

# Becoming an Educational Audiologist

Michelle Lane reflects on the benefits of training to be an Educational Audiologist

*"Being an Educational Audiologist has opened more avenues and doors for the children and families with whom I work, than I ever could have done with my ToD training alone."* Anonymous classmate, April 2016

In 2016 I donned graduation robe and cap and walked across the stage to receive my Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Audiology from the University of Hertfordshire, partnered with Mary Hare. Some classmates joined me and others supported from the audience planning to complete their MSc dissertation the following year. I set out on this adventure whilst juggling a full-time caseload of pupils as a ToD, with an active home life including two young children. It has been the biggest but most rewarding challenge of my life.

People often ask me why I trained as an Educational Audiologist. The answer is multifactorial, but revolves mainly around opportunity and need. My service (a very large county) took the wise decision to fund a third Educational Audiologist, in order to best provide the 'bridge' of service between Health and Education for children and young people who are deaf and their families. I already knew from my experience with colleagues that the role was interesting and fulfilling and essential to the people it served.

Having the mutual support of a wonderful cohort of life-long learners who became fast friends helped significantly. Together we arrived on the first day of the course from different services across the country, bringing a wide range of experiences and strengths and no shortage of opinions to share. Stalwart support came from my family who provided endless cups of tea whilst I focused doggedly on assignments which both fascinated and frustrated, but always brought greater understanding and relevance to my role. My service too provided significant support in the form of study leave and mentorship from colleagues to achieve success.

Educational Audiology training is based on the roles and competencies of the British Association of Educational Audiologists, which take ToD principles to greater depth and further understanding. This enhanced knowledge and skills together with the remit of joined-up working with Health are the two major factors that my classmates highlighted as benefits to the role and training.

The two-year part-time blended course has distance as well as residential (approximately five weekends per year) learning. It covers topics such as: acoustics, anatomy and physiology (we needed to be alert for these), audiology and partnership working (we needed to be pragmatic for these) and psycho-acoustics (we needed wine after this one!). The learning, teaching and assessments are varied (eg lectures, discussions, practicals, posters, case studies) and relevant. Recently the course was accredited by the British Academy of Audiology on behalf of the Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists who have opened the first ever



voluntary professional registration for Educational Audiologists.

The Audiology placement log (both clinical and educational) became our friend. We consolidated skills, logging 120 hours of work-based learning over two years in a variety of settings. Course tutors welcomed reflection in our practice and, believe me, our cohort was definitely reflective – sometimes excessively! My placement at the local audiology department helped improve joined-up working with Education, which still continues to grow today. Parents value the feedback we provide to audiology as it improves the child's access to speech and therefore learning.

In my day-to-day role, I skilfully identify ways to optimise a child's functional hearing and its influence on language development. We fit and evaluate the benefit of radio aids using speech-in-noise testing and radio aid balancing. We ensure the technology supports language development, enhances family interaction and communication and improves access to curriculum. During school visits we advise ToDs in relation to aspects of the pupil's audiology or signpost to further information. A significant part of our role is to disseminate advice or training which raises skills and knowledge throughout the ToD team, in the midst of the challenge to stay up-to-date on technological developments. Services benefit tremendously from having an Educational Audiologist on their team in order to work together with ToDs, pupils, parents and other professionals to secure better outcomes.

Becoming an Educational Audiologist was the biggest challenge of my life, but has been the most rewarding. For other ToDs who are considering such an undertaking (and have a big boot for all the equipment), let me encourage you that it is not only possible, but extremely worthwhile for yourself as a professional and for the children and young people you serve!



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