

Letter from a NRPST Registrant to their MP

See below a letter from Robin Humphrey to his MP lobbying for insourcing of language services in the Ministry of Justice. Please add your voice if you are concerned about continued outsourcing of interpreting and translation in the courts:

Dear Mr Shastri-Hurst,

Outsourcing provision of HMCTS interpreters, again!

I am a professional interpreter soon to be registered on the National Register of Public Service Interpreters. I have interpreted for police, counter terrorism units and the Home Office asylum system for over 20 years. I am fully qualified to do what I do. I will soon obtain yet more professional qualifications in the form of a DPSI Law. I have decided to contact you directly to ask you to speak to the current government to seek a reconsideration of the decision to outsource the provision of HMCTS interpreters again. The decision to implement a new Framework was taken unilaterally by the MoJ without any meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the NRPSI, the non-statutory regulator of public service interpreters.

I wish to inform you that I will not work under another Framework and ask you to consider a different model. The current model is fundamentally flawed. It is not serving justice or the taxpayer. We cannot make a living on its unfavourable terms and conditions. No other profession has been treated as unfairly as HMCTS interpreters, who provide an invaluable service to the Ministry of Justice. Without us, court hearings could not go ahead and justice could not be delivered. Without interpreters, the asylum system would grind to a halt. I know for certain that in the past few months the Home Office has *cracked the whip* so to speak and is processing an enormous number of asylum requests. Speak to the government on my behalf – that is what an Opposition is meant to do, in part – and tell them just how quickly the asylum system of the UK will grind to a halt overnight if labour were to be withdrawn by interpreters.

Moving back to the HMCTS, (which is a different arrangement altogether than the Home Office), the outsourcing has led to our pay being reduced by some 70%. The Big Word has made our working conditions intolerable. In 2019, many of us lost significant sums of money when the Big Word's subcontractor, Debonair Languages, went bankrupt and did not pay us for the work we accepted in good faith. Debonair Languages was a MOJ approved subcontractor, yet nobody protected us from the losses we suffered after the company went bankrupt.

Since the imposition of the flawed Word Synk application on us by the Big Word, many interpreters have not been paid for their work and now refuse to take jobs from your contractor. Courts are struggling to get interpreters for hearings and many cases have to be adjourned. This is aggravating the backlog of court cases.

For qualified interpreters, such adverse terms and conditions make the profession non-viable. Substituting interpreters with Level 6 interpreting qualifications with inadequately qualified bilinguals should, however, never be considered a bona fide option as this can lead to miscarriages of justice and cases collapsing at a significant cost to the taxpayer.

I ask you to consider a different model based on insourcing the contract. Since 2012, new technology has emerged that would enable HMCTS to operate the service via an automated application, which would significantly reduce the time spent by HMCTS employees on sourcing an interpreter. Prior to 2012, listings officers had to phone individual interpreters and this time-consuming process was quoted as one of the reasons for outsourcing the service to a single contractor. Only interpreters with OFQUAL accredited Level 6 interpreting qualifications and appropriate security clearances would have access to the portal. There would be no need for a separate costly quality control contract. The application would include settings, which would offer bookings based on interpreters' location, which would save travel costs for the MOJ. That feature was part of the Capita application created more than 10 years ago. Adequate rates would eliminate the need for coordinators as interpreters would accept the bookings without having to haggle over the rates.

A new Framework will lead to more professional interpreters leaving interpreting and seeking alternative careers. This will have a further detrimental impact on HMCTS operations, standards of interpreting and the administration of justice.

I feel you would benefit by knowing more about why the NRPSI exists, or rather how it came about. You can read here about R v Iqbal Begum. It's important and I would ask you kindly to spend time reading this.

https://www.nrpsi.org.uk/downloads/NRPSI_Our_Strategy_2019-2021.pdf

Your predecessor, Mr Knight, received many letters from me and it is your responsibility as my MP to carry on representing the interests of your constituents, whatever their political persuasion. I'll never ever vote Conservative in my life. NEVER! But that does not stop me asking you to do what is right, which is to work hard to have this Framework agreement decision changed – now!

Regards,

ROBIN

ENDS

14th October 2024