

Editorial

Several interpreters in Scotland and other stakeholders had access to a draft version of this newsletter. I would like to thank them for taking the time to read the draft and offer their input, which lead to several changes.

The Academy is working on setting up a *Register of Qualified Interpreters* (RQI) for Scotland, which will not be a Regulator. Our Regulator will still remain the NRPSI (www.nrpsi.org.uk). The RQI will be an accessible list of qualified interpreters who are members of the Academy. We want these qualified interpreters to be given priority for jobs, as they can guarantee quality for the public service and for vulnerable end users. We also want these qualified interpreters to be offered jobs from both direct clients and other Language Service Providers. These financial incentives will help qualified interpreters to remain in the industry, as we keep losing them. We also expect self-certified interpreters who do not have yet an interpreting qualification to look at the above financial rewards and be motivated to gain a qualification. This fits in with the overall plan to professionalise public service interpreting in Scotland.

There are many self-certified interpreters working in Scotland and we are under no illusion that it is not possible for everyone to become qualified overnight. This will take time. In the meantime, the Academy will design learning events to keep developing all working interpreters.

We need to work together to create the right financial incentives in this industry and offer support to self-certified interpreters to encourage them to become qualified and remain in this profession.

Agnieszka Ghanem, who has worked for the NRPSI (National Register of Public Service Interpreters) for 19 years and has been the NRPSI Professional Standards Manager for the past 11, wrote the first article of this newsletter. Her extensive experience at the National Regulator places her in a privileged position to answer the question: *what makes an interpreter a professional?*



How can you help?

*Please helps us spread the message
by sharing this newsletter. Thank you!*



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Acknowledgments

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Staying in touch

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What makes an interpreter a professional?

By Agnieszka Ghanem, Professional Standards Manager, NRPSI

In today's consumerism we want everything to be available all year round and delivered fast. We want to be famous, so we try social media platforms or reality TV. We want to get rich quick so we play the lottery. We want the ability to do things straight away so we watch a short video, and we are ready to go. We also want instant careers, without proper preparation or study. But who would go to a doctor who learned their trade from a YouTube video? I am sure you would rather be treated by someone who has a genuine medical diploma hanging on their wall; someone who has proven experience and who has shown competence in their role. I know I would.

Why then do we put up with spoken language interpreting not being treated like a profession but merely as an occupation?

To do something well, you need to acquire the knowledge by studying the subject. You may gain experience at the same time or after you have achieved your qualification. And even if you think that you know it all, why not prove it to yourself and others by sitting exams for a suitable qualification. If we want the profession of public service interpreters to thrive and the title 'interpreter' to be protected, we need to take interpreting seriously and treat it like the profession it deserves to be.

If I asked you 'Can you come to my school and fill in for a sick teacher?' Most likely you would say 'but I can't, I am not qualified to teach!' But when asked to interpret for a defendant in court, many bilingual speakers don't think twice to act as interpreters because they speak two languages. I also speak two languages and I am a qualified teacher of Polish literature, but I wouldn't feel suited to teach the language in the UK; I never studied the methodology of teaching it as a foreign language.

Interpreting is similar, in order to become a professional interpreter, you need to study and practise the methods and skills of consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, sight translation and translation.

You may say 'I learned everything on the job' or 'I self-taught it'. This is admirable, but you could have also learned some bad habits and practices that, although common, may not be appropriate in a professional environment and need correcting.

To do things right is to do them by the best possible standards you can find in the industry; standards which have been developed over the last 28 years through advocacy and lobbying for 'protection of title' by the NRPSI, ensuring regulated and Registered Public Service Interpreters have the respect and standing which reflects their professionalism. Professional interpreters should not only achieve qualifications (where these exist) and continuously update their skills through CPD and experience. They also should respect, and adhere to, the recognised and acclaimed Code of Professional Conduct emphasising the ethics which mark out a professional practitioner. This code not only guides you in what to do (or not to do) in a professional context, but it also protects you and your rights as a language interpreter. Being regulated by the independent voluntary regulator gives assurance to your prospective clients that you are taking your profession seriously and are accountable for your actions.



What also makes an interpreter a professional is his/her awareness of self-worth, limitations and margin for errors.

When you decide to invest in your study, attend CPD events or join professional associations or institutes, you raise the bar. And once the bar is raised you should inform your clients of your skills, qualification and experience; promoting your competencies.

All professionals should also be aware of their own limitations as some jobs require specialist vocabulary and knowledge of procedures. The NRPSI's Code of Conduct covers such cases and advises you to ensure that you only accept work matching your capabilities.

As for the margin for error, you should also be mindful that in some serious cases, you could be liable for your mistakes so it may be useful to get professional indemnity insurance.

In summary, being professional is much more than just wearing smart clothes and being polite. You need to invest in bettering yourself by attaining qualifications, continuously improve your skills and competencies, work according to the respected and established code of professional practice, provide assurance by being regulated, and ensure you know your worth and your limitations.

Agnieszka Ghanem, Professional Standards Manager, NRPSI

As the Professional Standards Manager at the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), Agnieszka plays a vital part in the creation, protection and development of professionalism in public services interpreting in the UK. A university graduate from her native Poland; she was headhunted 19 years ago for a position at the registration department of the NRPSI. At the time, the NRPSI was a subsidiary of the Institute of Linguists (now CIOL). When it became independent in 2011, Agnieszka began handling complaints and disciplinary processes. Since then she has played a pivotal role in the management of NRPSI: supervising the Selection Panel; advising on the Code of Professional Conduct; liaising with those organisations offering relevant qualifications and becoming involved in CPDs. Agnieszka is also involved with the NRPSI's Qualifications Committee, and both the Professional Conduct and Disciplinary Committees.

Standards are a shared responsibility

Who is responsible for professionalism?

The main role of Language Service Providers is to fill interpreting assignments with the interpreters that are available on the market. How can we make sure the available interpreters are *trained, qualified and regulated*?

Gaining an interpreting qualification

What would happen if we removed all interpreters from the industry overnight? There would be no industry. The interpreters are the industry. If we want interpreting standards to improve, this needs to start from the grassroots. It is our personal responsibility as interpreters to keep developing and to only work in languages that we know well enough to use for interpreting. Each single interpreter has the individual responsibility to gradually become trained, qualified and regulated.

Language Service Providers have an active role to play

One of the key responsibilities from agencies and other Language Service Providers (LSPs) is to give priority to qualified interpreters because these interpreters offer the best guarantee of quality to the industry. This is a key area where the Academy is working collaboratively with agencies and other LSPs based in Scotland. There is a great deal more that LSPs could do, and should do for the industry. For instance, we all need to find ways to pay better interpreting fees and offer better working conditions. Otherwise, it is difficult to attract and retain interpreters that have the right skills.

Tenders specifications impact on quality standards

Tenders dictate the rules on how agencies should operate. The way tenders value and recognise interpreting qualifications will have a long-term effect on the industry. It is important that tenders are not just a cost-cutting exercise, otherwise it leads to a gradual erosion of quality standards and it becomes a race to the bottom. Public service contracts should be offering value for money and the Academy wishes to work collaboratively with procurement teams, LSPs, the Regulator, interpreters and all other stakeholders to ensure we collectively come up with ways to find the right balance between cost and quality.

Shared responsibility

We are all responsible for the present state of our industry and we all can play our part in raising interpreting standards. All interpreters should be working towards **becoming** qualified and agencies should promote this commitment by **prioritising** qualified interpreters. If we all work together as an industry and combine both efforts, we will help to raise interpreting standards.

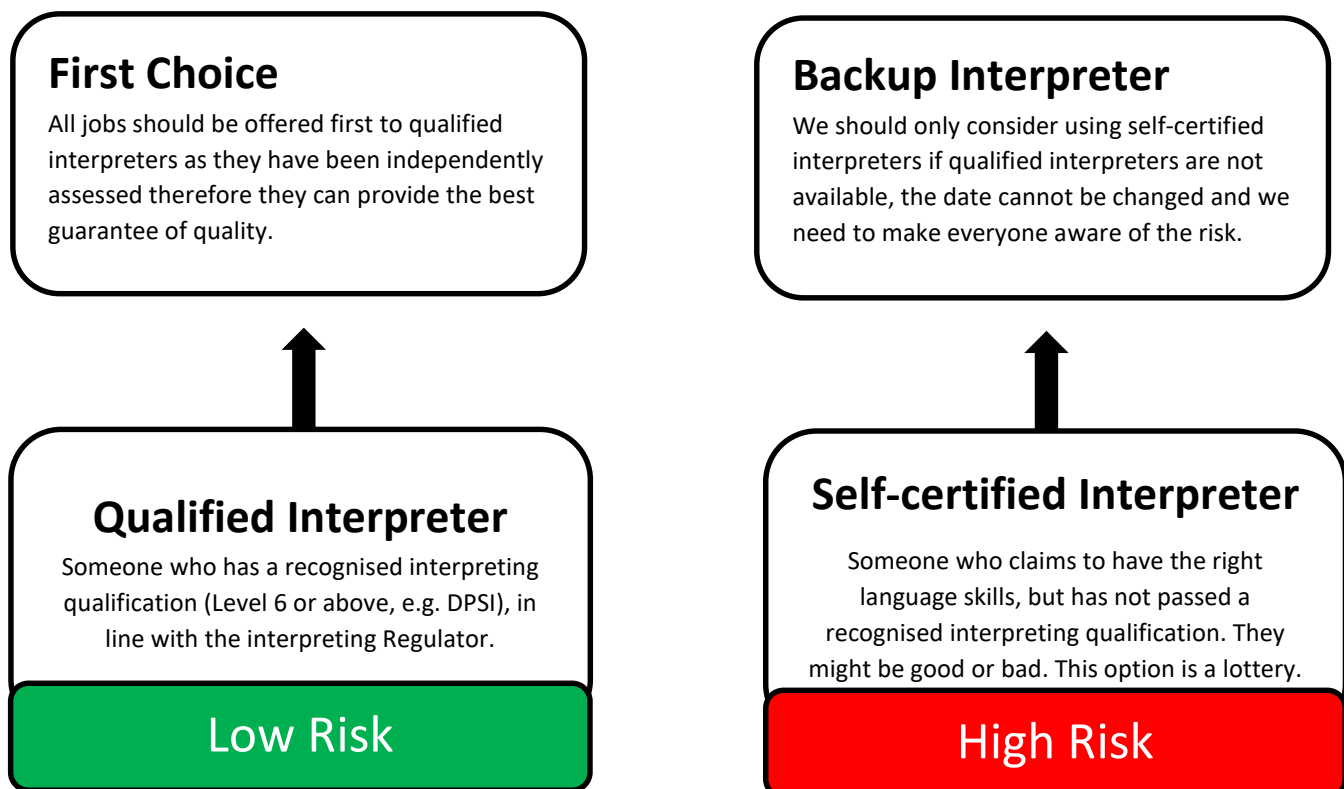
Working together as an industry to find
the right balance between cost and quality.

Qualified *versus* self-certified

If someone is not qualified, they are self-certified. There are amazing self-certified interpreters with a lot of experience. There are also some who, despite having completely inadequate language skills, are working as interpreters and causing ongoing harm to the lives of vulnerable people. Poor language communication can equally add tangible extra costs and delays to the public service:

- legal or medical appointments that need to be repeated
- vulnerable people who stop engaging with essential services
- loss of vital messages that might affect, for instance, legal court proceedings (e.g. leading to possible miscarriages of justice) or, in the NHS, lead to wrong medical diagnoses.

In our previous newsletter we discussed how using a self-certified interpreter is like playing a lottery with a huge risk to both the public sector and the vulnerable people who need an interpreter. This is why qualified interpreters should be given priority whilst all other interpreters should be able to access a clear pathway to recognised qualifications.



Reducing the level of risk

As in any profession, there is no guarantee of zero risk when selecting an interpreter. However, the risk of poor interpreting for vulnerable users, and for the public sector in general, can be minimised by selecting a qualified interpreter. Exams in any profession are benchmarks that offer a guarantee to the market that professionals have the right skills. Without assessments, the risk of employing someone who is actually unskilled becomes higher.

A job board for qualified interpreters

The Academy has plans to have an online job board for its qualified members. This is a way to promote and reward them. Will a job board replace agencies? The quickest answer is: no. The job board will actually allow both agencies and direct clients to offer jobs to qualified interpreters. Solicitors for instance are likely to use this service. Other private and public service direct clients are also likely to use it but realistically the biggest users of the job board will be Language Service Providers from Scotland, the rest of the UK and from abroad.

Police Scotland and Scottish Courts

Police and Scottish Courts interpreting jobs will appear on the job board. However, realistically, these jobs will not be advertised directly by the Police or the Scottish Courts. These jobs will be advertised by agencies. Will the Scottish Courts or Police advertise jobs directly in the future? This opens up a bigger debate about outsourcing and insourcing. Police officers nowadays no longer have the time to contact several interpreters to find one that is available. They cannot put a job advert in a job board and wait for a reply. Furthermore, if the interpreter found decides to cancel the job, the police officer will need to restart this process. This used to happen in the past but things have changed. Police officers and court officials have enough work already as it is. They expect that either external LSPs (outsourcing) or an in-house dedicated team (insourcing) will do this leg work for them.



A pool of qualified interpreters

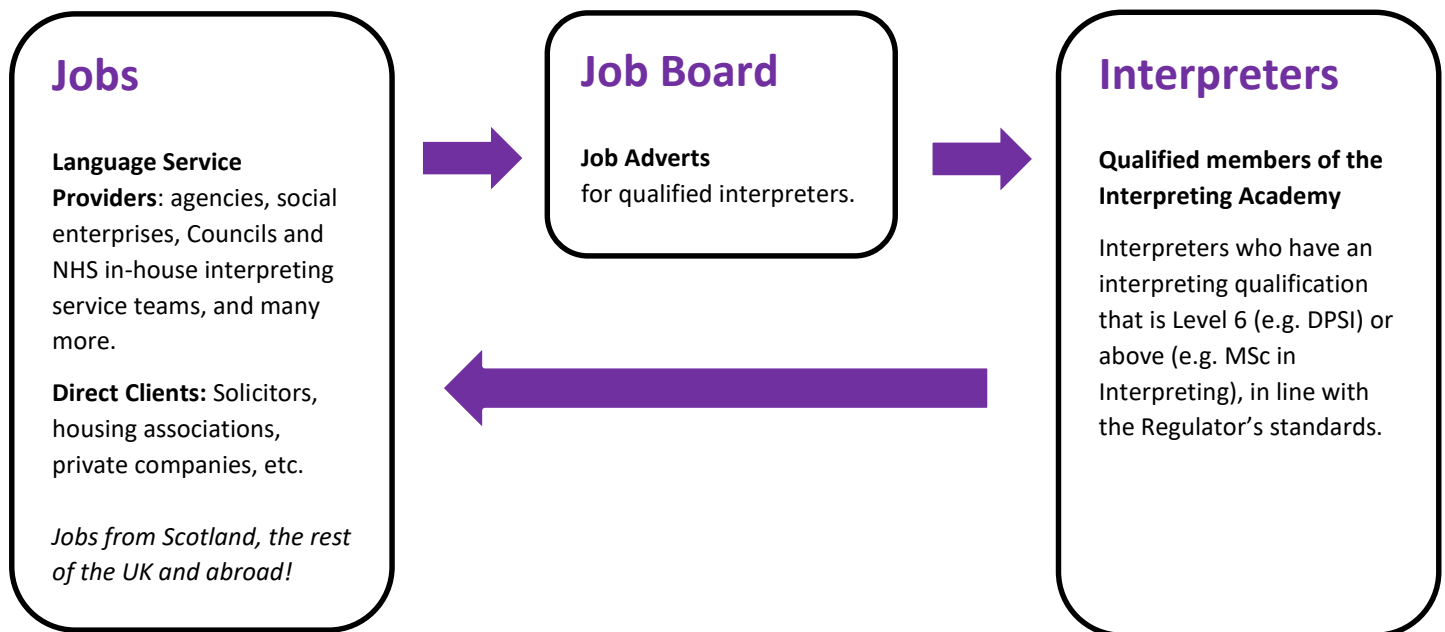
It is expected that agencies and other Language Service Providers will be the ones using the job board regularly to offer jobs to qualified interpreters. The pool of qualified interpreters should be available to the whole market. This will help raise standards, as more jobs are given to qualified interpreters.

Retention

If qualified interpreters do not earn enough money from interpreting they will leave the industry, reducing the future pool of available qualified interpreters. The job board will also have job adverts from direct clients which are likely to be better paid than agency ones. These extra jobs are important to boost the income of qualified interpreters.

How does a job board work?

A job board is an online place to advertise interpreting jobs. In the past, job adverts were placed on newspapers and now they tend to be online on job boards. After the job advert is placed online, interpreters are free to respond or not. If they respond the commercial relationship is between the interpreter and the organisation that advertised the interpreting job. Neither the Academy or the Register of Qualified Interpreters will get involved with those commercial transactions.



Financial incentives

When we ask self-certified interpreters why they don't choose to get a qualification, a very common response is:

*"What is the point of getting a qualification?
I am getting jobs anyway."*

The success of the job board is likely to become a great financial incentive for self-certified interpreters to become qualified.

In some cases, interpreters with and without an interpreting qualification are paid the same by their LSP which makes it seem that getting an interpreting qualification is more pointless. There are also other barriers that make it difficult for self-certified interpreters to get a qualification (e.g. the cost of the qualification and potential resits).

In a nutshell, for self-certified interpreters the benefits of getting a qualification often don't seem worth the cost and time investment it needs.

The industry needs to create the right financial incentives for interpreters to become qualified, such as:

- **Prioritise jobs** for qualified interpreters – LSPs and tenders have an important role to play here.
- **Higher interpreting fees** for qualified interpreters – this already happens with many LSPs and tenders.
- **Create a job board** that offers jobs exclusively to qualified interpreters – we are currently working on this incentive, which should also help the whole industry to use more qualified interpreters.