

Developing a 2012 Joint Interpreters Campaign

Notes of the Meeting of Organisations to discuss the Joint Campaign

Date: Thursday, 23rd February 2012

Time: 10:00am to 12:00pm

Venue: Unite House, the offices of UNITE the Union in London

Present: Andrew Murray, Regional Manager, Unite, also chaired the meeting; Amelia Naranjo, Secretary, NUPIT; Geoffrey Buckingham, Chairman, APCI; Aqil Minhas, treasurer, APCI; Madeleine Lee, PIA, Director (via phone link); Magdy Abbas, Director, SOMI UK; Klasiena Slaney, Director and Company Secretary, SOMI UK; Guillermo (Willie) Makin, Chairman, SPSI; Paul Wilson, CEO, ITI; Eulalia (Lalia) Pessoa-White, Director, NRPSI (observer); and Tony Wilcox, WITS, (joined via phone link at 11am).

Apologies received: Keith Moffit, Chair, CIOL Council

Background: On 30 January 2012, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) launched the new interpreter service, which has been implemented in courts across England and Wales. The changes mean that court interpreters are now sourced from one single agency, Applied Language Solutions (ALS). However, currently some 60 per cent of the 2,300 interpreters from the NRPSI are refusing to work under the conditions of the new system. As a result, there has been chaos in the courts and a large number of lawyers and judges have reported instances where interpreters were late, under-prepared, under qualified or failed to turn up at all, causing increasing costs due to adjourned hearings. This may lead to possible mistrials and miscarriages of justice. HMCTS and ACPO expected problems to occur in the next three months; however they never expected this level of disruption. There have been millions wasted in extra costs in 3 weeks and significant developments in the press. Professional interpreters are not prepared to work for the Terms & Conditions on offer.

Andy Murray opened the meeting stating that this was a follow-up meeting from the Unite Interpreter Seminar 21 January 2012, held to initiate a joint campaign to develop a unified approach to the severe challenges that our profession is currently facing. The agenda are the points on the flip chart composed from discussions at the seminar (attached).

After introductions of the participants of the meeting, there was a brief discussion about the Seminar which had 110 attendees. We all agreed it had been successful and constructive and thanks were extended to NUPIT/UNITE for organising and facilitating this event.

Representatives of the organisations present outlined what they believed this campaign should be about, and an update was given about their activities:

Geoffrey Buckingham: APCI and SPSI have launched the second part of the “Interpreters for Justice Campaign”, which they undertook jointly. This will include a press campaign and parliamentary and political lobbying. A survey has been sent to interpreters and was forwarded by the NRPSI to all their registrants, so far there were 500 responses. A second survey for solicitors will be sent off shortly; it will be important to publicise this to legal professionals.

APCI has continued contact with the European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA) and with Vivian Reading, EU Commissioner for Justice.

Several organisations are in contact with the Shadow Minister Andy Slaughter, who has put written Parliamentary questions (PQs) to the government about the Framework Agreement and the contract with ALS, as well as questions regarding the LOCOG (London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) translation contract with ALS.

Amelia Naranjo: NUPIT has many ideas and the backing and support of the biggest Union in the UK. The “Speak Up, Speak Out” is the NUPIT campaign to save professional interpreting and translation services. One of the principal objectives for the new campaign should be to obtain statutory protection of title for interpreters. The government should control quality of interpreting and maintain the NRPSI and the National Agreement. Using interpreters from the NR should be made compulsory. Minimum standards should be maintained, with heavy penalties if the quality is substandard. This should stop the use of unqualified linguists within the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Regulation of trainers and trainees of the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) should be revised to achieve higher standards.

Magdy Abbas: Never before have we seen so much effort exerted by individual interpreters and interpreter organisations alike, or the MoJ or the Lord Chancellor’s Department turn a blind

eye to such a concerted effort. Unite has access to MPs who can help us in this campaign by using their influence (not pressure) for the MoJ to have regular meetings with interpreters' representatives. Having a one-off meeting has not helped. Our concern in SOMI is that the situation is turning into a war with the MoJ and we are not at war with them, we need to talk. This is in addition to the actions taken by all other organisations which we support. It is important that we work towards having statutory regulations and protection of title and to maintain the NRPSI and NA. Our experience of having regular meetings with the Metropolitan Police has been successful. The Met are rejecting the FWA and outsourcing. With regard to Amelia's point on trainers' qualifications, there was a course set up for that purpose in the past but it proved to be expensive. This is something we could assist with in future.

Willie Makin: SPSI is taking part in the joint campaign with APCI and both have been working in collaboration with Cambridgeshire Police, helping it achieve savings in excess of 40% in the last financial year whilst guaranteeing quality. SPSI is willing to cooperate with the government to secure a better service based on the Cambridgeshire and Wales models. SPSI has written to the MoJ and to NRPSI, but has not yet had a reply.

Madeleine Lee: PIA has been active in their press campaign, which resulted in many articles being published and highlighting the many problems in the current FWA. PIA's campaign against the North West FWA was not successful because interpreters continued working when booked directly. However, this time interpreters are not willing to fill the gaps in the MoJ FWA. Unfortunately not everyone is fully aware of the direction that has been chosen and there is a need to explore our legal position to inform members. We need to reach out further to people who are not on the NRPSI. I agree with Magdy that we need to talk to the MoJ, a full on war is not an option. The organisations need to work together and coordinate tasks, thereby avoiding work duplication. We need to further create awareness among solicitors and barristers and malfunctions need to be recorded and publicised.

Paul Wilson: ITI is in favour of honest and open dialogue with the government. Agree fully with Magdy, a full on war is not an option. There have been lots of problems with the FWA. We need to keep information flowing to the decision makers.

Tony Wilcox: WITS is offering cooperation through their call centre and other facilities. It is important to have a coordinated and professional approach. Police forces are under colossal pressure from the MoJ to join the FWA.

A united front: THE NEW UMBRELLA CAMPAIGN

It was agreed that the aim of this new campaign should be:

1. In the short term: A return from outsourcing, back to direct employment
2. In the medium term: Regular dialogue between interpreter organisations and the government (keeping in mind claims that Downing Street may scrap the MoJ and put the Home Office back in charge)
3. In the long term: Statutory regulation and protection of title

HOW TO ACHIEVE THE AIMS

We need to launch the event and decide on times scales. We need a unified approach and apply persuasion and influence on MPs in order to reach the government. Interpreters can assist by contacting and informing their MPs.

We need to keep in mind that this government does not wish to talk to people, but they are now at half-way point and will start their political campaigns by the end of the year. We therefore need to include all government parties and influence their manifestos.

A JOINT CAMPAIGN MEANS

The current campaigns should continue, but there has to be an umbrella campaign involving all organisations in the planning and organising. There has to be at least one representative of each organisation, forming a steering group (an example is the Legal Aid “Justice for All” campaign, which includes 50 organisations). Each organisation can bring different skills to this new campaign. Even though they may not agree on everything, it is important that they do not contradict each other.

The terms of reference of this Steering Group will be:

- 1 – To develop the campaign plan and coordinate activities to deal with the FWA.
- 2 – Collate information about organisations.

OUTCOME

It was decided to have further meetings with the steering group formed by the organisations to develop a campaign plan and coordinate activities in order to deal with the Framework Agreement, talks with the government and in the long term, statutory regulation and protection of title, which will afford us the respect our profession deserves.

The next meeting for the steering group of organisations was set for Monday 5th March 2012 at 4pm, at the same location.

There was a further discussion about the Home Office Consultation re Police Procurement which has come to light. The organisations have agreed to respond to it and to encourage their members to respond too.

The meeting ended at 12pm.

Report prepared by Klasiena Slaney (SOMI UK)

APCI – Association of Police and Court Interpreters

CIOL – Chartered Institute of Linguists

ITI – Institute of Translators and Interpreters

NRPSI – National Register of Public Service Interpreters

NUPIT – National Union of Professional Interpreters and Translators, part of UNITE the Union

PIA – Professional Interpreters' Alliance

SOMI – Society of Official Metropolitan Interpreters UK

SPSI – Society for Professional Public Service Interpreters

WITS – Wales Interpretation and Translation Service