







UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

This paper is based on the experiences of three hearing impaired students from a larger sample of 29 disabled students interviewed within the Disability Effective Inclusive Policies (DEIP) project. The paper begins by exploring  terminology relating to deafness and hearing impairment. It then discusses  personal and academic issues that may be affected by a student's hearing and their response to the situations they encounter. It considers the impact of the higher education experience on identity, the implications for  educational providers and employers and concludes by outlining  recommendations and  questions for future research and discussion.

DEIP Discussion Papers

The DEIP project contributes to an increasing body of institutional research surrounding the experiences of disabled students in higher education. For a list of current and future DEIP project Discussion Papers (DP) see:  <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/1-2-9.html>. For details of the thematic topics emerging from analysis of institutional policy **DP1**, methodology **DP2**, an annotated bibliography of other relevant research **DP13** and further information about sensory disabilities **DP10**.

DEIP: an introduction


Funded by the European Social Fund, the Disability and Effective Inclusion Policies (DEIP) project is a piece of collaborative research undertaken by Sussex and Lancaster Universities. The project aims to explore ways in which higher education institutions support disabled students through higher education and into employment.

The DEIP project explored the experiences and understanding of services with current disabled students and university staff including policy makers and practitioners from the two case study universities. The views of UK disabled graduates and employers have provided a wider context of post university experience. The inter-relationship between each of these stakeholders is complex and in a state of constant change, with each stakeholder's perspective influenced by their position as recipient or provider of services. Consequently, each stakeholder influences the roles, responsibilities, expectations and actions of other stakeholders in the system either explicitly or implicitly, and to a greater or lesser extent.

Deaf or hearing impaired - culture or disability?

Deaf people who use British Sign Language to communicate and regard themselves as being in a linguistic minority are defined by Corker (2002) as that group of people with hearing impairments who are excluded from the dominant areas of social and cultural reproduction by the perpetuation of a phonocentric world-view. This does not include 'deaf' people with hearing impairments who, with the use of hearing aids or surgically implanted devices, are able to participate in the hearing world. Whereas Deaf (with a capital D) people with complete hearing loss may be defined by their culture, hearing impaired people may be defined by their impairment. It is commonly assumed that a person can either hear or they use sign language. As Susan said:

People think deaf and capital D, and then sign language, so if you are getting on OK they tend to forget that you have a problem.

For descriptions of different types of deafness see RNID fact sheet  <http://www.rnid.org.uk/> While there is a great deal of research literature on the subject of Deaf students (i.e. those with complete hearing loss), less is known about the issues facing hearing impaired students who may have managed the challenges they encountered in the school learning situation without receiving any specific support. It is important to recognise that at university new challenges appear in both the academic and social context. Communication with large numbers of new people can make the transition from school to university especially difficult.

🔊 Hearing impairment and student identity

Decisions about disclosure – a free or forced choice?

- **Hearing impaired students often face complex decisions about disclosure.** Situations and other people's response often force students into situations of repeatedly having to disclose. Students may not want to draw attention to a hearing impairment, as they may not wish to assume or be given a disabled identity, nor may they wish to enter the Deaf world with its specific culture. Leigh (1999) suggests that deaf and hard of hearing (*sic*) students feel that their self-identity should depend on personal rather than audiological definitions and consequently contact with hearing peers is valued. However, despite the benefits, when a student is dependent on the hearing world for their social identity and their learning, problems may arise when there is insufficient recognition of their specific communication needs.
- **In many cases the decision to disclose is imposed, or necessary because of the situation.** If they wish to be fully included in social interaction, hearing impaired students do not have the option of choosing not to disclose their hearing impaired identity and the associated label of a disabled person. Despite trying to challenge the disability label, sometimes individuals give up the battle. As Reeve (2002) discusses, with respect the psycho-emotional model of disability, the reaction of others can impact on an individual's future behaviour and for some this may lead to self-exclusion to avoid having to explain their needs or constantly place themselves in the position of 'other'.
- **The reaction of people with good hearing inevitably varies.** Several students referred to the fact that people seem unable to regularly take into account the communication needs of hearing impaired people and to accept that everything they say may not have been heard.

Educating others

- **Attempts to make themselves understood inevitably lead to frustration** and having to cope with people who forget they are talking to someone with impaired hearing and speak loudly, or slowly, or who have negative reactions can lead individuals to isolate themselves. Susan said:
I think I have stopped making friends if that makes sense, if they don't respond I give up... nightclubs are impossible; I take my hearing aid off
- **The potential isolation extends beyond the teaching and learning environment** and can impact on students' social lives and extra-curricula activities. This exclusion has important implications since, as Potts (2002) suggests, social activities can provide a useful mechanism for developing a strong social capital network and developing employability skills.
- **Students are often involved in having to educate others.** Some students are able to make more allowances for people who live in the hearing world and try to help them to understand their needs. Ultimately this willingness is based on a belief that the advantage is that the people around them will treat them better. Susan explained:
I am quite happy to tell everybody about my hearing. I would rather tell them than have them think I am ignorant when I can't hear them. I made a point of telling everybody on my corridor that they could find they were talking to me and I can't hear them. I much prefer people to know that I am not ignorant.

However, not all students feel this way. This student stated that it was not her job to change people's attitudes. This is a very poignant remark considering that hearing impaired individuals have to constantly raise awareness amongst hearing individuals if they are to feel included.

- ***Student life brings its own particular experiences.*** Living on campus for the first time and using a crowded kitchen means that a student may need to become skilled in educating fellow students. Susan said:


A couple of my friends picked up very quickly and then they would rephrase and translate and so they were very good. I was included. Boys annoyed me at first because they kept jumping at me, and said you can't hear us anyway, and at first it was funny but then after a few weeks I was getting annoyed and I told them and they stopped. ... I live with one of the boys and he will still tease me, but if anyone else does he will get annoyed.

Being able to live in a closed environment with everything necessary to daily life at close hand enables students to leave behind some of the difficulties of life outside of the university.

Teaching and Learning

Students who communicate primarily using British Sign Language may choose a university environment where there is a Deaf culture. Hearing impaired students may not want to enter the Deaf world or are unable or unlikely to, because they do not use British Sign Language.

On arrival at university hearing impaired students may find awareness of, and responsiveness to, their particular needs varies depending on the individual department and / or member of staff. Student Support Services, for example, will notify departments that a student prefers to get all the handouts for lectures. Academic staff receiving this information may respond in a range of ways depending on when they receive the information as well as their own awareness and knowledge of how best to provide an inclusive learning environment. The inclusive teaching website developed by the Open University and HEFCE provides a wealth of relevant information and support

 www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/understanding-and-awareness/types-of-deafness.php Please see **DP13** for additional resources

Learning for the future - Developing solutions for the world of work

Strategies developed to cope with obstacles faced within a teaching and learning environment are sometimes relevant to other aspects of life including employment. Within the context of the DEIP project it is important to think about how these experiences may impact on employment plans and the development of skills of employability. For example, attitudes and experience of the DSA may influence how a student responds to employment based 'Access to Work'. Some students apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance to buy equipment, which will help them to communicate, while others choose not to. This may be because there is no equipment which is tailored specifically to the needs of the student. Stacey chose not to apply for the allowance:

There isn't much they can do for me. There is the info loop but that is no use to me as I don't use a hearing aid. I went through school on my own and I prefer to carry on that way.

Students reported a range of situations in which they developed strategies to cope and / or avoid exclusion. These included dealing with: unreliable equipment, lecturers who speak quietly, who forget to turn on the loop system, fail wear the loop microphone, do not face the students when lecturing or object to the lecture being recorded. Despite recent legislation and disability rights, when a lecturer refuses to use the loop system the student can feel helpless. In this context developing the confidence to be assertive is likely to be a useful skill for the future.

Innovative teaching methods can also disadvantage hearing-impaired students:

We were looking at video clips on the computer in one workshop and I can't get the words out of it. I need a transcript for my coursework. The tutor only remembered when I reminded her. (Stacey)

Clearly staff development and increased awareness amongst staff and students is required to challenge this inequality of opportunity. The lessons however are easily transferable to the workplace and illustrate how important it is to focus on practice as well as policy if inclusion is to be achieved. Ultimately we need to recognise that without a strong commitment to inclusive learning there are some students who are at a disadvantage with respect to university teaching and learning experiences. The student accounts highlight the range of ways in which they seek to control and enhance their own learning experience including informal staff development for the staff with whom they come into contact. The DDA's requirement for 'reasonable adjustment' and an 'anticipatory' proactive response means that raising staff awareness regarding the needs of hearing impaired students is no longer an optional activity.

Technology

Amongst individuals with hearing impairment, there is a large degree of variation in their ability to hear the spoken word. In some cases technology may be unsuitable. For example, for a person with hearing loss in one ear, hearing aids are ineffective and hearing may be impaired where the sound is directed towards the non-functioning ear. In other cases, technology may not function properly (e.g. induction loops may be subject to interference from mobile phones). Such problems can make life particularly difficult for students with hearing impairment in lectures and seminars.

For further information and advice about the use of technology, see the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the HEFEC/Open University Making your Teaching Inclusive web sites:



<http://www.rnid.org.uk/>



<http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/inclusive-teaching/assistive-technologies.php>

✓ Recommendations

- To ensure academic staff development highlights the benefits of inclusive learning approaches, the diversity and complexity of issues and potential exclusion of hearing impaired students
- To recognise the impact of hearing impairment in the wider context of university life and provide staff development opportunities for all staff
- To recognise the effectiveness of the students' own strategies that they have developed over time and their usefulness in future employment
- To develop support services and knowledge of specialist equipment for hearing loss and awareness about the effect of using technology in teaching, including the efficacy of the loop system

? Questions for further research and debate

- How do the issues of disclosing a hearing impairment compare and contrast with disclosing other disabilities, including dyslexia, MHD?
- What are the implications of disclosure and technology for student interaction between hearing impaired students and their hearing peers in formal and informal learning environments?
- What are the range of strategies used by hearing impaired students and how can universities and employers respond to support hearing impaired students?

For further information about DEIP Project

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