

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

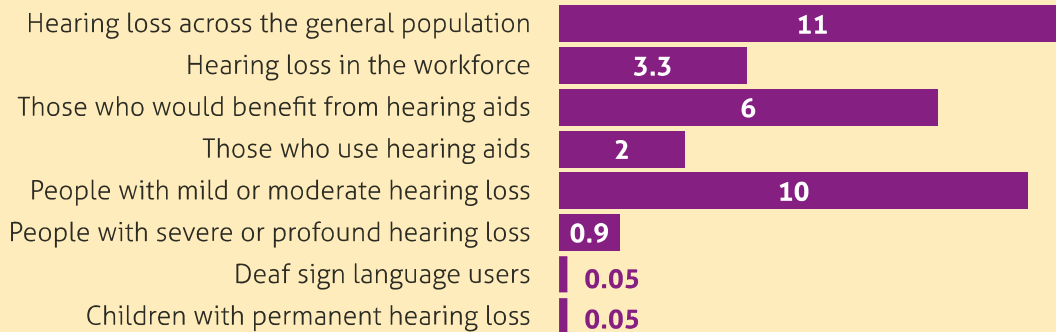
Most people with hearing loss have the capability to hear and follow things well, but will struggle or find it impossible if the meeting/event is set up or run in a way that introduces, or fails to remove, barriers. Some people also find high levels of noise not just uncomfortable but overwhelming and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

