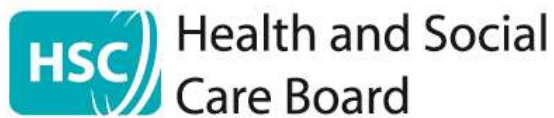


# Changes to your Communication Support



**Information – September 2019**  
**Easier to Read Version**

## About this booklet



We are the Health and Social Care Board, called HSCB. We are responsible for the Health and Social Care you receive in NI, and for your Communication Support.

When you use health and social care services, if you are deaf or hard of hearing, you might receive help with communication such as:

- Sign Language Interpreters
- Speech to Text Reporting (STTR)
- Notetaking
- DeafBlind Communication Support

This booklet tells you about some changes that are going to happen with your Communication Support.



## What happens now

At the moment we have an arrangement with 3 different organisations to provide Communication Support. They can support deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people in all areas of Northern Ireland.

- **Sign Language Interpreting Service**

There are approximately 5,000 British Sign Language (BSL) users and approximately 2,000-3,000 Irish Sign Language (ISL) users living in Northern Ireland.

Face to face BSL and ISL interpreters can be arranged. Last year these were mostly on Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 6.00pm.

- **Hard of Hearing Service**

There are approximately 300,000 people living with a hearing loss in Northern Ireland; approximately 70,000 of these people use a hearing aid.

Speech to Text Reporting (STTR) and Notetaking communication support can be arranged. However there are only 2 people who can provide STTR in Northern Ireland.

- **DeafBlind Service**

Specialist Deafblind Communication Support is provided through external organisations. The number of people who are deafblind is not known, but last year there were 28 bookings for Deafblind Communication Support.



# More information about the current Sign Language Interpreter arrangements

- **Bookings**

At least 2 weeks' notice is needed to book an interpreter. Complex appointments may need up to 8 weeks' notice. It can be very difficult to book an interpreter for urgent appointments, or in an emergency, or for times outside standard hours. We know of 92 times last year when a sign language interpreter could not be arranged when requested.

- **Costs**

Sign Language Interpreters cost about £35-£40 per hour, but there are also additional charges such as minimum booking fees, travel expenses, and cancellation charges.

- **Cancellations**

Last year Sign Language Interpreters were cancelled 269 times. Approximately 200 of these still had to be paid in full. Last year there were also 90 times that appointments had to be cancelled because there was no Sign Language Interpreter available.

- **Workforce**

At the moment there are 36 BSL interpreters and 4 ISL interpreters that can be booked. Most of these live near Belfast City or Derry City. Many interpreters also work for other organisations.

- **Remote or face-to-face**

At the moment all interpreters work face-to-face.

## Why there are going to be some changes

Currently it can be difficult to access a sign language interpreter in a timely way when needed and in particular in an emergency.

2 reviews have been carried out over the last few years...

- **In 2011:**

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority carried out a review of Sensory Rehabilitation Services in Northern Ireland. They found inconsistencies in the provision of Communication Support.

- **In 2016:**

We (the HSCB) carried out a review of the current Communication Support Services. An important recommendation in this review was that Communication Support should be provided through 1 provider – the Business Service Organisation (BSO).

We have agreed to change our service, to follow the recommendations that were made in the 2016 review.



## What changes are needed

The main recommendation is to provide a Communication Support Service that is:

- consistent
- standardised
- accessible
- value for money.

The Communication Support Service must include:

- central funding for interpreting, that can be used by organisations and other contractors such as GPs, General Dental Practitioners, Community Pharmacists and Opticians
- a plan for a good balance of face to face interpreting and non face-to-face interpreting
- a pilot programme for remote communication support
- a group of advisors, that includes users, to monitor the changes
- using Interpreters as efficiently as possible
- a central system, which will improve consistency, referrals and out of hours requests
- collection of relevant information
- agreed standards for quality, and a system to deal with complaints
- a Code of Conduct agreed with governing bodies.

## What has happened so far

We have been working with the Business Service Organisation (BSO) to change our Communication Support Service into 1 single service that BSO will run.

This has involved talking with a lot of different people including sign language interpreters, community and voluntary groups, and staff at HSC and BSO.

At the moment the BSO provide Foreign Language Interpreting. The experience and knowledge they have from running this will help them run a Communication Support Service for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people.

First we tried to develop a service with BSO that would sub-contract work to sign language interpreters and communication support professionals. But this did not fix all the current problems.



## The new service

The new service will be run by BSO.

### The aims are:

- to provide a service with safe, effective and clear communication
- to make sure the legal requirements are met
- to make sure the required standards are met
- to help users, carers and families so they can make good decisions.

### The different types of Communication Support will be:

1. British Sign Language (BSL)
2. Irish Sign Language (ISL)
3. DeafBlind interpreting
4. Speech to Text/Verbatim Speech to Text Reporters (STTR)/ Electronic Notetaking
5. Translation

The Interpreters for 1 and 2 will be recruited and employed by BSO. The people need for 3, 4 and 5 will be provided by external organisations.

### The new service will:

- book interpreters directly
- make interpreters available in emergencies or out of standard hours
- be better for interpreters, by giving them things like a guaranteed income, annual leave and sick leave
- give training, career development and support to interpreters
- provide support and structure through a team that manages the availability of interpreters
- organise interpreters well to reduce costs and to cope with demand
- improve the quality and safety of communication support
- be governed in a good way and held accountable.



## How it will work

The BSO will recruit and employ a number of sign language interpreters directly who will provide the service 7 days a week, 24hrs a day. The core service will be Monday to Friday 9am -5pm. There will be an on call system for out of hours or emergencies.

One senior person will be responsible for the professional work of the interpreters.

The BSO will keep a waiting list and a bank list of extra interpreters that could be added if requirements increase. They will also have access to an external service as a back-up.

The BSO will provide remote interpreting through an external service using video and internet technology. We will carry out more research into this next month.

## Telling users about the changes

There is a group of people who are working on a plan for telling users about the new service. They will

- provide awareness training to deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people to make sure they know how to use the new service
- provide awareness training to staff working in health and social care to make sure they know how to book Communication Support
- make sure users know how to give feedback or make a complaint
- provide awareness training for staff who work with deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people

# What happens next

We will

- firstly tell everyone what the new service will be and what we have done so far
- write the policies and procedures that are needed
- update the software and technology
- start recruiting
- plan and provide the awareness training
- improve the process for giving feedback
- assess the training needs of the new staff
- write a plan for induction and training
- continue the process to find a remote interpreting service
- run a pilot programme for remote interpreting
- continue to help the groups that give us advice.



Thank you to A2i for the words  
**[www.a2i.co.uk](http://www.a2i.co.uk)** (reference 31647)

The full version of this document is called  
“Regional Communication Support Service  
Briefing Paper - September 2019”