

# **CONNECTING TRANSLATION EMPLOYERS AND TRAINERS. EXPERIENCE OF INTERNSHIPS IN PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION TRAINING**

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The University of Alcalá, Madrid, offers a 1-year Master's Degree course in Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT). The curriculum is based on the principle of cross-fertilization of the three main parameters of training, research and practice. The implementation of this principle in practice means alliances and cooperation with all stakeholders that in one way or other participate in the translation and interpreting (T&I) working environment. Special attention needs to be paid to the job market and to the real recruitment conditions, as well as to the requirements for professional translators and interpreters. In the present article the focus is on one of the main parameters of a successful curriculum, i.e. practice in training, or internships. Internships serve as an introduction to the workplace. The pros and cons of the experience are discussed from three points of view: that of trainers, institutions and students. The information obtained from all three parties has revealed both strong and weak points of the process, but it helped to know what happened outside and inside the classroom for both sides— PSIT students and trainers, on the one hand, and providers of public services on the other. Conclusions serve as feedback and are taken into account when trying to improve educational aspects.

## **INTRODUCTION. MASTER IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION**

Becoming a professional translator or interpreter in general and specifically in the public service sector is a long and time-consuming process, which encompasses not only education and training, but also cooperation with all the agents in the T&I working environment. To address this need, since 2005–2006, the University of Alcalá has been running a course of the Master in Intercultural Communication, Public Service Interpreting and Translation (MICIT). The programme was preceded by years of experience, changing from a seminar (2000) to a continuing education course (2001), then to a Master's recognised at national level (2006). Finally, in 2009, this programme

was recognized as qualifying for the European Master’s in Translation network (EMT), coordinated by the EU-DGT. The Master’s is also integrated in a postgraduate programme in Modern Languages, Literature and Translation, thus representing a step towards a Ph.D. degree. This evolution and experience, gained over more than a decade and based on previous experiences and theoretical generalisations by other trainers and scholars, has given rise to the development of a research-based curriculum and what we consider an innovative model of didactics for university training.

The MICIT is aimed at people holding a university degree with an extensive knowledge of Spanish and English, French, German, but also Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Polish, Romanian or Russian, the migration languages in Spain when we commenced training in 2000. Other target groups considered are: (a) people who have served or are currently serving as liaisons for foreign people, eliminating barriers in a variety of settings (schools, hospitals, police stations, etc.); (b) people who have experience as linguistic and cultural mediators at either an oral or written level, but who have not been previously trained;

(c) people who have experience as translators or interpreters and who want to specialize in this type of inter-linguistic mediation.

The syllabus includes five different modules with different subjects as presented in the following chart:

| Mo d u l e s   | Subjects  |
|--|---|
| I. Interlinguistic communication<br>(on line)  | 1. Inter-linguistic Communication (5 ECTS)<br>2. Institutional Communication with Foreign-origin Communities (7 ECTS)<br>3. Techniques and Resources for PSIT (I) (6 ECTS)  |
| II. Interpreting and translation in healthcare setting (on site)                           | 4. Techniques and Resources for PSIT (II).<br>5. Interpretation in Healthcare Settings (language specific) (5 ECTS)<br>6. Specialised Translation: Healthcare Settings (language specific) (5 ECTS)   |
| III. Interpreting and translation in legal, administrative, educational settings (on site) | 7. Techniques and Resources for PSIT (III).<br>8. Interpretation in Legal-administrative Settings (language specific) (8 ECTS)<br>9. Specialised Translation: Legal Settings (language specific) (5 ECTS)<br>Specialised Translation: Administrative Settings (language specific) (5 ECTS). |
| IV. Internship or Practicum  | 11. Internship in public / private institutions (5 ECTS)  |
| V. Master’s Thesis   | 12. Research project (9 ECTS)   |

Chart 1

A maximum of twenty students per class and a minimum of eight students per language pair are needed for the course to be taught.

The course planning combines an on-line and on-site class. This combination seems necessary in order to give the opportunity to potential students or to guarantee the attendance of students, as quite a high percentage of them (35 per cent in the academic course 2009–2010) work or have family responsibilities, and a significant percentage (around 60 per cent) come from further afield than Alcalá or Madrid (including foreign countries).

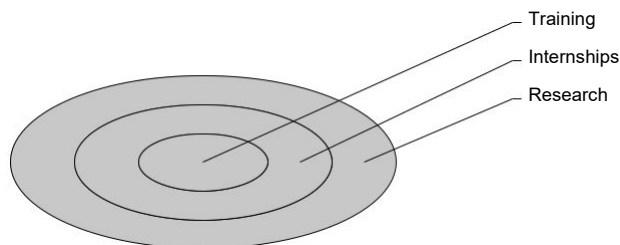
The timetable is:

September–October: On-line classes

November–February: On-site classes from Monday to Thursday, 20 hours a week.

March–September: Internships in institutional centres and work on the Master Thesis.

The design of the MICIT is based on the principle of cross-fertilization of the three main parameters: training, internships and research, which was worked out after a close consultation with scholars and trainers (e.g. Corsellis 2009) as shown below (Graph 1):



Graph 1. Parameters for cross-fertilization

To achieve this end means making alliances and cooperating with all the parties involved in the T&I working environment. Special attention is paid to the T&I market and to the real recruitment conditions and requirements for professional translators and interpreters, as well as training students in I&T skills. So, in tandem with their first months of training (Module I.), the students explore the real market conditions and are taught how to look for a job in the T&I sector, either at a public institution or a private enterprise, and even get some tips about how to develop a new T&I business.

During their on-site training, students work with real documents, which are sent by the institutions and enterprises collaborating with the Master's programme. This collaboration is regulated by agreements with the state and local administration agencies, NGOs, private enterprises and international organizations, where the students

complete a compulsory period of internship. This collaboration began in 2001 and has increased yearly, so that our students currently go to institutions such as the Home Office, Foreign Office, the Department of Justice or Education, town halls, schools, and hospitals, all of which have signed internship agreements.

The methodology used gives students the chance to acquire and practice translation and interpreting skills in the chosen language pair. The main objective is to train efficient professionals in an analytical and communicative capacity and train them to develop skills derived from a sound knowledge of language and culture. To this end, the programme encourages interculturality and interdisciplinarity as the necessary conditions for competence in the multicultural and multilingual EU. More information on the implementation of the program can be found in Carmen Valero-Garcés (2011).

## INTERNSHIPS AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKPLACE

Internships are regarded as an introduction to the workplace. All students have to complete an internship or practicum in public institutions. This serves two objectives: on the one hand, to help complete the ideal circle of productive development for all of the individuals and organizations involved through cooperation between the academic institutions and the workplace; and, on the other hand, to fulfil one of the methodological pillars upon which the training course is established, i.e. practice.

The Internship (Practicum) is worth 5 ECTS out of a total of 60 ECTS credits and is currently equivalent to 100–125 working hours for the student. He / she begins the Practicum after approximately 400 classroom hours have been fulfilled. The student has two advisors who monitor his / her progress during the internship: an academic and an institutional advisor. Both work together when carrying out their duties and each one must submit a report about the student according to the established protocol, which is kept in a document called an *Internship passport*. The protocol states that the institutional advisor is responsible for introducing, guiding and observing the students at work; the academic advisor is responsible, firstly, for deciding if the materials or tasks assigned to the student are appropriate, and secondly, for evaluating the student's work and giving him feedback. Finally, both the institutional and the academic advisors together decide on the final mark.

The students may perform the internship in one or several institutions, at the same time or consecutively, as well as on- or off-site (e.g. translation projects), once the mandatory classroom hours have been completed. The schedule is created as much as possible by mutual agreement between the institution and student in question.

The signed agreements also contain a list of general tasks that can be adapted according to the interests of both parties, but which must always be approved by the relevant legal consultants. The planned activities can be summarized in the following points:

1. Translation of texts, pamphlets or informational material;
2. Interpreting (generally consecutive or other variations of the same);
3. Other activities that could be related to intercultural communication such as mediation for scheduled consultations or helping project groups, attendance at meetings related to case assessments or training with healthcare staff, or even cooperation in the development of activities or seminars about cultural topics.

The evaluation criteria are as follows:

- 60 per cent of the total grade is based on the academic advisor’s evaluation (the sum of the average grade of the work completed: translations and / or interpretations, mediation);
- 20 per cent is based on the report from the *Internship passport*, sent by the institutional advisor;
- 10 per cent comes from the internship report, or diary, handed in by the student;
- 10 per cent is based on other factors like attention to deadlines, proper formatting of translation projects, etc.

The main types of institutions with which there is an educational agreement signed are, as seen in Graph 2 below:

- State and local administration agencies;
- NGOs;
- Private enterprises;
- International organizations.



Graph 2. Types of institutions for internships

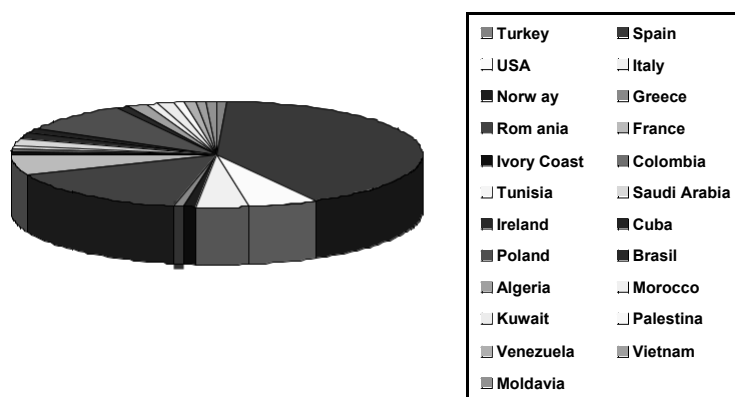
The Practicum’s implementation has been both criticised and lauded, but it is considered necessary in order to achieve the final goal: to provide a well-rounded education for future T&I professionals by exposing them to real-world situations.

Before evaluating the program some elements need to be considered. The most relevant for the main purposes of this article is the students’ profile.

## STUDENTS' PROFILE

Generally speaking, the number of students has been increasing each year. In the academic year of 2006-2007, 33 students registered from which 30 graduated in the same year (91 per cent) and two graduated in the following academic year, within the specific regulations about staying in the program. In the following academic year, 2007-2008, the number of registered students rose to a total of 54; in the next academic year (2008-2009) it increased to 55; in 2009-2010 to 83; in 2010-2011 there were about 110 registered.

As for the students' profile, every year the registered students come from a variety of different places. Considering the multicultural nature of this Master's, as well as the possibility of studying it in different language pairs, Spanish being one of them, great interest has been shown by people from all over the world, including, among other places: Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait, France, UK, Italy, USA, Greece, China, Poland, Romania and Tunisia (see Graph 3 below). This multicultural profile has enriched the training of our students and helped provide them with a multicultural perspective.



Graph 3. Students' origin

However, such a variety also means certain differences, such as conditions for gaining access to and availability of resources, influence by cultural and / or language distance (e.g. Spanish and English cultures are closer or know each other better than, for example, Spanish and Chinese), or even institutions' needs.

Apart from Translation and Interpreting, students can also access a great variety of degrees, including degrees on Modern Languages, Law, Mediation and Intercultural Communication, Engineering, Economics, Tourism or even Political Science, which are among the more popular, which means that they can experience a wide array of different social and educational backgrounds.

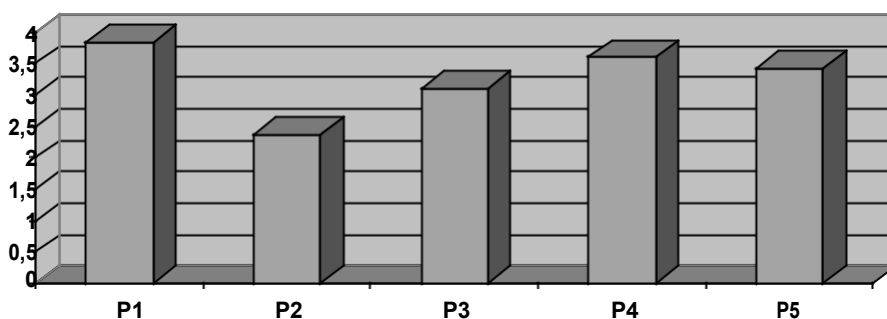
As for the results, in the last five cohorts (2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years), more than 200 students studied the Master's program in different language pairs: Spanish and Arabic, Chinese, French, English, Polish, Russian, Romanian. German and Bulgarian were not taught because of an insufficient number of students. The distribution among the groups was very uneven, with Chinese, English and French being the most numerous, since the last two languages were very often the linking ones for many other immigrants coming from African or Asian countries.

## INTERNSHIP EVALUATION

The data for the evaluation of the programme come from three main sources: students' and teachers' questionnaires that they must complete at the end of the Master's; teachers' reports, and language coordinators' reports, as each language combination has its own coordinator. Three main aspects are evaluated: the course's organization, the value of the internship, and access to the job market.

The three main participants, i.e., institutions, trainers and students, show a high degree of satisfaction.

As for the students' opinion about internships, Graph 4 below, (for the academic year 2009-2010) shows the benefits of the internship according to the students in terms of five specific aspects: usefulness (P1), adequate duration (P2), integration of the theory learned in the classroom (P3), orientation (understood as the type of activities that they carry out, supervision, organization, type of centers) (P4), and the material that is used (P5).



Graph 4. Students' opinion about the benefits of internships

As seen in Graph 4, of the five variables, the highest percentage corresponds to usefulness, followed by orientation and materials. The lowest rates refer to duration, as it is generally criticized not only by the students but also by the institutions since it is

considered that the internships should be served for a longer period.

In general, the main conclusions can be condensed into the following pros and cons.

The pros or the top 10 reasons to positively evaluate the internships are:

1. Putting into practice what the students have learned in class;
2. Helping to know each other—institutions and university;
3. Facilitating direct contact;
4. Knowing reality first hand;
5. Experiencing sensations / reactions;
6. Checking knowledge;
7. Being a source of information to improve or adapt training to real needs;
8. Linking user to provider;
9. Contributing to professionalization of TIPS;
10. Introducing students to the job market.

The cons can be thus summed up as follows:

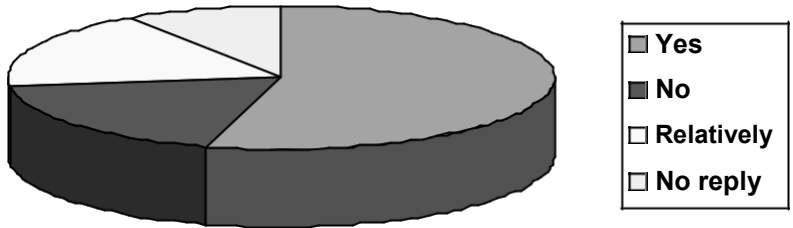
1. Lack of institutional cooperation;
2. Need to train institutional tutors or advisors;
3. Increased workload for trainers;
4. Management difficulties (schedules, language combinations, institutions' and students' preferences, etc.);
5. Not always well defined tasks for both institutions and students;
6. Students' different backgrounds and a sense of responsibility.

## INTERNSHIPS, JOB MARKET AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Each year, by the month of January, questionnaires are sent out to former students to obtain information about their success in securing job placement. Our statistics show that almost 50 per cent of our students found a job less than a year after completing their Master's. However, in the field of Public Service Interpreting and Translation the situation is more complicated, as it is still a grey area in Spain and it is not well structured yet.

For the period 2006-2007, 36 per cent of our students state that the internship period was useful for finding a job. This percentage was growing in the last cohorts rising up to about 45 per cent in 2009-2010. In fact, some of them were hired by the institution / company where they had their internship. It is also true that in Spain payment for the job in this field is low, but it is also important to mention that most of our students have noticed their boss's recognition of their training, as shown in Graph 5 below:



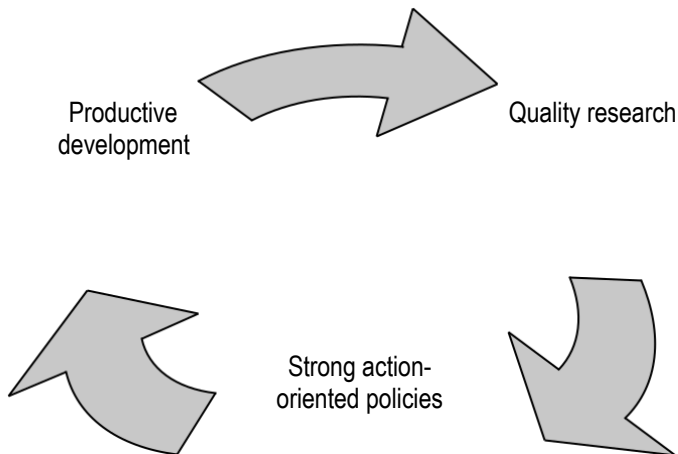


Graph 5. Recognition of the training by the superiors

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

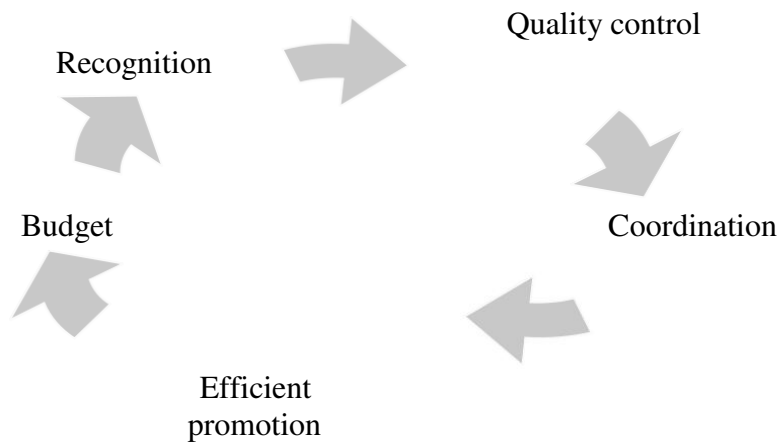
Considering the current situation of the translation and interpreting market in Spain, the Master’s in Intercultural Communication, Public Service Interpreting and Translation programme offered at the University of Alcalá, Madrid, in different language pairs, and based on the combination of training, research and internships, has proved to be quite successful since its launch. The Master’s programme has also provided our students with some job opportunities, but we all expect its recognition to improve further as this field is becoming more and more defined.

We are still working to complete the ideal circle as conceived by Ann Corsellis (2009) and shown in Graph 6:



Graph 6. The ideal circle of translator training

For that we need to go on working on improving relations between academia, society and the job market as seen in the graph below (Graph 7):



Graph 7. The ideal circle of the relations between academia, society and job market

So there is still a long way to go and improvements to make in the following areas:

- Implementing an efficient structure;
- Developing quality assurance instruments;
- Gain accreditation;
- Gain recognition of the profession.

While few professional postgraduate courses for public service interpreters are currently available, it is envisaged that more courses will be established for training public service interpreters. The Master's at the University of Alcalá, Madrid—with all its flaws—can be an example as it offers a research-based curriculum and a certain innovative model of didactics which takes into account the changing social, institutional and cultural contexts and pays attention to the different roles of the stakeholders involved in different settings.

I totally agree with Sandra Hale that ensuring quality training means 'support of university administrators and of the profession itself' (2007, 194) or, in other words, a united commitment to improve interpreting research, training and practice on the part of all parties involved: service providers, education institutions, policy-makers and translators and interpreters themselves.

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### **bandymas su Vienyti DARBDAVIŲ IR VERTIMO DĖSTYTOJŲ PASTANGAS: Vertimo raštu ir žodžiu studentų mokomoji praktika viešajame sektoriuje**

Carmen Valero-Garcés

Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariama Alkalos universiteto (Ispanija) patirtis organizuojant Viešojo sektoriaus vertėjų raštu ir žodžiu programos studentų mokomąją praktiką. Tai – vienu metų trukmės magistro programa, kurioje stengiamasi sujungti dėstymo, mokslinių tyrimų ir praktikos elementus siekiant parengti profesionalius vertėjus Ispanijos viešojo sektoriaus rinkai. Šiam tikslui pasiekti būtinas visų suinteresuotųjų šalių, vienaip ar kitaip susijusių su vertimo raštu ir žodžiu darbo aplinka, bendradarbiavimas. Programoje daug dėmesio skiriama studentų supažindinimui su darbo rinka ir natūraliomis įdarbinimo sąlygomis bei profesionaliems vertėjams žodžiu ir raštu keliamiems reikalavimams. Geriausi rezultatai pasiekiami atliekant praktiką darbo vietoje, nes šitaip galima tiesiogiai susipažinti su rinka ir darbo jėga. Straipsnyje aptariamos stipriosios ir silpnosios tokios praktikos pusių darbavių, dėstytojų ir studentų požiūriu. Daroma išvada, kad analizuojant praktikos viešojo sektoriaus įstaigose patirtį galima tobulinti vertėjų rengimo programas ir vertėjų mokymo procesą.