

The Association of Sign Language Interpreters
Four Winds House
Balderton
CH4 9LF

23 March 2020

To whom it may concern,

We are writing in response to your call for evidence regarding the impact of the current Covid19 situation on freelance workers, in particular relation to the financial provisions outlined last week for self-employed people.

ASLI is the largest professional membership organisation for Sign Language Interpreters and Translators in the UK, the vast majority of whom are self-employed. There are 1518 interpreters and translators registered with our national registration body, the NRCPD and approximately an additional 70 in the total workforce, the majority of whom are sole-traders, submit tax returns and pay tax annually. An experienced, qualified interpreter who has spent approximately eight to ten years training, at substantial financial cost to themselves to gain postgraduate qualifications, earns roughly £35000 to £42000 per year – their annual tax payment is more than the total sum they could receive under the current provisions you have offered. To provide employees 80% of earnings if out of work and offer sole-traders £95 per week is incredibly discriminatory to a workforce providing vital services to deaf people and service providers so they can communicate. How do you envisage sole-traders continue to pay for their mortgages, taxes, bills and other living costs?

Not only do interpreters and translators pay tax, which you can track through the HMRC and UTRs, but they have to pay registration fees, professional fees, pay for training throughout the year to maintain registration, pay for insurance – all before they factor in their general outgoings to live and travel to work to enable other people to go to work or attend appointments.

If online interpreting is provided through a Video Relay Service (VRS), the interpreters still have to factor in costs of equipment and have a suitable broadband connection, environment to work in and appropriate platform to provide interpreting – this is not suited to everyone and we recommend a minimum of three years' post-qualification experience before interpreters can start to provide such a service. Other requirements related to working such as owning a car, which is vital, mobile phones, appropriate clothing for the different environments and so on all incur costs to the interpreters and translators.

As you will appreciate becoming and working as an interpreter or translator is expensive in terms of training and ongoing requirements. This means that we rely on regular work and plan time off carefully. The emergence of Covid19 has meant that the work currently available is incredibly limited - the most experienced interpreters may be able to work for Video Relay Services but everyone else is restricted to the very small amount of work available. Some work may be conducted online directly with deaf people rather than through companies but there is minimal work available and dependent on the individual's circumstances.



Consequently, experienced interpreters have lost most of their work, while trainee and less-experienced interpreters have lost all work, and therefore income.

We call on the Government to recognise the impact of this virus on freelance workers and establish a way to ensure that they can access financial support at a similar rate to employed workers during this crisis. We would recommend at looking at income gained during the previous tax year and work out provisions accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

The ASLI Board of Directors

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