

The UK's National Register Of Professional Interpreters

Professional Interpreters
Providing A
Professional Service

Our Strategy For Creating
The UK's Number One Resource
For Accessing
Professional Interpreters



Our Vision

Our vision is to make the National Register the first choice for anyone that needs a qualified Professional Interpreter.

To achieve this vision we are:

- ◆ Maintaining and growing the National Register and expanding and enhancing its functionality and usability.
- ◆ Working to improve the recognition of Interpretation and Translation as a Professional service.
- ◆ Formulating new guidelines to maximise the mutual benefits of employing a Professional Interpreter.
- ◆ Recognising that the Industry is going through great changes and streamlining our procedures to match the new environment.
- ◆ Expanding the appeal of the register to everyone that uses the services of Professional Interpreters.
- ◆ Creating clearer distinctions within the register between levels of experience, qualifications and sector specialities.
- ◆ Creating guidelines to help users of Interpreter services get the most out of the engagement.

The reasons for our ideas are explained in the pages that follow. We know that it will take time to achieve what we have set out here, but we are determined to get there. However, we can't do it alone.

We are a new organisation with limited resources. Our greatest asset is the Professional Interpreters who share our vision.

If you are already on the Register then this outline of our strategy for the future will set your mind at ease that we are on your side and want a better future for all Interpreters.

If you use the services of Interpreters then we want you to know that we want to enhance the professional image of the industry so that it can serve you better.

If you are a membership organisation then you need to know that our aim is to complement the work that you do, not replace you.

If you care about the reputation of the interpreting profession, all we ask is that you join with us and we will achieve our vision together.



“We Are Stronger Together”

The Industry Model

It's clear from the feedback over the last year that the profession is changing. It wants to be seen as more professional and to attract interpreters of the highest quality. At the same time, because of the improving exposure, the profession is attracting unqualified Interpreters that are offering their services at very low rates and driving down the rates that can be charged by qualified professional interpreters.

Our opinion is that a professional service should attract a professional rate of compensation. But while some interpreters are prepared to accept low rates, the profession will continue to reflect the value it places on itself. We are not exempt from market forces. The National Register is however in no position to dictate what the proper rate should be. That is best left to the numerous membership organisations that represent the interpreters.

This is the normal phase that any professional industry goes through as it develops and grows, but that doesn't make it feel any more comfortable for those going through it.

Sourcing and managing interpreters obviously uses up resources within an organisation. Where organisations were large enough, they would set up a department to handle the admin. Some, in an attempt to reduce costs, outsourced the work of sourcing and paying interpreters to an external agency. But that didn't change the problem, it only gave the problem to someone else. The work involved in finding and managing interpreters is an unavoidable cost in using their services.

The cost of providing an interpreter through an agency should obviously be higher than going direct because the agency has to include the cost of providing their service as well as the cost of the interpreter. For an agency to keep their contract they obviously have to supply quality interpreters. Some use the National Register and others set up their own in-house list, which again incurs additional costs to maintain.

We believe that some agencies offered rates to the clients similar or even lower than they were already paying for just the Interpreter in order to win the contracts. So the only way they can meet these rates and stay in business is by offering lower rates to the interpreters.

In some ways this is OK. Interpreters who get on board with a good agency may get slightly lower rates, but they may also get more regular work. In addition, their own administration costs will be reduced as they do not have to invoice the service organisation for every job, and they no longer have to pay to advertise their services.



Most interpreters are self employed businesses. So it's really up to them to decide what price they value their service at and the minimum rate they are prepared to accept for delivering their service. They also need to decide if it is wise to trust their business to a single customer or a single source of revenue.

Our role in maintaining the National Register is to provide the assurance that interpreters, whether independent or agency workers, are qualified to the level that they claim to be and to check their recorded hours of service provision matches their claimed expertise; not to suggest how much they should be paid. That path may lead to a conflict of interests.

Why Us?

Many Interpreters are employed directly, while others provide their services through various agencies. But however they are sourced; the end user of the service has a right to know that the Interpreter that turns up is competent and able to do the job.

Historically, the NRPSI was the national register that provided reassurance to public sector bodies that the Interpreters they employed were professionally qualified. The register is the Gold Standard for the profession.

The register was owned by one of the leading membership bodies for linguists. While that wasn't a problem, in line with other professions it was decided that the membership and the regulatory functions should be separate. By doing so, a regulatory body is in a position to monitor and enhance the professionalism of the service without any perceived conflict of interest or being seen as working on behalf of a specific membership body.

If an Agency keeps a list to satisfy their contract requirements, without external validation, they face the same possible conflict of interest. So having an independent National Register is in everyone's interests. That is why the National Register is now independent from all membership organisations, agencies and users of Interpreter services.

In April 2011 the NRPSI set up to be a voluntary regulatory body of public service interpreters with a view to getting statutory status in the future. The National Register is now maintained by a private company limited by guarantee. All the profits from the service are now ploughed back into the service to develop and enhance it. We have no shareholders looking for a dividend or seeking to siphon off the profits for their own ends.

But it couldn't have happened at a worst time. The last year has seen a massive upheaval in the profession. At the same time that the NRPSI was seeking to set up and improve the new service, it found itself being dragged into contractual negotiations with some of the service users, vitriolic debates with some of the membership organisations and fielding endless questions from registered interpreters about what was going on in the profession.

They say that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. One of the biggest problems is that many, quite wrongly, saw the NRPSI as a statutory regulator. But we are actually a voluntary regulator. Our powers allow us to exclude someone that has either broken our code of conduct or misrepresented their level of competence from the National Register.



The power to do so ensures that interpreters on the National Register are appropriately qualified and have the level of competence claimed.

However we have no powers to set minimum rates of pay or say who can, or can't, become an interpreter. Maybe that will change in the future; that's a question for the profession as a whole. But for now, we are focused on improving the standard of service provided by Interpreters.

Users of Interpreter services know that if the Interpreter is on the National Register then they will be getting a professional service. Or at least they should, but sometimes there have been mistakes, and we're sorry. In the past, while complaints have been few, the NRPSI may not have been swift enough to take action against offenders.

The board of the National Register realise that the reputation of the list is vital and one of their first actions was to set up a more stringent disciplinary process that acted quickly. That move has been very successful and we plan to improve the rest of the operation as well. The

rest of this document will lay out our plans for the future and why every Interpreter that considers themselves to be a professional should join us.

Improved Recognition For Interpreters

The original purpose of the register was to allow Public Service organisations, who were licensed, to use the Register to check that an interpreter was who they claimed to be. Each Registered Interpreter is given a personal ID card with a unique registration number that can be entered into our online National Register search engine.

The simple search engine was later extended to allow a service user to find an interpreter in their area. And it works. Many interpreters have been approached by a prospective client after having their details presented to them using the search results.

But we know we can do better and we're going to. The system that we inherited provides no differentiation between interpreters. Because the majority of interpreters on our register are self employed, we know that some interpreters want to use the search engine to promote their business; the National Register is a valuable source of work for them.

So we are hard at work in the background improving the information provided by a search. It will take time to get right, and as a new business our resources are already stretched because of the upheaval in the profession, but we are determined to deliver a better service.

An Interpreter's record will identify not just that they are registered but their level of expertise as well. We know that it's important for the profession that we discriminate not just between languages but also the professions in which a Registered Interpreter has experience and competence in serving.

A full search should reveal which languages an interpreter has been qualified in, the sectors that they have gained experience in and how many hours they have logged as a professional interpreter. But that's the new minimum.

We also plan to include photographs and short biographies. These can be enhanced with testimonials or even mini case studies. In short, a Registered Interpreter's profile will become a showcase for their expertise. They can also include links to their Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter profiles if available.

In short, when someone uses the National Register to search for a professional interpreter they will be given the information and they need to decide not only if someone is qualified, but how they can best use their services.

Of course, this only works if individual interpreters provide the information.

We also understand and respect the fact that not every interpreter needs to source work through the register, so will be reluctant to provide the additional information. And that's OK; it won't be compulsory. But if you're a professional interpreter shouldn't you be letting people know just how good you are?

Even if you provide your services through an agency, won't the end client want some independent reassurance that you are up to the job? Our aim is that a quick search of the National Register will provide that reassurance.



Our aim is that the Agencies themselves should see the National Register as the final Arbitrator of quality in the profession and use it to control the quality of the service that they provide.

It's A Two Way Deal

We expect our Registered Interpreters to provide a professional service. That's why every interpreter signs up to our Code of Conduct. We accept that it hasn't always lived up to the ideal in the past, but we are now an independent organisation and that's the first thing that we put right. The integrity and reputation of the National Register is our number one priority.

We also expect clients that use our Registered Interpreters to treat them with professional courtesy. A Professional Interpreter can only provide a professional service if the client provides them with the correct resources, information and environment in which to do their job. As in most service industries, you get what you pay for, but to get the most value from a Professional Interpreter there is more to it than just paying them!

From the feedback we already have, we believe that there is confusion with some users of interpreter services about what is expected of them. Some have never actually been shown how to actually use the services of a Professional Interpreter.

We think it's important that as we open up the National Register to other public bodies (such as the NHS or private companies such as Solicitors) that we provide them help to get the most out of our system and from the services they procure from our Registered Interpreters.

So as part of our new and improved service we will be providing guidelines for service users on what they should expect from a Professional Interpreter and what an interpreter needs from them to be able to deliver a professional service.

Needless to say, those same guidelines will help our Registered Interpreters to ask their clients for the right facilities and briefings that they need to carry out a first class assignment. These guidelines will be freely available on the new website.

With the introduction of the new website service all users will be required to register on the site before they can access the search engine. This is becoming necessary to comply with the latest data protection regulations.

It will be free to search the National Register (a change to the pre April 2011 requirement to buy a licence) but we need to know who has access to the database. That way we can also seek feedback to ensure that the service is easy to use and providing the right level of functionality and information.

Our wish is for everyone working in the profession, or who relies on the profession, to work together to improve standards for all.



Into The Future

We see the future of the profession as a bright one. At the end of the shake up we are going through we will come out stronger. Many industries in the UK need specialised professional interpreters. Governments and Institutions recognise that to protect the rights and lives of individuals they require an ability to be understood in their native language.

Not everyone living or visiting the UK can speak English. Most pick up enough so that they can usually get by in their day to day lives. Go to any pub in London and you will see groups of people conversing in languages that are not their native tongues. Sometimes the whole group will be speaking in a second, but common language.

It's easy to believe that if you needed someone to translate or interpret something for you that they would be able to do so. There will always be a need for low level interpretation just so that people can understand each other. But in some circumstances getting by is not enough.

It's when people with just enough English to get by, or no English at all get involved with some of our world renowned bodies and institutions that problems begin. Talking in the language of some of our professions can be difficult for natural English speakers, never mind those with English as a second language.



Trying to give a statement to a police officer; conversing with a lawyer about a specific legal issue or explaining your health history to a surgeon that is about to perform life saving surgery requires more than just getting by.

The consequences of a misunderstanding don't bear thinking about.

That is when the services of a Professional Interpreter with specific experience and knowledge

of the sector can actually save a life or prevent a miscarriage of justice. That is when the sector professional has to put their full trust in the Registered Interpreter that turns up to assist. That is when they need to know that an independent professional body has vetted them and confirmed that they are capable of doing the job that's required of them. And that is why we exist.

Now is the time to come together and create the profession we all desire.

If you share our vision and are committed to creating a Professional Service that helps everyone that needs the assistance of a Professional Interpreter, then join with us.

“We Are Stronger Together”

www.NRPSI.co.uk

NRPSI Ltd Saxon House, 48 Southwark Street, London SE1 1UN

Tel: 020 7940 3166 Fax: 020 7940 3123 email: admin@nrpsi.co.uk

Registered in England No. 7585982