

# Breaking Barriers: Advancing Deaf Awareness in Health and Social Care

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## Context and Approach:

One in six people in the UK are Deaf or hard of hearing, rising to one in four by 2050. Many report poor experiences in health and social care due to a lack of Deaf awareness among staff—ranging from ineffective communication to unfamiliarity with booking interpreters or using British Sign Language (BSL). This results in limited access to safe, equitable care.

My Bevan Fellowship project addresses this gap by enhancing and promoting the DeafAware eLearning package—co-designed with Deaf communities across Wales and already piloted by over 500 Swansea University students.

My objectives are to refine the package based on user feedback, expand its content to reflect diverse Deaf experiences, and ensure its accessibility across health and care sectors.

## Planned Activity:

This work aims to embed Deaf awareness in healthcare education and practice, driving long-term systemic change to ensure more inclusive, person-centred care for Deaf individuals.

### Research:

**Research Question:** How can refining and promoting the DeafAware eLearning package improve Deaf awareness in health and care services, and what factors affect its use?

I lead research to improve and expand DeafAware, co-designed with Deaf communities. Using £15K impact funding, the package will be made more inclusive and shared via national platforms. I will gather feedback, survey stakeholders, and publish findings in peer-reviewed journals and open-access outlets.

### Leadership:

I lead a diverse team enhancing DeafAware with input from Deaf contributors, including people of colour and LGBTQ+ individuals. I supervise two Deaf PhD students and aim to support more early-career researchers across Wales.

I collaborate with health, care and industry staff to embed Deaf-aware practices and build leadership in Deaf communities and research.

### Education/teaching :

I integrate DeafAware into Swansea's health programmes to promote inclusive learning. I supervise Deaf PhD students, supporting their research on Deaf inequalities. I teach and host seminars on Deaf health topics, encouraging students and researchers to embed equity in their work.

## Progress to date:

- The DeafAware project steering group has met four times. We have now added to our collection of Deaf and hard of hearing people's stories for the DeafAware package, and increased the quality of existing media. We have translated the package into Welsh and moved it to an accessible platform – Canvas catalogue.
- We have organised a stakeholder feedback event for people across health, care, local authority and industry to book in, try out the DeafAware eLearning package beforehand, and provide feedback.
- Presented at the ARCH Forum (A Regional Collaboration for Health) for guidance on scaling and how best to accelerate innovation across health and care sectors in South West Wales.



## Reflections:

- How can inclusive, co-produced initiatives like DeafAware drive sustainable change in health, education and practice?
- What role does mentorship and representation play in empowering Deaf individuals and under-represented researchers to lead systemic reform?
- How can health and care professionals be effectively supported to adopt Deaf-aware practices that go beyond awareness into meaningful action?

