

# IN THE LOOP

## Part 1

### Hearing loop awareness for hearing aid users



***Bury U3A Accessibility Study Group  
& Communic8te Bury***

**August 2020**

*Updated 25/8/20*

## **In the Loop**

### **Part 1: Hearing Loop awareness for hearing aid users**

#### ***Bury U3A & Communic8te Bury***

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## **WITH THANKS TO...**

### **Editorial**

Members of Bury U3A's Accessibility Study Group

Members of Communic8te Bury's Loop Squad

The many local hearing aid users who made valuable comments

### **Professional guidance**

Representatives of:

NHS Audiology, Radcliffe Primary Care

Ideas for Ears

Ampetronic

Contacta

### **Artwork**

Heather Clarke Illustration



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## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

**Do you sometimes find it hard to hear staff in shops, banks and other places you visit, people in meetings or events, theatre performances, talks, religious services...? Then Part 1 of "In the Loop" may be for you.**

The Equality Act 2010 places an obligation on service providers (in retail, banking, health, entertainment etc.) to make reasonable adjustments to the services they provide in order to ensure equality of service. This includes ensuring that they can be adequately heard and understood.

The law means that service providers must ensure that people with substantial and long-term hearing loss can receive the standard of information, goods or services being provided for everyone else. They do this by making 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that you can.

Simple measures like clearer speech, turning down background music, finding a quiet place to talk, etc. may be sufficient in some settings. In others, further adjustments may be required. Among the most important adjustments for people with hearing loss is the provision of hearing loops (also known as induction hearing loops) which allow hearing aid users to access better quality sound via a discreet sound system. You may have one of these in your home to help you hear the television.

If you are not sure what hearing loops are, or how to use them; if you don't know if your hearing aids are capable of making use of a hearing loop; if you don't understand the potential benefits they offer, or where to expect to find them, read on.

**Part 1 of "In the Loop" aims to provide an introduction to hearing loops for people who use hearing aids.**

There are still many shops, offices and other public locations that do not have a hearing loop, or it is not working properly, or there's no information to let you know it's there, or staff don't understand how to use it. In these cases, even though a loop system may have been installed, the service provider is failing to comply with the law that requires them to ensure equality of service to all customers. This booklet tells you what to expect, what you are entitled to, and what you can do if the hearing loop is unsatisfactory. The duty to provide equality is anticipatory, it should be there in readiness for the disabled person and what they might reasonably need.

**Part 2 of 'In the Loop' provides information about hearing loops for frontline staff and managers. Please recommend this to staff and managers you are in touch with.**

## TERMINOLOGY

Communication as used in these booklets refers to the transactional conversation between a service user and a service provider. For convenience and brevity they will be referred to as 'customer' and 'staff' respectively, regardless of the role each plays in a given situation.

Hearing loops are assistive listening systems that use a magnetic field to transmit a signal. They are the most widely used assistive listening system and the one most preferred by end users. Other assistive listening systems include infra-red systems, radio frequency systems, and wifi digital systems. These are less favoured by end users and are not covered in this booklet.

A telecoil is the receiver inside a hearing aid that picks up the magnetic signal. The T-setting (also known as a T-loop or loop programme) refers to the mechanism used to switch it on or off.

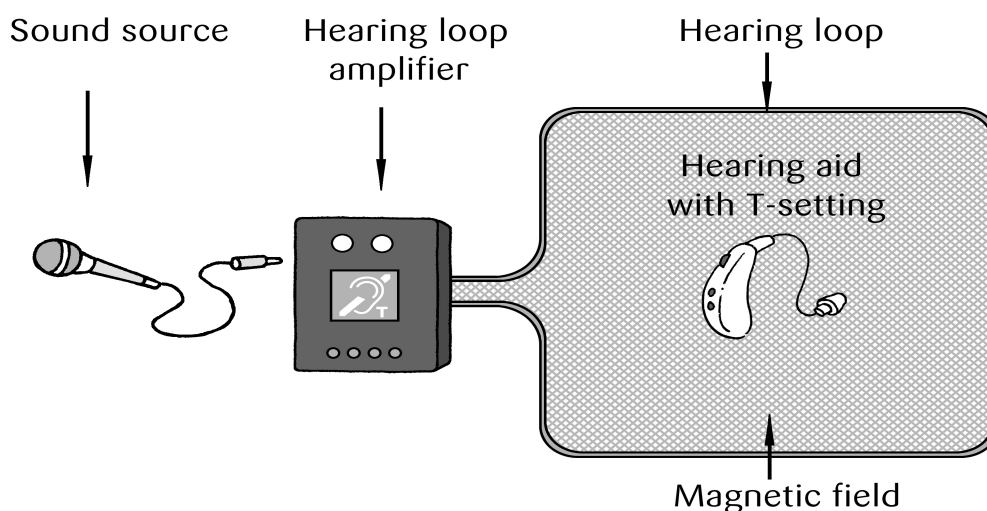
Cochlear implant and another hearing device, as used in this booklet, are included in the term hearing aid and are not always referred to separately.

## ABOUT HEARING LOOPS

### What is a hearing loop and how does it work?

A hearing loop (sometimes called an induction loop) is a sound system that converts the sound you want to hear into a magnetic signal which is then picked up by a receiver called a telecoil inside your hearing aid. The sound is then modified within your aid to fit your particular hearing loss. The T-setting (sometimes called a T-loop or loop programme) is the mechanism that allows you to switch the telecoil on or off. Most but not all hearing aids have a telecoil; if yours doesn't, you won't be able to hear the hearing loop. No one outside the magnetic field (or who doesn't have their hearing aid switched to the T-setting) will be able to hear anything either (*see the diagram below*). More about magnetic fields later.

### The main elements of a hearing loop system:



### Have you tried a hearing loop?

Hearing loops send sound directly into your hearing aids. This can create a more comfortable and relaxing listening experience. Many hearing aid users are unaware of the benefits of a hearing loop and feel it might be something for other people but 'not them'.

Be assured that hearing loops can benefit any hearing aid user who has a T-setting, even if your hearing loss seems to you to be fairly mild. Hearing loops can be particularly helpful in situations when you are quite far from the person speaking, for instance, in a theatre or meeting. Or where it is noisy or the room has an echo.

When a hearing loop is set up and working as it should be, then you will find it more pleasant and easier to hear sound through the hearing loop than through loudspeakers or without.

If you haven't tried a hearing loop, then this booklet will give you the information so you feel confident to do this. If you have tried one or more and had a poor experience, then this booklet will explain why this is and what needs to happen so next time you have a good experience.

### Why might I want to use a hearing loop?

A loop system that is working well has two main benefits for you as a hearing aid user:

1. **Clarity** Listening quality across a distance is better and clearer. Even the best hearing aids can struggle to pick up sound that is more than a few metres away. Additionally, as sound travels across a distance, it naturally deteriorates and this can have a big impact on the clarity of what is heard. With a hearing loop, the sound is beamed directly (and instantly) into your hearing aids so there is no reduction in quality or clarity.

2. **Background noise** Only the 'wanted' sound picked up by the microphone is transmitted; any background noise is reduced or eliminated (or it should be, if the system is working properly). This can make listening much easier and more relaxing, similar to the effect of wearing good earphone or ear buds.

### **What sort of premises have loops?**

Any sort of organisation or business that deals with the public is bound by law to ensure equality of service to all customers. In the case of people with a hearing loss, one of the adjustments often provided is a hearing loop. You will come across hearing loops at tills, checkouts, counters, reception desks, surgeries, care homes, meeting rooms, halls, churches, theatres, etc. Where a loop system is provided there should be a sign similar to the one on the cover of this booklet, but unfortunately signs are not always as well placed as they should be and you may need to search for them.

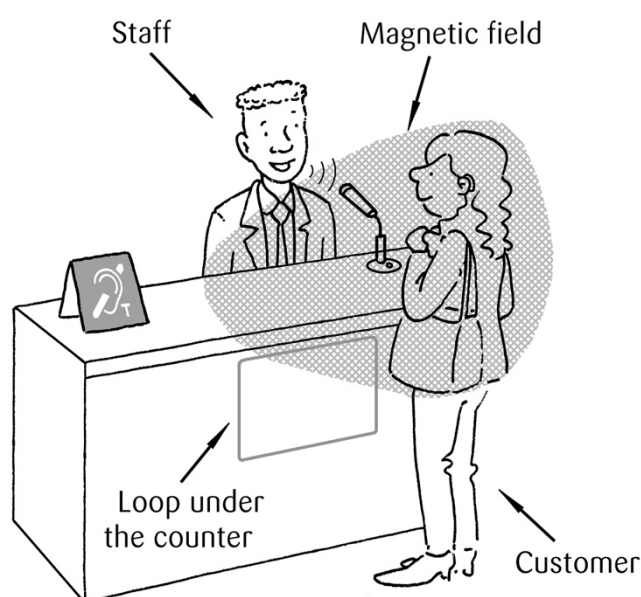
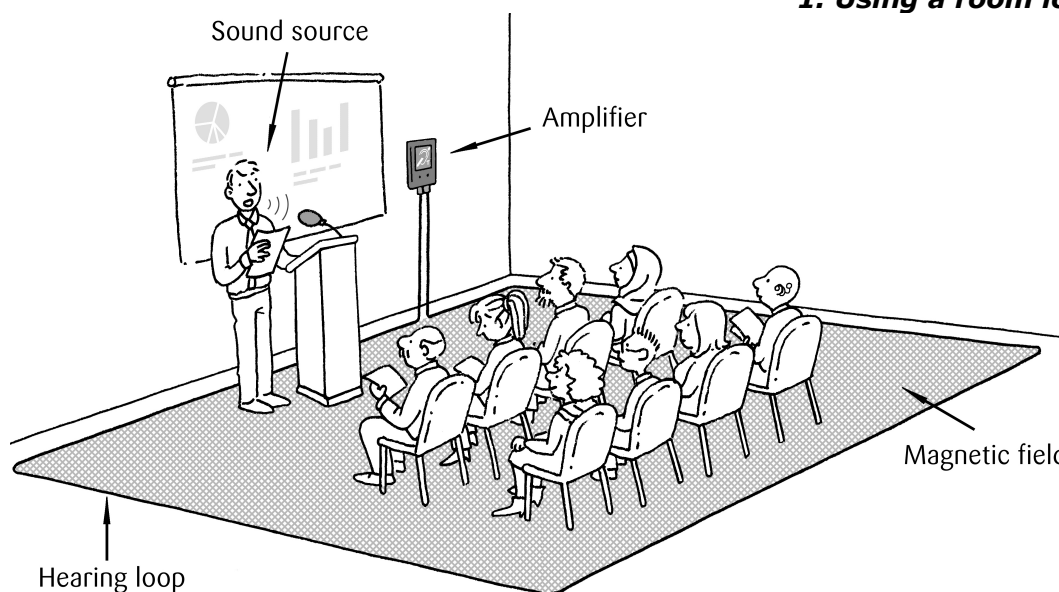
## ARE ALL HEARING LOOPS THE SAME?

No, there are several different types of hearing loop. They all work the same way but there are different versions available to meet the needs of different settings and requirements. This booklet deals only with hearing loops used in meeting rooms, lecture theatres and at customer service desks. Other places where hearing loops can be used (but which are not covered in this booklet) include taxis, intercoms and homes. The following pages describe and illustrate types of hearing loops you are likely to encounter in public places.

### Room loops

Room loops are used in places where the speaker uses a microphone; for example, in a hall or a church. The hearing loop runs around the edges of the room or crosses back and forth within the ceiling or floor. The signal can be picked up by anyone within the loop who has hearing aids switched to the T-setting (*see picture 1*). Unless the loop system is of very high quality the signal may seem 'weak' or 'thin' or there may be 'dead spots' in the room where the signal is absent or not loud enough. You may want to try another seat to see if the signal is stronger.

#### 1. Using a room loop



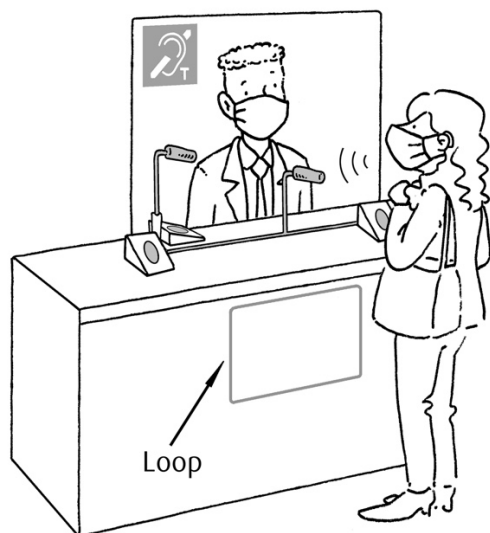
#### 2. Using a counter loop

### Counter loops

These are fitted at counters, reception points etc. where you need to speak to staff on a 1-to-1 basis, where it is noisy, or for reasons of confidentiality. In this case the magnetic field is quite small, about 1.5 metres, so that the sound can't be picked up by anyone else with a hearing aid with T-setting switch on who happens to be close by. Because you can hear the staff member more clearly this way, they won't need to raise their voice. These systems are usually built into a counter or desk, *as in picture 2*. The magnetic field's range is quite limited, so make sure that you are standing in the right place, or you will not be able to hear anything. The loop should already be switched on, so switch to your T-setting as you approach the counter.

### A screened counter with speech transfer and hearing loop systems

After the Coronavirus lockdown we can expect to see many counters equipped with protective screens, and staff wearing facial protection. Masks and screens reduce clarity of speech for everyone, customers and staff as well, so expect to see more screens equipped with speech transfer systems like the ones currently used in banks, ticket offices, etc. (See picture 3.) A speech transfer system dampens background noise and acts like a private two-way intercom, enhancing speech for the people on both sides of the screen. For people with hearing loss this will offer some help but maybe not enough. Increasingly, however, we expect that these systems will be integrated with hearing loops as standard, so watch out for the familiar sticker.

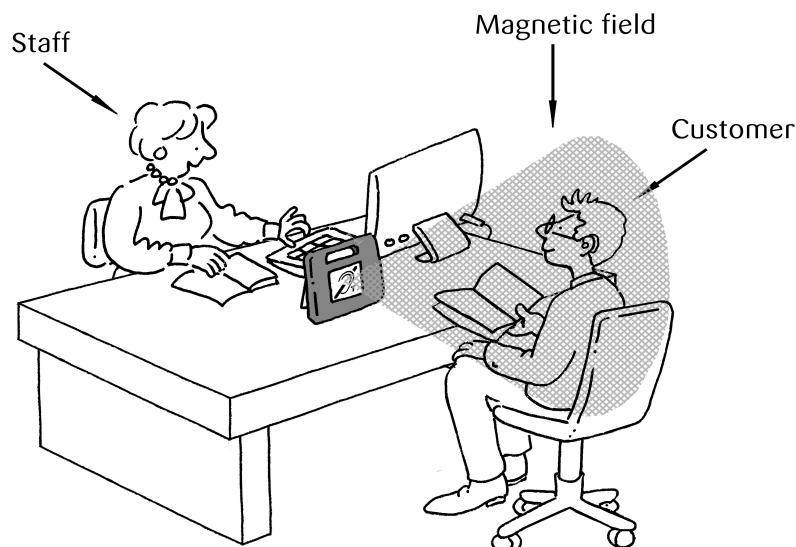


If no loop system is available, leave your hearing aid on whatever programme you would normally use in this situation.

**3. A screened counter with speech transfer system plus loop system**

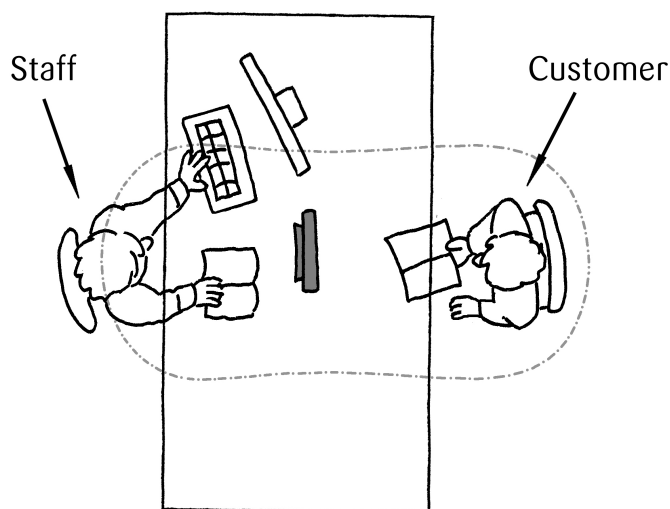
### Portable table-top loops

Occasionally, in a small consulting room, for example, where no desk loop is installed, you may be offered the use of a battery-powered portable table-top loop instead. These are of variable quality and combine microphone and amplifier in a single portable unit (see black box right) and may not be able to transmit a strong, clear signal. It is really suitable only for 1-to-1 conversations in a quiet environment. It should be placed between you and the consultant with the label facing towards you. As you can see in picture 4a, the range of the magnetic field is quite limited.



**4a. Using a portable loop**

Picture 4b shows the limited working range of a table-top loop; you and the person you are speaking to need to be no more than about a metre from the device. If the person speaking is further away their voice may not be picked up. If you go as a couple, think carefully about who will sit where. If the room is quiet you may find your hearing aids perform well enough and you don't need the loop.



**4b. The working range if using a portable table-top loop**

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*NOTE: There are other types of loop, such as infra-red and radio frequency systems which are used mainly in places of entertainment. They work differently. They are not included in this booklet.*



## ABOUT YOUR HEARING AIDS

### Are all hearing aids the same?

No. Apart from all the different makes and models, each aid is customised to suit the pattern and type of each wearer's hearing loss. Modern aids can come with all sorts of additional programs beyond the basic one, but how many of the extra programs can be incorporated into your aid can depend on the make and model you have. You can discuss with your audiologist or hearing aid provider which programs you think may be of use to you\*. Programmes can include: a music setting, a speech-in-noise setting, and a T-setting. You don't have to be 'really deaf' to benefit from the range of benefits modern aids can provide.

A T-setting programme can only be provided if your hearing aid has a telecoil inside it. Most hearing aids have this and it is simple for an audiologist to set it up to work. If you are not sure if you have a T-setting or telecoil, ask your audiologist or hearing aid specialist\* when you next visit. Explain that you want to see how much improvement a properly working hearing loop gives you.

### How do I know if my hearing aids have a T-setting?

If you are not sure, you can test out different programme settings when you are standing near to a hearing loop that you are confident is switched on and is working. If you find the sound suddenly going directly into your hearing aid then you will know that programme is the T-setting.

The other way, which might be easier for you, is to ask your audiologist or hearing aid specialist\*. Be aware that your hearing aids might not have had the T-setting activated either due to oversight or because your audiologist wasn't sure if you would be interested in using it.

You should also be aware that some hearing aids can be programmed to have two types of T-setting: one is the usual T-setting, where all background noise is excluded by switching off the usual microphone in your aid, so that only the sound transmitted to the telecoil can be heard; the additional, or alternative, programme is 'half-and-half' – you receive the sound transmitted, but the usual microphone is left 'live' so that you can also hear the sound around you. This may be useful in some situations such as when you want to hear the chat around you. If you want to be able to listen to a hearing loop without hearing background noise, then you may want to opt for the full T-setting. Discuss with your audiologist or hearing aid provider the range of options open to you and decide together which would suit you best\*.

### How well do you know your hearing aids?

Hearing aids vary in other ways. Some aids have automatic volume control, others allow you some measure of control. Some aids have a rocker switch or button that allows you to adjust the volume; others work automatically. Some aids have a number of additional programs as well as the T-setting. There may be a button or a rocker switch you need to press to change programs or volume. You should be able to hear a sound that confirms you have selected the right program. If you are not sure what programs have been installed on your aid, or how to select them, make an appointment with your audiologist or hearing specialist to return and discuss these matters again\*. If you received your aids from NHS see the back page for details of audiology clinics in this area.

***\*Jot down points you want to remember to raise:***

### Checklist: How well do you know your aids?

*If you can't answer some of the questions, don't worry.  
You will then have a list of questions ready to ask your audiologist or hearing specialist.  
Add them to your list on page 8.*

Do you wear one hearing aid or two?					
Make of aid(s)			Model		
Private purchase or NHS?			How long have you had them?		
Can you adjust the volume?					
Do they have a T-setting?					
Do they have a half-and-half T-setting? <i>(see previous page)</i>					
Can volume be controlled when in the T-setting?					
If there is no T-setting activated, why not?					
How do you switch between settings?					
How do you know which setting is operative? Is there a signal?					
What is your level of hearing loss? (Please circle)					
Mild	Moderate	Moderately severe	Severe	Profound	Don't know
Do you know what an audiogram is?					
Have you seen/do you have a copy of your audiogram?					
Do you understand what it tells you about the sound you can expect to hear without your aids? ... and with your aids?					

## WHAT CAN GO WRONG AND WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Hearing loops can provide real benefits for hearing aid users, but their potential can be poorly understood, both by users and by service providers. Below, find descriptions of some of the problems that can arise, and what you can do about them.

### How do I know if there's a hearing loop?

Where a loop has been installed, there should be a sign like this that tells you that a loop is available and reminds you to switch your hearing aid to the T-setting. The sign will incorporate the ear symbol and the letter T. Where there is more than one counter or window and only one has a hearing loop, you may (though by rights you should not) have to look quite hard to find it.



Some providers have a portable desk loop rather than a fixed one, so its position at that moment may not be obvious. If you can't see a sign, ask a member of staff. If they don't know, ask to speak to someone who does. If you discover they do have hearing loop but no sign to let people know, then (if you feel able to) ask that they put a sign in place, as this is part of the reasonable adjustment they are required to make.

### What should a hearing loop sound like?

If the hearing loop is working properly, you should enjoy listening to the sound. It should be clear and pleasant to listen to. It should improve the clarity of speech and make the process of hearing and following what someone is saying easier.

### What if the hearing loop doesn't sound clear and comfortable?

If the sound you are hearing is not clear and pleasant to listen to then there is a problem somewhere. Some possibilities:

- Perhaps your hearing aids are not set up as they should be – ask another hearing aid user to listen and see if they have a better experience with that same hearing loop
- Maybe the hearing loop isn't switched on – ask the service provider to check the correct light is displaying to show that it is switched on.
- Maybe the fault is with the microphone. Perhaps it's not switched on or not picking up the sound in the way that it should. This should be reported to the service provider.
- There may be a fault with another part of the hearing loop system that is not obvious, but any failure to provide you with clear sound needs to be dealt with. The service provider could be completely unaware that there is a fault, so it's up to you, as a service user, to point this out. Aim to be helpful rather than combative.

### I don't like to complain. What can I try first?

There are several things you could try. Here's a checklist to work through. If the member of staff you speak to is unable to help, ask for someone who can.

1. Have you switched to your T-setting? If not, switch on now.
2. If you have a volume control... Does it help if you turn it up?
3. Are you standing/sitting in the right place?  
If you are at a counter or desk, make sure that you are directly in front of the position and close enough to be sure you are within the limited area covered by the loop (between 1 and 2 metres from the person speaking. The position may be marked on the floor.)  
If you are in a hall with a public loop system, be aware that there may be 'dead spots' even within the looped area. Try changing your seat to see if you can hear any better.
4. Is the loop system switched on? If you think it might not be, ask someone to check.

5. Is the volume too low? If you have used hearing loops successfully before, ask a member of staff to report your difficulty with this particular loop. If you experience low volume on a number of occasions, with different hearing loops, ask your audiologist to check the setting on your aids.
6. Is the speaker using the microphone? If not, the system won't pick it up the sound. If you can, ask if the speaker can be persuaded to use the microphone, or take up the matter later with the organisers.
7. Does it look as if the microphone is in the wrong position? A free-standing microphone can easily be moved aside or knocked out of position by mistake. The microphone must be close to the person speaking. If it is too far away their voice will not be picked up clearly and any background noise will be picked up too. If a portable loop is being used, the T-symbol should be facing towards you. The microphone is at the back of the device, facing the person you are talking to. If you can see that there's something wrong, point it out.

If you have tried all the steps that are relevant, there are two main possibilities: the loop really isn't working (it may be technically 'on' but faulty) or there is an issue with your hearing aids and consequent inability to receive the hearing loop sound. You could make a point of trying out a loop elsewhere and see how you get on. Discuss the matter with your audiologist or hearing aid specialist\* to get to the bottom of the issue.

*\*Something else to add to your list on page 8?*

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Know the law

The **Equality Act 2010** states that everyone should be treated fairly with regard to provision of information, goods and services. In order to comply with the Act, service providers "are required to make changes, where needed, to improve service to disabled customers or potential customers." The information, advice or service they provide must be available in a form that is accessible to all. People who rely on hearing aids are classed as having a disability and are protected by the Act. In order to comply with the Act, the providers must make "reasonable adjustments" which may include making available assistive listening aids, such as hearing loops. Public bodies, such as local government, NHS, schools, etc. have a "continuing duty" to consider how different needs can be met and to keep their policies under review.

**Building Standards 8300** cover the installation of hearing loops and associated signage. The 8300 Code of Practice published in 2018 makes recommendations concerning provision of loops in public rooms, reception desks, ticket offices, etc. New buildings should be well equipped with high quality loop systems. Older buildings should update to these standards if they are making alterations, or if their current arrangements have been found to be unsatisfactory following a complaint.

*Further information about legislation and standards can be found in Part 2B "Hearing loop awareness for managers".*

### Your right to hear

Service providers are obliged by law to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that all their customers or clients can benefit from the services they provide. If your hearing loss means that you are unable to make use of any of those services, then you are entitled to ask for assistance to be made available. If your request is reasonable, the service provider must take steps to respond to your request. If they do not, you are entitled to complain.

Background noise is often a reason why people find it hard and stressful to listen and hear. Where background noise is the main problem, identify this and request a quieter spot is found. If there is background music playing, you can ask for this to be turned down. You might also ask them to write down words or details that you don't quite catch. These adjustments will tend to be viewed as 'reasonable' and could be sufficient for you to experience successful communication. You have grounds for complaint if reasonable requests are not acted on. Likewise, you have grounds for complaint if there is a hearing loop and you need it but the system is not working, or not working as it should be.

Remember that the service provider might be keen to act in accordance with the law and to provide a good service to all customers/clients, but simply doesn't have the necessary understanding of the needs of people who use hearing aids and hearing loops. In that case, an enquiry or request from you, made in an encouraging and positive spirit, may be all that is needed for the problem to be understood and action to be taken. Part 2 of this booklet, (for staff and managers) might help with that.

### Your responsibilities

The law supports your right to hear, but enforcing that right is another matter. There is no official body tasked with ensuring that hearing loops, where provided, actually work. It is up to hearing aid users themselves to take up the issue with service providers. If you feel you lack the knowledge or confidence to make a complaint, you are not alone. Many hearing aid users feel like this, which is why we created this booklet. Hopefully it will help you feel more able to speak up about problems. That is the only way things will get better. Please do what you can. There are some suggestions on the next page.

There are several steps you could take, beginning with a non-confrontational approach:

Ask to speak to the manager. Describe the problem and ask what they can do about it. If the problem arises from the way the system is operated, you might be able to offer a possible solution based on your experience and the knowledge you have gained from this booklet.

If you don't know what is causing the problem, or don't feel confident offering this information, you could suggest making contact with one of the national organisations listed below, with a local organisation you know, or one that is detailed on the last page.

If those steps fail, please consider making a formal complaint. (*See the resources below for advice on how to do this.*)

## **SOME ONLINE RESOURCES**

### **Essential things to know about hearing access**

It is not just hearing loops that can transform how easy it is to hear what people are saying; discover what else can make a difference, what you can ask for and what you are reasonably entitled to expect.

*Ideas for Ears:* <https://www.ideasforears.org.uk/education-and-training/about-hearing-access/>

### **Your right to hear**

<https://www.contacta.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/your-right-to-hear.pdf>

### **Guide to hearing Loops**

<https://www.contacta.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Guide-to-Hearing-Loops.pdf>

### **All about counter induction loops**

<https://www.ampetronic.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/UP30113-4-All-about-counter-induction-loops.pdf>

### **On making a complaint**

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/discrimination-in-the-provision-of-goods-and-services/discrimination-in-the-provision-of-goods-and-services1/taking-action-about-discrimination-in-goods-and-services/complaining-about-discrimination-in-the-provision-of-goods-and-services/>

<https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/live-well/everyday-life/using-health-services/how-to-make-a-complaint/>

*Action on Hearing Loss* has excellent Factsheets on many topics, including:

- Your rights when using services
- The Equality Act 2010 – an overview
- The Human Rights Act
- The public sector Equality Duty

<https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk>

## CONTACTS

**Further copies available to download here:**

<http://www.ideasforears.org.uk/hearing-loops>

**Editorial contact**

The idea for these two booklets arose from a group of volunteers from Bury U3A Bury and Communic8te Bury who at the beginning of 2020 had been planning to form a 'loop squad' to try to promote and improve provision of local hearing loops. Preliminary investigations alerted us to the extent of the problems and to the need, as we saw it, for more information for hearing aid users as well as for loop providers. The COVID-19 lockdown interrupted the project on the ground but provided the time to consult more widely and to produce the booklets.

We know there are other groups around the country involved in similar projects, hence the open copyright. We hope the booklets will prove useful to us all when things return to more like normal. We would love to hear from you if you have suggestions for the next update, or to exchange experiences. Please contact the editor, Hilary McColl, in the first instance:  
h.mccoll@icloud.com

*Add your own local contacts here:*

