



# PROTOCOL

## For meetings & events

**How to run meetings & events so they can be accessed by people of all hearing abilities, including those who are deaf**





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# Foreword

## Professor Ian Welsh OBE, Chief Executive, Health & Social Care Alliance Scotland

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, Disability Equality Scotland, deafscotland and Ideas for Ears share the viewpoint that inclusivity and access are paramount to an individual's contribution within the workplace and in terms of access to social, leisure, learning and cultural activities. Around 1 million people across Scotland, and 11 million throughout the United Kingdom, live with a degree of hearing loss, and many face barriers in terms of communication and information gathering, often leading to frustration, seclusion and marginalisation.

The Hearing Access Protocol is designed to enable organisers of work related meetings and other events to comply with their own organisational policies around access and inclusion in a way which recognises language and communication as fundamental rights and unlocks these enablers, enshrining equality and human rights legislation for all.

I am delighted to welcome this protocol which sets out a concise and practical toolkit for organisations and event planners to follow. At the heart of this work are the core values of inclusivity, courtesy and etiquette. The Hearing Access Protocol serves not only as an essential framework for colleagues with sensory loss, but also builds towards an architecture of inclusivity for all, within which we may communicate, collaborate and contribute to our full potential.

**Prof Ian Welsh OBE**  
**Chief Executive of the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland**

## Endorsed by

Janis McDonald, Chief Officer, deafscotland



deafscotland is Scotland's lead deafness organisation (formerly Scottish Council on Deafness).

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Disability Equality Scotland is a national charity that works to achieve a fully accessible and inclusive Scotland.

# Introduction

Meetings and events should be accessible to everyone, whatever their hearing ability. Anyone can be affected by hearing, listening and communication environments that are unsuitable for meetings and events. Unsatisfactory experiences can result from poor acoustics, a presenter who is hard to understand, background noise, and sub-standard audio-visual materials, amongst other things.

For people who have hearing loss, these sorts of issues have a particularly big impact. Consequently, it is affecting the way people access, participate in and contribute to meetings and events, which impacts on the effectiveness and productivity of those meetings and events, and which potentially also breaches equality and human rights legislation.

## Making adjustments

Most meetings and events, if they are inclusive and representative of the general population, will include people with hearing loss. The hearing, listening and communication needs of this group is not uniform and cannot be covered off by a single adjustment. However, many of the needs of these individuals will be met through the adoption of practices and processes that are sensible and beneficial for everyone, including those with good hearing.

The Hearing Access Protocol sets out how meetings and events should be run as the norm in order to accommodate the hearing and communication needs of people with hearing loss in an effective and meaningful way.

**Note:** throughout this document the term 'hearing loss' is being used to refer to people who have any degree of hearing deficit and who elsewhere may be referred to as hard of hearing, deaf, deafened or Deaf.



## Hearing & deafness

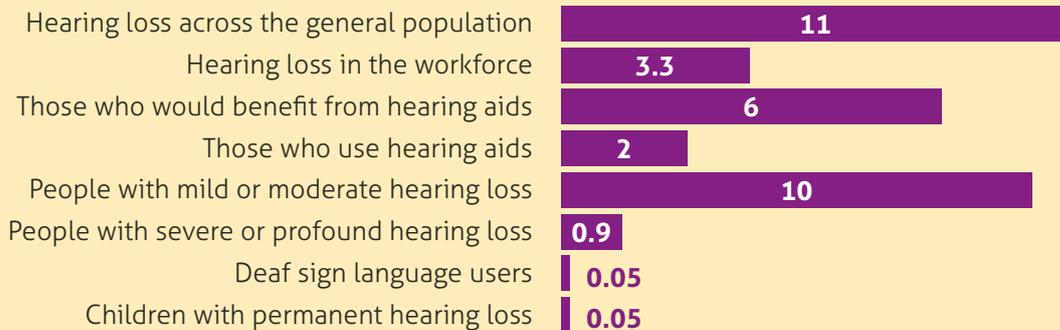
Most people with hearing loss have the capability to hear and follow things well, but will struggle or find it impossible if the meeting/event is set up or run in a way that introduces, or fails to remove, barriers. Some people also find high levels of noise not just uncomfortable but overwhelming and distressing.

Around 11 million people in the UK have some degree of hearing loss: that equates to one sixth of the general population and one tenth of the workforce. The numbers with hearing loss are growing as the population ages. Hearing loss is also becoming increasingly common amongst younger people as a consequence of noisy lifestyle choices.

Hearing loss cuts across culture, socio-economic status, ethnicity and geographic region. Severity of hearing loss can range from mild loss to profound loss. It can affect both ears or one ear. Some people use hearing aids or other hearing devices, but others do not. Many use lipreading to assist their understanding and for this they need to see the face of the speaker clearly.

People who have been deaf from a young age, and for whom sign language is their first or preferred language, may find written or spoken English hard to follow. People who have visual impairment as well as hearing loss may require a tactile form of communication to assist their understanding and access.

### Numbers by million in UK



### 11m people across the UK have hearing loss

England	9 million
Scotland	1 million
Wales	0.6 million
N.Ireland	0.3 million

## Rights & equality

Meetings and events are a necessary and important part of workplace, social, leisure, learning and cultural activities and opportunities.

The Hearing Access Protocol is a tool that will help organisers of meetings and events to comply with their own organisational policies around access and inclusion, and to also comply with equality and human rights legislation.

The Hearing Access Protocol will assist organisers to:

- Avoid discriminating against people with hearing loss under the Equality Act 2010.
- Deliver on Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 that sets out the right to information, and help them to comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities to ensure disabled people get support so they can enjoy the same rights as everyone else.
- Meet the requirements of the Patient Rights Act 2011 (in Scotland) and the Care Act 2014 (in England and Wales) by ensuring healthcare-related meetings and events can be accessed by people with hearing loss.
- Achieve inclusive communication, which requires that information is accessible as well as understandable.
- Deliver on the recommendations of June 2018 that deafscotland has set out for the public sector in Scotland regarding inclusion of people with hearing loss and deafness.



## How access impacts on participation

		Broad categories of hearing loss & what it means		
		Some hearing loss 1 in 7 people across the general population	Substantial hearing loss 1 in 70 people across the general population	Deaf sign language users 1 in 1300 people across the general population
Main beneficiary	Simplified description of the individual	Likely to identify as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having mild or moderate hearing loss</li> <li>• hard of hearing</li> <li>• hearing impaired</li> </ul> Likely not to feel or want to be referred to as 'deaf' and may be reluctant to disclose their hearing difficulties.	Likely to identify as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having severe or profound hearing loss</li> <li>• deaf or deafened</li> <li>• hearing impaired</li> </ul> Likely to be open about their hearing difficulties but may be cynical or disillusioned about the way others can or do assist them.	Likely to identify as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having little or no hearing</li> <li>• Deaf (with upper case 'D')</li> <li>• BSL user</li> </ul> Likely to use sign language as their first or preferred language and may be unable to proceed without appropriate language interpretation.
	Simplified description of their hearing experience	May not hear or catch parts of words or even full words.	May not hear or catch parts of sentences or even full sentences.	May not follow complex, or any, written or spoken English.
Impact of poor hearing access	What happens if reasonable adjustment is not made at meetings and events?	There's a real risk they may misunderstand or misinterpret what's said, resulting in mistakes and gaffes.	There's a real risk they may fail to grasp the subject matter or smaller detail, causing incomprehension and confusion.	There's a real risk they will be unable to participate at all, leaving them left out and isolated.
	How will it impact on the individual?	Access and inclusion is restricted. Leads to discomfort, stress, reduced enjoyment and exclusion.	Access and inclusion is blocked. Leads to indignity, stress, mental fatigue, and exclusion.	Access and inclusion is blocked. Leads to indignity, stress, segregation and exclusion.
Outcome of poor hearing access	Likely consequence for the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reluctance to participate</li> <li>• Avoidance of opportunities</li> <li>• Withdrawal and reduced well-being</li> </ul>		
	Likely consequence for the meeting/event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and inclusion is not achieved</li> <li>• Equality and diversity is not achieved</li> <li>• Effectiveness/productivity of meeting/event is degraded</li> </ul>		

Ideas for Ears, 2018

## Common barriers that people experience

Barriers for people with hearing loss	
<p><b>People with some hearing loss</b> (i.e. mild or moderate)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in 7 of the general population</li> <li>• 9 in 10 people with hearing loss</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background noise, especially when caused by the chatter of other people</li> <li>• Speaker facing away and/or mouth covered by hands/mug etc so not visible for lipreading</li> <li>• People not speaking clearly</li> <li>• Room acoustics being poorly managed so sound echoes/reverberates</li> <li>• Noise caused by air conditioning units, open windows and other things</li> <li>• PA system/mics not being used (at all or properly) when they should be</li> <li>• Being too far from the speaker to hear or lipread due to room layout or number of attendees</li> <li>• Failure to provide a working &amp; effective hearing loop (though this tends to be less important than provision of a PA system)</li> <li>• No written materials to support what is said</li> </ul>
<p><b>People with substantial hearing loss</b> (i.e. severe or profound)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in 70 of the general population</li> <li>• 9 in 100 people with hearing loss</li> </ul>	<p>All of the above, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a working &amp; effective hearing loop tends to be a greater barrier than lack of a PA system</li> <li>• Failure to offer/provide transcription of speech through a language professional can be as much a barrier as failure to provide written notes</li> <li>• Poor lighting for lipreading is a significant barrier</li> <li>• Failure to offer/provide support from other language professionals (e.g. Electronic Notetaker, BSL/English interpreter) can be a barrier</li> </ul>
<p><b>People who are Deaf sign language users</b> (where BSL is their first or preferred language)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in 1,300 of the general population</li> <li>• 1 in 200 people with hearing loss</li> </ul>	<p>Some of the above, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker facing away or not speaking clearly</li> <li>• Being too far from the speaker to lipread</li> <li>• Poor lighting for lipreading</li> <li>• No written notes to support what is said</li> <li>• Failure to offer/provide support from a BSL interpreter</li> </ul> <p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness that BSL is a separate language that is unrelated to English and does not translate in a literal way.</li> <li>• Lack of provision of inclusive written materials that are suitable for people for whom English is not their main language.</li> </ul>



# The Protocol

## Principles of the Hearing Access Protocol

### Core belief:

- Meetings and events should be accessible to everyone, whatever their hearing ability.

### Basic principles:

- Hearing access is influenced by the venue, the facilities/equipment made available, and the way the meeting or event is structured and run.
- Many of the adjustments that people with hearing loss require are sensible and beneficial for everyone.
- Poor hearing access can be difficult or impossible for an individual to overcome through their own actions alone e.g. use of hearing aids, listening intently, sitting in a particular place.

### General ethos

Responsibility is shared across the organiser, presenter/s, and attendees.

- Organiser is responsible for the choice of venue, provision of equipment, room set-up, and the way things run.
- Presenter/speaker is responsible for their own delivery and the effectiveness with which they use assistive equipment.
- Attendee is responsible for managing their own hearing needs and for being supporting of (or at least avoiding hindering) the hearing needs of other attendees.

## Features of good practice

Important characteristics of a meeting or event that is run according to the Hearing Access Protocol are as follows:

1. Attendees will be asked and reminded to speak clearly and to look at listeners.
2. Names, dates and other important detail will be shared in writing as well as verbally.
3. A PA sound system of adequate sound quality will be in place if there are more than 12 people attending and/or attendees are spread across a distance of more than 4m.
4. A properly working hearing loop will be made available if the meeting space is noisy or has poor acoustics or there are more than 8 people in the room and/or attendees will be spread across a distance of more than 3m.
5. All speakers will be asked to use a microphone, if a sound system is in use.
6. The organiser should be able to offer information in advance of the meeting/event about the quality of the hearing loop.
7. The organiser should be able to offer information in advance of the meeting/event about the venue acoustics and noise levels.
8. The organiser will be aware that hearing needs can be diverse and open to assisting individual experiences where possible.
9. The organiser will have procedures in place for responding to requests for additional adjustments relating to hearing and deafness.
10. Feedback forms will include questions about how easy it was to hear and follow things.





# The 5 Must-Do's

Guidelines for those attending a meeting or event

## 1. Speak so you can be heard and understood

- **Face your listeners, project your voice, and avoid covering your mouth.** Look at your listeners rather than at a presentation screen, notebook or other item. Do your best to speak with sufficient clarity and volume. Keep your face visible, if possible, so listeners can use lip shape and facial expression to assist them in following what is said.
- **Speak one at a time.** Avoid talking over each other. It can be difficult for listeners to decipher what is being said if there is more than once voice.
- **Be aware of your pace and that listeners may not keep up.** Avoid speaking quickly, especially if speaking with an accent that others may find hard to understand. If speaking for an extended period, check from time-to-time with your listeners how you are doing and provide recaps to assist those who may have lost the thread of what is being said.

## 2. Make use of the equipment

- **Use the microphone.** If a microphone has been made available, you should use it. Check with the organiser on how best to hold/place the microphone because models vary.
- **Write down important points.** Use a flipchart, Powerpoint, handouts and other resources to share information in writing as well as verbally. This reduce mistakes caused by mishearing and helps listeners to have confidence they have picked things up correctly.

## 3. Think about the venue you are in

- **Be aware of noise and poor acoustics.** Be extra considerate of the hearing needs of others when speaking in a room that has poor acoustics or background noise. Even slight noise or echo can make listening much more difficult. It can also create considerable discomfort for some.

- **Think about the lighting.** Glare or gloom can cause difficulties for people who use lipreading to assist them in following what is being said. Lower blinds if that helps and switch lights on after Powerpoint presentations.

## 4. Respect the dignity of others

- **Be aware that not everyone will wish to disclose their hearing needs.** Hearing loss can be hard to spot because there are often no visible signs and because people may choose not to highlight that they have hearing difficulties.
- **Speak directly to the individual not their support worker.** If an attendee has a communication professional to assist them (e.g. an electronic notetaker or a sign language interpreter), direct your conversation to the attendee not the communication professional.
- **Be helpful but avoid assumptions about others.** Be willing to make small adjustments that will have little or no impact on you, in order to accommodate particular communication or language requirements someone may require as needs can vary greatly. You should avoid assuming what support someone may require as needs vary greatly.

## 5. Give feedback

- **Offer feedback on how things went.** Let the organiser know how easily you could hear and follow the meeting/event proceedings. Do this in a collaborative rather than critical spirit. Seek to highlight the things that have worked well, as well as things that have proved challenging.



# Notes for Speakers & Presenters

Guidance to help Speakers and Presenters meet the needs of audiences made up of people with different levels of hearing ability.

## 1. Expect to speak to an audience that includes people with hearing loss

- a. Most audiences, if they are inclusive and representative of the general population, will include people with hearing loss. One sixth of the population has hearing loss and around one tenth of the workforce. The numbers with hearing loss are increasing, mainly because of the ageing population.
- b. Ability to hear varies from person to person. However, the majority of people with hearing loss have the ability to hear and follow things well or adequately if the speaker is speaking clearly, the surroundings are appropriate, and microphones (feeding into a PA system and/or hearing loop) are used as they should be. These same people are likely to struggle, or be entirely excluded, if these practices are not followed.
- c. Be aware that some people can feel sensitive about their hearing ability and may not wish to disclose or discuss when they are struggling to hear and follow things.

## 2. Specific requirements

Some individuals will require specific forms of support to be made available to assist them.

- a. Of those who have little or no hearing ability, most are not sign language users. Instead, they access information and conversation by relying heavily on lipreading, assistive technology, and communication support, such as speech-to-text transcription.
- b. People for whom sign language is their first or preferred language, may find written or spoken English hard to follow. They may require/prefer a sign language interpreter rather than text transcription to assist them in accessing meetings and events.
- c. People who have visual impairment as well as hearing loss may require a tactile form of communication support.
- d. If using PowerPoint or other visual materials, check regularly that those using communication support (e.g. text transcription, sign language interpreter) are able to follow things adequately. It is challenging to keep track of two sources of input at the same time.
- e. Where it is known that someone has a specific communication need, due consideration to their need should be given throughout the meeting / event.



## 3. Speech delivery

### 3.1. Volume

- Whilst variation in pitch, rhythm and timbre of the voice is important, make sure that volume remains adequate and constant. Guard against starting sentences at a good level and then letting the volume fall away so some words or whole sentences drop below audibility.
- Be aware that many people who use hearing aids and other devices have to manually adjust them to respond to different volumes of sound being heard. The time required to make that adjustment inevitably means that some of what's being said gets missed, which can make following things difficult.

### 3.2. Pace

- People do not just need to hear the words, they need the words to be intelligible. Guard against starting a sentence at a steady pace with clear diction and then lapsing into a faster pace where the words meld into each other.

### 3.3. Intelligibility

- Speakers who have an accent that may be unfamiliar to listeners should take extra care with pace and clarity. An unfamiliar accent requires the brain to work harder to decipher words and this adds an extra layer of difficulty for those with hearing loss.
- Check periodically that you are speaking clearly enough and at an appropriate pace. If anyone has made you aware that they have hearing loss, try to particularly seek their feedback (be aware this may need to be done discreetly to protect their dignity).
- Pause and recap from time to time so people can be confident they are following things effectively. The cognitive effort involved in listening is greater for those with hearing loss because they hear things less easily so their brain has to fill in missing bits of words and sentences. This takes a bit more time so pauses and recaps help greatly.

### 3.4. Support

- If a comment or question is put forward by someone not using a microphone or not easily heard, the speaker should first summarise or repeat the comment/question so that the response can be understood in context.
- If any audience members are using communication services (e.g. speech to text transcription or BSL/English interpretation) then check that the communication professional is comfortable with the pace. Also, be aware that they may lag behind the spoken word so you may need to pause periodically for them to catch up.

### Top Tip

**Arrange for someone in the audience to signal to you if you speak too quickly, too quietly or if the text transcription or other communication support is lagging behind.**

## 4. Face your listeners

- a. Use a flipchart, hand-out or other visual equipment to allow people to read as well as hear names, dates, numbers, acronyms and other important information. This will help those who are unsure if they're hearing the word correctly.
- b. Avoid covering your face with hands, notebooks, coffee cups etc. Beards / moustaches are much easier if they are trimmed so the lips can be seen.
- c. Room lighting should be set up so the light falls on the speaker's face. If the light is behind you (e.g. a window) then your face will be in shadow and therefore difficult to see.
- d. If it is known that someone is relying heavily on lipreading, try to restrict movement of your head and body. Avoid walking about the platform or turning around to look at your presentation slides. A podium can help keep you anchored to one spot.

## 5. Written information and hand-outs

- a. Write down names, dates, numbers, acronyms, unusual words and other important information. This will help those who are unsure if they're hearing the word correctly.
- b. Providing hand-outs to cover main points and important information helps people feel confident they have picked things up accurately. Check in advance if any audience members will require easy read materials and provide these in accordance with accessible information standards and inclusive communication principles.

### 7 common access barriers

- Presenters dipping their voice mid-way through words or sentences to create inaudible gaps for the listener.
- An increasingly fast pace of speaking as the presenter becomes more passionate and involved in the topic.
- A range of subjects or complex points being talked through without occasional recapping to assist those who missed or misheard some points.
- Listeners not having enough time to absorb the information being given.
- Key information not being written down to supplement what is being said, and hand-outs not being provided to recap on what was said.
- Presenters not summarising or repeating questions that cannot be heard by everyone so there is no context to the response that is given.
- Lengthy presentations or discussions that do not allow a rest from intensive and fatiguing listening and/or lipreading effort.



# Guidelines for Organisers

## 5 Must-Do's For Organisers

### 1. Create the right environment

- **Check the venue.** It is your responsibility to check that the venue is suitable and that the room layout, equipment, acoustics, lighting and other elements are what you require. Guidance is provided in accompanying Notes For Organisers.
- **Encourage the right mindset.** Make people aware that the Hearing Access Protocol is for the benefit of everyone and will help to ensure that all attendees have a positive and productive experience. Highlight it at the beginning of the meeting or event and flag up any aspects that are particularly relevant to that occasion.

### 2. Allow people to make an informed decision

- **Advertise the Hearing Access Protocol.** If you intend following the Hearing Access Protocol, say this in the promotion materials. It will help people decide whether to attend.
- **Be ready with information about what you can / cannot provide.** The individual is the best person to determine if your meeting will be accessible to them so pass on as much relevant detail as you can.
- **Invite people to alert you to specific or additional requirements.** Hearing loss varies greatly so make it easy for those who require a particular adjustment to ask for it. For instance, provision of an electronic notetaker or a sign language interpreter. Ensure they know of the arrangements made in response to their request so they are aware of the situation before they attend.

### 3. Be in control of equipment and support

- **Make it easy to share written information.** Provide name badges or find some other way to let people see names of presenters and participants written down. Provide an agenda or programme to guide people on what is happening and when. Provide a flipchart so important points can be noted down as the meeting or event unfolds. Share hand-outs that cover the main points.

- **Check that the sound system/s work.** Test the PA system and/or hearing loop system, if they're being used, and also check the microphone/s. If an alternative system to a hearing loop is being made available (e.g. an infrared system) then let attendees know in advance as it may affect their access.
- **Know how you will accommodate specific requirements.** Have procedures in place for booking communication and language professionals, such as Electronic Notetakers and Sign Language Interpreters, for attendance of assistance dogs and for other requests that may come up
- **Offer your help.** Not everyone is aware of solutions that can help them to hear better and they may be inexperienced in using equipment. For example, not all hearing aid users know the value of a hearing loop and not all will have a loop/t-setting on their hearing aid/s to allow them to use it. Be ready to provide basic instruction on any equipment being provided.

### 4. Have a suitable level of awareness and knowledge

- **Avoid assumptions.** Do not assume that you will be able to tell when someone isn't hearing well. People can become very adept at bluffing and can appear to hear even when they do not.
- **Respect people's dignity and privacy.** Avoid placing individuals in a position of scrutiny or vulnerability by highlighting their hearing limitations to the wider group, unless you have their permission to do so.
- **Build your skills.** Consider developing greater skills in communicating with people who have hearing loss through deaf awareness training and BSL training.

### 5. Request feedback

- **Proactively gather feedback on hearing-related issues.** Make it standard procedure to ask questions about the ease of being able to hear and follow proceedings rather than waiting for it to emerge unasked for. This will prompt those unused to commenting on the subject and will also encourage those who may feel sensitive or shy about raising any concerns they may have.



# Guidelines: Before Meeting/Event

## 1. Get things right *BEFORE* the meeting / event

Guidance to help Organisers plan the meeting/event.

### 1.1. Choose the room

- a. **Pick a venue that has good acoustics.** A clap test in the room when it is empty should reveal no echo. Rooms with carpets, soft furnishings and absorbent ceiling panels are likely to be fine. Those with lots of hard reflective surfaces are not.
- b. **Pick a room that will be quiet.** Check use of adjacent rooms and find out what the noise levels are like if a window is opened. Also, be mindful that the hum of air condition units or heaters can be unsettling to some.
- c. **Ask the venue to provide a quiet space** (e.g. a separate room or a 'sheltered' area created by 2 or 3 free-standing noise-absorbent panels) so people can choose to move to a space where there is less background noise during group discussions, breaks and networking sessions.

### Are you aware?

**Echo and noise make listening more tiring and difficult.**

- Even slight echo can significantly increase listening effort (and stress) for hearing aid users, and other hearing device users. This will reduce ability to accurately hear conversation.
- Noise creates discomfort for those with sound sensitivity and makes listening a struggle for others who find it hard to pick out speech/ words they want to hear from rest of the background noise.
- Modern hearing aids (and other hearing devices) are technological marvels but they still struggle to work well in noisy places. They tend to amplify speech along with unwanted noise, which can make listening uncomfortable, tiring and difficult.

## 1.2. Sort out the sound system

- a. **Determine if you need a PA system, a hearing loop, or both.** The 'rules of thumb' will guide you on this. See yellow information box below and overleaf.
- b. **Check that the PA system and/or hearing loop works effectively.** Do this as far in advance as possible in case maintenance is needed. See Section 1.3 for guidance on checking a hearing loop.
- c. **Check the number and type of microphones that are available.** If there is a fixed microphone, check where it is positioned so you can position the people speaking or presenting as close as possible to it. See Section 1.4.
- d. **If you are offering a hearing loop, double check it really is a hearing loop.** Venues can misunderstand what they offer and may say they offer a hearing loop when in fact they are providing an infra-red system. They are not the same thing and this has implications for access. See blue information box. See Section 1.3 below.
- e. **Check there is signage in the room.** If a hearing loop is being made available, there must be signage to alert people to it. Potential users need to switch their hearing aid / device to a different setting to pick up the hearing loop sound. They will not know a hearing loop is available unless they are told about it.
- f. **Let people know if a hearing loop will/will not be provided.** If a portable hearing loop, infrared system or some alternative is to be offered instead then you should also make this clear. It may affect whether someone wishes to attend or not.

### Rule of Thumb: for PA systems

#### Rule 1:

A PA system should be provided where there are more than 12 people in the room and/or attendees will be spread across a distance of more than 4m.

#### Rule 2:

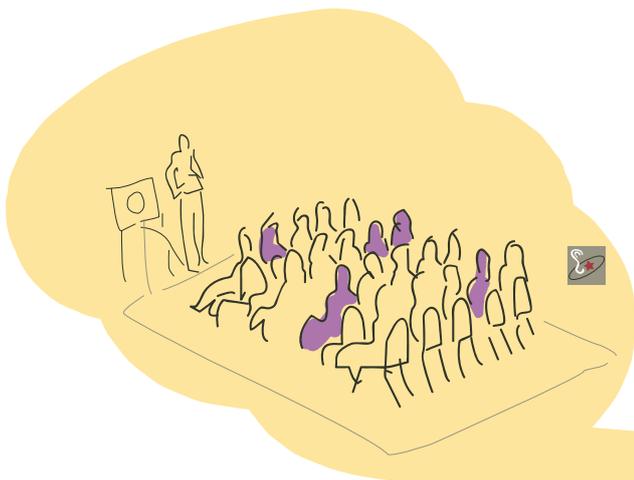
A PA system should also be made available in instance where it is specifically requested for a relevant reason e.g. a hearing loop is not available or not of a sufficient quality to be effective.

### Are you aware?

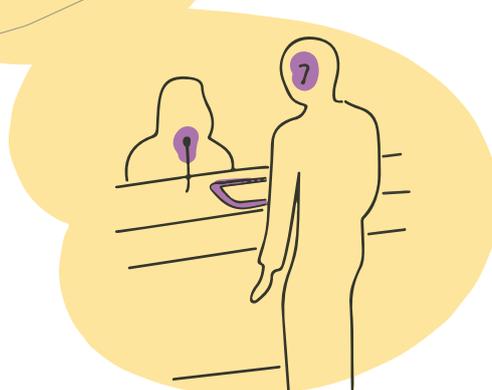
People's voices typically reach between 1 and 4 metres when speaking conversationally. Quality of listening will depend on how clearly and loudly the speaker speaks, the distance they are from the listener, levels of background noise, quality of acoustics, and the hearing ability of the listener.

### 1.3. Check the hearing loop

- a. **Establish that it really is a hearing loop** (sometimes also called an 'induction loop') and that it is available in the room/s being used. A common alternative to a hearing loop is an infra-red system. These are not the same thing. See yellow information box overleaf.
- b. **Check it has been recently tested.** Ideally, four or more hearing aid users should have scored it at least 7 out of 10 for sound quality (including speech clarity, listening comfort or tone purity, and volume). Handheld loop testing equipment does not provide the same assurance of efficacy, even if it is carried out by a trained engineer.
- c. **Check if there are known 'dead spots'** where loop signal is weak so that you can direct users to avoid them.
- d. **Know what type of hearing loop is being provided.** Ideally, you want a 'fixed hearing loop'. Avoid a cable-free portable hearing loop.
  - **Fixed hearing loop.** This is permanently in place in the room and is easily switched on. This is the preferred solution.
  - **Temporary room loop.** This involves cables being laid out and stuck down to the floor in advance of the meeting. Loop users are required to sit within the area delineated by the loop cable. Sound quality can become degraded by repeated manual handling, and there is a need to lay the cables safely and effectively before the meeting.
  - **Cable-free portable hearing loop.** This can sometimes be seen sitting on a shelf in a public place waiting to be used. It is rarely used because it has limited value. It is only a solution for very specific situations so take care with how/when you offer it.



Fixed or temporary room loop, with cable running around the room, or at a desk or table



Cable-free portable loop



## Rule of Thumb: for hearing loops

### Rule 1:

A hearing loop should be available in any meeting space that has poor acoustics (or any echo) or where there is background noise. E.g. if you want to meet in a lobby area or workplace café then a fixed localised hearing loop (of the sort provided a reception desks or ticket offices) should be provided to make this a suitable meeting place for hearing aid users.

### Rule 2:

In a quiet venue, a fixed hearing loop should be made available where there are more than 8 people in the room and/or attendees are to be spread across a distance of more than 3m and/or the room has echo/poor acoustics.

## The above rules are for guidance only.

A hearing loop should also be made available if it is specifically requested. It may be required because e.g. the individual uses a hearing aid or other device that does not have the power or sophistication to adequately pick up sound from a distance of more than 1m.

## Is it really a hearing loop?

**Hearing loops** require no equipment beyond the user having hearing aids with a Loop or T-setting. Fixed and temporary hearing loops are easy and dignified to use, assuming they work as they should. A cable-free portable hearing loop is less likely to be effective and dignified in a group setting.

**Infra-red systems** are a common alternative to a hearing loop. They require the use of additional equipment (headsets or neck loops) that are supplied by the venue. They can be helpful in specific settings but are less desirable for a variety of practical, effectiveness and dignity reasons.

**App-based digital systems** are fairly new and not widely tested. Most hearing aid users will be required to use a headset or neck loop (supplied by venue) so this could result in practical and dignity barriers.

### Take a moment to check.

As an organiser, it is ESSENTIAL that you know what is to be provided prior to advertising a meeting/event. Venue staff often wrongly describe what they have available. A misunderstanding at the point of advertising the event/meeting can lead to negative issues on the day as expectations may have been raised, which then cannot be met.

### 1.4. Check the microphone arrangements

- a. **Check on the number and type of microphones.** These should be adequate to pick up the voices of all speakers, including those who offer comments or questions from the floor/ audience. See information box.
- b. **Ensure you are clear about how best to use the microphones being provided.** Instructions should be made available to users because they differ in the distance they should be placed from the mouth in order to get best results.
- c. **Avoid microphones that need to be placed right in front of the mouth.** This will introduce a barrier for those using lipreading to assist them.

### Microphone options

**Suspended microphone.** This microphone is fixed / hung from the ceiling. The speaker should be placed as close as possible beneath it.

**Lapel microphones.** Fixed to clothing so they sit close to the speaker's mouth. Check clothing doesn't catch on it when the speaker moves.

**Fixed or handheld microphones.** Avoid models that require the speaker to hold them very close to the mouth, obstructing the view of lipreaders. The speaker should be asked (and reminded) to speak directly into it.

**Headset microphones.** These tend to give the best results because voices don't get lost when the speaker's head moves. However, they can be tricky or impossible for a hearing aid or glasses wearer to use because it goes over the ears.

**Roving microphones.** These should be available (and used) in events where questions or comments from the floor or audience are taken.

**Multiple microphones.** These should be used in larger meetings/events to ensure everyone can be heard.

**Ask the speaker/presenter** Check requirements with the speaker/presenter. For example, if there is a need for them to move around during their session then a fixed, static microphone will not be suitable.

### 1.5. Check the audio visual equipment

- a. If audio equipment is to be used (e.g. video conferencing unit or conference room phone) then the quality should allow people to hear and follow things effectively.
- b. Check if the sound can be broadcast through the PA sound system and if it can (and assuming it enhances the sound quality) use this option.
- c. Check that the sound can be linked to the induction hearing loop system so it can be heard more effectively by hearing aid users.
- d. Check if the venue makes headsets available to enhance listening over a distance. If so, make this information available to attendees.
- e. If using video clips that include speech, then subtitles should be present and easily visible. The font size should be large enough to see at the back of the room.
- f. If subtitles are not already available with video, then they should be added in preparation for the meeting. Alternatively, a transcript of the speech should be prepared and be made available to anyone who wants it.

### 1.6. Check arrangements for responding to specific requirements

- a. Review your organisation's policy for providing communication/language services for those who request this support to allow them to access your meeting/event.
- b. Ensure you have an up-to-date list of communication/language professionals that can be booked to support your meeting/event if required.
- c. Check your organisation's arrangements for providing assistance dogs with water and a toileting area.

## Top tips for specific support

**Book communication support well in advance.** It can be hard to find a suitable professional at short notice as services can become booked out due to limited availability of skilled professionals.

**Check registration and qualification details.** Make sure the professional you book is appropriately trained and skilled.

**Be welcoming to assistance dogs.** Ensure you have water available and a toileting area identified. Check on the day as to whether the assistance dog owner would like your support in sharing information with other attendees as to preferred etiquette around the dog to avoid interfering with its work.

**See info box that lists options for communication & language support**



## 1.7. Provide information to attendees

- a. Provide information to advise potential attendees of access arrangements (e.g. Hearing Access Protocol will be followed) as this will encourage attendance, as well as demonstrate access and equality principles.
- b. Invite attendees to let you know if they have any additional access requirements that you should be aware of.
- c. If you are aware that you will not all aspects of the Hearing Access Protocol and/or of additional requirements that people have, then pass on this information. Attendees can then make an informed choice as to whether or not to attend. You will also manage their expectations and demonstrate a level of care.

### Suggested statement for adverts

**When advertising the meeting / event, include a statement, e.g.**

"The Hearing Access Protocol will be followed". **And perhaps add:** A PA system and hearing loop will be available. The venue has good acoustics. Attendees are welcome to bring their own wireless technologies to assist their listening experiences."

### Top tips for offering support

**Transcription of speech to text** – verbatim transcription (i.e. word-for-word) is provided by a Speech To Text Reporter (STTR) using a phonetic keyboard. Real-time summaries are provided by Electronic Notetakers (ENT) using a standard keyboard. Both options involve a trained professional listening to what is said and simultaneously converting this to text, which can be displayed on a digital screen. They can attend a meeting/event in person or by listening via a web link. Find out more: [www.nrcpd.org.uk](http://www.nrcpd.org.uk)

**Manual note-taking** – professionals trained to provide this service will take a clear set of notes handwritten in English for the service user to read later. This service is often used in educational settings but can also be used in work settings like appraisals, conferences, training, and staff meetings. Find out more: [www.anpnotetakers.co.uk](http://www.anpnotetakers.co.uk)

**Lipspeaking** – a lipspeaker is a person with good hearing who has been professionally trained to be easy to lipread. The lipspeaker repeats the spoken message, either doing this silently, or using their voice. They may also use some sign language if this helps the service user. Find out more: [www.lipspeaking.co.uk](http://www.lipspeaking.co.uk)

**BSL/English Interpretation** – these highly trained professionals translate what is spoken in English into British Sign Language (BSL) and what is signed in BSL into English. Interpretation services can be provided in person or online via a webcam. Find out more: [www.nrcpd.org.uk](http://www.nrcpd.org.uk) or in Scotland, [www.sasli.co.uk](http://www.sasli.co.uk)

**Language Service Professionals for deafblind** - this involves a professional relaying a conversation to someone who has visual and hearing impairment using the deafblind manual alphabet. Find out more: [www.nrcpd.org.uk](http://www.nrcpd.org.uk)



# Guidelines: During Meeting/Event

## 2. Get things right *DURING* the meeting/event

Guidance to help Organisers deliver the meeting/event on the day.

### 2.1. Layout / seating

- Allow people to select where they sit so they can position themselves as effectively as possible for hearing, lipreading or following communication support.
- If you aware the hearing loop works best in a certain part of the venue, pass on this information.
- Position the presenters and main speakers so light falls onto their face rather than it being behind them (e.g. avoid placing them in front of a brightly lit window). This is visually more comfortable for those looking at them, especially those who use lipreading to assist them in following what is being said.

### 2.2. Lighting

- Check for glare or gloom, both of which can create uncomfortable and difficult conditions for people who use lipreading to assist them (as well as for those with visual impairment).
- Turn on lights and adjust blinds/curtains.
- If the lights are turned off for a visual presentation, turn them back on as soon as possible so those who use lipreading to assist them can see people's faces (and to aid those with visual impairment).

### 2.3. Highlight the Protocol

- Advise/remind attendees that the Protocol is being followed.
- Adopt a standard statement that can be used at the beginning of meetings or during 'housekeeping matters' to advise attendees that the Protocol is being followed.

## Suggested housekeeping statement

"This meeting / event will be run according to the Hearing Access Protocol, which should help to ensure that everyone can hear and follow things effectively. We want everyone to be able to participate as fully as possible."

### 2.4. Microphones and hearing loops

- If a microphone is in use, it should be used by EVERYONE, irrespective of whether they wish to use it or not. This reduces the possibility of people being excluded from hearing, especially those who are using the hearing loop (which the microphone feeds into).
- Check all the microphones are working and that they are feeding correctly into the PA system and/or hearing loop. (Use Loop Tester equipment to check)
- Check the positioning of the microphones so that they suit the layout of the room and the location of the people speaking.
- If a hearing loop is being used, check it is on and working and that signage is on a wall or door to alert people to the availability of a hearing loop. Do this as standard, but make an extra effort if someone has advised you they require to use it.

## People who use hearing loops

When people use a hearing loop, their hearing aid is switched to the loop/t-setting. This restricts its ability to pick up sound that is not coming through the hearing loop.

If people do not speak into a microphone (e.g. someone asking a question from the audience) then loop users have to switch their hearing aid away from the loop/t-setting to receive the sound.

At a practical level, by the time the individual has adjusted their hearing aid, they are likely to have missed what was said, if indeed their hearing aid has the power and capability to catch speech from a distance without assistance from the hearing loop.

### 2.5. Noise

- a. Be continually aware of background noise and avoid, prevent or reduce this where possible e.g. noise through open windows, adjacent rooms, air conditioning units, use of music.
- b. Be aware that many hearing aid users prefer not to sit close to projectors as the fans can be noisy and distracting.
- c. Avoid generating noise during meetings or presentations from the setting out of cups and saucers, plates and cutlery for refreshment breaks.
- d. During breaks and networking sessions, make people aware that a quiet space/zone is available for those preferring to chat in more peaceful surroundings.

### 2.6. Audio-visual equipment and text transcription

- a. If video material is used, make sure to remember to switch on the subtitles and/or provide the text transcript.
- b. If the audience is large and positioned at a distance from the speaker, consider whether you should provide a live video feed of the speaker on a large screen so those who use lipreading to assist them can see the speaker's face more easily.
- c. If providing a text transcription service (via a Speech to Text Reporter, Electronic Notetaker Professional, or possibly a digital App) then think about the position of the screen and the audience members who need to see it. Ensure that the PowerPoint screen (or other screen being used) can also be seen comfortably by those individuals.
- d. For events with large numbers of people with hearing loss, more than one screen may be required to display the text.
- e. Use of a digital App to provide a text transcription service should not be a replacement for a trained professional but could be offered to assist people who have hearing loss but who do not require, or wish to have, support from a communications professional.

### 2.7. Additional requirements

- a. Make it easy for people to use their own wireless technologies e.g. if they have a remote microphone that streams sound directly into their hearing aids, assist them to find the best place to position it.
- b. If specialist communication professionals are to be used, work with them and take their advice as to where they should be located. Likewise, work with the user to ensure they are located where they need to be.
- c. When speaking with someone who is using a communication professional, ALWAYS speak directly to the individual not to the professional who is providing the interpreting, lip-speaking or text transcription service.

### Top tips

**Check all is well.** Use the first break in proceedings as an opportunity to check that those using the communication support are finding it adequate. If not, be willing to work with them to make possible adjustment.

**Be confident.** You may not be an expert in access-related issues but if you are vigilant and aware that some people may experience difficulties then you will be more likely to spot people who are struggling. You can then discreetly check if there is any support you can offer.

**Know the benefits will be felt even if you don't see them.** People can avoid disclosing difficulties they experience so improved experiences may go unremarked upon. To find out about the impact the Protocol is having, include specific questions about access to information and communication (i.e. how well have they heard and followed things?). See Page 25.



## 3. Get things right *AFTER* the meeting/event

Guidance to help Organisers evaluate how well things went.

### 3.1. Feedback forms

Add questions to feedback forms to invite specific information about hearing, listening and communication experiences. See Feedback Form template, page 29.

#### Questions to ask could include:

1. How well could you hear and follow/see the main speakers at this event/meeting?
2. How well could you hear and follow/see questions or comments made to the group by other attendees?
3. Was the pace suitable for allowing you to hear and follow things?
4. How effective were the visual aids and could you follow them whilst also following what was being said?
5. How well could you hear and follow informal chat and networking conversation during breaks and unstructured sessions?
6. What issues, if any, affected your experiences?
7. Did you find the meeting room uncomfortably noisy at any time?
8. If you used the hearing loop, score it out of 10 (1 = terrible and 10 = excellent) for: speech
9. Clarity; listening comfort or tone purity (i.e. interference or noise); volume level.
10. Overall, how would you score your experience of being able to hear, listen and follow things at this event/meeting? 1 = terrible and 10 = excellent.

### 3.2. Equality Impact Assessment

For organisations carrying out an equality impact assessment, this would be the point at which you would be gathering data to identify the equality impact that results from implementation of the Hearing Access Protocol. This will enrich and add substance to equality impact assessments, measuring benefits being accrued not just by those with hearing loss, but by others with protected characteristics who may derive benefit due to the good practices being employed.





# Checklist for Organisers

## Check list 1: In advance of the meeting/event

✓

1. Venue acoustics are suitable	
2. Use of nearby rooms is suitable (to minimise background noise disrupting your event)	
3. Quiet space/breakout room available	
4. Background noise is minimal (e.g. air conditioning unit, traffic through open window, etc)	
5. Room layout sorted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the room is for a meeting, can everyone see everyone else?</li> <li>• Are microphones needed?</li> <li>• For an event – placing of PA system speakers, lighting, can everyone see the podium?</li> <li>• Is there space for Communication Support Professionals, including a screen for speech-to-text (if being used at the event)?</li> </ul>	
6. Need for PA system/microphones <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the PA system link to a fixed room hearing induction loop system? Has the microphone position been checked? Has the microphone position been checked?</li> </ul>	
7. Need for a hearing loop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which system is provided? Has the working status been checked? Are there any 'dead spots'?</li> </ul>	
8. Need for audio visual equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If using audio visual equipment, can the sound from the AV equipment be broadcast through the PA sound system?</li> <li>• If not, does the venue make headsets available to enhance listening over a distance?</li> </ul>	
9. Communication support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is required? (Speech-to-text, lipspeaker, etc.)</li> <li>• Has the communication professional been booked? (Ensure this is done well in advance to ensure availability)</li> <li>• Has advice been sought as to where they should be located during the event (and any furniture/ equipment they will need)?</li> </ul>	
10. Speakers/presenters notified that the Hearing Access Protocol will be followed (and provided with a copy of the Notes for Speakers/Presenters)	
11. Speakers/presenters notified that all videos must be subtitled (with a font size appropriate to size of screen and venue)	
12. Booking information for delegates includes access information (that the Protocol is being followed and possible info about availability of hearing loop, PA system, speech-to-text, etc). Invitation to contact the organiser about specific access needs is given.	
13. Emergency evacuation procedures for people with all access requirements, including hearing loss/ deafness	
14. Name badges for all attendees or alternative system for easily identifying people	
15. Agenda, programme or other handout giving details of all presenters/speakers	



Check list 2: On the day of the EVENT	Checked
1. Seating allows attendees to self-select where they sit • Information available about any 'dead spots' for the hearing loop (if used)	
2. Lighting on the stage/at the podium suitable to aid lipreading	
3. Speakers/presenters briefed as to the requirement to remain at the podium (not move about the stage), and remain in the light (to aid lipreading)	
4. All speakers/presenters briefed about the necessity to use the microphone	
5. Hearing loop system tested before the start of the event by venue staff	
6. Microphones tested (with PA system and loop) – including roving & lapel mics	
7. Someone in place to turn lights back on after any audio-visual presentation	
8. Someone responsible for minimising any noise interruptions (air conditioning, etc) during the event	
9. Someone responsible for settling in any Communication Professionals attending • Someone responsible for liaising with assistance dog owners about water, toileting area and statement to other attendees	
10. Awareness raised of the provision of a quiet space or quiet breakout room	
11. Procedure in place for discreetly checking with delegates with hearing loss as to the accessibility of the presentations at the event	

Check list 2: On the day of the MEETING	Checked
1. Seating allows attendees to self-select where they sit • Information available about any 'dead spots' for the hearing loop (if used)	
2. Lighting suitable to aid lipreading. Curtains or blinds at windows.	
3. Hearing loop system tested before the start of the event by venue staff	
4. Microphones tested – including roving mic and lapel mics	
5. Someone in place to turn lights back on after any audio-visual presentation	
6. Someone responsible for minimising any noise interruptions (air conditioning, etc) during the meeting	
7. Speaker/presenter has nominated someone to alert him/her if speaks too fast, quietly or if the communication support is lagging behind	
8. Someone responsible for settling in any Communication Professionals attending • Someone responsible for liaising with assistance dog owners about water, toileting area and statement to other attendees	
9. Procedure in place for discreetly checking with delegates with hearing loss as to the accessibility of the meeting	



# Evaluation

## Sample Feedback Form

### How well could you hear & follow things during this meeting/event?

Your name [if required]: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting/event attended: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of meeting/event: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. How well could you hear & follow the main speakers at this event / meeting?

very easily   
 quite easily   
 neutral   
 quite poorly   
 very poorly

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. How well could you hear & follow questions & comments made by other attendees?

very easily   
 quite easily   
 neutral   
 quite poorly   
 very poorly

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Did any of the following issues affect your experiences? Tick all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> microphone was not good enough quality or not used effectively or at all	<input type="checkbox"/> rapid changes in discussion topics made it hard to follow what was being said
<input type="checkbox"/> people did not speak clearly or loudly enough	<input type="checkbox"/> I couldn't always see the faces of speakers so it was hard to use lipreading to help me
<input type="checkbox"/> acoustics in the room were poor so noise reverberated and spread	<input type="checkbox"/> lighting in the room wasn't good for lipreading
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from passing traffic or other external source	<input type="checkbox"/> hearing loop wasn't available or didn't provide clear sound, or wasn't set at the right volume
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from elsewhere in the building	<input type="checkbox"/> people lacked hearing and deafness awareness
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from conversational chatter	<input type="checkbox"/> Other – please state
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from a ventilation system or similar	
Comments:	

#### 4. How well could you hear & follow people when chatting informally during breaks or networking opportunities?

very easily   
 quite easily   
 neutral   
 quite poorly   
 very poorly

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_



**5. Did any of the issues below affect your experiences of chatting with others? Tick all that apply.**

<input type="checkbox"/> people not speaking clearly or loudly enough	<input type="checkbox"/> I couldn't always see people's faces so it was hard to use lipreading to help me
<input type="checkbox"/> acoustics in the room were poor so noise reverberated and spread	<input type="checkbox"/> lighting in the room wasn't good for lipreading
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from passing traffic or other external sources	<input type="checkbox"/> assistive equipment I was using didn't perform effectively enough
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from elsewhere in the building	<input type="checkbox"/> people lacked hearing and deafness awareness
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from conversational chatter	<input type="checkbox"/> rapid changes in topics of discussion made it hard to follow what was being said
<input type="checkbox"/> noise from a ventilation system or similar	<input type="checkbox"/> Other – please state
Comments:	

**6. Did you find the meeting room uncomfortably noisy at any time?**

Yes (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
 No

**7. Did the way you heard and followed things negatively affect your experience in any way?**

😊 yes, definitely    😊 yes, maybe    😐 not sure    😞 not really    😞 not at all

**8. If yes, would you consider not attending the same event/meeting in the future because of this?**

😊 yes, definitely    😊 yes, maybe    😐 not sure    😞 not really    😞 not at all

**9. Overall, how would you score your experience of being able to hear, listen and follow things at this event/meeting? 1 = terrible and 10 = excellent.**

Terrible Excellent  
**1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10**

**ABOUT YOUR HEARING**

What is your hearing like?     Very good / good     Hearing loss or other (please tell us more)

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you use hearing aids, Cochlear Implant or BAHA?

<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> hearing aids - always	<input type="checkbox"/> hearing aids - sometimes
<input type="checkbox"/> BAHA	<input type="checkbox"/> Cochlear implant	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)

This feedback form is a template from Ideas for Ears, a not-for-profit organisation run by people with hearing loss that gathers & shares data on how easily people with different hearing abilities can access, contribute to, and enjoy meetings & events. [www.ideasforears.org.uk](http://www.ideasforears.org.uk) | [info@ideasforears.org.uk](mailto:info@ideasforears.org.uk)

## Thank you

Grateful thanks to all individuals and organisations who assisted with the development and review of the Hearing Access Protocol. Particular thanks to the volunteers from the Stirling area Hearing Hubs, who were instrumental in instigating this project. I am proud of this collaborative piece of work and the potential it has to make meetings and events more accessible.



Sally Shaw, Director, Ideas for Ears

This document has been produced by Ideas for Ears with support from deafscotland. It has been developed by people with hearing loss to provide clear guidance for how meetings and events should be run in order to meet the needs of people with different hearing abilities. Consultation on the content of this document was undertaken January to April 2018.

Content will be reviewed and updated periodically.  
Submit comments to [info@ideasforears.org.uk](mailto:info@ideasforears.org.uk).

Last review by Ideas for Ears and **Arc of Inclusion**: 01 July 2018 (v1)



**Ideas for Ears** is a not-for-profit social enterprise that uses insights about hearing and deafness to help organisations create suitable products, services and facilities for people with hearing loss.



**deafscotland** is the lead organisation for deaf issues in Scotland, and aims to ensure that deaf, deafened, deafblind and hard of hearing people can be active citizens and can access services and information across all sectors of society.

## Further information

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