



FROM COLLEGE TO EMPLOYMENT: HOW TO PREPARE DEAF STUDENTS FOR THE WORKPLACE

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR COLLEGES AND
COORDINATORS**

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INTRODUCTION

For many Deaf students, the end of college is not just the end of education; it is the beginning of uncertainty.

While hearing students often absorb career knowledge naturally through conversations, exposure, and informal learning, Deaf students can miss out on these opportunities. This creates a gap, not in ability, but in access.

Colleges play a critical role in closing that gap.

This guide provides practical, realistic strategies to support Deaf students as they move from education into employment. It focuses on what actually makes a difference: preparation, access, confidence, and informed decision-making.



CHAPTER I

WHY TRANSITION PLANNING MATTERS

There is a pattern that repeats itself every year.

Students are supported well during college. They have Communication Support Workes (CSWs), structured timetables, and clear expectations. Then they leave, and everything changes overnight.

No structure.

No clear guidance.

No one explaining what comes next.

That transition is where **many students lose momentum.**

If planning only starts in the final term, it is already too late. Students need time to build understanding, practise skills, and make mistakes in a safe environment before they enter the job market.

The goal is not to “help them get a job.”

The goal is to make sure they understand how the system works so they can navigate it independently.

That requires deliberate teaching, not assumption.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS DEAF STUDENTS FACE

It's easy to label challenges as “confidence issues” or “lack of experience.” That's lazy thinking.

The real barriers are more specific:

- Many Deaf students haven't had exposure to workplace conversations
- They have never seen what a good interview looks like
- They haven't been shown how to explain their communication needs clearly
- No understanding of available support (e.g. Access to Work)
- Over-reliance on support staff in education

They are expected to perform in environments they have not been prepared for.

There is also a cognitive load issue. Processing information through interpretation, lipreading, or text takes effort. In fast-paced environments like interviews, that pressure increases.

So when a student hesitates, gives a short answer, or seems unsure, it is often not a lack of ability. It is a combination of processing time, unfamiliar context, and pressure.

If colleges don't understand this, they will misjudge students and underprepare them.

CHAPTER III

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE JOB MARKET

Preparation needs to move from theory to reality.

Colleges should actively teach:

1. What jobs actually involve

Not just job titles, but real expectations:

- communication styles
- teamwork
- workplace behaviour

2. How to search for jobs

- job platforms
- application processes
- deadlines

3. Workplace communication scenarios

- meetings
- instructions
- asking for clarification

This is where most colleges fall short. They provide information, but not rehearsal.

Repetition is what builds confidence. If a student practises these situations multiple times before leaving college, the workplace stops feeling unfamiliar.

Without that, everything feels like a first-time experience, and that's where confidence drops.



CHAPTER IV

CVS, APPLICATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

This is where the gap becomes visible.

A student can be capable, motivated, and skilled, but still struggle to get past the first stage simply because they don't know how to present themselves.

CV Support

CV writing is often treated as a one-off task. It shouldn't be. It is a skill.

Students need:

- to understand what employers are scanning for
- clear structure
- simple, strong language
- relevant experience (even if limited)

Applications

Applications are even more challenging. Questions are often vague, and students are expected to interpret what is being asked. Without guidance, they either under-answer or overcomplicate.

Interviews

Interviews are where pressure peaks.

Biggest challenges:

- processing questions in real time
- managing communication
- unfamiliar environment and unfamiliar people = performance drops

Colleges need to normalise this by practising it. Not once, but multiple times:

- run mock interviews
- practise common questions
- discuss communication preferences in advance

Example:

Instead of hoping the employer understands, students should be able to say:

"I use BSL. I will need an interpreter for the interview."

Students should leave college having already experienced what an interview feels like, not guessing.

CHAPTER V

ACCESS TO WORK AND WORKPLACE SUPPORT

One of the biggest failures in the system is how late students learn about support. Many Deaf students leave college without knowing this exists.

Access to Work can fund:

- interpreters
- communication support
- dedicated support for interviews (CSI)
- equipment

If a Deaf student enters employment without knowing how to secure interpreters or communication support, they are immediately at a disadvantage because the system has not been explained to them.

Students need to understand this before they apply for jobs, not after.

They should know what to say to employers, how to explain their needs clearly (please see our “Ask for Support/Accommodations” eBook), and how support is funded. This removes hesitation and reduces the fear of being seen as “difficult.”

When students are confident in explaining their access needs, employers are more likely to respond positively.

However, there is an important limitation that is often overlooked.

Access to Work does not fund support for voluntary roles.

CHAPTER V

ACCESS TO WORK AND WORKPLACE SUPPORT

This creates a gap. Students are frequently encouraged to take on voluntary work as a pathway into employment, which can be valuable in building experience. But without funded communication support, these environments can become inaccessible or place additional pressure on the student.

This needs to be explained honestly.

Volunteering can still be useful, but students should understand the limitations and be supported to make informed decisions. Where possible, colleges should guide students towards opportunities that are accessible or provide alternative ways to build experience that do not rely on unsupported environments.

Without this clarity, students can end up in situations where they are expected to perform without the support they need. That is exposure without access, and that's where problems begin.

CHAPTER VI

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Confidence is not something students suddenly gain at the end of college. It is built through small, repeated experiences where they are encouraged to take control.

If a student is always spoken for, always supported without being involved, or always guided without making decisions, they leave college dependent, and that becomes a problem in the workplace.

Deaf students need opportunities to:

- make decisions
- speak up
- explain their needs

That doesn't mean removing support. It means shifting how support is delivered. The aim is not to make things easier in the short term. It is to make students stronger in the long term.

Shift this mindset:

Support = empowerment, not control



CHAPTER VII

WHAT COLLEGES SHOULD BE DOING (BUT OFTEN DON'T)

This is where honesty matters.

Many colleges believe they are preparing students for employment. In reality, they are preparing them for college.

They focus on academic outcomes, structured support, and controlled environments. Then expect students to adapt to completely different conditions after they leave.

Common gaps in colleges:

- Leaving career support too late
- Assuming students “will figure it out”
- Not explaining workplace rights
- Over-supporting instead of building independence

What effective colleges do instead:

- Start career conversations early
- Integrate employability into learning, not separate workshops
- Include Deaf-specific preparation
- Expose students to real-world scenarios
- Allow space for mistakes and learning.
- Most importantly, **they stop assuming students “already know.”** Because many don't.

CONCLUSION

The transition from education to employment is where support is tested.

If a student leaves college with knowledge but no understanding of how to apply it, they will struggle. If they leave with confidence but no practical skills, they will struggle.

What works is a combination of both.

- Clear guidance.
- Repeated practice.
- Honest conversations.
- Real-world preparation.

When those are in place, the difference is visible.

Students don't just leave college qualified. They leave ready.

EXTRA RESOURCE

ONGOING SUPPORT AND NEXT STEPS

Support should not end at the classroom door.

The first few months after college are critical. This is when students are applying, attending interviews, facing rejection, and learning how the system works.

Without guidance, this period can become overwhelming.

Ongoing support can take different forms:

- structured job support
- reviewing applications
- interview preparation
- understanding feedback
- workplace guidance

What matters is that students know where to go and what to do next.

Some organisations (including Deaf Umbrella) offer:

- job club support for Deaf people
- communication support
- Access to Work guidance

(Availability may vary depending on location)



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