Training and employability: What are the LSPs looking for and what can the graduates offer?

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Abstract

Training and employability are two terms that frequently appear in the speeches in those in charge of designing educational policies as well as in reports of economics or market trends. Training is necessary for integration into the job market. The aim of this article is to provide data extracted from several studies on university–language service providers (LSPs) relations in the European Union (EU) for the period 2010–2017. The EU Directorate-General for Translation through the European Master's in Translation network (EMT network) and European Union of Associations of Translation Companies developed those studies. The first and last studies focused on LSPs' companies while the second offers information on graduates and their training. The results obtained can be summed up as follows: what are employers looking for and what can the graduates offer? and indicate that translator education and training is a shared responsibility of universities and LSP in a highly competitive market.

Keywords: Optimale, European master's in translation (EMT) network, training, labour market, language service providers (LSPs), translation.

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1. Introduction

1.1. University–LSP relations

Academic training has become more and more focused on preparing graduates for their entrance into the labour market. Familiarity with this trend is paramount in order to design appropriate programmes and to provide future translators with a series of specific practical competences that will be necessary for their incorporation into the workforce. The business world also seeks to learn about the type of training their future employees receive and communicate their needs in order to obtain better returns on their investments. Cooperation between both sides is, therefore, needed and having data is crucial for decision making. In my presentation, I will analyse the results of several studies developed on university–job market/enterprise relations within the European Union (EU). The studies were carried out, on the one side, by the EU Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) and the European Master's in Translation (EMT) network and, on the other side, by language service providers (LSPs) (European Union of Associations of Translation Companies (EUATC)). In chronological order, the studies are as follow:

• Project *Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe.* The study was carried out by the OPTIMALE network (2011–2013). It is focused on LSPs.
• Project *'Employment and the future of the profession' (2015–2016).* It was carried out by the Board of the EU DGT-EMT network. The study offers data on the graduates and their training.
• *LSP Network survey* (2016–2017). The study is mainly monitored by EUATC, supported by the DGT through the LIND project and the EMT network. As a way to answer the questions about what employers are looking for and what the graduates can offer, a brief analysis of the results of this research are as follows.

2. OPTIMALE and the project: Optimising professional translator training in a multilingual Europe.

The study was carried out within the OPTIMALE project and contains the opinions of companies and translation agencies regarding the type of experience and competences required of their employees prior to hiring them. These results were presented at the Brussels DGT main office in December 2014. It was the first study of this type conducted in the EU.

OPTIMALE is a University Erasmus Network created by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the EU in order to carry out the Project *Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe* (2011–2013). 70 universities from 32 different European countries participated, including 24 from the EU and five countries, which do not belong to the European area. OPTIMALE worked closely with the EMT network and the EUATC, and other associations and professional services of the language industry.

The two main objectives were, first, mapping the translators' training and, second, investigating the new demands placed on professional translators as well as how the market evolved. This last objective was subdivided into three specific objectives:

• To determine the current and emerging competences that LSP require of their translators.
• To provide data for analysis and discussion among graduate programme designers and trainers in order to improve the employability of their graduates throughout their training period.
• To provide a pan-European view of the specific competences requested of graduates looking for employment within the language industry.

In order to obtain data, a survey aimed at translation agencies and companies (which we will refer to as language service providers or LSP) was designed. Members of the OPTIMALE network in their countries distributed this survey. Institutional translation and freelance translators were excluded as

they were the object of studies carried out by professional associations (ASETRAD, FIT), or the *Common Sense Advisory* report (*Language Service Market* 2010).

The starting point was not to discover the degree of linguistic and translation competence of the translators, but rather to focus on other competences that employer's value and look for in their employees. The survey was put online on 6 April 2011 and was available until 31 October 2011. 738 surveys were obtained.

The following are the results of the survey that are most relevant for this article, that is, how employers viewed the importance of different types of professional competence requirements. For more detailed information, refer to the articles Gambier and Valero-Garces (2014) and Toudic and Valero-Garces (2014).

The items considered are: 1) Experience versus knowledge; 2) Translation-related competences; 3) – Specialisation; 4) Technological competence; 5) Project management and customer skills; 6) Marketing.

2.1. Experience versus knowledge

As regards applicants' qualifications and experience, employers stress the importance of both in almost equal proportions (42% and 41%). However, when more specific questions are asked, priority is given to professional experience (88%) especially in related fields, as opposed to having a degree in translation (78%). Meanwhile, only 22% of companies consider having a university degree of little or no use. 50% of those surveyed consider it very important or essential to have a good knowledge of the industry and language professions whereas more than a third consider it 'not very important'. On the other hand, 86% of those surveyed prioritise professional ethic, which, along with quality, is one of the topics that attained the highest levels.

2.2. Translation-related competences

The focus was on translation as the process of producing a document in a certain language for a specific client within an established amount of time.

Companies were asked which was more important: quality or speed. The preference for quality was unanimous (100%). Only 2% of those surveyed responded that 'it was not very important' and only 32% considered speed an important element in order for a job to be perfect.

Beyond these almost predictable responses, the results from other questions offer greater variety. When asked to define 'quality', the majority of employers added that '100% quality' is a difficult objective to reach in the translation industry—quality is a relative value that depends on different factors like type of translation, purpose of translation and the demands of a specific client. The conclusion would seem to be that the ideal translator or project manager should aim to combine speed and quality, since a product that is submitted late or after the deadline is no longer valid. For this reason, 32% considered productivity tied to speed as important for achieving a perfect product.

2.3. Specialisation

The requirement of specialisation is nearly unanimous among employers, with 90% prioritising it. Those surveyed were not asked about in which fields there was a greater demand, although in later discussion workshops, it was concluded that technical translation in the broad sense and legal translation in some markets were the most dominant areas of the market. It is worth mentioning the importance given (69%) to the extraction and management of terminology.

2.4. Technological competence

In an industry that has undergone rapid technological change, a clear contrast between the need for what are now known as standard CAT tools or competences related to machine translation (MT) and the technological knowledge of these new advances can be observed. While the former (that is, the possibility of using MT systems, or processing and converting files) is considered essential or very important by three quarters of those surveyed, the use of voice-recognition applications or the possibility of pre- or post-editing machine translated texts do not yet seem to be important requirements. However, it is interesting to note that although only 1 out of 10 surveyed require voice-recognition technology, a significant 28% of those interviewed require MT post-editing skills, which reflects a growing interest in the integration of MT in the translation process.

The data also indicate that LSP are interested in other tools associated with communication tools (ICT), like web pages, mobile telephones or localisation with over 34%.

2.5. Project management and customer skills

Project management and customer skills hold an important place. Thus, another clear message sent by the survey results is the need for project management and client relations competences such as the ability to identify client requirements, to draw up estimates or to define the resources required for a given translation project. Three quarters of those surveyed considered these skills specific to project management as essential. The ability to define and/or apply quality control procedures also holds a high percentage (90%).

2.6. Marketing

The last question has to do with competences regarding 'marketing'. Although it does not receive the maximum importance, it is nevertheless considered important or essential by more than 50% of the respondents (517). An even higher figure (over 75%) see 'consolidating' client relations as being important or essential (in almost equal proportions), which can be viewed as a logical follow-on to the question on identifying client requirements.

2.7. Conclusion from OPTIMALE survey top 10 competences

In conclusion, LSP have to constantly adapt to the changing situation of the market and to customer demands. The need for optimal quality is behind many of the competences studied. Those that received the highest percentages were classified according to their importance from the employer's point of view. The top 10 competences in order of importance are:

• 100% quality (97%)
• identifying customer needs (94%)
• defining and/or applying quality control (92 %)
• specialisation in one or more fields (89%)
• experience in the field of professional translation (88%)
• knowledge of professional ethics (86%)
• identification and appropriate use of available resources (85%)
• ability to create estimates (78%)
• holding a university degree (77%)
• strengthening client relations (76%)
• use of translation memories (75 %).

Finally, the survey included an open section for comments which provided valuable additional information on the qualities and competences that employers felt that recent graduates needed. In it, many of the previously mentioned needs were included, especially the need to have a great knowledge of the working languages, particularly the native language, which should be required before initiating translation studies, and which were excluded from this study.

The study and these results were presented at the EU DGT in Brussels in December 2014. It was the first study of this type conducted in the EU.

3. The project 'employment and the future of the profession'

Once data regarding LSP expectations were obtained through the OPTIMALE project, a study was carried out by the EMT board in 2015. The project was entitled *Employment and the future of the profession*. The main objective was to understand the reality of access to the workforce for university students belonging to the *EU DGT-EMT network.* To this end, a survey was developed that aimed at graduates of the EMT network.

The EMT network is a partnership project between the European Commission and higher-education institutions offering master's level translation programmes that have been admitted to the network upon being accredited for five years. It started in 2009 with 34 members. In its second edition (2014–2019), 64 Masters were selected. These EU universities were submitted to a mid-term review in 2016. Next year, 2019, a new round for accreditation will start for all these universities that want to become part of the EMT network.

In order to contribute to the targets set, the EU DGT and the members of the EMT network carry out studies, one of which is the study *Employment and the future of the profession* explained below.

The study *Employment and the future of the profession* consisted of developing a survey aimed at recent graduates of EMT programmes (2010–2014) in order to discern which types of employment graduates in translation obtain, how they find these positions, and what role their studies and training play. Preliminary data from the study was presented at the *Translating Europe Workshop 'Quality work placements for translation students—Expectations and practices'*, on 18 February 2016 at the headquarters of the European Commission in Brussels. 1,519 responses were obtained from 46 universities and 22 countries. The survey included 25 closed questions and three open ones. Due to space limitations, the following are only some of the questions which are relevant to our objectives. For more information see Krause (2017) and Valero-Garces (2017a, 2017b). The questions and answers considered in this study are: 1) Training; 2) Employment; 3) Time required to find work; 4) Salary and level of satisfaction; 5) Internships; 6) Tasks during the internship.

3.1. Training

With respect to training, they were asked which competences acquired during their studies had been the most useful in their work. It should be mentioned that L1 (or A language) knowledge/skills were included for the first time. This was in response to comments from LSP studies as well as to complaints from some translators of the EU DGT regarding certain deficiences that were being found in novice translators. It was also due to the need to call for applications and hire native English translators, as this language is used for communication by many EU citizens, but its use in official documents (to give an example) is not always at the desired level.

A list of 17 competences was developed, generally based on the results of the previous study on the competences that LSP most valued and those that trainers considered essential or that were present in their programmes. These were: linguistic ability in source language; linguistic ability in target language; knowledge of other cultures; general culture; profiency in computer assisted translation; computer skills; general translation; specialised translation; personal management skills;

terminology; information extraction; editing skills; post-editing; digital editing; project management; synthesis skills; technical drafting skills and others (Table 1).

The results are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. EMT degree holder survey, percentage of usefulness of competences (Krause, 2017, p. 147)

Answer	Percentage %
Source language skills (1)	**68.12**
Target lanaguage skills (2)	**66.73**
Knowledge of foreign cultures (3)	38.60
General knowledge (4)	42.09
CAT tools proficency (5)	38.80
IT skills (6)	31.36
General translation (7)	**54.02**
Specialised translation (8)	**43.28**
Personal management skills (9)	24.90
Terminology (10)	35.18
Information mining (11)	24.24
Revision skills (12)	29.25
Post-editing (13)	12.98
Desktop publishing (14)	4.41
Project management (15)	20.75
Summarising skills (16)	12.38
(Technical) writing skills (17)	17.72
Other	5.40

A close look reveal that the higher percentage is as follows: source and target language skills were ranked first and second (68.12% source language skills and 66.73% target language skills); followed by general translation (54.02%) and specialised translation (43.28%), general knowledge (42.09%), knowledge of foreign cultures (38.60%) CAT tools proficiency (38.80%) and terminology (35.18%) (Krause, 2017).

The rest of the competences attained levels below 30%. The ones of least use were post-editing, synthesis and design layout skills. This is nonetheless surprising in the case of post-editing at that time. However, at present, LSP are requiring this training, as evinced by some comments from LSP representatives to members of the EMT network in a March 2016 meeting in the DGT headquarters of the European Commission in Brussels (personal conversation). This could be indicative of a new competence to be acquired.

3.2. Employment

Those surveyed were also asked about the number of jobs they had held after graduating. The data indicate that the majority (43.08%) had held one job, and a very similar percentage (41.37%) had held two or three. At a much lower percentage were those who had held three or more jobs, which could indicate certain instability.

When asked whether these jobs were related to language services, the percentage was very high (85%), followed by 23% in education. Around 20% of graduates do not carry out tasks related to their translation studies. With regard to their current situation, the data indicate that 64.82% work full time and 9.75% work part time, followed by 8.50% who are looking for work, 5.73% who study and work and a very low percentage (3.36%) who study only. The remaining 7.84% is for other. With regard to the sectors where they had worked, the data indicate that the ones with the highest percentage

(54.74%) are those related to language services (translation, localisation, post-editing, etc.), which indicates a high level of correspondence between their studies and their jobs. The next-highest sector is education, with a considerably lower percentage (13.77%). Further still are marketing and publicity (5.53%); entertainment and mass media (3.95%); tourism (2.37%); transport and logistics (2.31%); healthcare services (1.77%). For 'other', the percentage is 15.35%, which suggests that this is a topic to be explored.

3.3. Time required to find work

With regard to the amount of time that EU graduates needed to find their first job, 32.74% needed less than six months and 30.57% already had work at the time of graduation, for a total of 63.31%. The rest obtained a job in one year (9.62%) or two years (7.38%).

3.4. Salary and level of satisfaction

When asked about their net salary, the highest percentage earned between 10,000€ and 20,000€, followed by a higher salary (20,000€–30,000€) and finally a group that did not answer. When asked about their level of job satisfaction, the data are relatively positive. 41.30% state they are moderately satisfied, followed by 25.23% who are very satisfied and 11.66% who are moderately dissatisfied. Only 2.11% state that they are not satisfied. This response would seem to contradict the response regarding the possibility of changing jobs in the near future, to which the highest percentage responded affirmatively (47.06%) and 34.56% stated that they would not. When asked about how they found work, in Europe, as in Spain, the options and the percentages were varied. Of the eight possible options, the highest values are found for 'through a job offer' (28.66%) and 'after an internship' (14.69%). They are distantly followed by 'through friends or family' (7.97%), 'through a job application' (6.46%) and 'through former professors or advisors' (5.14%). Only 2.83% indicate using social networks and 2.31% through former classmates.

3.5. Internships

With regard to questions about internships and their relation to the labour market, in the question about how many internship periods they had carried out, the majority indicated only one (40.78%); followed by none (26.48%); two periods (19.70%); at a lower percentage, three (8.30%); and only 4.74% listed more than three. When asked about the nature of these internships, the data indicate that almost 50% were mandatory (46.64%); 27.87% were voluntary and only 12.12% were elective. With regard to duration, between 1 and 6 months reached 48.42% and only 18.12% corresponded to duration of more than 6 months. With regard to the type of internship, 44.27% indicated that they were paid and only 29.25% stated that they were not. As the graph shows, 26.48% did not reply.

3.6. Tasks during the internship

As far as the tasks carried out during the internship period, the following had the highest percentages: translation held the top spot (55.99%), followed by tasks related to test correction (38.74%), editing (25.49%) and tasks related to terminology (22.86%). With regard to the usefulness of the internships, if the percentages for 'very useful' (28.79%) and 'moderately useful' (18.84%) are added, they reach almost 50% (47.62%). However, 16.14% stated that they were not very useful and 9.75% said they were not at all useful, which should be explored. It should be mentioned that these are the overall results with respect to members of the EMT network.

3.7. Conclusion from the project Employment and the future of the profession

Some general conclusions emerging from this study about training and employment by EMT graduates are:

• Language competences are of utter importance (L1 & L2).
• More general & cultural knowledge is desirable.
• General translation is important but specialised translation become more and more important.
• CAT tools & terminology are also rising competences
• Main fields & tasks: language services and tasks related: translating, post-editing, proofreading, localisation and language adviser.
• Private sector but self-employment is rising too.

Nevertheless, some differences are made more evident when analysing data separately for some countries. For example, a more detailed study on graduates of Master's in Translation in the case of Spain shows some differences that will not be discussed here as it goes beyond the scope of this article.

4. The European language industry survey, 2017

EUATC that contributed to the OPTIMALE project by disseminating the OPTIMALE questionnaire among its member organisations is conducting a yearly survey about expectations and concerns of the European language industry since 2013. The 2016 survey gave a broader view of the translation market by asking European Language Industry Association and Globalization & Localization Association to co-operate being supported by the DGT through the LIND project and the EMT network. In 2017, the FIT Europe (the Europe International Federation of Translators) also offers her support to the 2017 edition of the European Language Industry survey. The survey also broadens its scope to the audience of individual language professionals.

The survey received 866 valid responses from 49 different countries, including many outside Europe.

The objectives of the survey—as explained in the EUATAC official website have not changed compared to previous editions:

It was not set up to gather exact quantitative data but to establish the mood of the industry. As such it does not replace other local, regional or global surveys of the language industry but adds the important dimensions of perception and trust, which determine to a great extent the actions of industry stakeholders.

Some clear trends like the increasing importance of MT and the still dominant role of technology are emerging from this survey. In 2016, two significant trends seemed to emerge. One is the outsourcing of linguistics and non-linguistics tasks, and the second is the trend toward domain specific translations despite the fact that the focus on specific domains is depending on the size of the LSPs.

In 2017, the well-established practice of outsourcing linguistic (+29%) or non-linguistic tasks (+26%) continues to show a strong increase (Figure 1) despite the fact that the focus on specific domains is depending on the size of the LSPs.
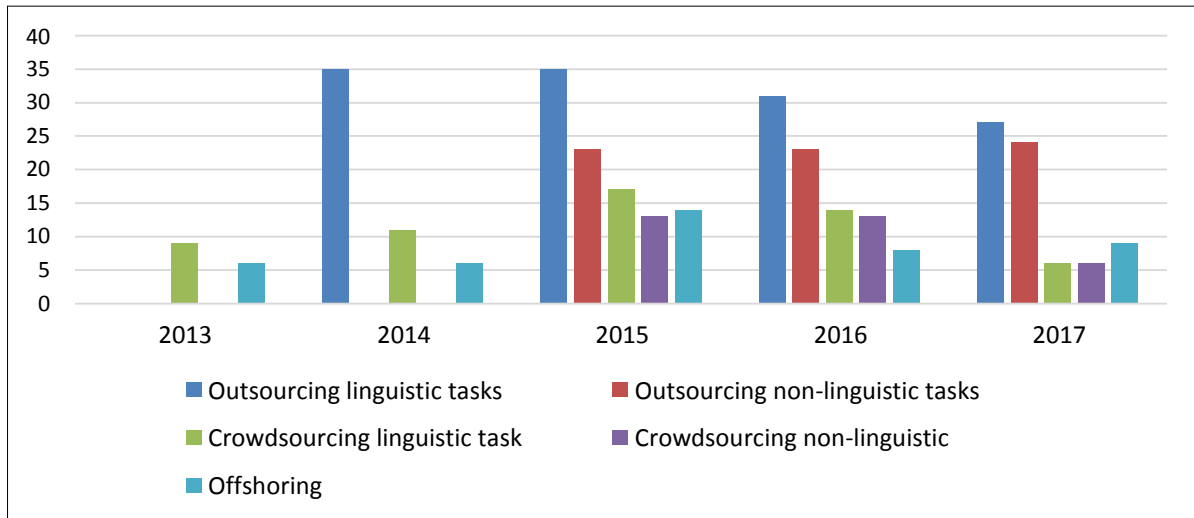
Figure 1. EUATC, changes 2013–2016 in outsourcing, crowdsourcing and offshoring

Some other more trends may also be interesting for trying to predict future developments (Figure 2) (EUATC). The most important criteria are native language competence and foreign language competence, followed by translation competence Almost 70% of the respondents

consider these competences critical and for more than 25% they are important. Other criteria are to a lesser extent critical. Taking critical and important together, all other criteria, with the exception of post-editing skills and MT system management skills, score well over 50%.
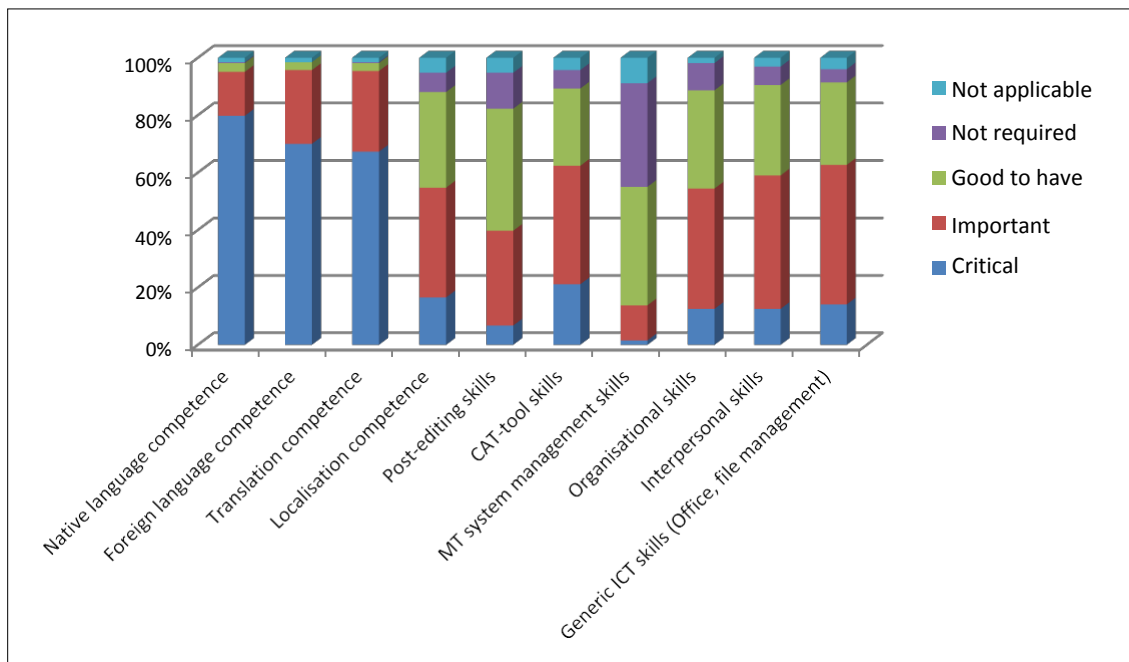

Figure 2. EUATC, required competences for translation-related positions

MT seems still not to be very popular, only 41% of the respondents use it but, as Krause (2017) points out, it has increased within the last two years and what is even more important for programme designing is the fact that LSPs using MT usually provide their clients with full post-edited output.

CAT tools have become an indispensable tool to nearly all LSPs—only 7% of the respondents do not use any form of CAT tools while 84% of LSPs use some form of translation management or workflow system. What other technologies are concerned, quality control automation (38%) and voice recognition (30%) seem to play a role in LSPs' work ambience. Taking into account that quality control becomes more and more important and that time is money it could be worth thinking of introducing some of those systems into academic teaching. As Krause points out (2017), taking into account that quality control becomes more and more important and that time is money it could be worth thinking of introducing some of those systems into academic teaching.

As for the second emerging fact—domain-based on the results of the EUATC 2017 survey, and as in 2016, legal services are the most widely served type of customer. This is the case for both language service companies and independent professional, followed by manufacturing, financing and life sciences. However, as EUATC (2017) report indicates there are significant difference between language service companies and independent professionals. Thus, the traditional engineering industries such as manufacturing and automotive attract more companies than independent professionals while human science oriented domains such as legal, government and tourism show the opposite tendency.

Another emerging fact from the EUATC survey shows a university degree is not a 100% requirement. Therefore, it is important for us as programme designers and trainers to adapt our translation programmes to the market´needs in order to increase the added value of an academic degree.

5. Conclusions and final remarks

Some general conclusions emerge from these studies:

• Language competences are of utter importance, the stress is put on native language competences.
• Specialised translation and domain knowledge become more and more important.
• Domain-related terminological work may disclose job perspectives.
• CAT tools are part of a translator's daily life but still need a boost within translation programmes.
• MT should not be considered a threat to translation professionals but a chance for creating jobs in pre- and post-editing.
• More cultural knowledge is desirable.
• Outsourcing and crowding have to be taken into account.
• Academic degrees are still very important in translation but need to be fostered by improving and adapting academic translation programmes.
• High quality is a self-evident requirement.
• Professional ethics is a core competence.

As final remarks a main question that arises could be: what lessons can these three studies offer to trainers and directors in translation programmes as well as to LSPs? The results from the research presented seem to indicate that the education and training of translators is a responsibility shared by universities and companies. Furthermore, in a highly competitive market, graduates should be equipped with a series of basic competences (a combination of theoretical and practical academic training and external internships) before entering the labour market. This is where they will be able to acquire greater experience, advanced knowledge and the competences that they will need in order to become professionals in the translation industry.

Universities are not businesses and for this reason they should not give in to the trends and demands of the market without conditions, but rather there should be cooperation between the two. That said universities have the responsibility of making sure that the students who intend to work in the translation industry are aware of the current and future needs of their potential employers. In addition, they should be given the opportunity to acquire a comprehensive range of both linguistic

and translation competences. They will also need knowledge of CAT tools, project management and quality control skills, which will allow them to occupy different positions within the translation industry, where an increasingly multidisciplinary profile is in demand.

With this in mind, after a consultation process involving the EMT network membership and language industry stakeholders, a new framework of competences has been produced. This has now been adopted as the EMT competence framework for 2018–2024.

As explained in the brochure by the EMT (2018): 'This competence framework aims to consolidate and enhance the employability of graduates of Master's degrees in translation throughout Europe'.

The framework contains five main areas of competences: Languages and cultures, translation, technology, personal and interpersonal and service provision. Within each of these areas, a number of skills are considered to be essential or important within the context of a Master's degree in translation.

The EMT network point of view is that translator education and training at Master's degree level should equip students not only with a deep understanding of the processes involved, but also with the ability to perform and provide a translation service in line with the highest professional and ethical standards.

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