

## *Children's, Adults and Families Adult Sensory Services*

### *British Sign Language Interpreters*

#### *Service Providers - Guide to your responsibilities*

##### *What is British Sign Language?*

British Sign Language (or BSL) is a language used by approximately 70,000 Deaf people in this country. The first preferred language of the Deaf community; it is accepted by both linguists and the British Government as a language in its own right (such as English, German or Polish, for example). Therefore written English may not always be understood by a BSL user, as it is a different language.

BSL is not simply miming or gesturing, or a system of spelling out English. It is a visual language, which like two-thirds of the world's languages, has no written form. BSL is just as rich in vocabulary, syntax and grammar as any spoken language.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, from October 2004 all service providers have had to make reasonable changes to make sure their services are accessible to everyone, including those people who use BSL.

##### *When should an interpreter be used*

A service provider who offers services to the general public has a legal duty:

- To provide a BSL/English interpreter if it would enable or make it easier for Deaf people to make use of its services, or
- To change a practice, policy or procedure which makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for Deaf people to make use of its services (with or without a BSL/English interpreter)

The service provider has an anticipatory duty, which means that the service provider has to think in advance about when a BSL/English Interpreter may



be required, and make the arrangements necessary to ensure that a BSL/English interpreter is effectively used.

The duty to provide a BSL/English interpreter as a reasonable adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act.

### ***Booking a BSL/English interpreter***

The following steps are likely to be part of the reasonable adjustment duty:

- Before booking, the D/deaf person should always be consulted on their communication needs prior to any meeting/appointment.
- Demand for BSL/English interpreters exceeds supply.
- Allow plenty of time for booking (at least four to six weeks in advance, if possible). Some interpreting agencies offer a short-notice service.
- Be flexible with arrangements around making appointments
- The cost of providing a BSL/English interpreter cannot be charged to the Deaf employee or client.

### ***Working with a BSL/English interpreter***

- When booking, give information about the nature, content and length of the assignment
- Send the BSL/English interpreter background information in advance
- When the interpreter arrives for the assignment introduce yourself and the Deaf person(s)
- At the place of the assignment, make sure that the BSL/English Interpreter and the Deaf person(s) can see each other clearly.
- During a lengthy assignment give the interpreter regular breaks
- Normally only one BSL/English interpreter is needed for short assignments. However, if the assignment is technical, complex or lasts a long time, consider booking two or more BSL/English interpreters.

### ***Planning Ahead/Things to Think About***

It may be useful:

- To draw up practical guidelines for booking and using BSL/English interpreters, and to distribute these to all staff, and
- To build communication support into budgets at the beginning of each financial year or of any relevant project.

### ***Further information***

For more information regarding BSL/English interpreters or any queries regarding Deaf Issues/Awareness, please contact the Sensory Team on 01253 476939 or email [tracey.stott@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:tracey.stott@blackpool.gov.uk) or [margaret.poxon@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:margaret.poxon@blackpool.gov.uk)