

YOU'RE HIRED!

A guide for employers when working
with deaf sign language users in Ireland



HAARIS SHEIKH, LORRAINE LEESON,
CAROLINE MCGROTTY, ANN HEELAN,
JOHN BOSCO CONAMA

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER	8
EDITORS' NOTE	9
PREFACE	11
1 IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE ACT 2017	13
2 DEAF COMMUNITIES & SIGN LANGUAGES	15
3 THE BUSINESS CASE	17
4 RECRUITMENT	18
5 IN THE WORKPLACE	27
6 WORKING WITH SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS	37
7 UNCRPD	45
8 EQUALITY LEGISLATION	47
9 FUNDING & FINANCIAL SUPPORT	49
10 RESOURCES & LINKS	50
11 EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES	51
12 ABOUT THE EDITORS	52





ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

IGI Publishing is the publishing arm of Interresource Group (Ireland) Limited which is an Irish company specialising in educational training, creative media & design and HR & business consulting.

Since 1999, the company has been involved in creating innovative education and training solutions co-funded by the European Commission. It has coordinated 12 international projects and has been a partner in 5 projects across 21 countries.

Interresource Group has managed projects in a variety of educational, economic and social domains including: tourism & hospitality, disability & social inclusion, healthcare risk management and language & cultural communication in international trade. The company has specialised and has led projects focussing on equality and access for deaf communities to employment; healthcare; education, and justice.

Some of the projects have been awarded accolades such as the European Language Label for the JUSTISIGNS, MEDISIGNS, SIGNALL and EUROSIGNS 2, projects. The MORPH project was selected as one of the top 32 best practice projects in Europe and FOSTER was reported in the Business and Disability initiative in Ireland. In 2010, SIGNALL II was featured in the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion campaign.

Interresource Group is the coordinator of the DESIGNS project.

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www.interresourcegroup.com

EDITORS' NOTE

We have adapted this guide for employers based in Ireland, who have employees or are considering engaging employees, who communicate in sign language and may require the assistance of a sign language interpreters in the workplace.

The aim of this guide is to offer practical guidance when engaging with sign language users and working with sign language interpreters. The guide draws on good HR and communication protocols and considers some of the complexities surrounding various work-based setting. This guide also considers some cultural and linguistic aspects arising when interacting with Deaf communities.

Some of these tips may seem pretty obvious - but we include them because these are issues that have been identified as stumbling blocks.

Our DESIGNS research has shed light on examples where sign language users' rights are compromised due to a lack of understanding of the Deaf community and the role that interpreters play; insufficient deaf and sign language awareness training leading to a breakdown of communication. The evidenced-based research underpinning this guide was carried out by a group of experts as part of the DESIGNS project.

It must be emphasised that this is a good-practice guide and should not be taken as a legal protocol, nor should it supersede or compromise your existing internal procedures. We encourage you to review your existing policies/procedures and integrate relevant features from this guide as appropriate. Our hope is that this guide serves as a tool that facilitates professional and/or institutional reflection regarding good practices when interacting with the Deaf community.

For updates on activities, please do follow us on twitter @designsproject.

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DESIGNS PROJECT

Deaf community employment

Nancy Rourke "Dandelions"



PREFACE

There is a direct link between early education, attainment of professional and/or educational qualifications, advancement into the labour market and social inclusion.

Deaf people in across the EU (as well as throughout the world), continue to face barriers in education, employment and when accessing services such as in healthcare, legal and social welfare domains. In a report on poverty in the Deaf community, Conama and Grehan (2001) stated that deaf people experience higher rates of poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. Factors such leaving school with no examinations, nor qualifications and inadequate provision and support for sign language interpreting, has resulted in deaf adults experiencing high levels of literacy issues compared to 25% of the population as a whole (Irish Deaf Society, 2007). To date, research and data on unemployment is under-reported and often inaccurate. “Deafness and hearing loss” is often used to report data. The experiences of deaf sign language users is under-researched. One of the common findings that has emerged is that a lack of deaf awareness amongst employers is perceived to be barrier to employment.

The DESIGNS project brings together 7 partners from 4 EU countries who are renowned experts in the fields of Education and Training, Employment, Sign Language Interpreting and Deaf Community Advocacy. The project undertakes to create training resources and exchange best practices across Europe to facilitate greater participation of Deaf sign language users in employment.

This is achieved by:

- ▶ training resources for deaf job-seeking graduates from higher education
- ▶ training for employers to increase their levels of deaf and sign language awareness to improve communication
- ▶ training to up-skill sign language interpreters in workplace domains.

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Number 40 of 2017

Irish Sign Language Act 2017

1 | IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE ACT 2017

- ▶ The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 was signed into Irish Law on 24th December 2017 by President Michael D. Higgins. It provides for the recognition of Irish Sign Language, its use in legal proceedings and the provision of interpretation into Irish Sign Language by public bodies and to provide for related matters.
- ▶ Under the Act, public bodies will be required to prepare and implement ISL action plans, and provide free ISL interpretation to people using or seeking access to statutory entitlements and services.
- ▶ The State recognises the right of Irish Sign Language users to use Irish Sign Language as their native language and the corresponding duty on all public bodies to provide Irish Sign Language users with free interpretation when availing of or seeking to access statutory entitlements and services. The community of persons using Irish Sign Language shall have the right to use, develop and preserve Irish Sign Language.
- ▶ The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection may, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas, provide funds to facilitate users of Irish Sign Language with regard to support in relation to access to social, educational and cultural events and services (including medical) and other activities by such users as specified in guidelines made by that Minister of the Government.
- ▶ A public body shall do all that is reasonable to ensure that interpretation into Irish Sign Language is provided for a person who is competent in that language and cannot hear or understand English or Irish when that person is seeking to avail of or access statutory entitlements or services provided by or under statute by that public body.
- ▶ A public body, in compliance with its obligations under this Act, shall not engage the services of a person providing Irish Sign Language interpretation unless the person's competence has been verified by having been accredited in accordance with an accreditation scheme funded by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.
- ▶ The provision of interpretation shall be at no cost to the person concerned.

...Deafhood is not, however, a 'static' medical condition like 'deafness'. Instead, it represents a process – the struggle by each Deaf child, Deaf family and Deaf adult to explain to themselves and each other as a community, and enacting those explanations rather than writing books about them. Deaf people engaged in a daily praxis, a continuing internal and external dialogue. This dialogue not only acknowledges that existence as a Deaf person is actually a process of becoming and maintaining 'Deaf', but also reflects different interpretations of Deafhood, of what being a Deaf person in a Deaf community might mean'

(Ladd, 2003:3)

2 | DEAF COMMUNITIES & SIGN LANGUAGES

Throughout this guide, we will be referring to deaf people who use a signed language as their first or preferred language as 'deaf sign language users'. We focus on deaf sign language users who identify themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority. Deaf sign language users have a shared culture based on their experiences of being deaf, using sign language, and navigating their way in a predominantly 'hearing' world of non-signing people. Deaf sign language users have a shared sense of pride of their language and culture, and also a sense of belonging with other deaf people as part of deaf communities, which include not only other deaf sign language users, but also their families and friends who sign, sign language interpreters and people who work with deaf communities.

This is all part of Deaf Culture.

- Deaf people see themselves as deaf, not as people with a disability.
- Deaf people look at their lives from a deaf perspective.

SIGN LANGUAGE

Sign languages, like spoken languages, differ from region to region and from country to country. So whilst English is spoken in Ireland, the UK and America or indeed any predominantly English speaking country, and can be widely understood by an English speaker; Deaf people from those countries use Irish Sign Language (ISL), British Sign Language (BSL) and American Sign Language (ASL) and will not automatically understand each other as they are different languages!

Sign languages have their own grammar, structure and syntax, which differentiates from spoken and written languages. The hands, eyes, shoulders and movements of the head, and some particular facial expressions articulate sign language as well as the characteristics of sign language such as the placement, movement, hand shape and orientation.

In Ireland, it is estimated that there are approximately 5,500 deaf people who use Irish Sign Language as their preferred first language and approximately 40,000 additional users of Irish Sign Language.



Diversity and inclusion in the workplace promotes equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of their gender, religion, ethnicity, social background or disability etc. There has been lots of research stating why hiring a diverse workforce is good for business. But what is the business case for hiring sign language users in your organisation?

- ▶ Deaf people are **flexible**. They spend every day adapting the way they interact with the world as best as they can which demonstrates their sense of **determination**.
- ▶ Hiring a deaf person can lead to **better communication within your organisation**. Staff working with a deaf person will learn alternative ways of communicating, for example, they may learn to hone their turn-taking skills, and improve their communication skills!
- ▶ Our research has found that deaf people are **loyal to the company**. They are more likely to continue working for an organisation making them **reliable**.
- ▶ A **more organised and structured workplace**. This means that meetings will be planned in advance to allow for adjustments to be made for the deaf employee such as arranging an interpreter **enhances focus and purpose**. It also fosters **better time management**.
- ▶ Deaf people face more challenges than those who are not deaf and therefore have to employ **creative thinking** and **problem solving** skills to find solutions.
- ▶ A potential way to **attract new customers** to your business. A deaf employee may be able to propose **new ideas** to make your business **accessible** to the Deaf community therefore **increasing company revenue**.
- ▶ Deaf employees can be an excellent addition to your company to promote and **showcase a diverse workforce** and will have a positive impact on not just the culture of the organisation, but also with the public.
- ▶ There are many qualified deaf people who can do the job an employer wants and may only require minor adjustments! Assume there's a way around any issue with the right supports.

4 | RECRUITMENT

Every employer has their own recruitment and selection processes and in-house procedures. Recruitment processes are competitive and there is no guarantee of an interview or a position for any applicant. However, employers have a legal obligation to ensure applicants with disabilities, including deaf people, can have access to employment and this includes all aspects of the recruitment process.

Before you start advertising a position within your company, there are several things you may need to think about before you make the position live to ensure as many barriers as possible are removed during the recruitment process.

THE JOB SPECIFICATION

Having a clearly defined job specification is the critical first step in ensuring your recruitment and selection policies are inclusive and fair to people who are deaf.

Job descriptions should describe the job and not the individual who will fill the job!

Using a competency based job specification, will help to clearly outline the core requirements, functions and skills needed. It can also then be used as a framework within which the interviewer can make a more informed judgment about the candidate's suitability to the job.

The more defined the job specification is, the easier it should be to measure the abilities of the deaf person, regardless of their deafness.

“EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION SKILLS!”

This phrase ‘excellent communication skills’ appears on almost every single job specification. What does it actually mean? Communication encompasses a wide range of skills; for example, telephone manner, report writing, presentations, listening skills, emails and so on. Notions of excellent communication skills are typically based on speech and hearing, but deaf sign language users can be excellent communicators in written and signed languages, and are also adept at communicating effectively through interpreters.

- ▶ Think about actual day-to-day functions of the job.
- ▶ What are the core and essential functions and cannot be changed?
- ▶ What aspects of the job can be modified or distributed?
- ▶ Is there a way to approach aspects of the job differently?

Very often, employers assume that ‘excellent communication skills’ is self-explanatory but if 80% of the role is providing customer support over the phone, what happens when a deaf applicant applies for that position? If you specify that telephone work is a core requirement in the job description, deaf applicants will be aware that this is an essential part of the role and they can determine whether they have the right skills set for the job, and how they will manage the telephone requirement.

APPLICATION STAGE

If a deaf person wishes to apply for a position within your organisation, are your application processes user-friendly and accessible?

Many graduate programmes with multi-national employers have dedicated websites where there are lots of videos of what the programme entails and stories of previous graduates sharing their experience. Are these accessible to a person who is deaf? You may want to consider adding subtitles to these videos or if possible, sign language interpretation, to ensure a deaf person has the same access and exposure to the material as anyone else.

Is there an alternative method of communication within the organisation if a deaf candidate wishes to enquire more about the job? Providing an email address as well as a phone number will be a good start.

DISCLOSURE & REQUESTING A SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER

We know from our research that many deaf people do not disclose that they require an interpreter ahead of an interview for fear of being discriminated against. For this reason, many deaf applicants choose to disclose only AFTER they are invited to an interview.

- ▶ Think about how you can highlight and encourage disclosure from applicants at the application stage.
- ▶ What statement or evidence does your company have that showcases it is willing to accept applications from a diverse pool of candidates, including deaf people?

SHORTLISTING

When you are shortlisting applications, be aware that people who are deaf and people with disabilities in general, may not have the same level of extra-curricular activities on their CV or paid-work experience as their peers. This stems from the fact that most extra-curricular activities in university are not accessible to the Deaf



community, e.g. an interpreter is usually only provided for lectures and tutorials. At the same time, you may find that some deaf candidates have engaged in Deaf community organisations, and bring the skills they have developed there to bear on their work.

Some deaf candidates may not have achieved the minimum educational entry criteria or experience for the job. This is not to say that they do not have the skills to do the job, as many deaf people have acquired excellent negotiations, advocacy and organisational skills simply because these competencies are part of their everyday lives.

INTERVIEWING

As mentioned earlier, deaf people are more likely to disclose they require an interpreter once they have received notification that they have been invited to an interview, so it's important that the employer is very clear about all aspects of the recruitment process.

The majority of employers will have a standard face-to-face interview, however additional layers of recruitment processes are becoming the norm, which means that people who are deaf may require different types of accommodations at each stage.

- ▶ Be clear about every aspect of the recruitment process
- ▶ Include a statement in the invitation to interview about accessibility requirements for each step of the recruitment process

Have a look below for some practical tips and measures you can take to ensure all aspects of your recruitment processes are deaf-friendly.

TELEPHONE SCREENING

For some deaf candidates, telephone screening may not be suitable. There are alternative options, for example:

- ▶ You can use a text-relay service;
- ▶ Conduct a Skype interview through instant messaging where questions and answers are typed;
- ▶ Meet the candidate with an interpreter (face-to-face or through a video remote interpreting or video relay service);

- Text and video relay services mean that a call can be made to the deaf person via telephone through a special call centre that either calls the deaf sign language user through with specific text-telephone or video conference technology.

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING & TECHNICAL TESTS

Psychometric testing presents people with disabilities with all sorts of barriers and the same is true for deaf people. Two significant barriers in this form of testing are largely to do with language and time restriction. Many deaf people will have received extra time at school or university to complete examinations, giving them extra time to process information and compose their answers. This is because deaf people's first language is often not a spoken or written language therefore think in sign language.

In order for them to process information by reading, they mentally translate the written or spoken language information into sign language. They then have to prepare to construct or select their answer carefully ensuring that they do not make a mistake that could hinder their chances for progressing to the next stage. The same barriers can also apply to technical and written tests which often included in assessment protocols.

- Allow extra time for the psychometric test to be completed. Time and a half is generally a good rule to go by.
- Will a sign language interpreter be required for the testing if it's being carried out in an assessment centre?
- Review the various elements within the testing. If there is audio or video files contained in the testing, are these accessible in an alternative format?
- Consider conducting an alternative recruitment process with the deaf graduate instead.

GROUP ASSESSMENT

The primary objective of group assessments is observation of a candidate's soft skills such as interpersonal skills, leadership, negotiation and teamwork. Usually a deaf applicant will require an interpreter for such assessments, particularly if they are the only deaf candidate in the group. An interviewer in a group assessment must be aware that a sign language interpreter has to wait a few seconds after

someone has spoken/signed before they can begin to interpret. This leads to an inevitable delay (which is normal when interpreting simultaneously), but which means that a deaf candidate must be given time to see the interpretation of the questions that are asked, and then given time to respond.

- ▶ A group assessment is often fast-paced with numerous people speaking over one another which can make it difficult for a Deaf person to interject and contribute due to the lag time of interpreting.
- ▶ Before you start, set some ground-rules around turn-taking to ensure that the deaf person is not left out. This exercise also gives you an insight into how candidates respond to instruction, how collaborative they are, and how they are inclined to operate in a team!
- ▶ Consider an alternative recruitment process for the deaf candidate.

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

For a standard face-to-face interview the process is simpler than group assessment because there is a limited number of people present — i.e. the deaf candidate, the interpreter, and the interviewers.

- ▶ If the interviewer has no prior experience working in sign language interpreted interviews, ask the deaf candidate or interpreter to provide a brief around interpreting and inter-cultural awareness.
- ▶ They may suggest changes to the layout of the room to ensure that all parties are visible to one another. Usually it's best practice for the interpreter to sit beside the interviewers.
- ▶ Provide the interpreter with the names and roles of all of the people in attendance and any relevant documentation which will help the interpreter to prepare for the interview. This also helps the interpreter to appropriately reference speakers when they work.
- ▶ Brief the interpreter about any special terminology or procedure/s that will arise during the interview.
- ▶ Deaf candidates and interpreters to be allocated time to prepare before the interview.
- ▶ During an interpreted interview it may be necessary for the interpreter

to intervene to ask for clarification. This does not necessarily mean that the deaf applicant needs clarification but rather that it is the interpreter who needs it. For example, if the interviewer makes reference to 'CRM', the interpreter may ask you to explain what 'CRM' (Customer Relationship Management) means as they themselves might not know what the abbreviation stands for. Therefore, it is important to find out whether it is the interpreter or the deaf person who is clarifying as this could influence your evaluation of the deaf candidate.

One of our interpreter interviewees noted the importance of preparation so that they can work effectively with deaf people attending job interviews to ensure that they are fairly assessed:

"If I was interpreting a job interview, I would want to have a meeting with the job applicant first... five minutes beforehand: a skyped conversation, a cup of coffee - something, just to get a feel for why they're interested in that job, to make sure that I can reflect them properly. I think going into a job interview cold is unadvisable, I would say. If you think about the interview situation, it's intensely unpredictable: you know there's going to be a panel, you know there's going to be questions that have to be answered, and there might be an activity; but in advance, neither the candidate nor the interpreter will know what the questions are going to be. So I think it's important that the interpreter understands the deaf person's world view, if you like, and makes an attempt to understand that before going into an interview situation.

I would always read up as much as I could about the particular post or the company - most companies have websites... I would want to feel that I knew what the deaf person felt they could bring to that job; why they wanted the job. I would want some of the technical language that might want to come up. I would want to read up about the company and feel properly prepared; because it's a very important moment for anyone, going into a job interview. I think if they're comfortable that they have done everything that they can to prepare their interpretation, that they do a good job on the day - I mean we're all fallible - but they feel that they have worked to the best of their ability to secure the communication flow."

Interpreter's perspective from Germany

"I wanted to convince them of my ideas, therefore I chose an interpreter I knew very well (...). It was just so nice then because I could sign freely without restrictions and I absolutely knew the interpreter was able to put exactly my ideas into words because we work very well together. The person I wanted to influence could be convinced of my ideas - this interpreter was very valuable in this moment"

Deaf applicant from Germany





If you hire a deaf person, you may need to put in place some adjustments (accommodations) in order for them to carry out their job as effectively as everyone else. In most countries, reasonable accommodations are required by law in order to prevent discrimination and to ensure equality.

ACCOMMODATING A DEAF EMPLOYEE

When it comes accommodating a deaf employee, it is important to understand the impact of their deafness versus the job of which they have been recruited for. Many Deaf people who use sign language will have varying degrees of deafness/hearing loss and some may be able to lip read or use assistive listening devices such as a hearing aid or a cochlear implant.

A key part in identifying the appropriate support/s required is to conduct a collaborative assessment of needs with the deaf employee before they start in their new job.

Take into account all aspects of the job and work environment. For example;

- ▶ Core tasks of the job (e.g. emails, research, report writing, etc.)
- ▶ Style of work (e.g. team, individual)
- ▶ Other activities such as training, meetings etc.
- ▶ Physical work space (e.g. open plan, own office etc.)
- ▶ Health and safety (e.g. fire evacuation plan, accreditation etc.)

As an employer, by doing this you will be able to identify areas where there is a need for a particular type of support. The most common concern, employers have, is around communication between colleagues which include a deaf person as it may not always be possible to provide a sign language interpreter every day. Have a discussion with the deaf employee about this; ask them what they think would be the best method of communication for these daily interactions. This can involve thinking about communication in a different way, for example, using written instructions via e-mail in place of verbal instructions. Employers should also think of the different communication situations that the employee will be in.

- ▶ Remember, deaf people have lived their lives communicating with people who do not sign every day, so they will know what works best for them!

- ▶ Also, remember that communication doesn't just happen in formal work-related communication. Social networking time at work is also an important part of work culture. So think about how you can ensure that any deaf employees are included in social gatherings (either with or without an interpreter).

Once you have determined how you and the deaf employee will communicate best, and ascertained when an interpreter will be needed, think about other supports you could put in place.

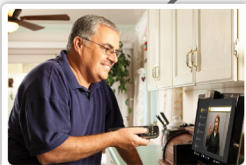
The most common types of supports are:

- ▶ Provide an interpreter for induction training and any training or presentations
- ▶ Book an interpreter for team meetings or important meetings with the manager
- ▶ Review the physical layout of the office — e.g. consider how desks are arranged
- ▶ Use email or text messaging for communication
- ▶ Allow extra time for reading or writing documents
- ▶ Explore the range of assistive listening devices available
- ▶ Deliver deaf awareness training to staff members
- ▶ Have a personal emergency evacuation plan
- ▶ Install visual alarms
- ▶ Ensure that all media material is accessible for a deaf employee

New technology is emerging all the time such as remote-video interpreting, text relay services, and apps that can translate from text to speech. The deaf employee will more than likely know of any additional services that are available.

If you are unsure, have a chat with your Deaf organisations who may have more knowledge in this area and provide assistance in identifying grants for assistive technology.

1. Deaf user signs to the interpreter



2. Interpreter speaks to the hearing user



3. Hearing user speaks to interpreter



4. Interpreter signs to deaf user

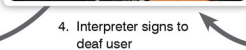


Photo used courtesy Sorenson Communications



**IRISH REMOTE
INTERPRETING
SERVICE**

Service Provision Through Irish Sign Language

visit: www.slis.ie to find out how to use a video relay service

ACCOMMODATING DEAF STAFF AT MEETINGS

- ▶ Deaf people draw on a range of ways of communicating at large meetings or conferences: some deaf people require an interpreter and others use technologies like a loop system that amplifies sound from within the 'loop', and delivers it to their hearing aid; or a SpeedText system, which transcribes speech to text.
- ▶ At the beginning of a meeting, ask the deaf person where they would like to sit, as they will need to be able to see everyone at the meeting, including the interpreter, if one is provided. Also consider the layout of the room, lighting and background noise levels. If the interpreting situation requires darkening the room to view slides, video tapes, or films, auxiliary lighting is necessary so that the deaf person can see the interpreter. If a small lamp or spotlight cannot be obtained, check to see if room lights can be dimmed but still provide enough light so that the interpreter can be seen.
- ▶ Following an agenda will provide context to a conversation for the deaf employee.
- ▶ If you want to interject at a meeting, raise your hand to avoid overlapping speech. This will give the deaf person a visual signal as to who is speaking at a given time. Also, interpreters can only interpret for one speaker or signer at a time so overlapping speech/sign means interpreters have to choose who to follow.
- ▶ Don't talk with your back to the audience, for example, if writing on a board, flip chart etc.
- ▶ The deaf employee may find it helpful to sit beside the note-taker at meetings or have a colleague share notes. This, along with a post-meeting debriefing will ensure that they get the most out of every meeting.
- ▶ Allow the interpreter to position themselves in a well-lit area where they are comfortable. They are working professionals and they will consult with the employee on the best positioning for effective communication. The interpreter should not be requested to stand in front of a window or other lighting source as that may cause distracting shadows and eye fatigue.
- ▶ When you are not sure - ask your employee about any specific needs in advance of the meeting or event.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

In the workplace, the actual work is only one aspect of an employee's career. There is an expectation that all employees integrate and participate in the activities of the wider workplace and take part in social aspects of office life. One of main things that has been reported through our research is the lack of social interaction with other colleagues. This includes limited or lack of access to:

- ▶ small talk during the working day
- ▶ casual networking
- ▶ engagement at lunch and break times
- ▶ chatting at beginning or end of meetings
- ▶ team building activities
- ▶ corporate days or events on site

These aspects of work life often occur when there is no interpreter present.

"A work assistant often is used to just make work tasks understandable to the Deaf person: to transfer information, getting things done - but what is left behind is the collegial sharing of experiences, the interpersonal exchange and the maintenance of a relationship. There are no interpreter hours included in the work assistance budget for occasion like a company Christmas party or a company trip and if the employer does not take action to cover the costs there will be someone excluded and well, that of course leads to isolation taking place"

Work counsellor's perspective

"At lunch colleagues meet up in the canteen, there is an interpersonal exchange happening but the deaf colleagues often remain left alone on their own."

Interpreter's perspective

To make your workplace more inclusive and accessible for deaf employee/s, try some of the following;

- ▶ Encourage team members to include the deaf person by using the notepad feature on a tablet or phone to communicate or even use old fashioned technology - a pen and paper!
- ▶ Group conversations can be limit a deaf person's involvement in a conversation. Adopt good turn-taking practices and maintain eye contact. Face the deaf person. These tips will make it easier for the deaf employee to lip-read if this is something that they wish to do.
- ▶ Do not cut the conversation short by saying something like "Don't worry, it doesn't matter" or "I will tell you later". Such comments are demotivating, and set the scene for effectively excluding a deaf colleague.
- ▶ Take time to explain. A deaf person may not understand you because your message might be unclear and not because they are deaf.
- ▶ Consider running a sign language course within your company. This will send a positive message to the deaf employee who will feel they are being included.
- ▶ Have a deaf awareness session with staff in your company and include the deaf person to participate in the discussion which could include practical tips around how to approach deaf people, busting myths around what it is like to be a deaf person, and exploring aspects of Deaf culture (could be a lunchtime session).
- ▶ Your deaf employee will be a valuable source of information about communicating with a deaf person. When you are unsure, they will be the best starting point.

PROGRESSION & PROMOTION

Deaf employees should have the same access to opportunities for progression and promotion as any other employee. It's important to ensure they have access to appropriate training opportunities and continuous professional development and be supported while doing so.

A good time to do this is during a performance appraisal, with an interpreter present. Make sure that you include time to support the deaf employee to identify

ways of enhancing their skills and performance. Outline why this is important such as increasing their decision-making capacity and taking responsibility for their work which will benefit them in the future for any promotion opportunities.

As part of any employee development or progression plan, it is vital that adequate interpreting support is offered so that a deaf employee is able to upskill through interpreter-mediated training. Also, if there are events outside of normal business hours, for example a conference, ensure that you communicate access and interpreter needs to the conference organisers.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Each company will have their own conflict resolution or disciplinary procedures for dealing with misconduct or poor performance. In dealing with deaf employees in this situation, employers still have an obligation to provide reasonable accommodations at each stage of any disciplinary process.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION

The objective of a formal discussion is to correct the issue at hand in an honest and constructive way.

- ▶ Remember - if you are dealing with a serious disciplinary matter, for example gross misconduct or a dismissal, ensure that you have a interpreter so that you can take accurate notes and that there is no risk of miscommunication. This is necessary for both the employer and the deaf employee.
- ▶ Addressing the issue of misconduct or poor performance can be quite an uncomfortable and emotive situation for any employee. Do not mistake what may appear to be over-exaggerated facial expressions or signs that are large as a sign of aggression. The deaf employee may simply be upset.
- ▶ Ensure that the employee fully understands the subsequent actions arising from this informal discussion.
- ▶ Inform them of the consequences should no improvement be made and the timeframe within which you expect to see changes.
- ▶ Note the changing dynamics of communication and how adjustments may be necessary in interpreter-mediated settings. If, for example, the employee has a representative such as a union official, they might not be familiar working in settings where there is an interpreter present.

"I have the feeling that there is a lack of courage [among Deaf employees] to come forward for a team leading position. To say "Hey there, I feel able to do this and I have the qualities for the job" is something many deaf persons do not dare to do. Or maybe it is because of the hearing management board who wish to see hearing persons in team lead positions - I cannot say it for sure. These two reasons come to my mind but I must say that I rather think it is due to the lack of self-esteem among deaf employees actually. (...) I am wondering about the situation but as well I myself lack the necessary self-esteem.

I do not feel at par with my hearing colleagues. Already in general work routines now I start doubting myself, my behaviour and if what I just told my colleagues was understood correctly. Honestly, I must say that I do not yet feel safe enough [to take a higher post] but maybe three years of working in the field might not yet be enough experience anyway."

Deaf employee's perspective





- While it is not essential, you might consider having essential policies and procedures translated into Irish Sign Language and available on your intranet. In this way a deaf employee is fully aware of the rules and regulations that govern their terms and can refer to the policies any time they wish.



6 | WORKING WITH SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Sign language interpreting is a highly complex skill. Interpreters are expected to have a formal qualification and membership of a professional interpreting association or registration body.

Their job is to interpret and facilitate successful communication for both the deaf person and the hearing person.

IMPORTANCE OF USING QUALIFIED INTERPRETERS

- ▶ Always use a qualified, professionally trained interpreter, ideally one with interpreting experience in employment settings and has knowledge about your organisation.
- ▶ An interpreter who is not qualified will not have the required level of competence, experience, linguistic capacity and context-specific skill and can severely compromise the communication process. Furthermore, if not qualified (or, where required, registered), they are not bound by a professional code of ethics, which could compromise confidentiality.
- ▶ Knowledge of a sign language alone does not qualify a person to interpret. Do not assume that someone who signs among family, friends or work colleagues could, or indeed should interpret.

INTERPRETER PREFERENCE

- ▶ It is not uncommon for a deaf person to have preferences around which interpreter/s they would prefer to work with. The deaf person may have worked with these interpreters in previous settings, such as at university or in other employment settings.
- ▶ What this means is that the deaf person is confident that the interpreter will understand them, and that their preferred interpreter will represent them effectively. You may also have a preference to work with a particular interpreter or agency as your organisation may be bound by procurement protocols, and, a preferred interpreter may not necessarily be available. Ensure that the deaf employee understands the reasons why their choice may not be possible.
- ▶ The Deaf community is a small community. In rural areas it is not uncommon for the interpreter to have prior knowledge of the deaf person: they may have worked with them, or have socialised together. In complex settings such as a disciplinary interview, the nature of any

pre-existing relationship should be declared in advance. However, this relationship itself should not be automatically seen as a potential conflict of interest.

CONFIDENTIALITY & CODE OF ETHICS

- ▶ Interpreters abide by a code of professional conduct, ethics and professional practice. They are not there to express their personal opinions, to intervene or 'help out' in a situation.
- ▶ The interpreter is not an advocate and you should not ask the interpreter to explain anything to a deaf employee as their role is to interpret the interaction. If you believe that the employee has misunderstood, seek clarification yourself by checking with the employee to clarify anything.

BOOKING INTERPRETERS

- ▶ Interpreters are in limited supply. Ensure that you book an interpreter as soon as you know that you need one. Preferred interpreters are often in high demand, especially during peak times (e.g. during college term time and are often pre-booked, sometimes up to a year in advance).
- ▶ Where you believe at a meeting that a follow-up meeting will require an interpreter, do not assume that the same interpreter will be available again as they may have to be booked through an interpreting agency. Booking through a reputable agency assures you that the interpreter has been selected based on their qualifications, experience and that the necessary checks have been performed, for example, Garda vetting.
- ▶ When booking an interpreter you will be required to provide them with as much information as possible; the time, date, location, expected duration of the event, the type of assignment (i.e. an interview or a meeting), how many deaf people will be there, sometimes the name of the deaf person(s) and the contact person for the assignment.
- ▶ Wherever possible, try and allow time for the interpreter and deaf applicant or employee to meet with one another in advance of an interview or meeting to prepare. This allows the interpreter to gauge the linguistics and communication skills of the deaf client.
- ▶ Do ensure that you share any documentation relevant to the meeting

with the interpreter or the booking agency in advance so that they can prepare effectively. They will treat all documentation as confidential and can be asked to return the paperwork to you on completion of their assignment and delete/destroy any digital records. The more they have from you, the more prepared they will be, and the smoother the interaction will be.

- ▶ It's important to ensure that you calculate the time needed for an interpreted interview or meeting appropriately, as an interpreter may have another booking that they need to attend to. If you think an interview or meeting may run over time you may wish to advise the agency of this and book them for extra time accordingly.
- ▶ If the deaf applicant progresses to the next stage of a recruitment process, you may need to re-book the interpreter on more than one occasion. Let the booking agency and/or the interpreter know of your requirements so that you can confirm availability.

HOW DO I BOOK AN INTERPRETER?

Interpreters' rates, terms and conditions vary from country to country, but are typically charged at a 2-hour minimum rate, and sometimes a half day or full day rate. There may also be additional costs such as administration fees or travel costs if there are no local interpreters available.

Interpreter can be booked directly or through interpreting agencies, and the systems and funding options also vary across Europe.

HOW MANY INTERPRETERS WILL I NEED?

- ▶ Sometimes, more than one interpreter will be required. This depends on the type and nature of the assignment. Typically for interviews, only one interpreter is needed as they are usually 30-40 minutes in duration.
- ▶ For any meetings or training sessions over one hour, you will need two interpreters. In challenging and complex interactions, conferences or difficult conflict scenarios you will need a team of interpreters (which could be three or more interpreters).
- ▶ Members of the interpreting team will take turns interpreting. While one is interpreting the other will be assisting, monitoring or clarifying. They may also be relaying information to a deaf Interpreter (DI).

- Interpreting is cognitively demanding and to ensure quality and to maintain accuracy, interpreters require regular breaks. The frequency of breaks should be discussed with the interpreter and will vary based on the complexity of the interaction/interview or meeting.

PREPARATION

Ensure that the interpreter is given as much information as possible about the assignment in advance. Any preparatory information will aid the interpreting process. This may include:

- ▷ Information about your organisation or company
- ▷ Job description and the candidate's CV
- ▷ Interview questions or assessment materials
- ▷ Training materials such as PowerPoint slides or documentation
- ▷ Minutes or background notes for the meeting

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS DURING AN INTERPRETED INTERACTION?

- An interpreter has to reformulate your question in another language, which has a different grammatical structure. This means they need to know the purpose of your comment so they can make sure your message is interpreted appropriately in ISL.
- There will be a slight lag time (a few seconds) which is normal when interpreting simultaneously.
- Interpreters might use consecutive interpreting methods – that is, they wait for you to complete a question/comment and then they begin to interpret. This approach can sometimes be more accurate than simultaneous interpreting for interpreting complex information but requires more time.
- If a deaf person is nodding, do not assume that they are agreeing with a statement put to them or confirming anything. Nodding can simply mean that the deaf person is following what the interpreter is signing to them but not necessarily that they are agreeing to the content of the message.
- Allow the deaf person to respond to questions put to them. Remember there will be a slight delay between you asking the question and the interpreted question being put to the deaf person. Thus, the delay in responding should not be taken to be a lengthy response time.

- ▶ As in any conversation, if you are not understood (by the interpreter or the deaf person), you may be asked to repeat or clarify what you have said.
- ▶ When an interpreter is present, face the deaf person directly and address them. The deaf person will look towards the interpreter when your conversation is being signed. When the deaf person responds, they may look towards you.
- ▶ To comply with GDPR, ensure the interpreter has consented to being filmed or recorded in anyway at meetings or events. Inform the agency or the interpreter if the meeting/event will be video recorded and for what purpose and how the footage will be used.

QUICK GO-TO TIPS FOR WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS IN ANY SETTING

- ▶ Ensure the interpreter has arrived and ask them if they have any other questions about the assignment.
- ▶ Offer to show the interpreter the meeting room layout, as they may suggest using a different layout which will ensure that the deaf person and the interpreter are in an optimal viewing position during the interview, training session or meeting.
- ▶ Look at, and speak directly to the deaf person at all times, both when meeting and greeting the deaf person and during the actual interaction. This may sound very basic but it can be incredibly hard to do, especially when the interpreter's voice is coming from beside you or behind you!
- ▶ The deaf person will look towards the interpreter when the interpreter is signing. When the deaf person responds in sign, they may still look at the interpreter to ensure that the interpreter has understood everything they have signed, but will also look towards you from time to time too.

"After my apprenticeship I stayed in the same company for 1.5 years which actually was totally horrible for me. I was not allowed to book interpreters. I was not allowed to have five extra days of holidays which I actually have a right to have as a person with a disability. Also I always had a negative view of persons who were holding a speeches at team meetings and I was not able to understand them. When I asked for an interpreter and provided all information possible for costs being covered and said that the state office of integration would pay the costs if requested - I got rejected. My boss said I could lip read.

I explained to him I didn't know any colloquial language nor all spoken language dialects that existed in this country and therefore I could not lipread. Furthermore I told him that hearing people can follow speech all the time while the speaker turns their back to the audience while I am just simply lost then as I cannot see the person's mouth anymore. It was not fair. I felt like I was treated unfairly. I was being exploited. I had done a great job and I had been working well and I had been working fast. I felt bullied and all this stuff led me to have a burn out. At the end I quit my job at this company and moved away to [another city].

Well I should mention: I had a plan to become a master in my field. I went to my boss and told him I wanted to learn to be a master because I really loved my job and because I had the motivation to do it and I asked my boss if he could provide further information for me. He laughed at me adding I would never make it through the masters school. I explained to him that I wanted to focus more on coaching on becoming part of the field where new technological innovations for implants were developed. But my boss always just sent my colleagues to the workshops while I had to stay at work. This was frustrating for me among many other things.

Then when I moved [to another city] I was very much afraid that at my new job everything would be just like I remembered my last job was. I was invited for a job interview which went well and which ended straight away with the company being willing to hire me. Starting to work again at first I felt totally lost. None of my new colleagues

knew anything about deafness. There was one more deaf employee and me as the new one. I was very anxious on how to deal with this situation. As I wanted to be brave I decided to try to communicate with gestures. My colleagues said they wanted to learn sign language. The boss offered to hire interpreters so communication could flow more easily. I was totally overwhelmed and suprised in a very positive way. An integration counselling agency (IFD) came to us and from then I could hire interpreters whenever I needed them. Also for any speeches they are booked. I am really so happy about all this! Everything got better and better for me. Eventually my boss asked me if I wanted to take part in a masters teaching programme."

"When I did not have any interpreter the first three months at work my boss was really nervous. I just started working and learning about my role. When the interpreter finally came, my boss was incredibly relieved. It left me stunned. He had been waiting to talk to me for so long to explain work related stuff to me (...) not only by using gestures. (...) I found it interesting to see that not only did I need an interpreter but my boss did as well."

"Hearing people should not only look at it as the deaf person needing an interpreter as they do so, too! Most hearing people forget about this. (...) If my boss talks I don't get anything and if I sign my boss doesn't get anything. So that means we both need an interpreter! But not many people are aware of it!"



UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities aims to guarantee equal rights for persons with disabilities to enjoy physical, social, economic, and cultural rights covering issues related to the environment, health, education, employment, information, and communication. It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organisations. The Convention entered into force on 3 May 2008.

The Convention marks a “paradigm shift” in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

The World Federation for the Deaf (WFD)’s main objective in the process however, was to ensure that Deaf people’s linguistic rights would be recognised within the Convention. As a result all WFD’s objectives on signed languages were approved within the framework of the Convention. Many rights are mentioned generally and these can be interpreted together with those articles where signed languages are mentioned. Non-discrimination on the basis of language and linguistic rights is mentioned in many segments of the Convention, including in the preamble.

Signed languages are mentioned 8 times in 5 different articles:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| (i) Article 2 | Definition |
| (ii) Article 9 | Accessibility |
| (iii) Article 21 | Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information |
| (iv) Article 21(e) | Recognizing and promoting the use of signed languages |
| (v) Article 24.3 (b) | Education |
| (vi) Article 24.3 (c) | Education |
| (vii) Article 24.3 (e) | Education |
| (viii) Article 30: | Participation in cultural life, recreation leisure and sport. |



EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY ACTS 1998–2015

The Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These include access to employment, recruitment and promotion; equal pay; working conditions; training or experience; dismissal and harassment including sexual harassment. The legislation defines discrimination as treating one person in a less favourable way than another person based on any of the following 9 grounds one of which includes disability, which covers deaf people.

Under this legalisation, employers are legally obliged to provide appropriate measures or what's known as 'reasonable accommodation' to people with disabilities as long as it does not constitute as a disproportionate burden on the employer. However, what constitutes as a disproportionate burden is not just about financial costs but it's also about the size and resources of the company whereby all funding options must be explored as well as an assessment of staff time and productivity.

Some appropriate measures or accommodations outlined in the Act for Deaf people can include such things like:

- ▶ Providing a sign language interpreter for interview or meetings
- ▶ Alternative methods of recruitment processes
- ▶ Re-distribution of tasks
- ▶ Assistive technology
- ▶ Time off for medical appointments



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Irish Deaf Society

In some countries, there is financial assistance and incentives to hire people with disabilities from the government. Explore this avenue by contacting your local Deaf organisation or local government offices. Deaf people are often familiar with financial supports available for interpreting costs, so if you can't locate the information, ask the deaf person directly.

In Ireland there are a number of grants available under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund run by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (www.welfare.ie).

JOB INTERVIEW INTERPRETER GRANT

This grant pays for a sign language interpreter for an interview (3 hours) or induction training when a Deaf person starts employment with a private sector employer. It is suitable for Deaf people who are actively seeking employment or have just started employment and would benefit from having an interpreter.

WORKPLACE EQUIPMENT ADAPTATION GRANT

This grant pays for any equipment or modifications a Deaf employee may need when they are in the workplace to make it more accessible. The maximum amount that an employee can get is €6,350 however in certain cases, this rises to €9,375.

WAGE SUBSIDY SCHEME

This grant subsidises the wage of a person with a disability at the rate of €5.30 per hour. The employee must have a proven shortfall in their productivity level to 80% in comparison with that of other employees. There are also incentives for employing more than one person with a disability under this scheme.

10 | RESOURCES & LINKS

AHEAD. (2008). *Workplace Attitudes to Graduates with Disabilities: Findings and Recommendations*. Dublin: AHEAD Educational Press.

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Cameron, A. (2013) What is the current employment situation of deaf, deafblind, deafened and hard of hearing people living in Scotland. <https://bit.ly/32bDU2L>

Cromwell, J. (2005) Deafness and the art of psychometric testing. *The Psychologist*, v.18 (12), p738-740. (<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-18/edition-12/deafness-and-art-psychometric-testing>)

Disability and work The picture we learn from official statistics: www.nda.ie/nda-files/Disability-and-Work-The-picture-we-learn-from-official-statistics.pdf

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GOV.UK (2017): Research and analysis Saleem: profoundly deaf user: www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-disabilities-and-impairments-user-profiles/saleem-profoundly-deaf-user

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House of Commons Library. (2017) Deafness and hearing loss - Debate Pack <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CDP-2017-0236#fullreport>

HSE (2015) Health and safety for disabled people and their employers www.hse.gov.uk/disability/largeprint.pdf

Total jobs (2016) Deaf jobseeker and employee experiences survey. www.totaljobs.com/insidejob/deaf-jobseeker-employee-report-2016/

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

www.dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-of-people-with-disabilities/Clarion UK : <https://www.clarion-uk.com/employment-support-for-deaf-people/>

www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JIIG-Guidelines.pdf

www.ahead.ie

www.irishdeafcommunity.ie

www.chime.ie

DESIGNS PROJECT PARTNER INTERPRETING AGENCIES

Bridge Interpreting: www.signlanguageinterpreting.ie

Sign Language Interpreting Services (SLIS) (Referral agency for freelance interpreters): www.slis.ie

Overseas Interpreting (International Sign Interpreters):
www.overseasinterpreting.com

Remote Interpreting Services: www.slis.ie

IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND INTERPRETING EXPERTS

Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin: www.tcd.ie/slscs/cds

IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE FILMING & TRANSLATIONS

IGI MEDIA: www.igimedia.eu

PROFESSIONAL HR SERVICES

Interesource Group Consulting: www.interesourcegroup.com

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PROFESSOR LORRAINE LEESON is Associate Dean of Research, Trinity College Dublin and former Director of the Centre for Deaf Studies (TCD). She is Ireland's inaugural Professor of Deaf Studies and a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin. Lorraine has published widely on aspects of the linguistics and applied linguistics of sign languages, and in the area of sign language interpreting. She has engaged in significant pan-European research and educational work with academic institutions, Deaf communities and interpreting organisations for almost 30 years. She is also a practicing sign language interpreter.

CAROLINE MCGROTTY is The WAM (Willing Able Mentoring) Programme Coordinator at the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD) which works on the transition to employment for graduates with disabilities. She holds a Bachelor in Deaf Studies from Trinity College Dublin and qualifications in ISL Teaching and Equality Studies. Caroline has twelve years' experience of working and volunteering with various organisations within the Deaf and disability community and is currently Vice-Chairperson of the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) in Ireland.

ANN HEELAN served as Chief Executive at the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD) until 2019. Ann holds a BA, H Dip in Education, Masters in Education, Training and Development, and a Certificate in Internal Verification. Ann is qualified and experienced in teaching, staff training and development, design and implementation of training to a diverse range of professionals and also has extensive knowledge about supporting disability in higher education. Ann has extensive know-how on the running of learning networks within organisations, familiarity with the management of research projects, writing reports and evaluation of practice.

DR JOHN BOSCO CONAMA is Director of the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College and former Chairperson of the Irish Deaf Society. He was the co-chair of the Irish Sign Language Recognition Campaign which led to the passing of the ISL Act in 2017. He holds an M.Litt in Social Policy (TCD) and a Ph.D in Equality Studies (UCD); his thesis focused on a comparative policy analysis of signed languages in two countries – Finland and Ireland. His recent publications have focused on Deaf people in society and social policies affecting Irish Sign Language.

