

There are lots of different industries and sectors that are going to require the [services of an interpreter](#). This can be for a variety of reasons. However, the aim is always the same. To ensure that those who are within the social services network have access to the help that they need and that they can understand the information that is being given to them.

If you are currently working as an interpreter and you want to move into working in social services, or you are new to interpreting, here is our guide on how to become an interpreter in social services.

What is an Interpreter in social work?

Much like any other industry that an interpreter may work in, interpreters in social work are there to help someone who doesn't have English as their first language. They will be able to [fluently speak another language](#) and translate what is being said to the person in English back into their spoken language, all in real-time.

Why are interpreters needed in social work?

Every single day social workers need to be able to communicate with users of the service effectively. For those who speak English as their first language, this communication can be made easily, the normal way that a conversation would flow. However, for those who do not have English as their first language and find it hard to speak or understand English, it can be difficult for them to understand what is being said to them.

More often than not, the information that is being communicated is incredibly important and must be understood, which is where the services of an interpreter are required.

Within social care, interpreters are there to ensure that everyone understands what is happening and what is being said, no matter what language they speak.

How do you become a public service Interpreter?

Much like any other interpreting job out there, becoming a [public service interpreter](#) means that you are going to need to take a look at local job boards and websites for any vacancies that are open to applications.

Sometimes, there may also be chances for you to work as an interpreter on a consultant or freelancer basis. However, this might not be as common as an employed role within social services.

What qualifications do I need to be an Interpreter?

One of the first things that you need to have as an interpreter is the ability to speak at least two languages (one of them being English) to a fluent level. However, there are also other qualifications that you can have which will help to improve the chances of you securing an interpreter role in social care.

One of these is a [Certificate](#) of Bilingual Skills, and another is a Diploma in [Public Service Interpreting](#). Both of these are designed to help to give you all the skills and knowledge that you may need to enable you to be the very best that you can be in your interpreter role.

Can you be an interpreter without a degree?

In order to become an interpreter, it is always recommended that you have a [degree in a relevant subject](#). This is because it will show that you have plenty of knowledge and experience in the area.

The most common degree is going to be around languages. This could be a specialism in linguistics, or it could be more around translation.

It is important to remember that having a degree in either of these areas is not an essential part of becoming an interpreter. Instead, you should always focus on having experience in the language that you want to interpret and that you also have a high level of understanding of the English language too.

Skills you'll need to have

As we have already covered a few times in this article, the first skill that you need to have is language fluency in at least two languages (one of which will be English). Not only this, but you also need to have an understanding of the culture and the other key aspects of both parts of the world, as this will definitely help you when it comes to interpreting.

You are also going to need to be someone who is able to listen carefully and really take on board what is being said to you, even if this is in another language and may not always be something that you understand.

An interpreter needs to have a keen eye for detail, as even missing a small part of the conversation could end up having a big impact on what is being said or the understanding of what is being said.

Finally, an interpreter should be caring and empathetic, especially if you want to work in social services. This is because, more often than not, the information that you will need to communicate is going to have an emotive response. It is important that you try to understand how the other person may be feeling and do your best to be sensitive to them and their feelings or emotions at that point in time.

Level of work experience

As with any job, you will find that the more experience you have in that particular role, the better chance you will have of securing the position that you are applying for. However, with interpreting, there is always a starting point, and so long as you have relevant language skills and are able to present yourself as having at least some of the key skills, you are going to be giving yourself the best chance of being successful.

Role and responsibilities

It is important that you understand that a social services interpreter will be a key part of the assessment and intervention process. They will be there to facilitate communication when the social worker cannot.

In doing this, they will be able to gain vital insight into the experiences of the people or persons who are involved in the case, as well as their wishes and feelings too.

Having their input on the situation is a key part of ensuring that their human rights are met and that there is not going to be a risk of an incorrect outcome to the case.

Forms of interpreting provision

There are a variety of different forms of interpreting provisions that can be offered. The first is consecutive interpreting, where the speaker will talk for

around five minutes before taking a break and allowing the interpreter to translate. It is a way to ensure that both parties are able to have a back-to-forth conversation whilst still covering all the important parts of the information.

You can also have simultaneous interpretation, which does not wait for any breaks in the conversation to translate. What is being said is interpreted and relayed right there and then as they are talking, and sometimes only has a delay of 30 seconds (sometimes even less). This can be one of the most pressurised of all the forms of interpreting services for an interpreter to have to work through.

What to expect on the job

Being an interpreter, particularly when you work in social services, means that your days (and the work that you do on them) is going to be incredibly varied. Whilst the main task that you complete (translating spoken word) will be largely the same, you are going to find yourself working with a variety of different people and in differing circumstances too.

This means that you will be able to gain a wealth of real-world experience and knowledge of the world. It will also allow you to really work on your own language skills and how you use them.

Professional career development

Once you become an interpreter, the career path will take you into more senior roles (albeit in the same line of work). However, you may also find that you can then use your interpreting skills to teach others how to start their own career in the sector.

You can even set up as a contractor or freelancer or hire a team and work as an agency on interpreting services.

Where to find employment?

Finding an interpreting job is much like finding any other job. One of the best places to look is online. If you want to work within social services, then you can always approach the relevant recruitment department and ask them to notify you if there are any relevant vacancies coming up in the future.

Interpreting training

It is always good to try to upskill yourself and your ability. This means that you should, wherever you can, try and attend interpreting training. This could be to work on your language skills (which will then help you with your work), or it could be for the soft skills that are also part of working with members of the public too.