



## **WASLI Interpreter Education Guidelines**

### **1.0 Introduction to the Document**

The following document is intended as a set of guidelines for countries wishing to offer interpreter education in their country where none exists or where it has been done in an ad hoc fashion. The document is not meant to be prescriptive but rather it is offered in response to the many questions that WASLI receives from countries asking for help in setting up interpreter education opportunities.

In 2009 a WASLI subcommittee was convened to explore ways to support countries making inquiries about interpreter education. WASLI put out a call for volunteer committee members through the email distribution list, the WASLI newsletter and via Regional Representative's networks. The committee had participants who were interpreters and/or interpreter educators from a range of countries – Australia, Belgium, Canada, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Singapore South Africa, Sweden, United States, and Zimbabwe.

The committee began their work in 2009 and has prepared the following guidelines for approval by WASLI. The final document was prepared by Debra Russell, Rachel Locker-McKee, and Julie Simon.

### **2.0 Description of Current Situation**

At the current time, there are many countries that either have no formal ways of training sign language interpreters in their country or they have infrequent training made available on an ad hoc basis with no particular plan for the content and sequence of the courses. Occasionally, interpreter trainers from other countries that have longer histories and experiences with interpreter education will travel and offer training in countries where they are invited. While this approach can be helpful, it also can be problematic if the training is not offered in a way that is linguistically and culturally sensitive, does not support local sign language recognition, and/or does not help to develop locally based trainers who can continue the work.



What WASLI has learned from its committee members and others who do international consulting is that there are a range of training opportunities that exist in some countries. For example, some countries will hold weekend or week-long seminars while others will engage in both sign language workshops and interpreting workshops on a range of topics – structures and grammar of sign languages, team interpreting, ethics and professional practices, language proficiency, interpreting in medical or educational settings, to name but a few. Other countries report having mentorship programmes, both structured and informal, as a way of increasing the skills and knowledge of sign language interpreters.

For countries with resources and longer histories we see interpreter education formalised at the post-secondary level, with diploma and degree based programmes in existence. Increasingly, we see such countries using blended educational formats, including distance education, on-line learning blended with traditional face-to-face classes, and in some situations, fully on-line learning. Programmes of study can range from two-year diplomas, to three- and four-year Bachelor degree, to Masters degree options, to vocational qualifications. Programmes can be taken part-time, or full-time and may have a pre-requisite of knowing sign language and graduating from a Sign Language Studies type of programme (often 1-2 years in length); others accept people with no knowledge of sign language.

WASLI recognizes that for countries of emerging economic means and political awareness of the Deaf community, it is not always possible to begin with creating interpreter education programmes in post-secondary institutions. So what is the best approach to starting interpreter education in countries with limited resources (financial, human, technological, knowledge, etc.)? Is there an approach that can support effective learning for countries in the early stages of interpreter education?

Based on this current situation, the WASLI Task Group chose to begin by drafting a philosophical statement that emphasises WASLI's commitment and desire that educators who travel to offer training and educational opportunities work with the Deaf community and respect local and/or national sign languages. This is our first guideline for countries and interpreter trainers as they begin discussions about how best to facilitate interpreter education in their country.



### **3.0 WASLI Philosophical Statement**

The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) is committed to the advancement of the profession of signed language<sup>1</sup> interpreting worldwide. Interpreter educators from countries with established interpreter education will collaborate with educators from countries where interpreter training is not available or is newly developing. Educators will work together to design effective practices and deliver quality education. They will do so in a manner that incorporates local expertise in the cultural, linguistic, social and political conditions that affect teaching and practising signed language interpreting in that country. The goal of collaboration is to ensure accessibility, relevance and effectiveness of training in diverse contexts while maintaining the integrity of national signed languages, customs and norms.

Experienced international educators will collaborate with relevant stakeholders including, but not limited to, Deaf and hearing community members, Deaf and hearing interpreters, national Deaf and Deaf-Blind representatives, spoken language community and translation/interpreting organisation representatives, government representatives, and educational-institution representatives. The aim of these collaborative efforts is the development of expertise and empowerment of local personnel to lead the establishment of interpreter education in their respective countries and to support existing and developing national associations of signed language interpreters. WASLI believes that the recognition of, respect for and incorporation of linguistic and cultural values throughout the process are imperative to the success of all activities.

### **4.0 International Examples of Interpreter Education Development**

WASLI explored both published reports of models of interpreter education and collected anecdotal evidence. After reviewing the various models we have chosen to highlight five examples that seem to represent the cultural and linguistic sensitivity embodied in the WASLI philosophical statement, and that also demonstrate different pathways to achieving interpreter education. There are several other models that exist worldwide, however for the purposes of this document we have limited our focus to the following examples.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the phrase *signed language* as the parallel form of *spoken language*. It refers to all of the natural signed languages, for example British Sign Language, Colombian Sign Language, Italian Sign Language, etc.

#### **4.1 Kosovo**

In this model, consultants from the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and from Australia worked with local interpreter trainers and Deaf clubs to have them begin identifying people with sign language skills who might be interested in completing some basic interpreter education. The training was offered in stages and the international consultant(s) worked with the local trainer to ensure that he developed the capacity to continue working with the students long after the international consultant returned home. The formation of an Interpreter Working Group also ensured that the steps needed to document and gain official government recognition of the national sign language were taken.

REFERENCE: Emerson, S. & Hoti, Selman. (2007) *The beginnings of Kosovo Interpreter Training and the Impact of International Advisors*. (pp. 115-122). In Cynthia Roy (Ed). *Diversity and Community in the Worldwide Sign Language Interpreting Professional – Proceedings of the second WASLI conference held in Segovia, Spain, 2007*.

#### **4.2 Mexico**

Mexico has recently implemented two programmes based on a collaborative approach between interpreters and a Deaf Association located in the Tijuana area of Mexico. The diploma programmes are both 185 hour in duration with one focused on Deaf community issues, instruction and practice in *Lengua de Senas Mexicana*, and the other focused on interpretation of Mexican Sign Language. It is a collaborative approach between interpreter and Deaf community organisations and universities, and it has resulted in the first post-secondary training for interpreters in Mexico.

REFERENCE: Ramsey, C. & Pena, S. (2010) *Sign Language Interpreting at the Border of the two Californias*. (pp.3-27). In Rachel Locker-McKee and Jeff Davis (Eds). *Interpreting in Multicultural Multilingual Contexts*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

#### **4.3 Colombia**

Like Kosovo, interpreters and Deaf community Organisations have partnered with various non-governmental Organisations to bring interpreter education



opportunities to their country. One specific example of collaboration follows: In 2010, a Canadian interpreter educator was invited to work with interpreters who work in educational settings for a five-day intensive seminar. Building on a model the educator used in Malaysia, the group identified 5 interpreters and 5 Deaf people who could act as language models and interpreter and language mentors during all of the practical activities. This team worked with the outside consultant learning the techniques and approaches, and then leading the skill development portions of the training. In this way the training event benefited the interpreters in educational settings, as well as expanded the pool of Deaf and interpreter mentors and broadened their skill and knowledge sets for the work. The work continues and universities are also examining ways to offer training in the near future.

#### **4.4 Kenya**

Collaboration between the Kenyan Deaf Association, the Swedish Deaf Association, and researchers at the University of Nairobi led to projects designed to document and teach Kenyan Sign Language that began in 1991. Subsequently a curriculum for basic interpreter training has been developed and delivered at this university and elsewhere. The part-time course has three levels that last between six- to twelve-months each, depending on funding. The course certifies interpreters who work in community and international contexts, although sign language interpreting is still emerging as a recognised service and professional occupation. Interpreter education has been complicated by the dissemination of ASL and other signed languages through international aid initiatives, particularly in deaf education, leading to variation in language use and sign language teaching. The Kenyan Association of Sign Language Interpreters was registered in 2000.

REFERENCE: Okombo, O., J. G. Mweri, & W. Akaranga (2009). Sign Language Interpreter Training in Kenya. In J. Napier (Ed) *International Perspectives on Sign Language Interpreter Education. Interpreter Education Series, V.4.* Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 295-300.

#### **4.5 New Zealand**

Following from the formation of a Deaf Association in the late 1970s, government support was obtained for the training and employment of interpreters in 1985. A first 'crash course' of three months in duration was led by an interpreter educator

from USA, who recruited local Deaf people to provide language immersion, and other professionals to support contextual studies. Interpreting services soon became established by graduates employed by the Deaf Association, but demand soon outstripped supply. In 1992, a two-year full-time diploma was established at Auckland Technical Institute, co-taught by a graduate of the first cohort who had gained further qualifications overseas and a Deaf lecturer. Realising that two years of study is insufficient to consolidate NZSL and interpreting skills, the diploma has been developed into a three-year bachelors degree in sign language interpreting at Auckland University of Technology. Interaction with overseas colleagues, access to the growing professional literature, and links with spoken language interpreters have all contributed to the development of the profession in New Zealand.

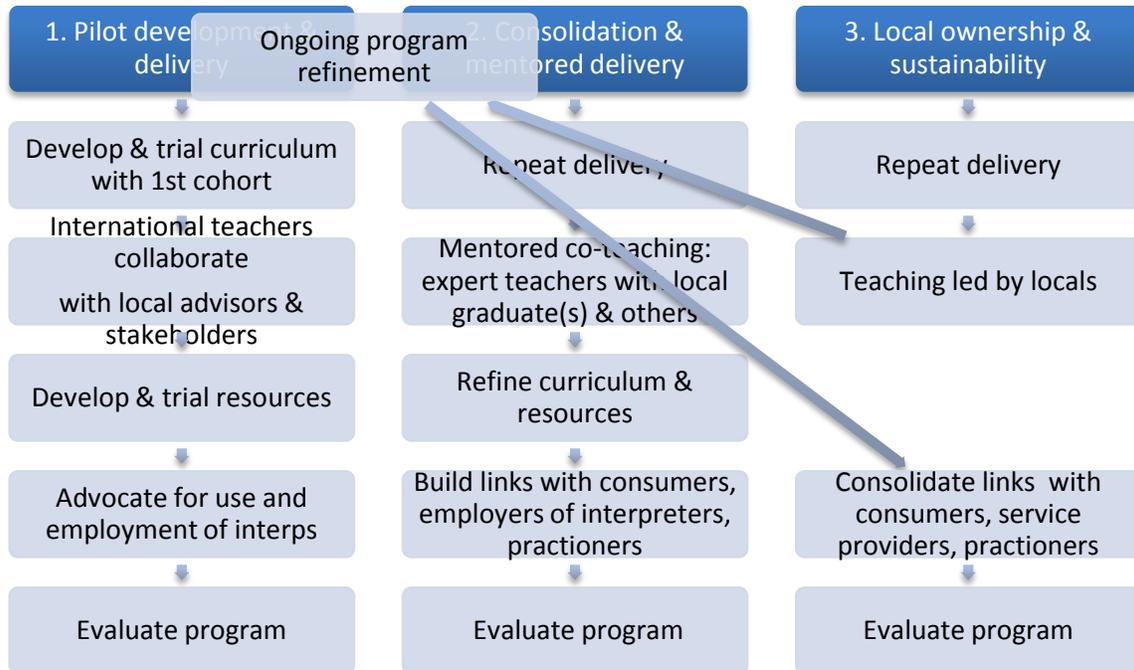
REFERENCE: McKee, R., S. Sameshima, L. Pivac and D. McKee (2009). Sign Language Interpreter Education and the Profession in New Zealand. In J. Napier (Ed) *International Perspectives on Sign Language Interpreter Education. Interpreter Education Series, V.4.* Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 200-220.

## **5.0 A Model for Establishing Interpreter Education Programmes**

The diagram below suggests a three-stage model for developing sustainable interpreter training over an extended period in a country where there is no existing pool of trained interpreters or individuals who have the expertise to develop an interpreter training programme.

Note that building strong links with stakeholder communities (consumers, service providers, employers, practising interpreters) is an important element in supporting successful outcomes of interpreter training and professionalisation.

Another pathway that has also occurred in several countries is for individual interpreters to study and work abroad, returning with professional knowledge and an academic foundation that can be applied to teaching interpreting in their home country.



There are some common first steps and content elements that WASLI recommends as part of every country's efforts to develop interpreter education. These are based on countries that have had success in developing formal and advanced interpreter education and we believe these educational components share commonalities regardless of the culture and language community.

### **5.1 Deaf People as Sign Language and/or Interpreter Educators**

There is a need to work with sign language communities to develop Deaf people as teachers of their sign language and to create mechanisms for the language to be taught prior to people meeting a criteria to begin to learn how to interpret. Strong language skills must be a pre-requisite for successful interpreter education. Many countries have developed strong programmes for teaching sign language, Deaf community and culture knowledge, and how to work effectively with Deaf people in order to support them in ways that they desire. These are often called Sign Language or Deaf Studies programmes and they have their own sequence of courses.

### **5.2 Documenting the National Sign Language(s) and Regional Variations**

Interpreter educators working in countries where they do not know the local sign language are advised to work with local Deaf associations and Deaf people who are the “experts” in their language. To assume that a country does not have a sign language is to risk language colonisation as clearly described in Philemon Akach’s (2005) paper in the Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference of WASLI. This is also a place where spoken language interpreters and linguists can play an important role in helping to document the sign language used by local communities, when they work with Deaf people as the community researchers. Finally it is important to also document and respect the language variation that may exist in a country or region, thus supporting all of the diverse ways that language exists in the country. Interpreters who wish to work in these regions need to demonstrate respect for, and knowledge of, these language variations.

### ***5.3 Recognising the national Sign Language***

There are many ways to define “recognition” of a sign language. For example there can be social acceptance of the language among a language community, there can be informal recognition of a language by the majority society, and/or there may be formal recognition of the sign language by governments. The lack of formal recognition does not prevent communities and countries from proceeding to prepare interpreters.

### ***5.4 Creating Sign Language Studies Programmes***

There are many models of sign language studies programmes that provide a foundation for preparing interpreters, however the following components appear to be consistent across several countries:

#### **Advanced sign language study 1**

This course will review and consolidate students’ expressive and receptive skills in the local SL, including the use of typical syntactic patterns, non-manual features, expression of time and number, productive verb morphology, accurate production features, and vocabulary enrichment.

#### **Advanced sign language study 2**

SL skills will be refined and extended, including the use of referential space and constructed action, facility with productive lexicon (classifiers) and awareness of SL discourse norms in various contexts (eg, presentational vs. conversational genres). The course aims to increase students’ metalinguistic

awareness of targeted language structures and their competence in effective use of these in monolingual and bilingual (translation) tasks.

### **Linguistic structures of (local) sign language**

Building upon metalinguistic and practical knowledge gained in advanced sign language study modules, this course will introduce students to the linguistic analysis of signed languages at the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and discourse. Reference will be made to local and international research literature and learning activities will include opportunity for students to apply linguistic knowledge to guided analysis of aspects of the local SL.

### **Advanced spoken language study**

This module will develop student's awareness of sociolinguistic factors in register and style variation within their spoken language. Interpersonal factors and skills in communication will also be identified in relation to the interpreting process. Learning activities will aim to enrich vocabulary and production skills in a range of discourse genres and registers relevant to the work of interpreters.

### **Deaf cultural studies**

Deaf people form a minority group within most societies. This course will develop student's understanding of the life experiences, history, social status, and collective ways of Deaf people in the local and regional context. Critical appraisal of the relevance of Deaf Studies literature from other countries and time periods may form part of course activities. (If the literature is available and in a language accessible to students.)

### **Service learning in the Deaf community**

"Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."<sup>i</sup> Students will apply and further their knowledge of sign language and deaf culture by contributing in a practical way to real-life needs or activities in the local Deaf community. The aim is to enrich practical skills, to develop relationships with Deaf and related stakeholders, and to encourage an attitude of service responsibility to the community

## **5.5 Interpreting Curriculum Content**

When students possess the appropriate sign language knowledge and proficiency to begin studying interpreting, an interpreting curriculum may then be

developed. A typical sequence of courses of essential courses may include:

### **Comparative Linguistics**

The course provides a comprehensive examination of the linguistic structures of the spoken language(s) and the signed language(s) of the country. Topics include study of sociolinguistics with focus on functions of discourse in two languages, the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and discourse, and creation of meaning

### **Introduction to Professional Practice**

This course offers an overview of the profession of sign language interpreting and the theoretical foundation for work as an interpreter. The role and responsibilities of sign language interpreters, role of professional bodies, and the prerequisite competencies, attributes, and knowledge needed to work effectively as a sign language interpreter are addressed. Students will be introduced to models of interpreter role and ethics, and consider these in relation to local conditions for interpreting between Deaf and hearing communities.

### **Translation and discourse analysis skills**

This course provides an overview of the major approaches to discourse analysis and translation strategies. Students develop the practical skills required to analyse both spoken and signed language texts in order to produce effective translations in both spoken and signed languages.

### **Intercultural Communication**

Provides an introduction to elements of effective and ineffective interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Topics include function of cultures, memberships in cultures, ethnocentrism, and how culture influences self-identity and communication behaviour.

### **Interpreting Skills and Techniques**

This can include several courses, designed to build on each other, ensuring that interpreters have a solid foundation of translation, consecutive interpreting, and simultaneous interpreting skills and can apply these skills to a variety of texts and interactions. Students will work with a variety of discourse genres. Students begin with dialogic interactions (interviews, consultations, etc) and progress to dealing with monologic discourse (speeches, lectures, sermons, etc). As well, they will be exposed to working with children, dealing with the dynamics of small and large group meetings, interpreting for non-standard SL users and working with Deaf Interpreters.

### **Ethics, Professionalism and Decision-Making**

Provides a thorough understanding of the codes of ethics, values and strategies that guide interpreters in making decisions in the course of their work,. Fosters application of critical thinking to real world scenarios enhancing the ability to make ethical and sound professional decisions.

### **Internships**

Students will observe, practice and critically reflect on interpreting in authentic settings. Ideally students will have opportunities to work alongside experienced interpreters, with student peers, and on their own. Exact requirements will be negotiated according to local conditions. A structured journal of critical reflection on practicum experiences is an essential learning and assessment task in this module.

### **Specialised settings (based on local contexts)**

Students will study demands and strategies for interpreting in specialised settings. Topics in some countries include interpreting in settings such as religious, platform, medical, educational, legal and Video Relay.

### **Working effectively In Teams with Deaf interpreters**

This course explores theory and practice approaches to working in teams of interpreting, including teams that include Deaf interpreters. Strategies and approaches to effective message management between the team members remain the focus of this key model of service provision.

## **6.0 Parallel Activity**

### **6.1 Developing Local Resources**

While there are some resources available to WASLI for sharing with countries, it is also important for countries to develop their own materials that support the local context in which the training is situated. Using materials developed for a European or North American context, for example, may not be helpful or applicable. While it can be helpful to examine existing curricula from another country, local educators need to have mechanisms in order to assess the appropriateness of materials for their country, and to be able to create their own or modify existing materials when necessary or desired.

### **6.2 Developing Local Educators and Support for Programmes**



In terms of developing educators, there is a need to identify interpreters who are experienced and respected by the Deaf community and who can serve as the first generation of interpreter educators. This also includes Deaf interpreters who may be already working informally in the community.

Advisory groups are also very helpful in shaping interpreter education plans. We stress that there needs to be Deaf community involvement in meaningful ways so that the programme that is created, is also supported by the Deaf community and is one in which they feel that they are a true partner in the training.

### ***6.3 Connecting programmes and communities***

The WASLI Philosophical Statement that shapes our approach speaks to working with spoken language interpreters, linguists, as well as Deaf community members and interpreter educators. There are often developed associations of spoken language interpreters who can act as mentors and potential teachers and who can offer support as the communities of sign language interpreters take steps towards professionalisation.

While the development of training for interpreters is crucial for Deaf people to be able to access education and services in their community, there is also a need to develop a plan to work with consumer organisations. While interpreters are being trained, Deaf community organisations and interpreters need to find effective strategies to educate and lobby for the creation of interpreter services that are funded appropriately and that provide stable services. This needs to occur across all sectors of the community – health, education, justice, etc.

## **7.0 Concluding Thoughts**

This document has articulated the WASLI philosophical stance on developing interpreter education in countries where professional sign language interpreting is emerging. It is not the intent of WASLI to prescribe any particular models or processes of interpreter education, as local conditions and opportunities vary widely between countries. The purpose of this guideline is to share some of what has been learned in countries that have experience in establishing and refining professional training for interpreters. This document has summarized examples of pathways to establishing training in several countries, and has outlined potential components of effective interpreter programmes. Ultimately, each country must move forward with interpreter education from its own starting point,



developing collaborations between local stakeholders and others in the wider profession as appropriate. A key aim of WASLI is to provide an international vehicle that can support these endeavours and achieve the results that communities of interpreters and Deaf people desire.

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<sup>i</sup> See: <http://www.servicelearning.org/what-service-learning>. An example of service learning applied to American Sign Language learners is described at: <http://www.servicelearning.org/slice/resource/american-sign-language-ii-class>