Using communication support
You’ll find this leaflet useful if you are deaf, deafblind or have a hearing loss and want to find out about the different communication support services that may help you. You’ll also find the information helpful if you wish to book communication support for an employee, client or student.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact our free Information Line:

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

Using professional, registered communication support at work means that I can work with hearing colleagues and customers on an equal basis. Without it, I simply wouldn’t be able to do my job.

Tanvir Ahmed, Senior Campaigner, Action on Hearing Loss
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What is communication support?

If you are deaf or have a hearing loss, communication support services can help you to communicate with people who are hearing at work or when you use public services – for example, at:

- job interviews
- work meetings
- training courses
- university or college lectures or seminars
- medical consultations, such as a GP or hospital appointment
- meetings with bank managers, solicitors or local government officials.

If you are deafblind (have both sight loss and hearing loss), you can also get communication support to help you with your daily routine (see page 6).

You won’t have to pay for this communication support yourself (see ‘Who pays for communication support?’, page 10).

What types of communication support are available?

There’s a range of communication services available, as the following section explains. Choose a service that suits you and your communication needs.

Always check that the communication professional you book is suitably qualified and registered with a recognised, professional association (see page 13).
We have detailed factsheets on all the services we describe in this leaflet – you can order them from our Information Line (see last page) or find them on our website at www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/communication

Sign language interpreters

In the UK, the majority of people who use sign language use British Sign Language (BSL). BSL/English interpreters help people who are deaf and whose first or preferred language is BSL, and people who are hearing, to communicate. They interpret from BSL to spoken or written English, and vice versa.

Check that the interpreter you are booking is registered with either the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) or the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) – see page 13 for contact details.

For more information, see our factsheet Working with a sign language interpreter.

Video interpreting

Although most interpreting is done face to face, some organisations now offer video interpreting services. This isn’t a replacement for face-to-face interpreting, but has been set up to try to solve the problem of getting an interpreter at short notice or for brief appointments. You can use the service if you have a computer or tablet device with a webcam and an internet connection, or a videophone.
Interpreters and communicator guides for people who are deafblind

Interpreters and communicator guides help people who are deafblind and people who are hearing to communicate with each other. They work with a range of communication methods, including:

- BSL
- hands-on signing
- the Block Alphabet
- the Deafblind Manual Alphabet
- speech-to-Braille.

Interpreters provide support in formal settings, such as training courses and medical appointments. Make sure you book an interpreter for deafblind people who is registered with NRCPD (see page 13 for contact details).

Communicator guides work more informally, helping with everyday activities such as shopping and dealing with mail.

To find out more, see our factsheet Communication support for people who are deafblind.

Lipspeakers

Lipspeakers work with people who are deaf or have a hearing loss who prefer to communicate through lipreading and speech. To use a lipspeaker, you need to be a confident lipreader with good English skills.
Lipspeakers:

• repeat what is said without using their voice, so you can lipread them easily
• produce the shape of words clearly, with the flow, rhythm and phrasing of speech
• use natural gestures and facial expressions to help you follow what’s being said
• may also use fingerspelling if you ask them to.

Always check that the lipspeaker is registered with NRCPD (see page 13).

ℹ️ To find out more, see our factsheet *Working with a lipspeaker.*

**Speech-to-text reporters (STTRs)**

Speech-to-text reporting is suitable for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss who are comfortable reading English, often at high speed and sometimes for up to a couple of hours at a time. An STTR types every word that’s spoken and the text appears on a laptop screen, or one large screen or more if several people are using the service.

STTRs manage to keep up with the speed of spoken English by using special shorthand keyboards. They type words phonetically – how they sound rather than how they are spelled. A computer software program immediately converts the text back into English, before it’s shown on the screen.
Remote STTRs

Some STTRs work remotely (from home or another office). They use a telephone link to listen-in to the meeting, and send the text directly to a computer screen, or other suitable device, using secure screenshare software. However, this option isn’t suitable for sensitive situations, where a misunderstanding could have serious results, such as during legal meetings.

Always check that the STTR you use is registered with NRCPD.

To find out more, see our factsheet Working with a speech-to-text reporter.

Electronic notetakers

Electronic notetakers work with people who are deaf or have a hearing loss and are comfortable reading English. They type a real-time summary of what’s being said on a laptop computer. You can then read this information on a screen in front of you.

Electronic notetaking means you have fewer words to read compared with speech-to-text reporting, and you won’t get a full word-for-word report. If you’d like to read everything that’s said, choose an STTR instead.

Manual notetakers

Manual notetakers take handwritten notes in meetings, on courses and at other events for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss and are comfortable reading English.

Some manual notetakers use a digital pen to take notes. The pen writes with ink on paper, but it also captures handwriting and turns it into data that’s displayed as text when transferred to a computer. This type of notetaking combines the ease of
handwritten notes with the convenience of electronic notes (you can have both sets of notes).

Always check that the notetaker you are booking is registered with NRCPD.

ℹ️ To find out more, see our factsheet *Working with a notetaker*.

**Using a notetaker**

It’s quite common to use a notetaker alongside another communication service. For example, if you’re watching a sign language interpreter or lipspeaker, it would be impossible for you to take notes and follow what’s being said at the same time.

Notetakers may specialise in a particular field. If you’re taking a science degree, for example, it’s important that your notetaker knows something about the subject. If you have very specific needs, you may need to spend time finding the right notetaker to support you.

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Our *Product catalogue* features the latest products and technology to help with hearing loss and tinnitus.

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Telephone 01733 361199  
Textphone 01733 238020  
Email solutions@hearingloss.org.uk  
Or shop online at  
www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop
Who pays for communication support?

Equality law means that, in most cases, organisations, businesses and public services need to pay for the communication support that their employees, or those using their services, need. This is so you’re not put at a substantial disadvantage compared to people who are hearing.

Employers may get money from the government’s Access to Work scheme to help cover the costs of any specialist equipment and communication support their employees need. You can apply to the scheme whether you’re looking for work or are employed, and your needs will be assessed to find out what you’re eligible for. The money to cover the costs of communication support and equipment will then be sent directly to your employer.

Schools and colleges are responsible for providing communication support for students up until they finish their further education (A-levels and vocational courses). If you’re in higher education (usually post-18 learning that takes place at universities or colleges), you’ll need to apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs) to help cover the cost of any communication support you need.

If you need communication support for private events, such as family gatherings, you may need to book and pay for it yourself.

For more information about your right to communication support, see our **Your rights** range of factsheets. To find out more about Access to Work, visit [www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) or [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) if you live in Northern Ireland.
Are you an employer?

Action on Hearing Loss has vast experience of advising employers on how to support employees who are deaf or have a hearing loss. Our **Work Based Assessments** can offer practical advice on what support, equipment and reasonable adjustments can be made to support your staff, and make sure you as an employer are taking steps towards fulfilling your obligations under the Equality Act (the Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland).

For more information, visit [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/wba](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/wba)

How do I book communication support?

Ask your employer or service provider what their procedures are for booking communication support – you might not need to book it yourself.

Communication support can be arranged through a variety of professional bodies, local organisations, public services and charities, including Action on Hearing Loss (see page 12). Please check that any company or organisation you use only supplies appropriately qualified and registered professionals.

If you’re booking communication support on behalf of someone else, always check what their preferred type of support is first.
Making your booking

Communication support services are in demand, so book early. Give as much information about the assignment as you can, including:

- the date, time, duration, venue and number of people attending
- whether it’s an interview, meeting or conference.

You’ll also need to provide preparation materials for the assignment, such as background information and any hand-outs that will be used on the day. If you are using video or audio clips, you’ll also need to provide these.

Usually, you’ll need to book a communication service for at least two hours (even if you don’t need it for that long). For assignments that are more than two hours long, you may need to book two communication professionals, who will take turns.

Providing communication support requires a lot of fixed concentration, so all communication professionals will need a break roughly every 30 minutes.

Action on Hearing Loss
Communication Support

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

The Plaza, 100 Old Hall Street, Liverpool L3 9QJ

Telephone 0845 685 8000
Textphone 0845 685 8001
SMS 07624 818778
Email communication.services@hearingloss.org.uk
How can I make sure I get a good service?

Always choose a registered professional – that way, you can be confident that they:

- have achieved the relevant qualifications, knowledge and skills
- work to recognised standards
- follow a formal code of ethics
- are subject to a complaints procedure
- have had Disclosure and Barring Service – DBS (formerly Credit Reference Bureau – CRB) checks
- are covered by professional indemnity insurance.

Registered communication professionals shouldn’t tell anyone else what is said in an assignment or offer opinions when working.

To check if a communication professional is registered, contact:

The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD)
Telephone 0191 383 1155
SMS 07974 121 594
Email enquiries@nrcpd.org.uk
www.nrcpd.org.uk

Sign language interpreters in Scotland register with the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) and/or NRCPD.

SASLI
Telephone 0141 248 8159
Fax 0141 221 1693
Email mail@sasli.co.uk
www.sasli.co.uk
(The website has a BSL sign video service for BSL users.)
Our Health in Your Hands

NRCPD and Action on Hearing Loss are part of the Our Health in Your Hands campaign, which helps people who are deaf or have a hearing loss get the right communication support at hospital and GP appointments.

You can ask to see the interpreter's NRCPD registration badge when you go for health appointments, to check they are qualified to the right level to support you. Interpreters should be able to produce this badge at other appointments too.

See the campaign website www.ohyh.org.uk to find out more.

Where can I get further information?

We produce a wide range of free information covering hearing loss, deafness, tinnitus and related issues such as ear problems, hearing aids, communication support, benefits, your rights, equipment and deaf awareness. Our leaflets are a good place to start as they cover the basics, while our factsheets go into more detail.

You can find our leaflets and factsheets on our website at www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets or order free copies from our Information Line (see last page for details). Our friendly Information Line Officers will also answer any queries you have.

You can find lots of other useful information online at www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Alternative formats

If you'd like any of our leaflets or factsheets in Braille, large print or audio format, please contact our Information Line.
Information you can trust

We are certified by The Information Standard as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information. For a list of references for this leaflet, please email references@hearingloss.org.uk

Can you help us improve our information?

We’d love to hear what you think of this leaflet – please email reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk And do let us know if you’d like to join our Readers’ Panel, to help us create new publications and improve existing ones.

Donate today and be part of the next life-changing breakthrough

Your support can help our research scientists develop new treatments and cures that will change the world for people living with hearing loss and tinnitus.

You’ll not only help people coping with hearing loss today – millions of people in future generations will enjoy a better quality of life thanks to your support.

Donate today

• Visit www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/donate
• Telephone 020 7296 8264
• Textphone 020 7296 8246
We’re Action on Hearing Loss, the charity working for a world where hearing loss doesn’t limit or label people, where tinnitus is silenced – and where people value and look after their hearing. We can’t do this without your help.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us, go to [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.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](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)

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