

Editorial

A great deal has happened since the last newsletter in terms of the Academy plans. One of the most important piece of news is that the Academy has been awarded some start-up funding by the *Social Entrepreneurs Fund*, delivered by Firstport. This funding will be used mainly to design a new interactive website. The Academy has decided to focus its efforts on the professionalisation of the interpreting industry in Scotland, and a website is a necessary step to gather momentum and identify achievable outcomes. Additionally, the Academy's collaboration with the rest of the UK will offer great opportunities to learn and exchange information and best practices.

Any changes in the interpreting industry in Scotland will also affect the rest of the UK and vice-versa. In our journey to professionalise our industry in Scotland, there will be plenty of lessons learned and successes that we will happily share with the rest of the UK in future newsletters. These newsletters are freely available to all interpreters and stakeholders across the four nations of the UK, giving everyone an opportunity to follow the news and progress made in Scotland. These newsletters will also be sharing news and articles relevant to interpreters across the whole of the UK.

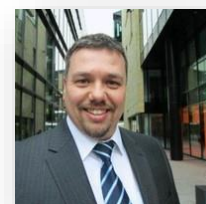
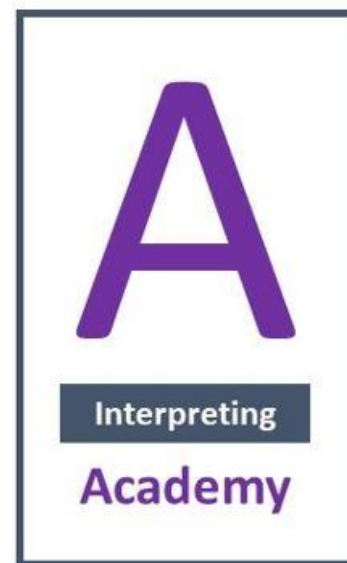
In this issue, for instance, we have a few articles from the NRPSI (National Register of Public Service Interpreters) Executive Director, Mike Orlov. One article talks about the NRPSI fees during the pandemic, while the other one has very exciting news for interpreters who also work in translation: a new Regulator for public sector translators is being set-up.

This newsletter also includes UK-wide articles from interpreters who worked at COP26 in Glasgow. The summit on climate change involved world leaders and activists from the whole planet and the interpreters' role during the event was crucial. COP26 would not have been possible without interpreters and it was a pleasure to read about the stories from several interpreters who worked at this event.

This newsletter would not have been possible without the work of volunteers and contributors. Behind the scenes, Adriana Uribe has used her amazing linguistic skills to proofread this issue and several interpreters have also reminded us with their articles of the impact interpreting has in the real world.

Our first article *why we do what we do* is the best way to explain what is the purpose of the Academy. It is very important that the Academy continues to follow its North Star to guide us towards a gradual professionalisation of the interpreting industry.

Please feel free to share this free newsletter with anyone you think might be interested in it.



Ricky Mateus

Interpreting Academy Chair

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*Are you an interpreter
who also does translations for the public sector?*



National Register of
Public Service Translators

The Why

Why we do what we do?

All the work that we do aims to support the industry to progress towards a higher level of professionalisation. Other well-known interpreting organisations in the UK, such as the NRPSI, also operate with a similar goal. The Academy has a social purpose and is working towards uniting all the industry's stakeholders around quality standards.



The objective of the Academy
is not to maximise profit, it is to
maximise professionalism.

www.interpretingacademy.org

Advancing professionalism

Anything the Academy does can be put to the test by asking one simple question: *will this advance professionalism?* If the answer is yes, then that will be the right thing to do. There will be times when we will have to make some tough decisions, as we will be faced with the choice between purely making a profit on a project or stand by our main priority of maximising professionalism. Our commitment is clear and the Academy will be prepared to reject certain proposals and projects if they are not aligned with its principal aim.

Social purpose

The lack of quality interpreting assurances can seriously impact on the delivery of quality public services to vulnerable users. Professional standards are an essential guarantee for vulnerable users and public sector professionals, as both rely heavily on the quality of these services. The main goal of the Academy is for all working interpreters to become *trained, qualified and regulated*. The Academy is committed to support interpreters from all levels to get closer to this goal.

Academy receives a start-up funding award

In order for the Academy to achieve its objectives, it needs funding and we are delighted to announce that the Interpreting Academy has been awarded some funding from the Social Entrepreneurs Fund. This funding is ring-fenced and will be used to create a website and cover some legal set-up expenses. Operational expenses will still need to be covered by future membership fees and training events.



Website and legal expenses

We are currently developing the specs for the website. The Academy also requires to finalise the legal work associated with its status as a social enterprise with locked assets. This translates in securing the Academy's autonomy so that no one working for the Academy could sell or use the organisation for personal gain. This organisation's revenue and work is designed to advance a social cause.

Gradual Growth

Our growth in terms of membership needs to be manageable, therefore it must be gradual. Rather than focusing on the number of members and their fees just to boost revenue, we aim to get it right. Membership will open first for the qualified category, followed by the opening of the trainee category at a later stage.

Scotland	UK Wide
<p>Professionalise interpreting in Scotland The Academy wants to help professionalise interpreting in Scotland. Any stories of successes and useful lessons will be shared with the rest of the UK through the newsletter.</p> <p>Membership The Academy membership will only be open, for the foreseeable future, to interpreters based in Scotland.</p>	<p>Following progress The Academy Newsletter and its social media will allow you to follow what is happening in Scotland.</p> <p>UK news and training events The Academy Newsletter will also include news and articles that are useful to the whole of the UK. Some of the training events will be of interest to all UK-based interpreters.</p>

Scottish Regulator plans put on hold

We have been having conversations about setting up a Scottish Regulator since 2018 because the NRPSI never really took off in Scotland. More recently, the Academy was planning to work together with the NRPSI in order to look into the reasons behind this. The Academy and the NRPSI were also considering organising a full scale consultation with all the stakeholders in Scotland to decide the best way forward.

With the start-up funding received, the Academy's priorities will now need to focus on its infrastructure. Therefore, the consultation plans regarding the Scottish Regulator had to be put on hold for the time being.

The Academy will not become a regulator

The Academy's main remit is to train and develop interpreters and it will not become a regulator.

Therefore, for the foreseeable future, the NRPSI will remain the only regulator in the whole of the UK for spoken languages in the public sector. Sign language interpreters do not use the NRPSI. They use other regulators.

Academy online database

The Academy will have an online database listing the languages of their members in the same way that is already done by other professional bodies databases, such as the CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) and ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting). Qualified interpreters in Scotland who join the Academy will appear on the Academy's online database. Membership fees will be reasonable to enable as many qualified interpreters as possible to join. Clients of interpreting services will then be able to do a quick online check to see if the interpreter who comes through the door is qualified or not, thus empowering them to demand quality, and strengthen the need for language services providers to prioritise qualified interpreters. We expect the volume of interpreting work for the qualified interpreters on this online database to go up. This initiative will give a much needed transparency to the interpreting market.

Consultation on the Academy Plans

The Academy membership, for the foreseeable future, will only be open to interpreters living in Scotland. We are currently undergoing a consultation period with local interpreters and general stakeholders about the Academy plans. We already had two small focus groups in January 2022 with a total of 15 interpreters. They have provided very useful feedback, which will help to shape how we move forward. There will be more focus groups and some large scale info sessions with Q&As.

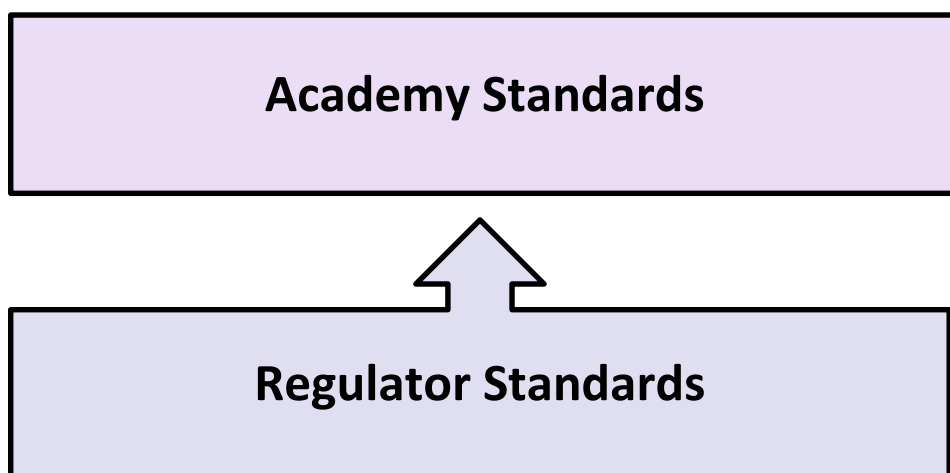
Do you wish to participate?

If you are an interpreter or another type of stakeholder based in Scotland, and you wish to participate, please get in touch with us at info@interpretingacademy.org.

The Academy will adopt the NRPSI Code of Professional Conduct

The Interpreting Academy has been given permission by the National Register of Public Sector Interpreters (NRPSI) to use their code of professional conduct. It is expected that a few adjustments will be required as the Academy will not be a regulator and, therefore, not all terms will apply.

Ideally, all interpreting organisations should adopt the Interpreting Industry Regulator Code of Conduct, rather than creating different codes of conduct. One single code of conduct for the UK would make it easier for everyone to understand and follow these key principles.



Code of Professional Conduct Training

Interpreters sign different codes of conduct for different organisations on a regular basis. We can all agree that it would be very useful to try to fully understand them in detail. This is what we will do with the NRPSI Code of Professional Conduct, as we are developing a training course around this key document. For instance, some ethical dilemmas are challenging and group discussions are a great way to test what we think is the right decision. The correct application of the code of conduct requires reflection.

You can find a copy of the NRPSI Code of Professional Conduct on the Regulator's website: www.nrpsi.org.uk

The Academy is developing further good quality learning and development opportunities and we will share more about them in future newsletters.

Membership categories

We want to simplify interpreting categories so that they are easily understood by the whole industry. This means that the Academy only plans to have two language registrations categories: qualified and trainee. Someone wishing to register with the Academy may be registered as qualified in one language and join at trainee level for another.

Membership Categories

Categories	Descriptions
Qualified	<p>Qualified interpreter</p> <p>The Academy is going to follow existing standards that have been set up by the Regulator. These standards are based on the <i>National Occupational Standards</i> and they determine who is a qualified interpreter and who is not. A qualified interpreter is someone who has an interpreting qualification, i.e. QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework) Level 6 or above. This extends to any DPSI (Diploma in Public Service Interpreting) equivalent qualification, which we define as an interpreting qualification that is equivalent (or above) to the DPSI. A qualification is still only one of the aspects that makes an interpreter qualified to do their job. Qualified interpreters will also be expected to have interpreting experience, carry on with their learning and development, plus fully understand and follow the Code of Professional Conduct.</p>
Trainee	<p>Interpreter in training</p> <p>Until someone has passed an interpreting qualification that is at least a QCF level 6, these interpreters will be considered trainees. In order to register with the Academy these interpreters will still need to pass a language and interpreting skills assessment for the language (or languages) they wish to add at trainee level. Then, they will undergo a training programme to gradually develop their skills and be in a position where they can pass the QCF Level 6 interpreting examination.</p>

Impact assessment

Our Regulator, the NRPSI, only has the qualified interpreter category. They do not have a trainee category. Before the Academy introduces this new category in the interpreting market we will need to have several discussions with interpreters and the rest of the industry to assess how this is likely to impact in our industry.

Avoiding unintentional consequences

For instance, qualified interpreters should be given priority for interpreting assignments and it would not make sense if trainee interpreters were suddenly to be regarded in the same way as qualified interpreters. Trainee interpreters should be given less complex interpreting assignments and they should be used only as a backup for when qualified interpreters are not available. Trainee interpreters should not be used as a first choice. The name “trainee” will help interpreting services clients to understand why they should prioritise qualified interpreters.

Frequently Asked Questions

There will be further information sessions with Q&A opportunities in the future, which will explain the Academy plans in more detail. In the meantime, here are a few frequently asked questions.

No	Question	Answer
1	Bilingual Experience - I do not have an interpreting qualification but I am bilingual with great language skills and a good deal of interpreting experience. Can I be put into the qualified category?	Experience is only one of the elements that makes an interpreter qualified to do interpreting. Without an interpreting qualification, how does anyone know if you have the right level of language skills to do your job well? An interpreting qualification is a much needed independent and reliable examination. Otherwise, deciding on the interpreter's competence becomes a guessing game.
2	Linguist - I am a linguist and I already have a different language qualification, which is not an interpreting qualification. Can I still join the qualified category?	In order to be a qualified interpreter you will need a qualification in interpreting, where both your language and interpreting skills will be tested in line with the National Occupational Standards for interpreting. If you are a linguist, you should have no problem passing the DPSI.
3	Multiple languages – I am qualified in one language, but I have also been doing interpreting in two other languages. Can I register them all as qualified on the Academy database?	If someone is qualified in one language, it does not mean that they are also qualified in all the other languages. The Academy registers the qualified languages of each interpreter. Therefore, only languages linked to a recognised interpreting qualification will be registered. You can still register the other languages at trainee level, if you wish. Even at trainee level, those languages will still have to be examined.
4	Trainee category - I am an experienced interpreter without an interpreting qualification, why should I join the trainee category?	The trainee category shows the level of competence that has been tested in that language or languages. The interpreter might have a higher level of competence, but if they have not taken the DPSI or an equivalent interpreting qualification they have not been tested yet at Level 6. The trainee category provides clarity to the clients of our industry. If you feel your interpreting skills for any language are higher than the trainee level, you can put those skills to the test by taking a DPSI exam (or equivalent) and join the qualified category. The Academy wants to support interpreters to take a Level 6 interpreting exam so that they can become officially qualified. Until all interpreters can reach level 6, we need to make sure that all working interpreters are assessed in their language and interpreting skills. All Academy members will have those assessments done at either trainee or qualified level.

Uniting the whole industry around quality standards

All interpreters and also all stakeholders across the whole of the UK are welcome to join our mailing list to keep up to date with what is happening in the interpreting industry. We want to unite the whole industry around quality standards and we all have a part to play in it. Therefore, everyone is welcome. If you are an interpreter and you also wish to become a member of the Academy, there are two categories for interpreters. Membership will open gradually and you can find more details below.

Entry requirements

Who?	Academy Members		Everyone
	Qualified Interpreters	Trainee Interpreters	Joining the mailing list
Entry Requirements	<p>Interpreting qualification (Level 6 or above).</p> <p><i>Further entry requirements will be published later.</i></p>	<p>Need to pass a language and interpreting skills assessment and complete an interpreting foundation course.</p> <p><i>Further entry requirements will be published later.</i></p>	<p>No requirements, anyone can join the mailing list, including members and non-members, interpreters at any level and any other stakeholders. You will receive a free copy of our quarterly newsletter via email or it will be posted in social media.</p>
Status	<p>This category is expected to open in 2022/23 to qualified interpreters based in Scotland. If you are considering joining, please contact us.</p>	<p>There is a great deal of work involved in setting up this category, so it will only be opening at a later stage. Please, email us if you have any questions.</p>	<p>The Interpreting Academy Newsletters are published quarterly. Contact us if you are an interpreter or stakeholder who wants to be added to the mailing list.</p>
Contact us	info@interpretingacademy.org		

Transition Period

Nothing will happen overnight, allowing everyone to prepare for potential future changes to the interpreting market in Scotland. The Academy is here to support the development of interpreters at every stage of their careers. If you are not yet a qualified interpreter in your working languages, the Academy will support your journey into qualification.

NRPSI and registration fees through the pandemic

by Mike Orlov, the NRPSI Executive Director and Registrar

NRPSI has received many requests for financial aid since April 2020. Fully understanding the pressures Registrants were under, the National Register developed a system which has proved to be fair to all Registrants and also ensured continued life for the National Register. Indeed, it was vital that the National Register continued, and continues to, operate effectively protecting the public and working on behalf of Registrants, including continued lobbying of public services.



After exhaustive attempts we modelled a prudent deferred fee scheme which has stood the test of time over the last two years. Recognising NRPSI is a not-for-profit organisation, we have ensured we have continued to remain free from political and commercial influences by protecting our not-for-profit status and never embracing funds from privately owned organisations; be it advertising or sponsorship of any kind.

However, this does mean that, other than Registrants' fees, we have no source of funding; there is no deep-pocket owner or white knight with surplus cash for NRPSI. We also do not have huge reserves, having kept registration fee increases to a minimum over the years to meet operational costs. So, if the revenues were reduced, given the organisation is a not-for-profit, then there would be a struggle to meet liabilities, potentially falling in to insolvency and thus face liquidation.

We listened to all feedback on the help Registrants needed, and the NRPSI Board decided we should offer Registrants the choice to: either continue to pay the full renewal fee, as indeed most Registrants have been doing, ensuring we could continue to maintain the National Register and provide access to all services; or, for those needing financial aid, to defer 100% payment of the registration fees for three months, in line with NRPSI existing procedures

We believed that this was the fairest approach and hoped it would go some way towards supporting Registrants who were asking for help at this very difficult time and ensuring continued operation of the National Register.

This process of deferring fees has indeed proven to be fair to all Registrants in that everyone could take advantage of it if they needed it and it could be managed to secure the long-term future of the Register. Actually, over the last two years just over a hundred Registrants have taken advantage of the deferred fee scheme and most Registrants have renewed as usual.

We wish all well and hope you stay safe as we seem to be clawing our way out of the worst of the excesses of the pandemic. NRPSI has not lost a day's work due to Covid-19, although we know we have been a little slower given remote working. We have continued to lobby for the profession and advocate on behalf of accredited, trained, qualified and experienced public service interpreters. NRPSI remains very much 'open for business' and we continue to promote protection of the public and improving terms and conditions for public sector interpreting engagements.



Mike Orlov

NRPSI Executive Director and Registrar

mike@nrpst.org.uk

NRPSI Board positions

Practitioner non-executive board member

The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) has announced the launch of a search, selection and recruitment process to appoint a new practitioner non-executive board member who is already an accredited Registered Public Service Interpreter (RPSI).



Registered and
Regulated Interpreter

For details of the job description see <https://www.nrpsi.org.uk/news-posts/NRPSI-is-recruiting-a-Practitioner-Non-Executive-Director-Click-here-to-see-the-job-description.html>

If you are interested, then please explore the full information pack which you will find at <https://www.nrpsi.org.uk/news-posts/For-those-interested-in-joining-the-board-explore-details-of-the-Practitioner-Non-Executive-Director-role-at-NRPSI-Click-here-for-the-full-information-brief.html>

Chair

NRPSI is also going to appoint a new lay non-executive chair; explore the details at <https://www.nrpsi.org.uk/news-posts/NRPSI-is-recruiting-a-Chair-for-the-board-of-directors-Ted-Sangster-who-has-served-as-chair-of-the-board-since-2011-will-be-completing-his-final-term-of-office-at-the-end-of-April-2022-Click-here-for-details.html>

A new regulator for translators in the public sector

by Mike Orlov, the NRPSI Executive Director and Registrar

In December 2019, The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) announced its intention to launch a National Register of Public Service Translators (NRPST). The website (www.nrpst.org.uk) was published on the last day of 2019 calling for those interested in registering their interest to get in touch and leave their details, with a view to launching the registration process in April 2020.



National Register of
Public Service Translators

Over the next few months over 700 people registered their interest. Unfortunately, all the nations of the United Kingdom were affected by the arrival of Covid-19 in late March 2020 and we have been handling the issues brought about by the pandemic, which have hindered our intention of launching the registration process for NRPST.

We are however now fully staffed and seem to be over the worst effects of Covid-19. Once the new team members are fully trained, our registration officers should be able to begin registering people for NRPST later this year. Once registered with NRPST, professional public service translators will show they have been independently accredited by an established and trusted not for profit organisation and are thus fit to practise, having obtained the appropriate qualifications and experience and pledging their commitment to professional standards.

NRPST will be the UK's only independent voluntary regulator of professional translators specialising in public service. We will develop and maintain a public register of professional, qualified and accountable translators. The National Register will be free of charge to access and searchable online.

Every translator on the National Register will meet the standards for education, training and practice in public service. All Registrants will be subject to the NRPST Code of Professional Conduct and we will regulate, investigate and follow up any allegations of professional misconduct.

Being on the National Register of Public Service Translators will provide a guarantee to clients that you are qualified, experienced and competent as well as adhere to a written Code of Conduct.

Using the National Register of Public Service Translators to find a translator will ensure clients not only employ a qualified professional practitioner but that the translator can be held accountable should their conduct or competence fall below the high standards expected of a Registered Public Service Translator (RPST).

Being a Registrant on NRPST will mean:

- You will be able to use the letters of accreditation RPST (Registered Public Service Translator) after your name
- You are recognised by public services across the UK as they will understand that the National Register provides a guarantee of competence and accountability
- Your details will appear on our public register where potential clients can find your details and contact you directly for work, or can confirm your registration
- You will receive a unique URL which links directly to your online record: use to promote your professional skills
- You will receive regular updates from NRPST on the profession and maintaining your standards
- You will benefit from the weight of the lobbying and advocacy of the National Register in terms of amplifying your voice and benefit from the protection of an organisation with over 27 years' experience of managing and operating independent language service public sector registers and regulators.
- A translator's language registration will be valid for one year from the month it is accepted onto the National Register of Public Service Translators (NRPST).
- Each translator must renew their listing annually.

As the UK's independent voluntary regulator for the translation profession, NRPST will recognise qualifications and experience needed to practise as a registered and regulated professional translator. It is part of our duty to ensure translators have the required qualifications and practical experience before joining the register, ensuring qualified and experienced translators offer their services to the public sector and for the benefit of the public. NRPST will also offer a Student Status category.

Only translators who have gained the qualifications and experience meeting the high standards can be listed on the register. Details of the qualifications and professional experience you need for registering with NRPST are available and will be forwarded if you write to mike@nrpst.org.uk.



Mike Orlov

NRPSI Executive Director and Registrar

mike@nrpst.org.uk



Interpreting on Stage

by Susan Swann Higgins

As a Glaswegian, I was excited at the prospect of COP26 coming to my home town. I had already volunteered to interpret for a field trip to the Cowal peninsula, when a French agency, which I work with occasionally, contacted to me to ask if I would be available for 2 days during the conference to provide French – English interpreting services for a president and vice-president from one of France’s major conurbations. I jumped at the chance!

Over the 2 days, the interpreting requirements varied greatly from 1:1 meetings to chuchotage during presentations. The equipment that was provided for the full two days was a tour guide set, which was sometimes of limited use.

My favourite part of the assignment was a “Round Table” discussion that took place in the sumptuous banqueting hall of Glasgow City Chambers. Four European mayors took the stage in front of an audience of about 200 people, and each spoke for 4 minutes about one of their own city’s sustainability projects. The general topics under discussion at city level were industry, transport and young people. I interpreted 3 presenters from English into French for my client. As I didn’t have a headset, and I couldn’t control the volume of the presenters, I sometimes struggled to hear them over the sound of my own voice.

When it was the French mayor’s turn to deliver his presentation, the City Chambers sound technician handed me a microphone, so the mayor spoke without a mike and I delivered his speech in English. As an interpreter, I have never been so visible! At the end of the event, several people congratulated me: they had never seen anyone interpret simultaneously before; they recognised that it was a difficult skill, and they wanted to express their new-found admiration for interpreters in general.

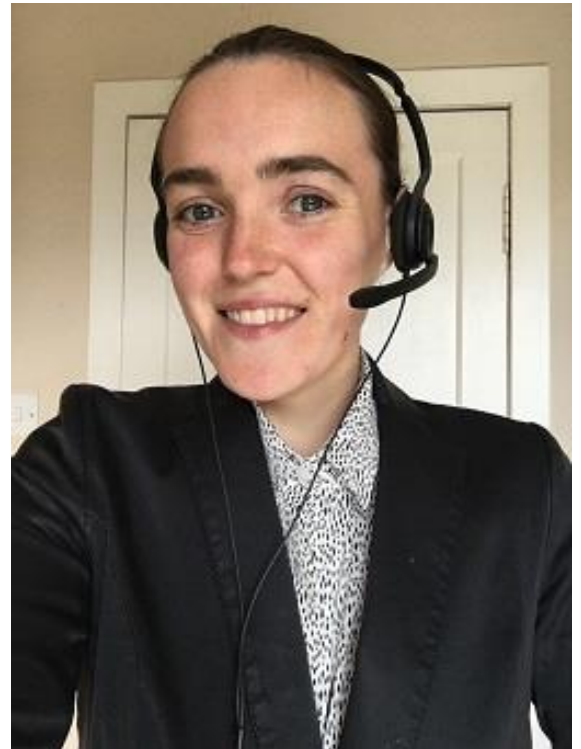
As interpreters, we aim to be invisible, so we shouldn't be surprised if people don't often appreciate what we do. This experience showed me that many people know very little about the work of an interpreter. Since that day, I've disappeared again, into the booth or behind my Zoom camera, taking with me a special memory of an interesting, unique and worthwhile experience of interpreting at COP26.

[Susan Swann Higgins LinkedIn](#)

Interpreting at COP26: A Volunteer's Perspective

by Beth Hanley

During COP26, I volunteered as a remote simultaneous interpreter working from and into English, French and Spanish. Overall, it was an incredibly rewarding few days. I interpreted at four events at the COP26 Coalition People's Summit and while the interpreters were not able to attend in person, we were able to connect remotely using the online platform Interaction, which allowed the in-person attendees to download an app to their phone to access the interpretation. The events were organised by grassroots campaigners and activists whose passion shone through. Undoubtedly, the speakers at the People's Summit events had to fight much harder to have their voices heard than those invited to the high-profile summits taking place at the SEC Centre. Therefore, it was a privilege for me to lend my voice to these activists so that their message could be conveyed to an even wider audience. The feeling of being genuinely appreciated made the whole experience worthwhile. Never before had I interpreted for such passionate and enthusiastic speakers and naturally, this was a real treat for me as an interpreter because the speeches



given by the activists were fast-paced, exciting and kept me on my toes, rather than being dry and dense. While the events were not without the occasional technical glitch, the coordination of the volunteer interpreters and translators was very well-organised. For that, I must take my hat off to those responsible for their stellar work.

[Beth Hanley LinkedIn](#)



Interpreting for the Nations

by Rebekah Dawes

Thanks to a couple of recommendations from kind-hearted ex-Heriot-Watt classmates, I had a total of ten projects for COP26, ranging from last minute calls to one gruelling ten-hour day. Day one saw me practising chuchotage for a workshop on gender equality in climate change for delegates from Nigeria and Madagascar, whereas I was launched straight into the booth for a presidency session on day two, where I found myself interpreting open-floor speeches given by delegates from various countries. Not only were the settings and conference rooms radically different, but I noticed that the theme of climate change was never oriented in quite the same way, from oceans to indigenous peoples to finance, a day on which I could not help thinking that, if I had a dollar for every time I had said “one hundred billion dollars”, I probably actually would have about one hundred billion dollars. There was even live music at one session but interpreting was thankfully not required during the interlude, as my singing voice leaves a lot to be desired.

Due to demand, I spent most of my time honing skills I did not even know I had as I interpreted from English into French for select delegates, the inverse of my preferred combination, but I still had nerves of steel throughout. That changed, nevertheless, when my time to shine did finally come and I was able to interpret three interventions from French into English, the combination I am really trained in. When I realised that a few hundred people were now listening to me and interpreters were taking relay from me for translation into no less than five different languages, I began to feel the heat, and understandably so.

I slowly started to feel my stress fading away as I grew more accustomed to the new and improved size of my audience, without forgetting that I had the big responsibility of communicating the questions to the panellist in French so that he could respond accordingly before relaying his responses back into English for the entire room and chair. I began to feel important as all ears were on me. The moment was mine. Without me, there would have been no conference, even if just for an instant. After sitting in the background for so long, I felt like I had finally been noticed. I felt appreciated. I had found my purpose and my place. And it was magnificent.

It goes without saying that COP26 was, by far, the largest and most important event that I have ever interpreted at. Everything about it was impressive: the queues for security; the endless corridors between venues that teemed with more people than I had ever seen at all hours of the day; the globe hanging from the ceiling outside the conference rooms; the prices of the lunch menu... not to mention the fact that, when I received my entrance pass on my first day, I quickly noted that I had been demoted to "Technical Personnel". When I went to explore the venue, I was even trampled in the corridor by a film crew complete with all the gear walking backwards unnecessarily quickly. But what may have intimidated others enchanted me. The hustle and bustle of the venue was tiring, but I quickly grew used to it, accepting it as a commonplace aspect of the career I was forging for myself at international institutions. What I had not expected, though, was to find myself interpreting Gordon Brown, Theresa May (who, sadly, did not dance onto the stage) and even John Kerry, the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate and 68th Secretary of State from 2013 to 2017.



One day, there was a particular buzz in the air. The session I had been booked for was full enough that there was no room for the interpreters, so my booth had been set up in the corridor outside. I looked up from interpreting at one point to see an entourage approaching and, seemingly out of nowhere, Barack Obama came to stop no more than two metres in front of my booth as he waited for a parallel conference to begin. He spent several minutes there and must have become as aware of our presence as we were of his as, at a given moment, he looked directly at my boothmate and waved to him. I had a hard time shaking off my astonishment after that as, bar one friendly technician who welcomed me to a session, that single moment was the only time in the whole week and a half that I actually saw anyone acknowledge an interpreter, and it was a former president of the United States of America.

When I headed along to my afternoon plenary session the same day, I was delighted when Obama entered the room to speak and I realised that I would actually have the chance to interpret for such a prestigious yet down-to-earth figure. Of course, my boothmate and I relished every moment of the experience. My once-in-a-lifetime opportunity was sadly cut short when a group of UN interpreters arrived and informed us that we were in their booths. It turned out that I had received the wrong location in the email, that Obama was not supposed to have interpreters and that few people, if anyone, had been listening.

I did not quite know what to make of the unexpected plot twist at first but, the more I reflected on it, the more I began to feel that it was a beautiful accident and I am so grateful that it happened. After all, while there were hordes of people in the corridors crowding around the areas Obama would pass by, waiting, their phones held high recording, hoping to catch even a glimpse, I was in my booth seeing Obama's face on my screen, hearing his voice through my headphones, being the French voice of one of the world leaders that I most admire. I was lucky enough to be in the plenary room for the simple fact of having flashed my pass to four different security guards as I entered. Interpreting is such a wonderful, surprising and heart-warming profession and I am beginning to think that the magical "Technical Personnel" is not such a bad job title after all.

[Rebekah Dawes LinkedIn](#)

Conference interpreting at COP26 versus public sector interpreting

by João Madeira

For a Portuguese interpreter based in Scotland there aren't usually many opportunities to do conference interpreting at local level, so when I was asked if I was available to interpret every day for the COP26 in Glasgow I would normally have jumped for joy, were it not for the fact that my wife's due date was bang in the middle of the conference. Instead, not wanting to let my clients down, I recommended some Portuguese-speaking colleagues who were free and agreed to take any last minute bookings that might come up.

Little did I know that the 'last minute bookings' would keep me pretty busy for the whole duration of the event – I found myself carrying out a wide range of assignments, from bodyguards bringing firearms into the country with no credentials to indigenous leaders defending their ancestral rights over the land, from high-level politicians to representatives from grassroots organisations. It was a great opportunity to experience the huge breadth of stakeholders involved at a Conference of Parties and really gain a better understanding of what it is all about.



However, the highlight of the whole event for me was the opportunity to connect and work with so many talented interpreters speaking a range of languages. Their proficiency and ability is not a result of chance, it comes through a lot of training and hard work practising. It also comes from having a full understanding of what they are doing and how to approach it, and I would like to reflect of some key differences between conference interpreting and public service simultaneous interpreting:

1 – Preparation: In conference interpreting, there is usually no chance to 'stop the speaker' to ask for repetition or clarification – if you get stuck or lost, things can potentially get a bit hairy and escalate into a snowball situation in a matter of seconds. Preparation is key: reading up on material you have been provided in advance, looking up YouTube videos of the speakers to get used to their accent and style, researching organisations and compiling lists of people that might be mentioned, as well as technical terminology that might come up. For one particular COP job, I found myself spending a whole evening compiling a list of bird and tree species for a 2-hour job the following day on mangrove ecosystems, only to get stuck on a bunch of people's names and titles that randomly came out of nowhere. I didn't get stuck on the birds though...

2 – Approach: It might be tempting to think that conference interpreting and public service simultaneous interpreting are all the same, but they are fundamentally different in approach. Public service interpreters are drilled in 100% accuracy, repeatedly alerted to the impact a single mistake could have. This means that style usually comes second to meaning and accuracy – and I notice this both in myself and when hearing colleagues in court. Everyone is trying to ensure they interpret everything that is said to their client, for fear that a case might collapse on a silly technicality. Conference interpreting is fundamentally different, and style is much more important – gist interpretations, summaries and approximations are not only allowed, they are a valid and often recommended approach.

3 – Teamwork: In conference interpreting you always work in pairs. You take turns interpreting, so you can have a rest every so often to recover your concentration. However, the colleague ‘resting’ can’t just switch off and needs to stay ready to help the colleague who is interpreting in case he/she gets ‘stuck’. It is an intense experience and there needs to be a level of professional ‘chemistry’ and mutual-support between colleagues. This is something you don’t get so often in public service interpreting, where we normally work alone.

4 – Equipment: Conference interpreting almost certainly requires the use of technology – a booth and multi-channel relay station with a million buttons on it, or some sort of digital equivalent when doing conference interpreting remotely. These systems and equipment are invariably always different, but essentially they all work the same way: you have several audio channels that attendees can choose depending on their language and that you can choose as an input channel and usually one or two output channels (sometimes more) depending on your language combinations. This can be daunting, but if you understand the general principle, it is then a question of arriving with plenty of time and asking the sound engineer to explain how the relay station works, and ‘what buttons’ to press. Digital relay platforms work based on the same principle and we just need to ensure we familiarise ourselves in advance with whatever system is being used. In public service interpreting, historically this type of system was rarely used, but since the start of the pandemic they have become much more popular: e.g. the Ministry of Justice have their own system based on a MS Teams engine which some of us will have experienced and you can even use Zoom to do multichannel conference interpreting if you have a professional account.

5 – Payment: Conference interpreting is difficult, requires a high level of skills and lots of preparation time. You should expect your payment to reflect that. Whereas for public service interpreting jobs are normally paid by the hour, conference interpreting jobs are paid by the day. Whereas a public service interpreter can expect to get anything between £14 to £35 per hour (depending on the job), a conference interpreter should be getting at least upwards of £400 per day – some getting upwards of £800, depending on language, region, experience and assignment. I know that people are often reluctant to talk about figures, and I should warn at this point that this is just my personal view. If in doubt, speak to a more experienced colleague in the industry who speaks your language – they might give you some insight into this.

So, the question for many of you reading this newsletter is: if you want to ‘get into’ conference interpreting, and maybe have the chance of getting some assignments for COP27 in Egypt, what should you do? Well, the answer is long and complicated, but the very first step is to ensure you work on the foundations; i.e. that you are confident and trained in your ability to do conference interpreting, as opposed to simple ‘simultaneous’ interpreting. If you have the possibility of doing an MSC in Conference Interpreting, go for it! If like me, there are no courses available for your language pair, then work on your skills, familiarise yourself with the technology and practise, practise, practise. Then when the opportunity comes, you can jump at it. You will then find that one opportunity leads to another, but it all starts by working on the foundations.

[João Madeira LinkedIn](#)

COP26 was not all roses – but teamwork won the day

by Yueshi Gu

I worked as a conference interpreter at COP26 in Glasgow, which was the largest international event ever held in the UK.

For any conference, there are always hurdles to overcome. But for this event, the obstacles seemed countless. First, there were logistic uncertainties as to how to get to the SEC from Edinburgh when faced with the imminent threat of industrial action from the rail and coach services. Luckily, Scotrail decided to call the strike off at the eleventh hour. Phew! And then, getting into the Blue Zone, a UN-managed space for the plenary sessions and negotiations, for the first three days was comparable to the Odyssey - the queues were standing still for almost an hour or so each morning. That was not the end of it – getting into the conference rooms also proved to be nearly impossible because the interpreters' names were not provided to the UN security team. Finally, there was the eternal struggle of getting the relevant reference materials in time for the conferences each day. Conferences of different themes were scheduled for each morning and afternoon – during the busiest day, we interpreted for four back-to-back events. But more often than not, scant reference materials were provided and almost always at the last minute. And if there *were* any reference materials, double-digit numbers of documents flooded into our inboxes only an hour or two before the start of the conference.

There were plenty of technical challenges too. On the first day, the technicians told us that they only received the request to set up the interpreting booths a few hours before the conference. So they were very sorry for the state of the booths, which rained dust whenever someone walked past. There was only one set of headphones between me and my booth partner, and we had to share a single booth in breach of the Covid health and safety rules at the time. The most farcical event was a remote conference, which failed utterly because the technicians could not connect us to the correct event. I did not blame the technicians, because once again, they had only received the request a few hours before.



As we know, for simultaneous interpreting at conferences, the interpreters work in pairs. My team-mate, Dr Isabel Liu, is Assistant Professor for Interpreting and Chinese Language at Heriot-Watt University, and was my tutor when I was studying for my MSc. At COP26, our resilience, stamina and ability to think on our feet were tested to the limit. Nevertheless, I can proudly say that we managed to get through the travails with the spirit of teamwork. We exchanged glossaries and research notes; we bought each other much-needed coffee and food during breaks; and we encouraged each other and laughed off the trials and travesties at different events together. The camaraderie I felt from other colleagues of various languages and the agency representatives was also unforgettable. All in all, despite all the challenges, this was one of the most memorable and meaningful experiences I have ever had as an interpreter.



Yueshi Gu and her booth partner Dr Isabel Liu

[Yueshi Gu LinkedIn](#)

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