



Multilingual Manchester



Greater Manchester Police

Volunteer Activity Report

2014–2015

1) Introduction

Multilingual Manchester is a cluster of research activities based in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester. Closely linked with local communities and services, these activities raise awareness of linguistic diversity in the region, as well as identifying and responding to language needs. There are over 150 languages spoken in Manchester, and Multilingual Manchester aims to understand how these languages are used, the ways in which they are maintained, and both the challenges and enormous benefits that they bring to the area. To this end, the team of researchers has forged partnerships with Greater Manchester Police (GMP), Manchester City Council, Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, several local schools, community centres, third-sector organisations, and more. Multilingual Manchester runs a large student volunteer scheme, which grants students from all academic and linguistic backgrounds an opportunity to explore the city's cultural fabric first-hand. In addition, this volunteering scheme draws on the diverse skills and expertise of our students to support and enrich the work of local service providers.

Representatives from Greater Manchester Police's Neighbourhoods, Confidence and Equality Team began discussions with Multilingual Manchester in 2014, around improving customer service delivery, satisfaction and confidence. Sergeant Russell Magnall, Customer Service and Victim Satisfaction Manager, and Claire Mayle, Customer Service and Victim Satisfaction Officer, were inspired by colleagues elsewhere in the UK to engage with local Higher Education institutions in an effort to improve communication with victims of crime. The Multilingual Manchester team proposed and set up an engagement project that brought together student volunteers and local communities to explore public opinion on GMP communication with victims of crime. The University of Manchester has the enormous privilege of being located within the heart of a city whose language diversity is an integral part of its identity, and the project aimed to draw on this distinct position, channelling voices from the city's diverse public into a consultation process that would shape public service delivery.

It was decided that student volunteers would work on redrafting letters that are sent to victims of crime in the aftermath and subsequent investigation of an incident, with a view to presenting refreshed drafts of these letters to GMP in summer 2015. To this end, students would use their own skills and academic experience, as well as consulting local residents from a range of linguistic backgrounds.

2) Project stages

After the initial briefing in October 2014, the project was divided in three main stages:

- a) October to January: **student analysis of the Victim of Crime letters;**
- b) February to June: **focus group consultations and initial redrafting;**
- c) June to August: **drafting of finalised letters and guidelines for improved communication.**

a) Student analysis of the letters

During the period October 2014 to January 2015, a group of student volunteers analysed a range of GMP's Victim of Crime letters, drawing on their diverse academic backgrounds, and produced a preliminary analysis, as well as a list of considerations for the redrafting process. Considerations included:

- Using a direct, first person address from a GMP staff member rather than a generic greeting from GMP as a whole;
- Avoiding overuse of the passive tense as this does not acknowledge the victim as a primary concern for the police. An active tense would give the victim a more central role (e.g. replacing 'Victim Support can be contacted' by 'You can contact Victim Support');
- Avoiding obscure, potentially confusing terms such as 'resources';
- Addressing the victim sympathetically, acknowledging the distress they will likely be feeling, and personalising communication, where possible;
- Referring to information from previous letters during follow-ups if possible to create a sense of continuity in communication ('As I/we have mentioned..');
- Making concrete references to the victim's case within the body of the text, rather than simply referring to an abstract reference number in the letter header;
- When promoting Victim/Witness Support & other suggested further contacts, making personal reference to how they can benefit 'you, your family members and all affected' (for example) rather than the relatively impersonal 'victims, witnesses and family members';
- Extracting the key details of any suggested further contacts, as well as additional contact details for GMP, and displaying these details in a separate box, to distinguish these from the bulk of the text and make them more eye-catching;
- Increasing font size – size 10 fonts may not be accessible to all readers.

b) Focus group consultations and initial re-drafting

A committed group of volunteers took the project forward from January 2015 onwards, under the supervision of Multilingual Manchester project staff. The group considered a range of methods they would use to survey public opinion on GMP's current

communication, and to gather feedback. Among these potential methods were the use of an online survey, street questionnaires and focus groups.

It was decided to organise focus groups from which the richest data could be obtained.

From focus groups, the students could gather relatively in-depth opinions, in an open format that encouraged discussion.

c) Focus groups

In spring 2015, the volunteer group began planning focus groups, approaching a range of potential leads, including local Councillors, existing Multilingual Manchester contacts and community organisations. The students arranged and conducted focus groups at a Somali community organisation, an intermediate ESOL class based at a Chinese community organisation, and an advanced ESOL class based at a library, with participants from a range of linguistic backgrounds. These focus groups took place in the Greater Manchester area, and reflected diversity in age, gender and linguistic and cultural background. The ESOL classes were particularly insightful; not only did they bring together participants from a range of backgrounds, they also gave an extremely valuable impression of how accessible existing communication is to people who speak English as an additional language.

3) Findings and future guidance

Using the feedback gathered from the focus groups and the volunteers' own reflections, the students redrafted the original range of Victim of Crime letters. These letters were then presented back to GMP at an initial handover meeting to discuss the findings and the implementation of the proposed changes, while the activity itself and the results of the project were showcased at an event on 12 November 2015 at GMP Force Headquarters.



Representatives from University of Manchester and Greater Manchester Police showcase the results of the volunteer activity

In addition, the group drew on the findings to propose a set of guidelines to be used by GMP for future redrafting of communication. This guidance is as follows:

CONTENT

- Reference to a specific officer makes the letter more personal and reassuring, and suggests more attention is being given to the case. Victims may also be encouraged to call for additional support or clarification, if given a personal contact; even if this contact is not available in that instance, the contact has been made and other staff could hopefully offer support.
- It appears important to victims that they are given clear and honest reasons for closing a case – but it is also crucial to do so sympathetically. Simply adding ‘unfortunately’ to a given phrase, for example, suggests empathy. This changes the tone of the letter, and therefore changes the way in which the recipient perceives it. This perception arguably affects the victim's satisfaction, and may even affect their readiness to report future crimes.
- Repetition of information, using different wording at various points in the letter, can be confusing for readers. Information should be stated once, in clear and accessible language, rather than repeated with different veils of politeness or using jargon.
- GMP contact details should take precedence over external organisations in order of appearance in the text. External support group contacts are extremely valuable, but should be given in addition to GMP contact details, rather than appearing first in the text. This would distinguish practical points of contact from supportive additional services.
- It is important for the reader to be thanked for reporting the crime as this helps build a positive relationship between victim and police. This also acknowledges the decision that the victim has taken in reporting the crime, which should not be assumed to be a default action.

LAYOUT

- There is an overwhelming demand for a shorter, more concise letter. Avoiding repetition of content, as described above, will help to make letters more concise.
- Boxes, bullet points and bold words help draw the reader's eye to the key details and render the letters more intuitive and easier to navigate. This emphasis is particularly helpful for victims who are not literate, or who are less proficient in English.
- Envelopes should be considered as part of communication with a victim, and the external visibility of the GMP logo may undermine the privacy of this exchange. Respecting the private, and sometimes sensitive, nature of communication between police and victim may encourage more victims to report crimes.

LANGUAGE

- The language used in Victim of Crime letters can be made be more accessible to readers, without altering the formality or the content. To achieve this, unnecessarily complex language and jargon should be avoided where possible, and replaced with clearer, simplified expressions. This would improve communication with English-speaking victims of crime who experience difficulties reading, as well as with those who speak English as an additional language.
- Sentences should not be unnecessarily long. Extended sentences should be divided into two or more smaller sentences, where possible. In the vein of the above recommendation, this would make the letter more accessible to those who are less proficient in English.
- Sentences should be active where possible, giving greater prominence to the victim (e.g. 'You can contact Victim Support...' rather than 'Victim Support can be contacted...').
- While large-scale and pre-emptive translation of material is arguably an ineffective use of resources, the availability of translated material on request could improve equality of access to police services for some residents. Such accessibility information is provided by other large public sector organisations, such as Manchester City Council, who signpost users to a telephone service for access to information in some additional languages.

4) Summary

The student volunteer group have combined their own, cross-disciplinary analytical skills with feedback from diverse focus groups, composed of participants with varying levels of English, to provide unique feedback on Greater Manchester Police's communication with victims of crime. The group have used this combination of information to produce a set of re-drafted letters, and to propose guidelines that can inform future decisions on communication. If these guidelines are taken into consideration, any future re-drafting of letters would inherently reflect elements of the consultation and public feedback process.

The collaboration between The University of Manchester and Greater Manchester Police drew on research expertise to directly support front-line service provision, highlighting the value of partnerships between service providers and Higher Education institutions. In this case, the partnership was further enriched by Multilingual Manchester's community contacts and the involvement of student volunteers, who in turn reported that the project allowed them a unique insight into how local services respond to language diversity.

Communities in Manchester are dynamic, and language and communicative needs can rapidly change; to improve communication with service users, local providers such as GMP must balance the important and evident need for interpreting and translation with a flexible response to varying levels of English. The latter cannot replace the former, as they cater to different needs at a particular point in time. However, reviewing use of English can instead constitute a cost-

effective way to enrich existing communication and broaden the reach of current engagement, improving access for those who speak English as an additional language, as well as accounting for enormous variation in literacy and style of English among native speakers.

The dynamism of Manchester's diversity, coupled with GMP's extensive range of external and internal interactions with both the public and its staff, indicates that there is scope to extend this pilot study and undertake further collaborative work to improve communication.

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