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ACTION ON HEARING LOSS

Training to become a BSL/English interpreter

THE FACTS

Training to become a BSL/English interpreter

This factsheet is part of our **Communications** range. It is written for people who are interested in training to become a British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreter.

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If you would like this factsheet in Braille, large print or audio format, please contact our helpline – see front page for contact details.

What does a BSL/English interpreter do?

A BSL/English interpreter helps sign language users and hearing people to communicate by interpreting from one language to the other. In the UK this will usually be from British Sign Language (BSL) to spoken or written English, or spoken or written English to BSL. Interpreting is a recognised profession and interpreters train for many years. They need a good level of English and relevant qualifications in BSL, and they should have completed approved interpreter training.

BSL/English interpreters are usually used by people who are deaf and whose first or preferred language is BSL, or who use sign-supported English (SSE).

What categories of interpreter registration are there?

National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) oversees the registration of BSL/English interpreters and has two categories of interpreter registration:

- Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI)
- Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI).

To become a TSLI you need to:

- be undertaking an approved course or approved development plan leading to registered status
- be supervised or mentored by an appropriately qualified or experienced RSLI
- provide evidence of your qualifications and demonstrate that you have the appropriate skills to work in the role.

To become an RSLI, you need to achieve a recognised Level 6 BSL qualification and have completed an approved training course (university or vocational) demonstrating that you have reached the level of knowledge and skills needed to meet the National Occupational Standards in Interpreting (NOSI).

Contact NRCPD for more information on approved training courses that lead to registration (see page 9 for contact details).

What qualifications do I need to train as an interpreter?

You will need a number of qualifications to become a BSL/English interpreter.

If you have no sign language skills, you should start your training with BSL Level 1 and BSL Level 2 qualifications offered by a nationally recognised and accredited awarding body such as Signature or Institute of British Sign Language (iBSL).

- The BSL Level 1 course is split into three units and involves a recommended 64-66 hours of guided learning. Learning often takes place over the course of one year, with modular assessments for each unit. Topics covered include meeting people, weather, numbers and directions.

Action on Hearing Loss offers Signature's Level 1 Award in BSL to individuals and businesses. For more information, please contact the Access Solutions team (see page 8).

- The BSL Level 2 course is split into three units with Signature and four units with iBSL and involves a recommended 100 hours of guided learning. Learning often takes place over the course of one year, with modular assessments for each unit. Topics covered include everyday conversation, interests and travel.

You can find out where to do BSL Level 1 and Level 2 courses at your local adult education centre, further education college or library. You can also contact Signature or iBSL for more information (see pages 8-9 for contact details).

How do I train as an interpreter?

You can train as an interpreter through the higher education route or the vocational route. You must ensure that the course you take is approved by NRCPD. Taking an approved course means your study meets recognised standards for training BSL/English interpreters and prepares you for registration as a TSLI or RSLI.

All RSLIs need to demonstrate that they are keeping their skills and knowledge up to date by undertaking continual professional development (CPD) to remain on the register.

The higher education route

There are a few universities in the UK offering undergraduate and postgraduate options for working your way towards becoming an interpreter. These will prepare you for registration with NRCPD as a TSLI or RSLI. Full-time degree courses can last for three to four years but can also be taken part-time.

Contact NRCPD for more information on approved courses and details on how to register (see page 9 for contact details).

The vocational route

You can study Signature or iBSL qualifications at a number of centres across the country (contact our helpline for more information – see front page for contact details). These courses are usually delivered part-time (once or twice a month) over an extended period, and can vary between weekdays or weekends. There will also be a significant amount of home study involved in each of these courses. Once you have successfully completed each level you will normally need time to use and practise what you have been taught on the course before taking the next step.

It is important to check your level of signing before you start any course to ensure that you can make the most of the teaching. Therefore, you will be invited to attend an interview or selection day. If you are ready, you will be offered a place on the course. If you are not ready for the course you have applied for, you will usually be given advice and guidance on how to practise and improve your signing ready for re-assessment.

Below is a table showing the qualifications offered by Signature and iBSL.

Signature	iBSL
Level 3 NVQ Certificate in BSL This course is usually split into two parts. The first part teaches you the necessary language skills for Level 3. In the second part you will build a portfolio of written and video evidence to demonstrate your ability to receive and produce BSL at Level 3. Note: there have been several changes to the Signature Level 3 qualifications over the last few years. If you have achieved the Level 3 NVQ in BSL or the Level 3 Certificate in BSL, you don't need this new qualification.	**Level 3 Certificate in BSL Studies** This course consists of three units and involves 150 hours of guided learning. Your receptive and productive skills and knowledge of BSL linguistics at Level 3 will be assessed in a coursework file and then a further 'live' assessment will be done in front of the external examiner.
Level 4 in BSL Not currently offered – There are plans to introduce this qualification in September 2014. For more information, please contact Signature.	**Level 4 Certificate in BSL Studies** This course comprises of three units and involves 150 hours of guided learning. Your receptive and productive skills and knowledge of BSL linguistics at Level 4 will be assessed in a coursework file and then a further 'live' assessment will be done in front of the external examiner.
Level 6 NVQ Certificate in BSL This course is usually split into two parts. The first part teaches you the necessary language skills for Level 6. In the second part you will build a portfolio of written and video evidence to demonstrate your ability to receive and produce BSL at Level 6.	**Level 6 Certificate in BSL Studies** In the process of being approved. For more information contact iBSL.
Level 6 NVQ Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting This course is usually split into two parts. The first part will introduce you to the theoretical and practical skills and knowledge required to be able to interpret a live interaction between BSL and English.	**Level 6 Diploma in Interpreting Studies** In the process of being approved. For more information contact iBSL.

This course can be started once you have Level 4 signing skills; your learning provider will be able to assess you to determine whether you are at an appropriate level to start the course. In the second part you will build a portfolio of written and video evidence of your ability to interpret at Level 6. If you successfully complete this qualification, you will: • have reached the level of knowledge and skills needed to meet the National Occupational Standards in Interpreting (NOSI) • be able to apply to NRCPD to register as a Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI). You will need to undertake continual professional development (CPD) to remain on the register.	

For more information about the structure and content of these courses, please get in touch with the relevant awarding body – you can find contact details on pages 8-9.

Understanding the deaf community and deaf culture

Language and culture are closely linked, so students of BSL also need to learn about deaf culture and the deaf community. This is normally learnt informally and through reading.

Students should have direct social contact with people who are deaf; for example, by visiting deaf clubs. Some deaf clubs organise ‘communication clubs’ for people who want to practise signing. Our helpline can give you details of your nearest deaf club (see front page).

Students should also read about the deaf community and deaf culture. Our library, based at UCL, is a very useful source of information if you live in or near London. Or you can borrow books through your local library with the inter-library loan scheme. You can also buy books on deafness and deaf issues from our shop and from Forest Books. See page 8 for contact details.

What employment opportunities are there for interpreters?

Interpreters work in a variety of different settings. You may be asked to work in social services departments, places of work, universities, hospitals or GP surgeries, or at meetings and conferences – in fact, anywhere a person who is deaf and uses BSL needs to communicate with hearing people. You may be employed full- or part-time to provide communication services to staff or clients.

Working as a freelance interpreter

A lot of interpreters work on a freelance basis and accept bookings through interpreting agencies. NRCPD offers free online access to its register of communication professionals (CPs). The register.includes details of availability, qualifications and catchment area. It also includes details of registered sign language translators, lipspeakers, interpreters for deafblind people, speech-to-text reporters and notetakers.

Interpreters working in Scotland can contact the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (see page 9).

What funding is available for training?

Funding for training is always a difficult question. Opportunities for funded places do happen occasionally, usually in order to fill a geographical gap in the provision of communication professionals. One way of finding out about these is by monitoring deaf forums, such as Deaf UK Jobs. There is usually a strict set of criteria in order to be eligible for the funding.

The government also provides some options on the gov.uk website. There is information about grants and loans available to adult learners. You must ensure that you read the information carefully to find out if you, your course and your learning provider are eligible. In the case of the loans that are offered, please ensure you understand how and when repayments are made.

Where can I get further information?

Action on Hearing Loss

We offer a wide range of information on many aspects of hearing loss. Contact our helpline to find out about our full range of free factsheets and leaflets – see front page for contact details – or visit www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets

Action on Hearing Loss – Access Solutions
Aeroworks, 5 Adair Street, Manchester M1 2NQ
Tel/ textphone 0161 276 2319
access.solutions@hearingloss.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss and UCL Ear Institute Library
The library is open to the public and provides reference and enquiry services to anybody conducting research connected with deafness, hearing or ENT medicine.
Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital, 330-336 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1X 8EE
Tel/ textphone 020 7915 1553 Fax 020 7915 1443
rnidlib@ucl.ac.uk www.ucl.ac.uk/library/rnidlib.shtml

Other organisations

Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI)
The professional association and support network for sign language interpreters in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
Fortuna House, South Fife Street, Milton Keynes MK9 2EU
Tel/ textphone 0871 474 0522 Fax 01908 32 52 59
office@asli.org.uk www.asli.org.uk

Forest Books
Specialises in books, DVDs and CD-ROMs on deaf issues.
Unit 2, New Building, Ellwood Road, Milkwall, Coleford GL16 7LE
Tel/ textphone 01594 833 858 Videophone 01594 810 637 Fax 01594 833 446
forest@forestbooks.com www.forestbooks.com

Institute of British Sign Language (iBSL)
Awarding body for British Sign Language courses around the UK.
11-13 Wilson Patten Street, Warrington WA1 1PG
Telephone 01925 632463
admin@ibsl.org.uk www.ibsl.org.uk

National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD)

Holds the national registers of BSL/English interpreters and other communication professionals in the UK.

c/o Mersey House, Mandale Business Park, Belmont, Durham DH1 1TH

Telephone 0191 383 1155 Textphone 0191 383 7915 Fax 0191 383 7914

enquiries@nrcpd.org.uk www.nrcpd.org.uk

Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI)

Manages the list of registered sign language interpreters in Scotland.

Baltic Chambers, Suite 317-319, 50 Wellington Street, Glasgow G2 6HJ

Tel/ textphone 0131 347 5601 Fax 0131 347 5628

mail@sasli.org.uk www.sasli.org.uk

Signature

Awarding body for British and Irish Sign Language courses around the UK. It publishes information about interpreter training programmes and exams.

Mersey House, Mandale Business Park, Belmont, Durham DH1 1TH

Telephone 0191 383 1155 Textphone 0191 383 7915 Fax 0191 383 7914

durham@signature.org.uk www.signature.org.uk

We welcome your feedback

If you have any comments or suggestions relating to this factsheet, please email reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk

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