

\$130m court translation plan sentenced to the bin

By Neil Western

A \$130 MILLION plan to introduce simultaneous translation of court cases has been scrapped by the Judiciary.

It was abandoned after two mock trials showed it did not work.

Instead the Judiciary will continue to use the current system of consecutive translation, while a steering

committee is studying ways to improve the arrangement.

However, many lawyers have apparently been kept in the dark over the move.

John Mullick, a Bar Association council member, said: "I suspect it was dropped because it was too expensive."

Simultaneous translation, which is used at Legislative Council meetings, was last year proposed

for use in courts following recommendations by legislators and legal associations.

The plan was to provide instant translations in English, Cantonese and Putonghua, saving time and money while establishing a truly bilingual court system.

But two mock trials using the system received a thumbs down from all involved. Practical problems,

including inaccuracy in translations, meant justice might be jeopardised.

A Judiciary spokeswoman said yesterday: "The steering committee on the use of Chinese in courts concluded simultaneous translation was not a feasible mode of interpretation for court proceedings.

"The Judiciary is considering further training for court interpreters and

equipment that could be provided to assist them."

The 15-member steering committee, appointed by Chief Justice Sir Ti Liang Yang is chaired by High Court Justice Patrick Chan Siu-hoi.

Court Interpreters' Association chairman Sidney Kam Po-kee said he had hoped the pilot scheme would be a success.

He said consecutive translation — in which translations are given at frequent intervals — was workable, but called for more investment.

There are 173 interpreters in courts, but Mr Kam said some had to forgo their leave because there was not enough cover.

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