

Meeting with MoJ at their offices in Petty France
29 December 2011

MoJ

Louisa Carrad (by telephone) - Interpretation Project Manager
Graham Anderson
Leslie Muir
Marilyn Reed

NRPSI

Ted Sangster
Sian Pritchard

MoJ current position

Louisa Carrad apologised for the fact that Martin Jones (Deputy Director) who had intended to lead the MoJ team at the meeting was unable to attend as he was ill, and then updated us on the current position of the MoJ.

They signed the Framework Agreement with ALS at the end of August, and it is open to all justice bodies to enable them to obtain interpreting services.

As well as those bodies under the direct control of the MoJ (Courts, Tribunals, Prison Service) they hope that all other bodies in the justice sector will also join up.

On Monday 28 November 2011 the following police forces went live with the new arrangements.

West Yorkshire Police
West Midlands Police
Lancashire Police
Staffordshire Police

The court services and Prison services will be going live over the next month and be completely rolled out by January 2012.

Interestingly they stated that the delay in implementing the new arrangements was down to the need to amend their internal operational and financial procedures to meet the requirements of the new contract – there were many different systems which had to be brought into a common framework to deal with the new system and this had taken much longer than had originally been expected..

NRPSI update

Ted outlined a little of the history and the change process that had taken place which had resulted in the NRPSI having been newly formed on 1st April 2011 as an independent company limited by guarantee.

There was a new board in place made up of 4 lay members and 3 practitioner members.

Ted explained that the new board was primarily concerned with standards in public service interpreting. In light of this we have introduced new systems to speed up the processing of complaints against interpreters.

We were also examining how we could tighten these procedures further and welcomed observations and comments from stakeholders that would assist in this.

Sian confirmed that ensuring the highest standards of interpreting for the public was our main concern.

MoJ's concerns over standards

Ted then raised the issue of the concerns MoJ had raised as to the standard of interpreters on the register and asked them to explain further what these were. In particular he pointed to comments made by Martin Jones and similar views subsequently expressed by ministers. He was also aware that ALS had mirrored similar opinions in some of their communications.

The MoJ explained that when they first looked at outsourcing interpreting services this was mainly in response to concerns with regard to cost. However at the beginning of the exercise as part of their evidence gathering in the autumn of 2009 they held a number of consultations with interpreters and Agencies within the MoJ and it was then that a number of concerns related to quality came to light and were evidenced at these meetings. Specifically they were:-

- 1) The poor English language skills of some interpreters
- 2) Interpreters behaving in an unprofessional manner and the fact that NRPSI did not deal with these interpreters.

The basis of the Framework Contract

As a result of this finding when the MoJ engaged with the agencies tendering for the contract they discussed with them the need to build in levels of quality assurance to the bids being made for the tender. It was out of this process that the Tiered approach and the Assessment process being run by ALS and Middlesex was developed by ALS as part of their tender and which are both

now seen by the MoJ as being an important part of the new framework agreement.

Other agencies tendering had put forward other solutions (including similar tier approaches) – but all to a similar aim, that of addressing the quality failures of the previous system.

Monitoring of the Contract

Sian asked how the MoJ was going to monitor the contract in respect of the quality assurance guarantees that ALS had made. In other words how will they ensure that quality is not sacrificed and that only qualified interpreters are used in Courts and Criminal Justice situations?

Graham insisted that under no circumstances would Tier 3 “interpreters” be used in these situations, and that they would actively monitor this.

He stated that they had put in place a number of processes to ensure that quality was maintained, such as Feedback forms and a Complaints forms which they will be encouraging public service officers to complete. There would be a monthly reporting process to the MoJ which would monitor issues of quality and also a running co-ordinated overview of the whole framework agreement.

The role of NRPSI

Ted pointed out that the Framework Agreement whilst making some reference to the NRPSI could be seen as bypassing the Register and therefore asked whether the MoJ saw any place for NRPSI in the new arrangements and if so what.

Louisa stated that it was for NRPSI to decide how they wanted to work with the new arrangements as NRPSI was independent of government.

They believe that they have set up sufficient quality assurances within the framework agreement. However they would look again at any relationship with NRPSI when the Framework agreement is reviewed in 3.5 years as to whether the role of NRPSI could be encompassed within such an agreement because of the added value that brought to the purposes and objectives of the contract and the MoJ.

Sian pointed out that NRPSI had stopped charging for access to the register as they understood the public services’ need to cut costs and that there was now a free open access register available for all to look at. It is our intention to maintain this open access. Siân also pointed out that the NRPSI did not just monitor public service interpreters in the Justice sector but the other areas of health and local government also.

Ted raised the issue that we understand that 1,200 – 1,300 interpreters have stated that they will not work for ALS. Graham said that the MoJ is well aware of this.

Rates of pay

Ted and Sian both stated that whilst quality of public service interpreting was our main concern we were also aware of the concerns that many in the profession hold with regard to the rates of pay being offered under the framework agreement and whilst we were not here to lobby on behalf of interpreters pay (this is a role for the membership bodies/trade unions) we wanted MoJ to be aware that this was causing a great deal of concern in the industry.

The MoJ acknowledged this as being a major concern of interpreters – but pointed out that it is a fact of the changed situation in the justice sector.

The future

To our question as to how we should look to work with the MoJ in the future we were told that they are not at present entirely clear what the relationship should be. They are moving in to new and different territory and see that they need to move forward slowly to tease out and build on emerging situations.

We stated that we saw our role as being that of the (non-statutory) regulator and having now established ourselves following the transition from our previous existence into our role as a completely independent regulator through a company structure we were currently undertaking a strategy review to determine the future priorities and direction of the NRPSI.

Louisa said that she would be very interested in having a sight of this, or a summary, once it is completed as it would help the MoJ in understanding the role and purpose of the NRPSI as we saw it, and (one assumes, although she did not explicitly state this) help them in determining what, if any value we will provide to the MoJ and therefore help define the future relationship between us.

Keeping in touch

It was agreed that this would be useful, probably on the basis of regular if not necessarily frequent email and telephone contact, to be supported by meetings as and when they were mutually felt to be necessary.

Agreed actions

We will share our revised Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures with the MoJ and invite their comments and suggestions, and also keep them up to date with any significant future revisions.

We will provide details or at least a summary of our strategy and plans once concluded.

We will “keep in touch” .

TED SANGSTER & SIAN PRITACHRD