate level of sign language delivery and with the flexibility of allowing for free contributions from participants, enabled the capture of comprehensive and detailed personal views.

The questionnaire covered the following areas and general content – listed in alphabetical order:

- **Being in Control**
Knowing one's job, reporting procedures, decision making and influence, Access to Work and management /communication support
- **Career Development**
Career path planning and appraisal processes
- **Communication**
Colleagues' awareness, deadlines, reviews, support needs and inclusion
- **Confidentiality**
Information exchange, confidantes, mentorship
- **Corporate Culture**
Probationary period, quality of product, terms of employment, communication with management
- **Feelings**
Being valued, responsibility, terms of overtime, social get-togethers, harassment and bullying
- **Leadership and Planning**
Organisational aims and objectives, confidence in leadership and knowledge of DDA
- **Motivation**
Self-actualisation and satisfaction with life, and keeping healthy
- **Relationships**
With colleagues, management, commitment and making friends
- **Trust**
Information sharing, honesty, keeping to agreements
- **Wellbeing**
Time off work, emotional needs, stress, consumption of alcohol, smoking, and relaxation
- **Work Progression/Promotion Prospects,**
Good and bad aspects to the workplace, future plans and achievements
- **Working Environment and Safety**
Support aids and equipment, workspace, deaf awareness and communication tactics training, provision of interpreters

Where interviews were conducted in work time and on work premises, permission was sought of employers. Several interviews took place outside of work venues, due to problems which participants were experiencing with their employers, line managers, or purely for convenience.

No time limit was set on completing the questionnaire during interviews. Participants were able to expand as they wished during coverage of any of the topic questions.

Due to the sensitive nature of the material being imparted, confidentiality and anonymity was assured, as much as is humanly possible, to all contributors – employees and employers alike.

The interview responses were analysed qualitatively based on evaluating given areas of labour relations and the workplace experience of participants. Comparisons were made of individual experience and wellbeing parameters, as set out in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs [Maslow, 1954] and aspects of emotional intelligence.

Each topic heading incorporated supportive specific question types to illicit participant views on how they saw themselves in relation to their organisation and its leadership, their management, their colleagues and how their personal experience of the workplace impacted on their personal feelings and feeling of wellbeing.

Conclusions were drawn from responses based on yes/no/sometimes responses and elaborative submissions.

7 Findings

A Participants' Interviews

A total of 13 people were interviewed in all. Within this number 12 were members of the deaf community and one was a hearing participant. The face-to-face interviews were conducted over a two month period. During several appointments, participants were observed in their working environments.

The same set questions were asked of each individual, deaf and hearing, but were unrestricted in their responses. All responses were analysed qualitatively.

The findings are listed in the order of the questionnaire categories.

B Responses by of the d/Deaf Participants by Category

LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING:

Pivotal to knowing and understanding one's employer's and organisational vision.

An initial overall response was sought on how participants felt about the leadership within their respective organisations. Two-thirds were not satisfied with their leadership and lack of trust was cited as a serious issue. Only half of the respondents felt they knew enough about the planning and objectives of their respective organisations. Coupled with this, only half again believed their organisations had adequate knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to take responsibility and decide upon reasonable adjustments for their employees.

CORPORATE CULTURE:

Key to setting the dynamic of welcoming diversity, difference and retention of employees.

Most of the participants were on long term contracts, or salaried. Generally speaking, they believed they were up to date with general non-specific company affairs. Only half believed that using one's initiative was encouraged and there was a clear disparity between how much contact the male members had with line or middle management, compared with the female members. The males were in contact far more than the female members. Inter-departmental exchange and interaction was felt to be insufficient and unsatisfactory by all participants.

"My colleagues do not include me in meetings and behave as though I am not there at all."

"I have no sense of belonging, changes are constantly made with no continuity and consultations do not bear fruit on disability issues."

Five participants were not given a probationary period and three members felt they were prevented from doing and giving of their best, due to issues of being ignored, being bullied and excluded in interactive sessions which carried important information for their work.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT:

Most of the group members expressed they had no clearly defined career path, although half the members felt they had the opportunity to learn and grow within their respective organisations. Appraisals were a critical omission for most participants, with seven still waiting to receive one.

There was clear evidence of deaf people being side-lined for job/career opportunities.

“The original youth worker left, so I went to become educated and passed all my exams, but was never offered, or interviewed, for their job as a replacement. That was over one year ago. I am still on part time work”.

“I was offered an inferior job when I needed a transfer, while other people hold higher posts with less qualifications”.

“There are several Deaf people where I work: none of them has ever had a promotion though.”

“I have thought about planning my career but I fear people have closed minds.”

“I left my previous job because of being sidelined and ill-treated.”

WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND SAFETY:

Feeling comfortable and safe in our place of work enables positive productivity, contribution and wellbeing.

Despite the Access to Work Programme and two-thirds of participants' colleagues having been through Deaf Awareness Training, still most participants had no nearby strobe light in case of fire. Five members were given the alternative of having a pager which is linked to fire alarm system within the building. More use was being made of text-messaging to alert d/Deaf employees of fire or bomb warnings, but this mostly relied on participants having their own mobile.

Often fire alarm tests were conducted without the deaf person/s being present at the time, so it was uncertain as to how reliable these methods were in alerting deaf staff members.

Most of the participants had a textphone nearby, but hearing staff generally had no idea how to use it, so it was seen as 'belonging' to the deaf person alone to deal with incoming calls.

In one case the Deaf person was not allowed to use the textphone for outside calls, when their hearing colleagues made outside personal telephone calls every day.

The environment for deaf workers is critical to their feeling of wellbeing and safety. Specifically, deaf people should be allowed to choose where to sit and have access to seeing people approach them in their workspace. Three women did not feel safe inside, or immediately outside, their working environment and only half of the participants were able to choose where they sat to do their work. Pleas to employers to request rectifying these problems had been ignored.

Example 1: Organisation's Car Park is isolated and unlit, leaving the Deaf female both Deaf and ultimately blind as well when walking to her car, causing anxiety and distress, so much so she no longer brings her car to work and would rather take much longer to get home on the train.

Example 2: Being forced to work in a small room without windows, cut off from people. Hence a feeling of being totally isolated from the world. Many other examples were offered of poor non-accessible environments.

“The corridors are constantly blocked with crates, and the automatic doors have been broken in the building for the past four years!”

“Invariably non-disabled people pinch the disabled car parking space, leaving me to wander around in my wheelchair trying to find the person responsible to ask them to move.”

“I have a big problem with background noise – to Deaf people that is lots of people constantly passing by your desk all day.”

A disturbing finding was that five members of the group had, or are being, bullied in the workplace and seven members had been made to feel small at times. The main person usually used to offload to was a line manager, but this proved difficult for those who were experiencing bullying via line management staff. There was little awareness that one had the right to request a change of Line Manager, if the staff member did not get on with them.

Experience of bullying was the worst emotive and destructive phenomenon in the workplace. Bullying is cited as an industrial relations issue by the Health and Safety Executive and one which is a risk to employees' health [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/other.htm]. One respondent who had suffered bullying over a long period, had lost all sense of their worth and had made several attempts to be reintegrated back into the team without success, due to the line management remaining the same person responsible for the bullying. (This example of bullying was departmental specific, not pervasive throughout the whole organisation).

All recorded senior management's responses to bullying episodes appeared impotent, slow and ineffective. In one such case several serious complaints had been made about a line manager by several people over two years, and yet the same line manager has been kept in the same post within the same department without any effective changes being made.

Communication Tactics training via the CACDP programme (Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People), was not yet well known to employers, although most organisational

departments had an awareness of how to book sign language interpreters. Loop systems were not given any priority by any organisation for any meeting rooms.

BEING IN CONTROL:

Only half the group had regular briefings and had any power to make decisions, with again just over half believing they could influence other colleagues' decisions. Most confident were those who had had their job descriptions fully explained to them and knew what was required of them.

All participants knew who they should report to about their work. However, most participants were not offered a named person/s to support them settle into their roles.

Only half the group believed their colleagues understood any aspects of what it might be like to be deaf in the workplace. Informing deaf staff of other deaf staff, or signing staff, working for the same organisation was hit-and-miss.

A positive outcome was that almost all believed they held the right qualifications for their positions, along with the right skills. They also believed they could request training and there was an identified departmental training budget available each year.

Of the 12, seven had Access to Work (ATW) already set up. However the time it took to completion varied enormously from member to member. The remaining members were experiencing serious difficulties in achieving any access whatsoever.

“I am now in my third job over several years and still do not have Access to Work, despite applying in each post I have held.”

“Access to Work do not know how to sort out a personal support employee for several hours a week, so I don't have one even though I need one.”

“ATW are very slow and the process extremely difficult. I started the process 4 years ago.”

“ATW is a big problem, they change their minds constantly and they have no awareness of Deaf people's needs.”

A key finding of concern was that only half the interviewees had been given communication support throughout the critical period of induction and during office meetings where the ethos and commercial structure and processes of an organisation are intrinsic to their work practice.

Three-quarters had been given sight of their disciplinary policies and just over half had seen any sort of policy related to sickness. Generally people

were required to account for their hours of work and two-thirds said they were in control of their workloads.

Only two participants had taken part in 360° appraisals and, on both occasions, this was to be appraised themselves. None had taken part in appraising a fellow work colleague, compared to several hearing colleagues within their organisations. This sample is too small to draw any firm conclusions from these figures.

“No one ever asks my advice 'cause I'm Deaf.”

RELATIONSHIPS:

Good relationships in work give a sense of belonging, the ability to make friends and feel liked and appreciated.

Of the question categories, this area held some of the most positive responses. Two-thirds of the group believed they had congenial relationships with their colleagues and found them generally supportive. Also, that they could make friends in the workplace. Most participants had a commitment to their colleagues and the organisation they worked for and believed their organisations would support difficulties experienced in one's personal lives. Ten members knew who their Line Managers were and felt liked and appreciated.

A major hurdle was time available and ability to talk about family and personal lives in general. More importantly, this would be incredibly difficult as the majority of colleagues did not sign.

A significant difference was the belief in some participants' ability to become a team player and being able to share experiences and general chat.

“I get depressed at times; I have to talk to them (colleagues), but they don't talk to me.”

“I don't know what my colleagues think, or feel, at work – can't access conversations with them enough.”

“Difficult to become a team player when you are Deaf.”

“Don't share personal life or comments, they (hearing staff members) tell me all their stuff, but cannot understand any of my replies, so everything is a one way street.”

CONFIDENTIALITY:**Essential to one's understanding of organisational and personal boundaries.**

All participants understood the meaning and reasoning behind confidentiality. All were also clear about the areas one could and couldn't share in terms of information and discussion. The most named person to share issues with was their Line Manager.

WELLBEING:**One's life and work satisfaction levels.**

All employers allowed time off work for GP/hospital/ENT appointments. Only half the group members believed their employers had any awareness of Tinnitus and the effects it could have on sufferers.

Starting a new job with the challenges of communication involved was cited as one of the most stressful times for d/Deaf people. Significantly, only half felt their employers were supportive in areas where they themselves were experiencing difficulties in work.

A staggering finding was that two-thirds of the participants had taken time off work due to stress. All of these diagnoses had been made when participants visited their GPs with emotional and mental suffering due to negative factors and barriers impacting on them in the workplace. Currently, stress accounts for about 40% of the 33 million working days a year lost through work-related ill-health, costing approximately £3.8 billion a year. It is cited as a crucial area needing management measures and early intervention initiatives to be put in place [Johnson A. Rt. Hon. 2004].

The results relating to wellbeing point to deaf people experiencing substantial problems in gaining emotional support at work. Some responses were profound and emotive.

| *"I go out to buy a coffee to de-stress and unwind."*

| *"I feel very up and down about life."*

| *"To me respect is No. 1 to feel good about yourself and I don't get any."*

| *"It is difficult to appreciate living and being alive, when communication in life is so difficult, especially at work."*

| *"I have never been happy at work for one day of my twenty odd years in the job. I have never felt I am one of them."*

| *"Ignoring issues leads to psychological negative attitudes towards deafness."*

| *"I have no emotional support or practical help given to me."*

All deaf participants believed stress would not lead them to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes more than usual, as all described themselves as determined people. However, one participant being severely bullied in the workplace, saw the Union as their main avenue for collegial support.

Just over half the members of the group took part in some form of exercise and relaxation each week and most believed they knew how to unwind on an individual basis.

TRUST:**Reliance and confidence in ones colleagues.**

Most of the candidates believed their colleagues to have open minds and could be trusted to be honest and pass on information to them. Equally, two-thirds felt they could trust their colleagues and could be honest with them.

In terms of communication, two-thirds considered their colleagues would say if they were not understanding anything during a conversation. These responses had to be taken at face value, as during the researcher's observations this was often seen not to be the case.

Contrastingly, some responses illustrated a deep-seated mistrust of colleagues.

| *"Don't feel I can tell people (colleagues) my ideas, feel they would steal them because I am Deaf and use them, so I get no reward for me."*

| *"I think lack of trust leads to stress."*

| *"People try to trick me with language and it builds barriers."*

Just over half saw their managers as people who kept to their agreements and promises. The remainder displayed a mistrust of management guarantees.

| *"I told my company about my need for a pager which links to the fire alarm system 4 years ago, still don't have one. At first they say 'yes' and then say 'no' later on."*

MOTIVATION:**That which stimulates us to go to work and do a good job.**

Responding to questions covering appreciation of being alive, going to work and accepting challenges, only half of the participants felt any appreciation of being alive, or motivated to go to work. This was surprising as most had said their jobs were interesting and that they could do a good job once they arrived at work.

All group members would volunteer and positively take on new challenges despite the many barriers facing them in achieving their desired goals. The giving and sharing of ideas was deemed equally important in taking on new aspects to one's work.

Although ten felt fully involved in their work projects, only two-thirds felt involved in work meetings for one reason or another.

| *"I feel pressure to prove myself because I am Deaf."*

| *"My self motivation is based on persevering from day-to-day."*

| *"I don't go to work Christmas Parties, I tried it once and was left out totally."*

A key factor towards motivation and self worth is appropriate remuneration for our toil. Within this small sample there was a feeling that deaf people were still being underpaid.

Nine of the respondents said they were not rewarded in any form for good work and only half believe their work productivity had increased over the last year.

Participants' views on salary levels were quite negative. Only five consider their salary reflects their roles and responsibilities.

| *"I still feel unequal to some of my colleagues."*

| *"They (management) should include deaf people in their policy making to influence hearing culture towards deaf employees."*

| *"I am underpaid for my job."*

WORK PROGRESSION/PROMOTION PROSPECTS:**The ability to reach self actualisation and fulfilment.**

This was one of the areas showing profoundly differing perspectives between genders. The majority of women thought they would not progress or rise up in the ranks at work, compared to only one male.

Bonuses were not something offered by any organisation, although one organisation did offer an 'employee of the year award'.

Of the whole group two-thirds considered their workplace to be fair and balanced, with the good parts outweighing the bad. Equal numbers had also formulated a mental plan for their career.

Participants genuinely felt they did make a difference to the services they provided and could be relied upon to complete their tasks.

The approach of organisations to appraisals was on the whole found to be poor. Appraisals were carried out with only half of the respondents, without which it would be difficult to ascertain one's progress and prospects of progression. General review meetings on work issues were given much more priority than one-to-one feedback and discussion. Some of these meetings were used to recognise achievements by team members. With merely two-thirds believing their skills and attributes were used effectively, there would seem to be a huge skills base left untapped, especially as eight had successfully applied and been given training to enhance their skills and knowledge base.

Another gender difference was that women generally felt they were praised quite regularly, where the male participants believed praise was given rarely.

The following comments were made when participants perceived their progress to be hampered.

| *"Personality clashes disrupt progression and affects one's confidence in the workplace."*

| *"Management have 'just get on with the job' attitude."*

| *"When I am due a promotion, they move me to another department."*

| *"I don't feel I am a member of staff at all. I have to work from home, because they won't give me any office space."*

| *"I felt bitter seeing people being given higher posts with less qualifications than me."*

| *"Not sure how worthwhile appraisals are. They (management) tell you that you do great work but you never get a promotion."*

| *"I know quite a few Deaf people where I work and none of them has ever been promoted."*

FEELINGS:

Feeling valued, secure, and included on an equal basis.

Most respondents had been given responsibility within their roles and felt good about this as it made them feel valued. Yet only half believed they were anywhere near gaining equality with their colleagues.

The majority of participants did get invited out to lunch with colleagues and eight respondents felt they fitted in with colleagues at work and expressed little evidence of harassment in the workplace.

All participants had experienced discrimination throughout their working lives. During this study there were several disturbing examples given of blatant discrimination experienced recently and currently, which left participants feeling shell-shocked.

“We got a new female boss and she demanded I moved desks one day and sit where she was sitting. I explained how important it was for a Deaf person’s wellbeing in terms of where they sit. She didn’t care, I had to move. I later learned from a colleague that she (the boss) had said – ‘it doesn’t matter about him, where he sits, ‘cause he’s Deaf and can sit in a noisy place.’ I was shocked.”

“If I have a personal problem at home, like my washer breaks down, my boss won’t let me use the minicom to call the shop to get it repaired and they (the shop) are closed when I get home from work.”

“My boss tried to fiddle my holiday entitlement... they thought I wouldn’t be able to check up with HR (Human Resources) because I am Deaf... I asked a friend to help me and HR department confirmed they (HR) had had trouble with this manager before.”

Another example found by the Core Researcher was a Deaf woman with Ushers Syndrome (degenerative loss of vision) who was, after a Social Services assessment, allocated a personal guide two hours per week. Sadly she was unable to use the resource, because her management would not allow her to adjust her hours of work to accommodate use of the guide.

Only eight respondents believed their ideas were listened to, with an equal number gaining direct feedback about their work. For the remainder it left them feeling doing one’s best was not appreciated or worthwhile.

COMMUNICATION:

This category is fundamental to d/Deaf people’s ability to achieve equality and inclusion in the workplace.

It was clear from the participants’ responses that serious gaps still existed in terms of employers taking responsibility for access generally. Whilst organisations showed much more awareness of the ability to book sign language interpreters for communication support, a lot of evidence was gathered in terms of lack of everyday one-to-one dialogue with their deaf employees.

No employer had taken the initiative to prepare the workplace before their d/Deaf employee arrived to commence their jobs. Therefore, from the first day in work, it then becomes a constant, often tiresome, battle to educate one’s colleagues.

Lipreading, the most common communication method of deaf people to engage in conversation in the mainstream, is not only very difficult to become skilled in, it can often lead to anxiety and concern about whether one has understood properly. The best lipreaders only glean under 50% of what has actually been said.

So at the most critical times when d/Deaf colleagues can build and formulate relationships they are, at times, totally disadvantaged. Two-thirds of the organisations had given some of their immediate team members, working alongside their d/Deaf colleague, Deaf Awareness training. Many participants felt this was often not deep enough in content and was conducted too late to be of any use. Typically, deaf awareness training was given to co-workers in the 4th or 5th month of their employment. By this time the deaf person has spent several months struggling to educate their colleagues and simultaneously endeavouring to get to grips with a new job and all its many facets.

“Because I am Deaf, people are frightened of talking to me.”

“I have good speech, but still face huge problems as a Deaf person.”

“I am last in the queue to know what is going on.”

Only seven group members were asked what their needs were before starting work. Organisational policies were often not explained, or even shown to deaf workers and when they were it was without communication support. Vital information such as disciplinary procedures and organisational policies were not available in sign language.

“I have no access to general chit chat and information. I cried and cried on my first day in the office, because I had no interpreter to give

me access to instructions from my boss on a daily basis.”

“Without an interpreter I feel cut off and have no access to what is going on.”

“Communication problems lead to stress at work, especially when you are new in the job.”

“At Christmas time I had no access and was just left out totally.”

“I had no interpreter for any of my training courses.”

Half the participants had grave concerns that they had not understood any of their papers given to them before commencement of their employment.

Positively, lots of colleagues had expressed a wish to learn sign language and three organisations had gone the extra mile and given some of their staff Communication Tactics training.

“I think they should have like a ‘channel person’ to tell me what I need to know.”

“There is a risk of loss of confidence due to lack of understanding of what is being said.”

“I am not involved in conversations 100% I only get the main points.”

Of those organisations that did follow good practice and booked interpreters for meetings, none ensured the deaf person was given an ‘eye break’ during the discussions. In all cases the interpreter was the person who determined if a break was necessary. More importantly, little support was given to deaf workers in the shape of notes taken for them throughout meetings, as deaf people are unable to watch the interpreter and take notes at the same time, unlike their hearing colleagues. Therefore, remembering a person, or team, or action points can become problematic. Only half the members participated in meetings where their colleagues understood turn taking where an interpreter was working and the need to allow time for their deaf colleague to contribute. Eight of the group had developed assertive skills to ensure their thoughts and contributions were heard. Three members had no access to interpreters at all, so their access to work meetings and joint discussions was practically non-existent.

“I researched interpreter provision myself and then put forward my needs.”

“I had to arrange all my own communication support for meetings.”

“Access to Work is kept as a central budget, trying to argue a case for your own provision is very difficult. Management think I only need

communication support for meetings.”

“I have to tell my colleagues, because they do not look at me when I want to talk things over with them.”

One deaf participant would seriously benefit from a loop system, but none was available in any meeting rooms she visited and Access to Work were taking forever to sort out her provision.

Email was the most popular form of communication between deaf and hearing colleagues. Instant messaging in particular was seen as very useful and beneficial for deaf workers. No-one had a ‘Vis-Mail’ facility as yet, where one can leave a visual/sign language message.

CASE STUDY:

Looking at a female hearing and male Deaf member of staff working in similar roles, joining the same organisation at a similar time and working within the same team.

This workplace had taken several proactive steps to ensure, as much as their knowledge allowed, that their new Deaf member of staff became integrated.

Firstly, the Deaf member was offered a mentor in the workplace to aid him to settle in, with a short probationary period, unlike the hearing member of staff.

Secondly, they were offered a choice of work space.

Noticeable differences arose in the following scenarios:

- The Deaf member was shown specific policies related to the organisation, whereas the hearing member was not.
- The Deaf member has much less ability to tune in to jargon and acronyms used with an organisation, compared to a hearing colleague. Again due to lack of access to subliminal learning. Hearing members can much more easily surreptitiously ask a colleague for help, whereas a request from a Deaf member is more obvious and embarrassing.
- Where general office chit chat took place and comments bandied about the workspace. The Deaf member was clear that he could not really enjoy and exchange his funny, or serious, stories at work as doing so would prove too difficult, whereas the hearing member took this as part of her everyday working life.
- Another area with a marked difference was the Deaf member wished to have more frequent communications with their Line

Manager and more evaluation conducted on the team's work, whereas the hearing member regarded her contact as more than sufficient.

- The Deaf member's confidence in their leadership was less than that of their hearing colleague.
- The Deaf member did not consider their employer to be knowledgeable about the DDA, whereas the hearing staff member did.
- The Deaf member believed it is only currently partly possible for a Deaf member of staff to be a team player, due to difficulties in connecting with people naturally sharing a common language. For the hearing member this was again something considered to be the norm.
- Accessing office information and banter was almost impossible for the Deaf member and taken for granted by the hearing member.
- The hearing staff member had not been informed they would be working alongside a Deaf person and so were not given any opportunity to try to prepare themselves on how to make things work better between them.
- Both members believed that Deaf Awareness Training did enable people to have more positive attitudes towards Deaf members of staff.
- Whilst the hearing member thought several members had been through Communication Tactics Training, the Deaf member's observations suggested they couldn't have done; although regularly people had expressed a desire to learn some sign language.
- The hearing member's perception of their salary level was that it was low comparatively in the industry, whereas the Deaf member believed it to be fair.
- The hearing member was the only participant to say they would probably drink more alcohol and smoke more cigarettes if stressed.
- The Deaf member also had a strategy for a career path, as opposed to their hearing colleague with none.

These particular differences in views, once again highlight the differing perspectives Deaf and Hearing people have towards personal wellbeing.

During the time of my observation the Deaf member of staff was moved position within the office space, as hearing members had decided he was missing out on too much valuable information being exchanged between other staff members.

This proactive approach to supporting one's deaf colleagues will aid integration and inclusion. Certainly, once again we see the need for the Deaf member of staff to be given more formal/informal direct exchanges about work, progress and quality of product from colleagues and Line Managers in order for them to tangibly sense a feeling of inclusion. Colleagues need to be far more proactive in physically gaining their deaf members attention and ensure they are not left out. This in turn will then develop their ability to gain the trust of their colleagues, Line Managers and their organisations as a whole.

Being a deaf individual will mean they naturally have superior knowledge of disability and access issues and the kinds of barriers deaf people face.

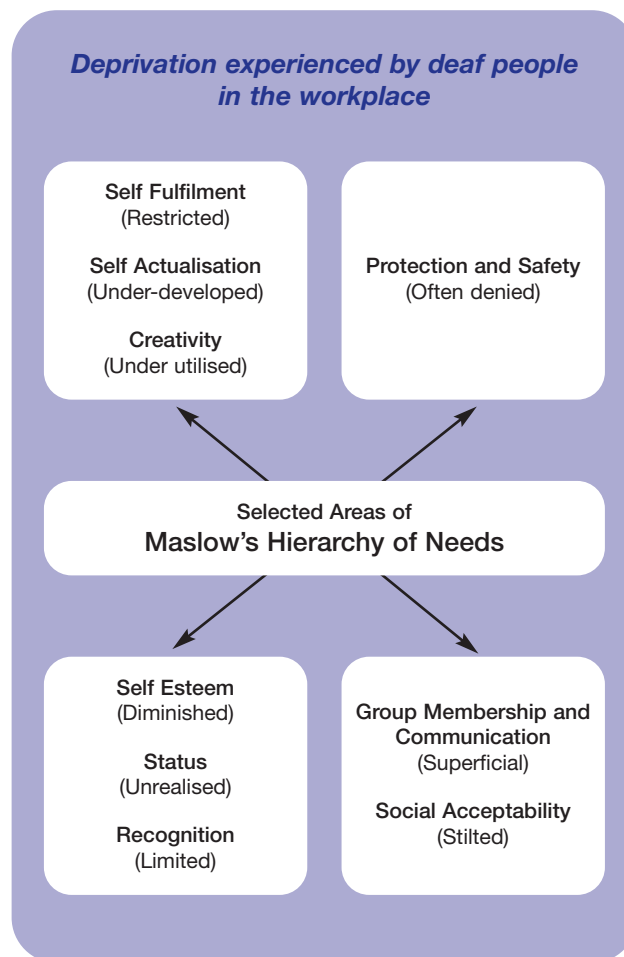
8 Conclusions

Evaluating the deaf experience of the workplace has highlighted some of the areas critical to deaf people's wellbeing in the workplace.

1. First and foremost is the need for more training to be given to employers on how to assist integration and inclusion of their deaf employees. This can be done via training and teaching on aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act as it physically and emotionally relates to deaf people. The concept of going beyond 'reasonable adjustment' to achieve 'inclusive reality'. Where deaf people can become a full contributory member of any department, with equal opportunity and realisation of one's aspirations in the job.
2. Create a pattern of feedback and update sessions with deaf employees. These do not have to be protracted, merely regular. This aids their feelings of having equal information to that of their peers.
3. Ensure that all important factors and information related to their work is given to them face-to-face and not shouted across the office alone.
4. There was clear evidence of discrimination taking place within the workplace, in the form of being ignored for promotion, offered inferior work compared to one's hearing colleagues, being ill-treated and treated unfavourably. Measures need to be sought to promote a positive and fair inclusive environment for deaf workers; and that takes full advantage of all the skills they have to offer as expert communicators.
5. Essential to deaf people's wellbeing is the ability to create a visual working environment. This would include being clearly lit, not being forced to sit facing a wall, or having one's back to the door, but allowing for their physical and psychological needs of safety and comfort. This concept of safety and comfort also extends to the immediate vicinity, for example, car parks.
6. For those who are wheelchair users, endeavouring to tackle the issue of disabled car parking spaces being taken by non-disabled people and ensuring corridors and rooms are clear of clutter and obstacles to mobility.
7. Providing communication support to inform deaf people of their rights in the workplace, and to an appraisal; change of Line Manager where appropriate; disclosure policy for bullying and the management processes to be followed and what can be done to support them and prevent the bullying reoccurring; an explanation of the organisational policies and expectations of their employers via suitable induction processes.
8. Allocate two named people to become responsible for passing on everyday information to their deaf colleague and to ensure their safety during fire alarm practises where no strobe lights are currently available.
9. Mistrust can often occur through lack of communication and exchange. Deaf employees need to see reasonable requests bear fruit, whether it relates to personal comfort or environmental necessities.
10. Take the time to inform deaf colleagues of internal departmental cultures. Ensure they are aware of the rules of purchasing gifts for colleagues, on which occasions and pass on trivia such as when birthdays occur.
11. Ensure deaf colleagues are given a full glossary of internal jargon and acronyms.
12. Take the time to share coffee or lunch breaks with your d/Deaf colleagues, to facilitate a relaxed way of exchanging information and trivia.

13. Ensure you know the processes of Access to Work and who to contact in your area. Support a deaf employee to build a business case for support in the workplace.
14. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) were not used by any of the participants in this research. They were considered to be of little help to the deaf community, due to their lack of deaf awareness and understanding of deaf people's needs. DEAs need to access more training in deaf issues and to be proactive in supporting their local deaf community and local employers.
15. The whole process of Access to Work for deaf people needs its own review. Currently it is failing on many levels and denies deaf people's rights to be realised.
16. Deaf Awareness Training is insufficient to cover the emotional and psychological wellbeing of deaf people. This course could be extended to incorporate additional factors and practical support in how to ensure deaf people have a more inclusive experience at work.
17. Ensuring deaf workers feel they belong will aid their ability to appreciate their working lives more and aid wellbeing. Taking the time to learn some basic sign language will aid casual discussions to become much freer and easier.
18. Explain the salary scales and how they work to deaf employees to ensure they feel their salaries equate to their hearing colleagues. Where remuneration cannot be given for extra responsibility, find other ways of showing appreciation and value.
19. Despite further and higher education being less of a barrier to Deaf people to gaining qualifications, there was still no sense of the ability to gain promotion in the mainstream. Therefore, appraisals need to be completed on time and carry some weight towards reward of the employee, where work has been of a particularly high standard, otherwise they are a waste of people's time and effort. Additionally, ways should be sought to ensure deaf people have a level playing field in gaining promotion and the same chance as anyone else to achieving it.

The following model shows the current access deficiencies deaf people experience each and every day of their working lives.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Where an organisation employs more than one Deaf person, look at the possibility of making one of them an internal consultant to look into deaf issues and deaf wellbeing in the workplace. Alternatively, bring in a Deaf consultant to assess the role to be covered and the deaf person's access needs before the deaf employee commences work. In doing this, when they arrive on their first day, they will feel like any other newcomer, not disadvantaged or disempowered but feel included and able to do a good job from day one.

DEAF EMPLOYMENT CHARTER

The creation of a Charter for Deaf-friendly Workplaces, would go a long way to supporting employers and employees when seeking guidance on how to ensure deaf people's well being in work.

Glossary

BSL means British Sign Language

CACDP means the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People

DDA means The Disability Discrimination Act

The term '**Deaf**', conventionally expressed using an upper case 'D', refers to the population of people whose first and preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL).

The term '**deaf**' with a lower case and d/Deaf is used to refer to people with all degrees of deafness.

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