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Position statement on translators' mental health and wellbeing

Position statement

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# Position statement on translators' mental health and wellbeing

**Consistent with its mission to “promote the highest standards in the profession” and given the increasing pressures and rapid changes taking place in the translation industry, the Board of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting have decided to put forward its position on translators' mental health and wellbeing.**

## Background

Changes in the labour market in the UK and elsewhere have led to a rise in short-term contracts, non-standard and flexible forms of employment, and reduced job security. This challenging external environment poses mental health risks for 21st century professionals, including occupational stress and psychological illnesses. For translators, there are additional job-specific pressures in the form of ongoing technological changes, an increasingly competitive business environment, and a fast-paced workplace. The source texts they may have to work with can also elicit a wide range of emotions and reactions, including anxiety and distress<sup>[i]</sup>.

Personal, health and well-being concerns were some of the main problems identified by language professionals in 2020<sup>[ii]</sup>. In order to respond to the changing nature of their work and adapt to varied tasks and projects, translators need to protect their mental health and wellbeing so they can carry out their assignments safely and effectively. Despite growing acknowledgement that translation can

be a lonely and stressful job<sup>[iii]</sup>, there is a lack of awareness among many translators around mental health risks and how to maintain wellbeing.

## The ITI Board position

The Board of ITI recognise that translators can face mental health and wellbeing risks in a variety of working contexts.

We welcome ongoing efforts to provide networking and mentoring opportunities that support translators' mental health and wellbeing.

We also recognise that translators' continuing professional development needs to include a commitment to acquiring and improving psychological skills alongside specialist knowledge as a means of responding and adapting to external events, and that the current scarcity of quality CPD in the area of translators' psychological health carries risks for the future sustainability of the translation profession.<sup>[iv]</sup>

However, we also take note of ongoing research showing inter alia that issues of mental health can be difficult to share and are still taboo for many<sup>[v]</sup>, and that there are cultural differences in the ways people view health and wellbeing<sup>[vi]</sup>.

## The ITI Board recommends the following:

Greater co-operation between employers of translators and professional associations to ensure that issues of work-life balance, occupational stress, and wellbeing are addressed more systematically and comprehensively in workplace settings.

Translator educators, employers, and professional associations should ensure that translators are adequately informed of the potential mental health risks involved in their profession, so that they are aware of the need to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing in order to carry out their work safely and effectively.

Translators have a responsibility to refrain from conduct that can lead to substandard performance and/or harm to anyone, including themselves. They should act to reduce the effects of fatigue and stress on their ability to continue to offer the

highest possible standards of work. They should seek expert help and advice if they are impaired in a way that could adversely affect their ability to work.

Employers of translators and professional associations should work together to ensure that translators working in challenging settings or with emotion-eliciting materials are adequately supported before, during, and after their assignment.

Research should continue towards the establishment of suitable working practices and psychological support which are tailored to particular contexts and cultures.

Development of new CPD courses addressing psychological skills and mental wellbeing should be encouraged, with the involvement of qualified translation professionals and/or specialists from the field of organisational psychology

[i]. Hubscher-Davidson, S. (2017) *Translation and Emotion – A Psychological Perspective*, New York and London: Routledge.

[ii]. Chartered Institute of Linguists (2020) 'CIOL Insights: The Languages Professions 2019 – 2020' Available at <https://www.ciol.org.uk/ciol-insights-languages-professions> (Accessed 15 March 2021)

[iii]. Chartered Institute of Linguists (2020) 'Health and Wellbeing Guide' Available at <https://www.ciol.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing-0> (Accessed 15 March 2021)

[iv]. Hubscher-Davidson, S. (2020). 'The psychology of sustainability and psychological capital: new lenses to examine well-being in the translation profession'. *European Journal of Sustainable Development Research*, 4(4). em0127. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejosdr/7901>

[v]. Jones, Anne. 2009. "The Translator's Self". Paper presented at the American Translators Association 50th Annual Conference, October 28–31, New York City.

[vi]. Gopalkrishnan, N., 2018. 'Cultural diversity and mental health: Considerations for policy and practice'. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 6, p.179. 6:179. <https://doi:10.3389/fpubh.2018.00179>

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## Authors



### Dr Séverine Hubscher-Davidson

Senior Lecturer and Head of Translation, The Open University in the UK

Dr Séverine Hubscher-Davidson is senior lecturer and head of translation at The Open University in the UK. She has taught translation theory and practice for over 15 years, and her research interest is in the area of translation psychology, and in particular how individual differences impact the translation process. She has published articles on translators' personalities, tolerance of ambiguity, and intuition. Her book *Translation and Emotion - A Psychological Perspective*, published with Routledge in 2017, tackles the impact of emotions on translation and interpreting performance.

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Milton Keynes Business Centre, Foxhunter Drive, Linford Wood, Milton Keynes, MK14 6GD

t: +44 (0) 1908 325250

e: : [info@iti.org.uk](mailto:info@iti.org.uk)



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