



Home Office

Criminal investigations: use of interpreters

Version 10.0

This guidance is based on the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance for using interpreters.

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About this guidance

This guidance tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about the use of interpreters, translation and transcription services available to staff undertaking criminal investigations.

The Home Office has a duty to safeguard vulnerable people and promote the welfare of children for more information see: Vulnerable adults and children.

Criminal Investigators in Immigration Enforcement must be aware of their obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Part 3 of the Data Protection Act 2018 see: IE CFI Data protection policy also see: Data protection guidance.

Contacts

If you 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 CFI Operational Guidance Risk and Compliance 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 Review, Atlas and Forms team.

Publication

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

- version **10.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **28 August 2025**

Changes from last version of this guidance

Changes from the last version of this guidance include:

- housekeeping changes

Related content

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Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance for using interpreters

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about the [Crown Prosecution Service \(CPS\) - witness guidance](#).

Criminal Justice System requirements for interpreters

The right to an interpreter is an integral part of the right to a fair trial. It is a principle of common law that the defendant must be able to understand the charges made against them and be able to properly defend themselves. The right is also enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. For further information, see [Witnesses - CPS](#).

Translation services are currently being provided within police stations and the courts by thebigword who are contracted by the Ministry of Justice. Sign language interpretation is provided by [Clarion UK](#).

Interpreters working within the Criminal Justice System should be registered on the [National Register of Public Service Interpreters \(NRPSI\)](#). NRPSI are an independent, voluntary public interest body and their core role is to ensure that standards within the profession are maintained for the benefit of the public and interpreters.

Interpreters at the police station

The role of the interpreter at the police station is governed by [PACE Code C 2019](#). If a suspect or a witness requires an interpreter for interview or the taking of a statement, the police must arrange for one to be present.

The interpretation arrangements must comply with the minimum requirements as transposed into UK law from Directive 2010/64/EU of the European Parliament. See: [Directive 2010/64/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings](#).

Section 13.2 [PACE Code C 2019](#) dictates that a suspect must not be interviewed unless arrangements are made for a person capable of interpreting to assist the suspect to understand and communicate.

In the case of a person making a statement under caution, Section 13.4 states that “the interpreter shall record the statement in the language it is made, the person shall be invited to sign it and official English translation shall be made in due course.” See [PACE Code C 2019](#) for more information.

Code C also applies to suspects who are hard of hearing or have speech impediments and require interpreters or other appropriate assistance to enable effective communication. For further information, see [PACE Code C 2019](#).

[PACE Code F](#) deals with the interview of suspects who are deaf, blind or have a speech impediment. It states that it might be appropriate to make a visual recording of the interview if the suspect is deaf, blind or in the case of a speech impaired person who uses sign language to communicate.

Any witness statement taken from a person who has difficulty in speaking or understanding English should be recorded in the language it is made and signed by the witness. It should include the declaration prescribed in [Section 9\(2\)b Criminal Justice Act 1967](#). Witness statements for the purpose of [Section 5A\(3\)\(a\)](#) and [5B](#) of the Magistrates' Court Act 1980, must be the statement of the witness and not a translation of what was said by the interpreter. For further information, see [Magistrates Court Act 1980](#) and [Witnesses - CPS](#).

If any transcription is to be completed prior to charging, officers should discuss this with Custody staff at the earliest opportunity if this may mean that an extension to detention may be required. See S13.1 [PACE Code C 2019](#)

Any potential breaches of PACE or the Codes may mean the evidence could be excluded under Section 78 of PACE. For further information, see [Section 78 PACE](#)

The interpreter is bound by a duty of confidentiality not to disclose what was said in consultation between the suspect and their legal representative. For further information, see the [National Register of Public Service Interpreters \(NRPSI\) website](#).

Guidance on using interpreters in a custody environment was issued to all Chief Constables on 4 October 2023 by the National Police Chief's Council's lead for Language Services. A summary of this guidance can be found here: [Advice regarding Health & Safety of Interpreters during police assignments](#). It states among other things that:

- face to face interpreters should never be left alone with a victim, witness or suspect, even with a solicitor present - if you leave the room, ensure the interpreter does as well
- it is best practice to use a separate interpreter for legal consultations and best achieved through telephone interpreting services for those solicitor consultations - this eliminates the possibility of interpreters being left alone as above and minimises the risks of the same face to face interpreter being used for both consultation and interview

Court papers

When preparing papers for court, the foreign language statement should be placed in the bundle of witness statements either immediately before or after the translation.

Interpreter as a witness in court

If a defendant has been interviewed through an interpreter and there is any contention as to what was said during that interview, evidence will be required from

the interpreter. Evidence from the police officer in this regard amounts to hearsay. If the interpreter used at the police station is to be called as a prosecution witness, a separate interpreter is to be used for court.

If an interpreter is required to give evidence, they should be given an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of any record of interview at which they were present.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for the payment of expenses of an interpreter who attends court to give evidence about what took place at the defendant's interview. For further information, see [Witness Expenses and Allowances - CPS](#).

Interpreter for a witness at court

A witness who has difficulty in speaking or understanding English may give evidence at court through an interpreter. It is the responsibility of the prosecution and defence to arrange interpreters for their own witnesses at court. For further information see: [Witness Expenses and Allowances - CPS](#).

The decision as to whether an interpreter should be allowed to assist a witness is a matter of discretion for the judge. They are not bound by the witness asserting that they require an interpreter, nor does the judge need to conduct specific inquiries as to their command of English.

If the question of competence of the interpreter is raised, the hearing should be adjourned, so that it can be resolved. The interpreter must be someone who is impartial.

CPS is responsible for ensuring that the interpreter is appropriately qualified to carry out the assignment and that terms and conditions have been agreed before the assignment is undertaken. For further information, see [Witnesses - CPS](#).

Interpreter for a defendant at court

The defendant's right to an interpreter at court is enshrined within Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR): (3) everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights - (e) to have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court. The right is not subject to qualification. For further information, see [Article 6 of the ECHR](#) and [Witnesses - CPS](#).

If a defendant requires an interpreter to interpret the proceedings, it is the responsibility of the court to arrange for the attendance and payment of an independent interpreter. Where there is more than one defendant, each should have a separate interpreter.

It is important that the CPS liaise with the court and the police to ensure that the court is aware of the need for an independent interpreter and any other relevant information, in order that an appropriate interpreter can be selected. When a defendant is remanded in custody from the police station to the Magistrates' Court, it

is the police and the officer in charge who are responsible for organising an interpreter.

‘Double translation’ is permissible at both interview and trial, where it proves impossible to find an interpreter who is fluent in both English and the language in which the defendant is fluent. Both interpreters must be suitably skilled in the interpretation of their part of the process. Each must be fluent in their common language as well as the language used by the defendant or in English.

For further information, see [Witnesses - CPS](#).

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Obtaining a witness statement using an interpreter

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about how to obtain a witness statement using an interpreter.

For further advice on using an interpreter to obtain a witness statement, and other criminal procedures associated with witness statements, please see Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) guidance on Witness statements.

When you require a witness statement to be completed by a witness whose first or preferred language is not English, it will be necessary to obtain the services of an interpreter in order to provide a witness statement in the specified language as well as an English translated version of the witness statement.

When producing the witness statement in another language (not English), the declaration at the top of the MG11, must be written out by the interpreter in the relevant language, signed by the person making the statement (not the interpreter) and the signature must be witnessed.

The person witnessing the signature will normally be the interpreter.

The officer should then seek to obtain the evidence from the witness by asking questions of the witness through the interpreter.

Once the main body of the witness statement is gathered and agreed with the witness (via the interpreter), the interpreter should then write down the witness statement on an MG11, in the witness's own language, using the witness' own words as guided by the officer. This record is called the original statement.

The role of the officer is to ensure that the statement is factually and evidentially correct.

Once the witness statement is recorded in the witness' own language, the interpreter will then make an English translation of that statement on another form MG11.

This translation will then become an exhibit.

The interpreter must then make another witness statement, explaining their qualifications and role in the process which enables them to produce the translated witness statement as an exhibit (for example, I've been employed by thebigword as a qualified and accredited Portuguese interpreter for 5 years).

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The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI)

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office what minimum accreditation is required from interpreters used to undertake criminal interviews and other criminal procedures.

If the services of an interpreter are required for evidential interviews and procedures the interpreter must be registered on [The National Register of Public Service Interpreters \(NRPSI\)](#).

The NRPSI provides and maintains the voluntary register for the interpreting profession. It ensures required qualification standards are met, the quality of interpreting is defined and maintained through a Code of Conduct and that access to a database of professional interpreters is freely available for all. Further details can be found on the [NRPSI website](#).

If the services of a non-NRPSI registered interpreter are used, for example if no NRPSI registered interpreter was available, the rationale behind this must be clearly documented.

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Face-to-face interpreting

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about what databases of interpreters are available to assist staff with criminal and voluntary face-to-face interviews.

Face-to-face interpreting is when you require a linguist to translate from one language to another, for example from French to English, in an interview situation.

You can obtain the services of an interpreter for face-to-face interpreting from either the Interpreter Management Database or thebigword.

Note: Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) do not have a planned purchase order with thebigword for face-to-face bookings. If you use thebigword for face-to-face services, officers should arrange for a purchase order to be raised, your local Business Support should be able to do this for you.

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Telephone interpreting

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about telephone interpreting services.

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Translation and transcription services

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Payment for interpreting services

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