

Teaching students in VET who have a hearing loss: Understanding the Education Standards and creating an inclusive classroom

The Disability Standards for Education (2005) supplements the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and all training providers must comply with the legislation. This means teachers and VET staff need to be aware of the legislation requirements and how that translates into what is practised in an inclusive classroom.

This leaflet aims to provide practical information to help teachers create a classroom that is inclusive for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Do I have to accept a deaf person into a course if they do not meet the selection criteria?

All students should be assessed against the same selection criteria, and all selection criteria should be based on objective, quantifiable requirements that are relevant to the course of study. Examples of such selection criteria might include: a pass in Year 11 mathematics; two years of relevant work experience; or the completion of a prerequisite qualification.

Excluding a student from a course on the grounds of their disability alone, or on the perception that the course or area of employment is not “suitable” for them in the long run, is not acceptable.

In addition, you need to make sure the criteria do not indirectly discriminate against any potential student.

What is a “reasonable adjustment” and how does this impact on the standard of my course? Am I supposed to accept a lower standard for the successful completion of learning outcomes?

Reasonable adjustment can be confusing, but the short answer is no, you do not have to accept a lower standard of outcomes. However the area is complex.

For example, although the learning outcome should be the same for all students, how you assess those outcomes may need to vary in order to allow the student to best demonstrate their competency.

Case study 1: motor mechanics course

The course assessment usually specifies that a student should be able to listen to the engine and adjust the engine speed accordingly. While a student with a hearing loss may be able to hear sufficiently to complete the requirement successfully, a student with a more profound level of hearing loss might be unable to do this. The student may, however, use other strategies to “listen” and adjust the engine in order to prove competency. For example, they may watch or feel the engine vibrations. This works as a reasonable adjustment because competence is assessed by the correct adjustment of engine speed and not the ability to hear the engine.

English literacy is another potential area for reasonable adjustment. While some training packages may specify a level of English literacy as a requirement, most do not. This means that the assessment process can be varied to allow a student to demonstrate competence in a variety of ways.

Case study 2: floristry course

One of the assessment activities in the course is a written examination. A student was not able to demonstrate competence in the exam. The teacher suspected this was due to the student's English skills. The teacher allowed the student to sit the exam with an Auslan interpreter so that the student could respond in Auslan and the student was able to demonstrate she met the required level of competence.

Contact the Disability Liaison Unit in your institute or deafConnectEd for ideas about other alternative assessment strategies.

If disability liaison provides support staff such as interpreters and notetakers doesn't that mean my classroom is inclusive?

Not quite. Interpreters and notetakers help create an inclusive classroom, but this may not always be enough.

When communication is mediated through a third party like an interpreter, there will always be a slight time delay because the interpreter must first understand what was said, in order to interpret it correctly. This means the deaf student receives the message after other students. Similarly, a student who is relying on lipreading may need time to fully understand what was said, piecing it together with contextual knowledge. This is because lipreading includes a great deal of intelligent guess work.

The bottom line is that each of these modes of communication may affect the student's ability to fully participate in class activities in some way. These barriers, however, may be overcome. Examples are addressed in the next section of this document.

What kind of barriers am I likely to encounter and what are the strategies I can use to address them?

Often the barriers faced by people who are deaf or hard of hearing have nothing to do with being deaf, but problems with accessing the information presented in the classroom. Once these barriers are removed they can get on with the business of learning. Luckily many barriers can be easily addressed by you and the learning environment you create. For example:

Room design:

- Arrange chairs into a circular or U shape where possible. This enables the deaf or hard of hearing student to see other students to lipread them, or at least see who is talking.
- Be aware of the glare from windows if you are being lipread.

One point of focus:

- Students cannot lipread you and watch a PowerPoint demonstration at the same time. Allow time for students to read a presentation and then speak. Similarly, explain what you will

show students on a computer, and then show it so that the student knows what they are looking at as you are doing your demonstration.

- When reading aloud: slow down, pause, and spell names and references. Allow the student to look at written material during pauses. Note key words on a whiteboard.

Multi-media:

- Turn on the captions on DVDs and YouTube clips.
- When selecting multi-media resources, look for resources that are captioned. This is useful for all students, not just those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Ensure important information isn't missed:

- Ask all students to repeat important information. A good example is safety instructions.
- Provide opportunities for assistance inside and outside class.
- Get students' attention before speaking and avoid walking around the room during a presentation. It's hard to lipread someone when they are moving and impossible if they are turned away!

English literacy:

- Look into options for one-on-one tutoring.
- Use alternative assessments (e.g. oral exams, plain English exams, or having an interpreter or scribe at exams).
- Use performance-based assessment (e.g. participation, journal writing, self-assessment).
- Allow extra time and provide a glossary of specialist terminology.
- Mark work on content rather than on the basis of English presentation.

Poor acoustics and noise interference (hard of hearing students)

- Repeat responses from other students
- Ensure your face is visible to the student for lipreading.
- Be aware that hearing aids amplify all sound equally. They do not correct what is heard in the way that glasses correct vision.
- Try to minimise classroom noise. Close the classroom door to prevent ambient noise interruption.

Difficulty in following or participating in classroom dialogue:

- Make sure only one person speaks at a time.
- Call on people by name and allow the student who is lipreading time to focus on the speaker before they begin to talk.
- Flag changes of topic (e.g. "Now we are talking about....").
- Remember that only 30 per cent of English sounds are formed and visible on the lips. The remaining sounds form in the throat and the back of the mouth and cannot be seen.
- If the student does not grasp the message, rephrase the sentence or think of visual aids that could assist.
- Be aware that fatigue, stress or illness can reduce concentration and lipreading ability.
- Be aware that an interpreter will be about five to ten seconds behind, so the deaf student always has a delay in getting the message.

More Information

deafConnectEd have a wide range of resources on our website with further information about supporting deaf and hard of hearing students in the VET sector and multimedia resources in addition to links to resources provided by other organisations. (www.deafconnected.com.au/resources)

Alternatively you may wish to contact us to discuss concerns or queries. We provide a state-wide service to the VET sector aimed at providing information to enhance the participation and learning experience of deaf students. We are happy to answer questions by telephone or email or we can visit your institute to provide coaching and advice to teaching staff in your department.

More Information

For all the latest news and more information on the services and support offered by deafConnectEd, visit the Centre website: www.deafconnected.com.au

The website has a wealth of information and useful about

- learning Auslan
- resources – information sheets, DVDs and multimedia
- research
- publications

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