

## COURT INTERPRETERS

# ALS, alack!

**I**T was a bad week for solicitor-general Edward Garnier, starting with a ticking-off from the speaker for his “eccentric” habit of turning his back on the House while he was trying to reassure MPs concerned about the state of the monopoly contract on foreign language interpreting in the courts (*Eyes passim*).

“The contract with Applied Language Solutions [ALS] is now running properly,” he insisted. “The company has got a grip on it and we can expect nothing but progress from here on.”

*Whoops!* Not only did the roof of Garnier’s Stockwell townhouse collapse later in the week, but official Ministry of Justice figures published on Thursday revealed the extent of ALS’s failure to supply an interpreter in thousands of cases. Between 30 January and 30 April, the Capita-owned firm failed to provide an interpreter 19 percent of the time, out of more than 23,000 instances where the courts asked for one.

At one point during that period the “success

Applied Language  
SOLUTIONS

rate” (ie cases where ALS actually sent someone) had dropped to 69 percent of tribunal cases and 58 percent of court cases. By the end of April it had crept up to 90 percent – still a poor showing against the 98 percent target in the contract and still far from “running properly”. Of the 2,232 complaints about ALS reported to the ministry, 44 percent were about no-shows.

Even when it does send along an interpreter, ALS continues to cause problems for courts. In Leeds recently, Judge Batty halted a sham marriage trial to ask why the ALS-supplied Slovak interpreter had stopped interpreting for the defendant and discovered that it was because she couldn’t understand what defence counsel was saying.

The case was only able to continue because one of the qualified interpreters boycotting ALS was observing from the public gallery and volunteered to step in.