WORKFORCE RESEARCH

Interpreting and translation

Key findings and recommendations

Report produced by Dr Philida Schellekens
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Foreword

This report is the product of research on interpreting and translation which was carried out between November 2002 and March 2004. It sets out a national profile of the interpreting and translation sector, covering its workforce and course provision. The report also records the skills development which the sector requires to fulfil the needs of its users. It does so in the context of an increase in international communication which drives the demand for professional language services ever upwards.

Central to this report are the views of interpreters and translators, agencies and course providers. One of the pleasures of this project has been to work with the many individuals who have participated enthusiastically in this research. It is in this context that I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 28 companies and agencies, 22 providers of training courses, and 305 individual interpreters and translators who responded to the call for information on their activity. Unfortunately, the number of contributors is so large that it is impossible to mention them all individually, but the data and observations which they have provided form an essential part of this report.

My thanks also go to the many organisations which participated in the consultation on the emerging findings. These included examination and awarding bodies, professional associations, course providers, organisations employing interpreters and translators and freelance workers. Their feedback has not just enhanced the contents of this report, but also confirmed that its findings reflect the profile and skills needs of the sector. In addition, they broadly endorsed the recommendations made in this document on how to take the development of the interpreting and translation workforce forward.

It is good to know that some organisations are already making use of the findings and recommendations contained in this report. Very many people and organisations have indicated that they would like to form part of the activity which is suggested here as necessary to tackle development. Since, as the report indicates, our sector is very fragmented, it will be a challenge to bring all segments and interests together.

We are all indebted to Dr Philida Schellekens and Derek Winslow for their hard work and enthusiasm in giving us this firm foundation on which to build. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Language Group has been pleased to support this research project and it is my hope that its outcomes provide the impetus for further development.

Vanessa Davies
Group Director, FCO Services
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

1. Introduction

The workforce research project in interpreting and translation was established in November 2002 to address the need for information on the UK sector. The project was initiated by the Languages National Training Organisation now merged with CILT to form CILT, the National Centre for Languages) and supported by the FCO Language Group to contribute to the National Languages Strategy. The research was carried out by the Schellekens Consultancy. The aims of the project were:

- to map the fields of interpreting and translation;
- to collect information on strengths and weaknesses;
- to review development needs;
- to recommend priorities for action;
- to provide the basis for workforce development planning which stakeholders can take forward.

1.1 Methodology

The research was conducted in two stages. The first consisted of the production and distribution of questionnaires to three categories of respondents: freelance interpreters and translators, interpreting and translation companies, and course providers. The resulting data was analysed and reported on by category of respondent. This analysis underpinned a draft paper which set out key findings and emerging recommendations. The second stage of the research consisted of the distribution of the draft paper to a range of stakeholders as well as to the individuals, organisations and course providers that had contributed to the research. Their comments and suggestions were subsequently incorporated into this report.

As far as is known, our project is the first to attempt to collect information on interpreting and translation on a national scale. In the process we have not just gathered data, but also identified gaps in information. We should note three major aspects here. In the first place, we report on 305 responses from individual interpreters and translators, 28 agencies and companies, and 22 providers covering 43 courses. Although we have no information on the exact size of the interpreting and translation industry, we can say that the number of respondents is low in relative terms and that as a consequence no statistical relevance can be derived from the information in this and the underpinning reports. A second consideration was that many interpreting and translation companies and course providers were unable to provide complete datasets. This applied, in particular, to information provided on numerical data on the workforce, student population and student destinations.

A third consideration affecting the research base stems from the possibility that the use of the Web to collect data from freelancers and organisations may have distorted the profile of responses.

To compensate for these potential weaknesses in the data collection, stakeholders were widely consulted to ascertain whether the information collected was indeed representative of the sector. The responses to the consultation exercise indicated that, these disadvantages notwithstanding, our findings were representative of the profession. These responses also showed that the recommendations and priorities for action identified in the draft report were considered to be workable.

1.2 Presentation of findings

Since the documentation which forms the outcome of the workforce research is considerable in size, it has been presented in two parts:

1. This document, which contains key findings and recommendations as well as a summary of the analysis of the returns on individual interpreters and translators, agencies/companies and course providers. The document is available in print from CILT and can be downloaded from the CILT website: **www.cilt.org.uk**.
2. A second document consisting of a detailed and factual analysis of individual, agency and provider responses. These underpin the key findings and recommendations made in document 1. This document can be downloaded from the CILT website: **www.cilt.org.uk**.

In addition, a glossary of terminology is provided at the end of both documents.

2. Overview of the sector

The first major finding of the workforce research is that the UK interpreting and translation sector is fragmented. The complexity of the sector, as we found it, contributes to a lack of transparency and appears to hinder development. This manifests itself in the two disciplines of interpreting and translation; the product, which can involve any of the languages spoken in the world; and domain and technological requirements.

The UK sector covers a multitude of provision, qualifications, levels of achievement and different professional registers. Interpreters and translators work predominantly freelance, mostly entirely independently but some also work part time for larger organisations. The people engaged in interpreting and/or translation activity possess a great variety of skills. They encompass unqualified bilingual people, who may have skills and experience; fully trained and experienced professional translators and interpreters; and people with postgraduate degrees and theoretical skills. Since this is an unregulated profession, all are able to call themselves interpreters and translators.

Course providers, freelance professionals and interpreting and translation organisations are all under pressure to deliver to targets. Many respondents felt that technological innovation created a major need for staff training, but there was insufficient time, funding and/or opportunity for continuing professional development.

The research confirms that the interpreting and translation market is truly international. This applies to the organisations which commission and deliver the product, the workforce and the student population. It is clearly important for the UK industry to position itself as a strong player in order to keep market share.

3. Key findings and recommendations

3.1 Data collection on students and their destinations

Few course providers were able to provide a complete dataset on their students and their destinations, in most cases because the provider did not collect information on the student population. This means that providers lose out on a major opportunity to review the profile of their student intake and to assess how far their courses meet employment requirements.

Providers of interpreting and translation courses should consider adopting a common format for the collection of data on their students. This should include information on student destinations. The data returns to organisations such as HESA, LSC and SQA as well as the questionnaire used for this research could be used as exemplars.

The analysis of student data and feedback from students on the effectiveness of their training should be used to inform quality assurance; evaluate current delivery; and help plan future provision.

Looking ahead, national and international research projects will provide a useful vehicle to collect further data on interpreting and translation. Sector stakeholders should work together to contribute and make use of the data collected[1].

3.2 Meeting industry demand for languages

Two major factors drive course provision: the students who present themselves for training and the demands of the industry and its clients. Course providers indicated that their provision was predominantly influenced by student intake and to a much lesser extent by the consideration of employment opportunities. By contrast, the agencies reported that their needs should play a larger role in the planning and delivery of provision. For example, half the organisations and agencies offering interpreting and translation services reported difficulties in recruiting staff. While the demand for interpreting and translation into and out of Western European languages remained high, companies identified an increasing need for professionals in Eastern European, Middle Eastern, African, Indian languages and Chinese, Welsh and British Sign Language.

By comparison, the course offer in higher and further education consisted predominantly of Western European languages. At the same time, eight courses had experienced difficulty in recruiting a sufficient number of candidates because of a fall in the numbers of students taking A levels in foreign languages, mostly Western European.

Course providers should consider how they can expand their collective language offer to include languages other than Western European languages.

Considering the replication of Western languages among course providers and the decrease in demand for these languages, providers should explore whether it is feasible to co-ordinate languages across organisations.

1 For example, the Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages 3 which will collect data on interpreting in the UK and other EU countries; and the DfES Higher Education Research Project which supports the National Languages Strategy HE Development Plan.

3.3 Meeting industry demand for native English speakers

The data provided on students and professional interpreters and translators showed the following profile for country of origin:

Area of origin	Students	Freelance	Company
UK	41%	44%	60%
EU	31%	30%	23%
Eastern Europe	4%	11%	6%
rest of the world	24%	14%	11%

The composition of the student population has relevance not just for individual providers, but also deserves attention in the national context. The table above shows that students from the UK made up 41%. However, this figure needs to be treated with some caution as country of birth does not automatically equate with being a native speaker of the national language. Considering the multilingual backgrounds of the UK population, it is quite possible that a proportion of the students who originated in the UK did not have English as their first language. Secondly, course providers reported that the expansion in student numbers had been in the main due to an increase in overseas students and that their numbers and fees contributed to the viability of courses. By contrast, courses which relied on UK students taking A levels in foreign languages had experienced a fall in their number of candidates.

The question is whether the supply of native English speakers is sufficient to meet the current and future demand for interpreters and translators. This affects especially organisations which require that native English speakers translate their materials into English. Secondly, organisations such as Government departments may require that their personnel are UK citizens for security reasons.

> Providers of foreign language, interpreting and translation courses as well as key players such as Government departments should consider how they can meet the demand for interpreters and translators who are native English speakers and/or have British nationality.

3.4 The range of interpreting and translation qualifications

The 22 course providers which contributed to this research offered 43 courses. These could be divided into fourteen different types of qualifications and covered BA degrees in Modern Languages with interpreting and/or translation options; postgraduate degrees which concentrated completely on translation and/or interpreting; courses preparing for CACDP and Institute of Linguists qualifications; and one PhD in Translation. Provider responses indicated that the range of skills on exit from courses varied greatly. However, there is currently no formal mechanism to record the skills and understanding to be achieved on exit from courses. The exception to this are the Institute of Linguists and CACDP qualifications, as they have been recognised on the National Qualifications Framework at Levels 4 and 5; and the university courses in BSL interpreting which have been mapped against a common CACDP framework.

Outside the direct remit of this research, but nevertheless of importance, is the question of when interpreters and translators are safe to practise. Any definition of the minimum standards required could usefully include the position of community interpreting and translation.

> Course providers should work towards a greater degree of transparency on the level and skills to be achieved on completion of their courses.

The sector should consider establishing a common and transparent framework to describe skills requirements on entry and exit to interpreting and translation courses. This should also include the place of community interpreting and advocacy. CILT's National Occupational Standards for Interpreting and Translation should provide a useful benchmark for this.

3.5 Choice of domain

Freelance interpreters and translators and companies reported that commercial clients provided by far the most employment; and that business formed the largest domain.

The providers covered a selection of domains, with MA courses offering the widest choice.

Where possible, course providers should reflect the client base and prevalence of domains in industry in their course offer.

3.6 Specialisation in interpreting and/or translation

The freelance professionals who participated in this research indicated that 9% worked as interpreters, 49% as translators and that 42% combined the roles of interpreter and translator. However, since only 42 out of 305 held both interpreting and translation qualifications, it appears that many practised without holding a formal qualification.

Companies offering interpreting and translation services confirmed a demand in particular for interpreters.

As far as training in either discipline was concerned, 55% of courses had translation as their subject; 28% interpreting; and 17% offered both. The organisations which offered translation rather than interpreting gave as reasons the cost of offering interpreter training, a lack of learner demand and a lack of space and/or specialist expertise to deliver interpreting training.

Given the number of language professionals who work as both translators and interpreters, course providers should reflect whether they should offer training in both disciplines.

Since the fields of interpreting and translation encompass such a wide variety of activity, the field should consider developing a taxonomy of the profession. This could include mapping the nature of the task, professional and personal skills, domain, the nature of the triadic relationship in interpreting situations, simulated/consecutive mode, etc.

3.7 Finding employment and work placements

While many universities and other training organisations had already set up mechanisms to help students with finding employment and work placements, others were not yet in a position to deliver.

Course providers should review the support they provide students with finding work placements and employment, in particular with local employers.

3.8 The quality and appropriateness of provision: Meeting industry standards

As we saw in Section 3.2, course providers indicated that their provision was planned on the basis of student supply rather than industry needs. Certainly, few course providers made use of employers and/or freelance professionals to verify that course requirements met industry standards, although some maintained that industry needs were covered by their employment of current or former language professionals on their teaching staff.

Twelve out of the 28 organisations which participated in this research felt that new recruits had immediate training needs. While some commented that this involved aspects such as familiarisation with in-house company procedures, others felt that new recruits were 'too academically or literature focused for commercial translation needs' or that there had been insufficient emphasis on the language skills in the mother tongue.

In the international context, members of IAMLADP have also expressed concern about finding new, adequately trained staff in the language professions.

Course providers should actively seek the involvement of professionals working in the interpreting and translating industry. Aspects which could be usefully explored are:

- whether course content meets the needs of the industry;
- labour market information, e.g. on skills requirements and language shortages.

Examination bodies and academic boards should ensure that programmes of learning and examinations meet the needs of employers. Best practice would involve representation of employers on academic boards and using professional interpreters and translators as examiners.

3.9 Continuing professional development

Many of the freelance interpreters and translators felt a sense of isolation. For example, one said: 'When working by oneself it's easy to be unaware of new developments'.

While six course providers offered short courses and opportunities for professional development, this does not appear to meet the demand for such provision: 60% of the organisations and 40% of the individual interpreters were not satisfied that the opportunities for professional development were adequate. They wanted more focused and structured training/CPD activity from course providers, professional/trade associations, awarding and professional bodies.

Course providers, examinations and professional bodies should:

- work with companies, Regional Skills Partnerships and freelance interpreters and translators to establish the CPD requirements of the workforce;
- offer training which meets the needs of the local workforce.

Information on training in interpreting and translation should be available centrally on a website.

3.10 Employers' ability to allocate work effectively

Only a minority of employers were able to provide information on their workforce on aspects such as their qualifications, specialist skills, etc. This created the impression that many employers allocated jobs by informal means.

Employers should consider setting up a database to record the skills of their workforce and to allocate jobs more effectively. This would also enable them to contribute to any subsequent research on the interpreting and translation workforce.

Guidance to clients needing interpreting/translation services should include advice on how to check that the individual selected is competent to carry out the work.

3.11 Provision for interpreting training in British Sign Language/English

A number of specialist BSL training providers, interpreters and agencies participated in this research project. While they shared many aspects with the spoken languages field, there were also some marked differences. In the first place, there has been an insufficient number of BSL/English interpreters for a considerable time and the recent introduction of the Disabilities Discrimination Act (DDA) will aggravate the shortage even further. One of the underlying causes of the lack of a sufficient supply of new recruits appeared to be the poor quality and quantity of language classes in BSL. Secondly, our research shows that, while many interpreting and translation courses incorporated multiple languages, BSL/English interpreting courses were delivered in isolation. This may lead to a lack of cross-fertilisation of techniques and best practice across BSL and spoken language interpreting. We understand that one university has recently taken steps to deliver joint modules with other languages in order to overcome this problem. Thirdly, at least one provider which attracted candidates from all over the UK had been denied funding by its local LSC because this LSC did not wish to fund candidates outside its own area.

In order to meet the DDA entitlement to BSL/English interpreting services consideration should be given to building the capacity of BSL/English interpreter training (and the provision of BSL language classes).

Specialist providers of BSL/English interpreting courses should be able to draw down central LSC funding.

There should be cross-fertilisation of interpreting techniques and best practice across BSL and spoken language interpreting.

3.12 Compatibility of professional registers

There are currently at least three national professional registers, two for spoken languages and one for British sign language, to which individual interpreters may belong and which confirm their professional status and skills. This is a cause for confusion among organisations and individuals which hire language professionals.

The organisations managing national registers should consider mapping against common standards the standards and skills requirements which entitle interpreters and translators to join their registers.

4. How can the interpreting and translation sector take these recommendations forward?

Considering the fragmentation of the sector and the pressures of time and resources reported on by many course providers and professionals, it appears that the pooling of resources on a cross-sectoral basis is the most effective way to foster development. We suggest that the National Languages Strategy in England could provide a useful focal point for planning and development in the context of the Government's strategy document *Languages for all: Languages for life*. We recommend that a taskforce be set up which includes representatives from the four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The findings of this study point to three levels of activity for the taskforce:

Objective 1
- To bring together the experience and professional skills of key players across the spectrum of UK course providers, examination bodies and employers.
- To review the adequacy of the delivery of ab initio training and continuing professional development on a national and regional level.
- To co-ordinate and contribute to research carried out on the interpreting and translation sector, such as the National Languages Strategy Higher Education Delivery Plan.
- To plan coherent national and regional training provision.

Objective 2
- To foster links with international organisations and projects such as the UN's IAMLADP project; the European Commission's SCIC, the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service; CIUTI and the Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages 3 which will collect data on a range of language professions in the UK and other EU countries.

Objective 3
- To develop a long-term strategy for the UK interpreting and translation sector. This should include regularly updated forecasts of national and international sectoral requirements as well as training needs.

4.1 Potential stakeholders

The following stakeholders have been identified as potential members of the interpreting and translation taskforce:

- course providers and their representative bodies, e.g. PLUG and UCML;
- academic boards of study and awarding bodies;
- organisations which hold national registers for interpreting and translation such as CACDP, NRPSI, ITI and AIIC;
- freelance interpreters and translators;
- organisations which employ freelance and in-house interpreters and translators and their umbrella organisations such as the ATC;
- companies which commission interpreting and/or translation services;
- funding bodies such as HEFC, LSC, SHEFC, SFEFC and ELWa;
- national and regional bodies such as CILT, the Regional Development Agencies and the British Chambers of Commerce;
- UK Government departments which use and provide interpreting and translation services.

5. Appendix 1: Summary of findings

This paper summarises the key findings from the workforce research on interpreting and translation. It gives an overview of the findings for the three categories of respondents which contributed to the research: individual interpreters and translators, organisations/agencies and providers of interpreting and translating courses. For a full description and analysis of data, please see the CILT website: **www.cilt.org.uk**.

5.1 Profile of individual interpreters and/or translators

- 305 individual interpreters and translators contributed to the research.
- 48% individuals worked as translators; 9% as interpreters; and 42% as both interpreters and translators. Only 42 out of 305 respondents held qualifications in both interpreting and translation.
- 68% of the sample was completely freelance; 31% also worked for interpreting and/or translation agencies.
- 65% of respondents worked 3 days or more as interpreters and translators; 50% also worked in another capacity.
- The respondents offered their services in 38 languages.
- 57% interpreted and/or translated between English and one other language; the rest worked between 3 or more languages.
- 44% of the language professionals originated from the UK; 30% from EU; 11% from Eastern Europe; and 12% from the rest of the world.
- 67% of the workforce was over 40; and 67% was female.
- 93 interpreters were qualified on entry to the profession; 70 were not.
- 163 translators were qualified on entry to the profession; 92 were not.
- 52% had a formal qualification in interpreting and/or translation.
- Commercial clients provided by far the most employment; and business formed the largest domain.
- 182 said that their CPD needs were being met; 118 that they were not.
- The most popular methods of CPD activity were learning on the job and attending courses.
- Several respondents reflected: 'There is a lack of information on what training is available.' The individual interpreters and translators made a host of suggestions for CPD activity which can be found in Section 8.2.1 in the full report which accompanies this document.

5.2 Profile of interpreting and translation companies/agencies

- 28 interpreting and translation companies/agencies contributed to the research.
- 14 organisations offered both interpreting and translation services; 8 translation only; and 6 BSL interpreting.
- 21 organisations were based in the UK; and 7abroad.
- EU languages were most in demand.

- 11 organisations offered the full range of world languages; 7 Western European languages; 3 Eastern European languages; and 3 Far Eastern languages.
- Employment was highly casual. For example, ad hoc freelancers made up 76% of the workforce. 3% of staff was permanent.
- Commercial clients formed the largest source of work; and business the largest domain.
- 41% of the interpreters and translators used originated from outside the UK.
- 13 organisations reported problems recruiting staff in specific languages. Half of these needed British Sign Language interpreters. The other half consisted of spoken language providers which quoted problems in recruiting staff for Welsh; Urdu, Arabic, Bengali; Korean; Estonian; Kurdish, Somali, Turkish, Dari, Pushtu, most sub-Saharan and African languages, and Portuguese.
- 14 organisations said their new recruits were job-ready; and 12 not.

  '*The new recruits are generally job-ready in that they have the skills as translators but need to learn a specific specialism'. 'Most [new interpreters] have little understanding of greater business context of commercial texts – they are too academically or literature focused for commercial translation needs.'*

- 16 companies reported that there were insufficient CPD opportunities for their staff.

  'We would like to organise workshops in-house, but with the current economic situation and the squeeze on the translation rate, we cannot really afford to put the time in.'

  Agencies would like:'Better funding for training; better training opportunities and quality trainers.' And 'A clearer structure for development and number of courses available.

  Part 2 of the analysis report contains a full list of suggestions for CPD activity.

- The challenges agencies face are summarised by three respondents' comments:

  'The challenge will be, and is, to convince clients to work with skilled language professionals, and to ensure that these professionals provide a service worthy of such recognition.'

  'Supply cannot meet demand at the current level.'

  'A lack of regulation of the profession, i.e. anyone can call himself/herself a translator.'

5.3 Profile of training/education providers

- The survey covered 43 courses which were offered by 22 HE, FE and commercial providers of education and training.
- 14 different types of qualifications were offered, varying from BAs in Modern Languages with interpreting and translation options to a PhD in Translation.
- The data collected reflects in essence post-graduate/NQF Level 4 courses. Undergraduate courses were in the minority: 2 BA/BScs had translation as their main subject; and 4 were language courses with interpreting or translation as a module.
- 41% of students came from the UK; 31% from Western Europe; and 28% from elsewhere.
- A breakdown by subject shows that:

  – 55% of the courses had translation as their subject;
  – 28% of the courses concerned interpreting;
  – and 17% offered both interpreting and translation.

- The providers covered 21 languages between them, of which 71% were Western European languages; 9% Eastern European; 8% from Middle East; 8% from Far East; and 4% from the Indian subcontinent.
- The data provided indicates that there was significant variety in content and study hours, even where they appeared to lead to similar qualifications. It was not possible to compare entry and exit requirements for courses.
- A decrease in the number of UK-based A level students in foreign languages was affecting recruitment for language, interpreting and translation courses. Overseas students appeared to be the main source for expansion in numbers.
- 26 courses provided support with finding placements and/or employment. Many of the students on the 10 courses that did not offer support could be expected to be in or near employment.
- 4 providers of post-graduate courses stated that their resources were insufficient to deliver interpreting/translation courses. Their departments were overstretched to deliver to current requirements. Seven organisations had either insufficient staff resources to update courses on new technology and skills or feared that additional modules would overload an already full programme of study.
- Six providers did not have the space, financial resource or specialist expertise to deliver interpreter training.
- Only a few course providers made use of employer input on their courses.
- The opportunities for new development were largely technology-based, e.g. localisation, subtitling, machine translation and telephone/videoconferencing.
- On challenges to the profession, one provider wrote: 'The financial rewards in [public service interpreting] may not be sufficient to attract students and therefore make it worthwhile to the university to move into public service interpreting'. Two providers felt that a growing number of language minorities and the application of the Disabilities Discrimination Act, which expands access to information and services to deaf people, would create new opportunities for training.

6. Acronyms

AIIC	International Association for Conference Interpreters
ATC	Association of Translation Companies
BSL	British Sign Language
CACDP	Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People
CIUTI	Conference Internationale D'instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes
CPD	continuing professional development
DDA	Disabilities Discrimination Act
DPSI	Diploma in Public Service Interpreting
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales
EMCI	European Masters in Conference Interpreting
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAMLADP	Inter-Agency Meeting on Languages, Documents and Publications
ITI	Institute of Translation and Interpreting
LSC	Learning Skills Council
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRPSI	National Register of Public Service Interpreters
NUPIT	National Union of Professional Interpreters and Translators
OCN	Open College Network
PLUG	Professional Languages in Universities Group
RDA	Regional Development Agency
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCIC	Joint Interpreting and Conference Service, European Commission
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SFEFC	Scottish Further Education Funding Council
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
TNP	Thematic Network Project
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCML	University Council for Modern Languages

