250909 Grand Committee Interpreting Services in the Courts (Public Services Committee Report)

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Interpreting Services in the Courts (Public Services Committee Report)
Volume 848: debated on Tuesday 9 September 2025
Sep 9 2025
Motion to Take Note
3.45pm
Moved by

Baroness Morris of Yardley

Share this specific contribution
That the Grand Committee takes note of the Report from the Public Services Committee *Lost in translation? Interpreting services in the courts* (2nd Report, HL Paper 87).

Baroness Morris of Yardley
(Lab)

Share this specific contribution
My Lords, I am pleased to introduce this debate on the Public Services Committee's report, *Lost in Translation? Interpreting Services in the Courts*. Before doing so, I congratulate the new Minister on her appointment. I understand that this is the first of her parliamentary appearances; we are pleased about that. We have set a bit of a habit here because, when Minister Sackman came to speak to our committee, she had been in her post for two weeks, so we had exactly the same situation. The only good news from that Minister's point of view, I suppose, is that she is still there, which stands us in good stead in terms of the length of service of the Minister here. We welcome the Minister to her post and we hope that she will take the opportunity to concentrate and focus on this, her first report, to see whether we can make a real difference.
I begin by thanking our committee team: Dan Hepworth; Tom Burke; Claire Coast-Smith; Clayton Gurney; Gemma Swan, who was our POST student and was very good; and Lara Orija. I also thank the officials at the MoJ and the Courts Service, who were unstintingly helpful and timely; the committee cannot say that about every government department, so we are very grateful. Although we have not always agreed with them, we have appreciated the working partnership that they have had with our committee clerk and their team.
This is an important part of the justice system, but it is not a large part. There will be some courts that do not make much use of translators, and there will be some for whom it is an everyday occurrence. Together, there are 17,000 bookings a month in more than 150 possible languages, so, for the people whose lives and cases are affected by this issue, it is absolutely

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crucial and 100% important. If it goes wrong, it not only has an impact on the people concerned, such as the accused and defendants, but leads to an unravelling in the way in which the courts work in terms of delayed cases and having to hear cases again.

The committee does not underestimate the difficulty of this service. If we had been talking about this 10, 15 or 20 years ago, the languages that were used most would have been different from what they are now. This is a changing game and I appreciate that that must make it difficult to make sure that the right people with the right skills are in the right place at the right time. The way in which the judicial system works means that 27% of the bookings are made only 24 hours before a case is heard, with 9% made only three hours before. That is difficult. To make that work efficiently and effectively, you need to be on top of the administration and you need to have a good cadre of people to call on.

I pay tribute to the translators. They are a hugely committed and talented group of people. The evidence that they gave us, particularly in the round tables we held with them, was important; indeed, it was instrumental in our findings. Although members of the committee who will speak today and the report have their criticisms, they are not of the translators but of the system. That is an important point to make.

The strange thing about this inquiry was that, as one often finds, it was like talking to groups of people who are describing totally different things. You think, "Unless we can get to the point where they're describing the same thing, no progress will be made". What we got here, in terms of differences of opinion, was the Minister saying, "It's not perfect but it's doing a solid job. There's a low number of complaints and a high fulfilment rate". We also had thebigword—the contractor that runs the service—saying that things were done

"consistently within the minimum service rates"

when describing how it works. However, let us look at the lawyers—the other bit of the judicial system—who work on that. The Bar Council said:

"Although there are committed and talented *interpreters* … the overall standard is not acceptable and not delivering justice".

The Magistrates' Association noted

"the frequent failure to book *interpreters*, leading to delays".

If we then talk to the translators, they describe a set of circumstances that are inappropriate for any group of workers, let alone for people with such a key role in one of our most important public services. I imagine that some members of the Select Committee, and others speaking here today, will talk about the conditions for *interpreters*, because that underpins a lot of what is going wrong in the service.

I do not want to go over the facts and figures. Instead, I will give two examples from the *interpreters* who gave evidence, which have stayed in my mind and which sum up what happens. The first was about not being valued, which came from an interpreter in response in an unrelated question; we did not ask a question about that. I did not realise that if an interpreter goes to the court to do their job, they queue with the public and wait until the doors to the public are open before they get into the court. Everyone else connected with the case—the judges, barristers, magistrates and court

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clerks—goes in through the staff entrance. That is utterly appalling and sums up what is wrong with the culture. Just think what message that gives about their importance and value. Imagine how that

hampers their job: if they are at the end of the queue, the time that they might have had—for example, to talk to the barrister, to meet their client or to check some legal nicety—is absolutely gone.

I looked at the Minister's MoJ staff who are present for this debate today. There are four of them; I could not spot the fourth, but at least two have day passes. They have not been right the way through the security system. They do not have passes like the rest of their staff—only the one at the end has a full pass; the others have day passes. If the MoJ can provide day passes for their staff to support them in this Committee, why can they not arrange for the courts to organise day passes for *interpreters* to do their job effectively with the people with whom they work?

The second example was about pay. It was the story of one man who had to travel a long way to do his job; I think it was in Wales. He had a language that was not in frequent use. Because of the timing of the case, he booked trains to go and to come back, and they had to be at peak times; I think he was going from London to Cardiff. The night before, the case was cancelled. He got one hour's pay, but he did not get the travel cost, and so the one hour's pay did not cover the cost of his train fare. Why would he do it again? Why would he respond to any request to do that again?

Those examples are anecdotal, but they are evidence. Those issues are repeated time and time again. There are specific problems with pay and travel, but the overall issues always come down to the system's view of the role that these people play in our court system—and that is what has to change.

We therefore have a difference of view. We have people in the same system who are meant to be jointly delivering the same service, but who describe that service in very different ways. It is difficult to work out why that is the case. One reason is that the data and the quality system do not provide all the accurate information that is needed. If you look at the figures, you could say that they are not bad; you could say that there has been an improvement in the last quarter or that there has been a complaint in only 1% of cases. However, if you look deeper at the figures, you will see that many statistics do not get reported.

There are also inconsistencies and contradictions in that data; I will mention just two. First, we never got an answer to the question as to why the unfulfilled requests are higher than the number of ineffective trials. If they did not get an interpreter, how did the case go ahead? Who did they use to do the interpretation? Secondly, we never got an answer to the question as to why off-contract bookings are higher than the number of unfulfilled requests. You are not meant to go to an off-contract booking unless you cannot fill the role with someone from the primary contractor, so how did that also go wrong?

On the quality control system and 1% level of complaints, quite honestly the Bar Council and magistrates were bewildered that they should ever finish a case at

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lunchtime, rush off to the next case in the afternoon and have time to make a complaint that the interpreter had not turned up in between. That data is not capturing the reality of what is happening in the interpretation service. We cannot rely on those figures and it is no good quoting them back and saying that all is well in the world of courts and *interpreters*. The Government have to ask themselves the difficult questions.

We welcome some of the Government's responses, including more coherent sets of data, refreshed guidance, improved welfare provision and strengthening safeguarding proposals. We welcome all those. There is a bit of me that thinks that that was the easy bit and a lot of me that thinks that the difficult bits

were not responded to as positively as that. We welcome their commitment to Ann Carlisle's report on qualifications, but it means that 80% of cases will need level 6 qualifications and 20% will need level 3. I have heard nothing yet to reassure me that the system, thebigword and the contractors will have anything place in as quick a time as is necessary.

I turn now to the contract, because it is on the contract that all rests. The reason we did not get answers on pay, conditions and travel expenses is that every answer from the department is, "It's in the contract. It's up to the contractor. It's up to whoever wins the contract". We have to remember that, prior to 2012, it was delivered centrally as a national agreement. This contracting and outsourcing has not had an easy start. It did not go well in 2012—the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Commission have made that point—and the present contract sits in that context. It had to be very good to wipe from people's minds that memory of a very bad start.

I will talk a bit about the problems with contracting out and why this is one of the sources of what is going wrong. I will give one example, which ties in with the other things that we have talked about. The contract was let to this provider in 2016. There has been no pay increase for *interpreters* since then—not one pay increase from 2016 until now. I do not know another group of workers for whom that is the case. We are not against outsourcing, or the market, but we are against outsourcing done badly. That is an important point that the committee was keen to make. The contract allows the MoJ and the courts to distance themselves from the reality of what is happening on the ground.

In their responses, the Government said that suppliers are best placed to set rules, suppliers are the experts and suppliers have gone in for dynamic pricing. This is a public service. You can outsource and you can let the market guide you, but if you run a public service, you cannot abdicate your responsibility for making sure that it is universally good and delivering an excellent level of provision for every single person whose life it protects. That is why they cannot answer on pay and travel costs. We have had no response at all other than, "It is going to be left to the market, and we trust the provider".

I just gently say to the Minister that I hope that, before that contract is signed, she has at least two assurances. An inflation increase has been guaranteed in the contract year on year but, despite our best efforts, we have no assurance that that increase will be

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paid to the translators as a salary increase. Be absolutely sure, before it is signed, that that is an agreement to pay a salary increase and not just to pay the successful contractor more.

I also want to know what the percentage of profit is on the contract compared to the amount going to running the service. I worry about dynamic pricing, which was a bit of a strange phrase until it started being used for pop concerts. My understanding of dynamic pricing is that somebody always loses. That is the nature of it. I want to know who the losers are in the dynamic pricing that the ministry is quite happy to use here.

This is important. The contract will go until 2030. Whatever is decided cannot be changed between now and the end of this decade. I very much hope that the Minister, given her background, what I know of her and that this is her first debate, will want to look at this contract again. I know that it is at the negotiation stage, but please do not sign it off as a job already done. Please seize it as an opportunity of perhaps doing something better. I am delighted to be able to move the Motion on this report and look forward to people's contributions.

4.00pm

Lord Blencathra
(Con)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, I congratulate our chair, the noble Baroness, Lady Morris of Yardley, for an excellent summary of our report and the flaws that we found in the court interpretation system. I also welcome the Minister to her position. I am looking forward to hearing what she has to say. It is a pity that at her first official outing she will defend some of the things that we found indefensible but, no doubt, she will make an excellent job of it.

The overwhelming conclusion that we all reached is summed up in paragraph 41 of our report:

"There is a clear disconnect between what the government hopes is happening, what the companies contracted to deliver the services believe is happening, and what frontline *interpreters* and legal professionals report is happening with interpreting services in the courts".

That message came through time and time again. We had evidence that *interpreters* and translators can lose significant amounts of money, with limited options to find alternative work when cases are delayed or cancelled. The noble Baroness, Lady Morris, described some of those. Current provisions such as the two-hour guaranteed payment and cancellation payments are not adequate, especially when *interpreters* are booked for extended periods of time.

However, the MoJ view is that the two-hour minimum booking provides a balance between attracting and supporting *interpreters* to take bookings while maintaining value for money for the MoJ. Of course, it certainly provides value for the MoJ but at the expense of *interpreters*, who can lose a whole day's pay.

We were critical of data collection, which we felt did not present a full picture of the problems of interpretation in the courts and could lead or had led to miscarriages of justice. The MoJ view was that there were no known instances of miscarriages of justice because of flaws in interpretation. But if you have inadequate data to begin with, how on earth can

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you tell? Also, if the interpreter is misinterpreting, who is to know? The MoJ view is that it is up to the judge and lawyers to complain about interpretation faults. But the dynamics of the court system is that unless the interpreter is, say, rolling around stone drunk or incapable, no one will check that the interpreted words are exactly right.

The MoJ says that it is up to the courts to manage all aspects of the case. That leads to the innate judicial arrogance that we see in the treatment of *interpreters*, who are regarded as of little consequence in the courts. For example, on the treatment of the interpreter workforce, we said that in some cases *interpreters* are not treated as professionals working within the court and are not considered key members in the running of the court. *Interpreters* are treated like members of the public and are not kept up to date on court logistics. Furthermore, we said that *interpreters* are not given appropriate information about potentially long, complex or technical court cases that may require extra preparation and resources by the interpreter ahead of time.

We said in our report that the Government should provide guidance to ensure that *interpreters*' key role in court proceedings is recognised and that His Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service provides information about cases ahead of time in order to improve *interpreters*' well-being and ensure that they can make

necessary preparations. *Interpreters* told us that the police, in the main, treated them far better than the lawyers in the courts. In particular, the police would brief *interpreters* in advance that there might be, say, technical forensic terms to be translated so that they could swot up beforehand—no such treatment in the courts.

I accept that in a court where no interpretation is required, the most important people in the room are the judge and the lawyers questioning the accused and the witnesses. But where an interpreter is used, that interpreter becomes by far the most important person in the court. It is the interpreter who will translate the lawyers' questions for the witness or the accused and then translate back the answers. In those cases, no one is more important than the *interpreters* and they should be given the respect and facilities that they need, like any of the lawyers, and not treated like a tea lady. Saying that it is up to the judge to manage the court is not good enough. *Interpreters* must be given advance warning of the broad nature of the case, whether it is a violent crime with technical medical forensic terms, or financial crime with its own vocabulary, or any other specialist case.

We said that the Government should introduce detailed audio equipment, including sound booths for *interpreters*, as part of court refurbishments, and provide appropriate portable equipment for unrefurbished courts. I accept that the main obstacle here is cost and that many courts would need some fairly extensive investment in audio technology. But the price of that kit is falling all the time and the quality is increasing exponentially.

Now the Ministry of Justice is in favour of it, but I wonder whether it is facing lawyer pushback and not going flat-out on this technology. I say that because the MoJ response, in paragraph 18.5, was:

"We will review the use of this equipment and promote its use where appropriate, within a 6-month period".

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That rather contradicts its comments in the preceding paragraph that

"the majority of courts and tribunals have the tools to support remote attendance should that be appropriate, and we are improving the equipment to enable this more widely".

Then there is the statement that

"the decision on whether remote interpreting can be utilised in a hearing remains for the judiciary".

Why? On what basis does a judge make a decision not to use remote interpreting facilities? Is it based on his technical analysis of the quality of the recordings or the locations, or on his personal preference that he does not like it and wants to see the bodies in court?

I suggest that this is not a decision for a judge. The Ministry of Justice must do a technical assessment of courts and pronounce which ones have good enough audio equipment, and also at the interpreter ends, for remote to be used at all times in that courtroom. It should be a technical assessment for the MoJ to make, not a judge.

In conclusion, the impressions I got from the MoJ were twofold: first, a fear of challenging old-fashioned judicial and lawyer behaviour that is causing inefficiencies. We have not finished taking evidence or written our report yet, but we are doing an inquiry at the moment and courts are able to see and hear top-quality digital audio and video recordings of police interviews. But the lawyers and the CPS insist on having them transcribed and then act them out in court. The technology is a million times better than in 1980, but the courts are still stuck in their Rumpole of the Bailey time warp.

The other impression I get is that the MoJ thought that it was doing everything rather well and right: that it knew what it was doing and there were no real problems with interpretation, or the concerns raised by *interpreters*. As we say in our report, and I conclude with my opening remarks, this investigation revealed a disconnect between what the MoJ thought it was buying, what the providers thought they were supplying and what the *interpreters* were having to do on the ground. That disconnect still prevails, I am afraid.
4.07pm

Lord Shipley
(LD)

Share this specific contribution
My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, who identified so many of the problems in the courts system that impact on the interpreting service. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Morris of Yardley, for chairing our inquiry so effectively and for having explained clearly the conclusions we reached as a committee. I thank too those who gave evidence to us and the committee team who did the research and drafted our report so comprehensively.
I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, who said to the Minister at the end of her speech that the Minister should not sign off the new contract as a job already done, on the grounds that it is not. I concur with that.
I thought when we started our work that we would learn of cases of miscarriage of justice, or potential miscarriages of justice, caused by poor interpretation. But it did not turn out like that, because the evidence is not collected through effective quality-assurance
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systems to tell us the answer. Those providing the service think it runs well and those delivering the service—the *interpreters* doing the work—generally speaking do not.
From the *interpreters*, we heard too many examples of poor treatment. Some travelled long distances to find trials cancelled without fair remuneration for their time and travel costs. There were many complaints of poor pay rates and inadequate increases for inflation over the period of the outsourced contract. It is no surprise that interpreting the courts is not seen as a desirable career path for many *interpreters* to develop.
When the Government outsourced the contract 10 years ago, it undoubtedly reduced costs but—I concluded, as we listened to the evidence—this was to the disbenefit of *interpreters* and led to poorer service delivery overall. For example, in the first nine months of 2024, there were over 600 trial postponements because of a lack of interpreter support. As the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, explained, concerns were expressed to us by the Bar Council and the Law Society, which told us that the overall quality and number of *interpreters* were insufficient. This meant that there could be a risk to public trust in the justice system. The Bar Council also told us that there had been a decline in the quality of the service in recent years.
For that reason, those pressing for a mandatory qualification for *interpreters* at higher levels than presently apply must be right. It must also be right for pay rates for *interpreters* to increase in line with the level of qualification held. High-quality *interpreters* should not have to look for off-contract court

interpretation jobs, which may offer twice as much as they might receive for a normal contract job. I do not think that GCSE level 3 is sufficient for a court interpreter and I think that the Government need to agree minimum pay rates for *interpreters* to ensure that what they receive is fair and reasonable.
Court *interpreters* should also be treated as professionals. We have heard quite a bit about that already from the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, and the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra. However, I too was concerned to hear that working in police stations was seen as more welcoming, with a room to wait in and a proper welcome. In the courts, they are being treated as a member of the general public. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, who said that this was just not acceptable.
I cannot recall any witness to our inquiry saying that the system worked well. The recent increase to the two-hour minimum payment for an interpreter, however long or short the case, is welcome, but the Government have an obligation to address poor pay rates generally and to drive up quality. They need to deliver stronger quality assurance, better statistics and better pay rates to give us confidence in the courts' interpreting services.
At the very end of her introductory speech, the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, asked the Minister whether something might be said, either in reply or perhaps later, on the profit levels deriving from the contract and the role of dynamic pricing. When we took evidence, I got the impression, and still have the impression, that too much is hidden behind the scenes. It is not public information and I believe that the public have an entitlement to know it.
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4.13pm

Lord Burnett of Maldon
(CB)

Share this specific contribution
My Lords, I start by thanking the committee en bloc for the important work that it has done in looking at this subject which, as has already been observed, is something of a Cinderella in the justice system. I also thank the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, for her overview and introduction to the work of the committee. It is a particular pleasure to see the noble Baroness, Lady Levitt, in her place on her first outing as Minister. She brings enormously wide experience of the criminal law, in particular from sitting in the busiest criminal court in London until, I think, the day before she was nominated for a peerage. I suspect that the noble Baroness has seen more *interpreters* in action in recent years than the rest of us put together. It is some years since I was in the position of seeing *interpreters* at first instance.
All who have sat in courts and tribunals will have a mixed experience of *interpreters*. Many are excellent, but some are less so. But now is not the time for war stories, which any judge or practitioner would be happy to share in slower times.
Interpreters are needed in many criminal cases, even for participants who understand and can speak in conversational English. It is vital for anyone involved in legal proceedings, whether they be criminal, family, civil or tribunals, to understand what is going on and, if they are giving evidence, for the court or tribunal to understand what they are saying. There is also a need for participants to be able to communicate with their lawyers if they do not speak English. Some family cases and, more widely, when necessary, other civil and tribunal cases are provided with *interpreters* at public expense, as are criminal

cases, but one should not overlook the fact that very large volumes of interpretation services are secured privately by litigants' solicitors on their behalf.

I of course welcome any steps taken to improve across the board the standards of interpretation in our courts. As has been observed, the range of languages that require interpretation grows and changes on a monthly and yearly basis. I also welcome the efforts suggested by the committee to improve the standing and treatment of *interpreters*. Like the committee, I am confident that the contractual provisions need careful attention.

I wish to focus for a minute or two on technology and interpretation. In June 2018, I gave a lecture to the British and Irish Legal Information Institute on technology and the courts. I mention it not to encourage any noble Lord to trouble to find it and read it, but in a throwaway couple of lines I suggested that, with the use of technology, within a very few years high-quality simultaneous translation would be available: both translation which produces a text and translation that would be vocalised by technology. I added that, at the time, 2018, we were in the technological equivalent of the steam age—others had described it as the stone age—and that things would improve. I soon learned of the proliferation of bodies representing the interests of *interpreters*. All of them got in touch very quickly to tell me how wrong I was and, had I been on any of their Christmas card lists, I fear I would have been struck off.

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Now we are seven years on and I confess my mild disappointment at the relatively small amount of space given to this issue by the committee and again, if I may say so, the rather dismissive response from the Government on this aspect. The reality is that those who represent *interpreters* are likely to be lukewarm about technology being used for translation and interpretation and, as has already been alluded to, the legal profession is not renowned for embracing change. However, technology really has moved on. Voice recognition software is now pretty reliable. It is very different from the early days when I used it 10 or more years ago, trying to dictate judgments. I found that it took longer to correct them than it would have taken me to type them in the first instance.

Translation software is also now very reliable. Of course, it is not available for all languages—one has to recognise that—but it is available for many, and English is the ubiquitous language into which many other languages have to be translated across the world. Publicly available software is always available now to vocalise translatable text. Many courts around the world are using this technology now for translation and interpretation purposes, and others are thinking of introducing it imminently. I declare an interest as Chief Justice of the Astana International Financial Court.

So its day has come, or very soon will come. Computing power is doubling every six months at the moment. I urge the Government to look closely at what is going on around the world and make plans urgently to keep up. When they do, I suggest, in the light of bitter experience of the court reform programme, that they buy products off the shelf and do not seek to build them from scratch or indulge in overengineering. I see the Minister smiling because she has seen this at the coalface. If there is time, I would be grateful to have an indication of what is being planned by the Government to use technology for translation and interpretation.

4.20pm

Lord Carter of Coles
(Lab)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, I wonder whether noble Lords can remember their first time in the Chamber or in the other place. My own memory is that it was architecturally imposing, with unfamiliar rituals; it left me with a sense of awe and, frankly, a bit of anxiety on that first day.

This led me to think of an accused person or a defendant going into a courtroom for the first time and experiencing some of the same feelings, with impressive buildings and people in strange costumes—and, of course, anxiety. For them, however, it is different. For us, a slip might have been slightly embarrassing, but they do not know what is going on because they cannot speak English. Therefore, to make that work, we must ensure that the evidence is translated properly.

I think it was Mr Jaggers, Dickens' favourite lawyer, who said it was not about how it looks but about the evidence. How we get that evidence there is clear—the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, gave us the numbers and statistics—but the point I want to make is that we should give some recognition to the fact that it is complicated. They do a good job. I do not think that we should diss these people. There is a problem of culture—which I will come to—but, under the skilful

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chairmanship of the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, and with the support of both our clerk, Dan, and our researcher, Tom, the committee undertook to try to understand what was going on, not so much to mark the homework of the Courts Service but to take a forward-looking view: what things could we draw attention to that would actually change things, rather than going back over old ground?

In some ways, you could say that it was partly encouraging. People are making it work, to some degree. It is not as good as it could be but, from a legal point of view, it is a fact that the Court of Appeal has not overturned a judgment in the past 20 years because of mistranslation. So, despite the fact that the data may not be good or accurate, and the complaints system is there, at the moment, we have not had a major collapse on that issue. So we found some encouraging things, and we recognised how difficult it was.

Then we turned to the problems. I suppose you could describe the major problem as cultural. There is a major disconnect between what we heard from various parties and what the Courts Service told us. I would not say that it was smug, but it did not seem to recognise the need for change. Perhaps that is a contractual question: this famous contract and whether they are locked into it. The processes and the technology seem, on the whole, to be stuck in stasis somewhere.

The big issues on which we really focused were quality and data. How can you improve something if you do not have measurement? How do you relate that to quality? How does it work—and, from that, complaints, et cetera? The two big issues that really stuck out were the pay and conditions of *interpreters* and the question of what we are going to do about technology. The Minister comes to this anew—she will soon be very familiar with the contract—but, on pay and conditions, I must say that I was reminded of 19th-century mill owners in their approach to this. It was, "Get is as cheap as you can. Pay piecework, then lay them off if there's nothing to do". I am not sure that is a sustainable basis for building this incredibly important workforce. We were told by many witnesses that there was going to be a shortage.

Looking forward, pay and conditions need reforming now, but, as the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, said, we keep getting pushed back. We do not know what those terms and conditions will be. They are

wrapped up in the secrecy of the contract and confidentiality. However, really and truly, there are two things here. First, we described pay as being “low and opaque”. Then there is the fact that the conditions, including cancellation of trials and non-payment for that, are unsustainable. There is competition out there, as the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, said. There is the police service and there are other people who employ them. So, if we are to have this service on a sustained basis, what we have to do is make sure that the terms and conditions are there.

Because the contract is being negotiated, all we can ask the Minister to do is to look at the contract to make sure that it is fair and modern and has some dynamic aspects. Looking at the existing contract, we were struck that it was sclerotic and juddery and that it did not have a mechanism for reform. All these contracts need something for continuous improvement.

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Those factors—pay and conditions—have to be got right, but equally important is technology. The Lord, Lord Blencathra, discussed audio-visual technology. It seemed amazing to us that the court service really has no idea of exactly what is going on out there. It talked about the need for technology and about who was responsible. Clearly, there should be an inventory and a plan. Can the Minister look at this and tell us, at some point, what assessment has been made of the existing state of technology in the courts? Is there a road map to correct it, and can that be put in place? Is it the usual story that the Treasury will not agree to it, or is there some other managerial shortcoming? It would be nice to know.

More important is the question of AI. I admit that, in this case, I often feel a bit like the famous dog watching television: I can see it but I do not get it—and I do not know how the department will get it. We had a lot of evidence discussing the speed with which AI would come. Realistically, we have to know what is possible. I hope that, at some point, the Minister will be able to tell us, perhaps in writing, whether there is a road map for this in the department, particularly for the court service. How will it assess the right moment to do it? Will it buy technology from abroad and, if so, what assessment has been made of that? Frankly, we will have a crossover with a declining labour force in this area if we continue with cheap pay, so will technology arise as an answer to some of that? We should think very carefully about that.

The question for me is the issue of continuous improvement in the contract. Let us hope that it is in the contract, and that we do not have something frozen in time. To get that right, the department must take ownership. This made me think of Mr Jaggers; he had some good clients with Magwitch and Miss Havisham, but he obviously built a pretty good practice by getting on and delivering it. I hope that the Ministry of Justice can get its act together with this contract, drawing on and taking forward what we say, so that we get a much better and, above all, sustainable service in a changing market.

4.27pm

Baroness Coussins

(CB)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, I warmly welcome this report and begin by declaring my interests as co-chair of the All-Party Group on Modern Languages, and honorary president of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, both of

which submitted evidence to the committee's inquiry. I am very glad to say that many of our concerns were shared by the committee and are reflected in its recommendations.

My overriding concerns are twofold: first, to ensure equal access to justice for everyone caught up in the criminal justice system, be they defendant, witness or victim; and, secondly, to secure a step change in the way that public service *interpreters*—PSIs—are acknowledged, treated, respected and rewarded. As we have heard, they are highly skilled and qualified professionals, yet their work is currently valued on a par with unskilled jobs. Their pay starts at £20 an hour, rising to a magnificent £26 an hour for complex cases, yet they are working alongside solicitors, whose lowest hourly rate recommended by government guidelines is £196.

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Progress on both my overriding concerns is achievable, if the Government agree not only to accept but to act on the committee's recommendations and within the timeframe specified; I would be grateful for the Minister's assurance on that. Timing, indeed urgency, is of the essence, because the two issues—of equal access to justice and the status of PSIs—are of course inextricably linked. We are seeing disheartened, disillusioned, exhausted qualified *interpreters* reluctantly leaving the public sector every month, because they cannot afford to live within the terms and conditions on offer. This results in an ever-increasing risk of individuals in courts and tribunals having their access to justice delayed, denied or diminished.

The need for a clear commitment from government on the timeline for a plan, with timebound milestones for ensuring a pipeline of PSIs qualified at level 6, is critical, and the committee has requested progress updates every six months. Can the Minister undertake to provide these? Similarly, there is an immediate need for better and fuller data collection to ensure that we have a more complete picture of the effectiveness or otherwise of court interpreting services and the quality-assurance regime.

We have seen a lot of improvements since 1985, when Mrs Begum won her appeal against her murder conviction after it was revealed that, in her original trial, the so-called interpreter had not understood the difference between manslaughter and murder. Unless the pipeline of level 6 *interpreters* is increased, we may risk going backwards, not forwards.

Will the Minister also agree that the MoJ should insist on service providers increasing rates of pay, including for travel time and expenses, and that minimum pay should be reviewed at least annually, as recommended? Can she also spell out what other measures the MoJ intends to take to improve the supply chain by enhancing support for training, public respect for the professionalism of PSIs, and the provision of the appropriate technical and other equipment they need in court to do their job properly and safely? Will she commit to costing and including dedicated audio equipment, such as sound booths, in the court refurbishment programme?

Another committee recommendation is that remote interpreting should be introduced more widely for less complex cases. This is undoubtedly pragmatic and realistic as part of a long-term solution. I would caution only that in the evidence submitted by the APPG, we pointed out that during the Covid lockdowns there was a big shift towards remote court hearings and that a series of major reports, including one from the Magistrates' Association, found significant concerns over the suitability of remote interpreting, with examples of misunderstandings, delays, poorly performing technology and missed verbal and non-verbal cues. We therefore recommended that research be carried out to show how such failings can be eliminated in future. Let us get this right, not rush it.

I caution also against the reliability and wholesale adoption of machine translation. The noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett, was quite right to say that it is not appropriate in all languages. The huge gaps currently in AI training data mean that machine translation works very well for standard Romance languages such

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as Spanish, Italian and French, and for German, but it is much less effective in languages with many dialects, such as Arabic, and has been shown to be virtually useless with tonal languages such as Mandarin and many other Asian and African languages. We need to look at what AI training data is being used before we commit entirely to machine translation.

Finally, it seems very strange to me, as it did to the committee, that different government departments and the police are all maintaining their own lists and registers of *interpreters* and translators when there is a national register in place which might simply need the Government and public services to get behind it. I hope the Minister might comment on this.

In conclusion, I offer my thanks and congratulations to the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, and her committee on such a rigorous and helpful inquiry and report, and I look forward to its speedy implementation, as well as to the reply from the Minister, who is of course most welcome in her new role.

4.34pm

Lord Mott

(Con)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, I congratulate the new Minister and wish her well in her—I hope—long career. As the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, pointed out, our committee has had some success with newly-appointed Ministers lasting a little longer than some colleagues.

The use of translation services in the public sector is of ongoing interest. It has been a pleasure to serve on the Public Services Committee under the excellent leadership of the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, and to be involved in the publication of this report. My focus today is going to be on the final set of recommendations on artificial intelligence, as already mentioned by one or two noble Lords.

Overall, a huge problem for the committee is the quality and availability of accurate data, not just in this report but in others we have made. Nevertheless, when it comes to our legal system, equal access to justice is a fundamental principle. That means providing high-quality interpretation and translation services to individuals when it is needed. The current level of services sometimes falls short and can present a risk to justice and potentially increase the burden on the court system.

As a result, the committee's report *Lost in Translation?* is timely, especially as the Ministry of Justice is currently renegotiating a contract for language services. It has been a pleasure to work on the report with colleagues from across the House and the report contains many recommendations that I hope the Government will draw on. These include improving performance data, quality assurance and the workforce—all of which offer practical solutions that I hope the Government will look at seriously.

Today I want to focus on what I regard as potentially the most transformational issues that we considered: the role of new technology and, in particular, AI. There are numerous benefits that it can

offer, from increasing the availability and quality of interpretation to reducing the cost to the taxpayer. Every part of the public sector is under pressure and will need to look for savings. AI could transform interpreting in our courts.

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First, we have all adapted to remote working since the pandemic. It is clear that it is not suited to everyone or to every role, but there are many ways in which it can increase efficiency. It can hardly be described as cutting edge. The report notes that the use of remote interpreting can increase the amount of work that an interpreter can do and that it is particularly suited to procedural, administrative and technical hearings. Does the Minister agree? Will the Government consider how they can use any court refurbishment to ensure that more courts are suitable for remote interpreting, including having the appropriate audio-visual equipment, court layout changes and procedures? This would be a positive step and could draw on lessons from across government, in areas such as health.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, is the role that AI may play in the future of translation in public services. I was initially disappointed to note that the MoJ seemed to be rejecting the potential value of AI, citing not only concerns on accuracy but also legal, policy, cultural and ethical implications. I agree that in such high-stake situations as substantive court proceedings, the need for accuracy and associated risks mean that we may not be quite there for full rollout. However, the use of AI for translation is already widely adopted in the business world. New technology should not be held to a higher standard than the status quo. Even the most skilled human interpreter cannot guarantee 100% accuracy. After all, human error cannot be totally removed from any system.

Best-in-class AI models are already way ahead of ad hoc use of basic digital translation tools that we heard in evidence are sometimes used as a last resort in the courts at the moment. The developments in AI that we have seen in the last few years mean that it would be a mistake to underestimate where the technology may be in the next 12 months, let alone five years. We heard from only one witness who believed that AI would move at pace. His evidence was quite punchy but nevertheless serious. It is clear that he was correct. I am disappointed that the department will not commit to a road map within six months. I strongly believe that AI will play a substantial role in the future of translation services. Most likely, this will be alongside and with oversight by skilled translation professionals. The Government should be planning on this basis.

Will the Minister commit to implementing the committee's recommendation to publish within six months a funded road map for the introduction of AI tools for interpreting in public services? Will the Government commit to continuing to engage with industry to ensure that they are able to make the most of AI in this area? We need to ensure that momentum is sustained, and I welcome the work that the Government have done with major industry players—from the memorandum of understanding between the UK and OpenAI on AI opportunities, signed in July, and ongoing work to boost automation and efficiency across numerous departments with partners such as Microsoft and UiPath.

Finally, while I was initially disappointed by the MoJ's attitude to the use of AI in the court system, I was heartened to hear that it is piloting the use of AI translation technology in certain prison settings. It is encouraging to see this taking place in modern and

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Victorian-era prisons. I hope that these pave the way for a wider rollout, in line with the Government's stated ambition to pilot and scale AI services. To do this, will the Minister also take forward our

recommendation to develop exemplar courts that can pilot the better deployment of remote interpretation and AI to support the delivery of interpretation and translation services?
In conclusion, I believe that we have an excellent example here of how AI is on the cusp of being suitable for deployment in public services. It can improve the work of our courts and, I believe, improve the status and work of translators. I hope that Ministers choose to seize that opportunity.
4.40pm

Lord Willis of Knaresborough
(LD)

Share this specific contribution
My Lords, I am grateful to have the opportunity to make a brief contribution, though it will take more than five minutes, on this report on interpretation and translation services in the courts. I welcome the new Minister and assure her that, of all the committees in this House, this is the one that provides excellent ideas, so that she can become a very successful Minister.
I confess that most of my interest during the inquiry was in how using technology, in particular AI, would resolve the challenge of the growing shortage of *interpreters*. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Morris of Yardley, for her patience and excellent chairmanship of the inquiry and the committee's members and staff, who had to put up with my often confusing proposals.
The final report explained the significant challenges facing court services and the growing concern and disillusionment of *interpreters*, who quite frankly were being treated with unacceptable levels of support, both financially and practically. To be fair, the Minister's contribution to the government response to the report accepted the need to modify expense, time and transport allocations for translators and for them to have access to the courts as professional colleagues, not merely members of the public. However, the real answers will become clear only when the new contract is produced, as the MoJ and the leading supply organisations have indicated.
Here lies the biggest challenge so far in response to the committee's report. Throughout our inquiry, virtually every major criticism was answered by the future publication of a new contract, yet to date neither Parliament, the courts nor *interpreters* have been given sight of the future arrangements. As the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, said, we have seen some indications that the new contract will deliver improvements, particularly to strengthening qualifications—we agree on level 6—but I ask the Minister whether level 3 qualifications should be sufficient for community work and whether that would apply to asylum applications, which have been a huge issue recently. Sadly, the Government appear to have cast aside the need to create a minimum rate for *interpreters* and an increased rate when bookings are cancelled. However, as both the previous and present Governments have used the new contract as a saving grace, I hope that early indications are wrong. I will let others comment more sophisticatedly on that challenge.
Quite frankly, unless the new arrangement is seriously improved to not only retain existing staff but strongly appeal to new contenders, the Government have to
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recognise that our court system, and other legal systems that require *interpreters*, will face a critical future. Between 2011 and 2023, we have seen a 33% decline in registered *interpreters*, which has led to

adjourned cases, potential growing miscarriage of justice and the use of poorly qualified individuals. This jeopardises the legal system. Yes, the decline is significantly due to the poor service offered to *interpreters*, but crucially also to the decline in students taking language courses who might become tomorrow's *interpreters*. Between 2010 and 2021, the number of students studying level 3 languages at school fell by 50%, with 28 of the 1992 new universities no longer even offering language degrees as part of their courses.

I make the point because the demand for language *interpreters* is rising dramatically, with some 200 languages now required, and the increase in individuals needing *interpreters* is rising dramatically too. The committee, given the limited time for this short inquiry, did not include the obvious increasing challenge to our legal system from the growing numbers of immigrants—94% of whom arrived in the UK between 2018 and 2024 and who have subsequently applied for asylum. They therefore need access to legal support and assessment, which require *interpreters*. Given that most do not have English as their first language, support from *interpreters* will be required, putting added pressure for *interpreters* on Border Force, the Home Office, thebigword, Clear Voice and Migrant Help.

It is because of the enormous increased demand for interpreting services that I again urge the Minister to take more seriously the move to use new technologies, in particular AI, in support of that demand. I am delighted that half the speakers today had AI on their programmes; it was just one when I started. It is very sad that the Ministry of Justice constantly ignores the opportunity that AI can bring to its services, including in translation. I accept that there will be a significant number of court cases where the complexity of the legal challenge will not be overcome by the use of AI alone or by other present technologies. For example, I do not want the Minister to duplicate Donald Trump's demand that all Medicaid contributions are initially assessed by AI before being granted. Please do not start down that way.

However, there is no doubt that AI and other technologies will have to be used, not simply to meet the huge shortage of *interpreters* in all public services but to improve those services dramatically by providing sophisticated analysis of arising data. To be fair, the Government have started using AI: the Home Office has used streaming algorithms to categorise visa applications and help manage the asylum system; it has used AI in combination with electronic monitoring, such as GPS ankle tags, for immigrant enforcement; and it has used AI systems to perform initial screenings of online e-visa applications, sending at-risk cases to an immigration officer rather than requiring support from *interpreters*.

This helps lessen the worry of many *interpreters* that AI will remove their work opportunities. That is simply not the case. AI in language and content interpretation will never be successful without the systematic involvement of high-level *interpreters* to monitor and control content.

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Since the committee's witness sessions, I have enjoyed reading the thoughts and proposals of Professor Susskind, one of the world's leading AI enthusiasts, through his publications such as *Tomorrow's Lawyers*. One I particularly recommend is *Online Courts and the Future of Justice*, where he quite rightly makes the point that the digital transformation of legal services is coming quickly—whether we like it or not. To be fair to the Minister, Sarah Sackman, she understood and agreed that this is the way forward but, without a very strong and positive agenda, it will emerge only when chaos demands. This was an excellent report and this is a wonderful opportunity for the Minister to respond to it and be noted for bringing AI to the centre of this work.

4.49pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe
(Lab)

Share this specific contribution
My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Morris for providing this opportunity to consider the recommendations of the Public Services Committee report and the Government's response. I add my welcome to my noble friend Lady Levitt, the Minister, for the baptism of her first debate in Grand Committee, which I am sure will be a precursor to many others.
I come new to this issue, but I saw that the committee's emphasis was on the fundamental importance of equal and ready access to the law for all. It is clear that this debate is timely. The current contract for interpreting services in the courts expires next year, and the Ministry of Justice is now going through a reprocurement process. The opportunity to improve the service, should it need improvement, and solve problems is now.
I welcome the committee's report. It makes many practical and forward-looking recommendations, drawn from a wide base of evidence given by court officials, *interpreters*, barristers, solicitors and the MoJ. To be able to access justice, *interpreters* and translators are, of course, sometimes necessary. No one should be disadvantaged in the legal process because of language barriers. Although interpreting is used in only a very small proportion of cases each year, the numbers are still considerable. I am sure I was not alone in being surprised that some 17,000 bookings for *interpreters*, across more than 150 languages, are dealt with by the MoJ through contracted private language providers each month.
The committee concluded that
"the current state of interpreting services in the courts is not working"
as "efficiently and effectively" as it should, representing
"a significant risk to the administration of justice".
Given the number of cases involved, that conclusion is truly worrying. The committee's report points to issues such as an inaccessible and poorly understood complaints process, which leads to the underreporting of problems. It also identifies the difficulties in recruiting and retaining highly qualified *interpreters*, due to widespread dissatisfaction with the remuneration, and terms and conditions. I will focus on those issues.
My noble friend Lady Morris has called this a significant crisis. The report cites evidence of *interpreters* being unable to make enough money to earn a living, and that low and opaque pay, a lack of control over earnings and remuneration for cancelled or delayed
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bookings, as well as a lack of respect, are all causes for leaving the profession. If it is the case, as my noble friend said, that T&Cs for *interpreters* have not changed since 2016, it is no wonder that experienced *interpreters* are leaving the contracted provider and offering services to the courts off plan when requests to the contracted provider cannot be met.
To counter this, the report recommends introducing minimum pay rates, annually reviewed, as well as improvements to cancellation pay, travel pay that actually reflects the cost of travel, and taking steps to ensure respectful treatment of professional *interpreters*.

Its recommendations also include having a more robust and transparent quality assurance program, and states that if the MoJ can seize
“the opportunity of the new contract it can improve the quality and transparency of the service, while preparing for the future both in terms of technology and the future workforce”.
Doing nothing, it says,
“risks reinforcing significant jeopardy to justice for the foreseeable future”.
That is strong wording and underlines just how important it is that we get the next steps right.
The response to the report from professional bodies was widely positive. The National Register of Public Services *Interpreters* welcomed the proposed new qualifications framework and strengthened QA. They all agreed that it is crucial that these steps are taken to ensure that poor quality interpretation does not lead to unfair trials or case delays. However, the NRPSI also said these developments will not stop *interpreters* “voting with their feet”. It and others point out that *interpreters* are choosing not to work with the MoJ’s outsourced contractor because of insufficient pay, lack of recognition, and unsupportive terms and conditions.
It is really disappointing to see the Government’s rejection of the report’s conclusions and recommendations on these points. It seems obvious that any progress on quality assurance will be hampered if new *interpreters* are not coming into the service due to a lack of improvement in pay and conditions. It will not serve justice if moves to improve the service falter due to a failure to address these key issues.
On qualifications, I gather that fewer than half of *interpreters* on the MoJ list hold a level 6 vocational qualification. Can my noble friend the Minister give us any indication of progress on plans to ensure that court *interpreters* meet level 6 qualification requirements? I am pleased that this is a government ambition but ask the Minister why this is not reflected in the qualification requirement expected to be included in the new contract.
The report recommends that the Government ensure that the new contract can be adjusted to require level 6 and introduces this requirement once an appropriate number of level 6 qualified *interpreters* are on the register. To that end, I note that interpreting services were to be included on the agenda for the June HMCTS strategic group—the forum in which the MoJ consults legal professional associations. Can the Minister relay any positive outcomes from this?
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On remuneration, can the Minister indicate any further steps the MoJ could take to tackle the ongoing issue of off-contract bookings, driven by poor Ts and Cs and inadequate pay? Can she give us an assurance that the department will look again at the new contract having provisions for reviewing and increasing minimum pay on an annual basis? More dialogue on improving Ts and Cs is vital. As the NRPSI points out, if they do not address the reasons why *interpreters* continue to walk away from MoJ contract work, the new contracts and all the other hoped-for improvements in interpreting services in the courts will not serve.
4.55pm

Lord Carter of Haslemere
(CB)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, we have heard some powerful speeches from distinguished and knowledgeable speakers this evening. I am very conscious that, like the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, I come to this debate relatively new. However, I have one ace in my pack. I have been briefed in detail by an expert who has worked at the coalface of our criminal justice system for 25 years as an interpreter in French and Italian: indeed, she was a witness to the committee, and I am delighted to say that she is with us in the Room today.

Let us remind ourselves of the importance of what we are discussing. Ensuring the fairness of criminal proceedings has always been accepted as paramount, and interpretation services are a core part of that. Even the otherwise skeletal provisions of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights state that fairness requires that everyone charged with a criminal offence should

"have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court".

That is hardly surprising, since what can be more important than a defendant being able to understand the case against him or her in a language they speak?

However, the committee's report shows that the current provision of interpreting services in the courts has broken down and presents a significant risk to the administration of justice. It causes delays to cases, results in defendants being detained beyond what is necessary and, ultimately, risks miscarriages of justice. Yet, unlike the backlogs in our courts, with delays in rape trials, et cetera, the problems besetting our interpretation services have been largely invisible, with little or no publicity—that is, until the committee's truly excellent report.

The crux of the problem is the way in which the current outsourcing of these services is totally failing to deliver for *interpreters* and, therefore, for defendants. There are inadequate remuneration arrangements for *interpreters*, especially when work is cancelled at short notice, and there are concerns around poor terms and conditions of service, quality assurance, performance data and transparency. Yet the Minister stated to the committee that, in 2024, only 0.7% of trials were delayed due to the lack of an interpreter, and that recent data showed an increase in service performance to 96%. How do we explain the clear disconnect between what the Government say is happening and what front-line *interpreters* and legal professionals report is actually happening?

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As other noble Lords have said, the answer lies in the reliability of the data on which the MoJ relies for assessing the quality of interpreting services in the courts. As the committee has pointed out, the complaints system for stakeholders is the best measure of performance, yet the number of complaints does not equate to the number of unfulfilled requests for language expertise. In more than 5,000 cases last year, language requests were not fulfilled, with no explanation, yet complaints were not lodged. So I am afraid the data falls far short of the reality.

What is the solution? I think that, before signing a new contract, we should take a step back and look at what has happened in the past. The National Register of Public Service *Interpreters*—the NRPSI—has since 1994 maintained the independently managed and not-for-profit register of nearly 1,700 level 6-qualified *interpreters* with a minimum of 400 verified hours of professional experience. This register has long served as the gold standard for quality assurance in the sector, offering a robust framework, verifying qualifications, upholding professional conduct and ensuring interpreter accountability within the justice system.

The NRPSI therefore deserves to be listened to. It says that the root of the problem is systemic and relates, as we have heard, to the outsourcing of language services since 2012. Far from streamlining court operations, the system now relies heavily on off-contract bookings as a workaround for the deficiencies of the contracted model. It has led to a hopelessly fragmented and less transparent system. Now is a pivotal moment to put this right, before the current failures are perpetuated by a new outsourcing contract in 2026.

Let us consider what happened before 2012. It was a one-tier structure, where courts sourced *interpreters* directly from the NRPSI under a national agreement, with set fees, terms and conditions, and vetting, with an efficient system for complaints and disciplinary measures. Once a court official had dialled up the NRPSI list of, say, regulated and recommended Italian *interpreters*, they would then email those professionals to arrange a booking, contracting with each freelancer directly. It had the huge virtue of simplicity, with no middle people such as outsourcers causing a delay and taking a percentage for their trouble.

It was changed to an outsourcing model in 2012, principally to save costs. So I ask the Minister: does saving costs really outweigh the merits of efficiency, quality and accountability that existed before outsourcing? In the words of my expert:

"The current outsourcing contract with the Ministry of Justice has all but collapsed. The overriding failing in court interpreting which I have noticed is the last-minute search for off-contract *interpreters*. I continue to receive last-minute requests, not just from court officials but more commonly from a wide array of small to medium sized agencies. There's absolutely no need for so many parties to be involved. I find it hard to believe that all this complexity in the back offices is any cheaper or more efficient than the pre-2012 arrangements".

That is testimony from someone who really knows what is happening on the ground, day by day. There is no substitute for that. While I do not blame the Government for being misled by the data, now is the time to acknowledge the reality and respond accordingly.

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5.02pm

Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames
(LD)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, at the end of a debate of very high quality, I join with others in commending this report, and the work of the committee, so ably chaired by the noble Baroness, Lady Morris of Yardley. I thank her for her opening: I hope I will not repeat any of it, but I was heartened to hear that, frankly, she did not mince her words. It is also my great pleasure to welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Levitt, with her wealth of experience, to her place on the Front Bench for her first debate. We look forward to many further discussions in the future.

I would not want to let this occasion pass without praising the work, over many years, of the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, both in opposition and recently in government. He is not a lawyer by profession but he is bolstered by extensive practical experience of the justice system as a magistrate in criminal and family

cases. His contributions to justice debates in the House have always been measured, courteous, knowledgeable and helpful.

The committee's report was thorough and made a number of carefully considered and well-evidenced criticisms of court interpretation services, drawn from the wealth of experience of the witnesses it heard from: experienced court service users, as the noble Baroness, Lady Yardley said, the Bar Council, barristers, judges, the Law Society and others.

This debate has, frankly, reinforced an impression that many speakers have clearly had, that the Government's published response has smacked of complacency. The noble Lord, Lord Carter of Coles, used the word "smug" and I believe he may have been justified. It is to be hoped that the response from the noble Baroness, Lady Levitt, will depart from that complacency, will be more thorough and will give better credence to some of the criticisms made by the committee.

In particular, the Government rejected a central conclusion of the committee, outlined in paragraphs 53 and 54 of the report. Paragraph 54 states that the current provision of interpreting services in the courts is

"not acceptable and presents a significant risk to the administration of justice".

The committee also recommended the collection of much more detailed and consistent data-gathering. It is plain that the failures of the services, and the distinction between the committee's findings and the Government's response, have largely stemmed from the failure of detailed data-gathering.

The Government's response was:

"The MoJ is confident in the quality of its published data, which has been externally reviewed recently … and found to be of good quality".

In response to paragraph 54, they state that

"the MoJ disagrees with the Committee's conclusion that the provision of interpreting services in the courts is not acceptable and presents a significant risk to the administration of justice".

Importantly, they add:

"The quality metrics for the service are good (96% success rate in Q4 2024) and the number of trials that are delayed due to lack of *interpreters* is very low (0.7% of ineffective trials in 2024)".

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However, the reality—as shown by the evidence taken by the committee and from speakers today—is that the system's weaknesses, in practice, simply do not show up either in the quality metrics or in the number of trials that were ineffective for lack of *interpreters*. Frankly, I wonder how far the Government have taken into account the difficulties of gathering data and making complaints when the primary sources are the primary users, whose difficulty with using the English language is the very factor that gives rise to their need of the service in the first place.

Striking points were made by witnesses to the committee about *interpreters* turning up to hearings without the time to attend pre-hearing conferences with counsel, because they were not paid to appear before the start time of the hearing. Then there were the dialect difficulties. One witness gave striking evidence of a GMC hearing, where the complainant witness spoke a particular Afghani dialect of Pashto, rather than a Pakistani dialect familiar to the booked *interpreters*, and so the witness could not communicate with the arranged *interpreters*. The committee reported on a clear conflict between the MoJ's data and the lived experience of witnesses, a point powerfully made by the noble Lord, Lord Carter of Haslemere; however, the MoJ's response relied on the same data, despite its flaws.

On training, the committee was very clear that the standard of the qualifications of court *interpreters* has been insufficiently high and that a level 6 qualification ought to be required. One can see that this may, in some cases, present difficulties with rare languages or dialects. However, on a careful reading of the Government's response, it appears that there has not been an insistence on a level 6 qualification and one is not proposed at present. The Government's current stated position is that a level 6 qualification should be the default level for full trials—which they call professional-level assignments—but that there is to be no insistence on that. Similarly, there is to be no insistence on a level 3 qualification as the minimum for lower-level bookings—non-evidential hearings and telephone interpreting. It is unclear from Government's response how far they will insist on contractual minimum standards for the new contracts when they are let, a point that the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, also explored.

I will make a further point on qualifications. Skill in interpreting is not limited to the ability to translate faithfully the questions put to a witness and the evidence given in the witness's answers. That is a vital part of it and should be the aim of every interpreter. However, it is also important to stress the need for *interpreters* to avoid the weakness, which we frequently experience in the courts, when a less qualified interpreter gets into a discussion with a witness about both the questions put and the answers to be given. When that happens, it obscures the evidence the witness gives, reduces its credibility and, in bad cases, can seriously mislead the court.

On *interpreters*' conditions, pay, hours, travel expenses and the like, considerable criticisms were made by the committee and speakers today. The committee called for minimum pay rates, subject to regular review, improved cancellation arrangements and payment for

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travel time and expenses, on which the noble Baroness, Lady Yardley, my noble friend Lord Shipley and a number of other speakers made similar points.

In addition, the committee commented on the widespread feeling that *interpreters* were inadequately recognised and valued within the existing court system, and the example of the lack of passes was given and had great deal of weight. They are treated with much less respect than their status as court professionals merits. The noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, made these points on conditions and on valuing, on which she has campaigned for years. The MoJ in its response disagreed with the committee's recommendations on conditions, maintaining broadly that the rate paid to *interpreters* is competitive. The MoJ also disagreed with the recommendation for an independent register, without any convincing argument for that disagreement. However, there is evidence that the present system encourages *interpreters* to seek off-contract bookings, rather than bookings through the MoJ's contracted suppliers. Of course, the ministry has an obligation to secure the best value for money for the taxpayer, but it is unclear that the present structure is achieving that—a point made by my noble friend Lord Willis.

I turn to whether the tender process designed to replace the present contract with TBW, which expires next year, ought to be paused and reviewed. The difficulty is that we are approaching the end of the TBW contract. However, the last point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Morris of Yardley, was that the new contract has not been signed and needs to be thoroughly reconsidered. That seems a thoroughly defensible position.

Finally, the committee was of the view, though not expressed in great detail, as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett, said, that the court should go much further down the road towards incorporating more translation technology into the interpretation services, with more remote interpreting and greater

use of AI, as new technology advances. The Government's response went into painfully little detail in this area while paying lip service to improving technology. I should be grateful, as would the Committee, if, when she responds to this debate, the Minister could respond to the points made by the noble and learned Lord, the noble Lords, Lord Carter of Coles and Lord Mott, my noble friend Lord Willis and a number of others, subject, of course, to the caveats expressed by the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins on the present limitations of AI translation for some languages. But the Minister should give us greater detail on how the Government propose that interpretation services could benefit from a fast-improving technology and a massively increasing use of AI—all that without compromising the service provided to litigants who need it in this vital area.

5.13pm

Lord Sandhurst
(Con)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, like others, I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Levitt, and congratulate her on her appointment. She brings much experience of the criminal justice system, and I am sure she will be invaluable to the ministry. I am grateful, too, for the compelling opening speech by the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, and to my noble friend Lord Blencathra for his illuminating exposition. Indeed, we have heard many powerful speeches.

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The multicultural society in which we live contains individuals with myriad languages and dialects. More and more individuals need access to interpretation services in our courts. The use of those services grew by nearly 6% between 2023 and 2024. This presents challenges that the Ministry of Justice, as this report makes clear, has failed to address.

The Ministry of Justice's most recent data shows that, comparing the last nine months of this Government against the previous Conservative Government, the proportion of unfulfilled requests for court *interpreters* has increased by just under 24%. Worryingly, in the same time, the number of complaints about inadequate standards has increased by 48%. I will come back to that. The Minister's predecessor's decision to ignore advice to pause the reprocurement process until after the committee had conducted a thorough review of court interpretation and quality assurance services was flawed.

It is very regrettable that those on the front line have a negative view of court interpretation services. The Magistrates' Association rightly pointed out that inadequate interpretation can lead to miscarriages of justice—that should be obvious to us all—as defendants cannot properly understand the legal options open to them. I highlight the evidence of Dr Windle that far too many trial *interpreters* have qualifications equivalent to an A-level. That is simply hopeless. The profession must be staffed by sufficiently skilled, trusted and properly paid *interpreters*. The observations of the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, in this respect are invaluable. The Government must listen, learn and adopt.

Even more alarming is the lacklustre quality-assurance framework. The company responsible for quality assurance conducts assessments by watching from public galleries, but *interpreters* in closed cases and family court sessions are shielded from accountability. The Ministry of Justice cannot in those circumstances be getting a true picture of quality. This report recommended that the assessment process

should include access to whispered communications between defendants and advocates during trials. Such communication, as any practitioner knows, is integral to court proceedings. This important point was not addressed in the Government's response and we on this side keenly await clarification.
Further, the report rightly pointed out the lack of transparency and the dearth of data available regarding the outcomes of the assessments of court *interpreters*. We do not know how many concerns regarding *interpreters* are escalated to judges, nor how many *interpreters* are removed from the ministry's register. So the public cannot hold this important public service provider accountable, nor be confident that the rule of law is upheld consistently.
The Government responded by saying that they required longer to act on the recommendation to release this data—if at all. I emphasise that. This weak response must be seen as shirking accountability and hiding behind data privacy. Given the significance of interpretation quality for the delivery of justice, when will the Government commit to acting on this powerful report and what steps are they taking to ensure they are best equipped to do this?
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The most direct recourse for users of interpretation services is access to a functional complaints procedure, not least because it is the practice to dismiss *interpreters* after they have incurred three complaints. It was therefore worrying to read that the process is not considered fit for purpose and that complaints, despite their sharp rise in recent months, appear grossly underreported. The report labelled awareness of the complaints system as "low". That too is serious. If stakeholders—those involved—are not even aware of its existence, how can *interpreters* be held accountable? Worse, many of those aware of the complaints system cannot engage with it satisfactorily. It is available only in English or Welsh. I echo the report's warning that this "must be urgently addressed". Those most in need of help are least equipped to access it.
The Minister's predecessor pledged to explore ways to increase awareness and methods of flagging complaints in the language of users. How exactly will the Government be doing this? They must outline the steps and methods being considered for a new complaints procedure that is accessible in different languages. As the noble Lord, Lord Marks, rightly said, the Government must abandon their complacent approach to these issues.
The problems are exacerbated by the striking disconnect between the Government's stated view of their delivery quality and reality. The report highlighted this as an overarching theme of divergence between government and those on the front line. Despite overwhelming evidence, the Government are not confronting these problems. They must set out the precise additional steps they have taken and will take to ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement. Existing channels are insufficient. How will the Government resolve this information asymmetry? Otherwise, they risk wilful blindness to the true extent of the justice system's challenges. The noble Lord, Lord Carter of Haslemere, made important points about data and information asymmetry.
It was a serious oversight on the ministry's part not to pause the reprocurement process until after the committee's findings had been reported to it. We are now in a position where the ministry has commenced retendering while unaware of the true quality and delivery of these services.
There are too many areas where the response does not go far enough. The Government must take further action to improve the quality of court interpretation services and reform their complaints

system. If not, complaints will continue to soar. They must foster genuine engagement with legal professionals and front-line workers and listen to their concerns if they are to deliver justice for all. Finally, I invite the Government to address and take seriously what the noble Lord, Lords Carter of Coles, and the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett, a former Lord Chief Justice with great experience, had to say about the future use of voice recognition technology and translation software, at the very least for major languages. In that respect, of course, the ministry should also pay heed to the advice of the noble Lord, Lord Carter, and indeed the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, and the thoughtful observations of my noble friend Lord Mott. There is a lot of expertise in

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this Room and the Government would be foolish to ignore it. The Minister has plenty to take away. We wish her well and we look forward to her reply.

5.23pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Baroness Levitt) (Lab)

Share this specific contribution

My Lords, I start by thanking all noble Lords for the warmth of the welcome I have received this afternoon. Today is literally my second day in the job and therefore I hope that I will be able to do justice to the wide-ranging points that have been made in this extremely important debate.

I am grateful to my noble friend Lady Morris for her opening remarks and for securing this important debate on interpreting services in our courts. I also thank the committee for its report and the invaluable feedback it has provided to the Government and the Ministry of Justice from the *interpreters* and other stakeholders who spoke to it.

Many noble Lords, including my noble friend Lady Morris, the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, and the noble Lord, Lord Sandhurst, have rightly reminded us of the vital importance of *interpreters* in courts across the board—not just the criminal courts but others, for example tribunals—in ensuring that justice is accessible to all. It is a fundamental tenet of our system that everyone is equal before the law. We are a multicultural society with many people within it, and everybody should be treated in exactly the same way.

So I can assure noble Lords that we are not complacent. We do not take this for granted, which is why the Government are continually working to improve the quality, consistency and accessibility of these services; we will continue to do so while ensuring a smooth transition to the new contracts, which are scheduled to start in October 2026.

Let me turn to the committee's concerns about the provision of the service. Many noble Lords have spoken on some or all of these issues. I hope to be forgiven if I am not able to reflect every single point that has been made by your Lordships, as that may not be possible in the time given to me today, but this is not intended as a mark of disrespect.

I shall start with the availability of *interpreters*. The committee rightly raised concerns about reported issues with the service, such as a lack of available *interpreters* and the risks that this poses to the administration and efficiency of the justice system. I am not going to minimise the day-to-day pressures, particularly in rarer languages; as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett of Maldon, pointed out, I

have been practising in the criminal courts for a very long time, and my experience reflects some of the frustrations expressed to the committee on occasion. However, I hope to reassure noble Lords on the overall position.

In 2024, only 0.7% of criminal trials were ineffective due to the absence of an interpreter. That is a very small number, but I do not wish to underplay the effect on a trial of a delay or of it being ineffective. Nevertheless, that was out of 115,000 listed trials and in the context of more than 200,000 booking requests. The on-contract fulfilment rate is currently 97%, with the use of off-contract *interpreters* closing the gap

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to 99.3%. The revised primary and secondary supplier structure, which will be introduced as part of the new contracts, will help to reduce off-contract usage. We continue to work with providers to recruit *interpreters*, particularly in priority and rarer languages.

I move next to the data on interpreting; this was raised by many noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames and Lord Sandhurst. The committee expressed concerns about the quality of data reports on our interpreting services. We already publish extensive data through the criminal court statistics and the Cabinet Office's key performance indicators; nevertheless, we accept that users should not have to piece together multiple sources in order to understand what the data shows.

My noble friend Lady Morris said that the data cannot be relied on; the noble Lord, Lord Carter of Haslemere, made a similar point. We are going to include additional guidance in the quarterly statistics, including explanations and signposting to all key data, so that the full picture of performance is accessible in one place. We will also explore the further publication of quality assurance and complaints material after the new contracts are implemented, engaging suppliers and the judiciary on what is proportionate and meaningful.

I make this point: the supplier surveys *interpreters* regularly. For example, in May 2024, there were 403 responses that had a satisfaction rating of 3.5 out of 5. Of course, that is different from simply anecdotal evidence; it provides data with which to back up conclusions.

I turn to the third area: quality assurance and governance, which was mentioned by the noble Lords, Lord Blencathra, Lord Shipley and Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames, and the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett of Maldon. I make the point that both the noble Lord, Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames, and the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett of Maldon, have had extremely distinguished legal careers and bring knowledge of the area about which I am not so knowledgeable—the criminal and commercial world—to what is, I hope, my useful experience of the criminal courts.

Our existing quality assurance operation samples interpreter bookings across the Ministry of Justice estate. We are strengthening these arrangements under the new contracts to introduce a more risk-based approach, which will allow for better oversight of the service and ensure that quality assurance is robust and responsive.

The committee recommended that the Government should clearly state the requirements for when and how the Ministry of Justice informs relevant parties of problems with interpreting that might have an impact on the outcome of the case. We collect data about quality failures, but we do not publish them because they are sensitive. While we understand the intent behind this recommendation, the Government must respectfully disagree. As with any matter before the courts, the responsibility for

safeguarding the integrity of justice lies with the judiciary. When a quality issue is detected, the ministry informs the court and provides necessary information. Concerns can be and are raised by other parties in attendance, and then it is for the judge to determine the appropriate course of action.

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The Criminal Cases Review Commission confirmed, as of July 2024, that there were no miscarriages of justice attributed to failures in interpretation, and we have not heard of any since. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring the highest standards of interpreting in our courts, and we are proud to lead the public sector in quality assurance for language services.

On stakeholder engagement, the committee reported that *interpreters* and legal professionals do not feel engaged with or represented in discussions with the Government regarding interpreting in the courts. I reassure the committee that we engage with the representative bodies of *interpreters* through multiple channels, including the language services external stakeholder forum, and we are going to deepen that engagement through targeted outreach to improve awareness of the complaints routes and to gather feedback, which we will act on and report back.

Complaints and feedback were particularly raised by the noble Lord, Lord Sandhurst. The committee is concerned that the current complaints data underrepresents the true scale of problems experienced in our courts. We agree with the committee that further engagement is necessary in this area. While legal professionals are clearly aware of the general HMCTS complaints process, we recognise that more can be done to clarify and promote the interpreter-specific complaints pathway. That will form part of what I just referred to as targeted engagement with stakeholders and suppliers to ensure that legal professionals and service users understand how to raise concerns effectively. There will be further improvements in this through the new contracts, including risk-based targeted assessments where the risk is highest and auditing providers' complaints handling so that concerns are escalated and addressed consistently.

While it is right that complaints can currently be submitted only in English and Welsh, and online translation tools are available, we recognise the need for proactive support. As such, we are in early discussions with our suppliers to explore how complaints can be flagged in the user's native language and will update the committee on progress as we move further along the procurement process. The Government remain committed to ensuring that all court users, regardless of language or background, can raise concerns and therefore can have confidence in our interpreting services.

Remote interpreting infrastructure was raised by my noble friend Lord Carter of Coles and other noble Lords. The committee highlighted the challenges *interpreters* face when working remotely, particularly due to the limitations in court infrastructure. Many courts and tribunals have means to support remote hearings, including interpretation, and there is dedicated audiovisual equipment that is available in the right situation. I am not going to pretend that all these things always work well, and some of the technology, certainly in some of the courts in which I have appeared and sat in trials, is clunky—if I can use that word. It works, but sometimes perhaps not as smoothly as it might do. Again, that is being worked on.

As an ex-judge, I cannot accept the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, that this decision should be made by the ministry rather than judges.

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There are some situations in which—I have personal experience of this—allowing remote interpretation literally doubles the length of the hearing. That is not true of all of them, but that is an assessment that only a judge can make on a case-by-case basis.

Many noble Lords—the noble Lords, Lord Mott and Lord Willis of Knaresborough, the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett of Maldon, and the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins—referred to artificial intelligence and innovation. I pay particular tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Coussins, for her great expertise in the field of linguistics. I assure all noble Lords that the Ministry does not dismiss the potential of artificial intelligence and the opportunities that it can bring. It is taking a proactive approach to exploring AI's role in interpreting services, in line with the Government's *AI Opportunities Action Plan*. Our new contracts require suppliers to engage with us on developing AI capabilities, to ensure that we remain at the forefront of innovation.

Earlier this year, we ran a proof of concept in eight prisons, providing interpretation and line-by-line transcripts in around 100 languages. The pilot concluded in August and evaluation is under way, with independent academic research from Lancaster University complementing the pilot's efforts. There was also a 15-month proof of concept at Westminster Magistrates' Court in November 2021 which tested speech-to-text services for extradition case judgments. The accuracy was 94%, which was considered too low for extended testing.

However, it is right that 2022 discovery work on AI for language services found that uncontrolled use in courts could harm justice outcomes. Therefore, responsible use—looking at the risks as well as the great promise of AI—is at the centre of the Ministry's approach. Extensive work on AI integration has already begun across the whole of the MoJ, and we will identify whether there are possibilities for this area and update the committee on that.

I turn to the committee's specific concerns about *interpreters*. Many noble Lords raised interpreter remuneration. While we respect the sentiment behind the committee's concerns about the level of remuneration and the calls for minimum pay rates, we do not agree that mandating pay levels is the right approach. We believe that suppliers are best placed to set rates that attract skilled professionals, while we—as the commissioning body—must ensure that these rates are fair and deliver value for money for the public. From June 2023, £2 per hour was added for face-to-face work, and from October 2024 all HMCTS face-to-face bookings have a minimum of two hours—that does not mean you get paid for two hours however long it lasts; you get paid for a minimum of two hours, but if it lasts longer than that, you get paid more.

I turn to extra uplift supply for harder-to-fill assignments. The supplier publishes a rate card—that is the floor—and dynamic pricing increases only pay, not profit. Supplier profit is commercially confidential, so it is not published, but the Ministry does monitor it. What matters most is that the terms we offer, such as a minimum booking duration of two hours, make interpreting assignments more viable and attractive. Our market engagement shows that the rates remain

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competitive in the public sector. I am pleased to report that the increase in the minimum face-to-face booking duration to two hours, which was introduced in October 2024, has led to improved contract fulfilment rates and a reduction in off-contract requests.

My noble friend Lady Morris raised issues around the rate of pay for cancellation. Again, this is being looked at in relation to the new contracts, and it will be more generous to the *interpreters* than it has been hitherto. The new contracts will improve their positions.
Qualifications were raised by the noble Lords, Lord Shipley and Lord Willis of Knaresborough. The majority of our bookings require level 6 *interpreters*. However, it is right to say that the justice system requires interpreting across a wide range of languages and assignment types, and our qualification framework reflects that diversity. I can confirm that the recommendations from Ann Carlisle's independent review have been fully accepted and incorporated into the new contract's specifications and qualifications framework. The noble Lord, Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames, said that there is no insistence on level 3 as the minimum level, but I do not think he is right; I think that there is now an insistence on that as a minimum level.
Our position is that a blanket requirement for all *interpreters* to hold the level 6 qualification for all assignment types simply does not match the Ministry of Justice's diverse needs. It is unnecessary and impractical. For example, an awful lot of hearings across the justice system are simply setting dates. For that, we need to have the flexibility that a range can give, but the majority of hearings will always be at level 6.
The committee has recommended a single independent register for the justice system. We respect the intent but do not believe that it is either necessary or proportionate. Our register meets the diverse needs of the requirements. The Ministry of Justice register is free. It has clear entry rules and allows removal for poor performance. We are going to strengthen oversight of it through existing mechanisms rather than create a costly new body. *Interpreters* who do not meet our quality requirements, as I say, can be removed.

The NRPSI does not offer us the level of assurance and control that we need.

Interpreter treatment and well-being was spoken to by many noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Shipley and Lord Willis of Knaresborough. The committee rightly highlighted the concerns about how *interpreters* are sometimes perceived and supported in the courtroom. The noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, said that, in many ways, the interpreter is the most important person in a courtroom when languages are in play. I want to be clear about this. We agree that *interpreters* are critical to the proper functioning of our courts and therefore their well-being is a matter that we take seriously. My noble friend Lady Morris spoke eloquently about some of the witnesses, how they did not feel valued or an important part of the system. That must stop; that clearly cannot be right.
That is why we are introducing improved welfare provisions in the new contracts. These include strengthened support and safeguarding guidance for those working
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on sensitive cases. We want to enhance the professional framework and we want clearer pathways for *interpreters* to opt out of assignments that may be distressing for them. Juries are frequently told in advance in criminal cases these days that there is a difficult and sensitive case, so that if they really feel that this is something they cannot do for whatever reason, they can let us know. It can only be right that *interpreters* also have that level of information so that they can make that decision. We are refreshing

and recirculating guidance to our stakeholders, including court, tribunal and security staff, so that we can reinforce our expectations about the way in which *interpreters* will be treated.
Day passes are a nice idea, but they are not really a thing in most courts at the moment. There are issues, particularly in some older parts of the court estate, about how we deal with all kinds of different groups of stakeholders coming into and going out of the court estate, but with good will and an enhanced reminder of the respect that is due to this cohort, I hope that things will greatly improve.
We are also going to explore what case information can be shared with *interpreters* in advance of their assignments, subject to court or tribunal permissions, so they have a chance to prepare in advance. It is common, certainly in the courts that I have been in recently, for somebody to make a copy of any transcripts that are being used so that they can be provided to the *interpreters* to help them as they go along. There may be other ways of doing that. To respond to what was said by the noble Lord, Lord Blencathra, that is sometimes a good reason for having a transcript—so that you can give it to the interpreter.
In conclusion, we value the committee's scrutiny and the contributions of the *interpreters* and stakeholders who support access to justice every day. The principle is clear: language must never be a barrier to justice. We are proud of the progress we have already made but we are determined to deliver further practical improvements through the new contracts. This includes clearer data, higher standards, stronger assurance and a service that treats the *interpreters* and those who rely on them with the respect they deserve. I thank all noble Lords for their contributions, and I look forward to working with the committee as we implement these changes.
5.44pm

Baroness Morris of Yardley
(Lab)

Share this specific contribution
I will not take many minutes to wind up—there is another debate to begin and we have heard a wide range of speeches from noble Lords with a whole range of experiences. I congratulate my noble friend on her inaugural speech as a Minister. She showed that her experience, and the fact that she still remembers it, is crucial and will stand her in good stead. She said she could remember with some trepidation—I forget the exact word she used—when things had gone wrong; if I have one word of advice, it would be to never forget that feeling, because the minute you do is the minute you stop trying to solve the problems.
The committee understands the complexity of this, the length of time that these problems have been in existence and that the court system has not been well funded by Governments of any party for far too long. So it is difficult, and we are grateful and appreciative
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of the progress that has been made. But this big contract is almost like a brick wall in front of us and, to be honest, I remain unconfident that some of the fundamental improvements will be made until we see the contract. I live in hope as far as that is concerned.
I will just respond very briefly to the noble and learned Lord, Lord Burnett. I take seriously his criticism of the report; the irony is that we probably spent longer talking about it than is reflected in the report. It

started with just the noble Lord, Lord Willis, speaking about it, and then we gradually realised that he had a bit of a good idea. Part way through, the Government published their road map on artificial intelligence, which we felt gave us a good hook to go forward with. Perhaps our committee did not reflect in the report our understanding of how crucial this is. It has got to happen, because it will happen whether or not the Ministry of Justice decides to take charge of it.

I thank everybody who has contributed, especially those who are not members of the committee. It shows huge commitment. I look forward to keeping in touch with the Minister and her department so that we can monitor further progress. I beg to move.

Motion agreed.