News 10 May 2024

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Formal qualifications not a requirement

On 6 May 2024 the **BBC reported** that the Isle of Man Constabulary were looking for individuals to act as interpreters for the police, saying no formal qualifications were required. ITI's Chief Executive, Sara Robertson, has written to the Chief Constable, expressing the Institute's grave concerns at this approach. You can read the full text of the letter below.

Dear Mr Foster,

As the Chief Executive of the **Institute of Translation and Interpreting** (ITI), I am tasked with promoting professionalism in translation and interpreting. Therefore, I

was surprised to read the recent BBC News story outlining your proposal to seek people who speak English plus any other language to serve as interpreters. I understand that these volunteers would assist with police matters, such as taking witness statements, and also help non-English speakers access various government services on the island. It appears that no formal qualifications would be required, though volunteers must be fluent in both spoken and written English in addition to another language.

While I appreciate your aim to better serve the diverse population of the Isle of Man, I would like to share our grave concerns about this proposal. The use of unqualified volunteers poses significant risks to members of the public and undermines the maintenance of appropriate standards of professional interpreting and translation in public services.

The **Institute of Translation and Interpreting** (ITI) is a member of **Professional Interpreters for Justice** (PI4J). This organisation promotes the use of qualified, experienced, and vetted Public Service Interpreters and Translators who are accredited members or registrants of recognised professional bodies. These highly trained professionals adhere to stringent codes of practice and conduct, ensuring that people using their services can be assured of their competence, reliability, and accountability. In contrast, your proposal to use volunteers without proper qualifications or experience could lead to serious misunderstandings, inaccuracies, and breaches of confidentiality. This potentially jeopardises the rights and well-being of those who rely on your services.

Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) upholds the principle that access to reliable and effective language services provided by qualified professional interpreters and translators is essential. It is a crucial resource for upholding justice and ensuring fair and equitable treatment for non-English speakers. The use of unqualified volunteers runs counter to this principle and risks eroding public trust in our legal and governance systems.

We therefore strongly urge you to reconsider your approach and to collaborate with language service providers and the relevant professional bodies to find an alternative solution that will ensure the provision of high-quality, reliable, and accountable interpreting and translation services for your diverse community. We would be happy to point you towards existing good practice guidance if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely



Sara Robertson
Chief Executive
Institute of Translation and Interpreting

Interpreting

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Milton Keynes Business Centre, Foxhunter Drive,
Linford Wood, Milton Keynes, MK14 6GD

+44 (0) 1908 325250

info@iti.org.uk

Registered in England and Wales (No 2166933).
Registered office address as above.

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