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Western  
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Translators and  
Interpreters Inc

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Newsletter

**May 2005**

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## FROM THE COMMITTEE

The Committee apologises that prolonged absences by several Committee members since the AGM have contributed to a very low-key year, and in particular, no newsletter since November. Reading through this bumper edition should satisfy members, however, that remaining Committee members have not been idle. See specific reports for updates on the Review of NAATI Test Administration, the Competencies project, and the State Language Policy Review.

### Life Membership awarded

At the end of year function in December, the Committee was pleased to award the status of Life Member to Dagmar Dixon. Dagmar has for many years been a Fellow of the Institute, having served on the Committee in multiple capacities, most recently as President. Dagmar's service to the profession is well known, with up to half of Western Australia's interpreting practitioners having benefited from her teaching through Central TAFE, and even more from simply having the benefit of her expert advice and unstinting fellowship. The Institute is enhanced by Life Members of Dagmar's standing.

### Member networking

The December end of year luncheon at The Pines Restaurant, Rendezvous Observation City Hotel, was attended by two dozen members and partners. The food was sumptuous, the raffle prizes plentiful, and the company

convivial. The October evening at the Baysie Bistro in Bayswater unfortunately proved a complete no-show, but the handful of members who made it to the Left Bank in Fremantle for April coffee and cake took charge – as is their wont – and changed the menu to wine and a late lunch instead. The usual Friday after work timeslot with a topic for discussion seems to be a format that suits members better, however. At the February networking event, about a dozen WAITI-ites gathered at Central TAFE to receive an update on the Competencies project. The group spent some constructive time debating and rationalising the outcomes of the Perth and interstate workshops, input that was then fed into the national process.

### Telephone, e-Bulletin and website

The WAITI telephone number has recently been changed and will be amended on the website and in telephone directories in due course. Please note **the new number: 0432-832-036**. The Committee has also decided that enquiries received via either telephone or website will from now on be automatically posted to the e-Bulletin. Members are reminded not to respond to the e-Bulletin, but to make direct contact with the entity seeking interpreting or translation services.

### Dates to diarise, and Committee service

Please put the following in your diaries, if you have not already done so.

PD Workshops 28 May  
(Sat.) 2 pm

Effective Writing

10 am 30 July (Sat.)  
Topic TBA

Networking 24 June (Fri.)  
5:30 pm Venue TBA

AGM 13 Aug (Sat.) 10  
am

At the coming AGM the WAITI constitution requires that Bente Sorensen step down as Executive Secretary. All other positions on the Committee are also available for nomination. This is a very exciting time for the profession, but there is a lot more we can and should be doing. Committee service is both an excellent way of networking and of being one of the first to know what is happening in the market in which we all operate. Do give some serious thought to nominating. You will get back much more than you give.

### **WAITI President, Fran Roberts, meets with NAATI Consultant, John Cook**

The purpose of my meeting with John Cook was to put forward our member's views on NAATI, however, by the time I met with him, John was

already fully aware of the situation and everyone's thoughts and there was little need for me to go into detail.

We therefore spent the time with John outlining his conclusions and possible recommendations. He is of the opinion that the NAATI Board should be made up of practitioners and should be on a rotational basis. Similarly, he felt examiner panels should comprise practising Translators and Interpreters.

John stressed that these will be his recommendations only, and there is no guarantee that they will be accepted and implemented.

John also indicated that he had met with the NAATI representative in WA, Valerie van Loggerenberg, and understood and was sympathetic to her position and the difficulty of the task she has ahead of her. He did not elaborate on those comments.

### **Review of NAATI admin may vindicate practitioner concerns - but will the findings be made public?**

*WAITI has welcomed the appointment of consultants to conduct a review of the administration of NAATI tests, particularly as the indications are that their findings may validate practitioner concerns. WAITI remains pessimistic, however, that the NAATI Board will make the report public.*

Mr John Cook, former Director of Examinations and Assessment at the Office of the Board of Studies in NSW, is an expert in testing and test delivery. He therefore has the expertise to objectively assess the

legitimacy of the profession's oft-expressed concerns about the NAATI testing system and its operation.

In a letter to Western Australian practitioners, the Executive Director of the Office of Multicultural Interests, Dr Leela de Mel, described the review of quality control in NAATI test administration as 'important and timely'.

Traditionally, the profession has found it difficult to effectively communicate concerns about testing and test validity to NAATI and its Board. Testing expertise and current industry knowledge are not represented in either entity. When presented with substantiated concerns, the Board has typically been either unable or simply unwilling to objectively assess the criticism. There is nevertheless mounting evidence – including the current Review of Administration – that the Board is privately acknowledging unsolved problems.

Concerns about the validity and integrity of NAATI testing have been a common focus of discussion among practitioners in this State and across Australia. Dr de Mel represents Western Australia's interests in NAATI on behalf of her State Minister. In 2003 she convened a working group of educators and professional associations to inform her on issues confronting practitioners in Western Australia.

It was largely through the advocacy of OMI that NAATI in early March appointed Mr Cook and his colleague,

Ms Hilary Dixon, to undertake the review. In advance of their appointment, WAITI representatives expressed concern to OMI about the independence of the Consultants. Mr Cook and his colleague are acting under the direction of the NAATI Board.

The Consultants' Terms of Reference are to investigate the need for improvements in:

- NAATI examiner panels, including the selection and appointment of panel examiners, and examiner panel management and liaison
- Testing, including test setting and approval, test integrity and security, and test production and delivery

Some indication of Mr Cook's findings may be gleaned from comments made to members of the profession around Australia:

- the testing process should be transparent and accountable
- there is a need for standardisation of levels across all languages
- there is a need for tests to be authentic; to as near as possible replicate the real world: for example, the use of computers by translators
- there is no congruence between language and interpreting and translating skill: DIMIA's use of

NAATI tests as a measure of language competence is a case in point

- the practice of double marking of the same translation test paper is of concern; if it is to continue, both markers must be made completely independent of each other
- the composition of examiner panels needs to be re-visited; panels should comprise practising interpreters and translators and a mix of experience and 'new' expertise
- NAATI's revenue raising through testing of visa applicants should be separated from its testing of practitioners resident in Australia
- the NAATI Board should comprise practising interpreters and translators, on a rotational basis

Mr Cook was in Perth from 13 to 15 March meeting with the interpreting and translation industry and industry stakeholders, including: the Office of Multicultural Interests, NAATI (WA), WAITI, AUSIT, the WA Deaf Society, Centrelink, RPH and Central TAFE(WA), as well as individual practitioners, including several WAITI members. Toward the end of his visit, persons meeting with Mr Cook were left with a sense that he had been impressed by the consistency of the message he received from WA, and the depth of understanding and

expertise demonstrated to him by all stakeholders.

In March 2004 the NAATI administration declined to respond to a seven-page list of questions arising from the 2002/03 Annual Report submitted by WAITI (<http://www.waiti.iinet.net.au/publications.htm>). Mr Cook believes that a number of the questions address 'information that the NAATI Board should have at their disposal if they are to properly oversight the accreditation/testing program.' There nevertheless appears to be little evidence that the necessary information is readily available as a routine part of the program.

WAITI continues to receive extensive documentation from practitioners about matters of concern and has therefore been able to raise issues with Mr Cook relating to:

1. NAATI performance targets being compromised
2. Consistent failure by NAATI to apply technology
3. Systemic problems in NAATI test administration
  - Lack of clarity/consistency in standards
  - Clerical errors at NAATI central
  - Anomalies in Interpreter test recording
  - Inconsistent test invigilation

- Potential compromise of marker objectivity

4. Questions about panel qualifications, competence and management

Mr Cook is required to finalise his report by the end of June. In late March he indicated that his draft report, due at the time of going to print, would be made available for feedback from persons having had input to the review. In the first instance, however, the draft report goes to the NAATI Board. Whether the Board will endorse Mr Cook's suggested consultation process remains to be seen.

**Members are reminded that submissions may still be sent** by e-mail to [jcook@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jcook@bigpond.net.au) or by post to John Cook, 17 Range Street, CHATSWOOD NSW 2067. Mr Cook has given an assurance that submissions will be viewed only by him and his fellow consultant. Any communications should be sent direct to him, rather than to NAATI.

## NAATI annual report fudges the figures --- again

The Annual Report is downloadable as a pdf from:  
[http://www.naati.com.au/annual\\_reports.htm](http://www.naati.com.au/annual_reports.htm)

The 2003/04 NAATI Annual Report became available for public consumption in early March, almost five months to the day after the company's financial statements were lodged with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, and a good four months after its AGM.

WAITI's seven pages of questions arising out of the 2002/03 report clearly had an impact. The latest report is ten pages shorter, better written, avoids gratuitous repetition, and contains only two obvious typos. Notably, however, it makes available less information than in previous years.

For example, this year it is impossible to calculate fail rates by level of accreditation. The report provides breakdowns only of levels of accreditation achieved, and not the number of candidates seeking accreditation at those levels.

Table 1 ACCREDITATION AWARDED, BY SOURCE OF CANDIDATE (2003/04)

	TESTS	COURSE GRAD.	O'SEAS QUALS	TOTAL	ACCR. AWARD
T&I	736	168	191	1095	77%
PPI/PPT	177	140	0	317	22%
Adv. T&I	0	2	13	15	1%
Total	913	310	204	1427	
<b>Accreditations awarded</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>14%</b>		
Previous year (2002/03)	59%	26%	15%		

Table 2 SOURCE OF ACCREDITATIONS AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL ACC. (2003/04)

	T&I	PPI/PPT	ADV. T&I	TOTAL
Testing	52%	12%	0	64%
Course graduate	12%	10%	0	22%
Overseas quals assessment	13%	0	1%	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>1%</b>	

NAATI profits are down, but still healthy, and there is one impressive highlight that makes last year's exercise in calculating revenue from non-resident sources superfluous. The report leaves us in no doubt whatsoever as to the priority that underpins management decisions.

“A significant contributor to the sound financial outcome has been the continuing demand for testing by persons seeking permanent

residence in Australia. Should this demand diminish significantly, NAATI's financial position will be adversely affected." [WAITI highlighting]

*p.3 Year in Review by the Chairperson of NAATI  
p. 26 Financial Outcomes*

Otherwise, as usual the devil is in the detail. While the statistics that are presented are clearer, analysis reveals that sums, and the ability to present data in a meaningful way, are again not necessarily NAATI's strong point.

Did NAATI deliver 4289 tests as stated at pages 1 and 9, or as many as 4406 as indicated by actually summing the figures at page 9? Did it deliver 1559 annual tests, or 1674? Were there 2206 on demand test candidates, or 2204? Were 312 accreditations awarded to approved course graduates, or only 310? And so it goes....

For the sake of the exercise, we will ignore the figures on page 9, accept those on page 12, and give the Chairman the benefit of the doubt by assuming that the figures ascribed to him at page 1 are correct. Here then, is our analysis, limited this year by the excluded data. Please note also, that we have excluded Language Aide figures unless expressly stated.

The overall fail rate of all test candidates is the usual 80 per cent, give or take 80 candidates. There is no way of confirming, however, whether the 736 candidates who managed to acquire Professional accreditation from testing are in line with last year's staggering 82 per cent fail rate for Professional accreditation test candidates.

The figures nevertheless reconfirm that the surest way to accreditation is not by testing, but by proper training; through course work either within, or outside Australia.

Table 3 PASS/FAIL RATES BY PATH TO ACCREDITATION (2003/04)

	TEST	O'SEAS QUALS	COURSE GRAD.	TOTAL
Number of candidates	4172	282	270	4724
Accreditations awarded	913	204	310	1427
<b>FAIL RATES</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>0% (-16%)</b>	<b>70%</b>

The little table of new figures at page 16 is fascinating; more for what it doesn't say, than what it does. It appears to address at least one of WAITI's questions in relation to the supposed efficacy of testing as an incentive to upgrade, which is the 'worst case' scenario in NAATI's proposed model for revalidation of accreditation.

Table 4 REPEAT CANDIDATES (2003/04)

	TOTAL	NEW	EXISTING	(UPGRADES)
Total	4724	3258	1466	(54*)
<b>Percentage</b>		<b>69%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>(1%)</b>

By definition, an upgrade can only be awarded to an existing candidate, of which we deduce there to have been 1466 in 2003/04 (ref. p. 10). We are told there were only 54 upgrades, but cross-referencing to page 12 shows that 48 of those could have been from testing, and the balance were by course approval or overseas qualifications. Does this mean that the other 865 accreditations from testing all went to new candidates? If it does, then potentially 96 per cent of repeat candidates failed --- again. Further, we are told that most of the new candidates were sitting tests, which invites speculation that there was a 73 per cent fail rate among new test candidates.

Table 5 SOURCE OF TEST CANDIDATES (2003/04)

	ON-DEMAND TESTS	ANNUAL TESTS	O'SEAS TESTS	TOTAL TESTS
Total test candidates	2204	1559	409	4172
<b>Percentage of total</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>10%</b>	
Previous year (2002/03)	45%	44%	11%	

The whole discussion of new and existing candidates, however, is further confused by the report's statement that fewer new candidates sat more tests. First, were there 3604 new candidates last year, as reported this year, or 3605, as reported last year? Second, we have been unable to find the figures that were summed in support of the statement.

Table 6 NEW CANDIDATES V. TESTS SAT

	NEW CANDIDATES	TOTAL TEST CANDIDATES (without Lang. Aides)	TOTAL TEST CANDIDATES (with Lang. Aides)
Current year total (2003/04)	3258	4172	4289
Previous year total (2002/03)	3605	4216	4243
Variation	-347	-44	+46

Finally, the financials are preceded by the usual confirmation that no NAATI Directors (Board Members) had contracts with NAATI itself. There still appears to be no requirement to declare contracts with NAATI's shareholder government departments.

### **More challenges for practitioners in the health arena - WAITI could do more to help, with more information**

An April 2004 publication by The National Health and Medical Research Council raises some interesting questions for interpreters in the health sector. *The General Guidelines for Medical Practitioners on Providing Information to Patients* and its companion volume, *Communicating with Patients* – Advice for medical practitioners, are an update of guidelines established in 1993. A working group of medical and legal professionals and community representatives affiliated with the Australian Health Ethics Committee oversaw the development of the publications, but no interpreter or translator representation appears to have been included.

In presenting information to patients, the *General Guidelines* advise doctors to 'use a competent interpreter when the patient is not fluent in English' (p. 12). The doctor is further advised that a trained medical interpreter is preferable to a family member.

In a specific section on the Use of Interpreters (p. 12), *Communicating with Patients* directs the doctor to

'when and wherever possible' use qualified interpreters, and points out that for privacy reasons, the use of family or friends is inappropriate. Of key interest, however, is the assumption that, 'Accredited interpreters receive formal training...'

It is no wonder that the health sector feels it is acting with impunity by requiring interpreters to carry their own professional indemnity, if there is a misperception among doctors that practitioner accreditation means more than just a two or three hour test. The reality, however, is that the 2003 WAITI Practitioner Survey revealed that only 46 per cent of WA interpreters achieved accreditation through completion of a training course.

WAITI last year challenged Royal Perth Hospital on its failure to provide worker's compensation for practitioners, despite the fact that under the relevant legislation, contractors providing only their personal labour must be covered.

Similarly, a recent ruling by the ATO confirms that an ABN does not protect an entity engaging contractors from the obligation to pay superannuation, if the contractor provides only their mental or physical effort and is not free to subcontract the work to someone else.

The matter of informed consent also remains outstanding at Royal Perth Hospital. It is quite clear from the *General Guidelines* and *Communicating with Patients* that the practice of requiring interpreters to sight translate informed consent forms is contrary to the objective of achieving good doctor-patient communication. What the practice does do, of course, is reduce the time that a doctor spends with an NESB patient, thereby reducing the cost to the hospital of the doctor's time. Further, it shifts the onus of proof that there has been no error onto the interpreter.

With so few members who regularly work for the two major teaching hospitals that have interpreter panels, however, the information available to WAITI is limited. If the Institute knew more about the challenges facing practitioners in the health sector, there would be more it could do.

The publications are available to download from:

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e58syn.htm>

Office of NHMRC (MDP 100) GPO Box 9848 Canberra ACT 2601 Toll Free 1800 020 103	Ethics Program (Australian Health Ethics Committee) Phone: +61 2 6289 9575 - Fax: +61 2 6289 9580 Email: <a href="mailto:ahec.nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au">ahec.nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au</a>
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## In the news.....(and beyond it)

### DPP drops drugs case

*Extract from The West Australian -  
8 September 2004*

Doubts about the translation of Arabic words lead to the dropping of a case in which a young property developer had been accused of running drugs... (after the defense lawyer) provided new translations of taped conversations involving his client. The case came as a bitter blow to police who seized more than 400g of amphetamines and 140g of ketamine tablets during a raid to the home of the accused.

DPP Robert Cock said the new translation provided showed that the accused could have been talking about removing furniture from the house, rather than drugs. Mr Cock said, "We had a translation in which it seemed to us when the Arabic was translated to English by our translator that there were some quite clear admissions, but in the translation provided by Mr Shirrefs (counsel for the defense) it didn't look like an admission at all and that was critical".

*From Counsel for the Defense, Mr Laurie Levy*

The case against the defendant 'revolved primarily around a conversation' for which the Department of Public Prosecutions had provided two different translated versions. The translated transcript ran to about six pages, but its content was disputed by the defendant.

Defense counsel arranged for an independent NAATI Level III interpreter [sic] to translate the disputed conversation, and stipulated ability to interpret [sic] in accordance with a Lebanese dialect of Arabic. An interpreter was engaged through an

independent firm in Sydney, which advised that the DPP's version was inaccurate. Defense counsel therefore obtained a second opinion from an independent NAATI Level III Arabic (Lebanese dialect) interpreter. Mr Levy described the result as 'astonishing'.

'Not only was the transcription provided significantly... (about ten pages...) longer, ... it was, to a large degree, unrecognisable in content from the first two translations provided by the DPP.'

The DPP's version was found to be inaccurate, or missing large slabs of conversation. There was also considerable doubt about who was actually speaking at various times, with three different male voices on the tape not properly identified in the DPP transcript.

As a result of his experience, Mr Levy has this to say to practitioners:

- Whilst practitioners no doubt do their best to be accurate, if they are not aware of the context in which they are translating, the meaning can become lost.
- The consequences in a criminal trial can be disastrous – liberty and property are at stake.
- Practitioners should be completely conversant with the appropriate dialect, and if they are not, must disclose that fact to whoever has requested their services. In criminal law “close enough” is not “good enough”.

- Translations should include the period of any pauses that occur, for example on a tape (eg silence for 1 minute and 7 seconds). If this is not done, meanings of conversations can be radically changed.
- All transcripts obtained for criminal trials should be counter-checked by at least one other qualified person.

### **Judge's Aboriginal remarks under fire**

*Extract from The West Australian - 29 December 2004*

A Supreme Court judge warned jurors, “Many Aboriginal people do not speak English as their first language and even those who do, sometimes have learnt to speak it in a way which is different to what we might call ordinary English – they tend to use the verbs in the present tense, and use pronouns differently.”

“They have trouble with some of the consonants used in the English language – especially f, v and th. F and v are often replaced with p or b so that the word fight might sound like pight or bite.”

“They use gestures, which are often very slight and (use) quick movements of the eyes, head or lips to indicate location or direction.”

Aboriginal Legal Service chief Dennis Eggington praised Justice Len Roberts-Smith's controversial comments about the way Aboriginal people handled themselves in court as having

tremendous insight into how Aboriginal people struggled to cope in a court setting.

Justice Roberts-Smith also suggested that Aboriginal people avoided direct eye contact, had lapses of silence and often agreed to leading questions to avoid confrontation.

But it was a ruling that the defense lawyer could not ask leading questions of a prosecution witness which caused trouble with the Court of Criminal Appeal.

Justice Anthony Templeman said that there was no basis for such a blanket restriction on the defense counsel and said that it was inappropriate for Justice Roberts-Smith to have done so. Justice Michael confessed to having "a sense of disquiet" about what had occurred. He suggested that the comments in relation to Aboriginal witnesses reflected "an unproved stereotypical view of their characteristics".

### **How a News Story, Translated Badly, Caused Trading Panic**

*Extract from an article by ANDREW BROWNE , Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL - 12 May 2005*

Guan Xiangdong, a reporter for the China News Service, is more at home writing about tourism than about finance. But she was on duty in Hong Kong last Saturday while more financially savvy colleagues took the day off. And in a bit of enterprise,

she put together a story on the impact of a possible appreciation of the Chinese currency. Her sources: bits and pieces of news and analysis gleaned from local newspapers.

Yesterday, her efforts roiled the world's trillion-dollar-a-day foreign exchange market and sparked panicky emails and phone calls among currency traders and fund managers from Singapore to Stockholm as the US dollar tumbled. The dollar later recovered against major currencies....

The online People's Daily got hold of her story and farmed it out to a translator who put it into English. The translation took her speculative musings and made them much more concrete....

The People's Daily article was written in clunky English, but the first sentence contained what could be construed as a major development: a revaluation of the yuan or an expansion of the band in which it trades "will be announced" after a meeting between Chinese and U.S. economic officials -- a meeting that actually did take place ...

Based on the article, Bloomberg shot a headline around the world. ... When the People's Daily announced their story was a poor translation "[Bloomberg] reported that immediately"...

After yanking the story, editors at the People's Daily online edition expressed regret, albeit defensively. "We are very sorry that the translation was not

accurate -- it is our mistake," said one editor, who declined to be identified. But the editor also took a swipe at the China News Service: "Their reporter should be criticized. She put too many vague sentences in the story, which eventually caused our mistranslation."

*For the full article:*

[http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/business/technology/2002275257\\_translation15.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/business/technology/2002275257_translation15.html)

### **Movie Review 'The Interpreter' - starring Nicole Kidman**

*From*

[www.hollywood.com/movies/reviews/movie/2439678](http://www.hollywood.com/movies/reviews/movie/2439678)

To Silvia Broome (Nicole Kidman), the UN represents a chance for world peace and diplomacy. She should know: she works there as an interpreter and sees how the power-brokering halls of the UN avert global crises daily. Her world is turned upside down, however, when she overhears a death threat against an African head of state, who is coming to the US to deliver an important address. Suddenly, Silvia becomes a hunted target of the killers and is placed under the protection of Secret Service agent Tobin Keller (Sean Penn). But Tobin believes Silvia is hiding something--and he's absolutely right. Turns out Silvia has an extremely personal interest vested in the assassination threat. She was raised in the small, African country the dignitary hails from and witnessed firsthand how, under his malevolent rule, her beloved country turned into genocidal ruin. Uh-oh. Now, linked irrevocably to the assassination plot,

Silvia must find a way to elude Tobin, playing out a gripping dance of evasion and revelation that keeps them both guessing as they race to stop a terrifying international crisis before it's too late. Wake me up when it's all over.

*From an international e-forum for Japanese and English translators*

... I recently saw *The Interpreter*, in which Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman discuss [the] meanings of to go and to die. She says, "If I translated gone as dead, I'd be out of a job" (to the best of my recollection). – Contributor A

And then they very cleverly peppered the script subsequent to that moment with people using "gone" as a euphemism for "dead".

It wasn't a bad film. There were some subtle jokes/messages there for interpreters which shows they had done their homework, in particular when he's reading her the letter in the park, says "I'm sorry" twice, and then says "the second one was me". – Contributor B

### **New Minister takes over Multicultural Interests portfolio**

*Adapted from*

<http://www.ministers.wa.gov.au/kucera>

In the Cabinet reshuffle after the February State elections, The Hon Robert (Bob) Kucera took over the portfolio of Citizenship and Multicultural Interests from former Minister, Premier Geoff Gallop. Mr Kucera already had responsibility for Sport and Recreation

and has taken on further responsibility for Disability Services and Seniors.

Mr Kucera is himself a migrant to Western Australia, coming here at the age of 18 with his family from Wales. Three years later he joined the WA Police Service. During a long and highly decorated career as a police officer, he pioneered the concept of 'community policing' and had particular influence nationally in those areas of policing that impact on youth, women's issues, minority groups, domestic violence, Aboriginal and ethnic affairs.

Mr Kucera has been a serving MP since 2001, and on his election was immediately appointed to Cabinet as Minister for Health. He has also served as Minister for Tourism, Small Business, Peel and the South West.

Mr Kucera has a strong sense of social justice and is a passionate advocate on a range of important issues, including racial tolerance.

The Hon Robert (Bob) C Kucera APM MLA  
Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural  
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### **Whither the need for Interpreter and Translator Services in Government?**

*Adapted from Hansard - 27 April 2005*

During Questions Without Notice in the Legislative Council, the Hon Ray Halligan sought an update on the State Language Service Needs

Analysis from the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests.

On behalf of the Minister, the parliamentary secretary, the Hon Adele Farina, replied that the report had been completed in May 2004, and had made recommendations in the three areas of: WA language services policy, indigenous interpreting services and a state-based interpreting service.

Ms Farina told parliament that the Premier, as the previous Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, had approved a review of the language services policy in June 2004, and had advised public sector agencies in September 2004 of the intention to implement a review.

Ms Farina also acknowledged on behalf of the Minister, the need for development of a whole-of-government approach to the provision of language services.

For the full transcript:

<http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/hansard>

#### *Advice from OMI*

Early this year tenders were called for consultants to implement a review of the State's language service policy. Awarding of the contract was delayed by the February election and the institution of a caretaker government. As at the time of going to press, however, consultants have been appointed, and will commence a desk audit of policies that government agencies currently have in place. Work on developing the new State Language Policy will commence in July, in

consultation with professional associations, educators and relevant government departments.

For a copy of the report, Analysis of the Need for Interpreting and Translating Services within the Western Australian Government Sector:  
[http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/OMI\\_Publications.asp](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/OMI_Publications.asp)

### **Samaritan acts not a duty: court**

*Extract from The West Australian - 19 May 2005*

People are under no obligation to rescue strangers in danger, a court has ruled in dismissing an appeal by a man stabbed after being refused sanctuary in a fast-food restaurant by a security guard.

The NSW District Court found the burger chain did not owe the man a duty of care when he sought damages, claiming the guard's negligent or reckless actions led to his injuries. The judge said the guard could not have foreseen the stabbing.

The case was further dismissed in the NSW Court of Appeal. The presiding justices found that the guard's first duty was to restaurant customers and workers, who may have been threatened if the gang followed the man inside.

Justice Handley said that a stranger was not obliged to rescue those in peril. 'In general the law does not impose legally enforceable duties on one citizen to help another,' he said. 'The moral commandment to love one's neighbour is not enforceable by law.'

## **Practitioner training and education**

### **Curtin University Grad Dip stillborn**

Sadly for Curtin, the University's foray into the arena of education for interpreters and translators came to an ignominious end before even getting started, with only one enrolment at the start of first semester.

The most obvious reason for the University's failure to attract practitioners was the cost; each unit is priced at \$1075. WAITI's research in 2003 showed that 81 per cent of practitioners in Western Australia who derived their main income from interpreting or translation earn less than \$25 000 per annum. Four units full time study must therefore provide some tangible market advantage if the average practitioner is to be induced to commit at least 17 per cent of their before tax income to course fees.

For their \$4300, the prospective student could have taken units in Translating and Interpreting, Professional Ethics and Talking Across Cultures, and one of either Language in Society, Language in Use, or Researching Language.

The less obvious problem with that list of units, however, is that with the exception of the Translating and Interpreting unit, none are specific to the profession. Language in Use is available to students in 61 different courses, including midwifery, and the

most important – ethics – is in fact a Social Work unit offered in courses as diverse as Journalism and Public Sector Management. In our profession, where our ethics are to the communication process and not the client, it is hard to see how practitioner students would have much in common with others in the class.

The specific unit in Translating and Interpreting is non-language specific, and requires only a paraprofessional language level for entry. However, in as much as the Graduate Diploma assumes a pre-requisite undergraduate degree in some discipline, though not necessarily language, one has to wonder how many Paraprofessional practitioners could have qualified to enter.

Obviously not enough of those from Royal Perth Hospital, which was the prime mover in inducing Curtin to branch into the interpreting and translation field. The University was hopeful that moves by the ‘institutions’ to subsidise practitioner participation in its course would bear fruit in time for second semester. RPH, however, now has other problems that may well take priority over the professional development of its interpreters, contract or otherwise.

### **The Force is with TAFE**

TAFE has this year again managed to deliver the Health Interpreting Certificate Course, despite the withdrawal of subsidy funds from TIS and the closure by the state government of the Health Department’s

Multicultural Access Unit. After 13 years of delivery, enrolments in the course this year are again ‘healthy’, with 23 of the 25 places filled.

The 11 week course is a joint initiative of the TAFE Centre for Languages and Interpreting, and the Child, Community Health and Primary Health Care Directorate in the Department of Health WA.

For their two hour a week commitment, participants pay \$155, and successful graduates are entered into the Health Interpreter Directory, which is distributed to hospitals and health care services throughout WA.

In the meantime, the Industry Advisory Committee to TAFE interpreting and translation course management last month identified a need for Diploma level training in interpreting in emerging West and East African languages. The Federal government is forecasting an influx of refugees from those parts of the world over the next 12 months.

At the same time, the Committee has repeated calls for Advanced Diploma training to be offered in interpreting in Malay and Indonesian. This is the second year in a row that industry has expressed a need for Indonesian, and the fifth year it has called for Malay.

The difficulty in all three cases is that for course approval, NAATI requires TAFE to provide lecturers who have accreditation in the language, profession and at or higher than the

level that they are teaching. NAATI will not allow, for example, a NAATI-accredited Translator to teach Paraprofessional Interpreting.

If TAFE is to satisfy industry, its only option is to deliver training that will impart the necessary skills and knowledge to graduates, but will not lead to automatic NAATI accreditation on successful course completion. That is an option that could only be viable if industry were to confirm that it sees the training as more important than the credential.

### **Competencies Project – Scoping Project Draft Report released for comment**

As we go to press, the Services Industry Skills Council is releasing the Draft Report on the Scoping Project to develop Competency Standards for Interpreting and Translation. After a four week validation period in which those who have already had input and stakeholders in general will be invited to comment, the Steering Group will deliberate on the feedback and sign off on the Report before the end of June. It will then be submitted to the National Quality Training Council for approval of the next stage; writing the Competency Standards.

A Steering Group, comprising representatives of professional associations, practitioner educators, and NAATI, was convened by the host of the Project, the Services Industry Skills Council. WAITI was represented at the inaugural October meeting in Adelaide, by Heather Glass. As the national

leader in interpreting curricula, TAFE (WA) was represented by Dagmar Dixon.

National consultation with practitioners on the development of Competency Standards for Interpreting and Translation began in Perth on November 27. Some 70 practitioners from WAITI, AUSIT(WA) and ASLIA(WA), and unaffiliated practitioners participated. The primary objectives of the workshop were:

- To educate the profession about Competencies and their development, and
- To begin the work of defining the skills and knowledge needed for competence in the occupations of Interpreter and Translator.

The outcomes of the Perth workshop were compiled and agreed by the ten workshop facilitators and fed forward to the practitioner network in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne and Alice Springs. An enormous amount of behind-the-scenes work by anchor people in each state went into collating and compiling the output from each workshop as it emerged.

Of necessity, the information in the Draft Report is a summary of the key findings of the consultation process. Its primary objectives are to further raise awareness and garner philosophical and funding support going forward. A more detailed tabulation of the findings of practitioner workshops has been submitted to the Project Manager and

– it is hoped – will form the basis for the writing of the Competencies.

The Steering Group reconvened in Canberra at the end of March and spent a solid day in vigorous and constructive debate. Throughout April and most of May the Group worked on summarising the outcomes of the consultation process and supplementing and refining the Draft Report.

Basically, the Draft Report describes a continuum of training and career development, from Certificate IV through to University Degree, for Users of Language at Work, Interpreters, Translators, and Managers of practitioner services. It identifies at least 40 broad skill and knowledge competencies for each of interpreting and translation; a far cry from the paltry four units of competence for both occupations drafted by PSETA.

Most importantly, from the process of consultation with practitioners has emerged the concept of risk associated with interpreting and translation outcomes as the primary criterion for defining levels of practitioner competence. This is a major departure from notions of ‘complex v. simple’, ‘technical v. non-technical’, ‘community v. commercial’, ‘specialist v. non-specialist’ and other ill-defined terms commonly used by lay people to inadequately categorise practitioners and their work.

Some 180 people – for the most part practitioners – who participated in workshops, will be directly invited to comment on the Draft Report. Through

this newsletter and other media and fora, the wider industry and stakeholder community will also be encouraged to read the Draft Report and provide feedback.

As anticipated, the repercussions of National Competency Standards for Interpreting and Translation are far-reaching. VET sector courses will no longer require NAATI approval. It will be possible to assess practitioners in the workplace according to performance criteria that truly reflect the workplace. The standards that are established in the VET sector can be expected to articulate through to institutes of higher learning, and even to NAATI testing. But most importantly, the consultation process is stimulating and facilitating the emergence of a clear and unequivocal practitioner voice.

For further information and updates keep an eye on the following websites:

<http://www.waiti.iinet.net.au/competencies.htm>

<http://www.serviceskills.com.au/public/content/ViewCategory.aspx?id=266>

<http://www.ntis.gov.au/>

## **OPINION**

### **NAATI and the Profession – never the twain shall meet?**

*Far away on the opposite spiral arm of the Galaxy, five hundred thousand light years from the star Sol the NAATI administration continued to race further and further away from the Australian interpreting and translation profession.....*

With apologies to the late Douglas Adams, but a comment by a

colleague recently involved in a meeting with representatives of the NAATI Board and administration has caused the above (plagiarised) line from Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy to reverberate in my head ever since.

In the course of a discussion over the appropriate level of text for a Professional Translation test, the Chair Person of NAATI is reported to have explained that NAATI testing is about 'community translation', or translation for the general public. He was making the point that in NAATI's view the panel to which my colleague is affiliated had been setting test standards 'too high'.

Never having heard the term— even though I have been an active practitioner for over 25 years - I googled it (input the term to the Google internet search engine), and found the term apparently has some currency. There is even a unit in the topic offered at the University of Western Sydney. Basically, 'community translation' appears to mean, translation 'for a community'.

But like me, you may well ask; what does that have to do with the linguistic complexity of a text? As practitioners, we all know that the measure of difficulty in translating a text is not determined by the audience that will read it, and is rarely determined by the topic it deals with, but has everything to do with how the source text is written.

What is scary, though, is that in the minds of the NAATI administration, and apparently select of their advisors, there is a belief that if a text is written for the general public (aka, 'the community') it is automatically 'simpler' than a text for a business audience, or an industry audience, or a political audience, or a diplomatic audience, or a public service audience, or an educational audience, or an academic audience, or, or, or....

The practitioner understanding is perhaps best summed up in the following debunking of the notion of 'community' anything as a legitimate measure of practitioner competence:

"Community interpreting" can be required in any language and be performed by any competent interpreter, so the adjective "community" adds nothing to understanding of the world when applied to the nouns "interpreter" or "language".  
<http://www.ausit.org/eng/showpage.php3?id=851>

It is difficult to expect the Board to have access to current practitioner knowledge, however, when professional associations are not represented in NAATI; even on the Regional Advisory Committees. WAITI has practically worn a path to the post office with letters to NAATI seeking representation on RAC(WA). There is also no ASLIA presence, though the WA Deaf Society is represented.

It is even more difficult to expect some consistency in NAATI standards

given the much-touted recent reviews of both the Examiner and Course Coordinator manuals. The former is a NAATI in-house document that is supposed to guide the marking of NAATI tests. The latter is for the consumption of educational and training institutions delivering NAATI approved courses.

The most recent Examiner's workshops were open also to lecturers from approved courses. Imagine our amusement to find that NAATI had commissioned separate teams to revise the two manuals and not ensured that the two teams consulted with each other. The result is as you would expect; the standards to which examiners are supposed to mark are different from the standards to which lecturers are supposed to train.

In the meantime, I recently helped clean out the WAITI archives. As you may imagine, there was and is some fascinating stuff in there, much of which proves there is little that is new under the sun. Dating from the early 80s on we found letters of complaint to NAATI about: lack of clarity or consistency in invigilation protocols, variations in standard between languages at the same level, spelling mistakes and omissions in test papers, lack of proper criteria in examiner panel selection, and poor testing conditions, including problems with cassette tapes.

But perhaps the classic is a 1991 report titled *Interpreting Translating and Language Policy*, by Uldis Ozolins, now of La Trobe University.

If you can get your hands on the publication, I strongly recommend it as an excellent dissertation on the history and development of the profession in Australia, and as still – scarily – relevant nearly a decade and a half later. At page 90 Ozolins says:

‘To some extent, NAATI shows the signs of an organization now needing to run certain activities to remain alive, that is, spend a good deal of time on activities designed to perpetuate it as an organization. For example, one of the main purposes of testing now, particularly in the larger, already well catered for languages, is simply for revenue.’

Heather Glass, FWAITI

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WAITI MEMBER NETWORKING Regular opportunities for WAITI Members and Associate Members to exchange ideas, opinions, and learning in a convivial atmosphere with other like-minded, practicing members. Held on the last Friday evening of the month.

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