



Zanda Berzina, Rhona Desmond & Andy Murray
National Union of Professional Interpreters and
Translators
BM NUPIT Ron Todd House
33-37 Moreland Street
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30 March 2020

Dear Ms Berzina, Ms Desmond and Mr Murray,

Subject: thebigword response to COVID-19

Thank you for your letter dated 20 March 2020 in which you expressed your concerns regarding communications from thebigword to interpreters, specifically during the fast developing COVID-19 international pandemic. I am again, responding on behalf of Guy Tompkins and have investigated the matters you have raised.

We are very grateful for the dedication shown by many interpreters through the unprecedented circumstances we have been experiencing over these last few weeks and recognise the vital service they provide to support our justice system.

HM Courts & Tribunals staff are working tirelessly behind the scenes to increase video and audio hearing capabilities. We will make as much use of our current technologies as possible, and are working urgently to increase our capacity, so we can keep our courts and tribunals running and minimise the risk to those key workers that we rely upon to facilitate justice.

Where interpreters are required to physically attend court, under recent Government guidance, they should reasonably expect to be able to maintain a two metre distance to others in the court room, and our staff are working hard to support and facilitate this. If interpreters have concerns I would encourage them to raise these with local court staff and/or thebigword. Due to the fast pace in which guidance is developing and changing, we are in daily contact with key officials at thebigword, who are raising key issues with us.

In relation to the matter you raise regarding the reduction of interpreter rates, thebigword has assured me that this is not the case for bookings made under the Ministry of Justice contract. I cannot comment on other areas of their business. Whilst rates of pay are in normal circumstances for suppliers to determine, we are working closely with thebigword to try to ensure that this position does not change throughout this period of uncertainty.

With regards to the issue of financial penalties that you raise, I would like to thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. Again, I can only comment on bookings made through the Ministry of Justice contract. On investigation, I discovered that thebigword

had applied late cancellation penalties in accordance with their agreements with interpreters. I raised this with thebigword who conceded that this action was not appropriate in these circumstances and they have committed to ensure that no interpreter will be charged a late cancellation fee if they are unable to attend due to any COVID-19 related issue. I understand this will be backdated to 1 March 2020.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact us regarding this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Medhurst
Deputy Director of Intelligent Client Capability