

Supporting d/Deaf learners

Preston College



Preston College is a large tertiary college serving the city of Preston and the surrounding area of Central Lancashire. The College employs over 1000 staff and serves a population of approximately 250,000. Students are drawn from the local area, nationally and from overseas. The College provides courses in all areas of learning and a wide range of vocational courses at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Higher Education is also offered through partnerships with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and Edge Hill University.

The Additional Learning Support (ALS) Team provides support to students who have a learning difficulty or disability. They work closely with colleagues across college to ensure that students receive the support appropriate to their individual requirements. There are about 50 members in the team which consists of a manager, coordinators, specialist tutors, Education Support Workers (ESWs) and Learning Mentors. Deaf/deaf learners are supported by a team of 6 Communication Support Workers (CSWs). Of the 6 CSWs, 1 is a qualified interpreter, another is a trainee interpreter whilst the remaining 4 CSWs have their British Sign Language (BSL) qualification, from Level 3 to Level 4.

The D/deaf community in the college

In the academic year (2010/11) there are 20 Deaf/deaf learners being supported. They consist of 3 x 16-19 year olds, 4 x 19-25 year olds and 13 over the age of 25. One Deaf adult learner is retraining and attends an NVQ2 course two evenings a week. He has 2 CSWs and a notetaker supporting him in each theory session.

Another Deaf learner is Norwegian and uses Norwegian Sign Language (NSL) as his first language. He attends classes to improve his spoken and written English skills and a CSW supports him during these classes. The learner has passed both E1 and E2 while at Preston College and is progressing onto an E2/ E3 literacy class next year. Also while at the college the learner has passed Level 1 BSL and intends to continue to improve his BSL skills.

Communication support is not restricted to classroom activities. d/Deaf learners are supported to access enrichment activities which are both learning and non learning related e.g. field trips, work placements and award ceremonies. For example, one CSW is travelling with a Deaf learner to Paris this year on a field trip, d/Deaf learners also attend "Learner Voice" meetings and they are accompanied by their CSWs.

For perspective d/Deaf learners Media Studies learners have developed a "*Day in the life of.....*" DVD which tells the story of Deaf learners in the college. The DVD is signed and subtitled.

Working with outside agencies

The Additional Learning Support team work with a range of external organisations – some specialist – to support learners with transition. For example, this year one young Deaf student is progressing to University. There has been much liaison with UCLan to ensure there is a smooth transition, that he can access his Disability Support Allowance (DSA) and that all his support is in place before his academic studies commence. CSWs also attend University taster days with learners.

Links are also made with employment agencies to support the transition to work process. For example, the college work with Progress, a recruitment organisation who has supported one of their Deaf learners into employment.

The ALS team have organised for guests visitors to the college. Organisations such as the East Lancashire Deaf Society (ELDS) and Dering, an employment Agency for D/deaf people have come to the college and discussed employment opportunities with Deaf learners.

Supporting staff and learners

The college has 1 Deaf teacher who teaches British Sign Language (BSL) with the Health and Social Care Team and a hearing impaired CSW. Both members of staff have been supported to use Access to Work funding to make the adjustments they need to access the workplace.

All staff and learners in the college go through an induction process during which Disability Equality is discussed. For specific “hints and tips” when working with d/Deaf/ learners staff are directed to the college Moodle which has specific Deaf Awareness information available. Mainstream teachers can (and often do) get in touch with the ALS team for additional information. If there is an issue in terms of group dynamics within a class where there is a Deaf/deaf learner the ALS team can (and do) spend some time with the class training them in Deaf Awareness.

Critical success factors

When asked what made their practice effective the CSWs responded by saying they adapt their practice to suit individuals, they use assistive technology where necessary and they are improving their resources constantly. This allows learners to have access to the total curriculum on offer in the college and does not restrict d/Deaf learners in their choices. The ALS team work closely with curriculum staff and support tutors to ensure d/Deaf learners have full access while ensuring the tutor retains overall responsibility for teaching the learner.

The ALS team are very supportive team towards each other and work together to create support plans, share good practice and resources.

Here are some questions that might guide you on what to do next:

1. What qualifications do members of your Additional Learning Support Team have in relation to supporting d/Deaf learners?
2. What provision does your organisation have to support d/Deaf learners beyond classroom activities?
3. How have you enabled your d/Deaf learners to inform your organisation of their needs?
4. How do you currently raise deaf awareness within your organisation for both staff and learners?
5. What do you currently do to support d/Deaf learners develop their ability to work in groups or teams?
6. What, if any, outside agencies do you work with in relation to supporting d/Deaf learners?