

qualifications year on year, the progress of which is monitored by this organisation. The numbers of interpreters registered with the main contractor with the DPSI qualification has increased.

I have no information on the one-day training course referred to at para 6, or the pay range disparity referred to at para 7 of your letter and therefore cannot comment further.

You raise a specific concern regarding comparison rates. This contract was placed following a full and transparent "Open" competition under the EU regulations. Fourteen bidders tendered for this requirement and there is no evidence to suggest that any of the tenderers or the winning two contractors misread or misinterpreted the basis for pricing. The main contractor did not submit the cheapest bid and other bidders submitted prices in a similar price range which would not indicate anything untoward. This contract has now been running successfully for over a year.

You specifically refer to sign language interpreting, which is not included within the scope of this Framework.

There has been no lowering of standards; I can confirm that this arrangement has had no adverse effect on the quality of interpreting services being provided to the Scottish Criminal Justice System. These contracts are formally monitored and there is no evidence or reports of deterioration.

A key part of our equality duties is the requirement to impact assess all of our policies to ensure that we do not inadvertently create a negative impact for equality groups. The law requires that this duty to pay 'due regard' be demonstrated in the decision making process. Such assessment does not necessarily have to take the form of one document called an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). We are satisfied that "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality with regard to race, disability and gender, including gender reassignment, as well as to promote good race relations was demonstrated in the decision to set up a collaborative Framework Arrangement used for the provision of Interpreting, Translation and Transcription Services.

We do not think it is appropriate to conduct an enquiry into the process involved in the establishment of this collaborative Contract and the terms and conditions used. This contract was placed following a full and transparent "Open" procedure under the EU regulations. The contract has been placed for a 3 year period with an option to extend for an additional year. This is in line with EU guidance on placing Framework Agreements and is a common procedure for procuring services and letting Framework Agreements. This requirement will be re-competed again towards the end of the contract term.

A Working Group on Interpreting and Translation (WIGITS) already exists, which is made up of representatives from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscals Service (COPFS), Scottish Court Service (SCS), Scottish Law Society, Scottish legal Aid Board, Scottish Government, and the Independent Inspectorate (of COPFS) which aims to establish and maintain common standards for interpreting and translation provision in the Scottish Criminal Justice System (CJS) and work towards the good practice guidelines set out in the Code of Practice for Working with Interpreters in the CJS.

I can confirm that there has been no breach of contract.