



Patient Experience - Interpreter Services for Deaf patients

August 2018



Healthwatch is the consumer champion for health and social care in England. We give children, young people and adults a powerful voice to influence and challenge how services are provided in the city by making sure their views and experiences are heard by those who run, plan and regulate local health and social care services.

In 2012 the Health and Social Care Act set out that each local authority should establish a local Healthwatch. In 2013, Plymouth City Council undertook a competitive tender process and awarded the contract to an established local organisation called Colebrook (SW) Ltd.

Experienced in public and patient involvement, Colebrook launched Healthwatch Plymouth in April 2013, ensuring independence through its governance structures and a memorandum of understanding between those working in and delivering the services, and the organisation itself.

Background

In late March 2018 Healthwatch Plymouth received feedback from Healthwatch colleagues in Devon about lack of availability of a British Sign Language/English (BSL) interpreter for a surgical procedure at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth. The following week, Healthwatch Plymouth held an engagement event at Lisson Grove GP Surgery where we took feedback from a Deaf gentleman via his BSL/English interpreter about experiences his Deaf sister had accessing an interpreter as an inpatient at Derriford Hospital and subsequent reablement stay in a care home setting.

Subsequently since this initial information, Healthwatch Plymouth have received considerable further feedback from other service users around availability of BSL/English Interpreters for appointments both in Primary and Secondary Care. This feedback has been obtained via face to face engagement, email, other organisations (Deaf Organisation based in Essex and Deaf Community in Devon) as well as discussions with several BSL/English Interpreters based in Devon and Cornwall.

British Sign Language

British Sign Language is a sign language used in the United Kingdom, and is the first or preferred language of some Deaf people in the UK. The language makes use of space and involves movement of the hands, body, face and head. Many thousands of people who are not deaf also use BSL, as hearing relatives of deaf people, sign language interpreters or as a result of other contact with the British Deaf community. Like many other sign languages, BSL phonology is defined by elements such as handshape, orientation, location, movement, and non-manual features

using a topic-comment structure for its grammar. It is also distinct from Signed English (a manually coded method expressed to represent the English language) and Makaton (a communication system for people with cognitive impairments or other communication difficulties).

Access to BSL/English interpreting services

NHS Accessible Information Standard From 1st August 2016 onwards, all organisations that provide NHS care and/or publicly-funded adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard. The Standard sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss. For Deaf people the standard states that they should *‘Be supported by a communication professional at appointments if this is needed to support conversation, for example a British Sign Language interpreter.’*¹

Equally NHS England’s Principles for High Quality Interpreting and Translation Services states *‘Organisations should ensure that communication professionals working with Deaf, deafened and deafblind people (including British Sign Language/English interpreters and deafblind manual interpreters) used in health and social care settings are registered with the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). Registration confirms they hold suitable qualification(s), are subject to a Code of Conduct and complaints process, have appropriate insurance, hold an enhanced disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service, and engage in continuing professional development.’*²

National Framework Agreements In December 2014 the UK Government stated its intent to establish a national framework agreement for NHS Shared Business Services to ensure ease of access and offer a compliant route to market for NHS organisations. Subsequently a National Framework Agreement is in place for Interpretation and Language Services - including sign language³. The concept of frameworks is that they provide cost savings. By buying in bulk, it is expected that savings can be made via increasing competition in the market. The current framework for Interpretation and Language Services runs until 31 October 2020.

Sign Language interpretation services in Devon and Cornwall

BSL/English sign language services in Devon and Cornwall are provided by the following companies:

¹ NHS England Accessible Information Standard – Overview 2017/2018

² NHS England’s Principles for High Quality Interpreting and Translation Services – Annex 1

³ www.sbs.nhs.uk/proc-framework-agreements-support

Signsolutions⁴

- Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Foundation Trust
- North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
- Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust
- Devon County Council

Language Empire

- NHS England Primary Care Commissioning - Devon
- University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust
- Livewell South West
- Plymouth City Council

Hearing Loss Cornwall⁵

- NHS Primary Care Commissioning - Cornwall
- Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust
- Cornwall Partnership Foundation Trust

Service user feedback that Healthwatch Plymouth has received is around BSL/English interpreting services provided by Language Empire.

As part of the background for this report, we looked at other commissioned services in Devon and Cornwall and engaged with Healthwatch colleagues in Devon, Torbay and Cornwall to see if there were similar issues with BSL/English interpreter availability commissioned with other services. The lack of patient feedback would indicate that there are no issues being reported. The system commissioned in Cornwall is run by Hearing Loss Cornwall. A breakdown of how the service runs is provided at Annex A.

Relationship between patient and interpreter

During our conversations with Deaf users of BSL/English interpreter services and the interpreters themselves, it has become really clear that Deaf people form strong relationships with interpreters that translate for them akin to a close family relationship. Deaf people are often challenged in their ability to read English as signing is their language. Therefore, the ongoing relationship with their BSL/English interpreters is an extremely important element to factor in. Trust is at the heart of this relationship and is built up over time; BSL/English involves not only signing but interpreting of facial expressions as well both by the Deaf person and the interpreter. The BSL/English interpreter meets or contacts the Deaf patient before the appointment to ensure that they find the right department, are

⁴ Information provided by Healthwatch Devon

⁵ Information provided by Hearing Loss Cornwall

less stressed and have often been the intermediary to ensure that the patient has followed pre-op instructions, such as not eating.

‘A patient had a last minute operation and had, therefore, not been in prior contact with her interpreter. She thought that only drinking clear fluids meant that she shouldn’t have her normal cup of tea. She proceeded to eat breakfast but only drink water.’

This mis-communication caused a seven hour delay at the hospital and some distress to the patient.

Deaf people generally seek continuity of interpreter when needed for communication support with public service providers ranging from interpreting in hospital and GP appointments to legal and justice matters, as well as social care, child protection and mental health services. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is not always possible for the same interpreter to be available for an appointment, the benefits to the individual of having continuity should not be underestimated. These include an individual who is known and trusted by the service user and confidence that information is accurately relayed to and from the service professional. Equally the service professional also benefits from this approach.

Service User Feedback

A report published by the Deaf Health Charity Signhealth in 2016 entitled ‘Sick of it - How the health service is failing Deaf people’⁶ highlighted issues that Deaf people were experiencing when accessing health care services. The report was produced in association with researchers at the University of Bristol and themes include ‘Bad access’, ‘Poor or no information’ and ‘Communication issues’. Despite the NHS launching its Accessibility Information Standards in the same year, the feedback we have received indicates that issues highlighted in the report appear to be still happening today.

The feedback we have received to date covers Primary Care services in Devon and Derriford Hospital and covers the following themes:

- Lack of availability of BSL/English Interpreters for planned appointments
- Alleged use of non-qualified interpreters in a health setting
- Lack of understanding or confusion over information given during health appointments
- Use of Video Relay Services

Lack of BSL/English Interpreters

BSL/English Interpreter services for Primary Care Services in Devon and Derriford Hospital in Plymouth are provided through a company called Language Empire

⁶ <https://signhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Sick-Of-It-Report.pdf>

based in Rochdale. This company also provide services for Plymouth City Council under contract. Language Empire are one of the supplier companies under the National Framework for Interpretation and Translation Services⁷. They act as a portal for services to request BSL/English Interpreter support for patients, liaising with BSL/English interpreters to meet the request and deal with invoicing and payment for those services. It should be acknowledged that BSL/English interpreters are freelance and the requesting NHS/Local authority service are not always able to secure a patients preferred choice of interpreter.

Service User feedback indicates that despite assurances from healthcare services that an interpreter has been booked, on attendance at the appointment often no interpreter is available. Feedback also indicates that this has become a more regular occurrence since early 2018 although availability issues were being experienced in 2017.

‘I have cancer, so I've had lots of appointments at Derriford Hospital. This all started last year (2017), and the difficulties I've had with getting sign language interpreters for my appointments have been getting worse and worse. Four times over the past months I have been to the hospital for appointments, only to find that there is no interpreter there.’

Another Deaf patient commented

‘Had an appointment last week (beginning of July 2018) with GP, but no interpreter available. Tried my best to understand but got GP to call my husband so he could relay information to me when I got home.’

Use of non-qualified interpreters

Feedback has also indicated that a non-qualified interpreter (as determined by NHS England Accessibility Standards) has been provided by Language Empire in response to service provider requests.

‘I attended an appointment on 25th June 2018 at 8.40am at Knowle House Surgery. I was glad that an interpreter was being provided as I needed communication to be clear.

Upon arrival I saw that [Name redacted] had been booked as the interpreter for my appointment. [Name redacted] IS NOT an appropriately qualified British Sign Language interpreter. I had great difficulty understanding the signs [Name redacted] was using to relay the doctor's comments. The appointment was confusing and I am not confident I obtained the full information I needed.

This was incredibly stressful for me. Communicating with hearing people is always challenging, especially difficult when medical jargon is involved. Attending an

⁷ www.sbs.nhs.uk/ica-interpretation-translation-services

appointment without adequate interpreter support is extremely upsetting and stressful.'

Another service user commented

'Everything was going well until 4 months ago when I had an interpreter for an endoscopy appointment⁸. The interpreter was a [Name redacted] provided by Language Empire. [Name redacted] is not a qualified BSL interpreter and I had to try my best to understand them but found it difficult.'

Lack of understanding or confusion over information given

Lack of face to face interpreter provision for appointments leads to a poor understanding of any information given leaving the service user confused. Within the Deaf community, the understanding of written English is variable and is often dependent on the age that someone became deaf. For those born deaf or who became deaf at an early age, understanding of the English language is likely to be limited.

This has the potential to compromise not only patient safety due to lack of understanding of information given but requiring an additional appointment with the service professional putting increased strain on systems that are already under pressure. The following three comments highlights some of the concerns raised by Deaf patients:

'Following an appointment GP prescribed me tablets, but I didn't understand what tablets were for or how to take them. I felt deaf awareness of the GP was not good and that they didn't understand the issues I had. [It was] unclear if no signer was available or one wasn't booked.'

'I had an appointment at Derriford for tests (June 2018). I was advised an interpreter was booked but had cancelled. I was informed that the nurse would sign a little. I went ahead with the appointment but didn't have a clue what was happening.'

'I have cancer! I REALLY need to know what is going on. I need to understand everything the doctors are telling me about my treatment. It is bad enough having cancer, without the added stress and frustration that comes from not having an interpreter there to make sure that I understand everything that is said to me by the doctors.'

Video Relay Services

Other services are also available to support Deaf people including lipspeakers, electronic notetakers, text services and video relay services (VRS). With the

⁸ Following investigation of patient records by UHPNT this appointment was conducted at the Nuffield Hospital in Plymouth

advent of mobile technology, the use of VRS is becoming more widespread. As such several systems are currently available including InterpretersLive!, InterpreterNow, SignLive Limited and SignVideo. The services are accessible by an app on mobile devices such as tablets and mobile phones linking the individual to an accredited interpreter provided by the host service available on a daily extended hour basis. Derriford Hospital use the SignLive VRS. This makes the service valuable for emergency/short notice appointments and for general enquiries to confirm appointments etc.

However, for planned outpatient appointments where diagnosis and treatment advice are being given, elective or non-emergency surgery is being undertaken or when important information needs to be passed to an inpatient, an accredited interpreter should be provided to reduce the risk of misunderstanding any information given.⁹ VRS should only be offered to the patient as a backup service in case of short notice cancellation of availability by the interpreter. It must be understood by service professionals that video relay services do not work for all Deaf people and some have commented to us that:

‘They didn’t feel connected with the signer’

‘Cannot always make out facial expression’

‘Found the system stressful and embarrassing and also difficult to understand due to being 2D’.

When recording the communication needs of patients, it should be ascertained whether the patient is comfortable in using VRS.

Technically the system also relies on having good broadband/Wi-Fi connectivity otherwise screens can freeze during interpretation and sound becomes unavailable making it equally frustrating for the service professional and Deaf patient alike. This often leads to the session being abandoned, with the Deaf person being left confused and not fully informed.

‘I found the whole SignLive experience very stressful and unworkable. The system kept crashing and even when the interpreter was on screen, the interpreter couldn’t understand me and there was a real struggle to communicate.’

Poor Wi-Fi connectivity in certain parts of Derriford Hospital has also led to issues with patient’s own mobile apps.

‘My Mother-in-law has dementia and relies on me to attend appointments with her, especially since her own daughter died recently. She has had appointments recently where no interpreter was available. I have a phone app called ‘Dictate’

⁹ NHS England Accessible Information Standard – Overview 2017/2018 Page 2

that turns speech into text. The phone was given to nurse to communicate, but poor Wi-Fi access meant it was unusable.'

Full comments are at Annex B.

Language Empire

We have been made aware of a dispute between Language Empire and BSL/English Interpreters in Devon that has currently not been resolved resulting in the refusal of a high percentage of interpreters to work with the company, which we are advised is due to continuous difficulties with this agency's payment terms (the dispute is predominately around late or non-payment of fees). This has led to a significantly reduced pool of interpreters who are willing to take work and provide services under the Language Empire contracts with Primary Care services in Devon, Derriford Hospital and Plymouth City Council.

Potentially this may indicate:

- The supply of unregistered and non-qualified interpreters for healthcare appointments
- Slow to react to safeguarding concerns raised by qualified interpreters to them about the use of unregistered and non-qualified interpreters
- Booking interpreters for appointments, using the name of an interpreter who refuses to work with them, only to 'cancel' these at the last moment and stating that the 'interpreter has cancelled'

We are aware that Language Empire have written to BSL/English interpreters around the payment issues stating that new processes and procedures are in place to resolve the previous issues, but we are advised that there remains a high degree of mistrust and lack of confidence amongst interpreters over the company's promises and instances of delayed payment have still occurred. BSL/English Interpreter comments and concerns are at Annex C.

Healthwatch Plymouth has also been made aware of a survey conducted with members of the Devon Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) where 17 respondents from 19 indicated that they do not currently accept work from Language Empire. When asked 'If Language Empire issue a promise to improve their payment system and operations in the future, would you ever work for them again?' 15 respondents said 'No', 3 said 'Yes' and 1 currently 'accepts work'. Full results and comments from this survey are at Annex D.

Healthwatch Plymouth have contacted Language Empire with the concerns raised above but have yet to receive a response.

Healthwatch Plymouth Observations

Healthwatch Plymouth has the following observations:

- The current lack of BSL/English interpreter availability for health appointments is a concern for Healthwatch Plymouth and is leading to inequitable access to services, an increased risk of treatment and medication information not being understood by the Deaf patient and ultimately concerns over patient safety
- The relationship that can build between patient and interpreter, especially trust, appears to be little understood and the lack of interpreter provision can lead to an erosion both of patient choice but more importantly patient confidence in the accuracy of information being passed to them
- Before the National Framework came into being, BSL/English interpreters could be treated as a preferred supplier, this is no longer the case. Whilst National Framework contracts can produce savings for the NHS, in the case of translation services it appears that payment terms and processes have become more convoluted. In part, along with Language Empire's payment process, this has led to the current situation between Language Empire and the BSL/English interpreter pool in Devon that indicates that a high percentage of interpreters will not accept work from Language Empire
- As a consequence of the National Framework and actions of the supplier, health service providers are also being let down leaving them to manage a difficult situation, often at very short notice. As a result, video relay services are being used more often to at least provide some form of interpretation service for patients, sometimes when this would be considered as undesirable or inappropriate
- Equally the lack of interpreter availability is potentially being used by the supplier to either supply unregistered and/or non-qualified interpreters or to give a name of an interpreter to the requesting service for the appointment without consulting the named interpreter and then cancelling at the 11th hour by stating that the 'interpreter has cancelled'
- Following conversations with colleagues in Healthwatch Devon, Torbay and Cornwall, lack of service user feedback held by these Healthwatch around BSL/English interpreter availability indicates that there is no or little issue of provision for GP services in Cornwall or for other NHS Trusts in Cornwall and Devon where different providers are commissioned. It would also appear that the commissioned service in Cornwall is robust.
- Deaf people find it difficult to make a formal complaint as the current process means that these complaints have to be written in English
- Deaf awareness amongst healthcare staff appears to be inconsistent and some staff do not understand the issues and potential anxieties that Deaf people experience in attending appointments

Healthwatch Plymouth Recommendations

Healthwatch Plymouth has the following recommendations:

1. All communication preferences for Deaf people should be recorded on health records, including whether or not they are comfortable in using communication aids like text or video relay services and their preferred BSL/English Interpreter
2. Review complaints processes to make it easier for Deaf people to raise concerns
3. Broadband/Wi-Fi connectivity in Derriford Hospital to be assessed to ensure that all areas where video relay services are being used have adequate signal to allow a seamless service without the connection breaking up
4. Deaf awareness training for clinical and administration staff should form part of regular staff continuation training for health professionals and non-clinical staff who have contact with Deaf patients
5. Commissioners to take into account the issues raised by local BSL/English Interpreters around the lack of trust and willingness to work with Language Empire so that availability and access to interpreters can be increased in order to better support Deaf service users and reduce inequalities for this patient group. Commissioners to consider working with local BSL/English interpreters and their associations (West Country Interpreters, Devon & Cornwall ASLI and Visual Language Professionals (VLP)) around resolution of the issues raised

Responses to our report

Healthwatch Plymouth have received the following responses to our observations and recommendations.

NHS England Primary Care Commissioning Team South (South West) responsible for GP service commissioning in Devon and Cornwall have stated:

‘Whilst noting the concerns raised around Language Empire, we would clarify that NHS England only commission the service for Primary Care services therefore we are unable to comment on any services which are supplied from Derriford.

In regards to Primary Care the report implies that NHS England went to the framework for language and translation. Although Language Empire are on the framework list of providers, a full procurement exercise was in fact undertaken. Following due diligence and evaluation of bids, the contract was awarded to Deafinite. Deafinite unfortunately made the decision to cease trading with only one months’ notice received. NHS England therefore, as per process in line with procurement practice and regulation, went to the next bidder who scored

the second-highest in evaluation and met the necessary criteria which was Language Empire.

After receiving short notice from Deafinite, Language Empire took over the contract on 18 December 2017 and had to mobilise very quickly in order to deliver on the contract and ensure that patients had continuous access to services. NHS England have had regular review meetings with Language Empire where the operation of the contract has been addressed particularly as they had mobilised at such short notice.

The issues around the lack of payment for interpreters was addressed with Language Empire at the last contract review meeting in August. Language Empire have demonstrated that they have put steps in place to ensure that payment is now more timely. Language Empire are also subcontracting bookings out to Sign Solutions to ensure that the appointments are filled.

NHS England are moving away from using independent interpreters in line with procurement law. Using a large and vetted supplier for BSL does ensure that interpreters are insured, compliant, and provides greater assurance to NHS England.

NHS England are confident that the issues that have been raised in the report have been discussed at length with Language Empire at local contract review meetings, and they have subsequently put considerable time and resources into building up the service to ensure that BSL patients have consistent access to Primary Care services in the South West which we will continue to monitor and assure.'

University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust commented:

'University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust has noted the concerns raised around Language Empire and is only able to comment on the aspects of the report applicable to this Trust.

University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust are not able to use independent interpreters in line with our governance and contractual arrangements. The Trust uses an interpreting agency to ensure all interpreters are insured, competent and qualified for assurance purposes.

We have raised our concerns directly with Language Empire and as a result of this, where Language Empire are not able to secure a booking for a BSL interpreter themselves, they have been outsourcing additional face to face BSL bookings through another interpreting agency. Following this action the Trust has seen an increase to its fill rate for face to face BSL interpreter attendance at patient appointments. It should be noted this is only a temporary measure whilst the Language Empire provision continues to be reviewed.'

Specifically in response to Healthwatch Plymouth recommendations, University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust have stated:

Recommendation 1 - Patient communication preferences are record on IPM which is our patient record monitoring system. If we have been unable to book an

interpreter we will offer SignLive as a back-up, but it is patient choice and will only be used if the patient consents. We also record a patient's SignLive extension number which allows us as a Trust to make calls to them. Following the review of a complaint received by the Trust has resulted in all BSL Deaf patients being written to when their interpreter has been confirmed for an appointment with the interpreters name and details of the appointment.

Recommendation 2 - The Trust has received a number of complaints, through MP's, advocates and direct from BSL Deaf patients. We recognise the difficulties BSL patients face in making complaints and have offered to go to the Deaf Association's service at Blake Lodge and run PALS clinics.

Recommendation 3 - The WIFI system at Derriford Hospital has been upgraded and we now only use the GOV WIFI system for SignLive; this has a stronger WIFI signal. The Trust have also had a meeting with the provider of SignLive to review issues with the service. SignLive has recently extended their opening hours to 24 hours 365 days per year which is positive for emergency admissions.

Recommendation 4 - Deaf awareness training sessions for staff have already started and the first one was held on the 5 June 2018.

ANNEXES

- A Profile of Hearing Loss Cornwall
- B Service User Feedback
- B BSL/English Interpreter Feedback
- C Association of Sign Language Interpreters Survey results

Hearing Loss Cornwall

Hearing Loss Cornwall are a Registered Charity, with the aims of ensuring that the barriers that Deaf people face are minimised as much as possible. Part of the charity's work is in running a BSL/English interpreting agency and they are commissioned to provide this service in Cornwall. This works well for the Deaf residents of Cornwall and for the NHS who use HLC's services to source interpreters. Patients have the choice of a number of ways to ensure interpreters are booked for their appointments. The system works well for service providers too:

- Patients can text or video call their preferred interpreter and ask them either to book a medical appointment (GP for example) or attend an appointment they have been invited to (eg Hospital Consultation). The interpreter, or the patient then simply advise HLC of the appointment and the charity take care of the authorisation and payment etc
- When patients receive a letter asking them to phone to book an appointment, the patients can either text or video call their preferred interpreter to ask them to call the HLC Booking Service to make an appointment, or the patient can contact HLC
- Patients can text or email HLC to ask them to source an interpreter
- Bookers can text, email or phone HLC to ask them to source an interpreter for an appointment
- For emergencies or out of hours, patients can text their preferred interpreter, who will, if available, attend emergency appointments with the patient, having every confidence that HLC will sort out the post-event authorisation and payments. When interpreting for a birth, for example, the interpreter know they can stay as long as the clinicians require them to and that the authorisation and invoicing will all go through smoothly
- In addition to the office-hours service, EDs & RCHT have information regarding how to contact HLC's out-of-hours service, which generates a phone message to all the interpreters registered with HLC, asking if any of them are free to attend
- HLC advocate and advise the NHS in Cornwall on the needs of the Deaf Community and actively ensure that any barriers which arise are dealt with smoothly and efficiently, using their extensive knowledge of deafness and the communication difficulties it causes
- Through experience, interpreters in the region state they have trust in HLC that invoices will be paid on time, that their queries will be dealt with in a professional manner, and that their professionalism and training will be respected

Annex B

To

Patient Experience - Interpreter services for Deaf patients

Service User Feedback

<u>Derriford Hospital</u>	
Neurology Department	<p>My elderly sister-in-law suffers from epilepsy and both she and her husband are Deaf. Following a fall at home, she was admitted to Derriford, where she remained for six weeks. Unfortunately she was not given access to an interpreter and it resulted in her sister (who is NOT deaf) to act as the interpreter whenever she visited. This was an emotional time for the family, and I felt that it was inappropriate that a close hearing member of the family had to act as the translator.</p> <p>My sister-in-law has now moved into a care home but unfortunately, no-one there is able to sign so is only able to communicate with her husband when he visits. I am keen to stress that the care being given to my sister-in-law is not in question, it's the isolation she must be feeling as she cannot communicate with those around her.</p>
Neurology Department	<p>I support my brother-in-law who is Deaf. My brother-in-law's wife (who is also Deaf) has epilepsy and was in hospital for 4 months (Dec 17 - Mar 18). The ward staff are OK, but no interpreter was provided during his wife's stay (Neurology) and relatives feel let down especially following tests. The family have contacted PALS, but despite assurances no interpreter booked/available. The wife is now in a care home.</p> <p>The family felt pressure was put on them to provide interpretation service, but feel this was not appropriate.</p>
Neurology Department	<p>Gentleman went to Derriford for a Neurology outpatient appointment. No BSL interpreter was available/provided. SignLive was available and worked with no technical issues. However, the SignLive interpreter ended the session before the patient could ask questions. Gentleman stated he prefers face to face translation as he cannot always make out facial expression when using a video relay service.</p> <p>Having booked in for his appointment on arrival, gentleman was in waiting room when a member of staff called his name. He could not hear this and it was only when he realised that patients who had arrived after him were going through to the consultant that he questioned with the receptionist whether he had been called through or not.</p> <p>Gentleman is now due <u>Physio appointment at Plympton Health Centre</u>, but is concerned that no interpreter is available.</p>

Annex B
 To
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Oncology Department	<p>I am not being offered an interpreter by health & social care services. I have to rely on my family. I try to ask services if an interpreter is booked but no-one ever seems to confirm to me that one is available. It is very frustrating and difficult when going through a major health concern. It links to depression and worry for me. It's wrong and shouldn't be like this. For last 3 years I have had bowel cancer and had to have 6 monthly check ups. I was never offered any alternative for interpretation. I personally like face to face interpretation, not online.</p> <p>I need to know if an interpreter is booked but my daughter has to call the hospital on my behalf. It should be automatic that one is booked and I am notified surely? I am so thankful to the interpreter at the Plymouth Deaf Association drop-in who will also make phone calls on my behalf. I am consistently let down when I arrive for an appointment and there is no interpreter there. Last Friday for the first time ever there was one and it was the best ever being able to access my own health information with an interpreter being present.</p>
Oncology Department	<p>I had an appointment at Derriford for tests (June 2018). I was advised an interpreter was booked but had cancelled. I was informed that the nurse would sign a little. I went ahead with the appointment but didn't have a clue what was happening. I have since given them a list of preferred interpreters that they could have called and booked. The 'system' is totally unreliable as it happens again and again. We are not given any decent choices.</p>
Oncology Department	<p>I want to tell you about how frustrated I've been during my treatment. I have cancer, so I've had lots of appointments at Derriford Hospital. This all started last year (2017), and the difficulties I've had with getting sign language interpreters for my appointments have been getting worse and worse. Four times over the past months I have been to the hospital for appointments, only to find that there is no interpreter there.</p> <p>Last month (March 18), I had an appointment for a procedure. There was no interpreter there. I felt so let down. Last week (April 18) I went about a lump in my neck. Again, there was no interpreter there. I was furious about this. This is SO frustrating for me. Of course, I need detailed information about my cancer and the treatments and procedures. I need access to all the information, through a BSL Interpreter. Tomorrow, I was booked for an appointment at the hospital. Unbelievably, I have been told today that the appointment has to be cancelled because Language Empire can't get an interpreter for me. I have really had enough of this. It is vital that I have an interpreter for every appointment so that I can understand what is going on with my cancer and my health. Without an interpreter, it is impossible for me to understand, or for the doctors to understand me. <i>(Continued over page)</i></p>

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	<p>In the past, the hospital used to book interpreters direct and everything ran smoothly. I could get an interpreter for any appointments I had and I was happy. Since the hospital started using Language Empire, things have become much worse.</p> <p>I have cancer! I REALLY need to know what is going on. I need to understand everything the doctors are telling me about my treatment. It is bad enough having cancer, without the added stress and frustration that comes from not having an interpreter there to make sure that I understand everything that is said to me by the doctors. I have really had enough of all this - it needs to change and I need to have an interpreter at every appointment, without Language Empire causing problems.</p>
Orthopaedic Outpatients	<p>Had phoned in advance of appointment and was advised an interpreter was booked. I attended my appointment and was advised that there was no interpreter as they couldn't make it and no SignLive was available. I had to go through the appointment with the consultant writing things down but it was not easy. An interpreter I know happened to be at Derriford around that time and spoke to reception on my behalf who made a phone call to the department to requested the information shared by the consultant in easy language, so that I could take it away and read. This process is not helpful or conducive to an effective medical appointment.</p>
Orthopaedic Outpatients	<p>My wife was referred by her GP to Orthopaedics for investigation of a hip problem. No interpreter was available for the appointment, SignLive was offered but connectivity slow and we found the system stressful and embarrassing and also difficult to understand due to being 2D.</p> <p>We have a further appointment on 9 July at x-ray and are now worried that no interpreter will be available. We are in our 80's and have no family support.</p>
Physiotherapy	<p>I received a letter from hospital saying the interpreter had cancelled but offering SignLive. I had wanted to cancel my appointment but my husband encouraged me to go. I attended and was provided SignLive but it had no sound and kept freezing, it was a shambles. I was about to give up and leave but an interpreter turned up from a sub contracted agency. It would have been a waste of appointment had I left when I felt like it. My hospital records state that I am deaf, therefore it should be automatic that an interpreter is booked. I have complained to PALS/GP (Knowle House) but have not heard back from PALS yet.</p>

Annex B

To

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Service not identified	My Mother-in-law has dementia and relies me to attend appointments with her, especially since her own daughter died recently. She has had appointments recently where no interpreter was available. I have a phone app called 'Dictate' that turns speech into text. The phone was given to nurse to communicate, but poor Wi-Fi access meant it was unusable.
Service not identified - Rowan House	I am not very impressed with Derriford responses as I have asked if interpreter was booked for me for Aug 7th at Rowan House. I had to wait over 4 days for their reply and would they let me know who the interpreter was. I felt let down as I didn't feel comfortable with interpreter they provide me for that day. It is not the interpreter I felt comfortable with as I depend on my usual interpreter and I understand she will never work for Language Empire. We should have our choice and confidence in the interpreter as this gives me confidence to explain consultant my view on my health.
Emergency Department	I had a disturbing time in Derriford as I was admitted into emergency department without any interpreter on August 5th. I know it was short notice, but my son came later to help with communication. On the Monday 6th August my son phoned Derriford early in the morning to make sure they will organise interpreter ready for my operation etc. They said oh yes we have, but the doctors who came to see me talk lack of knowledge what they said, so one of them wrote explain me not good at understand not clear what op was etc after op I felt stressed because of information not clear my wife and son came see me during the day then went home later nurse said I am ready to be discharged at 8 pm the same eve after op I was shocked told them I am still pains etc they said need bed for someone else
Maternity	<p>Unhappy and very concerned of my health and unborn baby wellbeing's.... story how start..... last Thursday see midwife for routine appointment check-up. As she reviews paperwork and measurement she concerned how I describe tight chest spells, dizzy and feel faint so she want to refer me to Derriford Hospital to have blood test for glucose and diabetes (G.D.) routine test for pregnant woman. She ring hospital and talk want to do glucose diabetes check and have baby growth scanning. [Midwife] wanted to make sure they confirm they provide interpreter. Midwife want to ensure I know everything information about G.D.</p> <p>They ring back midwife and confirm interpreter will be available [I am] pleased to hear.... till yesterday. On 13th August attended hospital with my mum who can't sign, regular orally lip read but she often not understand what I say like barriers to communication. We went day assessment unit, nurse said to us apologies no interpreter. Had go ahead take blood test and horrible drink like cough syrup! Had to wait other blood test for an hour and half.</p>

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	<p>But we had to go scan check baby. I suddenly feel unwell, faint, lightheaded my heart race beatings and chest is tighter but not aware this is side effect or not.</p> <p>When we [are] in scan room, lay down to scan my belly suddenly throw up and body is shaking unexpectedly... unbalanced stand up... offer me drink water, rest for few mins before continue to have scan..... came back to glucose test waiting room then I try explain my mum as she speak nurse say that [tests]normal. We went home after 2nd blood test finished. Today about 1pm between 1.45 the hospital ring my partner whom is hearing (he know small sign languages) talk and hospital confirm want talk me. My partner explain I'm positive of glucose diabetes test [and they] want me come back hospitals for monitoring and explain how use insulin's and dietician foods as they want talk me about have baby induced early due high risk. My partner ask please can provide interpreter as very important make sure I'm knowledgeable and awareness about it. She say will try get interpreter but can't promise. Sorry longest u to read as I'm genuinely concerned about myself (35+2 pregnancy) and my unborn baby.</p>
Car parking	<p>Recently used car park at Derriford. On leaving paid for parking, but unknown to me token was damaged. When I went to leave token would not work. Traffic was queued behind me and I could not reverse back. I was unable to communicate with the attendant at the car parking desk and it took a while for someone to come and sort out the problem.</p>

<p><u>Nuffield Hospital, Plymouth</u></p>	
Endoscopy	<p>Everything was going well until 4 months ago when I had an interpreter for an endoscopy appointment. The interpreter was a [Name redacted] provided by Language Empire. [Name redacted] is not a qualified BSL interpreter and I had to try my best to understand him but found it difficult ([Name redacted] is Signing Exact English qualified)</p>

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<u>GP Service</u>	
<p>Out of Hours GP Service based at Derriford Hospital but run by Devon Doctors</p>	<p>I am Deaf and attended the Out of Hours GP Service based in Derriford with my son in May 18. I was directed to this service by NHS 111. On arrival no video relay service was available, although ED Department do have the system.</p> <p>I and my son (who is a minor) were seen by an Asian GP and conversation was conducted by writing that excluded me and I assumed that my son was diagnosed with Scarlet Fever, but still not sure if this was the diagnosis. Generally when visiting the GP with my son or daughter, Mum feels invisible at the appointment.</p>
<p>Stirling Road Surgery, Plymouth</p>	<p>Following an appointment GP prescribed me tablets, but I didn't understand what tablets were for or how to take them. I felt deaf awareness of the GP was not good and that he didn't understand the issues I had. It was unclear if no signer was available or one wasn't booked.</p>
<p>Tavistock Health Centre</p>	<p>Had an appointment last week (beginning of July) with GP, but no interpreter available. Tried my best to understand, but got GP to call my husband so he could relay information to me when I got home.</p>
<p>Torpoint Surgery</p>	<p>The iPad is unreliable and really hard and you end up missing stuff. It jumps backwards and forwards. I see different doctors, which again adds to the confusion and it's all basically a lucky dip. The only way to get some reliability for my appointments is to bring a family member but you don't always want to rely on family for your personal appointments.</p>
<p>Knowle House Surgery, Plymouth</p>	<p>Attended an appointment on 25th June 2018 at 8.40am at Knowle House Surgery. I was glad that an interpreter was being provided as I needed communication to be clear.</p> <p>Upon arrival I saw that [Name redacted] had been booked as the interpreter for my appointment. [Name redacted] IS NOT an appropriately qualified British Sign Language interpreter.</p> <p>During the appointment I could see that the information I was being provided was not being fully and completely relayed. Also I had great difficulty understanding the signs [Name redacted] was using to relay the doctor's comments. The appointment was confusing and I am not confident I obtained the full information I needed.</p> <p>This was incredibly stressful for me. Communicating with hearing people is always challenging, especially difficult when medical jargon is involved. Attending an appointment without adequate interpreter support is extremely upsetting and stressful. Additionally, it is not appropriate to send a male interpreter when I had been advised on</p>

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	<p>my form that a woman was to be booked. As a result I had to have my appointment rebooked which is very frustrating.</p> <p>Furthermore, I am concerned that by attending an appointment with a signer that is unqualified and unregistered and therefore not bound by a code of ethics, I do not have access to the same level of privacy and confidentiality that other patients have.</p> <p>I am also very concerned that using unqualified and unregistered interpreters could mean that my health is at risk due to mis-communication.</p> <p>I would like assurance that for all future appointments [Name redacted] is not booked and only professional, qualified and registered British Sign Language interpreters are used.</p> <p>In my opinion, PCC need to set up a deaf community hub as a solution and central point for deaf people to attend and get support with their health and social care needs.</p>
Abbey Surgery, Tavistock	<p>I am profoundly Deaf and use sign language to communicate. When I meet with a GP I requires a fully qualified British Sign Language Interpreter to be present.</p> <p>I had an appointment on 1st June. [Name redacted] called the surgery on 30th May to ensure an interpreter would attend, as a result an interpreter was provided at this appointment.</p> <p>I was then booked in for a follow up appointment - the receptionist told me a BSL interpreter would be booked, however upon arrival there was no interpreter.</p> <p>I then had another appointment booked for 12th. [Name redacted] called the surgery on 6th July to request a BSL interpreter be present, however when I attended his appointment there was no interpreter.</p> <p>I am concerned about my health and feel that I have not been given the opportunity to converse with the GP in the same manner as other patients. I am anxious that my health concerns are not being investigated.</p>

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	<p>I would like you to be aware that this is incredibly stressful for me. Communicating with hearing people is always challenging, especially when medical jargon is involved. Attending an appointment without adequate communication support is extremely upsetting and unnecessary.</p> <p>I would like you to be aware that I feel let down by the surgery. I would like assurance that for future appointments, the same interpreter can be used for consistency. This is something that is important to me when discussing my medical history or health concerns.</p>
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<u>Video Relay Services</u>	
Derriford Hospital	<p>SignLive is great for when I need to phone the hospital to check about appointments and interpreters. It's good that I can get SignLive to interpret phone calls when I want to talk with PALS. SignLive is also good in A&E, when it's not possible to book an interpreter in advance. SignLive can be used until a proper interpreter gets there.</p> <p>SignLive is NOT suitable to use for consultations and appointments, or for things like oncology appointments or procedures. The hospital need to understand that these are complex and sensitive situations and no Deaf person should have to discuss their medical information via an iPad. I have been given an iPad sometimes when I've been at appointments, but not for many of my appointments. When I have been given an iPad, there have always been technical problems and the appointments have been a nightmare. Video relay needs really good Wi-Fi to work. This never goes smoothly in the hospital because of the Wi-Fi not being good enough. Sometimes I can see the on-screen interpreter but the doctor can't hear them speaking. Sometimes the connection fails, or won't connect at all. SignLive should never be used for pre-booked appointments anyway, a face to face interpreter is what's needed.</p>
Derriford Hospital	Had an appointment at Derriford and SignLive was provided for the appointment. Didn't feel connected with the signer and also frustrated as system kept 'freezing'.
Derriford Hospital	I received a letter from hospital saying the interpreter had cancelled but offering Sign Live. I had wanted to cancel appointment but my husband encouraged me to go. I attended and was provided Sign Live but it had no sound and kept freezing, it was a shambles.

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Derriford Hospital	I went to Derriford for a Neurology outpatient appointment. No interpreter available/provided. Sign Live was available and worked with no technical issues. However, interpreter ended session before I could ask questions. I have stated I prefer face to face translation as I cannot always make out facial expression when using a video relay service.
Derriford Hospital	My wife was referred by GP to Orthopaedics for investigation of a hip problem. No interpreter available for the appointment, Sign Live offered but connectivity slow and we found the system stressful and embarrassing and also difficult to understand due to being 2D. (Couple are in their 80's with no family support)
Derriford Hospital	I am deaf and needed to attend A&E with my young son who had an injury. I found the whole SignLive experience very stressful and unworkable. The system kept crashing and even when the interpreter was on screen, the interpreter couldn't understand me and there was a real struggle to communicate. As you can imagine, this made a bad situation much worse. I was already stressed by my young child's injury and trying to comfort him. Add to that the stress of the communication barrier not being effectively bridged and I have come away feeling frustrated and furious.

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BSL/English Interpreter Comments

As part of our research we have contacted some of the BSL/English Interpreters working in Plymouth and Devon. The following comments were made to us.

I am deeply disturbed that Derriford Hospital Trust and whoever agrees the interpreting contracts for GP surgeries in Devon have lumbered themselves with an interpreting agency that seems to be actively strangling its own ability to provide British Sign Language interpretation across the county. Language Empire, the agency, use only freelance local interpreters (having no salaried BSL interpreters themselves) and I know that MOST of the BSL interpreters have not been paid and are owed thousands of pounds in fees. They, like me, are not accepting jobs via the agency, deaf people are left without access to healthcare across GP, secondary and tertiary care levels, and the health trusts are contractually obliged not to seek interpretation from other agencies or direct from the interpreters themselves. I spoke to a deaf lady yesterday who had a leg amputation without interpretation this month (March 18). Such failures cannot go un-investigated.

I was asked by Language Empire to attend an appointment for a deaf gentleman but as I will no longer work for them I said no. However, knowing this gentleman has cancer and knowing him through the Deaf community, I attended the hospital to see what was happening regarding interpreter support for his appointment as I knew how desperate he was. He can't use the iPad and was uncomfortable having an unqualified family member interpret for him and the family were equally uncomfortable in interpreting for him.

I contacted PALS on this gentleman's behalf and was advised that the interpreter that was booked had cancelled. I asked who the interpreter was and the name they gave was mine. I assured PALS that the interpreter HAD NOT cancelled but that she had in fact refused to work for Language Empire in the first place.

Language Empire had not listened to me and had sent through the booking form to me anyway, which I sent back immediately saying again that I had already said I did not want the job. I have the paper trail to evidence this.

I was asked by PALS to interpret for this gentleman and because I know him I agreed to do it. However, by doing this interpretation I was essentially working for Language Empire which I do not wish to do.

I moved to the Plymouth area a few years ago. At that time, I took many bookings through Language Empire (LE). I had also taken bookings for a few GP appointments and was under the impression that I could invoice the NHS directly as there are a few of us that already do so.

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For the first year, I never encountered any problems, fees were never challenged, calls were returned, and I was paid in a timely manner.

Last year (2017) I had many issues relating to late payments from LE and resulted in a non-payment claim through the Courts. This was eventually resolved however, after a short time, payments began to add up again and a lot of time was taken up contacting LE via telephone and email to no avail.

At the same time, I was contacted by the NHS to say that I must invoice and take bookings through LE as they could not set me up as a direct supplier. NHS paid the few invoices I sent and repeated that I must now go through LE.

I had emailed my concerns to LE and the contact at the NHS but was assured everything would now be paid to date now the new pay system was up and running.

This is still a problem and due to late payments, I have asked LE to remove me from their database of suppliers. LE informed me they cannot do this until all outstanding payments are cleared. I am still owed for 5 bookings completed, dating from 29th of May until 6th of June.

I am often contacted by members of the BSL community to ask that I attend a health appointment. Very few Interpreters can attend and invoice without going through LE. If they are not available, the person has to wait/re-book for when the interpreter is available. I find myself available for most requests but not able to attend.

I have also experienced Health Centres contact me directly with the hope to book me due to ongoing issues they face sourcing Interpreters through LE. The patient gave them my details with hope of booking me. Again, I have no means of invoicing directly.

I also learnt that LE had told a requester I had confirmed a booking they had requested. At some point before the confirmed booking, the requester was informed that I had cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. I had no knowledge of this request and had never been asked if I was free or if I could attend. I complained and was told it was an admin error.

This happened a few times to my knowledge and after I saw written confirmation of this, I complained again. Originally, via telephone I was told this wasn't the case but was contacted via text some time later with an apology.

I emailed LE again around 16th July with a list of bookings I'm still waiting to be paid for. I have had a reply today via email to confirm I will be paid (I don't know when) and told it should have been 'picked up' automatically.

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As you are aware, the major issue impeding Deaf patients' access to healthcare in Plymouth is the contract which the Hospital Trust holds with Language Empire. Due to continuous difficulties with this agency's payment terms and behaviours, interpreters are refusing to work for Language Empire, meaning that hospital staff have to resort to either having no interpreter or using SignLive, often in wholly inappropriate situations.

When we talked previously, you mentioned discussions in which it was stated that Language Empire have promised to improve their systems. I stated that LE have promised this so many times before that interpreters had lost all faith in this agency and that whatever LE promised, they could not be believed.

A survey has recently been sent out (12 Jul with completion 17 Jul 18) to all the Devon & Cornwall BSL interpreters who are ASLI members. The results [*At Annex D*] speak for themselves and clearly show that the continuance of the LE contracts is untenable and detrimental to Deaf patients' access to healthcare.

Results of July 18 Survey to Association of Sign Language Interpreters

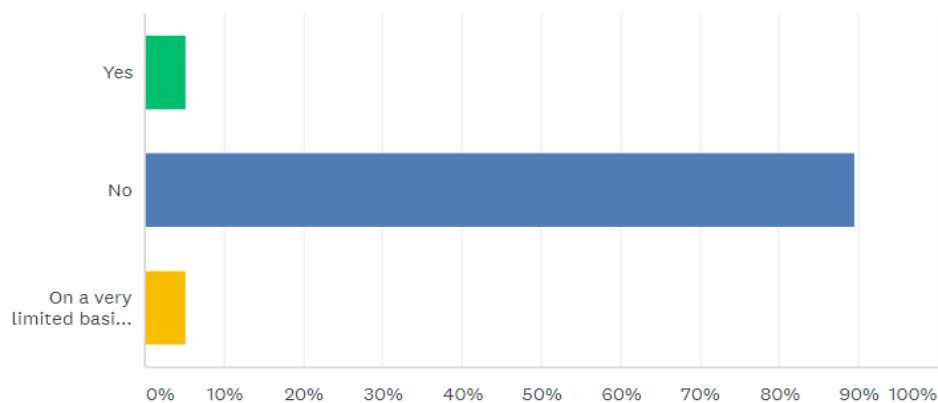
The following survey was sent out by the Chair of the local branch of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters. Healthwatch Plymouth have been given permission to share the survey results and associated comments.

Q1



Do you currently accept work from Language Empire?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



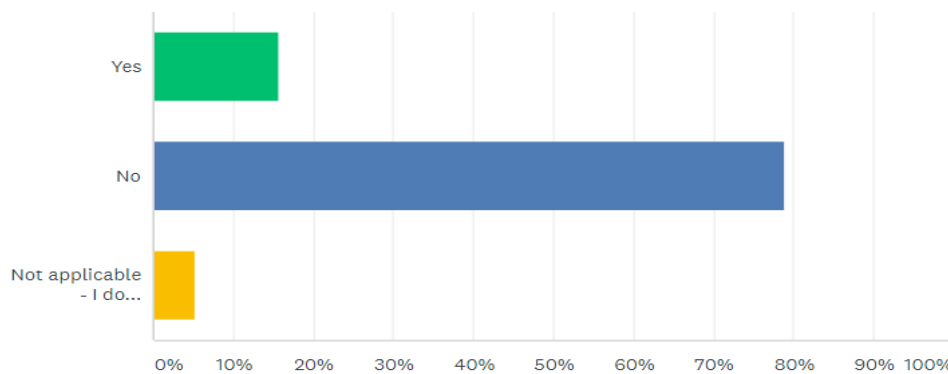
Responses - Yes = 1, No = 17, On a very limited basis = 1

Q2



If Language Empire issue a promise to improve their payment system and operations in the future, would you ever work for them again?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



Responses - Yes = 3, No = 15, Not applicable, I do currently accept work from LE = 1

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Comments

Sixteen of the nineteen respondents also provided comments as follows:

1 - I have no faith in assurances made by LE - their poor standards of professionalism and their constant lies mean I have no trust in what they say. They provide an appalling service.

2 - Have said no to Q2 because heard it all before. I believe it's impossible for them to improve their 'operations': don't wish to be associated with what is in my view a 'ramshackle, unethical' agency!

3 - Language Empire have proven themselves, time and time again, to be wholly unreliable, unscrupulous and dishonest. As a freelance professional interpreter, I provide my services to many trustworthy and reliable interpreting agencies but my experiences of working with Language Empire in the past have led me to require them to delete my contact details from their database and to refuse to ever work for them again.

4 - I stopped accepting work from Language Empire a year ago, when I could no longer cope with problems of their late payments. I only accepted bookings begrudgingly anyway (I say begrudgingly as I cannot abide their time sheets; they were patronising and never contained the terms I sent them). I also feel that having their own ID badge is completely uncalled for. By wearing their ID badge, I would appear to clients to be a representative of Language Empire, which I am not. The ID badge also poses a huge risk to clients. Those who are not familiar with the NRCPD badges could easily mistake an unqualified, uninsured and unregistered "interpreter" as someone with actual credentials. As soon as I started hearing from colleagues about the need to go to small claims court due to the amount of payments they had not received from Language Empire, and hearing from colleagues and Deaf people that they have regularly booked an unqualified, uninsured and unregistered "interpreter" to fulfil their bookings, I knew I could never work for them again. This has been easy for me to do, as I do not live in Plymouth, and therefore have not relied on them as a primary income source. I believe that if I accepted a booking through them, it would be highly unlikely that I would get paid anyway, so why bother?

5 - They have already promised to improve on numerous occasions and nothing has improved! They are completely untrustworthy, incompetent and irresponsible

6 - My answer to question 2 would be a reluctant yes if the NHS were to oversee strict payment terms of 30 days. At present we receive limp excuses that Derriford have paid LE, so it is not their problem.

7 - Language Empire is a disgrace. I would not work for them under any circumstance.

8 - I have been told by them they cannot remove from their system as a supplier until all outstanding invoices are paid. They are currently overdue/past 30 days but have been assured they will be paid. I do not know a date.

9 - I find LE to be totally untrustworthy both in their actions and their words. I would not work for them ever again. In the past I have made hundreds of phone calls and sent countless emails in order for me to get paid. Often these calls and emails go unanswered. Their practice of using unregistered interpreters is disgusting too.

10 - They have issued promises about pay before. I do get paid but they pay 2 months behind I have been paid up to end of April 2018 (paid 29/06/18) - (today is 12/07/18)

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11 - They need to get their act together and stop fibbing about payment terms. You feel you can't trust them so I only accept work up to a certain value and then insist on payment before I'll accept any more bookings. That is not a good situation and there is a definite lack of trust. I've ticked the box to say yes I would work from them if they improve their payment system, however can we trust them, I do feel we can't believe what [**Name redacted**] says? The proof will be in the pudding! It's a difficult situation for all, especially for the Deaf community who are not getting the support they need because of a lack of trust for getting paid and paid on time, in the Interpreting community. Something needs to be done!

12 - It's not only their awful payment process that's stops me from working for them but their lack of respect & understanding of both the Deaf community & interpreting profession, their lack of acceptance of our T&C's is eroding our profession and generally does not make me feel valued.

13 - I did accept assignments on limited basis, they currently owe me money. I will not work for them again due to their appalling administration procedures and lack of engagement with the interpreting profession. They are providing a dis-service to both us and to the Deaf community.

14 - I have heard endless promises of improvements yet nothing changes. In fact, despite their recent 'improvements' interpreters across the country are still reporting problems with getting paid. I have wasted days chasing payments and listening to endless promises and excuses that I'm afraid I have no confidence in anything they say. I have experienced them lie on many occasions and I have lost considerable money which I decided to write-off as it was causing me too much work and stress to continually chase. Derriford hospital have known about these problems for over a year and for much of that time chose to not intervene. Even now they promise change but nothing happens. I think it suits them to not challenge LE as they are then justified in continuing the use of sign live in wholly inappropriate situations. Deaf people are suffering and I don't think things will change until there is a fatality. I want to work at the hospital. I am available to work there but I won't until there is change. In the meantime, let's keep our fingers crossed there isn't a fatality.

15 - They have already made both general promises and specific promises to me and none have ever been honoured.

16 - LE have promised everything under the sun and they still haven't delivered. The amount of wasted energy and time I have wasted chasing payments has taught me they are not an ethical or competent organisation and I do not wish to work for them.