

# Working with a communication support worker

You'll find this factsheet useful if you want to know more about how communication support workers can support children and young adults with hearing loss in education.

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# What do communication support workers (CSWs) do?

Generally, CSWs support children and young adults in education who are deaf or have hearing loss. They work in schools, colleges, universities and training centres; they also support young people on work experience placements and in residential settings. Occasionally, CSWs work in non-education settings – for example, supporting people in their workplace.

In education settings, CSWs provide both educational and communication support to learners.

## Educational support

The educational support that CSWs provide includes:

- assessing the needs of learners
- helping learners to communicate with others in class
- helping learners understand what's required in class
- adapting learning materials to make the language clearer for students whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL)
- helping students to understand and produce written work in class
- supporting learners in talking about their learning needs with teachers
- supporting learners to become more independent

- suggesting improvements to the physical environment (such as better lighting or quieter rooms) to make listening and lipreading easier.

## Communication support

Some CSWs specialise in a particular type of communication support. But many are multi-skilled and can provide more than one of the following types of support:

- **Sign language interpreting** – interpreting from BSL to spoken or written English, and vice versa.
- **Notetaking** – taking handwritten or typed notes.
- **Lipspeaking** – repeating what is said without using their voice, while producing the shape of the words clearly, to make lipreading easier.

CSWs may also provide deaf awareness training for staff and other learners.

Teachers shouldn't ask a CSW to give extra tutorials, or produce learning materials such as information sheets. A teacher or tutor should do this, not a CSW.

### Confidentiality

CSWs offer a confidential service, but they work as part of a team supporting the learner. This means they may need to share information about the learner's work with other teachers. Teachers should let the learner know about any information that may need to be shared.

## Who pays for communication support in education?

Under the Equality Act (the Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland), education providers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to make sure that students who are disabled aren't placed at a substantial disadvantage. These adjustments can include paying for equipment and communication support, such as a CSW, for learners who are deaf or have hearing loss.

Students who are deaf or have hearing loss in higher education (usually post-18 learning) should be able to claim Disabled Students' Allowances to pay for any communication support or equipment they need.

 To find out more about the Equality Act, see the **Your rights** factsheets range.

## What qualifications should a CSW have?

CSWs may have training and/or qualifications in a number of areas including BSL, notetaking and lipspeaking. We recommend that they have a minimum BSL Level 3 qualification, plus a CSW qualification (for example, Signature's Level 3 Certificate in Communication Support for Deaf Learners).

## Who is responsible for booking a CSW?

The sensory support team or disability officer in a school, college or university is usually responsible for booking a CSW. Some colleges and universities employ CSWs - if not, they'll book through an agency. CSWs cannot be booked through Action on Hearing Loss.

## What if a CSW isn't available?

There are other communication professionals (CPs) who can support students who are deaf or have hearing loss. These CPs usually focus on one communication method and are registered professionals - for example, electronic notetakers, speech-to-text reporters and sign language interpreters. They more commonly work in higher education.

 For more on working with these CPs, see our other **Communication** factsheets.

## How many CSWs do I need?

The agency or disability officer will advise on how many CSWs you need to book. It will depend on:

- the time of day and availability of staff
- the pace of the course and how demanding it is
- a teacher or lecturer's teaching style
- the type of support the student needs – a CSW can't lipspeak or sign and take notes at the same time.

The agency or disability officer will advise on how many CSWs you need.

## How much do CSWs charge?

Fees vary. Agencies usually have a minimum call-out charge, which means they may charge for a minimum of two hours, even if the CSW is booked for one hour. They may also charge travel expenses for assignments.

The sensory support team or disability officer may need to consider these costs when planning timetables, to make the best use of student support and manage costs.

## As a teacher, what should I consider when working with a CSW?

When working with a CSW, remember:

- CSWs need regular breaks, though they often work for up to one-and-a-half hours. Don't expect them to work through lunch and breaks, unless you've agreed this in advance.
- Send the CSW advance copies of any papers, teaching materials or other information you'll be using. They can then prepare thoroughly for the lesson, lecture, seminar or tutorial.
- When talking to a student who is deaf or has hearing loss, do it in your usual way – don't direct your comments to the CSW.
- The CSW's job is to relay the information given in the class – they won't add their own comments or opinions.
- The CSW may ask for clarification if they don't understand a term that has been used or, occasionally, if they can't keep up with you.

# Where can I get more information about communication support?

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

- *Booking a sign language interpreter*
- *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 can order these from our Information Line ([see last page](#)) or download them from our website at [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets)

## Access Solutions

For more information about communication support, or to book through on Action on Hearing Loss, please contact our Access Solutions team:

Telephone: **0845 685 8000**

Textphone: **0845 685 8001**

SMS: **07537 410 086**

Email: [communication.services@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:communication.services@hearingloss.org.uk)

Website: [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communication](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communication)

### 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](mailto: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](https://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](https://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](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

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### 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**

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