

International Certification Study: Accreditation in Australia

By Jiri Stejskal

In last month's article describing professional certificates offered by the Arabic and Translation Studies Division at the American University in Cairo, I concluded with a promise to take a look at the accreditation of translators and interpreters in Australia. As I was getting ready to compile relevant information from the Australian National Accreditation Authority for

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Translators and Interpreters Ltd. (NAATI) Website (www.naati.com.au), I came across an article in the proceedings of the last Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT) Congress, which took place in Belgium in 1999. In this article, Klaus Hermes, former president of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT), describes in great detail the various forms of professional regulation available in Australia. I found this information to be highly relevant to the ATA's current efforts in overhauling its own program. While it is beyond the scope of the present article, I encourage anyone interested in these issues to review the FIT proceedings.

The NAATI is a national standards body owned by the Commonwealth, State, and Territory Governments of Australia. It sets and monitors standards of translation and interpreting (T&I) in Australia by offering accreditation to translators and interpreters within a number of different competency levels. NAATI accreditation may be obtained as a result of a measure of

competence either through NAATI testing or by completing an NAATI-approved course of studies (conditions apply). NAATI accreditation is accepted for the profession of T&I in Australia. Government T&I services require translators and interpreters to be NAATI-accredited.

NAATI accreditation has been instrumental in providing quality assurance to recipients of T&I services and in giving credibility to agencies that employ accredited practitioners. The NAATI is also an advisory body, producing an annual national directory of accredited and recognized interpreters and translators. This directory enables agencies, businesses, and government organizations to locate suitably qualified interpreters and translators. To set and monitor the standards of translation and interpreting at four accreditation levels, the NAATI accredits translators and interpreters who are appropriately qualified. The NAATI conducts translator and interpreter accreditation tests in various cities in Australia and New Zealand. It also provides similar tests for overseas candidates who are unable to sit for the tests in any Australian city. The NAATI provides a means by which employers of interpreters and translators can make a judgment as to their level of ability.

NAATI accreditation may be obtained by:

- Passing a NAATI test.
- Successfully completing a course of studies at an Australian institution approved by the NAATI.
- Providing evidence of specialized qualifications in translating/interpreting obtained from a recognized training institution overseas, or membership in a recognized international professional association.

Accreditation by Testing

The NAATI operates a three-year planning cycle to assist the NAATI, its candidates, and service providers with their forward planning. The three-year plan provides the following benefits:

- Candidates will have a better idea when their language(s) are likely to be tested and can therefore prepare for tests.
- Examiners will have longer lead times for test design.
- Service providers can encourage staff to upgrade their qualifications.

The NAATI conducts tests according to an annual testing program. Tests are designated as:

- Paraprofessional Interpreter
- Interpreter
- Paraprofessional Translator

- Translator
- Advanced Translator

Because of a consistently low demand for the advanced translator tests, they are not included in the annual testing program but are available on demand.

NAATI-Approved Courses

An alternative means of obtaining accreditation is by successfully completing an NAATI-approved course of study. In Australia, tertiary institutions may apply to the NAATI for approval of a course in interpreting and/or translation. To gain approval, the institution must provide a course of study which follows the NAATI guidelines for course content, duration, staffing, and supporting resources. The NAATI guidelines are a means to assist course providers so that the courses delivered not only provide theoretical background in interpreting and translating, but are also sufficiently practical to enable graduates to perform at reasonable standards when first entering the workplace. All courses have a required practicum component.

Students who successfully complete NAATI-approved courses may be eligible for two awards: 1) the academic award offered by the institution which delivers the course, and 2) NAATI accreditation. The two awards are separate. Students must meet the institutional requirements for the academic award. For NAATI accreditation, students must achieve the academic award and obtain a score of at least 70 percent in the final practical examination in interpreting or translation. Students must also be recommended to the NAATI by the course coordinator for NAATI accreditation.

Among the institutions offering NAATI-approved courses are: the Institutes of TAFE in various Australian cities, University of Wollongong, University of Western Sydney, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, University of Queensland, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and Central Metropolitan College Perth.

Overseas Qualifications

Accreditation at the professional level on the basis of overseas qualifications is available at the translator level only. Accreditation at this level is usually awarded in one language direction. Accreditation at the interpreter level is not available on the basis of overseas qualifications at this stage, since it is rare for provisions to be made to accommodate community interpreting skills relevant to Australia in training courses offered outside Australia. Translation accreditation is awarded when an applicant can submit documentary evidence of at least one of the following prerequisites:

- Successful completion of a formal course of training, with specialization in interpreting and/or translating, at a recognized institution overseas. In assessing overseas training courses, the NAATI aims to ensure that the content of study in translation and/or interpreting is sufficiently specialized to provide training in T&I skills at a standard comparable with its requirements.
- Membership at the senior level of a recognized international professional interpreter/translator association (e.g., International Association of Conference Interpreters, Association of International Tax Consultants, The American Association of Language Specialists). Professional interpreting/translating experience is taken into account in the NAATI's assessment only when the applicant also possesses the specialized qualifications required.

Further information on accreditation procedures in Australia can be obtained from Adolfo Gentile (FIT president and chairman of the NAATI) and Sherrill Bell (NAATI executive director) at anacapri@greatcircle.net.au and sherrill@naati.com.au. In the next issue we will examine the situation concerning the certification of translators and interpreters in the Czech Republic.

As the editor of this series, I encourage readers to submit any relevant information concerning non-U.S. certification or similar programs, as well as comments on the information published in this series, to my e-mail address at jjiri@cetra.com.

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