



Behind the screens: Exploring the experiences of online court interpreters in England and Wales

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Abstract

Despite their crucial role in facilitating participation for those unable to communicate effectively in the language spoken by the courts, spoken language and British Sign Language interpreters have received comparatively little attention in research on online hearings and barely feature even in internal evaluations conducted by the court service in England and Wales. To help fill this knowledge and evidence gap, this paper draws on findings from a national survey conducted in England and Wales as part of the Supporting Online Justice Project, which received 323 responses from interpreters. It delves deeper into the diverse concerns of interpreters with experience of the pandemic-driven move to online hearings, including problems with technology, the lack of advance information available to them, the specific issues of being located remotely from the person they are interpreting for, as well as concerns about how the online hearing space is laid out and managed.

Key words

Online hearings, interpretation, remote interpreting, COVID 19 pandemic, British Sign Language.

Resumen

A pesar de su papel fundamental a la hora de facilitar la participación de aquellas personas que no pueden comunicarse de forma eficaz en la lengua utilizada en los tribunales, los intérpretes de lengua oral y de lengua de signos británica han recibido relativamente poca atención en las investigaciones sobre las vistas en línea y apenas aparecen ni siquiera en las evaluaciones internas realizadas por el servicio judicial de

The survey was produced as part of research funded by the ESRC with HMCTS as a project partner. Some of the research that is outlined in this paper was submitted as written evidence to the House of Lords Public Services Committee Inquiry (Tsalapatani 2024).

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Inglaterra y Gales. Para ayudar a subsanar esta laguna de conocimientos y datos, este artículo se basa en los resultados de una encuesta nacional realizada en Inglaterra y Gales como parte del proyecto «Supporting Online Justice», que recibió 323 respuestas de intérpretes. El artículo profundiza en las diversas preocupaciones de los intérpretes con experiencia en el paso a las audiencias en línea impulsado por la pandemia, incluidos los problemas tecnológicos, la falta de información previa a su disposición y las dificultades concretas que supone encontrarse a distancia de la persona para la que interpretan, así como las inquietudes sobre la organización y la gestión del espacio de la audiencia en línea.

Palabras clave

Audiencias en línea, interpretación, interpretación a distancia, pandemia de COVID-19, lengua de signos británica.

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1. Introduction

The use of interpreters is crucial to the participation of those who cannot speak the language of the court, yet despite their importance, there is clear evidence that the conditions under which interpreters provide these services are far from ideal (House of Lords Public Services Committee 2025). The rapid move to online hearings required by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already difficult situation as many hearings moved online without adequate support or preparation. Very little research captured the interpreter experience during this period, and even the extensive justice system review of the early COVID-19 years barely engaged with court interpreters (Clark 2021). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to cast light on the conditions faced by spoken language and British Sign Language (henceforth BSL) interpreters who provided interpretation across a range of jurisdictions, hearing types, and formats in England and Wales during the early pandemic period of 2020 to early 2021. It does so by using data from an online survey (n=499, with interpreters accounting for n=323). The findings clearly highlight the many and multilayered challenges and inadequate support that interpreters faced.

2. Background

High-quality interpreting in courts and tribunals is essential for access to justice (Brown-Blake 2006, Stone 2018, Durdiyeva 2026). In recent years, facilitated by technological advances, interpreting is increasingly provided remotely by either video or phone (Tyer 2018). There are different ways to define and characterize the variations in remote interpreting (Braun 2015), but, at its simplest, it is when the interpreter is located remotely from one or more of the people that they are interpreting for. Some scholars have sought to define remote interpreting more systematically in relation to the exact configuration of the spaces, the location of the various participants, or the different types of technology used. For example, Braun and Taylor (2011a, p. 32), make the distinction between videoconference interpreting (where the “proceedings take place at two different locations that are video-linked and an interpreter is required to facilitate the communication”) and remote interpreting (where the proceedings take place in a single room, with the interpreter joining remotely via video). There are of course also other configurations, including those where all parties are separate and remote, such as in the case of a fully online hearing (Hynes 2025).

The systematic use of distance interpreting (in this case, by phone) has been evident in public service settings since the 1970s (Braun 2019), and in more recent years it has been expanded due to issues relating to the availability of interpreters, as well as the need to manage costs (Braun 2013). While we know that scale of interpreting in England and Wales is considerable, with the Ministry of Justice requiring “17,000 bookings for interpreters per month in over 150 possible languages” (House of Lords Public Services Committee 2025, p. 3), it is unclear from published statistics what proportion of these involve remote interpreting (Ministry of Justice—MOJ—2026).

The existing literature has shown that there are advantages and disadvantages to remote interpreting (Braun 2015, Amato *et al.* 2018). The often-mentioned advantages include catering to increasingly diverse language groups and responding to the difficulty in accessing suitably qualified legal interpreters (Myers 2020). Remote interpreting is also

more cost efficient for courts and those that provide interpreting services, as it allows interpreters to work in multiple locations without losing time to travel (Braun and Taylor 2011a). Research also highlights a range of disadvantages to remote interpreting, including “magnify[ing] known problems” (Braun and Taylor 2011b, p. 98), such as errors, interpreter fatigue, and lexical activation problems (where the interpreter may struggle to or be delayed in recognising or producing the appropriate word) (Braun 2013). Others have shown that there are also negative psychological effects for interpreters when working remotely, including alienation and isolation (Roziner and Shlesinger 2010).

Compared to the research done on interpreting between two spoken languages in justice settings, there is much less work on BSL interpreting in this context (notable examples include Brennan 1999, Napier and Haug 2017, Elder and Schwartz 2018, Lumsden and Black 2022, Skinner and Napier 2022). Furthermore, none of these studies deal directly with the implications of remote hearings for BSL interpreting (though there has been work done in police settings (Skinner 2024)). Despite attempts by His Majesty’s Court and Tribunal Service (henceforth HMCTS) at improving access for those using BSL (Loizou-Griggs and Torrilla 2022), BSL interpreting also seems to be largely forgotten or at least marginalised in relation to official discussions on interpreting. For example, the House of Lords Public Services Committee Inquiry on interpreting services in the courts (2025) only directly investigated spoken language interpreting (though it did include a handful of passing references to BSL in the report, due to the presence of this in various submissions).

There are significant and longstanding concerns around the provision and conditions of court interpreters in England and Wales. The aforementioned House of Lords Public Services Committee Inquiry highlighted substantial issues with the way interpreters were used by the Ministry of Justice [MOJ], including concerns around the quality of interpreting, as well as the lack of oversight and monitoring:

[...] the current state of interpreting services in the courts is not working efficiently and effectively, and presents a significant risk to the administration of justice in these cases. The MOJ’s published data masks problems in the service due to both data omissions and a complaints process which causes under-reporting of problems. [...] Wider technology issues in the courts limits the effective use of innovations such as remote interpreting or interpreting booths, and leaves the justice system unprepared for innovations in newer technologies (MOJ 2025, p. 3).

Court interpreting services have been outsourced to private companies for over a decade, with an earlier report into this and other aspects of the provision concluding that the MOJ “did not have a sufficient understanding of the complexities of court interpreting work” (House of Commons Justice Committee 2013, p. 3).

Due to the timing of this research, we must also consider the specific circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic period and the resulting special measures. These are illustrated in the HMCTS Evaluation of Remote Hearings During COVID-19 (Clark 2021), which gathered responses from 8,508 participants (8,328 survey respondents and 180 interviewees, spread across a range of public and professional user types). Despite the large number of participants overall, only five interpreters took part: two spoken language interpreters (no details were given as to the languages they were interpreting)

and three BSL interpreters. The report highlighted several concerns raised by these five interpreter participants, including the lack of contact with the person they were interpreting for, the absence of pre-hearing briefings and access to documents, and difficulties in seeing and hearing their clients clearly (Clark 2021). In addition, other respondents, in particular judges, frequently highlighted the issues associated with online interpretation; for example, 70% of the judges surveyed reported encountering problems in remote hearings that involved interpretation (Clark 2021). Accordingly, the report concluded that remote hearings work less well when an interpreter is required. Hearings involving interpreters were also described as taking more time (Clark 2021).

From the HMCTS review (Clark 2021), it was clear that remote interpreting was managed in a number of ways during the pandemic. In many cases, consecutive interpreting was being used, where a speaker pauses after an utterance and then allows the interpreter to interpret. This is considered more accurate and helps maintain the visibility of the interpreter and the person they are interpreting for (Russell and Takeda 2015), but increases the length of the hearing, due to the additional time it requires. In other instances, interpreters were being asked to interpret simultaneously, by calling the person being interpreted for using their personal phone, then mute themselves within the hearing. In response to these concerns, the Cloud Video Platform² team developed the “interpreter solution” – which involved situating the interpreter and the person they were providing interpreting for in a separate online “room”. This room was muted, to allow the interpreter to interpret simultaneously. This solution has been built into the new bespoke HMCTS online hearing platform.³

3. Methodology

This research is based on an online survey developed as part of the *Supporting Online Justice Project* (see Mulcahy *et al.* 2022), which sought to establish a baseline for the types of users who may or may not be suitable for engaging in online hearings. As such, it was circulated to a range of professional and support staff, such as lawyers, clerks, ushers, advice workers, interpreters, social workers, and intermediaries. This did not include judges, due to the difficulties of obtaining permission from the Judicial Office. The survey included both specific questions regarding the participants’ general experience of remote hearings (including the number and format of hearings attended, and whether there were types of public users that the remote format did not work well for), as well as asking for reflections on the last remote hearing that respondents attended, including information on the jurisdiction, the broad nature of the matter, and any materials or resources received in advance from the court or tribunal. The survey also included a series of role-specific questions, including interpreter-specific questions, which branched from the main survey. These considered the general type of interpreting that respondents provided, where they were located in relation to the person they were interpreting for, whether they received any advance contact or information, and any specific advantages or challenges they faced when interpreting in online hearings.

This survey was designed using the Qualtrics platform and was distributed in March and April 2021 to a wide range of stakeholders via HMCTS and other appropriate

² Henceforth “CVP”, the online video platform most widely used by HMCTS during the pandemic.

³ This was confirmed to the author at an outreach event where the new platform was being demonstrated.

networks, including advice sector organisations. As part of this, the survey was shared with HMCTS' two main interpreting providers, TheBigWord (for spoken language interpretation) and Clarion (for BSL). The survey received over 300 responses from interpreters, significantly more than from any other stakeholder group, which was an unexpectedly large response.

The survey included both multiple-choice questions (all with an "Other, please specify" option) and open response questions. The open responses were qualitatively thematically coded by the author, using inductive content analysis, with suitable representative quotations selected for this paper. Closed multiple-choice type questions have been analysed quantitatively, using descriptive statistics. This research received ethical approval from the University of Oxford's Ethics Committee (CUREC Approval Reference: R74246/RE001). In line with current ethical practice, the survey allowed participants to skip questions or indicate that they did not want to respond, leading to different numbers of responses to different questions. The survey was anonymous at the source, as it did not collect any identifying information, and the generic nature of the questions did not allow individual respondents to be identified.

3.1. Sample

Overall, the survey received 499 responses, of which 323 were from interpreters. The remaining respondents to the survey included clerks and ushers, solicitors, and advice workers. Of those who clarified which type of interpreter they were, 94% (n= 249) were spoken language interpreters and 6% (n= 15) were BSL interpreters. Participants reported experiences with various forms of remote interpreting: 49% (n=141) had taken part in hearings where they appeared via video link, while most other participants were physically together; 81% (n= 234) had participated in fully remote hearings with all attendees joining via video; 52% (n=150) had been involved in hearings where some individuals used video link but the majority were in the same room; and 30% (n=87) had experience with all three formats (multiple answers were possible).

Participants were asked how many remote hearings they had attended and, of those who responded to this question (n=288), almost half had interpreted in more than 20 hearings (47%, n=136), with roughly a quarter having only attended 1-5 hearings (24%, n=68), and the remainder attending either 6-10 (13%, n=37) or 11-20 (16%, n=47). The survey requested that participants indicate the jurisdiction or type of hearing they last attended. Of those who responded to this question (n=295), family law hearings were the highest, at 42% (n=123), followed by criminal hearings (30%, n=88), then tribunal⁴ hearings (18%, n= 52) and finally civil hearings (3%, n=8). While this question asked specifically about the most recent hearing that interpreters attended, 8% (n=24) provided some "other" choice, with the vast majority of these indicating that they had experience across all these jurisdictions, so the figures given above are likely to be higher.

⁴ In England and Wales, tribunals are specialist courts that deal with specific types of civil disputes. Examples of these tribunals include the Employment Tribunals, the Immigration and Asylum Tribunals and the Social Security and Child Support Tribunals. These are often more informal than traditional court settings and often deal with administrative justice concerns.

4. Findings

The findings of the survey relayed a range of concerns from interpreters regarding the challenges that emerge from remote hearings. Some of these challenges were common with face-to-face interpreting, while others were specific to remote hearings. When asked about the specific challenges of interpreting for remote hearings (n=172, open responses), respondents typically raised concerns that fell into three broad categories: technical challenges; challenges relating to the restrictions the format placed on interpreting; and the lack of advance information about the case and the hearing. Of those who raised technical concerns, these included issues with the quality of the audio (n=52), issues with the stability of the connection (n=28), problems connected to the interpreter's inability to see the person they were interpreting for (n=16), and other technical issues (n=20). Technological issues were especially relevant to BSL interpreters, given the need to see and hear both themselves and others. As one explained:

The key challenges we face is the technology. Whilst improvements have been made using CVP [Cloud Video Platform], there is often a problem with 'pinning' the deaf participant and the interpreters; we need to see ourselves as well when we are actively interpreting (as opposed to supporting) because we receive feedback from the image (in the same way that a spoken language interpreter can hear themselves). Being in a separate online room has helped (BSL1, >20, FR/HIR)⁵

Respondents highlighted that there were issues with how the online hearing space was laid out and managed. These included a lack of time given to interpret (n=33), inadequate turn-taking (n=18), and being unable to stop or interrupt the hearing (n=14). Their testimony indicated that the online setting made these experiences worse for interpreters, creating difficulties in communicating with others in the hearing, or even just identifying who was speaking. These conditions also forced interpreters to interpret in ways they did not feel comfortable with. One experienced interpreter explained:

In a virtual setting we are even less of a presence so can't even signal when we need one of the participants to slow down, repeat or clarify a point. We sometimes are not even given the chance to interpret everything that is said, which is our job! We are expected to summarise the information (which is NOT our job) or simply to omit it (which is NOT our job either). We don't know who the participants [are] as their names AND ROLES are not always clearly indicated on the screen. We don't know what type of hearing it is or who the bench are, so we can't address them properly (emphasis original, SL1, 11-20, AF).

During the pandemic, to allow for continuous interpretation, the interpreter solution was used, which muted the online "room" where the interpreter and the person they were interpreting for were in, meaning they could not be heard by the rest of the court until they were unmuted. This often made it harder for interpreters to interject in the hearing and gain access to the judge in relation to technical and other concerns:

⁵ A shorthand has been used following quotations to identify the details of the participant including: (1) a participant code that uses the type of interpreter they are (spoken language [SL] or BSL) followed by a unique number, (2) the number of remote hearings they had interpreted for (indicated in the scale of the original survey), and (3) the type of remote or hybrid hearing formats they have experienced indicated using the following shorthand: FR: fully remote; HIR: hybrid hearing where the interpreter is remote, but the rest of those involved are gathered together; HPR: hybrid hearing where the interpreter is in the room with others involved, but the person they are interpreting for is remote; AF: all formats as previously listed.

Direct access to the Judge is paramount to be able stop if there are technical difficulties for example loss of sound, distortion, unable to hear clearly. We need to be able to stop the proceedings at the time to repeat, however the court is on mute and the Judge cannot hear us as court interpreters asking for clarification (BSL2, 11-20, AF).

Furthermore, interpreters were concerned that muting or using a secondary device (such as calling the person they were interpreting for directly as some indicated that they were required to do), meant that their interpretation was not recorded and they feared it opened them up to challenges relating to their work:

Interpreters are not to be asked to mute themselves and interpret simultaneously to their clients over the phone in parallel to the main hearing. It puts interpreters under the risk of being accused of wrong interpretation if their performance is not recorded by the court (SL2, >20, AF).

BSL interpreters also raised a range of specific concerns. These are to be expected given the fact that remote BSL interpreting needs both a good audio and video connection, as well as often needing longer to communicate a particular piece of information. The BSL interpreters were clear about these additional limitations:

[...] sign language relies of [sic] body language as part of its grammatical structure and in a two-dimensional platform it can be difficult to ascertain some linguistic aspects compared to face-to-face interpreting (BSL2, 11-20, AF).

Hybrid hearings (where some of those present attend remotely, while others are gathered together in a room), and the lack of adequate technology in these settings, also made remote BSL interpretation difficult:

For criminal court, it is often difficult to see the deaf person as they are further back in the courtroom and a couple of defendants have expressed their frustration at not being able to see the interpreter except as a small frame. Interpreters really do need to be able to see the judge and barristers too, so that we know who is speaking. In High Court, the barristers and judges are very difficult to see because the camera is so far away and, on the last occasion, I had to interrupt proceedings on four occasions to ask the barristers to remember to speak into the microphones as it was difficult to hear (BSL1, >20, FR/HIR).

The final area in which challenges were frequently raised related to the lack of information provided to interpreters in advance. Specifically, respondents raised concerns both about the lack of information that they received about the parties and the hearing (n=21), as well as the lack of guidance given by courts on managing hearings with interpreters (n=20). As the survey asked directly about the sort of information that was received by interpreters in advance of their most recent remote hearing, it is possible to get some insight on this. In response to the question "what information did you receive in advance of your most recent online hearing?" (n=259), 41% (n=106) stated that they received no information in advance, and a further 18% (n=45) only received information about how to join the hearing. Of the remaining respondents, the information they received included things like contact details in case of technical issues and guidance on finding a suitable space to take their call. Respondents were also asked whether they got to speak to the person they were interpreting for before the hearing (n=205). The overwhelming majority (82%) indicated that they did not (n=169) and, of the 18% (n=36) that did, most highlighted in the free text sections that this was because the person needed assistance to connect.

No information on the hearing or case was systematically provided for those interpreting, whether in person or remote. However, respondents indicated that being present in the building often meant that interpreters were able to access useful information informally. This is explained by one of the BSL interpreters:

This information was seldom given prior to arrival at court pre-COVID but one could actively seek it out when in person. This is no longer possible and that has a negative impact on my perception of the quality of my interpreting (BSL3, >20, AF).

This was also echoed by a spoken language interpreter:

When interpreting face-to-face, the interpreter often gets a general idea of the subject of the hearing during preliminary consultations, this usually doesn't happen with video hearings, so the interpreter has no chance to prepare (SL3, >20, AF).

This inability for preparation created considerable uncertainty for interpreters and made it difficult for them to perform their job to the standard that was expected. As one interpreter explained: "You never know what to expect—same room as everyone? A second different room? Having to use my mobile to interpret to and from the witness?" (SL4, >20, AF). The lack of advance information made interpreting far more difficult, especially when specialist vocabulary was being used:

No previous information is given before the case (this occurs even if the case is face-to-face) which is a big challenge for interpreters if we want to be professional. Everybody in the room knows what the case is about apart from the interpreter! Sometimes we are faced with specialist vocabulary which we don't even know in our own language and it would improve the quality of the service we provide if we could prepare beforehand (SL5, 6-10, FR/HPR).

Similarly, other interpreters felt that they were being denied the information and resources with which to do their jobs adequately:

Not having any prior knowledge of the case is always incredibly difficult for interpreters, as the context of communication is vital for accuracy (if you tried to intervene in an in depth specialised conversation that's been going for two hours that day after months of prior preparation by each party, without even knowing what the conversation is about, who the participants are, which places they're referring to, etc, you may look like a fool, even if you are an expert on the subject). We're the only professionals in the courtroom that are denied the most basic relevant information to carry out our jobs accurately [...]. We don't know who the participants [are] as their names and roles are not always clearly indicated on the screen. We don't know what type of hearing it is or who the bench are, so we can't address them properly and we may look unprofessional as a consequence (SL1, 11-20, AF).

One participant went as far as to outline a specific baseline of information that they would like to receive:

Any information at all would be useful. As an interpreter booked by the court via an agency we have no information. It would be helpful to know: charge/ type of hearing; participant names and status (victim, witness, family etc); whether we are linked to the court directly or via an out of court consultation room; if the defendant is in custody. I have never received the video link in advance. I have always had to contact the court directly (impossible as phones are not answered) or contact the agency to remind the court to invite us (interpreters) in (BSL3, >20, AF).

Interpreters also indicated a range of other structural problems, such as being contacted at very late notice and often not being booked for the full length of the hearing. One interpreter explained how their role goes beyond language translation due to the lack of understanding of those they are translating for, which is challenging:

Most of the people who use interpreters are not literate so it's very hard for them to follow everything especially if they have not been to Courts before. They have the tendencies to speak at the same time as an interpreter, rather speaking when target language is being converted into foreign or vice versa (SL6, >20, HIR/HPR).

Finally, one respondent indicated that they were so concerned about the quality of the interpretation in remote hearings that they refused to engage with the format:

I simply stopped doing such [remote] hearings because I could not guarantee a good standard of Interpreting service (SL7, 1-5, FR/HIR).

5. Discussion

Overall, these findings not only illustrate the problematic working conditions of interpreters during the pandemic but also allude to the broader structural concerns associated with interpreting in the courts. When taken together, what is most alarming, is that interpreters found themselves in conditions where they were forced to interpret in ways that they were uncomfortable with and that made adhering to the Interpreters' Code of Conduct (henceforth, the Code) near impossible. The Code requires that:

Practitioners shall interpret truly and faithfully what is uttered, without adding, omitting or changing anything; in exceptional circumstances a summary may be given if requested (National Register of Public Service Interpreters 2016, p. 5 (sec 5.4)).

The findings above illustrate the lack of suitable conditions to enable interpretation, including appropriate access to the source material (such as being able to clearly hear and see the speakers, being informed who they are and their role in the hearing, and having access to the written materials being referred to), adequate time to interpret what is being said, and the opportunity to interrupt the hearing for clarification or if something goes wrong. As one respondent expressed so emphatically in the findings section above, although it is *not* the interpreter's job to summarise, unfortunately many were having to do this.

These findings align with a range of other authors, who have highlighted how conditions prior to the pandemic made it difficult for interpreters to meet the terms of the Code (Gibb and Good 2014, p. 290, Aliverti and Seoighe 2017, p. 145). They also echo the findings of the HMCTS Evaluation Report (Clark 2021) and House of Lords Public Services Committee Report (2025), which also provided evidence of these unsuitable conditions.

From the experiences of the smaller number of BSL interpreters, it seems that they are particularly at a disadvantage in remote hearings. The need for both high-quality video and audio, as well as the limits of a small two-dimensional image for an embodied language, means that poor-quality connections, and the lack of suitable equipment can have an even more significant impact. As this data has come from the *Supporting Online Justice Project*, it is important to note that this same project produced the first guidance

materials available via HMCTS for BSL users (Tsalapatanis *et al.* 2022). Nevertheless, greater support for BSL users and their interpreters is much needed.

Both spoken language and BSL interpreter respondents made it clear that greater information needs to be given to interpreters in advance of hearings, both in terms of the general administrative information required for attending the hearing, as well as the case materials, to allow for preparation and familiarisation. They highlighted that the move to online settings had reduced the ad hoc options that interpreters had previously used to obtain information in face-to-face settings. This too is in line with other existing research, as Clark came to similar conclusions regarding the need for the provision of background information:

Basic information (e.g. jurisdiction and hearing type) about the hearing should be provided to interpreters ahead of the hearing and opportunity should be allowed for BSL interpreters to have some interaction with the person they are interpreting for before the hearing starts [...]. It may be useful to consider allowing more time for hearings with interpreters when scheduling a remote hearing (Clark 2021, p. 83).

The findings from this study also suggest that information provision should go beyond just the basic details of the hearing and extend to making documents and other materials being referred to in the hearing available to interpreters in advance. There are examples of this from international courts, where participants are given access to documents in advance, and it is clear that this can help with comprehension (Stern 2012, p. 16). Other studies have shown the importance of preparation of case-related materials (Wong 2019), further emphasising the positive impact this has on interpretation.

From the findings, participants have provided clear evidence of the problems associated with the court estate in England and Wales, and that improvements to both remote and in-person interpreting can be facilitated through the improvement to the layout of these spaces and the technology that supports them. This includes providing adequate microphones, cameras, and screens, as well as developing the court estate to include spaces for in-person interpreters, such as suitable booths, as is done in other systems (Braun *et al.* 2018). This too was outlined in the 2025 inquiry, which concluded that:

Remote interpreting in courts is hampered by a lack of infrastructure such as insufficient audio-visual equipment and the integration of remote links into court proceedings. Many of these issues could be addressed with thoughtful refurbishment of the court estate (House of Lords Public Services Committee 2025, p. 45).

6. Limitations

While this research has highlighted a range of significant issues and areas of improvement, it is important to recognise that there are also a range of limitations to this study. This research was conducted in March and April 2021, during the specific pandemic conditions, so it is possible that some of the findings are now less relevant, as online experience of remote interpreting has increased. It is also worth recognising that there have been advances in both the technology used for these hearings (such as through the development of the new Video Hearing Service [Jukes 2024]), as well as a clear agenda for change brought about as a result of the inquiry (House of Lords Public Services Committee 2025). Another limitation of the survey was that it was not designed with the primary aim to report on interpreter experiences, but rather to capture the types

of users who may not be suitable for online hearings (Mulcahy and Tsalapatanis 2022), meaning that a broader range of questions could have been asked. The findings also do not expressly distinguish between the experiences of participation in different types of remote hearings. Nevertheless, this research provides important insights into areas where there is relatively little research, especially in relation to BSL interpreting.

7. Conclusion

Court interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating access for those who cannot communicate in the language of the court, but are often overlooked, both in research and during hearings. Interpreters in justice settings face a vast range of conditions that make their work challenging and, as this research shows, these challenges are even greater when having to interpret remotely. These findings illustrate that during the pandemic interpreters were not adequately supported and were being forced to interpret in difficult conditions that were not suitable for their work. These included issues with technology, concerns regarding the way the hearings were set up and managed, as well as having to interpret without receiving adequate prior information. The responses to this survey, as well as other research, have illustrated clear examples of ways to make improvements. Greater attention needs to be paid to the experiences and insights of interpreters, in order to improve their conditions and the experiences of those they interpret for.

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