



Supporting Adolescents in Transition to Post-School Education and Employment – Part 2

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Key facts

- ❖ Employers and educational institutions are obliged by law to provide “reasonable adjustments” to ensure equal opportunity and access to education and employment for people with disabilities;
- ❖ Young people who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) need to advocate on their own behalf once they leave school and need well-developed self-advocacy skills in order to achieve success in post-school education and employment;
- ❖ Social and emotional wellbeing and identity issues can become problematic for some D/HH adolescents and can have a detrimental effect on transition;
- ❖ Collaboration between teachers of the deaf and schools’ careers personnel is essential to ensure that D/HH students receive transition and career guidance that includes deafness-related issues.

Postsecondary education

Under the Disability Standards for Education (2005), Australian educational institutions are legally required to take reasonable steps to ensure access to enrolment, participation in courses and programs, general student support services, and specialised disability services. Supports available to students who are D/HH at universities and colleges of further education can include:

- ❖ Auslan interpreting
- ❖ Live captioning services
- ❖ Note-taking services
- ❖ Alternative exam arrangements
- ❖ Specialised tutoring
- ❖ Reasonable adjustments for professional placements, internships and other workplace arrangements
- ❖ Transcription of audio visual material if not already captioned
- ❖ Audio loops

However, many students with hearing loss do not access the disability services in postsecondary education. Students may choose not to do this because they do not identify themselves as a person with a disability, they do not identify as deaf, and/or they think they do not need any supports. Some students are unaware of accommodations that could help them and what they may need in new learning environments that are very different from school.^{1 2 3} Young people will be best prepared to succeed in university or TAFE if they make an appointment with the institution’s disability support office before beginning their course, if they have good communication and social skills, and if they make the most of accommodations available as well as services available to all students.^{2 4}

Employment

Many jobs that people who are D/HH would have been unable to do in the past are today possible with the use of technological and other accommodations. It can be helpful for students to explore websites such as Aussie Deaf Kids (www.aussiedeafkids.org.au), Deaf ConnectEd (www.deafconnected.com.au), Job Access (www.jobaccess.gov.au), and Hear For You (<http://hearforyou.com.au>), which all have examples and stories of people who are D/HH in a variety of jobs and careers.

Under Australian legislation (the Disability Discrimination Act 1992) employers are required to make reasonable adjustments or accommodations to enable a person with a disability to perform the “inherent requirements” of a job. Many adjustments are simple and cost little or nothing, such as improving lighting or re-arranging furniture so that a person with hearing loss can see others better in the workplace.⁵ Others may involve more cost. The Employment Assistance Fund, a federal government initiative through Job Access, provides funds to people with disability or their employer for adjustments such as adaptive equipment for the workplace, information and communication devices, Auslan interpreting, live captioning, and deafness awareness training to co-workers.

Self-advocacy

In order to obtain needed accommodations, young people who are D/HH need to be able to advocate on their own behalf once they leave school. The ability to be an effective self-advocate requires well-developed communication, negotiation and social skills. For young people who are D/HH, the specific self-advocacy skills and knowledge that help in their transition to post-school life include:

- ❖ Understanding their own hearing loss and strategies to address their communication challenges, and being able to explain these
- ❖ Best use and maintenance of their hearing aids, cochlear implants, and any other listening devices
- ❖ Awareness of appropriate accommodations in workplace and postsecondary education settings
- ❖ Ability to identify and access technological and other supports and accommodations
- ❖ Understanding their legal rights in postsecondary education and the workplace
- ❖ Knowing when and how to request help
- ❖ Knowing how and deciding when to disclose their hearing loss

Research has found that good self-advocacy skills are associated with better outcomes in post-school education and employment for people who are D/HH.²⁻⁵

Identity issues in adolescence

When D/HH children reach adolescence, their social and emotional wellbeing can become more problematic as they struggle with issues around their identity as a D/HH person, self-consciousness about their hearing aids or cochlear implants, and fitting in with hearing peers.⁶⁻⁸ These difficulties can have a negative impact on their social self-concept and their self-efficacy in the area of career planning and decision-making.⁹ They may be reluctant to wear hearing aids or use assistive devices. They are often also

reluctant to talk about these matters with anyone, and yet a collaborative conversation with an adult who is prepared to listen and understand can have an important positive impact. One way that professionals such as teachers of the deaf can establish a good dialogue about these things is to use a questionnaire as a basis for a conversation. The “Self-Assessment of Communication – Adolescent” checklist taps into D/HH teenagers’ perceptions and feelings about their hearing loss and can be the starting point of a helpful conversation between professionals and students.¹⁰

In-school collaboration to ensure deafness-specific transition and career guidance

D/HH school-leavers, including those with mild or moderate losses and those who have cochlear implants, are likely to face additional challenges and barriers in their post-school life, and need to have appropriate support and preparation in addition to their regular career curriculum and planning. In Australia, an estimated 85% of D/HH school students attend regular schools where they receive visiting teacher of the deaf support. In these settings they may be the only D/HH student in the school.¹¹ In general, students in these mainstream settings are unlikely to receive specialised, deafness-specific transition instruction or planning and there are considerable challenges in reaching these students with the specialised transition support that may benefit them.¹²

Collaboration between teachers of the deaf and school personnel working with secondary students on their career planning (careers counselors or advisors, year coordinators, etc.) is necessary for optimizing the transition of D/HH students. In schools with facilities or units for students who are D/HH, this is likely to occur regularly. However, in schools where there is a D/HH student with a visiting teacher of the deaf, it may be less common. The careers personnel may have no prior experience with students with hearing loss. Liaison between these personnel and the student’s visiting teacher of the deaf is therefore essential. Input from the teacher of the deaf can increase the career personnel’s understanding of the hearing-related challenges D/HH students are likely to face in post-school employment and education.

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