



Committee for Ministry of and among Deaf and Disabled People

Working with British Sign Language/English Interpreters

Whenever Deaf people who are BSL signers are present at an event or meeting, you should consider whether to engage BSL/English Interpreter(s). Always ask the Deaf people, if known, what their preferred communication is and what support they need to enable them to attend.

Who are the interpreters?

Generally, interpreters used by the National Church Institutions will be registered with the National Register of Communication Professionals with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). They will carry Personal Indemnity Insurance and will abide by NRCPD's Code of Professional Conduct.

The interpreters may be Registered Sign Language Interpreters (RSLI) or Trainee Sign Language Interpreters (TSLI). People in both categories have been trained to high standards, often on academic courses, and Registered Sign Language Interpreters will hold post-graduate qualifications, or equivalent.

It is highly recommended that only Registered Interpreters are used unless there are clear reasons to use unregistered interpreters.

In many situations, two interpreters are used. This is to protect the health and well-being of the interpreters and the quality and accuracy of the information being communicated. The decision to use two interpreters depends on the duration of the event or meeting and the complexity of the information being shared, not the number of Deaf people attending.

Who is the interpreter for?

Interpreters are present so that the normal relationships between attendees of the event or meeting can take place. The interpreter is there for Deaf people who cannot easily access spoken English *and* for hearing people who cannot sign.

If you are a hearing person, it may be a new experience for you to use an interpreter. The first thing you need to do is relax. Speak in a natural speed and tone of voice. While it may seem odd at first to be communicating through a third person, the process works best if you try to communicate directly with the Deaf person, speaking to them as you would anyone else. Try to maintain eye contact as much as possible, but don't be put off if the Deaf person doesn't always look at you - he or she will be watching the interpreter!

Online meetings

If the meeting is online via Zoom or another platform, then please try to make sure your audio and video is as good as possible. The interpreter will appear in the meeting and he or she needs to be able to hear you clearly and the Deaf person needs to be able to see you

clearly. The Deaf person or people attending the meeting may prefer to speak or use BSL when they contribute. Either way, the interpreter will interpret into BSL or spoken English.

If you are managing the meeting, please ensure the automatic captions are enabled since they may assist Deaf participants to understand what is being said.

The Deaf candidate should be advised to manage their own Zoom settings to enable them to see the interpreter clearly. We do not recommend using “spotlighting” (unless it is a majority Deaf, BSL meeting) but recommend that the Deaf participant “pins” the interpreter if they need to. If you are hosting the meeting on Zoom, this means you will need to give each Deaf person and each interpreter permission to “multi-pin”. That will enable them to see the people they need to see. And continue seeing them when the screen is being shared. Be aware that if “spotlighting” is used during the meeting, all the multi-pinning may be lost and Deaf people and interpreters will need to re-pin each person.

Using the “interpreter” feature on Zoom

Zoom has an “interpreter” facility by which you can allocate the interpreters to a specific space so they are visible on the screen at all times. You can find out more about this here: https://support.zoom.com/hc/en/article?id=zm_kb&sysparm_article=KB0064768 You should note that any local recordings (ie straight to a computer) will not record the interpreter so any recording needs to be made as a cloud recording in order to capture the interpreter.

Preparation

The interpreters will need information to enable them to prepare. They should have access to the programme, any notes for talks, worship, and any PowerPoint slides before the presentation.

If any presenter is using a video clip, check to see if it has subtitles. These may enable the Deaf person to access the clip without an interpreter. If the video is not subtitled, the interpreters will need to see it before it is shown but ideally, a video that is not subtitled shouldn't be used.

Please tell the interpreters about any group exercises or group discussions. They can then work out the best way to interpret these without disrupting the group dynamics too much.

Please make yourself available to talk to the interpreters if they need it. They may have questions about any specialist language and concepts you will be using.

How does it work?

1. BSL is a language that is different from English, with its own syntax and grammar. This means the interpreters will not be transliterating word for word but will be taking units of meaning and interpreting the information in real-time.
2. Interpreters have the responsibility to do their best to interpret all communication. If there is anything you do not wish a Deaf person to know, it is best to take that communication outside of the room or setting. The same is true if the Deaf person is signing something. The interpreter will interpret everything they are saying.
3. The Interpreters will keep all information confidential. This includes information they may know about the Deaf person from other interpreting settings. It is best not to ask the interpreter about the Deaf person. Ask the Deaf person directly and the interpreter will be happy to facilitate the communication.
4. Try not to engage the interpreter in conversation while they are actively interpreting.
5. Before the interpreting begins, discuss with the interpreter and the Deaf person the best positioning arrangements if the meeting is on-site. Care needs to be taken over lighting and sight lines.
6. There is lag time (typically 4-6 seconds) between a speaker and the interpretation. As a result, responses and questions from Deaf participants may be slightly delayed. Interpreters may need to ask you or the Deaf person for clarification on key points. Allowing this to happen enables the interpreters to do their job well.

Finding an interpreter

Sometimes, finding an interpreter can be very easy. The Deaf participant may have someone they recommend and would like you to use. Do check they are registered before booking them.

NRCPD has a database that is searchable by name or location so that is useful. It also enables you to email several interpreters at the same time with one click.

<https://www.nrcpd.org.uk/>

If you need interpreters with specific knowledge of Christian matters or theology, then you can send a request through the Signs of God Christian Interpreters Network by emailing interpreting@signsofgod.org.uk or visiting <https://www.signsofgod.org.uk/pages/contactus> and filling in the form.

Most interpreters work free-lance and so set their own fees. You can find out the average interpreting fee for your area here: <https://www.nubsli.com/guidance/interpreter-fees/>

Communication skills

Everybody can lip read but Deaf people often have to rely on it for normal conversation.

Here are some of the rules of communication to help people who are trying to lip read:

1. Face the Deaf person and make eye contact
2. Speak clearly but don't over emphasise words
3. Speak at a reasonable pace – don't slow down too much or the normal rhythm of speech will be disrupted
4. Don't put anything in front of your face (check that beards are trimmed!)
5. Don't keep repeating the same phrase over and over if the Deaf person hasn't understood it. Think of another way of saying what you are trying to communicate
6. Don't shout! It's pointless!
7. Don't stand with your back to a window or a light.
8. Use some gestures – or, better still, learn some signs.

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