

# NHS spending on interpreters and translation services

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## Introduction

NHS service providers have an obligation to ensure interpreting and translation services are provided to their patients free at the point of delivery. This can be provided face-to-face, over the phone or via other means like video conference.<sup>1</sup> However, this can lead to exorbitant costs as a large range of languages – including some of the rarest still spoken – require translation in order for care or information to be provided. This all comes at taxpayers' expense during a time of record NHS waiting lists.

This paper shows the amount spent by NHS trusts in the last three financial years on interpreters and translation services (interpreters), the languages requiring translation and the highest spending trusts.

## Key findings

- NHS trusts spent at least **£113,974,561** on interpreters during 2019-20 to 2021-22, an average of **£725,953** per NHS trust that replied.
- **£43,095,493** was spent on interpreters in 2019-20, the single largest year. This fell by 28 per cent to **£31,050,708** in 2020-21 before rising by 28 per cent to **£39,828,361** in 2021-22.
- The NHS trust which spent the most on interpreters in the UK was **NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde** with costs totalling **£8,853,676** during 2019-20 to 2021-22.
- **Barts Health NHS Trust** was the English trust with the highest spending on interpreters at **£5,533,389**. More than £1.9 million of this was spent in 2021-22 alone.
- **Cardiff and Vale University Health Board** had the highest spending among Welsh NHS trusts at **£2,036,179**.
- **The most commonly provided translation services by NHS trusts were into Polish (116), Romanian (116), Chinese (113) and Arabic (112).**
- If all NHS trusts had responded, the total spending on interpreters and translation services by the NHS in 2019-20 to 2021-22 is estimated to be **£174,228,629**. This is over **£60.3 million** higher than the total of the responses we have reported on.

[Click here to see the full dataset](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, *Language interpreting and translation: migrant health guide*, 22 March 2021, [www.gov.uk/guidance/language-interpretation-migrant-health-guide#:~:text=by%20the%20patient,-,Requesting%20an%20interpreter,their%20service's%20interpreter%20booking%20processes](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/language-interpretation-migrant-health-guide#:~:text=by%20the%20patient,-,Requesting%20an%20interpreter,their%20service's%20interpreter%20booking%20processes), (accessed 29 September 2022).

**Table 1: 20 NHS trusts with the highest interpreter spending, 2019-20 to 2021-22**

NHS trust	2019-20 spending (£)	2020-21 spending (£)	2021-22 spending (£)	Total spending (£)
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde	3,696,199	2,396,896	2,760,581	8,853,676
Barts Health	1,811,048	1,794,861	1,927,480	5,533,389
NHS Lothian	1,468,704	1,120,369	1,703,790	4,292,863
Homerton Healthcare	1,122,678	954,009	1,190,000	3,266,687
Bradford Teaching Hospitals	840,000	810,426	889,216	2,539,642
Central and North West London	770,000	753,000	938,000	2,461,000
Leeds Teaching Hospitals	1,234,612	557,711	562,512	2,354,835
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	752,677	502,640	780,862	2,036,179
Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health	583,306	677,174	725,396	1,985,876
Derby and Burton Hospitals	653,808	433,872	690,882	1,778,562
NHS Tayside	570,361	414,692	772,627	1,757,680
Northern Care Alliance	954,219	323,106	362,827	1,647,152
North East London	521,000	521,000	521,000	1,563,000
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	687,202	298,859	553,843	1,539,904
North West Anglia	579,417	381,664	549,248	1,510,328
Birmingham Community	527,000	349,000	617,000	1,493,000
Northern Health and Social Care	656,690	305,817	512,507	1,475,014
West London	481,052	357,228	624,650	1,462,930
London North West University Healthcare	589,110	339,532	458,999	1,387,641
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire	510,158	418,730	415,126	1,344,014

## Methodology

This research was undertaken by issuing freedom of information (FOI) requests to NHS trusts in the United Kingdom.

The request asked the following in respect of interpreters and translation services:

- *The total annual spending on foreign interpreters for the following financial years: 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22.*
- *A further breakdown of the languages they translate.*

Of the 240 trusts contacted, 161 fulfilled the request by providing a partial or full response. For the remaining 79, no response was received. Of those who sent a response, four did not provide figures for interpreter spending. This was either because the information was not held (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust) or because the trust applied section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act (Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust and Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust) to the request.

The potential spending for all NHS trusts was extrapolated from the 157 trusts that did respond with spending data. This was calculated on the basis that the spending of the NHS trusts failing to respond would have been in line with the average of those that did reply. All figures contained within the paper are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Any responses received after the 28 September 2022 were not included in this dataset.