

Making the Connections Improvement Fund

Research Project

Final Report – Summary

Project:

**Wales Interpreter and Translation Service
(WITS)**

1. Aim

The Wales Interpreter and Translation Service (WITS) project aims to develop an all Wales interpreter and translation service that provides improved, quality language services, which protect vulnerable people, are cost effective and are delivered to a consistent set of standards.

2. Background

Organisations are all governed by legislation that affects the way in which services are provided. There is a statutory duty to make services accessible to all, regardless of the language or communication needs of their service user.

There has been an issue around the provision of a professional interpreter and translation service in Wales for the last 10 years. As the number of asylum seekers and economic migrants increases, the need for improved language communication services continues to grow. Currently, many agencies in Wales are attempting to provide a quality service to individuals. However, at best this has proved to be expensive and inefficient, involving massive duplication of effort by numerous public bodies (for example CRB checks). The result is a service of often variable quality.

Due to the fact that the demand outstrips the present supply, and services are paying different rates for interpreters, statutory services are competing with each other for a scarce resource. Because of this, services have to resort to interpreters of unknown or insufficient standard, thereby increasing the risk of mistakes and subsequent litigation, which could all too often follow.

To this end the WITS research project has been completed on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government, in partnership with Gwent Police and Cardiff Health Alliance, to establish the current situation in Wales and to make recommendations. The project explores a collaborative approach to the provision of language services. This project covers all of Wales and all language and communication needs (Welsh language, foreign languages and disability-related communication needs).

3. Research Methods

The project consulted all public bodies in Wales through a questionnaire and also sought data on existing use of linguistic services by language and cost. It analysed records of linguistic service use where these were available.

4. Research Results

The project identified wide scale dissatisfaction with existing linguistic provision, with public service providers sharing concerns regarding quality and cost.

The absence of a centralised booking service means it is left to individual staff members of public service providers to identify the correct interpreter within reasonable travelling distance. Evidence from this research has shown that qualified interpreters are regularly employed from London and the south east England, when there is often a nearer and more suitably qualified interpreter on the National Register. Alternatively, interpreters are often sourced from local agencies, without any knowledge of individual's language ability or professional suitability.

The research measured the amount spent by each organisation on interpreting and translating services and also the amount spent on each language, during the financial year 2007-2008. (It is recognised that this information is in effect a snapshot of an ever changing situation, which continues to evolve as a result of the impact of world events on migration and asylum seeking.) The research revealed that public services in Wales are spending in excess of £3 million per annum directly on interpreter services. On top of this there are other costs in respect of National Register membership, security vetting, booking administration, finance administration which are likely to push the total spend to over £5 million.

The research has produced data showing the amount spent on each language in each public sector area. This information can be used to identify training needs as well as to assist with language choice when documents are being translated for public use.

The research identified approximately 1200 “interpreters or potential interpreters” either living in Wales or within reasonable travelling distance. However, only 24 (1%) of qualified professional interpreters on the National Register live in Wales. Clearly there is a need to identify and train local bilingual people as interpreters.

5. Recommendations:

This work has shows an overwhelming support for a high quality, co-ordinated, collaborative, interpreter service in Wales providing for public service providers and the voluntary sector. Organisations are seeking easy access to a supplier of quality interpreters at a reasonable price.

A ‘One-Stop-Shop’ offers the best solution for Wales. This would monitor the changing needs in Wales and then responds to those changes by training new interpreters in the languages that are needed.

It would provide a consistent, quality language service.

It would provide a professional 24/7 call centre and booking service, reducing delays and providing a better service to the public.

It would provide a guarantee that each interpreter has been properly security vetted.

It would allow costs to be standardised and controlled in line with organisations needs.

By running a single centralised service, charges per hour can be maintained at current levels and the call centre and training can be funded from within those rates. In short, once established, the service would be self funding. It also offers further savings to organisations that would be able to reduce administration costs in relation to payment procedures.

It is recommended that the Wales Assembly Government support the development of a business case for a 12 month pilot scheme for a ‘One-Stop Shop’, with a target commencement date of 1st June 2009.

The pilot ‘One-Stop Shop’ will:

- Improve the quality of language services, delivered to a consistent standard.
- Improve access to public services for vulnerable communities thereby improving public confidence
- Provide interpreters with sector specific training and an opportunity to gain employment whilst continuing to prepare for full professional qualifications.

- Provide improved local employment opportunities at this difficult time in the jobs market. There will be increased employment of
 - local interpreters
 - staff of the one-stop shop, and
 - staff at local training establishments involved in interpreter training.
- Redirect public spending back into the local economy of Wales
- Provide an opportunity for financial savings for public service providers through:
 - reduced fees for interpreter and translation services
 - reduced costs of administrative services in booking interpreters
 - reduced costs of finance administration (one monthly bill instead of a single invoice for every interpreting assignment.)
 - reduced charges for CRB security vetting for each organisation.
- Reduce the carbon footprint of Welsh interpreter services.
- Provide interpreters with sector specific training and an opportunity to gain employment whilst continuing to prepare for full professional qualifications.

9.2 It is recommended that the next task of the project is to identify potential partners for the pilot scheme in order to develop a consortium approach.

9.3 It is recommended that the Wales Assembly Government ensures the development of standardised practices for each public service provider. (This work is already being considered by the WAG Refugee Inclusion Unit)