

## House of Commons notes for speech

There are a number of misconceptions about the life of an interpreter, and what a good thing the Framework Agreement is. Today I should like to tell you a little bit about reality for interpreters and how life is going to be different after 31 October, when the FWA comes into effect.

Professional interpreters, especially Justice specialists, are on call 24/7, and are often woken in the early hours to go to a police station or are called requesting immediate attendance at a Crown Court. We are responsible for our own accounts, our own tax and National Insurance, Professional Indemnity Insurance – at least £500 pa – and subscriptions to such organisations as the National Register, £200 plus pa. If we are unwell and cannot work, we are not paid. If we are injured and cannot work, we are not paid. If there is no work, we are not paid. And there is no extra pension.

On the other hand there is a myth that we are well paid. You may have read an article in the Daily Telegraph on 6 August, 'We can't afford interpreters, says judge', reporting the comment of a Crown Court judge that interpreters are paid £85 an hour. Let's look at the reality; at Court there is a minimum payment of £85, plus travel at £15 ph and mileage at 25 ppm or the cost of return travel by public transport. Not a fortune. A morning's work earns around £115.

So, on the upside the pay is already poor and on the down side the operational costs considerable, and increasing.

Let us have a closer look at the FWA. The MoJ says that current costs of Justice interpreting are around £60m pa. There is no proper basis for this guess, but we do know that the FWA is priced for four years at £300m, which makes £75m pa. That represents an increase of 25%, so it is far from clear where or how savings are going to be made. Then there is no provision for an inflationary increase; interpreters will not be paid more, of course, but to enter into this agreement when inflation is now over 5% pa seems odd. Then we know from similar situations that after a while the contractor will start bleating about circumstances changing, with loads of excuses such as blaming the police for having more crime than anticipated, courts being slow, communities moving around unexpectedly. In short, the trick is to blame the customer, and the civil service just go along with it.

Interpreters' organisations became involved in a nonsultation, where our views were ignored, our questions ignored, our representations ignored, our alternative strategy ignored. The National Register, the gold standard for Justice interpreting, is being abandoned in favour of a commercial list. Questions relating to who will decide who will be included in the new register and details such as how disciplinary processes will be processed have been ignored. We fear commercial considerations will always take precedence in any decision.

Then there is the European dimension, where learned opinion says the FWA is in clear breach of several Articles of the EU Directive, and where the UK has made no apparent progress whatsoever towards fulfilling its obligations as to transposition. **Wolter Witteveen**, Head of Multilingualism and Interpreter Training Support at the European Commission's DG

Interpretation has shown great anxiety, saying *“Please be informed about some worrying developments in the UK”*. It is only a matter of time before Viviane Reding, Vice Commissioner for Justice, engages directly in the matter, and she is being kept fully informed. Claude Durand, Head of unit “Multilingualism and interpreter training support” has spoken of *“information about recent developments in the UK concerning the registration of legal interpreters. I hope that other Member States will not follow this dangerous path.”*

With professionals refusing to register, we predict chaos at court, unacceptable delays in processing detainees in police stations and further down the line convictions will be overturned and interviews under caution ruled inadmissible. The APCI and SPSI commissioned an independent Report, which shows – using the Treasury model – that the true cost of this FWA will be a net tax loss of £35m per year, and taking into account increased spending by the Courts and the police, an cost to the public purse of over £200m per year.

If these plans are allowed to go ahead, it will be a dark day for British justice and an expensive one for the British taxpayer. It is late in the day, but still there is time. We call on the Minister to stall implementation of this dreadful Framework Agreement and save himself, the government and the nation a huge amount of money and enormous embarrassment.

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