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THE ORGANISATION AND PROVISION OF BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETERS IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

The Organisation and Provision of British Sign Language/English Interpreters in England, Scotland and Wales

A study carried out on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

By

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Contents

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During the final stage of the project, Professor Richard Brown had a severe stroke. His co-authors would wish to express their deep appreciation not only for his contribution to this study but also for his contribution to the Deaf community over the last twenty years. We wish him continued progress in his recovery.

1 Introduction

1.1 About this chapter

This project was commissioned to map current British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreter provision, explore the experiences of interested parties, and make recommendations. This chapter provides a brief introduction to the Deaf community and British Sign Language, and looks at the role of interpreters and their emergence as a profession. Finally, it outlines the methodology for this research.

1.2 Background

This research project was commissioned by the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in May 1999, for the Inter-Departmental Group on Disability, following the Social Services Inspectorate's report "A Service on the Edge" (Department of Health, 1997).

There is currently no nationally co-ordinated booking system that records requests for BSL/English interpreters, the reasons for requests and what percentage of these requests are met. Such information is recorded by individual interpreters and organisations engaged at local and regional level in the provision of interpreting services, but the type and quality of information recorded varies considerably.

The project was to obtain information on the advantages and disadvantages of the current systems of provision and to report on how the current organisation of provision could be optimised and future provision improved. Research was conducted between May 1999 and January 2000, apart from the postal questionnaire which was sent to selected organisations that use BSL/English interpreters in August 2000. Interviews with three organisations were undertaken in August and September 2000 to provide examples of good practice in relation to the use of BSL/English interpreters and related services.

1.3 The Aims of the Project

These were to:

- describe the current organisation of BSL/English interpreters and interpreting agencies in England, Scotland and Wales;
- map the locations of registered qualified and trainee interpreters and interpreting agencies in each of these countries;

- obtain information on the settings in which BSL/English interpreters are used;
- explore the experiences of users of BSL/English interpreters, BSL/English interpreters and agencies engaged in the provision of interpreting services; and
- provide recommendations on how the current organisation of BSL/English interpreters could be improved and how current difficulties could be addressed.

Consideration was to be given to whether the current organisation of interpreting provision, working practices and employment opportunities encourages trainees to undertake training and obtain qualified interpreter status; or in the case of qualified interpreters, offers incentives to maintain or improve their skills.

1.4 The Deaf Community

The Deaf community in Britain has been defined as a group of people who share a common language, a common cultural heritage, common life experiences and a common sense of identity (Kyle and Woll, 1985; Gregory and Hartley, 1991; Brennan, 1992; Turner, 1994a, 1994b, 1997). Members of the Deaf community are to be found throughout the country, but the community is given a strong coherence through a network of local, regional and national organisations (British Deaf Association, 2001; www.britishdeafassociation.org.uk).

Thus, the term 'Deaf' as it is used here refers to membership of a particular linguistic and cultural group rather than to a group of people defined in terms of a handicap or physical impairment. In this report we shall follow the convention of using 'Deaf' with a capital 'D' to refer to members of the Deaf community and 'deaf' with a lower case 'd' to refer to those who are unable to hear or have a hearing impairment and whose preferred form of communication is a spoken language, or to the audiological condition of being unable to hear (Woodward, 1972).

The use of these terms allows attention to be drawn to the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the Deaf community compared to the larger population of people who have a hearing impairment or loss and define themselves in relation to their use of a spoken language. Accurate figures are unavailable, but it is estimated that there are between 28,000 and 70,000 members of the Deaf community in Britain (Panel of Four, 1992; Gregory, 1996; Kyle and Allsop, 1998; British Deaf Association, 2001).

It should be emphasised that the research reported here was concerned solely with the organisation and provision of BSL/English interpreting services. These services primarily exist to serve Deaf people for whom British Sign Language is their preferred language. The report does not address the situation of deaf or hearing-impaired people who prefer to use a spoken language and/or other means of communication.

1.5 British Sign Language

1.5.1 Introduction

British Sign Language is the language of the Deaf community in Britain. It does not have a conventional written form. Its use as the only or preferred language of Deaf people is perhaps the most important identifying characteristic of members of the community.

Only a small minority of deaf children, however, acquire BSL within the context of the family from their Deaf parent(s) or guardians. Some 90 per cent of deaf children have hearing parents whose first language is not BSL. Acquisition of BSL may come within such families, if parents or guardians are able and willing to learn, and then communicate, with their deaf child using BSL (Fletcher, 1987). Until recently, however, they were rarely if ever encouraged to do so, and thus deaf children were more likely to acquire BSL from their peers, in schools for deaf children, or even later in life as participants in the activities of Deaf centres and clubs (Taylor and Bishop, 1991).

1.5.2 Recognition of British Sign Language

British Sign Language is a visual-gesture language; it is perceived visually and meaning is conveyed by means of the movement of the hands and body, lip patterns and the use of facial expression. For many years, in Britain and in many other countries, the use of sign languages was denigrated and the emphasis in the education of deaf children was placed on oral methods, on the development of speech, often, in the view of Deaf people, to the detriment of their use of language and their general education (Taylor and Bishop, 1991; Ree, 1999; Brennan, 1999).

Since the 1960s, however, sign languages including BSL have gained widespread recognition as languages in their own right, comparable with spoken languages and capable of the expression of the most complex and sophisticated thoughts and emotions.

This recognition has been advanced by the pioneering work of linguists and other academics in the USA, Britain and elsewhere, who were able to show that sign languages have their own lexicons, grammar and syntax. Whilst there were certain inherent differences from spoken languages, for example the exploitation of space in the production of meaning, they could be analysed linguistically in a similar way to spoken languages (Stokoe, 1960; Klima and Bellugi, 1979; Brien, 1992; Brennan, 1992; Sutton-Spence and Woll, 1999; Brennan and Brien, 2000).

1.5.3 Campaign for government recognition of BSL

In the same period when these developments occurred, members of the Deaf community, through their organisations such as the British Deaf Association, were demanding government recognition for British Sign Language.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on sign languages in 1988 that acknowledged them as the preferred languages of Deaf people. It reiterated its support for the right of Deaf people to use a sign language as their preferred language by adopting a second resolution in 1998. The sign languages (or the use of the sign languages) of Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Portugal and Greece have gained official recognition in their respective countries.

Deaf people in the UK continue to seek similar recognition for British Sign Language through a national campaign co-ordinated by the Federation of Deaf People (www.fdp.org.uk). The Disability Rights Commission submitted a report to the government on recognition of BSL in November 2000. The report recommends recognition of BSL through inclusion in the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and recommends that the Government should increase the funding available for the development of BSL/English interpreting services (Disability Rights Commission www.drc-gb.org/Information).

1.6 BSL/English Interpreters

1.6.1 The need for interpreters

Though many Deaf people acquire the ability at some level to read and write English and/or other languages, members of the Deaf community, in contrast to other linguistic minorities, can never have full and equal access to spoken languages (as a consequence of their deafness).

Thus in many contexts Deaf people require the services of interpreters to access information in spoken form and engage in communication with hearing people, just as hearing people without a knowledge of BSL need interpreters to communicate with Deaf people and access information presented in British Sign Language.

1.6.2 Short-comings of early models of interpreting provision

Before interpreting was established as a separate profession (1970s), the basis on which such a service was provided was far from satisfactory. It depended on there being people reasonably fluent in the two languages: these included hearing children and relatives of Deaf people; missioners and social workers working with Deaf people; and teachers in schools for deaf children who had acquired a knowledge of BSL.

Their understanding of BSL and their ability to act as interpreters varied considerably, so that the services available to Deaf people were frequently far from ideal. In addition, there are inherent conflicts between the role of social worker or teacher and that of interpreter.

The transition from such a situation to one where the activity of interpreting between BSL and English has developed as a distinct occupation, and has gradually become a profession is a complex story, and one that is far from concluded (Scott-Gibson 1991, 1994, 2002; Moorhead, 1991; Pollitt, 1997; Stewart et al, 1998; Ozolins and Bridge, 1999; Harrington and Turner, 2001). Indeed, despite the developments outlined below, much 'interpreting' is still provided by unqualified 'interpreters' and/or the relatives and friends of Deaf people.

1.6.3 Interpreting as a separate profession

One starting point for recent developments is the reorganisation of social work in the early 1970s following the Younghusband (HMSO, 1959) and Seebohm (HMSO, 1968) reports. This led to the development of a generic qualification for social workers and the demise of the Deaf Welfare Examination Board. Thus, fewer social workers working with Deaf people acquired the communication skills that had enabled missioners and welfare officers to interpret for Deaf people, however imperfectly in certain cases.

Deaf people and social workers came to recognise that the roles of social worker and interpreter needed to be distinguished and a separate profession of BSL/English interpreters needed to be established (Scott-Gibson, 1991; Moorhead, 1991). The British Deaf Association (BDA) secured funding in 1977 from the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) to undertake a three-year project to develop a dictionary of British Sign Language and programmes which would facilitate communication between Deaf and hearing people. The project sought to facilitate Deaf people's independence by encouraging the use of BSL and establishing interpreting as a separate profession.

1.6.4 Formation of CACDP, SASLI and ASLI

In 1980, an independent, umbrella organisation emerged from the BDA's 1977 communication project. The Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP www.cacdp.org.uk) was established by a number of organisations of and for D/deaf people with the aims of improving communication skills, including among its measures establishing a series of nationally validated qualifications in BSL, and providing a register of qualified BSL/English interpreters (Simpson, 1991).

In 1981 the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI www.sasli.org.uk) was formed and became the examining and registration body for BSL/English interpreters in

Scotland. It also established a national interpreting agency that it continues to operate from its Edinburgh headquarters.

The Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI www.asli.org.uk), covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland, was formed in 1988 as a professional association (O'Reilly, 2000). In 2001, the Association published a Directory of Interpreters (ASLI, 2001).

1.6.5 Qualifications and numbers of interpreters

Following the example of the scheme that had already been introduced by SASLI in Scotland, CACDP developed a series of qualifications, graded in three 'Stages', initially in what were described as 'sign communication skills'. Since the end of the 1980s, the Stage One, Two and Three qualifications have indicated different levels of competence in British Sign Language (with Stage Three the most advanced of these).

The numbers of people entering and passing these examinations have grown rapidly, more than 20,000 taking Stage 1 and nearly 4,000 Stage 2 in 1998 (CACDP Annual Report, 1998). Until very recently Stage 3 has been a prerequisite for candidates seeking to take the interpreter examination for admission to the registers of interpreters. In the 1990s, CACDP and SASLI were engaged in restructuring their British Sign Language examinations within an NVQ/SNVQ framework.

In 1983, the CACDP Register recorded 121 qualified interpreters, but all except nine of these had been temporarily admitted to the register for five years because they held the Deaf Welfare Examination Board (DWEB) qualification. That became insufficient for registration in 1987, when passing the appropriate CACDP examination became an essential requirement for registration. In 1987, the number of registered qualified interpreters dropped to 62, from which point it grew to 83 in 1991, and 149 in the autumn of 1999. The CACDP list of registered trainee interpreters has grown from 115 in 1991 to 188 in 1999 (Simpson, 1991; CACDP Annual Reports). Each year interpreters on the CACDP Register are required to re-register. In August 2001, the number of registered qualified interpreters was 129 and the number of registered trainees was 132 (see chapter 2 for further information).

Since 1992 the CACDP has published a Directory containing details of registered qualified and trainee interpreters who choose to advertise their availability to undertake interpreting assignments through CACDP. The directory does not therefore include the names of all registered qualified interpreters working as interpreters at the time of publication. The directory also includes details of interpreting agencies registered with the Council. Thirty-one agencies were listed in the 1998/99 Directory; 22 in the 2000/01 Directory.

However, a number of agencies engaged in providing interpreting services in England and Wales are not registered with CACDP (e.g. the 1999 BDA Information Directory lists five agencies in England or Wales that do not appear in the 1998/99 CACDP Directory).

SASLI does not publish a directory of interpreters. However, there were 21 registered qualified British Sign Language/English interpreters in Scotland on the SASLI register in 1990 (Scott-Gibson, 1991) and 30, together with 16 registered trainees, in 1999 (SASLI interview). At the end of 2000, the numbers were 35 registered qualified and 12 trainee interpreters (SASLI Annual Report, 2000).

ASLI, as noted above, has published a Directory (ASLI, 2001) containing information about the Association and the Association's interpreter members. The directory contains entries for 50 Licensed Interpreters (49 of whom had Registered Qualified Interpreter status with CACDP at the time of publication) and 56 Probationer Interpreters (45 of whom, at the time of publication, had Trainee Interpreter status with CACDP).

1.6.6 Training

Training to enable trainee interpreters to qualify was initially in the form of short courses offered by different organisations engaged in interpreter training (these included courses run by experienced interpreters, D/deaf organisations and assessment bodies).

In 1987, the University of Bristol introduced a two-year part-time Certificate in Sign Language Interpreting. In 1988, the University of Durham established part-time post-graduate Advanced Diploma and MA courses in BSL/English Interpreting for students who had already passed a BSL Stage 3 examination. However, numbers were small: 14 in Durham and 8 in Bristol in 1990-1.

More recently, a postgraduate degree programme in BSL/English Interpreting has been established at the University of Central Lancashire and an undergraduate degree at the University of Wolverhampton. At Heriot-Watt University, a Certificate course in BSL/English Interpreting is offered in association with SASLI. However, the University of Durham programme ceased to provide training in 2000[1]

[1] CACDP commissioned an independent consultant to map current training provision in relation to CACDP's Interpreting Registration Standards for England, Wales and Northern Ireland on which entry to the CACDP Register is based from April 2002. The report (Hawcroft, 2001) describes how current university based courses, wholly or in part, meet the requirements of CACDP's Interpreting Registration Standards.

Interpreter training organisations (e.g. Sign Language International) and interpreting agencies (e.g. RNID, RAD) have established or are in the process of establishing training programmes to support trainees seeking to gain registered status by obtaining the National Vocational or Scottish National Vocational Qualification in sign language/spoken language interpreting.[2]

1.6.7 Registration of interpreters

In the 1990s, the CACDP pursued a policy of establishing both BSL language qualifications and the qualification for registered interpreters as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). The possession of a university qualification in BSL/English interpreting did not grant access to the Register of BSL/English Interpreters at that time.

The BSL/English interpreting NVQ qualification has been set at level 4 (the highest level NVQ qualification is level 5), where the emphasis is on acquiring the necessary competencies through work experience, on-the-job training and work-based assessments. It was originally proposed that the NVQ route should constitute the only route to registered status. However, CACDP's 1999 and forthcoming policy documents on the registration of interpreters (CACDP, 1999; 2002 forthcoming) state that registration may be achieved through other validated routes.

It has also proposed the establishment of two new categories to replace the existing, very broad, category of trainee interpreter. The new CACDP registration policy will recognise three categories of 'interpreter': junior trainee, trainee and member of the register.

The process of implementing the new registration policy through an independent panel has commenced, but the work of accrediting centres and different routes has still to be completed. CACDP has organised an assessment for graduates of recognised training programmes seeking entry to the register and granted registered status to those who satisfactorily completed the pilot NVQ interpreting assessment. Two university training programmes (at the Universities of Central Lancashire and Durham) have been recognised as providing training of the appropriate standard and range. Students who have satisfactorily completed these courses are granted direct entry to CACDP's Register of BSL/English Interpreters (Hawcroft, 2001).

ASLI, following consultation with its members, has published detailed proposals outlining a career and licensing structure for BSL/English interpreters (O'Reilly, 2000; ASLI, 2001). The

[2] The Scottish National Vocational Qualification in sign language/spoken language interpreting has been established but no organisation is awarding this qualification at this time.

proposals were based on a five-category structure: probationer, licensed interpreter, specialist interpreter, mentor and interpreter trainer. In 2002 the Association decided to suspend its own registration policy and accept an invitation to become a member of the Independent Registration Panel established to administer the CACDP Register.

1.6.8 Emergence of professional interpreters

In parallel with these changes, though not altogether at the same pace, opportunities developed for the employment and self-employment of registered qualified and trainee BSL/English interpreters and, because supply did not meet demand, for many interpreters who had not sought or gained admission to a register. Thus it became possible to contemplate earning one's living as an interpreter: individuals without much, if any, previous contact with the Deaf community could set out to acquire the appropriate training and expertise.

Some professional interpreters work independently on a self-employed basis, arranging requests for their services as best they can to fill their work time and secure a reasonable income. Others are employed by education establishments, local authorities or by voluntary bodies to help those organisations meet their obligations to Deaf clients. A further group of interpreters are employed by agencies, set up by voluntary bodies such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID www.rnid.org.uk), regional Deaf centres and local authorities. These offer interpreters contracts of employment and aim to provide interpreting services to a wide range of individual and organisational clients.

Some registered interpreters have regular employment that does not primarily involve the use of their interpreting skills and are interpreters only on an occasional basis. The current distribution of trainee and qualified interpreters between these various forms of employment is outlined in the next chapter.

A further sign of the development of BSL/English interpreting as a professional occupation has been the development by CACDP, SASLI and ASLI of codes of ethics or practice to guide the conduct of interpreters on their respective registers/directories in carrying out their work.

1.6.9 Monitoring of interpreter performance

Despite the existence of the registers and directories, training courses and registered, qualified interpreters, much interpreting is being carried out by interpreters who are at best registered trainees or probationers and in some cases much less well qualified than that.

The monitoring of interpreter performance tends to be limited and ad hoc, and because neither the Deaf client nor the non-signing hearing person can really assess how well the interpreter is performing it is possible for substandard interpreting to continue. What may seem to the external observer to be a fluent piece of interpreting, e.g. no interruptions for questions of clarification, may in fact be a gross simplification and even distortion of what the Deaf person really signed, or the speaker really said.

1.6.10 Current situation

The last three decades have seen major changes in the ways in which the needs for communication between Deaf and hearing people have been met, notably by the growth in numbers of interpreters and creation of BSL/English interpreting as a professional occupation. There are, however, a number of outstanding issues: provision for training interpreters; support for interpreters in training; qualifications and registration of interpreters and their customers' understanding of this; questions of quality control; and the matching of the number of qualified interpreters to the demand for their services.

1.6.11 Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

Part of the increase in demand for interpreting services can be attributed to Deaf people becoming more aware of the existence of professional interpreters and the services they can provide. This increasing demand is also the result of the impact of legislation such as the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

The DDA introduced new laws aimed at ending the discrimination that many disabled people faced. The Act gave disabled people new rights of access to goods, facilities and services, as well as in employment and buying or renting property.

Since October 1999, under part III of the DDA, service providers have to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services.

The provision of a BSL/English interpreter may constitute an example of reasonable adjustment under the DDA, but the Act does not specify in exactly what circumstances this would be the case. There are statutory codes of practice which give some examples of situations where providing a BSL interpreter might be considered an adjustment. One of the functions of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), which opened for business in April 2000, is to prepare and review statutory codes of practice. The DRC has a duty to work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people and to help them secure their rights.

1.7 Research Methods

The research team collected information by the following means:

- all the interpreting agencies in England and Wales listed in the CACDP Directory (30 at the time the study commenced), and agencies identified in Scotland (11), were asked to supply copies of their recent annual reports; they were also asked for details about the interpreters they employed and recent types, areas and levels of activity, and for copies of information they provided to service users; in addition, they were asked to complete detailed returns of completed and unmet bookings for a two-week period in June 1999;
- structured and tape recorded interviews were conducted with representatives from 26 interpreting agencies, including several from whom written replies had not been received;
- a postal questionnaire was distributed to all qualified and trainee interpreters on the registers of CACDP and SASLI: 372 questionnaires were posted to interpreters in England, Wales and Scotland and 223 usable replies were received;
- in four parts of Britain (Scotland, the North West of England, the English West Midlands and Wales) eight interpreters were randomly selected and asked if they would agree to be interviewed; structured and tape-recorded interviews were conducted with 14 interpreters in total; a public meeting was held in London to which all interpreters working in London were invited; the meeting was attended by five interpreters;
- structured and video-recorded interviews were conducted in BSL with 30 Deaf users of interpreting services in Scotland, the North West of England, the English West Midlands and Wales; the officers of Deaf centres in each region or country provided project staff with the names of Deaf users of interpreting services willing to be interviewed (see 5.2.1.2 for further details);
- public meetings were held with Deaf people in Scotland, the North West of England, Wales and London on their experiences of obtaining and using interpreters and their views on how interpreting services could be improved; the meetings were advertised through Deaf centres and were open to all Deaf people in each area or country; the meetings were filmed and were attended by 81 Deaf people;
- the researchers also consulted and analysed a range of information in published and other printed sources on the provision of interpreting services in Britain;

- semi-structured and tape-recorded interviews were undertaken with the principal officers, or other officials, of national D/deaf organisations and national organisations of BSL/English interpreters in Britain;
- a two-page questionnaire was circulated in August 2000 to organisations known to use the services of BSL/English interpreters: of the 168 questionnaires distributed, 84 were returned in time to be analysed; telephone interviews were also carried out with representatives of three organisations engaged in employing BSL/English interpreters and related services to illustrate aspects of good practice.

1.8 Summary

This research project was commissioned to map current British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreter provision, explore the experiences of interested parties, and make recommendations (1.1 – 1.3).

The members of the Deaf community in Britain are members of a particular linguistic and cultural group rather than a group defined only in terms of deafness or a hearing-impairment. British Sign Language is the language of the Deaf community in Britain (1.4).

Since the 1960s sign languages including BSL have gained general recognition as languages in their own right. Deaf people in Britain continue to seek Government recognition of BSL (1.5).

Deaf people require the services of interpreters to communicate with hearing people and access information presented in a spoken language, as do hearing people to communicate with Deaf people and access information presented in BSL. During the 1970s, the need for interpreting to be established as a separate profession came to be recognised. Categories of registration, qualifications and training for interpreters were developed (1.6).

The research team contacted interpreting agencies, qualified and trainee interpreters, Deaf and hearing users of interpreting services, and interested national organisations (1.7).

2 BSL/English Interpreters in Great Britain

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a profile of the distribution and numbers, social characteristics, training, qualifications and careers, and current employment and availability of BSL/English interpreters in England, Scotland and Wales.

As has been outlined in Chapter 1, the development of BSL/English interpreting as an occupation and profession and the growth of interpreting services took place rapidly over a fairly short period of 20 or 30 years starting in the 1970s. This has resulted in both BSL/English interpreters and interpreting agencies being far from evenly distributed across Britain.

The present situation, which is of course continuing to change and develop, might be likened to a patchwork quilt: there are a few patches in which there is adequate provision of interpreting services (compared to elsewhere) and many more places where the provision is thin if not virtually non-existent.

2.2 The Distribution and Numbers of Interpreters

2.2.1 Problems in mapping interpreters

Giving an account of the current provision is made more difficult by the fact that the available lists of either BSL/English interpreters or interpreting agencies do not provide a complete picture of the numbers.

For Scotland, the register of interpreters maintained by the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) is probably more comprehensive than that available for England and/or Wales, but their membership list is not published.

The most complete list for England and Wales, at the time the study commenced, was that contained in the Directory of the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP), published in 1998 for the period 1998-99. However, this does not include either all the active qualified or trainee interpreters nor all the interpreting agencies who became known to us during the course of this project[3].

[3] The current CACDP registered qualified and registered trainee interpreters can be found on the Council's website (www.cacdp.demon.co.uk). This is updated on a daily basis. On the 9th January 2002 there were 142 registered qualified and 157 registered trainee interpreters listed. The ASLI Directory, published in April 2001 contained entries for 106 interpreters: 50 licensed and 56 probationer interpreters (www.asli.org.uk).

In particular, not all qualified interpreters maintain their registration with CACDP. The CACDP list of agencies contains only those agencies that have applied for registration and have met the conditions laid down by the Council. As reported in 1.6.5 the British Deaf Association's Information Directory for 1999 lists both the registered and at least some non-registered (with CACDP) agencies. Lists of the agencies that became known to us during the course of the project are to be found in the next chapter in Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

In the following account of the present distribution of BSL/English interpreters and interpreting agencies we have therefore considered England and Wales, and Scotland separately. For each, we have collated a variety of sources of information to produce a picture of the current situation (see Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1 and 3.2 and the maps in the Appendix).

2.2.2 BSL/English interpreters in England and Wales

2.2.2.1 Sources

The following sources were used to derive this account of interpreters in England and Wales:

- the 1998-9 CACDP Directory;
- the questionnaires received in June and July 1999 from 199 qualified and trainee interpreters in England and Wales (60 per cent of all those contacted);
- the address lists of registered qualified and registered trainee interpreters supplied to us by CACDP and dated October 1999;
- information contained in documents received from interpreting agencies or provided during our interviews with representatives of those agencies;
- the interviews conducted with BSL/English interpreters.

The resulting picture relates to the situation in the late summer/early autumn of 1999.

SASLI's Register of BSL/English Interpreters contained 39 members on the register and 12 registered trainee interpreters in January 2002 (www.sasli.org.uk).

Table 2.1

THE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALIFIED AND TRAINEE INTERPRETERS IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1999

Country/ English Region	Total	RQI /RTI#	No Info.	Total Known	Freelance (p/t)+		Agency (p/t)+		Other (f/l)+	
Wales	13	4/9	1	12	6	(3)	4	(2)	2	(2)
North Yorkshire & Humberside	18	9/9	4	14	7	(2)	4	(2)	3	(3)
North West	26	16/10	4	22	9	(-)	9	-	4	(2)
East Midlands	35	16/19	4	31	10	(2)	12	(1)	9	(3)
West Midlands	34	19/15	3	31	10	(1)	11	(1)	10	(3)
East Anglia	58	22/36	16	42	18	(4)	16	(4)	8	(4)
Central	12	2/10	-	12	5	(1)	5	(2)	2	(2)
London	23	5/18	4	19	11	(2)	4	(1)	4	(3)
South East	48	18/30	9	39	12	(1)	17	(5)	10	(3)
South West	38	15/23	3	35	20	(5)	10	(2)	5	(2)
TOTAL	38	17/21	7	31	21	(6)	6	(2)	4	(3)
	343	143/200	55	288	129	(27)	98	(22)	61	(30)

Country/ English Region	Number of available interpreters		Total
	f/t	p/t	
Wales	5	7	12
North Yorkshire & Humberside	7	7	14
North West	18	2	20
East Midlands	19	6	25
West Midlands	19	5	24
East Anglia	26	12	38
Central	7	5	12
London	12	6	18
South East	23	9	32
South West	23	9	32
TOTAL	19	11	30
	178	79	257

* Region - the regions used are as defined in the 1998/99 CACDP Directory:

North	Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Durham, Cumbria, Cleveland
Yorkshire & Humberside	North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Humberside
East Midlands	Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire
North West	Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cheshire
West Midlands	Staffordshire, Shropshire, West Midlands, Hereford & Worcester, Warwickshire
East Anglia	Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire
Central	Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire
London	Inner & Outer London
South East	Kent, Surrey, East & West Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight
South West	Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Avon

Interpreters have been allocated to regions so far as possible in terms of their main place of work, rather than their home address. Many interpreters work within more than one region.

#The RTI category includes a small number of interpreters whose RQI/RTI status is not known.

+The figures in brackets for freelance and agency interpreters who work part-time (p/t), and for interpreters working in other employment who also do freelance interpreting. These are included in the main totals for each of these three categories.

2.2.2.2 Interpreter numbers in England and Wales

Table 2.1 above provides a summary of the results of this investigation showing the distributions of active registered qualified interpreters (RQI) and registered trainee interpreters (RTI), in full-time and part-time work in relation to the English regions and Wales in the *CACDP Directory*. The results can be summarised as follows:

	Number of Interpreters in England & Wales		
	Total	**Registered Qualified (RQI)**	**Registered Trainee (RTI)**
Number of interpreters identified	343	143	200
Those for whom only name and qualification known	55	25	30
Those not interpreting and in other employment	31	16	15
Total number of known available interpreters	257	102	155

Known available interpreters in England & Wales	**Employment status**		
	Full-time	**Part-time**	**Total**
Freelance interpreters also in other employment		30	30
Freelance	102	27	129
Employed by Agencies	76	22	98
RQI	75	27	102
RTI	103	52	155

As can be seen from the table there were at least 178 known full-time interpreters available in England and Wales in 1999, of whom 75 were Registered Qualified Interpreters. In addition there were at least 79 part-time interpreters of whom, 27 were Registered Qualified Interpreters. However, some part-time interpreters were only available to interpret for a few hours a week.

2.2.2.3 Regional distribution

The regional distribution shows marked differences in the availability of interpreters between the different regions. To assess the significance of these disparities the figures that are summarised in Table 2.1 must be compared with the distribution of the total population between these regions. (There are no available figures regarding the geographical distribution of the Deaf community of England and Wales, or Scotland; it is generally assumed to have a similar distribution to that of the overall population.)

As Table 2.2 shows, the proportion of available interpreters was smaller than the proportion of the total population in Wales, the North of England, Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West of England and East Anglia; and somewhat smaller in the most densely populated regions of London and the South East of England. In contrast the English East and West Midlands and the Central region to their immediate south were relatively well provided with interpreters, though only in comparison with other regions.

There are of course differences in the geographical distribution of interpreters within as well as between regions. One such concentration of interpreters within the South West of England - nearly half (47%) of the available interpreters in the region are resident in Bristol - almost certainly accounts for the larger proportion of interpreters than population in that region as a whole.

Table 2.2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF INTERPRETERS AND POPULATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1999

Wales & English Regions	Population	Qualified and Trainee Interpreters			Known Available Interpreters		
	'000	Total	RQI	Trainee	Total	f-t	p-t
	N = 52,111	343	143	200	257	178	79
Percent							
Wales	5.6	3.8	2.8	4.5	4.7	2.8	8.9
North	5.9	5.2	6.3	4.5	5.4	3.9	8.9
Yorkshire & Humberside	9.6	7.6	11.2	5.0	7.8	10.1	2.5
North West	12.3	10.2	11.2	9.5	9.7	10.7	7.6
East Midlands	8.0	9.9	13.3	7.5	9.3	10.7	6.3
West Midlands	10.2	16.9	15.4	18.0	14.8	14.6	15.2
East Anglia	7.6	3.5	1.4	5.0	4.7	3.9	6.3
Central	5.8	6.7	3.5	9.0	7.0	6.7	7.6
London	3.7	14.0	12.6	15.0	12.5	12.9	11.4
South East	13.2	11.1	10.5	11.5	12.5	12.9	11.4
South West	8.3	11.1	11.9	10.5	11.7	10.7	13.9

Population figures for 1997 derived from Table 14.1, pp.161-9 Regional Trends 1999, Office for National Statistics, London.
Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2.3

THE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALIFIED AND TRAINEE INTERPRETERS IN SCOTLAND IN 1999

Region	Total	No Info.	Total Known	Freelance (p-t)+	Agency (p-t)+	Other (f/l)+	Available (f-t)	Available (p-t)	Total
Dumfries & Galloway	2	-	2	-	-	2 (2)	-	2	2
Glasgow & West of Scotland	12	1	11	3 (-)	3 (-)	5 (2)	6	2	8
Edinburgh & East of Scotland	14	-	14	3 (-)	5 (-)	6 (4)	8	4	12
Aberdeen & NE	3	-	3	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	-	3	3
Highlands	4	-	4	-	-	4 (2)	-	2	2
TOTAL	35	1	34	7 (1)	9 (1)*	8 (11)	14	13	27

*Two of the agency interpreters (one at the Glasgow and the West of Scotland Agency and one at the Edinburgh and the East of Scotland Agency) work part-time and are entered in both the agency and availability columns.
+ The figures in brackets for freelance and agency interpreters who work part-time, and for interpreters working in other employment who also do freelance interpreting, are included in the main totals for each of these categories.

2.2.3 BSL/English interpreters in Scotland

2.2.3.1 Sources

The following sources were used to derive this account of interpreters in Scotland:

- the 1998-9 CACDP Directory;
- the questionnaires received in June and July 1999 from 24 qualified and trainee interpreters in Scotland (60 per cent of all those who were contacted through SASLI);
- information contained in documents received from interpreting agencies in Scotland or provided during our interviews with representatives of those agencies;
- information provided during our interviews with individual BSL/English interpreters resident in Scotland;
- the post codes for all qualified and trainee interpreters registered with SASLI.

2.2.3.2 Interpreter numbers in Scotland:

Table 2.3 provides a summary of the results of the collation of this information. We collected the names and qualification level of 35 BSL/English interpreters in Scotland (27 of them registered qualified and 8 trainees), but no further information about one of the trainees. The details for the 34 interpreters for whom we have information are as follows:

	Number of Interpreters in Scotland		
	Total	**Registered Qualified (RQI)**	**Registered Trainee (RTI)**
Number of interpreters identified	35	27	8
Those for whom only name and qualification known	1	0	0
Those not interpreting and in other employment	7		
Total number of known available interpreters	27		

Known available interpreters in Scotland	Employment status		
	Full-time	**Part-time**	**Total**
Freelance interpreters also in other employment	0	11	11
Freelance	6	1	7
Employed by Agencies	6	1	7
Freelance and employed by agency	2		2
RQI	7		7
RTI	7		7

Thus only 14 known interpreters (half of them registered qualified) appear to be 'available' full-time in the whole of Scotland, though there are altogether a further 13 interpreters who are likely to be available part-time, but in many cases only for a very few hours each week.

2.2.3.3 Geographical distribution

As in England and Wales, the geographical distribution of these interpreters is far from even. The majority are concentrated in the Central Belt stretching from Glasgow and the former Strathclyde region in the west to Edinburgh and the east coast. Only seven part-time interpreters were identified as being available in the rest of the country: Dumfries, Galloway and the Borders; Aberdeen and North East Scotland; and the North West and Islands and Highlands. (Provision in the Highlands at the time the study was undertaken was supplemented by a remote video service provided by RNID Scotland from Glasgow). Whilst

the majority of the population is also concentrated in the Central Belt, the effective availability of the small number of interpreters working elsewhere in the country is adversely affected by the fact that they often have to spend lengthy periods of time travelling to assignments.

2.3 Social Characteristics of Interpreters

2.3.1 Introduction

The rest of this chapter is concerned with the social and occupational characteristics of BSL/English interpreters, their experiences of work and employment, their current availability, workloads and future career intentions. Their views about how the organisation and provision of interpreting services in Britain might be made more effective are set out in chapter 6.

We draw heavily on the questionnaires received from 223 BSL/English interpreters in June and July 1999. These respondents comprised 60 per cent of all the registered qualified interpreters (RQI) and registered trainee interpreters (RTI) on the lists of the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) and the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) in May 1999.

We have no reason to believe that they are significantly different from the total population of such interpreters (we were only able to compare the respondents with the total population of interpreters in relation to gender, region and interpreter status). We have also drawn on the interviews carried out with qualified and trainee interpreters in Scotland, the North - West of England, the English West Midlands, Wales and London. The answers given and comments made during these interviews largely reinforced the findings from the questionnaires and allow certain points to be emphasised and illustrated in greater detail.

2.3.2 Social characteristics

The questionnaire respondents had the following social characteristics:

- gender: the great majority of BSL/English interpreters are women - 82 per cent of those on the CACDP address list (and 84% of our respondents); the predominance of women in the profession is likely to increase: whereas men constituted nearly a quarter (23%) of qualified interpreters, only a seventh (14%) of trainees were men;
- age: the great majority of interpreters are under 50; their median age at the end of 1999 was 38, a quarter of them were aged under 32, and only 11 per cent

aged 50 or more; qualified interpreters are, unsurprisingly, older than trainee interpreters: a median age of 44 with three quarters aged 36 or more, as compared with a median age of 36 for trainees and a quarter of them aged 30 or under;

- ethnic identity: just under five per cent (11) of the questionnaire respondents described themselves as other than 'white': four as 'black-Caribbean' and seven as 'mixed/other';
- deaf/hearing: five respondents described themselves as ‘deaf’ and one as ‘hard-of-hearing’;
- education: the questionnaire did not ask for details of general educational qualifications, but answers to other questions indicated that at least 29 per cent of the respondents were graduates; all except thirteen of them had an English Language qualification though for nearly half of those who did, this was a GCSE or O level or lower level qualification than these, and for over three- quarters this had been acquired at least ten years earlier.

2.4 BSL Training and Qualifications

2.4.1 British Sign Language

As we discussed in the Introduction, the occupation of BSL/English interpreter emerged from the work of those who undertook the same tasks either as friends or family members of Deaf people or as professionals in close contact with Deaf people, such as missioners, social workers and teachers. Many of the former depended on the knowledge of the language they had acquired as a child and from their interactions with Deaf adults as they grew older; few if any in either grouping had had any formal instruction or qualification in BSL. This situation has changed quite dramatically since the 1980s and is likely to change still further.

Only a quarter of the interpreters questioned had acquired BSL as a child, and this proportion was lower among trainees (21%) than qualified interpreters (31%).

This acquisition of BSL as a child was strongly related to age. The median age of those acquiring BSL as a child was 44 years, and a third were over 50; for those who had acquired the language as an adult the median age was 37, of whom only 7 per cent were over 50.

The great majority of interpreters (212 out of 223 - 95%) had passed the Stage 3 BSL language examination, which until recently was the qualification individuals had to obtain before they could apply to take the assessments for entry to the interpreting registers. Forty-four of them (36 RTIs and 8 RQIs) had an additional qualification in the language.

In those cases where this information was provided, the majority of qualified interpreters had obtained their Stage 3 qualification five or more years ago, whereas almost two-thirds of the trainees had obtained it more recently than that.

2.4.2 Other relevant qualifications

Many interpreters had additional qualifications:

- Seven questionnaire respondents (3%) reported being qualified to communicate with deaf/blind people, and three in note taking.
- Nineteen respondents (9%) claimed to be able to interpret between BSL and a language other than English and one claimed to be competent in International Sign, though interviews suggested that these claims may have been unduly modest. Some others reported having a measure of competence in a language(s) other than BSL and English.
- Other expertise held by interpreters (either from previous experience, occupations or training) included qualifications and/or significant experience in social or community work (44 respondents; 20%), education (27 respondents; 12%), nursing or medicine (19 respondents; 9%), the theatre (12 respondents; 5%), religion (11 respondents; 5%) and legal matters (6 respondents; 3%).

2.4.3 General interpreter training

Interpreter training can be categorised as having taken one of three main forms:

a) short (mostly part-time) courses ranging from a day to six months and often not leading to any formal qualification;
b) first degree or sub-degree courses (mostly full-time) leading to the award of a degree, diploma or certificate; and
c) postgraduate courses (mostly part-time) leading to an Advanced or Postgraduate Diploma or Masters degree.

The overall pattern of training reported by respondents is shown in Table 2.4.

Only four respondents (2%) reported no formal training of any type. No type of training predominated: the proportion of respondents who had had training did not reach a half in any of the categories listed.

With few exceptions, however, the qualified interpreters had only been on short courses, whereas there were larger proportions of the trainees with experience of longer and more demanding courses. This pattern is born out when the responses are analysed to show the 'most advanced' training received:

	Total		RQI	RTI	Age: 39 & under	40 & over
Postgraduate	44	*20%*	*15%*	*23%*	*22%*	*16%*
Cert., dip., degree	68	*30%*	*8%*	*37%*	*41%*	*19%*
Short courses	98	*44%*	*70%*	*35%*	*34%*	*54%*
None, no info	13	*6%*				
Total (N = 223)	223	*100 %*	91	132	118	105

2.4.4 Specialist interpreter training

Training in specialist areas of work is mostly in the form of short courses, or component courses or 'modules' within a programme of general training. In contrast to the pattern with general interpreter training, qualified interpreters were more likely than trainees to have had training in each of the specialist areas (see Table 2.5), though in the majority of cases this was more than four years ago.

- Only six RQIs reported no specialist training in contrast to twenty-seven RTIs. Those who had had specialist training had often had it in several areas of work.
- The most frequently reported areas of specialist training were legal and medical interpreting: half of all respondents and two-thirds of RQIs had had such training.
- Of the RQIs, more than half had also had some training in interpreting in the area of mental health and more than four-fifths in relation to child protection cases, but the proportions for trainees were considerably lower.

Table 2.4

General Interpreter Training

What, if any general training as an interpreter have you had? Were qualifications obtained? (Please tick one or more of the following as appropriate)

(percentages in italics)	Registered Trainee Interpreters N = 132				Registered Qualified Interpreters N = 90				Total N = 222*			
Type of Course	**None**	**F-t**	**P-t**	**Qual.**	**None**	**F-t**	**P-t**	**Qual.**	**None**	**F-t**	**P-t**	**Qual.**
Day/weekend courses	**74**	**12**	**46**	**10**	**42**	**8**	**40**	**16**	**116**	**20**	**86**	**26**
									52	*9*	*39*	*12*
Courses week – 6 months.	**82**	**14**	**34**	**11**	**41**	**9**	**40**	**23**	**123**	**23**	**74**	**34**
									55	*10*	*33*	*14*
Certificate courses	**111**	**5**	**16**	**11**	**75**	**5**	**10**	**14**	**186**	**10**	**26**	**25**
									84	*5*	*12*	*11*
Diploma/HND courses	**108**	**23**	**1**	**23**	**84**	**5**	**1**	**5**	**192**	**28**	**2**	**28**
									86	*13*	*1*	*13*
Degree courses	**117**	**10**	**5**	**12**	**89**	**1**	**-**	**1**	**206**	**11**	**5**	**13**
									93	*5*	*2*	*6*
Postgraduate courses	**102**	**7**	**23**	**17**	**76**	**3**	**11**	**11**	**178**	**10**	**34**	**28**
									80	*5*	*15*	*13*
Other courses	**117**	**3**	**12**	**3**	**79**	**2**	**9**	**-**	**196**	**5**	**21**	**3**
									88	*2*	*9*	*1*
No general interpreter Training courses	**3**				**1**				**4**			
									2			

Some interpreters were attending courses at the time they completed the questionnaire and therefore qualification were not yet obtained, so that the percentage of these respondents achieving a qualification is likely to increase slightly in the future.
*There was one non-response to this question
Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2.5

Specialist Interpreter Training

Have you attended education or training courses in any of the following specialist areas of interpreting, or studied such specialisms as part of your general interpreter training? (Please tick as appropriate)

(percentages in italics)	Registered Trainee Interpreters N = 132				Registered Qualified Interpreters N = 91				Total N = 223			
Specialism	None	Once	More often	Since 1995	None	Once	More often	Since 1995	None	Once	More often	Since 1995
Education	87	12	33	28	52	11	28	7	139	23	61	35
									76	*10*	*27*	*16*
Employment	107	5	20	11	68	5	18	14	175	10	38	25
									78	*4*	*17*	*11*
Legal	74	26	32	44	26	23	42	24	100	49	74	68
									45	*22*	*33*	*30*
Medical	59	31	42	25	38	19	34	17	97	50	76	42
									43	*22*	*34*	*19*
Mental Health	90	23	19	29	42	23	26	17	132	46	45	46
									59	*21*	*20*	*21*
Social Work	101	8	23	17	56	12	23	7	157	20	46	24
									70	*9*	*21*	*11*
Counselling	112	12	8	11	65	9	17	6	177	21	25	17
									79	*9*	*11*	*8*
Child Protection	100	14	18	19	40	23	28	15	140	37	46	34
									63	*17*	*21*	*15*
Theatre	111	12	9	11	62	18	11	6	173	30	20	17
									78	*13*	*9*	*8*
Television	126	2	4	2	72	10	9	1	198	12	13	3
									89	*5*	*6*	*1*
Other	94	19	19	17	64	10	17	9	158	29	36	26
									71	*13*	*16*	*12*
No Specialist Interpreter Training Courses	27				6				33			
									15			

Specialist training received as part of general interpreter training has been included in the 'more often' category.

Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

2.5 Careers of BSL/English Interpreters

2.5.1 Careers

As might be expected in view of the age distribution of interpreters and the recent emergence of BSL/English interpreting as a profession, most respondents had had quite short interpreting careers. Most had worked continuously as interpreters since they first started doing so professionally.

- Just over half of trainee interpreters had first registered less than three years ago, but nearly half had had their first professional (i.e. paid) interpreting assignment more than four years ago.
- The registered qualified interpreters were considerably more experienced. Half of them had been registered as RQIs for five years or longer, and nearly three-quarters for three years or longer. Over half of them had had their first professional assignment more than ten years ago, and only three less than four years ago.
- Seven out of ten of the trainee interpreters had worked continuously as interpreters since their first professional assignment or had only had exceptional breaks due to sickness, domestic circumstances, etc., but this was the case for only six out of ten of the RQIs. A further fifth of the trainees and almost a third of the RQIs had worked intermittently as interpreters or in interpreter-related employment, so that in both categories only one in ten had been mostly **not** employed as an interpreter since the time of their initial assignment.
- The main reasons for not working as an interpreter were being in employment outside interpreting (54%), other work commitments (22%) and family or domestic circumstances (14%).

2.5.2 'Survival' rates

In considering the careers of questionnaire respondents, we are, of course, looking only at those who had 'survived' on the registers as interpreters until 1998-9. There is some evidence that there has been considerable 'wastage' from those who initially register as trainee interpreters and even from among qualified interpreters. This wastage has of course taken place during a period, the 1990s, when the overall numbers of qualified and trainee interpreters have increased (see 1.6.5).

- Comparisons of lists of names from the CACDP Directory for 1994-5 with those listed in 1998-9 suggest that a substantial minority of those registered as qualified or trainee interpreters at the earlier date were no longer active in that role five years later.
- About a third of those registered as qualified interpreters in 1994 were no longer so listed in 1998-9; and some two-fifths of those registered as trainees were no longer trainees nor qualified interpreters at the later date.

- Of those listed as trainees in 1995-6 but not in 1994-5, i.e. newcomers to the register, more than half were no longer listed as trainees, nor were qualified interpreters, in 1998-9[4].

These comparisons took the form of matching names from the respective lists. Therefore they can only be suggestive because of possible surname changes following marriage or divorce or because the interpreter made a decision not to maintain their registration with CACDP, and therefore is absent from the list.

2.6 Current Employment and Interpreting Activity

2.6.1 Current employment status

The numbers of interpreters were broken down by category (freelance, part-time, employees of agencies etc) in paragraphs 2.2.2.2 and 2.2.3.2 above. The information in the questionnaires, however, also allowed the employment situations of interpreters to be categorised in other ways, and this enabled us to explore their availability to undertake interpreting assignments in more detail.

- The 223 respondents to the questionnaire were categorised according to whether they worked as freelance interpreters (107: 48%), as solely employed (38: 17%), as 'both' employees and freelance (71: 32%) or as not actively interpreting at all (7: 3%). There were almost equal proportions of registered qualified and trainee interpreters in the first three of these categories.
- More than four-fifths of the respondents in each of the three 'active' categories reported undertaking interpreting assignments either every working day or several times each week, with the remainder interpreting less often than that.

2.6.2 Types and areas of work

The types of interpreting undertaken by respondents were categorised in terms of the interpreting situations involved (e.g. one-to-one, small group, large meeting, etc.) and in terms of the area of work or substantive content of the interpreting (e.g. medical, legal, educational, etc.). The distributions of replies are shown in Tables 2.6 and 2.7.

The less formal types of assignment (one-to-one conversations, informal meetings, etc.) were most frequently reported, with educational/training assignments, interpreting phone calls and home visits the next most frequent.

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[4] One hundred and twenty of the interpreters listed in the CACDP Directory for 1998-9 do not appear in the 2001 Directory

Table 2.6

INTERPRETING SITUATIONS

In which of the following types of situation have you interpreted, and how often (approximately) in the last 12 months?

Interpreting Situation N = 222* Column percentages of valid responses in italics	Never	Very rarely 1-5 times	Sometimes 6-20 times	Frequently 21+ times	Total no. positive Response
Informal one-to-one conversations	**17**	**25**	**50**	**130**	**205**
	8	*11*	*23*	*59*	*92*
Formal or semi-formal one-to-one interviews	**10**	**26**	**64**	**122**	**212**
	5	*12*	*29*	*55*	*95*
Interviews involving a panel /several interviewers	**31**	**63**	**95**	**33**	**191**
	14	*28*	*43*	*15*	*86*
Informal meetings/conversations	**15**	**25**	**58**	**124**	**207**
	7	*11*	*26*	*56*	*93*
Formal meetings	**12**	**29**	**72**	**109**	**210**
	5	*13*	*32*	*49*	*95*
Public lectures	**47**	**86**	**58**	**31**	**175**
	21	*39*	*26*	*14*	*79*
Conferences	**53**	**104**	**51**	**14**	**172**
	24	*47*	*23*	*6*	*77*
Interpreting phone calls, messages, etc. at meetings but not interpreting in the main sessions	**85**	**69**	**31**	**37**	**137**
	38	*31*	*14*	*17*	*62*
Interpreting by video link	**172**	**41**	**7**	**2**	**50**
	77	*18*	*3*	*1*	*23*
Interpreting on call e.g. overnight for Residential conferences	**151**	**50**	**16**	**5**	**71**
	68	*23*	*7*	*2*	*32*
Interpreting via the telephone	**33**	**71**	**54**	**64**	**189**
	15	*32*	*24*	*29*	*85*
Education (schools, colleges, university)	**24**	**46**	**64**	**88**	**198**
	11	*21*	*29*	*40*	*89*
Training courses	**18**	**41**	**89**	**74**	**204**
	8	*18*	*40*	*33*	*92*
Home visits	**50**	**53**	**69**	**50**	**172**
	23	*24*	*31*	*23*	*77*
Translation: English text to BSL	**96**	**78**	**29**	**19**	**126**
	43	*35*	*13*	*9*	*57*
Translation: BSL into English	**107**	**73**	**26**	**16**	**115**
	48	*33*	*12*	*7*	*52*
Other/miscellaneous	**187**	**9**	**10**	**15**	**34**
	84	*4*	*5*	*7*	*16*

Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.
* There was one non-response to this question

Table 2.7

AREAS OF WORK

Approximately how often, if at all, have you interpreted in each of the following areas in the last 12 months?

Areas of Work N = 221* *Column percentages of valid responses in italics*	Never	Very rarely 1-5 times	Sometimes 6-20 times	Frequently 21+ times	Total no of Positive response
Medical	21	40	53	107	200
	10	*18*	*24*	*48*	*90*
Including GP surgery	43	47	57	74	178
	19	*21*	*26*	*33*	*81*
Hospital	29	44	55	93	192
	13	*20*	*25*	*42*	*87*
Legal	48	56	67	50	173
	22	*25*	*30*	*23*	*78*
Including Solicitors' Offices	72	67	65	17	149
	33	*30*	*29*	*8*	*67*
Probation work	134	49	31	7	87
	61	*22*	*14*	*3*	*39*
Police stations	99	61	44	17	122
	45	*28*	*20*	*8*	*55*
Tribunals	92	60	45	24	129
	42	*27*	*20*	*11*	*58*
Court	121	48	30	22	100
	55	*22*	*14*	*10*	*45*
Social Services	29	57	54	81	192
	13	*26*	*24*	*37*	*87*
Including Social work	39	62	54	66	182
	18	*28*	*24*	*30*	*82*
Mental health	85	68	42	26	136
	38	*31*	*19*	*12*	*62*
Child protection	97	72	34	18	124
	44	*33*	*15*	*8*	*56*
Employment	12	40	65	104	209
	5	*18*	*29*	*47*	*95*
Including Access to Training	38	48	77	58	183
	17	*22*	*35*	*26*	*83*
Job interview	34	74	82	31	187
	15	*33*	*37*	*14*	*85*
Workplace Meetings	20	49	64	88	201
	9	*22*	*29*	*40*	*91*
Education	22	46	57	96	199
	10	*21*	*26*	*43*	*90*
Including School	99	63	35	24	122
	45	*29*	*16*	*11*	*55*
Further Education	78	49	37	57	143
	35	*22*	*17*	*26*	*65*
Higher Education	79	58	45	39	142
	36	*26*	*20*	*18*	*64*
Statementing Children	153	49	14	5	68
	69	*22*	*6*	*2*	*31*
Business/commerce	71	64	59	27	150
	32	*29*	*27*	*12*	*68*
Counselling	113	66	29	13	108
	51	*30*	*13*	*6*	*49*
Theatre	140	50	24	7	81
	63	*23*	*11*	*3*	*37*
TV	179	32	5	5	42
	81	*14*	*2*	*2*	*19*
Tourism	129	78	14	0	92

	58	*35*	*6*		*42*
Other	**188**	**12**	**14**	**7**	**33**
	85	*5*	*6*	*3*	*15*

Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding

*There were two non-responses to this question.

- Most interpreters had at least some experience of interpreting on formal occasions such as interview panels, public lectures and conferences, but qualified interpreters were more likely to report undertaking these more formal types of assignment.
- Almost all respondents had undertaken employment-related interpreting with 90 per cent having interpreted in medical and educational settings, and only slightly fewer in Social Services/social work contexts; these four areas were clearly the major sources of demand.
- In contrast, more than a fifth of all respondents reported that they had never done legal interpreting of any sort, and much larger proportions had never interpreted in police stations (45%), in court (55%) or for the probation service (61%). More registered qualified interpreters had undertaken legal interpreting, especially in police stations and in court, interpreted in the theatre or on T.V., and in relation to mental health or child protection issues.
- More than three-quarters of the respondents undertook some interpreting on an unpaid voluntary basis, and nearly a quarter of them reported doing so at least once a month. Such interpreting was undertaken: to help relatives and friends; at church services, weddings and funerals; for voluntary organisations such as Deaf societies.

2.6.3 Preferred areas of work

Respondents were asked whether there were any restrictions on the areas of work they were currently willing to undertake. The main area of work mentioned in this context was legal interpreting. This may be explained by the fact that interpreter associations and the court and police authorities that require, or at the least would prefer to see, interpreting in court and in police stations undertaken by registered qualified interpreters. Considerable publicity has been given to the importance of employing registered qualified interpreters in such situations (Trials Issues Group, 2001).

- Yet, of the registered qualified interpreters, who are formally considered competent to undertake legal interpreting, a third were not prepared to interpret in court and one fifth in any legal situation.
- Despite this situation, trainee interpreters are in practice often asked to undertake legal interpreting. The proportions of trainee interpreters who stated that they were unwilling to do so (more than three fifths for any legal interpreting and more than four fifths for interpreting in court) were much higher than for registered qualified interpreters. Overall 100 respondents (46% of active interpreters) were

unwilling to undertake any legal interpreting and a further 40 (19%) were unwilling to undertake court interpreting.

- None of the other main areas of work elicited more than a handful of such restrictions, but there were substantial minorities of interpreters unwilling to undertake interpreting in mental health or child protection cases, interpreting in the theatre or on T. V. and religious or conference interpreting.

2.6.4 Time spent interpreting

The median time spent interpreting was twenty hours each week, ten hours travelling to and from assignments and five hours on preparation. However, these figures conceal quite wide variations (Table 2.8).

Table 2.8

Time spent Interpreting

Summary Statistics

	Employed N = 38		Both employed & freelance N = 71			
	I	**I & rt***	**I**	**I & rt**	**I**	**I&rt**
Number of responses+	99	91	35	34	44	39
Weekly hours						
25% less than median	10.00	22.00	10.00	25.75	15.50	27.00
Median	20.00	36.00	20.00	31.00	20.00	40.00
25% more than median	25.00	45.00	20.00	38.00	26.75	47.00

I = Interpreting
I & rt = Interpreting and related tasks
*'Related tasks' are preparation for interpreting assignments and travel

+ Some respondents gave information about the hours spent interpreting but not about hours spent on preparation and travel. Some of those who interpreted as both employees and freelances gave information about the hours spent interpreting in one capacity but not both.

Table 2.9

LIMITATIONS ON AVAILABILITY TO UNDERTAKE INTERPRETING

Do any features of your personal or domestic situation limit your availability to undertake interpreting?
If YES, what are they? If these conditions could be changed would you be willing to undertake more interpreting?
IF NO, would you be willing to undertake more interpreting?

Employment Category	Limiting features?		If limiting features:			
	Yes	No		Yes	No	No answer
Freelance			**If changed could do more**	39	12	2
N = 107	53	53				
(Non-response 1)			**Willing to undertake more**	23	25	5
			Total	62	37	7
Both Employed & Freelance			**Could do more**	23	20	4
N = 71	47	24				
			Undertake more	4	15	5
			Total	27	35	9
Employed			**Could do more**	9	5	1
N = 38	15	23				
			Undertake more	4	14	5
			Total	3	19	6
TOTAL			**Could do more**	71	37	7
N = 216	115	100				
			Undertake more	31	54	15
			Total	102	91	22

Limitations on availability to do more interpreting				
Those reporting Limitations:	**Total** N = 115	**Freelance** N = 53	**Both employed & freelance** N = 47	**Employed** N = 15
Child care & family responsibilities	61	28	23	10
Personal life	14	3	3	8
Other employment	11	6	3	2
Travel	6	4	2	-
Age, health	4	2	2	-

Lack of work in rural area	3	2	1	-
Other	20	9	1	-

- A fifth of freelance interpreters, and nearly as many of those who were employed, but only one in twenty of those both employed and freelance, spent twenty hours or fewer each week on interpreting and related activities.
- At the other end of the scale a third of freelances, only one in seven of the employed interpreters, and a quarter of those both employed and freelance, spent over forty hours a week on such work.
- With few exceptions those who undertook interpreting both as employees and on a freelance basis interpreted for considerably more hours in the employee capacity than as freelances.

2.6.5 Potential time interpreting

Interpreters were asked both whether they could spend more of their existing working time interpreting; and whether there were limitations on their availability to undertake interpreting which, if removed, could allow them to spend more time doing so (see Table 2.9). Further information about the views of interpreters on this subject can found at 6.2.2.1.

2.6.6 Availability over time and space

Interpreters were asked to indicate their availability over three time periods (weekdays, weekday evenings, and weekends) and within three different geographical areas (home within a 10 mile radius; region within a 100 mile radius; and 'anywhere in the country'); and to do so in terms of being 'normally', 'occasionally' or 'never' available.

Not surprisingly availability was less during unsocial hours and for more distant assignments. However, there were differences in availability between interpreters according to their form of employment.

- Most freelance interpreters were 'normally' available on weekdays, and a further seventh 'occasionally', but rather fewer on weekday evenings (more than half normally, and just less than half occasionally) and at weekends (two-fifths normally, and more than half occasionally).
- Of those employed interpreters who also interpreted on a freelance basis, a smaller proportion were available for freelance work on weekdays but almost as high proportions on weekday evenings and at weekends, though mostly 'occasionally' not 'normally'.
- The great majority of both types of interpreter were 'normally' available for freelance work in their home area (within a 10 mile radius), and as many at least 'occasionally' within the region (within a 100 mile radius). Availability 'anywhere in

the country' was very much less, with only two-thirds of interpreters saying that they were available to travel anywhere even occasionally.

- The great majority of those who interpreted solely as employees were employed full-time, and therefore mostly available to interpret every day during normal working hours, in contrast to less than two-thirds of employees who also undertook freelance work, a third of whom were employed part-time.
- Agency employees' availability to interpret diminished quite considerably in relation to assignments outside their home area. Only half were 'normally' available anywhere in the region though a further third of them were available 'occasionally'. Very few were 'normally' available to interpret anywhere in the country, something that half of agency interpreters were 'never' available to do.
- The effective availability of interpreters is affected by the extent to which assignments require, or are seen by agencies, interpreters or clients to require, more than one interpreter. There are potentially many such situations. Ninety-five per cent of the interpreters questioned could envisage situations where they would require a co-worker; and only two stated they would never do so.

2.6.7 Obtaining interpreting assignments

All freelance interpreters, including those undertaking freelance work in addition to their employment as an interpreter, relied on several sources to obtain their interpreting assignments.

- The most frequently mentioned source was interpreting agencies, which provided at least some of their assignments for the majority of freelance interpreters and for more than half of those who did freelance work in addition to their other employment.
- Around half of the respondents reported that they obtained assignments directly from clients and/or from personal contacts, and a quarter reported obtaining assignments from colleagues. For those solely dependent on freelance work, assignments directly from clients were somewhat more important; personal contacts and assignments from colleagues somewhat less important than they were for those who were also employees.

2.6.8 Employee control over the allocation of assignments

One of the attractions of freelance work is the fact that it provides the interpreter with control of what and how much work they do, though as with other areas of self-employment

this 'control' may in reality be limited – many interpreters may not feel able to afford to be too selective with assignments. In contrast employees are formally contracted to undertake tasks as allocated to them by their employer, though in practice this may be open to negotiation.

2.7 Career and Training Intentions

Interpreters showed high levels of commitment to their occupation, considerable satisfaction with their work, and a widespread desire to improve their levels of performance through further training.

- Nine out of ten of our respondents expected to work as BSL/English interpreters for the 'foreseeable future', 56 per cent of them full-time and 34 per cent part-time. Registered trainee interpreters and those interpreting solely as employees were more likely than others to expect to continue on a full-time basis. Twenty-two of those currently working full-time expected to continue part-time but eleven currently working part-time intended to work full-time in the future.
- The predominant reason for the intention to continue as an interpreter was because they liked the work, mentioned by over half of those replying. Health considerations or the desire to take up other employment were the chief reasons given by those intending to leave the profession.
- Four-fifths of all respondents, and a higher proportion of trainees and of those in employment had plans to undertake further training.
- The most frequently mentioned type of training was that which would enable trainees to gain full registration as a qualified interpreter, mentioned by more than half of all trainees. Substantial minorities mentioned specialist courses and postgraduate courses.

2.8 Summary

It was difficult to calculate the total number of BSL/English interpreters and interpreting agencies, as there were no comprehensive lists available. The number of interpreters identified by the study was 343 in England and Wales and 35 in Scotland. There were significant regional differences in the availability of interpreters (2.2).

The majority of BSL/English interpreters were female, young and white. Around a third were graduates (2.3).

Few interpreters had acquired BSL as a child. The vast majority had formal qualifications in the language (2.4).

Most interpreters, especially trainee interpreters, had been in the job for less than five years (2.5).

Commonly interpreters spend 20 hours a week interpreting, 10 hours travelling to and from assignments, and five hours in preparation. The most common subject areas for interpreting assignments were employment, medical, social services and legal, although some interpreters were unwilling to take legal assignments (2.6).

Interpreters showed high levels of commitment and job satisfaction, and the desire to improve their performance through further training (2.7).

3 Agencies: An Overview of Service Provision

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 About this chapter

This chapter examines the provision of BSL/English interpreting services by interpreting agencies based on information provided by agencies, and interviews carried out with agency representatives, between May 1999 and January 2000. The information contained in tables 3.1 and 3.2 was collated in October and November 2001. We describe their distinguishing features, their geographical coverage, and look at their operational arrangements, including funding, fees and salaries, and allocation of assignments.

3.1.2 Background

The major provision of professional interpreting services in formal settings, e.g. health, legal and Social Services, is provided through interpreting agencies. The establishment of agencies was based on two developments: the recognition by linguists, almost 40 years ago, that sign languages used by Deaf people are distinct languages independent of spoken languages; and the emergence of interpreting as a separate profession (Scott-Gibson, 1991; CACDP Agency Working Party, 1994; Thomson, 1995; Harrington, 1997).

In the course of this study, representatives of 26 agencies in England and Wales and Scotland were interviewed (83% of registered agencies listed in the 1998-1999 CACDP Directory). Tables 3.1 and 3.2 list the total number of agencies that became known to us during the study, but is not necessarily a complete listing of all agencies currently engaged in offering BSL/English interpreting services. No single organisation has responsibility for overseeing, organising or providing BSL/English interpreting services across Britain.

Agencies may be defined as organisations that specialise in the provision of British Sign Language/English interpreting and other communication services used by Deaf, deaf-blind, hearing-impaired and deaf people. Other communication services may include the services provided by lip-speakers, deaf-blind communicators/interpreters, deaf relay interpreters, note-takers and typists who have been specially trained to use equipment such as Palantype and High Link, which enables the spoken word to be presented in typed form as it is being spoken. These activities, however, constitute a very small percentage of the work of most agencies (although note-taking and speech-to-text transcription have a higher profile in agencies located in educational establishments).

The majority of agencies that participated in this study provide a range of communication services rather than concentrating exclusively on the predominant activity of BSL/English interpreting. The fact that many agencies provide a range of services may reflect their origin within social work in that they address the same client groups as social workers to deaf people viz. Deaf, hearing-impaired, deaf and deaf-blind people. The representatives of many agencies stated that they consider it impractical to separate the provision of interpreting services from the other communication services they offer. Most of their work is BSL/English interpreting and the separate provision of other communication services was not considered financially viable. Particular communication services are not necessarily specific to particular groups or situations. For example, a Deaf person attending a training course may access the course through a BSL/English interpreter but also engage the services of a note-taker, given the difficulty of taking notes and following the interpreter at the same time.

3.2 Distinguishing Characteristics of Agencies

3.2.1 Geographical coverage

Agencies range from those that offer a national service to those offering only a local service. There are some parts of the United Kingdom with no agencies or interpreters, as can be seen in Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1 and 3.2 and the maps in the Appendix.

a) Agencies providing a general interpreting service nationally.

   The largest such agency is the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) with Communication Support Units (CSUs) established in six locations in England in 1999: the South East (London), the South West (Bath), Central England (Aylesbury), the Midlands (Wolverhampton), the North (Manchester), and South Yorkshire and Humberside (Rotherham); one agency in Wales administered from Swansea, and one in Scotland based in Glasgow. The Glasgow agency provided a 'remote' interpreting service by video-telephone for the Highlands in 1999. However, this service has since been discontinued. SASLI provide a national service in Scotland. Specialist agencies such as Sign Solutions and SLIC (Sign Language Information Centre) provide a national service but operate from a single office.

b) Agencies providing interpreting services in more than one region.

   Examples in this category include the Sign Language Bureau based at Middlesex University, which covers London, the wider South East of England, and the English Midlands; and the Royal Association in Aid of Deaf People (RAD) based in Chelmsford

which covers London, the South East of England and East Anglia. In Scotland, the Edinburgh and East of Scotland Deaf Society covers Edinburgh and the wider South East of Scotland.

c) Agencies whose activities are largely or solely restricted to a particular area.

   The majority of agencies fall into this category, providing interpreting services within a county or borough. Most of these agencies are operated either by a local Deaf society or a local authority.

d) Agencies with a wide or national geographical remit that concentrate on particular areas of work.

   Examples of such agencies would include Sign Solutions (legal interpreting), Just Communication (short-notice and specialist interpreting) and SLIC (conference interpreting).

3.2.2 Type of host organisation

Interpreting services are provided by a variety of different types of organisations. These include national, regional and local Deaf/deaf organisations, local authorities and educational establishments. A small number of agencies operate as small private businesses run by one or more interpreters or an association of interpreters e.g. SLIC, Sign Solutions, SASLI.

3.2.3 Type of interpreting assignment accepted

The majority of agencies provide a general service i.e. they will seek to provide interpreters for any setting (although a small number of agencies stated that they provide only a limited or no service in relation to legal and mental health settings). A small number of agencies specialise in providing interpreting services for particular settings. The specialist agencies represented in this study included one specialising in legal settings, one in conference interpreting, one within an institution of higher education and one focusing on interpreting assignments made at short notice i.e. bookings are accepted no earlier than five days before an assignment.

3.2.4 Employment of interpreters and/or use of freelances

Agencies may be distinguished by how they organise the provision of their interpreting services. Three different types of provision can be identified.

- Most agencies directly employ an interpreter/interpreters and also engage as required the services of freelance interpreters (e.g. Nottingham Sign Language Interpreting Service, Deaf Direct, Coventry and Warwickshire Sign Language Interpreting Service).
- Agencies that do not employ interpreters as members of staff but undertake to obtain the services of freelance interpreters for assignments (e.g. SASLI, Sign Language Bureau, Sign Language International).
- Agencies that only accept assignments that interpreters directly employed by the agency are able to undertake; they do not employ freelance interpreters (e.g. Communication Unlimited).

3.2.5 Definition of client group(s)

Agencies differ in how they define their client groups. A number of agencies established by or based in Deaf centres, as well as some based in local authorities, describe Deaf people as their primary client group. This may be related to the fact that such agencies have a higher percentage of engagements initiated directly by Deaf people, compared to some other agencies where such bookings constitute only a small percentage of their business.

Certain agencies distinguish between customers (usually the Deaf person), purchasers (defined as the organisations that pay for the service) and referrers (the people or organisations that book the interpreter but who may or may not be responsible for meeting the cost).

Other agencies tend to define their clients as the people who are the recipients of interpreting services, viz. Deaf and hearing persons.

One agency that worked exclusively with freelance interpreters described interpreters themselves as their primary client group. They argued that without freelance interpreters they could not operate their service.

There appears to be a shared view of the role of the interpreter i.e. to facilitate or enable communication between Deaf and hearing people who do not share a common language or a particular form of a common language.

3.3 Location of Agencies

3.3.1 England and Wales

The distribution of interpreting agencies by region in England and Wales is summarised in Table 3.1.

There is only one agency based in Cumbria (in Carlisle) and in the South West of England (in Bath). The Midlands contains the greatest concentration of agencies with twelve. Other regions have levels of provision ranging between these two extremes. Agencies that do not directly employ interpreters seek to meet requests for interpreters by engaging the services of freelance interpreters. Such booking agencies may confine their activities to a particular geographical area (e.g. the agency operated by East Lancashire Deaf Society or the Newcastle City Council Communication Support Service) or offer a service in relation to the whole of the U.K. (e.g. Signing People).

The RNID aims to provide a national service in Wales.

Specialist agencies will usually consider interpreting assignments in any part of the UK.

3.3.2 Scotland

The distribution of agencies providing BSL/English interpreting services in Scotland is set out in Table 3.2.

The Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) operates an interpreting agency and aims to respond to requests for interpreting services from any part of the country. However, it employs no interpreters itself and is dependent on freelance interpreters being available to meet requests. The RNID also aims to provide a national service in Scotland.

There is one specialist agency (SLIC) based in Dumfries that focuses on conference interpreting. In Glasgow there are two locally based agencies and the RNID's Scottish agency (which in the past provided a remote interpreting service for the Highlands). There are locally based agencies in East Ayrshire, Falkirk, Edinburgh, Fife, Tayside and Aberdeen.

3.3.3 Access to agencies

Many users of interpreting services stated that they knew from experience which agency or agencies could best meet their needs. However, the present distribution of agencies may create problems of access to interpreting services: there is neither a truly comprehensive UK national service nor the certainty that there will be a local agency providing services in any

given town, city or county. There is duplication by agencies in some areas and no provision by agencies in many others.

Table 3.1

AGENCIES PROVIDING BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETING SERVICES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2001

Country/ English Region	Location of Agencies	No. of interpreters employed		Use of freelance interpreters	Further details	CACDP Register	
		f-t	p-t			1998/9	2000/1
Wales	Llandudno	3	-	Yes	North Wales Deaf Assoc.	No	No
	Pontypridd	-	-	Yes	Wales Council for Deaf People	No	No
	Rhyl	-	-	Yes	Signing People (national UK)	No	Yes
	Swansea	3	-	Yes	RNID Cymru (national service in Wales)	Yes	No
England							
North	Carlisle (Cumbria)	4	-	Yes	Cumbria Deaf Association	No	No
	Newcastle/ Middlesborough	1	1	Yes	RNID North East	No	No
	Newcastle	-	-	Yes	City Council	No	No
	(also Kirklees – see under Yorkshire and Humberside)						
Yorkshire & Humberside	Bradford	-	-	Yes	Sign Links UK	No	No
	Halifax (Calderdale)	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	Yes	No
	Kirklees+	1	1	Yes	Local Authority	Yes	Yes
	Leeds	5	1	Yes	Leeds Deaf Society	Yes	Yes
	Rotherham	2	-	Yes	RNID South Yorkshire	Yes	No
East Midlands	Derby	4	1	No	Communication Unlimited	Yes	Yes
	Leicester	3	-	Yes	Leic. Deaf Society	Yes	No
	Sleaford (Lincolnshire)	-	2	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	Mansfield*	1	-	Yes	North Nottingham Sign Language Int. Service: Deaf Society	Yes	No
	Newark	-	-	Yes	Sign Language International (national service)	No	No
	Nottingham	4	1	Yes	Nottinghamshire Sign Language Int. Service: Deaf Society	Yes	Yes
(also RNID Midlands – see under W. Midlands; RNID Central - see under Central; and Sign Language Bureau – see under London)							

AGENCIES PROVIDING BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETING SERVICES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2001 cont.

English Region	Location of Agencies	No. of interpreters employed		Use of freelance Interpreters	Further details	CACDP Register	
		f-t	p-t			1998/9	2000/1
North West	Blackburn	-	-	Yes	East Lancs. Deaf Society	No	No
	Liverpool	2	-	Yes	RNID Merseyside	No	No
	Manchester	6	-	Yes	RNID North	Yes	No
	Bolton	1	-	Yes	Co-Sign	No	No
	Tameside	1	-	Yes	Local Authority		
	Warrington**	7	1	Yes	Deafness Support Network Communication Service: Deaf Society	Yes	Yes
West Midlands	Birmingham	4	3	Yes	B'ham Ins.for Deaf People	Yes	Yes
	Coventry	1	1	Yes	Deaf Society	Yes	Yes
	Dudley	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	Shrewsbury (Shropshire)	-	2	Yes	Visual Interpreting & Communication Services Agency	Yes	No
	Wolverhampton	2	-	Yes	RNID Midlands	Yes	No
	Wolverhampton (and nationwide)	6	-	Yes	Wolverhampton University	Yes	Yes
	Worcester (formerly Worcester and Hereford Int. Service)	1	1	Yes	Deaf Direct Communication	Yes	Yes
	(also Sign Language Bureau – see under London)						
East Anglia	Ipswich (Suffolk)	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	Norwich	2	-	Yes	Norwich Deaf Centre	No	No
	(also RNID South East and Sign Language Bureau – see under London; RAD – see under South East)						
Central	Aylesbury	1	-	Yes	RNID Central	Yes	No
	Gloucester	1	-	Yes	Gloucester Deaf Assoc.	No	No
	Welwyn Garden City	-	-	Yes	Local Authority	Yes	Yes
	Luton	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No

English Region	Location of Agencies	No. of interpreters employed		Use of freelance Interpreters	Further details	CACDP Register	
	Oxford***	-	-	Yes	Oxford Deaf Society	Yes	Yes
	(also RAD – see under South East; Sign Language Bureau – see under London)						
London (Inner and Outer)	Islington	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	Hounslow	1	1	Yes	Local Authority	Yes	Yes
	London	12	-	Yes	RNID South East	Yes	Yes
	Middlesex	-	-	Yes	Sign Language Bureau/ BSL Beam	Yes	Yes
	Newham	2	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No

AGENCIES PROVIDING BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETING SERVICES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2001 cont.

English Region	Location of Agencies	No. of interpreters employed		Use of freelance interpreters	Further details	CACDP Register	
		f-t	p-t			1998/9	2000/1
London (Inner and Outer) cont.	Southwark	-	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	Greenwich	-	1	Yes	Local Authority		
	Waltham Forest	-	-	Yes	Local Authority	Yes	No
	Wandsworth	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	(also RAD – see under South East)						
South East	Bexley	1	-	Yes	Local Authority	No	No
	Chelmsford	8	2	Yes	Royal Ass. Of the Deaf (RAD) Deaf Association	Yes	Yes
	Southampton	1	-	Yes	Hampshire Interpreting Service: Deaf Soc.	No	Yes
	Leatherhead (Surrey)	1	3	Yes	Local Authority	Yes	Yes
	(also RNID South East and Sign Language Bureau – see under London)						
South West	Bath	4	2	Yes	RNID South West	Yes	No
Specialist Agencies							
	Birmingham	2	-	Yes	Sign Solutions (Legal)	Yes	Yes
	Croydon	n.d.	n.d.	Yes	Sign Away (Theatre)	Yes	Yes
	Redditch	9	0	Yes	Just Communication (Specialist, Short Notice and Remote Video Int. Service)	No	Yes
Specialist agencies will usually consider undertaking assignments in any part of the U.K.							

+ A communicator is employed in the part-time post.
* This agency has now closed.
** The figures provided include 1 part-time and 3 full-time communicators.
*** This agency, at the time the study was undertaken, employed 2 full-time interpreters. It now operates using only freelance interpreters.
n.d. no data provided by agency

Table 3.2

AGENCIES PROVIDING BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETING SERVICES IN SCOTLAND IN 2001

Region	Location of agencies	No. of interpreters employed		Use of freelance interpreters	Comments
		f-t	p-t		
Glasgow & West of Scotland	Auchinleck E. Ayrshire	-	2	Yes	Local authority
	Glasgow	3	-	Yes	Deaf Connections: Glasgow & West Scotland Deaf Soc.
	Glasgow	8	2	Yes	Local authority
	Glasgow	1	-	Yes	RNID Scotland (national service in Scotland)
Edinburgh & East of Scotland					
	Falkirk	1	-	Yes	Local authority
	Edinburgh	4	-	Yes	Edinburgh & East of Scotland Deaf Soc.
	Edinburgh	-	-	Yes	SASLI (national service in Scotland)
	Leven Fife	2	-		Local authority
	Dundee	2	-	Yes	Tayside Assoc for the Deaf
Aberdeen & NE of Scotland	Aberdeen	-	2	Yes	Aberdeen & North East of Scotland Deaf Society
Specialist Agency	Dumfries	-	-	Yes	SLIC (Conference)

Specialist agencies will usually consider undertaking assignments in any part of the U.K.

Sources for Tables 3.1 & 3.2, and section 3.3: CACDP Directories 1998/9 & 2000/1, BDA Information Directory 1999, supplemented with information from interviews, questionnaires and other sources. The numbers of part-time and full-time interpreters employed by agencies, and their policy on the use of free-lance interpreters is based on information obtained in October and November 2001. Full-time 'administrator-interpreters' have been counted as full-time interpreters.

3.4 The Organisation of Service Delivery by Agencies

3.4.1 Mission statements and professionalism

The majority of agencies have mission statements and/or clear descriptions of the services they offer available in written English but not British Sign Language or other languages. Most make explicit in their documentation that their aim is to provide a quality, professional service to D/deaf people or D/deaf and hearing people.

3.4.2 Professionalism

The term professional is used by agencies to refer to two aspects of their work: the status of the interpreters they use and the procedures they follow.

3.4.2.1 The interpreters used by an agency to undertake assignments

The majority of agencies stated that they use only registered qualified or registered trainee interpreters (i.e. interpreters registered with CACDP or SASLI). A small number of agencies stated that under exceptional circumstances, or at the request of a Deaf client, they would engage a person with a Stage 3 BSL language qualification. According to some Deaf service users and agency administrative staff there are on occasions, discrepancies between an agency's stated policy of employing only registered interpreters and what occurs in practice. In an information brochure obtained from one agency, people at 'Level 3' (Stage 3 BSL language qualification) are described as 'interpreters'. In a small number of agencies the term 'communicator' is used to describe persons working as interpreters who have not been able to obtain, or are in the process of seeking, registered trainee status.

3.4.2.2 The procedures followed in processing requests and allocating assignments to interpreters

Most agencies had clear procedures for administering requests and assignments. In some agencies staff were provided with written guidelines on how to process requests for interpreters. Differences in procedures seemed to reflect different types of agencies (e.g. agencies that directly employ interpreters compared to those that do not) and the degree to which demand exceeds the agency's ability to supply interpreters. In one agency visited, Deaf People were able to book interpreters in BSL by video telephone.

In the majority of agencies, the procedures for engaging freelance interpreters are basically the same and only really vary, if at all, where a substantial proportion of the agency's assignments are placed with freelance interpreters e.g. faxing lists of assignments to all freelance interpreters listed with the agency compared to contacting freelance interpreters individually about a specific assignment. A small number of agencies have introduced internet services through which interpreters may be booked, and/or interpreters can be offered assignments on line (e.g. Sign Language Bureau / BSL Beam; Just Communication).

In agencies that employ interpreters, administrative staff usually allocate assignments. In the case of assignments described as 'demanding' or 'difficult' administrative staff were usually expected to consult with a senior interpreter before allocating the assignment. However, a number of administrative staff reported that in practice this was not always

possible, (e.g. if the senior interpreter is unavailable) and that therefore they sometimes had to allocate such assignments themselves.

3.4.3 Management and administration of agencies

The work of agency managers/administrators is central to the provision of interpreting services at the present time. (This was recognised by the RNID in the recent restructuring of the management of its agencies. One of the reasons given for the restructuring was to enable the Institute to direct more resources to administrative staff directly engaged in processing requests and assignments.)

The administrative process of seeking to match requests to the available interpreters is, in almost all agencies, a labour intensive activity. At the time the study was undertaken there was only limited evidence of information technology being used to process requests and to identify the availability of freelance interpreters, e.g. very few agencies had databases that categorised interpreters by expertise or experience in relation to particular interpreting settings. However, customised software has been developed by a few agencies for recording and confirming bookings and invoicing clients. For example, in 1999, when the study was undertaken, the RNID was introducing a new database for use by its interpreting agencies; it was anticipated this would improve the administration of each agency as well as communication between agencies. BSL Beam has developed a database through which a network of interpreters make known their availability to undertake assignments. Interpreters may be booked on line through Just Communication.

In some agencies the administrator is also a registered interpreter. Such administrators are clearly better qualified (given their experience and knowledge of interpreting) to allocate assignments to interpreters than administrative staff from a non-interpreting background. With the exception of what were described as the “most demanding or difficult cases”, the shortage of interpreters does not usually allow administrators to choose between interpreters for a particular assignment.

The role of the administrator is not, however, confined to allocating assignments to interpreters. They were also responsible for the public presentation of the work of the agency and the negotiating of contracts. A number of interpreter-administrators suggested that such work needed to be undertaken by a person with an in-depth knowledge of the field and, in smaller agencies in particular, this may mean the interpreter-administrator or senior interpreter. Emergency or urgent assignments were often undertaken by the administrator-interpreter as s/he may be the only member of staff available to carry out such assignments.

3.4.4 Funding and fees

A number of agencies stated that they must at least break even financially each year or they can not continue to function. Others, however, though expected to break even, have an understanding that, given the importance of the service they provide, any deficits incurred will be covered by the organisation under which they operate.

Many agencies have entered into service level agreements with local authorities or particular public sector bodies such as NHS Trusts, the courts, police authorities, etc. Such agreements are usually for a minimum of one year and, in effect, provide agencies with 'core funding'.

Agencies based in, or associated with Deaf centres follow a policy of not charging Deaf people for interpreting services. In almost all the other agencies that contributed to the study, a source of payment had to be identified before a booking could be confirmed. Only on very rare occasions did this result in a Deaf person being charged for the provision of the service.

The majority of agencies in England and Wales (but not those operated by the RNID) stated that they based their charges on CACDP recommended rates. In Scotland the majority based their charges on SASLI recommended rates. In 2000 the RNID introduced their own scale of charges in an attempt to make each of their interpreting units self financing within a given time period.

In autumn 2000, the rates recommended by CACDP were £19.50 per hour for a registered qualified interpreter and £16.25 per hour for a registered trainee interpreter (with a minimum booking requirement in each case of two hours). SASLI's recommended rates were £60 for the first two hours and £20 thereafter for a registered qualified interpreter and £16.50 per hour for a registered trainee. The RNID charged £70 (London and the South East of England) and £62 (elsewhere) for the first two hours and £22.50 per hour thereafter for a registered qualified interpreter and £20 for a registered trainee.

The fees charged were related to the day-to-day running costs of the agencies. In the majority of cases they did not generate sufficient income to allow for capital investment or investment in training. In a number of agencies the booking fees charged varied between £10 and £20 per booking. For some agencies this was the only fee income they received from a booking, and usually represented a very small proportion of the total bill.

It was reported by agency representatives that some freelance interpreters on occasions charged higher fees. When this happened, some agencies stated that it was their practice, if they were unable to find another interpreter, to inform the client of the higher rate being

asked by the interpreter and leave the decision to the client. Interpreting in certain legal settings, the theatre and television were identified as settings in which interpreters were often able to negotiate a higher fee.

Most agencies and freelance interpreters charged a minimum two-hour fee for assignments of two hours or less. In some rural areas the minimum fee charged was for three hours. It was reported that some clients, doctors in particular, were reluctant to pay such fees for appointments that last only 10-15 minutes. Agency staff stated that some customers did not understand that interpreter's travel time was included in the fee (for further discussion and information on fees charged by BSL/English interpreters see Green and Hema, 2002).

3.4.5 Disability Living Allowance

A majority of agencies were of the view that the size of the actual awards made to Deaf people under the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) made it impractical for them to consider charging Deaf people who are in receipt of DLA. The awards granted to Deaf people bear no relation to the real cost of obtaining interpreting services. A DLA award would not cover the cost of one, two hour session, provided by a registered interpreter[5]. (See 5.2.4.2 for information on awards made to Deaf people under DLA. These awards may be compared to the fees charged by agencies and freelance interpreters reported in 3.4.4; also 6.3.1.4).

3.4.6 Salaries

From the information provided by agencies, staff interpreter's salaries ranged from £18,000 and £20,000 for registered qualified interpreters and between £15,000 and £19,000 for registered trainees in 1999.

3.4.7 Choice of interpreter

Agencies stated that they were rarely able to offer clients a choice of interpreter for most types of assignment. All agencies contacted stated that they tried to meet specific requests if possible. The setting in which choice was most frequently expressed was in relation to the gender of the interpreter for hospital/doctor appointments. Agencies were usually able to meet such requests despite the fact that interpreting is a predominantly female profession. Certain agencies had received requests for gay or lesbian interpreters and some agencies had received a very limited number of requests for Black or Asian interpreters. Agencies

[5] DLA is a benefit that recognises the extra costs incurred by severely disabled people. Entitlement depends not on particular disabling conditions or any specific expense to which these might give rise. It is for recipients themselves to decide how best to use their DLA to meet their needs.

acknowledged that the 'undemanding', 'less demanding' or 'less interesting' assignments were usually assigned to new (usually trainee) staff.

3.4.8 Emergency provision

Only a small number of agencies contacted were able to offer an out-of-hours emergency service. Examples of how such a service was provided include interpreters operating on a rota basis; the employment of freelance interpreters to provide such cover; or a combination of the two. In some areas such a service is provided by social workers to deaf people. One agency, Just Communication, specifically offered an emergency service.

3.4.9 Publicity and promotion

Promotion and explanation of the work of agencies appeared to be limited. Only a small number of agencies provide separate explanatory and promotional materials for Deaf and hearing clients. Almost all agencies expressed the concern that promotion of the agency would lead to increased levels of demand that they could not meet. This was the explanation given by the majority of agencies for why promotion is not, and could not, be a priority.

The majority of agencies arranged meetings specifically for Deaf people (conducted in BSL) at which the work of the agency is described. None of the agencies contacted provided information in BSL (on video) about the work of agencies. A few agencies did report that they were considering or planning the production of a video that would describe the services they offer and explain the role of the interpreter, in BSL, for use by Deaf clients. Some agencies had a copy of the BDA's 1992 video on how to use an interpreter in which information is presented in BSL (British Deaf Association, 1992). A number of agencies produced illustrated leaflets using a minimum of English to advertise their services to Deaf people.

3.5 Summary

BSL/English interpreting agencies vary in size, geographical coverage, employment/hiring arrangements and, in some cases, in the type of assignments accepted (3.2).

The pattern of provision in England, Scotland and Wales was uneven (3.3).

Agencies are committed to operating in a professional way, but often do so under great pressure arising from limited resources in relation to the level of demand. Most agencies are required to break even financially. They would aim to offer service users some choice of interpreter, but more often than not are unable to do so. Few are able to offer an 'out of

hours' or weekend service and only a small number considered they were able to offer an adequate emergency service. Most agencies undertake only a limited amount of promotion of their services (3.4).

4 The Demand for Interpreting Services

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the demand for interpreting services. The starting point is widespread evidence from the experiences of Deaf people, agencies, interpreters and others that demand has increased, and that there was a substantial amount of unmet demand, because of the limited number of interpreters. Attention is drawn to the distinction between 'expressed' demand and demand which is not expressed. The latter is not made known because it is seen as unrealistic to do so given the current shortage of interpreters, or in certain cases, because of concerns with the standard of interpreting services available in particular locations or settings. There has been an increase in the overall number of interpreters in the 1990s (see 1.6.5) but in the view of providers and users this has not matched the increase in expressed demand.

The current levels of demand for interpreting services reported by interpreting agencies is examined. Data on the views of interpreters on the issue of demand and the difficulties clients experience in accessing services are also considered.

Difficulties in measuring demand are examined. There is no agreed and comprehensive system for recording expressed demand.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the factors that may or may not lead to an increase in the demand for interpreting services in the future.

4.2 Levels of Demand on Interpreting Agencies

4.2.1 Difficulties in meeting demand

The great majority of interpreting agencies covered by this study reported difficulties in meeting all the demand they received for interpreting services. With a few exceptions, respondents agreed that current demand was greater than could be met by the currently available interpreters.

All agencies reported that demand had increased significantly over the previous year.

Though the data received from interpreting agencies varied in quality, where figures were provided they showed levels of unmet demand ranging from 2% to 38% of all requests to the agencies concerned.

Agencies that reported low levels of unmet requests for interpreting services had also experienced increased demand. They had been able to meet a high proportion of this by

increasing the number of staff interpreters employed, by engaging more freelance interpreters, and/or by existing staff working greatly increased overtime.

This increase in demand was confirmed in interviews with agency staff. They described their jobs as stressful and 'never-ending' because the demand for interpreters greatly exceeds supply.

4.2.2 Regional variations

Difficulties in meeting current demand for interpreting services appear to vary between different parts of Britain. For example, a large interpreting agency in the South East of England reported that they turned down on average 200 requests for interpreting services each month. In contrast, an agency in the English Midlands reported 1,700 requests for interpreters in 1998, of which only 33 could not be met.

Certain agency representatives and some Deaf people suggested that Deaf people in certain parts of Britain, in particular the South East of England, use interpreters in a wider range of situations than elsewhere, and they suggested that this was one reason why expressed demand greatly exceeds supply in these areas. They also claimed that this wider demand was mirrored by a proportionately greater number of public and commercial organisations seeking to provide access for Deaf people through interpreting provision in these areas, thereby further increasing expressed demand. The suggestion was also made that higher levels of expressed demand in London and the South East of England reflect the fact that a large number of Deaf people in professional occupations reside in this part of the UK.

However some agency representatives and Deaf people (see 5.2.5.4) outside of the South East of England did not accept that there was such a quantitative difference in demand between the South East of England and other parts of Britain. They suggested that the lower level of expressed demand in other parts of the country could be explained by Deaf people in these areas being more prepared to limit their expressed demand for interpreting services as a consequence of the widespread shortage of interpreters.

4.2.3 Lack of promotional activity

Agency staff believed that demand for interpreting services was depressed by the low level of promotional activity undertaken by the majority of agencies. Promotion (and explanation) of their work appeared limited and under resourced. All agency representatives interviewed on this issue expressed concern that promotion of their agency would lead to even greater increased levels of demand, which they could not meet.

4.3 Problems in Measuring Demand

There are a number of difficulties inherent in the process of measuring demand.

4.3.1 The recording of demand

Considerable variation was found in the comprehensiveness with which agencies recorded requests for interpreting services. The extent to which requests that agencies were unable to meet were met by other providers also varied between agencies.

Agencies engaged in contracted provision reported that they were being required to provide more detailed information on demand for interpreting services to organisations funding such provision, e.g. local authorities, NHS trusts.

Variations in the methods used by agencies to record demand do not permit figures to be aggregated to produce reliable national and/or regional statistics.

Despite an attempt to do so, the investigators were unable to secure from a number of freelance interpreters precise records of the requests they received for their services over a defined and limited period. Freelance interpreters tend only to record those assignments they are able to accept.

4.3.2 Double counting

In areas covered by more than one agency, there is a possibility that the same unmet assignment will be counted more than once by different agencies, if more than one agency is approached and they are both/all unable to fulfil the assignment. Double counting of requests was not, however, perceived by agencies in these areas to represent a significant percentage of aggregate unmet demand.

4.3.3 Interpreters employed directly by an organisation

The study focused on the provision of interpreting services by general purpose and specialist agencies. It did not, with one exception, have the opportunity to obtain information from organisations that employ interpreters for the exclusive use of their members or clients. Therefore, the evidence of demand provided by agencies does not fully reflect existing demand. This is particularly the case in relation to further and higher education where a small number of institutions have established their own dedicated provision. It also makes the task of compiling genuinely comparable regional statistics more difficult.

4.3.4 BSL users in organisations

The researchers sought information on whether the level of demand for interpreting services provided by agencies and freelance interpreters was affected by the presence of BSL users in workplaces and in public and commercial organisations dealing with the public. Such employees might obviate the need for an interpreter by being able to communicate with a Deaf person directly in BSL.

However, evidence from the survey of users of interpreting services indicated that such organisations still require the services of interpreters, and indeed may be more likely to employ interpreters than organisations without employees who can communicate in BSL (see 5.3.5.2). Anecdotal evidence suggested that a number of the employees identified as fluent users of BSL were in fact Deaf employees. It would follow that organisations employing Deaf people would be more likely to engage the services of interpreters on a regular basis than those who do not employ Deaf people.

4.3.5 Use of unqualified 'interpreters'

Deaf people also use unqualified people to 'interpret' for them: hearing relations and friends, bilingual professionals, communication support workers and others. A study carried out in Wales in the late 1990s, for example, suggested that a significant number of unregistered and/or unqualified people were routinely engaged in providing interpreting services, at least on a part-time basis (ASLI South Wales, 1999).

We did not find evidence of the widespread use of non-registered interpreters in formal settings in other parts of Britain. Agency staff and registered interpreters did, however, identify two particular settings in which they believed there was evidence of this practice: in legal settings in both police stations and courts (see also Brennan and Brown, 1997); and provision made available through the *Access to Work* programme.

4.3.6 Demand may be supply-led

Some interpreters and agency representatives reported that expressed demand for interpreting services may be, to some extent, supply-led. They argued that when Deaf people and hearing users of interpreting services learned that interpreting provision had been increased, demand grew rapidly. This may also simply reflect Deaf people and other service users identifying, in light of increased provision, previously 'unexpressed' demand as 'expressed' demand (cf. 4.1 above).

4.4 Interpreters' Views on Demand

One in eight respondents to the interpreter questionnaire indicated that current provision of interpreting services was characterised above all by a shortage of interpreters in relation to demand. The same view, that demand exceeded supply, was expressed by the majority of the interpreters who were interviewed. These comments came from interpreters in all parts of the country.

In only a very few areas – Devon, East Sussex (twice), the Highlands of Scotland and Wales – did individual interpreters suggest that they would like a greater demand for their services.

A number of interpreters (and agency staff and Deaf people) also stressed the need for greatly increased and improved provision of interpreter training, to meet the shortage of interpreters and to improve the standard of provision.

The great majority of interpreters interviewed drew attention to the need for co-working in certain situations, i.e. the need for more than one interpreter to be employed on an assignment. Recognition and acceptance of the necessity for co-working will inevitably affect demand.

4.5 Views of National Organisations on the Level of Demand

The view that there are great difficulties in meeting current demand for interpreting services is also shared by the major national organisations in the field.

In 1999, a working group consisting of the British Deaf Association, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People was set up to look at the shortage of qualified BSL/English interpreters in the UK (British Deaf News, 1999). In interviews for this study representatives of these organisations, and of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) and the Scottish Association of Sign Language interpreters (SASLI), identified the shortage of interpreters and

provision of appropriate training as major issues in relation to meeting current and future demand.

4.6 Service Users' Difficulties in Accessing Interpreting Services

4.6.1 Difficulties experienced by Deaf people

In all the geographical areas visited for this study, Deaf people stated that there was a shortage of interpreters, and many reported that they limited their requests accordingly. Most confined their requests to essential situations such as appointments with medical practitioners or particularly important occasions like job interviews.

Deaf people who used interpreting services also reported that they often had to book a long time in advance, or wait a long time, to secure an interpreter. Many expressed their frustration at having to schedule meetings or appointments around the availability of an interpreter rather than at a time or date most convenient to them.

Very few Deaf people reported being offered a choice of interpreters when booking. Requests for interpreters of the same gender were most frequently made for medical appointments. A small number of Deaf people expressed a preference for an interpreter of the same ethnic background or sexual orientation in particular situations.

Deaf people (as well as interpreters and agencies) drew attention to the absence of or very limited provision for emergency and out-of-hours interpreting.

Many Deaf people (and a number of freelance interpreters) reported that the more experienced interpreters were rarely available for use by Deaf people who are infrequent users of interpreting services. Experienced interpreters were usually booked well in advance by Deaf people in professional occupations who require the services of interpreters on a regular basis.

Some Deaf people who used unqualified people as 'interpreters' gave the shortage of qualified interpreters as their reason for doing so. They did not wish or could not afford to wait for a qualified interpreter to become available.

Obtaining the services of interpreters for assignments that are of short duration was a general issue for many Deaf users of interpreting services and a significant problem in places where interpreters were in short supply.

4.6.2 Difficulties experienced by organisations

In the questionnaires completed by organisations using interpreting services, 56 of the 84 respondents reported difficulties in booking interpreters, either occasionally (36) or more often/most of the time (19).

Such difficulties were experienced widely and more or less uniformly by users in different regions, in different types and sizes of organisation, and requiring interpreters in different situations: as employees, visitors, clients, customers and others.

Thirty-two respondents added comments to their replies emphasising the difficulty of securing interpreting services at short notice (15), the general shortage of interpreters (14) and the absence of choice (2), problems in booking an interpreter for particular hours, e.g. evenings (3) and problems with last-minute cancellations (1).

One of the case studies in the project featured a large trade union, selected as an example of good practice. The union representative explained that it was extremely difficult, in her experience, to obtain the services of interpreters at short notice. The representative was concerned that as a consequence they were not in a position to provide the same standard of service to Deaf members as for hearing members (see 5.3.7.1).

4.7 Predicting Future Demand

4.7.1 Increased demand predicted

There was general agreement among Deaf people, agency representatives, interpreters and other respondents that demand for BSL/English interpreting services was increasing. They believed that it was also likely to continue to increase in the future as Deaf people seek and obtain increased participation in society.

4.7.2 Impact of the Disability Discrimination Act

The demand for interpreting services was expected, by those interviewed, to grow as a result of the full implementation of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), as organisations face up to their obligations to make 'reasonable adjustments' to enable Deaf people to access their services.

More than a third of organisations using interpreting services reported that they expected their organisation's policies on using BSL/English interpreters would have to change to meet the requirements of the DDA. These were organisations already making use of interpreting services.

Most agencies recognised that full implementation of Part III of the DDA could lead to further significant increases in demand. Some agency staff, however, were uncertain

whether DDA Part III implementation would lead to increased access to services through BSL/English interpreters or increased provision of information in BSL.

They raised two major concerns:

- that due to a lack of proper awareness, access to services would be defined in relation to adjustments in the provision of written information rather than a requirement that information be presented in BSL or access granted through the provision of BSL/English interpreters;
- if access in BSL is deemed appropriate under the Act, how in practice can this be delivered, given the shortage of interpreters?

4.7.3 Raised awareness of interpreting services in the Deaf community

A number of Deaf informants suggested that an important source of unrealised demand lay with Deaf people themselves.

The contexts in which Deaf people used interpreters are predominantly what they described as "hearing situations". In such situations, they were usually the only Deaf person present. This led many to view the interpreter as part of a hearing setting, in which the interpreter is engaged primarily in conveying information from hearing professionals to the Deaf person.

A number of Deaf people felt that Deaf people needed far more opportunities to engage interpreters in settings of their choosing. In their view, this would enable them to develop different styles of using interpreters that would reflect their requirements rather than those of 'hearing' users. Such provision would greatly increase the level of demand for interpreting services and, in particular, demand identified directly by Deaf people. An example of an agency attempting to meet Deaf-initiated demand in one particular setting is the recently established RNID Communication Support Unit, Sensory Solutions, which provides interpreting services for shoppers at the Trafford Centre, Greater Manchester.

It was suggested by both interpreters and some Deaf people that many Deaf people lack confidence or do not understand how to use interpreters to achieve equality of participation or equal access to information. They commented on the lack of information in BSL on the organisation and provision of BSL/English interpreting services and up-to-date information on the role and responsibilities of interpreters. Some Deaf people (and some interpreters) felt this lack of information was compounded by many interpreters operating within what they consider is a very 'narrow' definition of the interpreter's role and responsibilities. Deaf people and interpreters who raised this issue suggested that a shared understanding of the role(s) of the interpreter needs to be developed which incorporates the views of Deaf people on

what constitutes ‘interpreting’ and ‘professionalism’ with the definitions of these terms drawn from spoken language interpreting.

4.8 Summary

Most agencies reported difficulties in meeting all the demand they received. There were some regional variations in relation to expressed demand (4.2).

There were difficulties in measuring demand for BSL/English interpreters (4.3).

Most interpreters expressed the view that demand for interpreters exceeded supply (4.4).

Major national organisations shared the view that there was difficulty in meeting current demand for interpreters (4.5).

Service users, both Deaf people and organisations, reported difficulties in obtaining interpreting services (4.6).

There was general agreement by all parties that the demand for interpreting service is likely to increase in the future, partly because of raised awareness among Deaf people and partly due to the anticipated impact of the DDA Part III (4.7).

5 Using Services: The Experiences of Deaf and Non-Deaf Service Users

5.1 About this chapter

This chapter describes the experiences and perspectives of those who use BSL/English interpreting services, both Deaf and non-Deaf service users. It explores

- their reasons for using interpreters;
- how they obtain the services of an interpreter;
- the arrangements made for payment;
- their views on the service provided by interpreters and interpreting agencies;
- their views on how the organisation of the provision of interpreters could be improved.

5.2 Deaf Service Users

5.2.1 Introduction

5.2.1.1 Sources

Deaf people's views on the provision and organisation of interpreting services were obtained through in-depth interviews with Deaf people at four Deaf centres, and four public meetings at which Deaf people were invited to present their views on any aspect of current provision. The interviews and public meetings were conducted in the North West of England, the English Midlands, London, Wales and Central Scotland.

The Deaf people interviewed individually (30) were from a wide range of social backgrounds and included people who described themselves as 'grassroots'[6] Deaf people, home makers, unemployed people and those employed in semi-skilled, skilled and professional occupations. The sample was made up of 11 men and 19 women. Three of the people interviewed identified themselves as members of an ethnic minority. The sample included both frequent and infrequent users of interpreting services. One woman was unable to complete her interview and therefore the findings from individual interviews are based on 29 interviews.

[6] A grass roots member of the Deaf community is a person who considers themselves to be an ordinary member of that community rather than one of its leaders or a person of influence within the community (because of their expertise and/or experience in an area of special interest to the community).

A total of 81 Deaf people attended four public meetings. Deaf people from ethnic minority groups participated in two of the public meetings. Men and women were present in approximately equal numbers at the meetings. The majority of people appeared to be aged between 35 and 55 years but there were Deaf people under 30 present who expressed their views.

A perspective on the organisation and provision of interpreting services across Britain was obtained from the British Deaf Association (the largest national representative organisation of Deaf people). The Association's views were obtained from their publications and through a series of interviews with a senior representative of the organisation (5.2.8).

5.2.1.2 Methodology

A British Sign Language video letter (and a written English translation) was sent to each of the Deaf centres selected. A Deaf member of the research team signed the BSL video letter. She explained the aims of the project and requested the assistance of the centre in organising a public meeting to which Deaf people would be invited to present their views on the provision and organisation of interpreting services locally, regionally and nationally.

She also asked for the assistance of each centre in contacting eight Deaf users of interpreting services in their area who would be prepared to be interviewed on their experiences of using interpreters. She explained that the interviews and the public meetings would be conducted in BSL and would be videotaped.

The response of the Deaf centres was, for the most part, very positive. The representatives of two centres were initially slow to respond to the invitations to participate in the study. This was unsurprising given the large number of requests Deaf clubs receive from research centres and students to contribute to large and small-scale research projects. Deaf people, who had initially been reluctant to participate, became very interested in doing so once the purpose of the project had been explained.

The interviews were conducted in British Sign Language. A video camera recorded both questions and answers, which left the interviewer free to engage with the interviewee without having to translate and record the responses in written English during the interview (British Sign Language does not have a conventional written form). Conducting the interviews in BSL allowed Deaf respondents to express their views in their first or preferred language.

The public meetings were also conducted in British Sign Language. A Deaf member of the project team chaired the meetings and those present were invited to give their views on the same issues addressed in the individual interviews. They were asked at the end of the meetings to identify any issues that they considered important but which had not been

covered in the discussion. Attendance at these meetings ranged from between eight and forty-eight Deaf people. It has not proved possible to provide an exact analysis of the views expressed at the public meetings. An indication of the level of support for particular views and proposals is included where this proved possible to estimate. At each meeting Deaf people made clear that they wanted to be consulted about, and involved in, improving the provision and organisation of interpreting services.

5.2.2 When do Deaf people use the services of an interpreter?

The twenty nine Deaf people interviewed provided information on how often they had used an interpreter in the month preceding their interview and whether they had used an interpreter in particular settings during the last year.

The frequency of use of interpreters in the month preceding their interview was as follows:

Daily	At least once a week	5-8 times a month	2-4 times a month	Not at all
4	9	3	4	9

One of the nine people who had not used an interpreter had been on holiday during the month in question.

Fifteen people reported using an interpreter during this period for 'personal matters' and sixteen for 'work related matters'.

The Deaf people interviewed were asked if they had used an interpreter at least once during the last year in a number of different circumstances.

Circumstance	Yes	No
Legal	12	17
Medical	6	23
Social Services	6	23
Education	12	17
Employment	11	18
Business/ commerce	7	22
Counselling	1	28
Leisure	15	14

On seven occasions when Deaf people had used an interpreter for legal matters, a staff interpreter of an interpreting agency had been used. In one case a freelance interpreter was engaged. In the remaining cases the status of the interpreter was not known: in two of the cases the interpreter was arranged by Social Services and in the other two by legal professionals.

Four Deaf people who reported not using an interpreter in medical settings had used a member of their family, one had used a friend, and two had attended their appointments by themselves. Where an interpreter had been used in a medical setting, four had been arranged through an interpreting agency. In one of the other two cases the Deaf person had engaged a freelance interpreter; in the other the Deaf person could not recall how the interpreter had been booked.

For those who used interpreters in social service settings, in two cases the interpreter was provided by Social Services and in the other four by an interpreting agency.

Where Deaf people had used an interpreter in educational establishments, interpreting services had been provided by the college in ten cases; in one case provision had been organised through an interpreting agency. One person using an interpreter in this setting did so as an employee of a college, and provision was organised by the college. In eight cases the Deaf person used an interpreter at least once a week for the period of their course.

Under the heading of employment respondents reported on their use of interpreters in their paid or voluntary (in the case of one person) employment and at job interviews. In each case it was reported that provision had been arranged through an interpreting agency.

In each case where an interpreter had been used in a business setting, provision had been arranged through an interpreting agency. One person reported using a family member to interpret in business settings.

In the one case where a Deaf person reported using an interpreter for a counselling session, interpreting services had been provided by Social Services.

Thirteen Deaf people using an interpreter during leisure pursuits had interpreting provision arranged by the organisation responsible for the event. In two cases where an interpreter had been used during a leisure pursuit, the Deaf person did not know who had arranged the provision of interpreters.

5.2.2.1 Frequent and occasional use of interpreting services by Deaf people

Deaf people in professional occupations who attended the public meetings, and representatives of interpreting agencies, drew attention to the existence of two distinct groups of Deaf users of interpreters:

a) Deaf people in professional occupations who were frequent users of interpreters. Sources of funding such as Access to Work were used to meet the costs of provision.
b) Deaf people who, for the most part, were infrequent users of interpreting services.

The former were in a position to book interpreters in advance and were, they claimed, more knowledgeable about which interpreters were the most highly skilled, citing the variation in standards that exist between interpreters. As a consequence many of the highly skilled interpreters were rarely available to take bookings made by, or on behalf of, Deaf people who were infrequent users of interpreting services. They were left with no option but to accept whichever interpreter was available to accept their assignment

5.2.3 Obtaining the services of an interpreter

5.2.3.1 Method of booking and equipment used

Twenty two of the twenty nine Deaf people interviewed used text telephones and/or fax machines to contact agencies or interpreters. Typetalk[7] was used by five Deaf people interviewed, but three reported that they did not like using it as you had to provide your name, account number and telephone number before you could proceed with your

[7] Typetalk is a telephone service that enables Deaf people to have their text telephone messages relayed to hearing telephone users in spoken English (and vice versa: spoken English messages relayed as text messages) by Typetalk operators. The service is operated by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and funded by British Telecom. Since these interviews were completed, Typetalk has introduced a direct dial system of access to the service.

communication. They also expressed a concern that mistakes could easily be made in conveying dates and times, which could result in errors in booking interpreters.

Some people provided examples where breakdowns in communication had occurred but it was not possible to estimate how frequently such difficulties happen based on the examples provided.

Many Deaf people complained that they found it very difficult to get through to agencies when they wished to do so as the telephone lines often seemed to be permanently engaged. A number of agencies were praised for providing written confirmation of bookings. Others were criticised for failing to do so or for long delays in sending out the confirmations of bookings.

In one area visited by the project team, video telephones were used to contact the interpreting agency. The eight Deaf people interviewed in that area expressed satisfaction at being able to book interpreters in British Sign Language. In other places, Deaf people expressed considerable interest in the use of video telephones to book interpreters and access interpreting services.

Only two of the Deaf people interviewed had ever used the CACDP Directory that lists the name, contact address and telephone number of qualified and trainee interpreters registered with CACDP. One Deaf person interviewed made reference to the Black and Asian Sign Language Interpreters Network (BASLIN) Directory listing Black and Asian interpreters. SASLI do not publish a directory of interpreters in Scotland.

5.2.3.2 Booking interpreters

Deaf people who were irregular users of interpreting services reported that they are often only indirectly involved in the booking of interpreters. Only one agency reported that the majority of its bookings were made directly by Deaf people.

In many instances the service provider contacts the interpreting agency to book an interpreter or the agency will undertake to make an appointment (e.g. with the Deaf person's doctor) and book an interpreter for the appointment at the same time. This was seen by those involved (including many Deaf people) as the most practical way of matching an available appointment with an available interpreter. However, a number of Deaf people did complain, as reported in 5.2.3.4 below, that appointments usually had to be arranged to fit with the availability of the interpreter rather than at a time and date most convenient to them.

5.2.3 3 Freelance and agency interpreters

Many Deaf people interviewed were not familiar with the distinction between freelance and agency interpreters, and therefore were unable to comment on whether any differences in provision could be related to whether interpreters were freelance or agency interpreters.

Those who were aware of the distinction suggested that they would not expect to find significant differences in the services provided since the freelance interpreters they used obtained assignments through agencies, or were former employees of agencies.

At the public meetings Deaf people expressed the view that freelance interpreters were less well known compared to agency interpreters based in Deaf centres. It was suggested that freelance interpreters need to improve the advertising of their services within the Deaf communities they serve. However, it was recognised that given current demand, and the shortage of interpreters, most freelance interpreters do not need to advertise to obtain assignments.

Some Deaf people at the public meetings identified three issues that, in their view, distinguished freelance interpreters from agency interpreters. Firstly, they thought it important that they knew the interpreter assigned to them and that there were far more opportunities to get to know agency interpreters based in Deaf centres than freelance interpreters. Secondly, they were uncertain how they could take forward complaints if problems arose in relation to a freelance interpreter whereas they knew that complaints could be taken directly to the agency when they used an agency interpreter. A third difference they discussed was that agency interpreters were understood to have little or no choice in the interpreting assignments that they undertook. They thought that the terms of their employment did not allow them to turn down assignments whereas freelance interpreters were able to choose which assignments they wished to accept.

5.2.3.4 Choice of an interpreter

Very few Deaf people reported that they were offered a choice of interpreters when booking the services of an interpreter. At the public meetings examples were given of situations in which it would be preferable for the interpreter to be of the same gender as the Deaf client e.g. presentations at conferences, appearances on television, Deaf people being interviewed on radio, etc. Requests for interpreters of the same gender were most frequently made for medical appointments. However, those that expressed a view on this issue stated that they would place competence above gender in almost all situations. A small number of Deaf people expressed a preference for interpreters of the same ethnic background or sexual orientation in particular settings (e.g. meetings attended exclusively by Deaf people of a particular ethnic background or sexual orientation).

Many Deaf people expressed their frustration at often having to schedule meetings or appointments around the availability of an interpreter rather than at a time or date most convenient to themselves. Some stated that they were resigned to the fact that it was impossible to obtain the services of an interpreter at short notice. Only one Deaf person interviewed was actually aware of the existence of an interpreting agency (Just Communication) that specialised in the provision of interpreters at short notice.

5.2.3.5 Lack of knowledge of CACDP and SASLI

A number of Deaf people either did not recognise the names of the two organisations charged with maintaining the current registers of interpreters in the United Kingdom or were unclear what their role was in relation to interpreters.

5.2.3.6 Is the status of registered qualified and trainee interpreter understood?

For many Deaf users the terms 'registered qualified' interpreter and 'registered trainee' interpreter were not meaningful. A very large number of Deaf people who contributed to the study did not know how the status of qualified registered interpreter was achieved. Many mistakenly believed that the BSL language qualification, Stage III, granted qualified interpreter status.

This raised the question of whether their views should be included in the study since they may not have been commenting on registered qualified or registered trainee interpreters in their answers to questions. However, the researchers decided to include their views since the Deaf people believed that the people they referred to as interpreters were professionals paid to provide interpreting services.

5.2.3.7 Why do Deaf people use unqualified 'interpreters'?

The shortage of qualified interpreters was the reason given by some Deaf people for using unqualified persons in certain circumstances. They did not wish to wait on the availability of a qualified interpreter before conducting their business.

In areas where interpreters were in particularly short supply there was a major problem in obtaining the services of interpreters for assignments that are of a short duration (e.g. medical appointments). It was reported that on occasions such assignments are only accepted if the interpreter can charge a minimum two or three hour fee. Where funding was limited or the service provider was not prepared to meet this minimum charge some

Deaf people interviewed felt they had no choice but to use a member of their family or a close friend.

The use of family members or close friends as 'interpreters' was widespread, in particular in medical settings and situations that Deaf people defined as 'private'. In many cases, this was a matter of not wanting such information to be known outside of their family or by other than a close friend.

Even though it was accepted that an interpreter would act in a professional manner and was required to treat all information relating to an assignment as confidential, there remained for many a sense of embarrassment in using an interpreter, whom they knew, in certain situations. In discussing this a number of Deaf people expressed the view that they would prefer professionals (e.g. doctors, solicitors, etc.) to be able to sign to a high standard so that private matters could be discussed without recourse to an interpreter.

5.2.4 Payment Arrangements

5.2.4.1 Deaf people's knowledge of fees charged

Twenty one Deaf people interviewed did not know the current fees charged by interpreters or interpreting agencies. Their general perception was that the fees charged were expensive. Estimates varied between £15.00 and £50.00 per hour. Deaf people who had negotiated the provision of interpreting services through the government's *Access to Work* programme were aware of the fees charged (see 3.4.4 for information on the fees charged at the time the study was undertaken).

5.2.4.2 Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

The right of Deaf people to apply for a Disability Living Allowance in relation to their use of BSL/English interpreters was first established in 1994 in the case of Rebecca Halliday. This decision by a Social Security Commissioner was challenged by the Department of Social Security in 1995 in the Court of Appeal. Deaf people's right to apply for DLA in relation to interpreting services was finally confirmed by the House of Lords in 1997 (this judgement, R(A)2/98, may be found at www.dwp.gov.uk).

Deaf people are required to demonstrate that they require the services of an interpreter for 'a significant portion of the day' to be eligible for the lower rate DLA (£14.20 per week in 2000-1; £14.65 from 1st April 2001) and 'frequent' use throughout the day to be eligible for middle rate DLA (£35.80 per week in 2000-1; £37.00 from 1st April 2001).

A number of Deaf people reported that the awards made to Deaf people at the lower or middle rates under the Disability Living Allowance did not reflect the fees charged by interpreters or interpreting agencies. Those who had appealed their award reported that they thought the basis on which awards were made appeared to vary. A study conducted by the RNID (Allirajah,2001) on deaf people's experiences of applying for DLA found that only 9.7% of those who described themselves as severely or profoundly deaf aged 16-64 were in receipt of DLA in 2000. The study was based on a postal questionnaire completed by 991 people of whom 95% described themselves as either severely or profoundly deaf. Forty three per cent of respondents (417) reported that BSL was their first language. A study carried out by the Deaf Studies Trust at the University of Bristol, based on interviews conducted in BSL with 200 Deaf people found that 53% were in receipt of DLA (Dye and Kyle, 2001; Dye, 2001).

The researchers found that a number of Deaf people at the public meetings who had applied for DLA understood that a disability living allowance was granted to meet some of the additional costs incurred in being Deaf in a hearing society. They did not think it was a grant to be used exclusively to meet the cost of BSL/English interpreters (See British Deaf News, November 1997, p.5 on DLA and interpreting services).

5.2.4.3 How should the provision of interpreting services be funded?

There was unanimous agreement at the public meetings that the provision of interpreters should be funded by central government. It was felt that it was unfair that provision appeared to vary between different regions. Some Deaf people suggested there needed to be national co-ordination of provision; others suggested that minimum standards of provision needed to be established in each area.

Eighteen of the twenty-nine Deaf people interviewed favoured the suggestion of a voucher-based system to pay for interpreting services. It was accepted that a direct cash grant might be used for purposes other than interpreting, although many Deaf people felt that Deaf people should be paid a separate allowance in relation to the other additional costs they incur as a consequence of being deaf. At two of the public meetings, Deaf people proposed that the use of vouchers should be restricted to registered interpreters. Thus, the use of unqualified 'interpreters' could be discouraged.

It was suggested that the vouchers should also cover the cost of interpreting for social and non-essential services. At two of the public meetings individuals pointed out that a Deaf person who needed to attend frequent medical appointments would quickly exhaust their allocation of interpreting hours. There was general agreement that in the case of essential

services (such as medical services, access to the law, etc.) interpreter provision should be the responsibility of the service provider (see British Deaf News November 1997 for a description of the Norwegian voucher system).

5.2.5 Deaf people, interpreters and interpreting services

5.2.5.1 What Deaf people expect from an interpreter

When asked to describe what constituted a good BSL/English interpreter almost all Deaf people interviewed or who expressed their view at the public meetings identified the following characteristics:

- good BSL skills
- confidentiality
- 'good attitude' towards, and good rapport with, Deaf people.

At the public meetings and in individual interviews (see 5.2.5.7) a number of Deaf people expressed their concern that some interpreters on television, and a number of 'new' and trainee interpreters, had not achieved the level of fluency in BSL required to be an interpreter.

The importance of interpreter confidentiality was stressed by many of the Deaf people interviewed. Some described experiences where they thought that interpreters had failed to meet this requirement of their profession. These people stated that because of these experiences they only used particular interpreters in whom they have trust, family members or close friends.

Many Deaf people stressed that a 'good attitude' was an important requirement for interpreters. They contrasted a 'good attitude' with the attitude of interpreters who had a 'narrow' view of their role, for example, limiting their role to 'what was said' and not being prepared to clarify technical terms or concepts which the Deaf person was not familiar with. Those interpreters who were described as having a 'bad attitude' were those whom Deaf people described as not seeming to respect Deaf people as equals, making decisions on behalf of Deaf clients without consultation, and, they thought, thus failing to follow the code of ethics of the regulatory bodies (CACDP and SASLI).

5.2.5.2 How do Deaf people judge how well an interpreter is interpreting?

The researchers found that many Deaf people seemed to base their evaluation of the competence of trainee and qualified interpreters on the standard of the interpreters' signing skills. They are not usually in a position to evaluate the standard of an interpretation from British Sign Language into spoken English and vice versa (given that they are unable to hear

the spoken English interpretation and, many stated, even if they could, they did not feel they had a sufficient command of English to do so).

A number of Deaf people appeared to operate on the basis that if the interpreter's signing skills were 'adequate' or 'good' then they presumed the interpreter's ability to interpret from British Sign Language into English and vice versa would be of a comparable standard. Others who recognised that this did not necessarily follow, relied on a process of deduction i.e. whether the contributions from the hearing persons present 'fitted' with what Deaf people had signed.

In one area visited by the project team where Deaf people reported that the shortage of qualified interpreters was particularly acute, the majority of persons engaged in interpreting in that area were described as having a Stage II BSL language qualification or being at that standard. The Deaf people interviewed, and those who attended the public meeting in that area, described the BSL skills of these 'interpreters' as poor. They did not see how the situation could be improved in the foreseeable future without the intervention of central or national government. The organisations in the area did not, in their view, have the resources to address the problem. A number of Deaf people explained that they had become resigned to the situation and took the view that Stage II 'interpreters' were better than none at all. Others strongly disagreed with this view and described the current situation in their area as unacceptable.

At two public meetings individual Deaf people drew attention to the importance of interpreters studying English as well as BSL on training courses, and the responsibility of training courses to ensure interpreters were able to competently interpret from BSL into English. This was considered to be of particular importance given, as stated above, Deaf people were not usually in a position to monitor the standard of such interpretations.

5.2.5.3 Regional variation in BSL

At the public meetings a number of Deaf people drew attention to the existence of regional variation in British Sign Language. As with spoken languages, signs may differ between geographical regions or be used by a minority group within the Deaf community.

Some Deaf people reported difficulties in following the signing of certain interpreters from outside their geographical area or social group, as well as a lack of confidence in the ability of these interpreters to translate signed communication into English.

A number of Deaf people stressed the importance of including regional and social variation in BSL on training courses and were opposed to efforts to 'create' or 'construct' a standard form of BSL.

5.2.5.4 Shortage of interpreters

The Deaf people interviewed were asked whether they thought there was a local and/or national shortage of BSL/English interpreters. Twenty-six (of the twenty-nine) Deaf people interviewed thought that there was a shortage in their local area, one did not think there was and two did not know. Twenty-one Deaf people believed there was a national shortage of BSL/English interpreters; eight replied they did not know.

Interviews and public meetings were conducted in different parts of the country in order to ascertain whether Deaf people's experiences varied in different geographical areas. Although examples of good practice were identified, the main difficulties experienced by Deaf people i.e. shortage of interpreters, difficulty of obtaining interpreting services at short notice, variability in standards (in particular in relation to trainee interpreters), etc., were found in each geographical area visited by the researchers.

There was some evidence to suggest that the degree of difficulty Deaf people experienced because of these issues varied between geographical areas. For example, it was suggested that the shortage of interpreters was a greater problem in London because the amount of notice Deaf people needed to give to be confident of obtaining an interpreter was greater. However, others suggested that this might, in part, be explained by a greater use of interpreters by Deaf people in London compared to other parts of the country. There also appeared to be greater 'self-denial' by Deaf people outside of London in relation to the occasions for which they requested interpreting services. A number of Deaf people (at public meetings held outside of London) explained that on many occasions they did not bother or did not consider it worthwhile to seek the services of an interpreter as they were certain none would be available.

5.2.5.5 The needs of Deaf professionals

A number of Deaf people employed in professional occupations (see also 5.2.2.1) explained that it was essential for them to obtain the services of qualified interpreters to properly carry out their professional responsibilities. They could not afford to engage the services of interpreters who might prove inadequate. Many would only use interpreters who were known to them personally.

5.2.5.6 Deaf people's views on the service provided by agencies in their area

The views of Deaf people interviewed for this study on the service provided by the agency(ies) in their area varied between areas. The four regions/countries in question are referred to as areas 'one' to 'four'.

In area one, all eight Deaf respondents expressed satisfaction with the work of the agency. The agency was complimented on the standard of interpreting of the interpreters that were regularly used by the agency, although reservations were expressed by one respondent in relation to one interpreter. All eight thought it very helpful that bookings could be made in BSL by video telephone, although three respondents felt the quality of the image needed to be improved. Two respondents recalled occasions when interpreters had failed to turn up for engagements. No other complaints were made. When asked how this agency could be improved three respondents suggested that more interpreters should be employed.

In area two, there was general satisfaction with the agency. However, two of the six respondents complained about the time taken to obtain the services of an interpreter and in the case of one respondent, the agency's failure on one occasion to inform them of the interpreter's last minute withdrawal from an engagement. One Deaf person was not confident about the quality of interpreting from BSL into English. Others complimented the agency on their use of visual information e.g. photographs of the agency's interpreters, the holding of meetings to discuss interpreting services and the establishment of an evaluation system to monitor the standard of service provided by agency staff.

However, one Deaf person was critical of the agency's use of an evaluation form in written English to monitor Deaf service users views on the standard of service provided by the agency. As with the agency in area one, when asked how this agency could be improved, three respondents replied that more interpreters needed to be employed by the agency, with one adding that interpreters required more and better training.

In area three, five of the seven respondents expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with their local agency. In two cases, the reasons given related to the agency's use of unqualified persons with only Stage II and Stage III BSL language qualifications. Another related reason was that on one occasion a trainee interpreter had been booked to work in a setting that required a qualified and/or more experienced interpreter (although it was acknowledged that the agency did provide another interpreter when the Deaf person complained). One Deaf respondent stated that an agency interpreter had failed to maintain confidentiality and another that an interview had to be rearranged due to the shortage of interpreters. According to most of the seven Deaf people interviewed this agency needed to improve the standard of interpreting of the interpreters employed by the agency, increase the number of interpreters employed and provide Deaf people with accessible information on the service provided.

In the fourth area Deaf people drew attention to the acute shortage of registered qualified and trainee interpreters. Considerable dissatisfaction was expressed by six of the eight Deaf persons interviewed at the situation in this area. Complaints were made by four respondents about the use of unqualified persons with only the Stage II BSL language qualification, and the lack of choice and availability of interpreters provided by agencies operating in their area. They thought there was a need to greatly increase the number of qualified interpreters in the area and provide Deaf people with information on interpreting services in visual form. It was claimed by one Deaf person that Deaf people did not bother to complete agency evaluation forms because these are only available in written English. One person expressed the view that the agency did its best in difficult circumstances.

5.2.5.7 Deaf people's views on the training of interpreters

There was a widespread belief amongst those who attended the public meetings that the standard of interpreter training was inadequate. Nineteen of the 29 Deaf people interviewed expressed 'concern' or 'some concern' about the standard of BSL of interpreters on television.

However the evidence presented by Deaf people at the public meetings related in almost all cases to the variation in standard of trainee interpreters and concerns over BSL language courses rather than interpreter training courses. Only in a small number of cases was reference made to specific interpreter training courses. In the majority of cases the examples cited related to BSL language courses and the standard of BSL required to enter certain interpreter training courses viz. Stage II and Stage III.

The issue of the costs of Stage II and Stage III BSL language courses was raised by some Deaf people. They reported that they knew of people who wished to train to become interpreters but who had been discouraged by both the cost and limited availability of BSL language courses and interpreter training programmes. They argued that pre-interpreter and interpreter training courses should be funded by national governments.

As reported in the next section (5.2.5.8) the proposed NVQ/SNVQ structures for the assessment of interpreters was criticised on the grounds that they did not appear to be capable of producing interpreters of the required standard or conferring on BSL/English interpreters the appropriate professional status which, in the view of these Deaf people, was required by the profession.

In contrast, the proposed new structures were considered by some Deaf people to be considerably more demanding than the previous systems of assessments, and therefore potentially off-putting to people who might wish to train as interpreters. In discussion other

Deaf people responded that this was necessary if interpreters were to achieve the standard required.

At each of the public meetings, some Deaf people expressed the belief that a lack of clear policies had contributed to the current situation of their being, in their experience, fewer interpreters available today compared to ten years ago.

Concern was expressed at the limited number of Stage III courses and the lack of training available to Deaf tutors who wish to train to teach on courses at this level. In each of the geographical areas visited, examples were given of Further Education colleges employing hearing tutors in preference to Deaf tutors to teach Stage I courses. Considerable anger was expressed by those who raised this issue at both the Further Education colleges that employed unqualified hearing tutors and the hearing people who undertook to teach such courses without the necessary competence or qualifications to do so.

5.2.5.8 Deaf people's views on NVQ interpreter qualifications

A number of Deaf people in professional occupations expressed concern at the decision to base entry to the CACDP register on an NVQ qualification[8]. Those who raised this issue at two public meetings suggested that the training and examination of interpreters should be based in universities and should be of the same standard as spoken language interpreter training courses[9]. They argued that such courses would provide a higher standard of training and confer a status that would be recognised by other professionals (e.g. doctors, solicitors, etc.). They suggested that after obtaining such a qualification interpreters would be in a position to specialise in a particular area or areas e.g. medicine, law, education.

5.2.5.9 Communication Support Workers engaged in interpreting

Communication Support Workers are usually employed in educational settings to provide a range of services to Deaf students. Their responsibilities may include interpreting, as well as note-taking and one-to-one tutorials with Deaf students. Considerable criticism was expressed by Deaf people at the public meetings of people with Stage I and Stage II BSL qualifications being employed in these posts and, in addition, that they were being expected to interpret within the college in which they were employed. In the view of the Deaf people

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[8] The NVQ/SNVQ in Interpreting and Translating provides common standards of assessment for both spoken language and sign language/spoken language interpreting and translating.

[9] As noted above, CACDP published a new BSL/English interpreter registration policy in 1999 that recognised both higher education and NVQ qualifications. Further information on the new policy may be found in 6.3.4.2.

who raised this issue, these qualifications do not equip Communication Support Workers to be able to communicate to the standard required to support Deaf students in educational settings. They argued that they were in no position to provide interpreting services in educational or any other setting. (For a discussion of the role of Communication Support Workers see CACDP, 2001b; Harrington 2001; Kernoff 2001.)

Some Deaf people therefore suggested that there was need to clarify the role of Communication Support Workers and, in particular, their role in relation to interpreters. A number of Deaf people expressed concern that the term "educational interpreters" was being used to describe Communication Support Workers. They felt this title was misleading and should not be used.

Recipients of both *Access to Work* and the *Student Disability Allowance* provided examples of people with Stage II BSL qualifications being recommended by *Access to Work* administrators and student disability advisors as appropriate persons to provide interpreting services. It was unclear to them whether this was done out of ignorance of the difference between BSL/English interpreting qualifications and the BSL language qualifications or an attempt to save money.

5.2.5.10 New entrants to the interpreting profession

For a number of Deaf people, in particular middle-aged and elderly Deaf people, the fact that an increasing number of those entering the interpreting profession were not known to them (i.e. do not have a Deaf background), was a matter of concern, as they feel more comfortable with familiar interpreters. They linked this to a wider concern about the number of trainees whom they thought had inadequate signing skills.

5.2.5.11 Awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act

Nineteen of the 29 Deaf people interviewed had very limited or no knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act. The Deaf people who were aware of the Act were usually employed by Deaf organisations and/or in professional positions.

When asked: "Do you believe the introduction of the Act will improve the provision of interpreting services for Deaf people?" some expressed hope that it would do so but the majority stated that they did not know.

At three of the four public meetings the issue of the circumstances of Deaf people being addressed under a Disability Act was raised by a number of participants. They considered it was inappropriate for their situation to be equated with that of disabled persons, and felt that

this contributed to a lack of appreciation of their situation within the wider (hearing) society. They viewed their use of British Sign Language as a linguistic rather than disability issue.

5.2.6 How could the provision of interpreters be improved?

5.2.6.1 Formal recognition of BSL

There was unanimous agreement at the public meetings on the need for the government to give formal recognition to British Sign Language. The participants considered that this would provide an appropriate context for addressing such language-related issues as the shortage of BSL/English interpreters and Deaf teachers of British Sign Language, the provision of recorded general information in BSL and how more hearing people can be enabled to engage in everyday conversations with Deaf people in BSL.

5.2.6.2 The role of Deaf interpreters

When discussing the role of Deaf interpreters a number of Deaf people distinguished between Deaf interpreters and Deaf presenters on television and information videos in BSL. Some Deaf people felt it was inappropriate to refer to Deaf 'interpreters' in that so far as they were aware no Deaf member of the Deaf community had obtained an interpreting qualification. In discussion reference was made to one interpreter with a hearing loss, who was considered to be a member of the Deaf community, and who had gained entry to the CACDP Register of Interpreters. This person had sufficient hearing to enable her to operate as an interpreter in certain settings

There was a definite preference for information videos in BSL and television programmes to be presented by Deaf people. The use of Deaf people instead of hearing interpreters, where appropriate, was also seen as a way of making an important contribution to the shortage of interpreters and improving the standard of BSL used in providing access to television and recorded information[10]. It was recognised that in certain situations where information is being provided in spoken English, there may be practical and financial difficulties in using Deaf interpreters. It would be expensive to provide a written transcript of the spoken presentation in order to enable the Deaf interpreter to translate the presentation into

[10] Two organisations employing Deaf translators have been established to provide translating and interpreting services to television companies that wish to make their programmes accessible in BSL. These are Signpost based at Tyne Tees Television in Newcastle upon Tyne and Independent Media Support based in London (see British Deaf News June and December 2000 and February 2001 for further information). Under the 1999 Broadcasting Bill terrestrial television companies were required to make 1% of their programmes accessible through BSL by 2000. The percentage is required to rise to 5% by 2008.

British Sign Language. It would be difficult for Deaf interpreters to provide non-signing participants with a translation from British Sign Language into spoken or written English.

In the case of popular television programmes (e.g. Eastenders, Coronation Street, etc.), a number of Deaf people preferred subtitles (colour coded to identify which character was speaking) to interpreters as this allowed them to follow the action more easily.

5.2.6.3 Provision of information on interpreters and interpreter organisations in BSL

At one public meeting a Deaf participant suggested that the status of the profession of interpreters was being undermined in the eyes of many Deaf people who are infrequent users of interpreting services because trainees who have not attained the required standard (as their status as trainees indicates) were being used. The participant suggested that these trainees are understood by some Deaf people to be 'qualified interpreters'.

Deaf people suggested that national bodies should provide Deaf people with clear information in British Sign Language on the role of interpreters, their training and qualifications and the role of the national bodies engaged in maintaining the registers of interpreters and representing interpreters.

5.2.6.4 Bilingual professionals

A number of Deaf people at public meetings and during individual interviews explained that, in certain settings, they would prefer professionals (e.g. doctors, solicitors) to be able to communicate directly in BSL so that they did not need to use an interpreter. They argued that this was a way of providing Deaf people with the same standard of privacy and direct access to services that is available to the majority, English speaking population. They suggested that the existence of bilingual professionals would make a significant contribution to alleviating the shortage of interpreters in professional settings.

5.2.7 Summary

There was agreement in each of the geographical areas visited by the project team on:

- the need for government recognition for BSL
- the existence of a regional and national shortage of interpreters
- the inconvenience Deaf people experience in having to organise appointments, etc., in relation to the availability of interpreters
- the need to improve standards of interpreting
- the need to improve and expand pre-interpreter and interpreter training

- the lack of adequate information in BSL on the role of interpreters, their availability in each area and the role of interpreting and interpreter organisation
- the need to increase the provision of all kinds of information in BSL
- the need to improve and expand training for Deaf teachers of BSL
- the need to increase the number of bilingual professionals
- the desire of Deaf people to be consulted about, and involved in, the training of interpreters and the provision and organisation of interpreter services

5.2.8 A national Deaf organisation's perspective on the organisation and provision of BSL/English interpreting services

In order to obtain a perspective of an organisation that represents Deaf people on the organisation and provision of BSL/English interpreting services in Britain, an interview was conducted with a senior member of staff of the British Deaf Association (BDA). Additional information was obtained from the Association's publications. The BDA is the largest representative organisation of Deaf people in the United Kingdom. In relation to interpreting services, the representative reported that it saw its primary role as representing the views of service users and in particular the views of Deaf service users.

5.2.8.1 Shortage of interpreters

The major issue identified by the BDA representative in relation to the organisation and provision of interpreters in the UK was a shortage of interpreters of the required standard. As a consequence it was almost impossible to obtain the services of interpreters at short notice. In situations requiring an interpreter, arrangements were made around the availability of an interpreter rather than at the convenience of the Deaf person. The quality of service obtained by Deaf people, varied, in the view of the representative of the BDA, according to Deaf people's awareness and knowledge of the system. Deaf professionals who regularly use interpreters were seen as obtaining the best service as they were often able to book interpreters in advance for regular meetings and were knowledgeable as to who were the best interpreters. The majority of Deaf people (infrequent users of interpreting services compared to Deaf professionals) were, as a consequence, more likely to be offered trainee interpreters (who varied considerably in terms of their competence), use family or friends, or conduct matters without an interpreter even though the quality of communication may be limited or very poor (i.e. the representative of the BDA thought that having the matter conducted at a time convenient to the Deaf person was considered, on occasions by Deaf people, to be more important than waiting until an interpreter was available).

5.2.8.2 The Deaf community and interpreters

The BDA has produced a video in BSL for Deaf people which explains how to use an interpreter (BDA, 1992). The representative of the BDA reported that this had proved valuable to both Deaf and hearing users of interpreters. Nevertheless, he recognised that there were a large number of Deaf people who remained unclear as to the role of a BSL/English interpreter. The BDA was seeking to address this through advocacy projects which included information on the role and use of interpreters. However, the organisation did not have the resources to provide such programmes across the UK. The organisation advocated that all Deaf school children should be informed about how to use and obtain the services of an interpreter before they left school.

The BDA representative drew attention to issues that in certain areas had created 'distance' between Deaf people and interpreters. The neutral role of the interpreter was not understood by many Deaf people and it was felt interpreters and their organisations needed to do more to explain the role of interpreters. It was suggested by the BDA representative that some interpreters defined their professional responsibilities in such a limited way that they failed to establish a rapport with Deaf clients and, as a consequence, were seen by Deaf clients as 'cold'. Such interpreters did not, the BDA representative suggested, enjoy the complete trust of Deaf clients. Some Deaf people expected to receive the same "type and level of support" from interpreters that they received from social workers to deaf people. The BDA was aware that some older Deaf people continued to use social workers as 'interpreter/advocates' and did not distinguish between different professional roles. The BDA thought that there were insufficient opportunities, particularly at the regional and local level, for Deaf people and interpreters to meet to discuss issues of common interest and concern. The BDA acknowledged that certain Deaf people harboured a degree of resentment at the employment opportunities available to interpreters in contrast to their own, limited opportunities to obtain paid employment involving the use of British Sign Language. In certain Deaf communities there has been a backlash against allowing hearing people entry to their communities to learn or improve their use of BSL. In other communities it was recognised that it was essential for interpreters to mix socially with Deaf people to maintain or improve their BSL skills. However, 'over involvement' can be resented.

In concluding his comments on the relationship between the Deaf community and interpreters the BDA's representative drew attention to how interpreters are viewed by some Deaf people: not as neutral facilitators, but as representatives of 'hearing society'. He reported that for many Deaf people their use of interpreters was limited to exceptional

circumstances that may not have been initiated by the Deaf person. In such situations the Deaf person was rarely consulted with regard to the selection of the interpreter. As a consequence the interpreter may be seen as being part of the (hearing) organisation that has convened the meeting rather than a resource available for use by both Deaf and hearing persons present. This lack of consultation with Deaf clients may be explained, in the view of the BDA representative, by the shortage of interpreters and the difficulty of providing Deaf clients with a choice of interpreter. Nevertheless the BDA representative felt there was a need to review current practices in the provision of interpreter services to ensure Deaf people were consulted and involved in the process. The BDA representative suggested that the contribution interpreters can make to the lives of Deaf people will not be properly appreciated until Deaf people were in a position to routinely obtain the services of interpreters for occasions of their choosing.

5.2.8.3 Current provision of BSL/English interpreting services

The BDA representative characterised current interpreting provision as being:

- of variable standard;
- of limited availability (in certain geographical areas availability is very limited or non-existent);
- undermined by the limited availability of pre-interpreter and interpreter training courses;

In relation to the last point the BDA representative was particularly critical of the lack of opportunities for Deaf people to train to teach BSL at advanced levels. Such training would enable Deaf people to make an important contribution to improving and increasing pre-interpreter and interpreter training courses.

5.2.8.4 BSL/English interpreting agencies

In the view of the BDA representative the standard of service provided by agencies varied between agencies. Examples of good practice were identified but attention was drawn to the general lack of real Deaf participation and involvement in the majority of agencies. Few Deaf people were employed in the administration and provision of the services provided by agencies. In the majority of agencies Deaf participation in 'quality control' was limited to a 'paper' exercise involving written English consumer satisfaction surveys. As these were conducted in written English Deaf consumers were, the BDA believed, placed at a disadvantage. There was need for more regular meetings between interpreters and Deaf

consumers (once a year was not considered sufficient) at which issues of joint interest could be discussed in British Sign Language.

5.2.8.5 How provision of BSL/English interpreting services could be improved

The BDA representative did not see how "adequate" national provision could be organised across the United Kingdom without the direct involvement of the national and devolved governments. At the present time provision varied across the country. In some areas there was more than one agency but in others none at all had been established. In the view of the BDA a national strategy was required. The BDA representative did not believe voluntary organisations and local authorities had the resources to establish such provision. There was need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the current diversity of provision against the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a single agency with national responsibility for organising provision through regional offices.

In the view of the BDA representative all agencies should be required to register with an appropriate regulatory body that would undertake to inspect the standard of service provided by agencies and registered freelance interpreters.

5.2.8.6 The use of video technology

The BDA representative viewed video technology as having an important role to play, in both the short and medium term, in making more efficient use of the limited number of qualified interpreters. The Association had established a working group to investigate the contribution videotelephony could make to the Deaf community. However, there were a number of important ethical and practical issues that the Association believed needed to be resolved before such remote provision was introduced. Deaf people and interpreters needed to be sure that the quality of image would allow interpreting to be conducted to the same standard achieved when both Deaf consumer and interpreter are present in the same location. Guidelines needed to be established to ensure that confidentiality (where appropriate) was guaranteed. If such issues can satisfactorily be resolved videotelephony could make an important contribution to improving provision for Deaf consumers (e.g. access to interpreters in other geographical areas, access to specialist interpreters, provision of interpreting services for assignments of short duration, the translation of written documents into BSL, etc). It had the potential to considerably reduce the amount of time interpreters spent travelling between assignments. However, the BDA representative stressed the importance of Deaf people being involved in the development of remote interpreting through videotelephony. The 'remoteness' of such provision could lead to Deaf

people feeling even more isolated in particular settings such as the 'hearing' settings referred to above (i.e. in situations where the Deaf person had not initiated the occasion and was the only Deaf person present).

5.2.8.7 The funding of interpreting services

The BDA representative saw considerable merit in maintaining the present system where service providers were responsible for the cost of provision. A voucher system could complement such provision by enabling Deaf people to use interpreters in settings of their own choosing and allow them to exercise choice with regard to which interpreter they engaged. A concern was expressed that a voucher system might involve considerable bureaucracy. However it would ensure that resources made available for interpreting could only be used for this purpose. It could also be administered in such a way as to encourage the use of qualified interpreters, but until the shortage of interpreters was overcome, it would create considerable difficulties for Deaf people if it was limited only to the use of qualified interpreters.

The BDA representative drew attention to the fact that the current fee structure was based on the cost of service provision and did not (except in the most limited way) contribute to the capital cost of interpreter training. The BDA representative could not see how training costs could be funded through the fees charged to consumers of interpreting services. There was the fear that current purchasers would react to an increase in charges by reducing the quantity of interpreting services they purchased (given that the majority of purchasers were operating with limited budgets). If agencies were to impose an additional training charge, they could be undercut by freelance interpreters who felt they did not need to make such a charge or were in a position to charge less to cover their own personal training needs. The BDA representative observed that the cost of initial training was not reflected in the fees charged by other professionals in, for example the fields of medicine and law. The BDA representative felt it would be reasonable to incorporate the cost of enabling interpreters to maintain (and improve) their skills after qualification within the fee structure but initial training should, in the view of the BDA, be separately funded by central and devolved governments. The BDA representative stressed that it was important in discussing interpreter training to recognise that interpreters provided a service to both Deaf and hearing people and therefore it was appropriate for costs to be met by central government in the same way that training for other essential professional services were funded through the Exchequer.

The BDA representative identified, as a major problem, the extent to which awareness of the need to provide interpreters was increasing without a corresponding increase in the supply of interpreters. He suggested that the Disability Discrimination Act was creating awareness and, in a number of organisations, the willingness to fund the provision of interpreters. The Act requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments to make their goods, facilities and services accessible for disabled people. The BDA representative was gravely concerned that, due to the shortage of interpreters, service providers could not reasonably be expected to provide BSL/English interpretation under the Act.

5.2.8.8 Conclusion

There was, according to the BDA representative, an urgent need to address the shortage of interpreters and to recognise that this could not be done in isolation from related issues such as the training of BSL tutors. He believed that it was essential that deaf and hearing children had the opportunity to study BSL as a modern language in school. This would provide the language foundation required by both interpreters and bilingual professionals (i.e. Deaf or hearing people who were able to provide professional services directly in BSL) as well as providing the general population with a basic introduction to the use of British Sign Language. In the view of the BDA representative there was a need not only to increase the number of interpreters but also to increase the number of persons who could reduce the demand for interpreters in particular settings e.g. Deaf and hearing bilingual professionals. In the BDA's view government recognition of British Sign Language (in terms similar to the Welsh Language Act) would provide the appropriate context in which to discuss how the provision of interpreters could be improved and increased (BDA, 2001).

5.3 Non-Deaf Users: Experiences and Perspectives of Organisations that use British Sign Language/English Interpreting Services

5.3.1 Introduction

5.3.1.1 Methodology

Two approaches were used to investigate the experience and views of those organisations that make use of BSL/English interpreters. First, a brief postal questionnaire was circulated on behalf of the research team by a number of interpreting agencies to a selection of their clients chosen to include frequent and less frequent users. Secondly, a member of the

research team conducted telephone interviews with representatives of a small number of organisations that the Deaf contributors identified as having developed 'good practice' in relation to access for Deaf people. These appear in 5.3.7 .

In neither case can the respondents be regarded as representative of hearing users of BSL/English interpreter services. However, the respondents included a wide and varied range of types of service user and their replies are likely to provide a fairly reliable indication of the main experiences and concerns that users currently have with interpreter provision.

The questionnaire distributed to non-Deaf service users on behalf of the project by agencies, asked for: basic information about the organisation being questioned, the frequency of their use of BSL/English interpreting services, for whom and in what situations the service was used, how they obtained interpreting services, whether they had experienced any difficulties with the services provided, who paid for the service, whether any members of the organisation could communicate in BSL, and the likely impact of the Disability Discrimination Act on their policy of using interpreters. Eighty-four completed copies of the questionnaire were returned (a 50% return rate). In some cases the respondents had only partially answered the questionnaire, others added additional information and/or comments. This information was collated and used to reinforce and illustrate the quantitative findings from the survey.

5.3.1.2 Questionnaire respondent characteristics

Information was obtained about the geographical location, the size (number of employees) and the main activities of each organisation.

Region:

Though questionnaires were sent to agencies in Scotland, Wales and the South West of England for distribution to users in those countries/regions, no replies were received from organisations based in Scotland, Wales, and South West England. In the case of one of these, replies were received three months after the date requested but it was not possible to include these returns in the analysis that follows. The largest numbers of replies came from the English West Midlands (24), the English East Midlands (18) and London (12) with smaller numbers from Yorkshire and Humberside (9), the North of England (5), the North West of England (4), East Anglia (4) and the South East of England (3). It was not possible to determine the geographical location of five respondents. The absolute numbers are relatively small, which makes it difficult to establish significant differences in the pattern of replies in relation to these eight English regions, and analysis has revealed very few such differences.

Number of employees:

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of employees in their organisation. Unfortunately, that part of the questionnaire was not completed in 35 of the 84 questionnaires returned, and those who did reply interpreted the question in different ways. Some indicated the number of employees for the whole organisation, whereas others, perhaps particularly those working in a department or section of a very large organisation, only gave the number of employees in that department or section. It is not always clear which figures have been provided. However, it can safely be claimed that the responses ranged widely in terms of size. For example, they included at least seven from organisations employing more than 1,000 people, and at least ten from organisations employing between 100 and 1,000. At the other extreme, of the 24 responses where the number of employees was recorded as 49 or fewer, at least ten were from autonomous or semi-autonomous organisations, which were not just departments or sections of a larger whole.

Type of organisation:

By far the largest number of replies came from organisations in the public sector (52) with much smaller numbers from commercial organisations (10) and voluntary and other organisations (21). One organisation provided no identification at all. In most cases it is possible to indicate the business or type of activity in which the organisation is involved:

Type of organisations that responded		**Number of organisations that responded**
Public Sector	Social Services including housing and probation	30
	Health (hospitals, clinics, GP practices etc)	10
	Education and training	9
	Courts, police authorities, tribunals	4
	Other national and local government departments	2
	Other public sector	4
Commercial	Manufacturing	3
	Services	7
Other	Voluntary organisations of/for Deaf people	5
	Trade unions	2
	Other	7
	No information	1
Total		84

The distribution is dominated by the public sector and within this category, organisations concerned with health, welfare and education. This may well reflect the overall distribution of service users nationally. However, the occupational groupings of remaining respondents are varied and their replies can be used to indicate where, if at all, the experience of this minority differs significantly from that of the public sector majority.

5.3.2 'How often and why do you book an interpreter?'

5.3.2.1 Frequency of use of interpreting services

The agencies were asked to include in their selection of clients to receive the questionnaire both frequent and infrequent service users, and the replies received did indeed cover a wide range in terms of frequency of use. Sixteen respondents reported using the services of a BSL/English interpreter 'about once a month'; 26 reported less frequent use, and 41 more frequent, 12 of them 'several times each week'. One respondent did not answer this question.

Data on frequency of use and size of organisation are difficult to interpret for the reasons outlined above, but there was no indication that larger organisations were more likely to be more frequent users, nor any clear relationship between frequency and region. However, more voluntary organisations and fewer commercial organisations booked interpreting services frequently.

A larger number of more frequent users than infrequent users of BSL/English interpreting services used both agency and freelance interpreters, reported difficulties in booking interpreters, and claimed not to use only registered qualified interpreters. Slightly more of those organisations that were frequent users also reported that members of their organisation could communicate using BSL, and fewer considered that their organisation's policy in using interpreters would be influenced by the Disability Discrimination Act.

5.3.2.2 Who requires an interpreter?

Respondents were asked to indicate whether interpreting services were required for employees, visitors, clients/customers and/or others. Thirty respondents mentioned more than one of these categories giving a total of 125. Fifty six respondents had used an interpreter for clients/customers; 35 for employees; 20 for visitors; and 14 for other people. Where 'others' were identified they included members/conference delegates (two trade unions, and a voluntary organisation), committee members (two deaf children's societies (who had also used an interpreter for visiting speakers) and another voluntary organisation),

volunteers (a Social Services and a medical organisation), and foster carers (a Social Services department).

5.3.2.3 The situations for which an interpreter is required

Most respondents mentioned several types of situation in which an interpreter might be required. More respondents mentioned formal situations, such as meetings, interviews, lectures, conferences, medical consultations than less formal occasions. Only two organisations (a hearing services department and a Social Services department) recorded no formal situations when interpreters were required. Few mentioned the use of interpreting services to translate written information into BSL or from BSL (e.g. a BSL video letter) into written or spoken English. The percentage of organisations responding that they used BSL/English interpreters in each of the following settings was:

Setting	Number of responses	Percentage of organisations using interpreters in each setting	Rank
Formal meetings	51	60	1
Formal or semi-formal interviews	40	48	2
Public lectures/presentations	38	45	3
Conferences	35	42	4 =
Training sessions	35	42	4 =
Informal meetings/conversations	34	40	6
Informal one-to-one conversations	30	36	7 =
Interviews with a board/panel	30	36	7 =
Home visits	22	26	9
Other	20	24	10
Translations to/from video	12	14	11
The other situations mentioned by more than one organisation:			
Medical consultations	8	10	
Courts/tribunals	8	10	
Counselling, supervision	3	4	

The above figures reflect the fact that organisations reported that they used BSL/English interpreters in more than one setting.

Whilst some organisations only required interpreters for one type of situation and client, for example hospitals and GP practices for doctor-patient consultations, just over half of the respondents mentioned four or more types of situation when they had required an interpreter.

5.3.3 Obtaining the services of an interpreter

5.3.3.1 Use of agencies and freelances

All the organisations that received a questionnaire did so from an interpreting agency for which they were a client, but respondents varied more than this would suggest in their accounts of how interpreting services were obtained.

Forty respondents claimed that they always used an interpreting agency to obtain interpreters, and 24 claimed to use both agencies and freelance interpreters, but four reported using their own in-house interpreters, one used only their own list of freelance interpreters, and 15 used other means or some combination of the above means. In all 73 used agencies either solely or in combination with freelance interpreters.

Some of the claimed 'other means' were in effect the use of an agency and others probably were, for example 'central arrangements for company' (a bank) or 'via local Health Authority' (a medical centre). But there were also such replies as 'relatives who can sign' (a welfare rights service) and social workers (GP practice; and Social Services department).

5.3.3.2 Difficulties in booking interpreters

Nearly a third of the respondents (27) reported that they had had no difficulties obtaining an interpreter when required. Of the remaining 56 (one 'no answer') 19 reported difficulties either 'most of the time' or, in two of these cases, more often than occasionally. The remaining 36 reported difficulties 'occasionally'.

Nineteen of those reporting difficulties added comments. The most frequent (9 respondents) were about the difficulty of obtaining an interpreter at short notice or about long waiting times: 'difficult when required at short notice'; 'need to book well in advance'; 'large waiting times'. Almost as frequent (7 respondents) were general references to the lack of availability of interpreters generally: 'lack of services in the region'; 'availability problems, especially with agency'; and, combining the two, 'none available, even when we book well in advance'. Two respondents noted a problem of time constraints 'sometimes not available to fit in with social worker's time constraints' and one respondent noted the absence of any choice of interpreter 'lack of availability and choice'.

The difficulties reported were not related to the type of organisation or the number of employees (but as noted above, such figures were not very good indications of organisational size). More respondents in the North of England, English East Midlands, East Anglia and South East England reported difficulties than those in other English regions, but the numbers involved are small.

More of those who reported difficulties were using both agency and freelance interpreters. Fewer relied solely on agency interpreters. Twenty nine of the 55 organisations that reported difficulties used both agency and freelance interpreters and 23 used only agency

interpreters. This compares with only 5 using both agency and freelance interpreters who did not report that they had experienced difficulties with interpreting services and 18 of those that used agency interpreters who did not experience difficulties with interpreting services.

5.3.3.3 Familiarity with the categories of interpreter registration

Respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the categorisation of BSL/English interpreters as 'registered qualified' and 'registered trainee', and if so which sort(s) of interpreter they used. Sixty-five respondents claimed to be familiar with these categories and only 18 unfamiliar. Just over two-thirds of those who were familiar reported using both registered qualified and registered trainee interpreters (44) and just over a quarter (17) used only registered qualified interpreters. Five respondents admitted to using less well-qualified 'interpreters' on occasions, for example:

> 'Use BSL Stage III people if Deaf/hearing staff happy' (a school for deaf children);
>
> 'In house we use staff qualified to Stage 2 BSL' (local authority Hearing Services Department);
>
> 'Communication Support Workers (with training and experience) when appropriate' (Further Education college).

5.3.4 Funding

5.3.4.1 Who pays for interpreters?

The answers to this question can initially be categorised as follows:

Payment for interpreter from	
The respondent organisation only	42
Another organisation only	10
Deaf client or other individual only	-
Covered by contract	4
Combinations of above	26
No information	2
Total	84

When the multiple answers are reallocated, including the responses of those who answered 'covered by contract', the pattern is as follows:

Payment for interpreter from:	
The respondent organisation	67
Another organisation	30
The Deaf client	3

The 'other' organisations that paid for the interpreting services required by these respondents either some or all of the time can be categorised as follows:

Payment for interpreter by other Organisation	
Employment service/PACT/job centre	12
Commission for legal services/tribunal/court etc	5
Social Services	4
Health Authority	3
Other (employer/local authority)	3
No information	3
Total	30

Thus 67 of the 84 respondents paid for at least some of the interpreting services they required from their own funds, but 30 of them got some or all of their funding from outside sources.

Although there were relatively few commercial organisations among the respondents, most (7 out of 10) relied solely on their own funds to finance interpreting services. Compared to less frequent users of interpreting services, more of those that were frequent users used funding from an organisation other than their own. Of those organisations that required interpreters more than once a month nearly a half obtained at least some of the funding from another organisation compared with less than a quarter of the organisations that required an interpreter once a month or less often. There appeared to be no other characteristics that related clearly to the sources of funding for interpreting services.

5.3.4.2 Has shortage of funds ever prevented you from obtaining interpreting services?

Only ten respondents reported that shortage of funds had prevented them obtaining interpreting services when needed, and 73 reported no such problems. With such a small number it was not possible to identify many characteristics shared by the organisations with funding problems which clearly distinguished them from the majority of respondents. Half were public sector organisations. Four of those who reported that a shortage of funds had prevented them from obtaining interpreting services depended on another organisation for at least some of their funding for interpreters.

Organisations gave the following explanations for shortages of funding: occasions which could not be funded by other agencies (e.g. the *Access to Work* programme of the former Department of Employment's Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACT) now known as Disability Services Teams) and when the costs had to be met by the Deaf client.

5.3.5 Relationships with interpreters

5.3.5.1 Satisfaction with interpreter performance

Seventy-five respondents reported that they were satisfied with the performance of the interpreters used by their organisation and a further five indicated both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Only three were dissatisfied. The reasons given for being dissatisfied were mostly concerned with the interpreter moving outside her/his professional role, for example, speaking on behalf of the Deaf person 'without authorisation', or acting in a way to 'impose themselves on [a medical] consultation'. A theatre company complained of interpreters who lacked a 'real understanding of the drama'.

5.3.5.2 Members of the organisation using BSL

Respondents were asked whether any members of their organisation could communicate using BSL and, if so, how many and at what levels. Six respondents did not answer this question or did not know, and a further 21 reported that no one could use BSL. In the remaining 57 organisations there were reported to be perhaps unexpectedly large numbers able to communicate in BSL, at least some of them at relatively high levels of competence.

Size of organisation: no. of employees	Number of organisations
1-9	26
10-24	8
25-50	4
50-99	1
No information	18
Total	57

Highest level of qualification reported	Number of organisations with at least one employee at this level
Stage 1	7
Stage 2	11
Stage3	4
Fluent or native user	28
No information	7
Total	57

Thus in more than two-thirds of the organisations that responded there was someone with at least a basic knowledge of BSL. In a third (28) it was claimed that at least one employee could communicate 'fluently' in the language (although 'fluently' was not defined and use of the term may have varied between respondents). Some but by no means all of these fluent users were Deaf members of staff. The ability to communicate in BSL, however

'fluently', is not equivalent to the ability to interpret. Further, it may be the case that organisations with staff members who had a knowledge of BSL were more likely to respond, so that respondents might well be a self-selected sample.

Sixteen organisations with staff who could communicate in BSL were voluntary and other organisations. Twenty-nine were frequent users of interpreting services whereas only 12 organisations without staff members who could sign were frequent users of interpreters. A greater number of organisations with staff members who were fluent users of BSL were frequent users of interpreting services and more were voluntary organisations compared with the remainder. Some of this difference may reflect the fact that 'fluent' users of BSL included Deaf members of staff who are more likely to need the services of an interpreter fairly frequently.

5.3.5.3 The effects of the Disability Discrimination Act

From 1 October 1999 the Disability Discrimination Act required organisations providing services to the public to make "reasonable adjustments" to the way they provide those services so that disabled people, including Deaf people, can access them.

Respondents were asked whether their organisation's policy in using BSL/English interpreters would be influenced by the Act. Thirteen respondents did not know, and 11 did not answer this question. The remaining 60 split almost evenly: 29 thought their policy would be influenced, 31 thought it would not. There were no marked differences between types of organisation or the frequency with which they used interpreting services.

In response to a request to do so, a large number of comments were made in explanation of these replies. Those who did not expect the Act to have any (further) influence claimed that the necessary policies and/or provision were in place:

> 'We already make the provision necessary' (a trade union);
>
> 'Because we work with Disabled people and understand their needs' (voluntary organisation);
>
> 'Already comply to the Act. Recently been awarded RNID's *Louder than Words* charter' (large manufacturer);
>
> 'As Equal Opportunities employer, needs of deaf persons were already considered before Act came into operation – although Act reinforces Council policy' (local authority department).

Those who expected the Act to have (further) influence mentioned the stronger obligation to make the necessary provision and to do so in more situations, the need to review policies

and to monitor practice, and the leverage the Act gave them in relation to other organisations:

> 'As a Public Health Service we are obliged to abide by all current legislation' (NHS Trust);
>
> 'Reviewing our policies and procedures currently' (hospital);
>
> 'We need to have a set contract to be able to fulfil DDA requirements' (Social Services department);
>
> 'We already complied – but monitor to maintain compliance' (law centre);
>
> 'DDA will provide (hopefully!) leverage to persuade other organisations to take responsibility for providing and paying for interpreters' (voluntary organisation);
>
> 'To increase Deaf awareness among other services and the rights of people to access them' (Social Services department).

5.3.6 How could the provision of interpreters be improved?

Twenty-two of the respondents took up the invitation at the end of the questionnaire to add their suggestions on how the organisation and provision of BSL/English interpreting services might be improved.

The two most frequent suggestions were that there should be greater availability of interpreters and funding for interpreting services. The need for greater availability, especially at short notice, was mentioned by eight respondents, and the need for more and better interpreter training provision by six respondents. Three others wanted interpreters with specialist skills, for example in theatre interpreting, and in relation to interpreting for trade unions and for the probation service. In addition, two respondents suggested that rather different training was needed: in Deaf awareness for the courts/tribunals/legal system and on the role and function of qualified interpreters for members of the Deaf community.

Some organisational points were made. Two respondents wanted other organisations to be compelled to offer interpreting services for Deaf people, in the case of banks, hospitals, etc. and at tribunals respectively. Another respondent wanted there to be 'published lists of freelance workers' to 'avoid having to use agencies all the time' and complained that existing lists 'are hopelessly out of date', and another asked, more simply, for 'more advertisement' of interpreting services. A respondent in a Social Services department asked for the '...development and independent review of sign language agencies and their practice. I am aware there is a shortage but must be careful not to drop professional standards'. Two others referred respectively to the desirability of being able to access interpreters without social workers acting as gatekeepers, and of being able to make appointments directly with

an interpreter to ensure continuity and a shorter gap before the next psychotherapy consultation.

5.3.7 Case studies

In this section descriptions of three examples of 'good practice' of access and social inclusion identified by Deaf contributors to the project. The terms 'access' and 'social inclusion' were the terms used by many of these contributors in explaining the role of interpreters in their lives. The Deaf people interviewed and those who attended the public meetings used 'social inclusion' to refer to equal participation in all forms of social interaction.

5.3.7.1 Case Study One: Participation through British Sign Language/English interpreting services

a) Nature of provision

The first case study describes the provision of interpreting services by a large trade union and is based on an interview with a senior Union representative. A number of interpreters and Deaf members of the BDA (one of whom was a member of the Union) had made reference to the range of the interpreting services the Union provided at its conferences, seminars, workshops and training courses. At national conferences interpreting provision was automatically provided. The Union representative reported that Deaf members of the Union considered that the different forms of interpreting provision made available at Union events enabled them to participate at these events to a degree that was unmatched at that time by any other mainstream organisation. In addition to a platform interpreting service (for presentations to all participants) the Union provided a 'floor' and 'network' interpreting service. The 'floor' service allowed Deaf delegates to liase with other delegates as and when they needed to do so. The 'network' service allowed Deaf delegates to engage in conversations and discussions with other delegates over meals and during breaks. The provision of interpreters was not confined to the main conference proceedings. Interpreters were also provided for fringe meetings and caucus meetings (informal meetings where members with a shared interest met to discuss issues of common interest without a set agenda).

b) Access to information in British Sign Language

The Union recognised the importance of providing Deaf members with information directly in British Sign Language. The Members' Handbook had been translated into British Sign Language and was available to any member who used British Sign Language. The preliminary agenda, final agenda and conference guide to the Union's Disabled Members

Conference were also available in British Sign Language. The Union had decided to view the provision of such information as one of its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act. In addressing the situation of its disabled members, the Union had based its policy on a social rather than medical model of disability. The Union viewed Deaf people as a minority language group and supported the campaign for formal government recognition of British Sign Language.

c) The Union representative raised the following concerns:

- Shortage of interpreters: the difficulty of obtaining interpreters at short notice

  In the Union's experience it was extremely difficult to obtain the services of interpreters at short notice. The Union was often called upon to provide services to members at short notice and therefore was concerned that it was not in a position to provide the same standard of service to Deaf members as it did to hearing members as a consequence of the shortage of interpreters.

- Standards

  The Union used a recognised agency to organise interpreting services at Union events. Deaf members had informed the Union that they did not have confidence in the (then) current system of registration and regulation that sought to ensure that all registered interpreters were of the required standard. There was also a need, in the view of the Union representative, for interpreters and agencies to provide more detailed information to purchasers of interpreting services e.g. the Union would wish to know prior to booking an interpreter whether s/he had experience of interpreting in trade union settings. The Union representative considered it important that interpreting agencies and freelance interpreters demonstrated that they were complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. She also felt that interpreters should be prepared to comply with the internal policies of purchasers of interpreting services on such issues as equal opportunities.

- Failure of other organisations to provide interpreting services

  The Union included Deaf members in the Union's delegations to conferences and meetings. On a number of occasions the host organisation had failed to arrange an interpreting service. As a consequence the Union had had to arrange interpreting services for its Deaf delegates. It had done so because it considered its first responsibility was to ensure the participation of its members. In the view of the Union representative host organisations should accept responsibility for

providing interpreting services or meet the cost of participants making their own arrangements. The latter arrangement would, in the view of the Union representative, enable Deaf participants to engage interpreters of their choice.

- Need for the Disability Discrimination Act to provide clear guidance on the use of British Sign Language/English interpreters under the Act

  As described above the Union had chosen to view the translation of its Members' Handbook into British Sign Language as its duty under the Disability Discrimination Act. However, it was not clear to the Union that it was required to do so under the Act. The Union representative believed that clear guidance needs to be provided as to the circumstances and situations in which Deaf people can access services through a BSL/English interpreter under the Act.

- Cost of Provision of Interpreting Services

  The Union categorised the cost of its interpreting provision as a mainstream cost. However the provision of interpreting services was a recurring cost and, in the view of the Union representative, organisations needed guidance on how such provision could be funded.

- Other Provision

  The Union recognised the importance of hearing and Deaf people being able to communicate directly with each other and therefore organised British Sign Language classes for hearing members. Hearing members learning BSL were encouraged to communicate with Deaf people but, in the view of the Union representative, needed to recognise the limited nature of their competence and not undertake to interpret in formal settings.

  The Union provided speech to text facilities at Union events as a standard service. This was used by Deaf members but also by other members and provided the Union with a written record of proceedings. This service was therefore not seen as one that was provided just for Deaf or hearing-impaired members. It illustrated how technology introduced to facilitate the participation of one group of people may provide unanticipated benefits for others, and the Union representative suggested that this needed to be reflected in the funding of the service.

  The Union representative recognised the contribution videotelephony could make to improving access. In particular such technology could make interpreting services available to Deaf people in areas where current service provision was limited or non-existent.

d) Conclusion

The Union representative acknowledged that other trade unions (and other organisations) could learn from their experiences of providing BSL/English interpreting services at Union events. However, the Union representative stated that she would recommend other organisations to first obtain advice from the British Deaf Association on the provision of interpreting services for Deaf people.

5.3.7.2 Case Study Two: Access to services through a bilingual service provider

Many Deaf people had described how they would value being able to access certain services directly in British Sign Language without having to use an interpreter (see 5.2.6.4). The most frequently cited situations were legal and medical. An interview was conducted with a hearing solicitor, fluent in British Sign Language, on his experiences of providing legal services to Deaf people directly in British Sign Language. The solicitor was employed by a national firm of solicitors that employed approximately 200 people.

The solicitor confirmed the value Deaf people placed on being able to obtain legal services and advice from a solicitor able to provide such advice and services directly in British Sign Language. He explained that within his firm he was seen as a 'central resource' for colleagues on matters relating to Deaf clients. He has advised his firm on the provision and location of text telephones so that Deaf clients can access the firm directly by telephone. His knowledge of interpreting services had led to guidelines and information being made available to colleagues on how they could obtain the services of interpreters for consultations with Deaf clients and court appearances involving Deaf people. He did not interpret for colleagues except in the most exceptional circumstances. If, for example, an important form needed to be explained to a Deaf client, rather than interpret for his colleague, he would take over and deal with the matter directly in BSL. However, it was not an appropriate use of his time or expertise for him to act as an interpreter for colleagues, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The company encouraged staff to learn British Sign Language and had organised classes for members of staff.

The solicitor noted a number of difficulties.

- As a bilingual service provider he was able to provide a direct legal service in those areas in which he was qualified to do so. However, Deaf people often expected that he would be able to deal with any legal matter that involved a Deaf person. There was, in his view, an exaggerated expectation of the services he could provide. It had proved difficult on occasions to explain that he was not, for

example, a criminal lawyer and was not in a position to give advice in that area or any other area of the law in which he does not have expertise. In such situations he had to advise the Deaf clients that their cases would be taken by an appropriately qualified colleague working through an interpreter. Some Deaf people came to the firm under the impression that he was there to provide a service exclusively to Deaf people.

- In cases involving Deaf clients for which colleagues were responsible, the firm faced the same problems as other users of BSL/English interpreting services. The shortage of interpreters was a major problem. However drawing upon his knowledge, the firm used particular registered agencies and had a list of preferred interpreters with experience of interpreting in legal settings. In cases in which he was involved he was able to monitor the standard of interpreting
- The solicitor drew attention to situations in which family members or friends of Deaf clients acted as the 'interpreter'. He reported that this gave rise to two potential difficulties. The family member or friend may not have the competence to provide an adequate interpretation either from British Sign Language into English or English into British Sign Language. The issue of the Deaf person's right to choose her or his interpreter had to be balanced with the duty of the professional to obtain accurate information from the Deaf person. The second problem involved family members or friends influencing the Deaf person inappropriately. When a non-signing colleague suspected either of these were occurring the bilingual professional would be called to advise his colleague. He stressed however, that their responsibility was to act on the Deaf person's instructions and it was never their place to make decisions for the Deaf client.

The solicitor, when asked to outline the developments that would improve the service to Deaf people, made the following points:

- Video technology clearly had the potential to enable legal firms specialising in provision for Deaf people to provide services to Deaf people in different parts of the country.
- In the solicitor's view Deaf people needed to have access to information about the law directly in BSL. In this way Deaf people with legal problems would become aware of how the legal system could be of assistance to them.
- When asked how other firms of solicitors could improve their service to Deaf people he suggested their starting point should be Deaf Awareness training. It was, he concluded, very important to know not only what type of services you can offer but also what services you are not in a position to offer.

5.3.7.3 Case Study Three: Access to Services through users of British Sign Language

The third of our case studies of good practice was a national chain of DIY (Do It Yourself) stores. They established a national access programme that included a designated member of staff in each store being able to communicate with Deaf customers in British Sign Language. The company paid for the cost of one or more members of staff to attend British Sign Language classes. The company's aim was to be able to welcome Deaf customers to their stores in British Sign Language and provide in-store services and basic product information in British Sign Language. Where more detailed information was needed (e.g. to provide design advice in relation to a home alteration) the store engaged the service of an interpreter through an interpreting agency.

The company had also arranged for information videos on different aspects of DIY that are played in their stores to be translated into British Sign Language for the benefit of Deaf customers.

5.3.7.4 Summary and Conclusion

The three case studies were selected to reflect different aspects of access identified by Deaf people. The provision of BSL/English interpreting services are essential to providing equality of access and participation of Deaf people within our society. Although such provision is essential it is not sufficient.

The first two case studies draw attention to the shortage of interpreters. In order to provide the level of access described in the first case study the Union has to employ a large

number of interpreters at its conferences. Inevitably this means that a significant number of interpreters are unavailable during this time to accept assignments from other Deaf people. This case study illustrates what 'adequate' provision might look like in practice. This level of provision could only occur elsewhere, and on a regular basis, if there is a major increase in the number of BSL/English interpreters in the UK.

5.4 Summary

The research identified two distinct groups of Deaf users of interpreting services: professional people who were frequent users, and others who were occasional users (5.2.2).

Text telephones or fax machines were the most usual means used by Deaf people to book interpreters. Most bookings were not made by Deaf people. Few Deaf people had been offered a choice of interpreter. Most found it impossible to obtain one at short notice. Some Deaf people used unqualified 'interpreters', often family and friends (5.2.3).

Most Deaf people did not know the fees charged by interpreters and agencies (5.2.4).

Characteristics of a good interpreter as defined by Deaf people were: good BSL skills, confidentiality, and good attitude to/rapport with Deaf people (5.2.5).

Deaf people were agreed on the need for Government recognition of BSL (5.2.6).

Deaf people wished to have access to recorded general information in BSL (5.2.6).

Deaf people wished to see an increase in the number of Deaf teachers of BSL, bilingual professionals and hearing people able to engage in everyday conversations with Deaf people in BSL (5.2.6).

Deaf people wished to be consulted about the training of interpreters and the provision and organisation of interpreter services (5.2.7).

The response to the small survey of non-Deaf organisations that reported using interpreting services came predominantly but not exclusively from public sector organisations in the English Midlands and London (5.3.1).

Interpreters were required primarily for customers but also for employees, visitors and others, and for 'formal' situations such as interviews, meetings, conferences, and training (5.3.2).

Most organisations used interpreting agencies to meet their interpreting needs, though some also used freelance interpreters. Two-thirds had experienced difficulties in booking an interpreter, nearly a quarter of them 'most of the time' (5.3.3).

Four-fifths of the organisations met at least some of the costs involved in providing interpreting services from their own funds, but more than a third of them reported receiving

funding from other sources: employment services, legal services, and health and Social Services (5.3.4).

The great majority reported being satisfied with interpreter performance, and to be aware of the registration categories for interpreters. In two thirds of the organisations that replied there were one or more members of staff who could communicate in BSL, half of whom were described as being able to do so 'fluently'. Only just over a third of the respondents thought that the Disability Discrimination Act would have an influence over their policy and practice, and slightly more claimed that adequate provision to provide equality of access for Deaf people was already in place (5.3.5).

The most frequent suggestions from organisations for improving the provision of interpreter services were greater availability, especially at short notice, and funding for interpreter services (5.3.6).

6 Providing Services: The Perspectives of Interpreters and Agencies

6.1 About this chapter

This chapter describes the perspectives of those who provide BSL/English interpreting services: individual interpreters (6.2) and interpreting agencies (6.3).

Chapter 2 provided factual information about the numbers, distribution and characteristics of interpreters, while Chapter 3 described the coverage and type of agencies, together with an operational overview. This chapter specifically presents data on the views of interpreters and agencies.

The views of interpreters were explored on the following issues:

- training;
- their current work situation;
- the use of technology;
- interpreting as a career;
- payment;
- the difficulties experienced by their clients; and
- improvements in the provision of interpreting services.

The views of agencies on the following issues were obtained:

- finance;
- the advantages/disadvantages of different types of agency;
- the organisation of current provision;
- the training and careers of interpreters;
- relationships between agencies and interpreters;
- the use of technology; and
- improvements in the provision of interpreting services .

6.2 The Perspectives of Interpreters

6.2.1 Training

6.2.1.1 What training is needed?

Training was one of the topics on which interpreters commented most frequently and critically in the questionnaires and interviews. Just over a quarter (58) of questionnaire respondents made suggestions or complaints about this issue. The most basic demand was for more and better training, and training that was accessible and affordable:

> More training courses at cheaper prices. More training courses in local areas rather than the large cities. It is difficult for a lot of RTI (Registered Trainee Interpreter) and QI (Qualified Interpreter) in full-time employment to find the time to travel afar to courses based in London, Bristol, Wales, etc.
>
> (Female, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, English East Midlands)

In addition to these general pleas for accessible and affordable training, individual interpreters argued for a better distribution of information about training opportunities, greater clarification and coherence in the training that was being provided and specific forms of training, though they did not always agree what these should be. Examples included alternatives to the NVQ/SNVQ, such as university level courses, and training for already qualified interpreters, specialist training and refresher courses:

> I do believe that there should be more training available, in different forms. This would enable people to choose the training that suits them best and that will fit in with their lifestyles, commitments and finances. A mixture of short, one-day or weekend courses, as well as the longer term part-time and full-time diplomas and degrees. Specialist workshops would also be useful.
>
> (Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance and employee, English East Midlands)
>
> There needs to be more choice re training. NVQ is only one option! There is no TRAINING [emphasis in the original] included in NVQ. University training courses need to carry more weight, e.g. someone who's completed a course full-time is deemed an RTI (with Stage 3) as is a person who's completed a 2-week training course with RNID. The university courses cover far more.
>
> (Male, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, East Anglia)

Further comments about the level and content of training drew attention to the need for the training of trainers and assessors, for support and mentoring of trainee and newly qualified interpreters, and for a greater contribution to be made towards the training of interpreters by organisations employing and/or using interpreters.

> Something needs to be done to sort out the mess of courses etc. for SLIs (Sign Language Interpreters). Also, some kind of encouragement and training so that new people can become trainers. At the moment there are very few assessors/trainers, so that even if there are various courses around the country, they are all taken by the same people.
>
> (Female, registered trainee interpreter, freelance and employee, Scotland)

However, a few of those who stressed the importance of training also placed the responsibility for securing it firmly on the individual interpreter:

> I feel very strongly that we interpreters who are working should be able to fund our own training. I don't know how this is going to go down, but I personally think that whilst there isn't funding we should be funding ourselves. Once you're qualified, I think that you have to have a wide variety of training available. And I mean that needs to be for the generic area and for specialised areas. I think it should be compulsory that people if they work in specialised areas that in order to be on what I would like to see as a specialised register of different domains, they have to have gone through particular training.
>
> (Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, North West England)

Comments on training were also linked to questions about qualification and registration:

> More clarification [needed] on future of interpreting qualifications (e.g. how long does registration last; how long can a trainee remain a trainee; what is the future re: NVQs; how do university graduates fit into current registration policies?)
>
> (Female registered qualified interpreter, freelance, South West England)

6.2.1.2 Interpreters' commitment and training intentions

As reported in 2.7 interpreters showed high levels of commitment to their occupation, considerable satisfaction with their work, and a widespread desire to improve their levels of performance through further training.

6.2.2 The current work situation of interpreters

Chapter 2 provided a profile of the distribution and numbers, social characteristics, training, qualifications and careers and current employment and availability of BSL interpreters. This section considers the comments of interpreters on various aspects of their work situation.

6.2.2.1 Potential additional interpreting time

Interpreters were asked both whether they could spend more of their existing working time interpreting; and whether there were limitations on their availability to undertake interpreting which, if removed, could allow them to spend more time doing so (see Table 2.9, Chapter 2). The replies indicated that there was some potential for increasing interpreter availability in these ways, though it might be difficult to realise.

Over half of freelance interpreters and more than a third of the remainder, felt that they could spend more of their existing working time interpreting at least if certain other conditions were fulfilled, especially less time spent travelling, more regular assignments, and a better

organisation of work. Time spent travelling was often mentioned as something that could be reduced by better, or different, organisation of interpreters' work:

> It must happen every day that interpreter (1) works in the morning in location A and in the afternoon in location B travelling at least one or two hours in between. At the same time interpreter (2) is doing the opposite. It costs clients the travel charge and is wasting interpreters' time and energy. Simply swapping so that (1) has A and (2) B solves the problem. If each interpreting assignment suits the interpreter.
>
> (Male, registered trainee interpreter, freelance and employee, London)

Just over half (115 – 53%) of the interpreters claimed that they faced limitations on their availability to undertake interpreting due to their personal or domestic situations, of whom 62 per cent said they could do more interpreting if the limitations were removed. Only 31 per cent of those without any limitations were willing to undertake more interpreting.

The chief limitation, reported by more than half of these 115 respondents, was childcare and family responsibilities, with their personal life or other employment being the other main factors mentioned. One part-time freelance interpreter explained the difficulties she faced:

> As a freelance a lot of the work that I would like to take and a lot of the work that comes in, it is a couple of hours in the morning in A---, or a couple of hours here, you know, in B--- in the afternoon, which ... would be great but if you have to arrange child minding, actually ...it's not worth your while to book in two hours because by the time you've paid child minding and travel the money you get for doing the job doesn't cover it. So you can only do that if

you've a guarantee that you're going to get something nearby, and of course you can't. So I end up turning down quite a lot of jobs I would like to do really, for those kinds of reasons.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, North West England)

6.2.2.2 Co-working

The effective availability of interpreters is affected by the extent to which assignments required, or were seen by agencies, interpreters or clients to require, more than one interpreter. There are potentially many such situations:

- Ninety-five per cent of the interpreters questioned could envisage situations where they would require a co-worker; and only two stated they would never do so.
- The factors which influenced interpreters' willingness to accept assignments working alone, or conversely that required one (or more) co-workers, were very clear: the length of the assignment (which might be somewhat mitigated by regular and frequent breaks) was most frequently mentioned (three-quarters of all respondents), but the complexity and/or intensity of the assignment would influence more than a quarter of them, and the familiarity and formality or informality of the setting were also mentioned by ten per cent of respondents. Two sorts of setting were seen as likely to require co-workers: nearly a quarter of all interpreters stated that they would expect one or more co-workers for a conference assignment; and a quarter of the registered qualified interpreters required a co-worker when interpreting in court.
- Co-working was seen as bringing advantages and disadvantages, with the former strongly outweighing the latter (only ten interpreters stated that they could see no advantages, whereas a third (75) of them could see no disadvantages). The main advantage, cited by 69 per cent of respondents, was support from the other interpreter(s) in what is generally a professionally isolated task, with checks on the quality of interpreting and learning from others each being mentioned by a fifth of the respondents. The main disadvantages related to 'not getting on' with the co-worker(s) due to their unwillingness to provide support, their different working practices, or their personal incompatibility. Similar comments were made in interviews where the issue of a lack of training for co-working and differences in competencies between co-workers were also mentioned.

6.2.2.3 Obtaining interpreting assignments

Three out of five of those respondents undertaking any freelance work either considered the present situation with regard to obtaining assignments as satisfactory or did not comment on it. Among the suggestions made were:

- better publicity regarding interpreter availability and services;
- a centralised agency either nationally or in a locality; and
- computerised databases to process requests and assignments.

6.2.2.4 Employee control over the allocation of assignments

Over half of the interpreters who were employees felt they had 'quite a lot' of control over how work was allocated to them, and only 15 per cent (but a quarter of those who were solely employees) claimed to have no such control. Control was exercised by managing their own work entirely, or by being able to refuse or at least negotiate regarding assignments. More than three-quarters of those who had little or no control would have liked to have more, but this was the case for only 16 per cent of those with 'quite a lot' of control.

6.2.3 The use of technology in interpreting

6.2.3.1 The potential of modern technology

The possibility of using modern technology to improve the organisation and availability of interpreting services was a live issue among interpreters. This was reflected, for example, in some of the comments concerning the ways in which assignments are currently allocated to interpreters.

There were perhaps three main ways in which such potential could be realised. First, voice and text phones and answer phones, mobile phones, fax machines and e-mail, which are already fairly widely available, could be used to speed up communication between Deaf or hearing service users and interpreters, and between agencies and their employees and freelance interpreters. Secondly, video phones, video conference facilities and possibly computer links could be used to allow interpreting services to be provided remotely - remote from either the Deaf or the hearing participants, or both. Thirdly, computers, e-mail and the internet could be used to provide databases of interpreters and/or assignments and the possibility of an internet based allocation system.

6.2.3.2 Availability of technology

The current availability of such technology varied quite considerably as between the particular device being considered and between interpreters in different types of work situation. In general those who were employees, or employees who also undertook freelance interpreting, had greater access to the various types of technology than did freelance interpreters.

- Access to a voice telephone was virtually universal (only one interpreter claimed not to have such access), and the availability of a conventional answer phone was also widespread, as was the use of a (voice) mobile phone. Perhaps surprisingly, more than a quarter of those doing freelance work did not have a mobile phone at the time the study was undertaken.
- Those means of telecommunication specifically tailored for the use of Deaf people - phones, mobile phones and answer phones providing text facilities - were much less likely to be available. Though all except 27 respondents (25 of them freelance) had access to text telephones, a half had no access to text answer phones (three-quarters of freelances) and more than three-quarters no access to text mobile phones. All except 24 respondents (again almost all of them (22) were freelances) had access to fax facilities.
- Most respondents (86%) had access to a video recorder, rather fewer (73%) to a video camera, with three times as many freelance interpreters compared to those who were employed not having such access. Video phones (24%) and video conferencing facilities (17%) were much rarer and in the great majority of cases only to be found in the workplaces of employed interpreters.
- Most respondents (92%) had access to a computer, but rather fewer (just under three-quarters in each case) had access to e-mail and/or the internet.

Thus, more extensive use of new technology to make interpreting services more readily available to Deaf people, and/or to provide a means to improve the allocation of assignments to interpreters through a centralised computerised database, would both necessitate making the appropriate technology more widely available, especially but not only to freelance interpreters. There were few signs of 'technophobia'; most interpreters appeared willing to consider favourably the possibility of using the latest technology to make the provision of interpreting services more effective.

6.2.3.3 Attitudes to modern technology

Interpreters were asked in the questionnaire whether they thought that 'the greater use of modern technology, such as video, could improve the availability of interpreting services', and similar questions were asked in interviews. The potential of a computerised database and/or booking system was for the most part raised by respondents in interviews or in the open-ended comments section of the questionnaire.

More than six out of every ten interpreters (62%) thought that greater use of video technology would improve the availability of interpreting services. A further 15 per cent were undecided, perhaps not surprisingly given that fewer than a quarter of respondents reported any experience of interpreting using a video link; and fewer than 10 per cent were definitely opposed to such use.

Those interpreters favouring the greater use of video technology stressed particularly the savings in travel time (25% of all respondents) and the easier access to interpreters (22%) and to experts (6%), which this could bring. Those opposed to or hesitant about such use argued that it would be mechanical or impersonal (15%) and that it could suffer from poor quality and only operate in two dimensions (9%).

The main advantages of video links for Deaf people were seen by interpreters to be their provision of immediate and remote access to interpreters, which was mentioned by nearly half of all respondents, and the savings in travel time and costs (13%). Set against this were the impersonal, two-dimensional nature of the medium (27%), the possibility of technical problems (16%) and the difficulties of reading intent and interpreting 'body language' (9%). There were fewer comments on the advantages and disadvantages of video links for hearing people but the same factors were the most frequently mentioned ones by those who did comment.

Twenty-one respondents (9%) made some reference to the potential of modern technology when commenting on the ways in which the provision of interpreting services could be improved. Their comments centred on two areas: the use of video links or video phones to make interpreting services more easily and quickly accessible; and the use of computerised databases/the internet to provide a centralised on-line means of checking availability and allocating interpreters to assignments. They demonstrated clear awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of the various possibilities:

> Use of the internet to: (1) enable interpreters to log-in their availability; (2) enable individuals to access the information in (1) above thus reducing the need to contact interpreters when they are not available; (3) use of videophones to give 'instant' access to an interpreter - leading to screening the need to provide a suitable 'live'

interpreter; (4) interpreters to work in group practices...where they are used to co-working with one another and where they can cover for one another.

(Male, registered qualified interpreter, free lance, South East England)

(1) A central booking system, which could allocate work more efficiently and better match SLIs [Sign Language Interpreters] with assignments - so that travelling is reduced and the best interpreters do the most challenging work. (2) Wider use of video conferencing technology especially when deaf people interact with public services on an ad hoc basis and for shorter interactions.

(Male, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, London)

Video telephones? I think realistically it's the only way in this generation's lifetime that they are going to get anywhere near an on-demand interpreting service. It offers true accessibility to communication support. So that's the interpreting bit. The other bit is 'well if your first language is not English, you must have hated a minicom all your life', and if you're going to get to use your first language, then... And probably if they do, then for once they'll be the ones that are getting the adulation from hearing people and everybody'll be interested in their technology for once... The way we interact face-to-face with somebody is very different from how we would on the telephone, say, and I think you lose some of the personal contact, the personal touch if you like. But with an experience of minicoms, the fact that you can actually see somebody is a bonus, so it's difficult for me to see that as being a negative point.

(Male, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, English West Midlands)

To summarise: most interpreters recognised and were favourably disposed to the potential of modern information and communications technology to improve the provision of BSL/English interpreting services. However, many lacked access to the more expensive and/or recently available equipment, and may also have lacked the necessary expertise to exploit it fully.

6.2.4 Interpreting as a career

6.2.4.1 Career structure

The career structure of BSL/English interpreting, or the lack of one, and its unfortunate consequences in the loss of qualified interpreters and the failure of others to progress, was another issue on which interpreters frequently commented with some dissatisfaction.

There were pleas to clarify and standardise qualifications, and to harmonise standards, e.g. between England and Wales (CACDP) and Scotland (SASLI); and between NVQs/SNVQs and university diploma, first degree and postgraduate qualifications.

Others stressed the need for a better career structure for interpreters. They wanted more guidance and support for the newly registered, perhaps with an extra post-Stage 3/pre-registered trainee status, and the possibility of greater specialisation in certain demanding areas of work for those who are qualified, together with appropriate pay and status:

> I think the profession loses many very good people with experience because of the lack of career prospects and good pay and conditions. We need to address the issues of (1) training more people and (2) then retraining those we have in addition to improving the organisation of services.
>
> (Female, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, Central England)

> Is it [BSL/English interpreting] a career? I don't think we have a career structure at the moment at all. I think you have a series of hoops to jump through, and once you've done that, you're an interpreter, and what you do after that point very often is entirely up to you, and very often unrecognised, unless you become well known for a certain specialism. I don't think there's a structure. I think there's a series of goal posts that you have to pass, and whether that defines it as a career, I don't know, there is no structure, no incremental system, there is no progression as such. And once you're at a certain level of qualification, or you're qualified, it's entirely up to you what you do, but there's no set path for you to follow, which is what I see as a career, I suppose.
>
> (Male, registered qualified trainee, freelance, English West Midlands)

6.2.4.2 Career support

More generally, many interpreters expressed their need for greater support in carrying out their work, support that might be met by mentoring, networking, local forums, counselling, and regional meetings:

> Far more support for interpreters. Counselling available to stop burn out and RSI [Repetitive Strain Injury]. More supervision and constructive feedback.
>
> (Female, registered qualified interpreter, both freelance and employee, South West England)

> Speaking as a trainee, I feel that monitoring is an essential part of our development as interpreters. If organisations such as local authorities are prepared to employ interpreters, they should provide regular professionally-qualified interpreters to monitor our work! I realise that freelance interpreters often complain about the feeling of isolation, however this can also be the case in situations like mine - only two interpreters employed by the Council, covering the whole of the County. More often than not I work in isolation and although I am able to 'off-load', feel that the

experience of a qualified interpreter would be invaluable to my professional development.

(Female, registered trainee interpreter, employee, Central England)

6.2.4.3 Networks and Associations

Information was obtained through interviews with interpreters and published information on two interpreter networks: the Local Authority Sign Language Interpreters Network (LASLIN) established in 1990, and the Black and Asian Sign Language Interpreters Network (BASLIN) formally established in 1998, although it had existed informally since the early 1990s. The networks were valued by members for providing opportunities to support one another, share and exchange views and information.

In 2001, LASLIN had seventeen members. Issues addressed by the group have included the promotion of interpreting services within local authorities, working conditions and the provision of interpreting services for Deaf people with minimal language.

BASLIN has similar aims to LASLIN in providing a forum for members to exchange information and offer each other support. The group meets monthly. The number of Black and Asian interpreters is small (the 1999 BASLIN Directory lists 11 members and in 2001 the membership was sixteen). Some members reported that as a consequence they felt isolated. Members have experienced prejudice and feel they do not get appropriate recognition or are offered the range of work made available to white interpreters of equivalent competence. In discussion it was suggested that Black and Asian Deaf people were under-represented in their use of interpreting services in many parts of the country, a view shared by a number of agency representatives.

The Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) has established regional groups across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 2002 the regional groups of the Association were Devon and Cornwall; Bristol and South West England; Mid-south coast of England; London and the South East of England; Central England and East Anglia; English Midlands; North West of England; North East of England; South Wales; and Northern Ireland. Regional groups of the Association organise professional development, information and training events for their members. The Association has established Education and Legal Task Groups to consider issues relating to interpreting in these settings and a Deaf Interpreters Network and a Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Interpreters Network. The Association produces a newsletter, *Newsli* to disseminate information to and consult with members. The Association is in the process of establishing a mentoring programme.

The Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) maintains an administrative office in Edinburgh. It operates an agency through which members are offered BSL/English

interpreting assignments. The Association organises professional development, training and information events for its members, and works closely with the School of Languages at Heriot Watt University which offers Scotland's only university based BSL/English interpreting studies course. The Association arranges supervision and assessment for trainee interpreter members. The Association's Training Strategy Working Group is currently engaged in producing a report for the Scottish Executive that will address, amongst other issues, the training needs of BSL/English interpreters in Scotland (SASLI, 2002 forthcoming). Previous publications have included *A Framework for Communication Support Services for Deaf, Deaf Blind and Hard of Hearing People* (1997) and *Guidelines for Police and Court Interpreting* (1998).

In 6.3.3.6 information is provided on agency networks.

6.2.5 Payment for interpreters

The interpreters who were interviewed drew attention to the different situations of freelance and salaried BSL/English interpreters, and their situations compared to those of spoken language interpreters. In the case of salaried interpreters attention was drawn to the variation in the level of salary offered in different parts of the country: in the case of freelance interpreters to variations in income in relation to different types of assignments.

> Are interpreters adequately paid? Well, I suppose it depends really on whether you are talking about a salaried post, or whether you're talking about freelancers. Some would say 'no they're not' and others 'they are'. I think there is the difficulty when you start comparing (sign language interpreters) with spoken language interpreters; ...if you compare conference level (sign language) interpreters and the type of training they do, what they get paid probably isn't as good as it should be, and it probably should be a bit higher. But then you have other people working in the spoken language field with community languages, for example Asian languages, etc., with very little training. It's difficult to make across the board comparisons. And there seems to be such a wide range of salaries paid to sign language interpreters. I saw an advert the other day for an interpreter in Gloucestershire at a salary of twenty to twenty two thousand. Elsewhere they are paying fourteen to sixteen thousand. It probably averages out at about seventeen thousand but there is such wide variation.
>
> (Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)
>
> Interesting question because sometimes I think we're overpaid and sometimes not. I had a situation where I got called out to a hospital not very long ago and when I got there I did a ten minute doctor's consultation and that really was it. I've got to

charge the National Health Service two hours for that. I'm really not sure that that is appropriate. It had taken me actually half an hour from leaving home to getting back to home. I just felt that was an absolute cheat to charge the National Health Service two hours for that. I also felt that if they (the hospital) had another Deaf person in for exactly the same thing they'd be less likely to contact a professional interpreter because of the cost they'd incurred. I'm very conscious of those kind of things and I think you can cut off your nose to spite your face. So in some ways, for big conferences and things, for very demanding work, I sometimes think we're not paid enough and for things like that we're overcharging. They're going to rely on a nurse next time who has got Stage One if we're going to charge that much. In the end I didn't fill in an invoice because I really felt that would have a more negative impact than positive impact.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, North West England).

Two of the interpreters interviewed related pay to the issue of retention and recruitment to the profession. One considered it would become an important issue in the near future in relation to retention, as members of the profession grew older. She did not think pay was a major issue in relation to recruitment at the present time as, it seemed to her, an increasing number of young people are seeking to become interpreters. The other interpreter who raised this issue took a different view.

Pay is a problem for retention and recruitment. We have moved away from the time when people wanted to go into interpreting for (only) altruistic reasons. And I think that is right. If we are looking to develop a profession, then people need to be paid a proper salary, particularly now with increased training requirements. A lot of time and money is being spent on training and therefore interpreters are looking to cover that at the end of the day.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)

The issue of associated costs, in particular travel costs, was raised in discussion of the fees charged by interpreters and agencies.

Are the fees charged an issue? On occasions, but not often. The issue tends to be more about travel costs not fees. It's travel costs that normally have the complaints. Shortage of interpreters means interpreters having to travel some distance, so sometimes travel costs are more than the interpreter's fee. And that can be difficult. Also if you quote mileage rates, people often forget to double it up for the return journey. Sometimes we're asked to use public transport, but it

depends whether that is convenient and also the time of day as well. But travel causes problems.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)

Under this heading the interpreters who were interviewed were asked what professions, in their view, were comparable to BSL/English interpreting. Only four felt able to suggest a comparable profession: three said spoken language interpreting and one considered the work of solicitors to be comparable. The remainder were unable to provide an example of a comparable profession, with the following response typical of the replies to this question.

Difficult really; what would I compare it with? I don't know really.

(Female, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, North West England)

This interpreter went on to suggest that the issue of appropriate pay for interpreters could not be resolved until the profession was properly regulated and recognised by other professions as a profession.

How can you say it is a profession (at this time) when you've got people who are qualified interpreters, and you've got people who are Stage One, Stage Two doing the same type of work? It isn't regulated enough at this time to be a profession.

(Female, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, North West England)

6.2.6 Difficulties experienced by service users

The interpreters who were interviewed distinguished between Deaf and hearing service users in their responses to this question.

6.2.6.1 Difficulties experienced by Deaf service users

All of the interpreters interviewed identified one or both of the following two problems as the main difficulties experienced by Deaf people:

a) Shortage of interpreters

Interpreters related the shortage of interpreters to Deaf people's use of unqualified persons as 'interpreters'. The following reply is typical of the response to this question.

There are no interpreters! You have one interpreter (in this area) who works half-time and that's for all clients. Major difficulty. And it puts (Deaf) people off wanting to use an interpreter. They'll use anybody just because they need somebody to communicate through.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)

b) Lack of understanding of the role of the interpreter

Interpreters felt that the majority of Deaf people were unclear or unsure as to the role of the interpreter (e.g. compared to that of social workers or missioners to deaf people with

whom, in the case of older Deaf people, they were more familiar) and/or how to use an interpreter.

> Often they don't know what an interpreter is. There's still this image that the social worker does everything for you. I mean we are a very new profession, and people need a lot more training on the different roles of the different professionals that there are now.
>
> (Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)

In making a related point however, another interpreter expressed the view that interpreters needed to respond to Deaf people's views on the role of the interpreter.

> A lot of Deaf people don't know how to use an interpreter. I think the truth of the matter is that many, many Deaf people would love to see the return of the missioners. Many Deaf people do not want the 'robotic' interpreter. I mean we're going away from that now, but we're not going away from it anywhere near as far as Deaf people want. The truth is that I don't know what the younger generation want, because they've all been mainstreamed. But for the generation that exists, if you go to the Deaf club, if you meet Deaf people, you can see the interpreters that they warm to. And those are the interpreters that give them more. Those are the interpreters that are more flexible with their role. And of course the argument is how flexible; who says it's right or wrong. I think there is an enormous amount of work to be done. Deaf people still come away very unsure.
>
> (Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, North West England)

A number of interpreters reported unease or difficulty in dealing with direct requests from Deaf people for advice in settings where they were present as the interpreter. They were able to explain to the Deaf person why it was inappropriate for them to provide advice but were concerned that in most situations Deaf people do not have access to advice directly in BSL.

6.2.6.2 Difficulties experienced by hearing service users

Interpreters associated the following difficulties with hearing service users:

- Shortage of interpreters
- Payment of interpreters
- Lack of understanding of the role of the interpreter
- Lack of recognition of the professional status of interpreters

> They have to be convinced first of all that an interpreter is worth the money. Because quite often within the office there'll be somebody who has got Stage One signing, or 'my auntie was deaf' or something and they'll think 'Well, why should I

pay out for an interpreter when I can use this person'. So firstly you have to train them. And then, again, there is this frustration in that you can't book anybody because there is nobody available. And then there is the 'Where does it come out of my budget? How do I pay for it?'

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)

They tend to see you as being the advocate for the Deaf person. They'll speak to you directly. They'll ask you your opinion on the Deaf person. They'll try and talk to you instead of the Deaf person. And there is not a recognition that you're a professional as well. They'll say 'Oh so is that your Mum, then?' and you say 'Well no'. And then they'll speak to you like you're a five year old. And you try and say 'Well actually I have a BA honours. I have an MA and I have an Advanced Diploma'. But you know there is no sort of recognition that you are a professional, and that actually you could be doing management but you have chosen to be an interpreter.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, employed, Scotland)

Interpreters reported that hearing people's view of Deaf people as 'disabled persons' influenced how their role is seen. In some cases, some interpreters reported that this could take the form of seeing the interpreter as a social worker or the Deaf equivalent of care workers employed to assist persons with a physical disability.

6.2.7 How could the provision of interpreting services be improved?

A considerable number of further comments on the ways in which interpreting assignments were obtained were made in interviews and questionnaires in answer to the question on how the organisation of interpreting services could be improved to achieve a more efficient deployment of currently practising interpreters.

These emphasised particularly: the need for greater centralisation and co-ordination of the work of interpreting agencies; better procedures for matching interpreter skills and experience to assignments; the need to reduce the time spent travelling (not always compatible with preceding demand); and the potential of a centralised register and of the use of information technology.

I've often thought why haven't we got a national agency which just has a massive computer database and like the AA [Automobile Association] contacts the nearest van and says 'there's them, just go and do this job'. It would be fair distribution, I think.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, North West England)

If a national organisation was formed to oversee the allocation and provision of interpreting services the interpreters currently practising would be used in the most effective and cost effective way. This would be to the advantage of interpreters and service users alike.

(Female, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, Wales)

To have a central bank so that requests and availability could be matched daily and constantly updated. When arranging further meetings the central bank could be accessed by telephone, e-mail, internet or whatever first to check availability and then book for any particular day or half-day provisionally and then confirm. I am regularly requested to work on the same day for several organisations when other days in the same week are free. Other interpreters say the same. It is important that this is done fairly.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, Yorkshire)

Whilst thinking along the same sorts of lines, other interpreters could see problems or competing alternatives:

A central database/web page with more in-depth details on training, qualifications and experience would give the purchaser a clearer idea of the interpreter(s) they were getting. A central agency would be the most efficient way of ensuring efficient deployment within safe limits and appropriate deployment. However this would destroy competition that would be a negative factor. Greater communication between agencies and freelancers would be good and world wide web based booking facilities could ensure a common contact point.

(Male, registered trainee interpreter, freelance, South West England)

Some computerised system that has bona fide interpreters on its list who can be allocated to the more LOCAL [emphasis in the original] work that arises. At present a significant amount of time, effort and money is spent on getting interpreters from A to B, whilst other interpreters travel from C to A. If the person at A could be allocated the work at A [it] would be much more efficient. Unfortunately, this will only be possible at the expense of personal choice, and at the expense of interpreters' autonomy.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance, South West England)

It's difficult whether the kind of central system or the kind of more devolved system [would be better], because in a way if there's a sort of central data bank, a free phone number or whatever, and people could say 'I'm going here; who's the closest?' And then that would be just the one number that has to be publicised

and known. Whereas there's positives about it being a local service: it's provided locally; people can get to know their local interpreters and stuff; but then there's less opportunity because there's a restricted number of interpreters in your local area.

(Female, registered qualified interpreter, freelance and employed, Scotland)

6.3 The Perspectives of Agencies

6.3.1 Finance

6.3.1.1 The costs of interpreting services

Information was not sought on the detailed costs of running agencies. A number of agencies confirmed that they had to break even or they could not continue to function. Others reported that they were required to break even but understood, given the importance of the service, that any deficit would be covered by the organisation under which they operated.

In 1999, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (a national organisation engaged in operating interpreting agencies in different parts of the country) had restructured their agencies and was seeking, through an increase in fees charged (see 3.4.4), to make each unit self-funding within a given time period. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People's (RNID's) representative was unsure how service users would react to the new charges: whether they would be accepted, or whether the expenditure by service users would remain constant, with a reduction in the level of service purchased.

The RNID had not consulted with other agencies before raising its fees. The explanation given for not doing so was that the reasons for increasing the fees were internal to the organisation, and related to the cost it incurred in delivering interpreting services. It was suggested, by the organisation's representative, that by increasing the fees it charged (as the largest organisation engaged in providing interpreting services) other agencies would be better placed to increase their fees should they wish to do so.

The issue of how interpreting provision can be adequately financed, given the distribution and size of the Deaf population, was an issue of common concern to all agencies.

6.3.1.2 Funding for training

The provision and funding of training for trainee interpreters, and in-service training for qualified interpreters, was identified by all agencies as a major problem.

The fee structure, inadequate as it was in the view of many of the agency staff interviewed, addressed only the current cost of service provision and not the capital investment required to recruit and train new entrants to the profession and maintaining the continued involvement of those currently practising. It was considered unrealistic to expect that training costs could be met from the income generated from the current fee structure. However, certain agencies were engaged in providing high level training e.g. by enabling staff to attend part-time postgraduate training courses and/or by engaging experienced interpreter trainers to provide in-service courses.

6.3.1.3 Service level agreements

Service level agreements with local authorities or public sector bodies (see 3.4.4) were seen to be advantageous by some agency staff because they were usually for a minimum period of one year. This provided a number of agencies with 'core funding'. Some agency staff argued that service level agreements with local authorities, which were based on the provision of interpreting services to Deaf people within the local authority's geographical area, enabled them to provide the most comprehensive service without direct cost to Deaf service users.

A number of agencies reported that they had negotiated a more limited form of service level agreement with their local authority. In these agreements interpreting provision was limited to providing access to, or appointments with, the departments of the local authority, e.g. housing, education, etc. Contracts with local authorities often specifically excluded NHS settings on the grounds that interpreting provision in such settings should be met from NHS Trust budgets.

The difficulty with both forms of contracts, i.e. general contracts providing interpreting services in a number of settings or contracts providing interpreting services in a particular setting, is the problem of establishing demand and negotiating contingency agreements on how provision can be continued if demand has been underestimated. Examples were given where requests to extend provision were simply refused after the budget allocated had been exhausted

It was accepted by a number of agency representatives that agencies should keep more detailed records of demand so that more accurate estimates can be made in relation to such contracts, and demand in general. Some agency staff suggested that it would be advantageous to have a common method for recording demand so that accurate and detailed information could be made available on expressed demand at local, regional and national level.

Some agency representatives suggested that local authorities and public sector bodies should be directed by central government to negotiate appropriate service level agreements. Some reported that considerable amounts of staff time was taken up trying to persuade local authorities or public sector bodies to enter into such agreements (one agency provided an example of where it had taken five years to establish an agreement with an NHS trust).

A number of agency staff expressed the hope that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) would require such organisations to enter into service level agreements or ensure the provision of interpreting services by other means. They thought it was unfair that there should be variation of provision in relation to public sector bodies and between local authorities in different parts of the country.

6.3.1.4 Disability Living Allowance

Researchers asked agency representatives whether they thought it would be appropriate for Deaf people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to contribute to the cost of interpreting services. Some agencies reported that they regularly provided interpreters for tribunals at which applications from Deaf people for DLA were considered. They were concerned that tribunals tended to focus on the particular limitations of applicants. They argued that it placed the Deaf person in the situation of having to deny their sense of a Deaf identity. The general view was that the more 'inadequate' an applicant appeared, the greater the chance of a successful application. In their view, Deaf people's need for access to interpreting services arises as a consequence of their social circumstances and not their personal inadequacy.

The size of the actual awards made to Deaf people under DLA made it impractical for agencies to consider charging Deaf people who are in receipt of DLA. Agency staff stated that the awards granted to Deaf people bore no relation to the real cost of obtaining interpreting services (see 5.2.4.2). In the view of these agencies the DLA should be funded to reflect the real cost of interpreting services as is the case under *Access to Work* and the *Student Disability Allowance*. Until awards were brought into line with the real cost of obtaining interpreting services, and it is stipulated that the award can only be used for interpreting services, the agencies interviewed did not plan to request payment from DLA recipients.

6.3.1.5 Vouchers

The majority of agencies were of the view that a voucher system would provide a more equitable system of funding interpreting services than one based on a DLA model or direct payment to Deaf people. Under such a system, each Deaf person would be granted an

interpreting allowance in the form of vouchers that they could use as they wished. Some agencies thought the voucher system was attractive in that the funding allocated could only be used for interpreting (and therefore would constitute potential income to agencies) and could be limited to registered interpreters, thereby encouraging Deaf people to use only qualified interpreters.

Some agencies acknowledged that this would bring to the fore the issue of variation in standards between interpreters, with Deaf people presumably, not prepared to use their allowance on interpreters they considered to be less than competent.

There would still need to be institutional provision by public service organisations, public utilities and commercial organisations required to make their services available to disabled persons under the Disability Discrimination Act (and any future legislation which improved current provision). Some agency staff and a number of Deaf contributors to the study drew attention to the fact that a Deaf person requiring regular medical attention would exhaust their individual allocation on doctor's and hospital appointments if such were not separately funded. Others suggested that a voucher system would grant Deaf people independence and the opportunity to exercise choice (see also 5.2.4.3).

A small number of agency representatives suggested an alternative system which would involve central or devolved governments allocating funding to authorised agencies on a per capita basis to provide an agreed level of service to Deaf residents within each agency's geographical area. A similar system exists at local level in certain parts of the country where local authorities contract interpreting agencies to provide interpreting services for Deaf persons resident within their authority. It was considered unfair that only a small number of local authorities undertake to fund such provision. It was suggested that uniformity of provision across the United Kingdom could only be addressed through central or devolved governments.

6.3.1.6 Fees and costs

Most agency staff thought that the level of fees was inadequate given the cost of providing interpreting services. A number of regional and local agencies were able to sustain their activities through contracts with public service organisations, which provided 'core funding'.

Some agencies, however, had entered into contracts that did not adequately cover the cost of delivering the interpreting services agreed. They then experienced considerable difficulty in attempting to renew these contracts at a rate reflecting the real cost of delivering the service.

However, some agencies did not see raising fees as necessarily the most appropriate way of addressing the cost of providing interpreting services. There was concern that if fees were

raised this could lead to a reduction in demand from statutory services. These services in particular were perceived as being under pressure to reduce expenditure.

6.3.1.7 The level of salaries

Most agency managers thought that the salaries paid to staff interpreters were fair (on average, salaries ranged between £18,000 and £20,000 for registered qualified interpreters, and between £15,000-£19,000 for registered trainees). They did, however, acknowledge that the lack of a career structure and limited salary scales were issues that could increasingly become a source of dissatisfaction, particularly for older interpreters.

The majority of agencies felt it was important to maintain a national scale of payments for freelance interpreters and for assignments undertaken by staff interpreters that are not covered by contracts and service level agreements. However, the agencies in London and the South East of England stressed the need to agree London and South East weightings in the fee structure. They felt that if this was not accepted it would lead to interpreters charging individual rates which, in their view, would devalue the standing of the profession as well as increasing the amount of time agency staff would have to give to negotiating each assignment. This, in the view of many, would make their jobs impossible.

As reported in chapter 3 (3.4.4) a minority of interpreters do, on occasions, seek to charge higher fees. Some agency staff thought that where exceptional demands were associated with an assignment, it was appropriate for this to be reflected in the fees charged. A number of agency staff expressed concern that if the national rates were not reviewed and, as appropriate, raised on a regular basis, an increasing number of interpreters would set their own rates.

6.3.1.8 Purchasers of interpreting services

Agencies reported that the response of purchasers of interpreting services to the fees charged varied according to the ability to pay. Large commercial organisations, or professionals on salaries that greatly exceed those of interpreters, usually accepted the rates without question.

It was expected that the level of demand from the public sector would increase with the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act in the autumn of 1999 under which organisations would be required to make their services accessible to disabled people. Agencies reported that many public sector organisations had limited or no knowledge of the implications of the Act for providing services to Deaf people.

Administrative staff did report that the role of the interpreter, and the fact that service users are expected to pay for the service, were understood by a great percentage of hearing

clients. There remained, however, a significant problem in relation to assignments of short duration. This issue was raised by a number of agencies. It was the practice of the majority of agencies and freelance interpreters to charge a minimum two-hour fee for assignments of two hours or less. In certain rural areas the minimum fee charged was for three hours. There were many reports of doctors in particular being reluctant to pay such fees in relation to appointments that last only ten to fifteen minutes. Agency staff reported that they believed that the need for the interpreter's travel time to be included in the fee was often not understood. A number of agency staff suggested that the provision of interpreting services by video might have a particular contribution to make in settings where the majority of assignments are of a short duration. Some also reported that some purchasers queried the need to employ more than one interpreter for certain engagements, and for engagements lasting longer than two hours.

Some agency staff believed that small commercial and voluntary organisations were for the most part infrequent users of interpreting services because of the cost. They reported that a number of such organisations, when they made initial enquiries, expressed surprise that the service was not free. Agency staff believed that they were under the impression that interpreting services were funded through central or local government and thought it would come under welfare or Social Services provision.

6.3.2 The advantages and disadvantages of different types of agency

Agencies differed in where they were based, who ran them and the type of interpreter they employed. These different types of agencies thought there were advantages (and in some cases disadvantages) to their mode of operation.

6.3.2.1 Agencies based in Deaf centres

Staff viewed the major advantages and disadvantages of agencies established or based in Deaf centres to be:

- Staff contact with the Deaf community. Agency staff thought that agencies based in Deaf centres were more accessible to Deaf service users and more flexible in their ability to respond to clients' requests. Staff had the opportunity to get to know Deaf service users over time. These views were endorsed by a number of Deaf people, but, for some, these advantages were perceived in a less positive light. As reported in chapter 5, some Deaf people expressed reservations about interpreter confidentiality. At the public meetings and during interviews a number of Deaf people claimed to have experienced breaches of interpreter confidentiality. The second concern that was seen as an inevitable consequence of interpreting

services being located within Deaf centres was that some Deaf people were uneasy at regularly meeting professionals in the course of their attendance at the Deaf centre. This was because the interpreter may be party to confidential information relating to their personal circumstances. Some staff felt it would be better if the agency was not located in the Deaf Club, as is the case in certain centres. A number of agency interpreters who attend Deaf social events (to meet with Deaf friends and to maintain and improve their use of BSL) recognised that some Deaf people and other interpreters would consider such involvement to be at odds with a concept of professional practice premised on maintaining a 'social distance' between the professional and the service user.

- The opportunity to engage with, and learn from, other initiatives being undertaken by or in the centre (in particular those involving Deaf staff);
- The opportunity to distinguish between, and make clear, the different contributions made by interpreting and other services, where a centre provides a range of services. The existence of advocacy and Deaf Awareness programmes were seen as making particularly important contributions to clarifying the role of the interpreter;
- The provision of a flexible service that reflects the needs of the community. All of the agencies based in Deaf centres employed staff interpreters and, as required, freelance interpreters. Some agency staff acknowledged that the use of staff interpreters limits the choice of interpreter available to Deaf service users (hearing service users rarely, if ever, made reference to the issue of choice). However, it did enable interpreters, through regular contact with members, to develop a detailed understanding of the interpreting requirements and preferences of the community. The employment of staff interpreters enabled the agency to undertake assignments that freelance interpreters may be reluctant or would not wish to accept, e.g. assignments of short duration. Some agency staff therefore suggested that staff interpreters were in a position to provide a more flexible service to the community compared to freelance interpreters. (This point of view was shared by some agencies that employ staff interpreters, but were not based in Deaf centres). It was recognised that difficulties could arise where there is only one staff interpreter e.g. if a disagreement arose between a particular Deaf service user and the interpreter. A number of agency staff thought that agencies need to employ a minimum of two interpreters in order to be in a position to address such situations if they arose.

6.3.2.2 Booking agencies

Agencies that use only freelance interpreters thought that they were able to offer service users greater choice. They suggested that this was because they were able to seek the most appropriately experienced and skilled interpreter for each assignment from the pool of freelance interpreters. They were not limited by financial necessity to assign jobs to staff interpreters even though a more experienced freelance interpreter may be available. It was acknowledged however, that in practice, given the level of demand and shortage of interpreters, they were rarely in the position of having more than one interpreter available to undertake an assignment.

Staff from this type of agency suggested that an interpreting service based exclusively on the use of freelance interpreters could be established nationally. It would, they acknowledged, be more expensive (per booking) compared to agencies using staff interpreters to deliver contracted services. However, some staff argued that many of the latter agencies were subsidising either directly or indirectly, the provision of their interpreting services. A freelance-based service might, in their view, prove to be the most efficient and (in real terms) cheapest method of providing a national service.

The establishment of such a national agency would require a considerable degree of co-operation between current service providers. This level of co-operation has not previously been achieved. Significant additional resources would need to be obtained to establish and staff a national administrative infrastructure. It would also need to address how such a provision could relate to, and engage with, local Deaf communities.

One agency, although based in a Deaf centre and employing staff interpreters, described itself as a booking agency. The reason it gave for doing so was to draw service users' attention to the fact that provision had to be arranged: it was not available immediately or at short notice.

SASLI, the regulatory body in Scotland, also operates a national booking agency. It has proposed the introduction of a system of registration for agencies in Scotland. It accepts that if SASLI were to be responsible for agency registration it would be inappropriate for the Association to continue to operate an agency itself.

6.3.2.3 Agencies based in local authorities

Many staff from these agencies believed they offer many of the advantages of services based in Deaf centres with the advantage, in the view of some, that they are not physically based within the Deaf centre, and therefore are able to provide a more 'private' service. However, some recognised that it was essential to ensure that members of the local Deaf community were fully aware of the services offered by the local authority agency, and that it

was clearly seen to be separate from social work services. Some staff believed that the existence of local authority interpreting services created a greater awareness of Deaf people within the local authorities in which they were established. However, in certain authorities there was a problem in maintaining levels of services because of pressure on local authorities to reduce expenditure.

6.3.2.4 General agencies, not based in Deaf centres, run by voluntary organisations

The majority of these agencies employ both staff and freelance interpreters to deliver both contract and non-contract interpreting services. Most of their work tends to be with public sector bodies. The staff interviewed from these agencies stated that they provide a very professional service to such clients. However, a number did acknowledge that they needed to develop much closer ties with local Deaf communities.

6.3.2.5 Agencies employing only staff interpreters

Staff in these agencies felt they could develop close relations with the local Deaf community and ensure, through only using their own staff, a consistent standard of service. They were not placed in the situation (as were agencies using freelance interpreters) of engaging freelance interpreters (in particular trainee interpreters) whose level of ability and experience were not known to the agency

6.3.3 The organisation of current provision

6.3.3.1 Problems identified by administrative staff

Administrative staff identified the following problems in carrying out their work.

The job is by its nature stressful, given that the demand for interpreters greatly exceeds supply, and therefore administrative staff were almost always at a disadvantage in seeking to match demand and supply. The job is never ending. There was, as one member of staff described it, 'never closure': staff leave each night knowing that no matter how many assignments they have been able to match with available interpreters, others remain outstanding.

Experienced staff felt they had built up a knowledge of the job and the interpreters used by their agency, and were therefore able to make informed judgements in allocating assignments. When they were uncertain, they would seek the advice of a senior interpreter although this was not always possible in practice if the senior interpreter was unavailable.

Many staff stated that they needed more training. BSL and Deaf Awareness training were identified as priorities. The extent of such provision varied markedly, with training in relation

to BSL often being undertaken by staff on their own initiative. The researchers identified examples of good practice in Deaf Awareness training. In certain of the larger agencies staff are provided with written guidelines on staff roles and responsibilities. The majority of staff found these valuable.

In certain agencies (as reported in 3.4.3) the administrator is also a qualified interpreter. Such administrators are clearly better qualified to allocate assignments to interpreters than administrative staff from a non-interpreting background. On the other hand, with the exception of what were described as the 'most demanding or difficult cases', the shortage of interpreters does not usually allow administrators the opportunity to choose between interpreters for a particular assignment. In a situation of widespread shortage of interpreters it may be argued that the separation of the two roles would represent a more effective use of very scarce resources. However, the role of the administrator-interpreter is not confined to the allocation of assignments. They are involved in monitoring the quality of service provided by their agency and sometimes act as mentors to staff interpreters and freelance trainee interpreters engaged by the agency. They were also responsible for the public presentation of the work of the agency and the negotiating of contracts. Some interpreter-administrators suggested that such work may need to be undertaken by a person with an in-depth knowledge of the field and, in smaller agencies in particular, this would mean an interpreter-administrator or senior interpreter.

In a number of agencies the interpreter-administrator often undertook emergency or urgent assignments, as s/he was the one member of staff who was available to undertake such assignments. They drew attention to the difficulties this created in conducting their administrative duties, and the difficulty of turning down such requests. The inevitable consequence was that administrative work was often undertaken as unpaid overtime.

6.3.3.2 Relationships with service users

A number of agencies highlighted the fact that large numbers of Deaf people have gone without access to any interpreting provision for many years. This has given rise to misunderstandings when requests for interpreting services have been made. Examples were quoted of hearing persons being offended by requests for interpreting services to be provided because they considered their established methods of communication with Deaf colleagues and/or Deaf business contacts to be satisfactory. It was reported by agency staff that certain Deaf people, who had not previously used interpreting services, felt inhibited from doing so for fear of negative reactions from hearing colleagues (particularly if the cost of provision was to be met by their employer).

Administrative staff identified the limited information provided by those seeking to book an interpreter as a recurring problem. Often bookings were made by people who know only that the Deaf person requires an interpreter. This person may have no involvement or responsibility beyond obtaining an interpreter. This, in turn, made it impossible for agency staff to provide interpreters with the background information they would wish to have prior to the assignment: often the only information provided was the name of the Deaf person and the setting (e.g. hospital appointment).

6.3.3.3 Rapport with interpreters

Agency administrative staff referred to the need to establish and maintain a good rapport with interpreters. They suggested that interpreters not based in an agency did not fully appreciate the demands placed on administrators. Only a small number of administrative staff provided actual examples of difficulties that had arisen in their dealings with interpreters. These included interpreters blaming administrators (rather than the service user) for providing inaccurate information about the time or location of an assignment; the failure to forward background information; and accusations that the administrator allocated particular assignments to favoured interpreters.

Few agencies appear to have been engaged in developing, or had the resources to develop, their relationship with freelance interpreters beyond seeking their services for specific assignments. There were some exceptions. These included agencies that extended invitations to freelance interpreters to attend training days arranged for their staff interpreters, and one agency that published a newsletter for the freelance interpreters employed by the agency.

6.3.3.4 The allocation of assignments

The fact that demand for interpreting services greatly exceeded provision influenced the ways in which assignments are allocated. The following points were made in interviews:

- A number of agencies acknowledged (as reported in 3.4.7) that the 'undemanding', 'less demanding' or 'less interesting' assignments were often allocated to new (generally trainee) staff. It was accepted that such categorisations of assignments did not always prove accurate resulting in the inappropriate allocation of some assignments.
- A number of agencies have written guidelines that advise staff on a range of issues and practice relating to the processing of assignments. A number of staff acknowledged that there were times when they found it difficult to follow guidelines, or to know how to deal with situations not covered by guidelines. The most

frequently quoted example related to the selection of interpreters for particular bookings that came under the heading of “demanding assignments”. Where administrative staff were uncertain, the established practice was to consult with the senior interpreter. Unsurprisingly, given the level of demand and pressure on both administrative and interpreting staff, some reported that it was not always possible to do so. There also appeared to be some variation between agencies on what would constitute “demanding assignments” that required consultation. This was an issue raised by certain staff in the larger agencies especially those agencies that employed a large number of freelance interpreters. In the smaller agencies there was inevitably a much closer relationship between administrative and interpreting staff that enabled such issues to be more easily addressed

- Only a small number of agencies were able to offer an out-of-hours emergency service (see 3.4.8). Many felt emergency cover should be separately funded by the emergency services and that a national policy needed to be established in relation to this. Agency staff stressed that in establishing such a service it was essential that it was directly accessible by Deaf clients and not based on Deaf people having to contact a third party who would then contact the interpreting service. It was suggested by one agency representative that it may be necessary in the medium term to establish a two-tier system: one in relation to areas where interpreters are known to be available and one for those areas where interpreters are few or non-existent. In the latter it was felt priority needed to be given to establishing remote provision by video telephone. It was recognised that in many emergency situations it would be essential to have an interpreter physically present but in certain parts of the country there are simply too few interpreters available at this time to provide this level of service.
- Some agency administrative staff described the difficulty of ascertaining the availability of freelance interpreters for assignments for which they had not received adequate notice (the definition of which varied, but for the majority of agencies ranged from between two and four weeks). All of the agencies visited were clearly operating under great pressure. Agencies in which demand for interpreters greatly exceeded supply required longer periods of notice of assignments. These agencies informed clients providing inadequate notice that it would simply be impossible in the time available to obtain an interpreter. If they could employ more administrative staff this would allow more time to be given to each request. Given the shortage of administrative staff, only a limited amount of

time could be given to each request. In other agencies the evidence provided suggested that demand appears to match or did not greatly exceed supply. Two important points were made in relation to these agencies. First, demand in all of these agencies had increased significantly over the previous year and this had been met either by increasing the number of staff interpreters employed, the number of freelance interpreters engaged or by existing staff working greatly increased overtime. Secondly, the majority of these agencies engaged in very limited promotion of the agency's work given that they were barely able to cope with current demand. (In the majority of agencies, where demand greatly exceeded supply, seeking new customers either did not occur or had a low priority.)

- The shortage of interpreters made it impossible for agencies to offer clients a choice of interpreter in the majority of situations. All agencies stated they would seek to meet specific requests if possible. Choice was also often non-existent or limited due to financial constraints (e.g. agencies were under financial pressure to use staff interpreters rather than freelance interpreters in the majority of situations). The setting in which choice was most frequently expressed was in relation to the gender of the interpreter for hospital/doctor appointments. Agencies reported they were usually able to meet such requests despite the fact that interpreting was a predominantly female profession and therefore there was a shortage of male interpreters. Certain agencies had received requests for gay or lesbian interpreters and some agencies had received a very limited number of requests for Black or Asian interpreters. In the case of the latter only a small number of agencies were aware of the existence of the BASLIN *Directory* (a directory listing Black and Asian BSL/English interpreters). There was a perception that there was a shortage of Black and Asian interpreters.

6.3.3.5 Use of BSL by administrative staff

All administrative staff interviewed expressed the wish to improve their BSL skills. The researchers visited only a small number of agencies where administrative staff were fluent in BSL. In practice, with the exception of agencies based in, or run by, Deaf centres, Deaf people rarely came in person to book interpreters (usually doing so by fax, text telephones or Typetalk). Bookings made directly by Deaf people represent a minority of the requests received by agencies.

In one agency Deaf people were observed making bookings by video link in BSL. This facility was clearly valued by these Deaf people but it required that the person processing the

bookings was fluent in BSL. In only three of the agencies visited did the research team meet Deaf agency staff. It may be that other agencies do employ Deaf staff, but the researchers gained the impression that few Deaf people are employed directly in the administration or provision of interpreting services.

6.3.3.6 Co-operation between agencies

The degree of co-operation between agencies of different organisations was limited. This was in part because there was no market pressure on agencies to co-operate (for example in collective, national advertising) given that demand greatly exceeds supply, although such co-operation might result in the provision of a better service for customers. In two areas an agency forum has been established. Representatives of the member agencies meet a number of times each year to share experiences and exchange information on issues of common interest and concern. Participants found such meetings valuable. Many would wish to hold the meetings more frequently but pressure of work makes this difficult.

There was, however, only limited evidence of co-operation between agencies of different organisations in relation to service provision. In some places informal arrangements exist between neighbouring agencies but these appeared to be limited to situations requiring specialist provision or involving an actual or potential conflict of interest. However all agencies stated they would provide clients with the names of other agencies in the area if they were unable to meet the client's request.

6.3.4 Training and careers for interpreters

6.3.4.1 Training for agency interpreters

All agencies reported difficulties in releasing interpreting staff to attend training courses. This was a particularly difficult problem for smaller agencies. The reasons given were twofold: the majority of agencies considered they were under-staffed and therefore, given rising demand, found it extremely difficult to release staff to attend training courses. On the occasions they did, it was limited to short courses (usually of one day's duration). The second reason was the cost of training.

Agency staff expressed the view that there needed to be a requirement on all interpreters (freelance and staff) to maintain and advance their skills and knowledge after qualification. A requirement for interpreters to undergo a regular reassessment of their skills was incorporated in proposals put forward by CACDP, ASLI and SASLI. There was a concern expressed that given the current shortage, interpreters could continue to obtain or be assigned work without having to invest in maintaining and improving their skills.

6.3.4.2 The reorganisation of the categorisation and registration of interpreters

A major issue raised by agency staff was the reorganisation by CACDP of the categorisation and registration of interpreters. The category of trainee interpreter in particular was considered, by itself, to be of little or no value in indicating to potential service users, or employers, the standard of a particular trainee interpreter. It was reported that standards of competence could vary enormously, from people commencing their careers with little or no experience, through to experienced interpreters who believed they had been denied the opportunity to achieve registered qualified status as a consequence of delays in introducing the new NVQ-based system of registration. CACDP provided the researchers with copies of correspondence in which the organisation had been critical of the demands placed upon it by the NVQ authorities, and the lack of support offered to the Council in relation to establishing an NVQ framework of assessment for BSL/English interpreters.

Agencies that employed interpreters who had attended university-based training courses were critical of the failure of CACDP in the past to give formal recognition to such courses within the proposed registration structure. A number of agency staff expressed the view that an exclusively NVQ structure would reduce the status of the interpreting profession in the eyes of the members of other professions who employ interpreters, e.g. the medical, legal, and teaching professions.

CACDP sought to address a number of the issues raised above in a new registration policy published in the autumn of 1999, when the interviews for this project were being conducted (CACDP, 1999). This proposed a three tier categorisation of interpreters for which the following titles were subsequently agreed: 'junior trainee interpreter', 'junior interpreter' and 'member of the register'.

It provides an expanded structure through which registration may be achieved either through designated university courses or NVQ assessment. CACDP established an independent registration panel to implement the new registration policy. The panel will be responsible for admitting interpreters to the Register and to the two trainee categories (CACDP, 2002 forthcoming). CACDP engaged an independent consultant to map all current training provision against CACDP's Interpreting Registration Standards (CIRS) on which entry to the register will, in future, be based. The findings and recommendations arising from this work have now been published (Hawcroft, 2001). The new system of registration comes into effect in April 2002.

A number of agencies described how they had been placed in an extremely difficult position because of CACDP's failure to provide, in their view, an adequate interim assessment

structure between the ending of the previous system of registration and the introduction of the new policy.

A number of agency staff were very critical of CACDP and felt that the organisation had been in error in investing so much of its resources in establishing an exclusively (at that time) NVQ system of assessment.

However, a small number of agency staff (including some who were critical of certain aspects of CACDP's performance) drew attention to the fact that CACDP had created a structure that had enabled the profession of BSL/English interpreting to become established in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. There was a danger, in their view, that the contribution made by the Council was not being adequately acknowledged as it sought to establish a coherent professional structure without adequate resources.

There was not the opportunity during this study to obtain the views of agency representatives on the new CACDP policy document, which had been approved by the Council trustees in the autumn of 1999 and was in the process of being circulated. There was, however, considerable frustration amongst agency representatives with what one representative described as 'the prolonged period of uncertainty' that had been allowed to continue until the publication of the new policy.

6.3.4.3 The registers of interpreters

Agency staff interviewed were divided on the issue of who should have responsibility for the register of interpreters in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Support for CACDP retaining responsibility for this register centred on two arguments. CACDP had established and maintained the current register and through their system of assessment and code of practice, had established BSL/English interpreting as a profession in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The second argument was based on the need, in their view, for the register to be operated by an independent, umbrella organisation. CACDP is such an organisation including within its membership organisations representing Deaf people, interpreters and employers of interpreters. Those who did not favour CACDP continuing to have responsibility for the register felt the responsibility should pass to ASLI as the professional organisation of interpreters in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This would create a similar system of organisation to that in Scotland, where the register is administered by the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI).

It was acknowledged that the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) had a membership of approximately 50% of practising interpreters in 1999. It would need to obtain additional resources (in terms of paid staff, etc.) if it were to take over responsibility

for administering the register. As noted in chapter 1 (1.6.7), ASLI published proposals detailing a career structure and licensing policy for the profession.

The majority of respondents were agreed on three issues:

- it would be confusing (at least to those outside the profession) if separate directories were published by the two organisations;
- it was essential for the two organisations to find a way of working together (with suggestions as to how this could be achieved ranging from CACDP voluntarily passing responsibility for the register to ASLI to ASLI working within CACDP as the lead organisation on interpreting);
- there needs to be agreement on a common standard (benchmark) and forms of assessment in relation to obtaining registered qualified/licensed status, and that members of each of the recognised registers (CACDP and SASLI in 1999) should continue to be qualified to practice in any part of the UK.

6.3.4.4 Career structures

Some agency staff raised the need to establish a career structure for interpreters. A distinction was made between structured progression to registered qualified (CACDP/SASLI) or licensed (ASLI) interpreter status and a career structure for qualified interpreters after registration.

As reported in 6.3.4.2, CACDP introduced a new structure involving a three-tier progression to registered qualified status. ASLI proposed a more detailed structure of progression to qualified status, with those achieving this status receiving the title of licensed interpreter. They have also proposed a career structure, which would involve licensed interpreters undertaking mentoring and training roles (ASLI, 2000; O'Reilly, 2000).

6.3.4.5 Maintaining agency standards

The issue of quality control in relation to the services provided by agencies may be divided between the quality and standard of interpreting services, and the administration of requests for services. In relation to the standard of interpreting, a number of strategies were identified by agencies. However, it was admitted by many agencies, that because of the shortage of interpreters and the pressure of demand, they were not able to monitor staff performance in the way they would wish.

Examples of good practice included: a senior interpreter monitoring assignments undertaken by both staff and freelance interpreters employed by the agency; engaging freelance interpreters only after a senior agency interpreter (or consultant interpreter where the agency does not employ staff interpreters) had co-worked with, or monitored, an

assignment undertaken by the interpreter; engaging the services of a recognised independent interpreter trainer to evaluate the skills of each interpreter and tailoring staff training accordingly (certain agencies used internal staff with experience of interpreter training or freelance interpreters to undertake such evaluations).

There were, however, few interpreters with the necessary training and experience to undertake such diagnostic work. All agency representatives expressed the need for more time to be given to monitoring and in-service training, but pressure to deliver services made this difficult.

Most agencies thought they provided an efficient service in relation to the administration of agency services (e.g. in how the booking of interpreters is processed, invoicing for payments, etc). However most agencies thought they were understaffed, and under-resourced in relation to administrative computer software. Most agencies acknowledged that their quality control systems, in particular in relation to obtaining the views of Deaf service users on the quality of service provided by their agency, were limited or inadequate.

6.3.5 Relationships between agencies and interpreters

6.3.5.1 Agencies and freelance interpreters

A number of agencies made reference to the profile of the profession viz. that it is made up of employees of an institution or agency (staff interpreters) and those who operate as freelance interpreters. The agencies that employed staff interpreters thought they were able to provide a more comprehensive and flexible service to Deaf service users. They were, in particular, able to meet assignments of short duration and, if staff were available, requests made at short notice. This was not usually possible for freelance interpreters.

A number of agency staff suggested that agencies were seen by many interpreters as a stepping-stone to becoming a freelance interpreter. Working for an agency enabled interpreters to gain a range of experience, and the opportunity to make contacts from whom work could be sought on becoming a freelance interpreter. For some agencies this was an issue. There was not, however, an obvious means by which agencies could prevent staff from leaving to become freelance interpreters or, as it was put by one agency representative, “of protecting their investment”.

Some had given consideration to requiring interpreters to compensate the agency for the cost of any formal training the agency had provided if they left within a given period of completing this training. Others took the view that such movement from employee to freelance status was now established practice within the profession and simply had to be accepted. It was necessary for agencies to retain qualified registered staff to enable the

agency to undertake specialist assignments (e.g. court interpreting, etc) and to monitor trainee staff. However, it was not as if, on becoming a freelance interpreter, their service was necessarily lost to the agency.

A number of agencies reported that they regularly used former staff in a freelance capacity. In many cases these interpreters were only able to continue to practice as interpreters if they became freelance, as they were not in a position to work the hours required by agencies because of changes in their personal circumstances. Staff working for agencies referred to the support provided by colleagues, the variety or work they were able to undertake, paid holidays and sick pay, amongst the reasons why they preferred to work directly for an agency or institution. Flexibility and freedom of choice over assignments were seen as the major attractions of working as a freelance interpreter.

6.3.5.2 Agencies without employed interpreters

Agencies that worked exclusively with freelance interpreters felt they were in a position to seek the best freelance interpreter for an assignment rather than being under an obligation to use a staff interpreter who may have no previous experience of particular types of assignments. This worked well where agencies were given sufficient notice to allow them the time to circulate the assignment to appropriate interpreters. However in practice, given the shortage of interpreters, such agencies usually assigned the booking to the first interpreter who indicated their willingness to accept it.

6.3.5.3 The allocation of demand

In accepting a position as a staff interpreter with an agency, interpreters knew they would be required to undertake a range of assignments. In most parts of the country demand exceeds supply and therefore most freelance interpreters could choose which assignments they undertook. It was suggested by agency staff that as a consequence, demand in particular settings was especially difficult to meet where provision was only, or predominantly through, freelance interpreters: settings in which there was considerable demand from Deaf people, but for which it was difficult to obtain the services of a freelance interpreter. Examples were given of interpreters who had interpreted on Further Education courses for a number of years, but who did not wish to do so indefinitely. Attention was drawn to the difficulty such interpreters experienced withdrawing from such assignments if there was no other interpreter available to replace them. Interpreters made reference to the greater job satisfaction of working in particular settings compared to others e.g. working in a specialist setting with a single Deaf person compared to working with several Deaf clients in more ‘mundane’ settings.

It was suggested by some agency staff that freelance interpreters "cherry picked" assignments, leaving to agencies the more 'mundane' assignments. It was suggested that this had given rise to a two-tier level of service. The minority of Deaf people employed in a professional capacity were able, it was claimed, to obtain the services of the best freelance interpreters. They knew who they were and often booked them directly without going through an agency. As a consequence such interpreters were unavailable for the one-off type of requests that agencies routinely received. A number of agencies and interpreters identified the increased frequency of use of interpreters by Deaf professionals as a major change in the pattern of demand in recent years.

6.3.5.4 Control of interpreters' diaries

Some booking agencies and some of the larger agencies stated that they would value having control of the diaries of freelance interpreters for specific days or time slots. This would allow them to more efficiently match current demands to current supply within current resources. For example, they argued that it would enable them to allocate two or three assignments in the same geographical area to one interpreter and that this would make it worthwhile for certain freelance interpreters to travel significant distances when they would not be prepared, or could not afford to do so for a single assignment. It was also seen as a way of countering the accusation that freelance interpreters "cherry picked" assignments. Certain freelance interpreters provided evidence that they do this already on a voluntary basis, consciously choosing a percentage of "everyday assignments" as their contribution to meeting the access needs of the community.

It was recognised that not all freelance interpreters would be in a position to make their diaries available to agencies in the way suggested, or be prepared to give up or modify their right to refuse assignments. A comparison made by one interpreter was with the legal profession and the practice of barristers being assigned cases on a "cab rank" system of taking whichever case was next in line. It would have the merit of potentially making the services of the most skilful interpreters available to a wider range of Deaf clients, therefore demonstrating the contribution the profession can make to the lives of all Deaf people (in particular those who rarely use interpreters).

Agency staff drew attention to the fact that some Deaf people were of the view that interpreters were exploiting the Deaf community: earning a good salary (compared to that of many Deaf people) because of the disadvantage Deaf people experience as a consequence of their use of a minority visual language. Certain agency staff felt such views had arisen in part because of the 'distance' that existed between the Deaf community and the profession (Scott-Gibson, 1994, 2002). Others thought such views unfair. In their view

interpreters provide a professional service and should therefore be paid an appropriate salary. Such views failed, in their view, to take into account the 'sacrifices' made by many interpreters to achieve the status of registered interpreter.

Some agencies reported that a number of organisations that regularly used interpreters book them directly in order to save the cost of booking fees. This reduced the income of agencies and the regular availability of the interpreters employed directly by such organisations. It was thought that these organisations were aware of which interpreters were considered the most skilled and therefore, by engaging these interpreters on a regular basis, they reduced their availability to the members of the Deaf community who use interpreters on a less frequent basis.

6.3.6 Use of technology

6.3.6.1 Introduction

There was limited use of advanced technology to process requests. For example, very few agencies had databases that categorised interpreters by expertise in relation to particular interpreting settings. Customised software had been developed by a small number of agencies to record and confirm bookings and invoice clients. The RNID planned to introduce a new database that would improve the administration of interpreting services by its agencies, as well as improving communication between agencies.

6.3.6.2 The use of video telephones

At the time the study was undertaken in 1999, video telephones were being used by the RNID and three regional agencies to deliver interpreting services. Unfortunately, none of these agencies were able to make reports available on their use of video telephones. These projects were ongoing (although as reported earlier the RNID no longer provides a remote video telephone service in the Highlands of Scotland) and it will be important to consider their findings as soon as these are available[11]. Five of the agencies listed in the CACDP 2000-1 Directory offered interpreting services by video telephone.

In discussion with agency staff, the following points were made:

- The use of video telephones appeared to offer a number of advantages not only to Deaf people residing in areas where there was limited or no provision of

[11] A remote videophone interpreting service has been established by a consortium of organisations comprising Just Communication (interpreting services), Red Lizzard (marketing), Remark (filming), Motion Media (technology) and Mouzer Associates (sales). The service was established in 2001 and is known as Radiate (BBC: See Hear, May 2001).

interpreting services, but also in augmenting provision in areas that were serviced by interpreting agencies and freelance interpreters. A number of staff thought that the use of video telephones would save interpreters' travel time and that this would enable interpreters to accept an increased number of assignments. They also thought senior staff would be able to monitor standards from recorded assignments. Some agency staff thought it would enable agencies to develop translation services and offer employment to Deaf interpreters (and Deaf persons bilingual in British Sign Language and written English) to provide information in BSL.

- At one agency visited by the project team, Deaf people were observed booking interpreters through a video link in BSL. Deaf people interviewed in this area clearly valued being able to book interpreters in this way. Agency staff stated that there would need to be a significant investment in technology, but that video telephones had the potential to make a significant improvement to the quality of interpreting services provided across the country. If used to book interpreters, administrative staff would have to be competent in BSL to receive bookings. It would create the opportunity for more Deaf people to be employed in an administrative capacity within agencies, as well as providing Deaf clients with a more accessible service.
- Reservations were expressed by some agency staff as to whether the quality of image on a video telephone was of a sufficiently high standard to enable interpreting to be delivered to the standard required. Concerns were also expressed that remote provision would leave Deaf people feeling isolated.

6.3.6.3 Use of the internet

In London, one interpreter had established a network of interpreters (BSL Beam) who advertised their availability on the internet. This was considered to be more efficient than the current methods of ascertaining the availability of freelance interpreters by fax or telephone, which are time consuming and labour intensive. BSL Beam is now working with the Sign Language Bureau[12]. Just Communication based in Birmingham offers service users

[12] The UK's first internet BSL/English interpreter booking agency has been established through a collaboration between BSL Beam and the Middlesex University Sign Language Bureau. Service users registered with the organisation may place their interpreting requests on a 24 hour electronic bulletin board. Interpreters registered with BSL Beam can select assignments from the bulletin board. Subscribers to the service may also search for an interpreter themselves by entering the date on which they require an interpreter. They will be provided with a list of BSL Beam interpreters available on that date. Service users may subscribe to the service on a quarterly or yearly basis or purchase single or multiple access to the service. Service level agreements can be arranged through the Sign Language Bureau.

the opportunity of booking interpreters on line. Freelance interpreters interested in obtaining work from the agency can also register their interest in doing so on line.

In time, as more Deaf people gain access to the internet, such a method of booking interpreters could remove the need for agencies. However, some agency staff expressed the view that both interpreters and service users might prefer to continue to work through a third party who would be responsible for invoicing, dealing with complaints, etc.

A number of agency representatives thought that if all agencies subscribed to an internet service (such as that established in London) on which all freelance interpreters advertised when they were available and agencies could advertise available assignments, far greater efficiency could be achieved. It could also provide the infrastructure for a national, co-ordinated service based on freelance interpreters.

6.3.7 Suggestions and Proposals

Agency staff drew attention to the need for wider debate on a number of issues.

6.3.7.1 Titles of agencies

The appropriateness of the titles used by agencies was raised as an issue by some staff. They questioned whether certain titles adequately reflected the range of services provided, or appropriately conveyed the nature of these services.

An example of the latter was the issue of whether an interpreting service should be seen as being for Deaf people, or for both Deaf and hearing people seeking to communicate with each other. Agency staff reported that in practice the majority of clients (defined as the person or organisation responsible for paying for the interpreting services) viewed provision as being exclusively for the benefit of Deaf people.

Some agency staff suggested that the use of the term 'communication support unit' and 'sign language interpreter' contributed to this perception. They thought the use of the term 'support' in a title directed attention to the requirements of the Deaf person rather than to the shared need of both hearing and Deaf people to communicate with each other. They suggested the use of the title 'communication units' for agencies offering a range of services. These services would be categorised under the language (or languages) through which the service was delivered, e.g. note-taking, lip-speaking, etc., would be categorised under for example English or another spoken/written language. Some staff felt that the use of the terms 'sign language interpreter' or 'sign language agency' failed to reflect the fact that the service facilitates communication between the users of a spoken and a sign language. They thought that this should be reflected in the title e.g. BSL/English interpreter or spoken language/sign language interpreter.

6.3.7.2 The need for provision to reflect Deaf people's priorities

Agency representatives acknowledged that the current profile of provision did not necessarily reflect the priorities of Deaf people but rather reflected the requirements of those organisations that are required, or have recognised their responsibility to grant access to Deaf people and have the capacity to fund such provision. The predominant form of provision could be characterised as essential services that are used on an infrequent basis (e.g. hospitals, the justice system, etc).

6.3.7.3 The demands of legal interpreting

Certain agencies do not accept assignments in legal settings. These agencies gave a number of reasons for this: concerns about the ability of their staff or the freelance interpreters they employed to perform in such a formal setting; the potential serious consequences for Deaf clients (in particular where the Deaf person is involved as a defendant); the publicity which certain high profile cases had attracted where trials were stopped as a consequence of interpreter error; and published research on interpreting provision in such settings (Brennan and Brown, 1997).

One agency that specialised in this field felt that the trend of interpreters turning down court interpreting assignments had recently been reversed. There was still however, considerable variation in standards across the country. In certain areas, contracts or local agreements had been established by agencies with police authorities, whereby the agencies would provide only qualified or very experienced trainee interpreters.

In other areas, agencies complained that police forces worked from their own list of interpreters that included unregistered people. It was acknowledged that this in part arose because the police needed to obtain the services of interpreters at short notice. However, many agencies felt that there was a lack of understanding of the issues involved and there was need for the Home Office to provide central guidance that would lead to common practice across the country[13].

A number of specific issues were raised in relation to legal interpreting:

- A number of interpreters who worked regularly in legal settings drew attention to the need for continuity of interpreting provision within a trial. It was extremely

[13] Lord Justice Auld in "A Review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales" (October 2001) makes a number of recommendations about the use of BSL/English interpreters (referred to as 'sign language interpreters' in the Review) in the criminal courts; pp. 584-587 (see wwww.criminal-courts-review.org). The Trial Issues Group in December 2001 published a revised agreement on the arrangements for the attendance of interpreters (including BSL/English interpreters) in investigations and proceedings within the criminal justice system.

difficult for both the Deaf client and the interpreter, if different interpreters were engaged for different periods of a trial or tribunal.

- Criteria should be established about the use of interpreters as expert witnesses e.g. where interpreters were asked to review the translation of a police statement that had been video taped; the use of interpreters to assess the language skills of Deaf people involved in court proceedings, mental health tribunals etc.
- The necessity for all proceedings to be recorded on video.
- A number of interpreters and agency staff stated that interpreting in legal settings tended to be granted a privileged status. The Lord Chancellor's Directive that only qualified registered interpreters should be used in Courts from January 2002 was welcomed. However, concern was expressed about how this could be achieved and whether, in a situation of shortage, agencies would be required to give priority to legal assignments. Some drew attention to the fact that interpreters were working in other settings in which the consequences for the Deaf person could be equally, if not more serious. The most commonly quoted examples were of medical settings in which serious illnesses were being diagnosed, educational placement decisions for the children of Deaf parents, etc. Some thought that there needed to be a debate on these issues, on whether guidelines could be developed that were informed by the views of the Deaf community, the interpreting profession and the relevant statutory bodies. They also wished for debate on how the required standard of interpreting could be provided when there are insufficient interpreters available to meet demand. A number of agencies and interpreters felt more efficient use of interpreters could be achieved by improved liaison between court administrators and agencies and freelance interpreters. Numerous examples were provided of court proceedings deferred without notice. Some interpreters complained about having travelled a considerable distance to interpret at proceedings that lasted only a matter of minutes. If it had been known in advance that a case was not to be taken forward it would, in their view, have been possible to have such brief proceedings assigned to a trainee rather than a qualified interpreter. The concern of the interpreters was not simply with the failure of the court administrators to inform them that a case was to be deferred but that, as a consequence, they were unavailable to undertake other assignments.

Some staff suggested that the issues identified above in relation to legal interpreting also applied to other specialist areas of interpreting (e.g. medicine, education, etc) and needed to

be addressed by research and training courses (see Brennan and Brown (1997) for recommendations in relation to legal interpreting).

6.3.7.4 Statutory provision

Suggestions made by the interviewees about statutory provision included the direct employment of interpreters by statutory bodies (e.g. the courts, etc) and the use of remote interpreting services via video conferencing facilities.

The suggestion was made by one interpreter that the appointment of interpreters to statutory bodies could take the form of fixed term appointments, e.g. six months. It was argued that this would allow the person to maintain their skills outside the specialist area and increase the number of people with experience of interpreting in these different specialist domains. The responsibilities of such interpreters would be seen as twofold: to interpret for Deaf clients in the particular settings and to produce translations in BSL (on video) of the information made available by these services in English.

Most Deaf people interviewed did not see equality of access as being defined only in relation to the provision of an interpreter on a specific occasion. Agencies reported that many Deaf people complained of not understanding or having access to contextual or background information in statutory settings. Their frustrations at this situation were often expressed as criticism of the interpreter for failing to provide additional information or guidance.

A number of agency staff felt that if interpreters did provide such information it would place them in breach of the profession's code of ethics. Others felt that if they did not, they would be failing to facilitate meaningful communication between the parties involved. The availability of more information directly accessible by Deaf people in BSL would represent a very obvious example of how Deaf people could be enabled to participate more fully in proceedings in which they are involved.

6.3.7.5 Use of British Sign Language in the workplace

Agency staff (and a number of Deaf people and Deaf organisations) drew attention to the important contribution made by organisations that enabled their hearing staff to acquire a basic competence in British Sign Language. The Deaf people interviewed did not wish to communicate with hearing people in the workplace and elsewhere only through interpreters. A basic knowledge of British Sign Language would enable hearing staff to provide Deaf clients with basic information in BSL and to communicate with Deaf colleagues. A Deaf person at a public meeting explained that one to one communication in BSL needed to be seen as an important component of inclusion, along with a substantial increase in the provision of information in BSL (e.g. on television, video, DVD, the internet, etc.).

However, some agency staff did point out that there was a danger that such people would be pressed to sign in situations beyond their competence. An example was given of a person who had attended a BSL language course that had been funded by her employer (a local authority). She was subsequently asked to interpret for (as opposed to communicate with) Deaf people that wanted to use the services of the authority. In discussion agency staff suggested that it was essential for examination bodies to make clear to students taking their examinations, and to the general Deaf and hearing public, the status of different qualifications. It was suggested that this issue, and the related issue of when it is appropriate to offer to communicate ('interpret') for a Deaf person, needed to be directly addressed within Deaf Awareness courses.

6.3.8 How can agency provision be improved?

6.3.8.1 Provision by the RNID

It was suggested by a number of local and regional agencies that the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, the national deaf organisation engaged in providing interpreting services in England, Wales and Scotland, might concentrate its efforts in areas where there is currently no provision. At the time the study was being undertaken in 1999 the RNID was engaged in restructuring the management of its units. This resulted in the removal of a managerial tier with resources being reallocated to those directly engaged in service delivery viz. interpreters and service co-ordinators.

The RNID's representative explained that it wanted to increase the number of persons who benefit from their interpreting services and, at the same time, reduce the cost of providing such services. As reported above, the RNID subsidised the cost of providing interpreting services through its agencies. It has made clear that it cannot continue to do so indefinitely and will require units to break even financially.

The RNID representative stated that it was unacceptable that a national charity should have to subsidise the cost of providing interpreters for statutory bodies such as the courts, Social Services, the health service, etc. In 2000, it increased charges in an attempt to address the deficit incurred in the provision of these services. Under this policy each RNID agency, within a given period, was required to cover real costs, including a contribution to the costs incurred centrally for the administration and management of the service. The RNID's representative explained that it would be proportionately more expensive for it to establish agencies in areas where there is no provision, and was not in a position to consider doing so at that time.

6.3.8.2 Agencies and freelance staff

It was suggested by some agency staff that the most efficient way of meeting demand would be by increasing the number of interpreters directly employed by agencies, or by freelance interpreters placing specified periods of their time at the disposal of agencies. It was suggested that those freelance interpreters not in a position to work with agencies in this way would, as the number of interpreters increased, need to become specialists in particular domains. It was anticipated that agency interpreters would, in effect, undertake the vast majority of day-to-day community interpreting in the future.

6.3.8.3 Interpreters employed by service providers

Some agency staff felt that organisations that provided services to a significant number of Deaf people on a regular basis should directly employ their own interpreters or contract freelance interpreters to provide interpreting services. The most frequently quoted examples of institutions that had established their own interpreting services were Further Education colleges and universities. In these settings service provision usually followed the Deaf service user.

They argued that further consideration needed to be given to which services and institutions should be required to embed interpreting services. The responsibility for providing an interpreter service would, in such a model, be with the service provider or institution rather than the Deaf service user (or person/organisation acting on their behalf).

The University of Wolverhampton's agency was an example of good practice that might be emulated elsewhere. During term time it operated as an agency for the university. In the vacations it functioned as a general agency offering interpreting services to members of the general Deaf and hearing public.

An issue raised by staff of different agencies was how Deaf people could gain access in British Sign Language to services such as NHS Direct[14]. They argued that there was a need to expand the provision of interpreting services beyond essential services into services that are directly accessible to hearing people but not to Deaf people. It was suggested that NHS Direct (and similar services) could be made accessible to Deaf people by establishing interpreting units to work with the staff in such services. Deaf people would access the

[14] The Department of Health has produced a video in BSL "A Guide to the NHS". This can be obtained by telephoning 0870 1555 455 (voice) or 0845 606 4647 (text) and quoting reference number '22545 video'.

service through interpreters by video telephone enabling them to obtain the information they require in BSL[15].

6.3.8.4 Consultation with the Deaf community

Agency staff gave some examples of comparative good practice in the use of Deaf advisory groups. One agency described how Deaf people were centrally involved in the monitoring of the interpreting service they provided.

The need for such advisory groups was recognised by other agencies and evidence was provided by a number of agencies that they were engaged in reviewing or establishing such groups. In the majority of agencies, however, such involvement was often limited to annual general meetings or was non-existent.

Some agencies advocated the need for a specific advisory group to liase with the local Deaf community, separate from a committee that would advise on the promotion of the service within the hearing community (which would include both Deaf and hearing members). A number of agency staff emphasised the need to clearly define the different roles of such committees so that the confidential nature of interpreting services was not compromised. A number of agencies drew attention to the practical difficulty they had in recruiting individuals, both Deaf and hearing, to participate in the work of such groups.

In a few agencies it seemed that the committee appointed to consider complaints was also used for the wider role of advising the agency on its provision of service. The researchers suggest that each agency should have clearly separate structures for dealing with individual complaints about the provision of interpreting services, and obtaining advice on how the service can be improved. The latter should be based on evidence gathered through quality control mechanisms and consultations with Deaf and hearing people who are service users, or potential service users, of the agency.

Almost all agency representatives acknowledged that their agencies needed to improve the type and quality of information they made available to the members of the Deaf communities they served, and provide (or increase) opportunities for Deaf people to contribute directly to the development of the interpreting services their agency provided.

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[15] The Leicester Centre for Deaf People in conjunction with Leicestershire Health Authority, Motion Media and Sumlock 2000, have established a remote video BSL/English interpreting service for Deaf people and health care providers.

6.4 Summary

Interpreters wanted more and better training that was accessible and affordable (6.2.1).

Most freelance interpreters felt that they could spend more of their working time interpreting if they had to do less travelling and their work was better organised (6.2.2). Interpreters believed that modern technology could be used to improve the organisation and availability of interpreting services, but the availability of such technology to them varied considerably (6.2.3).

Interpreters commented adversely on the lack of a career structure within their profession (6.2.4).

Some interpreters thought pay was an issue in recruitment and retention, but others disagreed (6.2.5).

The shortage of interpreters and lack of understanding of their role were seen as creating difficulties for both Deaf and hearing service users (6.2.6).

Interpreters' suggestions for improving the provision of interpreting services included centralised co-ordination and the greater use of information technology to co-ordinate and allocate assignments more efficiently (6.2.7).

Most agencies considered the current level of fees inadequate in relation to the cost of providing interpreting services and funding interpreters' professional development (6.3.1).

There were several different types of agency which differed according to where they were based, who managed them and the kind of interpreter employed: each type was thought to have particular advantages and disadvantages (6.3.2).

The administration of agencies was seen as being very demanding and stressful and involving considerable responsibility (6.3.3).

Although the operational needs of agencies and training needs of interpreters sometimes conflicted, agency staff stressed the need for interpreters to maintain their professional development. A number of agencies expressed concern at the system of categorising interpreters in place in 1999, and of the CACDP proposal to base entry to their register on obtaining the NVQ qualification in Interpreting (BSL/English). However, a small number of agency staff drew attention to the important contribution CACDP had made in establishing a coherent structure for the profession of BSL/English interpreting in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (6.3.4).

There was limited use of advanced technology by agencies to process requests. Some agency staff thought that video links had great potential for booking interpreters in BSL and undertaking certain types of interpreting assignments, but its use was not widespread (6.3.6).

Attention was drawn to the particular demands of interpreting in legal settings (6.3.7).

It was recognised that there was need for improved consultation with Deaf people on the organisation and provision of interpreting services (6.3.8).

7. Summary and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This research project was commissioned to map current provision of British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreters and explore the experiences of interested parties.

The Deaf community in Britain view themselves as members of a particular linguistic and cultural group rather than a group defined in terms of their hearing impairment or loss. British Sign Language is the signed language of this community. Since the 1960s sign languages, including BSL, have gained general recognition as languages in their own right. The Deaf community in Britain seek Government recognition for BSL. Deaf people use the services of interpreters to communicate with hearing people who do not sign or have only limited competence in BSL and to access information presented in a spoken or written language. Hearing people use interpreters to communicate with Deaf people and access information presented in BSL. Deaf people and professionals working with Deaf people recognised that BSL/English interpreting should be established as a separate profession during the 1970s and a series of qualifications, training programmes and systems of registration for interpreters were established. These continue to be developed.

To examine the provision of BSL/English interpreters and the service provided, the research team contacted interpreting agencies, qualified and trainee interpreters, hearing users of interpreting services, and interested national organisations. Deaf people's experiences of, and views on, the provision of interpreting services were obtained in BSL through interviews with and public meetings attended by Deaf people. In addition an interview was conducted with a representative of the British Deaf Association (a national organisation run for and by Deaf people in the United Kingdom).

7.2 BSL/English Interpreters in Great Britain

It is difficult to present a complete picture of the current level of provision by BSL/English interpreters as there are no fully comprehensive lists of currently practising interpreters or interpreting agencies. The numbers of interpreters identified by the study in 1999 was 343 in England and Wales and 35 in Scotland. There was a marked regional variation in the availability of interpreters.

The majority of BSL/English interpreters are white, female, and under 50. Twenty-five per cent of interpreters had acquired BSL as a child. Ninety-five per cent had obtained the most advanced BSL national qualification (BSL Stage III examination) available at the time the

study was undertaken. Around one third of the interpreters identified were graduates. Fifteen per cent of qualified interpreters and 23 per cent of trainee interpreters had attended a postgraduate interpreter training course.

A majority of qualified interpreters had been practising for five years or longer and the majority of trainee interpreters had been practising as interpreters for less than three years.

On average, interpreters spent 20 hours a week interpreting, 10 hours travelling to and from assignments, and five hours preparing for assignments. The most common interpreting assignments were in employment, medical and social services. Although legal settings were a common area in which interpreters worked, 65 per cent of interpreters stated they were unwilling to undertake court assignments.

Interpreters showed high levels of commitment. There was a widespread desire to improve their performance through further training.

7.3 BSL/English Interpreting Agencies

The geographical distribution of BSL/English interpreting agencies is uneven. The agencies vary in size, employment and hiring arrangements, and, in some cases, in the type of assignments accepted. The majority of agencies provide other communication services (e.g. lip speaking) in addition to BSL/English interpreting.

The agencies that participated in this research were committed to providing a professional service. In almost all cases reference was made to a shortage of interpreters and that they were thus operating under pressure. Most agencies are required to break even financially. They would wish to offer service users a choice of interpreters, but more often than not are unable to do so. Few are able to offer an 'out of hours' or weekend service, and only a small number thought they were able to offer an adequate emergency service. Most agencies undertake only a limited amount of promotion of their services.

7.4 Demand for Interpreting Services

There are difficulties in measuring the demand for interpreting services. This is because of variations in the ways in which requests for services were recorded, and potential double counting if more than one agency operating in an area was unable to meet the request for an interpreter. There is no central collation of requests for services recorded by agencies and interpreters. Information is not available on the number of interpreting assignments undertaken by freelance interpreters (unless the assignments are obtained through an agency) or interpreters employed by organisations for the exclusive use of their clients, staff

or members. The researchers found that there is a general lack of information in BSL on BSL/English interpreting services.

Service users, both Deaf people and organisations, reported difficulties in obtaining the services of BSL/English interpreters. There was evidence that on occasions Deaf people, aware of the shortage of interpreters, did not consider it worthwhile to make their requirements known. Most interpreters and staff of interpreting agencies expressed the view that demand for interpreters greatly exceeds supply. Most agencies reported difficulties in meeting all the requests for interpreting services that they received and they thought that demand was increasing. Likewise, national organisations representing interpreters and Deaf people, or engaged in the regulation or provision of interpreting services are agreed that demand for interpreting services exceeds supply and that there is a shortage of BSL/English interpreters.

The extent to which the demand for services was being met appears to have varied regionally. There was general agreement by all parties that demand for interpreting services is likely to increase in the future, partly because of greater awareness amongst Deaf and hearing people of the use of interpreters, and partly due to the anticipated impact of the Disability Discrimination Act Part III.

7.5 The Experience of Using Interpreting Services

7.5.1 Deaf people

The researchers identified two distinct groups of Deaf users of interpreting services:

a) Deaf people employed in professional occupations who are frequent users of such services and
b) the majority of Deaf people, who are not employed in professional positions, who are occasional users.

Most bookings for an interpreter were not made by Deaf people themselves but where they did so they usually used text telephones or fax machines to do so.

Deaf people commented on the variation in standards that exist between interpreters and the researchers found that the terms ‘registered qualified’ and ‘registered trainee’ interpreter were not meaningful to many Deaf people. Few Deaf people reported being offered a choice of interpreter.

Deaf people reported using ‘unqualified’ interpreters, often family or friends, in private or confidential settings or because of the difficulty in obtaining the services of a qualified interpreter. Most found it impossible to obtain an interpreter at short notice and many of

those interviewed expressed frustration at being unable to obtain an interpreter at a time of their choosing. The majority of Deaf people interviewed defined a good interpreter as one who has good BSL skills, demonstrates confidentiality and has a good attitude towards and/or good rapport with Deaf people. They expressed concern that certain interpreters have not achieved the level of fluency in BSL required of an interpreter. Many Deaf people presumed that an interpreter's ability to interpret into English would reflect their competence in BSL. Concern was expressed at the limited availability of BSL courses and interpreter training programmes, the introduction of NVQ/SNVQ interpreter assessments, and the role of Communication Support Workers. Deaf people believed there was a need for Government recognition of BSL, increased provision of information in BSL, and increased training for, and use of, Deaf teachers of BSL, Deaf presenters, interpreters and bilingual professionals.

Most Deaf people interviewed did not know the fees charged by interpreters and agencies. A number of Deaf people at the public meetings reported that the awards made under the Disability Living Allowance did not reflect the fees charged by interpreters and agencies. A majority of Deaf people who contributed to the study wanted to see a government funded voucher system introduced that would entitle each Deaf person to a set number of interpreting hours with access to interpreting services for essential services separately funded.

Many of the Deaf people interviewed wanted to be consulted about, and directly involved in, the training of interpreters and the provision and organisation of interpreting services.

7.5.2 Hearing people

The organisations approached about their use of BSL/English interpreters were predominantly but not exclusively public sector organisations in the Midlands and London who had used an agency (or agencies) to arrange their interpreting provision.

These organisations primarily engaged interpreters for their customers, although some also used interpreters for employees, visitors and others. Most used interpreters for 'formal' settings such as interviews, meetings, conferences and for training.

Most of these organisations used interpreting agencies to obtain the services of BSL/English interpreters. A small number also reported booking freelance interpreters directly or that they used their own in-house interpreters.

Two-thirds of the organisations surveyed had experienced difficulties obtaining an interpreter, and for nearly a quarter of these, this was "most of the time".

Four fifths of the organisations that participated in the study met at least some of the costs involved in employing interpreters from their own funds, but more than a third reported receiving funding from other sources: employment services, legal services, and health and social services.

Most organisations reported that they were satisfied with the service provided by interpreters. They also seemed to be aware of the different registration categories used to distinguish between interpreters (viz. 'qualified' and 'trainee') at the time the study was undertaken. Many organisations commented that a greater availability of interpreters, especially at short notice would improve the service.

In two thirds of the organisations that responded to the questionnaire, one or more members of staff could communicate in BSL, half of whom were described as being able to do so "fluently". Only just over a third of respondents thought that the Disability Discrimination Act would have an influence on their policy and practice. Slightly more claimed that they had already established adequate provision to provide equality of access for Deaf people.

7.6 Interpreters and Agencies Views on Interpreting Service Provision

7.6.1 Interpreters

Most of the interpreters surveyed wanted more and better training, and training that was more accessible and affordable. For 53 per cent of those interpreters surveyed who reported limitations on their availability to do more interpreting, child care and family responsibilities were the main reasons. However, many freelance interpreters thought that they could spend more of their working time interpreting if their work was better co-ordinated and organised, and involved less travel. Some thought that modern technology could be used to improve the organisation and availability of interpreting services. At the time of the survey, their access to such technology varied.

Some interpreters thought pay was an issue in the recruitment and retention of interpreters, but others disagreed. Some were concerned about the lack of a career structure.

The shortage of interpreters and a lack of understanding of the role of the interpreter were seen as creating difficulties for both Deaf and hearing service users.

Among the suggestions made by interpreters for improving the provision of interpreting services were central co-ordination of the service and the far greater use of information technology.

7.6.2 Agencies

Interpreting agencies differ in size. They are also owned and operated by different providers, for example Deaf centres, interpreter associations, voluntary organisations, charities and private companies. The type of interpreter employed by these different agencies also varied (i.e. employees of the agency and/or freelance interpreters).

The administration of agencies, in particular the matching of requests for interpreting services to available interpreters was seen by some as demanding and stressful. Some agencies commented on the need for more administrative staff. In only a small number of agencies were administrative staff fluent in BSL. Few Deaf people are employed in the administration or provision of interpreting services. The research showed that agencies are rarely able to offer service users a choice of interpreter. Only a small number of agencies are able to offer an out-of-hours emergency service. Many commented on the problem of providing interpreters for assignments of short duration. Small commercial and voluntary organisations were identified as infrequent users of interpreting services. Some agency staff recommended that there should be a common standard for the provision of interpreting services by local authorities and public sector bodies across Britain.

A number of agency staff expressed their concern about the registration arrangements for, and categorisation of, interpreters that were in place at the time the study was undertaken.

Agency staff would wish to be able to manage the availability of freelance interpreters more effectively. The researchers found that there was limited use of information technology by agencies. However, a number of agency staff surveyed thought that video links had potential for booking and providing interpreting services.

Although the operational needs of agencies and the training needs of interpreters sometimes conflicted, agency staff stressed the importance of facilitating training and enabling interpreters' to undertake professional development. The cost of providing training for trainee interpreters, and professional development for qualified interpreters, was seen as a problem by many agency staff surveyed. Most agency staff interviewed thought that the level of fees they charged did not meet the full cost of both providing interpreting services and the training and professional development of interpreters.

Most agency staff surveyed recognised the need for agencies to improve the quality and frequency of their consultations with local Deaf communities on the standard and organisation of their interpreting services, and that their service provision should be responsive to Deaf people's priorities.

7.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research showed that there was a shortage of BSL/English interpreters in England, Scotland and Wales. The researchers believe that the knowledge of this shortage influenced Deaf people's use of the existing interpreting services: when, how often and under what circumstances an interpreter was used. The limited number of professional interpreters, the geographical variation in provision and the varying standards of interpreting skills held, as well as organisational problems in the provision of interpreting services, provides Deaf people with limited access to services and organisations.

7.9 Recommendations

Based on the responses from Deaf people, BSL/English interpreters and users of BSL/English interpreting services that contributed to this project, the researchers recommend that:

1. in light of the importance of recognition of BSL to the Deaf community, the Government further considers the Deaf community's request that their use of BSL be formally recognised;
2. the statistical information needed to develop a national policy on the provision of BSL/English interpreting services be obtained; that
    - a common system for recording requests for BSL/English interpreting and related services be introduced and used by agencies, freelance interpreters (in relation to assignments not obtained through interpreting agencies) and organisations directly employing interpreters, and that this information be collated annually;
    - a question be included in future census forms to identify the number of deaf people who use BSL in the United Kingdom;
3. the title British Sign Language/English interpreter be used to refer to members of the CACDP and SASLI registers of interpreters;
4. the number of trained BSL/English interpreters needs to be greatly increased; that
    - special efforts should be made to recruit persons to interpreting from groups presently under-represented in the profession i.e. Deaf people, disabled people, members of minority ethnic groups and men;
5. efforts be made to identify why people leave the profession of BSL/English interpreting;
6. the Government review the current methods of funding interpreting services; it is suggested that consideration be given to
    - the introduction of a voucher system which would entitle each Deaf person to an agreed number of interpreting hours to be used in settings of their choice;

- the introduction of national service level contracts for interpreting services in relation to public sector organisations including the emergency services;
- increasing the awards made to Deaf people under the Disability Living Allowance to reflect the cost of obtaining interpreting services[16];

7. a Government department be designated as being responsible for co-ordinating the development, provision and organisation of interpreting and related services in England, Scotland and Wales;
8. the Government review the provision and funding of interpreter training and assessment;
9. all interpreter training and assessments centres work to agreed national standards;
10. membership of the CACDP and SASLI registers of interpreters be based on a common standard so that membership of either register grants an interpreter the right to practice in any part of the United Kingdom;
11. an agreed national code of service standards be developed and a system of inspection agreed for employers of interpreters;
    - a new system of licensing BSL/English interpreting agencies in England, Wales and Scotland be introduced to facilitate the implementation of minimum common standards of service provision; it is suggested that licensed agencies be required, within an agreed period of time, to operate in accordance with the code of service standards, be subject to independent inspection and employ and/or book only registered interpreters;
    - minimum acceptable conditions of work for interpreters be agreed, and the criteria governing when two or more interpreters should undertake an assignment be clarified and publicised;
12. the Disability Rights Commission identify in what settings and circumstances Deaf people are entitled to access services through a BSL/English interpreter under the Disability Discrimination Act;
13. interpreting service providers should engage in regular consultations, conducted in BSL, with local Deaf communities on the standard and organisation of their services;
14. training courses leading to nationally recognised qualifications should be established for those administering interpreting services;

[16] DLA is currently a benefit that recognises the extra costs incurred by severely disabled people. Entitlement depends not on particular disabling conditions or any specific expense to which these might give rise. It is for recipients themselves to decide how best to use their DLA to meet their needs.

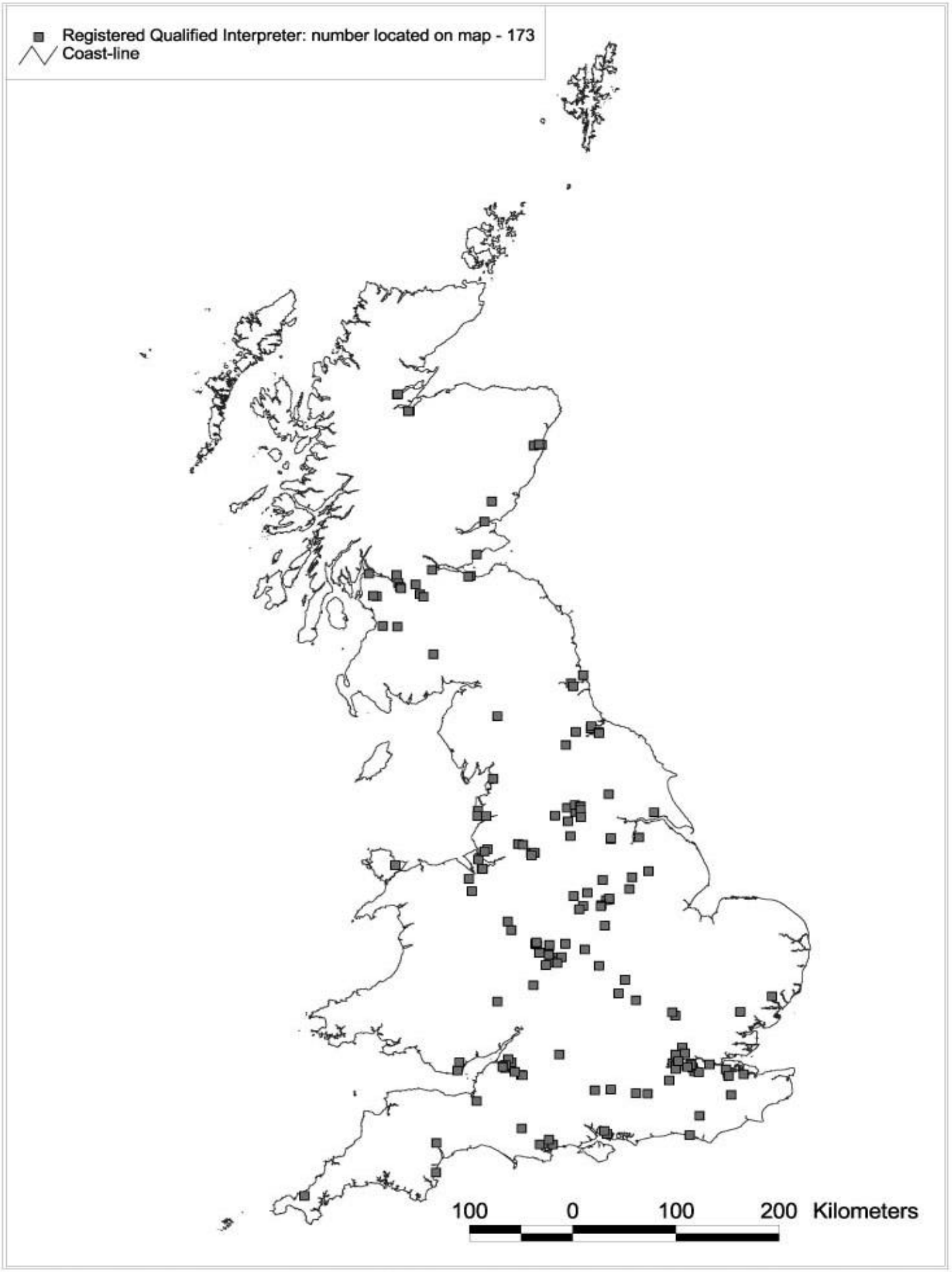
15. agencies and organisations engaged in the provision of interpreting services exchange information and promotional materials so that examples of good practice can be drawn upon;
    - it is suggested that a national conference of agencies and other employers of interpreters be held annually where issues of common interest and concern can be discussed and common methods of working be explored;
16. consideration be given to developing the current agency structure at two levels:
    - the number of agencies with a strong local base be expanded and work in conjunction with an agency or agencies able to provide a full national coverage (involving the use of video technology and a customised computerised data base);
    - the number of specialist agencies be expanded; it is suggested that they have a brief of providing interpreting services in areas requiring special skills/competence/ experience, such as legal interpreting, mental health work, child protection cases, etc.;
17. interpreting organisations and organisations engaged in the regulation and provision of interpreting services co-operate in a national campaign to make information widely available at local, regional and national level about:
    - the status and characteristics of BSL as a language;
    - the situations in which a BSL/English interpreter may and should be used;
    - how the services of interpreters can be obtained and what they are likely to cost;
    - what the interpreter can be expected to provide and how best to use her/his services;
    - the notice that needs to be given to secure the services of an interpreter in each area;
18. information on interpreting and related services be produced in British Sign Language, English, and minority languages used in Britain;
19. consideration be given to establishing a national videophone service, with a system of on-call videophone interpreters available 24 hours a day, with videophones in all interpreting agency offices and the buildings of public service providers such as hospitals, local government offices and libraries;
    - this would provide the foundation for a national emergency interpreting service, interpreting services in areas where there is no agency and few or no interpreters, and in areas where interpreting services are in the process of being established;

20. national telephone numbers (one for text telephones and one for voice), preferably free-phone, be set up for booking interpreting services;
    - this would facilitate access to services at short notice and in emergency situations;
21. a national internet based database be developed:
    - to provide an up-to-date record of interpreter availability;
    - to provide details of each interpreter's qualifications and experience; special skills, preferences and areas in which they are prepared to interpret; their geographical location; preferred hours of work; address, telephone numbers, and email address;
22. all organisations providing interpreting services should introduce systems which:
    - enable Deaf service users to obtain information and book interpreters directly in BSL e.g. through video telephone;
    - keep Deaf and hearing service users informed of the status of their requests on a regular basis if their efforts to obtain an interpreter for an assignment takes more than 48 hours; service users should be provided with written confirmation of bookings as soon as an interpreter has accepted the assignment;
23. efforts be made to manage the availability of interpreters more efficiently in order to maximise the time they are engaged in interpreting, reduce the 'unproductive' time currently experienced by many interpreters during their working day and thus enable interpreters to undertake more assignments; it is suggested that:
    - specially created databases would allow agencies to allocate assignments more efficiently;
    - the use of video telephone technology would allow interpreters to undertake an increased number of remote assignments and undertake more assignments of short duration;
    - freelance interpreters should consider making blocks of their time available to agencies so that agencies can seek assignments in the same geographical area and reduce travel time.

APPENDIX

The following maps were created from data contained in Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1 and 3.2.

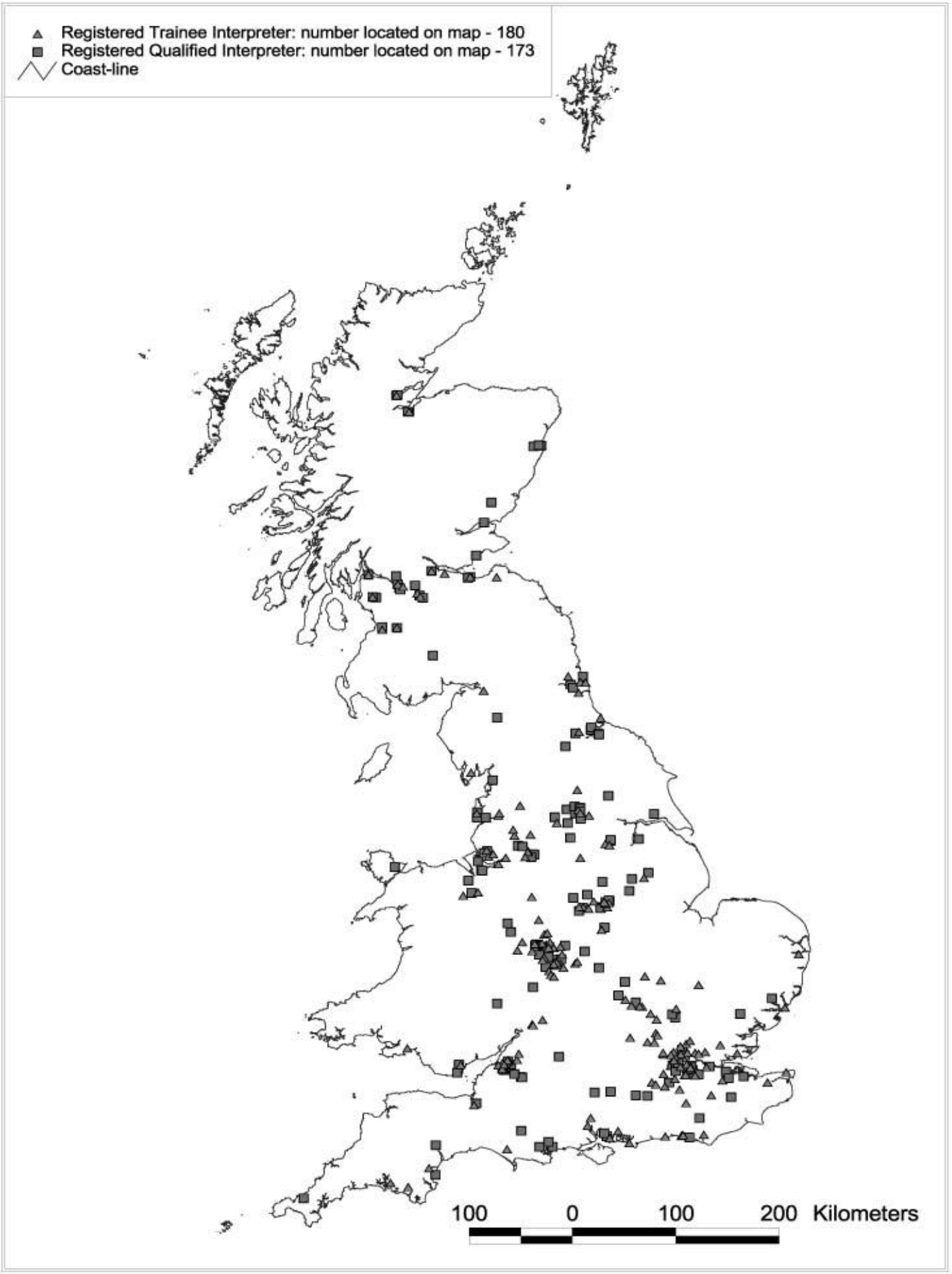
BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETERS: REGISTERED QUALIFIED INTERPRETERS IN 1999



Creation of this map is based on data provided with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is copyright of the Crown.

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETERS: REGISTERED TRAINEE INTERPRETERS IN 1999

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETERS IN 1999



Creation of this map is based on data provided with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is copyright of the Crow

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE/ENGLISH INTERPRETERS: AGENCIES IN 2001

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