
How to use & What is a BSL/English Interpreter

Here we look at the use of BSL/English Interpreters

- What they do and why are they needed?
- Why they should be used
- Where they can be used
- What's expected from you – as a Deaf person or a service provider

So, what does an interpreter do?

Basically – they interpret from one language (the source) to another (the target).

Why are they needed? – can't communication just happen (lip-reading/writing things down etc)

Well, first of all British Sign Language (BSL) is not like spoken English – it is different and at time strikingly different in its grammar, word order etc – it's a 'visual-gestural' language that uses; hands, facial expression, body & head movement etc etc

For example:

In English to write down 'the person stood at the top of the hill' would follow that word order.

Using BSL it will be more visual and most likely what would be 'visualised first would be the 'hill' then the 'person' standing on the top.

This is of course a very simple basic difference – but if you think of how complex language can be – no matter if it's just a short conversation or a full blown discussion on sensitive issues - the differences can be massive.

Communication can easily break-down and people can go away with the wrong message.

You may be asking yourself - **why they should be used?**

Why not write things down and take time ...

For some deaf people writing things down or lip-reading may be possible and effective, however, for those with BSL as their first or preferred language this may not be suitable.

Using an interpreter ensures that accurate information and meaning is passed between **both** parties – remember it's not only Deaf people who need interpreters – it's hearing people as well – communication is a two-way process.



This links to the use of appropriately Registered and trained BSL/English interpreters – make sure the interpreter is registered with either: SASLI (Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters) or NRCDP (National Register of Communication Professionals with Deaf People).

This also leads to ‘expected’ professional behaviour such as code of ethics and conduct, confidentiality, impartiality etc etc

Where can they be used?

You can find interpreters in all situation where communication between Deaf and hearing people may occur – this can be at:

- Meetings
- Employment interviews and meetings
- Medical appointments
- Legal discussion
- Training & education
- Telephone calls
- The list could go on and on

What’s expected from you – as a Deaf person or a service provider?

To assist interpretation to take place there a few guidelines to follow that can be very helpful and make the whole process run smoothly.

For example ...

Try to give as much notice as possible – although increasing, there is still a shortage of BSL/English interpreters around the country.

preparation – if meeting notes/minutes or other information is provided earlier – this means that the interpreter can prepare language/jargon before discussion takes place

If there is many people involved in the discussion please make sure that only one person talks at a time

– this ensures that no important information is missed – which may be crucial to the discussions.

Think about positioning – the interpreter will have to see the deaf person and be able to hear the speaker – this may mean a slight adjustment in seating arrangements. And remember, always look at the Deaf person and not the interpreter – eye contact is important.



If the meeting/discussion is expected to last for more than 2 hours – 2 interpreters would be required – if less, 1 interpreter can manage with the appropriate breaks – remember the process of interpreting is complex and mentally and physically tiring – if no breaks are made available the quality of interpreting may be affected. – and nobody wants that!

For further information on interpreting services please feel free to contact us where we can give you as much information as you require.

Look out for the next 'info-shot' – which will be available by email, our web sites and YouTube channel. If you think of any information that would be appropriate for 'info-shot' please let us know and we will see what we can do.

***We hope you enjoy this 'info-shot' as much as we enjoyed making it.
Please feel free to pass it on to anyone that it might be of interest to***

