

**Equality bulletin number 45 –
Guidelines for Using
Communication Support Services
for People Needing Language
Support and Alternative Formats for
People with Disabilities**

Revised October 2017

Points to Remember when Using Communication Support Services:

- When using Bigword Telephone Interpreting all staff must remember to use the access code that is applicable to their Office/Department/Unit and their own staff number.
- Staff booking interpreters/Sign Language interpreters must first confirm that the customer can attend the appointment before asking the Equality Unit to book the interpreter. Interpreter sessions are expensive and the Housing Executive will still be liable for the cost if the customer does not attend.

Introduction

Please note this bulletin replaces Equality Bulletin 40.

To help ensure access to our services for all our customers the Housing Executive provides an Interpreting & Translation Service for people needing language support and a range of Alternative Formats for people with disabilities.

These services are managed by the Equality Unit and can be accessed by emailing **andrew.murray@nihe.gov.uk**

This Bulletin aims to advise staff on the services available and sets out some of the ground rules when using them.

The first rule which should apply to all customers with specific communication needs is that the customers preferred method of

communication should be noted and where appropriate recorded on the relevant system when they first come into contact with the Housing Executive. This will ensure that the customers preferred method of communication will be made available to them at all times throughout their dealings with the organisation.

Telephone Interpreting

The Housing Executive's telephone interpretation service is provided by 'thebigword'. Telephone interpreting gives staff and customers instant access to an interpreter. The service is available across all NIHE Outlets and can also be accessed from a mobile phone if necessary. Also as it's a free phone number the Bigword can also be accessed from a customer's home landline at no cost to the customer. Each service outlet should display a Bigword poster to let the public know that the service is available. A guide to using 'thebigword' Telephone Interpretation Service can be found at Appendix 1.

Face to Face Interpreting

There will be occasions where it is more practical and helpful to use face to face interpretation and we would encourage you to do so. For example face to face interpretation can be more practical when dealing with complex issues such as 'sign ups' or form filling and would be more appropriate than using 'thebigword'.

It is important to note that a bilingual child should NEVER be used as an interpreter. However, it is acceptable to use an adult friend or family member as an interpreter, where the client has requested this. However, the client must be made aware that an interpreting service is available.

Ask approval from your Manager to use a face to face interpreter. Then contact the Equality Unit who will book the interpreter. It is recommended to request an interpreter at least five working days prior to the appointment date and provide the following information:

- Name of customer
- Name and contact number of the NIHE member of staff requesting the service
- Language required
- Should the interpreter be male or female
- Date/time of interview (Please remember to confirm that the date suits the customer)
- Location of the interview
- Approx length of interview
- Brief details about the purpose of the interview

Further guidance on using 'face to face' interpreters can be found at Appendix 2.

Translations

There is also a growing need for translated information. The Equality Unit will provide translations for operational use e.g. letters to customers. Copies of all documents translated are kept by the Equality Unit, both in English and 'target' languages, so that they are readily available for general use, and to avoid the same documents being repeatedly translated and paid for. Further guidance about translations can be found at Appendix 3 and a list of generic documents that have been translated by the Equality Unit can be found at Appendix 4.

Sign Language & Lipspeakers

Northern Ireland has two sign languages, British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL). They are two very different and distinct languages and it is therefore very important to find out which kind of interpreter is needed. It is estimated that there are between 3,000 and 4,000 BSL users and approximately 1,500 ISL users in Northern Ireland.

There are three categories of sign language interpreter:

- Member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters (MRSLI)
- trainee interpreter
- junior trainee interpreter

Ideally, MRSLIs should be used wherever possible.

In addition a customer may prefer to use a Lipspeaker. Lipspeakers work with Deaf people who prefer to communicate through lipreading and speech. Lipreaders repeat what is being said without using their voice, so others can read their lips easily. They will also use Fingerspelling if asked. Before booking an interpreter check what the Deaf person wants e.g. Sign Language Interpreter or Lipspeaker etc.

As demand for BSL/English and ISL/English interpreters often exceeds availability as soon as you have a date and time set for an appointment, you should contact the Equality Unit to book an interpreter. Quite often interpreters are booked days or even weeks in advance.

Please note the Deaf person requesting the interpreter may request a specific interpreter by name and may advise of interpreters that they do not wish to use. This information should be passed on to the Equality Unit. When booking a Sign Language interpreter the following information should be provided:

- Name of customer
- Name and contact number of the NIHE member of staff requesting the service
- Sign Language required (BSL or ISL)
- Should the interpreter be male or female
- Has the customer specified any interpreters they prefer to use or not to use

- Date/time of interview (remember the recommended minimum notice for booking an interpreter is 2 – 4 weeks and confirm that the date suits the customer)
- Location of the interview
- Approx length of interview
- Brief details about the purpose of the interview

For information on working with Sign Language interpreters see Appendix 5.

Other Forms of Communication

Electronic Notetaking/ Manual Notetaking

Electronic notetakers type a summary of what is said, on a computer. This information appears on a screen for the deaf person to read it. This service can be used at meetings, on courses and other events. A manual notetaker is trained to take clear notes in handwritten English. This is often used in educational settings.

Next Generation Text (formerly Text Relay)

Next Generation Text (NGT) replaced Text Relay in 2014. The NGT Service works in a similar way to Text Relay and calls can be made in the same way as before using the same textphone or telephone. It is a two way service, which can be actively employed by both callers and staff. Customers using prefix 18001 to the Housing Executive's number and if a member of staff is calling a customer they should prefix 18002 to the customer's number.

As with Text Relay the NGT service is available on home, office, and mobile phone lines. As well as using the same text relay assistants as Text Relay, supporting the same textphones, and having the same 1800 prefixes NGT has some new features, which deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired people can access including:

- **NGT Lite app** - can replace a deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired person's textphone with the free NGT Lite app for computers, smartphones, and tablets.
- **free-flowing conversation** - by using the NGT Lite app, VCO (Voice carry over) is a thing of the past and users no longer need to switch between text and voice.
- **Text Numbers** - gives people who are calling a deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired person an alternative to the 18002 prefix.

The NGT number is noted on all letters (see below) and the Housing Executive's website.

Day to day business	18001 03448 920 900
Repairs line	18001 03448 920 901
Housing Benefit	18001 03448 920 902

Further Information on receiving and making calls using NGT can be found at Appendix 6.

Alternative Formats for Written Material

A number of alternative formats can be made available for the communication of written material including, DAISY, Large Font, Audio, Braille and Computer Disc. If an alternative format is requested contact the Equality Unit who will make arrangements for the requested information to be produced. Also ensure that the request is addressed as soon as possible as it can take some time to receive information in alternative formats from providers. A list of documents that have already been converted to Large Pint format are included at appendix 4.

A statement such as the one below should be included with general publications (e.g. leaflets) indicating that the information will be made available in a selected format on request.

‘Please note this document can be made available on request in alternative formats including:

- Large font
- Audio
- Braille
- Computer Disc
- Main minority ethnic languages
- DAISY

By contacting: **Include contact details for requesting an alternative format**’.

Communication Support Awareness Training

The Equality Unit can offer awareness training which is delivered onsite and will only take around 45 minutes. If you wish to arrange training or discuss any other issue relating to this bulletin please contact:

Tony Steed, Equality Unit Manager

DDI: 028 9598 2556

Email: tony.steed@nihe.gov.uk

Lee Duffin, Equality Unit

DDI: 028 9598 2780

Email: lee.duffin@nihe.gov.uk

Appendix 1

'thebigword' User Guide

- Dial 'thebigword' free phone number 0800 757 3026 (If you are unable to get connected using this number you should try the back up number 0800 694 5096 and follow the same procedure below).
- You will then get an automated 'menu'.
- You will be asked to enter your 'Access Code' that is applicable to your Office/Department/Unit followed by the # key. The code is unique to each office or department.
- You will then be asked to enter your 'Pin Number', which is your staff number (You must always use your own Staff number) followed by the # key.
- Finally you will be asked to enter the 'Language Code' for the language you require followed by the # key – each language has its own code e.g. Polish is 5; Portuguese is 996; Lithuanian is 735; and Slovak is 755.
- The next person you hear will be your required interpreter. Make a note of the interpreter's identification number, time of the call and the language required; so you can provide any feedback if necessary. If you want to give feedback or report a problem, or check your access code, please contact the Equality Unit.

If You Need Assistance:

- If you need assistance when using the service – follow the same procedure above and dial 0 in place of a language code followed by the # key to connect to an Operator for assistance. They can help with any queries e.g. if you know the language you need but can't find the relevant code or if your client has requested to speak to a gender specific interpreter.
- If you don't know what language your customer is speaking (and they don't know what it is in English either) – again follow the procedure above and then dial 700 in place of a language code followed by the # key which will put you through to a 'Language Identifier Agent' who will listen to your customer & then put you through to the right Interpreter.
- If you accidentally put in the wrong Language Code and get through to a Mandarin Interpreter, when you want a Polish Interpreter; just apologise for the mistake, hang up and start all over again.
- If you experience difficulty in connecting to an interpreter, hang up and redial or try the back up number 0800 694 5096. If this fails call the General Service Queries number on 0800 757 3025 and an operator will connect you to the interpreter you require.

Tips for Using Telephone Interpreting

- Identify yourself and your purpose clearly and distinctly, speaking a little slower than usual.
- Give the interpreter a brief outline of the situation letting them know the information that you wish to deliver or obtain.
- Consider the interpreter as a human language link, facilitating communication between languages and cultures.
- Direct your questions to your customer, speaking in the first person. Do not direct your questions to the interpreter.
- Allow the interpreter a few moments to introduce themselves to the customer.
- Be prepared to hear accented English from some interpreters. Feel free to ask the interpreter to repeat a response.
- Understand that there may be some delay before the interpreter can elicit the information you need from the customer due to cultural differences, or a need on the part of the limited English speaker to establish trust.
- Be aware of linguistic differences. Different languages often require a different number of words.
- Expect occasional periods of what might appear as idle chatter between the interpreter and the customer as the communication bridge is built. Please be patient; the interpreter will get back to you but feel free to interrupt if you believe it is appropriate.
- If you wish to ask the interpreter a question, refer to them as 'interpreter'. This will avoid any confusion so your question won't be interpreted to your client.

Setting up a Conference Call

The procedure for a conference call is as follows:

- While on a call; press the Conference key to place the caller on hold. You will then hear the dialling tone.
- Dial the number of the person you want to add to the conference call i.e. your interpreter or your customer. You can talk privately to the person you are adding at this time.
- Press the Conference key a second time to conference all callers together.
- All 3 phones will now be able to hear each other and the call can continue.
- The Conference Call is terminated when any of the callers in the call hangs up. The other 2 callers can continue to hold a phone conversation.

Appendix 2

Guidance on Using 'Face to Face' Interpreters

- Advise the client of the arrangements – this can be done by having a pro-forma letter translated to give to clients, or by using 'thebigword'.
- Work out beforehand exactly what information etc. you need, or what information you wish to pass on to the client. Prepare all paperwork before the interview, with copies for the Interpreter.
- At the start of the session clarify your role within the Housing Executive for both the Interpreter and the Client. Allow the interpreter to introduce themselves, and to explain their role.
- Explain the background to the meeting and the role of the Housing Executive and what social housing is, if necessary. Explain the purpose and most likely outcome of the meeting.
- Allow enough time for the interview, as it will probably take twice as long as other interviews.
- During the session look at and speak directly to the client not the Interpreter, e.g. "Thank you for coming" rather than "Thank him for coming".
- Use short sentences and avoid ambiguous or complex grammar. It will also help greatly to avoid slang or jargon e.g. 'housing stress' or 'housing points'; and allow the Interpreter to speak when you have completed one, two or three sentences.

- Summarise and check that both you and the client understand each other correctly, and allow the Interpreter to intervene where necessary.
- Don't expect Interpreters to keep going indefinitely; they may need a break halfway through the interview or to continue at another appointment.
- At the end check with the client that they have understood everything and allow them to ask questions or seek clarification.
- Arrange another meeting if necessary, and ask for any further information you require or documents you may wish to see.
- Complete and sign the interpreter's time-sheet.

Appendix 3

Guidance on Requesting a Translation

- Ask approval from your Manager for a translation.
- Contact the Equality Unit to request a translation.
- Ask beforehand if there is a need for the translation. Check with the Equality Unit that a similar translation does not already exist.
- Is there support available? e.g. if a listed telephone number will be answered in English this should be made clear.
- Is the document being translated into the right language(s)? There are communities where more than one language is spoken e.g. within the 'Portuguese' speaking population there are also 'Tetum' speakers from East Timor.
- Is the most appropriate format spoken or written? Some languages may be used in a spoken but not a written form.
- In general, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is a 'brand' name and should not be translated.
- Finalise the text before sending it for translation.
- Bilingual Leaflets are recommended - i.e. showing the original English version as well as the 'target' language; an English version should always be available for reference.
- Put the name of the language on the cover - staff will need to know which language e.g. a leaflet is in.
- Avoid jargon or slang, as this tends to be untranslatable or needs explained; it is best to use universal language or explain terms.

Appendix 4

The following generic documents have been translated into other languages and also Large Print by the Equality Unit. This list is not exhaustive and new documents can be translated on request dependent on the business needs of the organisation.

- General Conditions of Tenancy in Chinese Traditional
- Notice Seeking Possession (NSP) in Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese & Spanish
- Notice of Proceedings for Possession of an Introductory Tenancy in Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish & Portuguese
- HB Further Information Request (Regulation 82 (1)) template in Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese & Slovak
- Acceptable Behaviour Contract in Polish
- Complaint Feedback Form in Polish
- Housing Selection Scheme Booklet in Arabic, Polish & Russian
- EEA Nationals Additional Information Form in Slovak & Polish
- Self Employed Income Form (SE1) in Polish
- Gas Wall Hung Boiler Servicing in Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese & Romanian
- Condensation in Your Home Leaflet in Portuguese, Persian (Iran)/Farsi, Chinese Simplified, Somali and Arabic (Egypt)
- Public Liability (PLIC) Claim Form in Polish
- Housing/Transfer Application Form in Large Print, Chinese Traditional and Chinese Simplified

- The Rental Exchange – Tenant Consent Form in polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Portuguese & Tetum
- Belfast Area Rules for Single Let Properties in Arabic (Syrian)
- Rules relating to behaviour in Temporary Accommodation provided by the NIHE in Arabic (Syrian)
- Gas Fact Sheet in Arabic (Syrian)
- Housing/Homeless Information Pack in Polish
- Customer Charter in Large Print
- General Conditions of Tenancy in Large Print and Chinese Traditional
- Tenancy Agreement in Large Print, Arabic (Egypt) and Polish
- Your Rights and Responsibilities in Large Print
- Code of Conduct Anti-Social Behaviour in Polish
- Good Neighbour Agreement in Polish
- Statutory Obligations in Polish
- Supporting People Programme in Arabic (Syrian), Hungarian, Lithuanian, Chinese Simplified, Persian (Iran)/Farsi, Portuguese, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Somali.

Appendix 5

Working with Sign Language Interpreters

- The interpreter and the person they are interpreting for need to be able to see each other clearly for the most effective communication. Interpreters will be able to advise on the most suitable place for them to be, and will take into account lighting and visibility.
- Always speak directly to the person with hearing loss, not to the Sign Language interpreter and talk at a reasonable, normal speed.
- Make sure only one person speaks at a time, otherwise it is impossible to interpret.
- Avoid jargon and abbreviations as much as possible.
- If the person with hearing loss doesn't understand what you've said, don't just keep repeating it. Try rephrasing your sentence or saying it in a different way.
- Allow plenty of time when using visual aids, so people can look at them and watch the interpreter at the same time.
- There will be a short delay because the interpreter needs time to comprehend and reproduce in spoken English what is signed in BSL or ISL and the other way around. This is especially important during questions or discussions.
- The Sign Language interpreter is always neutral - they are not allowed to give advice or offer opinions.

- Sign Language interpreters work within a strict professional code of practice, so everything that is discussed will be kept confidential.
- The Sign Language interpreter will communicate everything that is said or signed. This includes audible asides.
- To do the best possible job, Sign Language interpreters need preparation time and background materials.
- It's a good idea to send copies of any papers, teaching materials or other information at least two weeks before the assignment so that they know what to expect and can practise any technical terms or jargon.
- The work that Sign Language interpreters do requires a very high level of concentration, so they need to have short breaks every 30-40 minutes.

Appendix 6

Receiving a call from the Next Generation Text Service

- If you receive a call from NGT , you will hear the following 'Please hold for a relay – assisted call from a textphone user'
- A relay assistant will then be connected to the call. Once connected, you will hear the relay assistant say 'Hello, you have a call from a deaf or speech-impaired person and I will be relaying the call. Please say 'go ahead' when you have finished speaking.'
- If you have not used NGT before, you can ask the relay assistant to explain how it works.

Making a call from a telephone

- To start a call dial 18002 then the full phone number of the person you want to call including the area code.
- If the person you're calling picks up using a textphone, you will hear a recorded NGT greeting message while you wait for a relay assistant to join the call 'Please hold for the next available relay assistant'
- During a voice to text call each person takes their turn to speak or type. When you've finished, say 'go ahead'.
- When you want to end your call, just say 'bye' or 'goodbye'.

More information about NGT can be found at

<http://ngts.org.uk/textrelay.php>