

COURT INTERPRETERS

Loss for words

A FOREIGN language interpreting firm providing services to the courts has ceased trading, leaving linguists out of pocket and again raising questions about how much taxpayers' money goes to middlemen in the language industry.

Bolton-based Debonair Languages was a subcontractor for thebigword, the Ministry of Justice's main contractor for supplying interpreters. The international language giant took over the contract, which was previously run very poorly by Capita (*Eyes passim*).

Debonair was a father and son business run by Visvalingam and Paul Manivannan, who boasted in a 2015 interview with Bolton's local press that they had 1,000 interpreters on their books, doing work in justice, health and education. The 2018 accounts show that a £137,000 shareholder dividend was paid to Paul.

Court interpreters now face having to chase their own pay through the courts. One Mandarin interpreter is still owed for having worked at a 21-day trial at Birmingham crown court.

Before 2011, interpreters were booked directly by the courts and other parts of the justice system, such as police forces, drawing from a national register of qualified experts. Now the taxpayer is paying towards the profits of both the main contractor and a subcontractor agency, yet risks getting under-qualified interpreters who are not signed up to a professional organisation with a formal code of conduct. In January,

Eye 1488 reported that language agency ITL had been given the boot by police after problems caused by unqualified interpreters.

Problems with finding any interpreters at all also continue to plague the court service. Last month Essex police launched a hunt for an alleged rapist who disappeared (and is feared to have left the UK) after he was bailed from Colchester magistrates court because no interpreter was available for the case.

debonair