



Fact sheet 6: The role of bilingual staff in your organisation

This guide is for use by service providers when considering the appropriateness of using their organisation's bilingual staff to provide interpreting services.

Bilingual staff

The term bilingual refers to people who speak two (or more) languages fluently.

Many staff members have the ability to speak other languages and, in some cases, an ability to speak a language other than English is a requirement of their role.

Being proficient in a language other than English for everyday communication is not the same as having the ability to effectively manage dialogue between two people and accurately convey complicated information from one language to another, which is the role credentialed interpreters are qualified to do.

As a general rule, **bilingual workers** may assist in simple communication, but **should not be relied on to interpret complex, technical or sensitive information**.

The role of bilingual staff in simple communication with a client

Bilingual staff may be called on to meet simple communication needs between a government agency and a client who has limited English language proficiency.

Simple communication must be viewed as communication where the outcome has limited risk of adverse effects for both the person with limited English language proficiency and the agency.

Examples of simple communication include: directing a client to a meeting room, promoting a resource or showing a client a form they need to complete.

Bilingual staff can also help to improve front-line services through increased cultural responsiveness, increasing the confidence and skill level among other staff in communicating with clients with low English language proficiency.

Providing credentialed interpreters for complex, technical or sensitive information

Credentialed interpreters, rather than bilingual workers, are required to interpret:

- complex, technical or sensitive information
- discussion that informs or includes decision-making or signing of agreements/forms
- discussion where there is a high risk of miscommunication
- in situations where there is a (real or perceived) conflict of roles
- information that may place the person with limited English proficiency or the government agency at risk
- any discussion or information that is legally binding.

Issues to consider

When deciding if the assistance of a bilingual worker is sufficient or an interpreter is more appropriate, you should consider:

- do they have National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) credentials? The organisation will need to sight the interpreter's NAATI ID card when meeting them on site (refer to Fact Sheet 4: Deciding when to use an interpreting service)
- are there ethical implications? Bilingual workers are not bound by The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Code of Ethics (however the South Australian Public Sector Code of Ethics still applies)
- is there a real or perceived conflict of interest in the bilingual worker performing the role? (e.g. when the person providing the interpreting is also a decision-maker). Please refer to Fact sheet 7: Using interpreting services – conflict of interest.
- is there potential for misunderstandings to occur?
- is the discussion or information legally binding?

Interpreters or Translators Allowance for South Australian Government employees who hold NAATI credentials

The Part Time Interpreters or Translators (Public Service) (SA) Award provides for the payment of both a Linguistic Allowance and a Performance Allowance provided that an employee meets the necessary prerequisites detailed in the Award to qualify for receipt of these allowances.

Refer to the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment's Determination 3.2 Employment Conditions: Remuneration - Allowances and Reimbursements.

Supporting resources

This document is part of a series of resources available to other South Australian Government agencies when developing their interpreting and translating policies.

South Australian Interpreting and Translating Policy for Migrant and Non-Verbal (Sign) Languages

[Commissioner for Public Sector Employment's Determination 3.2 Employment Conditions: Remuneration - Allowances and Reimbursements](#)

Fact sheets

Fact sheet 1: Using interpreting services – a guide for service providers

Fact sheet 2: Using translating services for written materials

Fact sheet 3: Language list by country and place

Fact sheet 4: Deciding when to use an interpreting service

Fact sheet 5: Can family and friends provide interpreting services?

Fact sheet 6: Role of bilingual staff in your organisation

Fact sheet 7: Using interpreting services: conflict of interest

Fact sheet 8: Interpreting services: your rights and responsibilities

You can access all of the interpreting and translating resources on the [Department of the Premier and Cabinet website](#).

For more information:

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