

# THE DISABLED PERSONS (EMPLOYMENT) ACT, 1944

## EMPLOYMENT OF THE DEAF AND PARTIALLY DEAF

### NOTES FOR GUIDANCE

#### Introduction

1. The essential point about the deaf and partially deaf is that they are ordinary men and women who have lost, or who have never had, the full use of their hearing, or, in some cases, have never had hearing at all. There is no foundation whatever for the idea, held by some people, that the deaf are dull-witted or incapable of doing a good day's work. Given work for which hearing is not essential, and the understanding and co-operation of their fellows, they are, as a rule, capable of working in competition with the hearing to their own and their employer's satisfaction, and in some types of employment are able to work better than their hearing fellow workers.

#### Who are the deaf ?

2. For most purposes the deaf can be divided into two groups ; the born deaf and the hard of hearing (including the wholly deafened).

(1) The first group includes those who were born deaf or who lost their hearing before learning to speak and who therefore had to attend a special school for the deaf to be taught both speech and language. Even after such educational training many are able to use only a manual sign language or a combination of signs and limited speech and consequently may find it difficult to express themselves either orally or in writing. Furthermore they may have difficulty in reading anything but simple written matter. All, however, have some, and many very good, knowledge of lip reading. Their hearing deficiencies do not lower their industrial capacity when engaged in suitable work and many have considerable manual skill and are capable of high-quality work. Even amongst the born deaf, there are some who have learned efficient speech and the art of reading and of fully expressing themselves in writing. Indeed some have attained high academic, professional, or technical standards.

(2) The second group, the hard of hearing and the wholly deafened, have no language or speech deficiencies. They are handicapped only by the degree of their inability to hear. Many of the hard of hearing are able, with a hearing aid, to hear almost normally, but some find frequent noise very trying ; others, however, who suffer from head noises may find this trouble alleviated in noisy surroundings and some partially deaf people hear better in a noise. The wholly deafened are often very good at lip reading and then have little difficulty in maintaining an ordinary conversation.

#### Suitable and Unsuitable work

3. Jobs involving the immediate perception of sounds (such as telephone switch-board operating) are obviously unsuited to the deaf. Sufferers from nerve deafness who are susceptible to noise should not work in very noisy surroundings. Those subject to occasional fits of giddiness should not work at heights or on ladders.

4. In choosing suitable jobs for the deaf, therefore, much depends on the type and degree of the handicap, and much on the age, experience and qualifications of the individual, and the extent to which he can overcome his handicap by lip reading or the use of his residual hearing with or without a hearing aid. The very wide field of potential employment includes professional and semi-professional posts, as well as skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jobs in industry ; it is better to assume, in the first instance, that a deaf person can do any job (for which he is otherwise qualified) where good hearing is not essential rather than to regard a restricted range of jobs as being specially suitable. Nevertheless there are jobs where deafness has little or no significance and some firms have actually found it better to employ totally deaf workers on noisy jobs such as riveting, where, since they are impervious to noise, they are often better able to concentrate than people with normal hearing. Similarly, noisy jobs in offices, such as calculating machine

ROBERT HOUSE LIBRARY  
15, BROOKES UNIVERSITY  
OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY  
35, LONDON ROAD  
OXFORD

operating, card punching and copy typing, might be found particularly suitable for deaf workers (although, as pointed out above, this does not apply to certain types of deaf or partly deaf people, *e.g.* sufferers from nerve deafness who may be susceptible to noise).

### Interviewing and giving Instructions

5. There need be no difficulty in interviewing or giving instructions to a deaf person. A satisfactory interview can be had even with a wholly deaf person who cannot lip read, if a friend or other person is present to interpret. For applicants born deaf, a missionary or welfare worker for the deaf may be the best helper. Applicants who are partially deaf (or hard of hearing) or who have become wholly deafened, will probably prefer to bring their friends, but the hard of hearing Clubs are always ready to help when needed. The Local Employment Exchange, also, is always prepared to make arrangements to help an employer in interviewing a deaf person.

6. Provided care is taken to make sure that the deaf worker fully understands what is required, instruction on the job is usually fairly easy. Verbal instruction given clearly and slowly is often sufficient, though further guidance may be advisable in some cases by written instructions, signs, diagrams, charts, illustrations or demonstrations. The essential thing is to be quite sure that the deaf worker has understood his instructions.

### 7. Some Hints in dealing with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Speak slowly and distinctly, but do not shout or "mouth" your words. Clear enunciation is more helpful to both lipreaders and partial hearers than any form of exaggerated speech.

Be careful that your mouth is always fully visible when you are speaking.

Do not become impatient or irritable—this will only make you less intelligible and the distress caused to the deaf person will make it harder for him to understand.

If he has difficulty in understanding a particular word or sentence write it down and then go back to speech.

If he looks puzzled, ask him if he has understood you; he might not like to ask you himself to repeat what you said. Check his understanding of important points by asking him to repeat them, as you would in a telephone conversation.

Do not hesitate to ask him to repeat his words if you do not understand him properly, or, if necessary, ask him to write them down. The speech of the hard of hearing and deafened sometimes deteriorates but it is usually only necessary to indicate the reason that you could not hear, *e.g.* "Your voice is too deep; please raise it a little". If this is done tactfully, it will be gratefully received and time will be saved.

Do not expect a hard of hearing person always to wear a hearing aid while working; it can be an encumbrance on some jobs or disconcerting in noisy surroundings; if you wish to speak to him, make sure that he first puts on the hearing aid.

**Remember that the deaf or hard of hearing employee may be capable of doing much better work than that on which he is at present engaged. Therefore give him the same attention and opportunities of advancement as the worker with normal hearing.**

### General

8. If you need any further information about the employment of the deaf you are invited to get in touch with the local office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service.



MINISTRY OF LABOUR  
AND NATIONAL SERVICE.

St. James's Square,  
London, S.W.1.