

The Future of Independent Registration and Regulation of Public Services Interpreting

Would you accept an unregistered and unregulated doctor diagnosing your ailments? Of course not. Would you accept a barrister acting on your behalf in a trial or bail hearing who has only been approved by a commercial organisation whose primary concern is maximising profits? I very much doubt it. So why accept the services of an interpreter without the appropriate Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) in Health or Law who is not independently registered and regulated?

There is no reason why anyone should tolerate this when it is possible to work with a professional and qualified public service interpreter who has at least 400 hours of experience, checked and accredited by *the* independent, not-for-profit Regulator of spoken word public service interpreting.

While it is not yet mandatory for registered and regulated interpreters to be used by the public services, there are, thankfully, public sector organisations in the UK that act as if it were. One such example is the Metropolitan Police Service, where independent accreditation, registration and regulation of the interpreting professionals they work with is valued and considered vital, and where the professional conduct of interpreters and any arising disciplinary matters are handled totally independently and there is a transparent approach to managing those interpreters who act on behalf of the public in London's police custody suites.

However, although such organisations are the ideal, they are sadly the exception to the rule. In order to better protect the public, we need government and public sector organisations more widely to recognise the critical importance of independent regulation and the registration of those spoken word language professionals serving the public sector.

To support the transformation of the language service provision in the public sector and to meet future challenges demands a serious re-evaluation of the disjointed and inadequate ways in which public sector organisations approach the provision of interpreting services. Regulation and registration of the language services provision needs to be embraced and encouraged to be more independent, more transparent and more focused on quality (over supply and cost). What is the point in paying for something that is not fit for purpose?

Independent registration and regulation motivates and incentivises government, the public sector and those private companies in the ecosystem to behave in an ethically bound, socially responsible manner. Independent registration and regulation is the only means of holding those in positions of authority to account. The alternative is for them to be able to set and manipulate standards to suit them. Independent registration and regulation ensures commercial organisations cannot abuse responsibilities devolved to them in their drive for profits, dividends and shareholder value. Without recognition of the value of independent registration and regulation in the UK, quality standards slip, with supply and cost issues outweighing quality issues.

Such independent registration and regulation of professional spoken word public service professionals has been provided by the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) in the UK for the last 27 years. With a National Register of spoken word interpreters, who abide by a Code of Professional Conduct written specifically for their profession, which is underpinned by a disciplinary process that is fit for purpose, the UK has been a leading light in providing equal access to its public services and, concomitantly, in fighting discrimination and prejudice. With NRPSI as a national asset, the UK has the tool to ensure those who cannot speak English and are resident in the UK and those working in the public sector can access the high quality, professional language services needed to ensure that complex legal and health issues are managed effectively and efficiently.

Continued maintenance and development of such professionalism supports ethics and encourages the highest sector standards, notwithstanding what many believe to have been negative financial pressures since austerity was imposed in the UK in 2012. Public trust lies in independent regulation, and in the assurance that the professionals are being regulated by *the* independent body, who has no interest in maximising revenue from government contracts or reducing costs by paying interpreters low engagement fees.

Only by a commitment to independent registration and regulation of the public service interpreting profession and the safeguarding of its standards can stakeholders be assured that their interests in preserving the delivery of language services continue to be founded on long-term sustainability. Unlike the government and public sector organisations who are concerned with achieving immediate supply and financial targets, or the commercial contractors who are concerned with annual short-term profit-taking and dividend payouts, independent registration and regulation puts standards first, puts professionalism first and, critically, puts the public first by holding those who threaten those standards to account.

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