Part I

The Present and the Future of the Public Service Interpreting Marketplace
Introduction to Part One

In this first part, we look at the past and present of the Public Service Interpreting (PSI) industry in order to make informed recommendations about its future. It seems that there is an urgent need to re-assess the industry, addressing issues such as the current stakeholders’ needs, expectations and concerns; the pressures driving prices down but quality up; the power balance in the marketplace; the training and qualification options; the need to secure a sustainable profession; the role of “end-users” in framing the industry; the politics of interpreting costs; and the financial viability of the profession.

Chapter 1 contains the analysis of a nationwide survey that editors have undertaken among Public Service Interpreters (PSIs) in order to gauge their perceptions and attitudes towards training, quality control, ethics, conditions of employment and the industry as a whole. This chapter feeds into the Chap. 2, dealing with the professionalisation and standardisation of PSI provision.

Chapter 2 looks at several aspects pertaining to the professionalisation of the PSI industry, starting with what the current professional standards are, then focusing on the importance of training and describing the options available at present in order to conclude with suggested solutions to the problems identified in these areas.

Next, Chap. 3 explores a range of issues relating to the understanding of PSIs’ expectations of PSI; training and education options for CPD; gaining experience and employment. It also analyses the needs of the end users of PSIs, focusing on how to use PSIs so as to maximise the latters’ value; how to contract the right PSIs; and how to provide guidance and appropriate working conditions. From an overview of the way Language Service Providers (LSPs) contract PSIs, this chapter will propose a framework for how to select, recruit, train and manage PSIs by setting up key performance indicators, with the aim of gaining and retaining clients.

In Chap. 4, the author illustrates how, as part of their preparation to sit for either of the two main PSI examinations, trainee interpreters will undertake a course of study provided by a variety of teaching centres. These teaching centres, whilst being independent from the examining body, are also independent from each other and their standards vary
enormously. This article outlines an approach to PSI interpreter training which challenges this traditional exam-focused teaching preparation. It suggests ways in which a course can be designed and customized to help students prepare both for an exam, and at the same time for work in the real world, thus making them truly fit-to-practise.

Finally, in Chap. 5 the author describes the background and the content of a project undertaken by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity of Norway, which resulted in important findings, such as the realisation that public servants need to learn more about how to communicate via interpreters. Through real-life examples from the Norwegian public sector, this chapter shows the importance of drawing clearer borders between the interpreter’s and the interpreter user’s areas of responsibility and expertise in order to facilitate effective communication during institutional dialogues.