



Working in translation and interpreting

The following are extracts from a live Q&A session called 'Meet the Experts' which took place on 11th December 2009 on the Guardian website.

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The original discussion is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yklzoyd>

Moderator:

When we discussed careers in the [languages sector in the forums](#) earlier this year, one of the most positive and key themes of the discussion was just how valuable languages are in the world of work.

Recently, the [Higher Education Funding Council for England](#) surveyed graduates and their early careers and found the [mean salary of language graduates](#) 3.5 years after graduation is £26,823, ahead of that of graduates of engineering, mathematical sciences, physics and astronomy and chemistry.

To explore the sector in even more detail, we have a panel of experts joining the forum to talk about roles in translation and interpretation.

Fiona Harris is a staff translator with the [Directorate-General for Translation \(DGT\)](#) - the translation service of the [European Commission](#). She is currently on secondment to the DGT field office in London where she is involved in a range of initiatives to promote language learning in the UK and in raising awareness of opportunities for linguists within the European institutions. Following her postgraduate studies, Fiona worked as an associate lecturer in translation before setting up her own UK-based business specialising in medical and pharmaceutical translation. She is a long-standing member of the [Chartered Institute of Linguists](#) and the [Institute of Translation and Interpreting](#).

Angeliki Petrīts is a staff translator with the [DGT](#) of the [European Commission](#). Since 1990, when she joined the European Commission as a Greek mother tongue translator with French, Italian and English, she has been involved in several language related projects including machine translation, and the [European Masters in Translation project](#).

Frances Thomas is founder of [Frances Thomas Translations](#). After graduating, Frances worked for the [Financial Times](#) as part of its in-house translation team for two years before moving on to [Temple Translations](#), a London-based legal translation agency, as a staff translator for just under a year. In September 2009, she went into business as a freelance translator, carrying out translations from French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese into English in various fields, including law, finance, business, tourism and marketing.

Neil Payne is the founder and managing director of [Kwintessential](#), established in 2003 to provide a wide range of multilingual solutions for the business and legal sectors. Its services include translation,

interpretation, cultural awareness services, conference interpreting management, multi-lingual website translation and design and more.

Anne Marie Graham from [CILT \(The National Centre for Languages\)](#) — a government centre aiming to promote languages in all sectors

Daniel Roberts, joint national secretary of [The Association of Sign Language Interpreters \(ASLI\)](#) and a practising interpreter. Daniel has his full professional status as a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter and is registered with the [National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People \(NRCPD\)](#). He is employed part time as an in house interpreter at the [Economic and Social Research Council](#) funded [Deafness Cognition and Language \(DCAL\) Research Centre at UCL](#), and works part time freelance. He is currently studying part time for an MA in applied linguistics.

Sophie Howe is director of [Comtec Translations](#). Comtec provides a complete package for every sector, covering technical, medical, financial and legal translation, marketing and website localisation, interpreting, multi-lingual desktop publishing and software localisation. With a global network of professional linguists, Comtec works with translators and interpreters in more than 200 languages.

Professor Myriam Salama-Carr is the director of the [National Network for Translation](#) and professor of translation studies at [University of Salford](#), which leads on the National Network for Translation

Tamara Bloom studied Spanish at the [University of Exeter](#) before training as an interpreter and translator at the [University of Leeds](#). She now works for the National Network for Interpreting at University of Leeds which leads on the [National Network for Interpreting](#)

Elizabeth Dickson is Admissions Officer for the [Institute of Translation and Interpreting \(ITI\)](#). Elizabeth graduated in June 2006 from [Heriot-Watt University](#) with MA (hons) in languages (interpreting and translating) French and German. ITI is the only independent professional association of practising translators and interpreters in the UK

Elisa Noetinger works at the [Spanish Embassy, London](#), and holds the [Chartered Institute of Linguistics](#) diploma in translation (English into Spanish). She has been working as a translator in London since 2002 at the Embassy and since 2007 also on a freelance basis. She is now doing an MA intercultural communication at [Birkbeck College](#)

Question 1:

I'm particularly interested in translating/interpreting in Italy, as I am a Modern Languages student in Italian and Spanish and would like to work immediately with my languages as soon as I graduate next year. Would you say that studying translating and interpreting abroad is more challenging, because of working into the foreign language?

Also, if and until I obtain a professional qualification (which I'm not able to do in the immediate future), how easy is it to get translating jobs without it? I have translated in the past as part of something else, but as a full-time job I am not aware of the possibilities around for those who are not qualified as professionals but have studied the languages.

Responses:

Translation is best done into your strongest language, or your mother tongue. It is possible to study translation and interpreting abroad, of course, and many people do so, but if you are going to get a professional qualification, you should do it into your mother tongue. Translation employers will be looking for you to translate into your main language.

Interpreting is a bit different - some interpreters, for instance those that work for international organisations, will interpret only into their main language/mother tongue but other interpreters will need to be strong in both their main language and their foreign languages.

Having said that, any experience of living, working or studying abroad will help you enormously and will help develop your foreign language skills.

It is easier to get work if you have experience - that applies to all careers. You may find it helpful to visit the ITI website for information on how to get paid work in translation but another option is to visit the National Network for Translation website

(www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/translation/resources.html) where there is a repository of information for undergraduates on careers in translation and how to get started in the profession

Anne Marie Graham - CILT

You need to ensure that the translating programme you enrol on abroad allows you to work extensively into your main language as this is the one you will translate into. Professional qualifications (for translation) are not necessarily required but they help you find out about the profession and acquire translation techniques that are not taught as such in a language degree. A translation degree will also help you acquire research skills in specialised subjects which you are not familiar with to start with. As for interpreting, any serious interpreting work will be carried out by trained interpreters.

Myriam Salama-Carr – National Network for Translators

First of all I think it's important to point out that the vast majority of professional translators always work into their mother tongue (exceptions are occasionally made if someone has spent a considerable length of time living in a country where the language is spoken and has near native speaker fluency), so if you are thinking of studying translation abroad, I would look for a course that offers training in translation into English. I'm sure courses like this do exist, so have a look into it if that's what you want to do.

With regard to getting a job without a formal qualification, translation agencies do normally ask that

you have a Masters in translation or the Institute of Linguists Diploma in Translation (DipTrans). The DipTrans might be a good option for you in that it offers you the chance to just sit the exams (which I think cost about £500) without taking the course beforehand, so if you have already done some translation that might work for you. Alternatively you could try building up some translation experience by doing work on a voluntary basis for charities or NGOs, or doing a work placement at a translation agency.

I hope that answers some of your questions!

Frances Thomas – freelance translator

Please note: Most translators work from the foreign language into their mother tongue. This is considered best practise as it ensures a higher quality of target text. Even if you lived and worked in Italy it is likely that you would work from Italian into your mother tongue. If you are a freelance translator, you are much more likely to get work translating into your mother tongue as clients know the target text is more likely to sound like it was originally written in the target language (which is the ultimate goal of translation).

One of the major advantages of a career as a translator/interpreter is that there are likely to be jobs in a number of countries (especially those countries where your main languages are spoken). Furthermore, if you are a freelance translator/interpreter, you can move country at any point without losing clients or disrupting your work.

A qualification in translation is not essential to get work as a translator but is an extremely good idea as it equips you with the necessary skills and it shows potential clients that you have learnt the necessary skills and been tested on them. Remember that if you return work which is not up to standard, the client is unlikely to come back to you with more work in the future. So make sure you are confident about your skills as a translator - getting a qualification in translation (and therefore having feedback from industry professionals) is one way of ensuring that your translations are up to standard.

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

This depends a bit on the individual institution you go to and the language combinations/directions you offer. If you are forced to interpret and/or translate into languages you would normally expect to work out of, you may find that more of a challenge. Having said that, if the course allows you to work in a direction you are confident with, you might prefer the obvious benefits of living and studying within the linguistic and cultural environment of one of your languages. You'll have to weigh up the different factors involved in relocating, and look very carefully at the different schools and courses offered.

As for job opportunities without a translation qualification, training is the principal means of learning translation and interpreting skills and developing your own ability. However, while it is an advisable

step if you are looking to take your career in this direction, there are still possibilities for gaining experience in the meantime.

Elisa Noetinger – Spanish Embassy

XX

Question 2:

Since I am soon due to graduate I have been looking into potential employment. I have applied for the Civil Service Faststream along with a couple of other Government schemes. But I am now at a loose end since the odds are stacked against me falling into the Faststream on my first try.

I am due to graduate with a 1st or high 2.i. I have travelled extensively around the Middle East and spent summers before university learning Arabic in various countries. Ideally I would love to gain some employment related to the Middle East and where I can use my Arabic.

I have considered postgraduate study, and have applied for various postgraduate scholarships at US Colleges.

Basically I am posting here to see if anyone has any ideas of schemes I can apply for.

Thank you.

Confused History Student.

Responses:

It is difficult to advise here as it would depend a lot on the level of linguistic expertise. Spoken Arabic would certainly help to get by but for translation into English, degree level Arabic (at least) would be required.

Myriam Salama-Carr – National Network for Translators

Have you looked into careers with GCHQ? You might be a candidate for a role as a language and culture specialist. Visit www.gchq-careers.co.uk/Students-and-graduates for more information on what is available, and the profile of candidates they require. Good luck!

Anne-Marie Graham - CILT

XX

Question 3:

I am due to graduate in July with a degree in Spanish and French, I have enjoyed the translation work I have done during my course and I am interested in becoming a translator however all the jobs advertised seem to want people with experience. Do you have any advice for how to get started? Is it essential to have a Masters in translation?

Responses:

You are in a difficult position and one we come across almost daily. Agencies want experienced translators and newbies can't get the experience because they are not experienced! It is not essential to have an MA but you would need to become accredited in some way (ITI, IOL, etc).

What we did at Kwintessential to help people in your situation was give them work deemed as not business-critical. Some of our clients want simply to understand a document and we offer them much cheaper rates on the understanding that we are going to use someone not yet fully qualified. Most of them are happy with this. We have to pay the translator a bit less but at least they get the experience.

So maybe approach agencies on this basis.

Neil Payne - Kwintessential

An open competition for English mother tongue translators to work for the European institutions in Brussels and Luxembourg will be published next summer (probably in July 2010). In order to register for the competition you need to have a university degree (BA) in any subject and be able to translate out of two official EU languages into English. No experience is required. You don't need to have an MA in translation either in order to sit for the competition. Of course, an MA in translation will help you better prepare and, will theoretically enhance your chances to succeed but is by no means compulsory.

For more information on the competitions and in order to apply online, please check regularly the EPSO website: www.eu-careers.eu

For more information on the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission, including the translator profile and information on programs which have joined the European Master's in Translation Network, please check the following website:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/index_en.htm

Good luck with your career as a translator!

Angeliki Petraris - DGT

A lot of work is passed on by the recommendation of colleagues, so it is an advantage to make yourself known to others in the profession. You should, therefore, seriously consider joining ITI as an Associate while you are gathering the required experience to become a qualified member. As an Associate of ITI you will have the opportunity to make contact with established translators at workshops and seminars run by ITI and by its Networks and Regional Groups.

As an Associate you can also join one of ITI's language or subject Networks and also your local ITI Regional Group. The Networks and Regional Groups offer professional support and guidance as well as an important opportunity to break out of the isolation of freelance life.

ITI also operates a Peer Support scheme to give advice and support to new members and those seeking extra guidance. You would also receive the ITI bulletin which helps to keep you up to date with industry news.

If you are determined to be successful as a translator, ITI is here to help you help yourself. For more information on joining ITI please see our website www.iti.org.uk

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

I would strongly recommend approaching translation companies for work experience. We regularly take on students for either short (1-2 weeks placements) or longer periods (3-6 months). This provides a valuable insight into working in the industry and what companies are looking for in their freelancers. However it is important to agree with the company before starting the placement what type of work you will be involved in to ensure that the placement is worthwhile. You can work with them to agree a plan and objectives at the start.

You can find out more about placements in translation companies on the Routes into Languages website. There is a database to search for available placements. Go to www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/translation/placement/

Sophie Howe – Comtec Translations

As other members have already mentioned, getting started in the translation industry is very much a chicken and egg situation.

I would definitely recommend doing a Master's if possible - lots of the courses are available on a part time basis, and competitive grants are available, too, e.g. the AHRC - see <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/PPM%202008%20Guide.pdf>

The course will give you more confidence in your own skills and, just as importantly, will give your first clients that initial extra bit of confidence in your skills, too, and give you the chance to build up your reputation as a freelancer.

You could also try gaining experience by volunteering your translation skills. You can apply with big charities such as Oxfam, MSF, etc., or research smaller, local charities that may require your help.

Emma - In-house translator, Comtec Translations

Have a look on our website www.iti.org.uk under 'Getting Started'

There is information for translators and interpreters and documents which you can download.

Elizabeth – ITI Admissions Officer

XX

Question 4:

I'm doing an MSc this year in Translation and Conference Interpreting, working from French and Spanish into English. I may apply to the EU but will probably end up working as a freelance conference interpreter and translator when I graduate. I'm trying to think strategically about where I should live next year to optimise my possibilities of finding work, and I was wondering if you could give me any advice on where I should aim to live in France, Spain or elsewhere.

Responses:

The European Commission has two separate language services, DG Translation and DG Interpretation. They **recruit** staff **independently** of each other and on different criteria. Linguists at the Commission work exclusively for one or the other. As a result you have to choose which one of the two you want to do.

There is a huge shortage of English mother tongue translators and interpreters in the European institutions.

If you are interested in working as a translator (staff member), you need to pass an open competition (for the procedure and requirements look at my answer to Amy). If you prefer to work as a freelance, then you need to participate in a call for tenders and have your bid win. For more information on tenders, please check the following website:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/workwithus/contractor/index_en.htm

In order to work as an interpreter, you need either to pass an open competition (look at my answer to Amy) or, if you want to work as a freelance, pass an accreditation test. Accreditation tests take place several times a year and more information can be obtained on the following website:

http://scic.ec.europa.eu/europa/jcms/c_6328/career-opportunities-with-dg-interpretation

If you work as a staff member, translator or interpreter, you will be based in Brussels or Luxembourg. If you work as a freelance, you can choose where you prefer to leave.

Angeliki Petraris - DGT

Working abroad is fine but you must make sure that you keep up with developments in your own target language. Many translation users are happy to deal with translators who are based abroad as so much is online. But it will depend of course on the area in which you translate, how 'global' the company is.

Myriam Salama – Carr – National Network for Translation

In addition to the response given above, as a freelance conference interpreter you would expect to travel for most of your work, so in deciding where to live you would need to make sure you were well-connected as much as anything else. For translation you would probably work largely from home, communicating electronically, meaning in theory you can live wherever you choose.

The only exception to that is that if you are trying to start out as a freelance interpreter for EU institutions, you may want to start off living locally, in order to keep travel and expenses down while you build up experience. You can, of course, wait until finding work/passing an accreditation test before relocating!

Tamara Bloom – National Network for Interpreting

XX

Question 5:

Dear Fiona,

I would like to apply for a paid translation internship at the DGT in August next year (which would be the next intake).

I will soon be graduating from Imperial College in London with MSc in Medical and Scientific Translation with Translation Technology. I also have an undergraduate degree in Chemistry.

I am a Polish native, educated in the UK and would have to demonstrate knowledge of at least one more EU language. I have attended a bilingual French Lycée in Poland for four years, but for my final year I moved to a different, scientifically profield Lyceum. I ultimately have not graduated from the French Lycée. Would the proof of the time spent at the French Lycée in my application form be enough? Ultimately, I also have a certificate proving INTERMEDIATE knowledge of Spanish. Would you encourage me to enroll on a French course in order to obtain some more certification? I also speak German but have no certificates proving my knowledge. Maybe obtaining a certificate in that language would be a better option?

I have another question, if I may - I am a bit confused about the criteria for selection of candidates. I understand the internship is for young graduates, yet work experience (CV) seems to be an important factor? I have a strong degree but not much experience...

Responses:

To apply for an internship with the DGT you will need to furnish proof of a very good knowledge of two source languages (http://ec.europa.eu/stages/information/application_en.htm). Your problem seems to be what language to stipulate in addition to English - French or Spanish? I suggest you choose your strongest language in terms of translation ability out of it (as opposed to your active knowledge of it). Assuming it is French, state on your CV that you have done four years of secondary school in that language at a French Lycee in Poland (that will serve as proof you have studied in the language). It is also to your advantage that you mention your other languages - Spanish and German. Do not be too

modest as I understand the selection process is based on the applications only, i.e. a comparison of CVs.

I would not worry too much about lacking experience for the DGT traineeships. For DGT, languages are very important and you seem to be well placed in that respect, plus I seem to recall that you will have an MA in Translation by then which will stand you in good stead. Plus part of the aim of traineeships is to give you work experience. For more enquiries please feel free to get in touch by e-mail with our unit dealing with the "stages".

dgt-recruitment-and-traineeships@ec.europa.eu

Fiona Harris - DGT

XX

Question 6:

I am a French and Spanish freelance translator, but I am currently learning Greek to add another language to my belt. I was wondering what the opportunities to work as a freelance translator of Greek into English are like. I know there can't be that many translators working from Greek into English so I imagine the opportunities (and potentially the rates?) must be quite good. Any advice or guidance you could give me would be very much appreciated!

Responses:

If you are attracted by a career as a translator in the European institutions, you would love to hear that there is a big shortage of English mother tongue translators (look at my answer to above).

A language combination such as French and Spanish into English is very useful as is Greek into English. In 2008 the English Department translated almost 200,000 pages (1 page = 250 words) out of which 16 % were out of French, 14% out of German and 7% out of Greek. 50% of translations were done by freelance translators.

So, whether you are interested in working as a staff member or as a freelance translator, your language combinations are in demand. Please, look at my 2 answers above concerning the procedure to follow for both paths.

Angeliki Petrīts – DGT

XX

Question 7:

Dear Neil,

What is the best way to apply for work with Kwintessential as a newbie?

Responses:

It depends on your qualifications. If you fully qualified and experienced you would sign up at www.linguist-jobs.com

If you were looking to get into the industry as a newbie then it's a case of sending us a covering letter & CV. We would then add you to our database and contact you as & when jobs come in for your language pair.

Neil Payne - Kwintessential

XX

Question 8:

Can anyone give me any advice about becoming an interpreter or translator in the UK?

Responses:

For those who want to be an interpreter in the UK you can consider the Criminal Justice System, probation service, Border Agency (immigration), Home Office, Police, courts, NHS and more. As well as the obvious first class language skills and educational qualifications you should acquire a Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) (http://www.iol.org.uk/qualifications/exams_dpsi.asp) and join either the ITI interpreter categories or the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI).

For translators, acquiring a specialism in a subject such as engineering, medicine, law etc would be a significant advantage and help you to stand out in the crowd.

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

For British Sign Language interpreting in England, Wales and Northern Ireland you should follow the routes to qualification (<http://www.nrcpd.org.uk/page.php?content=11>) set out on the The National Registers for Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) website - www.nrcpd.org.uk

Daniel Roberts – BSL Interpreter

XX

Question 9:

I have recently graduated with a degree in Japanese language and Linguistics and I have been looking for jobs where I could use my language skills, but I have found most listings for Japanese-related jobs will specify that they only want a native speaker. It's extremely frustrating to feel that I'm qualified for

a job but be turned away because I'm not actually Japanese. Do you have any advice to help me overcome this?

I've been thinking of looking for an internship with a translation agency to help me get more experience. Do you think this would be worthwhile?

Also, I've looked into doing freelance translation but find it all very confusing. How would one break into doing freelance work? What should I charge and how can I best present myself to agencies?

Responses:

Working into your native language should be a positive really. There are more English to Japanese translators than Japanese to English so it should work in your favour.

I know that quite a few agencies specialise in English - Japanese. Have you approached any? Also try approaching agencies in Japan.

Here is an article on [getting started as a freelance translator](#).

Rates vary wildly. You may simply want to come in at any price initially to get work. We pay our freelancers for Japanese > English anything from £60 - £80 per 1000 words. As a starter, you would want to come in on the low, build up trust for a while and then up it gradually. An agency knows your worth after a while and won't quibble over the extra expense....well if they are a decent agency anyway. Also try proz.com and bidding for work. You may pick up a bit there.

An agency is only really interested in your qualifications, experience and rates. Keep it simple!

Neil Payne – Kwintessential

A degree in Linguistics does not prepare you for translation and interpreting work but the fact that you can work from Japanese into English should really give you an edge. Some employers though look for cultural knowledge (not only linguistic knowledge) and it may be the reason why a native speaker of Japanese is preferred, perhaps for dealing with clients in Japan? (I know of a similar case with Chinese). Try contacting translation companies which specialise with sino-japanese languages. There are some and I am sure they will be interested in someone who can work from Japanese into English. Or offer to work as an intern first?

Myriam Salama-Carr – National Network for Translators

XX

Question 10:

Thanks to all the panel for such helpful replies.

As far as getting experience goes, I am going to definitely look into Kwintessential and also into ITI

membership. If I don't manage to find any agency in Italy itself or company that needs translations, how easy is it to gain experience via the internet? I would align myself with one of the last post-ers in asking what the first steps should be to get one's foot in the door.

Responses:

Online translation/interpreting communities can be useful ways of finding tips, networking, sharing resources and finding jobs. Do be careful though; potentially anyone can become a member or post a job, so do make sure that you are happy with the legitimacy of the employer, and don't feel pressured into pushing your prices too low. Avoid accepting underpaid work or unrealistic deadlines in the name of 'competitiveness'!

Tamara Bloom – National Network for Interpreting

One thing you may want to consider if you are starting out is finding a mentor. If you can find an experienced translator who is perhaps looking for someone to take under their wing and to help with basic things like spell checking, punctuation, etc in the translations carried this may be a way of getting experience. I know of a few people in this set-up and it works well as the junior slowly starts to get more responsibilities.

I'm not sure if there have been any posts yet referring readers to websites for freelancers? If there have been, excuse me, but here are the favoured ones:

- <http://www.proz.com/>
- <http://www.translatorscafe.com>
- <http://www.peopleperhour.com/>

Neil Payne - Kwintessential

I agree that having a mentor is a good idea, particularly if the interpreter is still training and developing, or working freelance. ASLI, The Association of Sign Language Interpreters, offers a list of trained mentors for training interpreters:

<http://www.asli.org.uk/find-a-mentor-p117.aspx>

Dan Roberts – BSL Interpreter

XX

Question 11:

As we have Anne Marie Graham & Dan Roberts available for comment I'd like to know if they can elaborate upon what qualifications there are at present for interpreters.

There is the DPSI, those registered on the NRPSI, Certificate in Community interpreting, Metropolitan

Police Test and then accredited members of the IoL, ITI and APCI.

It would be nice to get your feedback on what a budding interpreter would have to get in order to be recognised as "qualified" in the UK.

Neil Payne - Kwintessential

Responses:

Plus of course Masters and Postgraduate Diploma programs in Interpreting, Conference Interpreting, Interpreting and translation, etc.

Tamara Bloom – National Network for Interpreters

As Neil mentions, the main qualification for spoken language interpreters is the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) - a degree level qualification. This is a requirement for interpreters wanting to work in the English legal system (and to a lesser extent, in the Scottish system). This is because we operate a National Agreement in the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales

(http://frontline.cjsonline.gov.uk/includes/downloads/guidance/race-confidence-justice/National_Agreement_on_Use_of_Interpreters-August_2008.pdf)

which requires interpreters to be a member of one of the national registers for interpreters (National Register for Public Service Interpreters -NRPSI- for spoken language interpreters, National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People -NRCPD- for sign language interpreters). Interpreters qualified with DPSI or approved Masters programs can join NRPSI. Interpreters qualified with NVQ Level 4 in sign language interpreting or approved Masters programs can join the NRCPD. There is no national agreement in Scotland, but the DPSI is used and valued.

The Diploma in Public Service Interpreting is offered in 3 specialisms; law (English or Scottish), local government or health.

If you want to work as an interpreter in Court, you must do the DPSI, the NVQ in sign language interpreting or a Masters programme approved by one of the National Registers to get work. If you want to work for the Metropolitan Police, they operate their own interpreting test, which is very demanding and also counts an entry qualification for the National Register for Public Service Interpreters.

There is no national agreement in the NHS or other public services - this only applies to the Criminal Justice System. However, individual primary care trusts and public services will usually have a service contract with an interpreting agency, stipulating minimum requirements as part of that contract.

For business interpreting, individual employers will stipulate their own minimum entry requirement for interpreting applicants.

Anne Marie Graham - CILT

For Sign Language interpreters there a number of courses for initial interpreter training:

Degree in interpreting BSL/English BA (Hons) from Wolverhampton University
Degree in Deaf Studies (Interpreting) BSc (Hons) from Bristol University
Post Graduate Diploma in Interpreting with the Deaf community
Degree in Deaf studies communication support and education (interpreting option) from City Lit, Validated by Middlesex University
Introduction to BSL/English Interpreting Certificate from Belfast Metropolitan Collage
Certificate in Interpreting Studies and Skills from Heriot-Watt University
Degree in Deaf Studies (including graduate modules) BA (Hons) from UCLAN
Graduate Diploma in BSL and Communication studies from UCLAN
NVQ level 4 in BSL (must be registered on an advanced interpreter training course to register as an interpreter or undertaking an Independent Interpreter Development Programme)

And advanced interpreter training to gain full professional status:

Post Graduate Diploma in Interpreting BSL/English from UCLAN
MA in Interpreting: BSL - English from Leeds University
Post Graduate Diploma in Interpreting: BSL - English from Leeds University
NVQ level 4 in BSL/English interpreting (with an initial interpreter qualification)

To be considered qualified as a BSL/English interpreting in England, Wales and Northern Ireland you need to have completed one of the advanced courses in interpreting. After completing an initial interpreter training course the candidate would be able to register as a Junior Trainee interpreter (JTI), or Trainee Interpreter (TI) depending on their course and qualification and after an advanced course they would be able to register as a Member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters (MRSLI). More information can be found at www.nrcdp.org.uk

There are national agreements that only registers MRSLIs should be used for legal work, and ASLI recommend that mental health interpreting should be undertaken by MRSLIs only.

Dan Roberts – BSL Interpreter

XX

Question 12:

I am currently in my 3rd year of an MA degree in Interpreting and Translating at Heriot-Watt University, studying French and Spanish. I hope to go into interpreting as a career, ideally with an institution such as the EU. I have thought about doing a Postgraduate course in Interpreting and Translating after I graduate, do you think this would be worthwhile or would it be better to try and get some hands-on experience? I'd appreciate some advice on what you think are the best steps to take after

graduating. I have heard about the internships available at the EU and the UN, are these very competitive?

Responses:

In order to qualify for an open competition or an accreditation test as an interpreter, it is mandatory to have, on top of a university degree in any subject (MA since you are studying in Scotland), a post-graduate degree in Conference Interpreting. Please check the following website for a list of Universities which run the European Master's in Conference Interpreting:

http://scic.ec.europa.eu/europa/jcms/c_6054/european-masters-interpretation

Concerning the traineeships, unfortunately, the Directorate-General for Interpretation does not accept trainees. Instead, they organise visits for groups of students. For more information on the visits, please check the following website:

http://scic.ec.europa.eu/europa/jcms/c_6052/visits-to-dg-interpretation

The Directorate-General for Translation receives trainees twice a year for a 5-month period (look at Fiona's answer above). These are limited to two trainees per language and per term, which corresponds to four trainees per year for the English language department. As a result, obtaining a traineeship is highly competitive!

Angeliki Petrakis – DGT

If you are thinking of doing police and court interpreting I would recommend the DPSI (Diploma in Public Service Interpreting) which is run by the Chartered Institute of Linguists (IoL). IT does not involve any training but simply sitting the examination. You can specialise in health or legal for example. For more information contact the IoL. Their website is www.iol.org.uk

You can begin community and telephone interpreting without any formal qualifications. You can get work by signing up with agencies. You may wish to try LanguageLine for telephone interpreting work. However, I am not sure how much demand there is for French and Spanish in this type of interpreting.

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

XX

Question 13:

I have just completed an MSc in Translation and Interpreting from French and Spanish into English, I am Italian and I live in the UK. I have been sending CVs and applying to online job offers for the last two months but I still haven't received any positive responses, despite the fact that I also have a degree in Law so in theory I have a very useful specialization...what would you recommend as a next step? Do you think going to introduce myself to the agency in person can be a good strategy? Also, do you think that for an Italian it would be easier to work in Italy or in the UK? Thank you for the useful tips!

Responses:

I can only speak on behalf of our experiences but for us the major issue we have is trust. We already have a group of translators per language pair who get all our work because we like them. We only go outside this group when we have too much work on - that's when we may consider someone like you. It's about getting the first job in, doing it exceptionally well and building a rapport with the Project Manager/company.

I know it's hard....

I think you would get the same issue whether in Italy or the UK.

Just keep trying, make some calls and yes if you do have an agency local to you why not pop in. At least they'll remember you.

Neil Payne – Kwintessential

I would definitely recommend picking up the phone to a few translation companies. Emails can be so impersonal. You will definitely stand out from other freelancers. You can introduce yourself and provide a short summary of your experience - they may then provide some feedback. Very often, it is all about timing. You may pick the perfect time to call just when a translation company has started looking for new freelancers in your language combination. Good luck.

Sophie Howe – Comtec Translations

XX

Question 14:

I graduated two months ago. If I wanted to subscribe as a member of ITI which status do you think I should apply for? Also I would like to know what the advantages of being part of ITI are.

Could I also ask you whether it is possible to subscribe to ITI as an organization/group of freelance translators or as a company and what are the requirements for this?

Responses:

I would recommend that you apply as an Associate. See my earlier post for details on the major benefits of joining as an Associate. Further information is also available at www.iti.org.uk under 'Join ITI' and 'Associate' - look for the document called 'Benefits'

We do have corporate members (like Kwintessential) but all applicants for corporate membership must be established companies who have been trading for a minimum of 2 years. For more information, please see our website under 'Join ITI' and 'Corporate'

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

XX

Question 15:

Hello everyone, what a splendid idea to have this discussion - full of great people and most useful advice! Thanks a lot for all contacts and links so far.

I have been a freelance translator for over 6 years now. I have two questions please if I may:

1. How can a translator become a specialist in a particular area? Does he/she necessarily have to attend a course in that subject, do another degree etc? Would just reading relevant press and studying online sources really enable someone to call oneself a specialist in [...]?

For example, I worked in a law firm but not as a lawyer. I was certainly exposed to all sorts of legal papers and discussions and learnt a lot about law. Does that count as sufficient experience to confidently carry out legal translation?

Is it a good idea to call yourself a specialist in more than 1-2 areas - even if you are capable of doing translations in other areas?

2. And the other question is about rates. I know they do vary and I know that they depend on a language pair. But I would love to hear an honest opinion on whether I am seriously undercharging or not. My language pair is English to Russian and Russian to English, I have over 6 years experience as a freelancer, a member of IoL and have an MA in a non-translation subject. I live in London.

I work with agencies only and my charges are £60 - £75 per 1000 words for all kinds of translations, from general to quite specialised and requiring extensive research, consultation with friends who work in that area etc.

I would be very grateful for your advice/opinions - many thanks in advance.

Responses:

Thanks for joining in. My responses to your questions would be:

1) You become a specialist either through a) working in a field and then coming into translation, i.e. an IT engineer and you bring with you knowledge into translation , or b) over time focusing on certain topics and becoming an authority in them due to you knowledge of terminology, style. etc.

2) I would advise any translator to not confine themselves - you should be an all-rounder with some specializations. That is unless you did only want to translate certain types of texts (and there are translators out there like that).

3) I would say your charges are spot on. You are not undercharging at all.

Keep up the good work!

Neil Payne - Kwintessential

To pick up on a few of your questions: I don't think you need to complete another degree to develop a specialist area. However there are a number of courses offered by universities such as the University of Westminster, City University London and the ITI in particular fields. One of our in-house translators recently attended an ITI course in EU terminology. The ITI has the International Calendar of Events which shows courses being run worldwide.

With regards to your rates, I think these sounds reasonable.

Sophie Howe – Comtec Translations

In response to your first question, I think formal training courses can be really useful, but in practice most translators acquire their specialist knowledge by translating texts on a particular subject, as this involves reading about the subject and carrying out extensive research into it. Based on your experience, I would say you could competently carry out legal translations (as long as you feel confident doing so, of course), as the knowledge you have acquired will help in your translations.

With regard to rates, I think your rates sound about right; although I don't actually do Russian myself so I couldn't be sure. You can compare average rates for your language pairs on translatorscafe.com and I think on proz.com too, so that might be helpful to you.

Frances Thomas – freelance translator

With your experience, you can certainly specialize in legal translation! I actually asked this question myself in the past! If you know and like the subject, and also if you feel confident, that's more than enough. Of course there is always room to improve, like reading specialized publications/magazines, etc (in your languages), on a daily basis, and keeping up to date with terminology in your field, researching resources and building a good network of colleagues is very important.

I think your rates are ok, but never charge too low; otherwise you would be underestimating your worth!

Elisa Notinger – Spanish Embassy

Be careful not to offer your translation services in a subject area which you are not confident in. If you return a poor standard piece of translation, you are unlikely to hear from that client again.

If you are unsure about a particular job, you could ask the client if you could see the source text or a section of it before letting them know whether you feel confident with the subject area.

If you join ITI you will be bound by our Code of Conduct which requires you not to take on work which you are not skilled to do. Our Code of Conduct is available to read on our website under 'Join ITI'.

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

XX

Question 16:

Do you know other organisations that offer good internships programs for translation or interpretation outside the European Union?

Responses:

There are very few internships available but you can get work/translation experience in other ways: Try contacting large companies who have their own translation departments (e.g. oil companies, banks, etc.). Try contacting charities and not-for-profit organisations and offering to do voluntary or low-cost translations to get some experience. Try contacting your local council to see if they hold lists of local available interpreters and translators.

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

XX

Question 17:

I graduated from Warwick in 2008 in French and German with a 2:2. However, my marks in translation were higher than this and after no luck finding any work suiting my abilities in and around the Medway towns where I live, I've decided that I should pursue translation because it could allow me to work internationally. I would like to work for the EU, but does anybody know of any translation firms in central London offering paid internships of 3-6 months that would allow me to get some translation experience?

I'm also considering possibly doing a Masters in translation, but am not sure if it will be any more help for my job prospects with the recession and the simplistic way employers in the UK whittle out applicants with 2:2s even if it is from a top university and in a hard arts subject (and we arts students get marked down compared to science students). I am willing to train on the job, but nobody seems to want to train anybody, which is getting me down and making me lose faith in society, education and everything.

Does anybody know if becoming an IoL member would allow me to do some courses that don't necessarily start in line with the university academic year and how easy is it to join the IoL?

Responses:

It sounds like you would qualify for and benefit from the internship programme that DGT runs. DGT is the translation service of the EU. The application process is now open for 5-month internships starting in August 2010. They are based in Luxembourg or Brussels but you get a grant, and it is a tremendous experience both professionally and socially from all accounts. More information is available here if you are interested in looking into this. (<http://ec.europa.eu/stages/information/application.en.htm>)

In the meantime join the IoL and the ITI as an associate, as has been suggested by other colleagues on this forum, and attend as many of their workshops as possible and network as much as you can.

Fiona Harris - DGT

XX

Moderator:

Panel, can you tell us some more about your own careers? What steps, qualifications, internships and jobs, for example, helped you to where you are today?

Responses:

Afternoon all,
I undertook a BA (Hons) followed by a PgDip in British Sign Language (BSL)/English interpreting at the universities of Wolverhampton and Central Lancashire (UCLAN) respectively. I have worked in a variety of setting, including medical, academia and conferences.

My first interpreting job was in an agency where I gained valuable experience; I then worked freelance for a few years and now work part time in house and part time freelance.

BSL/English interpreting has two main routes to qualification, you can undertake a degree and post graduate qualification where you learn the language and are trained in interpreting, or you can learn BSL through NVQs and once you are proficient in the language you can take a NVQ in interpreting.

Dan Roberts – BSL Interpreter

After doing a modern languages degree at university I did an MA in Technical and Specialised Translation at the University of Westminster, which I would recommend to anyone looking to become a translator, as the course provides both good training and a great deal of practical advice about careers in the field. I also did a work placement at the translation department of Lloyds TSB as part of the Master's, which was really good experience and helped in getting my first job. My time at the Financial Times and Temple Translations meant that I ended up specialising in financial and legal texts, which is what I now focus on as a freelancer.

Frances Thomas – freelance translator

Firstly I am not a translator! I tried and did some work for about 4 months working from Turkish into English. It gave me a headache and I decided it wasn't for me!! I still do some interpreting on an ad hoc basis when I travel to Turkey which is fun but I couldn't do it full time as a profession.

Kwintessential though was born out of my experiences with languages, cultures, business and living abroad. I was an English teacher in the Middle East for years which helped me with my Turkish, Farsi and Arabic. I then went back to university to do a MA in Middle Eastern studies which also involved a module in Turkish /> English translation.

I was rather unlucky afterwards and could not find employment. So I gave myself a job and started Kwintessential.

So I am not your ideal role model I'm afraid

Neil Payne – Kwintessential

I trained as a translator in Paris (ESIT), worked as a freelance translator there and in the UK, then as a staff translator before moving on towards academia. I found my training there hugely useful and feel that it is still influencing the way I translate (I still do some freelance work) and the way I teach translation to my MA students. Working as a freelance translator was difficult at first (keeping up with deadlines, learning to turn down assignments I did not feel qualified to take on, time management). I learnt that some subjects were not for me (for instance legal translation) but I have always enjoyed scientific/technical translation. I carried out a lot of medical/pharmaceutical translations.

Myriam Salama-Carr – National Network for Translators

I did a BA Hons in French and Spanish. During my first degree, I decided that translation into English was one of my strengths, and decided to go on and do a postgraduate diploma in technical and specialised translation at University of Westminster, adding Italian and Portuguese as passive languages. It was, and still is, possible to work and do the course part-time. In the meantime, I did voluntary translation work for charities, large and small, mainly using my Spanish and Portuguese language skills.

After completing the course, I went to work for a technical translation company as a project manager for a high-profile international client. After two years there, I moved into project management in medical and pharmaceutical translation, still doing very small pieces of non-specialist translation (again, mainly from Portuguese) and was the manager of their production department, dealing with European and international client accounts for nearly 10 years.

I've been working for CILT, the National Centre for Languages on a range of projects relating to skills and training for the translation and interpreting professions for almost 3 years now. It's fascinating stuff, and not where I'd imagined I would be when I first graduated! Translation studies develops your research and writing skills, so provides a lot of transferable skills in addition to the ability to translate from one language to another.

Anne-Marie Graham - CILT

Well in my case I was lucky, as I got a job as a translator without a formal qualification, but I had to do a translation exam (without a dictionary!). Then I got the DipTrans and became a member of CIOl.

After a few years I decided to start doing some freelancing, so I attended a very useful one day course at City University on "starting out as a translator". Also the CIOl and ITI events/workshops are a very good source of valuable information and guidance (and networking!). Then there are plenty of translators websites, such as Proz, Translators Cafe, etc, even, LinkedIn. Also a website is very important, at least a basic one:)

When I started to work as a freelancer, I approached the agencies in person, not online (unless that was the only option). But I had the time, so I went to some 30 agencies in London, with my CV in hand! I usually was kindly (and briefly) interviewed by the manager and they didn't seem bothered by the fact that I hadn't booked an appointment...

As I specialize in Environment and Agribusiness, I also approached companies/organisations in that sector, both here and in the UK and Spain...The Chambers of Commerce are a good source of information too.

Hope this helps!

Elisa Noetinger – Spanish Embassy

I did a degree in Scandinavian Studies and Dutch at UCL. I went on to do an MA in Translation (Norwegian) at the University of Surrey. While I was doing my MA I managed to secure a part-time job with a market research company reviewing and abstracting articles for daily and weekly bulletins (from home) - it was only about 8/10 hours per week but provided valuable work experience. As soon as I graduated I joined the ITI and the IoL and I obtained my first freelance referrals through them. I chose to specialise in medical and pharmaceutical translation (on account of experience in industry in this field) and was never short of work. This was partly due to my languages - Scandinavian languages and Dutch with English mother tongue. So I would urge all (budding) English translators of major languages who find it difficult to find work to a) specialise and b) acquire a knowledge of a cognate language, e.g. if you have German then acquire a good passive knowledge of Dutch or a Scandinavian language.

After working as freelance translator for many years I was successful in an open competition (for translators) for the EU institutions and was duly recruited. There is no age restriction (well, maybe 65!). And as Angeliki has said prospects are good for linguists with English mother tongue (translators and interpreters) as we are facing a shortage.

Fiona Harris - DGT

Well, I wanted to study Modern Languages but that was not possible in Greece in the 80's. So, I studied French language and literature at the University of Thessaloniki and at the same time studied other languages at the official institutions (English at the British Council, Italian at the Italian Cultural Institute and German at the Goethe Institut).

Following this, I did an MA (DEA) and then a PhD in sociolinguistics at the University of Paris VII.

I saw an announcement of the competition for Greek mother tongue translators at the EU Council while I was still in Paris and decided to go for it. I started working at the Commission in 1990 as a translator but moved quickly to other translation-related positions: project management for Machine Translation and language engineering projects for over 10 years in Luxembourg and then in Brussels, management of the DGT (Directorate-General for Translation) Field Office in Budapest for almost 2 years and then coordination of relations with universities and management of the European Master's in Translation project.

Since October, I am working in the EU Representation in London as a language officer where I am contributing to the promotion of language learning in the UK and to the awareness campaign of EU careers for translators.

All these years, I found my job extremely challenging and interesting and would have never changed it for anything else! The international atmosphere and the contacts you develop in the whole EU are big assets!

Angeliki Petraris - DGT

XX

Moderator:

What are your top tips for success in translation and interpreting?

Responses:

When it comes to interpreting there are a lot of skills involved, and it takes dedication and practice to develop these. Enthusiasm is paramount! My top tip, however, would be "never be satisfied". Whether you work in Public Service, Conference, Dialogue Interpreting or another area, you can never afford to think *now I know everything*. Whether improving your performance or learning more about the (usually very varied!) topics you're dealing with, there is always room to learn and develop more. To be successful, you need to love and thrive on that aspect of the job.

If you'd like to find out more about different types of interpreting, have a look at the NNI website (www.nationalnetworkforinterpreting.ac.uk). Anyone who'd like to have a look at some of the skills involved in interpreting can read, watch and have a go at the activities on our interactive skills map, http://www.nationalnetworkforinterpreting.ac.uk/tasks/int_skills/player.html.

Good luck!

Tamara Bloom – National Network for Interpreting

I would recommend meeting native users of the language, particularly for interpreting, because your interpretation will only ever be as good as your language ability. Study the language through reading, watching films; generally expose yourself to as much language as possible.

Practice and analyse what you have interpreted. Interpret the same source information more than once in different ways thinking about the audience, register and motive of the piece. As an interpreter I always find there is something to reflect on and there is always something I learn about my interpretation to incorporate for future work, but remember that no two interpretations will be exactly the same.

Daniel Roberts – BSL Interpreter

In my view, it is particularly helpful for translators to develop a specialist field. This may be a particular field of engineering, fashion, legal, finance etc. This would involve researching and understanding the particular sector, its terminology etc. You may then be able to build up relationships with translation companies who have a number of clients in this particular sector or alternatively approach companies directly. With a niche area, you may be able to charge higher rates. To gain experience in a particular field, you can look for work experience with translation companies who focus on a particular sector or look for junior in-house positions in relevant sectors. Once you have decided on a specialist area you could also subscribe to magazines in specialist areas (engineering for example) or online discussion forums. This will help you keep up to date with industry developments.

Sophie Howe – Comtec Translations

First of all I think it's definitely worth doing a formal training course, as this will help to improve your translation skills as well as giving you a taster of what it's like to work as a translator, so you can see whether you think you'll like it or not. It's also a really good idea to talk to people in the industry about their experiences and how to go about getting started.

You will usually have to specialise in a certain area, such as law, finance or medicine, and obviously it helps if this is a topic you're interested in! As well as a good knowledge of their source languages, translators also need to have strong writing skills in their mother tongue, an eye for detail and an enquiring mind, as a lot of the work you will tackle will involve researching subjects you know nothing or very little about!

Frances Thomas – freelance translator

My tips for success in translation are:

Always work into your mother tongue. People tend to think that translation is about foreign languages but excellent writing skills in the target language are essential.

Join a professional body such as the ITI or IoL - for CPD, nurturing, networking and work referrals.

If you are keen to add a language to your armory think about learning a cognate language - e.g. Romanian if you know Italian. It is sometimes easier to get work from the less widely spoken

languages as there are not so many qualification options in these and so less competition. Specialise in a field that you are interested in and get some industry-related experience if you can even if it is unpaid.

Get a postgraduate qualification in translation. They are now also available as distance-learning modules from some universities.

Fiona Harris - DGT

I just wanted to recommend two books:

The Translator's Handbook, by Morry Sofer

<http://www.amazon.com/Translators-Handbook-Third-Morry-Sofer/dp/1887563482>

The Translator's Handbook covers issues such as requisites for professional translators, translation problems, techniques, translation and computers, dictionaries, key translation areas, financial issues, translator/client relations, sources of translation work, training programs, etc. It is a very comprehensive book that I highly recommend if you are starting in this profession.

How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator by Corinne McKay

<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/how-to-succeed-as-a-freelance-translator/356819>

How to succeed as a Freelance Translator is a shorter book, but equally useful! It covers issues such as general info on the profession ("what does it take to be a translator?"), rates, professional associations, certifications, job search, your CV, business skills, setting up your office, etc.

Eliza Noetinger – Spanish Embassy

- 1) Gather knowledge and tips from more experienced translators/interpreters.
- 2) Commit to CPD (continuous professional development) – translators/interpreters need to constantly be learning and keeping up to date both with their languages and with the specialist fields they work in – you should attend courses and read relevant books/magazines on an on-going basis to continuously develop your skills and keep you up-to-date. This will make you a better translator/interpreter.

A great way to achieve these things is to join a community like ITI where you have regular opportunities to network with more experienced translators/interpreters and to engage in CPD.

If you would like to join ITI, please see our website www.iti.org.uk under 'Join ITI'

Elizabeth Dickson – ITI Admissions Officer

Further information and discussions about careers in translation and interpreting are available on the Guardian website: guardian.co.uk