

Overview

“Back in 1985 ... Semester 1 ... Day 1 ... Who was the most nervous? Was it the academics? ... Was it the numerous first year students? Was it Des Power as he eagerly awaited the first group of deaf students to come to tertiary education? ... Was it Lesleigh Brennan who was interpreting for orientation in front of hundreds of students ...[who] had never seen a ‘real’ interpreter work before? ... the prize goes to that first group of nervous deaf students”. (Excerpt from a speech celebrating 21st Anniversary of Griffith University Deaf Student Support Program)

Historically, deaf people have had to struggle against an all-too-frequent community view that they were “dumb” in the sense of being stupid as well as mute. *Dumb* in many languages has meant not only “mute” but “dull” or “stupid”, so that *dumb* has become a synonym for these terms. It was not until the sixteenth century that ancient views that deaf people could not be educated began to be overcome by the first attempts at schooling. Since then education for deaf children has become widely available in schools but it was only in the late twentieth century in Australia that deaf people received education of a standard that enabled them to aspire to a university education. There were no pathways for Deaf or hard of hearing people to get into university, there were no assistive devices to help them and they were considered only eligible for lesser roles not requiring university studies.

The establishment of Griffith University’s Deaf Student Support Program (DSSP) in 1985 was a milestone in Australian education. It also reflected a growing community commitment to the social values of equity of opportunity and acceptance of diversity. A deaf student recalling the great personal impact those changes had for her noted:

“My very first Deaf lecturer! That was the best and most exciting moment of my life. I would be floating on cloud nine for days after the lecture ...”

In 2007, the Program continues to provide arguably the most extensive support services to Deaf¹ and hard of hearing² students in the country.

A current student offered this advice to Deaf and hard of hearing people contemplating post-secondary study:

“Go to Griffith University and utilise all the resources and supports they offer—you probably won’t survive [your] university if the support [service] doesn’t understand the difficulties of being hard of hearing”.

The pioneers who established DSSP were ahead of their time in recognising that in education, deafness should not be regarded as a medical matter or an indicator of disability but a social and communicative way of life. The pathway to academic achievement for deaf students is through the provision of appropriate communication tools and support. For 21 years DSSP has been providing interpreting, note-taking, technological and tutorial services and a deaf student network that have become a benchmark for deaf higher education in Australia. This support has contributed to a completion rate for deaf students at Griffith that exceeds the completion rate for hearing students, with up to 40 students per year receiving a comprehensive range of communication, technological and learning supports.

The first schools for the deaf in Australia opened in 1861. These schools focused on preparing boys for trades and girls for factory and domestic work. Knowledge of the supports required to provide equivalent formal education for deaf students at high school level did not begin to have an impact until the 1970s. Even then deaf students aspiring to higher education were few and their way difficult. The few who entered universities had little or no support and even had to pay for their own sign language interpreters.

In 1985, Emeritus Professor Des Power, who had been involved in research and training in education of the deaf for many years, advocated successfully for the admission of deaf students into the Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education’s special education teacher training program. Deaf people and educators of the deaf had long desired opportunities for deaf people to become teachers of the deaf. The National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology and

¹ The use of capitalisation of ‘D’ in ‘Deaf’ is usually taken to refer to individuals who identify themselves as linguistically and culturally deaf; i.e., that they are distinguished by a common sense of experience of being deaf in a hearing/ speaking world and by possession of a common unique language - Australian Sign Language - *Auslan* (Power, 1997).

² Hard of hearing refers to individuals with significant hearing loss and replaces any former use of the term ‘hearing impaired’.

California State University Northridge, which Professor Power had visited, provided models of supportive programs for deaf students within regular universities. The Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education had been involved in training hearing teachers of the deaf for years. It established the Deaf Student Support Program (DSSP) and admitted the first group of deaf students in 1985, continuing with an annual intake thereafter. Deaf graduates of the program are now teaching in all Australian states and in a number of overseas countries.

When it was first established, the DSSP had a focus on making the breakthrough to preparing/supporting deaf students to become teachers of the deaf themselves. Dr. Breda Carty, Griffith's first Deaf PhD graduate, teacher of the deaf, Deaf historian, and Lecturer at Renwick College, a postgraduate centre for studies in education of children with sensory disabilities allied with the University of Newcastle contemplated the beginnings of her career in deaf education at the 21st anniversary celebration of DSSP in 2006:

"Most people said to me 'a deaf person becoming a teacher of the deaf, we've never heard of that. It's a stupid idea, just forget about it'. Time and time again I heard that. But there was one person—Des Power ... He was the only person who said 'a deaf person becoming a teacher—what a great idea. I've been supporting that idea for a very long time. I'd like to see it happen'. He was the only one who said that. I've always remembered that."

In contrast to the history of deaf education in Australia prior to the 1970s, one that did not promote academic education, Breda Carty's story highlights the vision and powerful influence of encouragement and support of the kind provided by DSSP. Now the DSSP supports, on average, 40 deaf students every year in a broad range of disciplines. Upon amalgamation of the Mt Gravatt campus of Brisbane College of Advanced Education with Griffith University, the support service was extended to all six campuses and all disciplines and programs of study across the University. Deaf students have now graduated from a broad range of programs including law, science, humanities, social sciences, visual arts, human services, health sciences, communication, multimedia, information technology, and hotel management. Several students have obtained graduate degrees and Dr Carty, the first Deaf PhD, graduated in 2005. In 2006, DSSP received a Griffith Award for

Excellence in Teaching for sustained innovation in "services supporting student learning".

Distinctiveness, coherence and clarity of purpose

Griffith University is known for its commitment to inclusive approaches and practices for disadvantaged and minority groups. Griffith's Deaf Student Support Program was a 'trail-blazer' in providing specialist support services for Deaf and hard of hearing students and paved the way for it to be the norm rather than the exception that deaf people could participate and be successful in mainstream education. It was the first such program to be established in Australia and has been sustained over 21 years. In Australia, very few universities have dedicated specialist support programs for Deaf and hard of hearing students. It is more common for support to be provided by generic disability offices. Since 1994 DSSP has provided interpreting services for deaf students not only at Griffith University but also for students at the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and the Australian Catholic University. In addition, in understanding the importance of recognition of cultural identity and the sense of belongingness for beginning university students, deaf students from these institutions are invited to attend the special orientation sessions provided for deaf students at Griffith each year.

"The Griffith University DSSP has become the gold standard against which other universities measure access and support services for Deaf and hard of hearing students in higher education. A number of university programs around the country (including our own) have endeavoured to emulate the outstanding services provided by DSSP for deaf students. The success of the DSSP is evident in the quality of the Deaf and hard of hearing graduates who have joined the professions after successfully completing their studies at Griffith University. At the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, for example, we are fortunate that the Deputy Principal of our bilingual/bicultural school, Ms Leonie Jackson, is a Griffith alumna and a beneficiary of DSSP services who has become a highly successful teacher of the deaf. Leonie not only contributes to the quality of educational services offered to deaf children, but is also a role model for their aspirations as future professionals." (Greg Leigh, Chair, Renwick Centre/Conjoint Professor of Education, University of Newcastle)

The DSSP provides students with a range of supports including sign language interpreting, peer note-taking and laptop services, classroom transcription, tutorial support, a newsletter, guidance for teaching staff on inclusive classroom practice, guidance for students on using support services, student orientation, liaison with Examinations and Timetabling officers, liaison with the Queensland Department of Education, Training, and the Arts regarding practice placements, liaison regarding learning environments, audio loops and provision of FM transmitters, liaison with the International Student Office, Legal Services and Graduate Recruitment, the Alumni Office and the Library. In addition, the DSSP provides outreach to deaf students in primary and secondary schools to provide information on transition to university.

“The Deaf Student Support Program has been coordinating the support services for Deaf and hearing impaired students at all Brisbane universities for a number of years now and their commitment and professionalism are second to none. They have willingly sent representatives to our student and parent information nights for senior students planning their vocational and educational pathways after school and have been an invaluable resource at these evenings. (Tony Egan, Head of Special Education Services, Runcorn State High School)

Peer Note-taking Service

In order to address the broad range of needs of students, DSSP has provided both interpreters and note-takers from its earliest days. Prior to 1993 note-takers were recruited from volunteers within the classes attended by deaf students. This system produced notes of great variation in quality and comprehensiveness. In recognition of this, in 1993 funds were obtained from a Higher Education Equity Grant to institute a more professional note-taking system at the University and to extend the service so it might be available not just to deaf students but to all students with disabilities unable to take notes for themselves. The note-taking training and service (exclusively a DSSP service in the beginning) involves meticulous training, careful selective recruiting and regular evaluation. Currently, each year over 300 first-year students who are willing to be peer note-takers attend a six-hour free training course. From these trainees a team is selected to become active as note-takers, providing notes from their course/s as photocopies or emailing their notes to the

Coordinator. Together with the Coordinator, they form the backbone of the *Griffith Note-taking Network*. The note-taking service meets with high approval ratings from clients and note-takers, due not only to the skills of its note-takers but also to the flexibility, close supervision and quality assurance measures of network operations.

“Peer note-taking was next best if not equal — this was an avenue to building friendships with others in classes, sharing information, joining in discussion groups ... deciding who to team up with for assignment — really imperative to success.” (Student quote)

“With note-taking, I found this very useful as it helped me to remember the main content of each class. It was also very useful during studying and revision.” (Student quote)

Laptop Transcription Service

Different from peer note-taking, the laptop transcription service plays an important role by providing laptop operators for students with hearing loss who do not use sign language interpreters. These students are able to follow the lecture by viewing an almost verbatim real-time script of the lecture prepared by a laptop operator sitting beside them. This is considered a communication service as distinct from a note-taking service, and in nearly all cases such clients also receive the note-taking service in the usual manner. Griffith is unique in supplying both immediate access to the lecture through transcription and notes following the lecture. Other institutions usually provide only the professionally produced transcript. However, the experience of DSSP is that students rarely reread the full transcript of an entire lecture after the event. This would add an additional hour or more to every class. The students are much more appreciative of the concise, well-structured notes from the peer note-takers that are more useful for study purposes.

Interpreting Services

The history of deaf education provides ample evidence that access to tuition in a student's first language is the breakthrough factor for success for students who are culturally and linguistically deaf. The recognition of Auslan as a community language in 1994, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education* embraced by the Australian Vice-Chancellors'

Committee recognise and reflect this as an equal access issue.

The DSSP was ahead of its time by more than ten years with the provision of sign language interpreting to deaf students commencing in 1985 at what was then the Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education (later the Brisbane College of Advanced Education (BCAE)). After the merger of the BCAE with Griffith University in 1989, the Sign Language Interpreting Services were provided initially through Griffith's Centre for Deafness Studies and Research, located at Mount Gravatt campus and were then transferred to DSSP. A team of eleven interpreters and a Coordinator worked initially on the then two campuses of Griffith, but its reputation for finding and deploying good interpreters grew, and by 1995 it was also providing interpreters for two Queensland University of Technology campuses and one University of Queensland campus. As word spread around the Deaf community about the quality of interpreting, note-taking and tutorial support that was provided by DSSP, people started applying for entry to these universities, coming from South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales to enrol in a range of courses, from Leisure Management and Psychology to Counselling, Environmental Science and Library Studies. During the last five years, DSSP has averaged in excess of 3,500 coordinated hours of interpreting annually.

"The great thrill of working in such a great program is that it has enabled a significant number of deaf people to achieve academic successes that they might not otherwise have been able to achieve. In fact, many of the student support services on offer in universities around the country are based on the service that commenced at Mount Gravatt over twenty years ago." (Comments from a former Coordinator of the Interpreting Service)

Summary of services provided

Service	2003	2004	2005	2006
Interpreting	3500	3104	*5219	3562
Laptop Notetaking	202	792	733	7 5 0
Tutoring	525	385	429	269
GRAND TOTAL	4227	4281	6381	4582

* In 2005 there was a higher proportion of Deaf students compared with hard of hearing students

Use of technology

DSSP currently utilises the following broad range of equipment, technology and strategies to accommodate individual needs:

- ✓ Personal FM systems with lecturers wearing microphones and students wearing dedicated receivers for use where room radio broadcast loops are not available;³
- ✓ Audio boosting equipment that involves the use of a small hand-held microphone and headphones – a "Pocket Talker";
- ✓ Live stenographic captioning services for students with significant hearing loss who do not use sign language;⁴ and
- ✓ Hearing aids tuned into hearing loops installed in main lecture halls (though new technology has largely overtaken these).

DSSP is also investigating a range of new technologies for suitability in the university setting including:

- ✓ Remote video interpreting (may be useful for students in remote locations) and
- ✓ Voice recognition software that converts speech of lecturer to text on a screen.

Research has shown that even with the access provided by interpreting and note-taking, Deaf and hard of hearing students still receive less information from lectures and tutorials than their hearing peers (Marschark, Sapere, Convertino & Seewagen, 2005; Napier & Barker, 2004). This has prompted DSSP to explore emerging technologies that may further enhance access. Trials are under way with the Australian Caption Centre to provide real-time captions to students in class using specialised technology and remote transcribers who send captions downline.

Influence on student learning and student engagement

Powerful evidence from first year experience research (Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005) indicates that empathetic guidance, advising and support for all students commencing their studies at university is crucial for success. Further, this research has identified "at risk" groups amongst commencing students, including students from

³ Recently, two hard of hearing students who had not used this technology before were moved to tears because they were so overwhelmed by the clarity of the speech they heard. It enabled them to function within the group like other students and to take their own notes.

⁴ Students have commented that it gives them 'ears' to hear the lecture.

minority and disadvantaged groups. Classroom participation and a sense of academic and social integration are acknowledged as important for the academic success of all post-secondary students (Tinto, 1993). A 2005 study of the DSSP and its impact confirmed that, of students utilising the service, 36% had a mild hearing loss, 32% a moderate loss and 32% a profound loss, all of these students comprising an "at risk" group. A large study in the USA (Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999) found that while deaf students receiving supports indicated similar levels of classroom engagement and communication, outside the classroom they did not feel as much a part of the university community as their hearing peers. Hence DSSP provides out-of-class social support through interpreting for social events and by facilitating deaf student networks.

Against an overall context of access, isolation and identity challenges, the achievements of deaf students supported by DSSP are remarkable. Success of the DSSP can be measured not only by statistical data such as completion rates. Students reported that they found DSSP supports made their personal and social lives much more satisfying:

"My year at Griffith was my favourite because of the support provided to me (FM, note-taking, interpreting and social-emotional support). I didn't spend so much time trying to catch up on what I missed and so had spare time to actually relax and not be so tired. I also made more friends and was not so lonely. For once, I actually felt like I was intelligent rather than not very bright and having to study so much harder to understand what others understood with ease." (Deaf Griffith student)

Recently, a profoundly Deaf student who has completed her Bachelor of Laws at Griffith as a second degree after her Bachelor of Justice Administration, has been offered a Parliamentary Internship with Mr David Gibson, the Member for Gympie in Queensland. Mr Gibson, who has relatives who are Deaf, is aware of the challenges faced by Deaf people in fulfilling their aspirations for education and employment. He commended the DSSP and programs like it for opening up education and making pathways to the professions for Deaf people. Mr Gibson had the opportunity to view the DVD, *Signs of Success*, ( click on CD-rom – *Signs of Success*) which has been produced by DSSP to commemorate its 21 years and which showcased the achievements of deaf

students who have gained access to higher education. Mr Gibson expressed his admiration for the resource, and its capacity for raising awareness of the need for, and outcomes of, accessible and appropriate education for deaf students. He intends to provide copies of this DVD to every Member of Parliament in Queensland.

Inclusion in the mainstream

While there are numerous special educational settings at the primary and secondary levels for deaf students, the prevailing philosophy for educating deaf students in Australia is one of inclusion in regular educational settings. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the DSSP has been the pathways it has created for deaf people to participate and be successful in the mainstream of higher education in any course of their choosing. In a 2006 study of DSSP (Hyde, Punch, Power, Hartley, Brennan & Neale. submitted) students were asked the reason for their choosing to study at Griffith. While twenty-one per cent of respondents reported that Griffith University's comprehensive support services for deaf students were the reason for their choice, the majority indicated that the major reason for their choice was the availability of their chosen course of study. The work of DSSP has made these options available. As noted above, when the DSSP service began at Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education, most deaf students enrolled in programs to become teachers of the deaf. At the time of the 2005 survey, 27 of the 72 individuals who completed the written survey reported having studied education or special education at diploma, bachelors or masters levels. The remaining respondents had completed their studies in a further twenty different higher education programs (Punch, Hyde & Power, in press).

Research continues to cite functional, environmental and attitudinal barriers faced by deaf students and a high rate of non-completion of degree programs among this population (Stinson & Walter, 1997). However, the support services provided by DSSP and its pragmatic approach to removing these barriers has demonstrably resulted in Griffith achieving very high retention and graduation rates for deaf students from the beginning. A 1995 study on the impact of the program (Power, 1995) showed that 82% of deaf students who had entered the program between 1989 and 1992 had graduated by the end of 1994. Hyde's 2005 study surveying a considerably larger group of students showed

that the completion rate for deaf students who used the DSSP services was 76% compared with 65% for deaf students who did not use the service. The 76% completion rate exceeds the overall Griffith University completion rate of 71% (Hyde et al., submitted).

“Everyone was very supportive of me ... without Des Power and Gwen Spradbrow, the interpreting support, note-taking support, tutorials and words of encouragement, I would not have survived.” (Griffith deaf student)

The vision of the DSSP was to dissolve barriers and foster the early development of role models so that deaf students could aspire to professional studies — firstly in deaf education, and then more broadly. The regular enrolment of around 40 deaf students each year, contracts with other universities for support services for their deaf students and a growing group of highly successful alumni are the fulfilment of this vision. Deaf students summed up the importance of DSSP’s service eloquently in reflections on their fondest memories of their time at Griffith.

“Meeting other deaf people — not feeling so isolated about being deaf. It was the first time in my schooling that I had support.”

Having other deaf and hard of hearing students in the same course, ‘I wasn’t the only one’... ‘Friendship with many people in all areas in the uni, either deaf or hearing [was great]. Being able to broaden my network of deaf people after growing up in an entirely hearing world during my school years.’

“I enjoyed my days as a fulltime student. Uni was the first place where all my educational needs were met. I was disappointed when my uni days came to an end. It really was an excellent place of learning. Uni life is something that every young person should have the opportunity to experience.” (click on CD-rom for more student comments)

The most visible aspect of the DSSP’s services is interpreting for those students who are Deaf who access lectures, tutorials, laboratory sessions, work placements, meetings and field experiences via sign language. While the classroom needs of these students are generally well understood and well provided for via interpreting and note-taking provisions, there is a danger that the needs of students who are hard of hearing and who are less ‘visible’ to academic staff, can be overlooked and misunderstood. Because most of these students

do not rely on signing but speechread, speak, and manage reasonably well in face-to-face communication, people who have contact with them may form a view that they need little support in lectures and other learning environments.

This is frequently not the case. Hearing aids (including FM [Frequency Modulation] radio aids), and peer note-taking or laptop services can supply these students with a degree of access, but the often poor acoustic and visual conditions of lecture theatres and other settings mean that, according to the degree and nature of their hearing loss, they may still have considerable difficulty in understanding much of what occurs.

The DSSP conducted a survey of these students in 2002 and discovered that they did indeed have difficulty in some settings in which they had to interact (Spradbrow & Power, 2004). It was found that the major difficulties were in lectures. Lecturers who made speechreading difficult by “pacing and prowling”, being half-hidden behind a lectern, talking while not facing the class, speaking too softly or quickly, not using a microphone, or having a non-English accent caused the greatest difficulty. “Chatter” from other students also often caused difficulty in hearing what was being said by the lecturer, as did discussion sessions in which speakers tended to overlap. Hard of hearing students tend to identify themselves as hearing, not Deaf, and for this reason have often tried to blend in, hiding their deafness, not wanting to stand out, thus compounding the difficulties they encounter.

The DSSP has taken steps to address this issue on a number of fronts — firstly by providing training for students in self-advocacy so that they have the confidence to make their needs known to lecturers and to suggest strategies to assist them in class. Secondly, DSSP staff liaise with lecturers to explain the difficulties faced by Deaf and hard of hearing students and outline a range of strategies to improve their classroom experience. These include:

- ✓ making oneself as visible and audible as possible by facing the class at all times while speaking;
- ✓ using a microphone tuned to the student’s FM device;
- ✓ providing as much visual support as possible via overheads, using captioned videos or providing transcripts of videos whenever possible;

- ✓ making lecture transcripts and notes and supporting material available on the internet; and
- ✓ being available for consultation with the students.

Thirdly, DSSP has taken many opportunities to bring deafness into the mainstream by ensuring that all of the activities of the University such as graduations and campus events are accessible. As academic and administrative staff have become more aware and support services have become more mainstream, the stigma associated with hearing loss has reduced and recent surveys suggest that hard of hearing students now make more regular use of services and aids. Peer note-taking and laptop transcription are also invaluable for these students.

Breadth of impact

In addition to supporting Deaf and hard of hearing students through to graduation, DSSP has been successful in making a continuous and meaningful contribution to the broader Griffith University community, the deaf service delivery sector and the Deaf community. This has been largely achieved via a range of inter- and intra-university and industry partnerships. DSSP provides a focal point for various services and organizations in south-east Queensland and nationally that share common goals and objectives for Deaf and hard of hearing consumers.

Collaborations with tertiary institutions

Significant among these have been the relationships DSSP enjoys with other universities and educational institutions. Most universities and TAFE institutes in Queensland have Deaf and hard of hearing students enrolled in their courses. However, these institutions do not in general have staff with specialist expertise in the area of hearing impairment, and therefore seek assistance in assessing the needs of and delivering appropriate support services to their Deaf and hard of hearing students.

In relation to interpreting, DSSP has assisted universities, including the University of Southern Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, the Australian Catholic University, the University of Queensland and a number of institutes of TAFE in relation to sourcing interpreters, discussion of appropriate working conditions for interpreters, and workplace health and safety issues. DSSP has also provided information resources in the form

of Fact Sheets (*click on CD-rom to see Fact Sheets*) outlining procedures and protocols for working with interpreters, and roles and responsibilities for interpreters and students as they work together with academic, administrative and disability support staff. DSSP has also provided consultation to interstate universities and institutes of TAFE directly or via the Higher Education Disability Network's national AUSTED email list (a network for Disability Support Officers). This has included identifying and disseminating support, information and creative solutions from colleagues around Australia. DSSP is a regular contributor to deafness and hearing impairment-related questions sent to the Disability Support Officer network, calling on the legacy of 22 years of experience in the field and a practical understanding of the ongoing challenges students and services face in a rapidly changing educational, economic and policy environment.

Centrally co-ordinated interpreting services such as that provided by DSSP across all universities in Brisbane is a unique model in Australia and has proved to be highly effective for delivering an optimum service for students, and good conditions for interpreters in terms of streamlined timetabling, coordinated hours of work, and salary management. These carefully nurtured partnerships with other tertiary institutions are vital for sustaining quality services for the Deaf and hard of hearing student cohort in South-East Queensland, as well as scaffolding the staff services that support them.

DSSP has also cultivated partnerships with universities internationally in order to facilitate Deaf Student exchanges. In 2002 a profoundly deaf student from California State University, Northridge (CSUN) undertook a one-year exchange to Griffith University and, supported by DSSP, successfully completed several units in the Arts/ Humanities discipline. In 2004, a Griffith University student majoring in Journalism studied at CSUN for one year, and during 2007 an exchange student from CSUN is attending Griffith University studying multimedia. (*click on CD to see interview with student*) In 2005 a Griffith deaf student studying environmental science participated in an exchange through her School to Waterloo University in Canada. Facilitating these exchanges has required significant liaison between

⁵ http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/FC997C1A-EC40-4B51-8CB4-B58E498034D0/4591/Disability_Standards_for_Education_2005.rtf

the universities overseas, the Griffith University International Office, the Schools in which the students are studying, and the DSSP. The rich repository of knowledge within DSSP about the particular needs of deaf students and its close links with other areas of the University have meant that the service plays a central role in brokering optimum supports for students.

DSSP also works in cooperation with Griffith University’s International Student Services to provide support to Deaf and hard of hearing students from overseas who attend Griffith as enrolled international students. Deaf and hard of hearing International students have come to Griffith from Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, the United States and Japan. Sign languages and other modes of communication vary greatly from country to country and such international partnerships present unique support challenges for DSSP staff with exchange students and international deaf students often needing to learn and/or work in a third language to participate in their studies.

The challenge of providing suitable interpreting services, technology and other supports to make learning accessible for these international students is considerable. Their requirements for support vary greatly — depending on their country of origin, whether or not they are fluent in their own sign language, whether or not they have acquired Auslan and/or English, and to what degree — each case must be assessed individually, and creative, flexible solutions sought through the combined expertise of the DSSP staff.

Collaboration with government

As illustrated in the following cooperative endeavours, DSSP has enjoyed a sustained and highly productive partnership with the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts.

- ✓ Deaf and hard of hearing students studying teacher education are required to undertake teaching practicum in hearing schools, so DSSP works closely with the Practicum Office at Griffith University and the primary and high schools where students gain practical teaching experience, providing advice to schools and cooperating teachers and supplying interpreters if required.

“Over the past twenty years this program has supported many deaf/hearing impaired students who have gone on to find

employment with Education Queensland. These people stand as excellent role models for our current deaf/hearing impaired students, many of whom now consider university to be a viable post-secondary option.” (Bronwyn Green, Statewide Education Adviser, Hearing Impairment, Department of Education, Training and the Arts)

- ✓ DSSP provides consultancy services to primary and secondary schools in both the private and public school sector where teachers have Deaf and hard of hearing students, offering presentations at Information Evenings and in other forums to provide information to teachers, parents and students.
- ✓ DSSP staff work closely with Advisory Visiting Teachers (Hearing Impaired) and class teachers who identify students who demonstrate the academic ability and aspirations to study at a tertiary level. Early identification is beneficial for the student, school and DSSP in preparing students appropriately for transition to university study.
- ✓ DSSP has also successfully worked with the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts in providing professional development opportunities for teachers of the deaf.

DSSP and industry partnerships

- ✓ DSSP has a partnership with the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service (NABS). NABS is the only national Auslan interpreting service in Australia and provides services for medical and health care appointments. NABS works closely with the staff of DSSP and Griffith University in the development of Interpreter training, research into consumer trends amongst the Deaf community, interpreting services policy development and sharing the limited number of interpreter personnel.
- ✓ DSSP liaises closely with interpreter training programs, particularly those offered through the Southbank Institute of TAFE and DSSP staff are asked to teach in these programs, particularly in relation to interpreter training for educational settings.
- ✓ DSSP continues to work closely with the Australian Association of the Deaf (AAD), the peak body representing the Deaf Community in Australia. This relationship allows DSSP to have input into, and dialogue about, issues

important to the many students supported by the DSSP. AAD was one of the major sponsors of the DSSP 21st Anniversary Gala Event in 2006. The DSSP was also nominated by AAD members for a “Fair Go Award” in 2006.

“The DSSP is held in very high regard by the deaf people of Australia. We strongly commend it for its outstanding contribution to providing quality educational services for deaf students.” (Karen Lloyd, Manager, Australian Association of the Deaf)

- ✓ The DSSP networks closely with both national and state levels of the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA) ensuring that DSSP policy and procedure in relation to interpreters is on a par with industry development.

Partnerships with Griffith

DSSP works closely with all academic and administrative elements within Griffith University in order to provide learning and teaching environments that are accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing students. On a day-to-day basis, DSSP works collaboratively with a wide variety of teaching areas ranging from the Sciences to Law, Education and Human Services by providing Auslan interpreters and/or note-takers and a range of information that assists lecturers to make the learning experience an accessible and enjoyable one for deaf and hard of hearing students.

DSSP has contact with almost every area of the University, as students are encouraged and supported to access a wide variety of generic services, all of which are part of everyday student life. These areas include Student Services — for access to counselling, welfare and health services; Examinations and Timetabling, (especially) in relation to the organisation of alternative examination arrangements frequently required by Deaf and hard of hearing students; School and International Orientation Programs; Learning Services; and Library and Computing Services.

DSSP has made a unique and valuable contribution to the learning and teaching community at Griffith University, especially to the learning experiences of deaf students and the staff who teach them. In 2006, the University awarded DSSP a “Griffith Award for Excellence in Teaching” in the area of “Innovation across the Institution”.

Concern for equity and diversity

Griffith University has maintained a strong commitment to equity throughout its life as a university. Students with disabilities are one of the equity target groups included in the University’s plans, policies and strategies. Griffith University’s Strategic and Academic Plans reflect a core commitment to social justice, equity and diversity.

Until 1985 there had not been a concerted effort to address the barriers experienced by people with disabilities in higher education. However, Griffith University and the then Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education were at the leading edge of the move to include people with disabilities in tertiary education. Griffith University was quick to respond to the government’s 1990 paper, *A Fair Chance for All: Higher Education That’s Within Everyone’s Reach*. They developed a partnership with Ithaca College of TAFE to deliver the Certificate in Adult Tertiary Preparation to a cohort of students who were deaf or hard of hearing in 1991. DSSP staff were among those commissioned by the [then] Commonwealth Department of Education and Science to develop a national *Code of Practice* for students with disabilities in higher education which has been widely used to guide the implementation of disability support program standards and practices (O’Connor, Watson, Power & Hartley, 1998).

In tandem with these developments in the higher education sector was the development of broader anti-discrimination legislation at both state and national levels. In Queensland, the *Anti-Discrimination Act* was enacted in 1991 and was closely followed by the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act* in 1992. More recently, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*⁵ have been developed with a view to clarifying the provisions of the Commonwealth Act. The Standards describe the rights and entitlements of students with disabilities, the legal obligations and responsibilities of educational providers and the measures that are considered to be evidence of compliance with these legal obligations.

As further expression of its commitment to equity, Griffith’s draft 2007 Disability Action Plan has taken a bold and comprehensive step in designating areas in which strategies should be implemented to improve access to, and

⁵ Total Communication usually refers the combined use of speech and a signed language. In this case, numerous other communication methods were used to supplement these.

participation in, education and employment for people with disabilities. In the context of higher education, the framework for the new Plan maps the areas covered by the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* against those outlined in the concept of "Student Lifecycle Management". This model is based on activities associated with key phases and points of transition for all students: future students, current students and alumni. It includes pre-entry and preparation activities, application, admission and enrolment and orientation to first year as well as activities associated with program and course delivery, graduation and the transition to employment and beyond.

To some extent, the DSSP has provided a working model for this. With regard to Deaf and hard of hearing students Griffith more than complies with the Standards in the scope and activities of its Deaf Student Support Program. DSSP has always provided support far in excess of that required by the legislation. DSSP has also had significant input into developing Griffith policy relating to students with disabilities generally.

"Former Griffith students are now prominent in many deaf education programs and other professional roles throughout Australia and other universities now offer similar support services as a matter of course. [DSSP has produced] a very valuable record of how these services were initiated and developed in the days before they were mandated by the Disability Discrimination Act in the early 1990s. Once the services were made a national requirement, Griffith had a model available for all." (Dr Breda Carty, University of Newcastle and Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children)

Support for a diverse student population

Students who comprise the cohort of deaf students at Griffith in any year can come from any community, race, ethnic background and religion and accordingly they have different attitudes to their deafness. Some will identify with the Deaf community and share a common language such as Australian Sign Language, Auslan, others will be bilingual in Auslan and English and others may not have been introduced to sign language due to growing up in hearing families and attending mainstream schools. There are international students with no Auslan and little or no English. Some students are not profoundly deaf but are hard of hearing and are struggling because they

are missing content in their lectures. Some may have denied their hearing loss in order to avoid social stigmatization and negative reactions from others (Richardson, Long & Woodley, 2004). Some hard of hearing students *"often appear to interact with relative ease in many favourable listening situations, but may be at risk of 'slipping through the cracks' in regard to accessing content in lectures and other teaching situations"* (Spradbrow & Power, 2004). These hard of hearing students usually have some residual hearing which is sometimes supplemented by hearing aids and some may have cochlear implants. Therefore, the support offered by DSSP covers a range of options that may be accessed by our culturally diverse, deaf and hard of hearing students.

Meeting diverse communication needs

While Deaf and hard of hearing students with a knowledge of English have to overcome hurdles to pursue tertiary education, it is difficult to imagine how deaf students without a knowledge of English or sign language can manage. The following case study demonstrates how staff in DSSP supported a profoundly deaf international student from Japan. Erico, enrolled in an ELICOS course (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and building on the partnership in place with QUT, DSSP was enlisted to support Erico. As it happened, working with support staff in a learning environment was a new experience for her. In Japan she had no similar support through school or in university. It required flexibility, ingenuity and determination on the part of DSSP support staff.

ELICOS courses teach and assess the four aspects of reading, writing, listening and speaking English, and classes reflect these aspects. This in itself proves challenging for teachers of the course with deaf students, and support personnel. Although Erico had been studying English in Japan, her written English was quite basic, her spoken/speechread English consisted only of the occasional isolated word, which was barely intelligible to native speakers of English, and she did not know any Auslan.

Initial support enlisted the use of "Total Communication"⁶ in its purest form. Staff at DSSP used a wide variety of communication strategies to converse with Erico, assisting her to find ways to access classes in English and participate with the rest of the group. These methods consisted

of mime and gesture, pointing, various forms of visual communication, aspects of Signed English, drawing pictures, writing words, following the book other students were using, and some “on the spot” speech lessons.

Erico’s case illustrates the predicament in which many deaf individuals often find themselves. She was a competent communicator, fluent in Japanese sign language and with a knowledge of American finger spelling, but now in an environment where none of these were in use. DSSP, aware of Erico’s dilemma, and without languages or communication codes in common, began negotiating among the three sign languages, Japanese, American finger-spelling, and Auslan, introducing Erico to Auslan, which she subsequently acquired. This enabled DSSP support staff to interpret class audiotapes at the same time as hearing students were listening to them, and Erico would answer the listening questions by “listening in Auslan”.

Erico left the ten-week full time course with successful results in all four areas of language acquisition at that level. In fact the ESL teacher was embarrassed to send results back to her University in Japan indicating the **deaf student** had “topped the class” in the listening component.

“Before I went to Brisbane, I knew some American Sign Language alphabet but nothing about Auslan. When I went to QUT first time the teacher introduced Lesleigh and Anne to me. Of course I didn’t know why so I surprised that they helped me to interpret during my class. I was really happy because I hadn’t these supports in Japan. So I always felt difficulty to understand what teacher saying since I was in elementary school to university. I started to learn Auslan from Lesleigh and Anne and I always felt happy to be able to understand all of the teacher’s talk same time as other hearing students.” (Erico)

Conclusion

DSSP has addressed both obvious and hidden inequities and cultural biases experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing students over the past 22 years. Students have not only been assisted by the provision of appropriate technology and support but they have been able to undertake their studies in a supportive environment. There are too many success stories to mention them all, but the following student profiles provide a glimpse of how successful deaf students in higher education can be when they are included, supported

appropriately and encouraged to fulfil their dreams:

- ✓ Profoundly Deaf student graduates with two degrees, Bachelor of Justice Administration and Bachelor of Law, offered Parliamentary Internship;
- ✓ First deaf student in Australia to graduate with a Bachelor of Psychology (Hons). Now working in USA;
- ✓ First Deaf student (first language Auslan) to graduate with a Bachelor of Environmental Science;
- ✓ Mature age Deaf student first in Australia to graduate with a Bachelor of Leisure Management, now the manager of Deaf Sports and Recreation Queensland; and
- ✓ Mature age Deaf student (proficient in Auslan) graduated with Bachelor of Arts majoring in Journalism and awarded University Medal. Was Media Relations Officer for Deaflympics 2007, now Communications Officer, VicDeaf.

Griffith University, through the DSSP, acknowledged more than 20 years ago that, for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals to have equal access to higher education, there is “no choice” about the provision of appropriate communication aids and support services. The advent of digital and computer technologies has delivered the possibility of an even more level playing field, but access still relies on a philosophy of inclusion, acceptance of diversity, and a commitment to resourcing creative solutions for the few as well as the many. Deaf and hard of hearing students of the future will be able to pursue their educational aspirations knowing that support services such as those provided by DSSP are available on their pathway to academic and professional success.

The DSSP Team:

Emeritus Professor Des Power
 Lesleigh Brennan
 Gwen Spradbrow
 Anne Winter
 Michele Stephens
 Dr Maree Madden
 Sharon Hyde

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