

COURT INTERPRETERS

ALS well?

IS THE agency hired in a £60m deal to provide interpreters for the justice service big enough to handle the work?

Applied Language Solutions (ALS) has entered into a framework agreement with the Ministry of Justice to supply interpreters to the courts, Crown Prosecution Service and probation service. Public service interpreters, already unhappy at the principle of giving a monopoly to a single agency, were appalled at the choice of supplier following the successful boycott of ALS in the North West, where a deal with four police forces was eventually scrapped following judicial review (see *Eye* 1293).

According to published accounts, ALS's highest annual UK turnover so far has been £3.4m. Indeed, so tiny is the company that it was able to take advantage of the small companies exemption and published only abbreviated accounts for 2010 –



meaning it didn't have to reveal its profits or losses.

In 2009 it made just £77,000 profit after tax. However, those accounts do reveal that the company "meets its day to day working capital requirements through a mezzanine funding arrangement" paying a 10 percent interest rate, secured against all the assets of the company. In February ALS's credit rating briefly dropped to a measly six out of 100.

This may sound familiar to readers of ALS founder and director Gavin Wheeldon's *Times* interview last year, "How I Made it". "I was ringing up and pretending I was this huge translation company when really it was just me in the back bedroom with a phone and PC," he said. Within two months he landed an order from Hewlett-Packard, the computer giant, for £22,000 to translate its European sales brochures. "I won the contract and then thought: oh my God, how on earth do I deliver this?" he said.