



Home Office

Interpreters Code of Conduct

Version 4.0

The purpose of this document is to explain the role and expectations of the interpreter when they are engaged to act on behalf of the Home Office.

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About this guidance

This guidance tells interpreters and Interviewing Officers what their role is when conducting assignments involving interpreters on behalf of the Home Office.

Contacts: for Home Office staff reference

If you are a Home Office employee and have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you, or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email the Interpreter Management Team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Contacts: for Home Office interpreter reference

If you are a registered Home Office interpreter and have any questions, or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email the Interpreter Management Team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **4.0**
- published for Home Office staff **30 November 2021**

Changes from last version of this guidance

- [payments section](#) updated information on autopayments

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to explain and clarify the role of the interpreter when they are conducting assignments on behalf of the Home Office.

Providing high standards of interpreting is essential to the Home Office delivering a robust, trusted and professional service to our customers. This Code of Conduct is intended to regulate the professional conduct of the interpreters registered on the Home Office panel. Interpreters provide an essential service on behalf of the Home Office and support the decision-making process for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Interpreters are not Home Office employees. However, whilst undertaking freelance work commissioned by the Home Office, independent freelance interpreters are expected to maintain certain standards. Failure to adhere to any of the following requirements may result in the removal of an interpreter from the Home Office Panel of Independent Freelance Interpreters.

Interpreters are considered part of the wider Home Office team and are entitled to be treated with respect when representing the Home Office. When registered on the Home Office panel of interpreters, interpreters are required to abide by this Code of Conduct.

Interpreters must be prepared to exercise sound judgement and common sense in deciding the right actions to take as this code will not cover every situation or eventuality that may arise. They will be expected to be polite, professional and show respect at all times to colleagues, fellow interpreters and other stakeholders, who all come from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures.

This code provides guidance setting out skills, practices and knowledge for interpreters to use in their professional lives.

The Home Office can act against those who fall short of the code's standards. Using this document, the Home Office ensures that the integrity of the profession is maintained, and the public can be confident in the service provided by a registered interpreter.

If there are any concerns or interpreters wish to discuss any matter, they must contact the appropriate team below:

- Interpreter Management Team
- Interpreter Bookings Team
- Interpreter Finance Team

Any interpreter who wishes to raise a complaint must not rely on someone else to do so, on their behalf. The complaint must come from the interpreter concerned. Raising of complaints will not impact future work appointments.

This document may be updated at any time and it is the responsibility of every interpreter to make themselves aware of these updates.

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Definitions

The **Code of Conduct** refers to this document and the contents therein.

Home Office refers to the government department which maintains and operates the panel of interpreters.

An **interpreter** is the person carrying out the work in a professional capacity.

The **Interviewing Officer** is the Home Office employee who manages the interview.

Home Office official refers to any Home Office employee, including Interviewing Officers.

Home Office Panel is the formal list of interpreters which is owned, managed and maintained by The Interpreter Management Unit.

Customer is the person whose dialogue is being interpreted.

Finance team refers to the team which processes interpreter payments.

Bookings team refers to the team from which an interpreter accepts work.

The interpreter management team manage raised interpreter issues, manage interpreter recruitment and quality assure the interpreter process.

Interpreter monitoring is the receipt and assessment of feedback from service users regarding the performance of interpreters.

Assignment is the name for a job an interpreter accepts from the Home Office.

Remote ID Profile (RIDP) refers to the document IMT have provided to enable your identification to be checked against for remote interview assignments.

The Official Secrets Act refers to the legislation that governs confidentiality and non-disclosure requirements in these circumstances.

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Role of the interpreter

Guiding principles

Interpreters must not bring the status of the Interpreter & Language Service Unit (ILSU) and the Home Office into disrepute by their conduct during assignments or outside of work.

Interpreters must not accept any work which they believe would directly or indirectly contravene the Code of Conduct.

Interpreters must not behave in a way which may result in them being liable to prosecution for criminal behaviour.

Interpreters must only accept assignments in languages for which they are registered on the Home Office database.

Interpreters must inform the Interpreter Management Team of any changes in personal details, or of any personal health issues which may impact their ability to carry out interpreting assignments.

Interpreters must check with the business area offering the booking if they are unsure of any requirements set out in an assignment.

Interpreters must properly and fully interpret what is being said, as close as English allows.

Confidentiality

On acceptance of a booking from ILSU the interpreter agrees to abide by the provisions of the Official Secrets Act. This means that they must not disclose to any person outside the Home Office, any information that becomes known to them during an assignment.

Interpreters shall always respect confidentiality and shall not seek to take advantage of information acquired during, or as a result of their work. The duty of confidentiality shall not end on the completion of work.

Interpreters must not distribute any personal material relating to the customers or themselves. This includes, but is not exhaustive of, photographic images and personal information including telephone numbers or any other personal details. This also includes sharing any information on social media.

Interpreters must not disclose such information to a third party unless instructed by the Home Office to do so, and only provided that such disclosure would not be unlawful or infringe the rights of any of the parties concerned. The duty of confidentiality shall not apply where disclosure is required by law.

Mobile phones

Interpreters must turn off all forms of communication including mobile phones, beepers and tablets which may otherwise cause distraction whilst in an interview.

Security / access to Home Office buildings

Interpreters are required to complete a security clearance application process successfully before joining the panel. A requirement of remaining on the panel is that clearance process is regularly renewed, Interpreters will be notified by the Interpreter Management Unit when their clearance becomes due for renewal. Failure to comply with this process will result in removal from the Home Office Panel of Freelance Interpreters.

Interpreters are required to show photographic identification (ID) (such as passport, national ID card, driving licence) to gain access to all government buildings.

Interpreters will not be granted access without the correct ID. Interpreters commissioned by the Home Office must familiarise themselves with local instructions when working at any Home Office location. The Home Office will ensure instructions are available to interpreters when completing assignments.

Interpreters must always display their security pass whilst on the premises and return their security pass when leaving a Home Office building.

Interpreters conducting virtual assignments will have their details checked remotely against their remote identification profile (RIDP), by the officer conducting the assignment, to validate their identity before the interview begins.

If the interviewing officer is in doubt about your Remote ID Profile (RIDP) appearance matching your appearance on video they will ask for you to show another form of photographic identification (ID) (such as passport, national ID card, driving licence) to continue with the assignment.

If you are unable to show suitable identification the officer will contact the Liverpool Interpreter Booking Team and you may be terminated from the assignment. It is your responsibility to supply a recent photograph to the Interpreter Management Team for your Remote ID Profile (RIDP) and to resubmit a photograph if your appearance significantly changes in any way, or you are asked to do so by the Interpreter Management Team.

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Disciplinary issues

Interpreters sanction process

This section contains the formal process for dealing with complaints and disciplinary issues. The purpose of the Code of Conduct is to ensure expected standards of conduct and behaviour are met and that any misconduct issues are addressed at an early stage.

Feedback is collected on interpreter performance and any incidents of alleged behaviour falling short of the Code of Conduct will be fully investigated. Feedback is primarily compiled by Interviewing Officers completing the interpreter monitoring form, but this form may also be completed by other Home Office officials.

This process sets out the procedure used when it is suspected or alleged that an interpreter has failed to meet acceptable standards of behaviour or conduct.

Prompt and decisive action will be taken as soon as the Home Office becomes aware of any alleged inappropriate conduct. This is in the best interests of the department, the interpreter, and where others are involved, the wider public.

Interpreters must comply with any requests from the Interpreter & Language Service Unit (ILSU) for information within the timeframe specified. If it seems a pattern of behaviour falling short of the Code of Conduct is emerging, interpreter monitoring may be considered to determine any further action.

There may be instances where it is in the best interest of all parties to temporarily suspend an interpreter. This protects interpreters and the business in situations where an allegation could result in reputational damage if substantiated. Interpreters will not be treated as guilty of misconduct until the fact-gathering is completed and they have been given the opportunity to offer any evidence. The Interpreter Management Unit retains the right to suspend an interpreter's services if deemed appropriate in the circumstances, whilst undertaking any required investigation. In respect of final action or actions taken, this will only occur when all available evidence has been sourced and assessed.

When making an assessment on an alleged incident of misconduct the following factors will be taken into consideration:

- nature of the alleged offence
- frequency and severity of the alleged offence
- risk of a repeat of the activity under investigation
- past record and previous incidents (if any)
- any instances of merit or previous examples of exemplary service
- the interpreter's evidence (if any)
- the potential reputational damage to the Home Office
- any other contributing factors

A breach of the Code of Conduct is defined as a minor violation of the code. For example, a minor, isolated incident which falls short of the standards expected. Some examples are:

- poor timekeeping
- using a mobile telephone or other electronic device during an interview
- inappropriate body language or nonverbal communication
- general conduct such as requesting so many breaks the flow of the interview is interrupted unnecessarily, causes stress to the customer and lengthens the interview process

This list is not exhaustive.

Conduct that warrants a warning being issued is defined as either repeated minor offences or significant breaches of the standards expected, for example:

- not interpreting what is being said accurately by a customer
- unauthorised conversations with a customer, which are outside the remit of the interviewing process
- inappropriate comments
- asking own, or different questions to those of the Interviewing Officer
- constantly refusing work assignments
- repeated minor breaches

This list is not exhaustive.

Suspension from the Home Office panel is defined as behaviour that is serious enough that all current activity as a Home Office interpreter must cease for a specified period. Examples could include:

- bullying, harassment or discrimination
- payment demands outside the Home Office's set rates
- repeated conduct that warranted a breach or a warning
- the Home Office receives information that, if substantiated, would compromise an interpreter's integrity or negatively impact the Home Office's reputation

This list is not exhaustive.

De-listing (from the panel) results from conduct that is so serious that continued activity as a Home Office interpreter is not considered appropriate. Suspension will precede all cases of de-listing. Examples of conduct leading to de-listing could include:

- contacting customer outside the interview situation.
- serious incidents of bullying, harassment or discrimination
- continually demanding own levels of payment outside Home Office set rates
- inappropriate behaviour
- failure to comply with CTC renewal process

- repeated offences following a period of suspension or the issuing of breaches and warnings

This list is not exhaustive.

Conduct and behaviour

Interpreters must inform the Interpreter Management Team immediately if they are arrested, charged, convicted or cautioned for any offence, or if they become subject to any professional disciplinary proceedings whilst registered on the panel.

Interpreters must inform the Interpreter Management Team immediately if removed from a list held by any other public sector body or interpreting organisation.

Dress code

Interpreters are expected to ensure that their dress code is appropriate for the situation in which they are working and that they present a professional image.

Some assignments may involve field work and interpreters may be asked to accompany Immigration Enforcement Officers on visits to employers' premises. In these circumstances, casual clothing and comfortable footwear may be more appropriate. Please check the circumstances of the interview with the business area offering the booking prior to the assignment.

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Fair treatment

Equality and Integrity

A freelance interpreter engaged by the Home Office has a duty to be impartial and to be seen by others to be impartial at all times. Even though they may not feel that they have bias or are not impartial, if other people perceive that they are biased or not impartial their role as an interpreter may be compromised. Interpreters must act with integrity in all their professional and business activities. This means acting with honesty, fairness and impartiality at all times and not allowing themselves to be improperly influenced either by self-interest or the interests of others.

Conflicts of interest

Interpreters must disclose any potential or occurring conflicts of interest or any other factor which may make it inappropriate for them to accept work on a particular case.

Interpreters must not accept gifts or hospitality offered to them, nor offer such incentives to others, which may be viewed as activity contrary to their professional obligations.

Interpreters must not offer any personal opinions, comments or personal observations on the credibility of a customer even if requested to do so. Such requests must be declined, and it must be stated that it is outside the remit of a professional interpreter.

Interpreters must not be acquainted with or related to the customer or anyone associated with the case. If after an interpreter has accepted an assignment, they become aware of a conflict of interest they must immediately inform the Interviewing Officer of the circumstances.

At the start of the interview interpreters must make it clear to a Home Office official if they have previously interpreted on the customer's case for the legal representative, or other supporting organisations.

The onus is on the interpreter to raise any issues relating to potential conflicts of interest.

Interpreters must not indulge in general conversation with a customer before, during or after an assignment (other than to establish that they both speak the same language and/or dialect). A seemingly innocent conversation can lead to a perception of bias. If an interpreter is approached by a customer or legal representative outside the assignment, they must explain that they cannot discuss the case and politely walk away without getting involved in any conversation. Any such approaches must be reported to a Home Office official as soon as possible.

Under no circumstances must contact be made between the interpreter and the customer outside the working environment.

There is no obligation for interpreters to carry out extra duties outside the formal requirements of the booking.

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Interpreting

During an assignment, the Interviewing Officer is responsible for managing the interview, therefore the interpreter must follow any guidelines given, only asking the questions they have been asked to interpret and only communicating with the customer as instructed.

The following guidance covers interpreters conduct during the interview:

- interpreters must be in a fit state to interpret effectively throughout the interview
- interpreters must speak slowly and clearly
- interpreters must not question the content of the interview
- interpreters must be aware that they will be interpreting for vulnerable customers and must behave accordingly
- it is important to remember that the Interviewing Officer will be relying entirely on the interpreted version of the account given by the customer and may draw conclusions about the customer's credibility - accurate interpretation is essential to enable fair and accurate decisions
- interpreters must retain every element of information that was contained in the original message and interpret in as close to verbatim as English allows
- interpreters must not try to anticipate what the interviewer or customer is trying to say or give an answer different from the one being provided
- interpreters must spell out names or unusual words said by the Interviewing Officer or customer
- interpreters must inform the Interviewing Officer immediately if they have any difficulty in interpreting
- interpreters must remain calm, especially if they hear unpleasant or controversial evidence - their duty is to remain professionally detached from what they are interpreting
- interpreters must use direct speech when interpreting - they must not say "he said..." this must be interpreted as "I..."
- interpreters must interpret language which may be offensive - for cultural reasons, obscenities may be difficult to translate - in this case they must look for the closest equivalent
- interpreters must not interrupt the progress of the interview other than to make a correction to the interpretation, request clarification, resolve a misunderstanding or draw attention to any distractions
- interpreters must confirm they are interpreting the correct language and/or dialect at the beginning of the interview, any differences in language or dialect being interpreted must be raised with the Interviewing Officer at the earliest opportunity
- interpreters must not ask the customer what they mean by a particular answer - they must ask the Interviewing Officer's permission to ask the customer to repeat or clarify
- interpreters must not show emotions - the only reactions they must express are those of the customer
- any notes which are made during the interview must be passed to the Interviewing Officer at the end of the interview

- interpreters will be required to interpret to a high standard on a range of protection-based and human rights topics including (though not limited to) religious conversion, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sexuality-and gender-based claims, all types and forms of persecution, medical (physical and mental health) and political activity

Remote interviewing

When conducting remote assignments booked by the Interpreter & Language Services Unit (ILSU) you must be UK based at the point of conducting that assignment.

Whilst not being housed in a HO/FCO facility, to be within the UK conducting remote assignments, means any operation is within UK law enforcement, the risks associated with cyber security are reduced and support for interpreters is improved.

Interpreters may be asked to conduct telephone interpreting. They will be informed in advance that this is the form of assignment to be undertaken.

Some telephone interpreting is not managed by the Interpreter & Language Services Unit, it is managed by the business area making the booking. It is an interpreter's responsibility to get details such as the Interviewing Officer's name and telephone number when a telephone interpreting assignment is booked.

Interpreters must ensure as best they can that they are in a safe and secure environment and cannot be overheard before carrying out a remote interpreting assignment.

Some interviews maybe carried out using video conference facilities. During these interviews, interpreters may not be in the same room as the customer or the Interviewing Officer. Interpreters will be informed in advance that this is the form of assignment to be undertaken.

Interpreters may be required to carry out interviews through the Digital Interview (DI) System and these interviews will be audio-recorded.

Interpreters who have been tested by Interpreter Management Team as remote capable may be asked to conduct virtual interviews using Home Office authorised remote platforms on a suitable device that has been tested.

They will be informed in advance that this is the form of assignment to be undertaken.

These interviews will be audio-recorded and subject to the same behaviours as telephone interpreting.

Interpreters are expected to keep their mobile phones charged and accessible when awaiting remote meeting invitations as the interviewing officer will contact interpreters on their mobile if experiencing technical or other difficulties.

Where technical difficulties arise interpreters will be expected to assist as far as possible to resolve issues by referring to the guidance and FAQ provided by the Interpreter Management Team.

During remote interviews, interpreters may be asked by Interviewing Officers for a scan of their environment for security purposes. Interpreters conducting such assignments should ensure there are no personal items on view which could identify their whereabouts or cause reputational damage to the Home Office. In addition, interpreters should be dressed appropriately for conducting a professional assignment.

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Training

It is an interpreter's responsibility to ensure that they remain up to date with the required levels of training and procedures to enable them to meet the expected standards of Home Office interpreting.

Health and safety

Interpreters must make themselves aware of Health and Safety requirements prior to attending a Home Office location. The Home Office will ensure relevant guidance is on display. Interpreters must raise any concerns about their own Health and Safety to the Interpreter Management Team.

Interpreters are entitled to reasonable rest breaks during their duties. If an interpreter requires a break, it is their responsibility to ask the Interviewing Officer to accommodate this request. It is essential that interpreters can conduct their duties to the best of their ability.

Medical conditions

Where a customer has a medical condition which can be contagious, interpreters must seek guidance from the Interviewing Officer regarding the continuation of an assignment.

References

Interpreters requiring a reference from the Home Office will receive a factual reference stating the dates of registration on the Home Office panel, and their registered languages only.

Bookings

It is an interpreter's responsibility, when accepting assignments from the Home Office, to ensure that they have recorded the full details relating to the assignment. For example, where the interview is to take place, the time they are required to attend, the length of time they will be required, the name and contact number of the officer who booked their services.

Interpreters must only accept assignments they know they are able to keep.

Interpreters must give a realistic time of arrival and make sure that they are punctual. If they are unavoidably delayed, they must telephone the relevant contact as soon as they know they will be late and give an approximate time of arrival.

If an interpreter needs to cancel a booking, they must contact the relevant booking unit. They must not delegate their assignment to another interpreter.

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Payments

Interpreters must submit their claim forms within 28 days of completing an assignment.

Interpreters will receive payment within 28 days of receipt of the claim form.

If the claim form is not submitted within 28 days, the payment will be progressed, and it will be automatically paid based on the information provided by the region who requested the service.

Interpreters must wait until 28 days have passed before enquiring about any impending payment.

Interpreters are entitled to a minimum payment for any cancellations received the day of, or 24 hours before, their assignment.

An interpreter must make sure they keep the originals or copies of all their paperwork relating to payment requests.

Amendments

This code may be amended and updated at any time, as necessary. It is an interpreter's responsibility to make themselves aware of any updates and amendments to the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct will be reviewed bi-annually to ensure that it is in line with changing business requirements. Any updates to the Code of Conduct will be notified via a mailshot and posted on the GOV.UK website.

Guidance for interpreters

Interpreters who require further guidance beyond the information contained in this document must contact the Interpreter Management Team.

Role of the Interviewing Officer

During an assignment, the Interviewing Officer is responsible for managing all aspects of the interview, which includes deciding the questions which are asked.

The Interviewing Officer is conducting the interview in order to gather information to enable them to complete their specific duties.

The Interviewing Officer may ask the interpreter to repeat or ask a question in a different way. This is not a reflection on the performance of the interpreter, it is purely to ensure the Interviewing Officer can gather enough information to enable them to complete their duties. The Interviewing Officer will explain to the customer the reasons behind any challenge or clarification.

It is the responsibility of the Interviewing Officer to challenge any behaviour or activity that is considered unsuitable or inappropriate during the interview.

In line with interviewing guidance, it is the role of the Interviewing Officer to accommodate all reasonable requests for a break from interpreters. It is important that interpreters can conduct their duties to the best of their abilities and breaks are an important part of this.

Declaration

Failure to adhere to any of the requirements detailed in this document will be dealt with under the [disciplinary process](#) and may result in an interpreter's removal from the panel of freelance interpreters.

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