

## Communication support for deaf children in early years settings, schools and colleges who use BSL to access teaching and learning position statement

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Good language and communication skills are at the heart of deaf children being able to make friends and succeed in education.
- 1.2 It is logical that the quality of a deaf child's communication support as well as the quality of teaching directly contributes to that child's ability to learn and achieve their potential in an educational environment. The role of the communication support worker is to support deaf learners in and outside the classroom.
- 1.3 The National Deaf Children's Society uses the term 'communication support worker' to mean an education professional tasked with providing flexible support to a child or young person who needs support to access the curriculum. This support could be provided in a range of ways including signing, lipspeaking, Cued Speech, notetaking, etc. depending on the individual needs of the deaf child and in a range of education settings, including schools, colleges and universities.

- 1.4 This is a distinct and different role to a British Sign Language (BSL)-English interpreter, whose role is purely to translate between English and BSL and vice-versa.
- 1.5 The primary role of a communication support worker involves the provision of communication support as well as the adaptation of the language of worksheets, videos and assignments. The communication support worker will also act as a note-taker, liaise with teaching staff on behalf of deaf students, undertake deaf awareness training if required, assist with examination preparation and advise on equipment needed to facilitate access. A communication support worker can be regarded as a type of specialist teaching assistant.
- 1.6 There are no national government standards in place on the requirements of a communication support worker and more specifically for the provision of BSL interpretation required. As a result there is widespread provision of poorly qualified, untrained and non-registered communication support workers who are failing to meet deaf students' needs. This undermines the deaf students' development and prevents them achieving their full potential in education.

## 2. Our policy

- 2.1 Local authorities<sup>1</sup> and all education settings are legally required to identify and meet the special educational or additional support needs of every deaf child, which includes their individual communication needs.
- 2.2 Where a child or young person communicates in BSL as their first or preferred language, the quality of access to the curriculum and its educational content is only as good as the quality of communication support that they receive.
- 2.3 For this reason every deaf child for whom BSL is their first or preferred language should be supported by a communication support worker qualified to a minimum of BSL Level 3.
- 2.4 Level 3 is the **minimum** requirement. However, local authorities must focus on the individual needs of each deaf child. Where a deaf child needs support from a communication support worker with a more advanced qualification in BSL, this should be provided.
- 2.5 Level 3 is approximately equivalent to an AS Level (or Higher in Scotland) and is therefore the minimum level required by a professional to communicate concepts, facts and arguments in a classroom environment.
- 2.6 Level 2 is approximately equivalent to GCSE grade B in England (or National 5 Certificate in Scotland) and is therefore insufficient. Any qualification less than BSL Level 3 is insufficient to give full access to education. It would be akin to asking someone with a GCSE in French to support a student in the classroom whose first language is French. Those professionals currently working with deaf children who are qualified to less than Signature Level 3 should be supported to reach this qualification.
- 2.7 Similarly, where a student has other specific communication needs or preferences, the local authority and education setting must ensure these needs

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<sup>1</sup> Education Authority in Northern Ireland

are identified and met. For example, where a student uses Cued Speech, they should be provided with support from a skilled Cued Speech Transliterater.

- 2.8 Local authorities<sup>2</sup> and education settings should ensure that communication support workers hold all the necessary relevant skills, including by ensuring they hold a relevant qualification as a communication support worker, such as the Signature Level 3 certificate in communication support for deaf learners. They should also seek to meet best practice in recruiting and employing teaching assistants by following guidance, such as that developed by the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP).
- 2.9 Local authorities and education settings should also work together to ensure that the future recruitment and training needs of communication support workers can be met. This may require them to work together collaboratively to commission and fund specific training courses aimed at communication support workers.

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<sup>2</sup> Education Authority in Northern Ireland