

The RLN YH would like to thank the individuals/  
organisations who contributed to this guide: Helen Tagg,  
Martha Stewart, Max Ghani, Richard France, ASLI, BDA,  
CACDP, RNID, RAD, Fair Play Partnership and  
Sheffield Council



## how to...

...work with British Sign Language(BSL)/English  
Interpreters in the public and private sectors

---

For further information about British Sign Language please visit the website below.

The information contained in this user guide is correct at the time of going to print. Content and advice may be modified, supplemented or withdrawn.

January 2004.

Regional Language Network  
Yorkshire & the Humber.  
Banners Building  
Attercliffe Road  
Sheffield  
S9 3QS

[www.rln-yh.com](http://www.rln-yh.com)

---

## FOREWORD

---

I am pleased to welcome this "How To" guide on British Sign Language/English Interpreters on behalf of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC). Sign Language is an important tool for improving communication and this guide provides clear and comprehensive advice for employers to help them comply with the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act. Under this legislation, from October 2004 all service providers will have to make reasonable adjustments to ensure their services are accessible to everyone, including those people who use British Sign Language. I would recommend this guide to employers.

**Isabella Moore, President,  
British Chamber of Commerce**

---

# CONTENTS

---

	<b>PAGE</b>
1. What is British Sign Language (BSL)?	1
2. Why do we need British Sign Language/ English Interpreters?	3
3. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)	5
4. Cost	11
5. You might not need to pay the full cost of Interpreters	13
6. Do I need an Interpreter?	17
7. Qualified Interpreters	21

---

---

	<b>PAGE</b>
8. Best practice	29
9. Qualifications and Registration	39
10. Interpreter's code of conduct	45
11. RNID typetalk – making telephone calls	49
12. Contact list	53

---

# what is british sign language?

British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of many Deaf people. It is a language in its own right, separate and distinct from English. The grammatical structures of the two languages are very different, and written English may not always be understood by a BSL user.

According to the Department of Work and Pensions there are about 70,000 BSL users in Britain.

**In 2003 the British Government officially recognised BSL as a language.**

Conventionally the use of the word '**deaf**' (with a lowercase 'd') refers to any person with a significant hearing loss, whereas '**Deaf**' (with a capital 'D') refers to a person whose preferred language is BSL.

---

**why do we need british  
sign language/english  
interpreters?**

Where English is not a person's first language, you may need to use the services of competent Interpreters. This is exactly the same with BSL users.

Interpreters work in a wide variety of settings, such as job interviews, staff meetings, legal situations, educational settings, doctor's and hospital appointments, council services, meetings and conferences.

---

# the disability discrimination act 1995

---

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) imposes a requirement upon employers to ensure their disabled staff are not disadvantaged.

All service providers, employers and trade unions have a legal requirement to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that their services are accessible to everybody, including people whose first language is BSL.

In any situation where information is to be shared with customers or staff through spoken English, it might be a legal requirement to use an appropriate BSL/English Interpreter.

---

**EXAMPLE:** Mark, who is Deaf and uses sign language, has a job interview. However, the interview has to be postponed because the company didn't book an Interpreter and were at risk of not fulfilling their duties under the DDA. Drawbacks for the Company of not booking an Interpreter included wasting the time of its interview panel and delaying the appointment by several weeks.

---

---

**EXAMPLE:** To save time and money, a national supermarket chain used emails and notice boards to keep its staff informed of changes to the company and its practices. Shireen's first language was British Sign Language and she found English hard to understand. She realised she was missing a lot of information and asked her manager to find an alternative way of keeping her up-to-date. The manager arranged for a meeting with Shireen and an Interpreter every month. Shireen later applied for internal promotion and was successful. She admitted to her manager that she had been looking for work elsewhere and would not have known about the promotion opportunity without the interpreted monthly meetings.

---

---

**EXAMPLE:** A Yorkshire-based company has weekly staff meetings. The managers have never booked a BSL/English Interpreter. Deaf staff do not attend the meeting and have to ask colleagues to try and explain what was discussed afterwards. After being told about their obligations under the DDA, the company book an Interpreter for the next meeting. During the meeting, it becomes clear that two Deaf members of staff know more about a particular process than anybody else, and because of the presence of an Interpreter are able to share this knowledge. Errors in this process drop by 15% as a result.

---

**cost**

Interpreters are either self-employed or work through Interpreting Agencies. Most Interpreting Agencies will charge a booking fee, and most Interpreters have minimum call out charges. Cancellation fees may also be charged. Please check with the Agency and/or Interpreter for the applicable rates. It is important that all fees are agreed at the point of booking to avoid possible misunderstandings at a later date.

Minimum call-out charges and additional hourly rates will vary depending on region. However, you can expect to pay a minimum call-out charge of around £75.

---

**you might not need to  
pay the full cost of  
interpreters**

---

## Access to Work Scheme

This is a Government run programme to provide information, advice and funding to disabled people, as employees or as employers.

- This scheme will pay for the costs (in part or in full) of the extra support that disabled people may need.
- Full Funding can be available for communication support subject to an individual assessment. Contact your local Jobcentre Plus.

Equality Training for staff may be funded through the Workforce Development team at your local Learning and Skills Council.

---

**EXAMPLE:** Jaz started work at a recruitment firm in Hull in 2002. His manager knew he was deaf, and so arranged for an early meeting to discuss any needs he may have. In the meeting, it was agreed to have an assessment from Access to Work to cover the costs of Lipspeakers and a textphone. Equality Training was arranged for staff to make sure they were confident about communicating with Jaz. The Company also decided to use email and written notes to back up any verbal communication. This way both Jaz and his manager could be confident that information was properly understood.

---

**do i need an  
interpreter?**

Not all deaf people use BSL and an Interpreter may not be the most appropriate option. The first step should always be to ask the deaf person about their communication preferences: the following checklist might help.

- BSL/English Interpreters
  - Sign Supported English Interpreters
  - Lipspeakers
  - Notetakers
  - Speech-to-text reporters
  - Electronic notetakers
  - Deafblind Communicator Guides and Interpreters
- 

This booklet only advises on working with BSL/English Interpreters, but our contact details section will point you towards organisations that can advise you on booking and using the other services listed above.

---

**qualified interpreters**

---

Always use Qualified Interpreters, as failure to do so can have serious consequences.

**EXAMPLE:** An engineering company in Birmingham had a Lifting and Handling training day, which all staff had to attend. They did not provide an Interpreter for Josh, who is Deaf and uses sign language. Instead, they asked another employee who had basic sign language skills to try and interpret. Josh gained his certificate of attendance. Six months later, Josh was off on long-term sick leave. His doctor said he had lifted something badly at work and had slipped a disc. On further investigation, it was found that Josh had not been able to access the course using his colleague.

He had only been able to watch the tutor's demonstrations. He had mis-understood the information and had been lifting wrongly as a result. Josh has not been able to return to work and could take legal action.

The different levels of interpreter qualification and professional registration are outlined in the Qualifications and Registration section below.

## Where can I find BSL/English Interpreters?

About 350 Interpreters are currently registered with CACDP (the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People).

---

---

You can book Interpreters:

- Through directories - CACDP, ASLI (Association of Sign Language Interpreters) and the on-line directory of RAD (Royal Association for Deaf people). Details in contact section.
- Through various Agencies that exist around the country. Contact details can be obtained from the organisations listed on the back page.

There is a national shortage of BSL/English Interpreters, which means that they are likely to be booked up well in advance. The more notice you give and/or the more flexibility you have with dates and times, the more likely you are to be able to book an Interpreter.

---

---

The recommended minimum notice for booking an Interpreter is 2-4 weeks.

## How do I book an Interpreter?

You should give as much information as possible to the Agency or Interpreter when you make the booking.

The checklist below gives examples of the sort of information you should collate before contacting an Agency or freelance Interpreter:

- The nature of the event.
  - The date of the event, including start and finish times.
-

- The full address of where the event is to take place, including directions and/or a map.
  - Contact details of the person making the booking.
  - How many people are going to be involved in the event, including the numbers of Deaf and hearing people who will be present.
  - Other information that will assist the Agency/Interpreter, for example, if a female Interpreter is required for reasons of privacy or decency, or if the deaf person has a visual impairment.
- 

## How many Interpreters will I need?

If the event will last longer than two hours, you may need to book two or more Interpreters. Check with the Interpreter or Agency when booking.

---

**best practice**

---

You should consider Interpreters as integral to the event and not as a last-minute extra.

**EXAMPLE:** A large accountancy firm has a Deaf Finance Manager. She uses sign language but has never asked for an Interpreter at meetings. This has left other Managers feeling frustrated at the poor communication, as they feel they are not kept fully informed of the financial situation within the company. One of the partners contacts the Finance Manager and asks if she would accept having an Interpreter at the meetings. She is delighted; she had been struggling at the meetings but was worried people may think she couldn't cope and therefore had never asked for an Interpreter.

---

---

## How should I schedule the event?

When Interpreters are used, be flexible, as the event may take longer than usual. For advice ask the Agency/Interpreter.

It is important to remember that watching an Interpreter can be tiring and, unlike a hearing person, a Deaf person is unable to rest their eyes whilst concentrating on what is being signed. Therefore it is advisable to have some rest periods during long or intensive events.

### Breaks for Interpreters

Normally an Interpreter is able to work for up to about 30 minutes at a time. Discuss with the Interpreter

---

when breaks will be needed. If breaks cannot be accommodated, you will need to book two Interpreters.

### Coffee and Lunch Times

If there are going to be opportunities for Deaf and hearing people to network you may need to book Interpreters to cover these sessions.

Please be mindful that the Interpreters will also need time when they can relax and refresh; do not expect them to interpret continuously throughout the day.

---

## What should I do before the Event?

You need to give the Interpreter:

- Relevant paperwork – including Minutes, Agendas and Speeches.
- Contact details (e.g. mobile number) of the person in charge of the event on the day.
- Details of any Co-Interpreters.

Handouts, Agendas, Minutes, and other papers are useful in advance. This information will assist the Interpreter to be prepared for the event. If you must give the Interpreter papers at the start of the meeting, allow sufficient time for him or her to read them.

---

Interpreters will know what information they are likely to need, so please give them the opportunity to discuss the assignment in advance. It is also helpful for Interpreters to have time to discuss any issues briefly on arrival.

Spend a short time with the Deaf person(s) and the Interpreter prior to the meeting to negotiate the seating arrangements, lighting and so on.

Introduce the Interpreter to key speakers.

The Interpreter should be positioned where they are clearly visible to the Deaf person and where they can clearly hear the proceedings.

---

Look at the positioning of equipment, such as OHPs and/or projector screens. Make sure the lighting is sufficient for sign language communication to take place.

## What should I do during the Event?

Speak directly to the Deaf person using the first person - do not speak to the Interpreter:

**Do not say** (to the Interpreter); "Please ask Mrs Jones to tell us why she wants the job."

**Do say** (to Mrs Jones); "Can you tell us why you want this job?"

---

---

Remember to speak clearly, at a reasonable speed, and avoid jargon where possible.

Ensure that only one person speaks at a time, as the Interpreter can only relay one message at a time.

Allow sufficient time for Deaf participant(s) to contribute. For example, the Chair of the meeting needs to be aware of the time delay due to interpreting - the interpretation is usually a few seconds behind the original.

## **Presentations and Handouts**

If slides and/or overhead transparencies (OHTs) are being used, allow extra time. The Deaf person will

---

---

need time to look at the slides/OHTs and then look at the Interpreter, sometimes they may also need to make notes.

When a speaker needs to refer to something in a paper, make heading or page references; for example say "on page 2, line 5": allow time for the Deaf person to find the reference.

If you distribute handouts during the event, please remember that the Deaf person and the Interpreter cannot sign and read papers at the same time. It is advisable to send out papers in advance but otherwise, allow time for people to read the papers, before the meeting continues.

---

## Feedback

Ask Deaf people attending your events to say how they found working with the Interpreters. This is good practice and will help to improve future events.

## Continuity

If the Deaf person, the Interpreter and other participants are in agreement, it may be advisable to book the same Interpreter(s) for any follow-on meetings. This will ensure that enough notice is given to the Interpreter and that future meetings run more smoothly, with less need for clarifications.

---

# qualifications and registration

---

## Qualifications

A Registered BSL/English Interpreter is expected to be undergoing, or to have successfully completed, a nationally recognised programme of training and assessment in order to attain qualified status. The training enables the Interpreter to have achieved agreed standards in Interpreting and in British Sign Language.

The minimum standard in BSL for Interpreters is CACDP Stage 3/Level 3 NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) or equivalent.

---

---

## Registration

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Interpreters can register with the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP).

There are three categories of registration:

- MRSLI Member of the Register of BSL/English Interpreters
  - TI Trainee Interpreter
  - JTI Junior Trainee Interpreter
-

The Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) has a Directory of its members in the following categories:

- Licensed Member
- Associate Member
- Student Member

The Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) operates an alternative system of registration for Interpreters in Scotland. Please contact them for more details.

Some Interpreters have had training or are experienced in particular areas such as law or child protection. Please discuss your requirements with the Agency, which should be able to help you to book an

---

Interpreter with appropriate skills. In some settings it is even more important that Qualified Interpreters are used. For example, in a hospital setting, misinterpretations could be life threatening. In a legal setting, interpreting errors could lead to miscarriages of justice. In a work situation, there are serious implications for Health and Safety or unfair treatment.

# interpreters' code of conduct

All BSL/English Interpreters who are registered will abide by professional codes of conduct and/or ethics.

The following are the minimum standards that should be expected from BSL/English Interpreters. You can obtain copies of CACDP's Code of Ethics and ASLI's Code of Professional Conduct - see Chapter 12 contact list.

**Confidentiality.** Any information given during an event will remain between the participants and the Interpreter.

---

**Impartiality.** The Interpreter is there purely to facilitate communication therefore they should remain impartial. During the session please do not ask them for their personal opinion.

**Advice.** When working, Interpreters should only give advice on issues that will help to improve communications between the two parties. Please do not ask the Interpreter to give advice on any other issues.

**Clarification.** An Interpreter may find it necessary to interrupt during the course of an interpreting session. This could be because the Interpreter needs to ask for clarification in order to ensure effective communication for all parties.

---

Be aware that the Interpreter will interpret everything that is said/signed, including side comments.

---

# RNID Typetalk – making telephone calls

## **RNID Typetalk**

Deaf people can use a "text phone" or "minicom" which has a keyboard and screen, to make telephone calls to other text phones. Text phones allow callers to type their conversation.

If you don't have a text phone, you can use a relay service called RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People) Typetalk. The service is free and the cost of calls is subsidised.

RNID Typetalk operators relay the conversation between the person typing on their text phone and the person speaking into their telephone.

---

For more information or an information pack call:

RNID Typetalk Customer Support  
on (voice) 0800 7 311 888 or (text) 0800 500 888

---

# contact list

---

Relevant telephone numbers and website addresses:

**Access to Work Scheme.**

Contact your Disability Services Team at local Jobcentre Plus Offices or see the website:  
[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

**Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI)**

Website: [www.asli.org.uk](http://www.asli.org.uk)

**British Deaf Association (BDA)**

Tel: 020 7588 3520 Textphone: 020 7588 3529  
Website: [www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk)

---

---

**\* The Council for the Advancement of  
Communication with Deaf People (CACDP)**

Tel: 0191 383 1155 Textphone: 0191 383 7915  
Website: [www.cacdp.org.uk](http://www.cacdp.org.uk)

**Disability Rights Commission (DRC)**

Tel: 08457 622633 Textphone: 08457 622644  
Website: [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

**Learning and Skills Council**

Tel: 0845 0194170 Fax: 02476 49 3600  
Website: [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

---

---

**National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)**

Tel & Textphone: 0808 800 8880

Website: [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

**Regional Language Network Yorkshire  
& The Humber (RLN YH)**

Tel: 0114 2813450 Fax: 0114 2815455

Website: [www.rln-yh.com](http://www.rln-yh.com)

**\* RNID**

Tel: 0870 6050 123 Textphone: 08088 8089000

Website: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

---

---

**\* Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD)**

Tel: 01206 509509 Textphone: 01206 577090

Website: [www.royaldeaf.org.uk](http://www.royaldeaf.org.uk)

**Scottish Association of Sign Language  
Interpreters (SASLI)**

Tel & Textphone: 0131 347 5601

Website: [www.sasli.org.uk](http://www.sasli.org.uk)

\* These organisations can be contacted for lists of Interpreter Agencies.

---