

Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD)

On Thursday May 19 2022, we are celebrating the 11th Global Accessibility Awareness Day. It aims to stimulate debate about digital access and inclusion for the more than one billion people worldwide with disabilities or impairments.

Of these, 11 million people in the UK are deaf or hard-of-hearing. They often face accessibility issues when using technology and digital products. The GAAD Foundation, launched in 2021 to celebrate the organisation's tenth anniversary, sheds light on this group's difficulties and addresses the technology inequalities.

The challenges of the Deaf community

GAAD supports a commitment to inclusion as part of people's civil rights – web content and digital services should be accessible to all. The needs of the Deaf community include captions for video presentations and visual indicators in place of audio cues.

Over 70 percent of Deaf people are unemployed or underpaid, and Deaf and hard-of-hearing people are more prone to mental-health problems than the rest of the population. This lack of inclusion can lead to distress and isolation.

With Zoom and Teams meetings becoming popular in the pandemic, Deaf people face another communication barrier. For those who rely on lip reading, a video conference call can be challenging, with buffering, un-synced sound and background noise being picked up on a microphone.

Technical solutions

Breaking down the hindrances mentioned above might include installing amplification systems that are compatible with hearing aids and cochlear implants, providing real-time captioning for all lectures and meetings by default, and providing interpreting and transliteration services (such as sign language).

Inclusion in educational settings

Deaf students too have a right to inclusion. The Equality Act 2010 stipulates that education must be accessible to all, and 'reasonable adjustments' should be made to enable students to participate fully. Inclusion good practice means adapting the physical and visual learning environment to be Deaf-friendly. This may include in-person and online interpreters for video platforms.

Towards inclusivity

Incorporating Deaf awareness into day-to-day communication can reduce barriers to

education and employment and improve people's quality of life.

Ultimately inclusion needs to be embedded from the start. Businesses need to ensure Deaf awareness training for all employees, not just those from the Deaf community. By fostering a positive attitude to Deaf issues, workplaces and education facilities can work together to support Deaf people effectively and help them succeed and achieve their ambitions.

