



Ministry of JUSTICE

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MR JOHN McCARTHY – APPLIED LANGUAGE SOLUTIONS

Thank you for your letter of 8 November on behalf of your constituent, Mr McCarthy, about the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) decision to sign an interpreting contract with Applied Language Solutions (ALS).

I realise Mr McCarthy has formed his own views on the department's decision to use ALS for its interpreting services. This decision was taken because the previous system was inefficient and found to be not robust by a MoJ Internal Audit in 2010. The National Audit Office agreed that the old system was inadequate and did not provide value for money. I will address Mr McCarthy's points in order.

It would have been inappropriate for us to encourage staff to provide personal views on Government policies. Guidance on this subject is set out in rules which govern civil servants, including the Civil Service Management Code.

The new contract allows for an increased range of acceptable qualifications and experience than was previously the case. Under the contract, all foreign language interpreters must provide evidence that they have the required qualifications before they can undertake assignments. The remuneration of interpreters and other terms and conditions are a matter between the contractor and the individual interpreter.

We accept that there was an unacceptable level of problems at the start of the contract and we asked the contractor, ALS, to take urgent action. That has started to show results, as borne out by the statistics the Ministry published in October.

The framework offers the opportunity for greater career progression than previously, through the tiering system. Interpreters also have the opportunity to engage in the full range of language services work across the different jurisdictions in the justice sector, which may not have been readily accessible previously.

We are aware that some sections of the interpreter community continue to express their opposition to the Framework Agreement. However, the previous system was not fit for purpose and we hope that interpreters will contribute constructively towards the new process. Where formal complaints are made, they will be investigated and, where necessary, the appropriate action will be taken.

I hope my reply is helpful. I enclose a copy for you to send to Mr McCarthy should you wish to do so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H. Grant', with a stylized, cursive-like script.

HELEN GRANT