

NUBSLI evidence for the market review of British Sign Language and communications provision for people who are deaf or have hearing loss – Translation and Translators

Translators and Translation - An explanation of terms:

Interpreting and translating are used as interchangeable terms. However they relate to different activities, skills and competencies.

Interpreting means working between languages as they are spoken or signed, e.g. a Deaf OT meeting with a hearing patient.

Translating means working to and from languages that are recorded, e.g. from an English autocue to recorded BSL for the news.

Interpreters as part of their work, particularly in employment (often ATW funded) will often do 'sight translation' and/or short pieces of translation between BSL and written English.

An example of sight translation would be translating an email with a Deaf BSL user, i.e. working from written English to live BSL.

Sight translation and translation require Level 6 fluency and skills (e.g. Level 6 NVQ Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting, unit INT6E1, Support sign language interpreting through sight translations of routine written documents)

NUBSLI has been told of Access to Work providing CSWs, who are not also qualified as interpreters, for office interpreting, on the basis that what is required is mainly communicating emails and other written information. This demonstrates a misunderstanding of the degree of skills required to do this work adequately.

Translation is also done for the media and for websites to publication standard. Translation done in this way is often from autocue to BSL, filmed in a recording studio. This requires specialist skills, e.g. Level 6 Diploma in Sign Language Translation.

NUBSLI's evidence

NUBSLI asked our members if they did *"translation work as a specific job role (rather than just as part of normal interpreting practice ...)"*.

25 respondents (of the 250 who took part in the survey) answered yes, of whom 3 are Deaf interpreters / translators and 22 hearing, 1 is a Sign Language Translator (SLT) and 1 a Trainee SLT (TSLT). 12 work as staff for a translation company, and 14 are freelance or work for their own company, including the 3 Deaf respondents.

Whilst the question was intended to exclude interpreters who do translation simply as part of their day-to-day interpreting work, some misread and still answered the question. As they raised issues relevant to the market review their comments have been included here.

NUBSLI evidence for the market review of British Sign Language and communications provision for people who are deaf or have hearing loss – Translation and Translators

“... there is little understanding ... that translating into written English is much more nuanced and time consuming than simply producing a voice over ...”

“People often do not appreciate that preparing a detailed translation from BSL to written English is much more time consuming than providing a live, spoken interpretation.”

“Translation is an important aspect of access to information for sign language users and receives very little attention.”

“Those clients that ... understand the skilled and detailed nature of the job ... are prepared to pay for it.”

“[Translation is simply] part of the normal Access to Work day”.

These responses (and other feedback from members to NUBSLI) illustrate that there is a lack of understanding of what translation means. The widespread belief that translation between written English and BSL is not a specialist skill, and is easier or quicker than live interpreting has an impact on the procurement and provision of translation work in the following ways:

(1) The failure to understand that translation to the standard required for the public domain takes considerable time, means that people are underpaid and/or the work has to be done at a pace that does not allow for meaningful translation.

“[I] would love for work to be monitored somehow - but costs can be an issue for clients.”

(2) The lack of understanding that translation is a specific professional skill means that it is sometimes assumed, particularly by Access to Work advisers in awarding support for Deaf customer, that it can or should be done by a Communication Support Worker, even though CSWs have no minimum language skill requirements and are not trained in interpreting or translation¹. Current ATW guidance does not contain any information about the skills required for translation. It would help advisers if this was remedied.

(3) A subtle but important impact is that because of the lack of understanding of what is required, and the distance between the translator and procurer though using agencies, procurement of translation work often results in pressure on translators to do work quickly, without full understanding of the intended message, resulting in translations that prima facie appear accessible, but in fact do not offer real access. It would be useful for the government to review the procurement process with translators and customers.

¹ Excluding those few CSWs who are also qualified interpreters.