



Language Services Policy

A multicultural future for all of us



Introduction

The Queensland Government Language Services Policy reflects the Queensland Government's commitment to the development of whole-of-Government communication strategies that address language barriers. The policy aims to enhance access to interpreters and translated information for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to enable equitable access to the full range of services. These strategies include the engagement of professional interpreters in circumstances where people experience difficulties communicating in English, the provision of multilingual information and the training of staff in how to work with interpreters.

Why are language services important?

In 2006, 303,160 Queenslanders spoke a language other than English at home. This represents more than 7 per cent of the state's population¹. Also, 47 946 Queenslanders (1.2 per cent of the state's total population) do not speak English, or do not speak it well.

Language services aim to provide people who have difficulties communicating in English with the same access to effective and efficient services and programs as English-speaking Queenslanders.

1. People of Queensland – Statistics from the 2006 Census, Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008.

Definitions

Language services are services provided by agencies which address communication issues affecting people with limited proficiency in English, this may include speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

These services include:

- engagement of interpreters via the telephone, videoconference or on-site
- employment of bi-lingual or multilingual staff
- accreditation of bi-lingual or multilingual staff
- use of multilingual information strategies.

An **interpreter** is a person who conveys oral messages, concepts and ideas from one language into another language (including sign language), with a high degree of accuracy, completeness, objectivity and sensitivity to the cultures associated with the languages of expertise.

A **translator** is a person who makes a written transfer of a written message or information from one language into another language to provide complete and accurate text reflecting the original material.

In this policy, professional interpreters are:

- interpreters accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) at the Professional, Paraprofessional, Interpreter or Conference Interpreter Levels, or with NAATI Recognition.
- interpreters accredited by NAATI in Auslan.
- conference interpreters who are members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).

Bilingual staff are people who are fluent in two or more languages but their language skills are not formally assessed. They should not be employed in the capacity of a qualified interpreter and thus are not expected to provide interpreting services as described above. They can act as liaison for the culturally and linguistically diverse communities (e.g. provide information directly in languages other than English or limited cultural advice). The community sector also employs bilingual workers to provide specialised information services and/or personal assistance within targeted communities.

Multilingual information management is planning and developing information in languages appropriate for a client group to meet their information needs. Information is provided in English and in languages other than English.

The **Queensland Interpreter Card** assists non-English speakers to inform Queensland Government agency staff that they require an interpreter. The card is similar in size and quality to a credit card and identifies the language for which an interpreter is required. Multicultural Affairs Queensland distributes this card.

The **Queensland Interpreter Card Kit** complements the Queensland Interpreter Card and assists Queensland Government agency staff to respond to a request for an interpreter. It includes a series of fact sheets available on the Multicultural Affairs Queensland website.

NAATI Accreditation and Recognition

The NAATI is the national standards and accreditation body for translators and interpreters in Australia. The following explains how NAATI accreditation works.

- **Accreditation**

Where there is sufficient community demand for a language, NAATI develops a language test that candidates need to pass to be awarded the credential of an accredited interpreter.

- **Recognition**

Where there is low community demand for a language and no accreditation available, NAATI provides a recognition credential².

The **Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators** (AUSIT), founded in 1987, is the national independent association for the translating and interpreting profession. Members of AUSIT are mainly practising translators and interpreters and membership is voluntary.

In this policy, **agencies** refers to Queensland Government departments and non-government organisations which these departments fund to provide services.

2. NAATI provides 12 months for recognised interpreters to obtain accreditation after a test is introduced for a language.

Queensland Government Language Services Policy

Policy statement

The Queensland Government recognises that a significant number of people do not speak English well enough or are not able to communicate adequately with Queensland Government staff and Queensland Government funded non-government organisations. Queensland Government clients should be provided with fair and equitable access to services that are responsive and high quality.

Queensland Government agencies will:

- work with professional interpreters to improve communication with people unable to communicate in English
- adopt a planned approach producing and disseminating information about services, policies and activities in forms accessible to Queenslanders who experience language barriers, after consulting with these groups.
- plan for language services by incorporating interpreting and multilingual information needs into agency budgeting, and human resource and client service program management
- make maximum use of the cultural and linguistic skills of employees in the development and implementation of this planning.
- incorporate provision for meeting language services needs with funded organisations.

Policy aim

Queensland Government agencies will:

- establish coordinated measures which address the specific communication needs of Queenslanders who experience language barriers and improve equitable access to programs, services and information
- introduce strategies (such as working with professional interpreters) to maximise the social and economic benefits of Queensland's diversity.

Policy implementation

Queensland Government agencies will implement this policy by:

- ensuring staff act on the obligation to provide effective, efficient and inclusive services through appropriate use of interpreters for people that are not proficient in English.
- acknowledging the entitlement to professional interpreter's services or to linguistically appropriate information by people who experience language barriers
- establishing protocols for engaging professional interpreters and protocols for when they are not available.
- ensuring that language services are culturally and linguistically acceptable by taking into account gender and ethnicity preferences (including dialect) and the appropriateness of telephone as opposed to on-site interpreting
- acknowledging that providing interpreting and other language services is the responsibility of agencies
- developing staff who are trained in cross-cultural skills and how to work with professional interpreters
- implementing appropriate budgets and assistance for funded non-government organisations to engage interpreter services for service delivery.

Role of Multicultural Affairs Queensland

Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ) is responsible for coordinating, implementing, monitoring and reporting on Queensland's multicultural policy A Multicultural Future For All of Us.

In this context, MAQ provides advice to Queensland Government agencies on implementation of the Queensland Government Language Services Policy, accessing interpreter and translation services, and the planning of multilingual strategies.

Guidelines for working with interpreters

Why use professional interpreters

Using professional interpreters means you can be sure of the level of skill and quality of the interpreting.

Professional interpreters are also trained to maintain confidentiality, impartiality and accuracy as part of their code of ethics.

Professional interpreters are impartial providing agencies with a level of certainty about the information being provided. This does not apply to relatives, friends and advocates, or the bilingual staff of agencies.

Bilingual, non-accredited staff can be of assistance to people in the language other than English, for example when a Mandarin-speaking officer promotes a government product to a group of Chinese business people, but should not be used in place of a professional interpreter.

Assessing the need for an interpreter

Agencies should provide an interpreter in situations where a person has difficulty communicating in English. When a person requests an interpreter (e.g. by showing a Queensland Interpreter Card), they should be provided with one.

It may be difficult to assess whether a person needs an interpreter. The ability to converse in English does not necessarily indicate that a person comprehends the English spoken by doctors, nurses, magistrates, lawyers, police officers etc or that the person understands written English. If there is any doubt about a person's ability to communicate in or comprehend English, an interpreter should be engaged.

If there is any doubt regarding a client's ability to communicate in English, here are some simple tests to help you make your decision:

- ask a question that requires the person to answer in a sentence. Avoid questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' or a familiar question such as 'Where do you live'.
- ask the person to repeat a message that you have just given in his/her own words.

Engaging a professional interpreter will be crucial in certain circumstances such as obtaining informed consent (health, mental health, aged care assessment), raising a record of interview (police), or for the swearing of affidavits or statutory declarations. Costly mistakes leading to complaints or litigation may result from an agency neglecting to provide an interpreter in these situations.

A professional interpreter helps both parties to communicate effectively. It is acceptable for an officer to engage an interpreter to ensure clear communication even if the person, family member or carer considers that they do not need one.

When assessing the need for an interpreter, agencies should also consider factors such as gender, levels of literacy, cultural and religious needs, dialect and hearing impairment. Even when an interpreter is present, other factors, including the person's level of comfort in the interview environment, may create communication difficulties and impact on the communication outcome.

Protocols for engaging interpreters

When obtaining interpreting services, agencies should engage a professional interpreter as much as possible.

The highest levels of NAATI accreditation are Conference Interpreter (Senior) and Conference Interpreter. These levels are required if organising an international conference. However, for most public sector agencies the third highest level of accreditation is adequate (Professional Interpreter).

Depending on availability and the interpreting task, the recommended order of preference protocol for engaging professional interpreters is:

1. NAATI accredited Professional Interpreter
2. NAATI accredited Paraprofessional Interpreter
3. NAATI Recognised Interpreter.

Other (non-professional) interpreters should not be used unless the situation is urgent and a professional interpreter is unavailable.

It is important to consider the gender and language (including dialect) preferences of the person.

In Queensland, the majority of professional interpreters are accredited at the Paraprofessional level. There may be no accredited interpreters and/or only a small number of recognised interpreters for the languages of small communities, particularly those who have recently arrived.

Access to professional interpreters in rural and remote Queensland is often limited to interpreting by telephone. However, some interpreters are available for on-site work in regional centres. The availability of professional interpreters can be checked through the relevant interpreter service provider. Additionally NAATI and AUSIT produce directories of accredited practitioners. Both directories are available on their respective websites.

In small communities, where people from the same cultural/linguistic group may know each other, an individual may feel embarrassed speaking through an interpreter from the same community, particularly about health-related issues. In this instance a telephone interpreter based outside the local community may be more appropriate.

Complex interpreting work, which may have serious implications for the person and the agency, should be undertaken by the most qualified interpreter available.

The category of interpreters and their preferred engagement within Queensland Government are summarised in the table below.

Type of interpreter	Qualification status	Preferred engagement within Queensland Government
Professional interpreter	<p>For languages where NAATI accreditation testing is available, NAATI issues accreditation at the following levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraprofessional Interpreter (lowest level) • Professional Interpreter • Conference Interpreter • Senior Conference Interpreter (highest) <p>For languages where NAATI accreditation testing is not available, NAATI issues a recognition level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognised Interpreter 	<p>Where accreditation exists, preferred order of engagement is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional Interpreters 2. Paraprofessional Interpreters <p>Where accreditation does not exist, preferred engagement is for Recognised Interpreters.</p>
Other (non-professional) interpreter	No NAATI credentials	Not to be used unless the situation is urgent and a professional interpreter is unavailable

Practices to be avoided

Friends and family members should not be used as interpreters. Children and young relatives are not appropriate interpreters in any context. Both clients and family members may be embarrassed when family members act as interpreters. Communication may be distorted or changed because of a lack of competence in English or the other language or bias on the part of the family member or advocate. However, the client may feel more comfortable with a family member, bilingual associate or worker present for support, along with the professional interpreter.

Using bilingual staff as interpreters (in place of a professional interpreter) is not recommended. Bilingual staff members that have not received accreditation may not be adequately skilled in the language. The impartiality of bilingual staff may also be brought into question particularly in sensitive health or legal situations where conflict of interest issues may arise.

Use of other (non-professional) interpreters should be avoided as much as possible. These interpreters may include local community elders, or people working in the industry that are yet to receive accreditation.

Note: While it is acknowledged that circumstances may require the use of non-professional interpreters, for example, during an emergency, a non-professional interpreter may compromise or misinterpret important information. Accordingly, the use of professional interpreters is recommended.

Arranging a professional interpreter

Interpreting services may be provided over the phone or when the interpreter is physically present (on-site). Audiovisual access to interpreters may be available through videoconferencing networks.

Information regarding how to arrange an interpreter is detailed in the following table:

Who to contact?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Some agencies have established internal arrangements to engage interpreter services. In this circumstance, staff should refer to the agency's internal guidelines on requesting and booking interpreter services.2. If your agency does not have an internal arrangement, options for booking an interpreter include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- pre-book a planned on-site and telephone service by fax on 1300 654 151 or email tis@immi.gov.au. Alternatively telephone 1300 655 082 (enquiry line)- for unplanned telephone service telephone 131 450 (24 hours, 7 days a week) for immediate telephone connection to an interpreter• NAATI online Directory at www.naati.com.au• AUSIT online Directory at www.ausit.org• For conference interpreters - The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) - Australian members on 02 6633 7122 or website www.aiic.net or Email swehov@nor.com.au.• Yellow Pages under Interpreters.• For Auslan interpreters - Queensland Deaf Society. Pre-book online or by fax on an Interpreter Request Form on 07 3392 8511, or phone 07 3892 8500 (office hours) or tty on 07 3892 8501. After hours emergency service is available on 1800 630 745. More information is available from www.deafservicesqld.org.au.

What to consider when requesting an interpreter

- Give as much notice as possible when requesting interpreting services.
- Brief interpreters on the nature of the assignment and provide relevant documents where appropriate.
- Establish language, gender, cultural background preferences for interpreters and request these from the provider.
- Request the same interpreter where continuity and client confidence is important.
- Always check the qualifications of the interpreter (i.e. evidence of NAATI accreditation or recognition).

Paying for interpreting services

Agencies are responsible for budgeting and paying for interpreters (including client initiated contact). Clients of Queensland Government agencies do not pay for interpreters.

Subject to Australian Government approval, some non-government, community based or non-profit organisations are eligible for free interpreting services. General practitioners and Members of Parliament are also entitled to free interpreting services. Further details about eligibility for free interpreting services can be obtained from www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/free-services.htm

Queensland Government funded non-government organisations (NGOs) must be provided with adequate budget and assistance to engage interpreter services for service delivery. The relevant funding department is responsible for informing funded NGOs of the process and arrangements for accessing interpreter services.

Selecting the most appropriate interpreting mode

An interpreter assists effective communication. Communication comprises both verbal and non-verbal channels. The following provides a brief overview of the advantages and disadvantages of three modes of interpreting.

- **On-site interpreting** where the interpreter attends in person, provides access to both verbal and non-verbal communication channels. On-site interpreting should be used in situations when complex or lengthy matters will be discussed including where documents and consent forms are involved (i.e. when an interpreter orally provides a sight translation of a written document).
- **Telephone interpreting** can be a cost-effective option for simple communications that are not lengthy. Telephone interpreting mainly involves verbal communication and is therefore not as detailed a communication option compared to on-site interpreting.

Telephone interpreting may be more suitable in circumstances where a client's confidentiality can be better preserved (e.g. in small communities) and where an on-site interpreter is not available. It can also provide more immediate access to interpreters (e.g. in circumstances where pre-booking is not an option).

- **Video conference interpreting** provides both verbal and non-verbal communication channels and is an alternative to telephone interpreting where agencies have access to video conferencing facilities. Video conference interpreting provides a practical option when sign language interpreters are not available locally.

Interpreter quality

Professional Interpreters observe the professional code of ethics to maintain confidentiality, accuracy and impartiality. Staff should check interpreters' identity cards and accreditation details.

The AUSIT Code of Ethics for Interpreters and Translators can be obtained from AUSIT.

Skilling staff in working with interpreters

Communicating with people through an interpreter can be a difficult skill to learn. Agencies should provide adequate training and access to fact sheets and checklists for staff who may need to work with interpreters.

The Multicultural Affairs Queensland website (www.communities.qld.gov.au/multicultural) contains fact sheets with information about working with interpreters, how to obtain an interpreter and procedures for locating a professional interpreter.

Agency staff will benefit from training in working with interpreters in their workplace. Organisations specialising in cross-cultural training often include courses in working with interpreters.

Data collection and reporting

Agencies should collect data regarding interpreter use, cost and languages requested and accreditation status of interpreters used. This data can help agencies to budget for interpreter costs and effectively meet the needs of people who experience language barriers.

Departments are required to provide information in their Annual Reports about interpreter use.

Guidelines for multilingual information planning

Media

Information strategies which include components in English and languages other than English may be in one, or a combination of, the following:

- in print - translated brochures and booklets, factsheets, business cards, advertising flyers and postcards, poster slogans, forms and papers, and advertisements.
- electronically - translated or original language messages on the Internet, Intranet or by email.
- audiovisually - subtitled, dubbed, voice-overed or original language videos, audio-cassettes, multilingual telephone information lines, ethnic radio television scripts and audio clips on websites.
- Bilingual/bi-cultural workers - focus groups or information sessions.

Planning

Multilingual communication requirements need to be planned based on market research and the use of client profile data which identifies language spoken, literacy levels, age, gender and recency of arrival in Australia. Planning also includes dissemination strategies and evaluation and feedback mechanisms.

Language choices should be based on in-house locally-researched data as well as external data sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census and other demographic data.

The choice of media used to communicate with clients also needs to be carefully considered. For example, only 55.8 per cent of people who do not speak English well or at all have access to the internet³.

Ethnic communities, business associations and peak agencies should be included in decisions about information needs, formats and dissemination strategies.

Agencies should organise their own networks with the assistance of the Queensland Multicultural Resource Directory and/or with the advice of Multicultural Affairs Queensland staff, or through contacting services.

³ People of Queensland—statistics from the 2006 Census,
Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008

These same networks may be available to give feedback on a draft multilingual product. This checking for cultural appropriateness is a vital part of any multilingual information strategy and will include feedback on the appropriateness of photography and artwork (e.g. cartoons) as well as language.

Agencies need to balance the imperatives of getting information to large identified groups with the information requirements of smaller or emerging groups and regional/ isolated communities.

The marketing of government products and services in multilingual form to international destinations requires sensitivity to local acceptability factors. Queensland's multicultural community is an ideal resource for product testing.

Planning can include professional development of bilingual staff to encourage them to attain NAATI accreditation and use their language skills in the workplace.

Contracting out work

Multilingual material (including translation work) used in any of these strategies should be obtained through professional sources. In Queensland the majority of translation and audiovisual work is contracted out to private organisations. Agencies should ensure that translators are accredited through NAATI.

Guidelines for organising translations

Using accredited translators provides agencies with more confidence that the product will be accurate, professional and appropriate.

Agencies should use NAATI accredited translators. NAATI levels of accreditation include Paraprofessional Translator, Professional Translator and Advanced Translator. A NAATI Recognised Translator can be used for new and emerging languages in which accredited translators do not exist.

Staff should be aware that translators are accredited either to translate:

- from English into another language, or
- from another language into English.

Verification through a stamp may be required for legal documents (such as translations of birth certificates) or driver's licences which are used to prove a person's identity.

NAATI accredited translators' stamp includes:

- the accreditation level
- the language of accreditation
- NAATI number.

Ensure that you leave enough time for the translation. The translator may need to check with you regarding particular terms or intended meaning and this may increase the time taken for the translation.

It is recommended that translations are either checked by a second translator or tested with the particular language group to ensure the most accurate translation in terms of context and intended message.

Distributing information

Agencies should consider which distribution methods are most effective for the communities they wish to target.

Options to consider include:

- using ethnic media outlets such as 4EB and community newspapers
- providing information to settlement service providers, ethnic community organisations and peak bodies such as the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland
- providing information through local churches, mosques, temples and cultural clubs

The Queensland Government encourages the use of the nationally endorsed interpreter symbol when distributing information.

Suggested performance indicators for policy implementation

Identification of client language service needs in the agency

- Ethnicity data collection mechanisms, including country of birth, first language spoken, English proficiency/need for an interpreter and language for which an interpreter is required is part of agency market research and client profile descriptors. Cross-linking with other agencies/sections on data is encouraged for a standard approach.
- Requests for interpreters and languages are recorded.
- Agency is aware of appropriate mode of interpreting for its client base (on-site only, telephone only, on-site and telephone, personal computer or site-based video conference).
- Agency has installed conference or dual handset telephones in public contact areas and interview rooms.
- Agency has researched information needs of its non-English speaking clients.
- Procedure is in place to flag a client's interpreter needs through agency services (e.g. by noting a client's file and records).
- Procedure is in place to obtain and record feedback from clients on levels of satisfaction in terms of both access to, and quality of, service delivery through the increased use of interpreters.

Working with interpreters

There must be flexibility in policies to cater for the language service needs of regional and remote area populations.

- Policy and planning and public contact staff are aware of and understand the desirability of working with professional interpreters for effective communication, and have been trained to do so.
- Staff members know when to engage professional interpreters.
- Procedures are available for staff to obtain interpreters in planned and unplanned (emergency) situations and staff know how to respond to and distribute the Queensland Interpreter Card.
- Budgeting arrangements have been made for the payment of interpreters by the agency.
- Policies guide staff not to use friends and relatives as interpreters.
- Staff are aware that a refusal to provide an interpreter could be potentially discriminatory and understand the importance of professional interpreters in obtaining informed consent in legal, police, health and other government agency contexts.

Multilingual information planning and management

- Communication plans are made before the agency produces multilingual (including English) information for culturally and linguistically diverse communities or other clients.
- Choices on media, languages and cultural appropriateness of information and its packaging are based on relevant data.
- Evaluation of past and present multilingual projects is used as part of planning to inform future information/promotion strategies.
- Effective dissemination links are in place through ethnic media and community networks.
- Bilingual staff members are involved in supporting effective information provision to clients

Integration of language services policy into organisational processes

- Data on languages spoken by clients is used as an important part of building responsive client services.
- Language services initiatives including interpreter use and multilingual information projects are part of core business planning and budgetary processes.
- A register of accredited and non-accredited bilingual/multilingual staff is available and policy exists relating to their role in liaising with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Language services-related initiatives (such as providing staff access to NAATI accreditation) are incorporated as part of agency enterprise bargaining, Equal Employment Opportunity and selection and recruitment processes.
- The agency has centralised its interpreter booking and recording functions where appropriate for greater efficiency in budgeting and data collection.
- The agency provides its staff with access to training in cross-cultural communication, working with interpreters and planning multilingual information strategies as aspects of its management of cultural and linguistic diversity internally and externally.
- The agency has trained its contact staff in product knowledge for an accurate response in either English or languages other than English (through interpreters) to information requests.

Contact Multicultural Affairs Queensland
Department of Communities

- **Call** 13 13 04
- **Fax** 3224 5691
- **Website**
www.communities.qld.gov.au/multicultural
- **Postal address:**
GPO Box 806
Brisbane QLD 4001



If you need an interpreter, call the Translating
and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.