

## Facebook post from Elena Shutova

There is a misconception in our courts that I think needs to become a matter of best practice, not just professional courtesy.

Many legal professionals, solicitors included, treat the court-appointed interpreter as a multilingual extension of their team. Someone who can pass messages, relay instructions, summarise advice, or keep the client informed while counsel is elsewhere. I understand why. It saves time. It feels practical. And many interpreters, wanting to be helpful, quietly go along with it. We should not. And here is why.

Case study. Bradford Crown Court. Sentencing hearing.

The defence had no interpreter of their own. Rather than sourcing one through legal aid, they asked to use the court interpreter. I agreed. That is not unusual, and in principle, not unreasonable.

We went downstairs. The conference in the cells went as it should. Then, as we were leaving the cells area and walking back through the corridor toward the main concourse, the solicitor stopped me.

"Madam interpreter, I need you to pass him a message. When you go back to the dock, could you just let him know..."

I stopped him before he could finish.

I am not authorised to pass messages. Not simple ones. Not urgent ones. Not any. Whatever is communicated between a solicitor and their client through an interpreter must happen live, in a three-way interpreted exchange. The moment a message is passed outside that setting, I become a participant in a privileged conversation I have no mandate to carry. I am not a legal secretary. I am not a paralegal. I am not a member of the defence team. I am instructed to interpret. The actual conversation. Nothing else.

But I did not leave him without a solution. The dock in that courtroom was open. I told him: once we are in court, before the judge comes in, you can approach your client in the dock yourself and pass the message directly. I will be there to interpret it. But that is your conversation to have.

He accepted. And then, as we walked away, he muttered that he had never worked with such an unprofessional interpreter. The thing is, it rather seems like he had never worked with a professional one.

This is not pedantry.

Privileged information passed through an unauthorised channel, even with the best intentions, is a problem. For the client. For the solicitor. And for the integrity of the proceedings.

If you need someone to assist with communication beyond the interpreted session, instruct a defence interpreter. And even then, understand what our role is and where it ends.

Court interpreters are highly trained professionals; some of us are bound by a strict code of conduct. We are not a workaround for under-resourced defence preparation.

This needs to be best practice. Not the exception.

ENDS  
18<sup>th</sup> March 2026

LEGAL TEAM

**Explaining or  
summarising  
legal advice**



COURT INTERPRETER

**Rendering  
counsel's  
words accurately**

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When a solicitor gives advice, the interpreter conveys those words faithfully. We do not simplify, rephrase, or add our own framing. If the client has not understood, that is a matter for the solicitor – not for the interpreter to resolve independently.

LEGAL TEAM

## Managing the client relationship



COURT INTERPRETER

## Remaining impartial at all times

Legal secretaries manage files, chase deadlines, and reassure anxious clients. Interpreters maintain strict professional distance. We cannot advocate, comfort, or build rapport on behalf of the defence team. Our role ends precisely where advocacy begins.

LEGAL TEAM

**Acting in the best  
interest  
of the client**

COURT INTERPRETER

**Ensuring accuracy  
of interpreting**



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A solicitor's duty runs to their client. An interpreter's duty runs to the communication – accurate, complete, impartial. These are not the same obligation. Conflating them compromises both.

LEGAL TEAM

**Passing messages  
between parties**



COURT INTERPRETER

**Interpreting what  
is said  
in the room**

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Interpreters cannot carry instructions, relay information outside an interpreted session, or act as a conduit between client and solicitor. Whatever is communicated must happen live, in a three-way interpreted exchange.