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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO THE FULL EMPLOYMENT OF DEAF PERSONS IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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Some 78,000 handicapped workers were employed in the federal Civil Service at the end of 1973 (USCSC, 1974). These employees and disabled persons seeking government jobs were dramatically affected by the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112). Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that all federal agencies submit to the Civil Service Commission (CSC) affirmative action plans for employment of disabled persons.

Such activities on behalf of disabled workers in the federal Civil Service have several historic precedents. In 1948, PL 617 amended the Civil Service Act to bar certain practices which discriminated against the appointment of physically handicapped workers. In 1957, a system of coordinators for employment of handicapped persons was established within federal agencies. And, in 1964, the CSC set up special appointing authorities outside of competitive service. This program implemented specialized techniques of placement and used 700-hour trial appointments to secure jobs for handicapped individuals. Permission was also granted to use continuing appointments to obtain permanent employment for disabled civil servants. Between 1964 and 1972 more than 1,800 handicapped Americans obtained federal appointments through this special program (USCSC, 1973). Nearly 58 percent (1,053) of these workers have been

deaf.

Vocational rehabilitation has played an increasingly important role in Civil Service efforts to open employment prospects for disabled applicants. Section 501e of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandated a program of unpaid work experience in government agencies by DVR-supported clients. This program has broadened training and work preparation of handicapped individuals to increase their employability.

Besides the temporary and continuing appointment authorities, the CSC in 1971 initiated the *counselor certification technique*. With this procedure the Commission authorized federal agencies to accept a report stating the results of the counselor's inspection of the prospective work site, job requirements, and statement of qualifications of the client to safely handle the job. The counselor could also propose job modifications as needed to facilitate clients' employment. This counselor certificate could substitute for passing a Civil Service examination (USCSC, 1973).

These developments bring the counselor closer to the client, the federal coordinator for selective placement, and the agency personnel director or supervisor. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has had a pivotal influence on affirmative action programming for America's handicapped citizens.

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Project Background

A pilot study of deaf persons in federal government (Bowe, Delk, and Schein, 1973) uncovered some evidence that deaf persons face unnecessary difficulties attempting to gain government positions and greater barriers to promotion than their normally hearing co-workers once they enter federal Civil Service. The United States Civil Service Commission agreed that, while conclusive evidence was lacking, the material gathered by the brief investigation did warrant a more thorough study, one which focused upon remediation rather than fault-finding. Accordingly, the Deafness Research & Training Center undertook a follow-up study aimed at overcoming barriers deaf workers may face in federal employment. The Civil Service Commission arranged with the Social Security Administration in Baltimore, Maryland and with the Navy Printing Office in Arlington, Virginia for cooperation in the project.

Methodology

Four specific surveys were conducted towards attainment of the general goal of the project—to improve employment and promotion opportunities for deaf persons in the federal government. First, entrance procedures and requirements for a sample of Civil Service position classifications were reviewed to identify procedures which hindered employment of deaf persons. Job requirements for these same positions were then examined to determine whether specific duties could be tailored to accommodate deaf workers. Third, deaf employees and their supervisors were interviewed to identify problems in the working situation and to obtain suggestions for improving productivity and job satisfaction. Finally, promotion patterns were studied to identify possible barriers to deaf workers and to develop methods to overcome such barriers.

Results

The two federal agencies studied were selected by Civil Service to represent large (Social Security Administration) and small (Navy Printing Office) agencies. SSA employs

about 26,000 persons in its Baltimore setting, a complex of 28 buildings spread over 265 acres. By contrast NPO employs 400 persons in a portion of the basement of the Pentagon. Both installations have had deaf employees; their records of numbers over time, however, did not specify deafness, so we could not plot trendlines. We did obtain anecdotal accounts of previous deaf employees from present supervisory personnel.

Social Security Administration. The Baltimore Office of SSA contains 14 divisions, each of which employs a specialist responsible for personnel. To determine what procedures are routinely followed in hiring, direct interviews were conducted with the personnel specialists in each division. Although the divisions differ in their manpower needs, the procedures for acquiring needed manpower seem to be quite uniform. It appears that most positions are filled from CSC registers.

Three registers are used to fill clerical and assistant-level positions. Each of these registers requires a written or performance examination for applicants. There are five registers used to fill technical and professional level positions. Assignment to these registers is based largely on education and work experience, although successful completion of a written examination can be substituted for educational requirements at the lowest level.

For severely handicapped persons, non-competitive procedures are made available. These include the 700-hour temporary appointment and the continuing excepted appointments. Employees are evaluated and recommended for promotion by the Civil Service Commission rather than by their immediate supervisors. To enter under these special appointments, a person generally must meet minimum qualifications and take a written examination or be certified by a vocational rehabilitation counselor as capable of handling the work. All persons entering through the 700-hour and excepted appointments must present a current medical examination. SSA does not actively recruit persons for appointment under these special provisions. Rather, disabled persons are referred by DVR or VA, or

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come in on their own.

Navy Printing Office. The Navy Printing Office employs approximately 400 persons, 70 percent of whom are printing specialists in WI classifications. Professional and technical persons in GS grades comprise the other 30 percent of NPO employees.

To determine what procedures are followed in hiring, interviews were conducted with NPO personnel officials. These interviews revealed that all employees are hired from registers. Wage-grade employees are all classified as printing specialists in the WI series. These employees are further classified as lithographic press or bindery workers. Persons in WI series are hired from one of two registers:

- (1) *Worker Trainee Register (WAW-101).* This register requires no written test for access.
- (2) *Maintenance & Service Workers Register (WAW-10A).* No written test is required. However, an applicant must demonstrate that he has had experience in the type of work sought.

Persons working in GS series jobs are hired from the Federal Service Entrance Examination (F.S.E.E.) register. This register contains names of persons qualifying for professional and technical positions at grades 5 and 7. Sup-

port staff (clerks, typists, etc.) are hired from Stenographer-Typing and Clerks registers.

All deaf employees were hired under the Schedule A appointment for handicapped persons. Most hiring of handicapped individuals begins informally, by word of mouth or through community service groups. Following employment, handicapped persons go through the same procedures as do other employees.

Survey of Job Requirements

Each of the 92 separate job classifications in SSA and the 27 distinct positions in NPO was examined to identify those jobs which appear suitable for deaf persons. Direct interviews with personnel specialists were conducted in both agencies and classification standards maintained by CSC were reviewed. All jobs were classified, on the basis of information obtained from the agencies and CSC, in terms of requirements for hearing, speaking, language usage, and physical, written or other examinations.

We chose to study six requirements which present possible barriers to deaf persons. The hearing requirement, for example, appears frequently: "Ability to hear the conversational voice with or without a hearing aid is required." Do all positions with this standard require nor-

TABLE 1

Numbers of Positions in Social Security Administration Listing Requirements Likely To Limit Employment of Deaf Persons.

Type of Requirement	Numbers of Positions			
	Total	With Requirement	Some Have Requirement*	Without Requirement
Hearing	92	54	36	2
Speaking	92	48	11	33
Language	92	52	0	40
Physical Examination	92	92	0	0
Written Examination	92	19	50	23
Other Examinations	92	29	11	52

*Job classification states some positions have the requirement, while other positions in same job category do not.

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mal hearing? On the basis of direct interviews and observation, we attempted to find out which of these jobs may be performed, with or without modifications, by deaf persons. Other jobs carry the requirement: "Ability to hear the conversational voice with or without a hearing aid is required; however, some positions may be suitable for the deaf." The requirement rarely specifies which positions in the job category may be suitable for deaf persons and which are not. Further, the basis for dividing jobs in this fashion is not specified. This lack of clarity may present obstacles to potential employees who are deaf.

Entrance examinations present other possible barriers to deaf persons. The written examination, for example, adversely affects a deaf person who is capable of performing on the job but whose limited English language skills hinder his test performance. Interviews may similarly present barriers to capable deaf applicants who have limited facility with oral or written English. Results of the analysis of stated requirements for SSA and NPO jobs appear in Tables 1 and 2.

Further analysis of job descriptions suggested that jobs in both agencies could be reclassified according to suitability for deaf

persons with or without modifications. The requirements for speaking and language are helpful in determining whether selected deaf applicants, those with good speaking and/or language skills may qualify. Again, we were able to observe the jobs themselves to determine where deaf persons can perform satisfactorily with or without modifications in the job. Of the 92 positions in SSA, 33 appear suitable for deaf applicants including those with limited speaking and/or language abilities, 7 appear suitable for deaf applicants with good speaking and/or language abilities, 25 appear suitable for deaf applicants with appropriate modifications, 26 do not seem suitable, even with modifications, for deaf applicants. Of the 27 GS positions in NPO, 11 appear suitable for deaf applicants including those with limited speaking and/or language abilities, 4 seem suitable for deaf applicants with good speaking and language skills, 7 appear suitable with modifications for deaf applicants and 5 do not appear suitable even with modifications for deaf applicants. A detailed listing of these positions, while not included here, is available from the authors.

By modifications, we mean procedures which enable deaf employees to perform duties

TABLE 2

Numbers of Positions in Navy Printing Office Listing Requirements Likely To Limit Employment of Deaf Persons.

Type of Requirement	Numbers of Positions			
	Total	With Requirement	Some Have Requirement*	Without Requirement
Hearing	27	13	13	1
Speaking	27	10	2	15
Language	27	10	0	17
Physical Examination	27	27	0	0
Written Examination	27	10	10	7
Other Examination	27	11	1	15

*Job classification states that some positions have the requirement, while other positions in same job category do not.

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which they cannot handle otherwise. For example, substituting a flashing light for a buzzer can enable deaf operators to identify malfunctioning equipment. We found that many of the positions in SSA and NPO which appeared, on the basis of written requirements, to be unsuitable for deaf persons could be made appropriate with such modifications.

Survey of Job Conditions.

Information in this part of the study was gathered through direct interviews with deaf civil servants and their supervisors, as well as observation of the actual work setting.

Nine deaf workers, employed either by SSA or NPO, were asked to provide information on their experiences in civil service. The sample group was prevocally deaf; eight of the nine lost their hearing before age 19. In addition to deafness, three workers reported another health problem; arthritis, cerebral palsy, and a nervous condition. Seven of the nine employees were between 23 to 28 years old; two were older. All respondents were white and had completed high school, including one who attended college and another with graduate-level university training.

All nine respondents had normally hearing supervisors or coworkers; two also supervised normally hearing employees. As expected under these circumstances, communication was primarily oral. Eight of the nine deaf workers reported that they spoke to their supervisors; all nine spoke to their co-workers. One had a supervisor who used signs and fingerspelling to accompany speech; two deaf workers had hearing co-workers who could also communicate manually. Four deaf workers rated their own speech and speech-reading abilities to be "good" or better; five respondents considered their oral communication skills to be less than "good". Inspection of the data showed that respondents' self-ratings of oral competency were not related to the types of communication (e.g., speech, writing) used with work associates.

When queried about their ideas on what changes could be made to better their jobs, only two deaf employees had suggestions. One felt he should receive a raise; another wanted a

change to a new job. The paucity of information generated by this question may indicate either that it was poorly presented or that the employees have not given much thought to possible improvements of their working conditions.

One case of unfair employment treatment was recorded during the interviews. This incident occurred nearly ten years ago; it is summarized here only for informational purposes. When asked about entry experiences in the Civil Service, one deaf interviewee stated:

I passed a written exam. I was told that I got a high score. They sent me a letter four months later stating that I was not qualified for the job because I had (an additional disability). But the doctor had not seen me; he took it by hearsay from the records.

Respondent's family wrote their congressman about this case, which was then reviewed by the agency and the interviewee hired.

Nine supervisors of deaf civil servants were also interviewed. Seven were currently supervising a deaf employee; two had done so within the last two years. How did these supervisors communicate with deaf personnel? Speech, supplemented by writing, was used by five supervisors; two used only speech, and two others used signs with speech. One supervisor noted, "Over the years I have learned to listen".

Five of these managers had supervised one deaf worker, while four others had supervised two or more deaf employees (see Table 3). Length of experience supervising deaf workers ranged from three days to five years. As the length of experience increased, supervisors tended to be responsible for more deaf employees. Some supervisors, however, only encountered one deaf employee, while others became specialists in this type of supervision.

Supervisors were asked to rate the work performance of their deaf employees compared to the work performance of normally hearing coworkers. Four replied that deaf workers were "better than" normally hearing personnel; four others stated that both classes of workers were "about the same", and one

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Table 3

**Supervisor Ratings of Deaf Workers, by Total Time
of Supervisory Experience with and Number of Deaf Workers Supervised**

Total Time Supervision of Deaf Workers	Number of Deaf Supervised	Supervisor Ratings: Deaf Compared to Hearing		
		Worse Than	About Same	Better Than
3 days	1		1	
3 weeks	1		1	
8 months	1		1	
1.5 years	1			1
1.5 years	2			1
3 years	3			1
3-4 years	1			1
4-5 years ¹	6-7			
5 years	5		1	

¹No opinion

supervisor had no opinion. None of the supervisors considered deaf workers “worse than” normally hearing workers. The evidence available from the interviews suggested that work performance ratings tended to improve as supervisors gained more experience or supervised additional deaf persons (see Table 3). When asked to justify their ratings, the following remarks were typical of those made by the supervisors.

One supervisor, who rated deaf workers “about the same” as workers who hear, commented:

When she first came into the unit, I didn't know she had trouble. I just asked the clerks to face her (when communicating). With two hearing aids she could hear easily. I treated her like everyone else and she is.

Another supervisor, who evaluated deaf employees as “better than” their nondeaf colleagues, felt this was because the former:

stick with the job better. They are always willing to work; cooperative. There is a problem with communication

. . . They have an asset other people don't have; they ask a question that gets the answer they want. They tell you if they don't understand, they always think they have understood, or come back.

These and other comments made by the supervisors during the interviews suggest that their attitudes ranged from a feeling that no special treatment is needed to the recognition of practical communication problems. Individual differences naturally intersect across this range of opinion. Neither deaf workers nor their supervisors fit into predetermined categories. Communication barriers, however, are experienced by many deaf wage earners and their normally hearing associates at work.

When asked to cite jobs that deaf workers could not perform within the agency, their supervisors classified the following:

1. *Use of sound-recorded equipment.* The telephone, dictaphones, and other information-transcribing devices pose difficulties for deaf workers.
2. *Use of machinery.* “We are worried about

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press operators not being able to listen to machines, but so far there has not been one accident", one supervisor observed. This comment may exemplify concerns found in various work locations with machinery in operation.

3. *Jobs dealing with the public* were seen by supervisors as occupations where deaf persons would face difficulties. While these supervisors were unwilling to exclude all deaf persons from such employment, there was general recognition of the limited opportunities for deaf workers in full-time public contact positions.

Aside from these three categories, the supervisors could not list other types of jobs which they felt deaf workers could not successfully perform.

Discussions with supervisors did not produce any evidence of specific modifications of the jobs done by their deaf personnel. Either these modifications had already been made and forgotten or additional changes were judged not necessary. One supervisor commented, ". . . everything is standard; deaf workers can do most anything without revi-

sions". A note of caution should be added to the interpretation of such observations. When supervisors believe that deaf workers should receive no special treatment different from agency staff who hear, this attitude may form an unconscious barrier to introducing job modifications which could improve the work performance of deaf employees.

One supervisor felt that new deaf employees need extra orientation to job requirements. Another supervisor observed that deaf workers need help "to know what jobs would be the easiest for them to work in." Two other supervisors saw advantages to providing sign language classes for agency staff who work with deaf employees.

Survey of Promotion Practices.

The purpose of this phase of the project was to examine experiences of deaf workers with promotions within the Civil Service.

Before joining the Civil Service, six respondents were employed in the private sector for at least six months; three of these worked for one year or less, and three others worked for two to three years. Seven employees

Table 4

**Numbers of Promotions of Deaf Personnel, by Agency,
Title, Grade, and Length of Service on Present Job**

Agency	Job Title	Grade	Time on Job	Number of Promotions ¹
SSA	Accounts Clerk	G.S.-4	3 weeks	0
SSA	Computer Aide	G.S.-5	6 years	1
SSA	Program Specialist	G.S.-11	8 months	0
SSA	Card Punch Operator	G.S.-2	2 days	0
NPO	Press Operator	W.I.-8	2 years	2
NPO	Half-tone Camera Operator	W.I.-6	2 months	1
NPO	Bindery Machine Operator	W.I.-12	8 years	3
NPO	Press Operator	W.B.-9	5 years	0
NPO	Photo Machine Operator	W.I.-12	2 years	2

¹Number of promotions while on present job.

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passed a Civil Service examination to obtain their present jobs while two others had oral interviews. Five persons were informed by family members or friends about job opportunities in the agency where they now work. Three others were helped to enter federal employment by education or rehabilitation specialists.

In addition to their formal education, seven of the nine respondents received vocational training, either on the job, or through adult education, extension, correspondence, or related courses. Only three of nine interviewees received special training in courses sponsored by the Civil Service. Among reasons expressed for not participating in Civil Service-sponsored training sessions were: "I never hear of it," "I cannot hear the teacher," "I think it is too hard because I am deaf." None of those who had attended federally-sponsored training reported using a sign language interpreter in the classroom. However, we are advised that this situation has now changed and sign language interpreters are made available.

The type of job currently held by the deaf employees as well as its corresponding grade level are given in Table 4. The deaf employees surveyed had held their current jobs for two days to eight years. Five of nine workers had

been promoted at least once while in their present job.

Respondents' experience in federal employment totalled 79 years (see Table 5). The group average was 8.8 years of federal career service, with individual cases ranging between two days and 32 years. During their government employment, deaf respondents had a total of 25 job changes, not including promotions while in the same job. While this represents an overall mean of one job shift approximately every three years, several divergences from this average can be observed in Table 5. These include two employees with a total of seven job changes during seven total years of federal service and another employee who has remained on the same job for eight years. Generally, as the length in time of federal service increases, mean length of time staying at one job also increases.

Reasons for shifting jobs are reported in Table 6. Reduction in agency work force or transfers accounted for 10 of 24 job changes. Only three respondents specifically cited dissatisfaction with their previous positions.

Two types of promotions should be considered. One is promotion to a higher-level job, generally involving a shift to a new agency

Table 5
Number of Job Changes, and Mean Duration Per Job, by Present Age, Age at Entry and Total Time in Federal Career

Agency	Present Age	Federal Career			
		Age at Entry	Length of Service (In Yrs.)	Number of Jobs	Mean Time Per Job
SSA	28	21	7.5	3	2.5 years
SSA	40	24	16	4	4.0 years
SSA	58	26	32	5	6.4 years
SSA	24	24	2 days	1	under 1.0 years
NPO	23	20	3	3	1.0 year
NPO	24	20	4	4	1.0 year
NPO	26	18	8	1	8.0 years
NPO	27	21	6.5	2	3.2 years
NPO	26	24	2	2	1.0 year

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Table 6

Reasons for Job Changes of Deaf Employees, by Agency

Reason	Agency		Total
	SSA	NPO	
Transfer	2	3	5
Reduction in force	2	3	5
Promotion	3	—	3
Dissatisfaction ¹	3	—	3
Now in first job	—	2	2
More overtime	1	—	1
Temporary job expired	1	—	1
Not reported	1	3	4

¹Boredom, did not like job, problem with supervisor.

or other work locale. The other is career ladder promotion, a rise in grade level while maintaining the same work position, most frequently in the same agency. Among the four workers who received no promotions while on their present job, three have been employed in their current positions for eight months or less. The other person was employed for five years without a promotion. Five other deaf workers reported at least one promotion while working in their present jobs: two were promoted once, two were promoted twice, and one was promoted thrice. Promoted workers generally were employed longer in their current posts than non-promoted workers.

When asked how their own rate of promotion compared to other employees, three deaf workers stated it was "slower", one said it was "faster", and four thought it was the "same"; one person had no opinion. Analyses of the data indicated that these perceptions of promotion rates were not related to the number of *within-job promotions* each had received. Attitudes about promotion rates apparently stem from a complex of interrelated employment conditions such as length of time on present job, current grade level, as well as the number of *career promotions* obtained.

When asked why they were not promoted

on the job they now hold, only one respondent felt it was because of his deafness. Two interviewees mentioned the short time they had held their present positions. Another respondent said, "I am at the top of the ladder as far as my job is concerned. Any other promotion within this office would be if one of the supervisors left." Another deaf worker noted that he was on a waiting list for a higher-level job.

Two problems are generally encountered by deaf wage earners; (a) facing a traditional barrier to supervisory level jobs and (b) lack of awareness of career ladders and advancement opportunities outside of the agency. Communication is a key factor in the effective solution of such problems.

Discussion

Requirements for entrance into two government agencies were reviewed and various registers identified. Requirements for 119 unique job classifications in two agencies were assessed for their suitability for deaf workers: 44 jobs were found suitable for deaf individuals with limited language and speech skills, 11 jobs were found suitable for deaf workers with good language and speech skills, 37 jobs needed appropriate modifications to become suitable for deaf employees, and 27 jobs were

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found unsuitable for deaf workers.

To evaluate job conditions and promotion experience, interviews were conducted with deaf civil servants and their supervisors in two cooperating agencies. Deaf workers interviewed shared several characteristics typical of other disabled workers studies by the Civil Service Commission (1973); most were in the 20-29 age bracket and most had a maximum of 12 years education. The report indicated that deaf workers, as interviewed, do desire self-improvement via special training, yet for various reasons only one-third participated in inservice training courses. Ratings by supervisors of their deaf subordinates were generally quite favorable. Supervisors identified three types of job barriers faced by deaf workers; use of sound-recording equipment, use of machinery, and agency positions requiring contact with the public.

The experiences of deaf workers with promotions while in the federal service were examined. Deafness was not judged by most of those interviewed to be a factor determining promotion. Analyses of the data suggested that conditions relevant to promotion were; length of time on present job, current grade level, and length of the federal career service of each deaf worker.

Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from two sources. Some are directly derived from the findings of this project report. Others came from concurrent activities within the federal government to broaden employment prospects for deaf as well as other disabled individuals.

1. The Civil Service Commission (1973a) defined hearing impairment in terms of the severity of the auditory loss. This report indicated that while hearing ability is a factor in evaluating suitability of job classifications for deaf employees, only 22 percent of 119 jobs reviewed were found unsuitable for deaf workers. Language and speech competencies were identified as other characteristics essential for meaningful analyses of Civil Service positions' suitability for deaf applicants.

2. Inservice courses sponsored by the Civil Service are now increasingly accessible to deaf employees in the federal government. Communication barriers need no longer prevent effective participation by deaf workers in classes conducted under Civil Service auspices. Wider advertisement of such courses would be beneficial for deaf civil servants.
3. Promotion opportunities for deaf employees in federal positions could be enhanced by greater understanding of the work orientation of deaf civil servants. There is reason to believe that deaf workers consider promotions only in terms of a limited number of positions in the agencies where they currently are employed. Therefore, deaf workers need exposure to *career* orientations across federal agencies, in addition to *job* orientation to a given agency.
4. Orienting supervisors to deafness can be worthwhile. Such orientation should be targeted to different types of supervisors; those with no experience with deaf employees, those with limited experience, and those with extensive experience.
5. Various procedures can help overcome communication difficulties faced by deaf employees in the Federal government. These include:
 - a. Installing teletypewriters in agencies with deaf employees.
 - b. Providing classes in manual communication for normally hearing coworkers.
 - c. Providing sign language interpreters.
6. Use of excepted positions to secure federal employment for deaf workers helps them to enter, but not necessarily to stay in, the Federal government. Promotion and advancement opportunities can be limited for civil servants in non-competitive positions. Larger than usual staff turnover may be harmful to federal agencies with disproportionate numbers of workers in low-grade excepted occupations. Conversion of excepted positions to competitive classifications wherever possible could have long-term merits.
7. The role of vocational rehabilitation in the

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federal selective placement program for handicapped workers has recently increased. The Civil Service Commission can explore with deafness rehabilitation specialists ways to coordinate efforts to place deaf workers in government positions.

8. Specialized adult education programs for

deaf persons are rapidly growing in numerous communities around the nation. Regional training officers of the CSC can develop relations with such instructional programs for inclusion of courses for deaf applicants and deaf workers in the federal government.

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