

Since we submitted our letter to you (re: Action on Hearing Loss) a few people have come back with some additional points:

- DEL provides to enable colleges to meet their obligations under SENDO. The Additional Support Fund (ASF) provides £4.5m per annum to colleges and in addition the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) can provide around £3m per annum to support those undertaking HE, including those participating in HE in FE Colleges
- There is deaf awareness training provided at all 6 Colleges
- The College which was awarded the Louder and Words Quality Mark – has recently been re-assessed and has successfully been awarded this status again

Grateful if you could make Committee members aware of these extra points.

Kind regards,
Karen

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Action on Hearing Loss research

Mr Robin Swann MLA

Thank you for your letter following the presentation to the Employment and Learning Committee by Action on Hearing Loss. We have responded to your queries both on facilities for those students with hearing loss across the Further Education (FE) sector and information on the student numbers over the last three years.

Details on facilities in the FE sector

The six regional FE Colleges aim to provide a supportive learning environment for all students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Each College has a Disability Policy that sets out the Colleges' commitment to both potential and existing students with a disability. All Colleges adhere to obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, Special Educational Needs Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and its statutory obligations. There are many different types of support available for students. Furthermore, some Colleges have been successful in winning awards for their provision in this area – namely the RNIB Model of Excellence and the Action on Hearing Loss 'Louder than Words' Charter Mark.

Any student who discloses a disability on their application will have an assessment of needs completed by a Disability Advisor. This assessment will take into consideration individual support requirements so a personalised plan of support can be developed. Also with assistance from College Student Support Services a disability can also be identified post the enrolment stage.

The types of services that the FE Colleges provide to learners with a hearing loss include:

- **A Sign Language Interpreter / Communication Support Worker** will facilitate communication between spoken and signed language by translating from BSL to spoken English and vice versa for student / tutor and student with other students.
- **A Learning Mentor** will assist a student with the organisation of their coursework, time management skills and exam techniques. This support is provided in a designated session outside of class time, usually for one hour on a weekly basis during term time or as agreed with the Disability Advisor.
- **Effective and appropriate use of technology** can produce major benefits for all learners. A wide range of equipment and assistive technology is available at each College. Below are some examples of equipment and technology that have been provided for students with a hearing loss:

- **Conversor:** Personal assistive listening solution for use with an existing hearing aid. This equipment can also be used by people with a hearing impairment who do not wear a hearing aid whereby sound is input directly to the ears using headphones.
- **Loop System:** Portable one-to-one amplifier system for use with T-setting hearing aids and induction receivers.
- **Smartlink:** The SmartLink is a wireless, digital listener, suitable for hearing aid wearers on the T/loop setting. It offers integrated Bluetooth technology, giving a digital link between hearing aid wearers and their Bluetooth mobile phones. It also includes three microphone options, as well as connecting remotely to hearing aids. The SmartLink offers the standard transmitter features, but gives added flexibility.

Information on facilities and services available across the FE sector are listed on our Colleges NI website <http://www.collegesni.ac.uk/Disability-Services.aspx> as well as the website for each of the six individual FE Colleges.

Numbers of students with hearing loss across the FE sector

When a student enrolls on a course they can choose to disclose a disability on their application form. On other occasions it is identified through a student's participation on a course. Over the last four years the number of students who are classed as Deaf or Hard of Hearing has been just over 400 each year.

- 2010/2011 – 438 students
- 2011/2012 – 416 students
- 2012/2013 – 405 students
- 2013/2014 – 403 students

In terms of ages of students – the proportions have remained constant over the last three years. In particular, 37% of such students are aged 19 and under, whilst 63% are aged 20 and over.

Therefore, approximately 0.4% of our 99,000 student population have a hearing loss. The NISRA census data which shows that in NI (based on 2011 census) 5% of the population stated they had a hearing loss. The Colleges will continue to do all they can to reach out and support all learners with a hearing loss and we are happy to discuss our role in this further.

I hope the above adequately answers your queries and if you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Gerard Campbell
CEO, Colleges Northern Ireland

