

'Training' plea for court interpreters

Patricia McDonagh

THERE could be a "miscarriage of justice" unless interpreters used in State organisations were given proper training, it was claimed last night.

The Irish Translators and Interpreters' Association (ITIA) said the Government needed to set up a State-run testing centre to ensure interpreters met the criteria needed to provide a good service.

Spokeswoman Mary Phelan said interpreting services in Ireland were of poor quality.

Concerns

The concerns come as the Courts Service revealed it would spend more than €2.5m on interpreters in 2008 - up from €2m last year. The gardai spent more than €3m on interpreting services in 2007.

"An independent State-run system should be brought in to test interpreters in an objective way," said Ms Phelan.

"People would have to pass certain criteria before they would be allowed to interpret in the State. I would like to see the test comprising actual role-plays to provide the person with some

experience," she added.

Ms Phelan said there were currently no controls in place to ensure a quality service was being delivered.

"Without proper training we could see a miscarriage of justice. It has happened in other countries," she said.

The calls have been backed by the Immigrant Council of Ireland. It said it was to be expected that the need for interpreters in various public services would increase with growing diversity.

However, it insisted that if there were concerns over the quality of the services in Ireland, they should be examined as a "matter of priority".

It added: "It would be a travesty if there were to be a miscarriage of justice or a misdiagnosis in the health system due to language misunderstandings."

The Courts Service last night insisted that its interpretation services were provided by a panel of "reputable agencies" over the last 11 years.

Since March 2007, the service has been provided by Lionbridge Ltd, which dealt with 7,054 cases during that year.

The top five languages catered for by the courts were Polish, Lithuanian, Romanian, Russian and Chinese.