

The ITI peer support scheme

Moving the mentoring scheme online has proved successful for tutors and mentees reports **Lanna Castellano**, who outlines plans for this year

Lanna Castellano is Chair of the ITI Mentoring Committee.

The peer support scheme in 2003

ITI has always tried hard to look after the newcomers to our profession. Our established members have struggled through that early period when you need work, but to get work you need experience, you know that academically you are good but you need to know whether you are good enough to make your living.

Individual help has been given in translation workshops, in networks and regional groups, through the guardian angel scheme and the less theologically named mentoring scheme. Last year, however, we launched a more systematic group effort. We set up a Yahoo online forum with a structured programme, but one that left full scope for asking questions and for the experts among us to offer support.

How it worked

The core part of the scheme ran from July to October. There was a series of targeted modules, with practical exercises and mentees' work posted on the forum, and then feedback from the module tutor and the other contributors, as well as from fellow mentees.

In the first module on CVs, for example, the tutor Cate Avery provided a background paper, the mentees produced their CVs, individual feedback was given; the contributors made comments and responded to queries from the mentees, who also made helpful suggestions. This led to a lively discussion on Marc Prior's argument

that we should be producing business profiles rather than CVs, and sparked off a debate on marketing and how to specialise.

There were modules on dealing with clients: quantifying and quoting for a job, for example, negotiating over the telephone (we're not too hot at this), producing invoices. Again, this led to other issues such as the nature of 'proofreading', hourly charges, fair terms and conditions, and a critique on letterheads and presentation. Jenet Peers provided a full brief on getting paid and what to do and say when problems arise.

The last module was hardware, software and translation memory, and the budget needed to acquire them. Michael Benis not only provided his detailed articles on several aspects but also gave immediate practical responses to the questions put by mentees.

The second phase, that of direct feedback on a translation done by small groups of mentees sharing a language combination, was harder to set up and asked a good deal of the ITI members who appraised the texts.

Improving the quality of one's translation is, however, the core of what one needs to succeed. A detailed individual critique is invaluable, but the best way of speeding up the process would be to work with an established translator, the latter receiving proper payment for revision and feedback. We hope that this kind of teamwork is something that we can discuss and organise with the networks.

What were planned as activities in the final phase – when the mentee becomes an active member of ITI and looks for her own one-to-one mentor – may or may not have happened so far. In this year's scheme, we will define the goals for phase three, to be achieved by the mentees on their own but with contact and encouragement from a tutor. The goals could be joining a network or regional group, attending a workshop or other ITI event or job-sharing. At the end, it would give a sense of achievement and raise the newcomer's profile within ITI.

Is this the right form of mentoring?

As far as the main part of the scheme is concerned – learning the practicalities of the translation profession – the e-forum has advantages over other forms of face-to-face mentoring:

- passing on expertise to a number of people rather than individually is more cost-effective;
- no one mentor can have all the expertise sought, and a good balance is created by tutors and contributors, all with their own angle on the subject, pooling their ideas; it also avoids the mismatch of personalities that quite often led to the failure of the guardian angel scheme;
- the essence of this learning is that the mentee contributes her own thought and effort and then receives a friendly critique of what she has produced in a semi-public context in which nobody is afraid of being thought ignorant or asking silly questions (in fact they are never silly);
- the contacts a mentee makes with her peers will encourage her to be an active contributor to ITI; in the longer term, former mentees are

likely to give back to others the kind of help they have received.

Dropping out

Twenty people enrolled, but the active mentees (and they were very active) boiled down to 12. This seemingly inevitable drop-out (or rather 'never-started') rate meant that there were more people providing support than there were mentees. And it was the men who dropped out, and those who remained were women – the reason for calling a mentee here 'she' (and we are in good company: Professor Newmark always refers to a translator as 'her').

The solution

Partly, but only partly, to discourage 'passive joiners' who exclude other would-be applicants, a charge will be made on acceptance for the next scheme. This contribution will go toward defraying the expenses and making token payments to organisers and tutors for their time and effort. It was thought by the tutors and most mentors in their replies to a detailed survey on the scheme that a charge of £50 is acceptable and that the quality of

APPLYING FOR THIS YEAR'S SCHEME

The 2004 version of the scheme starts on 25 May.

We already have a list of those who have applied, and they will have been contacted direct. If you would like to be considered, please waste no time! Ask the ITI office for a form. Contact details are on page 1.

The people involved in the peer support scheme

As last year, the organisers-cum-tutors are Cate Avery and Lanna Castellano. Also in charge of modules are Jenet Peers (payment issues), Anne Hulme (negotiating with

clients), Michael Benis (hardware, software, TM – the renaissance man of translating) and Marc Prior, an inspiring and original contributor. Our pleas for support from translation companies fell on deaf ears, but Gillian Hargreaves of Zebra Translations stepped in with practical advice from the work provider's viewpoint.

The translation appraisers were Nicolas Chadwick, David Harris, myself Lanna Castellano, and Luca Salice, with Janet Fraser in particular providing an innovatory expert review backed by a software assessment.

what is provided makes it good value.¹

Spin-offs

The suggestion by Marc Prior is that the expertise embodied in the ITI gurus' articles and briefs should be collected in a handbook – and he has offered to collate it. This would be not only for direct use by the mentees but also, in a more considered format, for use in 'fledgling workshops' organised by networks or at CPD sessions or weekend workshops.

Last year's mentees will be invited to observe the current year's scheme and, through a moderator, to chip in when they want to offer the benefit of their current, first-hand experience in establishing themselves.

And if the points system for qualified membership of ITI is adopted as outlined elsewhere in this bulletin, active participation in the scheme will count towards the total package.

1 For a summary of the response to the questionnaire, email Lanna at: lcastellano@ftnetwork.com

'Passing on expertise to a number of people by online e-forum is more cost-effective than face-to-face, individual mentoring'