

ACCESS TO THE HEARING WORLD

The Present

There are currently 1395 registered sign language interpreters in the UK, with an additional 31 sign language translators (NRCPD, 2022). On the face of it, access has improved considerably since the days of the Missions. Sign language interpreters and translators have a regulatory body and occupational standards are adhered to in order to 'protect deaf and deafblind people and maintain public confidence in language services across the UK' (NRCPD, 2022). However, it is still clear, that despite legislation, and greater numbers of interpreters in the public sector, in education and in the media, deaf people are still not gaining full access. Access to Health Services are still fraught with barriers; 'Deaf people have poorer access to health services, poorer communication in consultations, and poorer access to health information' (SignHealth, 2014).



Tutor-student conversation with a BSL interpreter – Photo by UCLan



Sign Language lecture with a BSL interpreter – Photo by UCLan

One only has to witness the 'Where is the Interpreter?' campaign which was founded during the pandemic in response to a lack of interpreted news bulletins regarding Covid-19 to see how far deaf people have yet to come to gain full access.

"From when I left school to how things are today is a huge difference. Now there is so much access. In one respect that is an improvement, but it is far from perfect. We still have lots of barriers to information. For example, at hospitals and at GP practices there are still barriers. It will take a long time for it to be resolved."

(Mark Heaton)

"But my Doctor is very good. They will communicate with me writing things down on paper. If it's a more serious issue, then they will call in an interpreter. Access is certainly better than it was but it's not a 100%. Some shops and some staff have awareness but then there are other shops where you ask for a paper and pen to write things down and they don't seem interested. I recall on one occasion I went into a shop and the staff member started speaking into their phone and was using speech to text software, firstly I couldn't read it because it was way too fast and secondly when it came to answering I couldn't answer them. So, the software may have been all well and good but how was I supposed to answer. It was a waste of time."

(Maureen Jackson)

"At the Doctor's it was just me writing everything down on with a paper and pen, that's how we communicated. But the doctor would only do that for a minute or two. I remember sitting there thinking how hearing people were in with the doctor for 15 minutes, but when it was my turn it was literally a minute or two max. There was never the use of an interpreter."

(Chris Steel)

"It was the same when I would try to get on a bus. Some of the drivers had no patience with me at all. I would like to see everyone learning BSL."

(Ian Smith)

