



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FOR PUBLIC SECTOR STAFF

Why was the Policy revised?

In 2003, the Office of Multicultural Interests commissioned a “Needs Analysis of Interpreting and Translating Services”. The Needs Analysis found that, despite Government commitment to providing effective interpreting and translating services, the lack of a robust implementation, monitoring and reporting framework for the Language Services Policy was a significant issue impacting on the effectiveness of the Policy to achieve its stated objectives. It also highlighted the extreme lack of Indigenous interpreting services.

The Needs Analysis recommended:

- a review of the WA Language Services Policy 2000 including the development and implementation of a robust monitoring and reporting framework; and
- an investigation into appropriate service models for Indigenous interpreting services to address the dire need for Indigenous interpreters in WA.

A review of the Policy was conducted and included recommendations that the Policy be revised to include:

1. An expanded definition of a ‘competent interpreter/ translator’.
2. Introduction of a set of minimum standards for the use of interpreters and translators in the provision of public sector services.
3. Development of a reporting and monitoring framework.
4. Development of guidelines on the use of interpreters and translators for public sector agencies.

The result of this process is the new Language Services Policy 2008.

What are the main differences between the new policy and the old one?

The Language Service Policy 2008 (LSP) includes:

- An **expanded definition of ‘competent interpreter/translator’** to also include interpreters and translators who have obtained a tertiary qualification in Interpreting or Translating in addition to the previous Policy’s requirement for NAATI accreditation or recognition. This broadens the range of languages in which translating and interpreting services are available, in particular, Indigenous languages and languages of new and emerging communities.
- **Principles and minimum standards** to assist public sector agencies to provide effective interpreting and translating services to people who require them.
- **Guidelines** on when and how to assess the need for an interpreter or translator and how to access interpreting and translating services.
- A **questionnaire** for determining when an Interpreter is required.
- A List of **Countries with main languages used**.
- A List of **Aboriginal Languages and Language Centres**.

Does the Policy apply to the community and private sector?

The LSP 2008 only applies to State Government public sector agencies.

Who are the groups being targeted by the LSP?

The LSP 2008 seeks to ensure that language is not a barrier to services and programs for people who require assistance in English. Amongst Western Australians who require assistance with communicating effectively in English are Indigenous people, migrants and those who are deaf or hearing impaired.

To which public sector agencies does the LSP apply?

The LSP applies to all Western Australian public sector agencies.

Western Australia's diverse population makes it vital for all service providers to plan and deliver services that are responsive to the needs of clients who have difficulty communicating in spoken or written English. Staff involved in both planning and delivering services should therefore be aware of the LSP 2008.

Demand for interpreting and translating services is determined by the:

- written and spoken English proficiency of the agency's clients;
- number of clients and potential clients who require the services of an interpreter or access to translated material;
- nature of the service provided by the agency and the complexity of the language used in the provision of the service; and
- level of risk to the State of Western Australia, its agencies and instrumentalities arising from miscommunication.

The level of complexity in the language requiring translating/interpreting and the risk to government for each service area will need to be assessed by individual agencies that have responsibility for particular service areas. A client who has sufficient English to organise a parking permit, for example, may not have sufficient English to understand the implications of a complex medical procedure. Other people may not need an interpreter but may require written information to be translated or need assistance with writing in English. In the case of Auslan users, the majority will be comfortable reading and writing in English but will need an interpreter for face-to-face communication¹.

Collecting data on the preferred languages of an agency's client group and their countries of origin is essential to understanding the demand for interpreting and translating services. As a first step agencies should access information either through their own databases or other sources about the number of clients who require interpreting or translating services and their preferred languages.

It is important that frontline staff know who to contact when an interpreter or translator is needed. Information sheets are available on the OMI website dealing with:

- How to work with a telephone interpreter
- How to work with an interpreter on-site

Who pays the costs of interpreting/translating?

Western Australian public sector agencies are expected to budget for the costs of interpreting/translating for their clients.

What resources are provided as part of the LSP?

The LSP includes:

- Principles and minimum standards to assist Government agencies to provide effective interpreting and translating services to people who require them.
- Guidelines on when and how to assess the need for an interpreter or translator and how to access interpreting and translating services.
- A questionnaire for determining when an Interpreter is required.

¹ Language Services Policy 2008 p.11

- A list of countries with main languages used.
- A list of Aboriginal Languages.

Copies of the Policy are available on the OMI website at www.multicultural.wa.gov.au.
Hard copies can be obtained from OMI by emailing harmony@omi.wa.gov.au.

The following information sheets are also available on the OMI website:

- What to do when a client presents a Western Australian Interpreter Card
- How to work with a telephone interpreter
- How to work with an interpreter on-site

Further queries can be directed to OMI by emailing harmony@omi.wa.gov.au
or by telephone: (08) 6217 8900.

Does the WA Government recommend specific translating and/or interpreting service providers? How do I find an Interpreter or Translator? Are the fees all the same?

The WA Government does not recommend specific translating and/or interpreting providers.

To find an interpreter or translator, look on the following websites or in the Yellow Pages:

- NAATI Directory of Accredited and Recognised Practitioners of Interpreting and Translating: <http://www.naati.com.au>
- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT): <http://www.ausit.org>
- Western Australian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (WAITI): http://www.waiti.org.au/find_translator_interpreter.php
- The Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA): <http://aslia.com.au>

The Yellow Pages can also be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.yellowpages.com.au>.

Both staff and clients need to be confident that interpreters and translators have the appropriate competency. Agencies should ensure that interpreters and translators used:

- a) meet the requirements for professional or competent interpreters or translators as defined in the LSP 2008; and
- b) adhere to a professional code of ethics that include the principles of impartiality, neutrality and confidentiality.

Is the agency responsible for promoting the service to its clients?

Yes.

The Language Services Policy 2008 Minimum Standards require that Western Australians who are unable to communicate through spoken or written English are made aware of:

- their rights to communicate in their preferred language; and
- when and how to ask for an interpreter.

Appendix 3 of the Language Services Policy 2008 lists the rights and responsibilities of parties to a communicative discourse (spoken, written or in sign language).

Should staff be trained on using interpreters, assessing customer needs for interpreter etc.?

Yes.

The LSP 2008 requires that all public sector agencies ensure that all staff who deal directly with clients are aware of:

- how to determine the need for an interpreter; and
- how to access and use interpreting and translating services.

Western Australia's Policy Framework for Substantive Equality also requires public sector agencies to:

- assess how policies, programs and practices affect Indigenous people and ethnic minorities;
- monitor the implementation of policies and programs and make sure they meet the diverse needs of the people of Western Australia; and
- ensure that staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to address issues of systemic racism.

For more information contact the language services area or Substantive Equality officer in your agency.

Will OMI provide information or referrals to professionals/agencies providing training on working with interpreters/translators?

No.

- As a public sector agency, OMI is not in a position to recommend the services of particular providers of training. However, agencies should be careful to ensure that training is delivered by competent interpreting/translating professionals. In the first instance, agencies may contact the following professional associations:
- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT):
Telephone: 1800 284 181 Email: admin@ausit.org <http://www.ausit.org>
- Western Australian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (WAITI):
Telephone: 0432 832 036 http://www.waiti.org.au/find_translator_interpreter.php
- Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA):
Email: info@aslia.com.au <http://aslia.com.au>

Information sessions and workshop sessions are also available through the:

- National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) WA Office:
Telephone: (02) 6260 3035 Email: info@naati.com.au <http://www.naati.com.au>

Can a client request a particular interpreter to assist them?

A client has the right to request a particular interpreter to assist them. However, the capacity of the agency to fulfil this request will be subject to the availability of the interpreter and whether the agency purchases interpreting services:

- on an as needs basis;
- through a formal contract with an approved language services provider; or
- employment of full-time or part-time interpreters or bilingual workers.

How do I know when it is okay to use a telephone interpreter for a client rather than an on-site interpreter?

The LSP provides a "decision making tree" to help you determine the type of interpreting service that is appropriate (Appendix 2).

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 may not be comfortable using the telephone. In some instances, a face-to-face meeting with an interpreter may be better.

Telephone interpreters can be used to establish the language spoken and the nature of an enquiry before an on-site interpreter is called. Telephone interpreting may be particularly useful in emergency situations when you need immediate assistance. It may be less expensive than on-site interpreting and it may also be more anonymous, which may be beneficial in certain circumstances. It is also more widely used in remote or regional areas.