

Editorial

Ted Sangster is leaving the NRPSI Chair role after being in post for 11 years. He has seen many changes in our public service interpreting industry during his time and in this issue he shares his reflections. It has been a pleasure to engage with him in meetings to discuss ways to professionalise our interpreting industry.

When anyone speaks with public service interpreters and other stakeholders about improving the interpreting industry, they all agree that this is desperately needed. Many are looking for immediate changes, but there is no silver bullet. Changes will take time and will involve the participation of the whole industry.

The Interpreting Academy is currently working on making changes in Scotland but we do not expect any overnight success. We are engaging with interpreters, agencies and other stakeholders. We want to bring people along through discussions and working together. The industry is all interconnected and only a collective effort and in the same direction can deliver positive outcomes for all stakeholders. Rather than going for a quick revolution, the Academy is going for a gradual evolution, with incremental changes.

How can our industry change if we don't? All stakeholders will need to make some changes if we want quality assurances to be a reality in the interpreting industry. These changes will need to start with interpreters, who are the grassroots. If we respect our profession, we need to move from self-certification into qualification. All working interpreters must become qualified.

The Academy is working on the website plans. Consultations are under way and we have been gradually meeting with interpreters and other stakeholders in Scotland to discuss key points for the new website. The Academy will initially open membership registrations only for qualified interpreters. At a later stage, it will include registrations for trainee interpreters. This will be a temporary category and will require an interpreting assessment and some foundation training.

The Academy will provide training to all working interpreters, not only to members of the Academy. There will be a long transition period before all interpreters are trained, qualified and regulated.



How can you help?

Please help us spread the message by sharing this newsletter. Thank you!



Ricky Mateus

Interpreting Academy Chair

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Acknowledgments

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We would also like to give credit to [Dylan Nolte](#) for his lottery photo posted on [Unsplash](#) and used on page 5 of this newsletter.

Staying in touch

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Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/interpretingacademy
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Reflections on 11 years with NRPSI

by Ted Sangster

Having been appointed as chairman of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) when it was hived off from the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) in April 2011, I am about to stand down and hand over to my successor. An opportunity to reflect then as to what has changed or indeed what has remained the same over the past eleven years.

The constants very much include the reason why NRPSI was established in the first place having been originally set up in 1994 in response to the Runciman report recommendations and reflected a mitigation of the risks arising to public services and their clients from employing unqualified and unaccountable interpreters.

The continuing common thread therefore is the need for and recognition of quality standards in the profession. However, it is not as easy or clear cut as that of course – life never is I suppose. Quality has to be paid for and if those delivering it are not being paid enough and therefore refuse to offer their services or have to change their career in order to make a living, then quality suffers and that is of direct concern to us in NRPSI and the interpreting profession as a whole. It follows that it should also be of concern to those who engage the services of interpreters in the public sector.

I can confidently say that it is almost universally recognised amongst the former (interpreters and interpreter organisations) but regrettably not always delivered by the commissioning bodies in the public sector – with some outstanding exceptions. Lip service needs to be evidenced by positive action – part of the holding to account that NRPSI and our partner organisations work so hard at.

Therefore, whilst NRPSI is a regulator not a membership body we share these common concerns and we recognised early on that we are inextricably bound to those who are more directly and properly concerned with the terms and conditions under which public service interpreters are engaged.

We also recognise that being the voluntary regulator for the UK the spread of our registrants is not even. In particular Scotland and also Northern Ireland have few NRPSI registrants compared to their populations – and yet the need for highly qualified professional public service interpreters is just as high.

Thus, just as we have forged working partnerships with like-minded organisations elsewhere it is important that we do so in Scotland where for the past few years we have been working ever more closely with the highly committed PSI's who share the recognition of the need for standards and accreditation to underpin the professionalism of public service interpreters across the country – for the protection of the public, the provision of professional career opportunities and the effective fulfilment of the rights to high standards of interpreting from those needing it throughout Scotland.



All this plus the commitment to training, qualifications and CPD is championed by the Academy that is leading the way across Scotland, and NRPSI is fully committed, indeed proud, to support the growth of the Academy as a partner and in any way that is practical and mutually beneficial in the interests of maintaining and raising standards.

So, looking ahead I see that everything that we and many others will be doing over the next few years will resonate with the view expressed in NRPSI's published strategy where we say:

"The work that interpreters do every day is of vital importance for both the public services and for the clients being interpreted. While the life and death situations quoted at the head of our Strategy may be exceptional, just about every job an interpreter carries out has the potential to change someone's life. This is why it is crucial that every interpreter working in the public services is properly accredited. It is our mission to ensure that this is accomplished."

Looking ahead therefore I see that NRPSI and its partners including the Academy will continue to make the case for the standards that we all espouse as being at the heart of public sector interpreting as the essential means of ensuring public safety and effectiveness of interpreting across all parts of the UK.

After 11 years I will be stepping back to observe with a much greater understanding than I had when I started, with a wholehearted commitment to the mission and an admiration for those who are engaged in pushing for change, improvement, and recognition.

Good luck to you all.

Ted Sangster

Chair

National Register of Public Service Interpreters

April 2022



Registered and
Regulated Interpreter

Going from self-certification into a qualification

Should we be playing lottery with vulnerable people's lives?

There are some excellent linguists and very talented bilinguals who provide high quality interpreting services. They just have not taken yet an interpreting exam to prove to everyone their great skills. But there are also some people working as interpreters who have very poor language skills and should not be doing interpreting. Therefore, self-certification is a lottery. You might get an excellent interpreter or a really bad one. What is certain is that the impact interpreting has on vulnerable people's lives is real and it should not be left to chance.



Without an interpreting qualification, deciding who has the right skills to do the job becomes a guessing game

Would you accept if someone came to you and said that they were a very good solicitor, but you knew they had never passed exams to become a solicitor? There is legislation that prevents this from happening in order to protect the public. Public service interpreting is however unregulated. Anyone can claim overnight to be an interpreter. They do not need any training or to pass any exam to call themselves an interpreter. The only way to have a high degree of certainty regarding the suitability of the language skills of an interpreter is by checking if they have passed a recognised interpreting exam, such as a DPSI (Diploma in Public Sector Interpreting). Other Level 6 or above interpreting qualifications are equally valid, i.e. an MSc in Interpreting.

Language proficiency is essential to be able to pass any Diploma in Public Service Interpreting exam

Interpreting is a skill that can be learned. A pre-requisite to developing interpreting skills is to have already a high level of proficiency in the languages you wish to work as an interpreter. DPSI Preparatory courses can't teach you English or any foreign target languages. They assume you already have reached the right level of fluency in those languages when you join these courses. Therefore, before joining a DPSI preparatory course, make sure you have developed your own language skills to a point that you could use them for interpreting. Otherwise, you will not be able to pass an interpreting qualification.

Stand out from the crowd by becoming qualified

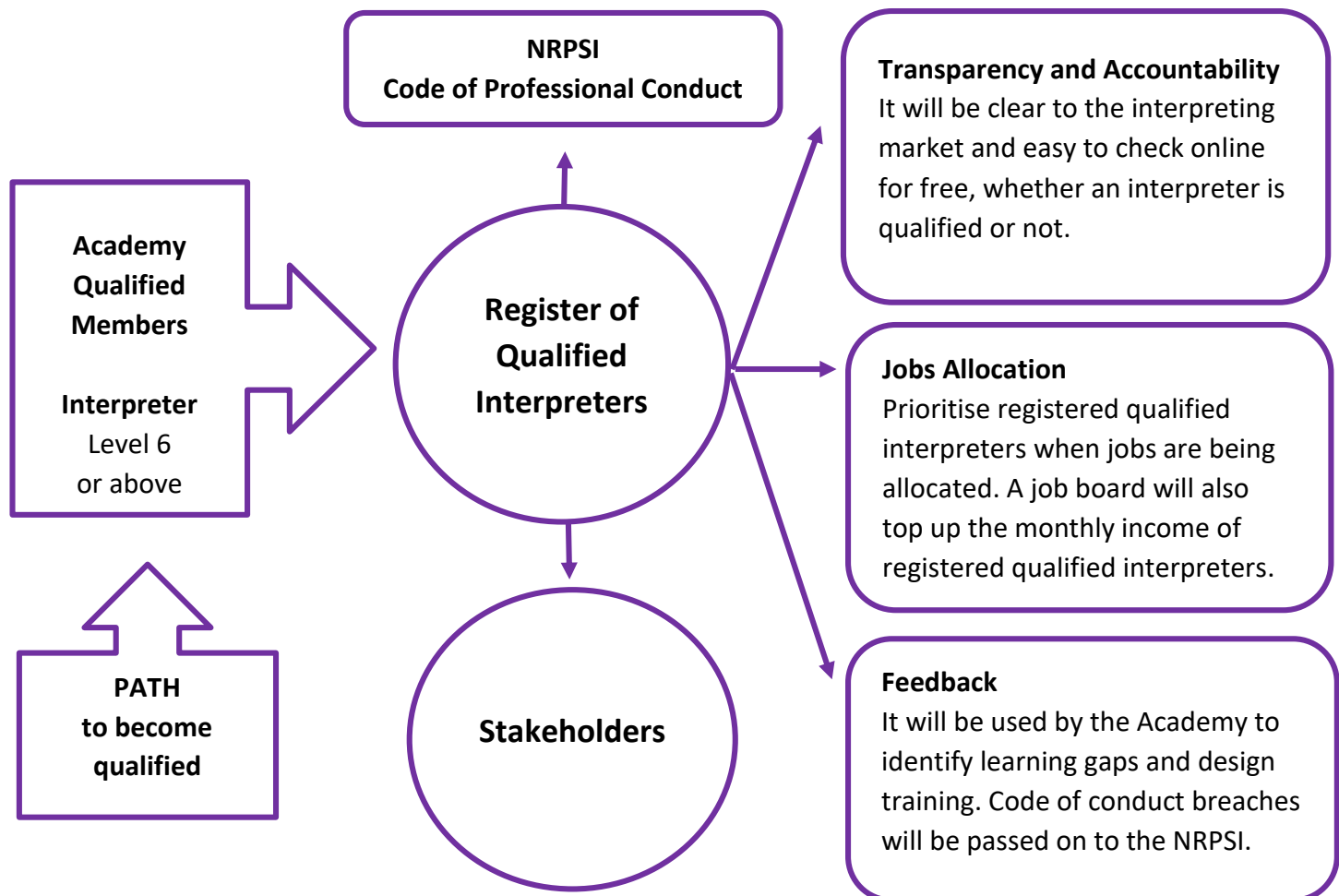
If you are interested in becoming a qualified interpreter on the languages you use for interpreting, please join our Facebook Group [PATH to become qualified](https://www.facebook.com/groups/pathtobecomequalified) and we will keep you posted with useful training, tips and information on how to gain a recognised interpreting qualification:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/pathtobecomequalified>



Academy professionalisation plans for Scotland

The diagram below captures some of the key elements the Academy will be focusing to progress the plans to professionalise public service interpreting in Scotland. These plans are gradually being shown to interpreters, agencies and other stakeholders and so far they have been well received.



Transition Period

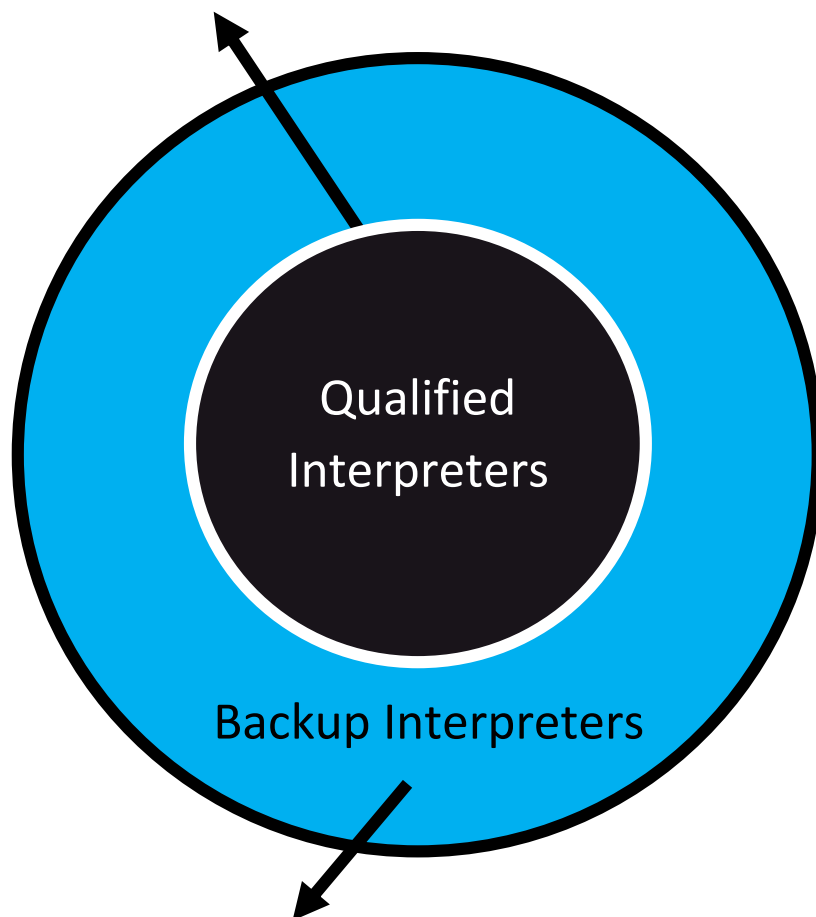
There are not enough qualified interpreters to service all the public sector interpreting market. There are also many good experienced bilinguals and linguists who need time to get their Level 6 or above interpreting qualification. We expect the pool of registered qualified interpreters to gradually increase and the pool of backup interpreters to become progressively smaller. We aim to reach a point where the market will only use qualified interpreters. During this transition period, all interpreters will benefit from training and the Academy will develop and source training solutions for all practicing interpreters. A qualified member of the Academy will be getting priority and discounts on training. They will also be offered more and better paid jobs through the job board and the priority system.

Jobs Allocation

The fair allocation of interpreting jobs is always an important topic for interpreters. We also need to be fair with vulnerable people that need the assistance of an interpreter. They should be offered the best available person for the job. This is what the system below is promoting.

Prioritising qualified interpreters

Interpreting jobs should be offered first to qualified interpreters. An interpreting qualification (Level 6 or above) offers the market the best quality assurance. Once the new *Register of Qualified Interpreters* goes live in Scotland, it will be transparent to the whole industry who has and who doesn't have a recognised interpreting qualification. We expect buyers of interpreting services to request interpreting service providers to book qualified interpreters that can be found on this future public database.



Backup Interpreters

Only if Level 6 qualified interpreters can't do the job, should interpreting jobs be passed on to backup interpreters. Backup interpreters should be at least *trainee interpreters*, a category that the Academy is developing in Scotland. Trainees will have their language and interpreting skills assessed and will also receive a foundation training. Some interpreting jobs will still be unsuitable for a trainee interpreter, so interpreting service providers will sometimes still need to either source an interpreter from further afield or try to reschedule that assignment.

Job board

Strategies to retain qualified interpreters

There are two key strategies that the Academy would like to promote to retain qualified interpreters. Firstly, they should be given priority for all jobs, thus increasing their overall volume of interpreting jobs. Secondly, they should also have some jobs coming from direct clients to top up their income with better paid jobs. When qualified interpreters do not earn enough they end up leaving the interpreting industry. It takes a long time to get someone properly qualified and with the right amount of experience. The interpreting industry faces huge losses whenever a qualified interpreter leaves the interpreting industry.

Direct jobs

Public sector interpreting jobs keep paying less and less. In order for qualified interpreters to make a living they will need to get some better paid jobs besides their regular low paid public service interpreting jobs.

Interpreting service providers

Every organisation that operates as an interpreting service provider (e.g. agencies, NSH and council interpreting departments, etc.) will have the opportunity to advertise their jobs on this future job board. Only qualified interpreters will receive these job adverts.

Access to the job board

This future job board will not advertise interpreting jobs to anyone who works as an interpreter but only to those qualified interpreters who have registered with the Academy.

Timeframe

Once the website is active we can progress with the full registration of qualified interpreters. The minimum number of registrations needed is 100 in order to open up the public database.

Notes of interest

If you are a qualified interpreter based in Scotland and you would like to register with the Academy once the membership is open, please drop us an email to confirm your **note of interest** so that we can contact you once registrations are open. Please email us on info@interpretingacademy.org and include your type of qualification, language you're qualified in and the city where you live. Once you are accepted, you will be able to join the *Register of Qualified Interpreters*, receive interpreting job offers and get discounts on future training events