



National Council of Women GB
For a fair and inclusive society

Making Deaf People Feel Welcome: A Guide to Planning Your Event

This factsheet provides guidance on how to make your event accessible and welcoming to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. It shows you how to plan ahead to make both face-to-face events and online meetings a more inclusive and successful experience for all attendees.

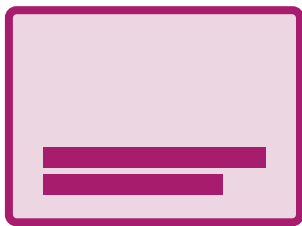
1. Pre-Event Planning and Communication

- **Choose an Accessible Venue:** Ensure good lighting (for lipreading), minimal background noise and good visual sightlines to speakers and screens.
- **Advertise Accessibility:** Clearly state in your event promotion materials (website, social media, flyers) that assistance is available. Use phrases like “BSL interpreters provided,” “captioning available,” or “contact us for accessibility requests.” Specify the types of interpreting being provided.
- **Personal Assistants and Hearing Dogs:** Some deaf people might like to bring their own personal assistant, hearing dog or communication support with them. Make it clear that personal assistants can accompany deaf people for free and that hearing dogs are welcome. If tickets need to be purchased, explain how free ones can be obtained.
- **Accommodating Special Requests:** Provide a clear and easy way for attendees to make specific requests. This could be a section on the registration form, a dedicated e-mail address or a phone number. Ask for requests to be made well in advance (e.g., two to four weeks) to allow time for arrangements.
- **Use Visuals in Promotions:** When using videos to promote and event, make sure the sound quality is good and it is captioned and/or includes a BSL interpreter.
- **Create a Point of Contact:** Designate a specific person or team as the accessibility contact. This individual should be knowledgeable about the assistance being offered and be the point of contact for any questions or issues on the day of the event.

2. On-Site Assistance

Interpreting:

- **Interpreting:** Consider using British Sign Language (BSL), Speech-to-Text Reporting (STTR), Lipspeakers (for lipreaders) and / or live captioners. It is important to take into account delegates who use BSL and those who do not.
- **Booking:** Book professional, qualified interpreters from a reputable agency. Use registered professionals (e.g., NRCPD in the UK). They should be booked well in advance. Provide them with subject matter for your event to allow them to prepare.
- **Placement:** Position the interpreter in a well-lit area, close to the speaker, and with a neutral background. The audience should be able to see both the speaker and the interpreter clearly without having to strain.
- **Breaks:** Interpreters need regular breaks. For events longer than an hour, it's essential to book a team of two interpreters who can alternate every 15-20 minutes to maintain quality and accuracy.
- **Materials:** Provide the interpreters with any scripts, presentations or speaker notes in advance. This allows them to prepare and interpret complex terminology accurately.



Captioning and Subtitles:

- **Hybrid Events:** Enable live captions on platforms like Zoom, Teams, or YouTube. Share access instructions before the event (e.g. how to turn on captions). Consider using a speech-to-text or transcription app on an iPad or tablet for smaller or shorter meetings and events. Some recommended apps are Ava, Otter or Google Live Transcribe. Bear in mind that apps are not an ideal replacement for interpreters at larger events.
- **Pre-recorded Content:** Any videos or pre-recorded presentations should be subtitled or captioned. Ensure the captions are accurate, easy to read, and synchronised with the audio.
- **Provide Transcripts:** For presentations or talks, consider providing printed slides, scripts, summaries or transcripts in advance or for use on the day.



Hearing Loop Systems (Induction Loops):

- **Availability:** Check if your venue has a fixed hearing loop system. If not, consider hiring a portable one. Test equipment beforehand.
- **Advertising:** Clearly state that a hearing loop is available and where it is located.

Hearing Loop icon created by Hadi Davodpour from Noun Project

RESERVED

Seating, Visuals and Lighting Cues:

- **Seating:** Reserve seating near the front of the venue for attendees who are deaf or hard of hearing, their interpreters, assistants and hearing dogs. Make sure the reserved seating has clear sightlines to the speaker and the interpreter on the platform or screen.
- **Lighting:** Ensure the lighting is good enough for everyone to see each other and that the stage, speaker and interpreters are well-lit. Avoid backlighting that makes it difficult to see facial expressions or signs.
- **Alerts:** In an emergency, use visual alarms or flashing lights. Do not rely solely on audible alarms.



3. Event Execution and Staff Training

Cultural awareness:

- **Conversing:** When you're talking with a deaf person who is using a sign language interpreter, remember to look and speak directly to the person, not the interpreter. Speak clearly and try not to talk too quickly but don't exaggerate it.
- **Promote Inclusion:** Consider featuring deaf speakers at your event.

Speaker Etiquette:

- **Face the Audience:** Speakers should face the audience and avoid turning their back while speaking. This allows lip-readers to follow along.
- **Speak Clearly:** Advise speakers to speak at a moderate pace and enunciate their words. Avoid jargon, acronyms and abbreviations as these may not translate well. Use plain language whenever possible.
- **Visual Aids:** Use clear, high-contrast slides with limited text. Incorporate images, graphs and visual aids to support spoken information.

Staff Training:

- **Brief All Staff:** Brief venue and reception staff. Train your own staff and volunteers on accessibility protocols. They should know where everything is (e.g., location of the interpreter, hearing loop area) and who the accessibility point of contact is as well as if dogs are expected.
- **Microphone Use and Questions:** Provide handheld microphones for all speakers and for audience questions, even in small rooms. No "shouting from the back". Repeat or summarise audience questions before answering. This benefits everyone.

4. Post-Event Follow-up

- **Feedback:** Include a question in your post-event survey about the accessibility of the event. This valuable feedback can help you improve for future events.
- **Share Materials:** Make presentation slides and a transcript of the talks available online after the event. This benefits attendees who may have missed information and serves as an accessible record of the event's content.

5. Smaller events

- **The Basics:** Local gatherings and events in village halls or community centres may not have a budget for interpreting or captioning. To make these easier for deaf people and those with some hearing loss, follow the low- and no-cost tips in this leaflet. Asking for advance notification of special requirements, briefing staff, optimising the lighting and room set up and ensuring people don't speak over each other are key.
- **Additional Considerations:** If there is no interpretation of public or emergency announcements, think about displaying these on a screen or in a handout.

While putting people with hearing loss at the front is important for cinema-style seating, if you are holding a small-scale meeting or discussion, seats in a circle might be more appropriate.

Public halls often have poor acoustics, being large open spaces which echo. Curtains and other soft furnishings can stop sound bouncing off hard surfaces.

If you frequently hold events at your venue, ask regular users about their experience.

Experiment with the placement of your audio speakers. If your budget allows, purchasing additional speakers or installing or hiring a hearing loop system might be beneficial.

Consider supplying an iPad or tablet with a speech-to-text or transcription app. Make sure users are seated close enough to the speaker so the microphone can pick up what is being said.

Background noise, such as that coming from adjacent rooms and circulation areas, should be minimised.

Provide any handouts and transcripts before and after the meeting.

6. Online Events and Meetings

Technical Set-up Beforehand:

- **Enable Closed Captions:** When you host an event or meeting on Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet, ensure that Closed Captions are enabled. Each video hosting platform has clear instructions on how to do this.
- **BSL Interpreters:** Invited interpreters attending the video call can be pinned by a participant by clicking on ... and then Pin. Or in Zoom the host can set up the Sign Language Interpretation view which places the sign language interpreter in a small pop-up box on screen, this can then be moved around by the participant to suit their view.
- **Transcript and Summary:** Always have the AI Transcription switched on and ask for the AI summary of the meeting. These can be emailed to all the participants afterwards; advise that you will be providing this, it is much easier than struggling to take notes whilst trying to maintain visual contact on screen.
- **Record Your Meeting:** If you are recording the meeting, please ensure captions are included and also provide a transcript.

During the Meeting:

- **Keep Cameras On:** When talking, keep still and stay close to the camera for easier lip reading. Unblur your background if you are going to use BSL or your hands may get blurred when you sign.
- **Ensure Your Face is Visible:** Adjust your camera so that your whole face is visible. Make sure that your face is well-lit and avoid strong backlighting. Try and avoid moving your hands in front of your face as this is an additional visual distraction. Don't cover your mouth, chew gum or eat.
- **One at a Time:** The host should ensure that everyone is clear on the importance of one person speaking at a time. This is vital for lip readers, and for interpreters as they cannot interpret two people at once.
- **Raise Your Hand:** Let people know who is speaking by using the 'raise your hand' feature. Introduce yourself by name to make it easier for deaf and hard of hearing people to find and follow you.
- **Minimise Background Noise:** Make sure you are in a quiet place; microphones can pick up a lot of extraneous background noise which makes your voice less clear. Use any noise cancellation software available in the settings. Mute yourself when you are not speaking.

Terminology explained

- **A hearing loop system** transmits sound directly to a person's hearing aid or cochlear implant (if it has a "T" setting). This reduces background noise and improves clarity.
- **BSL refers to British Sign Language** which is a visual-gestural language used by many deaf people in the UK. It has its own distinct grammar, vocabulary, and structure that is entirely separate from spoken English.
- **Live captioners** are trained professionals who type captions in shorthand which are displayed live on a screen. This helps deaf people who do not use BSL.
- **An STTR (Speech-to-Text Reporter)** provides a real-time, verbatim transcription of spoken content, allowing people to access audio information by reading the text on a screen. STTRs use a special electronic shorthand keyboard to type phonetically, which is then instantly converted by a laptop into English text. This text is displayed on a screen, often a large monitor for meetings or conferences, enabling deaf individuals to follow discussions and participate fully.
- **Lipspeakers** are used by people who prefer to communicate through lipreading and speech. Lipspeakers repeat what's said without using their voice.

You can contact us at:

National Council of Women, Administrative Office,
81 Bondgate, Darlington, Co. Durham, DL3 7JT

Call **01325 367375**

Email info@ncwgb.org

Registered charity No. 1001015.
Company limited by guarantee, registered
in England and Wales No. 502692

Publication date March 2026