

Workplace Assistance Programmes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees

By the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Two Commonwealth Government programmes – Auslan for Employment (AFE) and Workplace Modifications Scheme (WMS) provide very useful assistance to people who are Deaf or who are hard of hearing by providing support to improve access in the workplace. Both are available through the national JobAccess disability employment information and advice service.

Auslan For Employment

Since AFE was introduced in 2007, it has provided financial assistance to employers of Deaf workers to assist with the costs of providing Auslan interpreting and Deaf awareness training for the workplace. It has also assisted co-workers to undertake nationally accredited Auslan Certificate II courses.

There are three levels of assistance available under AFE. The first level may be approved for a range of work-related activities, including team meetings, induction training, occupational health and safety and skills training. Level one assistance may also be approved for Deafness Awareness Training for co-workers. Assistance at this level is available to a maximum of \$5,000 or for 12 months, whichever occurs first. Some travel costs may also be reimbursed for Auslan interpreters.

The second level of AFE assistance provides interpreting at job interviews, for both existing workers and new job seekers. The third level of assistance assists with the costs of co-workers undertaking nationally accredited Auslan Certificate II courses. Up to \$765 may be reimbursed for each co-worker.

Workplace Modifications Scheme

Another programme which helps improve access and productivity is the Workplace Modifications Scheme. It can pay for the cost of special equipment or modifications for the workplace. The Scheme may also reimburse eligible training where a worker with disability requires technical support or training for disability specific modifications or equipment. The Scheme can help with hearing and communication devices and assistive technology equipment that is required in the workplace to complete duties.

The amount of funding for each workplace modification usually isn't limited which means there is flexibility to provide workplace solutions that really meet the individual needs of employees – both new and existing employees.

One of the best things about the Scheme is that it is totally focussed on the individual's requirements and their workplace arrangements. The JobAccess advisers will provide information about products and work accommodations and there is also the Work Adjustment Tool on the JobAccess website, which people can use to search for solutions.

The JobAccess service acknowledges that many applicants come to them after they have undertaken research into workplace solutions and they have already identified the best solutions. JobAccess says this is good when people have researched their own needs and products, sought professional advice and sometimes products.

In other cases, our independent Workplace Assessors can also recommend a modification or device, which the applicant may not be familiar with. A range of communication software and equipment, warning lights and hearing devices have recently been approved to assist Deaf and hard of hearing workers.

Demand for assistance through the Workplace Modification Scheme is increasing, with an average of 424 enquiries per month.

To be eligible for assistance under the Workplace Modifications Scheme, the employee must be employed in, or have a job offer for a position that is at least eight hours a week and is expected to last 13 weeks or more. Employers, self-employed workers and employment service providers can apply at any time for the Scheme using the online application forms with step by step instructions available at www.jobaccess.gov.au.

JobAccess advisers are available on 1800 464 800 (Phone and TTY) to answer any questions.