



PRESS RELEASE

Government in denial about quality report

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The Government has refused to accept the main recommendations of an independent quality report into how the Ministry of Justice and Capita deliver language services in courts.

Professional Interpreters for Justice, the umbrella group of interpreter organisations, says the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has failed to listen to experts in the field.

Responding to the Independent Review of Quality Arrangements under the MoJ Language Services Framework Agreement, the Government Response states it does not accept three of the five recommendations.

Alan Thompson, Chairman of the Association of Police and Court Interpreters (APCI), says: “The government is showing that it is still wholly complacent about the catastrophic decline in quality standards in interpreting since this multi-million pound contract was implemented. The recommendations of this Review, which does contain some very good ideas, need to be addressed.”

The independent quality review, undertaken by consultants Optimity Matrix, recommends changes to quality standards and the way interpreters are allocated jobs. It also recommends that Capita TI amends its complaints procedure. A range of ideas are recommended in order to safeguard the fairness of proceedings for defendants and witnesses in court who do not speak English as their first language.

Paul Wilson, Chief Executive of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting, commenting on the publication of the report, said: “The Government Response shows they really don’t care very much that their contractor Capita is using thousands of unqualified linguists in courts and that there are no checks being made on the hundreds of unvetted sub-contracted language agencies Capita is using because it can’t fulfil the jobs itself.”

Fewer than 50% of the 2,223 interpreters currently registered with Capita TI are qualified to the new standard recommended by the review, which also says changes should be made to the tiering system which allocates jobs.

The independent consultants Optimity Matrix found there were 35,440 jobs fulfilled in the Criminal Justice System in 2013 by interpreters registered with Capita TI who do not hold *any* of the ten qualifications which are recognised as acceptable.

Installing an independent regulator to monitor the commercial contract was outside the scope of the review, which nevertheless recommends that the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) is given a role in setting standards and monitoring compliance. The Ministry of Justice says it fully supports this observation and is keen to engage with professional interpreter organisations and with the NRPSI.

Ann Carlisle, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Linguists, said: “The Government needs to act fast and show genuine intent that it is keen to gain the buy-in of the professional interpreter organisations. The Framework Agreement is nearing the end of its term and none of us want to see the same mistakes repeated in any new arrangement which follows.”

In 2012 the Ministry of Justice was described as ‘not an intelligent customer’ by the Public Accounts Committee Chair Margaret Hodge, who investigated how the small private contractor, Applied Language Solutions, was awarded a multi-million pound contract which she described as a ‘car crash’. ALS was bought by outsourcing giant Capita TI in 2012.

The succession of independent inquiries by the National Audit Office, Public Accounts Committee (who reviewed the contract again in early 2014) and the Justice Select Committee recommended that the independent review should be undertaken.

Ends

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See www.linguistlounge.org for commentary and updates.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Independent Review of Quality Arrangements under the MoJ Language Services Framework Agreement and the Government Response can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/moj-language-services-framework-independent-review-and-the-government-response>

A history of the MoJ language services contract can be found in Appendix 2 on page 51.

Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) is an umbrella group representing over 2,200 NRPSI registered and qualified interpreters in 135 languages. Its aim is to work in partnership with the Ministry of Justice to safeguard the quality of interpreting services for the Criminal Justice System.