

Words of warning

OH DEAR: as frequently predicted in the *Eye*, the outsourcing of foreign language interpreting in the courts has been a massive flop.

Just a fortnight after the £60m contract to supply interpreters for all levels of courts got under way, court service chiefs last week had to allow magistrates' courts and immigration tribunals to revert with immediate effect to the old system of booking individual freelance linguists for cases, "as a result of the contractor's difficulties with sourcing interpreters at short notice".

Throughout those two weeks lawyers and others working in the courts had contacted the *Eye* to flag up a catalogue of mishaps. Speakers of the wrong language, or interpreters who couldn't cope with legal terminology, were sent to court; interpreters were dressed inappropriately for court appearances, or turned up hours late or didn't arrive at all, delaying cases and leaving defendants remanded in custody. The *Law Society Gazette*, meanwhile, reported complaints from the West London magistrates' bench that they had been sent too many interpreters for some cases and none at all for others.

Around 60 percent of the interpreters qualified to work under the old system, which required membership of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters and legal accreditation, are refusing to work for the piss-poor pay rates and job conditions offered by Applied Language Solutions, which is now owned by Capita. Even before the scheme was suspended, many had received frantic calls from courts that had been let down by the agency and needed someone at short notice.

But the court service says it is still its "firm intention" to carry on with the ALS deal and has asked staff and judges to "encourage [the boycotters to] sign up to the new arrangements".
