



MONASH University
Arts

Pathways to Interpreting and Translating

Executive Summary

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by the

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1. The project 'Pathways to Interpreting and Translating'

Interpreting and translation services are vital to the management of essential community services. The identification of effective and sustainable pathways within the area of interpreting and translating is necessary in order to maintain and increase the supply and quality of interpreters and translators to Victorian communities.

As part of the Victorian Government Language Services Strategy, The Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) appointed Translation Studies at Monash University to provide research and recommendations into the pathways process, the findings of which will be used to inform current projects, future policy and work on other industry issues.

Building on the findings of the Needs Analysis conducted by Allen Consulting (February 2002), research by Monash focuses on the supply and quality of interpreters in Victoria. VOMA outlined the current challenges in the interpreting and translating industry as identified by Victorian Government Departments, which were divided into four key areas. Monash was asked to provide research and recommendations in the following four areas:

- **recruitment** of potential translators and interpreter
- **education and training** of translators and interpreters
- **accreditation** of translators and interpreters; and
- **retention** of translators and interpreters once they have entered the profession.

In line with the Needs Analysis, this research:

- focuses primarily on interpreting services rather than translating services;
- focuses on strategies that ensure interpreting services can be accessed by culturally and linguistically diverse individuals with low English proficiency;
- excludes Auslan (for hearing impaired individuals); and
- excludes indigenous languages

Research was based around national and international literature reviews and desktop research to establish current policies and best practice. The VIC-TAS committee of AUSIT was approached with a view to set up a focus group but was unable to assist in this regard. Instead, a panel discussion as part of the AUSIT/ASLIA 'Power to the Profession Conference' (22-24 October 2004) took place. As a follow up, a short article was placed in Bannelong (AUSIT-VIC newsletter) in December 2004, inviting interested parties to

contact the researchers. Monash University would like to thank all parties for their assistance.

A list of key stakeholders was provided by VOMA and interviewed face-to-face and by telephone in line with regulations set out by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) at Monash University. The following key stakeholders were approached within the duration of the project:

- Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA)
- Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC)
- Department of Education and Training (DET)
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA)
- National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI)
- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT)
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
- Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE (NMIT)
- Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES)
- Victoria University of Technology (VUT)
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)
- Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (VITS) Language Link
- On-Call Interpreters and Translators Agency
- All Graduates

In addition, Monash University consulted:

- Service Industry Skills Council (SISC)
- LOTE marketing

Monash University notes that since the initial project brief was provided by VOMA, several developments have influenced the direction of research. These are listed below:

- The Service Skills Industry Council has been working to introduce a national qualifications framework for the translating and interpreting industry. A draft report was released in May 2005, and the final report was published in December 2005. The proposals outlined in the draft report have been taken into consideration in this report.
- NMIT released a report titled Pathways to Interpreting and Translating – Executive Summary and Recommendations 2004 evaluating a pilot 'English as a Second Language' (ESL) program for students with a career interest in translating

and interpreting. The English for Translating and Interpreting pilot acts as a bridging course to develop students' English skills to a level from which they could go on to apply for the NAATI accredited Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses currently offered at RMIT.

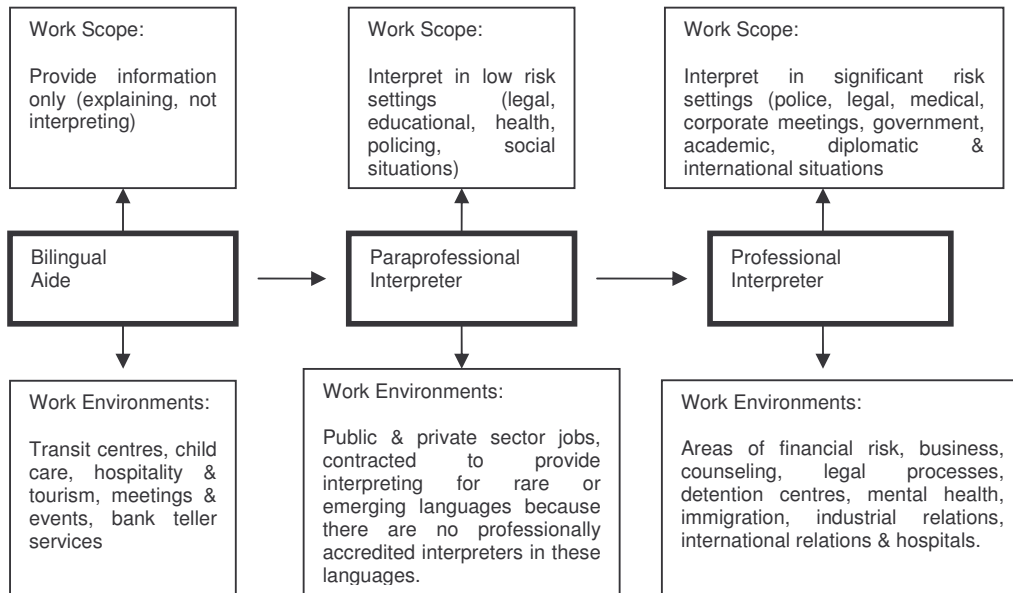
- In 2004, VUT undertook to redevelop and reaccredit an existing Victorian Diploma in Interpreting and Translating that was set to expire in December 2004. The Victorian Diploma was approved by the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) and has been given Crown Copyright status in Victoria.

2. Introducing the 'pathways' concept

For the purposes of this project, the concept of 'pathways' conveys the complete process through which an individual entering into the translating/interpreting field is guided: from the initial moment of considering career opportunities through to training, accreditation, recruitment as a professional and, to the stage of retaining long term employment and a high level of professionalism in the T&I industry. When providing suggestions for improvements to the current pathways process, it is vital to consider the gaps in the system which are preventing access, growth, expansion, bridging, and the future stability of the profession.

The recommendations provided in this report are intended to assist with the overall implementation of the 'pathways process', presenting a series of workable solutions to the problem of unmet demand in interpreting services in Victoria. The holistic nature of the pathways concept means that, through the creation of a series of functional pathways, both providers and receivers of translating/interpreting services will benefit.

3. Recognising job roles, work-scope and environment: from bilingual aide¹ to professional interpreter



The study further identified working environments that ideally would require specialisation beyond that acquired at the level of professional interpreter.

¹ This study had opted to adopt the job descriptor 'Bilingual Aide' (Source: Service Skills Australia-Career Paths and Training for Translators and Interpreters, 2005) in order to avoid confusion between the job role and the current NAATI accreditation level of 'Language Aide'.

4. Challenges to the T&I industry

The following challenges to the current state of the T&I industry were set out by VOMA:

4.1 Recruitment

- a lack of awareness of employment opportunities as interpreters/translators, particularly among newly arrived immigrants
- a perception of poor pay and working conditions including a casualised working environment

4.2 Education/Training

- lack of languages on offer in interpreting courses that cater for emerging languages in Victoria
- the language skills gap preventing many prospective interpreters in emerging languages from meeting entry requirements for interpreting courses
- lack of professional development, particularly training (and re-training) in specialised areas of terminology (such as medical and legal), and in maintaining language and memory skills; and
- lack of training for interpreters in languages that are unlikely to be offered NAATI accreditation in the long-term

4.3 Accreditation

- lack of pathways for interpreters whose languages have been 'recognised' by NAATI to obtain a higher level of accreditation
- lack of paraprofessional interpreters pursuing a higher level accreditation
- lack of monetary incentive to up-grade level of accreditation

4.4 Retention

- interpreters are leaving the profession at a higher rate than they are being replaced.

5. Addressing the challenges

The gaps and inconsistencies present within the pathways process must be considered in the light of both their individual impact (i.e. on the particular 'stage' of the process to which it is linked) and their comprehensive impact (i.e. on the overall pathways process).

The report addresses the above challenges in two sections:

5.1 Section 1 - recruitment and retention

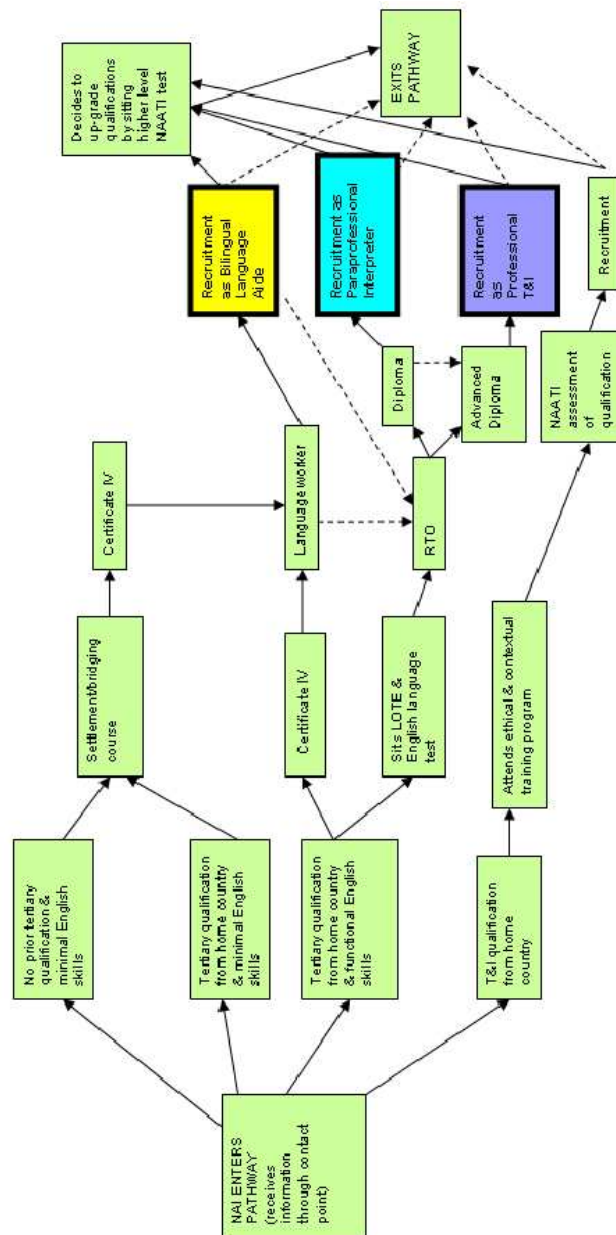
Recruitment is the foremost stage of the pathways process and occurs when an individual first displays interest in becoming a professional translator or interpreter. Issues related to retention (career opportunities, pay rates etc.) will usually arise at this very early stage of the pathways process. Recruitment and retention are often key areas of consideration for newly arrived immigrants.

5.2 Section 2 - education/training and accreditation

The relationship between training and accreditation is deemed vital in ensuring that as many people as possible bridge the pathway from training to accreditation. In realising this challenge, the structure of the training pathway must be refined, made more accessible to a wider-range of potential trainees and provide individuals with multiple entry/exit points. Most importantly, individuals must be encouraged to move along the pathway from training to accreditation.

6. The pathways approach

Viewing the pathways process as one that addresses the differing needs of various types of individuals is the key strategy to improving the delivery of interpreting services. Currently, pathways are limited, inflexible and failing to meet the varying needs of individuals. They should instead be flexible, wide-ranging and enable individuals to move with ease from one to another. The diagram below illustrates the possible pathways open to a Newly Arrived Immigrant (NAI):



Training pathways must be flexible and enable individuals to move between modules. The proposal was to broaden the training framework so that the focus is on the needs of various types of individuals. It is crucial to recognize that not all individuals will want to follow the same training pathway.

The study has identified several other pathways to interpreting: namely, for Australian high school graduates with a LOTE; for overseas professional T&Is; for international students, and for potential post graduates and researchers.

7. Key Findings

7.1 Unsatisfactory policy framework

While Victorian Government Policy states very clearly that Government Departments, private LSPs and funded agencies should only use NAATI accredited professional level interpreters and translators whenever and wherever possible, the reality of the current situation (i.e. the shortage of accredited interpreters in new and emerging languages) renders this policy ineffective.

7.2 Inadequate recruitment system

The current recruitment system does not always match skills to job requirements, making it difficult for employers to select interpreters qualified to perform at the required skill-level.

7.3 Unmet demand, supply and quality issues

Supply problems (i.e., lack of female interpreters or interpreters from new and emerging language groups) continue to impede massively the provision of high quality language services. Quality issues stem from gaps in the recruitment system: for example, LSPs are often obliged to send out non-accredited interpreters or paraprofessional interpreters (in place of professional interpreters).

7.4 Breaches of professional ethics

The absence of a professional standards body means that the industry is not self-regulated and breaches are not dealt with in a regulatory manner. A National Board of Professional Conduct (as suggested by AUSIT) is currently a notable absence in regard to the monitoring of breaches of professional ethics.

7.5 Lack of public awareness in recruiting of T&Is

There is a lack of awareness about the profession among the general public, especially in newly arrived immigrant communities.

7.6 Inadequate pay rates and working conditions for T&Is

Professional level interpreters in all fields are paid minimally, without workers' compensation coverage, superannuation, long service leave, sick pay or annual leave. Interpreters are sometimes asked to provide their own professional indemnity insurance, in addition to covering the costs of substantial non-productive travel time.

7.7 Ineffective focus of training pathways

To anticipate that each individual will exit the training/education pathway with the highest possible level of accreditation is an unrealistic and ill-considered response to the current situation.

7.8 Lack of language proficiency among ESL students

The English language competence of students currently being admitted to the Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses is not always sufficient and acts as a barrier to successful completion of training courses. Insufficient English hinders the development of important interpreting and translating skills and will later contribute to a lower standard of language service.

7.9 Failure rates

There is a high failure rate for students enrolled in NAATI accredited training courses. Failure rates are often attributed to insufficient levels of English or the inability to properly grasp the requirements of the Australian university system.

7.10 Accreditation

The current accreditation framework in Australia is not reflective of workplace practice. There is a high failure rate of candidates sitting the accreditation exam and delays in movement from recruitment/training to successful accreditation. A testing system that accredits so few practitioners creates disillusionment and dissatisfaction among candidates, stops 'new blood' from entering the profession and encourages T&Is to work without accreditation. It is counterproductive to both the individual and the industry to focus solely on creating ways to attract potential practitioners from new and emerging languages (at the recruitment stage) without addressing some of the reasons behind the large failure rate of NAATI accreditation candidates.

8. Key Recommendations

8.1 Revise policy framework

In interviews conducted with the major LSPs in Victoria, including one national public language service provider (TIS), it was made overwhelmingly clear that Government policy has a strong impact on the current recruitment framework and employment of T&Is. Recognising that there are shortages of accredited interpreters in certain language groups, and that not all jobs require the same level of practitioner skill, it is recommended that the current policy be revised to allow for a tiered system of recruitment: that is, one in which skills and competencies are matched to job requirements rather than being linked to a particular level of NAATI accreditation.

8.2 Innovative ways of addressing service shortfalls

8.2.1 LSPs must be supported in moving towards more innovative ways of providing language services. LSPs recognise the benefits of telephone interpreting as a way of overcoming supply/demand shortfalls and noted that they would be willing to expand their service in this area if some form of seed funding was available to support the upgrade of the technological base.

8.2.2 An attempt should be made to open up further communication lines between DIMA and LSPs. LSPs have outlined the benefits of advance information on potential high demand language groups that result from immigration/humanitarian programs.

8.2.3 In the future, and as a long-term strategy, it would be worth considering the feasibility of establishing an online database (tracking interpreters and their language proficiencies) linked to a co-ordinated booking system (made accessible to all government departments) as a means of stabilising the work-flow and thus improving the retention of interpreters.

8.2.4 Many problems related to ethical standards arise from a lack of training. Research has repeatedly shown that accreditation at the professional level is not the only indicator of quality service and key shortfalls such as the punctuality and time management of interpreters continue to plague the profession. Individuals should attend professional training courses, and attending a module on professional ethics training prior to sitting the NAATI accreditation exam should be mandatory for all trainees.

8.3 Raise awareness of career opportunities

8.3.1 Straightforward, low-cost advertising about careers in translating/interpreting could be widely distributed in the public sphere: to high school students studying LOTE in VCE, university language students and to clients of any adult migrant education service/centre.

8.3.2 Emphasising the positive aspects of the profession (flexible working hours, the interpreter's strong community presence etc) to students, newly arrived immigrants and language workers will assist in the recruitment of potential trainees.

8.4 Foster and develop a culture of mentoring

A mentoring system that ensures constant levels of quality within the profession will improve the standard of interpreting and help new entrants to the profession to build on their level of professional development.

8.5 Developing a government-led strategy to promote the profession

8.5.1 T&I training opportunities can be promoted in the media and press of ethnic communities. A State Government strategy to systematically promote activities, seminars etc which raise the respect and awareness of the interpreting profession could be developed. Such a strategy would fit in well with the current Government's Population and Diversity Policy.

8.5.2 Interpreters of new and emerging languages are almost always newcomers to the profession and to Australia, and must be made aware of all aspects of the profession. Information should be available at all initial contact points. Coordinated and regular communication between Government agencies such as VOMA and DIMA - that monitor languages in demand - and initial migrant contact sites, such as Centrelink, Migrant Resources Centres and Medicare would increase the flow of the pathway to recruitment.

8.6 Training pathways for local LOTE speakers

8.6.1 While there is an understandably high level of emphasis placed on offering interpreter training places in languages deemed 'high priority' languages, there is also a real need for local students (who are native English speakers with LOTE ability in a range of languages) to have reliable access to training pathways.

8.6.2 More effective synergies between high schools and Victorian T&I training courses could be facilitated through VOMA and backed by the Victorian Government Language Services Strategy.

8.7 Promotion of English skills

8.7.1 A high standard of English is needed before students enter training courses. Strengthening the pathway between ESL bridging courses and NAATI approved training courses is the most efficient way to solve this problem.

8.8 Training for teachers and examiners

8.8.1 Institutions offering interpreter/translator training should be aware that teacher training modules or seminars will benefit both teacher and student and improve the long term delivery of courses.

8.8.2 The non-standardisation of NAATI examinations and the examiners' varying levels of proficiency are contributing factors in preventing the successful completion of the pathways process in certain language groups. NAATI should consider the standardisation of testing and training of examiners as priorities in their review of the accreditation system.²

8.9 Review of accreditation system

8.9.1 A review of the current accreditation system is needed in order that testing practices better reflect the nature of the industry and market demands.

8.9.2 Some form of revalidation of accreditation levels is a necessary step in ensuring quality service.

8.9.3 Revision of current accreditation testing procedures to include examiners based in other states or even overseas would widen the pool of potential examiners and provide

² The researchers would like to draw attention to the report by J. Cook and H. Dixon published after the research for this project was completed. The report addresses several issues of direct relevance to the findings of this report. In particular, it notes the need for a fundamental revision of the NAATI testing system. (Source: *A Review of NAATI Administrative Processes Related to Testing Including Quality Control Processes. Final Report*. September 2005. Available at <<http://www.naati.com.au>>. Accessed 12 October 2005.)

better benchmarking by ensuring that the examiners are familiar with the skill level and requirements of the current industry. As a member of NAATI, the Victorian Government could recommend that NAATI consider

- the appointment of off-shore examiners where necessary,
- setting up examination panels of individuals teaching in accredited courses, and
- the development of online testing (especially for new and emerging languages).

8.10 Incentives for practitioners

8.10.1 Differentiation in the pay scales of interpreters with diverse levels of accreditation - rewarding up-skilling and encouraging paraprofessionals to improve their qualifications - should be considered.

8.10.2 Supplying T&Is with professional development sessions/courses should be seen as equally important as providing them with training pathways.

8.10.3 Interpreters are often placed in highly stressful work situations yet have no access to professional debriefing. Interpreters take confidentiality obligations seriously and thus are often unable to discuss issues which may affect them. Employers have a duty of care to interpreters to provide adequate and professional counselling services. A commitment by the State Government for resources to address this need (perhaps through one of the Departments, such as the Department of Human Services) would be highly desirable.

8.11 More effective recruitment options

Offering a greater number of recruitment options invites the individual to select different exit points within the training pathway, e.g. at a level other than the professional level. In doing so, individuals can choose to exit training and enter the workforce at different stages of the pathways process. This means that they gain vital industry experience before pursuing professional development or further training.

8.12 Linking training and recruitment pathways

Flexible training pathways benefit the individual by allowing for movement between different modules. The recruitment system needs to match the steps taken in training pathways. To facilitate this, it is recommended that some initiative be taken at State Government level.

8.13 Professional Development for revalidation of accreditation or of self-regulation

Partnerships between training institutions, LSPs and AUSIT would facilitate the provision of professional development at different levels on a regular basis. In order to effect attitudinal change among practising interpreters, professional training needs to become a compulsory component of initial accreditation and professional development should be an essential component in the revalidation of accreditation or self-regulation of the T&I industry.

8.14 Professional Development to up-skill

8.14.1 Interpreters who are encouraged to up-skill their qualifications - not merely from the paraprofessional to the professional level, but also to cover a range of specialised subject areas - will create a more functional workforce. It is recommended that NAATI consider the recognition of PD training in specialised areas of interpreting such as medical, legal and mental health as specific and specialised levels of accreditation.

8.14.2 The purpose of PD courses/workshops is not to offer language teaching or basic interpreting/translating skills and they are not intended to take the place of undergraduate training or postgraduate courses. PD should be viewed as an important supplement to generic training courses and as providing the opportunity for specialisation. Alternatively, PD could also be viewed as part of a mentoring program.

8.14.3 Training institutions currently offering T&I training courses (such as RMIT, Monash University and NMIT) should work in partnership to supplement their training with PD sessions in a range of disciplines. Building on partnerships between training institutions and AUSIT is also advisable.

8.14.4 The level of industry demand for PD modules should be monitored. AUSIT could assist by conducting annual or biennial surveys of its members to detect specific points of interest in PD.

8.14.5 Information Technology must be incorporated into PD training modules. It is vital for practising interpreters to be familiar with new technologies, particularly for newly arrived immigrants. This also needs to be considered in light of the development of remote interpreting.

8.14.6 Multi-media packages such as CD ROM kits should be developed for distribution among translator/interpreters practising in regional areas.³

8.14.7 Wherever feasible, attempts should be made to make video/audio recordings of course/workshop proceedings for distribution on the internet so that wider regional distribution of information is possible.

8.15 Increasing level of academic literacy among ESL students

8.15.1 Students in language groups identified by RTOs as having difficulties in this area should be provided with extra contextual training before commencing study. Cultural differences may need to be picked up by course deliverers and teachers as early as possible and students be advised on the expectations of learning in the Australian tertiary environment.

8.15.2 The NMIT certificate program recognises that migrant individuals with lower levels of education in one or more LOTE(s) could be used as bilingual workers in languages where interpreter numbers are currently limited. Successful completion of the NMIT certificate offers such individuals a training pathway that is academically sound, forming a valuable bridging pathway to acceptance into a NAATI approved course.

8.16 Re-evaluation of RMIT scholarship program

8.16.1 Continued funding of this program is not viewed as a particularly viable means of ensuring support and development of the overall translating/interpreting industry. Rather than channelling more resources into individual funding, it would be more practicable to develop alternative forms of funding that impact on the wider industry: for example, allocating resources to developing a mentoring system or developing online delivery of PD training.

³ The researchers would like to note the launch of the *MyLanguage* Portal after the completion of this research report. A partnership between the State Libraries of NSW, QLD, SA, VIC, and WA, and the NT and ACT Library Services, the portal offers links to information, services and news in 63 different languages, and currently has sites for the following emerging languages from Africa: Amharic, Dinka, Nuer, Somali, and Swahili. It is a source of authentic, current materials in the LOTE thus providing low-cost support and resources for rural areas. (Source: <http://www.mylanguage.gov.au>, accessed January 2006).

8.17 Highlight the existence of postgraduate pathways

8.17.1 While postgraduate pathways have less industry focus than the NAATI approved courses, they offer vital prospects for scholarly specialisation in the field and should be encouraged, particularly in the facilitation of scholarly research in the area of community interpreting

8.17.2 When examining recurrent issues such as the lack of professionalism in the industry and the low status of the T&I profession as a whole, it is important not to underestimate the impact such courses have on perceptions of the industry from both within and without. Every individual should be advised of the training opportunities available in Victoria to achieve a high level of specialisation in the field. Flow charts mapping various pathways have been created as part of this project, and it is hoped that these will be considered when individuals require information regarding a career in translating/interpreting. It is important to emphasise that all training pathways begin and end with strong prospects to excel in the field, whether it be as a paraprofessional or conference level interpreter/translator.

8.18 Revaluation of current T&I training module

Use of the revised module (produced by VUT) would provide a training model better suited to the real expectations of the industry. The units in the revised Diploma appear to better meet the needs of the specific cross-section of candidates at which the Diploma of Interpreting is aimed.

8.19 Widening the scope for accreditation

8.19.1 The payment required for the NAATI accreditation test is high, and sometimes out of a person's reach. In order to facilitate a stronger link between the training and accreditation pathways, we recommend that LSPs set up a controlled awards scheme that finances (wholly or partially) the cost of the accreditation exam for individuals who undertake some form of training but have difficulty paying for the exam.

8.19.2 Research suggests that the Bilingual Aide category be considered the first step in the training pathway for potential interpreters. While not a category that attests to interpreting proficiency, is an important award that recognizes a level of language skill deemed equivalent to that of Certificate IV, and must be given due recognition by NAATI as the first step in a training pathway for potential interpreters.

8.19.3 While additional training could be achieved through PD programs, additional levels of specialisation (mental health, legal etc) should be incorporated into the current NAATI framework.

8.19.4 Introducing an additional accreditation level above the professional level recognises an individual's specialisation in certain areas of need and would provide a further incentive to up-skill.