



Association of
Translation Companies
DEFINING STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

ATC Public Sector Manifesto

Towards sustainable development
in the procurement and provision of
language services for the public sector

23 January 2020

Introduction

The “ecosystem” of language service procurement and provision within the UK’s public sector encompasses public sector organisations who commission and use translation and interpreting services, together with the supply chain – language service companies and the translators and interpreters providing these services. At the very heart of the system are the individual people requiring translation and interpreting in their own languages.

In this ecosystem, the ATC represents language service companies from micro enterprises and SMEs to large companies providing the widest range of services in over 300 languages, using modern technologies for scheduling and managing translation and interpreting assignments. Within the association, the ATC’s Public Sector Procurement Committee comprises ATC Member companies actively involved in the sector’s work.

Under the ATC banner, we wish to actively work together with stakeholders across the entire ecosystem, specifically the commissioning organisations and the associations and organisations representing translators and interpreters.

About the Manifesto

This Manifesto sets out the ATC’s objectives towards sustainable development within the procurement and provision of language services in the UK’s public sector.

The Manifesto aims to identify and promote best practice, embracing the Government’s strategies around digitalisation and support of small and medium-sized enterprises while acknowledging and appreciating the challenges for those responsible for procuring public services in the current economic climate, following a prolonged time of austerity and in the future.

Our objectives

The ATC’s objectives within sustainable development of language service procurement and provision in the UK’s public sector are to:

- identify and promote sustainable best practices within the procurement and provision of language services;
- proactively work together on implementing realistic, concrete solutions that benefit the entire ecosystem;
- work towards a regulated environment, with more effective governance and oversight of the provision of language services at all levels; and to
- look beyond immediate challenges and into the future, supporting inspirational solutions and technology that advance the development of the industry, in meeting the needs of all users.

Understanding the market

Due to its size and continuous, organic evolution, the public sector’s translation and interpreting landscape is highly fragmented, which complicates our understanding of the procurement fulfilment process, and consequently creates challenges around implementing and monitoring best practice at all levels.

We believe that through increased understanding and visibility of the landscape, we can pave the way for more efficient and effective public sector procurement in the future.

Existing challenges and knowledge gaps

- Procurement at the top level of commissioning organisations is transparent, but the levels through which procurement takes place – from public sector organisations, regional authorities, individual offices or departments and their sub-contractors, to language service companies and their own sub-contractors, and the individual translators and interpreters carrying out the assignments – can be quite opaque.
- Unmapped or unforeseen, rapid regional and national changes in the need for different languages and the requirements for rare languages pose challenges both for the procurement and provision of services.
- Currently, accurate information is not available for the numbers of translators and interpreters working within the public sector in each language pair, nor the corresponding numbers required to fulfil public sector assignments regionally. This hampers our collective ability to ensure that the overall supplier pool is adequate, accessible and managed effectively to meet requirements both now and in the future.
- We have no overview on the diverse range of current requirements, impacting our collective ability and capability to exploit existing technological solutions to the fullest, or to invest effectively in the future especially when it comes to the application of technology for improved efficiencies in provision of services such as interpreting.

Sustainable best practices at Framework specification level

We believe that the foundations of sustainability across public sector procurement are laid at Framework specification level.

We wish to promote consistency and standardisation across Framework specifications, and to work collaboratively to identify and build best practice into the fabric of Framework specifications.

Together with our stakeholders, we will work on identifying characteristics of sustainable public service Framework specifications. We will identify and promote best practice with the objective of achieving a fair, sustainable ecosystem.

We believe that implementing best practice and unambiguous requirements at Framework specification level will result in a more uniform service delivery across the supply chain, and, importantly, an equitable and sustainable working environment for individual translators and interpreters.

Towards best practice

Best practices extend from Framework-wide concepts to individual elements within contracts.

It is our intention to engage in a meaningful discussion with our stakeholders to identify best practices and solutions that are realistic and tangible, and have the potential to bring about real and lasting changes.

Below, we explore some of the elements in existing specifications, some of which are already established and which the ATC's Public Sector Procurement Committee has identified have solid foundations for sustainability. We have also proposed potential further solutions, to facilitate meaningful discussion with stakeholders.

Financial & fulfilment

- Cost of contracts indexed and linked to inflation
- Quality/price weighting of Frameworks at a sustainable 80/20
- Financial penalties linked to fulfilment/delivery of service provision at a level appropriate to the Framework
- A built-in mechanism to ensure fair and equitable remuneration to individual translators and interpreters: e.g. floor/ceiling rates, remuneration to translators/interpreters specified by the tenderer linked to weighted points
- Fair cancellation policies appropriate and specific to the Framework, throughout the supply chain
- Appropriate classification/treatment of rare languages and non-standard work

Small businesses and national vs. local procurement

- Framework specifications built to support the Government's objectives of awarding more public sector contracts to SMEs
- Striking the right balance between centralised procurement approaches and the social value of localised provision

Fair market rate for translators and interpreters

- A fair rate of pay for individual translators and interpreters, commensurate with their qualifications and experience
- Fair reimbursement of travel time and travel costs
- Minimum assignment duration/charges specified in Framework specifications
- Acknowledgement of BSL/non-spoken languages' special status

Appropriate qualifications

- Appropriate qualifications commensurate with the requirements of the Framework or assignment
- Creation of realistic and intelligible guidelines for users of translation and interpreting services within public sector organisations, to remove uncertainty surrounding appropriate translator or interpreter selection

Security clearances

- Transparent mapping and understanding of hierarchies within security clearance levels across the public sector
- Transferrable/portable clearances to minimise cost and administration time
- Consideration for the cost of clearances

Governance

We acknowledge the need for robust governance of public sector contracts and the provision of effective language services within those contracts. We wish to work together with stakeholders to identify ways and means of achieving comprehensive due diligence during tendering, improved governance and oversight of service delivery, as well as reliable checks on the qualifications and competences of translators and interpreters engaged in public sector work.

We advocate open discussion on transparent levels of oversight and quality control that can reasonably and realistically be put in place.

Proposal for ensuring good governance

- To ensure good governance by contract holders throughout the lifetime of their contracts, a 2-3% service charge on the total cost of the contract is proposed, with the specific objective of providing a robust mechanism of oversight at all levels of each Framework.

Qualifications and competences

To fulfil the public sector's necessarily complex and diverse requirements for language services, we believe in working together to establish the different service level requirements needed, and to identify appropriate translator and interpreter qualifications and competences to match these requirements.

There are several different entry routes to qualification, and we need to engage in meaningful conversation with relevant stakeholders to establish appropriate and sustainable routes into the profession, whether via national qualifications, registers encompassing differing qualification and experience levels, or qualifications and competences set out in the requirements of emerging ISO standards for the language services industry.

We wish to draw special attention to rare languages, and the measures needed to ensure that suitable qualification routes are available to meet the requirements for these languages.

Training

We believe it is the responsibility of the entire ecosystem of language service procurement and provision to ensure translators and interpreters have access to the training and support they need to carry out their work, and the ATC looks forward to engaging with stakeholders in exploring ways of providing this training and support.

The effect of Brexit

We acknowledge the risks associated with stricter immigration policies, and the need to raise awareness of them within the public sector.

We are committed in our campaign to ensure the public sector's continued access to qualified and competent translators and interpreters, post-Brexit, and the viability of the profession of the self-employed translator and interpreter in the context of the UK's future immigration system.
