

# The UK's National Register of Public Service Interpreters

## Our Strategy for 2016-2018

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### Promoting and maintaining standards in interpreting

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## The importance of professional interpreters in an increasingly multicultural society

The UK benefits from a multicultural society. The 2011 UK Censuses revealed that nearly one million people living in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales described their English language skills as 'non-proficient'.

The Office for National Statistics reported that the population of the UK had grown by nearly half

a million to over 64,596,000 in the year to June 2014, with net immigration contributing 259,700 to the total increase. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts net immigration will be 105,000 a year by mid-2019 – a factor in upgrading its forecasts for Britain's economic growth.



## The advent of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters

In overturning a murder conviction in 1985 in the case of *R v Iqbal Begum*, the Court of Appeal, in a landmark ruling, highlighted the problems that can occur from inaccurate court interpreting:

*"It is beyond the understanding of this court that it did not occur to someone that the reason for her [the defendant's] silence... was simply because she was not being spoken to in a language which she understood."*

As a result, the 1993 Runciman Royal Commission on Criminal Justice recommended that only

trained and qualified interpreters be used in court and that a national register of qualified interpreters should be established with the aim of 'using only interpreters with proven competence and skills, who are governed by a nationally recognised code of conduct'. In response, the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) was established in 1994 with initial financial support from the Home Office and the Nuffield Foundation.

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## The ongoing need to protect the public

With increasing evidence of the use of unqualified interpreters in UK courts and other public services, the justification for NRPSI is as great today as it was in 1985.

The Independent Review of Quality Arrangements under the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Language Services Framework Agreement in December 2014 reported that 50% of respondents working for Capita TI did not hold even one of the top ten qualifications needed for interpreting in the justice sector. Capita TI holds the MoJ contract to provide interpreters and translators in courts, tribunals and prisons until October 2016.

The consequences of using poorly qualified interpreters are all too clear. Reporting in the Serious Case Review for the Coventry Safeguarding Children Board in September 2013, following the death of five-year-old Daniel Pelka, Dr Neil Fraser said:

*"Without proactive or consistent action by any professional to engage with him via an interpreter, then his lack of language and low confidence would likely have made it almost impossible for him to reveal the abuse he was suffering at home."*

The lack of 'suitable interpreters' is also highlighted as an issue in

a major maternal deaths study by G. Lewis (ed.), 'Saving Mothers' Lives: Reviewing maternal deaths to make motherhood safer 2006–08' [Brit J. Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Vol 118, Supplement 1, March 2011]:

*"A lack of availability of suitable interpreters is one of the key findings running throughout this Report. The use of family members... or members of their own, usually tight-knit, community as translators causes concern."*

Reinforcing the dangers of using a family member to interpret when they could be the perpetrator of abuse against the party they are interpreting for, the study reports a victim as saying:

*"Even if the perpetrator isn't with you, he sends one of his family members with you. And in the name of honour you can't ever talk about it. Especially if they say 'I'm going to interpret because she can't speak English'."*

As the demands of non-English speakers increase, the need to regulate those acting as public service interpreters, often in highly pressurised situations that have the potential to impact someone's life, becomes ever more important.



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## What NRPSI does

NRPSI is the independent voluntary regulator for public service interpreters. We maintain professional standards, thereby protecting registered interpreters and those who use their services. In order to do this we:

- Ensure, through our Code of Conduct, that registered interpreters meet our standards for professional conduct and practice
- Maintain the National Register, providing a free online resource to identify suitably qualified interpreters
- Assess and determine the standards required for registration
- Recognise the qualifications needed to become a professional interpreter
- Investigate complaints about a registered interpreter's conduct or competence following a transparent process
- Promote the role of the regulator and the importance of registration to ensure their value, to both the profession and society more widely, is understood.



NRPSI at the Language Show Live, 16-18 October 2015 at Olympia in London

## The challenges facing the public service interpreting profession

The provision of language services to the public services is facing many challenges, including:

- Financial constraints on the public services putting downward pressure on quality standards
- Government's policy of outsourcing language services to major contractors with little quality control
- Attracting new entrants to a highly demanding but relatively poorly paid profession
- Making those with the appropriate skills and required languages available at the right place and the right time

- The multiplicity of languages that could be required, and the limitations on ensuring qualifications are available for all these languages
- Ensuring that interpreters are appropriately security vetted in a timely fashion
- Implementing a "career ladder" for interpreters, from first qualification to recognition of higher levels of skill
- Ensuring that qualified interpreters maintain their skills throughout their career, responding to changes in language, technology and sector-specific procedures



## NRPSI's objectives: How we plan to meet the challenges

The core activities of NRPSI remain as relevant now as when the organisation was founded in 1994. We intend to embody and enhance our regulatory role,

acknowledging that it is voluntary and therefore requires the engagement of both interpreters and those who use their services.

### Immediate and ongoing objectives:

- Run the National Register effectively and sustainably
- Act to increase the number of new entrants to the profession and onto the Register
- Provide a robust professional complaints service for users of interpreters
- Lobby central government about using only registered interpreters and other issues impacting quality standards
- Promote the benefits of using registered interpreters to the public services
- Review the standards that form the registration requirements
- Promote the value of the Register to all users in the public sector and linked private sector
- Ensure that the Register is relevant to all parts of the UK
- Pursue a policy of openness and transparency in line with a quasi-public body
- Communicate widely and effectively our aims, standards and approach



HRH Prince Michael of Kent presenting the winner of the inaugural NRPSI Award for excellence in the Diploma in Police Interpreting at the Chartered Institute of Linguists awards



NRPSI Board 2015



### Medium-term

- Encourage Registrants to raise their professional standards through, for example, engaging in CPD
- Liaise effectively with government departments on their sourcing of language services
- Investigate widening NRPSI's public protection role to encompass related areas of language professionalism
- Form productive relationships with other language registers in the UK, Europe and elsewhere
- Review the potential impact of new technology to assess the need for changes to be made to training and what skills Registrants require to remain effective professionals
- Seek to be recognised as the government's arbiter of quality – its definition and maintenance across all levels of practice

### Long-term aims

- Bring about statutory regulation of public service interpreting
- Ensure protection of the title and status of Registered Public Service Interpreter (RPSI)



## Summary

The work that interpreters do every day is of vital importance for both the public services and individual members of the public being interpreted for. While the life and death situations referenced within 'Our Strategy' may be extreme, just about every job an

interpreter carries out has the potential to change someone's life. This is why it is crucial that every interpreter working in the public services is properly accredited with the National Register. It is our mission to ensure that this is accomplished.

**NRPSI** | Promoting and maintaining standards in interpreting

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