

**Outcomes of the Symposium on the**  
***Future Development of Interpreting Practice***

**Held on 13 October 2004**

**Outcomes of the Symposium**  
*Future Development of Interpreting Practice*

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For



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## Introduction

In 2003 VITS Language Link commissioned Dr. Uldis Ozolins to conduct a survey of interpreting practitioners and to prepare a report of the research findings, as part of its *Good Corporate Citizen Program*. The Ozolins Report on the *Survey of Interpreting Practitioners* identified the current situation in the provision of interpreting services including a profile of interpreters, allocation of assignments to the respective categories of interpreters, training and professional development needs; and described responses to a number of survey questions addressing issues such as possible preferences for the accreditation of practitioners, remuneration, control of the profession and satisfaction with the current situation. The Ozolins Report concluded with recommendations for research, action and policy for addressing key issues confronting the interpreting services network.

In September 2004 the Ozolins Report was distributed to key stakeholders including other interpreting services, relevant government departments, purchasers of interpreting services, relevant educational institutions and professional bodies; and interpreters. VITS Language Link sponsored a symposium on the 13 October 2004 facilitating the opportunity for the interpreting services network of providers, purchasers and practitioners to respond to the findings and recommendations of the Report. Consultants LDC facilitated the symposium which was attended by 39 participants representing the stakeholder groups (see attachment 1-list of symposium participants).

The findings of the Ozolins Report demonstrate the need to address some fundamental issues impacting the purchase and provision of interpreting services, and ultimately the accessibility and quality of interpreting services provided to Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Participants were invited to the symposium as representatives of their organization or to present the interests of specific stakeholder groups, e.g. interpreters, culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The outcomes of the symposium, presented in this report, reflect the diverse opinions expressed by stakeholders and demonstrate the need for continuing dialogue on the future development of interpreting practice. The report provides a summary of the key issues discussed at the symposium and positions adopted on the implementation of specific recommendations of the Ozolins Report on the *Survey of Interpreting Practitioners*.

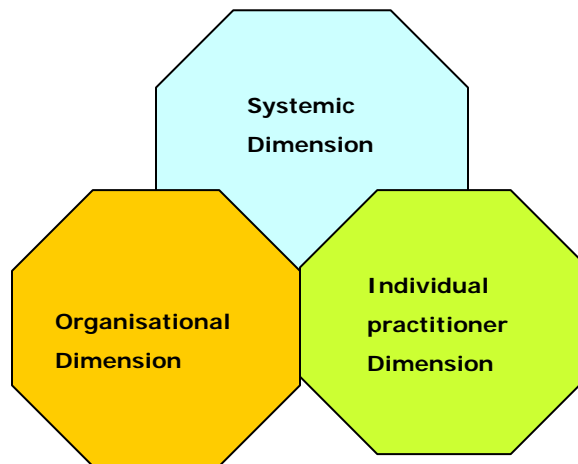
## **Symposium Program**

The symposium was held between 10.30 and 4.30 on 13 October 2004 with a program that included large and small group discussions. Participants were asked to consider:

1. Whether their organization supported the individual recommendations of the report.
2. Mechanisms or processes currently in place in the interpreting services network that can support the implementation of the recommendations.
3. Specific action that needs to be taken to implement each of the recommendations and by whom.
4. How respective organizations could be involved in implementing specific recommendations.

## **Symposium Outcomes**

To facilitate conceptualisation of the issues raised and responses by key stakeholders to specific recommendations of the Ozolins Report, the outcomes of the symposium are presented in the context of impact and action within the three dimensions of: individual interpreting practitioners, organizations involved with interpreting services, and the interpreting services system as a whole, as follows:



### **Systemic Dimension**

What are the systemic issues that impact the interpreting industry and the future development of interpreting practice? For example, with respect to:

- Government policy and service standards.
- Interpreter accreditation.
- Policies and procedures.
- Representation of interpreter interests by professional associations.
- Interpreter training and development requirements.
- Competitive tendering processes.
- Interpreter contracting structures and fees.
- Representation of interpreting industry issues by peak bodies.

### **Organisational Dimension**

How does the current situation impact individual organizations, including government departments, and what role can they play in the future? For example, with respect to:

- Providing and purchasing interpreter services.
- Training of interpreters.
- Accrediting and/or representing interpreters.
- Related policy and planning.
- Establishing industry mechanisms, e.g. Complaints mechanisms.

### **Individual Practitioner Dimension**

How does the current situation impact individual interpreters, and what action can/do they take in response? For example, representation of interpreters interests by a professional association.

## **Systemic Issues and Recommendations**

A number of comments were made commending the Ozolins Report as a useful contribution to the industry and thanking VITS Language Link for undertaking the research. It was generally agreed that the Report accurately represents the interpreting industry and that concrete actions are required to address issues such as the contracting of unaccredited interpreters including the need for policy development. One respondent however, questioned whether the survey used a representative sample group and therefore the extent to which the survey findings can be generalised across all interpreters. The same respondent

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also questioned the use of the term 'profession' possibly highlighting the need to develop and use agreed terms and definitions in future discussions. Other general responses were as follows.

General discussions about issues that impact the interpreting services system included debates and information sharing on the following:

- The importance of involving all stakeholders in discussions and actions.
- A national survey by NAATI has shown that the Victorian interpreting industry is different to other states, e.g. in Victoria self evaluation shows that practitioners don't seek training.
- Unaccredited interpreters need to be recognised if they cannot obtain qualifications.
- 'De-stigmatization' of the profession is required.
- Interpreting services for the culturally and linguistically diverse community need to be improved. The community has a right to interpreting services; the push for increased funding to ensure access to interpreters should be continued.
- There is a time lag in the provision of interpreters for new arrivals. Approximately five years are needed to train interpreters and therefore services cannot be provided readily to new language groups.
- Government budgets for interpreter use have not increased over time.
- It should be recognized that all industry sectors need pay increases.
- Ideas raised by the interpreting network must be valid regardless of whether they are supported by practitioners, e.g. the suggestion to regulate interpreting practice.
- Purchasers of interpreting services often believe that providing any/poor interpreting services is better than not providing a service at all, however, they may not fully appreciate the associated problems that may arise.
- 'Brand' development is needed to identify the profession.

Responses to specific recommendations were as follows:

### **The Profession and Professional Bodies**

#### Recommendation 12 (p.78 of the Report)

The results of this survey are communicated to professional associations or to other relevant bodies to show the overwhelming support among practitioners - of all accreditation levels - for a system of regulation for the interpreting profession.

There was considerable discussion and diverse opinions expressed about the need to regulate interpreting practice. Understandings and definitions of regulatory systems and processes, however, were not examined during the symposium as this was beyond the scope of the symposium agenda. Discussions to achieve common understandings about professional regulatory mechanisms and their advantages and disadvantages may therefore need to be further explored. Comments in respect of regulating interpreting practices included the following:

- Regulation is needed to address legal, health and safety issues which impact on clients, e.g. the example of an interpreter inappropriately answering questions correctly on behalf of a client undertaking a learner's permit examination.
- Some form of 'regulation' is needed, although what regulation actually means needs to be further examined. Regulation can be self-regulation.
- VOMA indicated that government registration is not possible. Government regulation only occurs in response to serious problems. The VOMA representative suggested that the industry should pursue self regulation and indicated that government provides support in training and guidelines for working with interpreters. It was also suggested that a complaints mechanism should be developed by the industry.
- A local government representative stated that policy to only use accredited interpreters is required and that national bodies such as the Australian Social Workers Association can set standards.

## **Issues Related to the Unaccredited**

Recommendation 2 (p.73 of the Report)

- (a) Establish professional development, training, and information exchange programs for NAATI unaccredited interpreters.

The recommendation was supported by symposium participants with the following comments:

- There is a need for information sharing, including sharing interpreters names. Services have interpreter's names and other relevant information and NATTI has a public register. Privacy issues however, also need to be considered.
- There should be a registration process of unaccredited interpreters with NAATI or VOMA.
- There are cost issues – the VOMA scholarship program for emerging languages pays for interpreters.

## **Recognition of Other Qualifications**

Recommendation 5 (p.75 of the Report)

T&I professional associations and researchers look at issues of qualifications additional to NAATI accreditation, and the educational backgrounds of practitioners, to assess to what degree the interpreting profession now approaches a graduate profession.

There was mixed support for this recommendation. Symposium participants agreed that interpreters' other qualifications should be considered however, translating/interpreting skills should be considered as the most important qualification. It was stated that the profession is a graduate profession as NAATI standards ensure a high level of skills by interpreters.

Other comments were as follows:

- NAATI restrictions are ad hoc and need to be taken into consideration with respect to employment opportunities.
- DVC scholarships are provided to promote the industry but they are not exclusive to graduates.
- The promotion of the translating/interpreting industry to graduates both local and overseas is required and issues of career paths, pay rates, preference for jobs, and professional respect need to be considered.

### **Issues in Remuneration**

Recommendation 9 (p.77 of the Report)

- (a) Slowly extend the policy of pay differential for different levels of accreditation to an industry standard.

Symposium participants agreed in principle to a pay differential for different levels of accreditation in order to motivate paraprofessionals to seek professional accreditation. It was indicated that at present there is a difference in pay rate of about \$2 per hour less for paraprofessionals. It was also suggested that agencies should adopt policy indicating their preference for employing/contracting professionals and that a twelve month sunset clause should be established once NAATI accreditation in a language is available to encourage accreditation of paraprofessionals as soon as possible. In addition, it was suggested that the pay differential between paraprofessionals and professionals needs to be greater.

Recommendation 9 (p.77 of the Report)

- (b) Negotiate with service users to ensure that fee differences dependent on levels of accreditation are not used as a means to contract less qualified practitioners.
- (c) Agencies adopt as a standard, a transparent process that indicates fee structures to clients and contract practitioners.

Agreement was not reached on negotiating fee structures with service users (b) and processes for indicating fee structures (c). Diverse views were expressed indicating that issues of competition/commercial imperatives need to be considered in the implementation of these recommendations.

## **Organisational Issues and Recommendations**

General discussions about issues that impact organizations providing or purchasing interpreting services, government departments, educational institutions and professional associations/peak bodies included debates and information sharing on the following:

- Organizations have to consider resource issues with respect to staff training.
- Professionals working with interpreters and purchasers of interpreting services don't always know about or understand the differences between levels of interpreter qualifications.
- Courts encourage staff training on working with interpreters.
- Interpreting costs within government agencies have to be contained, to show value for money.
- Some organizations are not readily working with interpreters, e.g. hospital staff asking relatives to interpret in order to reduce costs.
- Purchasers of interpreting services set standards in contracts and interpreters should meet the required standards.

## **Issues Related to the Unaccredited**

Recommendation 2 (p.73 of the Report)

- (b) NAATI publicise the possibility of Recognition of non-accredited languages more widely through agencies and professional associations and other means.

This recommendation was supported by symposium participants. NAATI reported that it already does this. Interpreters from overseas require two reputable references of their experience. NAATI has a pilot program with training sessions for emerging languages that will become a prerequisite for those seeking recognition.

Recommendation 2 (p.73 of the Report)

- (c) Agencies recommend Recognition systematically to their unaccredited interpreters.

The recommendation was supported by symposium participants with the following comments:

- Services reported that they see no evidence of this occurring and local governments use bi-lingual staff.
- NAATI should survey providers to identify the key areas of demand on a yearly basis. A data base should be developed to identify emerging languages.
- Services using interpreters need to get onto the NAATI survey list.
- High level planning does not include information/feedback to services using interpreters.
- NAATI's role needs to be 'advertised'.

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- Costs will be incurred if it is an issue of accreditation and processes are needed to:
  - Subsidise some of the costs.
  - Assist people to enter professions (pilot NSW).
  - Assist NAATI testing/costs, service help to subsidise the costs.
  - Emerging languages – costs including resources/materials/training personnel.
- Information sharing is needed to improve networking and to formalise structures, e.g. a newsletter for the industry (electronic/paper).
- Contractors must obtain NAATI recognition within a specified time frame. Agencies should seek recognition.

Recommendation 3 (p.73 of the Report)

- (a) Develop an integrated strategy of raising skills, ethics and operational effectiveness of interpreters in languages not currently accredited. This could be led by a policy agency such as VOMA, fitting into its present strategy of awareness raising of interpreting issues and current specific help to rarer languages such as scholarships for students attending RMIT courses in these languages. The strategy should link up efforts of agencies, educators, service users and policy bodies.
- (b) VOMA award small grants for interpreters in unaccredited languages to develop and maintain networks to bring together practitioners in those languages for support, debriefing and language specific PD, as well as providing a contact point for other PD activities.
- (c) Agencies place greater emphasis on securing feedback from clients served by unaccredited interpreter to determine any issues arising. This feedback should be suitably communicated back to interpreters.
- (d) PD and training providers and professional organizations ensure that unaccredited practitioners receive information on PD activities such as interpreting techniques, terminology and ethical issues, and short training courses.
- (e) Educators, to consider short courses of a non-language specific type on interpreting techniques, ethics and professional practice issues for practitioners in unaccredited languages, where specific language courses are not available in unaccredited languages.

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The recommendation was supported by symposium participants with the following comments:

- VOMA is integral in the integration of 'services' and should have a leadership role with services and other key stakeholders.
- VOMA should develop a more comprehensive strategy for industry integration and knowledge sharing. This should include providing links between users, e.g. newsletters, central pooling of information, website links, internet training.
- Information needs to be disseminated more effectively, e.g. training opportunities. Websites need to be accessed, e.g. NAATI and information about different levels of policy and service provision.
- NAATI should introduce a re-validation professional development test again. At present this is not enforceable. For example, the Victorian Deaf Society is a good example of how this can be achieved as they require professional development of all practitioners to continue in the profession.

Recommendation 4 (p.74 of the report)

- (a) NAATI review situations where seemingly competent practitioners have been left outside the accreditation system, perhaps through a dispute over the expertise of panels.
- (b) Consider the establishment of panels with credibility in the eyes of such practitioners, including the possibility of including a small number of authoritative figures from overseas if there is concern over a local panel.

It was indicated that this recommendation is to some extent already being implemented. However it was highlighted that having credible panels that are not biased can be an issue. The NAATI representative's view was that there will always be challenges to the examiners.

## **Training and Professional Development Issues**

### Recommendation 6 (p.75 of the Report)

- (a) Contractual arrangements between agencies and client institutions encourage professional development activities for interpreters and the staff of client institutions.
- (b) Ensure unaccredited interpreters have access to professional development.

The recommendation was supported by symposium participants with the following comments:

- Booking agencies offer training.
- VOMA strategy includes professional development of interpreters.
- In house interpreters provide training to in-house staff.
- The NMIT preparation course is now available.
- VOMA provides subsidies for interpreter training.
- AUSIT offers professional development courses.
- Purchasers of interpreting services need to allocate funds for training or take up offers for free training. At present purchasers don't generally take up training offers.
- Awareness and a cultural change are needed for people to recognize they need interpreters and skills to work with interpreters.
- There needs to be sharing of examples of good (and bad) practice.
- Private and non-private language service providers need to be working together.
- Unaccredited interpreters do have access to professional development.
- Testing of unaccredited interpreters – links to overseas.
- Other non-NAATI training should be acknowledged.
- Professional development of unaccredited interpreters should include developing English language skills as well as other professional skills.
- Unaccredited interpreters should be encouraged to achieve professional standards.
- VOMA, LSP, Interpreters and training institutions have a role.

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Recommendation 7 (p.75 of the Report)

VOMA and other organizations in the interpreting services network support and encourage the continuation of Paraprofessional courses in languages not yet accredited by NAATI, as initiated by RMIT in 2004.

Recommendation 8 (p.75 of the Report)

Current training courses such as RMIT investigate how to increase research in interpreting and translating.

The following responses were tabled for recommendations 7 and 8:

- Training in interpreting skills by RMIT is recognized by NAATI and is transferable across languages.
- Monash University research on accreditation, retention and training funded by VOMA should be disseminated more widely.
- Research involving private and public language service providers, needs to involve commercial providers.
- AUSIT is about to establish a research sub-committee.
- Research is needed into specialist needs areas and training, e.g. mental health.
- Other sources of funds for research and training should be considered, e.g. DHS, DEET, and Commonwealth Government.

## **Issues for Agencies**

### Recommendation 10 (p. 77 of the Report)

- (a) Agencies improve communication processes with contractors to ensure the appropriateness of communication between agency staff and contractors.
- (b) Agencies provide training and procedures to agency front line booking staff to ensure they can competently address professional issues that arise including issues of conflict and misunderstandings between client institutions and contractors, including the need for briefing and debriefing.
- (c) Agencies appoint wherever possible, staff who are dedicated to the professional issues that arise with interpreters.

There was agreement in principle on recommendation 10 with the suggestion that agencies should deal with these issues in house.

### Recommendation 11(p.75 of the Report)

Agencies consider the possibility of an industry body as a standing entity to consider inter alia aspects such as common codes of practice, accreditation, training, PD and feedback issues, and undertake agency-neutral research on issues of common interest.

Agreement was not reached on this recommendation. A number of participants were of the view that AUSIT should be the professional association responsible for this. Agency representatives indicated their concern about the lack of corporate membership of AUSIT. The AUSIT representative stated there is conflict of interest between agencies and translators that must be considered, and AUSIT is examining the development of a complaints process at present. It was suggested that just as agencies have played a strong role in supporting NAATI standards, they could also play a similar role with AUSIT by not using interpreters who aren't members of AUSIT.

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Participants generally concurred that the onus should be on service providers to encourage NAATI accreditation, membership of AUSIT, and networking of translators. Further, it was stated that agencies can contribute to sector development through the professional development of contractors. It was also expressed however, that agencies/companies cannot be mandated to respond or undertake specific action as there is no authority over independent agencies.

It was also indicated that VOMA is currently funding a training program at NMIT in TAFE. The program is currently being evaluated and may be extended to other TAFE programs.

VITS Language Link proposed that service providers should collaborate to establish funds for regular induction training for emerging communities. This proposal was supported by other agencies but concern was expressed about funding, and it was stated that there is not at present a level playing field in regard to line of credit from government, which would need to be considered.

It was also recommended that all stakeholders put funds into a research position, possibly via AUSIT, and it was indicated that AUSIT will provide a research model at its conference in October 2004.

## **Practitioner Issues and Recommendations**

General discussions about issues that affect individual interpreters included debates and information sharing on the following:

- Individual interpreters should take responsibility for their professional development, accreditation and membership with relevant bodies, e.g. AUSIT.
- Changes in the interpreting industry need to be spurred by interpreters.
- Many interpreters are not members of AUSIT because they do not consider there are significant membership benefits.

## Future Action

On conclusion, participants indicated the following actions and considerations for immediate follow up:

- Research the practicality of establishing a self regulation industry system. It was agreed that all stakeholders should consider funding a research study into the establishment of a 'Self-Regulation Board' for the industry.
- Undertake a review of other models that are already in place and that can further inform the interpreting services industry. Purchasers of interpreting services indicated they need more information and a professional body, possibly modelled on the medical profession, would help.
- All language service providers commit to a training fund to provide training for new and emerging languages in Victoria.
- Development of a complaints mechanism. VOMA to consider the recommendation to establish contract standards and a complaints process. Equity issues for interpreters regarding complaints need to be addressed.
- VITS to sponsor the next stage of the process which will include another symposium.
- AUSIT to review the option of corporate membership for interpreting services.
- Working parties to be developed to look at specific issues.
- Decision should be made with consideration of the fact that purchasers of interpreting services are not influenced by quality issues, the role of government is important as the main purchaser of interpreting services, the interests of interpreters should be paramount, and external perspectives to avoid fostering vested interests.
- No or poor interpreting services should be referred to the Ombudsman or Health Services Commissioner as individuals have a right to an interpreter in hospital or a government facility.
- AUSIT to take a leadership role.

## Attachment 1: Participants

	Category	Name	Confirmation
01	Author of Report	Dr. Uldis Ozolins	Confirmed
02	Language Service Providers	Senada Softic – VITS LanguageLink	Confirmed
03		Sophia Koutes – VITS LanguageLink	Confirmed
04		Merryn Tune – CentreLink	Confirmed
05		Con Pagonis – TIS	Confirmed
06		Ismail Akinci – All Graduates	Confirmed
07		Hulus Hulusi – On-Call Interpreters	Confirmed
08		Sandra Nestoridis – Monash Interpreter Department	Confirmed
09		Lyn Bongiovanni – St. Vincent's Interpreters Department	Confirmed
10	Clients - extensive knowledge and experience in LS	Yvonne Stolk – Mental Health	Confirmed
11		Senior Sergeant John Woodstock – Victoria Police	Confirmed
12		Carol Fraser – City of Maribyrnong	Confirmed
13		Paris Aristotle – Foundation House	
14		Spase Velenovski – Dianella Community Health	Confirmed
15		Anne Oakley – Palliative Care	Confirmed
16	Clients overseeing tenders/purchasing/contracts	Collette O'Neill – DHS	Confirmed
17		Sue Casey – DHS Diversity Unit	Confirmed
18		Ross Beaton – Department of Education	Confirmed
19	Policy Sector	Barbara Mountjouris – VOMA	Confirmed
20		Claire Hockley – VOMA	Confirmed
21		Claire Brown – Justice	Confirmed
22	Rural Sector	Sigrid Van Fondern	Confirmed

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23	Representing the issues from the NESB	Voula Messiimeri-Kianidis – Greek Welfare	Confirmed
24		Pamela Kosij – MRC South Central	Confirmed
25		Phong Nguyen – ECCV	Confirmed
26	Accreditation & Training Institutions	Sherril Bell – NAATI	Confirmed
27		Cynthia Toffoli-Zupan – NAATI	Confirmed
28		Mary Vasilakakos – RMIT	Confirmed
28		Mary Vasilakakos – RMIT	Confirmed
29		Filomena Schavio - RMIT	Confirmed
30		Liz Davidson – Victoria University	Confirmed
31	Professional Association – AUSIT	Sarina Phan – Chairperson	Confirmed
32		Chris Poole – Vice Chairperson	Confirmed
33		Collette Chau Wee	Confirmed
34	Hospital Association of Interpreters	Maryanne Dragovic	Confirmed
35	Practitioners - Extensive knowledge & experience	Dr. Zdenka Karakas	Confirmed
36		Marina Del Greco	Confirmed
37		Liliana Evans	Confirmed
38		Anh Ngoc Tran	Confirmed
39		Negassa Bedasse – Emerging language group	Confirmed
40	VITS Board of Directors	John Nieuwenhuysen	Confirmed
41		Trevor Tappenden	