

WORKING WITH...

A BSL/ENGLISH INTERPRETER



The following guidance should always be considered when using a BSL/English interpreter.

The role of a BSL/English interpreter

A BSL/English interpreter is there to facilitate communication between a person who uses BSL and a person who uses English. It is not simply 'translating' as a BSL/English interpreter will also use their knowledge and understanding of the cultures of each to ensure that information is presented to both parties appropriately and clearly.

What an interpreter **will not** do is to express their personal feelings or offer advice and will remain impartial at all times.

BSL/English interpreters are regulated by the 'National Registers of Communications Professional working with Deaf and Deafblind People' (NRCPD). The NRCPD is responsible for ensuring that the professional standards of interpreters are upheld. Interpreters are bound by a Code of Conduct which ensures confidentiality and professional conduct at all times.

BSL/English interpreters will generally refer to any event, appointment, meeting, etc. as an 'assignment'. As an interpreter could potentially be used in any number of situations and circumstances, we will refer to all uses of interpreters as assignments.

Checklist for booking a BSL/English interpreter

When booking an interpreter the following initial information should be provided:

- What is the assignment? This could be any number of things, for example job interviews, appointments, conferences, meetings, etc.

- What specific knowledge or vocabulary is required? Make sure that you are clear about any particular skills or experience the BSL/English interpreter may need to ensure they are able to convey the message fully in both languages.
- The date and time of the assignment. Equally important, you must estimate the duration of the assignment. For longer assignments it may be necessary to provide 2 or more BSL/English interpreters. When you place the booking, you will be given guidance in respect of the number of interpreters it would be appropriate to book.
- Where will the assignment be located?

The above information is really important to ensure that the most appropriate BSL/English interpreter is selected for the type of assignment that you are holding.

Please be aware that you may be asked for further information such as:

- The number of people that will be in attendance.
- Any specific requirements of the D/deaf and hearing people involved.
- If your organisation will be covering any travel expenses or other costs associated with the assignment. Sometimes these are included in the fee being charged for the BSL/English interpreter, so it is a good idea to check when making the booking.
- The name, email & telephone number of the person within the organisation who will be the main contact for the interpreter.
- Copies of any supporting materials that may be used prior to the assignment, e.g. copies of any documents, supporting information, etc.

Preparation

Any relevant paperwork should be sent to an interpreter well in advance. This will allow them to search for specialist vocabulary and to familiarise themselves with the subject and the people involved beforehand. The types of documents will vary depending on the nature of the assignment, but these could include:

- Minutes and/or agendas
- Copies of any additional information, such as signposting leaflets or information about other services
- Background information relating to the topic, the roles of the people attending the assignment, the organisation, etc.
- Any other documentation that may form part of the assignment.

All such information should be kept confidential by the interpreter and returned or destroyed after the assignment has been completed. More information about confidentiality and other protection is covered in the next section.

Verifying a BSL/English Interpreter

When making a booking, you should try to obtain the interpreter's Photo ID Card Number. If you are given this number, you must verify that it is valid by visiting the 'National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People' (NRCPD) website at www.nrcpd.org.uk. This website allows you to search Photo ID Card Number to ensure that the interpreter has not been struck off of the register. You can also search by name if you have this information. If they do not appear on the register then

you can assume that they have been struck off and therefore you are encouraged to source an alternative interpreter.

BSL/English Interpreters that are registered with the NRCPD are bound by a strict code of conduct. This requires them to hold any relevant criminal records checks, such as DBS checks. The code also binds them in respect of confidentiality and non-disclosure. Most interpreters are happy to sign any additional non-disclosure agreements should you feel it appropriate to arrange for this.

Also, using a registered BSL/English interpreter also means that there is appropriate liability insurance in place to cover any financial losses where poor interpretation results in poorer patient outcomes.

Before the assignment begins

Before any assignment commences, you must ask to see the interpreter's Photo ID Card. You will need to check the ID number displayed on the card matches the one that was given to you previously.

The colour of the card will tell you if they are a fully qualified or a trainee interpreter.

Yellow card	Fully qualified
Blue/grey card	Trainee

Due to the nature of the content of appointment and the importance of an accurate message being interpreted from BSL to English and vice versa, you are encouraged to only use a fully qualified interpreter.

Using a fully qualified interpreter, particularly one with experience of interpreting in a medical setting can also help to shorten the duration of the assignment as there will be fewer requirements to clarify words and/or meanings.

Room layout

As with all support workers or personal assistants, it is important to consider the layout of the room. This is not just about who sits next to whom but also about the available natural or artificial lighting provided. The deaf or hard of hearing client and/or the interpreter can help you to ensure that the setting is appropriate, but below are just a couple of tips that you can consider.

- Never sit the interpreter with their back to a window or with a light behind them. This can cast shadows over the interpreter's face making it harder for the D/deaf or hard of hearing person to see the interpreter's lips.
- Always sit the interpreter with their back to a plain and preferably neutrally coloured wall. Try to avoid any plain white walls as these can reflect light causing a similar effect to sitting the interpreter in front of a window.
- If there is a picture or other artwork on the wall directly behind where the interpreter will be sitting, simply take it down as sometimes these can cause a distraction.
- Where an interpreter sits in relation to the BSL speaker and the English speaker will depend on the nature of the assignment. For example, in a 1-2-1 conversation, it is preferable to have a square or rectangular table or desk. This allows the interpreter to sit next to the English speaker and opposite the BSL speaker. If the room you are using has a round table,

ensure that the BSL/English interpreter sits opposite the BSL speaker. And try to sit as close to the interpreter as possible.

- At other types of assignments, such as presentations or conferences, where the presenter is an English speaker, the interpreter should be placed at the front as close to the presenter as possible. Where you are also presenting visual support to your presentation, such as PowerPoint slides, the interpreter must not obscure the projected image but should be placed close to it so that the BSL speaker can easily see both the interpreter and the imagery. Where the presenter is a BSL speaker, the interpreter should be seated in the front row, and directly in front of the presenter.

Communicating visually

When you are speaking through a BSL/English interpreter, it is important to be mindful that the BSL speaker will need to look at the interpreter when they are conveying your words. When interpretation is underway, please be aware of the following tips:

- Always look directly at the Deaf person even though they will not always be able to look back. As with all communication, we all benefit from facial expressions and other body language to gauge a reaction and by looking at the Deaf person, you can still benefit from these reactions.
- As with the guidance for support workers and personal assistants, the use of the correct pronouns is important. If you are asking the person if they had found the building OK, you should say “Did **you** find the building OK?” and direct this at the BSL speaker. When the BSL/English interpreter

conveys the BSL speaker's response, they will use "I" as in "Yes, I found it straightway."

- You should not ask the interpreter any questions or make any comments directly to the interpreter. For more information, please see 'The role of a BSL/English interpreter' above
- If you are using visual materials or documentation, do not talk a BSL speaker through the information until they have had the opportunity to review the content. For complex or lengthy documents, it may be worthwhile breaking the document down into smaller sections. Allow the BSL speaker to review a section and offer any supporting explanation once they have had the time to do this. Sometimes, a BSL speaker may wish to make notes about the information they have just read before any discussion takes place about its content. Consider sending any information that is to be reviewed to the BSL speaker and, where appropriate to the BSL/English interpreter prior to the assignment to enable them to review the content before you sit down to discuss it.
- If an event is being recorded either using video or audio, it is best practice to seek the BSL/English interpreter's permission beforehand. We suggest that this is made clear at the point of booking an interpreter
- Finally, as with the guidance for breaks for interpreters, watching an interpreter for long periods of time can be tiring on a person's eyes. Most hearing people are able to rest their eyes and continue to listen whereas this is not the case when using BSL. Therefore, the best idea would be to follow the same guidance for breaks as is set out in 'Stopping for breaks' below.

Stopping for breaks

Some people believe that BSL is a like-for-like of English. However, in fact, BSL has its own grammar, vocabulary and structure. If you have ever learnt a spoken language other than your first language, you would have found that there are many situations where there isn't an exact equivalent; this is also true for BSL. Also similar to other spoken languages when compared with English, BSL has cultural, environmental and regional variations. Therefore, it is worth considering that, from your perspective it may seem that an interpreter is very busy with their hands when actually, the interpreter is applying an even greater amount of mental effort in interpreting the meaning in either language which is not as simple as just replacing the words. Because of this, interpreting requires a great deal of concentration and, when done over long periods of time, can be very tiring. Therefore, it is important that you factor in breaks for the interpreter to ensure that the quality of accuracy of the interpreting does not suffer. For longer meetings, i.e. 2 hours or more, it is often best to have two BSL interpreters present. In any event, you should factor in a break for the interpreter every 20-30 minutes. This is particularly important when only one interpreter is being provided.

This guide can also be provided in Braille, audio cassette disk, large print or other languages on request by phoning 01935 385240

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