

ASLI's Position paper on the use of video interpreting services for public services

This document contains ASLI's position on the use of videoconferencing technologies to deploy remote interpreting services to facilitate communication with public services (e.g. NHS, police, Government departments etc). Many of the principles contained in this document are expanded further in ASLI's Video Interpreting Best Practice guidance. In brief ASLI supports a collective approach to determining where, when and how video interpreting services are to be used in public services settings. Research has repeatedly shown how interpreting is already a complex and imperfect exercise. Therefore, when adding technology to the interaction this must be done in a sensitive way that improves or preserves how people interact and receive public services. Based on these principles ASLI recognises the need to retain onsite interpreting provisions as an option, define where video-mediated interpreted (VMI) services can be used, and how this VMI option is presented to consumers.

Background

The UK, like many other countries across the globe, is seeing an expansion in the use of technology to offer alternative ways of reaching an interpreter to provide their service to clients in a different location. Videoconferencing technologies is one example of how sign language interpreters are able to provide their service from a different location, this is often defined as video-mediated interpreting (VMI). There are two popular ways in which interpreting can be used: Video Relay Service (VRS) and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).

Video Relay Service (VRS) connects two parties in two separate locations, the hearing party using a standard telephone connection, and the deaf party using a video link (from an internet enabled device). Examples for using VRS are:

- A deaf person calling their GP to make an appointment, a friend, a relative, a colleague, a business contact, a telephone help desk
- A hearing person contacting a deaf relative, friend or colleague
- A deaf person using telephone banking, or customer services telephone support

In essence, VRS opens up telephone networks to both hearing and deaf people to communicate with each other. Callers use VRS to communicate, as they would typically do with any other person over the phone. There will be some time lag as the interpreter interprets between the two languages.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) refers to situations where all participants are in the same location, and a remote interpreter is introduced to the conversation via a web-based video link. Typical examples of where you might see this kind of interaction are:

- Staff team meetings, one to one meetings with a colleague
- Appointments at a local council or government building
- Last minute healthcare appointments
- Classroom settings: one to one support with tutor
- Conferences

Video Interpreting Services in the UK

There are a number of small, independent video interpreting service providers operating in the UK. In Scotland a nationwide publicly available VRS service, ContactScotland, is enabling communication between government departments and the Deaf community. Some independent interpreters are known to provide video interpreting via Skype, FaceTime, ooVoo, Hangout etc. Unlike the BT Text Relay Service, video interpreting services are not nationally available throughout the UK. Currently, video interpreting services are provided through contracts and individual agreements. For example:

- Companies may contract a video interpreting service to enable customers to contact their call centre
- A deaf employee may be funded to have video interpreting service at work
- A deaf tradesperson may be funded to have video interpreting service when away from their base
- A vulnerable deaf person may be funded to have video interpreting service at home

Assessing the appropriateness of video interpreting provision

It is recommended that service providers consult with potential users of the service to determine the suitability of a video service versus a face-to-face interpreter provision. Video interpreting is not suitable for all situations and research has repeatedly shown consideration must be given to the needs of the interpreter and the clients involved in the call. Key measures to determine the suitability are:

- I. The severity and long-term consequence on the individual's life once the call has ended
- II. The number of people participating in the call

- III. The speed of interaction
- IV. The use of additional resources (e.g. power-points, handouts, documents, videos, etc.), which will be used throughout the call
- V. The visual and acoustic quality from the incoming caller or call receiver
- VI. The sensitivity of the content being discussed

ASLI recommends that video interpreting service providers should have guidelines in place that specify when an interpreter can decline or withdraw from a call. For example:

- I. A caller is abusive to the interpreter
- II. Poor screen resolution or other technical faults
- III. A conflict of interest arises
- IV. When the caller tells the interpreter they are pretending to be someone else and asks or expects the interpreter to continue interpreting the video call
- V. Or when a subject matter (e.g. see list below) is not appropriate, or becomes inappropriate, for a video relay call.

Situations where video interpreting has been defined as “not appropriate” for video interpreting are:

- I. Police suspect/witness interviews
- II. Court hearings
- III. A psychiatric assessment
- IV. A Mental Health tribunal
- V. A Mental Health discharge assessment
- VI. A Emergency Mental Health Assessment (that may involve an individual being sectioned)
- VII. Tribunals or disciplinary meetings
- VIII. Immigration interviews
- IX. Settings with multiple participants, involving fast paced exchanges of turn and no formal structure, such as classroom teaching, or board meetings
- X. Highly emotional, or potentially volatile settings, such as counselling, therapy
- XI. Settings involving a deaf user with an additional disability, such as a visual impairment or learning disability

(This list was produced following a survey completed by VISG with industry providers, practitioners, academics and users of video interpreting services).



Video interpreting services should have a protocol in place for customers who do not use BSL.

During the course of the interpretation a video interpreter may find that the subject matter becomes unsuitable for interpreting via video. The interpreter should advise participants that the session will be ended due to the inappropriate nature of the subject matter. The interpreter should use their professional judgment and refer to service protocols to determine whether this action is appropriate.

As outlined in section 6 of the video interpreting best practice guidance, video interpreters must respect the confidential nature of any information gained in the course of their professional activity, except in exceptional circumstances where there is a risk of harm to an individual or they have concerns about the welfare of a vulnerable adult or a child. Video interpreters should refer the service provider's protocols for raising an alert about a vulnerable person.