

# Bring back good practice!

There are daily revelations confirming the shocking decline in standards of public service interpreting, especially in the courts, since outsourcing and privatisation. Unregistered bilinguals without formal interpreter qualifications and linguists who are untrained as interpreters are everywhere; some have been observed failing to even interpret a single word of proceedings. Many can be seen outside courtrooms loudly exchanging contact details and giving “legal advice” to the people they are supposed to be interpreting for, taking on an ‘advocate’ role. The campaign for protection of title and for the mandatory use of accredited, regulated and registered interpreters must be stepped up. But for the moment our focus should be as follows -

- **We need to regularise and bring good practice back in to the system**
- **So what is best practice and how can fellow Registrants fight back against agency normalisation of bad practice?**

## IN COURT

- An interpreter should not sit with or enter into discussion with the person they are interpreting for prior to the hearing
- When working as court interpreter he or she should not interpret during pre and post hearing conferences unless specifically directed by a judge
- Regular interpreter breaks are vital, there is ample research to demonstrate this. Breaks are being drastically reduced in most interpreting scenarios. No break interviews and court sessions are becoming normalised, as many of us have observed. Article 5.10 of the interpreter code states the interpreter should ensure the provision of adequate breaks and withdraw from the assignment if breaks are not provided and they are unable to interpret accurately.
- The interpreter should never be left alone with the person they interpret for. Your personal security and the integrity of the assignment must be protected.
- Poor practice should be reported to the usher, court manager, agency and National Register when appropriate.

## POLICE

- The interpreter should always insist on beginning with a short statement explaining that s/he is impartial and present solely to facilitate communication.
- He or she should insist that Officers speak directly to the person in question and allow the interpreter to do their job, rather than “Can you ask him if... Can you find out whether.....”
- Under no circumstance should the interpreter be left alone with the person she is interpreting for. This happens constantly, many officers are surprised when you follow them out and explain why this shouldn’t happen.
- It is for the officer(s) to take the statement and NOT the interpreter.
- When visiting a private address, the appointment should begin in the police station and the officer should go with the interpreter to the appointment. Interpreters should not be asked to go to private addresses and be left standing in the street risking their personal safety.

**THERE IS SUCH A THING AS SOCIETY!**

Austerity might be ending. As budgets are increased, education and training as to the role of an interpreter must be provided for police officers and court officials- the latter should not be introducing the interpreter to their “client”.

Each court system and police force should have a small committee of *representatives of interpreters and local court and/or police professionals* to liaise on such matters, highlighting problem areas and suggesting solutions. Such committees were in existence prior to outsourcing but rarely exist nowadays, if at all. Let’s campaign to bring them back!

NRPSI, the union, associations and others - we all have an enormous education task ahead in relation to police, courts and some colleagues. **Let’s not shirk the task!**



*Paul Tomlinson*  
13656