

*with your views*



## Interpreting money talks

I read 'We Need to Talk About Money' (TL62,1) and would like to share my perspective. I have been working as an interpreter and translator for over 15 years and have seen the landscape change a lot – more specifically, the privatisation (or so-called outsourcing) of the interpreting profession within the criminal justice system. Since then, the quality has gone down as the rates of payment have decreased significantly.

I have been thinking about it a lot in recent months as I increasingly come across court hearings which cannot go ahead as no suitable interpreter is provided. I have also witnessed hearings where a family member or friend interprets, or where the parties decide to carry on even though at least one of the people cannot participate in the proceedings effectively due to the language barrier.

Interpreters used for discussions outside of the proceedings are pressured to interpret in the courtroom. Often they are not adequately qualified and vetted to do the job they are being asked to perform and, in any event, they are conflicted as they are privy to information which is discussed outside of the courtroom in the strictest confidence.

At times I see linguists appearing remotely even though the parties are there in person. Many of them are not fully qualified and cannot interpret safely in the legal setting.

Finally, I see that courts are trying to source their own interpreters directly as they are unable to get them through their preferred supplier. The fees offered by agencies are often so low it is no longer financially viable for registered interpreters to work with them.

In 2007, the National Agreement on Arrangements for the Use of Interpreters, Translators and Language Service Professionals (in investigations and proceedings within the criminal justice system) stipulated that interpreters would be paid £30 per hour for their interpreting time (minimum of three hours). Additionally, we were paid £15 per hour of travel and £0.25 for mileage. To put things into perspective, in 2007 the minimum hourly wage was £5.52. That means interpreters were paid just over 5.7 times the minimum wage and had their travel time and expenses reimbursed.

Currently, the hourly rate from the MoJ (Ministry of Justice) ranges from £18 (family proceedings) to £24 (some 'complex' cases), paid in one-minute increments. The first hour and the first 10 miles of their commute (each way) are not reimbursed. As such, they may have to block out most of their day just to earn £18. It's no surprise that qualified interpreters are no longer accepting such jobs.

To make matters worse, £18 earned as a self-employed person is worth significantly

less than the same amount earned as an employee. The true cost of an employee is approximately twice the basic salary. Additionally, freelancers have no regular hours, no holiday or sick pay, no employer's pension scheme, nor any other perks that come with regular employment. In order for us to practise safely (i.e. to be insured, attend CPD, and treat interpreting as our profession and not a 'side hustle'), the rates of the remuneration have to improve.

In April 2023, the National Minimum Wage increased to £10.42. Going back to the National Agreement example, I would argue that registered public service interpreters should be paid £60 per hour (minimum of three hours), in addition to their travel time (£30 per hour/£0.45 per mile) and expenses. Until then, further disruption and costly miscarriages of justice are likely to take place.

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### Star Letter prize

This issue's Star Letter writer wins a copy of League of the Lexicon. Read our review of the board game at [cutt.ly/TLWinter](https://cutt.ly/TLWinter).

