

Ten top tips for HM Prison Officers, working with Interpreters

- 1** Make sure the interpreter has *enough information* about the proposed conversation to have had a chance to check on terminology. This is best done when the interpreter is first requested. Remember that what the interpreter needs to think about may be e.g. drug related slang, or the proper spellings of local geographical names so as to relate to their pronunciation to the way a speaker of another language may pronounce them. A *short briefing* with the interpreter would be useful, so you can provide any relevant circumstantial details.
- 2** There are many accents and speech styles. Everybody thinks that they speak clearly, but not everybody is right. It's a case of "*tuning in*". *Clear questions* and care with ambiguity make for successful transfer of meaning.
- 3** Make sure you look at, and address your prisoner directly, *using "I" and "you"*. The interpreter will maintain these forms of address and will only use the third person to signal a need to clarify something: e.g. "the interpreter needs to stop, because....." He or she is an invaluable linguistic and cultural resource, within the terms of their codes of ethics and good practice.
- 4** Make sure *the interpreter can see everybody's face* (where this is practicable) *and* that he/she can *hear properly*. Excessive background noise makes the job especially difficult.
- 5** Interpreters take *notes* while listening, to ensure total recall when relaying messages. These are confidential and *should be destroyed upon completion of the assignment* and it may help to build confidence if the prisoner is aware of this.

- 6** If the interpreter is delivering simultaneous whispered interpreting¹, try to *leave a short catch-up pause* every couple of sentences. If the interpreter is delivering consecutive interpreting², *finish the thought* before you stop to allow the relay.
 - 7** Please make a point of *allowing the interpreter to complete the interpretation* of each speech by the prisoner. The vital information or a key phrase may come at the end.
 - 8** Please remember that *the interpreter's role* is specialist and specific to relaying meaning across language and culture. He/she is not there to undertake other roles e.g. liaise with other services for you.
 - 9** *Under no circumstances should the interpreter be left alone with or exposed to unsupervised contact from a prisoner or their supporters*. Remember if you need *protection* so does the interpreter.
 - 10** Please be aware that however professional the interpreter is, there may have been elements of the interaction that he/she found upsetting. Since both of you have a duty to confidentiality, a *short debrief with you* would, in some circumstances, be very helpful.
- ¹ Simultaneous interpreting is when the interpreter is listening, changing the language and speaking (whispering) all at once.
² Consecutive interpreting is when the interpreter listens and takes notes while one party speaks and then passes the message on in the other language, before the other party replies.

Where to go next

National Register of Public Service Interpreters.
www.iol.org.uk/nrpsi

The Chartered Institute of Linguists.

The Institute serves the interests of professional linguists throughout the world and acts as a respected language assessment and accredited awarding body.
www.iol.org.uk

Institute of Translation and Interpreting.

Independent professional association of practising translators and interpreters in the UK.
www.iti.org.uk

BLIS Professionals. Database of international communication experts.

www.blis.org.uk/professionals

Code of Practice for interpreters.

Please read the Code of Practice for interpreters at www.nrpsi.org.uk for further information.

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www.rln-yh.com

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0114 281 3450

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This tent card has been designed to give tips/guidance to prison officers when communicating with patients through an interpreter.

It is not a definitive guide and is meant as a quick reference only. For more detailed help and advice contact the Regional Language Network NW (RLN NW)

The RLN websites are a gateway to many useful resources relating to language and culture.

BLIS Services serves as a single reference point for anyone looking to use or provide services in language and cultural expertise and includes:

BLIS Professionals

Database of international communications experts

BLIS Jobs

Job site for people with languages

BLIS Facilities

Directory of business language support services

BLIS Courses

Language courses across the country

All BLIS Services are free and on-line.

www.blis.org.uk

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