TransCert: Current Position

First: the good news. Originally, the partners in the TransCert project for voluntary translator certification had decided to award certification after a training period of only five (!) days and a pass in a multiple choice test. However, translation practitioners (mostly members of the Advisory Board and a few project partners who are themselves translators) managed to forestall this. Now the final hurdle will involve a 9-day process culminating in a text for translation, several open questions and, inescapably, in a multiple choice exam. The text for translation will be marked and assessed in accordance with university standards.

Now for the bad news. The Austrian association Universitas, which only recently joined the Advisory Board, has officially left it, saying it does not see the usefulness of certification for professional translators and prefers to concentrate its energies on activities that are of more benefit to its members. This is in line with the point of view of professional translators in general. For FIT Europe, the watchword is, as always, and as decided by its member associations at the annual meeting, to ‘participate in the project and try to steer it in a sensible direction, even if that does not seem at first glance to serve the interests of professional translators. The sector involving amateur and dilettante translators should continue to be monitored’.

The departure of the Austrian association went unnoticed. The project management apparently did not find it useful to inform the project participants that yet another translation grouping had chosen to leave, for the reasons given above (the BDÜ had taken this decision earlier). For its part, Universitas requested that the official letter announcing its departure should be circulated to the members of the Consortium. As far as is known, this has not been done, and one can only speculate as to the reason why. Unfortunately, this leaves the remaining associations (SFT and FIT Europe) and practitioners in a weaker position.

The 17-18 February 2014 meeting of the project partners and Advisory Board in Anvers had eligibility criteria for the training stage on its agenda. Here, the provisions of the draft ISO 17100 (requirements of translation services) were called into play. These define, in a text that is still not fully approved, which qualifications a translator should have (formal qualification, non-professional qualifications):

- a recognised university degree in translation;

- a university degree in another discipline and two years’ full-time translation experience;

- five years’ full-time translation experience;

- a certificate from an official authority confirming competence in translation.

This was accepted by all parties as a compromise, one which in effect mirrored the membership criteria of many of the European associations (but ADÜ, for example, does not at present accept as members translators, even with five years practical experience, that do not have a degree or have not passed the State examination).

But since in the future it is likely that forms of certification that conform to ISO criteria will be awarded by all kinds of translation agencies and associations (through the sale of training kits, for example - a not insignificant source of revenue) these agencies and associations will probably try to add the words *autorités non-officielles* [non-governmental entities] to the text of the Standard. In the English version the proposed formulation of the text is ‘governmental and non-governmental entities’. (At the time of writing, these contentious phrases are under review.)

From our point of view, this offers no benefit to translators.

Until now, this kind of certification, even if it has been corrected since, has been of no benefit for professional translators. If certification conforming to ISO regulations is to be imposed, we can only hope that the barriers facing organisations that award certification, as defined in ISO 17024, (general requirements for authorities awarding certification to individuals) will be considered so high that our area of activity, translation, will not be adversely affected.

The text of the ISO 17024 standard itself contradicts this:

*“8 Certification schemes*

*8.1 There shall be a certification scheme for each category of certification.*

*8.2 A certification scheme shall contain the following elements:*

*a) scope of certification;*

*b) job and task description;*

*c) required competence;*

*d) abilities (when applicable);*

*e) prerequisites (when applicable);*

*f) code of conduct (when applicable).*

*NOTE 1 Abilities can include physical capabilities such as vision, hearing and mobility.*

*NOTE 2 A code of conduct describes the ethical or personal behaviour required by the scheme.*

*9.2 Assessment process*

*9.2.1 The certification body shall implement the specific assessment methods and mechanisms as defined in the certification scheme.*

*9.2.2 When there is a change in the certification scheme which requires additional assessment, the certification body shall document and make publicly accessible without request the specific methods and mechanisms required to verify that certified persons comply with changed requirements.*

*NOTE Recertification can be used to achieve this verification.*

*9.2.3 The assessment shall be planned and structured in a manner which ensures that the scheme requirements are objectively and systematically verified with documented evidence to confirm the competence of the candidate.*

*9.2.4 The certification body shall verify the methods for assessing candidates. This verification shall ensure that each assessment is fair and valid.*

*9.2.5 The certification body shall verify and accommodate special needs, within reason and where the integrity of the assessment is not violated, taking into account national regulation [see 9.1.2 e)].*

*9.2.6 Where the certification body takes into account work performed by another body, it shall have appropriate reports, data and records to demonstrate that the results are equivalent to, and conform with, the requirements established by the certification scheme.”*

This leads to the conclusion that certification, while it would not be difficult to obtain, could well be expensive for the candidate. But an ISO standard is global in its reach and some bidders headquartered outside Europe would be able to offer lower prices.

Here too we must remember that the selling of training kits and registrations for the test are in fact purely commercial activities. As before, it is quite clear that where certification is concerned it is translators who will have to carry the burden of informing clients and colleagues and counter any future pressure on the market.

Equally, for a client wishing to purchase provision of translation, the situation does not become much clearer. Which certification should you trust? Indeed, is the word itself appropriate in all languages? Are certificates of more or less value than a university degree?

We can only hope that the world of translators (and their clients) will treat a future plethora of certification schemes of all shapes and sizes with a pinch of scepticism, as happened with the EN 15038 standard (translation services - requirements for translation services).

Natacha Dalügge-Momme, Vice-Chairman FIT Europe, 27 May 2014