BSL First | Qualify

Sign Language Interpreter

BSL/English and ISL/English pathways

Stream 1 of the Signature Level 6 Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting and Translation

Develop the knowledge, practical skills, professional judgement and supervised experience required to progress towards professional practice as a sign language interpreter.

Level 6 | Four six-month cycles | BSL/English or ISL/English

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER

Contents

Develop the knowledge, practical skills, professional judgement and supervised experience required to progress towards professional practice as a sign language interpreter.

1 Course at a glance
2 Is this programme for you?
3 Your professional pathway
4 How the programme is structured
5 What you will learn
6 How you will learn
7 Practice, supervision and professional development
8 Assessment, evidence and feedback
9 Qualification, course status and professional recognition
10 Learning support and resources
11 Entry requirements and readiness
12 Application and selection
13 After the programme: progression and careers
14 Why train with BSL First?
15 Current course information and next steps

Prepare → Apply → Practice → Assessment

01 Course at a glance

The BSL First Sign Language Interpreter programme is a structured professional training pathway for hearing people who use British Sign Language (BSL) or Irish Sign Language (ISL) as an additional language.

It delivers Stream 1 of the Signature Level 6 Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting and Translation, developing learners from advanced signed-language competence through interpreting training and supervised professional practice towards qualification.

Stream 1 – interpreting between a spoken and signed language

QUALIFICATION
SIGNATURE LEVEL 6 DIPLOMA IN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION

PATHWAY
STREAM 1 – INTERPRETING BETWEEN A SPOKEN AND SIGNED LANGUAGE

WORKING LANGUAGES
BSL/ENGLISH OR ISL/ENGLISH

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE
FOUR SIX-MONTH CYCLES

CYCLES
PREPARE → APPLY → PRACTICE → ASSESSMENT

SCHEDULED TEACHING
60 HOURS PER CYCLE / 240 HOURS ACROSS THE PROGRAMME

STRUCTURED INDEPENDENT STUDY
60 HOURS PER CYCLE / 240 HOURS ACROSS THE PROGRAMME

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
MINIMUM 20 HOURS OF SUPERVISED PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DURING CYCLE 3

DELIVERY
HYBRID – ONLINE TEACHING, FACE-TO-FACE INTENSIVE LEARNING, INDEPENDENT STUDY AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

PROGRESSION
ASSESSMENT AT THE END OF EVERY CYCLE

PROFESSIONAL OUTCOME
PROGRESSION TOWARDS QUALIFIED AND REGISTERED SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING PRACTICE

60 SCHEDULED + **60** INDEPENDENT

A 60 + 60 learning model

Each cycle combines 60 hours of scheduled teaching with 60 hours of structured independent study. Learners should therefore plan for a minimum of 120 hours of structured learning within each six-month cycle, before allowing for additional assessment preparation, wider reading, professional activity and, during Cycle 3, supervised professional practice.

The independent-study component is not optional supplementary work. It is an integral part of the programme.

01 Course at a glance

The programme provides 240 hours of scheduled class/contact teaching. The regulated qualification specifies 500 guided learning hours overall, with additional guided activity taking place through assessment activity, tutorials, meetings and other directed work outside scheduled classes. Independent study is separate from guided learning.

Progression is assessed at every stage

Each cycle ends with an assessment of the knowledge, skills and professional readiness developed during that stage. Passing a cycle does not simply mean that you attended the required classes. It means that you have demonstrated that you are ready to begin the next stage of training.

If you have not yet reached the required standard, you will need to repeat the cycle before progressing. This staged approach is designed to prevent learners being moved through the programme before they have established the foundations required for the increasingly demanding work that follows.

02 Is this programme for you?

“ Becoming an interpreter requires much more than being a confident signer.

This programme is designed for people who have already developed advanced competence in BSL or ISL and are ready to make the transition from language user to professional interpreter.

You will be expected to study interpreting and translation theory, analyse professional practice, complete Level 6 academic work, develop practical interpreting skills, undertake independent research and preparation, respond critically to feedback and progressively take responsibility for your own professional development.

Do not underestimate the commitment

This is a demanding Level 6 professional programme. It should not be approached in the same way as an evening language class or a qualification that can be completed primarily through attendance.

There will be periods when the course makes substantial demands on your time and attention. If your existing work, family or other commitments leave very little protected time for independent study, you should consider carefully whether this is the right time to begin the programme.

Every six-month cycle includes 60 hours of scheduled teaching and 60 hours of structured independent study. Assessments, reading, research, interpreting practice and preparation sit alongside this. Cycle 3 also requires a minimum of 20 hours of supervised professional practice.

The academic workload should be taken particularly seriously. A significant proportion of the qualification requires research, analysis, critical reflection and written work at Level 6.

The programme is likely to be suitable for you if you:

- are a hearing person who has learned BSL or ISL as an additional language;
- already meet the Level 6 signed-language entry requirement;
- want to work professionally between English and BSL or ISL;
- are ready for substantial academic as well as practical study;
- can manage sustained independent learning between teaching sessions;
- can respond constructively to detailed feedback;
- are prepared to analyse your own performance critically;
- can make time for interpreting practice and professional experience; and
- are comfortable taking increasing responsibility for your own development.

Interpreter training does not begin by teaching you BSL or ISL. Advanced language competence is the starting point from which interpreting competence is developed.

If you are interested in interpreting but are not yet sure whether you are ready to commit to a full professional programme, BSL First also offers an optional six-week Introduction to Interpreting and Translation course. Completion of that course does not guarantee admission to this programme.

> If a signed language is your first or preferred language, the Deaf Interpreter & Translator pathway may be more appropriate.

03 Your professional pathway

The Sign Language Interpreter programme sits within a longer professional pathway:

Trainee professional practice

Where the relevant requirements are met, learners may progress towards Trainee Sign Language Interpreter status while completing their qualification.

For trainees progressing through the BSL First programme, BSL First acts as the Senior Practitioner for TSLI registration. The Senior Practitioner role should not be confused with professional supervision or mentoring.

BSL First

BSL First remains responsible for the training programme, progression requirements and qualification assessment. It does not provide ongoing professional supervision or individual mentoring as part of the course.

Learners who want or require additional professional supervision or mentoring are responsible for arranging this themselves. BSL First can signpost learners towards appropriate professional support.

Qualification is a milestone, not the end point

Completing the Level 6 qualification is a major professional milestone, but professional competence continues to develop after qualification. Qualified interpreters are expected to continue learning through professional experience, continuing professional development, reflection, peer networks and appropriate specialist development throughout their careers.

04 How the programme is structured

1 Prepare | 2 Apply | 3 Practice | 4 Assessment

The programme is divided into four six-month cycles:

Each cycle has a distinct purpose. More importantly, each cycle has a defined standard that must be reached before the learner progresses. The programme therefore works as a series of connected developmental stages rather than one uninterrupted course in which progression happens automatically with time.

How cycle progression works

At the end of each cycle, learners complete a progression assessment appropriate to that stage of training. The assessment asks a simple question: are you ready for what comes next?

If the answer is yes, you progress. If your current knowledge, practical competence or professional readiness does not yet meet the required standard, you repeat the cycle and receive a further structured period in which to develop before being reassessed.

Cycle 1 — Prepare 01

Cycle 1 develops the academic, theoretical and professional foundations required for interpreter training. You study interpreting and translation theory, professional ethics, communication, role boundaries, assignment preparation, terminology, reflective practice and the practical systems surrounding professional work. Practical interpreting activities are introduced alongside this work so that theory is connected to interpreting decisions from the beginning.

The Part 1 professional-development assessments also begin during this cycle.

60 scheduled teaching hours | **60 structured independent-study hours**

Cycle 1 concludes with a practical interpreting/translation readiness assessment supported by critical analysis and reflection. Its purpose is to determine whether you have sufficiently developed the professional foundations, analytical skills and emerging practical competence required to move into the more intensive application stage.

Successful completion allows progression to Cycle 2 — Apply. If the required standard has not yet been demonstrated, Cycle 1 must be repeated before progression.

Cycle 2 — Apply 02

Cycle 2 focuses on applying the foundations established during Cycle 1. You develop consecutive and simultaneous interpreting in both language directions alongside analytical, memory, preparation, reformulation, self-monitoring and coping strategies. You work with increasingly complex source material and develop greater consistency across different speakers, signers, registers and contexts.

Part 1 qualification work continues alongside practical development.

60 scheduled teaching hours | **60 structured independent-study hours**

Cycle 2 concludes with practical assessment activity and professional reflection designed to determine whether you are ready to move from controlled training activities into supervised professional practice.

Successful completion allows progression to Cycle 3 — Practice. If the required standard has not yet been demonstrated, Cycle 2 must be repeated.

04 How the programme is structured

Cycle 3 — Practice 03

Cycle 3 moves the centre of learning away from the classroom and into supervised professional experience. You are expected to become significantly more independent.

Rather than BSL First arranging placements for you, you are responsible for identifying appropriate professional-practice opportunities and experienced interpreters in your local area who can support your development. You may work with one experienced interpreter or with several, depending on the opportunities available. These interpreters act as practice supervisors or tutors while you observe professional work and undertake supervised interpreting practice.

Cycle 3 includes a minimum of 20 hours of supervised professional practice. The practice is structured in blocks of approximately five hours, with three-hour group supervision/reflection sessions interspersed through the cycle. These group sessions allow learners to examine what has happened in practice, discuss challenges and professional decisions, reflect on feedback and identify priorities before the next period of practice.

These are course-based reflective learning sessions. They should not be confused with individual professional supervision or mentoring.

60 scheduled teaching/group learning hours

60 structured independent-study hours

20+ hours supervised professional practice

Following formal observations and supervised-practice sessions, you complete an observation report with the experienced interpreter who has supported the activity. These reports provide structured evidence of what you observed or practised, the feedback received and the professional learning that resulted.

Where the evidence meets the relevant requirements, observation reports may be submitted towards the Part 2 internal assessments, subject to acceptance by the BSL First assessor. Responsibility for collecting suitable evidence remains with the learner.

By Cycle 3, BSL First deliberately becomes more hands-off. The course continues to provide structure, assessment, group reflection and guidance, but learners are expected to take responsibility for finding appropriate practice opportunities, building relationships with experienced local interpreters, organising observations and supervised practice, preparing properly for professional activity, maintaining their evidence, identifying their own development needs and seeking additional professional support where necessary.

Cycle 3 progression is determined through the Part 2 internal practical assessment process and associated evidence of professional practice. If you are not yet ready for the external assessment stage, Cycle 3 must be repeated.

Cycle 4 — Assessment 04

Cycle 4 is the summative assessment stage. Its purpose is not to teach substantial amounts of new interpreting content or to repair weaknesses that should have been addressed earlier in the programme.

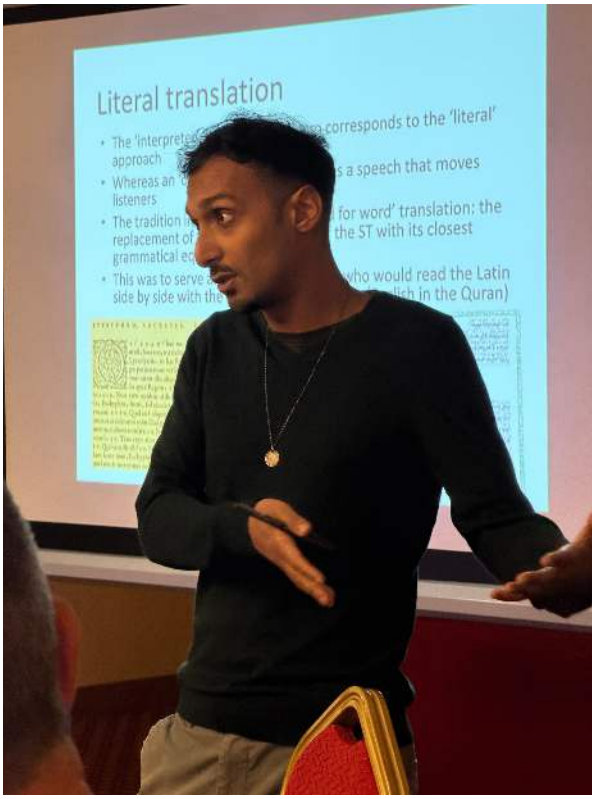
By the time you enter Cycle 4, you should already have demonstrated through the first three progression stages that you have the underlying knowledge, practical skills and professional readiness required for the final qualification assessments.

The cycle focuses principally on targeted examination preparation, familiarisation with assessment requirements, practice under assessment conditions, final preparation and feedback, and completion of the external INTRA6 Part 2 assessments.

60 scheduled assessment-preparation and course hours

60 structured independent-study and assessment-preparation hours

Cycle 4 is the point at which you demonstrate the competence developed through Prepare, Apply and Practice, rather than begin developing that competence from scratch.



04 Taking a break between cycles

The programme recognises that learners may sometimes need to take an extended break from study because of pregnancy, health, caring responsibilities, extenuating circumstances or other significant life events.

An approved break does not remove the need to demonstrate current readiness for progression. Interpreting competence is practice-dependent. A learner may successfully complete a cycle and then experience a substantial period with little signing, interpreting, academic study or professional practice.

For this reason, if you take a break between cycles, you will be required to repeat the preceding cycle and its progression assessment before moving on to the next cycle.

For example, if you successfully complete Cycle 2 and then take an extended break before beginning Cycle 3, you will return to Cycle 2, complete the learning and assessment again, and demonstrate that you remain ready for supervised professional practice.

This requirement is not a penalty for taking time out. It is a professional-readiness safeguard. It gives returning learners a clear structure through which to rebuild, demonstrate readiness and then progress with a realistic chance of success.

05 What you will learn

The curriculum follows the same four-cycle progression as the programme itself. Each stage adds a different layer of professional competence.

Cycle 1 — Prepare: professional foundations

You are introduced to key concepts from interpreting and translation studies and begin connecting theory with practical decision-making. You explore the role of the sign language interpreter, professional boundaries and responsibilities; develop frameworks for ethical decision-making; learn how to research assignments and build specialist terminology; consider the systems required for professional business practice; and develop Level 6 academic, critical-reading and reflective skills.

Cycle 2 — Apply: developing interpreting competence

You develop consecutive and simultaneous interpreting in both language directions. The cycle covers meaning, register and discourse; memory, analysis and note-taking; coping and repair strategies; remote interpreting and technology; co-working and collaboration; and preparation for professional practice. By the end of Cycle 2, practical training increasingly focuses on whether you are ready to apply your developing competence in supervised professional environments.

Cycle 3 — Practice: professional experience

Cycle 3 is substantially more self-directed and practice-based. You apply the theory and practical skills developed during the first two cycles in authentic professional environments. You learn to judge whether an opportunity is suitable for your current competence, prepare appropriately, work under the guidance of more experienced interpreters and respond professionally to feedback.

Observation is an important part of this stage. Watching experienced practitioners allows you to analyse different approaches to preparation, interaction, language choice, professional boundaries and interpreting decisions before comparing these with your own developing practice.

Supervised interpreting then allows you to test your own decisions in a controlled professional context. Following observations and supervised work, you record and analyse your learning through structured reports.

Cycle 4 — Assessment: summative demonstration

Cycle 4 is the final summative stage. There is deliberately much less new teaching at this point. The focus is on preparing for and completing the formal Part 2 external assessments required by the qualification.

You revisit the required assessment modes, practise under examination conditions, respond to final targeted feedback and prepare strategically for each assessment.

The cycle includes external assessment in simultaneous interpreting from signed language into English; simultaneous interpreting from English into signed language; two-way face-to-face interpreting; two-way remote interpreting; sight translation from English into signed language; and immediate translation from signed language into English.

06 How you will learn

The programme uses a hybrid model because different aspects of interpreter education are best developed in different environments.

Online learning

Online teaching provides continuity across the programme and is particularly well suited to theory, academic development, structured discussion, remote-interpreting practice and regular practical skills work.

Face-to-face intensive learning

Scheduled face-to-face learning provides opportunities for immersive practical work, live interaction, observation, detailed skills feedback and assessment preparation. Current face-to-face locations and dates are published on the website for each live cohort.

60 + 60

Each six-month cycle follows a 60 + 60 model: 60 hours of scheduled teaching or course activity plus 60 hours of structured independent study. During Cycle 3, the minimum 20 hours of supervised professional practice is additional to this core commitment.

Independent learning

Independent study may include academic reading and research, written assessment work, terminology research, interpreting practice, source-text analysis, preparation for taught sessions, reflective writing, assessment preparation, reviewing recorded material and developing professional knowledge.

The programme becomes increasingly difficult to manage if independent study is repeatedly postponed until immediately before an assessment. Learners should plan protected study time throughout each cycle.

07 Practice, supervision and professional development

Professional development within the programme operates at several different levels. It is important not to confuse them.

Professional observations → Supervised practice → Feedback → Group supervision and reflection → Professional development

BSL First's role

BSL First is the training provider and assessment centre. Its responsibilities include delivering the programme, providing the teaching and learning structure, assessing readiness to progress between cycles, supporting learners with qualification requirements, assessing internal evidence, preparing learners for formal assessment and, where applicable, acting as the learner's Senior Practitioner for TSLI registration.

What the course does not provide

Professional supervision and individual mentoring are not included as part of the course. Learners who wish to establish an ongoing relationship with a professional supervisor or mentor are responsible for arranging this themselves. BSL First can signpost learners towards appropriate sources of support.

Local practice supervisors and tutors

Cycle 3 requires learners to identify one or more experienced interpreters who can support observations and supervised practice in their local area. For the purposes of the course, these experienced practitioners act as practice supervisors or tutors.

After a formal observation or supervised-practice activity, the learner and supervising interpreter complete the relevant observation report together. The completed report may contribute evidence towards the Part 2 internal assessments, subject to review and acceptance by the BSL First assessor.

Group supervision and reflection

Supervised-practice periods are interspersed with three-hour group supervision/reflection sessions delivered within the programme. These sessions create a structured point at which learners can examine professional decisions, difficult or unexpected situations, feedback received from experienced interpreters, ethical questions, assignment preparation, boundaries and competence, and priorities for the next period of development.

These sessions form part of the educational programme. They are not a substitute for individual professional supervision.

Learning to manage your own career

Cycle 3 represents a deliberate shift in responsibility. At the beginning of the programme, BSL First provides a relatively high level of structure. By the professional-practice stage, learners are expected to organise opportunities, build professional relationships, collect evidence, seek appropriate support and make informed decisions about their own competence.

Cycle 3 represents a deliberate shift in responsibility.

08 Assessment, evidence and feedback

Assessment has two connected purposes within the programme. The first is to determine whether you are ready to move from one cycle to the next. The second is to complete the formal assessment requirements of the Signature Level 6 Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting and Translation.

8.1 Progression assessments

Every cycle has an assessment point:

1. Cycle 1 — Prepare: practical interpreting/translation readiness assessment with critical analysis and reflection, measuring whether the professional, theoretical and analytical foundations required for Cycle 2 are secure.
2. Cycle 2 — Apply: practical assessment activity and professional reflection demonstrating readiness to move into supervised professional practice.
3. Cycle 3 — Practice: Part 2 internal practical assessments and accepted professional-practice evidence, measuring readiness for the final external assessment stage.
4. Cycle 4 — Assessment: formal Part 2 external/summative assessments, demonstrating final qualification competence.

Progression is not automatic. A learner who has attended a cycle but has not demonstrated the required standard does not progress to the next one. Instead, the learner repeats the cycle and its progression assessment.

8.2 How the Signature assessments map onto the cycles

Cycles 1 and 2 — Part 1 professional development

The five Part 1 assessments are developed across the Prepare and Apply stages:

1. Interpreting and translation studies essay — a 3,000-word academic essay demonstrating engagement with relevant interpreting and translation theory.
2. Professional business plan — demonstrating understanding of the systems and processes required for professional practice.
3. Specialist terminology glossary — development of a terminology resource linked to relevant professional interpreting domains.
4. Preparing for assignments — evidence demonstrating effective preparation for four interpreting assignments.
5. Professional Development Plan — supported by reflective journals.

08 Assessment, evidence and feedback

Cycle 3 — Part 2 internal assessment

The six internal assessments are:

1. One-way consecutive interpreting: signed language → English
2. One-way consecutive interpreting: English → signed language
3. One-way simultaneous interpreting: signed language → English, with critical analysis
4. One-way simultaneous interpreting: English → signed language, with critical analysis
5. Two-way face-to-face interpreting, with critical analysis
6. Two-way remote interpreting, with critical analysis

Evidence generated through professional observations and supervised practice may contribute towards these assessments where it satisfies the relevant requirements and is accepted by the BSL First assessor.

Cycle 4 — Part 2 external assessment

The six external assessments are:

1. One-way simultaneous interpreting: signed language → English
2. One-way simultaneous interpreting: English → signed language
3. Two-way face-to-face interpreting
4. Two-way remote interpreting
5. Sight translation: English → signed language
6. Immediate translation: signed language → English

The structure of the course therefore follows the assessment logic of the qualification: Prepare — build the theory, professional foundations and academic knowledge. Apply — develop interpreting competence in structured training environments. Practice — demonstrate that competence through supervised professional experience and internal assessment. Assessment — complete the final external assessments.

What happens if you are not ready to progress?

Not passing a cycle progression assessment means that more development is required before moving on. You will therefore need to repeat the cycle and demonstrate the required standard before progressing.

The purpose is developmental rather than punitive. Moving a learner into a more demanding stage before they are ready significantly increases the risk of later failure.

Progression decisions are based on current competence. Where a learner takes an extended break between cycles, the re-entry requirements described in Chapter 4 apply before progression to the next stage.

Formative feedback

Assessment is not limited to formal qualification tasks. Throughout the programme, learners receive formative feedback through taught practical activities, tutorials, peer work, practice evidence and internal assessment preparation.

09 Qualification, course status and professional recognition

RQF

Level 6

The programme delivers Stream 1 of the Signature Level 6 Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting and Translation (RQF). Signature is the awarding organisation responsible for the qualification and its assessment requirements. Stream 1 is the pathway for interpreting between a spoken and a signed language.

Qualification and professional registration are different

Completing the qualification and becoming professionally registered are related but separate processes. Successful completion of the Level 6 Diploma provides the professional qualification associated with this pathway. Professional registration is governed separately by the relevant regulator and may include additional requirements beyond completion of the qualification.

The programme is designed to support progression towards Registered Sign Language Interpreter status, subject to the professional registration requirements in force at the time you apply. Because regulatory requirements can change, the prospectus does not reproduce a detailed registration checklist.

Trainee registration

Where eligibility requirements are met, learners may be able to progress towards TSLI registration during the programme. BSL First acts as the Senior Practitioner for eligible trainees within its current TSLI framework. This role supports the learner's training and progression within the qualification but does not include ongoing professional supervision or mentoring.

10 Learning support and resources

Support throughout the programme

Interpreter training is demanding. You will be expected to work independently, manage substantial academic study, practise regularly and take increasing responsibility for your professional development.

That does not mean you are expected to do everything alone.

BSL First provides a structured support infrastructure throughout the programme, combining teaching, tutorials, feedback, peer learning, online resources and professional-practice guidance.

The level and type of support changes as you progress. During the earlier cycles, the course provides more structured guidance. By Cycle 3, learners are expected to become increasingly independent and to take greater responsibility for organising their own practice and professional development.

The purpose of support is therefore not to remove that independence, but to give you the structure, resources and feedback you need to develop it successfully.

Your Student Hub

Learners have access to the BSL First Student Hub on Moodle, which acts as the central online learning environment for the programme.

The Student Hub gives you access to course materials and learning resources throughout your studies, including recorded lectures, an online library and interpreting practice clips. These resources allow you to revisit taught material, explore topics in greater depth and continue developing between scheduled teaching sessions.

Tutorials

Tutorials provide additional opportunities to discuss your progress outside the main teaching sessions. They can be used to clarify course or assessment requirements, discuss feedback, identify areas requiring further development and consider how you are progressing through the programme.

Tutorials are part of the academic support structure of the course. They do not replace the independent study and practice expected between sessions.

10 Learning support and resources

Feedback and progression support

You will receive feedback throughout the programme rather than only at the point of final assessment. Practical activities, formative work, internal assessments and end-of-cycle progression assessments are used to identify strengths and areas requiring further development.

Because progression between cycles depends on readiness rather than attendance alone, this feedback should help you understand where you are now, what standard is required next, and what you need to work on to get there.

Where a learner has not yet reached the required progression standard, repeating the cycle provides a further structured period of teaching, practice and development before reassessment.

Peer learning

Interpreter development benefits considerably from learning with other trainees. Peer groups provide opportunities to practise interpreting, discuss course material, compare approaches, analyse interpreting decisions and support one another between formal teaching sessions.

Peer learning does not replace tutor assessment or professional feedback, but it gives learners additional opportunities to practise, experiment, reflect and develop confidence.

Community Hub

Learners also have access to the wider BSL First Community Hub. This extends the learning environment beyond an individual class and allows students to remain connected with the wider BSL First learner community.

The aim is to support professional connection, peer exchange and a sense of belonging within a broader community of people developing their signed-language and professional practice.

Cycle 3 group reflection

Additional support is built into the professional-practice stage. During Cycle 3, periods of supervised practice are interspersed with three-hour group supervision and reflection sessions.

These sessions provide a structured space in which learners can return from professional practice, examine what happened, discuss feedback and professional decisions, identify difficulties and plan priorities for the next period of practice.

The sessions are educational and reflective components of the programme. They are not individual professional supervision.

TSLI Senior Practitioner support

Where a learner progresses towards TSLI registration and the relevant requirements are met, BSL First acts as the learner's Senior Practitioner as part of the trainee-registration process.

The Senior Practitioner role is separate from professional supervision and mentoring. BSL First does not provide an ongoing professional supervisor or personal mentor as part of the course. Learners who require or want these additional professional relationships are responsible for arranging them independently, although BSL First can signpost learners towards appropriate sources of support.

Reasonable adjustments

BSL First operates a formal reasonable-adjustment process for learners who require adjustments because of disability or another relevant access need.

Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments can be considered for teaching, learning and assessment in accordance with BSL First policy and the requirements of the awarding organisation.

Adjustments are designed to remove unnecessary barriers to access. They do not change the competence standard that must ultimately be demonstrated for the qualification.

Student benefits

Eligible learners can access TOTUM student membership, providing access to the benefits and discounts available through the scheme.

What support does — and does not — mean

BSL First provides substantial academic, learning and progression support, but interpreter training ultimately requires increasing professional independence.

Support from the course does not mean that BSL First completes academic work for you, provides unlimited individual tuition, organises all professional-practice opportunities, supplies an individual mentor or professional supervisor, or guarantees progression simply because you have attended the course.

By Cycle 3 in particular, you will be expected to identify suitable practice opportunities, establish relationships with experienced interpreters, maintain your own evidence, respond to feedback and take responsibility for your continuing development.

> **A useful way of understanding the programme is: we provide the structure, teaching, resources, assessment and feedback. You are responsible for using them.**

That partnership between structured support and increasing learner responsibility is central to the way the programme prepares you for professional interpreting practice.

11 Entry requirements and readiness

This is an advanced professional programme. Meeting the formal language entry requirement is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own. The selection process also considers whether an applicant has the academic capacity, professional maturity and available time required to succeed.

Formal entry requirements

Applicants should:

- be a hearing person who has learned BSL or ISL as an additional language;
- hold the required Level 6 qualification in their chosen signed language, or an accepted equivalent; and
- demonstrate the language competence required to work between English and their chosen signed language.

Academic readiness

The academic demands of the programme must not be underestimated. The qualification requires critical reading, research, academic writing, interpreting and translation theory, structured analysis, reflective writing and the ability to make evidence-based arguments.

BSL First therefore asks applicants about their previous university study during the application process. Preference is given to applicants who already hold a university degree because previous successful study at this level provides useful evidence that the applicant is likely to manage the academic demands of the programme.

A degree is not a substitute for the signed-language entry requirement or professional suitability. Applicants without a university degree should pay particular attention to the academic requirements and be prepared to demonstrate that they can undertake sustained Level 6 study.

Time and workload readiness

Being academically capable is not enough if you do not have time to complete the work. Every cycle contains 60 hours scheduled teaching plus 60 hours structured independent study, with additional demands arising from assessment and, later, professional practice.

This is not a programme where independent work can routinely be left until the final week before an assessment.

Independent learning

As the programme progresses, the level of direction from BSL First reduces. You will increasingly be expected to plan your own study, research unfamiliar topics, practise independently, organise professional-practice opportunities, identify your own weaknesses, respond to feedback and seek appropriate professional support.

Professional maturity

Interpreter training involves confidentiality, boundaries, ethical decisions and responsibility for working within other people's interactions. Applicants need to demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the seriousness of professional practice and an ability to reflect on their own limitations.

Digital competence

Because the programme includes online teaching, remote interpreting, Moodle resources and digital submission of learning and assessment evidence, learners need sufficient digital confidence to participate effectively.

Meeting the formal language entry requirement is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own.

12 Application and selection

The application process is designed to assess more than whether you hold the minimum qualification. It considers language competence, academic readiness, professional potential, motivation and whether the programme is the right next step for you.

01

Stage 1 — Application

Applicants submit an up-to-date CV and a signed-language video of up to four minutes explaining why they want to become an interpreter, using the signed language associated with the route for which they are applying.

BSL First reviews qualifications, relevant experience, signed-language competence, motivation and professional potential before deciding whether to invite the applicant to interview.

02

Stage 2 — Online interview

Selected applicants attend an online interview of approximately 30 minutes. The interview includes a 10–15 minute two-way interpreting simulation.

Applicants are not expected to perform as already-qualified interpreters. The activity is used to explore language processing, communication, potential and readiness for professional training.

The interview also includes questions about the applicant's ambitions, expectations, previous study and readiness for the demands of the programme, together with an opportunity for the applicant to ask questions.

03

Admissions decision

Following the selection process, BSL First decides whether the applicant is ready to enter the programme and whether the route is appropriate for their current stage of development. Meeting the minimum entry requirements does not guarantee a place.

Current application availability, live cohort details and current application arrangements are published on the BSL First website.

13 After the programme: progression and careers

Successful completion of the programme provides the Level 6 professional qualification associated with Stream 1 of the Signature Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting and Translation.

Community services | Education | Healthcare | Workplaces | Public services | Events | Conferences | Remote environments

Professional registration

Graduates may progress towards Registered Sign Language Interpreter status, subject to the requirements of the relevant professional regulator in force at the time of application. The qualification and registration should not be treated as identical. Learners remain responsible for meeting any additional professional registration requirements.

Where interpreters work

Qualified sign language interpreters may work across a wide range of settings, including community services, education, healthcare, workplaces, public services, meetings, events, conferences and remote environments.

Interpreters may work on a freelance basis, as employees, or through a combination of professional arrangements.

Working within competence

Qualification does not mean that every interpreter is immediately ready for every specialist setting. Professional interpreters are expected to make responsible decisions about the assignments they accept and to work within the limits of their current competence.

Some areas of practice require further experience, specialist knowledge, supervision, mentoring or additional professional development after qualification.

Continuing professional development

The end of the course marks the beginning of a new stage of professional learning. Interpreters continue developing through practice, continuing professional development, reflection, peer learning, appropriate supervision and specialist training.

BSL First's wider **Develop** offer provides opportunities for qualified professionals to continue building advanced and specialist practice.

14 Why train with BSL First?

Interpreter training should develop more than the ability to pass an assessment. BSL First's professional programmes are designed around a connected process of knowledge, application, supervised practice, observation, feedback and reflection.

A measurable contribution to the profession

In 2026, BSL First reported that:

150+

150+ professionals had been trained across sign language interpreting and translation since 2020.

1 in 6

1 in 6 trainees in the national trainee interpreter pipeline were training with BSL First.

14%

BSL First-trained interpreters accounted for 14% of the net growth of the RSLI register since 2021.

10%

BSL First-trained translators accounted for 10% of the net growth of the RSLT register since 2022.

These figures were based on BSL First programme records and published NRCPD registration figures at the time. The RSLI and RSLT percentages compare BSL First-trained professionals with net growth in the relevant national register over the stated period.

Specialist professional training

BSL First specialises in sign language education and professional interpreting and translation training. The curriculum is designed around the particular linguistic, ethical, academic and professional demands of working across signed and spoken languages.

A staged route into practice

The four-cycle structure deliberately prevents learners being moved directly from advanced language study into unsupported professional practice. You first Prepare. You then Apply those foundations. You move into supervised Practice only when you have demonstrated readiness. You enter final Assessment once your internal practical competence has been established.

Increasing professional independence

The programme does not aim to make learners permanently dependent on their tutors. Responsibility shifts progressively towards the learner. By Cycle 3, you are expected to organise professional-practice opportunities, develop relationships with experienced interpreters, maintain your own evidence and identify the professional support you need.

Learning beyond scheduled teaching

The Student Hub, recorded lectures, online library, practice clips, tutorials, peer learning and Community Hub support development outside formal class hours. The 60 hours of independent study within every cycle reflect the expectation that professional competence is built as much through sustained work between sessions as through the sessions themselves.

Development beyond qualification

Passing the Level 6 qualification is an important milestone rather than the end of professional learning. BSL First's wider professional-development offer allows qualified interpreters to continue developing advanced and specialist practice as their careers progress.

15 Current course information and next steps

Current course information

For current course dates, fees, payment options, face-to-face locations and availability, visit the Sign Language Interpreter course page on the BSL First website.

The website is the live source for current BSL/English and ISL/English cohort information and application availability.

Before you apply

Before submitting an application, you should:

- read the current course information on the BSL First website;
- review the entry and readiness requirements in this prospectus;
- consider realistically whether you can commit to the academic, practical and independent-study workload; and
- consider the optional Introduction to Interpreting and Translation course if you want to explore interpreter training before applying to the full programme.

Contact

training@bslfirst.com
https://bslfirst.com/int-application-form/

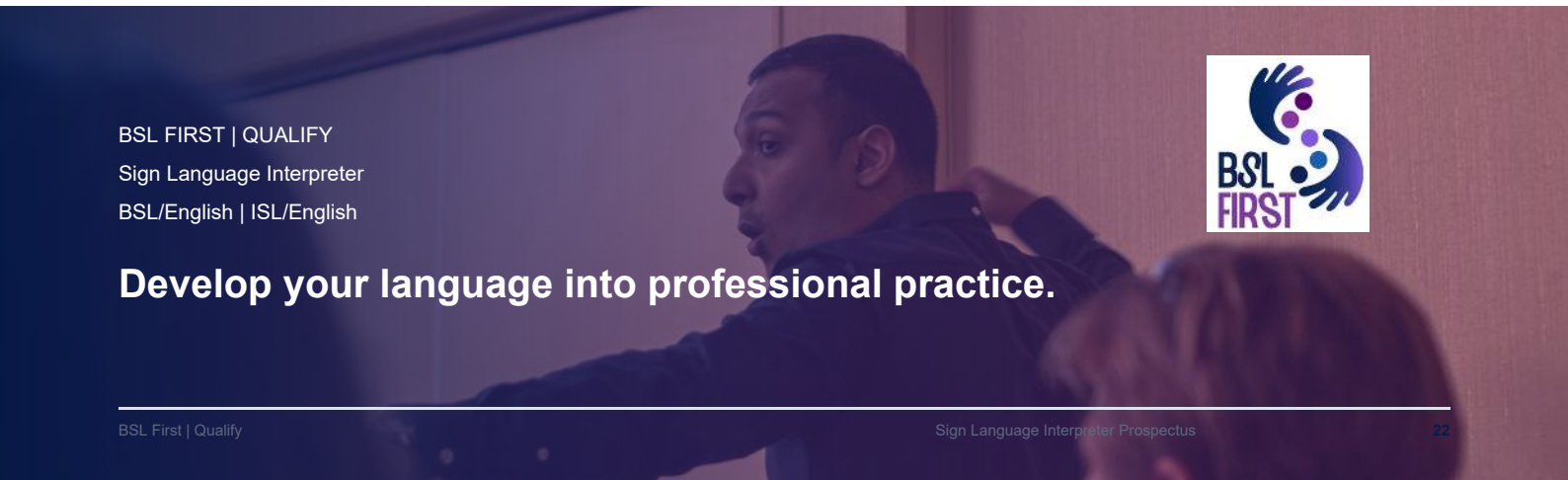
QR

BSL FIRST | QUALIFY

Sign Language Interpreter

BSL/English | ISL/English

Develop your language into professional practice.



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