
Chapter Twelve: The Translating and Interpreting Service

TIS provides telephone and on-site interpreting and translations and is an important safety net for people facing language barriers to successful participation in the community. TIS is also an important tool which assists government agencies and government-funded services to meet their access and equity obligations to non-English speaking members of the community. TIS interpreting services are available on a user-pays or fee-free basis depending on circumstances. TIS provides fee-free translations of settlement-related documents to permanent residents within the first two years of arrival or of the grant of permanent residency, whichever occurs later.

TIS operates within a limited budget and faces rising costs of service provision. The main source of budget pressure is growth in demand for fee-free on-site interpreting. There is therefore a need to promote more strongly the use of the more cost-effective option of telephone interpreting, including in relation to the Doctors' Priority Line and in rural and regional areas.

Shortages of interpreters in particular languages or regions continue to be a challenge for TIS. Although TIS and the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) already have methods in place for recruiting new translators and interpreters, there would be benefit in DIMIA funding subsidies to pay fees for appropriate bilingual people from small and emerging communities to gain NAATI accreditation.

There is also a need to promote the role of language services to new arrivals and service providers, and to clarify the boundaries between TIS and State/Territory language services.

Introduction

TIS provides a telephone and on-site interpreting service for non-English speakers and for service providers with whom they need to communicate. The telephone interpreting service also includes the Doctors Priority Line, which is a fee-free dedicated telephone line for doctors requiring assistance in communicating with their non-English speaking patients. TIS also provides extract translations of certain personal documents for eligible permanent residents of Australia during their first two years of permanent residency in Australia. Given that low English proficiency constitutes a major barrier for people in gaining access to services and information,

TIS plays a crucial role in implementing access and equity principles.

The history of TIS

TIS is unique. Australia is the only country in the world with a federally-funded translating and interpreting service that provides a national, twenty-four hour, seven-days-a-week telephone interpreting service. TIS is also unique within DIMIA-funded services because its interpreting service is available to all people with low levels of English proficiency, regardless of their period of residence in Australia, the visa category under which they entered Australia or their location. TIS interpreting services are available on a user-pays or fee-free basis depending on

circumstances. In this sense, TIS operates as an important 'safety net' for people facing language barriers to successful participation in the community.

From 1947, government departments and the Red Cross performed translating functions for migrants. Commonwealth Government translating arrangements began to assume their present form in December 1958 when DIMIA took responsibility for these translating functions. The Emergency Telephone Interpreter Service was established as a free service in Melbourne and Sydney in 1973 (although the word 'Emergency' was later dropped). Reflecting the predominance of European migrants at that time, the Telephone Interpreting Service initially provided interpreters in Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish. It also provided Arabic interpreters.

In 1977, Commonwealth and State/Territory governments created the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) in order to promote the development of translating and interpreting and to establish national standards in the field. NAATI continues to operate as the national standards body owned by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments of Australia. NAATI sets and monitors standards for translating and interpreting in Australia by accrediting translators and interpreters at a number of levels of competence.

The 1978 Galbally report found that, despite the importance of English tuition programs within settlement services, there would always be a significant proportion of people who did not speak English well. While the report favoured the employment of bilingual staff by government agencies to respond to this issue, it also recommended enhancement of the Telephone Interpreting Service and the

establishment of appropriate standards for the translating and interpreting profession.¹ Following the adoption of the Galbally report, the Telephone Interpreting Service expanded significantly across Australia. The budget for the Telephone Interpreting Service increased from approximately \$1 million in 1977-78 to \$3.5 million in 1980-81.

In 1981, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) commended the speed with which the Telephone Interpreting Service had been extended to regional centres and smaller areas. It noted that usage of the Telephone Interpreting Service had grown by over 80% in the triennium, that interpreters in over seventy languages were available and that the translating workload had also increased. The report found that although most Australian residents whose first language was not English were covered by the Telephone Interpreter Service, many migrants were unaware of the service. More than half of all organisations surveyed relied on family and friends of non-English speaking clients for interpreting and translation.²

Through the 1980s, both the Telephone Interpreter Service and Commonwealth translation services were expanded, and on-site interpreters became more available. From 1988, following the release of the Jupp report in 1986, regional clients could call the Telephone Interpreter Service for the cost of a local call. This period also saw the introduction of computer-based management systems.

The 1988 Fitzgerald report recommended that translating and interpreting services be one

¹ Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services to Migrants (Chairman F Galbally), *Migrant Services and Programs*, AGPS, Canberra, 1978, p. 49.

² Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (Chairman F Galbally), *Evaluation of Post-Arrival Programs and Services*, AIMA, Melbourne, 1982, pp. 149-152.

of four areas of settlement services to receive priority in future public expenditure. The Commonwealth Government response to the Fitzgerald Report made no specific commitment to increased expenditure on interpreting and translating services. Instead, it announced moves towards rationalising national interpreting and translating services and greater implementation of cost recovery where this was appropriate. It also announced its withdrawal, over a four-year period, from the joint language service cost-sharing arrangements with the States/Territories. By the late 1980s, State/Territory government interpreting and translating services existed in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Northern Territory, and Queensland, although the scope and nature of the services differed between States/Territories. In 1991, the Telephone Interpreting Service and translations unit within DIMIA were integrated, and the service was renamed the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS).

From 1990, the Telephone Interpreting Service charged Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies and some private sector clients for its services on a user-pays basis. Non-English speaking clients, community organisations and medical practitioners were not charged. However, a 1994 evaluation recommended that the responsibility for paying for these services should be transferred to more appropriate agencies than DIMIA. It also recommended that government departments be charged at a level of full cost recovery by 1996-97.³

In 1996, the *A Fair Go for All* report into migrant access and equity noted that cost recovery by TIS had been widely criticised, but also that use of the service had increased and response times had improved.⁴ An important recommendation from this report was that access and equity principles should constitute part of the obligations for all service providers.

In 1997, a departmental review of TIS was conducted. The review concentrated its

attention on the continuing need for DIMIA involvement with an interpreting/translating service, paying particular attention to related issues of access and equity, the different ways DIMIA could continue such an involvement and the different options for providing an interpreting/translating service in the future.

The review concluded that effective involvement could be achieved through DIMIA's role as a purchaser of interpreting and translating services, rather than the department being involved in the delivery of such services. As such, the review recommended the commercialisation of TIS.

In order to move the program to a more commercial basis and enhance services to clients, the increasing consolidation of TIS was deemed necessary. In 1998, TIS was consolidated from nine separate sites in the capital cities to three operational centres in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. In 2002, TIS was consolidated to a single site in Melbourne.

Under the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, launched in 1998, Commonwealth and State/Territory governments became explicitly responsible for effective communication with their clients who spoke little or no English. In the same year, the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs agreed that government agencies should make provision for translating and interpreting services as part of core funding of all government-funded community organisations.

As a result, since 2000, DIMIA has operated a limited, annually allocated budget from which it funds fee-free translating and

³ As noted in DIMIA, TIS Review Unit, *Review of the Commonwealth Translating and Interpreting Service Report*, 28 May 1997, p. 15.

⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *A Fair Go for All: Report on Migrant Access and Equity*, AGPS, Canberra, 1996, p. 92.

interpreting services to approved settlement clients as well as to non-English speakers for whom no other department is responsible. This budget is \$6.6 million.

Nevertheless, DIMIA has maintained its focus on extending the reach of fee-free services. TIS has continually increased its coverage of languages and now provides interpreters in more than 100 languages. It has also adopted increasingly sophisticated technologies. In 1996, for instance, a new national computer system designed to improve TIS services and provide management information came into full operation. Since 2000, TIS has operated the Doctors Priority Line, a dedicated telephone line offering fee-free telephone interpreting to doctors communicating with their non-English speaking patients. In 2002, an upgraded telephony system was introduced to improve access to TIS throughout Australia and provide the technical capacity for continuing improvement in response to market demands and government policy requirements.

In the same year, TIS out-sourced document translations to the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service LanguageLink (VITS LanguageLink), and contracted the AMEP to provide a document collection service for eligible clients.

TIS has attempted to manage the impact of increased service charges. TIS charges did not increase from the time of their introduction in 1991 until 2000. Full cost recovery will begin on 1 July 2003 when the final set of increases in user charges will commence. TIS user charges are now comparable with most language service providers.

Throughout the history of TIS, the issues with regard to interpreting have remained relatively consistent: the range of language groups to be covered; the continual changes to the migrant and humanitarian intakes; the difficulties in recruiting interpreters for small and emerging communities; and the high costs of providing quality services.⁵

Current arrangements

Who uses TIS?

TIS is available to any person or organisation in Australia requiring translating or interpreting services. TIS provides services on a fee-charging basis to Commonwealth, State/Territory or local government departments and authorities, private business, and individuals who wish to communicate with their clients. Some agencies or organisations which are charged for TIS services choose to pass this cost onto their clients, while others do not.

Fee-free interpreting

In order to provide fee-free services to some permanent residents and Australian citizens, DIMIA covers the cost of interpreting from TIS for the following groups:

- private medical practitioners and specialists providing services that are covered by Medicare rebates;
- certain non-profit, non-government, community-based organisations that are not fully funded by any government department or agency;
- members of Commonwealth, State/Territory Parliaments providing assistance to their constituents (but not for electioneering or ministerial purposes);
- local government authorities, such as city or shire councils, for general administration enquiries to rate-payers, but not organisations providing outsourced council services - for example, garbage contractors or counselling services;
- trade unions assisting non-English speaking members with employment or award conditions, or advising them about

⁵ D Cox, *Understanding Australian Settlement Services*, AGPS, Canberra, 1996, p. 33.

union services, but not in relation to workers' compensation matters; and

- emergency services organisations during national emergencies as directed by Emergency Management Australia.

The client group for fee-free interpreting, therefore, includes non-English speaking migrants and humanitarian entrants themselves, and the English-speaking groups and individuals providing services to them. Fee-free interpreting to assist permanent residents in gaining access to the services provided by the above groups is essentially a life-long service, as there are no imposed time limits for fee-free interpreting.

While certain non-government, not-for-profit community-based organisations that provide settlement-related services can be eligible for fee-free interpreting services, this is not the case for all such organisations. Eligibility is based on the services they provide, how the organisation is funded, and any specific interpreting assistance provided. As at 30 June 2002, DIMIA had approved the provision of fee-free interpreting services to 1,321 non-government organisations.

Doctors providing services claimable under Medicare to non-English speaking permanent residents or Australian citizens are key clients of TIS fee-free interpreting services. In November 2000, DIMIA launched the Doctors Priority Line to provide doctors with more efficient access to fee-free telephone interpreting. Calls to the Doctors Priority Line are given priority over other non-emergency calls to TIS in order to ensure better access to health care for non-English speakers.

Fee-free translations

Fee-free translations of personal settlement related documents are available to permanent residents within the first two years of arrival on a valid permanent residence visa or onshore grant of permanent residency, whichever occurs later.

From mid-2003, business skills and business employment visa holders will become ineligible for fee-free translations. Migrants holding these visa types generally have the capacity to pay for translation services, and many of their settlement-related documents are translated prior to migration as part of the visa application process. The change to eligibility will assist DIMIA in managing fee-free translations within the existing budget allocation and redirect available funds to groups of new arrivals with greater needs.

The core functions of TIS

TIS assists government agencies and government-funded services to meet their access and equity obligations to non-English speaking members of the community.

As part of its interpreting function TIS delivers:

- a twenty-four hour, seven-day-a-week telephone service;
- a twenty-four hour on-site interpreting service where bookings are made during normal business hours; and
- emergency on-site interpreters after hours, on weekends and on public holidays.

In 2001-02, TIS provided a total of 289,189 telephone interpreting calls and 74,000 on-site interpreting visits (including both fee-free and cost-recovered interpreting jobs).

The core function for the translating arm of TIS is to provide fee-free document translations to new arrivals. The fee-free service provides an extract or summary translation of the following settlement-related personal documents:

- birth, marriage, death and divorce;
- certificates of change of name (issued before immigration);
- baptismal certificates (only where the bearer does not have a birth certificate);
- national identity documents (at the discretion of TIS);

Figure 12.1: Cost of fee-free services, 2000-01 and 2001-02 compared

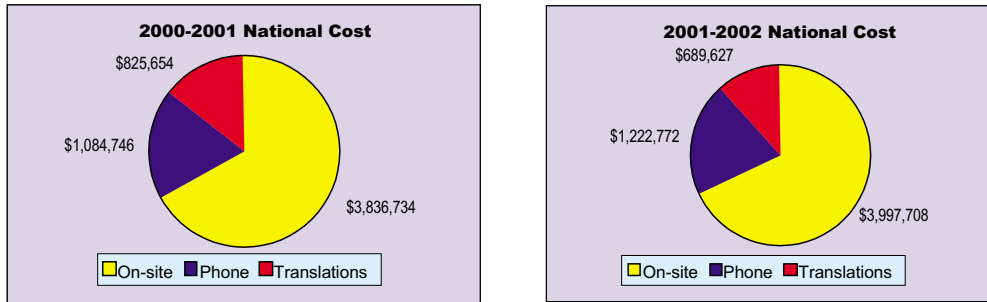
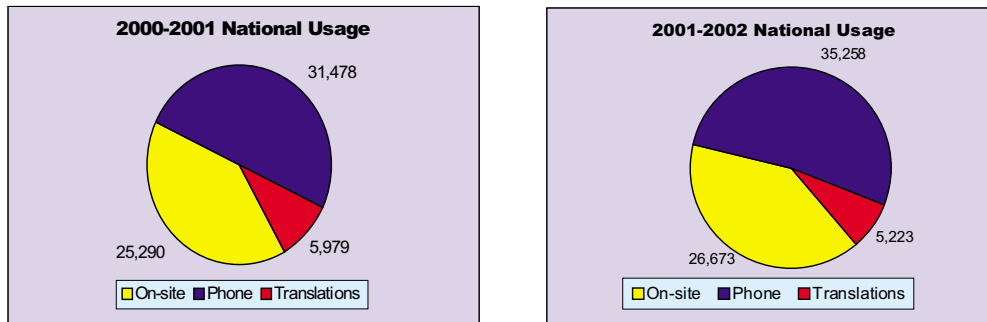


Figure 12.2: Use of fee-free services, 2000-01 and 2001-02 compared



- employment certificates/records/references;
- primary school certificates required for entry to primary or secondary school and secondary education certificates, normally relating to the final year(s) study;
- tertiary education certificates;
- vocational (professional and trade) certificates;
- drivers' licences;
- police/penal certificates if required for settlement purposes;
- medical reports issued before immigration to Australia and needed for medical treatment here; and
- vaccination certificates issued before immigration to Australia.

Documents for translation may be lodged during business hours at AMEP offices nationwide for dispatch to TIS providers. Document translations generally take up to twenty working days from the time the document is lodged to the time the translation is returned to the client. TIS closed its commercial translations service in March 2001.

Use and cost of fee-free services

For the 2001-02 financial year, the TIS fee-free budget was just over \$6.6 million. The total expenditure on fee-free services was \$6,596,727. During this period, this amount purchased 5,223 document translation jobs (consisting of around 13,500 individual documents), 67,522 telephone interpreting services and 26,673 on-site interpreting services. All of these services were provided to clients fee-free.

The pie charts in figures 12.1 and 12.2 compare the cost and use of each type of fee-free service to DIMIA during the 2000-01 and 2001-02 years. These graphs do not include the expenditure on and number of unsuccessful telephone interpreting calls (which are explained in detail in the following section of this chapter).

These charts show that during 2001-02:

- on-site interpreting represented 40% of total services and 67% of the total cost;
- fee-free telephone interpreting represented 52% of total services and 21% of the total cost; and
- translations represented 8% of total services and 12% of the total cost.

Although costs can vary from job to job, the average cost per service during the 2001-02 financial year was:

- \$149.88 for on-site interpreting;
- \$34.68 for fee-free telephone interpreting; and
- \$132.04 for translation jobs.

Unsuccessful telephone interpreting calls

A lesser issue in pressure on funding for fee-free services is presented by unsuccessful telephone interpreting calls. If the third party to an interpreting call is not a government agency or organisation which has already agreed to accept TIS interpreting charges, DIMIA covers the cost of the call. There are two categories of unsuccessful telephone interpreting calls: settlement service overhead calls and 'no parties willing to pay' calls.

A settlement service overhead call is a call initiated by a non-English speaker to TIS seeking direct assistance and requiring an interpreter for the operator to convey information to the non-English speaking caller. This is a 'safety net' for all people with low levels of English proficiency who need to communicate with service providers, for

whatever reason. DIMIA accepts the cost of interpreters for these calls when the call is not successfully connected to a chargeable third party (for example, because the line was busy or there was an answering machine).

A 'no parties willing to pay' call is a call initiated by a non-English speaker where, prior to the non-English speaking caller being successfully connected to a chargeable third party in the private sector, the non-English speaker is asked to accept the cost of the interpreting service. If neither the chargeable third party nor the non-English speaker agrees to accept charges for interpreting, the call is terminated and recorded in the TIS computer system under 'no parties willing to pay'. Where an interpreter has been used for this interaction, DIMIA covers the cost of the interpreter.

The number of unsuccessful telephone interpreting calls is currently falling. During 2001-02, there were 32,264 unsuccessful telephone interpreting calls which cost DIMIA \$686,622. This compares with 39,571 such calls at a cost of \$841,976 in 2000-01. There was, therefore, a reduction of 18.5% in both the number and cost of these calls.

This chapter now turns to the issues that have been raised in public consultations and submissions to the review.

Budget pressures

In considering how to provide the most efficient and equitable service without significant increases in costs, the high cost of on-site interpreting is the most crucial issue. Fee-free on-site interpreting costs DIMIA around five times more than telephone interpreting. While TIS strongly encourages clients to use telephone interpreting rather than on-site, the criteria for receiving on-site interpreting is discretionary. Continuing growth in demand for fee-free on-site interpreting is the main source of budget pressures for DIMIA in providing fee-free

translating and interpreting services. In addition, this service is often not available in a number of rural and regional areas, and this raises equity considerations. DIMIA, therefore, encourages the use of telephone interpreting in all situations, but particularly in rural and regional areas due to the distances and expenses involved with on-site interpreting.

The Doctors Priority Line

The Doctors Priority Line was introduced in late 2000 to further assist doctors to communicate with their non-English speaking patients. While growth in the use of the Doctors Priority Line has been steady, commentary from public consultations and submissions to the review has reflected a widespread view that there are still not enough doctors using the Doctors Priority Line. Stakeholders have argued that there is a need for greater education in the use of the service.

*We particularly commend the GP Priority Line, but it continues to need **as much promotion as possible in regional rural areas where interpreter access is even more difficult than in metropolitan areas**. We also note that many rural/regional centres where an interpreter may be needed lack the simplest necessary technology like **a dual hand set** to facilitate the service. Such a provision could be made by DIMIA to assist the work of the Rural Strategy CSSS workers in the community centres where they are based.*

Submission from the Newcastle and Hunter Region Migrant Resource Centre, NSW (emphasis in submission)

Key barriers to accessing [health] services include: accessing GP and specialist medical services when numbers of GPs and private practitioners do not use TIS in assisting patients... It appears that ongoing and sustained training across the Region is called for to address this issue... It appears that the use of family members as interpreters by patients accessing the regional health system, rather than following NSW Health's policy on the use of accredited interpreters, continues to be an issue in a number of cases.

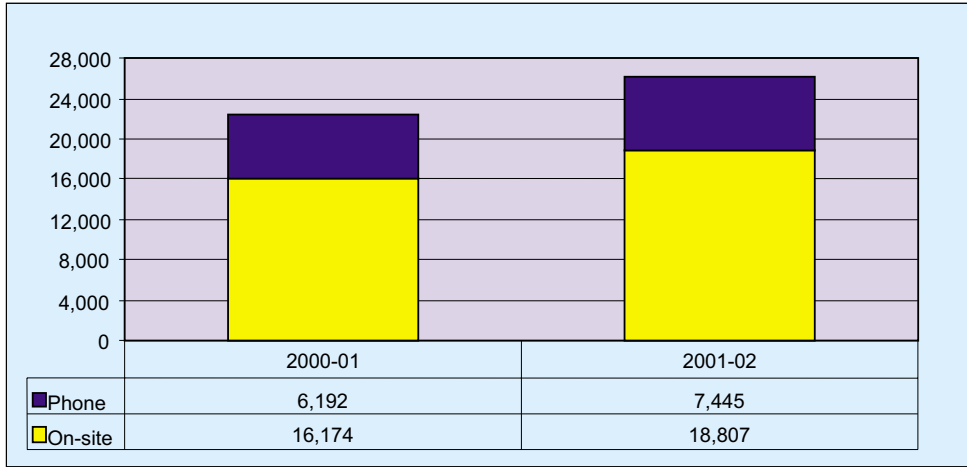
Submission from the Migrant Network Services (Northern Sydney), NSW

An intended effect of the introduction of the Doctors Priority Line was to shift doctors away from using on-site interpreting to more cost-effective telephone interpreting. This would enable more non-English speaking citizens and permanent residents to benefit from fee-free interpreting without increasing the overall cost of the service as well as address the above mentioned equity issues for those in rural and regional areas.

As figure 12.3 highlights, during 2001-02, the number of telephone services provided to doctors increased by 20.2% due to the promotion of the Doctors Priority Line. However, the number of on-site services to medical practitioners also increased by 16.3%. It appears that a number of doctors targeted in the promotion of the Doctors Priority Line became more aware of fee-free interpreting services but preferred to use on-site interpreters.

This trend to high use of on-site interpreting by doctors is creating growing budget pressures.

Figure 12.3: Number of interpreting tasks for doctors, 2001-02 and 2000-01 compared



Source: DIMIA, *Annual Report for 2001-2002 on Fee-Free Translating and Interpreting Services*, 2002, p. 12.

Of the \$6.6 million allocated for fee-free translating and interpreting in 2001-02, doctors used interpreters to the value of \$2,939,206. Telephone interpreting represented only \$239,150, or 8.1% of doctors' total costs, while their on-site interpreting usage cost \$2,700,056 which was 91.9% of the total cost of interpreting provided to doctors. In particular, a relatively small number of doctors in urban areas are using a very large proportion of fee-free funding. While some doctors insist on using on-site interpreters over telephone interpreting, this is not generally necessary but largely a matter of what they are familiar with.

A possible solution to this problem lies in further promotion of telephone over on-site interpreting. TIS currently provides about 68,000 fee-free telephone interpreting jobs each year compared with about 27,000 on-site services. While on-site interpreting may be preferred by some services, delivery of services via electronic communication technology is a growing trend in the broader service network. For example, video

conferencing, satellite and telephone communication is widely used in medicine, the media and in business.

Promotion strategies to encourage use of telephone interpreting over on-site interpreting could include:

- dispatching information brochures and leaflets on the Doctors Priority Line to individual medical practitioners on the TIS data base;
- publishing information about the Doctors Priority Line in relevant medical publications;
- providing information about the advantages of the Doctors Priority Line on professional tapes produced specifically for doctors; and
- promoting the Doctors Priority Line through direct contact between TIS and doctors and/or their receptionists.

While provision would need to be made for additional funding to cover this initial outlay in the short-term, the intended reduction in

on-site interpreting by doctors should offset this outlay in the longer-term.

Recommendation 52

That DIMIA further promote the use of telephone interpreting services, including the Doctors Priority Line, as a more efficient and equitable service than on-site interpreting.

Training for translators and interpreters

Public consultations and submissions to the review have suggested that the level of interpreter training, including ethics training, should be boosted.

There also appears to be a need for more and better trained interpreters from major client language groups in NT, which are, however, generally 'new' languages where NAATI testing is either in its early stages or not yet developed due to the complexities surrounding the issues involved.

Submission from the Adult Migrant English Program, NT University

As noted above, the professional accreditation of translators and interpreters is the responsibility of NAATI. In allocating assignments, TIS gives preference to contractors whose professional skills are formally recognised by NAATI. Of the interpreters engaged by TIS on a contract basis:

- around 23% are accredited by NAATI at Level 3 or above (professional level);

- almost 39% are accredited at NAATI Level 1 and 2 (para-professional level); and
- around 37% have no formal accreditation.

According to the VITS LanguageLink, the company holding the fee-free translation services contract, 124 translators covering fifty-seven languages are employed to translate settlement related documents. Of the 124 translators:

- around 77% are accredited by NAATI at Level 3 or above;
- around 7% are accredited at Level 2; and
- just over 16% are either accredited at Level 1 or have no formal accreditation.

NAATI accreditation indicates a high standard of attainment. NAATI accreditation may be obtained in three ways:

- by passing a NAATI test;
- by completing successfully a course of study at an Australian institution approved by NAATI; or
- by providing evidence of specialised qualifications in translating and/or interpreting obtained from a recognised overseas educational institution.

NAATI grants approval of courses upon application by the institution. The institution submits documentation to NAATI that demonstrates that the course meets NAATI requirements relating to the level of academic award, the content of the course, the duration of the course, assessment procedures, staffing and resources. For graduates to be eligible for NAATI accreditation at the completion of their course, they must fulfil the requirements of the academic award and achieve at least 70% on the final practical examination.

Accreditation on the basis of overseas qualifications is similarly demanding. NAATI must be satisfied that the following criteria are observed:

- that the qualification is recognised at the equivalent of a Bachelor Degree level or higher in Australia;
- that the content of the training is comparable with stipulated NAATI standards and with standards on other courses assessed;
- that the course is a dedicated translating/interpreting course; and
- that the status of the educational institution offering the course is appropriate.

NAATI recognition is different from NAATI accreditation and is only granted in languages for which accreditation testing is not available. It has no specification of level of competency because NAATI has not had the opportunity to administer a competency-based test. NAATI recognition is based on documentary evidence of frequent and regular practice of translating or interpreting within the community. Following the introduction of accreditation testing, translators and interpreters recognised by NAATI are expected to upgrade to accreditation status.

All interpreters used by TIS are contractually obliged to conform to the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators' (AUSIT) professional Code of Ethics. Although the fee-free translation service is now contracted to VITS LanguageLink, translators used by VITS LanguageLink are also obliged to conform to the same code.

Shortages of translators and interpreters

A number of stakeholders have raised the issue of shortages of translators and/or interpreters in some languages and/or in some geographical areas. This appeared to be a problem to some extent in all States/Territories and arose particularly in the case of the languages spoken by small and emerging communities.

An effort needs to be made to identify and register more interpreters for particular languages. For example, there are only two Oromo interpreters available through TIS across Australia. There is also a problem in finding interpreters for other African groups, particularly the tribal Sudanese languages.

Submission from the West Coast College of TAFE, Adult Migrant Education Service, WA

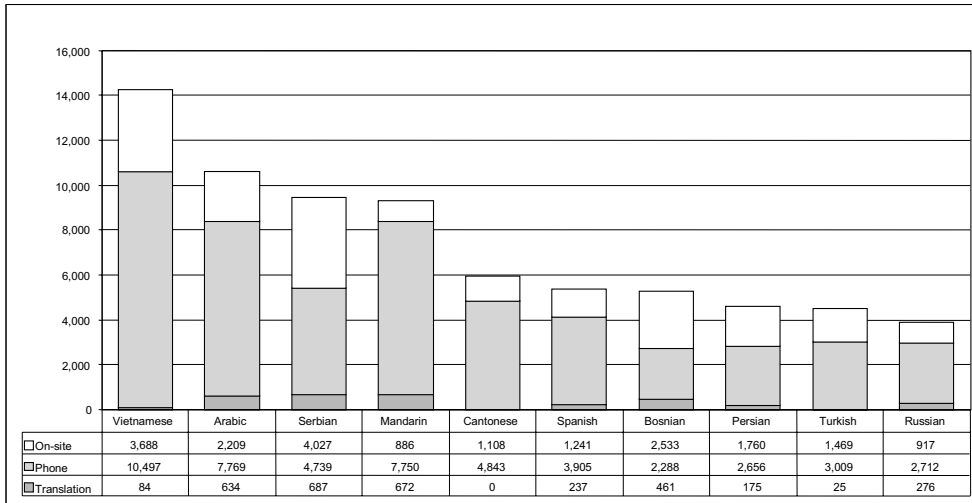
There is a shortage of skilled interpreters and translators in emerging community languages and clients who access TIS are often asked to wait for a call back when an interpreter can be found... More interpreters should be recruited and accreditation courses should be subsidised.

Submission from the Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre

In relation to on-site interpreting, this issue was particularly acute in outer metropolitan and rural and regional areas.

Interpreters are presently not available in this area in some of the newly arrived people's languages such as the African languages of Nuer, Dinka and Chollo, or are unresponsive to local needs. For example, it is very difficult at times to convince interpreters living in the western suburbs to travel to the City of Greater Dandenong area for work. Resources ought to be made available for not only fast-tracking the training of interpreters in newly arrived people's languages but also for those residing in areas where migrants and refugees settle. In this fast-track training, female interpreters must be included to ensure

Figure 12.4: National top ten languages, 2001-02



Source: DIMIA, *Annual Report for 2001-2002 on Fee-Free Translating and Interpreting Services*, 2002, p. 16.

the provision of cultural and gender sensitive services.

Submission from the Greater Dandenong Migrant Settlement Committee, VIC

[A]s a regional Centre, we express grave concern about the lack of and cost of on-site TIS interpreters outside the Sydney Metropolitan area, but still inside the 100km travel radius.

Submission from the Illawarra Migrant Resource Centre, NSW (emphasis in submission)

TIS provides good coverage for the languages most in demand. In 2001-02, fee-free translating and interpreting services were provided in ninety-nine languages. Figure 12.4 shows the most frequently requested languages nation-wide across all fee-free translating and interpreting services. Trends in the most frequently requested languages

were similar to the previous year, except that Russian replaced Croatian in the list of the top ten most requested languages.

However, stakeholder comments in relation to shortages of interpreters are supported by the well-known difficulties of providing for languages of small and emerging communities and for on-site interpreting in regional and even outer metropolitan areas in Australia.

These communities and geographical areas, by their very nature provide a very limited pool of bilingual people from whom to recruit translators and interpreters. In addition, due to the fewer number of new arrivals in rural and regional areas, these communities do not have the same workload demands as their longer-resident or urban counterparts. As a result, from the point of view of potential translators and interpreters, the workload and subsequent income for translators and interpreters do not justify the cost of NAATI accreditation testing. In the case of small and emerging communities, the problem is compounded by the fact that these communities are often primarily made up of

humanitarian entrants with limited resources to undertake accreditation testing.

As the shortages of interpreters in particular languages or regions has been a long-term challenge for TIS, both TIS and NAATI have already established methods for recruiting new translators and interpreters.

TIS currently identifies interpreter requirements by analysing the number of requests for interpreters that cannot be provided. Requests from community agencies to DIMIA are also taken into consideration. Community agencies and groups are then approached to put forward the names and contact details of potential interpreters.

NAATI employs a number of strategies to assist in increasing the pool of interpreters and translators in the languages of small and emerging communities. These strategies include:

- developing accreditation tests in new community languages, in consultation with stakeholders and service providers, to meet emerging demands;
- working with tertiary institutions to increase the number of translating and interpreting courses offered by such institutions; and
- promoting professional level accreditation for interpreters while maintaining facilities for para-professional accreditation to meet the particular needs of some States/Territories - mainly in languages spoken by small and emerging communities.

In relation to the first strategy, NAATI identifies the language needs of TIS according to information provided by settlement staff and settlement-related agencies, demand from ethnic communities, and feedback from on-site booking staff. When demand for the service of translators and interpreters in a particular language increases to the level where the market place requires accredited

translators and interpreters, NAATI puts in place appropriate processes for accreditation or recognition of the identified language. For instance, in the past three financial years, NAATI has added four languages: Bengali, Kurdish, Singhalese and Pushto, to its list of accredited languages.

A recent initiative in Victoria involved running a free course in translating and interpreting for people who spoke a language of a small and emerging community, in order to enable them to serve as a link between their communities and government service providers. Such initiatives by States/Territories to meet their local needs could also be important avenues for providing for small and emerging communities.

Generally speaking, the individual undertaking the assessment pays for NAATI accreditation fees (by test or course completion). Some individuals have their fees subsidised or paid for by their employers. Commonwealth and State/Territory governments subsidise NAATI accreditation services through their annual contribution to NAATI which constitutes around 40% of NAATI's total revenue. The following NAATI accreditation fees apply for the 2002-03 financial year:

- For Australian citizens and Permanent Residents

Application fee	\$65
Assessment fee	\$235
Qualification review	\$110
- For non-Australian citizens and non-permanent residents living in Australia

Application fee	\$65
Assessment fee	\$355
Qualification review	\$115
- For non-Australian citizens and non-permanent residents living overseas

Application fee	\$58
(excludes GST)	

Assessment fee (excludes GST)	\$330
Qualification review (excludes GST)	\$115

recognition in languages of small and emerging communities for which interpreters are in short supply.

Public consultations and submissions to the review have suggested that DIMIA target the continuing shortage of interpreters in languages of small and emerging communities through subsidies to pay the accreditation fees for interpreters from small and emerging communities, particularly for humanitarian entrants who may otherwise be unable to afford these costs.

Integration with mainstream services

The crucial role of TIS in facilitating access to mainstream services has attracted extensive comment in the review process. As highlighted in chapter six of this report - Mainstream Services, a number of public consultations and submissions to the review have raised concerns about a lack of integration of translating and interpreting services with the delivery of mainstream services. In some cases, the problem lay in lack of knowledge of TIS. In others, it lay in inadequate budget provision by service agencies, reluctance to pay for translating and interpreting services and/or lack of experience or training in using these services.

[I]t is important for DIMIA to... link settlement planning with TIS recruitment of interpreters where possible to avoid delays between availability of interpreters and new and emerging refugee communities; where a shortage of interpreters of a specific language is identified, consider exception or deferred payment of NAATI course-related fees for potential interpreters who may be unable to afford the up-front expenses.

Submission from the Refugee Council of Australia

For regional and outer-metropolitan areas experiencing shortages of interpreters, the most realistic solution lies in telephone interpreting. Telephone interpreting is the only alternative for many people where a local, face-to-face interpreter is not available.

One of the barriers to mainstream services using TIS is the cost and a lack of confidence in using Interpreters. If services have not got an exemption, the fee structure is a considerable barrier. Perhaps this is a Whole of Government issue, where DIMIA needs to encourage other funders to include realistic Interpreting Costs in their funding formulas. Low cost training should be made available to mainstream services to increase their level of skill and confidence in using Interpreters.

Submission from the Inner West Home & Community Care (HACC) Development Project, NSW

While there are policies for government agencies to follow for the use of TIS services, not all government agencies or officials would always follow the procedures. More effective use of TIS services can be enforced by the establishment of particular laws and

Recommendation 53

That DIMIA pilot a program to fund subsidies for National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accreditation fees for appropriate bilingual people from small and emerging communities to gain NAATI accreditation or NAATI

legislation that agencies must (use) professionally trained interpreters under particular identified circumstances.

Submission from the Multicultural Development Association, QLD

Translating and interpreting services [should] be better integrated into the delivery of mainstream services by the Commonwealth by building the cost of appropriate language service provision into Commonwealth funding for those services. Further, that this should include appropriate language services industry development and training of staff in the use of interpreters and preparation of material for translation.

Submission from the Victorian Government.

TIS recognises the importance of training mainstream agencies in the use of interpreters. TIS has updated its online information (accessed through the DIMIA web site) which includes access to a PowerPoint training module for agencies needing assistance in how to use interpreters. There are also numerous publications and videos available to the public on how to use an interpreter. TIS promotes itself through issuing the TIS Guide and 'information packages' which include help cards, posters and the like to government agencies on request. TIS is also promoted widely throughout the community by many agencies via the TIS logo and/or the TIS telephone number being included in customer correspondence.

While DIMIA has limited ability to ensure that mainstream services use TIS, an important role for DIMIA lies in promoting the role of TIS in implementing access and equity principles to Commonwealth agencies. As noted earlier in this report, under the *Charter of Public Service*

in a Culturally Diverse Society, the provision of translating and interpreting services is a key strategy for implementing these principles.

DIMIA is currently circulating a toolkit for raising awareness of these important principles among Commonwealth agencies and for providing practical advice on achieving effective language services. The toolkit consists of the *Language Services Guidelines for Commonwealth Agencies* and a *Model for Assessing Translating and Interpreting Requirements*, aimed at community organisations delivering government-funded services.

The guidelines outline:

- the obligations of Commonwealth agencies in relation to language services;
- the benefits of integrating language services into mainstream service planning, delivery, and evaluation; and
- steps for delivering effective language services drawing on the performance management framework for Access and Equity Annual Reports.

The model provides:

- a model for organisations estimating the cost of providing language services;
- assistance for government funding bodies in developing appropriate service and budget specifications for their purchasing processes; and
- guidelines for monitoring the provision of language services.

TIS and State/Territory language services

A number of commentators have expressed concerns regarding a lack of clarity about the division of responsibility between TIS and State/Territory services. Some stakeholders pointed to consumer preference for a single contact point for services.

Currently the services provided by the Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) and Community Relations Commission (CRC) are in our experience not integrated effectively... The services delivery boundaries of these two agencies are in practice ambiguous and confusing, and many areas of need fall in to a gap between the two.

Submission from the South West Sydney Community Legal Centre, NSW

All State/Territory governments provide language services to individuals with low English proficiency. New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory have developed their own language services. New South Wales and Victoria also offer a service specifically for interpreting in relation to health issues. TIS remains the primary provider of interpreting services for States/Territories that do not have established services. TIS also operates as a back-up measure where State/Territory services are in place but are unable to meet particular demands such as interpreting in specific languages or outside of standard work hours.

Other language services are provided by Centrelink and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Centrelink provides free on-site and telephone interpreters to assist staff with non-English speaking customers. Documents required to verify individual circumstances are translated at no cost to the customer. The Centrelink Multilingual Call Centre enables customers from anywhere in Australia to receive call centre services in their own language at local telephone charge rates. SBS is a Commonwealth government agency that delivers language services to both the commercial and public sectors, including translating and interpreting.

Recommendation 54

That DIMIA work with State/Territory governments to clarify the different Commonwealth and State/Territory responsibilities in provision of interpreting and translating services, and to disseminate this information to clients (particularly service providers).

Administrative arrangements

In the context of the review, stakeholders have raised a number of concerns regarding booking arrangements and quota systems for on-site interpreting, costs, training provisions for providers, and the recent centralisation of TIS.

It was suggested that the establishment of TIS as a single centre in Melbourne has led to a decline in service provision for other parts of Australia.

The national centralisation of the interpreting and translating service in Melbourne has created a number of operational problems. Concerns regarding the quality of identified services, which have been referred to the TIS manager, have in some cases remained unresolved. Therefore, feedback mechanisms providing two-way communication regarding the identification and provision of a suitable level of service is required to deal with problems. The remoteness of the operational headquarters in Melbourne, combined with poor communication, does little to enhance the integration of TIS functions into mainstream services.

Submission from the West Coast Adult Migrant Education Service, WA

It is perhaps inevitable that the consolidation of TIS in one central point would have

'teething' problems of this kind. However, regular visits and meetings by TIS senior officers with major clients, contractors and the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators have revealed general satisfaction with the service from TIS, following the consolidation to a single site.

With respect to the management of TIS services, it was suggested that operational requirements, such as providing a client name for interpreting, could sometimes be intrusive. However, collection of such information is necessary to provide accurate billing to agencies paying for interpreting services. Large users, such as hospitals, need this kind of information in order to send the bill to the appropriate ward to confirm that services were provided. It is important to note, in this context, that TIS maintains strict confidentiality of client data and is bound by Commonwealth privacy legislation.

Some organisations considered the four-week pre-booking period for fee-free on-site interpreting to be a rigid system that meant a less responsive service. This issue has been raised particularly in relation to newly-arrived humanitarian entrants.

TIS requires interpreter bookings to be made at least two weeks in advance. New arrivals to Australia, particularly IHSS and other refugees (who speak little or no English) require medical attention in many instances soon after arrival and earlier than two weeks. This essentially means that TIS is not available to the most needy group of new arrivals for whom the settlement process should be the most responsive...A shorter timeframe for booking interpreters should be established, making the service more responsive to the needs of new arrivals and improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Submission from the Adelaide Central Community Health Service, SA

In fact, the main issue for equitable access to fee-free on-site interpreting is not the four-week booking period but a tendency among some organisations to book very far in advance. A trend towards pre-booking by up to six months has recently developed. This results in daily quotas being used up and, consequently, the unavailability of service to eligible clients who have attempted to book an interpreter within the normal allowable timeframe. The limitation of advance booking to no more than four weeks, effective as of 1 January 2003, is aimed at overcoming this problem and giving all eligible clients equal opportunity to use the fee-free on-site interpreting service.

Promotion of TIS

It has also been suggested that TIS should be more widely promoted through a comprehensive marketing plan. There are concerns that some within the defined settlement services target group, particularly those from small and emerging communities, are being disadvantaged because they are not aware of the availability of TIS.

[I]t is considered that it is important for DIMIA to: continue to ensure that TIS services are promoted to entrants by the IHSS Initial Orientation and Information Assistance workers ...[and] to promote TIS services to government departments and agencies, community organisations and approved individuals;

Submission from the Refugee Council of Australia

One form of improvement would be to introduce a standard procedure for introducing new entrants to the use of TIS with the objective of giving new entrants the knowledge and confidence to use the service themselves. ... When all new entrants have this practical experience, knowledge and confidence,

they can be an effective part of the process of better integrating TIS into the delivery of mainstream services.

Submission from St John the Apostle Parish Refugee Resettlement Committee, ACT

Without this knowledge, new arrivals with low English proficiency may not be able to access all the services they need to settle effectively in Australia. To overcome this problem, DIMIA could educate newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants with low English proficiency on the availability of TIS. Likewise, DIMIA could educate service providers such as MRCs/MSAs and CSSS to the function and availability of TIS. In addition, effective promotion is a key strategy for integrating interpreting services into the delivery of mainstream services. Furthermore, a coherent communications strategy that encourages organisations to purchase telephone interpreting has the potential to relieve pressure on on-site services and increase overall productivity and efficiency.

Recommendation 55

That DIMIA more actively educate service providers and newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants on the role and availability of TIS.

Conclusion

TIS makes a unique contribution to the settlement of new arrivals and facilitates access to services in Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse society. Given that not everyone achieves functional English despite the amount of time they may have spent in language classes or living in Australia, TIS constitutes an important 'safety net' for many migrants and humanitarian entrants. The range of issues and recommendations raised by stakeholders provides a useful basis for enhancing TIS services. An important solution to issues identified in the review and to rising costs lies in greater use of telephone rather than on-site interpreting. Fee-free TIS services must be provided on an efficient and equitable basis in order for TIS to continue in its important role.