

HOW TO REQUEST A BSL INTERPRETER (and actually get one)

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR WORK, EDUCATION, AND EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

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BSL is recognised in the UK. But many Deaf people still:

- attend meetings without full access
- rely on others to “fill in the gaps”
- are told “we’ll look into it” and hear nothing again

This isn’t because support doesn’t exist. It’s because the process is unclear, slow, and often handled incorrectly.

This guide shows you how to approach it properly so you’re taken seriously.

YOUR RIGHTS

You are not asking for a favour.

Under the Equality Act 2010:

- Employers and education providers must make reasonable adjustments
- This includes communication support such as interpreters or CSWs

The British Sign Language Act 2022:

- Recognises BSL as a language in its own right
- Strengthens visibility and expectation of access

Important:

These laws support your request.
But they don’t automatically organise it for you.

STEP 1: KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEED

Before asking, be specific. Ask yourself:

- When do I need support? (meetings, training, classes, interviews)
- What type of support? (BSL interpreter, CSW, notetaker)
- How often? (daily, weekly, specific events)

If you don't define it clearly, the other person won't either.

STEP 2: MAKE A STRONG REQUEST

Weak request:

"Can I have an interpreter?"

This gets ignored because it's **easy to ignore**.

Use this instead:

*"I require a qualified BSL interpreter to access [meetings/classes/training].
Without this support, I am unable to fully participate and access information equally."*

Then add:

- When you need it
- How often
- Why it matters

Example:

*"I require a qualified BSL interpreter for weekly team meetings and training sessions.
Without this support, I am unable to fully access information or contribute effectively."*

This does three things:

- Makes the need clear
- Shows impact
- Signals that this is not optional

STEP 3: SEND IT TO THE RIGHT PERSON

This is where many requests disappear.
Send your request to:

- Manager or supervisor
- HR department
- Disability or learning support team (education)

If you're not sure, ask:
"Who is responsible for organising accessibility support?"

Do not rely on one person "passing it on."

STEP 4: UNDERSTAND HOW IT'S FUNDED

This is one of the biggest barriers, but also the biggest misunderstanding.

In many work situations, support is funded through Access to Work.

What this means:

- The employer does not usually pay the full cost
- Support (interpreters, CSWs, equipment) can be covered
- You apply, and funding is agreed

This removes the most common objection: "**We don't have the budget.**"

STEP 5: FOLLOW UP (THIS IS NOT OPTIONAL)

If you send one email and wait, nothing happens.

Follow up after a few days:

"Just checking in regarding my request for communication support. Please let me know the next steps."

You are not being difficult.
You are making sure the process moves forward.

COMMON PROBLEMS (and what they actually mean)	WHEN THINGS DON'T MOVE
<p><i>"We'll look into it"</i> → They don't know what to do next</p> <p><i>"We've never done this before"</i> → They need guidance, not avoidance</p> <p><i>"It might be expensive"</i> → They don't understand Access to Work</p> <p><i>"We'll try to manage without for now"</i> → They are delaying, not solving the issue</p> <p>Recognise these early so you don't get stuck.</p>	<p>If nothing happens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up again • Ask for a timeline • Ask who is responsible <p>If needed, reference your rights clearly and professionally.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p><i>"As communication access is essential for my role, I would appreciate a clear update on how this will be arranged."</i></p>

THE REALITY MOST PEOPLE DON'T SAY

Even when you do everything right, applications can be slow, employers can be unsure, and processes can stall

This is where most people give up.

Not because support isn't possible, but because the system is difficult to navigate alone.

A BETTER WAY

Instead of chasing emails, explaining the same thing repeatedly, navigating funding alone, etc., you can have an agency support you by handling:

- the Access to Work process
- communication with employers
- setting up the right support from the start

BSL being recognised matters. But recognition doesn't create access on its own.

Clear requests, correct process, and proper support do.

If you need help setting this up properly, we support Deaf professionals and employers every day.

You don't have to figure this out alone.

www.deafumbrella.com