

NATIONAL REGISTER OF PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETERS

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NRPSI Ltd
Saxon House
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15 May 2012

The Rt Hon Mr Kenneth Clark QC MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Clark

The MoJ Framework Agreement for Interpreting Services

The National Register of Public Service Interpreters maintains the UK's register of qualified interpreters working in the public sector – many of whom work for the courts and police services.

I wrote to Mr Martin Jones in February following a meeting with his team on the range of concerns that we have about the way in which the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the engagement of Applied Language Solutions is impacting on the professional life of our over 2,000 registrants.

I had been encouraged to contact Mr Jones direct given that in his letter of 21st December he specifically asked us to keep him informed and offered to meet us to hear about any on-going issues we may have once the new service had been introduced across the MoJ.

Unfortunately I have received neither acknowledgement nor reply from Mr Jones. Hence I am writing to you.

The concerns that we referred to in February have not gone away, indeed the position now appears to be worsening almost daily to the detriment of both professional interpreters and equally importantly in our view to the efficient and fair administration of public service across most of the justice sector.

Our observation that the interpreters employed through these arrangements are not receiving sufficient payment is still valid and is, we believe at the heart of the present difficulties. Unfortunately we are not aware of any acknowledgement of this from either officials or ministers but rather a continual denial of this as a fundamental issue and a passing on of responsibility to ALS as your contractor to be held to account for the operation of the contract in which these inadequate payment schedules are enshrined.

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We offer the informed observation that from what we are told the payments offered are in our view woefully inadequate and fully support the pleas made to you by many interpreter membership organisations that ways be found of remedying this.

Our main concern is that of the increasing undermining of the quality of the provision of interpreting across the MoJ services because of both the inherent provisions within the Framework Agreement which fail abysmally to provide any control in this respect and the execution of their contract by ALS who are, despite what they say, solely driven by cost control – because in our view their basic contract with yourselves gives them no other option. Quality is very much a secondary consideration in reality although hyped up artificially and without substance in public and political justifications.

If the MoJ and ALS are serious about maintaining quality standards then within the wider context of addressing the issue of adequate payments there is a need to embrace and fully incorporate the National Register as being the means by which such quality standards and benchmarks are maintained, monitored and delivered.

This is an obvious point for me to make of course but in support I can also point to the wholehearted endorsement of this by all the interpreter representative organisations following a recent meeting we had with them on this very issue, and also a number of Police Authorities with whom we have also been in touch.

I repeat again that we would be pleased to meet you or your officials to discuss the current situation with the employment and use of interpreters in the justice sector, and in particular the ways in which a greater recognition and use of the National Register can assist in reducing or eliminating some of the present concerns and difficulties. Whilst I accept that your objectives of cost effectiveness are important it is the issue of quality that underpins it all and has the greatest bearing on a sustainable, transparent and justifiable provision of public service interpreting. Therefore whilst we would encourage any movements to address the woefully inadequate payment system under the new agreement, the NRPSI would be particularly interested to engage and work with you on maintaining the quality of interpretation that underpins all else.

I will be copying this letter to our registrants and others in due course, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Ted Sangster
Chairman, NRPSI Ltd

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