Sign Language Interpreting Service

PROMOTING ACCESS AND STANDARDS IN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

Assessing current capacity of sign language interpreting in Ireland

Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) launched a research project in January 2017 designed to assess the current capacity of interpreting in Ireland. In recognition of the growing field, national skill shortage, and unique working conditions of ISL interpreters, SLIS aimed provide a clearer picture of the number of interpreters available to the Deaf community. Participants were contacted for voluntary phone interviews, reaching interpreters available to work full time, part time, and open to participants who no longer work as an interpreter. Each response was associated with a random identification number to ensure participant confidentiality.

An independent researcher conducted interviews over the span of two months, and collated data into the final results of the study. The data analysis began by coding responses into categories based on themes that emerged from each question. Themes were prioritized by magnitude and frequency of response, and identify opportunities to improve the retention of Irish Sign Language interpreters and the conditions they currently work in.

The results of this study will inform future operations within SLIS, and begin to identify the occupational barriers Irish sign language interpreters face.

Study results

25 participants (77 contacted)

› 18 full time interpreters, 7 part time interpreters, 0 interpreters no longer working
› 17 trained at the Centre for Deaf Studies (Trinity College Dublin), 3 NUI Cork and Bristol University, 3 other training

Interpreter availability:

On average, how many hours per week do you work as an interpreter?
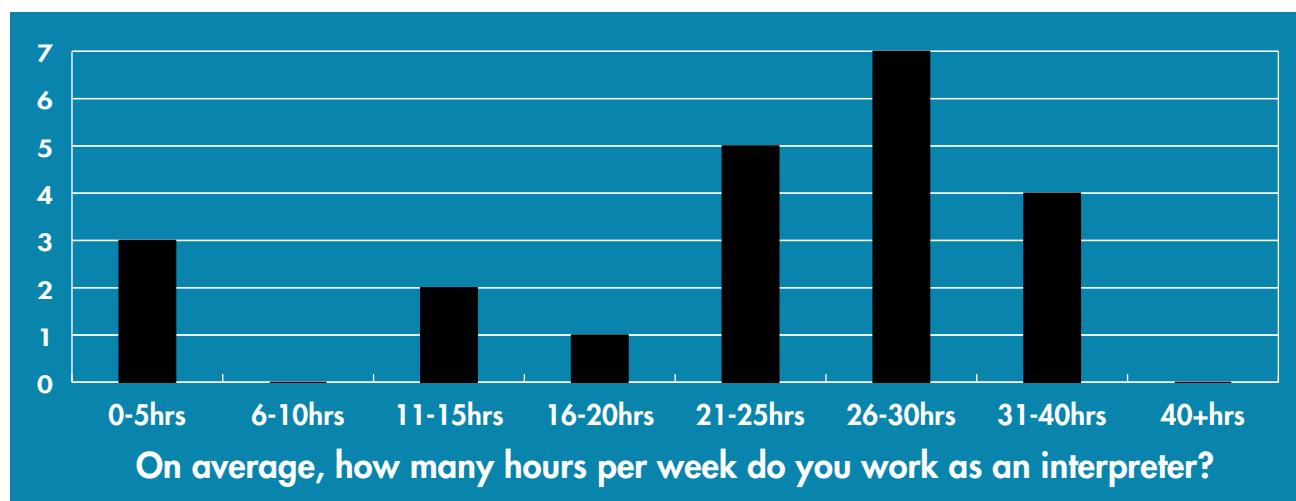
Additional working hours:

› Administrative activities: majority average between *0-4 hours per week*
› Commute for work: Majority average between *9-20 hours per week*

Available work has seasonal patterns

› Busiest months:
  » September-November
  » February-April

› Least busy months:
  » June-August

› Mirrors academic calendar
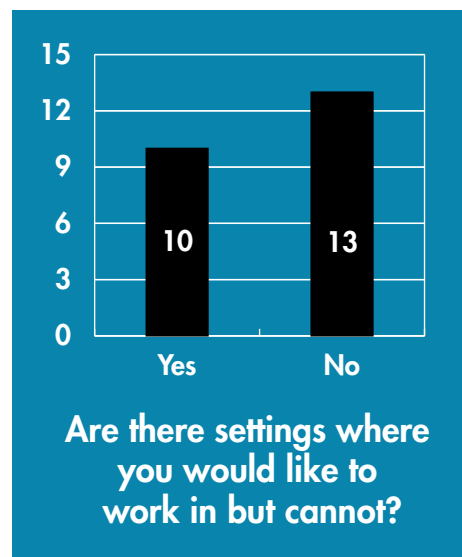

Do you have regular work throughout the year?
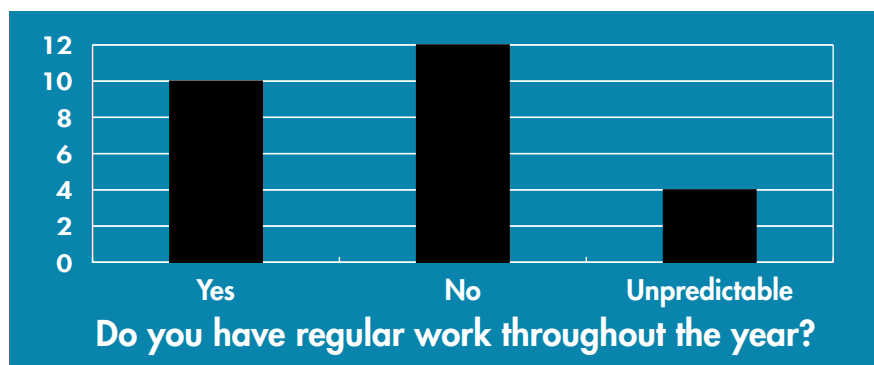
Expanding interpreter opportunities

Specialisation: requires training or mentorship

› Legal
› Medical
› Performance
› Teaming with a Deaf interpreter

Interpreters not often contracted

› National schools
› Prisons
› Heritage sites

Are there settings where you would like to work in but cannot?

	Yes	No
	10	13

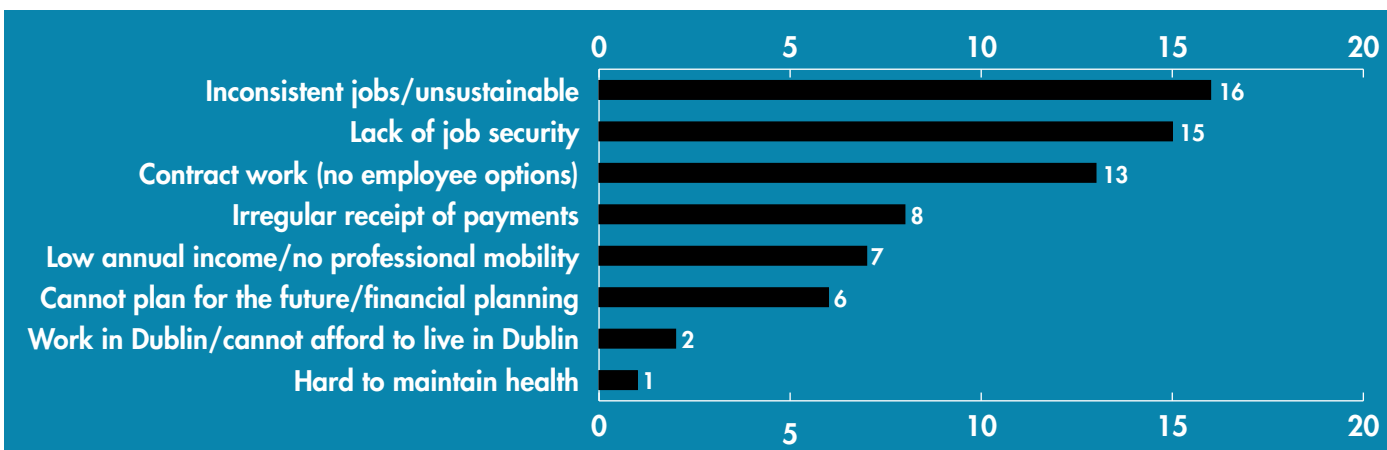## Growth and retention of sign language interpreters

Support requested

› *Training and continued professional development*
› *Improved mentoring*
› *Money management and business skills*
› *Support systems for self-care*

Proposed changes

› *Clarification of the interpreter role for service providers and Deaf community*
› *Formal recognition of the profession*
› *Formal mentoring system*
› *Stronger collaboration with the Deaf community*

Careers, not jobs

Survey participants recognise work infrastructure as a principal concern for retention of interpreters in Ireland. The graph below identifies specific barriers:

Barrier	Value
Inconsistent jobs/unsustainable	16
Lack of job security	15
Contract work (no employee options)	13
Irregular receipt of payments	8
Low annual income/no professional mobility	7
Cannot plan for the future/financial planning	6
Work in Dublin/cannot afford to live in Dublin	2
Hard to maintain health	1

National opportunities

› Active government support
› Legal standards: Irish Sign Language recognition, interpreter registration

National skills shortage: Professional instability and burnout

The combination of job insecurity, travel time, business management and underlying structural issues are significant barriers to growing the capacity of sign language interpreters in Ireland. The results taken in isolation highlight specific concerns and sources of burnout, however the overall landscape of ISL interpreting is inhospitable to the professionals providing services. Many participants suggest motivated and committed interpreters are often forced to leave the field due to the barriers found in this survey.

Recommendations

Training and mentoring

› On-site and online streaming
› Topics requested by interpreters (e.g. business skills, legal, medical, voice over, teaming)
› Programs for structured/paid mentorship

Advocacy

› Lobbying and position papers: ISL recognition
› Clarification of the interpreter role with Deaf and hearing clients
› Promote teaming for long jobs
› Employment opportunities and job security
› Peer support and self-care
› Awareness of barriers facing the Deaf community

Partnerships

› Strengthened interpreter networks
› Leadership and transparency
› Develop professional standards (cancellation policies, rate and raises)

Future research

› ISL interpreting profession
› Deaf community

Thank you to all the sign language interpreters who participated in this study. Your voice is invaluable to the growth and retention of the profession.

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