

Well done, Wheeldon



SO. Farewell then Gavin Wheeldon, who sold his foreign language interpreting firm first to the Ministry of Justice and then to Capita – even though it was being boycotted by hundreds of the interpreters needed by the court service.

As regular *Eye* readers will know, Applied Language Solutions (ALS) has a monopoly on providing interpreters to the justice system in England and Wales. Wheeldon left the firm this month “by mutual consent”, having stayed on as chief executive officer after Capita paid him £7.5m for the company. Astonishingly, ALS has actually managed to *worsen* Capita’s track record in big public sector cock-ups as criminal trials fell apart and judges complained when no interpreters were sent for important hearings.

Justice minister Lord McNally admitted this month that the contract wasn’t going to save taxpayers the £18m originally projected and is unlikely even to save the revised figure of £12m. Baroness Coussins, who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on modern languages, said politicians were still “hearing daily from judges and others about the failure to provide interpreters or the sending of unqualified, inexperienced people with no experience of simultaneous interpreting and some who are simply incompetent.”

● A murder trial at Winchester Crown Court was put on hold after the man who turned up to interpret for a witness revealed he was filling in for his wife, the real interpreter, who was busy.

Mubarak Lone, who is neither qualified nor registered as an interpreter, was caught out on 13 July by a Punjabi-speaking junior barrister who spotted that he even got the oath wrong. When the trial resumed on 16 July, the replacement interpreter sent by ALS also had to be helped out by the barrister, who said her vocabulary was “completely lacking”.