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I first came to Queen’s as an undergraduate student on the BSc Economics programme in 1997. Twenty years later, aside from three years working in the disability sector, I am still here, having studied or worked across four different Schools.

During that time I have confronted and sought to challenge a range of taken for granted practices; practices which are perceived as ‘normal’ by hearing people but which become barriers to people like me who are deaf. From videos which rely only on the (inaccessible) spoken word to teaching in rooms with only audible (as opposed to flashing) fire alarms, and students who assume a fire alarm going off is a drill because the lecturer hasn’t responded. It would be easy to be critical of such examples.

However they are also testament to the lack of societal awareness about diversity and disability, and the uncertainty that can come with having a deaf member of staff for the first time.



The last eight years as an academic in, first, the School of Education, then the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, and now the merged School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, has been a journey of awareness-raising, finding solutions, and perseverance. This has also been undoubtedly grounded in my own research interests in disability rights and children’s rights.

This journey has been supported through the Queen’s University Disability Support Fund.

Through the fund I was able to purchase two small microphones and a personal loop system for use in both teaching and research.

This amplifies sound directly into my hearing aids. This has worked well, not only in facilitating communication with students in class, but also in demonstrating to students, the real life implications of the subject matter in which I teach. The use of the microphones also allows for a more considered and accessible approach to research and committee meetings throughout the university, ensuring that only those who have the microphone are speaking (apart from myself given I don’t need to hear myself speak – small advantage!). Whilst facilitating accessible meetings can take time to perfect, the benefits are now clear to see.

Although there continues to be times when the microphones, which resemble silver pens, are confused for real pens, and vice versa!

Awareness-raising has been critical. Direct conversations with other colleagues and students allows for the issues to be tackled head on.

Disability is ever-present whether we realise it or not. We all have the potential to become ‘disabled’ at any time.  It is not only a topic to be taught through the medium of textbooks and powerpoint, but a part of the rich tapestry of the world in which we live and work.