

Letter to the Editor

Continuing Education Requirements

We have read Tom West's article on accreditation in the April issue and discussed it with some of our Russian translation colleagues. We have a few questions to ask and a few comments to make that we are sure will be of interest not only to ourselves, but also to many other ATA members.

In general, we agree that continuous education may indeed be required to elevate the status of ATA members. The devil seems to be in the numbers, though. It appears that in order to retain ATA accreditation, a translator will have to spend a significant amount of time, effort, and money—the latter not only from "additional work and expense," as noted by Mr. Hamm, but also, and mostly so, in the form of lost earnings resulting from major distractions from our routine work process. No doubt you realize that most ATA members make their living as full-time translators or interpreters. (If this is not the case, then it should be, as follows from the name of our professional association.) Now, based on the proposed continuous education requirements, in addition to paying their membership dues, translators will need to: attend, annually, one or more seminars, workshops, or conferences or take/give educational classes (you are certainly aware of associated costs); perhaps become members of some other professional associations and, therefore, incur additional membership expenses as such; write a book or an article (is the level of effort really the same for writing an article as for writing a book?!) to obtain an additional two hours of credit; and so on and so forth.

Our question is, How about

translation and interpreting? In other words, how about making a living? Like most committed professionals, we really are very busy, each translating an average of several thousand words daily, maintaining project glossaries, etc. Our first, and rather emotional, response to Mr. West's article was, if this is really the case, we will probably have to leave ATA. From what we hear from some other Russian translators like ourselves, their response seems to be pretty much the same. What will the outcome be, then?

The real professionals, those who spend all of their time on actual translation and interpretation, will be forced either to leave ATA or, at the very least, lose their accreditation, while the proportion of those who regard translation and interpreting as a part-time occupation, a side job, or a hobby will begin to grow. Is membership reduction really what you seek to achieve? We don't think so! We strongly disagree with the concept of sacrificing our primary professional work to other associated activities in order to maintain our accreditation in a professional association.

In addition, Mr. West's article never mentions exactly how you envision enforcing these requirements and monitoring compliance. This, too, may prove to be an additional redtape burden for ATA members.

The best way to improve professional qualification or obtain continuous education is through actual translation work. That is why we believe that, as an alternative to the proposed continuous education requirements, a translator or interpreter can provide proof that translation or interpreting is indeed a primary

source of his or her income (say, constituting no less than 50% of

income, as evidenced by Form 1040 or Schedule C of the tax return for freelancers or Form W-2 for in-house translators). Any other pertinent supporting documentation could also be used for this purpose—for example, a translator's website advertising his or her services, and so on. There are also other ways to prove that a translator or interpreter is in business. For example, a letter from the client confirming completion of a certain volume of translation or interpreting work over a year, or any other proof of professional work completed. This, of course, does not exclude the continuous education option for those who choose to take advantage of it, voluntarily.

ATA should not manage its members' affairs or prescribe how they should improve their skills. It is the market, and market alone, that must be the ultimate judge of whether a translator or an interpreter is qualified to do his or her job. We get our education so we will be able to work—not the other way around. If we work in our areas of specialization, and have worked successfully for decades, why should we seek any further academic training? According to its bylaws, ATA may offer an opportunity ("stimulation and support") for continuous education as a professional improvement avenue—yet ATA should not be turning this opportunity into a precondition for retaining ATA accreditation. Please don't allow this to happen!

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