

UK's language service regulators and registers welcome Government's acceptance of amendments to 'Victims' Code'

Changes to the code that ensure only qualified language professionals are used in the justice system are considered a win for victims and the system

25 April 2024

The **National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI)** and the **National Register of Public Service Translators (NRPST)** welcome the UK Government's acceptance of amendments to the proposed 'Victims' Code' in relation to interpreting and translation services.

The strengthening of the wording of this code – intended to set out and protect the rights of victims of crime – makes it clear that those victims and witnesses who do not speak English have the right to be provided with a qualified language professional.

The changes go to the root of victims' experiences of the justice system and its integrity

Baroness Coussins, Co-Chair of the APPG on Modern Languages and VP of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL), led the call for these changes to the 'Victims' Code' on the basis that the quality of the language services provided not only goes to the root of a victim's or witness' experiences of the justice system, but the integrity of this system as well.

Addressing the House of Lords on 16 April 2024, **the Baroness said:** *"It is well worth reflecting that the use of professional, qualified interpreters and translators is not just right and proper for the victims, who need their services; it cuts both ways, also enabling those responsible for the administration of justice and the quality of justice to understand better what has happened and what needs to be done about it."* (See Editor's Notes for link to full transcript.)

Calls for changes that go further and the justice system to only engage language professionals through an independent regulatory body

The amendments received wide support from members of the House of Lords, including from Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police between 2011 and 2017.

Lord Hogan-Howe said: *“In my speech on 31st January 2024, I fully supported this thrust to establish consistency in the engagement with language specialists who deliver the service required when someone does not speak English... Where the standard of interpreters and translators is not established to a high and consistent level, there is a risk that the obtaining of evidence is damaged. This matters particularly for the police but also all involved in the criminal justice system.*

“From my time as Commissioner and Head of London's Metropolitan Police Service I am proud to say we engaged with professional and qualified public service interpreters who had been independently accredited: their qualifications, experience and right to work checked by the voluntary, not-for-profit National Register of Public Service Interpreters. This organisation also manages a most effective complaints and professional conduct process with robust appeals protocols. This is based on a thorough Code of Professional Conduct, which is transparent and effective, and is a major benefit in engaging practitioners through the regulator, treating qualifying practitioners as professionals with their own independent regulatory body.

“It is no longer a case of the criminal justice system ‘should’ support regulation and registration through an independent body, but it is time that the criminal justice system ‘must’ engage practitioners through an independent regulatory body. I am delighted to see the launch of the National Register of Public Service Translators, which is now sitting alongside the National Register of Public Service Interpreters.

“The question is now not ‘why should we have an independent regulator for interpreters and translators who are engaged by the criminal justice system?’, but ‘why don’t we have an independent regulator for interpreters and translators who are engaged by the criminal justice system?’”

Further changes needed to future-proof the language profession to ensure the justice system has access to qualified language professionals

Mike Orlov, Executive Director and Registrar of NRPSI and NRPST, said:

“We are delighted with the amendments to the ‘Victim’s Code’ and thank Baroness Coussins and supporters in the House of Lords for their work in achieving them; this is a significant step in the right direction.

“However, we now face the issue of ensuring that there are enough qualified public service interpreting and translation professionals available to the victims and witnesses of crime and the justice system. The number of practising qualified public service interpreting professionals in particular is falling. The only way to tackle this decline is for those in power to properly acknowledge the professional status of these practitioners with statutory protection of their title; fair working terms and conditions; pay that is commensurate with their qualifications and experience; and by making it a requirement that only registered language practitioners can work with the public services. Consequently, we wholeheartedly agree with Lord Hogan-Howe’s call for the justice system to only engage regulated, registered language professionals.”

ENDS

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Editor’s notes

Victims and Prisoners Bill | Volume 837: debated on Tuesday 16 April 2024:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-04-16/debates/5047DA2C-E4B3-422A-B9B9-114A936DF1DA/VictimsAndPrisonersBill#contribution-C6572E50-61ED-4F22-B373-10132B1CDB5E>

The BBC conducted a survey of NRPSI registered interpreters for the [Radio 4 File on Four ‘Lost in Translation’ programme broadcast on 21 November 2023](#). 10% of the 600 public service interpreters who responded to the survey indicated that they are unlikely to continue in the profession after the next 12 months due to poor remuneration and challenging contractual terms and conditions.

The BBC’s findings when taken together with NRPSI’s own data, which shows the number of registered interpreters has fallen in the last 12 years by 33% (from 2,400 registrants in 2011 to 1,600 in 2023), indicate a worrying trend.

About

The **National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI)** is the UK's independent voluntary Regulator of the public service interpreting profession. Established in 1994 it is funded by Registrants' fees. By maintaining interpreting standards, it safeguards the public. All Registrants – there are currently around 1,700 covering approximately 100 languages – satisfy rigorous entry criteria in terms of qualifications and experience. They also demonstrate their commitment to professional standards by signing NRPSI's Code of Professional Conduct. While NRPSI is a voluntary Regulator, its powers allow it to discipline and ultimately exclude a Registrant who breaks its Code of Professional Conduct. In this way, it can ensure that interpreters on the National Register, which is publicly available and searchable online for free, are appropriately qualified, have the level of competence claimed and employ best practice. (<http://www.nrpsi.org.uk/>)

The **National Register of Public Service Translators (NRPST)** is the UK's independent voluntary regulator of the public service translation profession. Recently launched, the register of translators runs along similar lines to the NRPSI Register of interpreters. It is an open-access online register of accredited translators who have met the standards set by NRPST for professional practice and agreed to abide by the Code of Professional Conduct. The register of public service translators is separate from the NRPSI Register of interpreters. However, there are links between the two registers to make it easy to identify those language professionals who are registered in both disciplines. (<https://www.nrpst.org.uk>).

NRPSI Ltd is the not-for-profit organisation, registered as a company limited by guarantee at Companies House (No. 7585982), that manages and owns the **National Register of Public Service Interpreters** (NRPSI) and the recently launched **National Register of Public Service Translators** (NRPST). NRPSI Ltd brings the same strong values of public interest and protection to the management of both registers.