

Court-watchers' Expose a 'wild west'  
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<https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news-focus/courtwatchers-expose-a-wild-west/5119840.article>

In summary:

A mass court observation project which sat in on more than 1,100 hearings has reported that more than a fifth of hearings (230) involved a defendant for whom English was not a first language. An interpreter was not provided in 104 of those cases. Defendants who needed interpreters were 'some of the worst served by the court', the report said.

Some highlighted points regarding the state of interpreting services :

More than a fifth of hearings (230) involved a defendant for whom English was not a first language. An interpreter was not provided in 104 of those cases. Defendants who needed interpreters were 'some of the worst served by the court', the report said.

The report added: 'One defence lawyer was overheard telling their client that getting an interpreter would take so long that it was better to proceed without one.'

One court-watcher reported a judge's attempt to communicate with a defendant 'by typing up a transcript on Google Translate and using the text-to-speech feature, but the audio on her laptop would not work, and the client did not understand the written transcript, meaning he likely had little understanding of what happened during the hearing'.

The report said: 'Some examples of courts' attempts to proceed in the absence of an interpreter – through Google Translate and "speaking loudly" – would be laughable if they did not represent a serious breach of someone's basic right to understand what was happening at such a life-changing moment.'

It added: 'Courts were mostly kind to defendants, but where the defendant's right to effectively participate in the hearing faced off against the system's desire to get through the caseload for the day, the latter often triumphed.'

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