

Lost for words

THE Olympic ideal of achieving international understanding through sport may be under threat at the 2012 Games – since organisers have hired the same hopeless interpreter agency that is currently causing chaos in the courts.

In answer to a written question from MP Andy Slaughter, sport minister Hugh Robertson said that the London 2012 Organising Committee (LOCOG) awarded the contract for outsourced translation support to Applied Language Solutions (ALS) following a “rigorous tender process and is confident that they will deliver the services it has procured”.

But then, the Ministry of Justice also claimed that the Crapita-owned ALS was selected through a “robust and rigorous procurement process” and that it had had “no indication of the issues which have arisen since full implementation”. Really? National linguists’ organisations, and indeed the *Eye*, gave plenty of warning that properly qualified court interpreters would refuse to work for ALS.

As reported in the last *Eye*, the MoJ had to suspend the scheme in magistrates’ courts and immigration tribunals after just two weeks, allowing the courts to go back to booking individual interpreters rather than through the ALS framework agreement. But the deal remained in place for other courts.

Even that has now proved too much for ALS. At Leeds Crown Court, one judge was so infuriated by the collapse of a case involving a Czech defendant because no interpreter was provided that he called the local press into court before dismissing the jury and apologising to witnesses.

“The cost of this now aborted trial is likely to run into thousands of pounds. The attempt to show a saving of a few pounds has led to an entire hearing going up in smoke,” said Judge Robert Bartfield. The case will go for retrial later in the year. Similar cases are reported throughout the country.

Justice minister Crispin Blunt said: “There have been an unacceptable number of problems in the first few weeks of the contract and we have made clear to the contractor that this must be changed.”

For the Olympic Games, the company won’t have “a few weeks” to get up to gold standard.