Guide to BSL and non-spoken languages

>dals<

Non-spoken language guide

What is a BSL/English interpreter?

A BSL/English interpreter is a person who holds nationally recognised qualifications in BSL and interpreting theory and practise. They have fluency in British Sign Language and at least one other language (usually English).

BSL is a complex and rich language with its own grammar that is independent of English. It is not a derivative of English, neither is it another form of English.

Signed language interpreters can work between two signed languages (for example British Sign Language and American Sign Language) or, as is more common, between a signed language and a spoken language – as is the case for BSL/English interpreters.

Other non-spoken languages

Hands on BSL – used by deaf people who are also blind or have limited vision, they communicate using the signs from BSL but made in the palm of the other person.

Visual Frame Signing – also used by deaf people with limited vision, in which the signer uses a smaller area that stays in the smaller field of vision of the deaf person.

Deafblind Manual – a way to communicate using touch only.

Lipreading – used by people that might have gone deaf or experienced hearing loss through the course of their life and who do not know BSL. Lipreading consists of recognising a person`s lip shapes, how they use their teeth and tongue, as well as understanding their gestures and facial expressions when speaking.

Makaton – a simple and easy form of signed communication. It is not a formal sign language and is more frequently used by people with learning disabilities.

Deaf Relay – when the patient is a non-native BSL speaker, but uses another sign language, it might be very hard to get a signer from their native country or international one, so what we can suggest is a deaf relay interpreter. They are language intermediaries for deaf people who are not fluent in BSL, who work alongside BSL interpreters. This means apart from raising a request for a deaf relay interpreter, one will need to raise a request for a BSL interpreter as well.

Speech to Text operators – another option that can be used for patients that went deaf or experienced hearing loss through their life and who don't know BSL, in which the interpreter will type on a speech to text keyboard to produce live captions of what the other parties are saying.

Trainee interpreters

Whilst undergoing training, interpreters often register with SRLPDC in Scotland, or with NRCPD across the UK, as a Trainee Sign Language Interpreter.

This enables them to undertake certain areas of work such as community and workplace interpreting. Trainee Interpreters should not undertake work in Child Protection, Legal or Mental Health settings.

Qualified interpreters

Once qualified, they can then become a Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI) with the NRCPD or with one of the alternative regulatory bodies, RBSLI or SRLPDC.

The difference between TSLI and RSLI

Registered Sign Language Interpreters (RSLIs) hold a Level 6 qualification in sign language interpreting and a Level 6 qualification in British Sign Language. RSLIs have been assessed against the National Occupational Standards for Interpreting.

Trainee Sign Language Interpreters (TSLIs) are working towards, and therefore have not yet completed, a Level 6 qualification in sign language interpreting and a Level 6 qualification in British Sign Language. TSLIs are assessed against the National Occupational Standards for Trainee Interpreters.

Trainee Sign Language Interpreters (TSLIs) are limited in the range of assignments they can take.

TSLIs should not be employed for assignments that could have an adverse or significant effect to human life, such as legal settings, court, mental health settings and child protection cases.

There are some settings where only RSLIs should be employed, such as legal settings, court, mental health settings and child protection cases.

What do BSL/English interpreters do?

In the simplest form, BSL/English interpreters take a message from a source language, either BSL or spoken English, and reproduce it in the target language, BSL or spoken English.

However, the role of the interpreter is considerably more complex and multi-faceted. BSL and spoken English are not comparable in a grammatical sense and therefore the interpreter must understand not just the words or signs, but the intention, meaning and context to ensure the closest possible message is passed on. A native BSL user can express concepts in one or two signs that take a native English speaker as many as two or three sentences to express.

BSL/English interpreters are also at risk of Upper Limb Disorder, also referred to as Repetitive Strain Injury. More information on ULD can be found here. To ensure that BSL/English interpreters' health and wellbeing is not put at risk, it is essential to consider whether your session will require one or two interpreters. The best person to advise whether this is the case would be the interpreter themselves.

How to work effectively with a BSL Interpreter

Sign language interpreters will help your organisation to improve accessibility and customer service by breaking down barriers between deaf and hearing people. Knowing how to work effectively with a BSL interpreter will help you get the most out of any meetings, appointments, conferences etc. where one or more attendees are deaf.

Sign language interpreters are highly skilled professionals and will have trained for several years before becoming qualified to provide their services to your organisation.

Follow these five tips to get the most out of your experience:

Prepare the interpreter beforehand – You can do this by providing the interpreter with information about the appointment such as attendee name(s), agenda, PowerPoint slides or meeting notes. Providing this information in advance of a meeting will allow an interpreter time to research any specific vocabulary/signs they will likely need to use.

Timing – The interpreter will need additional time to translate what's being said from BSL to English and vice versa. Not allowing enough time could result in inaccurate interpretations.

Your audience – Deaf audience members need to be able to see the speakers and the interpreter. If one of your speakers is deaf, it may be useful to provide the interpreter with a microphone, so the hearing audience members can easily hear the spoken interpretation. Reserve front row or accessible view seating for deaf audience members to ensure the interpreters are visible. Alternatively, you may want to consider the addition of interpreters on-screen where there will be a large audience and front row seats for deaf patrons cannot be guaranteed.

Communicating to a deaf person via an interpreter – Speak directly to the deaf person and make eye contact with them, don't ask interpreters to explain what a deaf person is communicating and don't expect them to do this for you. Don't ask the interpreter to "tell him/her..."

Seating – Don't place either the deaf person or interpreter in front of a window, or too far away, as they won't be able to see clearly.

BSL interpreter are professionals who follow a strict code of conduct. They will never share or leak information, nor will they offer personal views or opinions. During any meetings where an interpreter will be used, there will be no need for you to speak slowly, over pronounce or try to think of simple sentences. It is not appropriate to ask interpreters about their career in any professional setting where their services have been or are being used.

BSL/English Interpreter registers:

When using NRCPD, you can filter for different non-spoken language professionals.

National Register of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People
www.nrcpd.org

Regulatory Body of Sign Language Interpreters & Translators
www.rbsli.org

Association of Sign Language Interpreters
www.asli.org.uk

The Scottish Register of Language Professionals with the Deaf Community
http://www.thescottishregister.co.uk

Other useful links:

Help & Resources - British Deaf Association
http://bda.org.uk/help-resources