



PRESS RELEASE

Interpreter complaints increasing and costing millions

15 November 2013

A Ministry of Justice report has published details of 9,800 complaints about its court interpreting contract, with the report revealing that the numbers and frequency of complaints have increased this year. Capita has delivered the service since 30 January 2012 and the Statistics Bulletin reveals that 3,786 (39%) of the complaints relate to interpreters not being available for courts or tribunal cases.

The service is essential for those whose first language isn't English and who need help in understanding and communicating accurately in court cases and tribunals.

Professional Interpreters for Justice, the umbrella group representing interpreter organisations, says the Statistics Bulletin's stated figure of an 87% "success rate" of completed requests hides the true picture of the thousands of court and tribunal cases where Capita's failure to supply an interpreter, or when an interpreter is late or of poor quality, is disrupting the delivery of justice and wasting tax payer's money.

In the second quarter of 2013 there were 1,957 complaints, 23% more than in the same period of 2012. The majority of these (64%) were about interpreters not being available. When compared with the same period of 2012, figures showed there was a four-fold increase this year in interpreters not being available, rising from 218 cases (April-June 2012) to 1,254 between April-June 2013.

Paul Wilson, Chief Executive, Institute of Translation and Interpreting, which is part of the umbrella group Professional Interpreters for Justice, said: "The accumulated cost of all the delayed and abandoned cases which resulted in complaints needs to be offset against the stated savings the Ministry of Justice thinks it is making. A conservative estimate would be £10 million of wasted court time so far."

It costs approximately £10,000 per day for a Crown Court trial and approximately £1,600 per day for a magistrates' trial or tribunal.

The Bulletin includes, for the first time, statistics on the numbers of 'off contract' bookings made by courts and tribunals rather than use Capita. For the three months April – June 2013, 2,929 of these bookings were logged. The Tribunals Service, which had its own automated system, accounted for 50% of these 'off contract' bookings. Court clerks were asked to make a manual log.

Geoffrey Buckingham, Chairman, Association of Police and Court Interpreters, says: "It's important to understand what these figures aren't showing. We know for example that there are high numbers of sub-contract arrangements which Capita has put in place to prop up the contract. We hope the Ministry of Justice will recognise this sooner rather than later, so we can work on something better."

The Statistics Bulletin, published on 31 October, listed 9,800 complaints from 30 January 2012 to 30 June 2013. 39% (3,786) were because Capita could not supply interpreters for courts or tribunals, 16% (1,530) were because the booked interpreter did not attend, 15% (1,515) were because the interpreter was late and 4% (410) related to the quality of interpreting. The remaining 21% (2,042) complaints were explained as "time sheet errors, operational issues and other interpreter issues".

Three successive parliamentary inquiries (National Audit Office, Public Accounts and Justice Select Committee) have been highly critical and the Public Accounts Committee has begun further investigations.

Keith Moffitt, Chairman, Chartered Institute of Linguists, one of the organisations highly critical of the current approach, said: "The Ministry of Justice has dragged its heels on addressing the issues of this contract despite a series of official reports which have highlighted what it needs to do."

The majority of professionally qualified interpreters withdrew their services as a result of the outsourcing arrangement, which lowered the requirements for qualifications and experience and cut interpreters' fees and travel expenses to such an extent that many left the profession.

Ends

MoJ Statistics Bulletin

Here is the link to the Ministry of Justice Statistics bulletin on the use of language services in courts and tribunals: Quarterly Update to June 2013

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254144/stats-use-language-

A week in the life of the Capita contract:

5 November: Lianjan Sun, who is accused of attempted murder in Ipswich, could not be brought into South East Suffolk Magistrates Court for a pre-trial hearing as no Mandarin interpreter arrived for the proceedings.

<http://www.linguistlounge.org/all-articles/news/954-ipswich-garrick-way-victim-named-as-ruo-jun-tian-interpreter-mix-up-delays-attempted-murder-hearing>

8 November: a speeding offence case which had previously been adjourned because a Portuguese interpreter was unavailable at Bodmin Magistrates Court nearly had to be adjourned again. Victor Simeos, who had pleaded guilty, ended up being helped by his friend, who was not qualified as an interpreter but agreed to translate so the case could go ahead. <http://www.thiscornwall.co.uk/Drove-98mph/story-20071490-detail/story.html#ixzz2kWyr93zN>

10 November: Magistrates adjourn a case of a man accused of having over 3.5 times the legal alcohol limit because there was no interpreter present.

<http://www.spaldingtoday.co.uk/news/latest-news/accused-of-excess-alcohol-offence-1-5670319>

12 November: two Bradford Brothel keepers must wait another week to be sentenced because a Polish interpreter did not turn up for their case. The court was told it would be a week before an interpreter would be available. They were bailed to return on 19 November.

See

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/10804025.Brothel_keepers_face_sentences/?ref=mr

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. **Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J)** is an umbrella group representing over 2,200 NRPSI registered and qualified interpreters in 135 languages. Our aim is to work in partnership with the Ministry of Justice to safeguard the quality of interpreting services for the Criminal Justice System.
2. **Quality Review:** representatives of Professional Interpreters for Justice were invited to a Ministry of Justice workshop in September 2013 to give their ideas for an independent quality review which was recommended by the National Audit Office last year.
3. **National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI)**
Until 30 January 2012 qualified interpreters were sourced using the National Register of Public Services Interpreters (NRPSI) which provides and maintains the voluntary register for the interpreting profession. NRPSI ensures required qualification standards are met; the quality of interpreting is defined and maintained through a Code of Conduct; and that access to a database of professional interpreters is freely available for all.

The value of the National Register was endorsed by the JSC report in its conclusions and recommendations (no.4) saying “there do not appear to have been any fundamental problems with the quality of services, where they were properly sourced i.e. through arrangements that were underpinned by the National Register of Public Service Interpreters.”

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See www.linguistlounge.org for commentary and updates.

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