

Unsung heroes: Celebrating public service interpreters

By Mohammed Ahmed

Interpreters and translators are necessary during any interaction between the police and people who do not speak English, and in England and Wales public service interpreters and translators attend around 66,000 face-to-face assignments for the police each year. These assignments often take place during unsociable hours and amid difficult and complex circumstances.

To acknowledge the vital role interpreters and translators play in policing, the first ever National Police Language Services Conference and Awards Ceremony was held in April 2023. Dedicated to the skills and talent of public service linguists, the event was aimed at recognising those who have been doing exceptional work within police interpreting, helping the force to serve non-English-speaking members of the public across the country.

At Translate UK, we work with public service interpreters who are listed on the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI). In addition to acting as a sponsor for first-time applicants and helping those in our network renew their DBS clearances, we pride ourselves on providing skilled and professional interpreters and translators across the country. In line with our mission, we are delighted that two NRPSI-registered members of our network were recognised and celebrated for their contribution during the National Police Language Services Awards.

Karina Stefanescu, who has been on the National Register since September 2003, was named as the winner of The Simon Cole Award for Excellence in Police Interpreting, which recognises an interpreter or translator who has demonstrated considerable expertise, dedication, determination and support to policing over a protracted period of time, while Shefki Bytyqi, who joined the National Register in November 2001, was named as the runner up for the Spoken Interpreter of the Year Award.

The NRPSI is a not-for-profit organisation which was set up in 1994 by the judiciary because of some terrible miscarriages of justice due to shocking interpreting in the courts. Its main mandate is to protect the public and according to Mike Orlov, Executive Director and Registrar at the NRPSI, the “national register always encourages each and every agency to act as professionally as possible and engage with practitioners who are NRPSI registered”.

At Translate UK we are proud to be working with the NRPSI by ensuring that our members have the right qualifications, skills and experience to carry out their roles competently and professionally.

While the National Police Language Services Awards was a wonderful way to celebrate interpreters and translators, the vital role they play sadly often goes unrecognised. This was best expressed by Baroness Coussins, who is herself a linguist and who co-chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages to promote the teaching and learning of languages, during her opening address at the conference.

She said: “The strategic importance of linguists goes largely unnoticed and unsung, especially in the field of law enforcement and the administration of justice, despite being so vital – vital to the quality of public services, to the quality of justice and to human rights.”