



Survey of BSL Interpreters' Working Conditions

Contents:

Executive summary	3
Methodology & Findings (Q1 & 2)	4
Findings (Q3 & 4)	5
Findings (Q5 & 6)	6
Findings (Q7 & 8)	7
Findings (Q9)	8
Findings (Q10 & 11)	10
Conclusion	10
Recommendations	11
Acknowledgements & Thanks	11
Appendix (Q7)	12
Appendix (Q9)	19
Appendix (Q11)	26

Survey of BSL Interpreter's Working Conditions

Executive Summary:

This survey was produced to give a more accurate view of the state of the BSL interpreting profession today. Anecdotally we have heard that some professionals feel as a career, interpreting is no longer sustainable. The aim of this piece of work was to assess whether this was the common view amongst interpreters/translators.

The survey has produced some cause for concern. Just under half of the profession took part (there are approximately 1,100 NRCPD registered interpreters). Notably that of the 485 interpreters that participated, almost half (48%) are stating that they definitely or might be leaving the profession. Only 43% said they were not thinking of leaving.

Of the respondents who expressed a desire to leave or were thinking about it:

- 93% were qualified.
- 49% had over 10 years experience.
- 15% had over 20 years experience.

Of those thinking of, or that are leaving 82% state a reason as being the future of the profession is uncertain.

Of those stating they do not have or sometimes do not have enough work, 56% say agencies do not pay sustainable rates.

These results are very worrying and should not be ignored. The effect of potentially losing half the workforce, particularly those with the most experience, would leave access for the Deaf community in a precarious position.

Background:

The National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters (NUBSLI) is a newly formed branch of Unite. Established in May, 2014, the branch now represents approximately 25% of the profession.

NUBSLI undertook a survey of BSL interpreters (both members and non-members) to ascertain the current state of the profession. The drive was partly to look at the effects that the past eighteen months have had, in light of the problems with Access to Work, but also to look at the future prospects for our industry.

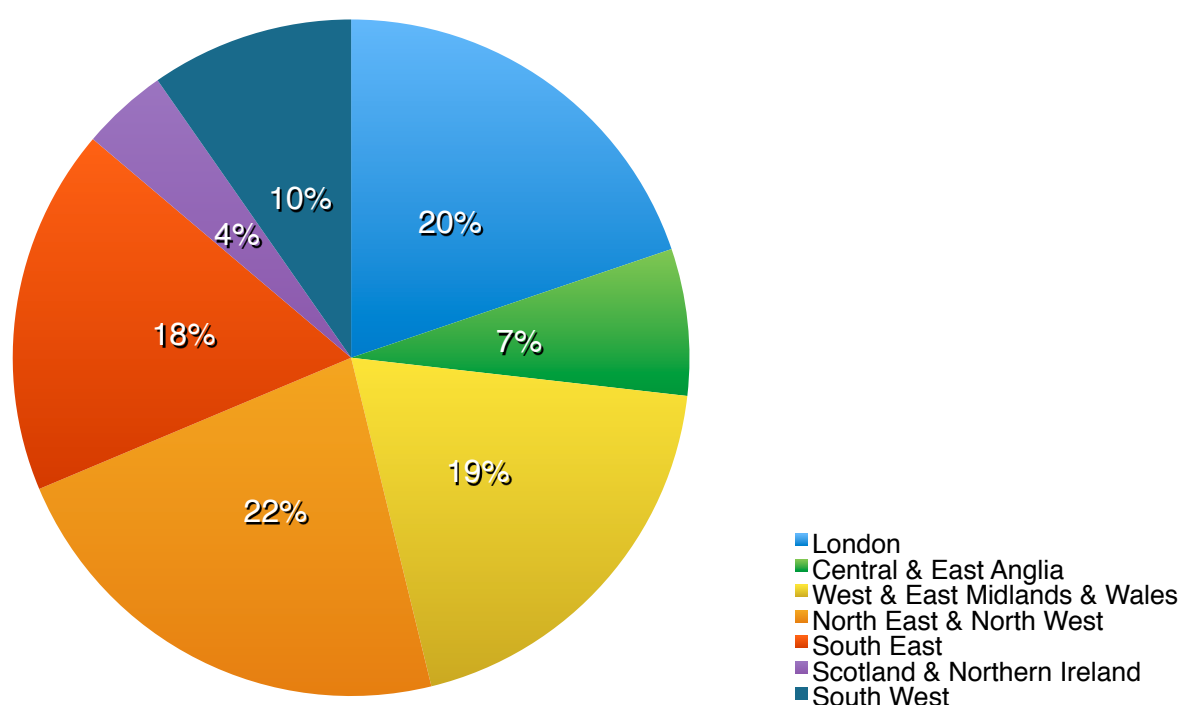
We hope that the survey findings will help us identify areas of concern and look at ways that we can come together with our professional organisations (ASLI, SASLI & VLP) to resolve these where possible. This includes consulting with government bodies and agencies, and sharing this information with Deaf organisations whose members this directly affects.

Methodology:

The online survey was sent out to interpreters via various channels including NUBSLI, ASLI, VLP and the e-Newsli e-group and used SurveyMonkey. Interpreters were given a window of approximately three weeks in which to complete this (10th December 2014 - 2nd January 2015). There are approximately 1,100 NRCPD registered interpreters in the UK: roughly half, 485 individuals, participated.

Findings:

Question 1: Which region do you live in?



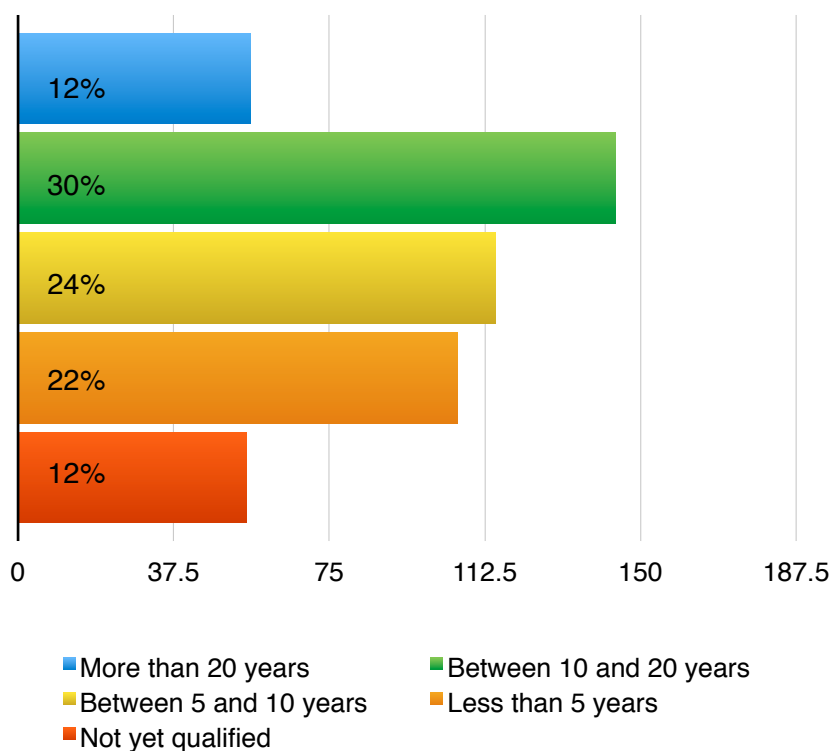
Question 2: Are you:

A Qualified Interpreter	83.5% (398)
A Trainee Interpreter*	12% (59)
A BSL Translator or Deaf Interpreter	0.5% (1)
A CSW/Signer	4% (17)

* On an Interpreter Development Programme



Question 3: How many year's experience do you have post qualification?



Question 4: Do you work:



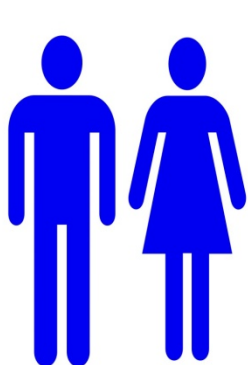
Full time 61% (286)

Part time 35% (166)

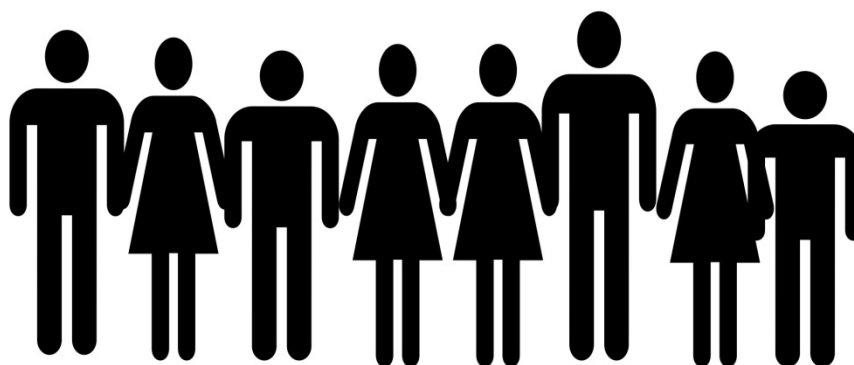
I am an interpreter but I mostly work in other roles e.g. Academic/training 3.5% (17)

I no longer work as an interpreter/CSW/signer 0.5% (2)

Question 5: Do you have other paid work that is nothing to do with interpreting?



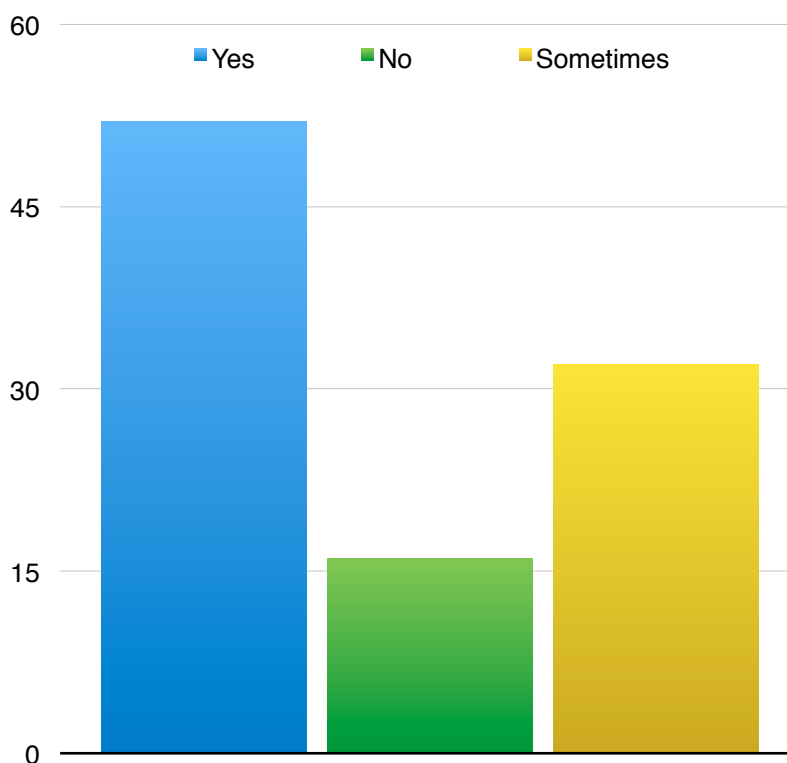
Yes 19% (91)



No 81% (377)

Question 6: In a typical working week, do you have enough work as a BSL interpreter?

Yes	52% (236)
No	16% (72)
Sometimes	32% (146)



Question 7: If you do NOT have enough work (you answered No or Sometimes to Q.6), why do you think this is? Tick all that apply.

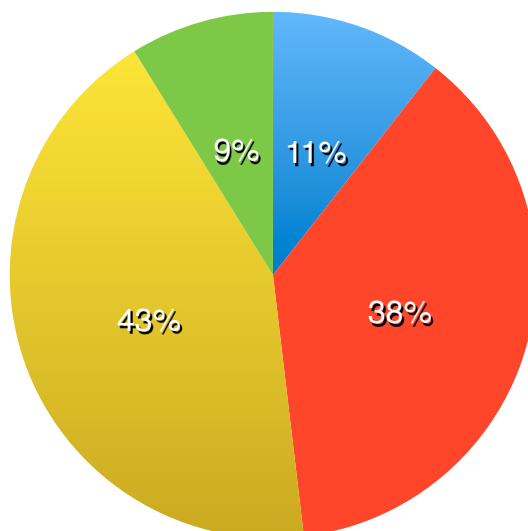


Please see appendix for comments given under 'other' on page 13.

Question 8: Are you thinking about, or will you be, leaving the profession?



■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ No ■ I don't know



Question 9: If Yes or Maybe to Question 8, why are you thinking of leaving? (Tick all that apply).

I would like a change of career	17% (38)
I do not have enough work	30% (66)
My earnings / hours have decreased	46% (102)
The future of the BSL interpreting profession is uncertain	82% (182)
I do not like working for agencies	28% (61)
NRCPD is not an independent regulator (from Signature)	35% (77)
I feel unsupported by organisations	30% (66)
The profession is too fractured	46% (101)
I have been ill	1% (3)
I am retiring anyway	5% (10)
Other (Please specify)	52 responses.

The most common themes of responses were poor practices of agencies, payment issues, not being valued as a professional or respected as an individual, no recognition from Deaf organisations or individuals and problems with Access to Work (comments can be seen in the appendix on page 20).



I do a lot of Access to Work funded work and have undergone serious payment issues.

I would suggest that those who wish to downgrade our skills and professionalism are short sighted in the extreme and, quite honestly, ignorant.

Too many national and multi-national generic agencies/ private businesses are jumping on the BSL bandwagon as they see it as a way of gaining more market share even though they have no specialism in this area. They win big contracts by promising a cheaper bottom line with no concern about quality and services to Deaf people, the only way to sustain this is to reduce what they pay interpreters and use under-qualified individuals.

Instead of being a self-employed individual I am just a commodity to the agencies. Further they do not value my knowledge and experience and are simply interested in driving down prices and payments, presumably to increase their own profits.

Once the framework agreement rolls out, I am certain I will have many, many more gaps in my diary.

Agencies milked the Access to Work cow. They have done very well out of it and remain unchallenged.

I find the whole issue demoralising and upsetting, and I'm not sure I have enough fight left in me to continue, so if I left interpreting, it would be because I had been pushed out by having my rates slashed.

From what I've seen, NUBSLI seem to be one of the few organisations who are actually representing my views as an interpreter and taking proactive action on the various issues the profession faces.

Question 10: If you are leaving the profession, what steps have you already taken?

I am already looking for alternative work	11% (34)
I already do alternative work part-time or voluntarily	17% (54)
I am retraining in or studying for another career	7% (22)
I am researching other careers currently	36% (113)
I am not planning to leave the profession	45% (142)

Question 11: Is there anything else you want to add?

We had 130 comments. These ranged from comments on pay and concerns over the future, to problems with agencies charging clients double the interpreter's fee and monopolies within the market. Issues around training and being expected or pressurised to work outside your capabilities were expressed by a number of trainee interpreters. Feelings of isolation and not feeling valued were also a common theme.

There was concern over the driving down of standards, seen with Access to Work bookings and other areas, and the effect this was having on the Deaf community.

The lack of career progression is a common thread. The level of training required to become an interpreter and the lack of recognition from government and agencies whose goal is to reduce cost was another.

There were a lot of complaints about some interpreter organisations and the National Register, NRCPD. People felt there was a lack of support and were angry about the behaviour of these organisations. The comments have been included in full in the appendix (page 27).

Conclusions:

This survey has shown that BSL interpreters are experiencing a time of uncertainty. There is little job security and concerns over fees and sustainability are growing.

The framework agreement is a cause for concern and there are general feelings that interpreters are being used by agencies and are undervalued for their knowledge and skill.

A large percentage are at a point where they are either definitely or maybe leaving the profession.

One very clear message from interpreters is how much they enjoy their job and their commitment to providing the best service they can to the Deaf community they serve.

Recommendations:

- The government consults interpreting organisations, other service provider organisations and unions including NUBSLI and NUPIT and Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) on **quality, standards and independent regulation**. Organisations consulted must be independent of any other bodies, with **advice being sought separate from supply**.
- The government consults with interpreter organisations around **fees and working conditions** to ensure framework agreements and contracts are **set at sustainable rates** thereby minimising the **risk of experienced interpreters leaving the profession**.
- The government conducts **full and proper public consultations with the Deaf community and BSL Interpreting professionals**.
- Deaf organisations to work with NUBSLI to run an **interpreting awareness campaign**, to improve the image deaf people have of interpreters.
- **Interpreters continue to join NUBSLI** to strengthen representations made to government.
- Interpreters continue to **use the minimum fees guidance** to ensure all interpreters are paid at sustainable rates.
- Key **organisations look at membership engagement** and what can be done to improve support for interpreters.
- **Agencies support NUBSLI's minimum fee guidance** and pay interpreters sustainable rates.
- **Agencies do not bid for contracts at unsustainable rates**.

Acknowledgements & Thanks:

We would like to acknowledge the support we have received from Unite's research team in creating this survey.

We would also like to thank everyone who participated. This piece of research has seen one of the highest response rates by the profession. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.



Unite the Union
Unite House
128 Theobald's Road
Holborn
WC1 8TN

Appendix

Question 7.

If you do NOT have enough work (you answered No or Sometimes to Q.6), why do you think this is?

There were 63 comments left under other:

1) As a trainee interpreter I feel that a lot of the work offered to me should be carried out by fully qualified and more experienced interpreters, so therefore I do not accept the work. I am worried that as I am offered the work as a registered trainee then it is possible that the most appropriate interpreters are not being used for many of the assignments offered.

2) Loss of ATW clients

3) Over the last year there have been periods where there seems to be less work available but this varies. Certain domains of work are no longer available because the service has been contracted out to agencies who pay less than my usual fees. Another factor is there seem to be more short notice bookings rather than in advance, compared to previous years. This makes planning a working week more difficult.

4) Sometimes I feel there is less work but sometimes I feel this is the perception because bookings are made much less in advance than previously. There are more last minute requests.

5) It's good to have more qualified interpreters, but instead of raising interpreting standards/expectations as a result of having more qualified SLIs AtW/agencies/organisations and individuals are picking below the qualified bar which leaves qualified interpreters without enough work. Usually it seems the reason being it's a cheaper option to book below trainee/qualified level rather than seeing the final cost as a sign of expertise/experience/quality assurance.

6) Number of newly qualified interpreters in the area and from surrounding areas coming into the region for work due to lack of work in surrounding areas. Some willing to accept lesser rates. Agencies texting out work and filling assignments with cheaper options rather than taking into account the interpreter's knowledge and experience.

7) Being undercut by other interpreters, even though I charge the lowest within our pay range. I have not increased my fees for 5 years

8) Agencies/organisations often book the cheapest interpreters/signers to keep costs down due to lack of funding and ATW cuts.

9) Contracts have been taken off local agencies and handed to large corporate agencies that book any Tom, Dick or Fanny, from miles away etc because those 'interpreters' have registered directly with them. Us qualifieds that have moral in our bodies choose not to

register with them hence the work disappears from us. also A certain person in my area, qualified a year or so ago and whenever they are booked (which they go out to services, hunting down work) they send in their family members (spouse, children etc etc who have learned to sign but not to interpret) to do the work. They have monopolised the work in my direct area. This perpetrator has withdrawn from NRCPD so we are at a loss for what to do. Hence,, work in my area is grim. Seriously thinking of running away and opening a gift shop.

10) Some of the work - I cannot say most of it - goes to trainees, CSWs and signers

11) Due to cuts in AtW money, I no longer get a full day's work so must grab 3 hour slots here and there. Most of my clients cannot afford my rates now, which are £30 per hour (Minimum 3 hour call out), plus 45p per mile travel.

12) Many of the available assignments are for medical domain and I am not suitably experienced.

13) AtW have capped the hourly rates and are not paying travelling expenses.

14) I'm not sure. I can be a bit picky, but it just seems to be that there are less offers coming in!

15) Much of my regular work through local BSL agencies has been tendered out to national providers with untenable conditions. I am now working predominantly in Education, although health is my preferred/most skilled domain. The majority of my work was once in Manchester and Oldham. I no longer work these areas at all as I refuse to be bullied down.

16) I usually get informed of assignments from agencies by text. 99% if the time, even if I reply immediately, the job has already been taken. One particular local agency only ever contacts me on the day of the assignment, which is always too short notice, and it's fairly clear that I'm being used as a last resort. This particular agency has a reputation for providing unqualified interpreters, regardless of assignment. Over the past few years fees have been systematically lowered and lowered, often jobs are offered for a fixed fee including travel, and the time and expense I would incur travelling to and from the assignment makes it not worthwhile. Also agencies in general book interpreters according to the cheapest, irrespective of qualification or suitability for the assignment. On one occasion I was a participant in a meeting. A trainee interpreter had been booked for the meeting by an agency. The trainee explained that she had only ever worked before in one-to-one settings, and this was her first meeting. I ended up having to take over the interpretation as the trainee was overwhelmed by the assignment and became so upset and embarrassed she had to leave. The main issue is that agencies in general are not competent in understanding what skills are required for particular interpreting assignments, and base their criteria for booking 'interpreters' purely on finance.

17) Due to contracts being awarded to large agencies that have unacceptable Terms & Conditions I am restricted in the fields in which I choose to work. I now rarely do medical and legal work and am almost entirely reliant on Access to Work clients.

18) A few qualified interpreters in the area are happy to accept T&C's and less pay from agencies. It appears that agencies who advertise to many appear to go with the cheaper option.

19) Summer holidays etc

20) For a Deaf interpreter there isn't many bookings out there. Or if there is, it is usually gone by a system of first come first served and best priced.

21) Sometimes the agencies won't pay travel, saying it is down to Access to Work agreements, I won't consume all this cost. Jobs go out, but get booked up very quickly, so I assume there are lots of interpreters out there waiting to get the work, whether they are qualified or not I don't know.

22) The booker re-books interpreters who have interpreted for the service user previously. I will be qualified 3 years in February. I feel that more experienced interpreters are used and are given first preference for jobs. I receive texts for jobs and reply that I am available and within minutes I get a text back saying that job is already covered. During July and August there is very little work about.

23) There is a real drive to push down our fees at every opportunity. It is rare when I can accept a booking, quote my standard fee and travel, and not have to haggle with the person or the Agency. I am very aware that the 2-hour minimum is becoming the norm in many areas - but this is unsustainable for me, as a morning job and an afternoon job would mean I am only being paid 4 hours per day, and it is rare that 3 bookings DO come along which dovetail in terms of time and travel - and which wouldn't leave me too tired to deliver a proper service. On top of that, in our local area, Deaf people are hugely disempowered and there is no history of the community campaigning for better access etc. so Deaf people will frequently tell me stories of not getting interpreters at hospital / GP / for social services appointments and so on - or that they have somebody "who didn't have very good signing" used instead of an interpreter. There are also examples of clients not wanting to pay for two interpreters, even when this is good practice, there is precedent and clear reason why one interpreter would result in poorer service - you have to argue and present the case each and every time; it's exhausting and completely demoralising.

24) I avoid working for some agencies as I do not like the t& C's. Another (hearing) agency is a very slow payer and do not need the added stress and time needed to chase up my payments. I am no longer registered with NRCPD as I cannot commit myself to the CPD that is required throughout the year. I think this is just plain wrong. An agency based in the Midlands has the contract to provide interpreters at the Manchester hospitals. I don't like the T &C's. Also as I am not NRCPD they say they cannot book me.

25) Agencies have secured contracts and use in-house interpreters to fill the jobs. Very little is subcontracted to freelance interpreters. Other agencies in surrounding counties are quoting an all inclusive fee of £75, which I cannot afford to accept as the jobs are 40+ miles round-trip plus parking, the job itself would mean I'm working for a lot less than I'm worth.

26) At least two local authority agencies allegedly use CSW's for their bookings because they're cheaper. Spoken language agencies have been procured for public sector bookings, their rates are pants. AtW have reduced hours/rates for some of the deaf employed/self employed people so they can't book me as much as they used to and struggle in their jobs. Part of it is self-inflicted in that I don't work in legal/police or mental health work. One specialist sub-contracted agency that deal with legal/police work (along with other bookings) behave in a bullying way to their freelancers and employ spectacularly incompetent administrators so I couldn't work with them any longer. They also pay low rates and even told me a year or so ago that they make more profit from HE bookings yet, when I stepped forward for some HE bookings, they were paying even less. Enough is enough for my own mental health so I dropped them.

27) There are far fewer requests from agencies or online portals such as BSL Beam than there ever used to be. I am unsure of the cause, more interpreters or less work (or perhaps a combination of the two). Unless you have 'regular' clients via ATW bookings, there is definitely not enough work to sustain full-time employment.

28) Agencies work on favoritism I feel Too many jobs at the same time and not enough at other times. Far too many last minute (on the day) bookings. Agencies under cutting offering £80 inclusive for bookings or less. Verbal booking but not sending confirmation until later or resulting in cancelation as it was only verbal. Using SIGNERS rather than interpreters.

29) Travel to London is too expensive unless it is for a full day, but even then agencies will not cover this cost.

30) Majority of bookings are taken by the more experienced interpreters . Deaf prof use their preferred interpreters. Deaf community are not given enough information/ or options to be informed they can use interpreters NOT family members . Unfortunately it's a vicious circle for interpreters like me. I will not take bookings if I'm not experienced enough(due to the experienced interpreters / some deaf people) judging you and talking negatively in the community about interpreters who attempt to gain experience in situations they have not yet worked in. These comments result in some interpreters not getting booked. Furthermore not getting experience in domains.

31) Agencies are not always willing to provide sufficient information regarding the assignment prior to accepting the booking. As a TSLI I cannot appropriately assess my competence for an assignment so err on the side of caution and decline work.

32) I apply to Agencies for lots of work but am more often than not refused it because my rates are too high and my T&C's don't align to theirs.

33) I've recently moved to Liverpool from the North Wales area. I've found both areas have very different problems: Liverpool seems to have an abundance of interpreters. Whereas there are not enough in North Wales and deaf people are used to not getting interpreting provision and do not know their rights to access.

- 34) I think it is a combination of many more qualified and trainee interpreters in my local area and Deaf people being made redundant. Deaf people are struggling to get jobs and keep jobs. Local FE colleges do not employ interpreters and there appear to be less Deaf people in HE.
- 35) Agencies control all the work. I am a VLP member not ASLI. The major agency here is an ASLI pool. When I have co worked down here it has only been with Trainees.
- 36) Once I send in my quote agencies tend to try and lower this. It is often not feasible to travel to given the cost they will pay.
- 37) Although I've only ticked one of the above, I suspect that work going to cheaper people (be they CSWs or trainees) may also be a factor. Difficult to say for certain as agencies will not volunteer such information.
- 38) Agencies no longer go for quality. They go for the cheapest. None of my jobs pay the going rate. The most bizarre thing is that trainees and CSWs either get paid the same as me or more. This has happened once too often and no one no where is doing anything about it. I'm tired of repeating myself these past five years. I get my work from trainees and CSWs who are overwhelmed with work. Qualified Interpreters no longer share the work that used to happen in the past.
- 39) I am still a trainee and I feel that I am missing out on some work as a result of this.
- 40) People's AtW hours and rates have been cut and many Deaf clients are unable to pay for interpreters.
- 41) I do not enjoy interpreting as a career.
- 42) Generally, bookings come out and they are first come first serve they do not look at interpreters skill and there qualification. There are a decent amount of fully qualified interpreters in my area which makes more competition as well as agencies using people who are trainee over qualified or people who are level 3.
- 43) I lost 4 out of 5 days work due to Access to Work budget cuts so even though I am a Trainee Interpreter and need to build on my experience in September I decided to accept work in Further Education as a Student Support Worker/BSL Communicator. It took me about a year to build up a small regular client base, traveling to Essex and Surrey and occasionally London for work; I live in Brighton but work is hard to come by as a TI (quite rightly) as there are some well established experienced RSLI's available. It became nonviable to continue working for my AtW clients out of area at their reduced budget, £18.19 per hour; I worked for a couple of months at the lower rates as I was aware they had no one else to fulfill the bookings at the rate offered and waited 3 months for payment but I couldn't sustain this reduction in salary/income.
- 44) Interpreters in my area are undercutting each other in an effort to secure work. I'm highly experienced with a raft of qualifications but unless I'm prepared to work for the same rate as those who qualified just very recently, I'm squeezed out.

45) We used to be inundated with work as a whole. Since contracts have been taken over by corporate foreign language agencies, work has rapidly reduced. We used to get between 5-8 calls per day via BSL Agencies, now we are lucky if we get 1 -2 calls per week. Nobody seems to know why. Deaf people are still around so who is the work going to?

46) I have a full-time salaried position for an agency that has been awarded contracts to serve. There are too many interpreters in my area though to all sustain a living and this is not the fault of any government or other institution; this is down to individual choices about where to live and what work they would wish to do. More interpreters have qualified in this area without understanding that there are not suddenly any more Deaf people than there have been before and there is no increase in demand for interpreting services.

47) The amount and type of work that is requested now has decreased and is of a different nature - - very few ATW bookings as Deaf people are either not in work or do not access ATW for staff meetings etc (lower paid jobs so not regular bookings) - Health appointments are the bulk of the requests but this has undergone a change in contractors so being ironed out at the moment - no first aid courses / training/ developmental courses that used to be a regular request 7 plus years ago. - There are more interpreters around so there is more competition for the work.

48) Some agencies have taken over contracts in home areas and I'm no longer able to get local work from that agency as they use cheaper interpreters

49) Much of my work was ATW related. Quite a few of my clients have had their ATW budgets reduced or lost their jobs. Those who are well qualified but currently out of work are really struggling to even get to interview stage and even if they do will probably struggle to get ATW costs agreed at an appropriate rate (many ATW advisers are setting budgets far too low - i.e. at CSW rates rather than interpreter rates). My University client has had such a lot of problems with her Disabled Student's Allowance that she has dropped her course with only one year left. I used to get offered some medical bookings but they are under an Agency contract and I believe are now being assigned to a handful of interpreters rather than being broadcast to a wider group. I've also heard that some work is being given to trainees or those with not much experience who are charging less than the going rate. There is much debate about what the going rate should be - my fee has not increased this since 2009, but my income has decreased drastically in the last few years. I now work part-time but still have to pay all the same costs (registration, training etc) as when I was full-time. I'm considering re-training to enter a different profession.

50) It seems there are more in house interpreters. Jobs go very quickly after they are emailed / texted. A lot of jobs are for court / legal work.

51) We have a local interpreter who has a scooter and seems to scoop up all the small jobs - often arriving late and leaving early to get to his next job. Unfortunately the deaf people will only complain to other interpreters and not to the agency or the commissioning service. I suspect he undercuts the rest of us and has been known to take the agency managers out for coffee to discuss "business".

- 52) Some agencies prefer the cheaper option of booking trainee interpreters. Some spoken language agencies book unqualified personnel to save costs. Some agencies are very slow at paying invoices 5 to 6 months wait therefore many qualified interpreters are not willing to work for them so they resort to booking less experienced or unqualified interpreters / CSWs.
- 53) ATW cuts
- 54) Bookings available are not always appropriate for me to take which limits the work I can accept.
- 55) I am new to the profession so I am a bit picky of what jobs I accept.
- 56) Interpreters accepting sub-standard rates of pay & conditions are traveling into our area from Wales for work.
- 57) Changes to ATW have created problems. I have lost an ATW contract after 3 1/2 years. Which means I have lost £1,000 of income a month. The work has gone to a CSW. Also, more interpreting agencies are asking for us to reduce our rates. Everyone appears to be choosing the cheapest rate over the quality and experience of the interpreter.
- 58) Some agencies that have the NHS contract don't share the work fairly and they book interpreters out of the area!
- 59) Organisations will not book and pay for an interpreter; some interpreters have contacted organisations and offer special rates if they are booked; interpreters covering a regular booking for you and then 'take' the work on themselves; interpreters are only booked in the region they live in, as AtW or organisations, etc will not cover travel expenses
- 60) Too many interpreters - mostly under qualified coming into London and taking work. Health sector don't pay my rates and therefore I won't do Health work. Others might be the same and agencies find there are not enough interpreters and then the work goes to those who charge list rates and stack up the appointments throughout the day.
- 61) I am increasingly finding that I'm competing for work with qualified interpreters coming in from outside the area. They are prepared to travel here for jobs that still pay a decent rate, as payment for much of the work in their home areas has already been drastically cut.
- 62) As a Trainee I can only accept what are within my limitations.
- 63) There are two interpreting agencies in Oxfordshire where I live. Both agencies employ several in-house interpreters (9 each) and so there is very little work for freelancers. I have to travel a long way to get work outside of Oxfordshire.

Question 9.

If Yes or Maybe to Question 8, why are you thinking of leaving? (Tick all that apply).

There were 52 comments left in the 'other' section:

- 1) Although I love interpreting I do not feel there is enough support for trainee interpreters. I feel more job shadowing/support should be available. Although I am close to completing my interpreting qualification I do still not feel confident enough to take on a lot of the interpreting jobs that are already offered to me now. I feel the profession is fractured and there is too much dispute and ill feeling between a lot of interpreters never mind all the "third party" interference, this is quite unnerving for someone starting out.
- 2) I am concerned about the future of the interpreting profession and feel it risks being too fragmented but I am highly committed to the profession and the services we provide, and am determined to do all I can to work towards unity and securing the future. I am a member of most of the key organisations and hope that by working within them I can promote a positive future. Being realistic, I have considered alternative careers if it became untenable for me to continue in the profession, although I would prefer not to have to do this.
- 3) Fed up with politics of the interpreting profession...for example VLP v ASLI scenario to name but one....
- 4) It's some agencies I don't like working for, not all. Some organisations are unsupportive of interpreters not all.
- 5) I do a lot of access to work funded work, and have undergone serious payment issues. Cost of training. Continual changes in career progression/training requirements
- 6) I believe it is important for interpreters to have a professional body and to be registered, but I earn no additional salary for interpreting and have no desire to become a freelance interpreter. I have chosen to train to interpreter level so I can do my existing role better. NRCPD registration is expensive and it really isn't clear why it costs what it does. NRCPD claims it's there to monitor interpreter practice but from what I've seen its complaints procedures aren't effective and don't improve practice. The quality of interpreter practice in the profession amongst qualified interpreters is very variable, and trainee interpreters have to meet differing levels of expectations and practice to qualify depending on how and where they study. It doesn't give me much faith that being qualified really means much sometimes.
- 7) Recently a few organisations that should be more professional have behaved in a very unprofessional way and I feel undervalued and actually very much like a scapegoat as most of the work I do is without a co-worker, with naive non bi-lingual people and a few deaf people have manipulated the system so they do not get into trouble. Feels like a 'shoot the messenger' scenario.

8) The lack of support for the profession from the over-priced NRCPD is dispiriting to say the very least and it appears that well-founded fears that NRCPD's days may well be numbered have led to desperate actions from Signature. Signature seem intent on providing misinformation, when they will communicate, and have proven time and again that their own communication falls far short of acceptable; it is ineffective. They seem only to wish to provide whatever constitutes the opposite of encouragement to Interpreters, while behaving like a secret society. Their continuing lack of professionalism over the past couple of years in particular has been a real eye-opener and smacks of wholesale mismanagement - unacceptable when I am supporting them financially. A vote of no confidence in Signaure/NRCPD would come as no surprise to me. I am quite exhausted by all that is being thrown at us: NRCPD's behaviour; ASLI's behaviour; UKCOD's behaviour; people suggesting the honest wage I receive is too great (my job was subject to 'valuation' during an equal pay reorganisation and was upgraded); people refusing to pay for work they have commissioned; etc, etc, etc. It really is little wonder that this is leading to many Interpreters needing to look towards other potential revenue streams, either full- or part-time. I would suggest that those who wish to downgrade our skills and professionalism are short sighted in the extreme and, quite honestly, ignorant. That ignorance, displayed in the rubbish being peddled about us, and the lack of support from the quarters where conflict of interest, empire-building and game-playing appear to be rife, is simply staggering.

9) I am looking for more autonomy and more opportunities to use my skills and experience gained prior to becoming an interpreter. I am also fed up of sitting in meetings and not being able to offer my own opinion or ideas (for obvious and legitimate reasons).

10) Family commitments

11) Too many national and multi-national generic agencies/private businesses are jumping on the BSL bandwagon as they see it as a way of gaining more market share even though they have no specialism in this area. They win big contracts by promising a cheaper bottom line with no concern about quality and services to Deaf people, the only way to sustain this is to reduce what they pay interpreters and use under qualified individuals. When it's all based on the cheapest cost it takes the enjoyment out of interpreting and smaller specialist agencies don't get a look in or are bullied out of the market!

12) The uncertainty of the profession is taking its toll, the tension between clients is strained due to ATW, other agency cuts & I have found myself doing lots of freebies when deaf people have an emergency & no one will pay, it's untenable!

13) Whilst I currently have enough work, an observation is that it is difficult to maintain/sustain. In order to maintain the income I am used to I am finding that because the rates have been cut, or there is no travel etc... I am having to take on additional work, more than is sensible for someone who does such a physical job - it is having an impact on my health. I do not have holidays any more, and I desperately need one, and I go to work when I am sick. Neither of these things promote my best performance or ensure that I will be able to continue to benefit the users of interpreters in the long term if I end up injured or make myself further unwell. There seems to be little consideration for the care of interpreters and a lack of regard that we can only work a certain amount of hours before it becomes detrimental. I am not a robot but I feel like I get treated like one. Also, many of

my ATW clients can be a bit cheeky - they know I need to earn and they find things for me to do that are not at all appropriate so I feel I am being taken advantage of left, right and centre and it is not what attracted me to interpreting in the first place. Feel very demoralised at times.

14) Although there appears to be sufficient work in this area at the moment, I can see this changing on a monthly, if not weekly, basis. In no small part, I believe this is happening as a direct result of the profession being fractured and by people prioritising their own interests more and more, rather than those of the profession and the people we work with (both Deaf and hearing) as a whole. I understand that this situation is by no means new, nor is it only happening in this area, however, some are not thinking of the implications of their actions for others working in the area, or the short- and long-term effect on our profession as a whole. As an example, there are instances of working alongside unqualified and unregistered signers in various settings - theatre, local open meetings aimed specifically at the Deaf Community, higher education. If it continues, what will it do to our profession in the long run? Why would anyone understand the need to use those of us who have trained and registered? And if we try to explain it to them, why would they bother to listen?

15) I want autonomy and less 'suppression of self'. I want to be able to express my ideas and thoughts and beliefs and to be able to take action and make decisions.

16) I am nearing the end of my part-time PhD research and after that intend to move into consulting and training.

17) Just trying to think about what to do.

18) I find that I do not like the 'grabbing' of bookings and attitude of some colleagues which seems to have come to fruition in the last 2/3 years. I am told constantly that Interpreters are expensive and I am getting tired of having to justify my fees. I am not sure I know of any other profession that has to do this.

19) Due to the problems of getting paid my ATW and the huge delays in payments. Due to this I am struggling to pay my bills.

20) Instead of being a self-employed individual I am just a commodity to the agencies. Further they do not value my knowledge and experience and are simply interested in driving down prices and payments, presumably to increase their own profits. The joy has gone out of the profession.

21) Just feel glad I'm over 50 and not just starting out in this profession. The way things are going, I doubt very much that I will be working as an interpreter in 5 years time. Whilst I currently have enough work to cover my bills - most months anyway - my income has decreased by around £10k since last year and I definitely have less work now. Also, I'm continually being asked to reduce my rates. I stand firm, but I know this means I get less work. It is not financially viable to carry on like this.

22) I work for a charity as an in-house interpreter 4 days per week. The number of contracts which we will retain is uncertain so there may be future redundancies. My freelance day, I worry that work will dry up as there are so many interpreters in the area, lots with less experience who will do work for cheaper than me.

23) I do not want to stop interpreting; I thoroughly enjoy it, I believe that through application and training I have become skilled and useful (I am RSLI of 10+ years). I also fear for the Deaf community if good interpreters turn away; they will be left with access and inequality similar to 100 years ago. How can a community complain if you take away their language access? I find the whole issue demoralising and upsetting, and I'm not sure I have enough fight left in me to continue so if I left interpreting, it would be because I had been pushed out by having my rates slashed. Another point; I am charging the same amount I was 8 years ago - except that I am not because these rates are no longer being accepted and many agencies want you to accept a 2-hour minimum which is de facto a 33% cut in income!!

24) I am not due to retire for 8 years but could retire early once my husband retires next year.

25) Professional standards have declined incredibly since the introduction of NVQ. Now the lower skills are accepted as the norm, and consequently the lower fee some are charging has become the norm also. Gov /AtW cutbacks eg including travel in overall costs means that it pushes my costs above clients budgets.

26) Agencies just want you to go and do the job. I am very supportive of my local Deaf agency as any surplus goes back to the deaf community in one way or another. They are also more deaf aware.

27) The current government approach seems to be a devaluing of skilled professions and a willingness to accept untrained, unqualified, low-skilled workers just because they are cheaper. The concepts of quality and equality seem to have gone out of the window. Everything is based on financial cost in the short term, rather than long term financial cost and, more importantly, human and societal cost. Our profession has always struggled to be fully appreciated for the skills involved in its work and this has only got worse. VLP split the profession into those who did not want to do CPD & wanted cheap PII, versus those who are committed to CPD and developing the profession. I am still committed to our profession and to fighting to make it better, but sometimes I despair. I have not put my fees up since the recession; this morning the news talked about wages increasing and resultant inflation increase - I cannot see how I am going to put my fees up given that agencies and National Framework Agreements are driving them down. To be honest it's depressing filling in this survey - makes me realise how devalued our skills are :-(

28) Once the FWA rolls out, I am certain I will have many, many more gaps in my diary. The contract will go to the usual suspects (Capita/Serco) who are profit motivated so will book the cheapest at their own rates, regardless of what's appropriate. Added to that, when Capita or whoever get the FWA, they'll be starting the process from scratch so won't have any experience so all the hackneyed excuses Harper gave in the Select Committee hearing will be trotted out again (new staff, time to train, blah blah) What with that and how

AtW are actively cutting hours and rates, I really don't feel positive of any future in interpreting

29) As interpreters we take the flak and we get no support.

30) Agencies want cheap labour so under qualified, under experienced Interpreters offer cheap rates and in return they see it as an opportunity to gain experience at the expense of the Deaf person, e.g. court work where someone's liberty could be on the line!

31) I had hoped to taper my working week over a period of years, but issues around registration/CPD may force my hand and call an end to my work.

32) I despair for the future of the profession- not only are we facing attacks from organisations and bodies who are ignorant as to the complexity of our work, we are also increasingly ill-served by the splintering of the professional bodies who are meant to support and represent our profession. The fact that alternative professional organisations and registers are being set up by people who just cannot accept that mandatory CPD is a vital element of the profession makes my skin crawl. It is sad to see so many years of hard work to attain professional status and to try to bring some standards to the quality of interpreting being eroded by those who are meant to protect consumers. Signature are complicit in this.

33) It appears that Agencies don't care about the level of service they are providing, eg matching the best interpreter for the assignment. The Agencies don't seem to want to fight for Interpreters rights or rates of pay. Tendering by Agencies has made them think solely of profit margins and not service levels.

34) My heart is no longer in it the way it used to be.

35) I cannot continue working as a staff interpreter for long due to the unreasonable demands on my health and life. At present almost all of my work is in London and I don't believe there will be sufficient work in my local area. I am also fed up of the constant erosion of our standards and conditions, I believe we are treated with significantly less respect by other professionals and I cannot see a future for professional interpreters.

36) If I could find alternative work I would go tomorrow. That's how bad it has become.

37) I have been ill because of all the above. In the past there was Signature / NRCPD / ASLI. Now there is also VLP and NUBSLI and soon to be a new register. Everyone is fighting everyone within the profession. No one trusts anyone anymore. Deaf organisations are held to ransom and can't do anything right anymore. NRCPD is being hammered when we would not have been a profession without them. Yes there are problems with the system but throwing out the baby with the bath water makes absolutely no sense at all. Access to Work highlighted all the discrepancies within the profession. Inadequate interpreters are not being challenged. Trainees and CSWs are not being challenged. CSWs have no register and can do whatever they like unchallenged and have been doing so for years. Agencies have milked the Access to Work cow and have done very well out of it and remain unchallenged. My salary is less than what I was earning in the 90's. I

cannot afford a mortgage, I have three dependants. I travel everywhere for work. I am exhausted. I am so disheartened and heartbroken to see so much infighting amongst people that used to work alongside each other. People may not have liked each other personally but everyone was fighting for the same cause. I have not seen that approach in years. Access to Work is everyone's lesson that everyone is choosing to ignore. Deaf organisations, Deaf professionals, Deaf self employed people are all suffering at the hands of our so called profession. It's shameful, embarrassing, hurtful, all that work that has been done over the years gone because of greed and incompetency.

38) I will be emigrating, but hope to continue as a sign language interpreter in the country I move to.

39) I enjoy teaching, training, communicator guiding and social work more than interpreting.

40) Interpreting is no longer the kind, supportive, community-based work it once was. It feels over-regulated just for the sake of being regulated, and individuals feel as though they have little or no control over their own careers any more. I'm particularly dubious about NRCDP and its lack of intelligent thought and insight.

41) I do not intend to leave interpreting, if there was a cut in the wage that I am earning and less work then I would seriously consider it as despite it being a career choice it is not feasible.

42) Interpreters have started to turn on each other. Hearing providers really struggle to understand the profession and see interpreters as overpaid. Many grass roots deaf people also struggle to understand the profession and as a result of poor education and lack of access tend not to be aware of their rights.

43) I'm disappointed that newer entrants the profession have not been sufficiently trained and are not appropriately skilled to begin their careers and provide an acceptable minimum level of quality service. This is not fair to them, or their customers/clients; ultimately, it is Deaf people who suffer the most from this circumstance.

44) From what I've seen, NUBSLI seem to be one of the few organisations who are actually representing my views as an interpreter and taking proactive action on the various issues the profession faces.

45) The attitude of some Deaf people towards interpreters can be really upsetting. It has actually caused me to become quite an anxious person and I'm not sure how much longer I am going to be able to sustain this. I loved this work and could never imagine the thought of going on to do something else, so the situation must be pretty bad.

46) Working full time for an agency gives me little freedom that I had as a freelancer but when I was freelance I didn't have enough work. As I am probably what you would call past Middle age I want to find a career that will be of similar remuneration but less stressful mentally and physically

47) Interpreters can be used and given uncomfortable situations by regular clients and ill informed agencies which are dominated by their need to work. It's a fickle vocation with little respect or thanks given to the interpreter.

48) Whilst I'm not (yet) planning to leave the profession entirely, I have already accepted a part time research position, commencing in January. The decision to apply for this post was driven in no small part by the constant squeeze on income (I'm earning less now than I was 5 years ago) and serious concerns about the state of the profession going forward.

49) I fear for the future and although there ought to be work available it will be at a rate that I can not live on.

50) I do not think that BSL interpreters are recognised as the professionals we are. The complexity of our role is little understood and hence undervalued. If the Government manage to control our working conditions and rates of pay as they seem to be seeking to do, I do not see a sustainable career in interpreting.

51) I have enough work at the moment but with the ATW situation and upcoming National Framework for interpreting I'm unsure there will be enough work (paid at current levels) in the near future. Also there is no career progression in interpreting, unlike in teaching for example, which means there's nowhere to go beyond my current income. I've looked into becoming a teacher / teacher of the Deaf.

52) Too many invoices are not paid on time.

Question 11.

There were 130 comments left when interpreters were asked if there was anything else they wanted to tell us:

- 1) Thankfully I have a couple of regular bookings. Work outside of this is much more last minute, whereas previously work was in the diary 2-3 weeks in advance.
- 2) I believe there needs to be a strong emphasis on the standard rates of pay for interpreters. As a freelance interpreter I have my own rates and Terms and Conditions that I feel are in keeping with that of the profession. There needs to be some form of agreed rate before people are forced to take jobs that pay less but expect more from the profession.
- 3) Thank you
- 4) I am most worried about being expected to work prolonged periods solo. I have noticed more and more two/three-hour bookings that are very intense will only pay or use one interpreter. This is the thing I'm most worried about, I think I could probably take a cut in my wages, I could probably take less work but I don't really look forward to the time when one interpreter is being used on one-day bookings. I'm most worried about my health and I think that if things continue the way they are, companies refusing co-workers, that's when I will seriously consider retraining and looking elsewhere for employment.
- 5) Within our profession there are always going to be negative experiences and people we work with who test our patience and often leave us frustrated at the lack of awareness and knowledge surrounding communication access for D/deaf people. Having said this I am really excited about the future for CSWs and Interpreters, yes there are many areas of improvement but when surrounded by the right people and working in the appropriate environment that matches individual's knowledge and skill base, this is a wonderful profession to be in.
- 6) I carry out translation work as well as interpreting, however, this is by choice and not for extra income.
- 7) Why would I leave such an amazing profession?! Interpreting is the best thing I have done, and the money is only one part of that. Even if I have to earn less, I won't give up on the Deaf community.
- 8) PLEASE DO NOT PUBLISH THESE COMMENTS WITH MY NAME - I'm currently trying to take on more freelance work. My limited experience of agencies (so far) is 'concerning' to say the least. I'm not quite sure how charging clients double my hourly rate can be justified, especially when the agency's organisation is sometimes lacking (incorrect information on booking forms, a lack of prep, not passing on relevant information to co-workers, etc.). Also, I don't know if it is the same in all regions, but in the east, there seems to be little competition between agencies - Different agencies cover different areas/ specialisms - so each have a monopoly and there is little choice for clients.

9) I think NUBSLI should open up to level 6 CSWs.

10) After level 6 BSL, developing is very much a hands on process. However I am dismayed by the attitude of some qualified interpreters towards us 'CSW-Signers'. Most professions have junior members who work in their field and develop. Student doctors, nurses, law professionals. These have no fracture between juniors and qualified members, but a supportive structure, albeit perhaps very competitive.

11) Too many trainee or non registered Signers are accepting work outside of their capabilities or NRCPD's recommendations and NOTHING is done about it. Where a complaint should be made it can't because of the Deaf person's vulnerability.

12) I have enough work to manage my expenses etc so have not actively sought alternative work. The worry of losing work is in mind however but I don't know what other work I could or would like to do.

13) I love what I do, and I believe that it will only get better.

14) I try to ensure I have a mixed diary to avoid having all my eggs in one basket - a combination of individual clients and agencies. I am well aware that if the agency who currently have the local health contract take on more staff interpreters, I will lose out considerably on bookings. Most independent clients pay me via AtW which is another concern.

15) We are extremely lucky that a number of colleagues still have the drive and energy to support our profession. Thank goodness NUBSLI was set up by some of them.

16) I have been offered a job to start in the new year. It is part time so I will still be interpreting 1-2 days per week.

17) Personally I am not looking outside the profession but I know other experienced interpreters who are.

18) At the moment I have enough work due to the fact that a local college of further education has been using interpreters as their CSWs were made redundant. However, usually in my area, there is not enough work to go round the interpreters, due to organisations using unqualified interpreters and Deaf people not recognising their rights for a qualified professional. Thank you for setting up this survey - the results will be interesting.

19) I am concerned about feelings of isolation as a freelancer once I've finished my interpreter training and worry about this as a cause of wanting to leave the profession.

20) There is no career progression or potential for enhanced earnings as we move through our career; we often do not feel valued and our career suppresses our freedom of expression.

21) I still want to continue working as an Interpreter but I am looking at other ways to supplement my income.

22) I am fortunate to work for a good agency as an in house interpreter so I get regular part time work and opportunities for overtime. Without this, I think it would be a struggle to find work.

23) I have undertaken training to achieve qualifications that compliment my interpreting work. This additional work is in the teaching, assessment and qualification of interpreters as they work towards RSLI status. I would not want to rely on an income from interpreting alone.

24) I work as a CSW three days a week and take on interpreting work on the other two days and in the college holidays.

25) I'm waiting to see what happens and if I feel I have to work in a way that challenges the reason I entered the profession I would seriously consider leaving.

26) I am also a qualified lipspeaker so it's hard to gauge whether or not I'd have enough interpreting work in any one week. I work full time and turn work away because between the lipspeaking and the interpreting I'm kept pretty much busy. Plus I work 2 days a week at a deaf centre .

27) I do know there is a lot of unease around the profession, and it is worrying. I am lucky in that I have no dependents to look after, therefore my expenses are limited, so I am able to cope. I do feel as though I am in a very fortunate position. I do not feel very representative of the profession as a whole.

28) I only work two days per week but if I were to go back to full time work I think I would struggle to fill my week with work and earn a salary that reflected a full time working week. The reason being there is a lot of people going for the same jobs and often it is allocated on a first come first served basis rather than on experience.

29) There needs to be some regard for progression within our profession. In other lines of work this would be recognised and rewarded accordingly. I also feel very strongly about the consideration of care and good well being for interpreters as I currently feel that I am being driven into the ground trying to find sustainable work. Money is more important than our health and the equality of Deaf people who are also tax payers. That is an attitude that needs to change. Even if I could go on holiday I wouldn't relax because of all the uncertainty.

30) In order to truly understand and be able to represent our profession as a whole, NUBSLI need to increase membership across the country. At the moment, and while I appreciate the efforts thus far, this isn't the case. Only then can NUBSLI truly speak for the majority of those in the profession (something which I don't think any organisation can do at the moment).

- 31) The only reason I am sustaining my career is because I am in receipt of Tax credits. I am currently bringing in freelance exactly what I was earning 7 years ago as a salaried trainee. I have averaged this same amount for the last 3 years (18,000 gross). I am distraught about the £100,000 statement. I do this job because I am committed, not because I want to be rich, but after all my investment of time and money into my qualifications the remuneration is pitiful. My accountant friend recently had a £13,000 pay rise. She works from her home barn conversion in a purpose built office above her detached garage. I drive all over the north of England in a clapped out '04 fiesta and run my business from the kitchen table of my 3 bedroom end terrace. It makes me sick.
- 32) I love my job and despite the turbulent nature of being freelance and the possible issues we face in our industry, I feel honoured to be able to earn a good wage doing something I am so passionate about. I am Peterborough based and currently have enough work in a variety of domains.
- 33) I'm considering other options as do not feel this career is certain.
- 34) I have just accepted a new part time job which means I will reduce my interpreting to 20% of my work. I would like to stop completely but can't afford to.
- 35) Questions don't quite fit me. I also accept manual note-taking work which is not completely separate from interpreting as it is Deaf world work also being affected by ATW, agencies, unqualified people doing it, and so on.
- 36) There are many issues with sign language interpreting as a profession: it's lack of regulation; the variety of (unequal) routes that interpreters can become qualified; I don't feel the NRCPD or Signature are bodies that genuinely understand that BSL is a modern language like any other (since it is not taught or assessed like other modern languages); that BSL tutors are not required to have the same qualifications as spoken language tutors; the extraordinary cost of training for BSL interpreters (which leads me to believe that not only agencies are interested in financial gain); the fact that one can become a BSL-English interpreter without a qualification in English, to name just a few.
- 37) I find working as an interpreter makes me very anxious these days due to the uncertainty for the future created by funding cuts...after 20 years of so much hard work done by so many people (myself included) to further the profession and improve standards for the benefit of the Deaf community, to see this unravelled in 4.5 short years is upsetting and stressful. I worry about my future, but even more so about the future careers of those younger than me, who are just starting out. Also what happens to Deaf people's access when the profession is decimated? Just writing this I feel my anxiety levels rising....after all that hard work, it seems that we are not held in any regard at all. When people think your job can be done equally well by someone with a GCSE equivalent of BSL and no interpreter training, it is disheartening beyond belief. The fight has gone out of me. How sad.....
- 38) I say I have enough work as I only work part time interpreting with very flexible hours. If my hours were more rigid and if I needed to work full time, I suspect that I would not get enough work.

39) Currently I feel as though there is plenty of work in London, but I am waiting to see the effects of the framework agreement as I am worried that this will incur massively reduced fees, which could mean that interpreting is no longer a viable profession.

40) I am frustrated with colleagues in the field who do not appear to see the bigger picture, accepting rates which I do not believe are viable, under the guise of 'well Deaf people still need interpreters'. I fear we are going back to a very paternalistic time and risk much of the interpreting work becoming a job done by those who can do it for pocket money or voluntarily. I am saddened that interpreters continue to keep the MoJ/FWA afloat whilst others have been boycotting it since its inception. I am irritated by agencies who bid for tenders at such low prices that they can not afford to pay interpreters a decent fee. I am incensed by those agencies who send out trainee interpreters or the cheaper option and make such a profit off the backs of interpreters, D/deaf and deafblind people that it is just morally wrong. I am sad that a rift appears to be developing between the Deaf community and interpreters and a 'them' and 'us' attitude, although I am aware that in parts we are coming together more to fight what is currently happening. I am annoyed that NRCPD/Signature do not: • push the National Register more • appear not to listen to interpreters • make the Register more accessible and user friendly. Surely in this day and age they can sort out a system whereby a service provider can tick on a list of interpreters in a given area and do a mailshot to those interpreters requesting their services. In addition, it irks me that they say interpreters are the best option, yet perpetuate the myth to people that CSW's with limited to no interpreter training, not fluent in the language and little knowledge in professional boundaries, are very flexible and can adapt etc. to suit the needs of deaf people! I am discouraged that major decisions about the interpreting profession appear to be taking place with little to no input from interpreters. It appears many stakeholders bar the interpreters are having greater input. Thank goodness for NUBSLI - doing great stuff for all the right reasons.

41) The profession is a mess; Signature do not regulate the whole profession (only their own registrants) though their messages indicate that they do monitor and regulate everyone; There is not enough consultation with BSL users regarding changes to qualifications, standards, and provision in general; Agencies making massive profits from bookings are ruining the profession. The training is too focussed on BSL skills and not enough on voice-over/English skill (many qualified interpreters cannot voice-over to a 'safe' standard).

42) I love my job but unless there is a change of government soon I'm not very hopeful for the future :(

43) Although working towards retirement I am still keen to do some interpreting but becoming saddened & disillusioned at the current situation

44) I love interpreting and would love to continue with it but even with regular work and a regular income, the uncertainty of the current situation is enough to have made me start to re-train. I have a child and a mortgage and it is that simple.

45) I am concerned with the issues being faced by interpreters and the cuts in pay. My key concern is for organisations taking over the responsibility for provision of BSL interpreters who lack knowledge in this field. This is a great risk to the Deaf community. I work for a BSL Interpreting co-operative who run an agency. Their fees have been slashed recently, their fees are low in comparison. Profits feed back into community work, not lining pockets of shareholders. Cutting out these providers will lead to less provision in emergency situations. We will become further separated from the community we work with. It's Deaf people who suffer in the end. That's my core concern. My wage will be whatever it may be, that's secondary to where Deaf people go for face to face bookings/ support etc that's my concern! I spoke to a national organisation recently who provide interpreters, hey they didn't even understand what we do! they failed to write our contact number 5 times! Their service is inaccessible to Deaf people. PANTS! Sorry but I'm being polite.

46) I already took a pay-cut and less favourable terms and conditions when contracting bodies changed providers, in the last two years, where I live/work in. The sign language interpreting industry is already in a mess, as there is no clear structure for progression and rewards (pay and other) related to quality of work, skills, specialisms, experience and length of service etc. I am not convinced that the minimum fees that have been published are helpful. Time will tell. As for there being "not enough interpreters" that cannot be true for Brighton and Hove, possibly not for the wider Sussex area too.

47) The professional interpreting landscape is undoubtedly in a rocky position, mostly due to govt cuts and outsourcing to large agencies. However it is a profession that I enjoy and have years of experience to offer. The current rot should be stopped.

48) Whilst I wonder if there is a future in my career, I haven't taken any practical steps to change career.

49) Interpreters are being churned out factory style to the benefit of NRCPD/Signature without concern for the quality or sustainability of the profession. Government cuts are also contributing to the unsustainability. Agencies, particularly spoken language agencies, are using our skills, which are more complex than those of spoken language interpreters, as a lucrative income base often by utilising under qualified personnel. Although I only have 6 years experience post qualification I have 17 years experience in total. The difference is because of changing goal posts in the qualifying system.

50) There was more than 1 reason why there is a lack of work but we could only pick 1. Also feel interpreting jobs go to unqualified because they cheaper.

51) There is definitely a dip in the volume of work and major knock on effects from ATW and the delay in payment. I do not feel there is a shortage of interpreters but I do feel there are a lot of interpreters under cutting with their fees.

52) I am talking about leaving the profession/retiring but that is only because it is no longer a nice marketplace. I will probably work on increasing my training to back up my income.

53) When I first started out as an interpreter, I was embarrassed to charge the fees normal for this area. However, I now know I'm worth it. The stresses and strains of this job - the

toll it takes on me emotionally and physically are considerable. To the uninformed, fees may well seem like a lot of money, but it takes one hell of a lot to become an interpreter, and stoicism, skill and tenacity to remain working as one (never mind the costs of CPD, counselling, supervision etc). It's not worth the toll it takes if fees are reduced and income drops as drastically as mine has. I'd rather do a 9-5 menial job and not be strung out all the time!

54) I'm not planning to leave but rather diversify my skills to other jobs linked to the deaf community.

55) I am concerned about the lack of experience newly qualified interpreters take on specific assignments, such as in the legal and mental health domains. I'm also concerned that perhaps a minority of people embarking on the profession is more to do with monetary matters rather than the essence of being an interpreter working within a specific community hence a lack of professional conduct within the profession.

56) Looking into doing teacher training post grad qualification but I would much rather continue interpreting. I thought I would have a job for life but am convinced now the pay rates are falling so dramatically, budgets are being slashed and yet every year more graduates from Wolverhampton degree come out and work locally that supply has swamped demand. I am sad I think I will have to re-train.

57) At the moment

58) I do a mix of interpreting, assessing, verifying, teaching and consultancy work. This means I have more than one strand of work and it keeps my diary full. Some weeks I interpret a lot and other weeks it is the assessing or teaching that fills my diary. This has been healthy for me in terms of physical and financial health.

59) Lower standards, less regard for our profession and lack of support from professional bodies and deaf organisations means that there is real danger that deaf people will NEVER achieve their full potential.

60) The only positive support is from VLP and NUBSLI. The agencies are taking most of fees charged and at the same time paying me as little as they can get away with! The less they pay the practitioner the more profit for themselves. The agencies are unregulated and most have no concept of quality interpreting provision. The agencies are getting away with murder as they know it's impossible for deaf people to complain or give a view!!! I the interpreter have to listen to complaints coming from deaf people all the time yet no one asks me what my experience is.

61) To clarify: I work 3.5 days a week as an interpreter. Two of these are regular clients with whom I have been working for between 2 and 5 years. On other days I take ad-hoc assignments. I do voluntary work 1.5 days a week which is unrelated to interpreting.

62) At the moment I am fortunate enough to have 3 regular full days (all funded through AtW). This means that I have enough income. However, if this work was to become too poorly paid or withdrawn, then I would struggle to fill my diary. There are a number of AtW

deaf clients in this area, and a lot of interpreters have regular work supporting them in their professional duties (lecturers, OTs, Social Workers, Disability advisors, a Communicator-guide mentor, CSO, teachers etc). If all the 'terps who work for them found that AtW no longer provided a suitable income, then the competition for the remaining 'community' jobs eg health, CAB etc would be too much to sustain everyone.

63) No

64) I trained hard for this profession and intend to do it until retirement (in 15 years time) so need to know there is a secure future for me. Very concerned about the next round of budget constraints as these could affect our work enormously.

65) I am also concerned about standards within the profession and lack of input from Deaf people into those standards, assessments of interpreters and post-qualification assessments. I have already had quite heated email exchanges with NRCPD over this and find this frustrating. I have ticked the box that says I get enough work because mostly I do: I have lived in my area and worked with the local deaf, hearing and interpreter communities for many years, and I have developed specialisms and good relationships with particular organisations. That is why I am pretty well provisioned with work, but even so it can be a struggle some months. This is particularly so as organisations now only want to pay for 1 or 2 hours max and so that does not make a living wage.

66) The ATW situation and the national framework looming make me feel vulnerable . This is why I am planning to retrain in an unrelated career.

67) I am currently working part-time in a local college and do freelance work around this. You do need to be willing to travel to get work.

68) This is a dreadful time for deaf people and interpreters alike. It's so deeply frustrating that many of the deaf community seem to believe the government rumour mill (£100K salaries etc) and even claim we're taking over the 'fight' away from deaf people. If only more would get off their complacent arses, grr!

69) A local health contract is up for tender now and a possible new provider will be brought in next year... If Pearl linguistics (or someone equally as abysmal) are awarded the contract I will have no work as 85% of my work comes from this contract... This will force my hand and leave me unemployed. Very scary, sad times ahead :o(

70) I would still aim to do some freelance interpreting work if I do leave the profession and do not want to just 'abandon' Deaf people, but as we are all going to have to work until we are elderly, we have to be realistic and BSL interpreting doesn't feel like it has a very secure future on its own : (

71) I still fill my working week... However a lot of bookings are last min! There does seem to be more interpreters after the same bookings. Last minute bookings means you don't always feel confident that you will get enough work.

72) As a new interpreter I have found it difficult to find work other than that with agencies

73) In the areas you have why isn't Yorkshire included?

74) I work for an agency.

75) If a deaf person is off work due to an illness the interpreter receives no pay. This could continue for a wk or so. If we take everything into account like no sick pay, no holiday entitlement, working long days independently because AtW won't provide a coworker then interpreters are getting a rough deal, yet again.

76) At the moment I have the perfect mix of work, I can afford to develop myself by attending courses, I am not over stretched and can afford to attend a peer support group and be a member of ASLI. However, if I start to get paid less for the same work, I may not be able to sustain my life and may have to think of other work - but I love my job and I want to stay, and feel valued for the work I do! Remuneration is important, but I personally am distressed by the way people talk negatively about interpreters as money grabbing. I don't think there is a dearth - I think we get paid as we do because we do a highly skilled job. I am 42 years old and I earn heaps less than my peers who have been working in their careers for 8 years. I think the way interpreters are booked is the key - the Netherlands has an online booking system shared by Deaf and interpreters and run by their Atw team. deaf people request hours and payment is standardised and then interpreters have a profile with photo and soon to have video clips.

77) I have not increased my fee for 10 years. My interpreting income is keeping pace with the real cost of living. I feel the profession is not valued by either the deaf community or the hearing community. Some of this is due to ignorance on both parts. It is concerning that society as a whole and the commercial and service industries have no knowledge about communication access for all parties. I've been qualified since 2002. The situation now is much worse than it was then. The deaf community is being increasingly isolated and excluded from society as a result. There should be more engagement by our professional body with the commercial and business sector to help them to understand the value of interpreting work and the difference between a 'signer' and a qualified interpreter.

78) I have great concerns about NRCPD / Signature as I do not feel it's right that the same company have monopoly over both registration and training of interpreters. I do not feel they make it clear that they are the same organisation and struggle to see how they remain impartial when campaigning etc. I understand that there are other organisations which operate a registration / membership for interpreters but these are not widely recognised by statutory services. It's taken us until now to get statutory to recognise the need to book registered interpreters, so I do not feel that interpreters boycotting NRCPD is the correct action because this would not be reflected by service providers and this lead to a drop in quality services for deaf people.

79) Unless you set up an alternative register nothing will change. Nrcpd have railroaded all the agencies into this political use nrcpd only which is costly to people who need interpreters. I will join Nubsli when you set up an alternative register. I have been Interpreting for over 25 years and registered with cacdp or whatever for 25 years. I can tell

you hand on heart you are wasting time and effort " talking and meeting" these parasites who run the interpreting profession. There is so much I could say.

80) Please, can people sit around the table again. Put in systems for trainees and CSWs. They have taken over freely and ably because no one is doing anything about it. Can NUBSLI be the change that is required? Can NUBSLI work with Deaf people in whatever capacity? Will Deaf people ever be allowed to lead their right to have BSL? Will Deaf people ever be allowed to have qualified interpreters again? Will Agencies be stopped overpricing and underselling the interpreting profession? How many more qualified interpreters will leave the profession before anyone listens?

81) I am looking to supplement my interpreting work with a permanent part time position using my transferable skills.

82) I currently work in house for an interpreting Agency. There is some uncertainty within the organisation due to having to re-bid for contracts of work. If we are unsuccessful then there is a possibility of redundancies in the new year.

83) Having to justify my worth and fight for pay and conditions is exhausting! I feel like cuts to ATW are eroding our professional status that I have worked so hard to achieve.

84) The so called Interpreter shortage is an absolute nonsense. It is in fact a 'political posit' that has been bandied around since time immemorial, usually to serve a money agenda rather than any genuine concern for the community who utilise interpreting services.

85) I think that interpreters' attitude has a lot to do whether or not they get work. However I imagine in rural areas there will be an issue of there not being enough work for the interpreters living in the area.

86) I love this job, however the future looks quite bleak at the moment. I have spent lots of money & years of my life training to become qualified, which I did gladly out of my passion for this work. The financial squeeze now being inflicted and the pure ignorance from the politicians making the decisions about the profession, is depressing to say the least. On top of technology advances that aim to cut out the need for interpreters, I feel somewhat brow beaten and ready to say 'ok, I give up' & look for work elsewhere. Morale amongst interpreters is low. Outside of cities interpreters travel many miles in a working day. This time isn't paid for & the extra reductions & cuts here & there on hourly rates, petrol costs (often offering none!) trying to be enforced by government & foreign language agencies that have no concept of the work role, could mean I lose money by accepting many assignments. If these cuts go ahead, continuing will be untenable.

87) I am uncertain how this survey will quantify if there is actually a lack of work for interpreters. There is no benchmarking question, it is merely anecdotal.

12/17/2014 7:25 AM View respondent's answers

88) N/a

89) Thank you, NUBSLI, for the incredible hard work you undertake. You represent everything that a supportive organisation should be.

90) I feel fortunate that this is a second career anyway, so if worst comes to the worst I can go back into my previous field.

91) I am undertaking other qualifications as a back up plan and honestly feel that for things to change, the minimum call out fee should be set, interpreters should not be expected to earn under £25 an hour as fully qualified to compete with unqualified, trainee or level 3 signers. Agencies also should be transparent as many times they are charging double or treble the hourly rate of the interpreter and see that if they save on what they pay the interpreter by using unqualified they make more money.

92) Living in rural areas means it's hard to keep a full diary. I have to travel in to London regularly to get work. This has a knock on effect whereby I am rarely available in my local area. If that experience is repeated by other terps then skills are in short supply in rural areas.

93) I live in a small city..I feel that I have enough work mainly AtW with deaf people who have booked me direct. But large agencies have taken over the 'bread and butter' medical appointments.

94) I am in a fortunate position where I have 2 stable bookings per week. If it were not for these bookings, I would be deeply concerned about my future as an Interpreter.

95) I love my job and would prefer not to be thinking about leaving it.

96) I have enough work as I only work on average 9-10 hours a week during term time fitting around children's schooling.

97) I am disgusted by the Framework draft.

98) I love my job and do not want to leave but we do need to consider alternative income streams because of the incessant drive, and draconian measures taken by Whitehall to cut the funding avenues for disabled people who are being deprived of communication access!

99) Working in the north east we have not increased our rates for over 6 years. The role is becoming unsustainable due to a consistent effort to drive down costs.

100) Agencies have too much power to go for cheaper terpies regardless of whether they are the best terpie for the job or not. Very often you feel as if you have to 'suck up' to agencies in order to get dibs on jobs. I have a wealth of experience in mental health and despite there being ample work in this area, I do not get a look in, because the agency dictates who they use. They use terpies who, in my opinion, are not best placed to do the work. Agencies, who very often have no interpreting knowledge and are just a coordinator in an office, are making these judgements on interpreters in the field and their deaf clients. Utter madness. Old school days, there was a choice of work and you could choose the work more suited to your skill set. Nowadays it's grab what you can even if it's not your

strongest area. I have advocated interpreting as a good career choice for years but I've stopped doing that more recently. I don't see a positive future for a rewarding career anymore. I already have additional income but am looking to expand that area quickly as my main source of income ASAP. It's a shame to see a rewarding and challenging career going to the dogs. Feels like I'm being doom and gloom but in real terms - I've had no pay increase for 8 years, in fact my income has gone down. I only see that being further eroded over the next few years. Time to get the hell out or at least make it an income I don't need to rely on.

101) I love my job and don't want to leave the profession. It's important for deaf people that we don't leave, but, I have a mortgage and bills to pay, so I can't work for a much lower rate (which is what is potentially being proposed). I would just like some recognition of our value, we have a highly skilled job that takes years to train for and even longer to gain experience in.

102) As a professional in British Sign Language. Our skills are not yet recognised by NHS. A nurse with basic sign will be used to convey a diagnosis! The hearing professional applauds this! The Deaf person's rights ignored! This is discrimination. Ignorance is bliss? The Deaf community are still suffering. Within the medical setting continuity can be useful.

103) I Love interpreting and my job but I also need to feed my family so I have to think of the future - contrasting stories about not needing qualified interpreters / decreased rates of pay / feeling undervalued for all I have worked hard to achieve to qualify and continue to prove my worth with (expensive) CPD - I have to balance the books and at the moment they are not balancing.

104) Large agencies who have no deaf or BSL expertise have contributed to the destruction of services for deaf people .. I feel like I'm doing fire fighting interpreting work ie a community severely affected by these changes in mental health and welfare generally

105) I work 2 days as a contracted CSW and 3 days as a freelance interpreter. I also feel that due to being male in a widely female dominant profession there is a lot of scope for a young male interpreter.

106) We should start by stating that you are either a qualified interpreter or a student interpreter as this will make the ordinary public know the difference. It's deaf people who are ultimately suffering.

107) It has taken many years and a lot of money to become a qualified interpreter yet the profession I love is dying due to decreasing and lowering wages. I can honestly say I'm heart broken. I do not want to retrain but feel there is no choice as I am far too young to retire and have not yet started a pension!

108) Freelance work is notoriously isolated; one does not have a full picture of what is happening on the ground. Interpreting contracts are awarded to different agencies and so work fluctuates. The highs are higher and the lows ie quiet patches are more often and longer.

109) I believe that some agencies are charging unreasonable costs and we are being seen as expensive. This is not always transparent to consumers. Providing an interpreter that fully meets the needs of the client is a thing of the past, in most instances we are not given the name of the client due to confidentiality but this can lead to a difficult situation if you are unable to work with that particular client for a specific reason. Details given regarding an assignment are often minimal and could potentially lead to accepting work which is not within the experience of that interpreter.

110) As a profession we have failed to construct a career path to sustain a future for all concerned.

111) I also work as a BSL Translator and run a translation service. This is not a second income and forms part of all my 'interpreting' work.

112) I have regular clients, two are AtW, and one is a weekly health appointment. Without these regulars, I don't know if I would have enough work, within the days/times that I am able to work (I have a young child, and so only work two days a week).

113) I am already reducing my hours to part time as I have invested in a well known franchise and I am developing that area of my career as the future of interpreting is so bleak.

114) I am not planning to leave the profession any time soon as I still love the job that I do but it is becoming more and more frustrating seeing work in my area being given to untrained, unqualified people, who have no interest in doing any kind of interpreter training because they are constantly being rebooked by interpreting agencies who are not doing their due diligence and checking whether they are either qualified or registered. I am also getting frustrated at not being able to work in my own area as the interpreting agency who won the contract dictate their own terms and conditions which are not in line with mine so I still haven't yet registered with them therefore having to travel further afield to do work for agencies who will pay me.

115) I'm concerned that there will not be enough work in the future to receive a full time income. I have only been qualified for 1 year, have accrued student loan debt of £25,000 during training, plus additional fees of £3,000 for final diploma in interpreting. I am already looking at other ways to support my interpreting income as I do not feel confident that the work will be given to qualified interpreters. I cannot retrain due to the costs/length of training to be qualified interpreter. I am 43 years old.

116) I love my job!

117) I would love to keep working as an interpreter but will only be able to do so with an earning potential that offers a fair standard of living.

118) RSLI's need to be aware that to command regular, appropriately paid work they MUST move with the profession and market needs - and engage in realistic CPD - otherwise they will not be rebooked

119) In recent years, I have felt frustrated at the lack of career progression in interpreting, and the lack of recognition for specialism. This really pales into insignificance though, in comparison to the current threats to fees and standards. I am sure there is a concerted, deliberate effort not only to reduce costs by targeting interpreter income (as opposed to exploring other cost-saving measures), but also to reduce standards (new 'Intro to Interpreting' qualification and moves to create a register for CSWs). I have little faith in my regulatory body and fear greatly that the Deaf community is on the brink of being pushed back 20 years in access terms. It all feels rather hopeless, if I'm honest.

120) I love my profession, but the future looks to uncertain, but I want to stay as an interpreter if I can.

121) A lot of the agencies that have the contracts have no deaf awareness, they are very profit driven. The Government needs to invest in legislation to protect the Deaf community so that deaf people have the right to a qualified interpreter, also the profession to have guidelines set as to pay structure of fees as a guide for agencies and Government to use so that no one is of the belief we all earn £100k a year which is untrue!

122) I am in a lucky position of having a major contract to fulfil locally. With this work I am able to find enough work for myself, my wife (who is also a qualified interpreter) and to give approximately 10 jobs a month to other interpreters. The securing of this contract was in part due to the organisation using trainee interpreters who had made serious errors and the deaf employees insisting on the use of qualified interpreters. Besides this work in my locality there is a major issue in medical situations due to spoken language agencies having the contract who charge the NHS £150 per job but refuse to pay local interpreters more than £60 per appointment. Many qualified interpreters refuse this work but the jobs are fulfilled by csw or trainee interpreters.

123) Whilst there is seemingly enough work in the London area currently, I am not certain that this will continue. I do not want to leave BSL interpreting, but feel that the profession is being squeezed so dramatically by external bodies with little understanding of what a BSL interpreter does. It is exhausting and demoralising having to justify our fees, when no one would question the fees of other skilled professionals. I feel that I need an alternative career although I am not sure currently what that might be.

124) I'm very pleased that NUBSLI exists and I would very strongly advocate that one of the main strands of its work should be to establish a fully independent professional organisation under a new code of ethics similar to the General Medical Council. NRCPD is not fit for purpose.

125) Please can we see more collaboration and support from ASLI! I am also questioning where my membership fees go and it's questionable at the moment. Including NRCPD - what do they give us, except a headache.

126) I've discussed this with a number of colleagues and they've all described the same situation. Also another colleague, close to retirement thinks the DWP will enforce the

American model of VRS interpreting in the near future to "drive down costs" which would force me into a decision to change career.

127) I am so disappointed that this National Framework Agreement is coming ... It puts my chances of getting work onto a back foot - a worse position than I am already in. I fear for the profession that I have put my heart and soul into and that I love. I fear for the future of Deaf people's access to services etc as well. I will not be able to afford to do all the travelling I must do to secure work if I cannot claim back travel expenses or car park charges. I am a peripatetic worker.

128) The fee cuts, and people just not paying, are making this professional less enjoyable. I've just taken a job that's 2 full days but if I find out ATW are paying I may have to pull out at the risk of just not being paid for it!!

129) I can't afford to retrain in a different career but feel like I need to as the future of interpreting looks so bleak

130) I think although I've work, the advertisement of assignments are noticeably less than 3 years ago.