



Agency Steering Group

Signed up to ASG standards

Agency Steering Group History

Following the decision by CACDP (Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People), to withdraw an Agency Registration system in April 2004, several Agencies, decided to get together to develop a new system.

A steering group was convened, their remit was agreed as follows:

- To create 'Agency Good Practice Guidelines' utilising existing research, knowledge and resources on the subject.
- To collate a UK wide list of agencies.
- To circulate draft guidelines to all identified agencies for feedback.
- To collate feedback received and produce a second draft.
- To explain the work of the group and present the second draft to a wider audience at the UKCOD Conference on 6th July 2004 (deaf organisations, service purchasers, relevant professional bodies, and other interested parties etc).
- To collate feedback for a third and final document.

The overall aim of this work was to ensure that the agency registration system, which commits agencies to a minimum set of standards would result in improved communication support services for deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people. Agencies signing up to the standards ensure that any person employed as staff or as a freelancer, possess the appropriate qualifications and skills to deliver a LSP communication support service professionally. In addition, it was resolved to put a monitoring system in place to ensure that persons not fully qualified would be supported and supervised appropriately and to encourage those agencies, who had not previously registered, to do so.

Current ASG Members:

The steering group currently comprises members from the following categories:

1. Agencies providing Language Service Professionals
 - National Charity
 - Private Agency
 - Voluntary Agency
 - Statutory Agency
2. Professional Bodies representing LSP's
 - Association of Sign Language Interpreters
 - Association of Lipspeakers
 - Association of Verbatim Speech-to-Text-Reporters
 - Association of Notetaking Professionals
3. Consumers
 - Deaf Representation.

Current Status:

After a period of consultation the standards have now been finalised. Following on from agency discussions the ASG recommended IRP/CACDP registration only, (ie LASLI on its own would not meet the

criteria). However, after the ASG conference in Walsall (2005) it became clear that due to issues around the independence of the IRP and the reluctance of some ASLI members to sign up to the register this was not practically possible.

The requirement has now been altered to IRP/CACDP and LASLI initially for a period of 12 months. The ASG hope that the field will work together to resolve issues by April 2007, when the aim is for IRP/CACDP registration to be the sole criteria for interpreters.

The group is at a very exciting stage, as the standards came into effect on 1st April 2006. There were several press releases and a BSL DVD targeted at deaf consumers to raise awareness of the initiative.

Future:

The ASG aims to secure Government approval of its work with the objective of securing national recognition and regulation of the LSP profession.

Agency Standards

All agencies providing language service professionals (LSPs) should sign up to the standards listed below, covering staff and service.

We use the term **customer** to describe someone who is booking a language service professional (LSP) – in other words, paying for communication support.

We use the term **user** to describe someone who is using the service – in other words, using communication support.

Standards of Service - standards relating to agency staff

1. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks

Agencies are responsible for ensuring that all staff and freelance language service professionals (LSPs) have an up-to-date, enhanced CRB check. CRB checks must be renewed every three years. The agency must have a policy stating how it will deal with the results of CRB checks.

Other agency staff likely to have significant contact with members of the public should have an enhanced CRB check in line with current legislation and registration requirements. If there is no contact with the public a CRB check is not required. We would recommend that agencies seek their own expert guidance to establish which of their staff could fall within current requirements. Please call the CRB application line (on 0870 90 90 844) for information about eligibility.

2. Registration status of LSPs

All LSPs contracted by the agency, both staff and freelance, must be registered with a relevant national registration body, either CACDP directly, or, through the Independent registration Panel or SASLI.

There are some exceptions:

-Full members of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters

-Electronic notetakers and manual notetakers:

There is currently no registration system. These LSPs are required to be 'CACDP certificated Level 2 electronic notetakers' and 'CACDP certificated Level 2 manual notetakers' respectively.

- 'Communication assistants' (or the equivalent post):

Agencies are a good place for communication assistants to train so they can gain the necessary skills,

experience and qualifications to register as an interpreter with CACDP through the IRP. Agencies signing up to the standards would need to meet the following criteria when employing communication assistants:

They are directly employed, for instance as members of staff, by the agency concerned.

They are employed as part of an explicit training strategy. They are never defined or referred to as 'interpreters' by agency staff and publicity materials. Communication work taking place outside of the agency must be carried out under the supervision of an MRSLI. Charges must be commensurate with their qualification level.

The standards do not cover block communication, hands on communication or deaf relay as there is currently no training or registration system in place for these services therefore monitoring is not possible.

The deadline for the exclusive use of CACDP/SASLI registered LSPs is currently **1 April 2007**. The ASG will continue to monitor developments within the field to assess whether this is attainable.

3. Training, development and monitoring of agency staff (both administrative staff and in-house LSPs)

- Supervision and staff appraisal/development systems are required for all administrative staff and in-house LSPs.

- All agency co-ordinators (or the equivalent post) must have the CACDP Deaf Awareness qualification.

- If an agency provides a BSL/English interpreting service and office staff have direct contact with deaf BSL users, co-ordinators (or the equivalent post) must have or be working towards CACDP BSL Level 2. If office staff have no direct contact with deaf BSL users, this is not a requirement.

Note: The generic term to describe any person employed to receive and arrange booking requests is 'agency co-ordinator'. Agencies will have their own terminology for this position. However, the same standards apply.

4. Health and safety

Agencies must comply with health and safety legislation. This is to include risk assessments for all agency staff, lone working policies and co-working policies in reference to staff LSPs.

Agencies will determine the content of their own policy. Although not a requirement of the standards in terms of lone working/co-working, it would be good practice to share this information with freelance LSPs where relevant.

Standards of Service - standards relating to the agency

1. Type of agency

Agencies must declare their status in their Standards of Service document, whether they are a:

- registered charity
- local authority
- private company
- education establishment
- other (please specify)

2. Charges and cancellation terms

Charges, including cancellation terms, must be available in writing and included in the Standards of

Service document. Agencies are expected to provide customers with their charges on request, including call-out rates, hourly rate, travel cost/time rates (for instance, evening/night/weekend/bank holiday rates) and so on.

Customers must not be misled by hidden charges that they have not been informed of before the assignment has taken place.

3. Complaints policy

Agencies must have a complaints policy, compatible with the policies and procedures associated with LSP registration. This must be readily available in written English and in BSL, as well as large print or Braille on request. It would be good practice to have this in other languages too, but this is not a requirement for sign-up to the standards.

The number of complaints processed annually must be displayed in the Standards of Service document.

The number of complaints received can be shown as:

- a percentage or
- as the number of complaints out of the total number of bookings dealt with over the preceding financial year.

This should be separated into complaints about how the service was co-ordinated and those related to the service provided by the LSP.

4. Performance statistics

This is intended as a general guide to the level of service the customer can expect.

A booking is **acknowledged** once an indirect booking is received (for instance by fax or email). The agency should then let the customer know that their booking request is being processed.

A booking is **confirmed** once a booking is received and the agency lets the customer know that their booking request has been recorded.

Agencies must record the date bookings are received, have proof that the request was acknowledged and record the date the booking was confirmed. This has been the required practice since 1 April 2006.

Agencies must state their targets for response times, for both acknowledgement and confirmation of bookings.

For example: % of requests acknowledged by X working days
 % of requests confirmed by X working days

Agencies may wish to add a sentence giving reasons for their figures.

5. Advertising

Current CACDP/IRP/SASLI terminology must be used for the services provided. All publicity materials (including the Standards of Service document) must contain accurate information in clear English and not be misleading to the service users or customers.

It is good practice to have a range of publicity information such as booking procedures, charges, equal opportunities, and so on, available in BSL and other alternative formats. However, this is not a requirement of signing up to the standards.

6. Insurance

Agencies must hold public liability insurance and employee liability insurance. All staff and contracted freelance LSPs must be covered by the agency's professional indemnity insurance. This ensures that all the agency's freelancers are covered without having to check each individual annually. It protects the agency in the event of a claim against it for work done by a freelance LSP.

7. Data protection

Agencies must have a data protection policy that complies with current legislation.

8. Equal opportunities

Agencies must have an equal opportunities policy that complies with current legislation.

9. Service user involvement

Agencies must provide opportunities for user involvement. A minimum requirement would be to use feedback forms for services provided. Direct methods of consultation, such as user forums, are also recommended. Details of the level of user involvement must be included in the Standards of Service document.

10. Terms and conditions for freelance LSPs

Agencies must determine the contents of their terms and conditions of service for freelance LSPs. As a guide we would suggest that a basic terms and conditions document would contain:

- basis of contract
- the LSP's responsibilities
- the LSP's liabilities
- fees, invoicing and expenses
- agency's payment terms
- cancellation terms