

# Role of the Interpreter

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The role of the Interpreter is to facilitate communication between two individuals, where, typically, one is a service providing agency, such as a local authority housing department and the other a client with a problem or an important request.

Interpreters are often given little time to prepare for work in a given situation. They must, therefore, possess the requisite skills and information to respond immediately and effectively to their client's needs in a particular context.

In order to work reliably and effectively, interpreters working in the public sector must have:

- a good command of English and the target language;
- a familiarity with and an objective understanding of the culture(s) in question;
- competence in the relevant interpreting and translation techniques;
- an ability to function professionally in all situations;
- a commitment to the National Register of Public Service Interpreters' professional Code of Conduct and Guide to Good Practice;
- a commitment to the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters' Code of Conduct and Practice;
- a sound knowledge of the structure, procedures and commonly used terminology of the professional areas in which they work; and
- complete impartiality of attitude, speech and script.

## Initial Contact

On initial contact the Interpreter must indicate clearly and unequivocally:

if s/he is  
available to undertake the assignment;  
if s/he is  
able to accept the nature of the task; and  
that there  
is a correct match between the language of the non-English speaking client  
and the interpreter's own working language.

If the assignment is accepted, the interpreter should  
record appropriate details, such as:

the date  
and time of request;  
the name,  
address and telephone number of the agency from which the request is being  
made.

#### Impartiality

the  
interpreter will not negotiate or advocate on behalf of either party;  
the  
interpreter will not act as advisor or counsellor for any party; or  
the  
interpreter will not attempt to influence the outcome of any exchange  
between parties.

#### Confidentiality

The interpreter will maintain utmost confidentiality and  
trust, since clients need to feel that total discretion will be observed by  
both the interpreter and the agency.

#### Awareness of Professional Limitation

The interpreter has the right to refuse an assignment in  
the following circumstances:

when s/he  
feels that they have been inadequately briefed;  
when s/he

feels that they do not have adequate training or support; or  
when s/he  
is subject to unacceptable demands or behaviour from clients.

## Equal Opportunities

An interpreter will not discriminate between parties, either directly or indirectly, on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, age, nationality, religion, gender or physical ability.

## Cultural Guidance

The interpreter may, as a separate assignment, give guidance on cultural norms and differences, in order to facilitate fuller understanding between parties. This is done, however, in the recognition that it is the view of the individual interpreter and that no individual can speak for a whole culture or race.

## Sensitivity

If the assignment has been accepted, the interpreter will also be required to demonstrate sensitivity and understanding in coping with tense and stressful situations, such as racial abuse, child abuse, domestic violence or the trauma of asylum seekers. Similarly, consideration should be given to the sensitivities of the interpreter and his/her vicarious exposure to such situations

Please see full guidelines regarding how to engage an interpreter (organizing a meeting with an interpreter (pdf)