

A photograph of three women in a rehearsal space. In the foreground, a Black woman with short dark hair, wearing a black top, is shown in profile, signing with her hands. Behind her, two other women are standing. The woman on the left is wearing a bright orange and white patterned coat and blue sneakers, also with her hands raised in a gestural movement. The woman on the right is wearing a light blue and pink patterned coat over a white t-shirt and white sneakers, gesturing with both hands. They are in a room with a wooden floor, a blue wall in the background, and a potted plant. A rolled-up paper lies on the floor near the woman in the foreground.

**Taking  
flight**

**WORKING WITH  
BSL/ENGLISH  
INTERPRETERS IN  
THEATRE/ARTS**

## INTRODUCTION

British Sign Language (BSL) is used by the Deaf community in the UK. It is a language in its own right, with its own grammatical and syntactical structures which are completely different from English. As such, when looking at working with interpreters in theatre/arts you must book a BSL/English interpreter who holds the relevant qualifications and has sufficient experience in this kind of work. You can check against the NRCPD website whether the person you are working with is both registered and qualified as an interpreter.

For some instances, you may require a BSL Translator. In circumstances where you may require a translator, you must book a qualified Deaf translator.

**© 2023. This document was written by Steph Bailey Scott, Elise Davison & Wales-based BSL/English interpreters on behalf of Taking Flight Theatre Company.**

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## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

The overall picture in regard to working Interpreters within Wales currently stands as the following...

- A very small fraction of Interpreters works within the theatre/performance domain within Wales.
- Fewer than half of these identify as male.
- There is only one interpreter from the global majority.
- There are less than five BSL translators working within Wales.

In regard to language, please see the following...

- Less than 5 interpreters can work fluently between Welsh and BSL.
- Currently only one works as a performance interpreter.
- None of these identify as male.
- None of these are from the global majority.

Geographical statistics...

- Most interpreters are based in Southeast Wales, smaller numbers are based in Southwest/ West Wales and an even smaller number located in North Wales.
- There is one interpreter based in Powys and areas such as Anglesey, Ceredigion etc may require interpreters to travel long distances.

## PERFORMANCE INTERPRETING

There are different types of performance interpreting detailed below. You must make yourself familiar with these types in order to decide which style is appropriate for your circumstance and prepare the interpreter effectively.

- On Stage Interpreting – often placed to the side of the action however, it is imperative that the choice of position allows the audience member to see the action onstage and the interpreter in clear view.
- Semi-Integrated Interpreting – An interpreter moves around the space interpreting the show, however they are not necessarily a character within the show. They would be cued to move to spaces on stage providing optimum view and access for the audience member.
- Integrated Interpreting – The interpreter may be a specific character within the performance and/or move around the stage, interacting with the other characters in the space.



## BOOKING INTERPRETERS

The points below need to be considered when booking an interpreter, please take time to read the following...

- It is important to book interpreters that have **experience within the Theatre/Arts domain** in order for them to access Theatre/Arts specific jargon and interpret effectively.
- **Not all interpreters work full time**, and most will have varying availability. This will be due to working hours that fit around their schedules undertaking community work and accommodating regular clients that they may work with already.
- You must **book your interpreters as early as possible**. Many interpreters are booked months in advance so in order to book those who have the appropriate skills and experience, you must act as soon as possible.
- **Last minute bookings/requests – these are almost impossible to fulfil** (explained in the above points). Most interpreters have little time for additional work on top of their existing schedules.
- **Full time interpreters may struggle to commit to the entire rehearsal period** due to their busy schedules. They may not want any additional evening/weekend work to account for the number of hours of preparation that will need to be undertaken.

- If your production has Deaf performers and/or creatives, you may want to consult with them and take onboard recommendations of interpreters that they have previously worked with. Please note – it is not appropriate to pass the responsibility of booking interpreters onto the Deaf performer and/or creative unless previously agreed.
- Due to content of the production, you may want to **consider booking more than one interpreter**, particularly with integrated interpreting. This will open you up to more creative choices.
- In most cases, **it is not appropriate to use trainee interpreters in theatre/performance interpreting**. This includes R&D (often unscripted), or where the trainee works by themselves. Occasionally, it may be acceptable to use a trainee but only if an experienced interpreter supports them and said trainee has prior experience within the theatre domain.
- Your interpreter will want to work with your lighting and tech crew. They usually arrive an hour or so before house opens to get the lighting position and levels correct. Enough to be seen clearly but not enough to dazzle them.
- On stage Interpreters may need a separate speaker facing them, as sound can often carry forwards and it can be difficult for the interpreter to hear from the side.



- Please ensure you leave enough space on the stage for your interpreter as they do move around a little especially if interpreting a musical. Do not put your interpreter on the very edge of the stage with little room to spare (they may fall off!) or near any pyrotechnics. Your tech may have to be moved for the BSL interpreted performance. Try not to place your interpreter immediately in front of a speaker, consider health and safety issues for your interpreter.
- You may have to remind your performers to avoid the space near to the interpreter, they may usually stand in that position or in front and may block sightlines. Therefore, blocking may have to be adapted for this particular show.
- Interpreters may need someone to cue them on stage, they will need to be in position before announcements are made or before the show begins.



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## PREPARATION

Interpreting any show, regardless of which style you may opt for will require a significant amount of preparation work. The amount of preparation work will vary from production to production and the number of hours spent will differ. For example, a Shakespeare play may need over 100 hours of preparation to consider and breakdown translation/interpretation issues. Whereas, a 1-hour monologue may need less preparation. **ANY QUOTE FOR PROVIDING INTERPRETATION SERVICES MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT PREPARATION WORK.**

In order for preparation to be done effectively, the following may need to be provided to the interpreter:

- A copy of the most up to date script.
- The interpreter must be notified of any changes to that script at any point during the process.
- The interpreter will need to be involved where possible during the rehearsal process to watch, and watch a full run of the production, all of which must be paid and considered when quoting.
- A recording of the show wherever possible. This may be in lieu of seeing a performance in the space (especially for one off performances/touring show or new shows).
- Recording and lyrics for any songs.

- An understanding of the blocking, movement, and placement of those on stage. Interpreters are able to supply feedback on when this might affect audience sightlines. (Especially if semi integrated or integrated).
- In some cases, where the play may have specific terminology or be set in a certain time period, a BSL consultant may be required to assist with any translation issues, please discuss this with your interpreter and budget for this.
- Lighting and placement on stage needs to be discussed early in the process. It is useful for the lighting designer to know if there will be an interpreted show so they can allocate a light for this. Time should be given to plotting interpreter lights and ensuring placement is conducive to all involved.
- A contact sheet with the appropriate people that the interpreter may need to contact either prior, during or after the booking. This includes the appropriate person to send invoices to and any payment queries.



## BOOKING APPROPRIATELY

Consider the appropriateness of the interpreter you are working with. It is tempting to book the first person you can find, but they might not be the most appropriate.

- **Where possible, ensure gender matching** (i.e., female interpreters for an all-female cast, male interpreters for an all-male cast) and **consider representation of wider community groups**, the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as the cultural make-up of the cast. IOCN (Interpreters of Colour Network) and the "LGBTQIA+ Interpreters and Translators Network" can provide more advice on ensuring appropriate representation. Please note, although these networks may include those geographically based in Wales, they are networks covering the span of the UK. Therefore, it's important to make it clear whether you need an interpreter locally based or whether you can consider reaching out further afield.
- Consider also matching your interpreter to the theme of the show – if it's a 'gay man's coming out story' then work with an interpreter who has that lived experience. Similarly, if the show discusses themes around feminism, then work with a female interpreter

- You should work out the type of performance interpreting you want to use (on stage, integrated etc) and plan/ budget appropriately. This will allow an interpreter to decide if they are appropriately skilled for, and willing to undertake this job.
- Check that the interpreter is registered with NRCPD – you can do this here <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk/>. Alternatively, you can search for interpreters on RBSLI here <https://rbsli.org/>
- Welcome the interpreter to the space, introduce them to the cast
- Allow them the opportunity to ask questions, including speaking directly to the director, actors, and back-stage crew in order to do their very best job for everyone involved.
- Your interpreter may well ask the cast, director, stage manager questions about the script and intent of the lines they speak.
- During the show the ASM or Stage Manager should assist the interpreter with going on and off the stage during any overture, interval, and endings.
- Ensure that the Stage Manager who is calling the show knows when the interpreters have finished before bringing the lights down. BSL may finish slightly later than the spoken word and it's important not to cut off the translation mid-sentence.

- On the day of the interpreted performance – a separate interpreter will be needed for the front of house/box office, in case Deaf audiences have questions, or in cases of fire evacuation. It also reassures them that they are welcome and safe in the space. Budget for this.
- If a post-show Q and A is offered a separate interpreter will need to be booked. This might be the same person as FOH but this needs to be discussed on booking.



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## COST CONSIDERATIONS

Consider the costs for interpreters at the start of your project, preferably at the planning and funding application stages. Funding is usually available to cover some, if not all, of those costs.

Most interpreters charge a daily fee for their interpreting services but, depending on the nature of the show/performance, their involvement and the amount of preparation, these costs will vary from show to show.

The cost below is correct at the time of printing, but they will increase over time.

Quotes are usually based on:

- Total fee for the entire job, to include preparation, rehearsals and interpreting of the show(s).
- **OR**
- A daily fee for preparation/rehearsal and a separate fee for the performance.
- Shows that tour should not include added costs for the preparation work (once it's done) if using the same interpreter(s), but only for the performances on the day.

### Current estimates of interpreter fees are:

- Hourly rates tend to be in the £35–£40 region for both preparation and interpreting, following nationally agreed minimum pay rates as set by NUBSLI. Please note, NUBSLI rates are guidance and **not fixed**.
- Best practice guidance suggests the need for two interpreters in a meeting/rehearsal that exceeds an hour. Factor this into funding applications.
- Quotes could be based on a half day/full day rate. A half day will usually be 4 hours, with a full day being 7. There is usually a minimum 3hr booking fee. Check with your interpreter when booking.
- Total fee quotes will depend on the number of days including preparation, rehearsal, and performance.
- Fees for the performance itself will usually be at the half day/full day rate or a specifically agreed amount.
- There may be room for negotiation on the total job fee. However, you should note the nationally agreed minimum pay rates as stated above.
- Fees for front of house/box office interpreters is likely to be set at the minimum call out charge of between £90 and £120 (per booking).



## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

This section lists the main components of an agreement for the booking of BSL/English Interpreters. Clauses which may appear in the venue and/or company's standard contract relating (for example) to press and publicity, confidentiality and equality and diversity policies, are not included here.

### Confirmation of Booking

- The venue/company manager/designated individual will book their interpreter at the earliest opportune moment. These are to be booked in advance of rehearsals starting, in order to maximise booking potential.
- The venue/company manager/designated individual will supply a written confirmation of the booking. The confirming will include details of the performance, venues, dates, and times, considering rehearsals and opportunities to see the performance as part of their preparation.
- The venue/company manager/designated individual will supply a contact sheet with the appropriate people to contact should the interpreter need to raise any queries regarding the booking itself or queries related to the production itself (aiding with their preparation).





## Fees

- The agreement will include confirmation of the fee to be paid to the interpreter.
- The fee will cover preparation, rehearsal time and performance delivery.
- The agreement will also include the fee payable for repeat performances during a run. This repeat performance fee will include additional work undertaken by the interpreter (such as script and/or blocking changes) for which further viewing, and rehearsal may be needed.
- The fee may consider any materials that will be recorded, used on public platforms or live streaming.

## Expenses and Subsistence

- Payment of travel, accommodation and other expenses incurred by the interpreter is negotiable between the venue/company manager/designated individual and the interpreter. The booking agreement should include a breakdown of these costs and agreements of subsistence should be made in advance.

## Payment

- Payment to be made following submission of invoice by the interpreter.
- Where expenses are claimed, the relevant receipts will be produced.
- If payment is covered by any other claim forms (for example, access to work) this will be submitted alongside the invoice.

## Cancellation

- If in the event that a confirmed engagement is cancelled, within two weeks of the start date, the full fee is due to the interpreter.
- If the event has required preparation which has been undertaken their time is to be compensated at 50% the agreed fee up to one month of the start date.

## Insurance

- The manager will confirm that the venue has in place appropriate public liability and any other insurance that may be required under the law from time to time, and that this insurance covers all visitors at the venue including both the interpreter and the persons benefiting from the interpretation service.



- The interpreter will be in receipt of their own insurances and will have their documents to produce on request.

## **Copyright**

### **Copyright relating to the recording of the production**

To protect the copyright holders involved, the interpreter undertakes not to copy the recording of the production; not to allow the recording to be viewed by any other individual without express authority from the manager of the venue or the production company concerned; and to sign a document confirming these conditions if required.

## **Dress code**

If the venue or company requires the interpreter to wear costume please discuss this on booking and take advice in terms of suitability of costume from the interpreter. Ideally a discussion with the designer is useful.



## RESPONSIBILITY OF THE VENUE

- Ensure the venue and box office staff are aware of the interpreter and what they are doing.
- Provide clear instructions of meeting time and place at your venue.
- Provide a safe space for the interpreter to base themselves before the event.
- You must work with the interpreter to ensure that the positioning, lighting and sounds levels are working with and not against the interpreter.
- Depending on the production, in-ear monitors should be provided to ensure optimum access to the language produced onstage.
- Establish the interpreters point of call whilst in the venue to answer any queries.
- Marketing to your Deaf community, you may want to consider producing a BSL flyer for this using a Deaf translator. If you wish to use the interpreter for marketing purposes, this must be agreed prior, and a separate fee must be paid for their services.
- Advertise the name of your interpreter, dates and times on your posters and flyers.



- Research into marketing within the Deaf community on social media platforms so that they are seen and accessed easily.
- Liaise with all relevant departments in regard to the security and safety of the interpreter, including sticking to risk assessment procedures, in particular when using spaces of the theatre not regularly used by cast but in this case, by the interpreter.
- To share any formal or informal consumer feedback to the interpreter when appropriate. Make sure your interpreter is happy to receive feedback.



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## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INTERPRETER

- Liaise with the manager to agree performance dates, times, fees, and other information included within the booking confirmation/contract.
- To prepare effectively ahead of the production using the source materials provided by the production.
- To ask questions and raise queries in order to aid their preparation journey prior to the production.
- To suggest and work with the stage team in order to find the best place to stand when on stage interpreting, ensuring clear and non-obstructive views.
- To partake in any technical rehearsal to ensure lighting is clear and the interpreter is lit.
- To produce clear interpretation in line with the theme, style, and direction of the production.
- To contribute feedback to the venue/production that is constructive and can help to the improvement of accessible productions in the future.

