

Dear Mr Muller,

I am a professional interpreter registered on the National Register of Public Service Interpreters. I hold Level 6 Ofqual accredited interpreting qualifications and I have worked for HMCTS for many years. I have decided to contact you directly to ask you to reconsider your department's decision to outsource the provision of HMCTS interpreters again. The decision to implement a new Framework was taken unilaterally by your department without any meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the NRPSI, the non-statutory regulator of public service interpreters.

I wish to inform you that I will not work under another Framework and ask you to consider a different model. The current model is fundamentally flawed. It is not serving justice or the taxpayer. We cannot make a living on its unfavourable terms and conditions. No other profession has been treated as unfairly as HMCTS interpreters, who provide an invaluable service to the Ministry of Justice. Without us, court hearings could not go ahead and justice could not be delivered.

The outsourcing has led to our pay being reduced by some 70%. The Big Word has made our working conditions intolerable. In 2019, many of us lost significant sums of money when the Big Word's subcontractor, Debonair Languages, went bankrupt and did not pay us for the work we accepted in good faith. Debonair Languages was a MOJ approved subcontractor, yet nobody protected us from the losses we suffered after the company went bankrupt.

Since the imposition of the flawed Word Synk application on us by the Big Word, many interpreters have not been paid for their work and now refuse to take jobs from your contractor. Courts are struggling to get interpreters for hearings and many cases have to be adjourned. This is aggravating the backlog of court cases.

For qualified interpreters, such adverse terms and conditions make the profession non-viable. Substituting interpreters with Level 6 interpreting qualifications with inadequately qualified bilinguals should, however, never be considered a bona fide option as this can lead to miscarriages of justice and cases collapsing at a significant cost to the taxpayer.

I ask you to consider a different model based on insourcing the contract. Since 2012, new technology has emerged that would enable HMCTS to operate the service via an automated application, which would significantly reduce the time spent by HMCTS employees on sourcing an interpreter. Prior to 2012, listings officers had to phone individual interpreters and this time-consuming process was quoted as one of the reasons for outsourcing the service to a single contractor. Only interpreters with OFQUAL accredited Level 6 interpreting qualifications and appropriate security clearances would have access to the portal. There would be no need for a separate costly quality control contract.

The application would include settings, which would offer bookings based on interpreters' location, which would save travel costs for the MOJ. That feature was part of the Capita application created more than 10 years ago. Adequate rates would eliminate the need for coordinators as interpreters would accept the bookings without having to haggle over the rates.

A new Framework will lead to more professional interpreters leaving interpreting and seeking alternative careers. This will have a further detrimental impact on HMCTS operations, standards of interpreting and the administration of justice.