

English for Speakers of Other Languages Units at Intermediate 1[‡]

The candidate

The candidate is profoundly deaf and a BSL (British Sign Language) user. The candidate accesses mainstream subjects through sign language and support from a teacher of the deaf and/or signing auxiliary. Tutorial support provides extra support to learning. Additional support is provided by the speech and language therapist. The candidate's speech is understood by the majority of her peer group and subject teachers.

Although the candidate has a desire to improve her English, accessing the mainstream English Course was proving to be unsatisfactory due to her linguistic difficulties. In addition to her school work the candidate wanted to take on a more active role in the community, including a voluntary job in preparation for applying to college. She also wished to develop confidence in interacting with others including those unfamiliar with deaf people. Functional English was viewed by the candidate as essential. Literature, whilst important, was viewed as less important.

The candidate selected the following Units:

- ◆ Everyday Communication
- ◆ Work and Study-related Contexts (with a focus on study as it is the candidate's intention to proceed to college)

The Units

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Units are designed for candidates whose first language is not English but who need to develop their ability to use English in personal and social contexts. Candidates undertaking these Units should have some basic knowledge of English. It focuses specifically on developing candidates' English speaking, listening, writing and reading skills in the context of their daily lives. There is little focus on literature, rather on the daily application of the written and spoken word.

Each Unit has four Outcomes which must be passed in order to successfully complete the Unit. The Units require the candidate to demonstrate understanding of short, spoken and written texts, to write short pieces of text, and to talk to others on topics of immediate personal and general interest/work and study-related issues.

[‡] The Units available are DV34: ESOL: Everyday Communication, F1AE: ESOL: Work & Study-related Contexts and F1AO: ESOL: Transactional Context

The issue

Whilst it is accepted that British Sign Language is used by deaf people it was only formally recognised as a language with its own grammar and syntax in March 2003. Consequently, there are some people who are unaware that BSL has gained this recognition.

It is also a signed language and not a spoken language.

Each ESOL Unit requires the candidate to listen and to speak; both of which present difficulties for this candidate. There were three main areas requiring reasonable adjustments.

The teacher of the deaf discussed the issues with the SQA Assessment Arrangements team and alternative arrangements were agreed that maintained the integrity of the assessments.

1 Demonstrate an understanding of spoken English

Despite the use of amplification and the candidate using her cochlear implant, it was not always possible for the candidate to hear and understand the conversations. By allowing the candidate to have a 'live' speaker, the candidate was able to lip-read the speaker and therefore access the materials and the assessments.

2 Communicate orally in English

Whilst the candidate's speech is understood by the majority of her peers it is clear that, due to the profound hearing loss, there are some omissions of sounds which the candidate can neither hear nor reproduce when speaking. It was deemed desirable to include a member of staff unfamiliar with the candidate's speech for the oral presentations to ensure that the candidate was being assessed for intelligibility to listeners both familiar and unfamiliar with deaf speech.

It was also considered desirable that the candidate demonstrated she had strategies in place to support communication repair when she either misunderstood or was misunderstood by another. This would reinforce positive communication and embrace confidence in communicating with others.

3 For internal verification purposes the delivery of the oral presentations would be videoed

The quality of video recording and the additional issues of videoing deaf speech were of concern to the candidate, the teachers and the internal verifier. However, the quality of the video recording does not form part of the assessment. The paperwork and checklists for recording the assessment and delivery of these oral presentations has to be completed accurately and in detail highlighting the candidate's strength and areas for future development.

The internal verifier, however, was unable to hear the presentations clearly due to issues with the video recording and believed the candidate had not met the required standard. Therefore, despite the completed paper evidence being submitted it was regarded as insufficient.

The solution

Communication is a two-way process and the candidate, working with the staff and the speech and language therapist, has over a period of time developed appropriate communication repair strategies for use when there is a breakdown in communication — whether from not hearing the speaker or not being understood.

It is therefore important that the candidate has opportunities to learn and to develop her ability to use the language in personal, social, work and study contexts.

The candidate's desire and recognition of the importance of functional English beyond school provided her with the motivation to attempt all components of the Units — including those which, due to her profound deafness, would prove more challenging. The candidate wanted to achieve a recognised qualification.

Providing the candidate with a 'live' speaker resolved the issues surrounding hearing the speaker as the candidate was able to lip-read.

Prior to the oral presentations, the candidate was encouraged to give consideration to the seating of the audience to minimise potential lip-reading difficulties.

Through active involvement in the assessment arrangements the candidate gained confidence in the communication process with other people.

The candidate was actively encouraged to consider word choice and sentence construction while retaining the integrity of the communication task.

The assessments

The Unit content and assessment criteria were discussed with the candidate prior to the start of the first Unit. The candidate was aware that the assessments were a combination of both practical (oral and auditory) and written tasks.

The candidate would prepare drafts and final copies of written tasks under supervision.

There would be an unfamiliar assessor present who would observe the spoken interactions and complete the assessor's checklist. At least one audio recording from each Unit would be retained as evidence.

Challenges for the final completion of the Units

All pieces of work completed by the candidate, including the assessor's paper checklists, would be submitted to the internal verifier before an assessment decision was agreed.

The verifier would have access to the video recording of the oral presentations to confirm the standard had been met, however the quality of the videoing process would not be

considered. The completed assessors' checklist and records would be submitted along with the video tape.

All candidate assessment is subject to external verification and may need to be retained for this purpose.