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Working for Change

Support and advice needed for people with hearing loss or deafness in work

# Executive summary

We wanted to understand what support people with hearing loss or deafness would find most beneficial, so they can feel empowered to be open about their hearing loss and get the support they need in the workplace. This report brings together survey and qualitative research from 2019, in addition to previous research from Action on Hearing Loss.

Key findings

Aspects of work that people find difficult

Respondents to our 2019 survey find the following tasks the most difficult at work: taking part in video or teleconferencing meetings (75%), taking part in training sessions (70%), and socialising with colleagues (71%).

Previous research by Action on Hearing Loss has highlighted that people with hearing loss or deafness also feel their careers have been held back due to their hearing loss. We also know that many people find being open about their hearing loss at work difficult.

Support currently accessed

Just over two-fifths (42%) of people who took the survey said they have not tried to seek support for their hearing loss or deafness at work. The most common reasons for not seeking support are that people aren't aware that support is available or they don't know where to look for support.

Respondents to our 2019 survey gave an average score of four out of 10 in terms of the equipment and support they have to fulfill their potential at work, where one means they do not have any of the support and 10 that they have all the support they need. By far the biggest reason respondents gave for not getting support is that they feel employers or colleagues do not have the knowledge to help, with 57% of people giving this response.

The three most used types of support among respondents are support from a colleague or manager (51%); information via leaflets, websites, or emails (42%); and access to assistive equipment or communication support (39%).

People who took our survey said access to assistive equipment and communication support (63%), and support from a mentor (58%) have been the two most helpful types of support for them. The support that respondents have found least helpful are information via leaflets, websites, or emails (46% said they were helpful).

Support people would find most helpful

The types of information most needed by respondents are information on educating colleagues and managers so they can better support them (44% gave this response), information on types of equipment, adjustments, or communication support that is available (44%), and how to access funding for adjustments (38%).

The top three types of services or support needed are support to manage the stress and anxiety of having a hearing loss in the workplace (37%), access to funding for assistive equipment (33%), and support from a colleague or manager (26%).

People told us they feel that the most beneficial types of support to help feel more confident being open about their hearing loss at work would be knowing colleagues had received training or advice about working with people with hearing loss (53%), and training and advice for themselves about how to be more confident in the workplace (42%).

Over half of respondents (55%) would be confident in delivering some type of deaf awareness activity. The two activities people would be most comfortable doing are sharing their experience of having a hearing loss with the organisation (60%) and putting up hearing loss and deaf awareness tips in the workplace (60%).

Recommendations

It is recommended that three broad areas of support are explored further – either for Action on Hearing Loss, or another organisation, to deliver.

1. Support so that people can raise deaf awareness themselves in the workplace.
2. Emotional support to help a) with the impact of having a hearing loss or deafness at work and b) give people more confidence to be open about their hearing loss, so they can get the support they need.
3. Information about assistive equipment and communication support available and how to access it.

Other things to consider:

* BSL and non BSL needs are broadly similar, therefore the recommendations above are applicable to both groups.
* It will be important to user test any support or advice devised, to work out how to best to address the needs outlined in this report.
* Many people in the survey said they had not sought to access support because they are unaware of the support available to them. Therefore, suitable resource will need to go into publicising any service or advice offered.
* There was a strong feeling from both the quantitative and qualitative research that people find managers and colleagues unsupportive in the workplace. It is suggested, therefore, that any communications to employees with hearing loss outline our work with employers, so it is clear that we do not think it is solely the employee's responsibility to improve their situation in the workplace.

# 1.Introduction

Our research tells us that people of working age, who are deaf or have hearing loss, face major barriers getting into and thriving in employment. Over the next few years the Working for Change campaign aims to change this, so that deafness or hearing loss do not limit people's ability to access and thrive in employment. This ambition is crystallised in our main objective for the Working for Change campaign:

People with deafness or hearing loss get the understanding and support they need when accessing employment and when in work.

The three sub-outcomes we have identified to enable us to reach this main outcome are:

1. People with deafness or hearing loss feel empowered to be open about their hearing loss and get the support they need.
2. Employers & colleagues demonstrate understanding of deafness or hearing loss and take action to support employees.
3. People with hearing loss or deafness get tailored support from Government interventions in the labour market, including in employment support services.

To address the first outcome, our aim is for Action on Hearing Loss, or other organisations, to provide support and advice to people with hearing loss so they feel more empowered to be open about their hearing loss and to get the support they need in the workplace. In order to understand what support would be most useful for beneficiaries, we embarked on this research.

This report brings together the results of qualitative and quantitative research conducted by Action on Hearing Loss in 2019, in addition to previous research from the charity. The report outlines what people find difficult at work, the support they have already received for the workplace, and what support people feel they need. For details of the methodology, please see the appendix.

2. Findings

2.1. Aspects of work that people find difficult

2.1.1 Activities at work

The majority of people we surveyed have at least some difficulty undertaking typical workplace tasks because of their hearing loss or deafness. But, the **three most difficult tasks** reported by respondents were: taking part in video or teleconferencing meetings (75%), taking part in training sessions (70%), and socialising with colleagues (71%).

Figure 1: Q Thinking about your deafness, hearing loss or tinnitus, to what extent do you find the following aspects of work difficult or not?

Base: All respondents who undertake these activities (base sizes for each activity type differ – please see topline for more information)

We know that video or teleconference meetings are difficult, because people are unable to lipread (on a teleconference) and it is harder to hear people on the phone.

Respondents' qualitative responses in the survey highlighted that training can be problematic due to it often being delivered online, with no availability of subtitles. It was also noted that training can also take place in venues outside of the workplace that may be noisier.

Difficulty socialising with colleagues is an issue that is frequently raised. In our previous Working for Change survey, nearly four in five respondents (78%) said they think social interactions with colleagues at work have been negatively affected by their hearing loss.[[1]](#endnote-1) Socialising with colleagues is an important aspect of work and not being able to do so means people feel left out of working life.

*"There's the informal side of work, the office chat, that mostly goes over my head….I do miss out on potentially useful information….none of it's intentional and my colleagues certainly don't mean to leave me out but I do feel very much apart from my hearing counterparts. "* Working for Change Survey 2018 Respondent[[2]](#endnote-2)

BSL users who took part in the 2019 survey do not find taking part in video or teleconference meetings as difficult as those whose first language is not BSL (6 out of 18 of BSL users find it difficult). This may be because a BSL user in this situation will be using BSL or will likely have an interpreter on a call. However, It is also worth mentioning that, although the survey indicates that BSL users have less difficulty talking part in teleconference, focus group participants reported that meetings booked last minute can be problematic as it may not always be possible to book an interpreter in time.

Like non-BSL users, socialising with colleagues is a problem for BSL users and this is the area that this group find the most difficult at work (64% find it difficult). Similar to the sentiments of non-BSL users, one participant described how socialising with colleagues doesn't just mean their job is more enjoyable, it's an important aspect of networking in order to get ahead in the workplace.

*"[being able to socialise with colleagues] is about building the trust that you can. It's about having that really good relationship with colleagues that enables the promotion."* Working for Change interview participant 2019

2.1.2 Career aspirations

Previous research by Action on Hearing Loss has highlighted that people with hearing loss or deafness feel their careers have been held back due to their hearing loss. For example, over a third (36%) of respondents in our 2018 survey said they had not had the same opportunities for promotion as other colleagues.[[3]](#endnote-3) Our Hidden Disadvantage report also found that 71% of respondents felt that their employment opportunities were more limited because of their hearing loss and half (50%) of respondents felt that hearing loss had stopped them from changing jobs as often as they wanted to. [[4]](#endnote-4)

These sentiments may be grounded in reality. Nearly a fifth of respondents (18%) in our 2018 Working for Change survey reported that employers had implied or suggested that they might not be able to do their job with a hearing loss. Research by the Business Disability Forum also found that a lack of support and understanding of the impacts of hearing loss and deafness at some organisations has meant that some employees have received performance warnings for not contributing to certain workplace tasks, such as meetings – despite the employee telling the manager they need more support in such situations.

Some employers, then, are preventing people from progressing in the workplace. However, we also know that there are employers who are supportive and help people develop their careers. The case studies in our Employers' Hub[[5]](#endnote-5) demonstrate this. It may, therefore, be the *perception* that people with hearing loss are unable to progress in their careers that holds some back.

2.1.3 Disclosing hearing loss and deafness in the workplace

Our view is that it is important for people with hearing loss to be open about their condition with managers and colleagues. Without doing so, people will very likely not get the support they need in the workplace. However, our research shows that many people are hesitant to be open about their hearing loss – over half (54%) of respondents to our 2018 survey said that they had not disclosed their hearing loss to people at work.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Our 2019 focus groups found that people who didn't like to talk about their hearing loss did so because they either did not feel confident doing so or did not feel it was necessary. Participants who felt less confident being open about their hearing loss described how they found talking about their hearing loss embarrassing; they did not want to talk about how they had lost their hearing loss because this process had been stressful; or they were worried about the impact that talking about it might have on their job prospects.

*"You want to do a good job at work, you do not want anyone to see [hearing loss] as a weakness."* Working for Change Focus Group 2019 Participant

Further information about why people might not feel able to be open about their hearing loss at work, can be found in the Working for Change 2019 focus group report.

2.2 Support currently accessed

2.2.1 Are people looking for support?

**Two-fifths (42%) of the 2019 survey respondents said they have not tried to seek support** for their hearing loss or deafness at work. As figure 2 shows, the **two most common reasons people do not look for support** is they aren't aware of support available (44%) or they don't know where to start looking for support (38%)

Figure 2

Q: Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, why have you not tried to get support or information to help you at work?

Base: Respondents who have not tried to get support or information to help at work (298)

Findings from the qualitative research mirror these survey responses, with participants describing how they have been unaware of support that is available.

*"My employer just kept asking me what I thought I needed, but it was all new to me so I had no idea."* Working for Change Focus Group 2019 Participant

*"People sort of expect you to know the answer to your problems as well and recommend equipment. At my job I was asked well is there something we can do or get you? I don't know because I don't know what is available."* Working for Change Focus Group 2019 Participant

Our recent research to inform the organisational strategy also found that there is a demand, among people with hearing loss, for better access to information about support and help available to them.[[7]](#endnote-7) It will be important, therefore, to consider not only the service design itself but how the service or piece of advice can be effectively marketed.

Almost all (90%) 2019 survey respondents who have not told people at work about their hearing loss or deafness said that they have not tried to seek support. Qualitative responses in the survey also revealed that some do not like seeking support because they don't like to talk about their hearing loss.

*"I don't really want to course a fuss or highlight the issue further."* Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

These findings chime with research into unaddressed hearing loss in general, which has found that people can be reluctant to identify as someone with hearing loss and this can prevent them from seeking help.[[8]](#endnote-8) It will be important, then, to address the fact that some people will need help and guidance to come to terms with their hearing loss and feel comfortable talking about it at work, before they look at any other advice or support available.

The majority of respondents whose first language is BSL (77%) said they have tried to get support for the workplace. A similar proportion (83%) of BSL users in the survey said they had applied for funding from Access to Work (AtW), which suggests that BSL users, who are more likely to need to address their deafness (by getting an interpreter for example), do not face the same barriers as non-BSL users in terms of looking for support.

Findings were similar for those who are self-employed, compared to those who are employed. However, open text responses suggest that some people who are self-employed may be unsure whether they're able to access support and this prevents them from seeking it.

*"Due to being self-employed I am not sure whether I am entitled to any support."* Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

2.2.2 Are people receiving the support they need?

Respondents to our 2019 survey gave an average score of four out of 10 in terms of the equipment and support they have to fulfill their potential at work, where one means they do not have any of the support and 10 that they have all the support they need. The average score was broadly the same or similar for people across organisation sizes and sectors. It was also the same for people who had worked at their current organisation for differing numbers of years and among those with differing types of hearing loss. This demonstrates that any support given by Action on Hearing Loss, or another organisation, is necessary for people working in all types of organisations, with all types of hearing loss, and at all stages in their careers.

2.2.3 Why do people find accessing support difficult?

As shown in figure 3, by far the **greatest reason for not getting support** is that employees feel employers or colleagues do not have the knowledge to help (57%). Our 2017 survey of employers also shows that this is the case: two-fifths (39%) said they do not feel well-equipped to enable staff with hearing loss to stay productive in the workforce.[[9]](#endnote-9) The second most common barrier identified in the 2019 survey is that employers or colleagues are reluctant to help (37%). Therefore, some employers and colleagues may have the will to support people but they are just unaware how to do this most effectively. Qualitative responses to the survey also highlight this mismatch between employers' intentions and the support they can offer.

*"Employers want to help but don't know how to arrange. Went down the Access to Work route. It took 8 months and still waiting for manager to authorize. It has to go to the top to pay and they don't understand what we are ordering."* Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

These findings show that any materials, advice, or services given to people with hearing loss must be given alongside an explanation of the work we're doing to upskill employers and organisations, so they can better support people with hearing loss. This will mean that it is clear that we do not think it is solely the employee's responsibility to improve their situation in the workplace. It will also help promote the support on offer for employers and colleagues, which people with hearing loss could promote.

In terms of providing support for people with hearing loss or deafness themselves, it is recommended that advice be given around how people can upskill their colleagues. Further information on how we can help people do this can be found in section 2.3.4.

Many qualitative responses to the survey also talked about difficulties in receiving funding for equipment, including funding via AtW. More information about difficulties respondents face receiving AtW are in a separate report.

Figure 3: Q Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, why have you found it difficult to access support or advice to help you at work? Base: Respondents who have found it difficult to access support (298)

2.2.4 Support respondents have received

The **three most common types of support that respondents access** are support from a colleague or manager (51%), information via leaflets, websites, or emails (42%) and access to assistive equipment or communication support (39%). Respondents were least likely to have received support from a mentor, with only 8% having done so.

Table 1: Q Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, how have the following types of support, if any, improved or not improved your experience in the workplace?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Type of support | % who have used support | Don't know |
| Support from a colleague or manager | 51% | 4% |
| Information via leaflets, websites, or emails | 42% | 4% |
| Access to assistive equipment and/or communication support for the workplace | 39% | 4% |
| Opportunities to exchange experiences with people who have hearing loss, tinnitus, or are deaf | 22% | 4% |
| Lipreading/managing your hearing loss or deafness classes | 19% | 5% |
| A mediator or advocate, from outside your organisation, who can help you get adjustments in the workplace | 17% | 4% |
| Support to manage the stress and anxiety of having a hearing loss, deafness, or tinnitus in the workplace (e.g. from a hearing therapist or other counsellor) | 15% | 4% |
| A network of people with hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, health conditions, or disabilities in your workplace | 15% | 5% |
| One-to-one support from a specialist employment advisor | 10% | 3% |
| Support from a mentor | 8% | 5% |

Base: All respondents (base sizes for each support type differ – please see topline for more information)

2.2.5 Views on support currently accessed

As shown in figure 4, people who took the survey told us that access to assistive equipment and communication support (63%), support from a mentor (58%), and opportunities to exchange experiences with people with hearing loss have been the **three most helpful types of support**. Information via leaflets, websites, or email are seen to be the **least helpful** (46% said this type of support is helpful). This suggests that user testing our materials with people with hearing loss and deafness will be beneficial.

Figure 4: Q Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, how have the following types of support, if any, improved or not improved your experience in the workplace?

Base: Respondents who have received the support (base sizes for each support type differ – please see topline for more information)

2.3 Support people would find most helpful

2.3.1 Types of information most needed

Figure 5: Q Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, what information would most help you fulfil your potential at work? Base: All respondents who need support (672)

We asked people which **top three types of information** would be most helpful for them. Information on educating colleagues and managers so they can better support them (44%) and information on types of equipment, adjustments, or communication support that is available (44%) were the most common responses. These results reinforce the finding that people are particularly struggling with the attitudes of colleagues and managers. The need for information about adjustments also came out in the focus groups. In particular, participants want to know more about the latest technology available and how to use it:

*"A guide on equipment is needed; the problem is technology is evolving so fat that they are out of date very quickly; I would prefer some online information, with regular update to a leaflet"* Working for Change Focus Group 2019 Participant

which is obsolete within 6 months

*"I still do not know the best place to go for [information about] tech."* Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

Interestingly, a similar number of people who had received adjustments from AtW said they would like information on technology, compared to those who had not applied for AtW funding. It could be beneficial, therefore, for advice about equipment to sit alongside AtW support, rather than our solution being to simply direct people to AtW for advice about the technology available to support them. It will also be important for AtW to ensure that they are up-to-date with knowledge about equipment and communication support available to people with hearing loss. This point is addressed in the separate report about AtW experiences.

Participants in the qualitative research also said that both types of support – information about educating colleagues and information about equipment – need to be available. Currently, participants noted, employers and colleagues only think of support as access to equipment rather than emotional support:

*"I think technological 'tools' are just that tools, not solutions, but definitely a means (or a partial means) to an end. The emotional support and empathetic approach needs to back these up, but that's not well understood in the workplace."* Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

The third most needed type of information is advice around access funding for adjustments (38%). From our previous research, we know that people are unaware of AtW (36% of respondents in our previous survey said they hadn't heard of AtW[[10]](#endnote-10)) and therefore advice will likely be helpful to illustrate what AtW is, in addition to information about how to apply for support through the scheme.

The 2019 survey results also suggest that information about the Equality Act would be preferable above other types of information, with a third (34%) of respondents saying they'd find this helpful. Focus group participants were generally hazy about the Equality Act and how it could help them in the workplace. There was also a widespread view that people saw talking about their rights in the workplace as a potentially uncomfortable experience and one that would be a "last resort." It will be helpful, then, to explain what the Equality Act is, while also giving people the confidence to talk about their rights in the workplace.

*"Often when you're discriminated because of your disability it's difficult to know where to go to seek advice as you don't want to rock the boat or jeopardise your employment. Who do you speak to at times like this? Where can you get advice on how to proceed?"*  Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

Figure 6

Q: Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, what information would most help you fulfil your potential at work? Base: Respondents who need support and whose first language is BSL (29)

Information needed by BSL users compared to non-BSL users is generally similar. Although, BSL users told us that information about access to funding for equipment or communication support would be the most useful type of information (62%). Findings from the qualitative research with BSL users, and responses to the survey show that BSL users may find this information useful as some are not receiving the financial support they need for interpreters. This is either because AtW isn't giving them enough financial aid, or their application for AtW has been delayed.

2.3.2 Types of services and informal support most needed

The **top three types of services or informal support needed** by survey respondents are support to manage the stress and anxiety of having a hearing loss in the workplace (37%), access to funding for assistive equipment (33%), and support from a colleague or manager (26%).

Table 2

Q: Thinking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, which services or informal support would most help you fulfil your potential at work?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Type of support | % who would find useful |
| Support to manage the stress and anxiety of having a hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus in the workplace (e.g from a hearing therapist or other counsellor) | 37% |
| Access to funding for assistive equipment and/or communication support for the workplace, for example government grants such as Access to Work | 33% |
| Support from a colleague or manager | 26% |
| A network of people with hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus, health conditions, or disabilities in your workplace which can offer support and work together to make the workplace more inclusive | 23% |
| Lipreading/managing your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus classes | 23% |
| Opportunities to exchange experiences with people who have hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus | 19% |
| Information about how to fulfil your potential at work with hearing loss or deafness, via leaflets, websites, or emails | 18% |
| One-to-one support from a specialist employment advisor | 14% |
| A mediator or advocate, from outside your workplace, who can help you get adjustments in the workplace | 13% |
| Support from a mentor | 11% |
| Don't know | 11% |

Base: All respondents who need support (662)

It is not surprising that people most need support to manage stress and anxiety related to hearing loss, as our previous research has shown that many people can find working with a hearing loss incredibly stressful. In our 2018 survey, we found that eight in 10 (79%) have felt stressed at work because of their deafness or hearing loss.[[11]](#endnote-11) Participants in the qualitative interviews also told us how working with hearing loss can be stress inducing.

*"Decoding what people are saying is what is so tiring and frustrating."* Working for Change Focus Group 2019 Participant

In discussions about services related to supporting people with stress related to having a hearing loss, it will be important to take into account that this type of service was one that was seen to be least helpful (see section 2.2.5). Therefore, it may be worth exploring further why people have not found support on this topic useful.

In terms of access to assistive equipment, our 2019 survey of people with hearing loss and deafness for the strategy development, also highlighted the need for better access. Half of respondents (48%) said better access to technologies and assistive products would make the biggest difference to their life, which was the second most important type of support identified.

BSL users have broadly similar needs to those who do not use BSL, although access to funding for assistive equipment was the most common response among BSL users (46% chose this option) and a network of people who are deaf in the workplace was the second most common (32%). BSL users in our focus groups also told us that they would like the opportunity to speak with people who are Deaf in their organisation. Only one BSL user in the survey said that they would like advice about how to fulfil their potential via leaflets, websites or emails. This also correlates with what focus group participants said: that they would prefer advice and support to be face-to-face, rather than online or on paper. It was also highlighted that if advice is online, then it is often not in BSL, which may also be why face-to-face support is seen to be preferable.

2.3.3 Types of support needed to feel more confident about talking about their hearing loss

We have found in previous studies that people can find it difficult talking about their hearing loss in the workplace. Because of this, we asked a question specifically about what would help give people the confidence to be more open about their hearing loss. Respondents said they would find knowing colleagues had received training or advice about working with people with hearing loss the **most beneficial type of support,** with over half (53%) saying this. This finding mirrors responses to other questions in the survey – that people find deaf and hearing loss awareness is lacking in workplaces. Training or advice about how to be more confident in the workplace was the **second most popular response –** nearly two-fifths (42%) said this support would be useful.

Figure 7

Q: Which of the following, if any, would help you feel more comfortable talking about your hearing loss, deafness or tinnitus in the workplace? Base: all respondents (658)

2.3.4 Which hearing loss and deafness awareness activities would people like to do?

Our previous research has shown that deaf awareness is poor in workplaces, [[12]](#endnote-12) as has also been confirmed by the 2019 survey. We therefore wanted to know what deaf awareness activities people with hearing loss or deafness might be able to undertake themselves in the workplace. We found that around half of respondents (55%) would be confident in delivering some type of deaf awareness activity. As figure 8 shows, the **two activities people would be most comfortable doing** are sharing their experience of having a hearing loss with the organisation (60%) and putting up hearing loss and deaf awareness tips in the workplace (60%). Although it was the least common response, nearly half of respondents (47%) said that they would be comfortable delivering a deaf awareness session with colleagues. There is, then, an appetite for people to raise deaf awareness themselves, which would be good to be supported by Action on Hearing Loss.

Figure 8: Q How confident, or not, would you be doing the following activities?

In terms of content for deaf awareness raising activities, responses to the open questions suggest that exercises or workshops to demonstrate to colleagues the impacts of hearing loss would be helpful. Feedback about our employers' toolkit also highlights this need:

*"The only problem I have is that it is still pretty much impossible to explain to a hearing person exactly what everyday life is like."* Recipient of Action on Hearing Loss' toolkit

Respondents to the survey and participants in the focus groups also stressed that colleagues often forget to be deaf aware and therefore help knowing how best to remind colleagues of communication needs would be beneficial.

*"Any means of reminding colleagues of my communication needs would be helpful. However good a training session is, people forget."* Working for Change Survey 2019 Respondent

*"In high school, I had a mentor who used to come and ask me how I was getting on at school and recommend equipment to me."* Action on Hearing Loss Focus Group Participant

# Recommendations

It is recommended that three broad areas of support are explored further in terms of Action on Hearing Loss, or another organisation (including government) delivering this.

1. Support so that people can raise deaf awareness themselves in the workplace.

Many respondents to the survey said they would be confident in undertaking deaf awareness activities in the workplace. Since our research consistently shows that a lack of deaf awareness in organisations is one of the most problematic aspects of work for people, it would be beneficial to explore this area of support. There were no particularly clear activities to raise deaf awareness that survey respondents would be more confident in undertaking, therefore it is suggested that all suggested activities are explored.

In terms of content for deaf awareness raising activities, people told us they still find it hard to demonstrate the impact that having a hearing loss has. Survey respondents also noted that colleagues may know how to be deaf aware but they often forget. These issues would therefore be good to be addressed in any support or advice delivered.

Aspects of work that people find difficult could also be addressed via this area of support. For example, survey respondents identified that taking part in video or teleconference meetings is the most difficult aspect of work and therefore advice could cover educating colleagues about how to best conduct these types of meetings.

Many people who took the 2019 survey would like more information about the Equality Act and many have also found that their employers have been reluctant to give support. Therefore information about how to explain the Equality Act to managers should be included in this area of support.

1. Emotional support to help a) with the impact of having a hearing loss or deafness at work and b) give people more confidence to be open about their hearing loss, so they can get the support they need

The service most needed by respondents is support to manage the stress or anxiety of having a hearing loss at work. Our previous research has also shown that having a hearing loss at work can be extremely stressful. Addressing this need is, therefore, important. Our survey respondents who have had a mentor have found this particularly helpful and therefore a mentoring network or service may help give the emotional support that people are looking for.

Our 2018 survey and qualitative research also highlights that people may be unconfident in talking about their hearing loss and this may impact their ability to receive the support they need at work. Respondents to our 2019 survey also indicated that advice on how to be more confident in the workplace would be useful. Content for advice about how people can be more confident about working with a hearing loss could cover the areas that participants in the qualitative research gave as reasons for being less confident. For example, addressing the fact that people find talking about their hearing loss embarrassing or that they do not want being open to impact their job prospects. Findings from research about unaddressed hearing loss in general could also be useful when developing content for this area of support.

1. Information about assistive equipment and communication support available and how to access it

Both the need for further information about assistive technology available to help people, as well as needing to know how to access funding for this, came out strongly in the research. Part of the solution here will likely involve working with the AtW policy team at DWP, so that more people are aware of AtW and that assessors on the scheme are knowledgeable about the latest technology available. The survey asked questions about people's experiences of AtW. Please see our separate report for an analysis of these findings.

However, the research also found that people who have applied for Access to Work also feel a need for better information on technology available. It may be, therefore, that information on assistive equipment and communication is developed outside of AtW, to ensure that people have access to the latest tools that could help them and information on how they can access these.

Other things to consider when planning support

*Support for BSL users*

It was felt that the support needs between BSL users and non-BSL users may be different. However, findings from this research show that they are broadly the same. Therefore, the areas of support noted above are applicable for both BSL and non-BSL users. Of course, it will be important to look into how to make any support and advice accessible for BSL users, as well as non-BSL users as these two groups will have different needs in this respect.

*User testing support and advice options*

This research has uncovered what support and advice is most needed for people with hearing loss or deafness. However, it has not looked in detail at how this support or advice could be best delivered and what content might be most useful. In order to do this, it will be important to test any proposed support or advice options with potential users. In particular, respondents found paper and online materials the least helpful types of support they currently access and therefore it is recommended that any user testing investigates why this is. Participants can be recruited for this research by looking at respondents in the 2019 survey who said they would like further information about our research.

*Put suitable resource into publicising any support offered*

Many participants in this survey, and in other research, feel they are unaware of the support available to them. Consideration, therefore, must be given to how any support is marketed, in addition to thinking about its delivery.

*Communicate the work that we're doing with the Working for Change campaign*

There was a strong feeling from both the quantitative and qualitative research that people find managers and colleagues unsupportive in the workplace. This echoes previous research we've undertaken. It is suggested that any communications to employees with hearing loss outline our work with employers, so it is clear that we do not think it is solely the employee's responsibility to improve their situation in the workplace.

# Appendix

A.1 Methodology

A.1.1.1 Qualitative research

*A.1.1 Focus groups and interviews with non BSL users*

Qualitative research was conducted first, to help understand why people aren’t always open about their hearing loss, what impacts them getting support for their hearing loss, and what services or organisations they've received help from.

This round of qualitative research comprised of:

* 4 online focus groups
* 1 face-to-face focus group
* 1 in-depth interviews

In total, we spoke to 29 participants who are currently in work. All respondents, apart from one, were non BSL users. The final sample included a range of people within the following demographic groups:

* Age
* Geography
* Gender
* Level of seniority in current organisation
* Organisation's sector (private; public; voluntary)

*Focus groups and interviews with BSL users*

Following consultation with BSL users, it was decided to gain the views of BSL users through qualitative research, rather than translate the survey, although 46 first language BSL users did also take the survey. The qualitative research with BSL users comprised of:

4 one-to-one depth interviews

1 paired interview

In total we spoke to 6 BSL users as part of the qualitative research.

A.1.1.2 Quantitative research

The results from the qualitative research fed into the design of a survey, aimed at people with hearing loss, deafness, and tinnitus who are currently working. The survey asked people about the barriers they face at work, any support they currently receive, and support they would like to receive.

The survey ran from 9 July – 23 September 2019 and 854 people started the survey. However, base sizes for each question differ as respondents will have chosen not to answer the question or would have been filtered out of the question. Base sizes reported in this survey may also differ from the topline results as some respondents would have been filtered out. Please see base descriptions for more information.

Where possible comparisons of answers among different sub-groups was undertaken. However, this was not always possible if sub-group numbers were very small – i.e. below 25. Where sub-group results were small but reported, these results have been communicated as numbers and not percentages.

For a breakdown of who answered the survey, by demographic group, please see the separate topline results document.

A.1.1.3 Secondary research

Over the past few years we have conducted several studies related to employment, which are relevant to the objectives of this research. This report, therefore, references findings from this research, where applicable.

A.2 References

1. Action on Hearing Loss (2018), [*Survey of Workplace Experiences*](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/you-can-help/campaigns-and-influencing/working-for-change/) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Arrowsmith (2014), [*Hidden Disadvantage: Why people with hearing loss are still losing out at work*](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/how-we-help/information-and-resources/publications/research-reports/hidden-disadvantage-report/), Action on Hearing Loss, London [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/employers](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/employers) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Action on Hearing Loss (2018), [*Survey of Workplace Experiences*](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/you-can-help/campaigns-and-influencing/working-for-change/) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Action on Hearing Loss (2019), *Survey of people with hearing loss* [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Rolfe, C and Gardner, B (2016) *Experiences of hearing loss and views towards interventions to promote uptake of rehabilitation support among UK adults*, International Journal of Audiology, 55:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Action on Hearing Loss (2018), [*Survey of Workplace Experiences*](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/you-can-help/campaigns-and-influencing/working-for-change/) and Cook, L. (2017) *Working for Change: Improving attitudes to hearing loss in the workplace. Action on Hearing Loss* [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Action on Hearing Loss (2018), [*Survey of Workplace Experiences*](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/you-can-help/campaigns-and-influencing/working-for-change/) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See Action on Hearing Loss (2018), [*Survey of Workplace Experiences*](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/you-can-help/campaigns-and-influencing/working-for-change/) and Cook, L. (2017) *Working for Change: Improving attitudes to hearing loss in the workplace*. Action on Hearing Loss [↑](#endnote-ref-12)