



UK Visas & Immigration

CENTRAL INTERPRETERS UNIT (CIU)

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE HOME OFFICE REGISTERED INTERPRETERS

Please note that although you are not a Home Office employee, whilst you are on our premises and undertaking freelance work commissioned by The Home Office there are certain standards that will be expected.

Failure to adhere to any of the following requirements may result in your removal from the Home Office Panel of Freelance Interpreters

1. Duty to treat all people equally

The Home Office employ a wide range of staff from many varied and diverse backgrounds and is firmly committed to a policy of Equal Opportunity for all staff. We shall not discriminate on the grounds of gender, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, faith, or any other factor irrelevant to a person's work. We encourage a diverse workforce and aim to provide a working environment where all staff are valued and respected, and where discrimination, bullying and harassment are not tolerated. We expect all staff whether permanent or otherwise to play their part in supporting this aim.

You will be expected to be polite, professional and show respect at all times to your colleagues and fellow interpreters who all come from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures.

2. Impartiality

A freelance interpreter engaged by the Home Office has a duty to be impartial and to be seen by others to be impartial at all times. Even though you may not feel that you have bias or partiality, if other people perceive that you are biased or partial your role as an interpreter is compromised. Therefore, you must strive to avoid any situation in which it might appear that you have favoured one side or another in a case.

A freelance interpreter engaged by the Home Office should not:

- offer opinion, comment or declare any personal observations on truthfulness or ethnic veracity of an applicant even if requested to do so. You must decline the request and state that it is outside your remit as a professional interpreter.
- indulge in general conversation with an applicant before (other than to establish you both speak the same language and/or dialect), during or after an assignment. A seemingly innocent conversation can lead to a perception of bias. If you are approached by an applicant or legal representative, outside the assignment, you must explain that you cannot discuss the case and politely walk away without getting involved in any conversation. You must also report any such approaches to a responsible Home Office official as soon as it is practical.
- be acquainted with or related to the interviewee or anyone associated with their case. If this circumstance arises you **must not accept** the assignment and must explain why. To accept would call into question your professionalism and that of the Home Office. If after you have accepted an assignment you become aware of a conflict of interest you **must immediately** inform the interviewing officer of the circumstances who will decide whether it would be appropriate for you to interpret on this occasion.
- Accept an assignment if you have previously acted as the interpreter for the legal representative on the same case and should **immediately** inform the interviewing officer. It is inappropriate for the same person to interpret on behalf of the Home Office and the legal representative on the same case.
- have any personal interest in the outcome of an assignment and not stand to benefit financially from the results of an assignment.
- act as an immigration representative or offer immigration advice of any kind to the non English speaking person, whether solicited or not.

3. Confidentiality

On acceptance of a booking from the Home Office you undertake to abide by the provisions of the Official Secrets Act. This means that you must not disclose to any person outside the Home Office any official information (This means any information, document or article which you have had in your possession by virtue of your position) that becomes known to you during the course of your assignments.

A freelance interpreter engaged by The Home Office should treat everything heard or seen, whilst on an assignment as confidential. You should not disclose any communications discussed between parties (any individual present during an interview) outside the Home Office. Any breach of this requirement may result in criminal or civil proceedings and in immediate removal of your name from the Panel of Freelance Interpreters.

There may be times when a Home Office interpreter is assigned to a case, which, because of its very nature or because of the subject(s) involved, may be considered what is commonly known as a 'high profile case'. These types of cases may attract media attention. If you are contacted by the media you should not under any circumstances provide them with information. You should immediately contact the CIU who will bring the matter to the attention of the Home Office Press Office.

4. Accurate and Precise Interpretation

A freelance interpreter, engaged by the Home Office has a duty to:

- ensure that what was stated in another language, by a non-English speaker, is precisely and accurately interpreted.
- place non-English speaking applicants on an equal footing with those who understand English.

It is important to remember that the interviewing officer will be relying entirely on the interpreted version of the account given by the interviewee and may draw conclusions about the interviewee's credibility. An inaccurate interpretation may have serious implications. For example a legitimate asylum seeker may be unjustly denied the right to live in this country and is returned to their country of origin because you have not performed your job professionally and with integrity.

You must:

- retain every single element of information that was contained in the original message, and interpret in as close verbatim form as English style, syntax and grammar will allow.
- be in a fit state to interpret effectively throughout the interview.
- speak slowly and clearly.
- spell out any foreign name or place said by the interviewing officer and/or interviewee.
- inform the interviewing officer immediately if you have any difficulty in interpreting.

- remain calm, especially if you hear unpleasant or controversial evidence. Your duty is to remain detached from the evidence you are interpreting.
- use direct speech when interpreting. You should not say, "he said he....." this should be interpreted as, "I....."
- interpret language which may be offensive. For cultural reasons, obscenities may be difficult to translate. In this case you should look for the closest equivalent.

You must not:

- interrupt the progress of the interview other than to make a correction to the interpretation, request clarification, to resolve a misunderstanding or to draw attention to any distractions.
- embellish what is being said. Your function as a Home Office interpreter is to interpret accurately.
- omit any part of the interviewee's account. It is not within your role to determine what information, is or is not, relevant. Your duty is to interpret **everything** that is said.
- ask the interviewee what they mean by a particular answer. If you are unable to interpret a statement, you must ask the interviewing officer if the information may be repeated by the party concerned.
- try to anticipate what the interviewer or interviewee is trying to say or give an answer other than what is being said.
- let your own experience or views get in the way of how you interpret the evidence.
- show your emotions. The only reactions you should express are those of the interviewee. This may be difficult at times if the account given by the interviewee is upsetting or it is clear that the interviewee is lying. However, body language such as the 'rolling of the eyes' or 'tutting' when an account does not appear plausible is not acceptable. The interviewing officer will judge an interviewee's credibility, this is not the role of an interpreter.

5. Personal limitations

A Home Office interpreter should:

- disclose any professional limitations when an assignment is offered and only accept assignments within their competence. For example, if you do not already hold a department recognised public service qualification you should not accept an assignment working at a police station. This is because you may be required to take a written statement and you will not have been assessed in this competency.
- ask the interviewing officer for a break whenever you feel that fatigue is beginning to interfere with your accuracy.

6. Personal Advantage

Home Office interpreters should never accept gratuities, gifts, favours or any other form of advantage of any kind from anyone for whom you have interpreted, for whom you are likely to interpret, or from anyone acting as an agent for such a person. If such a gift is offered, explain politely that you are paid by the Home Office for your services and are not allowed to accept gifts from any parties involved in the case. You should also refer the matter to the Head of the CIU who will take appropriate action.

7. Professional Conduct

It is imperative in the interest of justice and professional services that the Home Office maintains a panel of interpreters who are of the highest professional standard.

You must inform the CIU immediately if you are:

- charged, convicted or cautioned for any offence, or if you become subject to any professional disciplinary proceedings, whilst registered on the panel.
- removed from any list held by any other public sector or interpreting organisation.

You should not:

- engage in any behaviour likely to discredit the Home Office, including impairment through drugs, alcohol, sexual misconduct, violence, intimidation, political activity or abusive behaviour.

8. Bookings

It is your responsibility when accepting assignments from the Home Office to ensure that you have recorded the full details relating to the assignment. For example where the interview is to take place, the time you are required to attend, the length of time you will be required, the name and contact number of the officer who booked your services.

You **must** only accept assignments you know you are able to keep.

Once you have accepted an assignment you should:

- give a realistic time of arrival. make sure you are punctual. If you are unavoidably delayed you should telephone your relevant contact as soon as you know you will be late and give an approximate time of arrival.

- if you need to cancel a booking then please notify the relevant contact - **do not** delegate your work to another interpreter.

9. Payment

Once you have completed your assignment you should complete your claim form and pass it to the interviewing officer for authorisation. The claim should be submitted for payment within 4 weeks of the assignment.

Any interpreter who is found to have made a fraudulent claim will be removed from the panel and where appropriate the matter will be referred to the police.

10. Dress Code

Interpreters are expected to dress appropriately for their assignment. For example, if the assignment is at a UK Visas and Immigration office the interpreter is expected to dress smartly to reflect the professionalism of the department.

However, some assignments may involve field work and interpreters may be asked to accompany Enforcement Officers on visits to employer's premises etc. In these circumstances casual clothing and comfortable footwear may be more appropriate.

Interpreters must check with their booking officer if they are in any doubt about the dress code required for the assignment.

Any interpreter who arrives for an assignment and is considered to be inappropriately dressed will have their booking cancelled immediately and will not be paid.

Interpreters should not chew gum, or any other substance at any time, whilst on an assignment for the Home Office.

Mobile Telephones

Interpreters **must** turn off all mobile phones, beepers, watches etc which may otherwise cause a distraction in the interview whilst in interview rooms.

Access to and within Home Office buildings

Freelance interpreters engaged by the Home Office should familiarise themselves with local instructions, when working at a particular location, regarding areas that they are allowed and not allowed to enter. In pass controlled buildings please display your security pass at all times, whilst you are on the premises, and **remember to return the pass** when leaving the building.

Please note that failure to adhere to any of the above requirements may result in your removal from the Home Office Panel of Freelance Interpreters

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