

Rt Hon Baroness Morris of Yardley
Public Services Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

MoJ ref: Sub 127462

24 September 2025

Dear Lady Morris,

SIX-MONTH UPDATE ON INTERPRETING SERVICES IN THE COURTS

I am writing to provide you with an update regarding some of the specific actions the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) agreed to take forward as part of the Government response to the Public Services Committee's report on the interpreting service. Below I have set out the areas where the MoJ agreed to provide an update on progress within six months of the report's publication on 24 March 2025.

Since the report's publication, the MoJ has taken a number of steps to act on the Committee's feedback. We have also embedded key learnings into our continuous improvement plans that will strengthen the service in readiness for the transition to the new language service contracts in October 2026.

Our commitment to enhancing service delivery is beginning to be reflected in the positive trends in our latest performance data. In Q1 2025, the number of unfulfilled requests fell sharply compared to Q1 2024 with a decrease of 28%.¹ As a result of this, the overall success rate for the service in Q1 2025 increased to 97%, a return to levels that were last seen in 2023, whilst demand has continued to rise.²

Data on Interpreting

While we remain confident in the breadth and standards of our data, we acknowledged that we need to restructure the way it is published to provide a clearer view of service performance. This work needs to be completed and effectively embedded before we can begin to consider publishing further data.

We are developing a consolidated and more coherent narrative with signposting to, and explanations of, all the available service data. This narrative will be included in the next quarterly release of the MoJ's Criminal Court Statistics (CCS), due to be published at the end of September 2025. We will seek feedback on this narrative from our stakeholders and users to identify if it has been successful in aiding understanding and supporting transparency of service performance.

¹ Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025 - GOV.UK

² Ibid.

Looking ahead, we will use this feedback to inform our engagement with suppliers and the judiciary to explore what further data could be published to aid understanding of the service provided by the new contracts.

Stakeholder Engagement and Complaints

The Committee made separate recommendations on stakeholder engagement and the service's complaints processes and I have provided a combined update of our progress below.

To address the Committee's concerns regarding disengagement amongst frontline legal professionals, the MoJ committed to expanding on our existing partnerships to deepen stakeholder engagement within a six-month period. I am pleased to inform you that we have been making steady progress to achieve this objective which, in turn, has supported us in driving forward ongoing work to refine our long-term communication strategy for the service.

In particular, the HMCTS Contract Management Team attended the HMCTS Strategic Engagement Group in June 2025 to have an open discussion on the interpreting service with key stakeholders, including representatives from the Bar Council and the Law Society. Regular engagement has also continued with the Language Services External Stakeholder Forum, which is attended by organisations representing interpreters, visual and tactile communication practitioners and voluntary regulator organisations such as the National Register for Public Sector Interpreters (NRPSI), the Chartered Institute of Linguists, (CIOL), and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI).

We have started targeted activities across these forums to gather insight into members' experiences of the service and are acting on your feedback to ensure that legal professionals and court users clearly understand how to raise their concerns. We have developed communications for legal professionals to raise awareness of the complaints processes, which includes a survey asking for their feedback on the interpreter service. This will be shared with members of the HMCTS Strategic Engagement Group for wider circulation over the coming weeks.

We are conducting our annual survey to gain deeper insight on the service experience. This survey is shared with operational frontline staff across the department and findings will inform future improvement and engagement activities.

As part of our strategic planning, we are also focusing on improving the accessibility of these complaints processes to ensure that all court users can share their experiences and help shape service improvements, including overcoming the challenges presented by a complainant not being able to complain in English or Welsh. We are in early discussions with our suppliers to explore how complaints can be flagged in the user's native language and will update the Committee on this as we move further along the procurement process.

Remote Interpreting

The Committee highlighted limitations in court infrastructure and how this hampers remote interpreting. While the MoJ agreed with the benefits of remote interpreting we noted that the decision to use remote interpreting in any given hearing remains a matter for the judiciary.

Nonetheless, we are working to ensure that our facilities fully support remote interpreting. We are reviewing the use of our existing headset equipment nationwide to consider how to improve its appropriate use across our estate. We will work with operational colleagues to develop targeted engagement to drive uptake of this equipment among court staff and the interpreting community.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Committee recommended that the MoJ should develop and publish a funded roadmap for the introduction of AI tools for interpreting in public services within six months. While we acknowledge the great promise that AI holds, we are equally mindful of the risks and sensitivities associated with its deployment in judicial settings.

I am sure the Committee understands the sensitivities of implementing AI in an environment with life-changing consequences, such as the courts, and that the reliability of this technology must be proved and accepted by all court stakeholders and the judiciary before implementation. These requirements are why we cannot yet publish a specific roadmap that details our plans on AI integration in the interpreting service. However, I am pleased to update the Committee that in July the MoJ published its first AI Action Plan for Justice. This outlines how we will utilise AI across the department to transform the public's experience with the justice system. This plan includes an overview of the MoJ's roadmap for the delivery of our strategic priorities for AI adoption over a three-year period. The MoJ will develop and maintain an integrated AI roadmap to keep the system aligned and refine it iteratively.³

In alignment with the strategic priorities within the AI Action Plan for Justice, the MoJ has established an AI working group to provide a framework within which specific AI opportunities can be explored. This work is also informed by the Government's Artificial Intelligence Playbook for the UK Government, which provides departments and public sector organisations with accessible technical guidance on the safe and effective use of AI.⁴ We are also a member of the cross-government AI Language Group which ensures understanding how AI is being developed and used across the Criminal Justice System.

We are also testing the use of AI specifically for interpreting. An AI Proof of Concept (PoC) exercise for non-legal discussions has been deployed in eight prison facilities earlier this year. This pilot, which provided interpreting and line-by-line transcripts in around 100 languages, concluded in August and evaluation is currently underway. We are also benefiting from Lancaster University's independent research in this area, through its research paper on interpreting in prisons. The insights will help inform our assessment of the pilot, and I am grateful to them for this valuable work. Outcomes from the evaluation will shape future strategic planning to develop AI use across the service.

I hope this provides assurance to the Committee that we are committed to developing AI integration within the interpreting service and, once the technology is ready, we will in a position to communicate our plans for delivery. I also remind you that our new contracts for the language services include the requirement for the suppliers to work with us on developing and implementing AI solutions.

I would like to thank the Committee again for their report and continuous engagement with the interpreting service. I hope the updates I have provided emphasise the MoJ's dedication to deliver

³ AI action plan for justice - GOV.UK

⁴ Copy of AI Playbook for the UK Government (word)

further, practical improvements to the service. I look forward to working with the Committee as we implement these changes to deliver a strengthened, high-quality service for our stakeholders, court users and interpreters.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sarah Sackman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sarah" and the last name "Sackman" clearly distinguishable.

SARAH SACKMAN KC MP
Minister Of State