

'Proof of professionalism'

– an interview with Anna Lesniewska

'Movers and Shakers' is a series of interviews with the interpreting profession's leading lights.

In November 2014, Anna Lesniewska became the first recipient of the 'NRPSI Award for excellence in the Diploma in Police Interpreting (DPI)'. Awarded by the Institute of Linguists Educational Trust (IoLET), Anna achieved the accolade for graduating from the course as the highest scoring candidate. Having worked as an interpreter since 2012, Anna already knew that interpreting was the career for her. What she sought by undertaking the DPI qualification was professional recognition and confidence in her own expertise. Here Anna talks more about what led her to a career in interpreting, her motivations for studying and the fact she'd love to work more. But, then, there is only so much you can fit in when you have a new addition to the family!

What led you to a career in interpreting?

I have always been fascinated by languages. I come from a family with a strong focus on education and languages. My paternal grandmother was a translator. She spoke French and Russian fluently and translated many works from both of these languages into Polish. I was, therefore, aware of the



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"Taking the DPI or DPSI qualification will give you more confidence and open up more opportunities."

profession of translation and interpreting from an early age. However, it wasn't until I studied conference interpreting that I realised that I wanted it to become my profession. I gained a Diploma in Conference Interpreting in 2010, but was unable to find a job as a conference interpreter where I live in South West England. It wasn't until 2012, when I discovered that Capita TI was recruiting interpreters,

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that I managed to start working as an interpreter.

Which language/s do you interpret?

I interpret from Polish to English and vice versa. I also speak Russian, but I don't possess a qualification in this language and so don't use it in a court room.

You recently won the NRPSI Award for excellence in the Diploma in Police Interpreting (DPI). Can you tell us why you chose to specialise in police interpreting?

I've been called to Exeter Magistrates' Court on a number of occasions following an arrest and police interview, and have always found the work interesting. I like being able to assist a client from the beginning to the end of their case if I can. This way you get to know the person and establish trust. The client is reassured that things won't go wrong due to language barriers and this in turn helps them to remain calm. There is also a demand for Polish interpreters to help the police as well as the probation services.

"Interpreting standards should be kept really high and the benchmark should be the same for all."

Can you tell us a bit about your motivations for undertaking a qualification?

I always found it embarrassing that I wasn't an NRPSI registered interpreter when asked if I was. It undermined my confidence, so



HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCMG presenting Anna with the 'NRPSI Award for excellence in the Diploma in Police Interpreting'

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I decided to take the DPI exam. Around the same time I found out that I was pregnant and this became an additional motivation. I knew that once my baby arrived I wouldn't have time to study.

What were the key learnings from your studies? What have you found of most use or value?

Having worked as an interpreter for two years, I already had a good practical knowledge of interpreting.

I must admit that I didn't find the exam extremely difficult, but I had prepared very well using past papers and by completing them against the clock.

Has what you learned through your studies influenced the way you work?

It has to a degree, yes. My use of vocabulary has definitely become more precise and I have improved my interpreting speed.

What advice do you have for anyone starting out in interpreting? What is the best way into the profession? Where should they go for information?

I would say that interpreting is a great choice of career. If you have good language skills, are considerate of others, trustworthy and can be impartial, then it is definitely a career you should consider. Taking the DPI or DPSI qualification will give you more confidence and open up more opportunities. I guess the way I entered the profession wasn't a bad route. I obtained a qualification in conference interpreting first and then obtained practical experience of face-to-face interpreting working for a language agency. I enjoyed this and knew straight away a career in interpreting was for me. It came to me so naturally.

There is a lot of useful information on the Chartered Institute of Linguists website for anyone thinking about a career in interpreting. As with almost every profession there is some element of routine. Working for the courts, for example, the cases can sometimes appear similar. But with time, the more you work with the courts, police and probation services, the more interesting the job becomes. You learn something from every case.

You mentioned that you started out working for a language agency. Is this a good route into the profession?

I can't say that my experience of working with an agency was entirely satisfactory, however, at the time I felt I had no choice because I had no other means of sourcing regular work. I also didn't know about the National Register of Public Service Interpreters. I think that working for an agency can provide practical experience and is a way to get

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started, but I would recommend working solely for yourself.

Are there instances when you don't need to be a registered interpreter?

Interpreting standards should be kept really high and the benchmark should be the same for all. If you are confident in your expertise and knowledge, you should take the DPI or DPSI qualification. If I had failed, I would have felt forced to rethink my career. I'm really glad that I took the exam and now have proof that I am fit for this job.

go to sleep because he has to look after our baby while I go to court. The situation is very challenging for both of us.

I would love nothing more than to support my family working as a professional interpreter. Unfortunately, however, there aren't that many cases that require my services in South West England. The region is very quiet; people are very well behaved! 

"I always found it embarrassing that I wasn't an NRPSI registered interpreter when asked if I was. It undermined my confidence, so I decided to take the DPI exam."

When you were studying you were expecting a baby. How do you manage working as a professional interpreter alongside your very important other recent commitment of bringing up a new baby?

To be honest, I find it very difficult. I am currently still on maternity leave, so I should be spending time with my new baby and family. While I do this, I also miss my job very much and take every local case I am offered. My husband is a support worker and mostly works nights. He usually arrives home at around 8.30am and sometimes can't