

The North of England Refugee Service

Interpreting Policy and Procedure

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Summary

This policy document aims to provide staff and volunteers at the North of England Refugee Service with a framework for the principles and practice to follow in working with interpreters.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The provision of interpreting services of the highest attainable standards is a duty incumbent on NERS in order to promote equality of opportunity for our clients. Access to quality interpreting services affords our clients the opportunity to express themselves, make informed decisions, be clearly and fully understood, and thus have appropriate access to the range of services provided by NERS as well as services provided by external agencies.
- 1.2. This policy document aims to establish good practice in interpreting for refugees and asylum seekers. While it is acknowledged that it may not always be possible to attain such high standards, especially in emergency situations or mass arrivals, in such situations any potential lapse in standards **must** be notified to the Interpreting Service Coordinator, preferably in advance.
- 1.3. It is acknowledged that there may be occasions where it is impracticable to work within this policy for less substantial contact with clients, for example providing the client with directions. However, staff must comply with this policy for more substantial or "crucial" contacts with clients e.g. advice giving, even if this means delaying the contact while access to appropriate and adequate interpreting resources are organised.

2. Principles

- 2.1. One of the abiding principles of NERS is that of the empowerment of refugees. That principle is central to this policy.
- 2.2. It is a principle of NERS that is efficient, transparent and fair. This principle must apply to all interpreters' appointments.
- 2.3. Respect for privacy and confidentiality must be maintained at all times.

3. Recruitment

- 3.1. All vacant permanent and fixed term Interpreting staff posts will be filled in compliance with NERS recruitment and selection procedures.
- 3.2. Casual/sessional interpreters will only be paid for their work after providing proof of their right to work in the UK. This is a requirement of law so there can be no exceptions.

4. Training

4.1. Interpreters

4.1.1 Relevant training for interpreters on permanent or fixed term contracts will be organised by NERS as resources permit. In addition, registered interpreters will be encouraged to up-date their skills through other sources of training.

4.1.2 NERS will strive to ensure that all interpreters used by the organisation have either undertaken in-house training or have received training from a recognised organisation.

4.2 Staff

4.2.1 All NERS staff who uses interpreters must have received some basic training/induction on the use of interpreters. Training should include issues pertaining to working with interpreters as well as issues pertaining to good interpreting practice. Staff members providing direct services to refugees must familiarise themselves with this policy as part of their induction programmes.

5. Supervision of Interpreters

5.1. Supervision and line management of interpreters on permanent and fixed term contracts, and hourly paid/sessional interpreters, will be the responsibility of the Interpreting Service Coordinator.

6. Operational Standards

6.1 The fundamental role of the interpreter is to enable advisors to provide a professional service to clients in the client's preferred language. All interpreters employed by NERS as well as those working with the organisation on sessional/hourly paid basis are required to comply with the NERS Code of Conduct.

6.2 It is the responsibility of those charged with supervising interpreters to ensure that both employed and registered interpreters familiarise themselves with NERS's Code of Conduct as well as all other relevant NERS policies and procedures.

6.3 Given the specific nature of the interpreting role there are particular standards and principles that are especially relevant to this area of work. The following are specific standards that must be adhered to by anyone involved in working with interpreters on behalf of NERS.

6.4 Confidentiality

- 6.4.1 All information divulged during the course of interpreting must be treated as strictly confidential. Interpreters must sign NERS' Confidentiality Statement and care must be taken to ensure they understand the implications of this for their working practice. Any casual/sessional interpreter who does not comply with this statement must not be used again.
- 6.4.2 A central and confidential list must be kept in the office detailing the names of casual interpreters who should no longer be used by the organisation because of a breach of confidentiality (or other professional practice issues). This list is to be maintained by the Interpreting Service Co-ordinator and will not be released to third parties.

6.5. Impartiality

- 6.5.1. NERS aims to ensure that clients have access to impartial and factual information from which they can make their own informed decisions. It is the responsibility of both the advisor and interpreter to work together to ensure that the advice process empowers the client and supports the client's needs.

6.6. Giving advice

- 6.6.1. Sometimes an interpreter, through greater knowledge of the language, culture and experience of the client may be in a position to offer information that may be useful, either to the advisor or to the client. However, in order to maintain professional boundaries and avoid confusion, any information the interpreter obtains must only be offered if the advisor is made aware and is comfortable with the interpreter's intervention and has given express permission.

6.7. Conflict of interest

- 6.7.1 To maintain standards of confidentiality and impartiality, an interpreter engaged in interviewing the client should not be related to, or known to the client, outside the working relationship. In the event of exceptional circumstances where there is found to be such a relationship but the interpreting session cannot be postponed, any such relationship must be disclosed prior the commencement of the advice session or other contact with the client.
- 6.7.2 Interpreters must never make use of any information that they become privy to as a result of their interpreting work with NERS. If an issue has arisen which they feel needs to be taken forward, for example a child protection issue, this must be reported as soon as practicable to the Interpreting Service Coordinator.

6.7.3 All clients must be offered access to a NERS-registered interpreter. Friends or family members should only interpret on behalf of clients as a last resort and only if an interpreter from the Interpreters List is unavailable, this should be in very exceptional circumstances such as in an emergency. Children under the age of 18 years must never be used to undertake formal or prolonged interpreting.

6.7.4 If members of the Board of Directors become interpreters of the organisation, such potential conflict of interest must first be disclosed to the Chair of the Board. The following steps must be taken:

a) Once the member has disclosed his/her intention to apply to be an interpreter in the organisation, s/he will withdraw from any Board discussion related to the matter.

b) The Chair of the Board is responsible for raising any potential conflict of interest and ensuring the above steps are followed.

c) If an actual conflict of interest is disclosed, the Board Member will be invited to decide whether to continue working for the organisation either as a Board member or as a paid interpreter and advise the chair of his/her decision to resign from one or other position accordingly.

6.7. Security

6.7.1. Staff and interpreters must never give any personal details such as interpreters' home or personal mobile telephone numbers to clients.

6.7.2. All recruitment documentation, interview notes and other relevant documentation must be securely stored in accordance with the provisions of the 1998 Data Protection Act.

7. Monitoring

7.1. The Operations Manager is responsible for monitoring the interpreting service at least once per year covering the following standards:

- Access to interpreters, including availability, ie whether appropriate interpreters are available by appointment or at short notice.
- Language use versus client intake – so as to ensure the most effective use of interpreting resources.
- Quality of Interpreting – for both face-to-face interpreting and telephone work.

- 7.2. Appropriate methods must be used to monitor the quality of interpreting services provided. These will include client and users surveys and questionnaires.
- 7.3. It is the responsibility of the Interpreting Service Coordinator to ensure that such mechanisms are developed and implemented effectively.

8. Complaints/Feedback

- 8.1. Where a NERS-registered interpreter is unhappy about the behaviour of an advisor, a user or any other NERS member of staff, they must discuss this with the Interpreting Service Coordinator. NERS's complaints procedure must be publicised and made available for both clients and interpreters.
- 8.2. Clients must be made aware of the existence of the Complaints Procedure and where possible have access to a translated copy. It is the responsibility of the advisor to ensure that both clients and registered interpreters are aware of the procedures regarding making a complaint.

9. Interpreters' Register

9.1 Accessing Interpreters

- 9.1.1. NERS operates a comprehensive register of available interpreters in the North East. This register contains the relevant details of interpreters who have completed a recruitment procedure and who have provided the organisation with all of the documentation requested. Interpreters on the register **must** have undergone appropriate training or pass NERS's interpreter test and have the skills needed to assist NERS in its work.
- 9.1.2. The register must be regularly up-dated in order to meet the changing language needs of NERS's client group.
- 9.1.3. Only interpreters on the register should be used. Where this is not possible, interpreters must be sought through another reputable source such as an external professional interpreting agency.

10. Choosing an Interpreter

- 10.1. NERS will strive to offer all clients access to an interpreter who speaks the client's preferred language.

- 10.2. Before identifying and matching an interpreter with a client, consideration needs to be given to the most effective method of communicating with the client. This will require taking the following factors into account:
- the gender of the interpreter and the client,
 - regional dialects,
 - (if known) any cultural, religious and political sensitivities of the client.

11. Fees and Payment

- 11.1. NERS interpreting fees, procedures for reimbursement of travel costs, systems of payment and methods of making a claim will have been clarified with registered interpreters during the initial interview and in writing prior to undertaking paid interpreting work with NERS. These rates will be reviewed periodically.
- 11.2. In very exceptional cases it may be necessary to use an interpreter not yet registered on the NERS list. In these circumstances the Interpreting Service Coordinator or other NERS staff **must** first obtain all appropriate documentation from the interpreter (ie at the minimum, proof of permission to work plus a signed confidentiality agreement) before the interpreter undertakes any work on NERS behalf.

12. Interview Preparation

- 12.1. Prior to the interview, the advisor and interpreter should meet in order to provide the interpreter with some background to the case, clarify the purpose of the interview and agree how they should work together.
- 12.2. At the beginning of the session the interpreter must establish that s/he has the necessary language skills to communicate effectively with the client. The adviser is responsible for ensuring that appropriate introductions are made. During the interview the interpreter must always make the advisor aware if they are not able to interpret due to difficulties with dialect or technical language. Interpreters must try to interpret everything that the client and the caseworker say.
- 12.3. If conflict arises or the advisor is unhappy about how the interview is developing due to an issue involving the client, or is unhappy about the interpreting process itself, the advisor has the right to interrupt or terminate the interview. They may if appropriate reschedule the interview and arrange for a different interpreter. It is the responsibility of the advisor to inform the Interpreting Service Coordinator of any such incident in writing.

- 12.4. It is the responsibility of the advisor to ensure that the interpreter leaves with him/her and does not remain with the client after the session is complete.
- 12.5. Interpreters must never be left alone with children (ie anyone under the age of 18).

13. Telephone Interpreting

- 13.1. It is sometimes the case, for example, with cases arising out of hours or for reasons of linguistic availability, that telephone interpreting will take place. This should, when possible, only be used to address immediate needs.
- 13.2. Use of interpreters on the telephone should only be for short contacts with clients. Whenever possible, a personal interview must be organised at the earliest available opportunity for all substantial contacts.

14. Reviewing the Policy

The policy will be reviewed from time to time and as necessary, and at least annually, by the Interpreting Service Coordinator, who will recommend any changes in writing to the Operations Manager.

Approved by the Executive Committee: Signature.....

Position.....

Date.....