



Government of Western Australia
Department of Training
and Workforce Development

GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE
LANGUAGE SERVICE POLICY

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All policy and procedural statements contained within this document are lawful orders for the purposes of section 80(a) of the Public Sector Management Act 1994 (WA) and are therefore to be observed by all Department of Training and Workforce Development employees.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LANGUAGE SERVICES POLICY

Interpreting and translating services can make Government more accessible to people who use Australian Sign Language (Auslan) or speak a language other than English, and is an important way to improve communication with our diverse clientele.

Interpreters and translators play a critical role in helping people connect with Government, by:

- attending appointments with clients in schools, hospitals, courts, police stations and other agencies;
- providing services over the phone and face to face; and
- translating important information.

The Language services policy is available from the Department's [policy website](#).

What is the difference between a translator and an interpreter?

A **translator** deals with written text. They translate from one language to another. A translator is needed for documents like a birth certificate, driver's licence and other written documents. For example, a translator may be required to translate a Department brochure from English into another language.

An **interpreter** deals with the spoken word or signed language (for example Auslan). They interpret what someone says into another language. An interpreter is needed for situations where you need help in understanding what someone is saying or to help someone else understand what you are saying. For example, an interpreter may be required at a corporate event or function to interpret the presentations into sign language for the audience who use Auslan.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE LANGUAGE SERVICES POLICY

Strategies to promote the *Language services policy* include:

- use of [National Interpreter Symbol](#) in all Department buildings in a place which is visible to clients;
- policy and guidelines available on the Department's intranet;
- promotion of the policy through Departmental publications and staff notices; and
- information to be included as part of induction program for new staff through *The Good Oil*.

LEVEL OF RISK OF MISCOMMUNICATION

There can be serious legal consequences as a result of mistranslation and misinterpretation.

As the core business of the Department is not usually related to health, safety or legal matters, most areas would be considered relatively low risk. Those areas within the Department that have a higher level of client contact may potentially be at more risk of miscommunication.

Example of high risk miscommunication

High risk communication would usually be associated with medical emergencies and crisis situations. However, in the case of the Department, this may relate to the signing of a training contract. If a legal guardian is signing on behalf of their son/daughter but does not speak English, it would be important to have an interpreter present to clearly explain to the legal guardian, the contract terms and conditions and the expectation of their son/daughter as part of the contract.

Example of low risk miscommunication

Low risk communication would usually be associated with general information such as community resources and information about courses and apprenticeships. Low risk communication would also include teaching and learning materials such as textbooks and online learning objects developed for the training sector as a whole.

Determining when to use professional interpreters and translators

Determining when to use professional interpreters and translators 'must', 'should' or 'may' be used depends on:

- the risks of miscommunication and the potential for legal liability or legal consequences for the State of Western Australia, its agencies or instrumentalities;
- the client's ability to communicate in English;
- the purpose of the communication and the kind of information, including its complexity, that needs to be conveyed;
- the client's ability to effectively communicate in a stressful or unfamiliar environment; and
- whether the client prefers to communicate in his/her own language, even though he/she can communicate in English.

The *Language services policy* states that Western Australians who are unable to communicate through spoken or written English are provided with professional level interpreters and translators in their preferred language where they:

- need to be informed of their legal rights and obligations;
- need to give informed consent;
- are required to enter into a legally binding contract or agreement with the State and are not required to engage their own interpreter or translator;
- require essential information to fully participate in decisions or proceedings relating to their rights, health and safety; or
- require essential information to protect their rights.

GUIDELINES TO ASSESS WHETHER AN INTERPRETER OR TRANSLATOR IS REQUIRED

It is important that staff who deal directly with clients know how to determine if a client needs an interpreter. It is not acceptable to solely rely on clients to request an interpreter as many clients may not be aware of their right to ask for an interpreter or be able to ask for one in English. There are recommended assessment questions to be used to determine whether an interpreter is required.

There are no assessments necessary for clients who use Auslan as they will almost always require the assistance of an interpreter and should have an interpreter present in all circumstances.

Recommended assessment questions to determine whether an interpreter is required

This test was adapted from the Northern Territory's Aboriginal Interpreter Service Test for Aboriginal Languages.

The test is structured in three stages and involves asking questions that are designed to see how far the person can understand English and how well they can respond using English.

The following questions are provided as a guide and should be asked in a manner sensitive to the individual needs of the client.

Stage 1

"Before we talk about _____, I need to be sure that we can communicate effectively in English.

I am going to ask you some questions to see how you answer them. This will help us work out if you need an interpreter. Let me ask you this question first.

- *"Do you have any difficulties with speaking or understanding English?"*

If the interviewee does not respond or if they answer yes, but can give no clear details, then there is no need to proceed further, an interpreter is warranted.

Stage 2

"Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about yourself so that I can check that you are able to give me information in English. Please listen to my questions and answer them as well as you can.

- *Can you tell me where you were born and your date of birth?*
- *What education have you had?*
- *Do you know how to read and write English? (If yes, then ask them to read a newspaper headline and to write: I know how to read and write in English)*
- *I would like to find out if you have enough English to tell me a story. So tell me a little bit about the country you came from. For example, where is it, what did you do there, how is it different from Australia."*

If the interviewee's responses are inappropriate to the questions or if answers are only one or two words long or if the interviewee cannot provide a few clear sentences for the last question, then there is no need to proceed further as an interpreter is warranted.

Stage 3

"Now I'm going to ask you just a few more questions. This time I will try to make some questions a little bit more difficult or ask them in another way so I can see if you understand.

- *When you were born, was that this century or last century?*
- *When you were growing up in Sydney, was the food good?*
- *How long did you go to school in Sydney? Was it more than one year?*
- *This is the last question: are you satisfied that we can go ahead in English or do you think we need an interpreter?"*

If the responses do not match the questions or fails to recognise and rectify false assertions about Sydney, then an interpreter is required.

Ensure the client is given sufficient time to respond to the questions. If the client seems to have difficulty responding to these questions or the responses are not in context, then an interpreter is required. If at any time the client requests an interpreter, a suitably qualified interpreter should be sourced.

Your client may ask for an interpreter of a particular sex or background (for example ethnicity). This may be for cultural or personal reasons, or because the appointment is of a sensitive nature. As far as practicable, you should try and meet this request while ensuring the use of the services of a competent interpreter.

Clients may ask to use a family member or friend to interpret for them. This is not recommended as they may be emotionally involved, and lack the necessary skills and impartiality. They are not bound by the same standards of conduct, such as maintaining confidentiality, as competent interpreters. However, providing the action does not compromise the service being provided, and does not expose the State of Western Australia and its agencies to legal liability, a family member or friend (aged 18 years or over) may be used in urgent situations or for basic communication exchanges.

In all cases where a competent interpreter has not been used details of the decision and the circumstances justifying that decision should be specifically documented.

Identifying the client's preferred language

Guessing a client's language by their country of birth can be unreliable. If a client is unaccompanied by an English-speaking person, you may need to use a telephone interpreter or visual aids to identify their spoken language.

In situations where a client speaks a particularly rare dialect, it may be useful to ask whether they also speak another language, and how well. If there are no interpreters who speak the client's preferred language, you may be able to arrange an interpreter who speaks their second language.

HOW TO ACCESS AN INTERPRETER OR TRANSLATOR

Agencies can access competent interpreters and translating services in a number of ways.

Language services providers

Language services providers arrange the supply of competent interpreters or translators.

Professional interpreting and translating agencies are listed in the Yellow Pages. Accredited interpreters and translators can be found using the NAATI Directory of Accredited and Recognised Practitioners of Interpreting and Translating, which is available at www.naati.com.au

Professional associations also maintain online directories available at www.ausit.org or www.waiti.org.au

Aboriginal language centres

Language groups are kin-based with kin relationships usually accorded priority in an Indigenous person's life. Speakers of a particular language usually occupy a specific area within a broader region. In addition to the distinctiveness of Aboriginal languages, the cultural nuances associated with kin groups vary from region to region and can impact heavily on the provision of interpreter services. Given this diversity, Aboriginal language centres that have a strong regional focus are best placed to advise on interpreter services due to their in-depth understanding of language use, regional culture, customs and traditions, and strong regional networks.

Irra Wangga Language Centre – Geraldton

T: 9923 9733

F: 9923 9744

E: reception@bundiyarra.org.au

Kimberley Interpreting Service – Broome

T: 9192 3891

F: 9192 3982

E: kis@wn.com.au

Kimberley Language Resource Centre – Halls Creek

T: 9168 6005

F: 9168 6023

E: info@klrc.org.au

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-Gerring Language and Culture Centre – Kununurra

T: 9169 1029

F: 9168 2639

E: info@mirima.org.au

Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre – South Hedland

T: 9172 2344

F: 9172 2355

E: reception2@wangkamaya.org.au

Refer to [Western Australian Language Services Policy 2008](#) – Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) website for additional guideline documents including:

- decision tree for engaging an interpreter;
- countries and main languages used; and
- Aboriginal languages.

What to do if a client presents an “I need an interpreter card”

If the client has an “I need an interpreter” card the language your client speaks will be written in English on the front of the card. More than one language may be written on the card. This means the cardholder is proficient in each of these languages. You should try to arrange an interpreter in the client’s first language. If this is not possible you may be able to arrange an interpreter in one of the other languages listed.

GUIDELINES FOR HOW TO WORK WITH AN INTERPRETER OR TRANSLATOR

[Guidelines for how to work with an interpreter on site](#)

[Guidelines for how to work with a telephone interpreter](#)

AVAILABLE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING SERVICES

On-site interpreting

An on-site interpreter attends a meeting in person and should generally be used in situations where complex, sensitive or lengthy matters need to be discussed. On-site interpreters offer a face-to-face service by facilitating both non-verbal and verbal communication. This results in a broader understanding of the information than occurs with telephone interpreting, where the interpreter cannot see either the client or staff member. On-site interpreting is generally more expensive than other interpreting options and requires advance notice, particularly where interpreters are required to travel long distances. The availability of on-site interpreters may also be limited in some rural and regional areas, although on-site interpreting would be the preferred option for Aboriginal people in rural and remote locations.

Telephone interpreting

A telephone interpreter delivers a service over the telephone and may be particularly useful in emergency situations when you need immediate assistance. It may be less expensive and more anonymous than on-site interpreting. It is also more widely used in remote or regional areas. Telephone interpreters can also be used to establish the language spoken and the nature of an enquiry before an on-site interpreter is called. Telephone interpreting can be pre-booked and is generally charged per 15 minutes. Telephone interpreting is not suitable for interviews of a sensitive or complex nature. Telephone interpreters cannot take account of non-verbal signals and some clients, such as the elderly, may not be comfortable using the telephone. In some instances, a face-to face meeting with an interpreter may be better. Telephone interpreting is not suitable for Auslan users or other people with hearing impairment or where forms need to be filled in. Agencies can make use of TTY, a teletype system over a phone-like appliance where the message is not spoken, but typed, and turns up in type on the other end.

Videoconference interpreting

Videoconference interpreting uses an interpreter to deliver a service through video link. This type of interpreting service enables large groups of people to take part in a discussion and can be organised at short notice where the necessary facilities are available. Videoconference interpreting may appeal to organisations in rural and regional locations that find it difficult to access, or meet the travel costs associated with, on-site interpreting services. Using videoconferencing may save organisations time and money. It is an ideal alternative where on-site interpreting is not available.

Translating services

Most translating service providers offer a range of services including:

- basic translations;
- checking of text;
- editing translations for publication;
- multilingual desktop publishing and design and e-translations; and
- preparation of bromide-quality hardcopies suitable for printing.

Translating agencies should be able to provide the final translation in hardcopy and/or electronically. If you receive the final translation electronically make sure to specify the file type needed.

Audio and videotape translations

Audiotapes or videotapes/compact discs (CDs) of important information can be played in the office or at home and are an alternative to written translations. These are worth considering if your clients have limited literacy in their preferred language. Reasons for this may include limited or disrupted schooling for various reasons, such as war or displacement.

DATA COLLECTION

Minimum data set

A Minimum Data Set (MDS) is a collection of data that measures the Department's clients and the translating and interpreting services that they receive.

Analysis of collected data from the Department sites provides:

- crucial information to assist with policy development and strategic planning; and
- evidence to demonstrate the demand for translating and interpreting services.

Annual completion of a data collection form (see Appendix 1) will enable analysis of the demand for translating and interpreting services.

Understanding demand

Demand for interpreting and translating services is determined by:

- the written and spoken English proficiency of your agency's clients;
- the number of clients and potential clients who require the services of an interpreter or access to translated material;
- the nature of the service provided by your agency and the complexity of the language used in the provision of the service; and

- the level of risk to the State of Western Australia, its agencies and instrumentalities arising from miscommunication.

It is important to know your agency's current and potential client base. Collecting data on the preferred languages of your client group and their countries of origin is an important step to understanding the demand for interpreting and translating services.

Planning for translating and interpreting costs

Based on an understanding of the likely demand for interpreting and translating services, the Department will:

- identify available funding sources; and
- determine appropriate purchasing methods to maximise available resources (for example, establish annual budget).

The method of purchasing interpreting and translating services should be based on likely demand patterns and expenditure and best value for money.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Service Delivery Operations Branch
Service Delivery Directorate

APPENDIX 1: FORM TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE LANGUAGE SERVICES POLICY

A new form is to be used for every occasion where translating or interpreting services are required including requests for Australian Sign Language (Auslan).

1. Branch within the Department:	
2. Does your branch display the National Interpreter Symbol?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Who requested the interpreting/translating service?	Client <input type="checkbox"/> Department <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Specific client information (if applicable): a. Client country of birth: b. Main language spoken at home: c. Is the client of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? <i>(For both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, mark both 'Yes' boxes.)</i>	No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Torres Strait Islander <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Purpose for engaging interpreting/translating service:	
6. Organisation providing service:	
7. Type of service, for example, translating/interpreting:	
8. Method of service delivery, for example, telephone, face to face, or online:	
9. Language(s) requested:	
10. Language(s) provided:	
11. Cost of service:	

Thank you for completing this form. If you have any questions or comments contact the Manager Skilled Assessment Programs, Service Delivery Operations Branch by telephone on 6212 9728.

Please email the completed form to friederike.krogel@dtwd.wa.gov.au