

IN THE LOOP

Part 2

Hearing loop awareness for frontline staff and managers



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

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In the Loop

Part 2: Hearing loop awareness for frontline staff and managers *Bury U3A & Communic8te Bury*

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Editorial

Members of Bury U3A's Accessibility Study Group

Members of Communic8te Bury's Loop Squad

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Heather Clarke Illustration



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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

National estimates suggest that about one in six of the general population have hearing loss and that about half of those use a hearing aid. This means that 32,000 people in Bury are likely to have hearing loss, and that around half of these will rely on hearing aids. These numbers are growing as the population ages and audiologists expect them to grow further as members of the younger generation who like to listen to loud music at close quarters for extended periods reach a vulnerable age.*

People with hearing loss are protected by the Equality Act of 2010 which states that reasonable adjustments must be made so that disabled people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage because of their disability compared with non-disabled people or people who do not share that disability. The duty is anticipatory, so must be made in readiness for a disabled person and what they might reasonably need to ensure that goods and services are available to all equally.

Amongst other requirements, this means providing an environment that allows disabled people to access goods, services, information and communication as far as is reasonably possible to the same standard and on the same basis as usually offered to non-disabled people. This obligation includes ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made so that people with hearing loss can enjoy equality of access to information and communication. Reasonable adjustments can include action to improve the acoustic environment so that noise and reverberations do not mask or distort spoken conversation and staff training to ensure that customer-facing staff are aware of the need to speak and communicate clearly. It also includes provision of hearing loops (also known as 'induction loops') as an auxiliary aid for people who use hearing aids, cochlear implants or another hearing device.**

Recent research suggests that, while industry guidance and technical information is available for specifiers and engineers employed to commission and install hearing loops, there appears to be little or no user-friendly information for frontline and managerial staff who interact with the public on a daily basis. Consequently, although hearing loop technology has been around for a long time, it is often poorly understood, poorly maintained and poorly utilised, which means the equality of access that could be delivered often fails to be achieved.

This publication, Part 2 of "In the Loop", helps to fill that gap, with notes for frontline staff and local managers, a 'toolkit' to assist self-assessment, and links to further information online. A parallel publication, Part 1 of "In the Loop" provides information for people who use hearing aids.

PDF copies of both Parts can be downloaded at <http://www.ideasforears.org.uk/>.

** All figures are estimates; there are no definitive measures.*

*** A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted electronic device that provides a sense of sound to a person who has a severe or profound hearing loss.*

NOTE ON 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 tend to be less favoured by end users and are not covered in this booklet.

Continued overleaf >

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.

NOTE ABOUT PEOPLE WHO USE HEARING LOOPS

Well designed, well installed and properly working hearing loops are of enormous benefit to many, many people who rely on hearing aids for ease of communication. Not all who could benefit actually do so however.

This may be due to lack of information about hearing loops and their benefits, lack of knowledge about what their hearing aids are capable of, lack of confidence to make use of a hearing loop 'in public', or simply because they think loops are for other people, not for them.

If they do try to use a loop and discover it is not working, or not working well, they tend quickly to lose confidence. Few are likely to complain, so if someone does find the courage to do so, their complaint should be taken seriously. It may be the only complaint, but it won't be the only person who has had the bad experience, just an indication of what is likely to be a more wide-spread problem.

Part 1 of "In the Loop" was written to provide information to people who wear hearing aids and to encourage them to take advantage of this wonderful resource. Should you, or someone in your workforce be able to make use of Part 1, PDF copies can be obtained from h.mccoll@icloud.com.



A: NOTES FOR FRONTLINE STAFF

Understanding hearing loops – *page 5*

What is a hearing loop?

How do hearing loops work?

Why are hearing loops needed?

Are all hearing loops the same?

Room loops

Counter loops

Screened counters

Portable table-top loops

Be prepared: Self-assessment checklist – *page 10*

UNDERSTANDING HEARING LOOPS

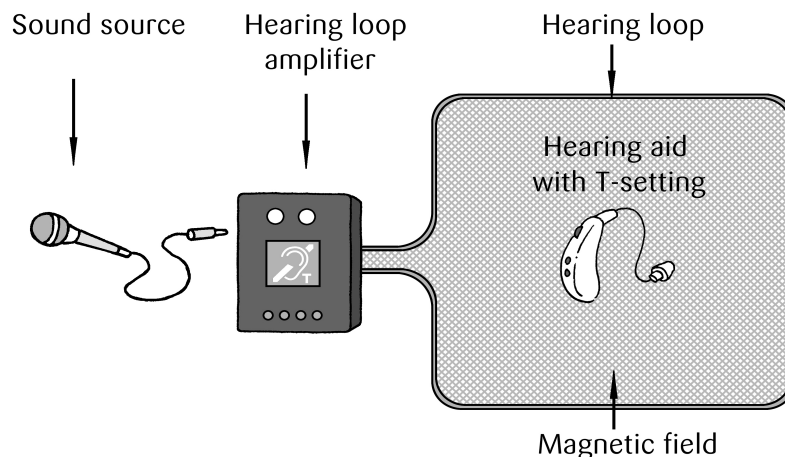
What is a hearing loop?

A hearing loop (sometimes called an induction loop) is a sound system that beams sound directly into hearing aids by picking up sound going into a microphone and converting it into a magnetic signal. This signal is then picked up by a receiver called a telecoil inside a hearing aid. The sound is then modified within the hearing aid to fit the wearer's individual hearing loss. The T-setting is the mechanism that allows the wearer to switch the telecoil on or off. Most, but not all, hearing aids have a telecoil. Sound broadcast by a hearing loop can only be heard by people who have their hearing aid/s switched to the T-setting or those who are using a 'loop listener', which is a phone-sized device with a headset that also connects to the sound. Anyone standing outside the magnetic field will not be able to hear anything broadcast by the loop system. (More about that later.)

How do hearing loops work?

A microphone transmits the sound of your voice via an amplifier and a hearing loop cable (essentially the aerial) to the telecoil receiver inside your customer's hearing aid. In order to receive the magnetic signal the system produces, the customer must be positioned inside the area covered by the hearing loop (see below).

The main elements of a hearing loop system:



Why are hearing loops needed?

Assuming that the hearing loop system is set up correctly and is working well, it has two main benefits for a hearing aid user:

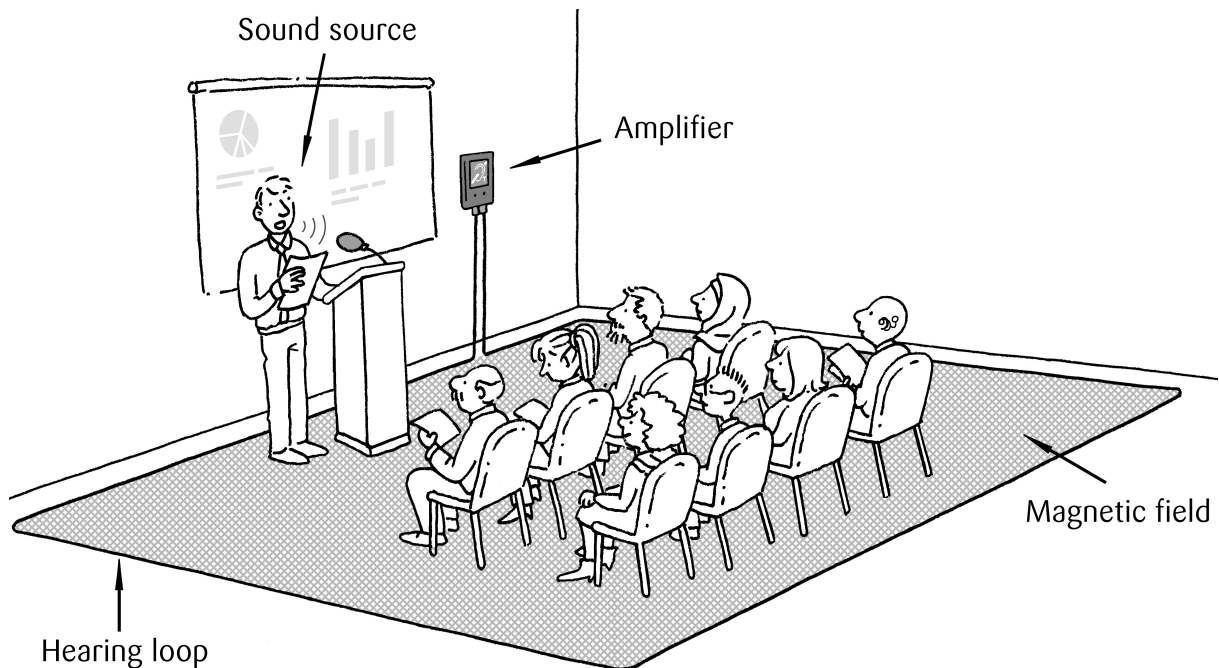
1. Listening quality across a distance is better and clearer. Even the best hearing aids can struggle to pick up sound that is more than a few metres away. Additionally, as sound travels across a distance, it naturally decays and alters and this can have a big impact on the clarity of what is heard. With a hearing loop, the sound is transmitted directly (and instantly) into the hearing aid so there is no reduction in quality or distortion of clarity.
2. Background noise is reduced or eliminated. Only the sound picked up by the microphone is transmitted, so any other sound is cut out. This can make listening much more relaxing and easier and can give an effect similar to that of wearing good headphones or ear buds

Are all hearing loops the same?

They all work in 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: vehicles, intercoms, and homes (usually to transmit the television signal directly into the wearer's hearing aids). The following pages describe and illustrate different types of hearing loop encountered in public places.

Room loops

Room loops are used in places where groups of people meet and need to be able to hear what individual people are saying; for example in a hall, meeting room or a church. There may also be loudspeakers in the room. The loop either runs around the edge of the room or crosses back and forth within the ceiling or the 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 system is of high quality the signal might seem 'weak' or 'thin' and there may be dead spots in the room where the signal is absent or not loud enough.

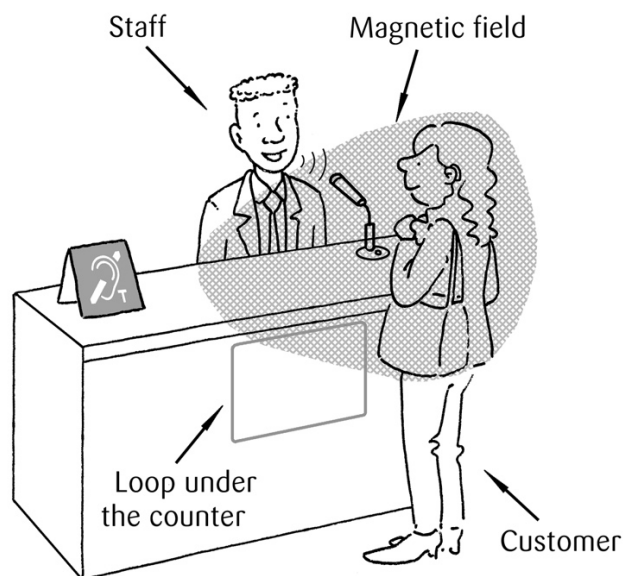


1. A room loop in use

Counter loops

These are fitted at counters, reception points etc. where customers speak with staff on a one-to-one basis. They are especially essential where it might be noisy, or where there might be need for confidential discussion and so voices cannot be raised. The area covered by a counter loop is quite small, no more than about 0.5m – 1.5m, so that the sound won't be picked up by anyone else with a hearing aid switched to the T-setting who happens to be close by. Because the customer can hear you more clearly, you should not need to project your voice. These systems are, as the name implies, usually fixed – built into a counter or desk. (See *picture 2, overleaf*.) As you can see, the magnetic field is quite limited, so you must make sure that the customer is standing in the right place, or they will not be able to receive the signal. (So correct positioning of signage is important.)

The position of the microphone is crucial. It must be close to you as possible so that it picks up your voice well but not so close to your mouth that your breath interferes with the sound. Check that the microphone has not been moved out of position or covered by papers or placed next to a computer or phone. Sounds produced by office equipment can be very painful for the customer if they go directly into the microphone.

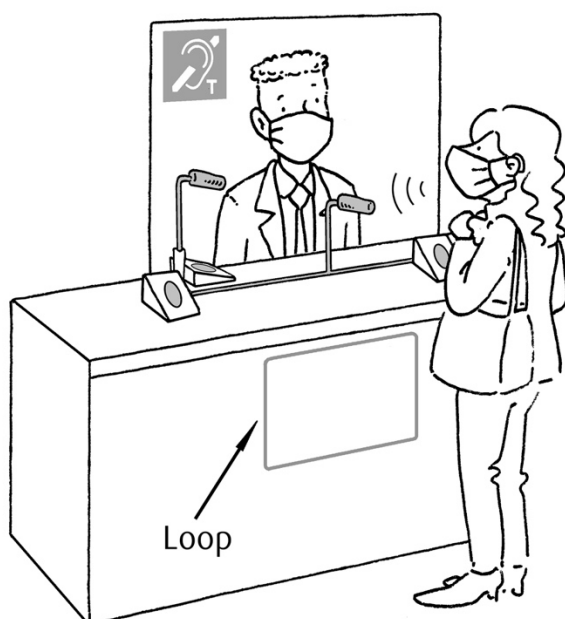


2. Using a counter loop

A screened counter with speech transfer and hearing loop systems

Due to Coronavirus lockdown we are seeing many counters equipped with protective screens and many staff are wearing facial protection. Masks and screens reduce volume and clarity of speech for everyone (staff as well as customers) whatever their hearing is like, 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 customers (and staff) with hearing loss, the amplification will offer *some* help, but for a significant number of people it will not be enough. It will be important for these systems to be integrated with counter loops, as standard, so that customers using hearing aids can receive additional assistance.



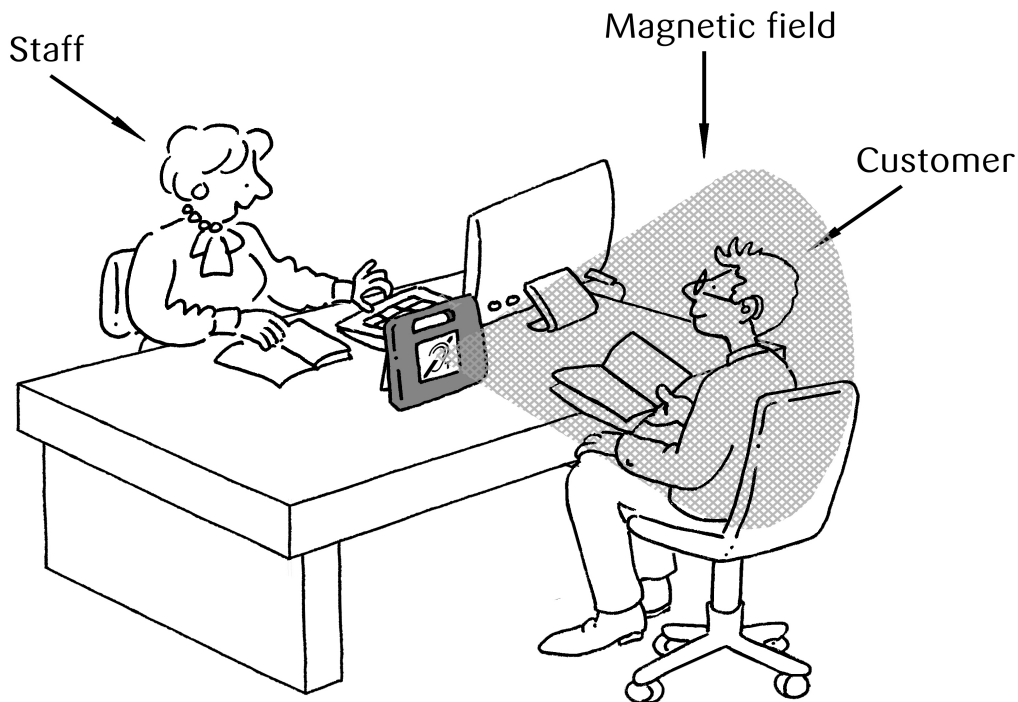
3. A screened counter with speech transfer and hearing loop systems

Portable table-top loops

Occasionally, in a small consulting room, for example, where no fixed desk loop is installed, you may need to offer the customer use of a portable table-top loop instead. (See example, right). These are of variable quality in terms of the clarity and volume of sound they broadcast to the hearing aid user. They have serious limitations in the distance that they operate across. They are not recommended for use in anything beyond a one-to-one conversation because the box typically has to be 1 or 2 metres from the person speaking and the person listening i.e. directly between them.



When using a portable loop the black box should be between the two of you, with the label facing towards your customer. As you can see in picture 4a, the magnetic field is very limited. The speaker must usually also be within a metre of the box in order for their voice to be adequately picked up.



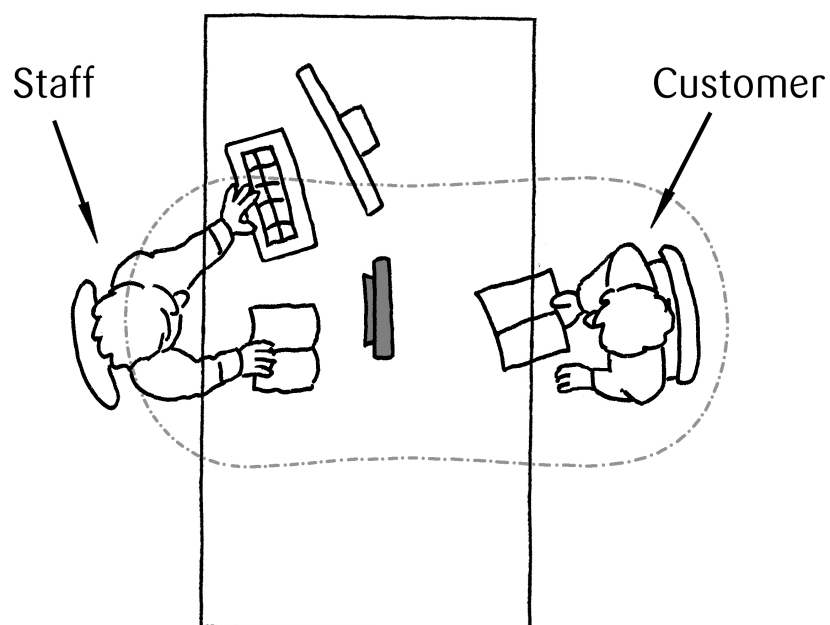
4a. Using a portable table-top loop

A portable loop combines microphone and amplifier in a single unit. The inbuilt microphone is usually multidirectional, so if there is any background noise it will pick that up as well. If there is a directional microphone that can be plugged into the unit it might perform better, but not all portable loops have these.

The device is battery-powered and must be kept permanently on charge ready for use. You will need to know where to find the unit, and then how to set it up for use.

As you can see in picture 4b (*overleaf*), you and your customer need to be no more than about a metre apart. The microphone at the back of the unit picks up the sound of your voice. If it is multi-directional it will also pick up any background noise. This means it is suitable only for 1-to-1

conversations in a quiet environment. If you are interviewing two or more people, think carefully about how to arrange the seating, and who will sit where. Ideally you will have a chance to practice with it before using it with a customer.



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

BE PREPARED: SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Ideally you will have had training in clear speaking and in other communication skills helpful to people with deafness and other communication needs, ensuring your face and mouth can be seen; and ideally the environment will be conducive to easy communication with the majority of your customers, whether they use a hearing aid or not. Clear speaking and a quiet environment give most people the best chance of following you adequately.

However, some of your customers will still struggle, especially if you are in a noisy or echoey environment (though they might not tell you of their difficulties.) For these individuals, a hearing loop can feel to them like a life saver.

A hearing loop is a reasonable adjustment that can transform poor listening experiences into good ones. Unless you are familiar with the loop system installed in your place of work you will not be able to offer equal treatment to customers who require to use a hearing loop.

How many of these questions are relevant to your situation, and how many of those can you answer?

For starters:

1. Is there a hearing loop where you work?
2. What type of hearing loop is it? *(See previous section)*
3. Have you been trained to use the system and to check that it is working?
4. If there is no hearing loop, what alternatives can you offer that might help a customer who has difficulty conversing with you on account of hearing loss?

If it is a room loop:

1. Is it always switched on? If not, do you know where to find the switch?
2. Are you allowed to switch it on? And do you know how to? If not, do you know who to ask?
3. Do you know how to use the microphone so that you will be heard clearly and consistently by all members of the audience?
4. Before anyone starts using the microphones will you, or will someone else, check that the hearing loop is working? that everyone can hear? and that it is broadcasting a clear, good quality sound?
5. Have you checked in advance that any other sound source you intend to use (e.g. audio-visual from lap-top) can be plugged into both the public address system and the hearing loop system?

If it is a counter loop:

1. Is it always switched on? If not, do you know where to find the on/off switch?
2. Is the microphone in a suitable place to pick up your voice clearly? *(Near your mouth but not too near? Not displaced or obscured by papers, computer etc? Not close to something noisy like a phone or keyboard? – the sounds generated by these things will send unpleasant and unwanted sounds to the hearing loop user.)*
3. How far does the magnetic field extend? Where is the best place for the customer to stand/sit in order to be sure of being within the magnetic field?

If there is no fixed loop:

1. Is there a portable table-top loop?
2. Do you know where to find it?
3. Is it charged?
4. Do you know the range of that particular portable loop you will be using? *(See pictures 4a and 4b)*
5. Is there a suitable place to put it so that it will be between you and your customer and not too far from either of you?
6. Do you know how to switch it on and adjust the volume?

In general:

1. If the system you are using seems to be working but the customer is still struggling to hear, perhaps the system is not working as well as it should? Is background noise making it difficult to hear? Is the microphone you are using close enough to your mouth? If not, it may be picking up some of the background sound? Can you move to a quieter location? Is there background music that could be turned down, or off?
2. If your customer wants to ask a question to which you don't know the answer, or if they wish to make a complaint, who should you refer them to?
3. Regardless of what system is in use, who can you ask for help if you need it?
- 4.

If you can answer all the questions that are relevant to you, you are ready to provide an excellent service to people who use hearing aids. If you are unable to answer some of them, perhaps now is the time to ask for a word with your line manager and request some training.

Remember that providing equality of treatment to disabled customers is not a matter of choice; it is a legal requirement. A dissatisfied customer is entitled to complain of discrimination and seek redress from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.



In the Loop
Part 2A



B: NOTES FOR MANAGERS

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The Equality Act 2010
Building regulations and standards

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LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Human Rights Act 1988 protects the basic human rights and places a duty on all public authorities in the UK to behave in a way that respects individual rights and allows them to be enjoyed equally by all people. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities can also support claims made under the Human Rights Act.

The Equality Act 2010 states that everyone should be treated equally 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." People who rely on hearing aids are classed as having a disability and are therefore protected by the Act. In order to comply with this requirement businesses and other organisations must make "reasonable adjustments" to their premises to accommodate the needs of disabled customers. This includes ensuring that the environment is free of acoustic characteristics that are liable to add to the difficulties of customers with hearing loss (obtrusive music, for example, or noisy air conditioning). To accommodate customers who rely on hearing aids, most businesses provide "assisted listening" solutions of one sort or another, often in the form of hearing loops. Unlike earlier legislation which highlighted 'access', more recent legislation emphasises inclusion and participation.

Building Regulations Part M: Volume 2 "Access to buildings other than dwellings", has a section on assisted listening which underlines the need for 'systems to be chosen carefully to ensure intelligibility', taking account of the 'acoustic environment'. It emphasises the need for comprehensive signage and suitable lighting to facilitate lip-reading. It makes provision for 'a hearing enhancement system' to be installed in rooms and spaces designed for meetings, classes, performances, and reception counters, especially in noisy areas or 'behind glazed screens' (We have taken this to apply equally to reception counters behind the Perspex screens now in vogue.).

BS 8300-2 is a code of practice on the design of accessible and inclusive buildings. While not legislative, following an update in 2018, it elaborates on the regulations given for assistive listening. BS 83002 specifies that induction loop systems should be installed in accordance with BS 7594 and should perform in accordance with BS EN 60118-4. The presence of an induction loop system should be clearly indicated for each looped area by an appropriate sign both at the approach to, and inside, the room or space in which the system is fitted. Where possible, all assistive listening systems should be tested by user trials.

BS 60118-4 specifies the minimum acceptable standard at which any hearing system should perform. It sets out measurable criteria that govern installation and maintenance standards. Any contractor working with induction loops should have a good understanding of the requirements of this standard. Alongside other parts of BS 60118, this also informs hearing aid manufacturers of the parameters they need to take into account when they incorporate telecoils into the hearing aids they produce.

The main pieces of legislation to be aware of in relation to hearing loops, are shown above. However, it should be borne in mind that legislation sets out very broad requirements, which may not be enough on their own to ensure that your hearing loop is fit for purpose. Compliance with a British Standard cannot confer immunity from legal obligations.

This booklet 'In the Loop', along with 'The Hearing Access Protocol', and other grass roots publications are concerned to add realistic interpretations of national and international guidance which will lead to more effective provision of support for customers who rely on hearing aids, and more satisfying experiences for those customers.*

*See page 28

COMPLYING WITH THE LEGISLATION

Design and installation

The assistive listening system must be designed and installed by technical personnel familiar with the relevant legislation and with the specialised technical specifications of the solution to be installed. Hearing aid users should be involved in verifying that the system installed works satisfactorily.

New builds and renovations

All new public buildings must comply with the legislation from the design stage onwards. In existing buildings, any new loop installations must comply. If a system has to be replaced or modified, all new work must comply.

Coverage

Legislation requires that as well as room loops for large areas, businesses must supply counter loops at all points of interaction, such as reception, booking and information desks. Where there are several customer service points, the aim (over time for existing buildings), is to have a hearing loop at each, not just at one specified location.

(The legislation is further supplemented by the Hearing Access Protocol. See details in the Resources section.)

Maintenance

To comply with the legislation the system must be maintained such that the system is constantly available to customers who require it. Previous recommendations include monthly verification that the system is performing satisfactorily (this can be carried out by a trained staff member using a loop listener) and annual servicing and repair carried out by suitably qualified technician who can confirm that the system meets all technical specifications.

The Hearing Access Protocol would further stipulate the need for a group of at least three hearing aid users to check the quality of listening scores at least 7 out of 10. *(See checklist 4.)*

Signage

A hearing loop is of no use if potential users don't know it is there, so wherever a loop has been installed, you must display standard hearing loop signage where it can be easily seen by those who need to use it. The sign should advise users to switch their hearing aid to the T-setting.



Staff training

Even the best hearing loop will be useless if frontline staff and line managers are unaware of them, how to operate them, how to speak clearly and communicate effectively with customers who have hearing loss. The Equality Act 2010 requires an ongoing programme of staff training to be put in place. *(Suggested training providers are listed under Resources, in the last section.)*

Complaints

Providing equal treatment to disabled customers is not a matter of choice; it is a legal requirement. A dissatisfied customer is entitled to complain of discrimination and seek redress from the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In the event of a complaint you will be required to show that you have procedures in place to identify faults and correct them. *(For more on this, see the Resources section on the back page.)*

A note on portable table-top loops

(See pages 8 & 9)

Portable table-top loops have a number of limitations which make them unsuitable for group meetings. They should be regarded as a temporary measure until a fixed loop can be provided.

- They are battery powered and must be kept permanently on charge so as to be ready for use when required.
- Signage must clearly state that a portable hearing loop is available. It is not acceptable for a customer to have to ask if there is a loop available.

- The effective range of the device is very limited. (See pictures 4a and 4b). A portable table-top loop is generally suitable only for 1-to-1 conversation. If two or more customers are involved, careful thought must be given as to who will sit where.

A note on "protective measures" post Coronavirus

As work on this booklet is being completed, (July 2020) it seems likely that personal protective measures will be the norm for a considerable time to come. Counter screens and face coverings create additional challenges for people with hearing loss and this needs to be fully considered in order to ensure that equality of access is provided. The extra amplification provided by Dual Speech Transfer Systems where they exist at tills and ticket windows are of some assistance to both customers and staff. However, for people with hearing loss who are much more likely to rely on lip-reading to assist their understanding of what is being said, face coverings will present a particular difficulty. You should therefore ensure that hearing loops are provided at counters and built into dual speech transfer systems. This will help you to comply with equality legislation and should be planned for when new screening is planned and erected. (See page 7.)

COMMON PROBLEMS

Employing a skilled, experienced hearing loop technician to oversee the specification and installation of any new hearing loop system or any major renovation is highly recommended. This will help you to avoid common problems and ensure that your system will perform well for years to come. Quite often, problems arise because of poor purchasing decisions, wrongly specified component parts, or incorrect set-up.

However, it is clear, from experiences reported by hearing aid users and others, that the existence of a hearing loop is, on its own, no guarantee of satisfactory compliance and experience indicates that although some failures may be due to problems with **the hearing loop system**, or poor-quality equipment – especially **microphones**, failures can also be caused by issues related to, but not specific to **noise** and poor **staff training**. Common failings relating to these four areas are examined below.

1. Problems with hearing loop systems

Where a hearing loop is installed it should provide high quality, clear sound to hearing aid users. Sadly, surveys by hearing loop activists have repeatedly found that hearing loops are more likely to be poor or not work than they are to deliver the vital clarity required. Systems that don't work or that deliver poor quality sound are non-compliant.

If a complaint is made and proven to be justified, individual or corporate legal action might ensue. The following page lists situations frequently encountered by customers attempting to make use of a system which in practice fails to meet their needs.

Problems with hearing loop systems may include:

- Poor commissioning, installation and/or maintenance by managers or technicians unfamiliar with the specifications required or who fail to recognise the importance of ensuring that the system broadcasts clear, high quality sound.
- Inadequate or non-existent verification or maintenance programmes.
- Poor signage, so that customers are unaware of the existence of a loop system, or where to position themselves to benefit from it.
- The system is not switched on, or, in the case of portable table-top loops with batteries, not charged, resulting in difficult communication and consequent embarrassment.
- Poor microphone quality, type and/or positioning (see next section).

2. Problems with microphones

The quality of the microphones and the location and use of those microphones is crucial to the effectiveness of a hearing loop. As the diagram on page 5 clearly shows, the microphone is the entrance key to the whole system. If the microphone is not functioning perfectly the whole system is compromised. Here are some of the things that can go wrong.

- a) An incorrect or poor quality of microphone is being used. The type of microphone being used might be poorly suited to the position it is being used in. For example:
 - It may be fixed on a wall some distance away from where the speaker is, or may be picking up sound from the entire room instead of being focused on the speaker.
 - A table or counter loop can easily become displaced and no longer near enough to the speaker's lips.
 - A microphone on a counter or desk can be inadvertently covered by papers, etc. It can become hidden, or the sound of papers rustling can obscure speech.
 - The microphone could be placed too near to a computer or phone and be picking up sound from the other equipment.
- b) The person speaking is not using the microphone. Reasons could include
 - They may not feel it is necessary, especially in a small room. They may not realise that the microphone is essential for ensuring that the hearing loop works.
 - The microphone hasn't been switched on, or the speaker isn't using it.
 - The microphone is in the wrong location for picking up the sound of the speaker's voice.
 - The speaker is positioning themselves incorrectly in relation to the microphone.
- c) There is an echo or other noise that is being picked up by the microphone. This may be due to faulty design, installation or location, or perhaps it needs to be serviced by a good technician.

Problems with noise

A poor or poorly positioned microphone that allows background noise to enter the hearing loop system can cause problems for customers who wish to make use of the loop (*see previous section*).

However, for customers who do not use hearing aids, background noise can still be a problem.

It is worth bearing in mind that, although roughly 1 in every 6 of your customers is likely to experience some difficulty in hearing, not all will wear hearing aids, and not all hearing aids users will need further assistance. To be truly inclusive, at least as far as hearing is concerned, you should aim to create an environment in which all of your customers (and staff) are able to hear clearly and with ease, whether or not they use hearing aids.

We know that, as hearing begins to deteriorate, one of the first abilities to suffer is the ability to discriminate between the sounds you need to hear and the sounds you don't. It follows, therefore that any environmental sounds other than speech will make speech itself more difficult to hear.

Managers should consider the environment in which they offer their services. Extraneous noise may be created by: other people talking; environmental sounds from outside the premises, such as traffic; environmental sounds within the premises, such as heating, air conditioning, lighting, or piped music. Does sound echo? You may want to consider downloading one of the free mobile apps that allow you to measure background noise and determine whether it is likely to obscure speech (*see list of resources*).

See Checklist 1 in the Self-Assessment Toolkit section of this booklet for a list of possible sources of unwanted noise and other conditions which detract from speech clarity. If you already employ a qualified sound engineer to maintain your hearing loop, they will also be able to assess the acoustic environment and advise on measures to reduce disturbance where possible.

Problems with training

Staff may have only poor or moderate proficiency in clear speaking and little understanding of the communication problems faced by customers with hearing loss or the strategies that can be employed to assist.

Failure may also be due to poor understanding by staff and management of how a loop system works, how to operate the system and how to ensure it is used to best effect by customers and staff.

Staff may not know who to refer to if difficulties arise or, if they do, that specific person may not be available at the time.

MAKING COMPLIANCE LESS STRESSFUL

Failure to comply with legislation invites disgruntled customers, who may not report their poor experience to you but may share it with other potential customers and who may not return. There is also the possibility of legal action. Litigation can be costly for your business and its reputation.

Ensuring compliance can be a source of anxiety, and it is sometimes not obvious where to start improving matters. However, some solutions may be simpler and less costly than you think: behavioural changes, for example, cost nothing to implement, and we hope this booklet will help.

Part 2:A could be used to assist with staff training. The 'Self-assessment Toolkit' in Part 2:C starts with an overview, a chance to review your current practice. If your review leads you to the conclusion that more specific monitoring needs to be put in place, have a look at the checklists. You may find that customised paperwork has already been developed within your organisation, or you may decide to design your own. In the meantime, you may wish to make use of the basic checklists and templates provided here. Select the ones that best suit your current situation.

The important thing is to be able to show not only that you are complying with relevant legislation but that you are providing solutions that work for your customers and that will deliver good service to all your customers equally.



"In the Loop"
Part 2B



C: SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

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Checklist 1	General considerations – <i>page 22</i>
Checklist 2	Recurring problems: Handling complaints – <i>page 23</i>
Checklist 3	Assessment by hearing aid users – <i>page 24</i>
Checklist 4	User-testing log and reports – <i>page 25</i>
Checklist 5	Maintenance Log – <i>page 26</i>
Checklist 6	Annual service & ongoing maintenance – <i>page 27</i>

Some online resources – *page 28*

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OVERVIEW – FEATURES OF GOOD PRACTICE

As local manager you may not have any responsibility for installing the loop system, but no system works well without regular maintenance. A designated person must be familiar with the system and keep maintenance logs. That person should be empowered to carry out, requisition, or at least recommend, any repair that is required. This can also be the person tasked with ensuring that fixed hearing loops in any location are switched on or that portable loops are charged.

This review of good practice will allow you to carry out an initial survey in order to establish what you already do well and what aspects of your provision may need improvement. The Checklists that follow provide simple tools for monitoring progress.

Professional maintenance of hearing loops

Good practice standards require annual maintenance and checking by a hearing loop technician. Hearing loop standards are defined in the IEC 60118-4 Standard, so ensure that the technicians employed (by you or by Facilities Management) are fully conversant with all relevant standards and capable of ensuring a fully functional system. Ask for a certificate of completion that ensures compliance with all legislation and standards. (See *Checklists 4 & 5.*)

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Weekly checks using a loop listener

If you don't already have one, invest in an inexpensive 'loop listener.' The hand-held device (*pictured right*) allows a non-hearing aid user to use headphones to listen to the hearing loop sound. Although this is not exactly what a person using a T-setting would actually hear, it can alert you to the existence of a problem. Appoint a member of staff to use the loop listener to routinely check the hearing loop, at least once a week. (See *Checklists 4 & 6.*)



<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Assessing quality of sound

Hearing loop technicians can assess if the loop is working but can less easily assess the quality of sound because they have only one pair of ears and what works for their hearing may not work so well for others, especially if they have good hearing themselves. Arranging for annual (or more frequent assessment by three or more hearing aid users will ensure that a range of individuals with hearing loss report on the volume and quality of the sound received. If you can't identify hearing aid users to help with the assessment, your local hearing and deafness centre, or local sensory centres might be able to help. (See *details on back page.*) Encourage customers to alert you to any problems with the hearing loop by displaying a notice to this effect as part of your signage.

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Recurring problems

If a hearing aid user alerts you to a problem, take it seriously – far fewer hearing aid users report faults than actually experience them. Can you show that you have taken action to resolve the matter? (See *Checklist 2*.)

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Powering the system

Loop systems vary, but all need power to operate. All hearing loops in fixed locations (e.g. at counters and in meeting rooms) should be switched on before start of business, so that as soon as a hearing aid user switches to the T-setting and enters the area where the loop is operative, they will receive the signal without the need to request it.

A portable counter/table-top loop is powered by internal batteries so it should be recharged overnight and ready to be switched on when required. If this means the device must be stored close to a power socket, all staff likely to need it should know where to find it and how to operate it. Designate a person responsible for checking these each morning.

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Signage

The Equality Act of 2010 requires that, where a hearing loop has been installed, users should be made aware of its existence. A standard logo, well-positioned, ensures that information is clear. In many cases however, signs are too small or badly positioned. Ensure that you have at least one good-sized notice in a prominent position close to the hearing loop. The sign should include some wording that reminds the hearing aid user that their T-setting needs to be activated in order to take advantage of the facility. (See *the exemplar on the front cover of this booklet*.)

Hearing aid users with T-settings are best placed to let you know if the sound they receive from a hearing loop is satisfactory, but they are often reluctant to report unsatisfactory experiences. Consider adding signage that encourages them to alert you to any problems that arise.

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Staff training

All frontline staff, including receptionists, should speak clearly and be able to spot when someone is finding it hard to hear and follow them. They need good communication skills so that communication with all customers is as easy as possible. They should know, how the loop system works and how to operate it to best effect. A process should be in place to make sure training is up-to-date and that new members of staff or replacement staff do not miss out. On-going training in hearing access and deaf awareness will support commitments to disability equality. *(You could use the 'Notes for frontline staff' that make up Part A of this booklet, or see under 'Some online resources' and 'Local contacts'.)*

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

Chain of responsibility

If only certain staff are fully trained to help customers with hearing loss, all other frontline staff should know who that person is and be aware of any protocol for requesting their assistance. All staff should know who to refer to if problems arise, either with the hearing loop equipment or with a customer who is dissatisfied with their treatment.

<i>Date of review</i>	<i>Improvement needed?</i>	<i>Action to be taken.</i>

CHECKLIST 1: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS			
Reducing / eliminating Background noise	Problem? Y/N	Action possible	Action taken?/Date
traffic			
chatter			
piped music			
hum or buzz from machinery			
lights			
heating			
air conditioning			
catering sounds			
echo			
reverberation			
Interaction with staff			
deaf awareness and willingness to help			
clear speech and good communication skills			
familiar with alternative strategies			
Alternative strategies available			
quiet spots identified			
control of music possible and allowed			
notepad and pen/pencil handy			

CHECKLIST 2: RECURRING PROBLEMS Handling complaints		
If you are notified of recurring problems, work through this process. Tick when each step has been completed. You may wish to add the date as well.		
1.	Thank the hearing aid user who is making the complaint for pointing out the problem. Assure them that you take the matter seriously and will carry out checks. Record name, date and nature of complaint <hr/> Nature of complaint <hr/> <div> <div>Name</div> <div>Date</div> </div>	
2.	Use a loop listener to see if you can replicate the fault.	
3.	Invite other hearing aid users to check the system for you. Capture their feedback on Checklist Y.	
4.	If the hearing aid testers feel the loop is working, that's fine; you can sign off on the complaint. If there is no other issue identified via the loop listener then the problem is likely to have been with the complainant's hearing aids.	
5.	Checks completed. No fault detected	Fault detected. Invite a hearing loop technician to carry out maintenance checks (see <i>notes below</i>) and record results.
6.	If the complainant returns let them know the result of the checks you have carried out and invite them to test another hearing loop to see if they have issues with that.	

NOTES

If you do not have hearing loop maintenance contract in place you can find a competent individual or company through the ISCE Hearing Loop Assessment Scheme. (See under Resources.)

You could also see if any local groups, clubs or services for people with hearing loss can put you in touch with hearing aid users to carry out an assessment to give you some idea of what the problem might be. This might help you to identify a small problem that could be easily put right.

CHECKLIST 3: ASSESSMENT BY HEARING AID USERS

Date of assessment _____

Location of hearing loop tested _____

TYPE OF LOOP Features	√ / X	SCORE 1-5	COMMENTS
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Score 1 = very poor; score 5 = very good

Room loop

Loop on			
Loop working in all parts of room			
Clarity/quality of sound			
Volume of sound			
Consistency of sound across the room			
Suitable signage in place			
Microphone type seems suitable			
Microphone location seems suitable			

Counter loop

Specific location of loop tested:

Loop on			
Loop is working			
Was easy to position myself			
Clarity/quality of sound			
Volume of sound			
Suitable signage in place			
Microphone location seems suitable			

Portable table top loop

Specific location of loop tested:

Loop is working			
It was made available easily			
Clarity/quality of sound			
Volume of sound			
Signage in place			
Position where loop was placed			

Staff

Job description of staff member spoken to:

Knowledge of hearing loop			
Attitude towards hearing needs			
Clarity/quality of sound			
Diction and clarity of speech			
Microphone awareness and use			

Environment

Type of place visited (e.g. shop, bank, hotel, hospital):

Noise levels			
Reverberation ('echo')			
Other distractions			

With thanks to Ideas for Ears for permission to use and adapt

CHECKLIST 4: USER TESTING LOG AND REPORTS

Best practice guidance suggests that a small team of hearing aid users regularly check that the hearing loop system is working and providing crystal clear quality.

How often are checks carried out, and by whom?

[illegible]

CHECKLIST 5: MAINTENANCE LOG

Hearing loop systems should be checked regularly and repaired when necessary by a qualified hearing loop specialist fully conversant with the relevant regulations and standards.

Date checked	Checked by...	Satisfactory √ / x	Action required / taken

CHECKLIST 6: ANNUAL SERVICE & ONGOING MAINTENANCE	
Type of system	Power source
Make	Model
<p>When was the system installed?</p> <p>By whom?</p> <p>Contact details:</p>	
<p>Do you have a current Certificate of Compliance?</p> <p>When does it expire?</p>	
<p>How often is the system checked by User Testers to see if it is working?</p>	
<p>How often is the system checked by a specialist engineer</p> <p>When was it last checked?</p> <p>By whom?</p> <p>Were you provided with a certificate of Compliance?</p> <p>When does it expire?</p> <p>Did you carry out User Testing afterwards?</p> <p>What was the outcome?</p>	
<p>Which member of staff is responsible for overseeing the daily operation of the system?</p> <p>Who is responsible for training staff to operate the system correctly?</p> <p>Have all relevant staff been trained?</p> <p>Is there an ongoing system to ensure that new and temporary staff are trained?</p>	

SOME ONLINE RESOURCES

Regulations

Equality and Human Rights	equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010 gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance
Disability discrimination	equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/disability-discrimination
Code of Practice on Services, Public Functions and Associations	equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/services-public-functions-and-associations-statutory-code-practice
Legislation and standards	contacta.co.uk/hearing-loop-hub/hearing-loops-legislation/
Latest requirements	ampetronic.com/info-centre/legislation-standards-best-practice/

Installation and maintenance

Hearing Loop Assessment Scheme: isce.org.uk/resources/hearing-loop-assessment-scheme/
Ampetronic: ampetronic.com/
Contacta: contacta.co.uk

Staff training

Hearing loops, communication & clear speaking, deafness, etc.

<https://www.ideasforears.org.uk/education-and-training>
(also see 'In the Loop' booklets Part 1 and Part 2A)

General advice

Hearing Access Protocol 2018 is a user-led guide that defines what people with hearing loss feel they require in order for access, inclusion and equality to be delivered to them. Developed by people with hearing loss, it identifies the adjustments and actions that are most required in different situations (with a focus on meetings and events) so that service providers can prioritise and direct resources in the most effective and helpful way. <https://www.ideasforears.org.uk/>

Good Practice Guide: Hearing Loop Systems (for service providers) <https://ihlma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Good-Practice-Guide-Rev4-100918.pdf>

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

Hearing Loops: a guide for services:

https://www.disability.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/hearing_loops_a_guide_for_services.pdf

Assistive Listening System Checklist: https://www.hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/GITHL_Assistive_Listening_System_Checklist.pdf?pdf=GITHLaldChecklist

Advice for hospitals: <https://healthbusinessuk.net/features/inclusive-environments-patients-hearing-loss>

Inclusive communication resources: <https://inclusivecommunication.scot/>

CONTACTS

Further copies of Part 1 and Part 2 can be downloaded 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:

