deafness forum of australia

POSITION STATEMENT

TITLE: COMMUNICATION ACCESS – EDUCATION FACILITIES

ISSUE:

Many education facilities (government, religious or private schools, universities, technical and further education colleges, etc.) provide inadequate communication access facilities for use by students and staff who are Deaf or hearing impaired.

All people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment have the same right to access facilities as do people with hearing. Therefore, all education facilities should provide facilities that enable Deaf and hearing impaired people to hear (or see) all sounds that they need to hear. If Deaf and hearing impaired people are to participate in education, they will also need such facilities in all classrooms, meeting rooms, lecture theatres, assembly halls and auditoria, whether or not they are equipped with sound amplification systems. Failure to provide equitable access to such facilities means the person who is Deaf or has a hearing impairment is discriminated against. It is illegal to discriminate against people on the basis of their hearing/deafness disability. The Disability Discrimination Act (and pending DDA Standards on Access to Education) is the relevant legislation. If there are legislative provisions to provide particular facilities, such as emergency or fire alarms, then again those facilities must be accessible to all.

It is possible to provide communication access through the provision of the right equipment. For example, it is possible to purchase or hire hearing augmentation systems designed for use by people who are hearing impaired. It is possible to purchase Teletext-enabled TV sets so that captions may be displayed (and to obtain DVDs or videos with captions for the Deaf and hearing impaired). It is possible to purchase telephones with volume control, and portable telephone amplifiers and couplers. It is possible to purchase emergency or smoke alarms and a range of other devices that attract attention via flashing lights or vibrations rather than via sounds. A range of affordable solutions exists.

There is no valid reason why operators of education facilities cannot provide adequate communication access for all users who need it.

POSITION:

That, regardless of whether or not there are particular legislative requirements:

1. All education facilities shall have appropriate means in place to ensure that all Deaf or hearing impaired users of those facilities (including staff) will be alerted to any danger (e.g. fire, bomb threat), and to any evacuation drill or system test, within the premises at the same time as all other users. Appropriate means for

emergency or fire alerts might be alarms with flashing lights and portable vibration pagers.

2. All education facilities shall provide (as required by students or staff):

- Functioning assistive listening systems (ALS), such as Sound Field, Induction Loop (IL), Frequency Modulated (FM), or Infrared (IR) systems, to enable all students who need ALS to clearly hear teachers, tutors, lecturers and other students without reverberation or background noise, and for all students using the provided ALS:

  a) stetoclip or light weight headphones (for students without telecoils or without hearing aids) and
  b) inductive neck loops (for students with telecoils). (Receivers with inductive neck loops are not required where IL covers the area.)

- Real-time captioning systems to enable all students who need such systems to follow what all teachers, tutors, lecturers and other students say.

- Auslan interpreters to enable Deaf students who need such interpreters to follow what is said by all teachers, tutors, lecturers and other students, and to contribute to themselves.

- Access to captioning on television sets and video display facilities being used for any teaching purpose.

- Where telephones (including payphones) are provided for staff or students:

  - voice telephones shall have:
  a) built-in or clip-on amplifiers (minimum of 20dB gain compared to a standard telephone as defined by Telecommunications legislation) and
  b) telecoil couplers (minimum field strength of 100mA/m) and
  c) flashing lights to alert the user to the fact that the telephone is ringing

  - text facility using Baudot 50 (such as TTYs) compatible with TTYs complying with EIA/TIA-825, and compatible with the National Relay Service. In addition, flashing lights shall be provided to alert the user to the fact that the text telephone is ringing.

3. All education facilities shall implement:

- Ongoing maintenance and checking of all communication access equipment (particularly visual warning indicators) and procedures, including making sure that captioning on television sets is always on.

- Procedures to ensure an adequate supply of spare parts and supplies for all communication access equipment.

- Promotion of the existence of installed communication access facilities to all students, staff, and visitors by in-house signage, Website information, and facility directory listings. Signage shall encourage students and staff to make their needs known.

- Use of the International Symbol for Deafness where appropriate to identify:
  - the existence of hearing (communication) access
  - the types of system available
  - which areas are covered by the system
  - where to obtain receivers and attachments needed to use a system

4. All staff shall ascertain the needs of students and visitors, and ensure they are met.

5. All staff shall be trained in the use of all communication access equipment, including basic maintenance.

6. All staff, students, and visitors should make their specific communication access needs known to the education facility operators if they expect them to be met. Ideally, this should occur at the time of commencing employment or education. (This does not remove the obligation of the education facility to make necessary provisions.)

Explanations:

1. People with telecoils in their hearing aids need telecoil couplers for telephone access. They are built in to some telephones. Many phones that are fitted with telecoils are of insufficient strength.

2. People without telecoils in their hearing aids (or without hearing aids at all) need built-in or clip-on amplifiers for telephone access.

3. Adequate volume control for the majority of hearing impaired people is 20 dB gain compared to a standard telephone as defined by telecommunications legislation.

4. Telephones with the 20dB gain usually have built in telecoils of sufficient strength, and do not require clip-on amplifiers or clip-on telecoil couplers.

5. Wherever flashing lights are used to alert people, they must be visible from all parts of a venue or meeting room.

COSTS OF POSITION:

The costs of implementing this position statement will vary depending on the size of the education facility, the solutions chosen and the purchasing power of the facility operator.

RESEARCH BASIS:

The availability of the range of communication access facilities referred to in the position statement is known. A large percentage of respondents to a Hearing Access Standards Project survey conducted by the Deafness Forum in 2003 identified needs for all of the facilities referred to in this Position Statement.

APPROVED: Board 1 April 2005.

REVIEWED: No review yet undertaken.

DATE OF NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW: No further review yet scheduled.