

Careers in Interpreting



Why interpret?

The world would not work without interpreters. How else would politicians, business people and other individuals communicate when they don't speak a common language?

If you are naturally curious, able to analyse information, can think on your feet and want to help people communicate, then interpreting could be for you. When you train as an interpreter, you'll develop these abilities and learn strong public speaking, note-taking and research skills; you'll also learn about the professional interpreter's role in different contexts and will work on tact, diplomacy and empathy.

All these skills and your knowledge of other languages, spoken or signed, will not only prepare you for a career in interpreting but will also make you extremely employable in other sectors.

Interested in Interpreting?

It is widely known that interpreters need to have excellent knowledge of a second or third language. But many people don't realise that all interpreters need excellent knowledge of their mother tongue too. They should have a wide vocabulary, be able to use the appropriate language for a particular situation and be clear and concise when speaking or signing.

As an interpreter, you might have to work on very sensitive topics or in very stressful situations. Therefore strong nerves and a mentally robust disposition are a must!

What kind of work is available for trained interpreters, using spoken or sign languages?

Freelance interpreter

Freelance interpreting allows you to build up a range of clients and specialist subject areas. Potential clients include governmental and non-governmental organisations, football clubs, multinational corporations and law firms, as well as national and local government agencies including the NHS, police forces and the courts.

Flexibility and being your own boss are the benefits of working freelance, but you must be disciplined to work independently and prepared to be persistent and patient while you build up your client base. You can combine a part-time in-house post with some freelancing, giving you the best of both worlds.

In-house interpreter

As an in-house interpreter, you are employed full-time, part-time or on a contract basis as part of a company's permanent staff. In-house positions are available in large organisations, where you are more likely to perform other tasks in addition to interpreting, including translation, document drafting, editing or minute-taking. In some organisations, you might specialise in one area such as law or medicine. Working in-house provides a more stable income but does not have the flexibility of working on a freelance basis.

Conference interpreter

Conference interpreters work in-house or on a freelance basis, interpreting simultaneously (as the speaker or signer is delivering) or consecutively (by taking notes and conveying what has been said or signed when the speaker/signer pauses).

With international institutions such as the European Commission or United Nations, you often work in a booth, interpreting simultaneously into your mother tongue to delegates wearing headsets. If working for large multinationals or the diplomatic service, you normally work in meetings interpreting consecutively or whispering. For consecutive interpreting, you need notetaking skills, as you do not interpret until the delegate has finished talking. Whispering uses all your simultaneous interpreting skills, but without a microphone!

Public service interpreter

Public service interpreters help people to access the services they have a right to use as UK residents. As a freelancer, you could work for a range of public services, including local authorities, Job Centres or the Home Office. In-house work can be just as varied – if working in a hospital you might interpret for a woman giving birth, a child with a broken finger and a diabetic all in the same day. You must be very sensitive to the circumstances and, of course, enjoy working with people.

Telephone interpreter

Telephone interpreting is used in situations where the individuals requiring an interpreter cannot be present in the same place (e.g. international conference calls, help lines) or where they are in the same place but could not plan for an interpreter being physically present (e.g. doctors' surgeries). As a telephone interpreter, you usually work from home, either 'on call' or on pre-arranged calls, and usually perform 'liaison' (consecutive) interpreting both into and out of your mother tongue. You'll experience a great deal of variety in your work as well as the advantages of working from home.

Voice over

Voice-over recording is increasingly in demand. It is used in a number of different media - the news, commercial adverts, sports events, etc. You can work on a freelance basis or as an in-house linguist, working on providing voice overs in addition to other language services such as interpreting and translation. Working as a voice-over recorder gives you the chance to use your language skills in exciting fields as well as use state of the art technology and learn a variety of recording techniques.

Produced by the Routes into Languages National Network for Interpreting.

Led by University of Leeds, in partnership with University of Bath, University of Salford and University of Westminster, the National Network for Interpreting was established in order to address the following issues:

- National shortage of first language English translators and interpreters
- Reverse the decline in language learning
- Boost interest of young people in the professions
- Generate wider awareness of interpreting needs
- Create greater cooperation between all sectors of education and employer in terms of training.

For information on interpreting, please contact the National Network for Interpreting:
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For information on translation, please contact the National Network for Translation:
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