

Supporting Members with Hearing Loss

The following advice aims to support u3a members with hearing loss so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in u3a activities. Hearing loss can vary from mild to severe and may also prevent members from taking part in events and groups because they want to avoid feeling cut off from people in social situations. In all cases, it is important to approach it sensitively and appreciate that it can be difficult for members to admit, either to themselves or to others, that they are losing their hearing. Below, are some simple steps that can be taken by all members to make u3a events as accessible as possible and information on where members with hearing loss can find extra support for themselves.

Speaking to Someone with Hearing Loss

- Ensure that you are speaking clearly and distinctly but without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements.
- Speak at normal speed or just slightly slower, pausing between sentences and making sure you have been understood before moving on.
- Use plain language and don't waffle.
- Avoid using sentences that are unnecessarily long and complex and if the member has not understood what has been said, try and find a different way of saying it.
- Say the member's name before beginning a conversation. This gives the listener opportunity to focus attention so the first few words are not lost.
- Ask a member if they have better hearing in one ear or another and make sure you are standing in the best place.

Setting Up an Activity

- Try to minimize extraneous noise.
- Make sure that members take turns in speaking and encourage use of hand signals to attract attention.
- Have a pen and paper ready to write something down if necessary.

- Where possible, use a venue with a loop system or take a portable system and use microphones where available (see overleaf for more information).
- Check that any hearing support systems are working correctly before starting a talk.
- Make notes available either during the session (for instance a summary of the main points on a handout, flip-chart or PowerPoint presentation) or as soon as possible afterwards.
- Encourage those who are hard of hearing to sit nearest the speaker or group leader and consider reserved seating.
- Let speakers know that some members of the audience are hard of hearing so they can adapt their speed and position.

Lip Reading

- Find out who is lip reading so that you can be aware of how you position yourself in the room in relation to them.
- Face the person you are talking to as much as possible and keep your hands away from your face when talking.
- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking.
- Be aware of light levels: avoid situations where light is shining in members' eyes or where lighting is too low to see someone's face clearly.
- Horseshoe or boardroom style layouts can increase visibility.
- If you have speakers, ideally, they should be in front of a plain background and not too high.
- Use lapel microphones or ask speakers to ensure hand-held microphones do not obscure their face.

Other:

Equipment Available for a u3a to buy

Portable loop systems which range from those suitable for one-to-one communication and smaller systems without microphones, to those which cover an area of 8m square. Price from £75 to £1,000.

Equipment Available for Members to buy for Personal Use

Personal enhancers – from £60 to £350.

Advice and Supply of Equipment

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) have a catalogue of products and an online shop:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop>

Telephone: 03330 144525

Textphone: 03330 144530

Email: solutions@hearingloss.org.uk

Sign Language Services

You can book a British Sign Language interpreter through Action on Hearing Loss:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/communication-support/book-communication-support.aspx>

Telephone: 0845 685 8000

Textphone: 0845 685 8001

Email: communication.services@hearingloss.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss also provide information on learning British Sign Language:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/your-hearing/ways-of-communicating/british-sign-language-bsl.aspx>

Telephone: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

SMS: 07800 000 360

Email: information@hearingloss.org.uk

Other Resources

National Association of Deafened People

www.nadp.org.uk

Telephone: 0845 055 9663

Email: enquiries@nadp.org.uk

British Deaf Association

www.bda.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7697 4140

Email: bda@bda.org.uk

Hearing Link

www.hearinglink.org

Telephone: 0300 111 1113

Email: helpdesk@hearinglink.org

UK Council on Deafness

www.deafcouncil.org.uk

07903 560037

British Tinnitus Association

www.tinnitus.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 018 0527 (free); 0114 250 9922

Email: info@tinnitus.org.uk