

The National Union for British Sign Language Interpreters and Translators (NUBSLI) represents sign language interpreters and translators working across the UK. This includes trainees currently enrolled on programmes such as yours.

Since March 2020, trainee members have contacted us to express their concerns about the impact that the imposed restrictions and lockdown measures have had, including how their studies, training and work have been affected. In order to gain better insight into this, a consultation event was held and the challenges they reported are summarised below.

Impact of the pandemic on trainee interpreters and translators

- Imposition of first lockdown restrictions in March 2020 resulted in a significant drop in work available (whether employed or self employed). For some, work stopped completely.
- Those able to work are doing so remotely, a task recognised as extremely demanding for even our most experienced colleagues.
- All have found the change in working environment extremely challenging and even more isolating.
- Severe risk of becoming deskilled due to lack of work or opportunities to practice. This in turn poses a significant hindrance to the development of the skills required to complete training programmes.
- The change in working conditions has had a significant impact on their training and many are experiencing difficulty collecting portfolio evidence, particularly when the criteria state that video clips must capture in-person interactions.
- They cannot access the same level of support, shadow colleagues, attend interpreted events, or access many of the other informal development opportunities that they could pre-pandemic.
- Feeling the need for additional input from training providers that reflects the unprecedented circumstances they are navigating.

As you are aware, the financial cost of studying and/or training with the aim of achieving registered status is significant. For many this is self-funded and requires that they are able to work at the same time as they train. Unfortunately, we have already heard from trainee members who have taken work in other industries in order to maintain a source of income at this time. This situation is echoed by some of our RSLI/T colleagues and there is a very real risk that they will not return to the profession in future. The consequences of this must not be underestimated and it is vital that the situation be mitigated against now, not only to safeguard the profession but to ensure the deaf communities we work with continue to have access to the interpreting and translation services they deserve.

How can you help?

We are aware that many institutions have allowed for deferrals, however this is not the favoured option for all trainees. With this in mind, those present at our consultation event compiled a list of key measures that, if enacted, would reassure students and provide more desirable outcomes for current and future cohorts alike. These are:

- Flexibility regarding the types of evidence to be accepted during the pandemic. Clarification on what this would be to be provided by Signature, iBSL and relevant universities.

- Training centres and institutions to offer safe opportunities for evidence collection during the pandemic.
- Instruction on remote working practice to be included in SLI/T training programmes.

What else are NUBSLI doing?

Our Trainee Action Group is facilitating opportunities for trainees to shadow experienced, qualified colleagues while they carry out remote work and we also offer informal one-to-one buddying support for trainees and newly qualified SLI/Ts who are members.

Some trainees may not be aware of the support NUBSLI can offer them and we hope this letter can also be the first step in establishing a dialogue with training providers that could enable better long term support for trainees going forward.

We would be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this letter and respond in good time, detailing the allowances and adaptations that are being made in order to support current and future cohorts of BSL/English interpreting and translation students.

Kind regards

The NUBSLI Committee