

Equipment for deaf learners

We have lots of information on deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus.

Go to

www.rnid.org.uk

Contact our Information Line

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

Or write to us

informationline@rnid.org.uk

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Three facts

RNID • 

Changing the world for deaf and hard of hearing people

Equipment for deaf learners

This factsheet is part of our **education** range. You will find it useful if you are an education provider. Deaf learners and their families may also find it helpful. We use the term 'deaf people' to refer to deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people throughout this factsheet.

Read this factsheet to find out:

- What is discrimination?
- How does the DDA affect higher and further education providers?
- What does the law require?
- How does the law apply to pre-school education and schools?
- How do I put the law into practice?
- What sort of equipment might deaf learners find useful?
- Can I get funding for equipment?
- Where can I get advice about equipment?
- Where can I go for further information?

If you would like this factsheet on audio tape, in Braille or in large print, please contact our Information Line (see front page).

What is discrimination?

Discrimination can happen in two ways:

- Less favourable treatment
- Failure to take reasonable steps

Less favourable treatment

This happens if a disabled learner is treated less favourably than other learners, without justification, because of their disability. The reason for the less favourable treatment must relate to their disability.

Failure to take reasonable steps

- Courses should be accessible to everyone and not just changed to meet the needs of particular individuals.
- Disabled learners must not be placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' through failure to take 'reasonable steps'. These are 'anticipatory duties', which means they should be taken in advance, in anticipation of likely problems.

- 'Reasonable adjustments' to the school, college or university and the way that courses are taught should be planned in advance and be in place before a disabled student starts their course.

The DDA does not say what is meant by the term 'reasonable'. The meaning might not be decided until a claim is made against an education provider in court.

How does the DDA affect higher and further education providers?

- The aim of the DDA is to stop discrimination against disabled people, which includes deaf people, as service users and employees.
- The DDA (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act 2001) has made it unlawful for course providers to discriminate against learners because they are disabled.

What does the law require?

Reasonable adjustments

Learners must not be placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' because of an education provider's failure to make 'reasonable adjustments' to policies, procedures and practices. This principle applies to admissions, student services and exams. Auxiliary (additional) aids and services have to be provided, including information in different ways – for example, using BSL/English interpreters and providing equipment.

Allowances, grants and benefits

When buying equipment, the DDA allows other sources to be taken into account. For example, if a learner gets disabled students' allowances (see page 11), they will be expected to use them to pay for aids and services. However, if their allowances do not cover everything they need, then you are responsible as the education provider. Only allowances and benefits made specifically towards the costs of equipment and other support should be used for this purpose: other grants and allowances for the general cost of living should not be used. See our factsheet **Benefits – information for deaf students**.

Physical features

Learners must not be placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' because of a failure to make 'reasonable adjustments' to the physical features of premises. These adjustments might include fitting electronic display boards or permanent induction loops. They apply to lecture theatres, seminar rooms, catering facilities, residential accommodation and other premises provided wholly or mainly for the use of learners.

For more information, see our range of **education** factsheets. Contact the RNID Information Line for copies.

How does the law apply to pre-school education and schools?

In pre-school education and schools, including school sixth forms, in the UK, the duty to provide equipment is covered by the Special Educational Needs (SEN) law. The DDA does not require schools to provide additional aids or services such as equipment or to remove or alter a physical feature of a building. But in certain circumstances, the DDA could be relevant. For example, if staff refuse to use equipment that the school has provided, it might be possible to say that they have treated a disabled child less favourably. Adjustments that involve physical changes to buildings are also covered by the DDA through the duty to prepare accessibility plans and strategies.

Contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) or the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (see page 9) for more information on how the DDA applies to pre-16 education.

How do I put the law into practice?

Improving acoustics

Teaching areas should have good acoustics (sound quality) and should not give off reverberations or echoes or let in too much noise from outside. An architect and acoustic specialist can advise on how best to absorb and control sound in a new or existing building.

Ceilings, floors and walls can all be modified to create better acoustics. The best way to control reverberations in a room is to put fibreboard tiles or lightweight panels on the ceiling. You can use underlay on floors and line walls with fibreboard panels. For more information, contact:

Association of Noise Consultants,
6 Trap Road, Guilden Morden, Royston, Herts SG8 0JE
Telephone 01763 852958 Fax 01763 853252
anc@ukgateway.net www.association-of-noise-consultants.co.uk

What sort of equipment might deaf learners find useful?

The learning environment and curriculum should be accessible to all potential deaf learners. The learner (or their family) should have the opportunity to discuss their needs before starting a course. Many young people and their families are unaware of the range

of equipment available. Learners moving from school to college may only be familiar with equipment they have used in school and may welcome a chance to try other aids, particularly if they offer greater freedom of movement and discretion.

The local advisory service for children with a hearing loss will be able to advise on the latest developments and how technology can be used in a variety of education settings.

Equipment that can help deaf learners

Conference folder

The conference folder is suitable to use in small groups or on placements. It looks like a standard document folder and can fit A4 pads, pens and paper. It is battery-operated and has two microphones that relay sound to a small amplifier. A loop cable built into the folder sends this sound to the learner's hearing aid (set to 'T'). You can also use an extension microphone or neckloop with the folder, or attach a tape or digital recorder to record the lesson and transcribe it later.

Cost: from around £200 (including VAT).

Alerting equipment

Fire alarms

You can protect deaf and hard of hearing staff and learners by installing equipment that can alert people who are unable to hear your fire alarm. This is particularly important for those providing overnight accommodation.

RNID can provide equipment to meet this need or refer you to specialist suppliers that install systems to protect deaf and hard of hearing people. These are usually flashing light systems or commercial paging systems designed, installed and commissioned to meet the requirements of BS5839-1; 2002 (amended 2004).

Cost: can vary significantly depending on the size of the building or campus to be covered.

Other alerting equipment

Telephones, doorbells and alarm clocks are available with flashing lights, louder sounds, or vibrating pads or pagers. You can also buy a multi-alerting system that draws attention to a range of alarms. Multi-alerting systems use a single pager that the learner clips to their clothes or puts in their pocket. When, for example, the phone rings, the pager either flashes, makes a loud noise or vibrates. Most pagers use symbols, text or numbers to let the learner know which piece of equipment is going off.

Cost: from as little as £15 for an alarm clock and up to £350 (including VAT) for multi-alerting systems.

Induction loop and infrared systems

A loop system helps deaf people who use a hearing aid or loop listener hear sound more clearly by reducing or cutting out background noise. A loop system can be used to pick up sound in a range of situations, such as a television, conversations or lectures. Anyone sitting in the area of the loop can pick up sound if they switch their hearing aid – or loop listening aid – to the ‘T’ setting. Counter loop systems can also be installed at reception desks to provide hearing support for visitors.

Infrared systems provide an alternative to loops and reduce the problems of sound signals ‘spilling over’ into adjoining areas. The deaf learner will need an infrared receiver (which you will need to supply and maintain). Infrared systems are not usually prone to interference unless the receivers are in direct sunlight. Unlike loops, several systems can be used at the same time in adjacent rooms.

There are two types of infrared receivers – one for learners who wear hearing aids and one for those who don’t wear hearing aids (but who have useful residual hearing). Both types of receiver should be available, maintained and have fully charged batteries.

Contact an experienced installer for advice before you buy a system.

Cost: Fitting a system can cost anything from a few hundred pounds for a small meeting room, to several thousand pounds for an installation in a large venue. Infrared systems tend to be more expensive than loops because they need a stock of receivers, although this is not always the case, especially in places where the receivers are supplied according to the number of users, rather than the number of areas fitted with the systems.

Portable loops and infrared systems

Portable loops work in the same way as permanently fitted loop systems. They cover a smaller area and can be packed away after use. They are useful if a permanent system is not necessary or possible, or if the loop is needed in different rooms. The signal quality provided by a portable loop may not be as good as that from a professionally fitted system.

Portable infrared systems are also available. Like portable loops, they cover a smaller area, may have inferior performance, and can be packed away after use.

Cost: from about £500 to £3000 (including VAT). The price depends on the size of the room and the type of accessories you buy with it. See our factsheet **Loop and infrared systems – for people managing public venues.**

Mobile phones

Older learners will find mobile phones useful to contact fellow students and tutors and work placement providers via text messages (SMS). See our factsheet **Mobile phones**.

Radio microphone systems

These systems are designed for use in classrooms or similar settings. They can help deaf learners hear the teacher, lecturer or other learners from a distance. Learners with or without hearing aids can benefit from them. Some also work with cochlear implants. Whoever the learner wants to listen to (for example, a university lecturer) will need to wear a clip-on microphone. The deaf learner will need to wear a receiver, which can be used with headphones, a neckloop, or via a direct or wireless link to a hearing aid.

Cost: from £300 to just under £2000 (including VAT).

Soundfield systems

A Soundfield system provides low-level amplification of the teacher's voice via a microphone and distributes it evenly around the room from speakers mounted above head height. Radio aids can be used in conjunction with Soundfield systems to improve the level of sound received by deaf learners. Soundfield systems help both hearing and deaf learners by cutting down distracting background noise and improving reception of the key speaker. They have also been shown to reduce voice strain and vocal fatigue for teachers.

Cost: from £1000 (including vat) depending on the size and layout of the room.

Subtitled videos/DVDs

See our factsheet **How to get subtitles**.

Telecommunications

RNID's TalkByText software allows staff to communicate with deaf textphone users from their PC. It provides real-time, character-by-character conversation and you can transfer calls to other PCs on your computer network. Deaf and hearing staff can also make calls to each other. Incoming calls are identified by an audible and/or visual alert.

See also our factsheet **Textphones**.

Videophones

See our factsheet **Videophones**.

RNID Products (see page 10) can provide further information and catalogues where these products are described in more detail. The Technical Services Team can also provide advice, free surveys and the supply and installation of a wide range of sound support systems.

Can I get funding for equipment?

There is a range of funding available to help pay for equipment in schools, colleges and nurseries. The following is not a complete list but gives you an idea of where to start.

Sure Start

A government initiative that sets up local programmes to improve services for families with children under four. Pre-school groups can apply for Sure Start funding to help fit equipment. Contact:

Sure Start Unit, Department for Education and Skills,
Level 2, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

Telephone 020 7273 4830 Textphone 01928 794 274

Fax 01928 794 248

info@dfes.gsi.gov.uk www.surestart.gov.uk

Schools Access Initiative

Provides funds to make mainstream schools across the UK more accessible to children with disabilities and special educational needs. You can apply for funding for projects such as acoustic tiling and Soundfield systems. Contact your local education authority for further information or search

www.teachernet.gov.uk

The Deaf Children's Communication Aids Project (DCCAP)

Funded through the DfES, it aims to help pupils in England who have communication difficulties. It can provide technology to enable them to access the curriculum and interact with others.

DCCAP c/o Deaf@x and BATOD, Room G6, No 1 Earley Gate,
University of Reading, Whiteknights Road, PO Box 236,
Reading RG6 6AT

Tel/textphone/fax 08700 770 6161 www.dccap.org.uk

Disabled students' allowances

Learners in higher education across the UK can apply for disabled students' allowances from their local authority. They are for any additional disability-related costs of study such as computers, notetakers and other paid helpers. Learners in a further education college doing a higher education course – for example, an HND – could be eligible for DSAs. See our factsheet **Benefits – information for deaf students**.

Where can I get advice about equipment?

- An RNID equipment adviser can visit your institution and suggest solutions to help deaf learners. Contact RNID Products (see page 13) for more details.
- The NDCS publications *Deaf-friendly schools* and *Deaf-friendly pre-schools and nurseries* are written for mainstream education providers.
- Our Education guidelines give practical guidance and information for professionals working with deaf learners in mainstream and special school settings. See www.rnid.org.uk/shop/publications for details of all our publications.
- The NDCS Listening Bus visits venues across the UK, demonstrating the latest equipment to help with communication and learning: NDCS, 15 Dufferin Street, London EC1Y 8UR Tel/textphone 0808 800 8880 Fax 020 7251 5020
- www.ndcs.org.uk helpline@ndcs.org.uk

Where can I go for further information?

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The EHRC 'is working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society'.

England

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline (England)

FREEPOST MID02164

Stratford upon Avon

CV37 9BR

Telephone 08457 622 633 Textphone 08457 622 644 Fax 08457 778 878

Wales

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline Wales

Freepost RRLR-UEYB-UYZL

1st Floor, 3 Callaghan Square, Cardiff CF10 5BT

Telephone 0845 604 8810 Textphone 0845 604 8820 Fax 0845 604 8830

Scotland

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline Scotland

Freepost RRLR-GYLB-UJTA, The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DU

Telephone 0845 604 5510 Textphone 0845 604 5520 Fax 0845 604 5530

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Provides information, advisory and training services to assist all employers and organisations in carrying out their duties under equal opportunities legislation in Northern Ireland.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Equality House,
7-9 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast BT2 7DP

Telephone 028 90 500600 Textphone 028 90 500589 Fax 028 90 248687

information@equalityni.org www.equalityni.org

Further information from RNID

The RNID Information Line offers a wide range of information on many aspects of deafness and hearing loss. You can contact us for further copies of this factsheet and our full range of our information factsheets and leaflets. You can also contact us if you would like information in Braille, on audiotape or large print.

RNID Information Line

19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL

Telephone 0808 808 0123 Textphone 0808 808 9000

Fax 020 7296 8199 SMS 0780 0000 360 (costs vary depending on your network)

informationline@rnid.org.uk www.rnid.org.uk

Buying equipment from RNID

RNID Products sells and installs a range of equipment for people with hearing loss and tinnitus. Visit the RNID Shop at www.rnid.org.uk/shop to buy items of equipment online. Alternatively, you can request a copy of the *Solutions* catalogue or our access catalogue by contacting RNID Products directly.

RNID Products, 1 Haddonbrook Business Centre, Orton Southgate, Peterborough PE2 6YX

Telephone 01733 361199 Textphone 01733 238020 Fax 0870 789 8822

solutions@rnid.org.uk www.rnid.org.uk/shop

RNID Information, December 2007