

# International Certification Study: U.K. and Ireland

By Jiri Stejskal

Last month we explored the interpreter-oriented certification process in Austria, a country where legislation for the certification of translators dates back nearly one and a half centuries. Since then, I have reviewed the websites of the Institute of Translation & Interpreting and the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association and contacted their respective representatives, Dr. Catherine Greensmith (chairman of ITI) and Mary Phelan (public relations representative of ITIA and a lecturer at Dublin City University).

It turns out that in the U.K., the focus is on the certification of *translations* rather than of *translators*. A similar situation exists in Ireland, a haven for many multinational translation and localization companies. Neither translators nor interpreters in the U.K. or Ireland can be officially certified through procedures similar to ATA's accreditation or the certification offered by the government, as is the case in Austria. A translator, however, may certify his or her translation either as a professional member of a translators association or by having it witnessed by a solicitor. In addition, academic credentials in T&I can be obtained by linguists in both countries through examining bodies such as the London-based Institute of Linguists. The following information relies largely on the respective organizations' websites.

## United Kingdom

The Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI) was founded in 1986 as the only independent professional association of practicing translators and interpreters in the United Kingdom. It is now one of the primary sources of information on these services for government, industry, the media, and the general public. With its aim of promoting the highest standards in the

profession, ITI serves as a meeting place for all those who understand the importance of translation and interpreting to the economy and society.

ITI has a large and growing international membership of translators and interpreters, not just in the U.K. but also throughout Europe and in other countries where English is commonly used. Different levels of membership are offered to suit translators and interpreters with varying amounts of experience, from newcomers to the

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T&I industry to experienced professionals. Members are required to abide by ITI's professional code of conduct. Corporate membership is also open to educational, commercial, and government bodies, as well as translation companies.

As a professional association, and one that assesses the skills of its members, ITI maintains a list of members with suitable language skills and technical expertise. It can also hold its members accountable in the event of complaints. ITI has taken steps to establish itself as a body whose members can certify translations. "Qualified members" of ITI, while not certified themselves, can certify their translations.

The requirements for "qualified membership" consist of:

1. A minimum age of 25 years.
2. A first degree or postgraduate qualification in a relevant subject or a corresponding qualification that is accepted by ITI.
3. Recommendations regarding ability and good repute by at least two persons for translators and lecturers, three for ad hoc interpreters, and five for conference interpreters.
4. Recent professional experience, including:

### For translators

- A minimum of five years of full-time work (or a correspondingly longer period of part-time work) and successful assessment of work or a passing grade on the ITI membership examination.
- Alternatively, three years of full-time work (or a correspondingly longer period of part-time work), plus a passing grade on the ITI membership examination, unless the applicant can convince the Admissions Committee that there are exceptionally strong grounds for exemption.

### For interpreters

- A minimum of 200 days of work over a period of five years, plus a successful assessment interview.
- Alternatively, a minimum of 120 days of work over a period of three years, plus a passing grade on the ITI membership examination and/or a successful assessment interview.

In contrast to civil law countries, the concept of a "sworn translator" does not exist in the U.K.'s common

law system. Even so, translations have to be “sworn/certified” for various purposes. Whether a translation is “certified” or “sworn” has no bearing on its overall quality, but such classifications serve to identify translators and their qualifications so that they can be held accountable for the work produced. When a translation is sworn before a solicitor, this individual does not verify the quality of the translation, but merely satisfies himself or herself of the translator’s professional status. Certification does, however, lend weight to a translation. For example, if a document is willfully mistranslated or carelessly translated, the translator could be charged with contempt of court, perjury, or negligence.

The legal advice received by ITI is that, “a certificate is acceptable if it is accepted,” and that ITI should certify translations and wait to see whether a certificate is challenged and, if so, by whom. ITI advisers feel that such a challenge is unlikely, or that by the time a challenge does arise a firm precedent will have been set. Where users insist on a higher grade of certification, they should be reminded of the existence of notarization and referred to notaries (where practicable, those firms whose members are ITI members).

Below is the suggested form the wording of a self-certification should take:

*I, the undersigned, (name), Member of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting, (other qualifications), declare that the translation of the attached documents (identifying particulars) is to the best of my knowledge and belief a true and faithful rendering of the original (language), done to the best of my ability as a professional translator (and verified by [name and ITI membership qualification]).*

## Ireland

Since 1986, translators and interpreters in Ireland have been represented by the Irish Translators’ and Interpreters’ Association (ITIA). ITIA brings together technical, commercial, and literary translators, as well as interpreters. Through its Professional Membership Committee, ITIA is working towards standards of certification for Irish translators and interpreters. Ordinary membership is open to anyone with an interest in T&I. ITIA has about 300 members, of whom 95 are full “professional members” (i.e., they have proven standards of professional competence and expertise). Apart from the professional membership category, membership in ITIA should not be misunderstood as representing a professional qualification.

### Requirements for Professional Translators in the Commercial/Technical Fields

1. Success in foreign examinations organized by the profession abroad and recognized by ITIA (within a period of five years preceding the application, plus one year of full-time professional experience in the same period); or
2. Award of a translation degree by an Irish third-level institution or similar foreign institution recognized by ITIA (within a period of five years preceding the application, plus one year of full-time professional experience in the same period); or
3. If the applicant is a staff translator, two years of professional experience substantiated by the employer’s reference (within a period of five years preceding the application); or
4. If the applicant is a freelance translator, three years of professional experience substantiated by

invoices, statements, or other recognized proof of work completed on a commercial basis (within a period of five years preceding the application, where it is estimated that the linguist translated at least 80,000 words in each of the above three years). The applicant has the option of submitting references, or, where discretion will allow, examples of work completed (to be treated in utmost confidence by ITIA). The association also reserves the right to administer a sample translation test.

Literary/cultural translators are required to submit a portfolio of work they have had published, broadcast, or produced.

### Requirements for Professional Interpreters

*For bilateral interpreters:*

Three years of professional experience, estimated to be at least 40 days of interpretation per year and substantiated by invoices, statements, or other proof of work completed on a commercial basis (within a period of five years preceding the application).

*For conference interpreters:*

Three years of professional experience, estimated to be at least 20 days of conference interpretation per year and substantiated by invoices, statements, or other proof of work completed on a commercial basis (within a period of five years preceding the application). The interpreter has the option of submitting references from clients. The association also reserves the right to administer its own test.

Acceptance for professional membership is ultimately at the discretion of the Professional ➡

Membership Subcommittee, whose decision in all such matters is final. Anyone failing to satisfy the above criteria in a given year of application may submit their application one year later, indicating further experience or qualifications which may be relevant.

For those who wish to take a degree course specifically aimed at training translators, there is the B.A. in applied languages program offered by Dublin City University (French, German, Spanish, and Japanese). Modules are available in economic and scientific/technical translation, and students can choose an option in bilateral/consecutive interpreting. This is a four-year program which involves training in two foreign languages, translation skills, courses in science, technology, and economics, and a year abroad at a foreign translation school. Another B.A. program in applied languages, offered by the University of Limerick, also provides graduates with linguistic and cultural competence in two foreign languages (with the possibility of studying three years for a degree) along with elective courses in marketing, politics, international relations, and technical writing.

An advanced degree in translation is available at the Dublin City University (M.A. in translation studies). The program was featured in the October 2001 issue of *Language International* magazine, and includes courses on localization, corpus linguistics, terminology, and translation from either one or two languages into English. As regards interpreting, Dublin City University offers an M.A. degree in conference interpreting, available in French, German, Spanish, and Irish.

Similar programs are also available in the U.K.: Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, the Modern Languages

Centre in Bradford, the University of Kent at Canterbury, the University of Surrey at Guildford, and the University of Westminster in London.

### Other Options

Linguists in both the U.K. and Ireland may opt for training and examination by an external examining body, such as the Institute of Linguists. The Institute of Linguists is the U.K.'s largest membership organization for professional translators, interpreters, language educators, and those using languages in industry and commerce. The Institute also serves as an examining body, offering assessments and certification in a large number of languages to suit candidates at higher levels (degree and postgraduate) seeking a professional qualification. Founded in 1910, the Institute now has around 7,000 fellows, members, and associate members. It aims to:

- Promote the learning and use of modern languages;
- Improve the status of all professional linguists;
- Establish and maintain high standards of work;
- Serve the interests of all linguists; and
- Ensure professional standards amongst language practitioners through its code of conduct.

The Institute of Linguists' Language Services Ltd. carries out customer-specific assessment and validation of language qualifications, and conducts courses on behalf of local and central government, industry and commerce, and educational institutions. It also assists with the recruitment of linguists. The institute provides a range of public examinations at the post-beginner,

professional translator, or public service interpreter levels. The examinations assess qualifications of practical and vocational linguistic skills, and are currently available in nearly 40 languages at centers throughout the U.K. and overseas. The Institute of Linguists' qualifications are recognized in education, industry, and professional life as a concrete measure of competence in language skills.

The Institute offers a Diploma in Translation at the postgraduate level in most of the major European languages. It consists of three parts: a general paper with annotations and two papers with semi-specialized options (technology, business, literature, science, social science, and legal). The examinations are very difficult with a high failure rate. They may be taken at any acceptable venue anywhere in the U.K. and the world. Another diploma offered by the Institute is a Diploma in Public Service Interpreting, which is an initial professional qualification available in a range of languages, in combination with English, including Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Croatian, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Mandarin, Mirpuri, Punjabi, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. It is available in four options (health, local government, English law, and Scottish law) and tests simultaneous and consecutive interpreting and sight and written translations into and out of English. Both diplomas serve as a qualifying examination for membership in the Institute of Linguists, and the Diploma in Interpretation also serves as a qualifying examination for membership in the National Register of Public Service Interpreters.

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Interpreting, Charleston; Monterey Institute; etc.), are not yet available or are not financially accessible.

- Encourage our graduates, young and old, who form part of the large army of translators and interpreters in the U.S., to become accredited and certified in order to add to the prestige and respect (and pay) which are long overdue in our professions. (Groups such as ATA and the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators as well as, occasionally, some state courts, offer such tests.)

Recognition and due respect will only be achieved inasmuch as our important work and profession are known, sought out, and acknowledged by the very society we serve: doctors, judges, attorneys, managers, defendants, educators, social workers, and many others who, sooner or later, will require our services.

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## International Certification Study: U.K. and Ireland Continued from p.14

To find out more about any of the organizations described here, please visit their respective websites:

- Institute of Translation & Interpreting: [www.iti.org.uk](http://www.iti.org.uk)
- Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association: <http://homepage.tinet.ie/~translation>
- Institute of Linguists: [www.iol.org.uk](http://www.iol.org.uk)

In the next issue, we will visit the second largest nation of South America and see the challenges faced by Argentine translators and interpreters. 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 [jiri@cetra.com](mailto:jiri@cetra.com). *ata*

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