

Key recommendations

Our study has identified a number of everyday inclusion barriers facing people who are deaf or hard of hearing in Wales. RNID Cymru has developed the following general recommendations as key areas where action is needed in order to bring down the barriers facing people who are deaf or hard of hearing in Wales. Specific recommendations for the four key study areas can be found at the end of every section.

We believe that following and achieving these recommendations are vital in order to ensure that people who are deaf or hard of hearing have equal opportunity in Wales.

1. Accredited deaf awareness training for all frontline staff

The issue of a lack of deaf awareness amongst frontline staff was raised by the majority of study participants when accessing a range of services. Ensuring all frontline staff in public services and service-providing organisations receive accredited deaf awareness training will help bring down barriers facing people who are deaf or hard of hearing when accessing services. Deaf awareness training can give staff a better understanding of the needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing as well as enhancing their communication skills. It is vital that training is repeated regularly in order to ensure that staff do not forget the skills learnt and to reflect the possible turnover in staff.

2. Implement the Welsh Assembly Government's Delivering in BSL: Advice for Public Services

Participants who use BSL or SSE identified a number of barriers in accessing communication support for a range of activities, including attending parents' evenings, medical appointments and Job Centre Plus interviews. Poor communication in service settings can lead to a poor quality of service. Participants also raised issues such as a lack of information in BSL, and a lack of understanding regarding booking an appropriate interpreter. We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to further promote the advice developed in its 2006 publication, Delivering in British Sign Language: Advice for Public Services to public services across Wales. Further, we call on public services to implement the advice provided, and ensure accessible and equitable services for people who use BSL.

3. Induction loop systems fitted, maintained and regularly tested

Participants who are hard of hearing raised some problems they had experienced relating to induction loops systems and shared examples of theatres, banks and train stations where induction loops are advertised but are not turned on, maintained, or staff trained in their operation. There were several shared experiences of frustration and isolation as a result. It is vital, therefore, that public services and service-providing organisations ensure that induction loops are fitted, maintained and regularly tested in order to enable more people who use hearing aids to access a range of activities, from enjoying a theatre production to buying a ticket at the train station. Further, all staff should be trained in their operation.

4. More opportunities for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to take part in art, entertainment and cultural activities

Barriers identified by the study to taking part in art, entertainment and cultural activities included a lack of accessible performances, induction loops not being maintained and a lack of accessible information on activities. We call on art, leisure and entertainment venues across Wales to review the opportunities offered to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. We also call on venues to engage with people who are deaf or hard of hearing regarding the activities, opportunities and events they would like to see held in their area.

5. Public services and service-providing organisations aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

The study has shown that a number of public services and service-providing organisations could be breaching the Disability Discrimination Act in their provision for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Clear examples were provided when 'reasonable adjustments' were not being made when providing services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. We call on all public services and service-providing organisations to be aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and ensure that the needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing are met by the services they provide.



Open to all?

Barriers facing people who are deaf or hard of hearing in Wales

In 2009, RNID Cymru received funding from the Welsh Assembly Government New Ideas Fund to undertake a research project into the everyday inclusion barriers facing people who are deaf or hard of hearing in Wales. The study was carried out between 1 April and 31 December 2009.

Standard research methods were used during the study. These included a self-completion questionnaire and five open forum focus groups held across Wales. Almost 600 (590) people who are deaf or hard of hearing took part in the study.

The questionnaire asked about people's experiences of:

- using public services and service-providing organisations
- using public transport
- access to arts, entertainment and leisure activities
- employment and training opportunities.

The open forums were held following preliminary analysis of the questionnaires. The forums debated the main issues raised and also provided an opportunity to identify to what extent people who are deaf or hard of hearing experience isolation, exclusion and prejudice.

RNID Cymru would like to thank all participants for taking the time to share their thoughts, views and experiences.

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Access to public transport

Public transport is essential for providing access to employment, social events, health services, education and leisure pursuits. Three fifths (61%) of questionnaire respondents had used public transport provided by local authorities in the past year.

The same proportion (61%) of respondents believe that being deaf or hard of hearing makes it harder to use public transport, while 66% believe it makes it harder to use public transport when they're on their own. A lack of deaf awareness by public transport staff was identified as the main barrier to using public transport by nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents. Over a quarter (28%) identified a lack of accessible information, while nearly a quarter (24%) identified the attitude of service providers as a barrier.

Over two fifths of respondents (41%) have been on a train in the past year. While over a quarter (27%) said it was difficult to get information before travelling by train, over two fifths (42%) find it difficult during the journey. These figures were substantially higher amongst respondents who use BSL or SSE, with 60% finding it difficult to get information before the journey and nearly three quarters (72%) finding it difficult during the journey.

Open forum participants highlighted specific barriers to travelling by train. They raised the fact that there are no real-time visual information displays. This is not only in stations and stops but also in carriages. They also noted that they found it difficult to hear audible announcements. As a result, participants felt that they had to rely on the reaction of other travellers, which also led to confusion and unease when travelling.

Seven in ten (70%) of respondents have travelled on a bus or coach in the past year. Nearly one fifth of respondents (18%) said it was difficult to find information before travelling, while 28% said it was difficult to get information during the journey. On the whole, older open forum participants were comfortable travelling by bus because they have a free bus pass, so getting on the bus is much easier. However, open forum participants under 30 years old identified a lack of deaf awareness amongst bus drivers as a barrier and, as a result, their negative attitudes towards travellers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Over two fifths (44%) of questionnaire respondents have used a taxi or a mini cab in the past year. Of respondents, one fifth (20%) said it was difficult to find information before travelling, while over a quarter (28%) said it was difficult during the journey. Again, a higher percentage of

Key findings

Access to public services and service-providing organisations

Over four fifths (84%) of questionnaire respondents believe that being deaf or hard of hearing makes it harder for them to use services. A lack of deaf awareness was identified as the main barrier to using services by nearly 80% of respondents, while over a third (36%) identified the attitude of services providers as a barrier.

Over 90% of respondents had accessed services provided by local authorities, the health service, banks and post offices in the past year.

Nearly a quarter (23%) said it was difficult to get information about services provided by local authorities. When discussing local authority services, open forum participants raised the need for specialist social workers for deaf people in every local authority as well as the lack of lipreading classes across Wales.

About one in six (15%) said it was difficult to get information about health services. The figure rose to nearly half (45%) of respondents who use British Sign Language (BSL) and Sign

Supported English (SSE) in response to this question. When discussing the health service, open forum participants raised a number of barriers to accessing services. Participants with different degrees of hearing loss noted a lack of visual information displays in waiting rooms, and shared how their hearing loss was not clearly marked on medical records. Participants who use BSL or SSE felt that there was still a lack of understanding regarding the need to provide interpreters for appointments, and a need to consider the interpreter preference of patients within the health service.

One in ten of respondents said it was difficult to get information about services provided by post offices and banks. However, the figure rose to one in three (33%) of respondents who use BSL or SSE. Open forum participants highlighted that induction loop systems were often turned off or not maintained in branches and shared difficulties in conducting enquiries over the telephone.

Overall, a large proportion of study participants, and in particular those who use BSL or SSE, have difficulty in obtaining information about a range of services provided by public services and service-providing organisations.



respondents who use BSL or SSE noted that they found it difficult to get information. Open forum participants raised the issue of a lack of deaf awareness amongst taxi drivers and the difficulty as a result in communicating with them.

Our study has identified that a large proportion of respondents have difficulty obtaining information before and during their journey when using public transport. Participants identified travelling by train as the most difficult.

Access to art, entertainment and leisure activities

An opportunity to access cultural, entertainment and sporting activities is central to leading a full and active life for all. Four fifths (79%) of questionnaire respondents believe that being deaf or hard of hearing makes it harder for them to take part in art, entertainment and leisure activities.

Nearly half of questionnaire respondents (46%) noted a lack of deaf awareness as the main barrier to going to the theatre. Nearly two fifths of respondents (37%) identified a lack of captioned / subtitled performances. This figure rose to over half (54%) of respondents who use BSL or SSE. Nearly half (45%) respondents who are hard of hearing identified a lack of induction loops or loops being switched off as a barrier. Open forum

participants highlighted these issues further. They noted a lack of captioned and signed performances in their local area, while those who are hard of hearing expressed their frustration that induction loops were often turned off or not maintained.

Over half of respondents (53%) noted a lack of subtitled screenings as the main barrier to going to the cinema. Further, open forum participants' awareness of the availability of subtitled screening was low. However, those who did know about them noted that subtitled screenings were often unavailable at their local cinema and that they had to travel some distance to see a subtitled film. It was also raised that subtitled screenings were often shown at inconvenient times.

Nearly two fifths (39%) of respondents identified a lack of deaf awareness as the main barrier to visiting a museum or art gallery, while one third (34%) believed that there were no barriers. However, 45% of respondents who use BSL or SSE identified a lack of signed tours as a barrier, while a third identified a lack of accessible information.

A lack of deaf awareness was highlighted once again as the main barrier to taking part in sports and leisure activities. However, nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents believed that there were no barriers to taking part. Young open forum



participants were on the whole confident in accessing sport and leisure activities such as going to the gym. However, many participants did note that they had difficulty in communicating with staff.

Our research has clearly identified a number of barriers for people who are deaf or hard of hearing in participating in cultural and entertainment activities in particular. It has highlighted the need for venues to ensure that their activities are accessible to all.

Employment and training

Three fifths (59%) of respondents of a working age believe that their deafness makes it harder to find a job. While nearly half (45%) identified a lack of communication support as the main barrier to finding a job, about two fifths identified a lack of suitable jobs and the attitude of employers.

These issues were highlighted further during the open forums. A number of young participants noted barriers in accessing services provided by Job Centre Plus. Participants noted a lack of visual information displays in waiting rooms, of not being provided with a BSL interpreter for appointments and a lack of deaf awareness and support from members of staff.

Open forum participants also perceived the attitudes of employers as a barrier to finding work. Some participants noted that their experiences in applying for jobs often made them question if they were being prejudiced as a result of their hearing loss. Some also felt that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding amongst employers and employees regarding schemes such as Access to Work.

Those in employment shared their experiences in the workplace. Over one third (36%) find it difficult to communicate with their colleagues. Further, open forum participants said they felt isolated and excluded at work. One in three respondents of a working age received work-related training in the last year. Of those, about two fifths were provided with support or equipment or thought their trainers/tutors were deaf aware.

Our research has highlighted that often the barriers facing people who are deaf or hard of hearing in employment and training are not related to their deafness or any limitations this may impose upon them. It is advisers' and employers' lack of deaf awareness and information regarding the support available for employers and employees that stand between people who are deaf or hard of hearing and the world of work.