



Press Release

‘Shambolic’ contract must be ditched, say interpreters

EMBARGOED: 00.01am Wednesday 6 February 2013 The interpreter community, represented by Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J), have welcomed the damning report published today by the Justice Select Committee (JSC) which states the Ministry of Justice’s outsourcing of court language services and its handling of the contract are ‘nothing short of shambolic’.

The report highlights the numerous warnings issued by the professional interpreter community, which had been repeatedly ignored by ministers.

The JSC describes the Ministry of Justice and its contractor Capita, which bought Applied Language Solutions, as having “buried their heads in the sand” and says that “many of the concerns interpreters raised regarding the nature of the new operating model were realised during implementation, were utterly predictable, and should have been properly considered from the outset”.

Geoffrey Buckingham, Chairman, Association of Police and Court Interpreters (APCI), one of ten organisations which make up Professional Interpreters for Justice, says: “The Framework Agreement and the contract with Capita do not work and never will. The Ministry of Justice was determined to push this through in the face of overwhelming evidence that it would reduce the quality of language services. Even now the Minister is attempting to get the interpreting community on board, but we insist this failed delivery model must be abandoned.”

He added: “The Ministry of Justice showed contempt to the interpreting community, contempt for their own court officials by preventing them from taking part in the Justice

Committee's online consultation and contempt for the previous excellent reputation of British justice, which is now in tatters."

The JSC report states that performance figures in the contract, now a year old, are likely to represent a "significant overestimate". According to the report "performance figures clearly do not reflect the company's fulfilment against 100% of the requirements of HMCTS and they should be altered, retrospectively and in the future, to indicate this".

Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) has repeatedly asserted that the Ministry of Justice has deliberately given the wrong picture about its contractor's performance and they wrote to Justice Minister Helen Grant MP last week (22 January), rejecting the publicly stated "95% performance" figure.

PI4J estimates that Capita is fulfilling around 50% of interpreting assignments for courts and tribunals or just 20% of the Framework Agreement's full value of £42 million per annum. On 8 January 2013 Capita TI reduced its incentives and travel payments to 20 pence per mile excluding the first 10 miles each way, which is likely to lead to a further deterioration of the fulfilment figures as interpreters on its register withdraw their services. They join the majority of professional interpreters from the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) who have refused from the outset to support the Framework Agreement.

PI4J is calling for the Minister to revert immediately to the previous National Agreement arrangement whereby qualified interpreters were sourced using the NRPSI. This will give time for a credible alternative operating model to be put in place.

The Justice Committee report, in its conclusions and recommendations (no.4) endorses the value of the original National Register, 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."

Keith Moffitt, Chair, Chartered Institute of Linguists, says: "The Justice Committee's hard hitting report has rightly identified that the volume and quality of interpreting services required have not been supplied and Capita has paid lip service to its regulatory duties. The fact that Capita is propping up the contract financially makes it wholly unsustainable and the Justice Minister should terminate it now."

Nick Rosenthal, Chair, Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI), said: “In our professional view the Framework Agreement is unsalvageable and must be replaced by something better. The rates of pay that are offered under it are so low that qualified, professional interpreters are no longer able or willing to continue working in the court system.”

Ends

Representatives from Professional Interpreters for Justice member organisations are available for interview.

Members of Professional Interpreters for Justice

Association of Police and Court Interpreters (APCI)

Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL)

Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI)

National Register of Public Service Interpreters Ltd (NRPSI)

National Union of Professional Interpreters and Translators, part of Unite the Union (NUPIT)

Professional Interpreters Alliance (PIA)

Scottish Interpreters and Translators Association (SITA)

Society of Official Metropolitan Interpreters UK Ltd (SOMI)

Society for Public Service Interpreting (SPSI)

Wales Interpreter and Translation Service (WITS)

Professional Interpreters for Justice 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.

The National Register of Public Services Interpreters (NRPSI) provides and maintains the voluntary register for the interpreting profession. It 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 NRPSI was originally managed by the Chartered Institute of Linguists and since April 2011 has been wholly independent.

For further press information and to arrange interviews please contact:

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Notes to Editors – wrong interpretation of the figures

Justice Minister Helen Grant MP (16 January) in written answers to Sadiq Khan (Shadow Justice Minister) said there is a “95% performance” level by the contractor Capita, who bought the company which won the contract, Applied Language Solutions, in December 2011. *Source:*

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

Professional Interpreters for Justice believes that about half of the estimated 800 daily assignments for interpreting services in the criminal justice system are not included in the Statistical Bulletin on language services published by the Ministry of Justice.

The Ministry of Justice report on the first seven months of the contract February – August 2012 stated there were 72,043 requests for interpreters from HMCTS and that 56,818 were fulfilled, equivalent to 405 per working day.

Source: Ministry of Justice “Statistics on the use of language services in courts and tribunals” Statistical Bulletin, 30 January 2012 to August 2012.

Professional Interpreters for Justice points out that in the House of Lords on 9 July 2012, Lord McNally, Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, when answering questions about the disruption and delay to criminal trials ‘as a result of the serious inadequacies’, said “we are talking about a system with some 800 requests a day for such interpretation.”

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/120709-0001.htm>

All of the interpreter bookings not made by Capita are excluded from the Ministry of Justice’s Statistical Bulletin on the use of language services, giving a false picture of performance in the seven months February – August 2012.

The excluded figures include the short notice requests for interpreters for hearings and tribunals which the Ministry of Justice excused Capita from fulfilling within a week of the contract going live in February 2012 because it could not register enough interpreters. In addition many clerks at crown and magistrates courts are making direct bookings with interpreters or using other agencies rather than Capita.

More evidence of the discrepancy in the reported figures is illustrated by another of the written answers to Sadiq Khan, when the Minister states the spending on Capita for the language services contract over 11 months has been £8.5 million. This represents just 62% of the stated annual contract value of £15 million with Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service.

The Framework Agreement put in place by the Ministry of Justice is however designed to be rolled out to other agencies (e.g. police forces) with a total potential value of up to £42 million per annum, so over the course of 11 months the language services provided by Capita therefore represents just 20% of the full potential. (See *‘House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, The Ministry of Justice language services contract. Published 14 December 2012 page 8 (Procurement, paragraph 4).*)

Police constabularies, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Tribunals Service are amongst those who the Framework Agreement with the single private contractor Capita are designed to support.

Professional Interpreters for Justice has published 'A Different Interpretation of the figures' together with its letter to the Justice Minister, Helen Grant MP (22 January).

These are available from Involvis.

Follow Interpreters for Justice on Twitter [@United4Justice](https://twitter.com/United4Justice)

Also see www.linguistlounge.org for commentary and updates.