



PRESS RELEASE

81% OF COURT INTERPRETERS BOYCOTT CAPITA REGISTER

4 March 2013: A survey commissioned by umbrella group Professional Interpreters for Justice has revealed that four in five interpreters (81%) are still refusing to join the private register operated by Capita for interpreting jobs in courts and other parts of the justice system, even though the contract has been in operation for over a year.

The group will now share the new survey findings with Justice Minister Helen Grant MP as she considers her response to the recently published Justice Committee report (6 February) which described the Ministry's handling of the court interpreters contract as 'nothing short of shambolic' and said it 'failed to heed warnings from the professionals concerned'.

A succession of six-monthly online surveys since August 2011, commissioned by the professional interpreter bodies and carried out by consultancy Involvis, have consistently shown 80%-90% of qualified and experienced freelance interpreters refusing to work under the new system because professional standards have been lowered by the private contractor and the interests of justice are not being served.

Madeleine Lee of the Professional Interpreters Alliance, one of ten organisations on Professional Interpreters for Justice, spoke at a seminar attended by 150 interpreters in London on 23 February where the findings were announced. She said: "We can't call a strike because we are freelancers. Nonetheless the strength of feelings has been borne out and the majority are not willing to work for Capita. It's very clear that after one year it's not simply a matter of pay, it's a matter of principles, standards and quality – we don't want to be lumped in with others who are not as qualified as we are."

A total of 859 interpreters completed the online survey between 29 January and 10 February 2013 with the results showing that the calls to review the Framework Agreement and the Capita contract are still supported by the majority of those in the profession.

Keith Moffitt, Chair, Chartered Institute of Linguists, also part of umbrella group Professional Interpreters for Justice, said: “The survey findings are strong evidence for the Ministry of Justice that interpreters cannot be persuaded to work under the Framework Agreement or the Capita contract.”

He added: “The dissatisfaction of interpreters who haven’t registered to work was echoed by those who have in fact signed up for jobs with Capita TI, who said they were not happy with the pay and conditions offered and felt mistreated.”

58% of those who refuse to register with Capita stated they have been telephoned directly by Court clerks in the last three months with urgent requests for them to attend because Capita has been unable to supply.

Geoffrey Buckingham, Chair, Association of Police and Court Interpreters, said: “We will be discussing with the Justice Minister that there have not been the marked improvements to the service which she believes are happening. How can there be when over half of the respondents to our survey who refuse to sign up with Capita say they are being contacted by courts desperate to get them to work?”

He added: “There have been continual breaches and no published statistics by the Ministry of Justice since August 2012. Those which were published last year are unaudited. The surveys we have commissioned are the only insights into what is happening and how interpreters feel and any attempts to persuade them to work under the Framework Agreement are bound to fail.”

Guest speakers at the seminar on 23 February included Alex Tinsley of Fair Trials International and Liese Katschinka, President of EULITA (European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association), which is guiding EU member countries on the implementation of the EU Directive on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. This comes into force in October 2013.

The Ministry of Justice has been repeatedly criticised, most recently by the Justice Committee, for signing a four year Framework Agreement for language services with Applied Language Solutions (ALS) which was acquired by Capita in December 2011 and now operates as Capita Translation and Interpreting.

Incidences of interpreter 'no shows' and poor quality interpreting at courts and police stations across the UK are still being reported at an alarming rate. For example on 7th February at Snaresbrook Crown Court a case collapsed due to disputed interpreting by a Sylheti (Bangladeshi) linguist, resulting in Judge Joana Korner CMG QC specifically instructing the Crown Prosecution Service not to "hire any interpreters in future who are not on the National Register".

Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) have rejected Justice Minister Helen Grant MP's publicly stated figures on the performance of Capita TI. On 16 January, in a written answer to Shadow Justice Minister Sadiq Khan, she said there was an "increasing improvement in service to 93.5% performance by August 2012."

Ends



Photo Caption: Professional interpreters show a united front against the MOJ's Framework Agreement and contract with Capita at a seminar on 23 February with (left to right) event chair Andrew Murray (Unite the Union), Keith Moffitt (Chartered Institute of Linguists), Madeleine Lee (Professional Interpreters Alliance), Hilary Maxwell-Hyslop (formerly Institute of Linguists Educational Trust), Liese Katschinka (EULITA) and Alex Tinsley (Fair Trials International).

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Notes to Editors

'The FWA one year on - interpreters' survey results' executive summary and topline findings accompanies this release. The full report is available on request.

Figures

Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) has repeatedly rejected the misleading and unverified figures published by the Ministry and assert that the Ministry of Justice has deliberately given the wrong picture about its contractor's performance. Independent calculations estimate that the performance figure for the contract is nearer 50%* rather than the Minister's publicly stated figure of 95% (16 January) and that fulfilment of the Framework Agreement, which has a total potential value of up to £42 million per annum, is currently at just 20%.

For the Justice Minister's statement re figures see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130116/text/130116w0002.htm#13011670004896>

National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI)

PI4J is calling for the Minister to revert to the previous National Agreement arrangement whilst proper consultation takes place on a viable new delivery model which delivers value for money and upholds justice. Under the National Agreement (until 30 January 2011) qualified interpreters were sourced using the National Register of Public Services Interpreters (NRPSI) which provides and maintains the voluntary register for the interpreting profession. NRPSI ensures required qualification standards are met; the quality of interpreting is defined and maintained through a Code of Conduct; and that access to a database of professional interpreters is freely available for all.

The value of the National Register was endorsed by the JSC report in its conclusions and recommendations (no.4) saying "there do not appear to have been any fundamental problems with the quality of services, where they were properly sourced i.e. through arrangements that were underpinned by the National Register of Public Service Interpreters."

Professional Interpreters for Justice

PI4J is an umbrella group representing over 2,200 NRPSI registered and qualified interpreters in 135 languages. Our aim is to work in partnership with the Ministry of Justice to safeguard the quality of interpreting services for the Criminal Justice System.

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The NRPSI was originally managed by the Chartered Institute of Linguists and since April 2011 has been wholly independent.

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See www.linguistlounge.org for commentary and updates.

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