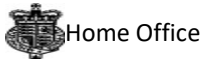


## Home Office Update

*Please see below the notification from the Home Office Head of Interpreter & Language Services (ILSU) sent to Home Office interpreters, and the policy paper - A response to an inspection of the Home Office's use of language services in the asylum process (accessible version) - Published 11 November 2020*



### Interpreter Update

Dear Home Office interpreters,

We have recently received a number of enquiries from interpreters relating to concerns around a published message from one of our external suppliers, thebigword. We are advised that the particular paragraph that is causing concern stipulates:

“All language service requirements for the Home Office were split across two Language Service Providers, but thebigword are now sole providers and receive 100% of all interpreting, translation and transcription work from all areas covered under the contract.”

We can confirm that the above extract relates to the historic externally procured interpreters services only and does not represent a change in our current arrangements with you as part of the internal pool of interpreters. Historically the Home Office have had in place two contract providers, primarily for telephone and translation services. The change is that we are now operating with one provider instead of two. The contract will run in sync with the internally developed and managed resource pool of interpreters as has historically been the case.

We have a proud history of managing and developing the internal resource pool and working with you, the interpreters to ensure the best possible service to our stakeholders. Your continued performance and professionalism is key to this delivery and we thank you for your continued patience during the difficult last few months. We are moving into an exciting time for language services and we are already making great innovative strides in adapting to the current situation with bookings numbers steadily increasing. Your role in this delivery is key – historically, presently and for future delivery.

We thank you and are very much looking forward to our continued working relationship. I hope the above addresses any concerns.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/response-to-an-inspection-of-the-home-offices-use-of-language-services-in-the-asylum-process/a-response-to-an-inspection-of-the-home-offices-use-of-language-services-in-the-asylum-process-accessible-version>

**Policy paper - A response to an inspection of the Home Office's use of language services in the asylum process (accessible version) - Published 11 November 2020**

The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) for his report. The Home Office is grateful to the ICIBI for the effort that he and his team have devoted to this inspection, and the attention which has been given to a wide range of complex and interrelated issues. Work is already underway to take forward the recommendations in this report to tackle the issues in a strategic and co-ordinated way.

This has included the formulation of a working group that has collected and analysed Home Office wide interpreter data, ensured the Language Services were in contract and mapped individual and collective interpreter requirements. The progress thus far will provide a strong base to the work that will be taken forward by the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship (BICS) Language Services Owner, following deeper strategic assessment.

The Department has accepted all three of the ICIBI's recommendations.

The Home Office response to the recommendations:

The Home Office should:

1. Appoint a BICS "owner" for language services, with accountability across BICS for the formulation and implementation of policies and processes, collection of data and performance monitoring, planning and delivery of the required resources and capabilities, risk management, internal and external communications, monitoring and management of contracted out services, and stakeholder engagement.

- 1.1. Accepted

- 1.2. Work commenced as part of a BICS wide mapping exercise on the use of language services. In December 2019 the Second Permanent Secretary appointed a lead within UKVI who commissioned a dedicated working group to undertake the initial mapping and to take forward actions ahead of appointing an Official owner. This enabled the owner to conduct a deeper assessment and initiate improvement work ahead of the Chief Inspector's findings with work ongoing.

- 1.3. The improvement work focuses on policy, process improvement, data collation, performance monitoring, interpreter resource utilisation, interpreter capability, risk management, communications, commercial management and stakeholder engagement.

- 1.4. Key achievements so far include significant steps to improve the commercial aspects of language services, introducing a new interpreter database which will support data collation and assurance. We will be looking to deliver a revised Code of Conduct for interpreters which will be published in November 2020 on the GOV.UK website.

2. Under the direction of the BICS “owner”, create, publish and resource a comprehensive programme of improvements to the provision and use of language services, with clear timelines and deliverables. Drawing on the findings from this inspection, this should include the identification of urgent tasks and “easy wins” as well as longer-term projects.

2.1. Accepted

2.2. We have a Programme to build in existing improvement work and deliver additional solutions that address the ICIBI’s recommendations. The Programme is supported by detailed plans, covering a multitude of activities to improve structure and governance, technology, system innovation, quality assurance, data capture, performance, policy, customer experience, risk management, commercial, language resourcing and language industry mapping. A central team managing the work has been in place since the Spring 2020.

3. Ensure that the risks and issues in relation to language services are fully and accurately reflected in the Risk Registers for the Home Office, for BICS, and for individual BICS directorates and business areas, and that mitigations and actions are regularly reviewed.

3.1. Accepted

3.2. A language services risk register, and process has now been implemented. This will be reviewed by BICS wide stakeholder leads monthly, with an appropriate structure for escalation of risks being coordinated via the appointed deputy directors command.

3.3. A risk management lead has been appointed who will provide ongoing dynamic risk assessment of language services BICS wide to ensure consistency and greater governance of emerging risks. The lead will report emerging risks via an already established structure accordingly.

On Sat, 14 Nov 2020 at 12:39, Klasiena Slaney <[klasienaslaney@gmail.com](mailto:klasienaslaney@gmail.com)> wrote:

*FYI: Please read this important report - it appears that the Home Office is making some changes based on the recommendations - HO interpreters have received a notification of 're-branding', something is going on but they haven't told us what the reasons are.*

The writer of the report: David Bolt, Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

Some extracts:

3.15 thebigword declined to share other data requested by inspectors, including about the qualifications held by its interpreters, citing “commercial sensitivity”. The original contract with thebigword was with the Crown Commercial Service. It was transferred to the Home Office in 2018, by which time it had already expired. ICIBI was told that the contract document could not be traced. If it agrees to a new contract with thebigword, the Home Office needs to remedy the current lopsided arrangement and put an effective

monitoring regime in place. It also needs to ensure that as a provider of services covered by the UK Borders Act 2007 Section 48, thebigword is not able to frustrate independent inspection.

5.25 Inspectors requested a list of interpreters available to the Home Office through thebigword, broken down by language, dialect and type of qualification. The Home Office was unable to provide this information,<sup>18</sup> and thebigword declined to share it due to commercial sensitivity, and also stated that it was unable to provide a definitive list “as they cover over 150 different languages and dialects and it frequently changes”. However, inspectors were told that some thebigword interpreters were listed on the CIU database, having signed up to both.

7.12 The Home Office was “unable to provide” inspectors with thebigword charging rates “as Supplier charging rates for services is (sic) commercially sensitive and cannot be divulged to third parties in line with contractual agreements with suppliers”. However, the per minute rates were quoted in Border Force guidance available on the Home Office’s internal intranet (Horizon). Comparing these to published Home Office interpreter telephone rates, thebigword appeared to be cheaper for calls of less than 20 minutes (or 40 minutes between 00.00 and 08.00). Screening interviews are likely to need longer than 20 minutes, but other Border Force business requiring interpretation may be completed more quickly.