

## **Lipreading support Policy statement**

---

### **Our position**

Lipreading is the ability to recognise lip shapes and patterns and to use context to fill gaps in conversation in order to maximise communication. For many people with hearing loss, lipreading is a vital communication skill. Most people learn to lipread by attending classes, which in addition to lipreading typically include other vital information and support to improve communication and encourage people to manage their hearing loss. We would like to see lipreading support recognised throughout the UK as an essential part of rehabilitation for people with hearing loss and widely available as a mechanism to help people adjust to and manage hearing loss, to complement interventions such as hearing aids. There are a number of recommendations and activities that we propose in order to contribute to achieving this vision.

### **Introduction**

This policy statement outlines the main issues for people with hearing loss when accessing lipreading support. It sets out our position on the issues and suggests the actions that need to be taken to improve access to this support for people with hearing loss<sup>1</sup>.

We use the term 'people with hearing loss' to refer to people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing throughout.

### **Background**

Lipreading is the ability to recognise lip shapes and patterns and to use context to fill gaps in conversation in order to maximise communication. For many people with hearing loss, lipreading is a vital communication skill. Most people learn to lipread by attending classes taught by a qualified lipreading teacher. Lipreading classes develop the ability to recognise different lip shapes and patterns and to

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note that, like many policy documents, this statement reflects the issues relevant at the time of writing. Over time this may be subject to change, such as new legislation, and we may review and amend the document.

use context to fill gaps in conversation. Classes also include information about other strategies to encourage attendees to manage their hearing loss and enhance communication, such as knowing how to manage a communication environment (e.g. knowing the best place to sit in a group setting). Many classes will also provide useful information about services and equipment for people with hearing loss. In addition, classes provide an important source of peer support, as people meet others with hearing loss and have an opportunity to share experiences and coping strategies.

Therefore, while often referred to as 'lipreading' classes, it is standard practice for courses to provide a package of support for people with hearing loss.

While lipreading classes provide vital support and information to people with hearing loss, access to this support varies widely. Many people may not access this support until some years after developing hearing loss. People are not always made aware of this support, or it may not be available locally. There are a number of inter-related factors that are contributing to this situation.

### ***Recognition of lipreading and managing hearing loss support as a rehabilitation tool***

Our evidence (see below) demonstrates that lipreading support can be a vital tool in helping people to adjust to and manage hearing loss. However, as a devolved policy issue, lipreading is not currently recognised UK wide as being a part of the rehabilitation process for people with hearing loss.

In England, lipreading has traditionally been viewed as an adult skill and falls under the responsibility of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Since 2005, lipreading classes have been funded through the Community Learning budget (previously Informal Adult and Community Learning) because lipreading cannot be linked to literacy or numeracy measures, with funding administered to providers by the Skills Funding Agency. This classification places lipreading alongside other Community Learning opportunities, some of which are typically taken for leisure purposes. This can lead to a perception that lipreading classes are attended as a hobby – this is not the case. Sign-posting to lipreading classes from audiologists and GPs happens on an ad-hoc basis and people may have to pay to attend classes.

In other parts of the UK it is recognised that lipreading support is part of the health agenda. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland lipreading classes are

considered part of the rehabilitation process after diagnosis of hearing loss, as referenced in the *Quality Standards for Adult Hearing Rehabilitation Services*<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Class availability***

There is a great deal of variation in where lipreading classes are available and how much they cost to attend. Having to pay to access a course will prohibit some people from attending.

Our report 'Paying lip service'<sup>3</sup>, based on research conducted in 2010, described the state of lipreading class provision in England and Wales at that time. It identified that there were approximately 450 lipreading classes in England and Wales, enough to support fewer than 5,000 people, despite there being over nine million people with hearing loss who could potentially benefit from classes. In some regions there was no lipreading support available at all. In Wales, this represented approximately 19 classes at that time, with fewer than 205 people attending them.

According to the Scottish Course to Train Tutors of Lipreading (SCTTL), 34 tutors were delivering 63 lipreading classes in 11 health board areas across Scotland in 2010. Classes are funded from a range of sources, some are free to attend and some charge a small fee.

Our 2011 report from Northern Ireland, 'Read my Lips' recorded 10 lipreading classes operating on both longer and short term bases. In Northern Ireland classes are funded on an ad hoc basis by individual health and Social Care Trusts, often for short periods. Classes are free of charge to participants.

We continue to receive reports from our members and supporters who are unable to access lipreading classes.

The Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults (ATLA) can provide information about where lipreading classes are available.

### ***Teacher numbers***

The limited supply of qualified lipreading teachers also impacts on the availability of classes (see *Paying Lip Service*, 2010). For example, in Northern Ireland there are currently 5 lipreading teachers providing lipreading classes. There are currently very few opportunities available to train as a lipreading tutor and the

---

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2009). *Quality standards for adult rehabilitation services*. These standards have also been adopted in Wales and Northern Ireland. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/270517/0080557.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Paying lip service*, (2010): RNID.

insecurity of available work and lack of career progression may deter people from joining the profession.

## **Evidence**

### *The value of lipreading*

In 2010 we surveyed our members<sup>4</sup> and asked a number of questions about attending lipreading classes. The survey captured information from more than 6,000 of our members and found that more than one-third (36%) of respondents said they had attended a lipreading class. We asked those who had attended about the benefits. The top three benefits were identified as improving lipreading skills (84%), meeting other people who are dealing with hearing loss (75%) and finding out about equipment and adaptations that could help them (66%).

Our 'Read my Lips' reports in Scotland (2010) and Northern Ireland (2011) both explored the benefits of attending a lipreading class and some of the challenges linked to accessing this support. The findings in these reports challenge popular misconceptions about lipreading, for example that learning to lipread is a hobby or that people attend classes out of a general interest. The reports also highlight a lack of awareness amongst other health professionals in sign-posting people to support.

Our 2013 report 'Not just Lip Service' explored in detail the benefits of attending a lipreading class. We funded a beginners' lipreading and managing hearing loss course as the basis for a research project, conducting a lipreading exercise and in-depth interviews with class members throughout the duration of the 30 week course. Our research found that the course provided a package of support that was vital in enabling people to adjust to and manage their hearing loss.

Every class member who completed the course demonstrated a measurable improvement in their lipreading ability over the duration of the course and improved confidence in managing their hearing loss. Additional tips and techniques delivered through the course also helped our participants to improve communication. Overall, participants were more confident, more in-control and more independently able to manage communication than they were before attending the course. The support was particularly beneficial for people who had most recently been diagnosed with hearing loss.

---

<sup>4</sup> Annual Survey Report 2010, (2010): RNID.

Our findings demonstrated that accessing this support equipped learners with a range of communication tactics that they could use to participate in day-to-day activities. Examples of how the course benefited class members included:

- Mental and emotional wellbeing: feeling less negative about hearing loss
- Personal development: being able to better manage communication at work
- Social skills and participation: less likely to find social situations isolating.

## **Recommendations**

**We would like to see lipreading support recognised across the UK as an essential part of rehabilitation for people with hearing loss to complement interventions such as hearing aids.**

In order to work towards this vision a number of co-ordinated activities will be needed across the UK:

- Further research is needed in order to identify the most effective and efficient means of delivering lipreading support as part of the rehabilitation process built in to the hearing loss patient pathway.
- Alongside this, there should continue to be on-going investment in lipreading teacher training opportunities in order to secure the future provision of people able to deliver this support.
- In the short-term, information needs to be provided about lipreading support and the benefits of this support at the point of a hearing loss diagnosis. Greater join up between GPs, audiology services and lipreading class providers would help to achieve this.

As lipreading is a devolved policy issue, the following sections set out specific recommendations and activities across the UK that will contribute to achieving our vision.

### **In England**

- We recommend that the Government carries out a cross-departmental review to identify how people with hearing loss can have adequate and appropriate access to lipreading and managing hearing loss support.
- We have secured funding from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to undertake a pilot project to explore the health and wellbeing benefits of delivering a package of lipreading and managing hearing loss

support as part of a patient pathway at an early stage of diagnosed hearing loss.

### **In Wales**

- We will use funding from the Welsh Government to train 23 lipreading tutors to ensure that Local Authorities have the resource base to run many more classes at a local level.
- We will work with audiologists to develop and evaluate an effective pathway from audiology to lipreading classes, to be implemented across Wales.

### **In Scotland**

- With Scottish Government funding, the Lipreading Strategy Group – through a one-year course designed by SCTTL – had trained 11 newly qualified students by summer 2013 and nine more people from across Scotland will be trained to become lipreading tutors by summer 2014.
- We are also using this funding to undertake vital research to identify the triggers and best timing for people with hearing loss to access lipreading classes.

### **In Northern Ireland**

- Further research is required to identify numbers of people who could benefit from lipreading;
- The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety need to plan to meet this need, and fund Health and Social Care Trusts to provide classes;
- A referral pathway should be agreed between audiology services and local lipreading classes;
- A longer term rehabilitation strategy should be designed to move people from the point of diagnosis, fitting of hearing aid, aftercare, lipreading, and hearing loss management to independent living
- We will use funding from the Health and Social Care Board to train 18 lipreading teachers to increase the number of qualified teachers available to deliver this support.

## References

Annual Survey Report (2010) RNID

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/annual-survey-of-members.aspx#>

Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults (ATLA)

<http://www.lipreading.org.uk/index.php>

Not just lip service (2013) Action on Hearing Loss

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/not-just-lip-service.aspx>

Paying lip service (2010) RNID

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/blogs/our-guest-blog/paying-lip-service.aspx>

Read my Lips (2010) RNID Scotland

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/about-us/scotland/policy-and-research/research.aspx>

Read my Lips (2011) Action on Hearing Loss Northern Ireland

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/about-us/northern-ireland/lipreading-in-northern-ireland.aspx>