

# National Police Interpreter of the Year Awards 2023

On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023 NRPSI attended the 1st National Police Interpreter of the Year Awards at the National Police Language Services Conference, organised by the national lead for language services, the Leicestershire Police. Special thanks to the management team of the Dynamic Purchasing System, headed by Ian Fraser, and the PAIT scheme, managed by Mark Lewis.

Baroness Cousins delivered the key note address, which is published in full below. The awards ceremony, dedicated to professionalism and interpreters who were nominated by police forces and agencies, was a powerful reminder of the work conducted by language practitioners.

Congratulations to the winners and runners-up:

Spoken Interpreter of the Year is **Samira Hajmi**, NRPSI registration number 16241; on the National Register since March 2012

Runner Up is **Shefki Bytyqi**, NRPSI registration number 11589; on the National Register since November 2001

The Simon Cole Award for Excellence in Police Interpreting is **Karina Stefanescu**, NRPSI registration number 12270; on the National Register since September 2003



Runner up for the Simon Cole Award for Excellence in Police Interpreting is Monica Iftime and Ahmad Najim is commended by the judges for Spoken Interpreter of the Year



Awards were also given for Non-Spoken Interpreter of the Year: winner Alison Gilchrist; and runner up, Lesley Weatherson.

CPD sessions were led by Detective Jenni Heggs with Monica Iftime describing the complex issues involved in a particularly intricate case and by Paul Howkaluk from DA Languages reviewing statement taking in police settings.



**Keynote speech delivered by Baroness Coussins at the  
National Police Interpreter of the year Awards 2023, held at the  
National Police Language Services Conference**

*Good morning and a very big thank you for inviting me to be part of this important conference and awards ceremony.*

*I'm delighted to have the opportunity to meet with a group of such distinguished linguists and managers of highly specialised language services. I am a languages graduate myself and call myself a linguist, but I am acutely aware that my skills are very amateur indeed compared to yours, despite some decades ago actually having worked and volunteered as an interpreter now and again.*

*But I am glad to have the platform of the all party parliamentary group on modern languages, not only to promote the teaching and learning of languages but to sing the praises of linguists. The strategic importance of linguists goes largely unnoticed and unsung, – especially in your field of law enforcement and the administration of justice—despite being so vital, vital to the quality of public services, to the*

*quality of justice and to human rights. You can almost count on headlines when things go wrong, but the daily competent exercise of your specialist and professional skills is largely hidden and yet every year in England and Wales public service interpreters attend about 66,000 face to face assignments for police forces, often in out of the way places at unsociable times.*

*Other disciplines, such as classics, science and history, have thrown up high profile media figures and glossy, popular TV programmes. But there are no TV linguists to help fire up the interest of the next generation in learning a language. I think that it's because language and the cultural knowledge that goes with it is not only an academic and intellectual discipline in its own right, it's also a vital enabling ingredient running through all other disciplines. So people don't quite know where to place language skills and they become invisible.*

*The part of the criminal justice system which has come most under the spotlight of media and political scrutiny because of its failures and shortcomings with the provision of interpreters has been the courts and tribunal system. And as I'm sure you will all be aware, the Ministry of Justice is currently conducting a thorough, independent review of the qualifications and experience required of court interpreters, so that the mistakes and even scandals we have seen in the past do not continue.*

*To summarise briefly, court interpreters currently come from the MOJ's register and are delivered via outsourced private companies, in a way that can be inadequate, often very seriously inadequate, leading to mistakes at best, miscarriages of justice at worst, and an easy way for fake interpreters to present themselves. Too often, hearings need to be abandoned and expensively rescheduled, sometimes with defendants kept on remand for longer, all at public expense.*

*I'm sure everyone would agree that if they were having heart surgery, or even having their tonsils out, you would expect the surgeon to have more than a GCSE in Biology. And if you were passengers in an aeroplane, you wouldn't expect the pilot just to have a geography degree and know roughly which way was south. And you would not expect your car to be serviced by a mechanic whose only proven competence was in the use of a tin opener. And yet, up to now, you have been able to get onto the MOJ's Register of approved interpreters simply by having a GCSE pass, or a low level 2 week foundation course, or just by being bilingual even if you've never set foot in a court before.*

*Of course the landmark case which first drew significant attention to the problems with court interpreters illustrated the far, far more serious and potentially life-changing implications of using un- or under-qualified interpreters in the most serious and complex cases. This was where a woman accused of murder found herself in court with an interpreter who didn't know the difference between murder and manslaughter.*

*So we wait to see how the MOJ will improve their system, and I believe the signs are encouraging, with a great deal of attention being paid to the consensus amongst the specialist professional bodies that the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting at Level 6 should be more prominently acknowledged. This is supported by the National Register of PSIs, the Chartered Institute of Linguists, the Association of Police*

*and Court Interpreters and, of course, the Police Approved Interpreters and Translators Scheme, known affectionately to us all as PAIT.*

*And the good news is that while all the controversy and agonising has been going on in the MOJ, the police, I am pleased and proud to say, have been decisively ahead of the game.*

*PAIT has blazed a trail for high standards which respect all parties involved, including the interpreters themselves, through a dynamic purchasing system, which combined with the National Register of PSIs, could be a really effective model for the courts too. Not only is Level 6 a requirement, but also 400 hours of experience.*

*The importance of experience as a crucial component of a minimum standard, rather than a qualification alone, has been starkly illustrated by the results of spot checks conducted on behalf of the MOJ by The Language Shop, who carried out checks on 118 interpreters allocated from the MOJ's register. An alarming 50% of them failed the check's criteria, and 39 out of these 59 failures were people who did have the Level 6 Diploma, which demonstrates that what is needed is qualification plus experience. Whether we're talking about the courts or the police, it's fair I think to expect that the balance between qualification level and extent of practical experience might justifiably vary according to the type and complexity of a case, which could range from the contested parking ticket to charges of murder, rape or terrorism.*

*There are several other features of the PAIT scheme and the process that led up to its launch in 2020 that I want to mention as I think they help to mark it out as a trailblazer scheme which has set a national standard that others in the public sector should recognise and emulate.*

*The first is consultation. When contracting out became the norm, interpreters themselves found they were out in the cold, with agencies and individual police forces setting rates of pay and other terms and conditions with no reference to the interpreters. But in 2017, Ian Fraser started an extended period of consultation about setting up a police specific procurement process for language services. Representative bodies including the NRPSI all contributed, and the dynamic purchasing system was born.*

*But the process and culture of consultation didn't stop there. Mark Lewis was recruited to manage contracts and advise on day to day operational issues, and part of this is holding regular meetings with an independent advisory group of all relevant stakeholders in the field.*

*Secondly, there are genuine and efficient mechanisms in place for the assurance of standards and behaviour, through the PAIT Code of Conduct and then PAIT Discipline Process.*

*Thirdly, the external provider agencies are monitored and regulated, with an audit every 11 months of everything from training to making sure you are all paid on time. Interpreters and interpreter representative bodies have access to Mark if they believe they have been unfairly treated by an agency, and an investigation will take place. I believe all these factors add up to the confidence that the police have gone the extra mile in creating a level of engagement that is unprecedented in the UK languages*

*services sector. Instead of a hotchpotch of different police forces operating different systems, we now have most police regions in the UK mandating the same minimum hourly rate that must be paid to the interpreter by the agency. Cancellation fees and travel costs are also becoming more standardised and Mark and Ian are working hard with suppliers to ensure a completely consistent package of terms and conditions across the whole country.*

*Looking forward, there are other arguably even more controversial issues on the horizon. One is the extent to which the use of video interpreting and indeed technology more generally is increasing. Video interpreting has its pros and cons, and the jury is out. But in the meantime, Mark has been characteristically proactive and issued interim guidance on remote interpreting to all police forces so that there is at least a degree of standardisation.*

*As for artificial intelligence and machine translation, while it undoubtedly has its place, it can never replace humans when it comes to nuance, cultural sensitivity and complex understanding or meaning, and this will another huge challenge for PAIT to face up to.*

*You might have seen the amusing story that made the media headlines a few months ago to illustrate the pitfalls of turning to google. A supermarket in Wales was re-doing all its signage above the aisles and one of the new categories it had to put up a sign for in Welsh as well as English was alcohol free drinks. Well, the machine wasn't very well up on the importance of word order and it turned out that the Welsh version said 'free alcohol' instead of 'alcohol free'.*

*We can only shudder to think of what the infinitely more serious consequences might be if machines not people were doing the translation and interpreting for soldiers on deployment, or if algorithms rather than specialist linguists like you were translating what might be crucial detailed information about terrorists or people traffickers.*





*I am confident that with the watchwords of consultation and consistency, not to mention quality, we will see PAIT lead the way once more.*

*Another issue which is not so much in the future but challenging us right now in post-Brexit Britain is the supply chain for public service interpreters.*

*The All Party Languages Group was successful in persuading the government to put all modern language teachers on the Shortage Occupations List for immigration purposes, and I strongly believe that public services interpreters should be added to the list as well and will continue to press Ministers on this point. About a third of PSIs are EU nationals, and in an even more precarious position than teachers, as most of you work on a freelance basis so have no formal employer to act as sponsors. Watch this space. Before I finish and sit down, I hope you will indulge me if I take a couple of minutes finally to paint a bigger and broader canvass to illustrate with just a clouple of examples the importance of and challenges for interpreters and translators globally.*

*I have been working with a splendid international NGO called Translators Without Borders, who have provided interpreters and translators to work alongside the health professionals in Sierra Leone and other countries where the ebola crisis has broken out.*

*Language was one of the main difficulties faced by humanitarian workers. Language is not usually seen as a priority in emergency responses and as a result, misinformation and panic can spread quickly.*

*Information was available mainly in English or French, but only a minority of the people affected spoke either of these. In Sierra Leone, only 13% of women understand English. Most Sierra Leoneans, particularly in rural areas, speak Krio, Mende and Themne. This led to important knowledge gaps. So TWB developed its Words of Relief project, the first translation crisis relief network in the world.*

*Hundreds of ebola-related items were translated and disseminated, including posters, videos, cartoons and maps.*

*The main problem was getting content from the aid agencies. TWB believes this is partly due to aid organisations being stretched too thinly during the crisis, as well as a lack of incentive because use of local languages is not one of the effectiveness measures for projects.*

*The other campaign I am involved with that I wanted to mention and thought you'd be interested in is to do with the need for more protection for interpreters working in conflict zones. There is a United Nations Security Council resolution on the protection of journalists in conflict zones, but nothing equivalent for civilian interpreters. Together with the NGO Red T and various professional bodies representing the interests of interpreters and translators, I have been calling for a parallel Resolution on the protection of interpreters. After all, at the end of a conflict, journalists go home, but interpreters on the whole remain*

*there because they are locals, and they are frequently vulnerable to kidnap, threats, torture and death from parties who perceive that they have been working with the enemy in the conflict. The most prominent example at the moment are the Afghan interpreters who have been working with the British armed forces and many of whom have been subject to intimidation and worse from the Taliban. The Geneva Conventions on protection of civilians is clearly inadequate for the protection of civilian interpreters, who are unsung heroes, often the victims of distrust, discrimination and threats from all sides; indeed, there is a syndrome known as the translator-traitor mentality, in other words the assumption that the local, civilian translator or interpreter isn't doing a neutral, professional job but must be working for the other side, whoever that happens to be. Yet their linguistic skills and cultural knowledge are often the very things which enable the uniformed troops or the journalists to do their job. So, on behalf of your fellow linguists working in conflict zones around the world, I hope you will wish me luck with that campaign!*

*Let me conclude by offering you all my thanks for the vital work you do, which I know at times can also be very harrowing, dealing with some of the most challenging scenarios it is possible to witness, such as child murder, the Grenfell fire, trafficking and terrorism. And my thanks and congratulations also to Ian, Mark and all the others who helped to create the PAIT scheme, and especially for having the foresight and generosity to establish the first Awards Ceremony here today.*



ENDS