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**A demographic snapshot of the profession:
The 2021 Census of sign language translators &
interpreters in the UK
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Jemina Napier, Robert Skinner, Robert Adam,
Christopher Stone, Sandra Pratt & Chijioke Obasi



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1. Executive summary and Recommendations

Due to a lack of general information about how the sign language translation and interpreting (SLTI) profession is structured, and concerns about the lack of diversity and equality of opportunities in the SLTI profession, the Association of Sign Language Interpreters UK (ASLI) commissioned the Centre for Translation & Interpreting Studies in Scotland at Heriot-Watt University to conduct a census survey study. Its goal was to establish a baseline profile of sign language interpreters' and translators' training and/or working in the UK. With this in mind a census was conducted to obtain a snapshot of the demographic profile of SLTI practitioners in the UK in February 2021 in order to inform the planning and forecasting of the workforce, to inform education and training needs, and to identify gaps in community representation.

To ensure diversity in the research team, HWU established a research team with the University of Wolverhampton and the University of the West of Scotland. An advisory group was also established to ensure representation from stakeholders across the sector from sign language teachers, sign language interpreters/translators and their representative organisations. Research team and advisory group members are listed above.

A census style questionnaire was developed in consultation with the advisory group, and with reference to relevant literature and other censuses. In total, complete survey responses were received from 690 practitioners from across the UK (43% of the potential sample). The survey responses were analysed using SPSS statistical software specifically to look at the relationships between female versus male respondents; ethnic minorities¹ versus White British respondents; respondents who identified as LGBTQIA+ versus 'Straight' with respect to: part-time versus full-time work; caring responsibilities; high status work (i.e., conference and TV in-vision work); and route to qualification (higher education versus vocational). This report provides an overview of the findings, along with discussion of the profile of the SLTI profession in the UK, and suggested recommendations for actions for key stakeholder organisations.

¹ Rather than BAME or BME, the term 'ethnic minorities' is used throughout this report to capture the characteristics of translators and interpreters, as per UK Government Race Disparity Unit convention: <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/08/please-dont-call-me-bame-or-bme/>

1.1 Summary of findings

The survey resulted in 822 responses, of which 690 (83.94%) completed in full. With respect to the demographic profile of SLTIs, the majority of respondents were hearing (92.5%), with only 3.62% who identified as being deaf or hard-of-hearing. Another 3.0% chose to self-describe and focused on their status as sign language users, so it was difficult to ascertain whether they were hearing or deaf.

A total of 99% of respondents lived in the UK and NI. Greater London (18.4) followed by the South East (11.88%) and Scotland (11.88%) were the most populated regions. Birmingham, followed by Bristol and Edinburgh were the most populated single postcode regions, most likely because they are in close proximity to university TIEP programmes. From this census data it appears that SLTIs are less diverse than the populace as the majority of SLTIs were born in England, and 93.75% of respondents were born in the UK. Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2011) figures reveal that for the UK populace the figure is 86%.

The mean age of SLTIs is 44 years old (youngest respondent was 18 years old and the oldest was 76 years old), and the profession overall is 82.02% female, 16.81% male, 0.43% are nonbinary/genderqueer, and 0.28% are transgender. A total of 679/690 respondents identify with the sex registered at birth. When looking only at deaf practitioners, however, the gender balance is 60% female and 40% male.

With regards to ethnicity, 89.56% of respondents identified as white, and 8.84% identified as within the Black or minority ethnic category. Within this, category the largest single ethnic group were from Black Caribbean heritage ($n=16$ respondents) followed by Black African/Caribbean ($n=14$ respondents) and South East Asian (10 respondents). The comparable figure from the UK Census in 2011 is that 86% of the UK population were white, and Asian ethnic groups (7.5%) made up the second largest group, followed by Black ethnic groups (3.3%). Again, the SLTI profession does not reflect the diversity in the populace (although there are more interpreters identifying as Black than Asian). With respect to sexuality, 80.14% identified as heterosexual/straight - a lower figure than the comparable census data that indicates that 94.6% of the populace identify as straight - confirming that there is a much higher proportion of LGBTIQ+ people within the SLTI profession at 14.49% of the profession (as opposed to 2.2% of the UK population).

A total of 477 (69%) respondents indicated no disability or mental health conditions, and 18.11% reported such conditions. Although the incidence of these conditions can be multiple and differs from person to person, the complete list was too large to share in this report. Of these, 7.24% reported on a mental health condition and 5.07% reported a stamina issue or breathing fatigue. A total of 1.73% indicated a social or

behavioural condition (associated with autism, attention deficit disorder or Asperger's syndrome).

A total of 56.6% of respondents were parents, with 26.6% having one or more children under the age of 12. A total of 51.12% identify as having no religion and Christians made up a total of 38.11%, followed by Buddhist (1.2%), Jewish (1.15%), Muslim (0.43%) and Hindu (0.28%).

In relation to the language and cultural backgrounds of SLTIs, a total of 30.9% had a signing background, including 19.8% who reported at least one deaf parent. With relation to deaf practitioners, the majority came from a signing background and only 32% of deaf practitioners had no deaf signing background. A total of 48% were in a relationship with another deaf signing person. The majority (84.2%) identified English as their preferred language and 64% of deaf practitioners considered both English and BSL as their preferred language. The other "preferred language" included three signed languages (Irish Sign Language (ISL), Swedish Sign Language (STS), Australian Sign Language (Auslan) for deaf SLTI, and five spoken languages (French, German, 'Nigerian' (the specific language from Nigeria was not made clear), Spanish and Welsh) for hearing SLTI. A total of 87.82% of respondents did not know another signed language, but of the deaf practitioners' subgroup, one third of those did know another signed language.

With respect to registrations, 90.4% were registered with NRCPD, followed by 3.91% with RBSLI and 3.62% with SRLPDC (in Scotland). Membership of a professional organisation questions revealed 66% were members of ASLI, followed by 39.2% who were members of NUBSLI, followed by 22.1% who were members of VLP, and 3.62% were members of SCOSLI.

A total of 44.63% of respondents were self-employed or freelance translator/interpreter without employees - full-time, and 39.97% self-employed or freelance translator/interpreter without employees - part-time - and a quarter of those had another employed position, and respondents were employed part-time (11.15%) and full-time 10.57%. The majority of those undertaking part-time study were also working (20 were self-employed without employees part-time; 15 were self-employed without employees full-time; 7 were employed part-time and self-employed without employees part-time. Twenty deaf SLTIs worked in a self-employed capacity, but only ten did so full-time. Only three deaf practitioners worked in an employed (in-house) full-time position.

In relation to training and qualifications, the data indicates that 57.9% have a vocational diploma, and 42.9% had university qualifications. A fifth of respondents (19.27%) were enrolled on a training programme, and 57.9% of these were in a vocational training programme and the rest were in an academic training

programme. NVQ qualifications made up of the most popular pathway to qualification at 36.9%, followed by the UCLan and SLI/UCLan pathways, totalling 25.6%. For deaf practitioners, the vocational pathway was the most preferred at 64%, and 16% deaf practitioners completed an academic course.

Half of all practitioners had a qualification in another field other than translation or interpreting, including: accountancy, administration, applied linguistics, arts, business, biology, chemistry, computing studies, counselling/therapy, deaf studies, design, drama/performing arts, education, health & social care, hospitality, human rights, finance, geography, history & politics, law, languages (Chinese, English, German,), lip-speaking, management, mathematics, media studies, modern history, nursery nursing, philosophy, politics, psychology, religion & theology, social sciences, sociology, social anthropology, social work, teaching and more.

When examining work patterns, it was found that interpreting between English and BSL was the most common pattern for 63.57% of respondents, followed by translation between English and BSL (14.26%), and from one signed language to another (0.59%). Around half of the respondents (52%) had no experience of working with a deaf practitioner. Most of the deaf practitioners (48%) preferred to work with a human generated text (e.g., STTR or re-speaker), a quarter (24%) preferred working with a hearing interpreter, and most deaf practitioners did not have AtW funding. Translation work was mostly letters/documents followed by website documents, TV programmes and legal documents.

The work done by practitioners as a whole is predominantly in Access to Work settings (33.88%) followed by medical appointments (20.6%), education both FE and HE (11.59%), remote interpreting (10.97%), small ad-hoc meetings (7.83), mental health appointments (7.65%), children's education (5.55%), theatre (3.39%) and then training events, conferences/seminars, legal (2.04%), religious events in that order. For both translation and interpreting in-vision television work and legal domains (particularly court followed by policing) were the least desirable domains to work in. Specifically for interpreting, other unpopular domains include political and musical events.

Male respondents were more willing to take on high status work than female respondents, but there were no differences between Ethnic Minorities and white, or LGBTQIA+ and straight respondents.

In sum, the census data reveals that, on average, the typical profile of a SLTI practitioner in the UK is a hearing, straight, white, British woman, 44 years of age, non-religious, with caring responsibilities, self-employed, from England, working predominantly as an interpreter (more so than translator), qualified either through the academic or vocational training system (or combined), registered with NRCPD and a member of ASLI. There has been a positive shift over the last twenty years

since the last wide-ranging survey of the SLTI profession (Brien, Brown & Collins, 2002), in that there are increased numbers of practitioners who are deaf or from ethnic minorities, a higher self-disclosure of LGBTQIA+ and disabled or neurodivergent statuses among SLTI practitioners, but there has been a consistent proportion of female:male practitioners. SLTIs are geographically spread and concentrated in Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh and London, but with a shift to more remote working online this does not restrict SLTIs to only work locally. Despite increased diversity in representation in some areas, there is still a lot of work to be done to achieve a truly representative profession. There is an under-representation particularly of deaf and South Asian practitioners, SLTIs with different faiths, and women of all backgrounds are under-represented in high-status work. As such, the SLTI profession continues to face challenges in ensuring a diverse and representative profession.

1.2 Recommendations

As a consequence, we make an extensive list of **20 recommendations** across **5 categories**, which are outlined below and are mapped against suggested stakeholder organisations that may be able to action the recommendations. These are the organisations that we have identified as being well placed to action the recommendations, but in doing so we recognise that there may be financial implications for these organisations to take on this work, or the recommendations may fall outside their remit. As such, *these are suggestions and not a mandate for these organisations*. We also recognise that the responsibility does not end there. There are many predominantly hearing organisations and communities that can do more to raise awareness and promote the SLTI profession, for example, LGBTQIA+, ethnic minorities, faith and religious organisations could be instrumental in improving representation. There is also scope to work more collaboratively with deaf-led organisations to ensure that the SLTI profession meets the needs of deaf communities.

Table 1: Summary of recommendations according to stakeholder organisations.

Stakeholder organisation	Acronym	Relevant recommendations
Association of BSL Tutors & Assessors	ABSLTA	2, 4, 19
Association of Sign Language Interpreters UK	ASLI	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
Black Deaf UK	BDUK	4
British Association of Teachers of the Deaf	BATOD	10

British Deaf Black & Asian Ethnic Group	BDBAEG	4
Deaf Ethnic Women's Association	DEWA	4
Deaf Interpreters Network	DIN	2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Interpreters of Colour Network	IOCN	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
National Register for Communication Professionals with Deaf & Deafblind People	NRCPD	1, 6, 7, 16, 17, 18, 19
National Union of BSL Interpreters	NUBSLI	1, 7, 15, 16, 18, 19
Network of Sign Language Interpreter & Translator Educators (<i>proposed new organisation</i>)	SLITE	3, 13, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19
Registration Body of Sign Language Interpreters	RBSLI	1, 6, 7, 16, 17, 18, 19
Scottish Collaborative of Sign Language Interpreters	SCOSLI	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Scottish Ethnic Minority Deaf Club	SEMDC	4
Scottish Register of Language Professionals with the Deaf Community	SRLPDC	1, 6, 7, 16, 17, 18, 19
Visual Language Professionals	VLP	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19

Diversity/ representation in the SLTI profession

1. Key SLTI registration bodies (NRCPD, RBSLI, SRLPDC) and the National Union of BSL Interpreters (NUBSLI) to establish policies and targets with recommended targeted outreach for registration categories that include SLTIs with diverse characteristics that reflect the wider UK population.
2. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and networks (IOCN, DIN) to work with the Association of British Sign Language Tutors & Assessors (ABSLTA) to engage with all BSL training providers to promote the SLTI profession to BSL students from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+, men, deaf, disabled.
3. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and networks (IOCN, DIN) to engage with all Translator and Interpreter Education Programme (TIEP) providers to support recruitment strategies into TIEP programmes for students from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+, men, deaf, disabled.
4. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and IOCN to work with ABSLTA and BSL teachers, as well as representative deaf ethnic minorities,

organisations (BDBAEG, BDUK, DEWA, SEMDC) and hearing ethnic minorities, organisations in regions where there are higher populations of ethnic minorities in the wider and deaf communities (in particular London, Glasgow, the Midlands, and North West England) to target BSL classes and deaf community networks for recruitment from BSL learners/ users from ethnic minorities.

5. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and networks (IOCN, DIN) to work with SLTI agencies to develop policies and targets for booking interpreters and translators to ensure representation of practitioners with diverse characteristics, particularly practitioners from ethnic minorities or who are deaf; and to ensure a gender balance in high-status work.
6. Registration bodies (NRCPD, RBSLI, SRLPDC) to require interpreters and translators to evidence some level of engagement with diversity and inclusion issues as part of their annual Continuing Professional Development requirements.

Marketing/promotion of the SLTI profession

7. All stakeholder organisations including membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP), networks (IOCN, DIN), registration bodies (RBSLI, NRCPD, SRLPDC), NUBSLI and TIEPs to ensure that marketing materials feature intersectional representation in photos/videos of people who are ethnic minorities, deaf, disabled and have balance of gender/ transgender.
8. TIEPs to develop marketing strategies to target BSL training providers and schools across the UK to promote the SLTI profession as a career choice and recruit potential students.
9. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and networks (IOCN, DIN) work with SLTI agencies to ensure that marketing materials feature intersectional representation in photos/videos of people from ethnic minorities or who are deaf, disabled and have balance of gender/ transgender.
10. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and DIN to work with British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) to engage with teachers of the deaf to promote the SLTI profession as a career choice to deaf students.

Training/ education of SLTIs

11. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and networks (IOCN, DIN) to work with TIEPs to offer training and mentoring opportunities to female interpreters for doing high-status work.
12. BSL and TIEP tutors, educators, trainers and SLTI membership organisations to use visual materials and case studies that feature intersectional representation of people from ethnic minorities, who are deaf, disabled and have balance of gender/ transgender in any training materials.

13. Establishment of a network of Sign Language Interpreter & Translator Educators (SLITE) to share teaching practices, activities and materials that foreground intersectional characteristics.
14. SLITE to conduct needs analysis of vocational and academic pathways and whether more and / or different programmes of which kind are needed where; for example, for deaf practitioners or for working with deafblind people, and whether the current qualification pathways are fit for purpose.

SLTI practice

15. Key SLTI membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP) and networks (IOCN, DIN) and NUBSLI to work with other deaf-led organisations to support deaf practitioners to get Access to Work through provision of advice and guidance for applying for and obtaining support.
16. All stakeholder SLTI organisations including membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP), networks (IOCN, DIN), registration bodies (RBSLI, NRCPD, SRLPDC) and NUBSLI, to discuss who does translation work (deaf or hearing); the remit of translators as opposed to interpreters, and guidelines for accepting translation work.
17. All stakeholder organisations including membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP), networks (IOCN, DIN), registration bodies (NRCPD, RBSLI, SRLPDC), to discuss who does deafblind interpreting and make recommendations to update registers of deafblind interpreters accordingly.
18. All stakeholder organisations including membership organisations (ASLI, SCOSLI, VLP), networks (IOCN, DIN), registration bodies (NRCPD, RBSLI, SRLPDC) and NUBSLI, to develop joint recommendations on who does interpreting in spaces occupied by those who are Asian, Black and/ or of other ethnic backgrounds.

On-going review

19. Establish a working group with representatives from all the stakeholder organisations working on recommendations 1-18, meeting twice a year to review progress, student intakes and pipelines, new registrations and membership profiles (in line with GDPR restrictions).
20. ASLI to conduct a census every 5 years, which should include: more options for Northern Ireland and new questions in relation to updated registration categories or training programmes available, post-pandemic working, patterns of remote working, and training needs; as well as a BSL version of the census survey instrument.