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## **Online meetings and events – Ensuring Accessibility for Deaf Participants**

When making adjustments for a deaf participant, it's firstly important to remember that there is no one size fits all approach. Deafness and hearing impairments vary in severity. Some people lip read, some people use sign language, some people use hearing aids, and some do not.

With the move to remote working, accessibility of online meetings is more important than ever.

You can make many free adjustments to aid participation. Other adjustments may need to be arranged/booked in advance. There is Access to Work funding to help with the cost of adjustments.

Please find below some adjustments you could make to help deaf participants. This is for those who do not use BSL. Those who do use BSL will require a BSL interpreter booked to join the meeting.

These adjustments will give you some ideas, you do not necessarily need to make them all at once!

### **Free and easy adjustments**

- Communicate with the individual via email, text message or instant messenger o Instant messenger services can accommodate multiple participants / large meetings.
- Lay down some ground rules in advance of online meetings which can include:
  - Providing an agenda in advance so the deaf person knows what to expect.
  - Asking participants to speak one at a time so the deaf person is not confused.
  - Participants can raise their hand or use the 'raise hand' button to identify speakers.
  - If a meeting is longer than 1 hour, provide a break during the meeting as lip reading is very tiring. A break can also help live captioners avoid repetitive strain injury.
  - Mute yourself if you are not speaking to minimize background noise. o Warn in advance if you are sharing your screen as your image disappears into a small box, making lip reading much more difficult to do.
- Enable captions in video calls.
  - Some video platforms (but not all) have an automatic captioning option.
  - Be aware that automatic captioning is not 100% effective and works best in smaller meetings and where people speak one at a time. It is also not good with accents.
  - Inform the deaf participant in advance if you are going to share your screen or split people into breakout rooms - this can disable any automatic captions.
  - It is better to book a live (human) captioner to join the call and caption. See information on next page. They would require 1-2 weeks' notice due to availability.
- Avoid using virtual backgrounds in video calls.
  - Virtual backgrounds can make lip reading and viewing body language more difficult. It may also interfere with visual impairment software if someone is visually impaired.
- Provide PowerPoint slides in advance.
  - This will help the deaf person prepare and better follow meetings.
  - It will reduce the amount of typing that any communication support worker will do.
- Provide a transcript for webinars, videos, and podcasts.
  - As above, this will better enable the deaf person to follow what is being said.
  - If you do not provide a transcript until afterwards, the deaf person cannot properly participate and there may be a delay in their ability to action any key points.
- Provide manual captions on videos.
  - Do not assume that YouTube automatic captions will be enough. It can vary in accuracy and sometimes even replace a word with a rude one.

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## Adjustments that require advance planning / booking

- Booking a Live captioner (also known as a stenographer / electronic notetaker)
  - Captioners booked should be members of the NRCPD as they have a Code of Conduct to follow regarding matters such as confidentiality and ethical practice.
  - The deaf participant should have between 1-2 weeks' notice of meetings and events to enable them to book a live (human) captioner if they feel they need one.
  - A live captioner can help where there are multiple speakers to lip read or listen too, or important matters being discussed.
  - A live captioner will join the online meeting or event as a silent participant, and type what is said. They can also attend physical, face to face, meetings to caption.
  - The captions will appear on a separate tab (for the deaf participant) or within the video call (for everyone). If a separate tab, the link is sent to the deaf participant.
  - A live captioner will not take notes for all meeting participants. They are not attending to take minutes. They will only share their notes with the deaf participant, regardless of who has booked and paid for the captioner.
  - The live captioner will only interrupt the call if for example people are talking at once or someone has spoken too quietly to be heard.
  - It is important that the meeting host provides a link to the meeting to the captioner or deaf person and allows the captioner to join the call. This should happen 5 or 10 mins before the start so the captioner is set up and ready to go.
  - Meeting participants should be made aware a captioner is joining the call, in case of queries as to 'who the stranger is or why captions are appearing in the call.
  - The host should remind participants to speak one at a time, identify themselves when speaking and speak clearly. This will help the captioner.
  - If the meeting over runs, the notetaker fee could immediately double and/or they could stop captioning so meeting hosts should try to stick to original timings.
  - Most live captioners will not work more than 1 hour without a break and will not work 2 hours without a co-worker. This should be factored into meeting agendas.
  - Breakout rooms - the deaf person should be placed in the same room as the captioner. Other participants should not start talking until both are in the room.

**And the most important deaf awareness tip of all: “this meeting could have been an email.”**

### Useful links

[Action on Hearing Loss Communication Tips](#)

[Supporting deaf people at work](#)

How to enable captions in [Zoom](#), and [other video platforms](#)

How to [Book a live captioner / stenographer and what they do](#)

Other deaf awareness training [online](#)

Where to buy [Clear face masks](#)

[How to be an ally to deaf people in the workplace](#) (this is particularly useful)

NRCPD [Code of Conduct](#) for live captioners

## **FAQs about Captioning/Note taking Services.**

### **Who pays for the service?**

Someone who is Deaf or hard-of-hearing, will not usually be required to pay for communication support. Under the Equality Act 2010, it is the responsibility of the service provider to pay for any 'reasonable adjustments' a disabled person requires. There are, however, different funding streams the individual can access to help pay for Electronic Notetakers or Captioners in employment and education. This funding can fund communication support either in full or partially.

Access to Work <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Personal Independence Payment [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

Disabled Student Allowance <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas>

### **What professional standards does a captioner follow?**

Captioners / Notetakers should be registered at least as a Level 3 Electronic Notetaker. They should ideally be registered with the National Register for Communication Professionals Working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). This is because registrants must adhere to a strict Code of Conduct and Practice. This means that they cannot take part in the meeting and anything that is said must remain confidential.

The NRCPD Code of Practice for communication professionals can be downloaded [here](#).

The NRCPD Complaints Procedure can be downloaded [here](#).

If you wish to book an Electronic Notetaker or Captioner directly or through an agency, it is your right to ask whether the ENT is registered with NRCPD.

### **How many communication professionals should I book?**

Where an assignment is expected to last longer than two hours, two notetakers/captioners should be booked. The notetaker/captioner should not be expected to work more than one hour without a break. If the client cannot pay for more than one notetaker, more breaks will need to be negotiated.

### **Who provides the equipment?**

Electronic Notetaking is a portable system and easy to use. The Electronic Notetaker booked for the session should provide two laptop computers and associated software. The client or venue should provide a table, a seat with a view of all speakers and power source – unless the meeting is online.

### **What information do I need to provide?**

Ideally, the notetaker/captioner should have sight of presentation or teaching materials before the assignment and a list of speaker names. This enables them to enter short forms into their abbreviation dictionaries. Preparatory material is also helpful if speakers will be reading from scripts.