

Sectoral Assembly of the Languages Service (March 2016-February 2017)

Minutes of the 4th meeting of the Bureau¹

Held in room E.4116 on Thursday 21 July 2016 at 2.30 p.m.

Attended by: Luis SARABIA UTRILLA (President), Ahmed GHAILAN (ATS), Naima ABDELLAOUI (ATS), Jamila CHEDAD (ATPU), Leslie FILLION-WILKINSON (ETS), Pauline ESCALANTE (ETPU), Olivier MEYER (FTS), Ana María IZQUIERDO (STS), Philippa FLETCHER (ES, note-taker), Elena ISSAEVA (Reference Unit), Nina STEPANOVA (RTPU) and Miguel MORENO (Terminology Unit).

Agenda

- I. Adoption of the agenda
- II. Activities of the President since the previous meeting
- III. Other matters

The meeting began at 2.30 p.m.

I. Adoption of the agenda

1. The agenda was adopted without modifications.

II. Activities of the President since the previous meeting

2. Mr. Sarabia Utrilla said that at a meeting he had held with Ms. Keating after the previous meeting of the LSSA, she had said that in order to be able to use special assignment (SPA) for language training, staff would need to be able to prove that the language they were studying was useful in their job or would be useful in the future. Given that the staff of the text processing units (TPUs) were now working on text alignment in several languages, that should be sufficient to justify their language learning needs. Translators would need only to demonstrate their intention of translating out of their new language when they completed all the levels of the course in order to justify their use of SPA. They would not be penalized if they chose to drop the course before reaching the highest level.

3. A discussion took place regarding that new policy, which was one of the Stream I working group outcomes. Some staff representatives felt that the Organization should provide the time for language classes as part of its commitment to staff career development, and that, given the multicultural nature of the Organization, it was useful for all interested staff to attend language classes in order to broaden their knowledge of different cultural backgrounds, quite apart from the use they might make of the language skills they gained. Mr. Sarabia Utrilla said that he had indicated to Ms. Keating that staff were disappointed at the lack of consultation about the working group's recommendations. She had explained that it would be impossible for the working group to consult sectoral assemblies in all duty stations on every version of the recommendations, and stressed the right of managers to take managerial decisions without fully taking the opinions of staff into consideration. Several staff representatives said that there was a feeling among staff that the consultations that had taken place had been a sham, particularly given the increased productivity pressure being put on all language staff, which left them no time to participate in any consultation

¹ The opinions reflected herein represent staff suggestions and views collected by their representatives. Any requests for corrections to the minutes may be submitted to the President of the LSSA or to any representative for inclusion in the minutes of the following meeting.

processes. **It was agreed that LSSA members would review all the recommendations when they were published and draw up a list of those considered most egregious, ideally in consultation with colleagues from other duty stations.**

4. Also at the meeting with Mr. Sarabia Utrilla, Ms. Keating had said that DCM had no say in the fact that P1 (in-session) documents were not taken into account when calculating translation sections' compliance rates.

5. In response to the Bureau's request to the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council to seek an independent external evaluation of UMOJA, the Executive Secretary of the Council had said that the usual practice was to undertake such an evaluation once a project was fully operational.

III. Other matters

6. Olivier Meyer reported that a recent FTS meeting had focused on occupational burnout. The Chief of the Section had called the meeting in the light of cases of members of the Section who had, after long absences, either resigned or gone on long-term sick leave. She had invited Ms. Keating to the meeting, who had suggested that staff members attend a training session in mid-August run by the medical service on how to avoid burnout. While he welcomed the acknowledgement of the problem, it nonetheless would seem to be a direct result of the requirement, now written in to staff members' workplans, to translate at least five estimated standard pages a day. While staff could indeed work faster, they could not maintain the same quality. They nonetheless faced the close scrutiny of revisers who continued to demand the same high quality as in the past. Many members of the Section were working significantly more than eight hours a day and still having to work at the weekends, a situation they were finding untenable. In ATS, one solution had apparently been to introduce more monitored self-revision for P-3 translators, with full revision being replaced by quality control.

7. A discussion took place regarding the introduction of monitored self-revision for P-3 staff in ATS, which was helping to increase the Section's productivity. While it was also a way of appeasing staff who had been at the P-3 level for some years and no longer welcomed constant revision, there was concern that the widespread introduction of monitored self-revision for P-3 translators would negate the need for P-4 revisers, which would be counterproductive. Another possibility, introducing "fit for purpose" translations, had been discussed some years previously, but that modus operandi was not often useful at the United Nations, where so many documents contained reprise from existing documents. It was felt that there was a need to explain to Member States the reasons for the productivity standards at the United Nations, given how low they appeared in comparison with those in the private market. Member States could not be expected to understand the rigorous fact-checking, referencing and terminological research that went into ensuring the high quality of United Nations translations.

8. Elena Issaeva voiced concern at the alleged introduction of productivity standards in the Reference Unit, especially as different standards were said to be in the pipeline for the different staff grades. It was particularly perplexing that productivity would apparently be measured by the page at a time when references on demand, which clearly could not be calculated in term of numbers of pages, were about to be introduced.

Action: Mr. Sarabia Utrilla encouraged the staff of the Unit to discuss those plans with their Chief, and offered to meet with him to assist in the discussions if necessary.

9. Pauline Escalante raised the issue of the daily productivity standards for staff of the text processing units, and how the evaluations of the staff would be affected by the fact that there were sometimes no documents for them to work on. In ETPU, staff with no work assigned to them did training, whereas in STPU, staff had been asked to note in their timekeeping schedule that there was no work available.

Action: Mr. Sarabia Utrilla had convened a meeting on 25 August to address that issue and the excessive timekeeping requirements for TPU staff.

10. A discussion took place regarding the task of producing the minutes of the LSSA meetings and the possibility of widening the pool of note-takers, particularly to include members of FTS who could produce the minutes in French. While there was agreement that concision was necessary as members of the Service were too busy to read detailed minutes, the minutes were considered a valuable tool for communicating with all staff, especially those in sections that were not represented on LSSA. Those who wished simply to read the minutes quickly could focus on the action points only.

Action: Olivier Meyer and Mathias Arminjon (FTS) would possibly draft minutes in French in the future.

11. It was agreed that the next Bureau meeting would be held on Thursday 1 September.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.