



CSW QUALITY CHECKLIST FOR COLLEGES SUPPORTING DEAF STUDENTS

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ENSURING
COMMUNICATION SUPPORT WORKER
PROVISION IS CONSISTENT,
APPROPRIATE, AND EDUCATION-READY**

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CONTENTS

Introduction	03
Chapter I	04
Role clarity and professional boundaries	
Chapter II	05
Classroom readiness and education context	
Chapter III	06
Professional judgement and decision making	
Chapter IV	07
Supporting independence rather than dependency	
Chapter V	08
Consistency and shared expectations	
Benefits of the checklist	09



INTRODUCTION

Communication Support Workers (CSWs) play a critical role in enabling Deaf students to access learning in education settings. However, access quality depends not only on communication skills, but on professional judgement, role clarity, and an understanding of how classrooms function.

This checklist is designed to help colleges review whether CSW provision is clear, consistent, and aligned with the realities of teaching and learning. It can be used whether you employ one CSW or manage a wider support team.

The focus is not on fault finding, but on clarity, quality assurance, and protecting Deaf students' access to learning.

CHAPTER I

ROLE CLARITY AND PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

A clear understanding of the CSW role is the foundation of effective support. In education settings, blurred boundaries can lead to unintentional interference with learning, confusion for teaching staff, and inconsistent experiences for Deaf students.

A CSW should be able to clearly explain their role as enabling access to communication, not delivering learning content or influencing academic outcomes. This includes understanding that they are not responsible for teaching, assessing, prompting answers, or managing behaviour.

The CSW should demonstrate confidence in maintaining professional boundaries in the classroom. This includes knowing when to support and when to step back, how to avoid over explaining, and how to ensure the Deaf student remains the primary participant in their learning.

Colleges should be confident that CSWs understand how their role differs from other support roles such as interpreters and notetakers. This clarity helps prevent role drift, reduces pressure on CSWs, and ensures Deaf students receive the right type of support at the right time.

Quality check:

Can the CSW explain their role and boundaries clearly, using education focused examples rather than generic descriptions of support?

CHAPTER II

CLASSROOM READINESS AND EDUCATION CONTEXT

Education settings place unique demands on communication support. CSWs need to be prepared for the pace, unpredictability, and variety of learning environments they will encounter.

A classroom ready CSW understands how to support access during lectures, group discussions, practical activities, workshops, and independent tasks. They are able to adapt their approach depending on the teaching style, subject matter, and structure of the session.

This includes managing fast turn taking, overlapping speech, unclear instructions, and last minute changes without disrupting the flow of learning. The CSW should be able to prioritise key information, support comprehension, and ensure the Deaf student can follow what is happening in real time.

Importantly, classroom readiness also means understanding how to support learning without becoming the focus of attention. The CSW should work in a way that integrates smoothly into the learning environment and supports the Deaf student's independence and confidence.

✔ Quality check:

Is the CSW confident supporting access across different lesson types and able to adapt their support appropriately without relying on guesswork?

CHAPTER III

PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

One of the most significant differences between inexperienced and well prepared CSWs is professional judgement.

In education settings, CSWs constantly make decisions. When to clarify information. When to wait. When to intervene. When to allow the student to ask for clarification themselves. These decisions directly affect access, independence, and learning outcomes.

A well prepared CSW understands that there is no one size fits all approach. They are able to read the situation, consider the student's preferences, and respond appropriately. They understand the impact of over supporting as well as under supporting.

Professional judgement also includes managing sensitive situations such as misunderstandings, missed information, or moments where the Deaf student may be disadvantaged without support.

The CSW should feel confident making these decisions within their role, without overstepping boundaries.

✔ Quality check:

Can the CSW explain why they chose a particular approach in a classroom situation and reflect on its impact?



CHAPTER IV

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE RATHER THAN DEPENDENCY

High quality CSW support empowers Deaf students to engage with learning independently wherever possible. This does not mean withholding support, but providing it in a way that builds confidence and autonomy.

CSWs should understand how their actions can either promote independence or unintentionally create reliance. For example, consistently speaking on behalf of a student, anticipating answers, or over clarifying can reduce opportunities for the student to participate directly.

Effective support involves encouraging the Deaf student to engage with tutors and peers, ask questions, and develop strategies for managing communication challenges themselves, with the CSW acting as a facilitator rather than a substitute.

✔ Quality check:

Does the CSW actively support the Deaf student to remain the primary communicator and decision maker in their learning?

CHAPTER V

CONSISTENCY AND SHARED EXPECTATIONS

Inconsistent support is one of the most common issues reported in education settings. This can occur when CSWs have different interpretations of their role, different levels of preparation, or no shared framework for practice.

Colleges benefit from having clear, documented expectations of what CSW support should look like in practice. This makes it easier to onboard new staff, support developing CSWs, and address issues early.

Consistency does not mean rigid practice. It means shared understanding, common language, and agreed professional standards across the team.

Training plays a key role in establishing this baseline, especially in settings where CSWs may be recruited quickly or work across multiple departments.

Quality check:

Are expectations of CSW practice clear, documented, and understood across the team?

CHAPTER VI

ACCOUNTABILITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

CSW support should be part of a college's wider quality assurance processes, not something that operates in isolation.

This includes having systems in place to review practice, provide feedback, and support ongoing professional development. CSWs should know who to approach for guidance, how concerns are addressed, and how their role fits within the wider support framework.

Having evidence of structured training, clear role definitions, and ongoing development supports colleges in demonstrating their commitment to inclusive practice and access for Deaf students.

✓ Quality check:

Can the college evidence how CSW support quality is monitored, supported, and improved over time?

BENEFITS OF THE CHECKLIST

This checklist is intended as a reflective tool, not a pass or fail test. If any areas feel unclear or inconsistent, this often indicates a need for clearer guidance or structured training rather than individual fault.

Many colleges use this checklist as a starting point to:

- review current CSW provision
- support new or developing CSWs
- standardise practice across teams
- strengthen access provision for Deaf students

Whether you employ one CSW or manage a larger support team, clarity and preparation are key to ensuring Deaf students receive consistent, high quality access to education.

Find more free, thoughtful resources at 🗨️ www.deafumbrella.com/freebies



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