



## COMMUNICATION POLICY

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## **SYNOPSIS**

The Communication Policy has been created to ensure clarification of communication issues between Manchester Deaf Centre's staff, service users, outside agencies/organisations. The policy is aimed to ensure communication difficulties do not arise, resulting in inappropriate provision of service. This Communication Policy hopes to clarify communication needs and issues in relation to D/deaf<sup>1</sup> people.

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<sup>1</sup> The policy uses the convention first introduced by James Woodward (1972) and later developed by Carol Padden (1980) whereby a lower case 'd' will refer to deaf people of the medical model who are 'labelled' or call themselves hearing impaired/ hard of hearing and upper case 'D' for those who are culturally Deaf, a part of the Deaf community and sign language users.

## **MANCHESTER DEAF CENTRE AND DEAF PEOPLE:**

Manchester Deaf Centre aims to promote services enabling deaf, hard of hearing and the deaf-blind people to improve the quality of their lives.

Manchester Deaf Centre recognises the need to improve D/deaf peoples' access to all mainstream services including the centre's own services.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNICATION POLICY:**

- Recognise the views of D/deaf people and encourage further discussions and thought into the development of access to services within and outside the deaf centre
- Meet their needs to obtain full access to services
- Identify and fulfilling the appropriate communication and equipment needs to meet the direct needs to the D/deaf individual.
- Encourage and develop opportunities for Deaf/ Hearing<sup>2</sup> awareness and British Sign Language training for deaf and hearing members of staff.
- Ensure correct and appropriate provision of services is made available to D/deaf people
- Develop policies for better service provision for D/deaf people
- Encourage positive attitudes and well being for all staff, service users, and visitors of the deaf centre promoting independence and empowerment of D/deaf people.

This policy envisions a reduction of discrimination against D/deaf people we serve and indeed for any D/deaf people employed within the deaf centre and its services. D/deaf people within the working environment should receive positive working relations, development of discussion and encourage appropriate practice.

Manchester Deaf centre will continue to encourage and put to practice positive change and better understanding of communication and language needs of Deaf people.

The introduction of this policy and guidelines will:

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<sup>2</sup> For Deaf members of staff we would encourage that they attend hearing awareness, to understand hearing perspectives and the hearing world.

- Enable providers of services for D/deaf people to meet obligations in terms of complying with clients and employees communication requirements.
- Enable good models of practice when meeting, assessing and providing a service to D/deaf people, ensuring they are provided with as full communication access as possible in order to function to the best of their abilities.
- Ensure the communication rights and linguistic<sup>3</sup> needs of services users are identified and provided for.
- Ensure the Services can offer communication access to all Deaf people regardless of the code of communication
- Ensure the cultural and linguistic requirements for Deaf people from ethnic backgrounds (whose first language may not be BSL) and minority groups are identified.
- Ensure communication policies and practices for D/deaf people are incorporated with the Equal Opportunities Policy and highlight the need for awareness of discriminatory practice in accordance to the Disability Discriminatory Act.

The Communication policy and practices for D/deaf people outlined in this report are incorporated within the Equal Opportunities Policy and highlight the need for awareness of discriminatory practice.

The Communication policy is designed to enable purchasers and providers of service to D/deaf people to promote an environment and service whereby quality if communication can be planned, developed and practiced.

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<sup>3</sup> One linguistic issue which needs to be met when communicating with Deaf Mancunian residents is to ensure their regional signs are recognised and can be matched. Where Deaf people go to school can have a large influence over the way they sign, this means there are regional variations all over the country. Many Deaf residents of Greater Manchester attended an old Deaf school in Old Trafford and these signs continue to be used today.

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

### Statistics relating to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people:

Statistics relating to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in the United Kingdom give us an idea to the extent of numbers of people who have deafness and the range of different levels and ages of deafness and its onset. For each of the different levels of deafness seen below it should be remembered different modes communication are preferred.

Source of statistics outlined below is from the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) 2002 cited on the Hearing Concern website: [www.hearingconcern.org.uk](http://www.hearingconcern.org.uk)

- Deafness is the second most common 'disability', after mobility disability.
- There are approximately 9 million people affected by deafness in the UK (1 in every 7 persons)
- The majority of people with a hearing loss are hard of hearing: 8.3 million. Many people in this group benefit from hearing aids. Hearing loss is an invisible 'disability' which can often be missed especially when many deaf people are expert lipreaders or have some residual hearing boosted by their hearing aids.
- Hearing loss increases sharply with age – 6.5 million people over the age of 60 are hard of hearing, and approximately one-third of the population over the age of 70 have a hearing loss.
- Approximately 25,000 people in Britain were born with a profound hearing loss. Many children in this group are part of the Deaf community with their own distinctive signed language and culture.
- Approximately 50,000 Deaf people in the UK use Sign Language as their first or preferred language.
- There are about 123,000 deafened people (those who become profoundly deaf suddenly or progressively). Of these 11, 000 are under 60 years of age.
- There are 24,000 deaf-blind people
- There are 23,000 deaf children (0 – 15 years)
- Deafness can affect a person at any age – even before birth

- It is estimated that three children in every thousand are born with some degree of deafness. One child in every thousand has a severe or profound hearing loss.
- 90% of all deaf children are born to hearing parents
- Approximately 10% of adults have experiences tinnitus for longer than five minutes.

### British Sign Language:

British Sign Language is the first language of over 70,000 Deaf people in the United Kingdom today, most of whom form a linguistic, cultural and minority group. This community has suffered a great deal of misunderstanding, which has resulted in a history of incorrect service provision, which has not met the unique needs of each D/deaf individual.

Membership of the Deaf community has demographic, linguistic, political, psychological and sociological dimensions. "Britain's Deaf community shares characteristics born from common experiences, beliefs, values and norms. Most importantly, the community bonds through a common language, sign language and a shared culture" (Ridgeway, M.R 1998. *The Psychological Health and Well-Being of Deaf People in the Community*, PhD.). This membership enhances self-esteem and development of a positive self-concept, which is considered a vital tool in seeing the empowerment of Deaf people and ensuring they gain equal access to all services as their hearing peers do.

Studies have shown more specific statistics of Deaf people in the North West. Research by Reeves, D. et al (September 2002) outlines population estimates of Deaf in the North West as follows:

"Using these figures [...figures from the Office of National Statistics...] in conjunction with results from the National Study of Hearing....would suggest that approximately 1.1 million adults in the NW region have a significant hearing loss, of which 138,000 are severe or profound losses. And on the basis of the BDA estimate of 70,000 BSL users nationally (BDA, 2002), around 8,500 of these would be resident in the NW."

D/deaf people for many years have been campaigning for the recognition of BSL as an '**official language**', a language in its own right. The government have only recently recognised BSL on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2003. However this is only the first step as no legislations have yet been made in accordance to the official recognition of BSL. The recognition of BSL by Manchester City Council was in fact enforced much earlier than the government. The Executive committee meeting formally accepted BSL as an '**official language**' in March 2000.

## **IMPROVING SERVICE PROVISION FOR DEAF PEOPLE:**

### Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995:

An important aspect to which this communication policy must work in conjunction with is the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which came into force in 1995. The DDA is a significant legislation for disabled people, which has drawn people away from the 'medical model' of disability and shifted towards a more 'social model' which views disability as a consequent failure of society to adequately provide for the full range of abilities and capacities amongst its members. (Reeves, D. et al: 2002) This change of view has also been adopted by the SSD.

The DDA is being phased over a period of time with more amendments to move with changes of time. Since December 1996 it became illegal to refuse, provide a lesser or different service to people on the grounds of disability.

The RNID have produced a fact sheet which gives guidelines to providers of goods, facilities and services as to how the DDA affects them and how adjustments must be made to prevent discrimination against Deaf and Hard of Hearing people.

In order to prevent discrimination the DDA states 'reasonable adjustments' must be made to ensure full access. RNID fact sheet explains in relation to D/deaf people where these adjustments must be made and how this can be practiced, brief examples are outlined below:

#### **Practices, policies and procedures:**

"...if your organisation's work in a way that makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a deaf person to use your service, you should change the way you work."

#### **Providing services by alternative means:**

"...If a Physical feature of your premises makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a deaf person to use your service, you should make alternative arrangements."

#### **Additional aids or services:**

"Reasonable adjustments also include providing additional aids or services to enable a deaf person to access a service or make it easier for them to do so. You do this by providing communication support, the right equipment or other support."

*(The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – a guide for providers of goods, facilities and services, RNID Information, April 2003)*

## **DEVELOPING A DEAF FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT:**

Manchester Deaf Centre is aimed for deaf people and therefore already fairly accessible and aware of the needs of all deaf people. However with the wide range of deafness levels and unique needs of each individuals staff need to be fully aware of all possibilities in creating a deaf friendly environment and the aids to communication which may be needed.

Aids to communication will help facilitate the development of D/deaf friendly environment. Mainstream services would find this list quite comprehensive and would need to consider how to make their own individual environments relevant and D/deaf friendly. Some departments may not have a “visitors” room but will nevertheless need to make the appropriate adaptations to the environment.

Reference should also be made to Manchester City Council’s own policies on access to their services for disabled people. From January 2004 an updated version of “Design for Access” can be found at <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/disability/policies/access>

### Hard of Hearing/ deaf people:

Certain adaptations to buildings are recommended to meet the access and safety needs of D/deaf people such as loop systems and flashing lights for fire alarms.

When meeting/ communicating with deaf people who do not use sign language there are a number of strategies and coping mechanisms that can help to improve communication in social environments.

Hearing Concern outlines (on website [www.hearingconcern.org.uk](http://www.hearingconcern.org.uk)) some useful tips to follow when talking to people with a hearing loss, these tips are shown below:

- Make sure the person you are talking to is able to see your face and knows you are speaking to them
- Speak clearly (not with exaggerated lip movements)
- Speak a little more slowly (not excessively slowly)
- Be patient and allow listener time to take in your message
- Keep it short and to the point
- Don’t ramble
- Don’t change the subject abruptly
- Write it down if necessary (At work meetings it may help if a deaf person can have a copy of the agenda or items for discussion)
- Don’t talk with your hand over your mouth or while chewing or smoking
- If you are in a group speak one at the time
- Make sure the person is aware of the subject before you start



- Speak up, but do not shout (*Speaking louder only increases the volume of what is already being said it does not clarify what is being said*)
- Use body language and facial expressions
- Use plain English, avoid using jargon if possible
- Stay in the light – this will make lipreading easier....Try not to have speakers with their backs to a bright window.

Again further tips are outlined for communication with hard of hearing people on the telephone, where face to face communication is not possible:

- Speak clearly
- Speak a little more slowly
- Be patient, allowing the listener time to take in your message
- Identify yourself clearly
- Keep it short and to the point
- Don't ramble
- Rephrase rather than repeat
- Keep background noise to a minimum at your end
- Summarise
- Don't hang up until you are sure you have been understood
- Repeat any information such as phone numbers, names and addresses
- Follow up by sending written information if necessary

#### Deaf people:

Where Deaf BSL Users are concerned an interpreter or staff member should always be available who can translate from English to British Sign Language (BSL) and vice versa. Such individuals need to have appropriate training, qualifications and experience as set out by Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI). Training and relevant experience in the specific areas is preferable. For example qualified interpreting, additional and specified training and awareness are needed when interpreting for mental health issues or issues involving police matters.

Waiting areas need to be made D/deaf friendly – visual materials should be displayed so information can be accessed. Remember for many D/deaf people BSL is their first language, which mean written English is their second and writing and reading skills are often limited.

## THE SIGNING ENVIRONMENT:

This policy advocates that a healthy working environment and attitude towards the people to which it serves helps resolve some of the communication difficulties that often arise in a mixed cultural setting. A bicultural environment across clients and employees will reduce potential tension when users find themselves in a new situation.

To obtain full access to communication staff will:

Whenever a Deaf person comes into the service environment whether making enquiries or is meeting someone every effort should be made to ensure they are able to communicate freely in their preferred language. Whether or not members of staff are able to sign they should all have received some deaf awareness training.

Where an unexpected situation arises there should preferably be someone within the building who can sign. However if not arrangements should be made depending on the urgency of the situation to call for an interpreter or make another appointment where an interpreter can then be booked.

This policy readily acknowledges that a hearing person who is signing and speaking at the same time is **not** using BSL. However, to facilitate some level of language access for Deaf clients and staff, it might be an appropriate mode of communication to use with hearing people who do not sign. This may also be the case for a deaf person who does not sign fluently but is a hearing-aid wearer and like to have some things signed.

If a non-deaf person is learning to sign they would respect the above points by signing to their maximum level in these situations taking on board nothing that is above their level.

Where non-deaf people need a private conversation within an environment where D/deaf people are present and wish to use their first language e.g. English, this should be in private with the door closed.

Where Deaf users need a private conversation with an employee or with another Deaf person, using their first language e.g. BSL, this should be in private with the door closed. Where the conversation is being held between a Deaf person and a member of staff who is hearing an interpreter must be present and used appropriately.

If the person is deaf but does not use sign other communication/ access needs may need to be met by physical or technical aids such as a lipspeaker or a loop system.

The above respect for a person's first language; recognises that using a second language sometimes has linguistic limitations, respects environment and ensures confidentiality.

Whilst signing to Deaf people it must be ensured that the register is appropriate e.g. the person may be more comfortable with signed English i.e. signs produced in English order, or they may be fluent BSL users and therefore require a person with fluent signing skills. If this is not possible it means the person works harder to access the information that is being given, resulting in reduced access and understanding.

## **COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES:**

These guidelines are to be applied to all situations involving communication and interaction with D/deaf people and also apply to the same situations involving D/deaf staff in a range of establishments.

### Meeting Procedures:

With particular reference to meeting held in respect of the client i.e. the **D/deaf person**, the following points are emphasised:

Clients should have full access to meeting involving their care.

Clients should have the right to be informed as to who is invited and why.

Clients' communication method and preference should be identified and provided.

Clients should have full access to what is happening whatever way they require to gain that access. This will usually be through a British Sign Language Interpreter and/or a Deaf interpreter. Other communication aids i.e. visual aids can add further access.

To identify a client's communication needs basic deaf awareness is required to understand and gather information about their needs. Before an interpreter is booked information will need to be gathered which may require communicating to the Deaf person without an interpreter at first. If this is the case, see outlined communication tips in the section *developing a deaf friendly environment*.

### Language and Communication Issues to identify:

Does the D/deaf person use:

- British Sign Language (BSL)/ Irish Sign Language (ISL)
- Sign Supported English (SSE)
- Minimal Language Skills (MLS)
- deaf-blind Manual
- D/deaf with Ushers
- Visual Sign (using pictures/art/body movements)

Clients need the opportunity to meet with interpreters prior to meetings in order to familiarise themselves with each others signing and regional variations as appropriate.

Opportunities should be made available for clients to talk about their feelings following any meeting concerning and involving them. Clients will often reveal

their feelings of concern in this way particularly where there may be a poor self concept, lack of confidence or anxiety. Clients may reveal lack of understanding of proceedings.

It should not be presumed that the provision of an interpreter will mean there will be no communication difficulties nor should it be presumed that the client would feel able to say what they feel or want to say.

Exceptions to the presence of interpreters will arise where all those present are Deaf and use Sign Language or where hearing people with fluency in Sign Language (minimum level of NVQ3) rather not use an interpreter. All participants will normally use their preferred language or a language they are most comfortable using.

#### Translation Issues:

As previously mentioned where Deaf people are concerned, spoken and written English is usually not their first language, thus when accessing written documents or files Deaf people often can not understand what the information is about.

Translation services where various documents in written English can be translated into sign and recorded onto video is **not yet** a service which has been developed and made widely available. Manchester Deaf Centre and indeed Manchester City Council are aware of the need for signed translations of documents and policies which are accessible for non-deaf people but not to Deaf people, thus they are looking at ways in which this situation can be resolved.

However if a Deaf person does request or need translation of written materials the Manchester Deaf Centre's Communication Support Services can be arrange this.

## **TRAINING ISSUES:**

All employees in any aspect of providing services or of caring services to D/deaf people require basic deaf awareness. Awareness of sign language, history and development is necessary to enable better understanding of deaf issues. Deaf Awareness Training packs and courses are provided by various deaf organisations.

Fluency in British Sign Language is considered of ultimate importance for all Deaf people, therefore if no staff members have signing skills an interpreter should be available at all times, or at least contact details for communication support services close at hand.

Staff members are encouraged to use their own initiatives and resources to achieve the standards set in this policy.

All staff working with Deaf people should aim to obtain at least basic sign language skills. Minimal levels of attainment in deaf awareness knowledge for all staff will facilitate better understanding of D/deaf people their culture, community, language or technical aid preferences.

It is envisaged that all staff that have regular contact with D/deaf clients, staff and visitors should at least level II BSL within two years of commencement of post.

Staff working in the therapeutic roles (include providing direct care and support to service users) should be at NVQ level 3 within 5 years. This is the minimum expected level of attainment of all staff that has, or will have therapeutic involvement with D/deaf clients.

Individual communication requirements need to be acknowledged and understood. Understanding and ability to recognise and adjust to different levels of language and varied range of communication methods needed. The implications is that some staff will need to take extra training and expertise in deaf-blind manual (should be at appropriate level within 2 years) and other modes of communication which are usually based upon the English language structure and grammar. Staff should have knowledge and awareness of communication issues relating to users and users people. These needs are in addition to knowledge of British Sign Language.

Where staff are not in regular contact with D/deaf people they should still have the knowledge and awareness to be able identify the clients communication needs and able to then book and provide the appropriate communication support needed.

Staff interested in training in sign language skills and deaf awareness should be encouraged at all times.

It is recognised that some people may take longer to learn a second language. This is why individual motivation, supervisor and team support is important in mixed cultural and linguistic settings

It would be good practice to introduce the Communication Policy at interview stage when selecting new staff regardless of whether they will be working directly with D/deaf people or not and whether they are D/deaf themselves.

This policy will also form an important part of any induction and can be used as a welcome policy reflecting positive attitudes, respect and understanding of cultural differences.

Such an approach can help develop deaf awareness knowledge more effectively.

It is considered good practice to include this policy within the grievance and complaints practice of the department, agency or establishment.

**GRIEVANCES UNDER THE COMMUNICATION POLICY:**

All D/deaf people have a right to seek redress for grievances relating to communication issues. This also includes grievances, which may arise in relation to the operation of the workplace’s communication policy or lack of communication policy.

Care should be taken to ensure that all D/deaf people and staff are given appropriate access to all information and communication arising within the provision of a service and its workplace. This needs to also be seen in good faith under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and under Equal Opportunity Policies.

All grievances need to be addressed and recorded. Action should be taken to encourage those who have broken communication policy guidelines to address their difficulties and seek guidance from others. Disciplinary action should be taken as appropriate. The involvement of D/deaf staff and willingness to listen to D/deaf people will encourage better identification of difficulties related to communication issues.

All grievances addressed should follow Manchester Deaf Centre’s complaints procedure.

Manchester Deaf Centre strongly supports the adoption of this policy in all establishments who are providing services to D/deaf people within and outside the deaf centre.

Staff of Manchester Deaf Centre should also make reference to the Grievance Procedure in the Employee’s Handbook.

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**Agreement:**

I ..... (name) agree to abide by the above.

Signed:.....

Line Manager:..... Signed:.....

Date:.....

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**Communication Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.  
Next review: September 2018**



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