

Quality Standards for the use of personal radio aids

Promoting easier listening for deaf children



Our vision is a world without barriers for every deaf child.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the UK Children's FM Working Group for its valuable contribution to the creation of this resource.

The UK Children's FM Working Group

The UK Children's FM Working Group (www.fmworkinggroup.org.uk) is made up of a range of professionals including educational audiologists, representatives from the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD), the Ewing Foundation, the National Deaf Children's Society, the National Health Service, an auditory implant centre, commercial organisations and higher education. The group promotes best practice in the provision, management and use of radio amplification and works to ensure the quality of signal is protected in a rapidly developing technological landscape.

This revision is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth (Liz) Wood, a much missed member of the Working Group.

Photographs

Thank you to the staff and pupils at Auriol Hearing Impaired Specialist Provision and the Hearing Impaired Unit at The Mead Infant School, Surrey.

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We use the term ‘deaf’ to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss such as glue ear.

We use the term ‘parent’ to refer to all parents and carers of children.

1. Foreword

In an age of rapidly developing technology there are more opportunities for deaf children than ever before. Hearing connects us – it's the basis for the development of spoken language, literacy and friendships. Werker reminds us of evidence that “infants typically acquire language through listening and start life ready to speak. Furthermore, by 17 months phonetic distinctions guide new word learning as infants use their phonetic categories for learning new words.”¹

Children live and learn in hostile acoustic environments which have traditionally been thought of as formal learning environments. Schools are challenging acoustically and the use of radio amplification in such settings should be considered as standard provision. There is a solid evidence base that the foundations for language are laid in the first years of life. Young children are exposed to language learning when travelling in a car or on public transport, on shopping trips, going to the park, sitting in a front-facing pushchair, at playgroups and at nursery. Radio amplification is ideal for such settings as these are all challenging acoustic environments. Very early use of radio amplification has been shown to offer significant benefits to deaf children.² All children have busy lives outside of school, where the opportunity to learn to ride a bike, join a local group, go horse riding or take up any other activity would be enhanced by sensitive use of radio amplification. Learning takes place in as many informal as formal settings. Deaf young people can be considered to be digital natives,³ in that they expect connectivity with a range of other equipment. Restricting use of such equipment to school only is limiting a child's access to their social activities. Hearing aids and implants, whilst being increasingly sophisticated, are poor in multiple-speaker situations and at distance – radio amplification when well fitted, maintained and used can offer real opportunities for language enrichment.

1. Werker, J. The perceptual foundations of bilingual acquisition in infancy. 2012. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1251:50-61.

2. Mulla, I. *Pre-school use of Amplification Technology* [thesis]. 2011. www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/uk-ac-man-scw:138160 (accessed 24 January 2017).

3. Prensky, M. Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. *On the Horizon*. 2001. 9 (5):1–6.

In an ideal world, every deaf child would receive a complete amplification package, including a radio aid at first hearing aid fitting, which would change as the child's needs and interests change. In Great Britain, the Equality Act 2010⁴ means that schools and other education settings must provide auxiliary aids (such as radio aids) as reasonable adjustments. More recently, in England, changes to the special educational needs framework have introduced a new focus on early intervention and improving outcomes. Forthcoming changes to legislation in Northern Ireland and Wales also have similar aims.

This new edition of the quality standards for the provision, fitting, management and use of radio aids is an evidence-based resource that promotes best practice. It's invaluable for anyone who is responsible for ensuring that deaf children have access to the best opportunities to develop language. Education professionals (educational managers, Teachers of the Deaf, educational audiologists, mainstream teachers, teaching assistants), healthcare professionals (audiologists, speech and language therapists and auditory implant centre staff) and parents will all find this resource an important best practice guide.

Evidence of the benefits of radio aids is compelling and deaf children deserve the very best opportunities. All those concerned with the provision of services have a responsibility to ensure that radio aid systems are used appropriately to enhance the experience of all deaf children, both at home and in educational settings.

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4. Equality and Human Rights Commission. Equality Act. 2010. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents (accessed 24 January 2017).