

29th January 2025: Message from those taking withdrawal of service action from HMCTS

Dear Colleagues,

Our heartfelt thanks go to the colleagues who have partaken in five successive withdrawals of services from HMCTS, in protest against lack of transparency in the procurement processes and breach of interpreters' trust along the way.

Join our Sixth Withdrawal of Services on 17-18 and 20-21 February 2025 by choosing either of the two sets of dates, or both! Please send the prepared updated letter to your MP!

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

- Many colleagues have noticed that as a result of our withdrawal of services staff would either sign their full booked duration or demonstrate polite manners.

Although that makes us feel appreciated, we all know this will not last, nor will it make our line of work reliable to commit to.

- Through the submissions (80), some of which written by us, we have proven to the Inquiry that interpreters are underpaid whilst TBW keeps making profit. We have proven we do not receive an average of £46 per hour nor between £36 to £72 per hour.

We cannot continue working if our travel time is not paid, as the current plan of the MOJ states in terms of the next contract and this new contract will last until the end of this decade.

- The Inquiry called for a pause of the tender so that issues get resolved and the future contract does not bring the quality further down and further dissolve the existing pool of interpreters.

Oral Evidence - 18.12.2024 <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15176/pdf/>

Q114 Lord Porter of Spalding: When would the contract go live now if you do not pause it? You are panicking over a 2028 go-live date if we asked you to pause it for three months.

Nick Goodwin: We have just received some bids. They will be reviewed between now and March. Quite a lengthy clearance process is required across government. We will award the contract in early 2026 and they go live in October 2026. That is the current timetable.

The Chair: It is a five-year contract?

Nick Goodwin: It is a four-year contract.

FUTURE ACTIONS

It is felt, however, that the fight is not yet over, and we need to press on collectively for the MoJ to implement changes to the current contract. There has been much diplomacy over the past decade and we believe it is now interpreters that can make a difference by withdrawing services. Our next step is to contact the current Independent Review of the Criminal Courts led by Sir Brian Levenson.

The previous withdrawals caused a stir across the system - some courts were desperate to secure an interpreter for the day. And the fulfilment rates for the first three quarters of 2024 steadily declined (90%), as the MoJ's data shows. We are particularly grateful to the colleagues who have continuously withdrawn their services, thus, showing resilience and commitment.

The discussion goes on across various media, including our WhatsApp forum which allows real-time discussions, of the steps to be taken, and the demands to be put forward.

At the same time, we invite everybody to participate in stopping work, both directly contracted and through agencies, on those chosen days. It does not take much to stop working for one day, considering the rates we are receiving, and it will produce an impact, therefore the more of us together in it, the better.

With regards to our duty as public service interpreters to protect the justice system and ensure it runs uninterruptedly, this function was formally delegated by the MoJ to the intermediary agencies, leaving interpreters working for them accountable to agencies and the agencies accountable to the HMCTS for the smooth running of the procurement processes. Therefore, it is perceived that there is no obligation on the interpreters entering into contractual agreement with the HMCTS on their own terms following a direct request from courts (off -contract) to withdraw their services. However, they can help the cause by not making themselves available on the days of the withdrawal.

We feel that it is an unsubstantiated fear that if colleagues do not work on certain days, a competitor colleague may take their job. If one sees the bigger picture, by briefly abstaining from assignments, you have positively contributed to the cause, as MoJ will be one interpreter short on the day, which we believe benefits all of us long-term in being heard.

We receive annual notifications around April regarding increases in council tax, insurance policies, phone bills, internet, car and boiler service; interest rates have sky-rocketed; rent and mortgage payments have doubled in the last 5 years. Meanwhile, interpreters have been paid progressively less, falling victim to the so called "competitive dialogue" approach exercised by the MoJ!

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of our Withdrawal of Services is to show the MOJ and their respective Supplier that interpreters matter.

- We need better Terms and Conditions now
- We cannot work in the uncertainty that TBW/another agency introduces itself by changing their working conditions as they deem fit
- The model no longer operates in the best interest of the public or the public purse
- We have to become stakeholders when the current tender is being discussed and it is not deemed fit for purpose as set out currently.

We have achieved a lot and we need every single interpreter to join our efforts so that we reach these goals sooner, rather than by waiting months or years.

One of the suggestions is to link in to a live broadcast on the day of the withdrawal (A link was kindly organised for us on the day of the protest at Parliament Square and a colleague brought his laptop).

Whether interpreters choose to withdraw services, take jobs, work with additional, or do nothing at all, TBW will never cease to recruit new individuals who would inevitably undercut their colleagues with no change to the T&Cs. Consequently, interpreters will be left insecure about their income.

With the above in mind, may we join forces in unity over the withdrawals to bring about a tide of much needed change!

Kind regards,

The UK Court Interpreters (Level 6/Level 7)