

Booking a sign language interpreter

You'll find this factsheet useful if you need to book a sign language interpreter. It explains the role of an interpreter and how to book one, and provides useful tips for working with an interpreter.

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i If you'd like this factsheet in Braille, large print or audio, please contact our Information Line – see last page for contact details.



What does a sign language interpreter do?

A sign language interpreter helps people who are deaf and use sign language and people who are hearing (and use spoken language) to communicate.

In the UK, the majority of people who use sign language use British Sign Language (BSL – see box, right).

BSL/English interpreters interpret from BSL to spoken or written English, and vice versa. They provide communication support for:

- people who are deaf whose first or preferred language is BSL
- people who are deaf who use Sign Supported English (SSE – see box, right).

Interpreters often adapt to the different levels and styles of signing that their clients use.

Interpreting is a recognised profession and interpreters train for many years. They need to have a good level of English, relevant BSL qualifications and approved interpreter training.

What is video interpreting?

Although most interpreting is done face to face, some sign language interpreters now offer video interpreting services. This isn't a replacement for face-to-face interpreting, but has been set up to try to make it easier to get an interpreter at short notice or for brief appointments.

You can use a video interpreter if you have a webcam and computer with a good internet connection, or a videophone.

Some councils, hospitals and police stations offer a video interpreting service. It's particularly useful for meetings or appointments up to 30 minutes long.

However, video interpreting isn't suitable in sensitive situations, where a misunderstanding could have serious results, such as during legal, disciplinary or child protection meetings.

BSL

BSL has evolved naturally, as all languages do. It uses a combination of hand shapes and movements, lip patterns, facial expressions and shoulder movements. It's structured in a completely different way to English. In BSL, you start with the main subject or topic. After that, you say something about the topic. For example, in spoken English, you'd say: "What is your name?". In BSL, you'd sign: "Name – what?"

SSE

SSE isn't a language in its own right, more a type of English with signs. It's used by some people who are deaf, particularly if BSL isn't their first language. Interpreters aren't given a qualification in SSE, and often just adapt their signing style. However, some interpreters can't, or won't, interpret SSE, so do check when booking if you need this service.

When is an interpreter needed?

Sign language interpreters are needed for a variety of situations, including:

- college and university lectures
- medical appointments
- job interviews
- meetings and training at work.

Who pays for communication support?

Under the Equality Act (the Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland), private, public and voluntary sectors need to make 'reasonable adjustments' so that people who are disabled aren't placed at a substantial disadvantage. These adjustments can include providing equipment and communication support, such as a sign language interpreter, for their employees or those who use their services who have hearing loss.

Public services, organisations and businesses may be able to get government funding to help cover the costs of any equipment and communication support needed by their employees or those who use their services (see opposite).


People who need communication support for private events, such as family gatherings, may need to book and pay for it themselves.

 You can find out more about the Equality Act in our **Your rights** range of factsheets.

In the workplace

Access to Work is a government-run scheme that provides practical advice and support to people who are disabled and their employers. It may help to pay for any communication support and equipment that people with hearing loss need at interviews and in the workplace. It's usually the employer who arranges and pays for the support – they then claim back the approved costs from Access to Work.

Large organisations and businesses may need to contribute towards the cost of the equipment and communication support.

 Find out more at [gov.uk/access-to-work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) or at nidirect.gov.uk if you live in Northern Ireland.

In education

Schools and colleges should arrange, and pay for, communication support for students with hearing loss in primary, secondary and further education. Students with hearing loss in higher education should be able to get Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) to pay for any communication support and equipment that they need.

All institutions will have a student support or disability office that you can contact for further information.

i To find out more about DSAs, contact your national student finance body ([see page 7](#)).

In health and social care services

National guidance and quality standards aim to improve the accessibility of NHS and social care services for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. Any communication support needed should be provided, and paid for, by these services.

i For more information, and to find out about our campaign to improve access to healthcare, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk/ontherecord

How much do interpreters charge?

Fees and travel expenses vary, so check these when you book. The interpreter may have a minimum call-out charge – for example, they may charge you for two hours, even if you only use them for one hour.

How do I book an interpreter?

If you're booking a sign language interpreter for an employee, student or client who is deaf, first check that this is their preferred type of communication support.

You can contact a freelance interpreter directly through The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) – or, if you're based in Scotland, the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI). [See page 7](#) for contact details. Interpreters based in your area will charge less for their travel, so contact them first.

Alternatively, you can book an interpreter through an agency or through our Access Solutions team ([see page 7](#) for contact details). Access Solutions and similar agencies have access to a large number of interpreters, so it's likely that they'll be able to arrange one for when you need the service.

Only use a qualified interpreter

Always make sure the interpreter you book is registered with NRCPD or, if you're based in Scotland, SASLI. This guarantees that the interpreter has the right qualifications and follows a strict code of conduct.

There are two categories of interpreter:

- Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI)
- Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI).

Check with the interpreter that they have the right qualifications and experience for your assignment. In some settings – for example, legal and mental health – you can only use RSLIs.

All RSLIs and TSLIs follow a strict code of conduct. Everything that's said in an assignment is strictly confidential. They won't give advice or opinions while working with you.

How many interpreters should I book?

When making a booking, ask for advice on whether you'll need one or two interpreters. For an event such as a full-day conference, with few breaks between speakers and where presentations are highly technical, you'll need two interpreters. For a two-hour meeting between two people, you'll usually need just one interpreter.

Interpreting can be very tiring, even for an expert, so the interpreter will need enough breaks throughout the day to provide a professional and accurate service. Don't expect them to work through breaks, unless you've agreed this with them beforehand.

Deaf awareness and sign language training

We offer flexible training options to meet your organisation's specific requirements. To find out more, contact our Access Solutions team:

Telephone: **0333 240 5658**
(calls welcome via the Next Generation Text Service)
Email: access.solutions@hearingloss.org.uk
Website: actiononhearingloss.org.uk/business

What else should I consider?

Book early

Interpreters are in great demand, as there aren't many of them, so book at least 4-6 weeks in advance, if possible.

If you need an interpreter in an emergency, the interpreter or agency will try their best to help.

Book an interpreter with experience in the setting

Try to book an interpreter with experience in the setting you need them for. For instance, if it's for a legal appointment, an interpreter who knows legal terminology might be helpful. Ask about this when you make the booking. Don't expect someone who only has basic sign language skills to interpret for you.

Provide preparation material

If you're arranging the session, send the interpreter, or agency you use, copies of any papers, teaching materials or other information at least two weeks before the assignment, so they know what to expect and can prepare for it as much as they can.

If you're planning to show a video or DVD during a meeting, try to show it to the interpreter before the assignment.

Consider the layout of the room

The interpreter and the person for whom they are interpreting need to see each other clearly. And anyone relying on spoken English will need to hear the interpreter.

The interpreters will advise on the best place for them to sit or stand and will take into account lighting and visibility.

If you're using flip charts, an overhead projector, handouts, film clips or practical demonstrations, place them near to the interpreter so the person using BSL doesn't have to change the direction of their attention.

Other tips

- Make sure only one person speaks at a time – it's impossible to interpret two people speaking at the same time.
- Allow plenty of time when using visual aids – the BSL user can't study these and watch the interpreter at the same time.
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations.
- Talk at normal speed and address the person who is deaf rather than the interpreter.
- The interpreter needs time to understand and reproduce in English what has been signed in BSL, and the other way round, so expect short time delays as this happens. This is especially important during questions or discussions.

Tips for working with a video interpreter

Before using a video interpreter, make sure your videophone or webcam and internet connection are working properly.

For the best picture quality, make sure that the background behind the videophone or webcam is as plain as possible – and that people aren't moving around in the background. Good lighting is also important to avoid shadows or silhouettes.

You might need to sign or speak more slowly when using a video interpreter.



For more communication tips, visit [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communicationtips](https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communicationtips)

Where can I get more information about communication support?

Action on Hearing Loss

The other factsheets in our **Communication** range are:

- *Working with a communication support worker*
- *Working with a lipspeaker*
- *Working with a notetaker*
- *Working with a speech-to-text reporter*
- *Communication support for people who are deafblind*
- *Careers supporting people who are deaf.*

You may also find our leaflet *Learning British Sign Language* useful. You can order these publications from our Information Line ([see last page](#)) or download them from our website at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets

Access Solutions

To book communication support through Action on Hearing Loss, contact our Access Solutions team:

Telephone: **0845 685 8000**

Textphone: **0845 685 8001**

Email: communication.services@hearingloss.org.uk

Or book online at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communication

Other organisations

Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI)

Registering and membership body in Scotland for British Sign Language (BSL)/ English Interpreters, Deafblind Manual Interpreters and Guide Communicators.

Telephone (office): **0141 248 8159**

Telephone (BSL users): **0141 249 0380**

Email: mail@sasli.org.uk

BSL video chat: www.sasli.org.uk/contact-us

Skype: email address above to arrange

Website: sasli.co.uk

Student Finance England

Telephone: **0300 100 0607**

Textphone: **0300 100 0622**

Website: gov.uk/

student-finance-register-login

Student Finance NI

Telephone: **0300 100 0077**

Telephone (postgraduate tuition fee loan enquiries): **0300 100 0493**

Website: studentfinanceneni.co.uk

Student Awards Agency for Scotland

Website: saas.gov.uk

For contact details, click on the 'CONTACT US' tab on the home page and follow the instructions.

Student Finance Wales

Telephone: **0300 200 4050**

Textphone: **0300 100 1693**

Telephone (postgraduate loan enquiries):
0300 100 0494

Textphone (postgraduate loan enquiries):
0300 100 1693

Website: studentfinancewales.co.uk

The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD)

Regulates communication professionals who work with deaf and deafblind people. Find a registered professional by searching the online registers.

Telephone: **0191 383 1155**

Text (SMS): **07974 121 594**

Email: enquiries@nrcpd.org.uk

Website: nrcpd.org.uk

Information you can trust

We are certified by The Information Standard as a producer of high-quality, evidence-based information.

Did you find this factsheet helpful?

We'd love to know what you think of this factsheet – please email us at reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk

If you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create new publications and improve existing ones, please let us know.

Further information from Action on Hearing Loss

Our expert information covers everything you need to know about:

- hearing loss and deafness
- tinnitus
- ear problems and treatments
- hearing aids and cochlear implants
- useful products and technology
- communication tactics and support
- benefits and grants
- your rights.

Visit our website actiononhearingloss.org.uk or call our Information Line ([see last page](#)) for information, support and publications. You can also find out about services in your area, our hearing research, and how you can get involved.

Please help us support others

We provide our leaflets, factsheets and Information Line service free of charge to anyone affected by deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss in the UK. We rely on the generosity of our supporters to help us do this. We would be very grateful if you would consider making a donation – of as little or as much as you can afford.

Please send a cheque, payable to Action on Hearing Loss, to:

Freepost RTLX-CZKX-BTTZ
Action on Hearing Loss
1-3 Highbury Station Road
London N1 1SE

(No stamp needed)

Donate online at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/icanhelp

Or make a donation over the phone by credit or debit card:

 **0203 227 6182**

 **0203 227 6185**

Thank you.

Our purpose is to help people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss to live the life they choose. We enable them to take control of their lives and remove the barriers in their way.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us, go to actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss Information Line

Telephone **0808 808 0123**
Textphone **0808 808 9000**
SMS **0780 000 0360**
(standard text message rates apply)
Email **information@hearingloss.org.uk**

Join us

 Action on Hearing Loss

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