

# Communication support FAQs

## Introduction

### What is communication support?



Communication support describes any service or function which aims to make spoken communication accessible for disabled people. Meeting or event attendees may require communication support to be able to participate fully and equally, for example because they are D/deaf or hard of hearing, neurodivergent, or have a learning disability.

There are various forms of communication support, including:

- interpreting: conversion of a spoken or sign language to another spoken or sign language, for example, English to British Sign Language (BSL);
- transcription/captioning: conversion of a spoken or sign language to written text, for example, spoken English to written English.

### Is it a requirement to provide communication support?



Under the Equality Act 2010, organisations have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can participate as fully and equally as possible. This means that meeting and event organisers should provide communication support if attendees need it to participate equally.

The legal duty to make adjustments is 'anticipatory'. This means that meeting and event organisers should be proactive in providing for their attendees' access needs, rather than waiting to be asked. For larger events, without attendee registration, providing anticipatory reasonable adjustments will entail building in some form of communication support by default – particularly for virtual and hybrid events where free and low cost captioning is readily available.

The Equality Act also specifies that the financial burden of reasonable adjustments should not fall on the disabled person. This means that event organisers are responsible for the cost of making events as accessible as possible, rather than relying on disabled attendees to shoulder the cost of overcoming access barriers themselves.

For more guidance on making events inclusive and accessible to all, see our quick guide to [inclusive events](#).

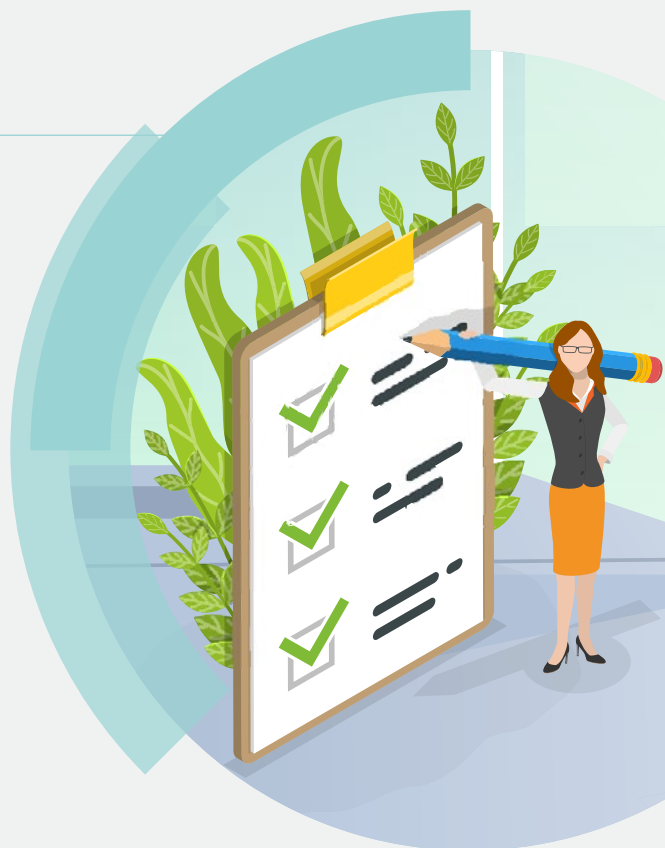


## What types of communication support are available?



The type of communication support required will depend on the person who requires it, and on whether the event is virtual or in-person.

- Sign language interpreting – interpreting from spoken language to sign language;
- Video remote interpreting (VRI) – a service that provides remote online sign language interpreters for onsite events. Enables later-notice booking than onsite sign language interpreting;
- Lipspeakers – professionals trained to repeat the conversation in a way that is easy to lipread;
- Audio description – descriptive audio used to make visual media more accessible for Blind and partially sighted people.
- Captioning/subtitling/closed captioning/live transcription – all these terms mean that captions are shown on the screen during virtual events and in videos. Captions can be:
  - **transcript** – a written record of the event. Can be produced automatically (by Zoom, for example), or by note-takers, captioners, and palantypists. Enables participants to keep the notes after the event;
  - **electronic notetaking (ENT)** – real-time summarised notes of spoken conversation. Can be provided onsite or remotely;
  - **speech to text reporting (STTR)/palantypists** – real-time verbatim transcription of spoken conversation. Can be provided onsite or remotely.



## How can I ensure attendees know how to access communication support?



- Ensure attendees know how to enable and see captions and/or sign language interpreters. This should be communicated both verbally and in writing, for example, by including the instructions in pre-event communications, on slides, or in chat windows for virtual or hybrid events.

## Captions/live transcription

What types of captioning are available for online events?



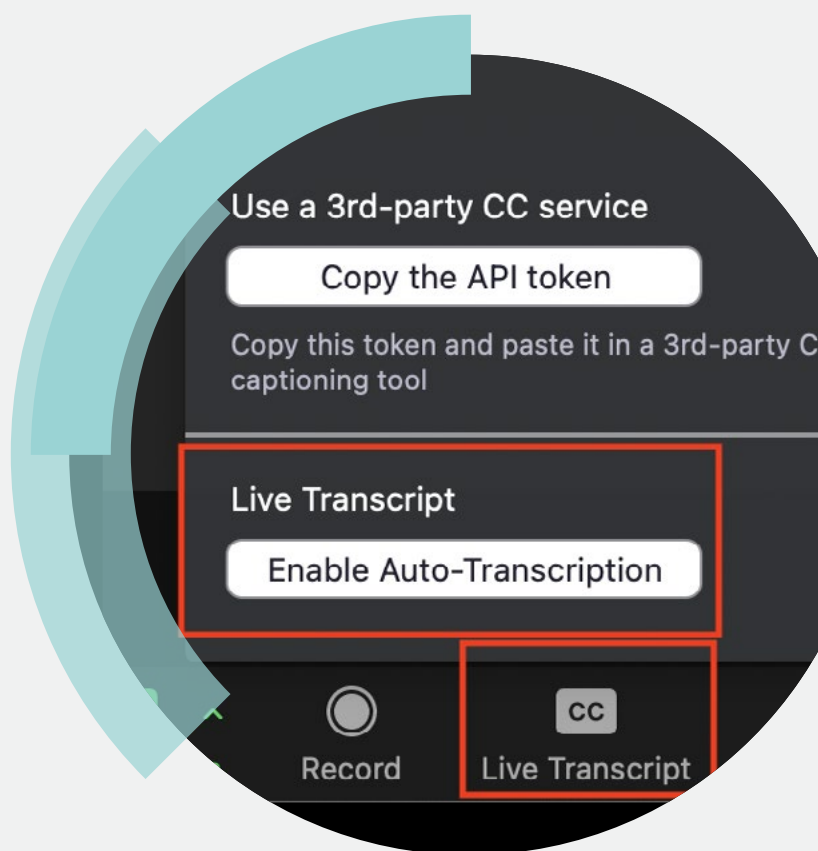
- Automatic captioning is generated electronically by software. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet provide automatic captions as an integrated feature. Google Chrome provides in-browser automatic captions. Other third-party options are also available.
- Manual captions are generated by a palantypist, usually via a paid third-party service.
- The format of third-party captions (whether automatic or manual) varies by provider. Some providers display captions in the form of a transcript in a separate browser window, which allows for flexibility in event platforms, but visually separates the captions from the event platform itself. Some software, including Zoom, allows for the integration of third-party captioning services via an API token.

AUTOMATIC CAPTIONING		MANUAL CAPTIONING	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free options available.</li> <li>• No need to pre-book.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality may vary depending on speech clarity, audio quality, and technical language.</li> <li>• Only available in English on most platforms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally higher quality.</li> <li>• Technical language guidance can be provided in advance.</li> <li>• Available in multiple languages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires pre-booking.</li> <li>• Cost commitment.</li> </ul>

## How do I enable automatic captioning?



- **Zoom:** event organisers must enable captions in their Zoom settings for attendees to be able to use them. See this [guide on enabling captions in Zoom](#). Be aware that live transcription currently has limited language options and is not yet enabled in breakout rooms.
- **Microsoft Teams:** no action is required from the host, each attendee can turn on the captions for themselves. See this [guide on using captions in Microsoft Teams](#).
- **Google Meet:** no action is required from the host, each attendee can turn on the captions for themselves. See this [guide on using captions in Google Meet](#). Be aware that live transcription has limited language options.
- **Google Chrome:** offers live captioning in English for in-browser media. See this [guide to enabling Live Caption in Chrome](#).
- Organisers or attendees can also use external captioning software, such as [Otter.ai](#), to generate captions.



## Are captions saved in recordings?



- Whether captions are saved in recordings is dependent on the platform. For example, Zoom displays a transcript next to recordings saved to and viewed in the Zoom cloud, and the transcript can be downloaded as a separate file.
- Caption files can be added to videos hosted on YouTube, as well as on many other video hosting and social media sites. See this [YouTube guide to adding captions and transcripts](#)

## Sign language interpreting

### How can I support sign language interpreters?



- Share slides and handouts with interpreters before the event so that they can familiarise themselves with the topic and terminology, particularly if technical scientific language will be used.
- Invite interpreters to any pre-event all-speaker meetings, or record these, so that interpreters can become familiar with speakers' presentations and speaking styles.
- Ensure that interpreters have access to the event platform. If needed, ensure that they receive training on how to use the platform.



### How can I use sign language interpreters for online events?



- Ensure that the interpreter will always remain visible to participants. On platforms that allow for it, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, ensure that participants can pin the interpreter's video on their own screens. If a gallery view and user-end video pinning are not available, ensure that only the main speaker's video and the interpreter's video are turned on.
- If available as a feature, spotlight the interpreter's video so that they will stay on the screen if somebody else turns on their video or a screen is shared. If several interpreters have been booked, spotlight them in turns or make the interpreters co-hosts of the event.

### Can I book the same interpreters for all attendees?



- Not all D/deaf and hard of hearing people use sign language. Check with attendees what communication support they need.
- Just as there are many spoken languages, there are many sign languages. For international events, or if an attendee uses a sign language other than British Sign Language (BSL), it may be necessary to book an interpreter in the relevant sign language.



## Costs and funding

### How much does communication support cost?



- Cost will depend on various factors such as provider, type of support, funding scheme (see below), specification level of terminology used, amount of preparation needed, and event length.
- For events lasting over an hour, more than one communication support worker will usually be necessary.

### What funding is available to cover communication support costs?

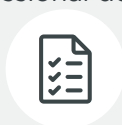


- It is the responsibility of event organisers to provide reasonable adjustments for event attendees. When planning events with a budget, it is therefore important to factor in communication support costs.

If this is not possible or would not constitute a 'reasonable' adjustment within the context of the event – for example, if the event has no budget and is run by volunteers – it may be appropriate to signpost attendees to other sources of funding:

- **Access to Work** is a government grant scheme used to cover work-related expenses for disabled employees. If events are undertaken as part of employment, and the attendee receives support from Access to Work, this funding may cover communication support.
- **Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)** is a grant scheme for disabled university students used to cover education-related expenses. If events are undertaken as part of their studies, and the attendee receives support from DSA, this funding may cover communication support.
- Attendees may apply to the **RSC Accessibility Grants** for support to attend a chemistry-related meeting, conference, workshop or professional development event.

### What are some examples of communication support providers?



*This list is provided for informational purposes only and is not exhaustive. The Royal Society of Chemistry is not affiliated with, and does not necessarily endorse, any of these providers.*

- **Clarion UK** – a range of services including BSL interpreting, note-taking, services for deafblind people and interpreting to some sign languages other than BSL, for example, Irish or French.
- **Ai-Media** – human speech to text and captioning using speech recognition software.
- **121 Captions** – manual captioning.
- **Matinée** – a range of services including audio description for Blind and partially sighted people.
- A register of **freelance communication professionals**.

## Supporting D/deaf and hard of hearing attendees

### How can I make social breaks more inclusive?



Captioners and interpreters are often not booked for breaks and social events, which results in D/deaf and hard of hearing people experiencing exclusion from important social and networking opportunities.

For virtual events, ensure automatic captioning and chat are enabled during breaks and social events.

#### Tips to increase accessibility for onsite events:

- If possible, ensure that the facility has quiet areas available.
- Face the D/deaf person so that they can lipread you.
- Speak clearly but at a steady pace. Avoid over-exaggerating pronunciation.
- Encourage participants to speak one person at a time.
- Use a speech to text or chat function, for example, through mobile phone messaging or notetaking apps.
- If the person uses any sign language, learning their sign language alphabet (fingerspelling) and signing first letters of words can be useful.



### Where can I learn more?



Some organisations organise Deaf awareness training, for example [Clarion](#) and [BID](#).



Together we can help make chemistry truly for everyone.  
[See our quick guides for more help with inclusive events, communications, and committees.](#)