



Comments for Centrelink's Australians Working Together Customer Reference Group.

1) Training of Centrelink Staff

The major issue for Deaf people is always communication and how information is provided to them. It is vital that Centrelink staff communicate effectively with Deaf clients. This means of course, using Auslan interpreters. However, it also means that Centrelink staff need to have at least a basic understanding of Deaf culture, why it is often difficult for Deaf people to understand the information being given to them even if they understand the interpreter, and how to explain information in a way that Deaf clients can understand it – which may mean using Deaf relay interpreters as well as ordinary Auslan interpreters. Centrelink really should have Deaf people working in their centres dealing with Deaf clients – Deaf people just seem to understand information better when it is explained to them by another Deaf person.

Training programs should involve Deaf people. It is one thing for a hearing person to explain how to communicate with a Deaf person. It is an entirely different thing when staff have to actually communicate directly with a Deaf person – they should be exposed to the “real thing” in their training.

Centrelink staff also need to be aware that for a Deaf person, meeting activity requirements is often more difficult. Just as an example, the average reading age for Deaf people is 9 years. Writing a job application is very difficult for large numbers of Deaf people; few are going to be able to do it in good English without assistance. Who is going to provide this assistance to them?

2) Assessment

What are the key issues for making a good assessment? eg timeliness

It should not be an assessment only of disability but also of the employment environment – ie it should not assume that because a deaf person has xx decibel hearing loss they have xx ability/disability to work xx hours.

What as a minimum must be included in the assessment process? What are key features?

The person's qualifications skills and experience.
The barriers the person faces and the impact of these barriers on their employability.

How many assessments are needed? ie, can a good assessment be done in a single interview?

A single interview may be sufficient depending on the person's skills and experience. If they are articulate and able to clearly describe their situation a single interview may be sufficient. However, many people are not going to be able to do this. They will need support from others who are familiar with them – eg specialist service providers working with Deaf people – and these service providers should be consulted as part of the assessment process.

Who should do the assessments? Should there be a panel of specialists? What knowledge, skills and links/relationships should the assessors have?

A panel may not be practical. But some facility for including input from other appropriate specialists should be available. It is unlikely that any one assessor is going to be able to have an indepth knowledge of the whole range of disabilities so they need to be able to call upon the expertise of other professionals who are skilled in specific areas.

How can quality assurance be maintained? What Key Performance Indicators should there be? What appeal rights?

Assessments should include information on who was consulted and how assessments were arrived at. KPI's should include this requirement. Clients should have the right to appeal not just the decision but how it was arrived at – who was consulted etc.

What reporting/data requirements should there be?

Would like to see something that reflects skill levels and employability and how these were assessed, rather than just based on level of hearing loss, speech ability or whatever.

What training should staff have?

Staff should have training in Deaf culture as well as in how to communicate with Deaf people. They need an in depth understanding of the deaf experience. Training should be done by Deaf people.