Careers supporting people who are deaf

You’ll find this factsheet useful if you are interested in a career supporting adults who are deaf or deafblind, or have hearing loss.

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If you’d like this factsheet in Braille, large print or audio, please contact our Information Line – see last page for contact details.
What do communication professionals do?

Communication professionals (CPs) help people who are deaf or have hearing loss, and people who are hearing to communicate with each other. There are different types of CP and the support they provide varies, as this factsheet explains.

If you are looking to train as a CP, it’s important that you take a course approved by The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) – or the Scottish Association of Sign Language Intrepreters (SASLI), if you want to train to become a sign language interpreter in Scotland. This is so that you can register once qualified.

Registration will provide your future clients with the guarantee that you’ve achieved recognised qualifications and work to strict professional codes of practice.

Sign language interpreters

In the UK, the majority of people who use sign language use British Sign Language (BSL). BSL interpreters support people who are deaf and people who are hearing to communicate with each other.

To become a Trainee Sign Language Interpreter, you must:

- have a high level of BSL skills
- have a good level of English
- be on an approved development plan or an approved course.

To become a fully qualified Registered Sign Language Interpreter, you must also have achieved a Level 6 qualification in sign language interpreting or an approved university qualification.

Make sure your course is approved by NRCPD, or SASLI if you live in Scotland.

Contact NRCPD or SASLI (see pages 10-11) for details.

Lipspeakers

Lipspeakers work with people who are deaf, or have hearing loss, who prefer to communicate through lipreading and speech.

A lipspeaker repeats speech using clear lip patterns. They reproduce the flow, rhythm and phrasing of natural speech. This makes it easier for people who communicate by lipreading to follow what others are saying. To become a lipspeaker, you need a clear speaking voice and good hearing.

Contact the Association of Lipspeakers (see page 8) to find out more.
Notetakers

Notetakers work with people who are deaf or have hearing loss, and others who have difficulty taking notes.

An **electronic notetaker** types a summary of what is said at a meeting or lecture on a laptop. They can either work with one laptop or two that are linked.

The client can read the information on the screen, if they wish to. If the notetaker has two laptops, the client can interact with the notetaker by typing a question or comment.

To become an electronic notetaker, you need to have excellent written English skills, including accurate spelling and grammar. You also need to show that you have a minimum typing speed of 60 words per minute.

A **manual notetaker** takes clear, accurate notes in handwritten English. To become a manual notetaker, you need to have excellent English skills, including legible writing and excellent spelling and grammar.

‘Phonetically’ means the STTR types words according to how they are pronounced, rather than how they are spelt. A special software programme then converts the text into English for people to view on screen.

Most STTRs first train as court reporters. Court reporters aren’t trained to work with people who are deaf or have hearing loss – they need additional training that’s approved by NRCPD.

Contact the Association of Verbatim Speech-to-Text Reporters or the British Institute of Verbatim Reporters (see page 8) to find out more.

Communication support workers

Communication support workers (CSWs) mainly work in education – schools, colleges and universities. They support students who are deaf or have hearing loss to communicate with their teachers and other learners.

CSWs often work as part of the education team alongside other professionals who support students who are deaf in a variety of ways. They may interpret between English and BSL, notetake or lipspeak. They can also help students to understand and produce written materials in class, and adapt learning materials to make them easier to understand. CSWs cannot be booked through Action on Hearing Loss.

Contact the Association of Deaf Education Professionals & Trainees (see page 8) to find out more about becoming a CSW.
What is a teacher of the deaf?

A teacher who specialises in working with children and young people who are deaf is commonly known as a teacher of the deaf. They help the children to develop their language skills and play an important part in their education.

Most children who are deaf go to mainstream schools, but some go to specialist schools. Teachers of the deaf may work with a pupil in either type of school.

Teachers of the deaf will work with mainstream or specialist teachers, or manage teaching assistants and communication support workers who work with pupils who are deaf. They may also work as part of a team in hospitals or health centres - for example, supporting children who have cochlear implants.

To become a teacher of the deaf, you must have qualified teacher status and have had some classroom experience before taking a Teacher of the Deaf training course. This course lasts one year full time and two years part time. Entry requirements vary depending on the institution.

Contact the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (see page 8) to find out more.

How do I become a teacher of lipreading to adults?

A teacher of lipreading to adults teaches people who are deaf, or losing their hearing, to develop lipreading and other communication skills.

To qualify as a teacher of lipreading to adults, you need to complete a training course for teachers of lipreading. Basic entry requirements vary, but you need to have a clear speaking voice, be able to express yourself clearly in written and spoken English, and be easy to lipread.

Contact The Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults (see page 8) to find out more.

What does a social worker with deaf people do?

A social worker with deaf people works mainly with adults who are deaf, as well as sometimes with children who are deaf and their parents.

In partnership with other professionals, they assess needs and offer support and services to enable people who are deaf to lead independent lives. They are employed by social services or by voluntary and private social care organisations.
To work as a qualified social worker with people who are deaf, you need to complete a three-year degree course in social work. To work with people who are deaf, you’ll also need training in deaf issues and communication skills, including BSL.

To find out more, contact the Health and Care Professions Council (England); the Care Council for Wales (Wales); the Scottish Social Services Council (Scotland); or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Northern Ireland). See pages 9–10 for details.

What mental health services opportunities are there?

There’s a range of opportunities to work in mental health services that support people who are deaf. You could train as a counsellor, psychotherapist or psychologist, or as an occupational therapist. There are also opportunities in psychiatry and mental health nursing.

The entry qualifications and training vary for each job, although sign language and knowledge of deaf issues are important. Once qualified, you could work in a range of settings such as hospitals, hostels, registered care homes, and community and day centres.

Contact the British Society for Mental Health and Deafness (see page 9) to find out more.

What is a speech and language therapist?

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) assess and treat speech, language and communication difficulties in people of all ages to help them to improve their communication skills.

Newly qualified therapists work with a general caseload for at least a year, usually with both adults and children. They can then choose a particular group of clients or an area of clinical work in which to specialise – for example, people who are deaf. Most therapists work in NHS hospitals, community settings or schools, but some work in private practice or in research, teaching or management.

To become an SLT, you need to take an undergraduate degree course in speech and language therapy for three or four years. If you’ve already graduated in another discipline and want to qualify as an SLT, you can take a two-year (full-time) course that will lead either to a postgraduate diploma or a master’s degree.

You can also train as an SLT’s assistant. Do check entry requirements with each university running the course before applying.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) offers a number of accredited courses across the UK (see page 10).
What skills do I need to work as a subtitler?

A subtitler accurately presents the whole soundtrack of a pre-recorded or live TV programme, or film, in words. These appear as subtitles on programmes or films.

Subtitlers work for TV channels or for companies that specialise in subtitling for the cinema and DVDs. Speech-to-text reporters (see page 3) may also be employed to subtitle live programmes.

At present, there are no formally recognised qualifications for subtitlers and training is generally on the job. This includes training in specialist software, so you must be confident using new technology. You must also have strong language skills and be able to work to tight deadlines.

It’s important to be familiar with the difficulties that some people who are deaf or have hearing loss experience when watching programmes or films. Visit the websites of the BBC and other TV companies for vacancies and opportunities to train as a subtitler.

What is an in-vision BSL translator?

An in-vision BSL translator translates TV or filmed programme information into BSL. They usually appear on a TV screen, so BSL users can watch them and the TV programme at the same time.

In-vision translators work for TV channels or on a freelance basis. Some websites also use BSL translators to produce content in BSL for the site.

To become an in-vision translator, you need to provide evidence that you have Level 6 or equivalent in your second language (either BSL or English) and have taken one of two approved courses. You also need experience of translating between BSL and English. Most BSL translators are deaf and use BSL as their first language.

Contact NRCPD to find out more (see page 11).

How do I qualify as a British Sign Language (BSL) tutor?

BSL tutors work mainly in colleges and other training organisations. To qualify as a BSL tutor, you must show evidence of fluency and clear presentation in BSL, have detailed knowledge of BSL linguistics and be deaf aware. You must also have a teaching qualification for teaching adults. Many BSL tutors are deaf and use BSL as their first language.

There are two awarding bodies that offer training for BSL teachers and assessors: Signature and The Institute of British Sign Language (iBSL).

To find out more, contact Signature, iBSL or the Association of British Sign Language Tutors and Assessors (see pages 7-10).
How can I work with people who are deafblind?

Working with people who are deafblind involves providing them with communication support to enable them to lead fulfilling lives. People who are deafblind use a variety of communication methods, depending on their needs: for example, the Block Alphabet or the Deafblind Manual Alphabet. People who were born deaf and lose their sight later might use hands-on signing.

To work with people who are deafblind, you need to be confident using a variety of communication methods. There is a range of courses that aim to teach you the different communication methods used and how to work with people who are deafblind.

For more information about deafblindness, contact Deafblind UK or Sense (see pages 9–10).

How do I work for an organisation for people who are deaf?

There are a variety of charities and voluntary and community organisations that work with and for people who are deaf. Some - such as Action on Hearing Loss - work with and support a variety of people, from those who are profoundly deaf to people who are just starting to lose their hearing.

Others work with a particular group of people, such as those who are deafblind, deafened or deaf with additional needs.

Jobs at national charities such as Action on Hearing Loss, the British Deaf Association (BDA) and the National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) may be office based or involve working in the community. Different jobs require different skills, experience and qualifications. One way to find out what would suit you best is to work first as a volunteer or to get work experience.

You can find the latest Action on Hearing Loss job vacancies on our website: actiononhearingloss.org.uk/jobs

And for volunteering opportunities, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk/volunteer

The following pages provide contact details for other national organisations.

Where can I find out more about working with people who are deaf?

Association of British Sign Language Teachers and Assessors

Provides information and advice for those interested in the teaching and assessing of BSL.

Online contact form: abshta.org.uk/contact-us
Email: info@abshta.org.uk
Website: abshta.org.uk
Association of Deaf Education Professionals & Trainees

Professional network for people who work in deaf education.

Online contact form: adeptuk.co.uk/Contact_us
Email: admin@adeptuk.co.uk
Website: adeptuk.co.uk

Association of Lipspeakers

Professional body representing lipspeakers.

Online contact form: lipspeaking.co.uk/contact-us
Email: enquiries@lipspeaking.co.uk
Website: lipspeaking.co.uk

Association of Notetaking Professionals

Professional body representing electronic and manual notetakers, including information about routes to qualification.

Online contact form: lipspeaking.co.uk/contact-us
anpnotetakers.co.uk/contact
Website: anpnotetakers.co.uk

Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults (ATLA)

Professional association for teachers of lipreading to adults.

Online contact form: atlalipreading.org.uk/ask-atla-a-question
Website: atlalipreading.org.uk

Association of Verbatim Speech-to-Text Reporters (AVSTTR)

Professional association representing speech-to-text reporters who work with people who are deaf.

Email: enquiries@avsttr.org.uk
Website: avsttr.org.uk

British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD)

Professional organisation representing the interests of Teachers of the Deaf and the children and young people they teach.

Website: batod.org.uk

British Deaf Association (BDA)

Association campaigning for the rights of sign language users and works with communities across the UK.

Contact (telephone, email, Skype, Oovoo, Facetime options): bda.org.uk/contact
Website: bda.org.uk

British Institute of Verbatim Reporters (BIVR)

Professional body representing verbatim reporters working in all fields in the UK.

Telephone: 020 8907 8249
SMS: 07976 848 674
Email: sec@bivr.org.uk
Website: bivr.org.uk
British Society for Mental Health and Deafness
Promotes the development of accessible mental health services for people who are deaf.
Email: info@bsmhd.org.uk
Website: bsmhd.org.uk

City Lit London
City Lit offers a variety of deaf education courses, including professional qualifications for working with people who are deaf or deafened.
Telephone (enrolment): 020 7831 7831
Telephone (switchboard): 020 7492 2600
Fax: 020 7492 2735
Online contact form: citylit.ac.uk/contact-us
Website: citylit.ac.uk

Deafblind UK
National charity providing support services to, and campaigning on behalf of, deafblind adults and their carers.
Telephone/textphone: 01733 358 100
Fax: 01733 358 356
Online contact form: deafblind.org.uk/contact-us/
Email: info@deafblind.org.uk
Website: deafblind.org.uk

Institute of British Sign Language (iBSL)
Awarding body for British Sign Language courses around the UK.
Telephone: 01925 632 463
Email: admin@ibsl.org.uk
Website: ibsl.org.uk

National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS)
National charity supporting deaf children, young people and their families to overcome the challenges of childhood deafness.
Telephone (free): 0808 800 8880
Telephone (head office): 020 7490 8656
Fax: 020 7251 5020
Email: ndcs@ndcs.org.uk
Website: ndcs.org.uk

Health and Care Professions Council
Regulates health, psychological and social work professionals.
Telephone: 0300 500 6184
Website: hcpc-uk.co.uk

Northern Ireland Social Care Council
Regulates social care workers in Northern Ireland.
Telephone: 028 9536 2600
Online contact form: niscc.info/contact-us
Email: info@niscc.hscni.net
Website: niscc.info
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

The professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK.

Telephone (main switchboard): **020 7378 1200**
Telephone (general information and professional enquiries): **020 7378 3012**
Email (general information and professional enquiries): info@rcslt.org
Email (membership enquiries): membership@rcslt.org
Website: www.rcslt.org

Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI)


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

Scottish Social Services Council

Regulator for the social service workforce in Scotland.

Telephone: **0345 60 30 891**
Online contact form: www.sssc.uk.com/contact-us
Website: sssc.uk.com

Sense

National charity supporting people who are deafblind, have sensory impairments or complex needs, to enjoy more independent lives.

Telephone (information and advice): **0300 330 9256/020 7520 0972**
Textphone: **0300 330 9256/**
**020 7520 0972**
Fax: **0300 330 9251**
Email: info@sense.org.uk
Website: sense.org.uk

Signature

Awarding body for British and Irish Sign Language courses around the UK and publisher of information about interpreter training programmes and exams.

Telephone: **0191 383 1155**
SMS: **07974 121 594**
Fax: **0191 383 7914**
Online contact form: signature.org.uk/contact-us
Website: signature.org.uk

Social Care Wales

Works with people who use care and support services and organisations to lead improvement in social care.

Website: socialcare.wales
The National Registers for Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD)

NRCPD regulate communication and language professionals who work with deaf and deafblind people. It holds registers of interpreters for deafblind people, lipspeakers, notetakers, sign language interpreters, sign language translators and speech to text reporters.

Telephone: 0191 383 1155
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.

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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](http://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-CZKK-BTTZ**  
Action on Hearing Loss  
1-3 Highbury Station Road  
London N1 1SE  
(No stamp needed)

Donate online at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/icanhelp](http://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

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