



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.