

Clocking On

To begin our new series of articles in which people tell us about their employment experiences, we hear of how **Charlotte Sanderson** returned to her role as an Adjudicator at the Financial Ombudsman Service after developing severe hearing loss...



Can you tell us more about your hearing difficulties?

I have a rare genetic condition called Neurofibromatosis Type 2. Most people with NF2 develop tumours on both hearing nerves, which cause hearing loss – often accompanied by benign brain and spinal tumours, as in my case.

My hearing deteriorated sharply around the time I was diagnosed in May 2011. I am now completely deaf in my left ear and have moderate to severe hearing loss in my right. In June 2011 I underwent neurosurgery to remove a large brain tumour. The operation was a success and I made an excellent recovery.



Were you nervous about returning to work?

Yes. After my operation I stayed with family in Yorkshire to recuperate, so returning to work meant moving back to London and being independent again. After such a period of upheaval, I was quite nervous about it all. My first day back was exhausting, but it was good to see everyone and return to routine and normality.

How did the Financial Ombudsman Service support your return to work?

The role of Adjudicator is essentially about assessing information from a wide variety of sources, while communicating effectively with consumers and businesses. This often involves using the phone, so I knew that my operation and

the extent of my hearing loss could affect the way that I worked. I didn't go back to my usual duties straight away, but while I was adapting to my new way of working I was still able to make a valuable contribution to the team.

By March 2012, I had returned fully to my role. My preference now is to communicate through letters and email, and I explain this to consumers from the start. If a phone call is necessary on one of my cases, other members of the team are always willing to help.

I am pleased to have a job that I can more or less do independently, despite my hearing loss, and I continue to benefit from developing my written skills. I feel like

my manager really cares, and could not have done more to help and support me. I am confident that my hearing loss does not affect my ability to do my job as well as anyone else.

How has your hearing loss impacted on your life more generally?

On a day-to-day basis it can cause communications problems, which is very frustrating and sometimes isolating. Life would be much easier if people were like DVDs and came with optional subtitles!

I enjoy all the same things though – spending time with my family and friends, a good chat, literature, fashion, art, good food, history, my work, my independence. I don't let my hearing loss affect my lifestyle or sense of self; mostly I just find it really annoying.

I recently finished a yearlong lipreading course at the City Lit adult learning centre in Covent Garden. Researching a suitable course and enrolling was one of the first things I did when I came back to London, as lipreading is an effective way to overcome some of the communication issues caused by hearing loss.

What advice would you give other people with disabilities considering returning to work?

I would say take advantage of all the specialist support that is offered and to which you are entitled. At the same time, don't be afraid to contribute your own ideas and solutions to any obstacles you face. We are lucky to live in an age and culture where employers are obliged to make adjustments – and encourage the valuable contributions that individuals with different needs bring.

Further Information

If you would like to find out more about working for the Financial Ombudsman Service or how they can help out with a financial complaint, visit www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk. You can also come and chat to Caroline Wells, Head of Outreach at the Ombudsman and regular **access** columnist, at this year's Naidex South show taking place at ExCeL London from 17-18 October.



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For further details on the learning lipreading at City Lit, contact **020 7492 2600** or visit www.citylit.ac.uk