

Interview with Roger Beeson



Q What's it like working as a Sign Language video interpreter at SignVideo?

Roger Well, the interpreting is more challenging in many ways, compared with interpreting when everybody is in the same place.

Q Why's that?

Roger Usually, when you're interpreting for, say, a meeting at a housing department or an office meeting, you can see all the people there. You can see documents on the table. You will probably have a brief talk before the meeting, to get some background information. But with video interpreting, you go straight in at the deep end. The videophone rings, you answer it, and then it can be straight into action without any prep.

Q What difference does that make to your interpreting? Why is it more difficult?

Roger You have no chance to "tune-in" to the Deaf person's signing. In multi-cultural Britain we can be faced by people who are not yet fluent in British Sign Language. Or else the person may be agitated because their lives are under stress. For example, they may have just been made homeless, or they've received a demand for unpaid council tax. On top of this, we may not see the other people speaking in the room, or papers they are referring to. All this adds to the interpreter's task. As an interpreter, the more experience you have of Deaf people, of Sign Language, and life in general, the better it is. It's not for unqualified trainees, or those who've got Level 3 BSL, or newly-qualified interpreters. The potential for misinterpretation is too huge.

Q How long have you been interpreting, and how long have you been working for SignVideo?

Roger I've been qualified for 18 years, and I've worked at SignVideo over a 2-year period. I should say that I don't work full-time there. I think that most interpreters would agree that they need a balance of types of work, to maintain their interpreting skills. Video interpreting is up there as a challenge, alongside big conference interpreting.

Q Do you think that video interpreting will change the lives of Deaf people and interpreting generally?

Roger I hope so. Already we've seen that Deaf people are using the service to interact with, for example, their local council in a way which other people take for granted. They can pop in and enquire about services and be on their way, without having to wait weeks for an interpreter to be booked. And most of the calls are so short, that I doubt that an interpreter would have been booked anyway. I hope that video interpreting will eventually become a normal way for Deaf people to access services and use telecommunication systems. I see this as meeting a huge un-met need. Most of the current interpreting work, I think, will carry on. I can't imagine video interpreting eliminating the need for my other work, but who knows? And I do think it will be more possible for interpreters to do some of their work from home in future.

Q Thank you!