

## NUBSLI evidence for the open consultation into Communication Support Workers (CSWs)

83 people responded to the four questions about Communication Support Work in NUBSLI's survey. The responses have been shared with the market review as agreed. This is NUBSLI's evidence, drawing from the responses and other feedback and discussion with members.

### How do you define communication support work as done by CSWs?

The majority of respondents said that CSWs interpret<sup>1</sup>, predominantly in an education setting such as schools and colleges, but increasingly in the workplace funded by AtW.

Some respondents said that CSWs facilitate communication (in an education setting) by a variety of methods such as making notes, lipspeaking, explaining words and supporting the teacher to make lessons more accessible.

The majority of respondents said that there is no meaningful difference between the interpreting that qualified interpreters do, and the communication support that CSWs do, except that CSWs are usually not trained in interpreting (although a small number of CSWs are also qualified or trainee interpreters), and are often not fluent signers. Many respondents expressed concern about the negative impact on the deaf person of being provided with interpretation from a person who may only have level 2 or 3 BSL skills.

One respondent said *"If we are to keep this role, it should be applied to individuals who are studying for their Level 6 ... as a minimum (not level 2 as is currently commonplace)."*

### In your experience, what do CSWs actually do?

Again, the majority of respondents noted that CSWs interpret, and expressed concern about the lack of minimum skill level in both BSL and interpreting. Several respondents noted that CSWs are being used as unqualified interpreters by agencies who are trying to keep their costs down.

A respondent who is both a CSW and a qualified interpreter explained *"In the FE college where I work we are effectively interpreting. Of a small team, two of us are fully qualified and NRCPD registered and a further two have their NVQ6 in BSL. We do an interpreting role and then some, e.g. notetaking, modifying materials, liaising with other staff, teaching deaf awareness."*

Another respondent, who had previously worked as a CSW, said *"An example of my own experience of working as a CSW in the workplace (that I'm not proud to share): I was booked as an Office CSW to interpret in a care home. A CQC Inspector arrived and I was persuaded to 'interpret' for an interview with one of*

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<sup>1</sup> See section – A problem with terms (below).

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*the service users. Needless to say, without the necessary skills and training I did a very poor job. Despite my efforts to explain my unsuitability to the Inspector, she declared herself satisfied with the interview (with no way of knowing how competent my interpreting was). I now know that I should have refused to do the job but, without the training and experience I didn't have the confidence to decline. Needless to say the repercussions of mistakes made in this instance could have been serious and far reaching."*

Other tasks that CSWs were said to do included notetaking, translating between written English and BSL, advocating for deaf students, teaching, mentoring, liaising with others, correcting written English, working 1:1 on projects with deaf students, advising teachers on deaf awareness, Learning Support/Teaching Assistant, and providing Office admin support (with sign language).

One person said that his business provides CSWs to act in the role that social workers for the Deaf used to perform. For example, assisting Deaf people with reading correspondence, assisting with obtaining prescriptions, support with establishing daily living routines.

### **In your experience, where and how can CSWs add value?**

There was little consensus about this from respondents. Many said that CSWs can or do add value in an education setting, especially with deaf students who are not sign language users. A similar proportion felt that CSWs do not add value because they are being inappropriately used as unqualified interpreters.

Several respondents said that if used alongside qualified interpreters, in an education setting, CSWs could assist deaf students with learning by re-explaining what is being taught and assisting with written English. One respondent said “[They can add value] *by working in a team of qualified interpreters. In school, interpreters should be available for didactic teaching and sight translation of texts, with CSWs taking high quality lesson notes and doing the follow up 1:1 work.*”

### **In your experience, to what extent does the use of CSWs mask the demand for sign language interpreters and other communication and language professionals?**

Over 90% of respondents said that the use of CSWs masks the demand for qualified sign language interpreters. Almost all cited the use of CSWs in education as examples, but some also noted that agencies use CSWs in other settings as ‘cheap interpreters’.

One respondent said “*some agencies will take on [a government] contract, saying that they will provide RSLIs, then after a while cancel out the RSLIs and put in CSWs, saying it will only provide RSLIs for meetings and supervision (and not for day to day support). But still claim at RSLI rate. So yes it masks demand and I*

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*believe is a fraudulent practice.*” Another respondent echoed this and gave a specific example of this practice.

One respondent made a more nuanced argument, saying *“I believe they are seen as a cheap alternative by organisation, who are indifferent to the impact of a lower quality service. The long term effects are borne by the Deaf and hearing clients who are trying to communicate via CSWs. Organisations do not want to pay for the skills that TSLIs and RSLIs bring, so the CSWs do not mask the demand for quality interpreting and translation provision - organisations shut their eyes to the demand.”*

### Interpreters and interpreting, and Communication Support Work: A problem with terms.

*“The term CSW needs to be thrown out ...”*

The word ‘Interpreter’ denotes a person who has passed the requisite qualifications to register with the NRCPD, or equivalent, as a trainee or qualified interpreter.

The term ‘interpreting’ is simply a descriptor of the function being performed, and does not convey any particular quality standard.

It is clear from the responses to our survey that the title ‘Communication Support Worker’ does not denote a person with a particular set of skills to a specified level. The term is used to describe a job role that incorporates a wide variety of functions with no requirement of minimum skills or qualifications.

The fact that CSWs often interpret, as a core activity, whilst usually untrained and lacking sufficient fluency to do so (except for those relatively few cases where the CSW is also an interpreter,) is hidden by the use of terms such as *“facilitating communication”*<sup>2</sup>, aiding *“communication between pupil and teacher by using Signing where appropriate”*<sup>3</sup>.

Currently the umbrella term CSW covers such a wide range of work activities and competencies that it is potentially a barrier to the effectiveness of the market in communication services for Deaf people.

NUBSLI and our members recognise that there are a range of customer communication support needs and work roles, and that clarification and honesty would be a first step towards a functioning market. This would include:

- Being clear that CSWs are currently being used to interpret, and requiring the appropriate skills to do that effectively (i.e. Level 6 BSL and interpreter

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.deafaction.org.uk/our-services/communication-support/types-of-communication-support/communication-support-workers/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.indeed.co.uk/cmp/St-Paul's-Catholic-School/jobs/Communication-Support-Worker-0eab1828e5cf90c7?q=Bsl+Communication+Support+Worker>

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training).

- Standardising the CSW job role, which would allow minimum competencies to be specified, and appropriate training and accreditation to be developed.
- The title Communication Support Worker should have a standardised meaning, e.g. communication support with deaf people who don't require BSL.