



# Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services



**Customer services:**  
0330 20 20 270

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# Introduction

Language Empire recognises the importance of timely and effective interpretation and translation services for the provision of quality care to service users who may require this due to a disability or language requirement. People who use our services and their carers have the right to effective communication in a form, language and manner that enables them to understand the information provided to them. Where necessary and reasonably practicable, this includes the right to a competent interpreter. People who speak little or no English need interpreters

in order to use health, legal, social welfare and education services. Using interpreters is crucial to ensure people with little or no spoken English can access services and receive an appropriate standard of care.

In general, interpreting means bridging a language and cultural gap between two people who need to communicate with each other but who may have different cultural backgrounds, do not share a common language and therefore may be unable to communicate effectively.

## 1.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE

**The aim of this service is to:**

- a) Assist NHS employees to communicate with people who have specific communication needs including:
  - people from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds
  - disabled people (including people with sensory impairments, people with learning disabilities and deaf and deafblind people)
  - families/children and young people within the social care system
  - people with mental health issues
- b) Enable service users, including members of the general public, carers, and their families, for whom English presents a significant language or communication barrier to:
  - have access to a high quality and confidential interpretation and translation services
  - have equal access to the local services and information
  - have their needs identified and met
  - participate in and contribute to the services they receive (for example, social care visits/assessments of vulnerable adults or children, which can be very sensitive or volatile situations, such as child protection issues or if the service user has been subject to abuse)
- c) Promote best practice in the field of interpreting
- d) Achieve the highest level of competence
- e) Protect the privacy of all parties and the confidentiality of information
- f) Maintain professional conduct and comportment
- g) Provide timely access to interpretation and translation services
- h) Provide high levels of satisfaction from non-English speakers
- i) Provide high levels of satisfaction from health and social care professionals
- j) Provide positive responses and actions for non-English speakers and peer feedback on service improvement.



## 1.2 DEFINITIONS

**Service user:** A service user (non-English speaker) is an individual who is using services from **the NHS**.

**Carer:** A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support.

**Telephone interpreters:** A professional who is available over the phone to convey spoken information from one language into another.

**Face-to-face interpreter:** A professional, who in person, conveys spoken information from one language into another, or sign language into spoken English and vice versa. They can also act as 'cultural mediators', taking into account potential cultural differences between service users and staff.

**Translation:** Information that is converted from one format (normally written English) into another format such as Easy Read, braille or text in another language.

## 1.3 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE GUIDANCE

This guidance gives staff information and good practice for:

- effective booking of face-to-face and telephone interpreters
- effective communication with service users through face-to-face and telephone interpreters
- considering translation needs and requests for information from service users, carers or people in local communities
- useful contacts for help and advice in relation to interpreting and translation.

## 1.4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Managers and team leaders will:**

- ensure all staff are made aware of and have read the guidance
- identify any additional training and support needs required to enable their teams to effectively use interpretation or translation services and highlight this to your organisation's equality manager.
- ensure periodic monitoring of the quality and effectiveness of interpretation and clinical / professional staff use of interpreters.

All staff (including business support staff) who book interpreters and professional staff (i.e. social workers etc.) will:

- follow the good practice and guidelines set out within this document when using interpreters or considering translating information
- ensure that they are aware of the process for booking, and if required, give feedback on interpretation and translation services
- arrange interpreting or translating services as soon as the need becomes apparent.
- inform service users and carers that an interpreter can be arranged at no cost to them
- provide accurate information to the interpretation and translation service provider.

**The role of the interpreter is:**

To facilitate communication between people who do not have a language in common. The key factors that influence the requirements for interpreting are:

- ensuring the best patient outcome
- facilitating communication to all involved
- working towards fostering trust and maintaining confidentiality.



## Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services

# 2. Translations

## 2.1 WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION COULD NEED TRANSLATING?

- Written information that individual service users and staff need for the provision of care such as assessment and support plans.
  - Written information about your organisation that local people may need to know about, such as leaflets about services, policies, strategies or events.
- The main categories of translated information are:
- Accessible information: information that is provided in a format that makes it accessible to someone with communication support needs related to a disability. This includes audio information, large print and Easy Read.
  - Information in other languages: information that is translated from English into another language or vice versa.

## 2.2 WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO TRANSLATE INFORMATION?

### Translating information for individual service users and staff:

- It is appropriate to consider translating information into an accessible format to make a reasonable adjustment in the provision of care to a disabled service user.
- It is appropriate to consider translating information that is essential for either a service user or staff member to have or to be able to provide effective care.

### Translating information for groups of service users or people in local communities:

Each decision should be made on a case by case basis by considering the most effective method of communication:

### Is translating written information the best way of communicating the information?

- Another way of communication may be more effective. For example, by attending a group meeting and communicating by using an interpreter or by working in partnership with another organisation to assist communication.
- Do you know how you will evaluate or get feedback on the usefulness of the translation?

### What translated information already exists?

- Has anyone else translated the information? (Links to some translated leaflets, resources and information relevant to your organisation may be available on your organisation's intranet.)

### Who is the intended recipient of the translated information?

- Is there evidence of need for similar translations? For example, high use of interpreters for a certain language within your organisation?
- Will the translated information be used more than once?
- Will the translated information be relevant to groups of service users or local people?

### What is the purpose of translation?

- Is it to raise awareness of your organisation's services, how to access them and what people should expect when they do?

### What are the costs of translation?

- Does the cost seem proportionate to the need?



### 2.3 HOW DO YOU REQUEST A TRANSLATION?

Translation of non-confidential information can be sent to Language Empire by email.

Requests to translate private and confidential information about staff or service users should be requested through Language Empire's secure online booking portal [www.language-empire.net](http://www.language-empire.net).

Details of how to request such translations, translation costs, frequently asked questions, and links to existing translated information can be found on your organisation's intranet.

## 3. When to use an Interpreter

Staff should consider using an interpreter if a service user or carer is deaf or if their first language is not English and:

- their command of spoken English compromises care
- they request an interpreter
- a family member is offering to interpret for the service user, but this may not be in the service user's best interest
- when the person has a limited use of English
- when there is a concern that the person does not understand the clinical information given in English
- when the person is deaf or has a hearing impairment or uses sign language
- when information such as a referral form or medical records indicates that someone needs an interpreter
- when there are concerns that the service user or carer, family or friend is unable to express themselves fully and freely due to language barriers.

#### IMPORTANT:

- Staff should use qualified interpreters from your organisation's interpreting service provider whenever an interpreter is required.
- Staff should never use children as interpreters.

#### What language does the person speak?

It is important not to make assumptions about the language that a person speaks. Where only the ethnicity is stated or information is sparse, you may need to check further to ensure a correct match. There may be sensitivities around ethnic or regional tensions or dialects. Therefore, if unsure, please check with the service user.



## 4. Risk of using non-qualified interpreters

Almost all public sector organisations throughout the UK such as NHS organisations and local authorities advocate that professional interpreting is used where possible before relying on carers, family or friends.

Using a relative, friend, bilingual volunteer or staff member to interpret may seem to have advantages (for example, availability or being familiar and reassuring to the service user). However, staff should be aware of potentially significant risks to doing this, such as:

**Inaccuracy of interpretation:** Vital information from the service user may be left out as untrained interpreters might not fully understand the service user or might change the information given based on lack of knowledge. They may not be willing to say that they do not understand something that you or the service user has said for fear of 'losing face'.



**Lack of completeness:** Friends and family may omit swear-words or abusive language so as not to 'offend' you (the practitioner). This information could be vital for example, when assessing someone's mental state. They may 'censor' information they may perceive to be 'embarrassing', 'inappropriate' or 'shameful'. They may want to protect the service user from bad news or decide to tell them in private later on. They may try to hide the true cause of a partner's bruises or incidents of child or sexual abuse.

**Lack of confidentiality:** Family members and lay people may not fully understand the need for strict confidentiality. Furthermore, if a family member is interpreting, the service user might feel forced not to disclose issues about family problems or conflicts which might be the origin of the current crisis. It may inhibit the service user from discussing sensitive, embarrassing or traumatic issues or past events. Some service users may be concerned about confidentiality or stigma from their family or community. They may prefer someone who they do not know to interpret for them.

**Lack of impartiality or conflict of interest:** A relative may 'side' with the practitioner or the service user, or might not pass on information they do not agree with.

**Advice giving or advocacy:** Often with an understandable wish to be 'helpful' or 'supportive', friends and family may misinterpret the practitioner's instructions or advise the service user what to say.

**Availability cannot be guaranteed:** This is especially important in an emergency situation or outside working hours.

**Lack of training:** Most informal interpreters will not have received any interpreting training and although some may have an instinctive understanding of what is required, others may lack empathy or have a poor grasp of the language.

## 5. Telephone interpreting

### 5.1 TELEPHONE INTERPRETING

Telephone interpreting is where the interpreter delivers the interpreting over the phone. To increase accessibility to our services for people who don't speak English, telephone interpreters should be considered as an option, however, face-to-face interpretation is considered to be the best option when dealing with sensitive and complex issues.



### 5.2 WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO USE A TELEPHONE INTERPRETER?

Telephone interpretation is appropriate for first time contact with service users, when pre-booking is not possible, for short and straightforward enquiries, or in circumstances that cannot be planned for, such as when someone visits unexpectedly, emergency situations, when you need immediate assistance, or when all other attempts to get a face-to-face interpreter have been exhausted or unsuccessful.

Telephone interpreting can also be used to establish the language spoken and the nature of an enquiry before a face-to-face interpreter is called.

Additionally, it can also be used to remind service users or family members about a meeting arranged or to communicate brief appointment arrangements.

Alternatively, some service users who do not speak English take great comfort from the anonymity of a telephone interpreter, particularly in small or closely knit ethnic communities. Some service users may feel a level of distress due to cultural or social pressures from within his/her community. If the service user is forced to talk to his/her practitioner with another member of their community in the room, even if that person is a professional interpreter, he/she may feel unable to speak openly and honestly.



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Telephone interpreting may not be suitable for all assessments or interviews owing to its complexity or sensitivity. It may not be advisable in a situation that would exacerbate the service user's symptoms, such as paranoid delusion or auditory hallucination. This form of interpreting may also interrupt the flow and may not be conducive to building rapport between service users and practitioners. To most service users (and practitioners) this form of interpreting can seem somewhat artificial.

Telephone interpreters cannot take account of non-verbal signals and some service users, carers, family or friends may not be comfortable using the telephone.

Telephone interpreting is not suitable for service users with hearing impairment.

### 5.3 HOW DO YOU BOOK A TELEPHONE INTERPRETER?

All bookings are made through Language Empire's online portal at [www.language-empire.net](http://www.language-empire.net) and you will need to click "+ Schedule Telephone booking" and complete the form. Instructions of how to use this to book a telephone interpreter and the costs involved can be found on your organisation's intranet, or you can contact Language Empire's customer services department for support.

### 5.4 HOW SHOULD YOU WORK WITH A TELEPHONE INTERPRETER?

- Be aware that there is a charge for every minute of the call.
- Before you call the telephone interpreter make sure you have the details of the assignment at hand, as well as any other relevant background information.
- Always write down the interpreter's name for identification and follow up.
- Introduce yourself and brief the interpreter on background information and any relevant issues before talking to the service user.
- Ask the interpreter to introduce participants when the service user is connected.



## Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services

# 6. Video Interpreting

Video interpreting is an increasingly effective way to conduct an appointment. It allows a personal face to face experience without requiring additional travel costs. They can be accessed through any mobile device and can be extremely useful for any urgent, or rare language bookings.

## 6.1 WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO USE A VIDEO INTERPRETER?

It's appropriate to use a video interpreter for any on-line meetings you may have. They would also be appropriate for a meeting with a strong internet connection and quiet venue. Places with loud or distracting backgrounds would not be suitable as the interpreter needs to be able to keep focused at all times.

It's appropriate to use a video interpreter for any on-line meetings you may have. They would also be appropriate for a meeting with a strong internet connection and quiet venue. Places with loud or distracting backgrounds would not be suitable as the interpreter needs to be able to keep focused at all times.

If your meeting requires moving around, it's important to bare this in mind and ensure you have a portable screen and camera which can be easily moved. The screen size must also be large enough to see the interpreter clearly, especially for British Sign Language bookings.



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## 6.2 HOW DO YOU BOOK A VIDEO INTERPRETER?

Bookings must be submitted through Language Empire's online booking portal at [www.language-empire.net](http://www.language-empire.net). Details of how to obtain log in details and instructions for booking interpreters, and the costs involved, can be found on your organisation's intranet, or you can contact Language Empire's customer services department for support.



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## 7. Face-to-face interpretation

Face-to-face interpretation facilitates oral communication, either simultaneously or consecutively, between users of different languages and should be the chosen form of interpretation, particularly when dealing with more complex or sensitive cases, when over the phone interpretation is not sufficient to bridge the cultural or communication gap.

Seating arrangements are very important and you should ensure that everybody is facing each other – a semi-circle is always a good arrangement with the interpreter sitting between the health care professional and the service user (where practical).

For British Sign Language it may be more useful for the arrangement of the room to be slightly different. Where possible, it is important to remember that the service user will need to face the interpreter and not the health care professional.

### 7.1 WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO USE A FACE-TO-FACE INTERPRETER?

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Face-to-face interpreters are suitable for a range of one-to-one appointments with service users, as well as occasions when staff may need to communicate with groups of people, such as at a local community meeting.

It is important to consider the service user's perspective and needs (other than just language), as well as the nature of the session when booking an interpreter. Some factors to consider are:

- Would it help to request an interpreter of the same gender?
- Would it help to request a named interpreter that the service user knows and has confidence in?
- Would booking an interpreter who speaks the same language but is of a different nationality help to reduce a service user's concerns about stigma from members of their community?
- What concerns may a service user from a country where there has been conflict have about who their interpreter is? For example, would factors such as the ethnicity, religion, nationality of the interpreter present barriers to open communication?
- A brief description on the nature of the assignment must be provided.
- Any additional requirements should be specified when making a booking.



### 7.2 HOW DO YOU BOOK A FACE-TO-FACE INTERPRETER?

Bookings must be submitted through Language Empire's online booking portal at [www.language-empire.net](http://www.language-empire.net). Details of how to obtain log in details and instructions for booking interpreters, and the costs involved, can be found on your organisation's intranet, or you can contact Language Empire's customer services department for support.

Problems can sometimes arise in securing an interpreter, for example, when requesting a rare language or making a short notice booking. Any problems should be raised directly with Language Empire to be resolved. However, if problems persist, staff can contact the Surrey County Council contract manager within Buying Solutions who is working on the Language Empire contract.

## 8. How should you work with a face-to-face interpreter?

There are three stages involved in a face-to-face interpreted session.

### 8.1 STAGE 1: BEFORE THE SESSION

It is important to spend some time with the interpreter to ensure that the session goes smoothly. Topics covered should include some background information if the interpreter has not worked with the service user before and a brief explanation of the purpose of the session. At this stage the interpreter can advise on any cultural issues that may arise, although this information should be regarded as tentative to avoid making incorrect assumptions. It is also an opportunity to agree with the interpreter on how they should intervene if:

- anything is done or said that is culturally unacceptable to the service user
- where the interpreter feels that there is a clear misunderstanding
- if anyone speaks too long or the interpreter cannot hold all the information
- agree physical arrangements (chairs, lighting, etc.) to suit all parties' needs.

### 8.2 STAGE 2: DURING THE SESSION

On a first session introduce yourself to the service user and explain your position and role in this session as well as the role of others. To promote trust you should also explain that the content of the interview will be kept confidential within the limitations of the law. The interpreter should then introduce themselves to the service user and explain that they will also keep the session information confidential. You must also explain the purpose of the meeting/session.

- ✓ Ensure that everyone is sitting in a way that they can see each other and that eye contact will be easy.
- ✓ Explain to the service user that the interpreter will interpret all that is said by both parties and that it is important for everyone involved to speak slowly and to pause frequently to allow accurate interpreting to take place.
- ✓ Always speak directly to the service user (e.g. How are you today?) and maintain eye contact (where culturally appropriate). Check your tone of voice as an interrogating style can be off-putting for the service user and put pressure on the interpreter.
- ✓ Avoid the tendency to ask the interpreter questions (i.e. 'how is he today') and ask the interpreter to do the same when he/she interprets back.
- ✓ Only say things to the interpreter that can be translated to the service user. The service user can feel alienated if the interpreter and clinician have a private conversation.
- ✓ Stay involved when the service user is talking and show you are listening through your body language.
- ✓ Observe the service user's non-verbal communication but bear in mind that gestures can mean different things in different countries or cultures. Ask the interpreter if appropriate.
- ✓ Speak clearly and slowly in manageable chunks and pause after each sentence to allow the interpreter sufficient time to translate.
- ✓ Use straightforward language and avoid jargon and acronyms. Encourage the service user to ask questions and check to see that they have understood.
- ✓ Be aware that the service user or interpreter may need a short break, particularly if the service user has been talking about distressing experiences.
- ✓ Keep explanations simple. Longer condensed and information packed sentences may make it difficult for the service user to understand.
- ✓ Be aware that interpreters are not trained to interpret behaviours.
- ✓ Interpreters should not be asked for their opinion about any aspect relating to the service user.

### 8.3 STAGE 3: AFTER THE SESSION

A short debriefing session gives the opportunity to check out the following:

- Did the session go smoothly?
- Go over the interview content, asking for any factual observations from the interpreter. It is an opportunity to ask questions about observations or cultural issues. Any communication difficulties should be discussed at this point.
- Consider if the interpreter needs debriefing if they have been listening to distressing information.
- Complete and sign the interpreter's claim form.

## 9. What can you expect from professional interpreters?

### 9.1 PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS SHOULD:

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- act in an impartial and professional manner
- not discriminate against service users, carers, family, friends or professionals directly or indirectly, on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, age, nationality, religion, gender, sexuality or disability
- be fluent in the language(s) specified
- have a basic understanding and knowledge of medical terminology, including psychiatric terminology
- not pretend to understand something when they haven't
- introduce themselves to the service user/family and reassure them that confidentiality will be respected
- interpret accurately without anything being added or omitted from the interaction
- be punctual; if they are running late for the session, he or she should call the authorised user in advance to inform them of their expected arrival time
- dress appropriately and professionally at all times.



### 9.2 INTERPRETERS SHOULD NOT:

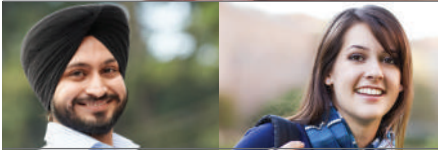
- engage in long conversations with the service user or family and then provide summarised versions of what he or she said at the end
- assume that they have to advocate for the service user, replying on their behalf or helping them to answer the questions
- pass on their personal details (i.e. mobile telephone numbers to service users to contact them outside of the consultation); all bookings for interpreters should be managed via the authorised users and the interpretation booking system.





## Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services

### 10. Good practice for working with an interpreter

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | Be punctual. Always keep waiting times to a minimum.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|    | Remember to request an interpreter of specific gender if appropriate.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|   | Make a note of the interpreter's name. This will enable you to use the same interpreter the next time if requested by the service user.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | Remember that sessions with an interpreter take longer than sessions where you are able to speak directly to a service user. The interpreter may take some time to interpret the language spoken in English (or vice versa). You should allow for this when setting the time of the sessions and in the timing and interjection of your speech during the session. |
|  | Allow a short time at the start and the end of sessions to brief the interpreter.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|  | Always speak directly to the service user. This improves communication. Avoid talking to the service user through the interpreter (e.g. 'Please ask him/her about...').                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | End the session by checking that the service user has understood everything. Remember to ask them if there is anything else they would like to ask.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|  | Check that decisions taken during the interview are clear to everyone.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|  | Be aware that the interpreter has the responsibility to interpret all comments in any setting whether the comment is made directly to the service user or not.                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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# 11. Compliments and complaints

The majority of interpreters provide a high quality service for service users and staff and it is important for this to be acknowledged. However, when problems do occur it is important that these are identified and responded to accordingly.

You can leave positive and negative feedback through any individual bookings on Language Empire's online booking system.

Ensure that you provide full details of any bookings when giving feedback. Language Empire needs this to pass on compliments or investigate complaints, and doing this ensures feedback is recorded in the monthly reports your organisation uses to monitor Language Empire's service provision.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG WITH AN INTERPRETER?

A session with an interpreter can go wrong in the following cases:

- The interpreter seems to lack the language and skills required.
- The interpreter takes over the session by answering for the service user or expressing his or her own opinion.
- There is conflict between the interpreter and the service user.
- The interpreter overly identifies with the service user or clinician.
- Either party is late.
- The interpreter paraphrases responses rather than reporting word for word.
- There are technical difficulties or other problems with telephone interpreting.

If problems arise, you may have to pause the session and have a private word with the interpreter to raise your concerns and negotiate a solution. If this does not work, it may be better to end the interview and reschedule with a different interpreter. You should also provide formal feedback on the interpreter to Language Empire.





## Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services

# 12. Key Contacts

## LANGUAGE EMPIRE

### Face-to-face interpreting

Our face-to-face interpreting service allows you to have an interpreter there in person at your meeting so that all persons present can understand what is being said.

- It is available for simultaneous, consecutive, and whispered interpreting.
- Specialist services can be arranged for medical, health, and mental health settings.
- We also offer interpreting services for community events, conferences, media events, interviews, and for legal and other hearings.

Our non-spoken face-to-face interpreting service is available for deaf and deafblind people who need support to access spoken English in meetings. Our interpreter will be present at your appointment.

We offer non-spoken communication professionals who specialise in British Sign Language (BSL), Irish Sign Language (ISL), Foreign Sign Language, deaf relay, deaf expert witness support (and other deaf forensic services), lipspeaking, deafblind interpreting, visual frame, hands on or manual, speech-to-text reporting, electronic and manual note taking, Sign Supported English (SSE), video relay, conferencing, consecutive or simultaneous interpreting, note taking, and cued speech/Makaton.

The easiest and quickest way to book your face-to-face interpreter is to make your request via our secure LE-LSM™ online booking portal.



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Customer services telephone:

**0330 20 20 270**

Dedicated email:

**[bookings@empire-groupuk.com](mailto:bookings@empire-groupuk.com)**



Customer services:

0330 20 20 270



## Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services

### Translation services

Our translation services convert your written English documents into other languages, or vice versa. The services include:

- transcription, which is the conversion of documents into alternative formats such as braille, large print, audio, video or pictorial English and normal print
- written translation and transcription of audio, tapes and other forms of electronic media
- ancillary services including voiceovers, subtitles, Easy Read and large print.

We can help you with advisory and guidance documents, correspondence, information leaflets, specialist texts (including technical, scientific, legal, medical and financial), verbatim translations, artwork, design, illustration and typesetting, proofreading, translation memory software, multimedia and e-learning materials, PR, web copy and software localisation.

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If your file is sensitive or confidential you can send it to us using our LE-LSM™ secure online portal. Simply log in with your access details and upload your files, providing the information required on the online request form. You can also send files by email.

LE-LSM™ online portal: [www.language-empire.net](http://www.language-empire.net)

Dedicated email: [translations@language-empire.com](mailto:translations@language-empire.com)

Translation department telephone: 0330 20 20 273

### Contract management team

If you cannot access our online portal you can send a completed Interpreter Request Form to the dedicated email address below. You should receive an email acknowledgement. If you do not, please contact us to ensure your request has been received.

Email: [contract.management@empire-groupuk.com](mailto:contract.management@empire-groupuk.com)

Contract management team telephone: 0330 20 20 348



**Customer services:**  
0330 20 20 270

# Best Practice Guide To Using Interpreting and Translation Services

