

United Nations at Geneva Staff Union

Languages Service Sectoral Assembly 2021-2022

Report on the activities of the Bureau

1. Between May 2021 and April 2022, the LSSA Bureau held 11 meetings. The online format made it easier to be flexible and rearrange meetings, which allowed us to hold one every month. The minutes of those meetings can be found here: <https://unogstaffunion.org/language-service-sectoral-assembly/>. After a campaign to encourage interested staff to stand, representatives from all translation sections, the Editing Section and two desktop publishing units were appointed to the Bureau. It is hoped to increase the number of represented units during the next term.

Organization of work

2. At the first meeting, Pablo González Silva was appointed Vice-President. It was agreed to aim for a monthly meeting lasting no longer than 1 hour 30 minutes.

3. Responsibility for drafting the minutes rotated between all Bureau members on a voluntary basis. The succinct one-page format was retained and a new practice was introduced of inserting relevant documents such as written replies received from management as an annex.

4. The Bureau agreed on a programme of work at the start of its term. As expected, the question of the workload standard for translators occupied most of the meeting time of the Bureau. In practice, during this particular mandate, urgent matters for discussion arose almost every month and many of the broad topics on the programme of work will need to remain open for discussion by future assemblies.

5. In September 2021, the Chief of LS and Director of DCM attended part of the Bureau meeting and responded to questions from the members.

Workload standard

6. Given that this policy is set by DGACM in New York, global coordination on this issue proved essential. The Bureau discussed and advised the President on the position to take in the informal coordination forum established for cooperation across duty stations, particularly before the major steps taken, including the global surveys for translators and text processing staff on the impact of the new workload standard, the two global townhalls and the drafting of letters sent to DGACM management.

7. The Bureau members agreed to collect examples and technical arguments on the problems with using so-called eLUNa leverage to calculate reprise. This process is ongoing.

ETES vision

8. A document setting out wide-ranging changes to the work of the English Translation and Editing Service in New York came to the attention of the President and other LS staff. The Bureau members collected feedback on this document from their colleagues, to be consolidated by the President. A very brief response was received from the Chief of LS.

gdata 2.0 productivity interface

9. The Bureau members discussed the problems with the new interface, including those related to inaccurate and missing data, poor communication and rounding errors. These were passed on to management, who acknowledged that lessons needed to be learned from the rollout.

Concerns of desktop publishing staff

10. The main concerns discussed and raised with management during the term concerned the lack of feedback following the evaluation of the desktop publishing units carried out in 2020 and the pressure from New York to use an obsolete “global macro”. The feedback on the evaluation was eventually received and the Bureau was assured that the Chief of LS did not support the use of obsolete technology.

Concerns of editors

11. Editors face similar productivity pressures to translators. The issue of unfair crediting practices resulting from different average wordcounts in different languages was included in the programme of work and will need to be raised by a future LSSA. The editors reacted strongly to the “ETES Vision” and explained how in Geneva there is no justification for reorganizing editing work along New York lines.

Promotion of the language professions

12. During this term, the [President](#) and Bureau member [Jianjun Chen](#) both published articles in UN Today on their work as language professionals at the UN.

13. The Bureau members from all translation sections contributed examples of poor-quality translation from all UN languages to produce a handout to be used for lobbying purposes with delegates in New York.

Home leave for Chinese translators

14. The Bureau member from CTS briefed the Bureau on the inability of Chinese staff to use their home leave entitlement owing to strict COVID-19-related restrictions. The President agreed to raise it at the Union level.

Special assignments

15. The gap between the number of additional tasks staff are required to perform and the limitation on the amount of special assignments granted was discussed. Staff were encouraged to keep their own records of these to feed into a future survey.

Harmonization of practices within LS

16. Discrepancies between practices in different sections and units were raised several times, including in relation to attendance of language classes, the use of evaluation forms, the interpretation of back-to-office requirements and the granting of special assignments. These were raised individually in meetings and written exchanges with the Chief of LS and Director of DCM.