GUIDANCE FOR DEAF ACCESSIBLE ACADEMIC MEETINGS

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In the UK, 1 in 3 adults (18 million) are D/deaf, hard of hearing (HoH), or have tinnitus[1]. There are 2 million hearing aid users and it is predicted that 8 million more would benefit from a hearing aid[2]. A primary cause of hearing loss is degeneration with age; 50% of people aged over 50 and 80% of people aged over 70 have some form of hearing loss[1].

For students, the proportion who apply to University from A Level (or equivalent) is representative[3]. However, 1 in 4 D/deaf students who attend University leave without any recognised qualification[4]. For hearing students, this figure is 6%.

That is to say: being HoH or D/deaf is a significant invisible barrier of access for the audience in academic meetings.

This document is designed for organisers of academic meetings and conferences with clear guidance and recommendations for making their event accessible to the D/deaf and HoH.

Being inclusive benefits everyone – not just those who need it.

1 RNID, Prevalence of deafness and hearing loss (2025)

2 hearingaid.org.uk, UK Hearing Loss Statistics 2026 (Feb 2026)

3 British Science Association, Why deaf inclusion matters (2022)

4 University of Manchester, Further Education as a post-secondary destination for deaf and hard of hearing young people: a review of the literature and analysis of official statistics in England (2014)

Advice for the organiser

Before the event

- **Include a section on the registration form asking about any accessibility needs.**

  This should be a welcoming text response question, for example:

  ✓ Please list any accessibility requirements here.
  ✓ We will try our best to accommodate your requests.
  ✓ For any further queries, please feel free to contact us.
  ✓ Would you like to request any of the following provisions:
  - ☐ BSL Interpreter
  - ☐ SSE Interpreter
  - ☐ Lipspeaker

  Additionally, consider including a note in your event email or advertisement: *This event will have hearing loops and use microphones throughout. We will try our best to accommodate all accessibility requests.*

- **Get in contact with those who made specific requests.**

  This helps them feel heard, respected, and that you recognise their request. Look into your hosting venue: is this an accommodation you can make? If not, suggest some alternatives which can be made and communicate accordingly. Ask if they would like to be sat at the front to see an interpreter and/or captions on the presentations.

- **Arrange for interpreters.**

  Contact presenters in advance to tell them interpreters will be in attendance and exchange their contact details. The interpreters can receive talk information prior to the meeting and prepare. For meetings which run in parallel/have multiple workshops, arrange an interpreter for each D/deaf person. They should all be able to attend talks with an interpreter!

- **Inform the invited speakers.**

  Those giving a talk should know their audience and the needs of the audience. Passing on information such as "There is someone with hearing difficulties in the audience" could prompt the speaker to change their format and behaviour to benefit the audience. It will also be useful for the speaker to know where the microphones are (if they are not portable) so they don't walk in and out of range during the talk.
  If the invited speaker is contributing videos, ask that these are played with subtitles.

- **Check the tech!**

  Ensure the microphones in the hosting venue are working and the sound levels are appropriate (perhaps with suitable guidance from IT support). While use of microphones is paramount for hard of hearing audience members, echoing and high-volume microphones can be uncomfortable for the audience.

  Things to check in the venue:
  - Is there a microphone?
  - How many microphones are there? For example: on the lectern, handheld, clip on? Do they overlap?
  - How loud is the microphone? (Bring a friend for a sound check!)
  - Check the batteries on the microphone.

During the event

- **Use the microphone!**

It is a common misconception that the speaker is the only person who needs to use a microphone. Anyone addressing the whole room should be using one too!

- Making an announcement about lunch?
  - Use the microphone.

- Introducing the next speaker?
    - Use the microphone.
- Asking questions at the end of the talk?
    - Use the microphone.

- **Be an active chair.**

During the talk, it is understandable that the speaker becomes distracted with what they are talking about and could start mumbling or talking too quickly. It is the responsibility of the person chairing the meeting to speak up and remind the speaker to talk louder/slower. This takes the responsibility away from the audience member who is struggling to hear and may find it daunting to speak up about it.

Remind the speaker to not be standing in front of captions/the interpreter!

- **Repeat questions from the audience.**

The rest of the audience often don't hear a question posed to the speaker. To benefit the rest of the room – and also the speaker – repeat the question asked into a microphone so that everyone is included in the discussion. This responsibility could also be asked of the speaker: when given a question, repeat it before answering!

Alternatively, consider having question-askers come up to the front. This way, the D/deaf person can see the interpreter at the same time.

After the event

- **Get back in contact with those who asked for reasonable adjustments!**

Close the feedback loop and ask how they found your event. Did the changes you made work well? Was there anything you could have done better? Note it down for next time!

Remote or hybrid meetings

All of the above applies when hosting remote or online meetings too. There are some extra considerations:

- Turn on closed captions on the remote platform!
- Allow participants to have their camera on and pin themselves. Then the D/deaf person and interpreter can see each other.
- When sharing your screen or changing arrangement, ensure the interpreter and D/deaf participant can see each other before the next segment begins.
- Remember to put the interpreter and D/deaf participant in the same breakout room, if using them.