



Association of
Translation Companies
DEFINING STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Getting It Right Certified Translations Client Guide

2023

Certified translations – getting it right

When public authorities need a certified translation of a document that is not in English, it is important to choose a qualified, registered translator or translation company. This expectation is clearly set out in <https://www.gov.uk/certifying-a-document>.

Public authorities can reduce the risk of error or omission by only using a translator or translation company with a clear affiliation to a recognised professional body or association such as the [Association of Translation Companies](#) (ATC), the [Institute of Translation and Interpreting](#) (ITI) and the [Chartered Institute of Linguists](#) (CIOL).

ATC, ITI and CIOL maintain easily accessed public registers of accredited companies and translators:

- <https://atc.org.uk/member-directory/>
- https://www.iti.org.uk/iti-directory.html?directory_type=translator
- <https://www.ciol.org.uk/translator>

As per government guidance, the translation document is best annotated or accompanied by a certificate with at least the following information:

- The translation is ‘a true and accurate translation of the original document’
- The date of the translation
- The name and contact details of the translator or a representative of the translation company

Businesses, public service and UK Government agencies can take confidence in the quality assurance processes of ATC member companies (Accredited), and in the accreditation processes for experienced professional translator members of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (MCIL and FCIL) and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (MITI, FITI and Corporate LSP Members). All three organisations endorse each other’s guidance for certifying a translation.

Certification by Accredited ATC Members

Only accredited member companies of the ATC have the right to use the ATC’s Certification Stamp. The ATC Certification Stamp carries the name and membership number of the member company, and the year on the stamp always indicates the current year’s membership.

You can check a company’s membership at <https://atc.org.uk/member-directory/>

Types of certified translations

Most UK public service and other authorities require all translations of official documents to be certified. Examples of translations requiring certification can include civil record certificates (birth, marriage or death certificates), diplomas and transcripts, company registration documents, or documentation used in legal proceedings.

Certified translations act as official documents which are deemed acceptable to authorities due to the presence of explicit signals that denote the professional competence of the translator. When accompanied by the original document, a translated document acquires the same official and legal authority as the original. The translator or translation company accepts responsibility for its accuracy by adding a translation certificate or affidavit stating that the translation is “true to the original”, which is then signed and stamped by the translator.

This is the type of certification that is required by UK government bodies such as the Home Office, Passport Office, and the UK Border Agency, as well as by universities and most foreign embassies in the UK.

The certificate should be written in the language of the intended recipient only. If the translation is intended for courts or government authorities in the UK, the certification should be in English only, rather than in both the source and target language.

Many countries have a system of “sworn”, “official” or “state authorised” translators accredited by government authorities to certify translations of official documents. No such system exists in the UK.

Accredited ATC member companies, ITI members and CIOL members can offer advice on the various certification options available.

We strongly recommend that you check with the receiving authority to ensure that the level of certification requested is correct for that authority.

Hard copy or digital?

Most authorities require certified translations to be presented as hard copies, on paper.

Some authorities may accept digitally certified translations, but this must be checked with the authority beforehand. Any digitally certified translations must be suitably verified and tamper-proof using digital signatures and stamps.

Certified translation

The translation is carried out by a suitably qualified or experienced translator, bound together with the source text and a written declaration (‘certificate’). The certificate is signed by the translator and/or a representative of an accredited translation company. The certificate may also be stamped by the translator or the translation company.

Affidavit

The translation is carried out by a suitably qualified or experienced translator, bound together with the source text and a written declaration carrying the translator’s name and affirming the translator’s ability to translate from the original source to the target language accurately (“affidavit”).

Signed by the translator and/or a representative of an accredited translation company, in the presence of a solicitor. The certificate is signed by the solicitor and may also be stamped by the translator or the translation company.

Notarised translation

The translation is carried out by a suitably qualified or experienced translator, bound together with the original and a written declaration (“certificate”).

In a notarised translation, the translator signs the translation and takes an oath before a Notary Public acknowledging the accuracy and completeness of the translation. The Notary Public then affixes their official seal to the translation, certifying that the translator's signature is genuine.

Notarised translations are often required for legal documents, such as contracts, deeds, and powers of attorney, when they are to be used in foreign countries or for official purposes. The notarisation provides an additional level of authentication and verification of the translation's accuracy, making it a legally binding document that can be submitted to government agencies, courts, and other authorities.

Legalised or Apostilled translation

A legalised or an apostilled translation is a type of official translation that has been certified by a legal authority, such as a government office or embassy, to be valid and legally binding in a foreign country.

The legalisation process in the UK involves obtaining the Hague Apostille, which is a certificate issued by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The apostille certifies the authenticity of the document and confirms the authority of the person who signed it.

Legalisation is the process of verifying the authenticity of a document or translation and ensuring that it meets the legal requirements of the country where it will be used. In the UK, translations are typically legalised when they are required for official use in a foreign country. This may include legal documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, and diplomas, which need to be presented to foreign governments, educational institutions, or other authorities.

The legalisation process may include authentication by a Notary Public, certification by a government agency, and/or legalisation by a consulate or embassy of the country where the document will be used.

In order to legalise a translation in the UK, the translation must be

1. certified by a professional translator or accredited translation company. If the latter, it is advisable to include the name of the professional translator in the affidavit, as it may be required by the FCDO; and
2. certified by a solicitor or Notary Public in the UK. When the solicitor or Notary Public signs the document, they must
 - sign the document in their own name (not a company signature, or a PP (per procuracionem) signature, i.e., signing on someone else's behalf);
 - have a valid practising certificate;
 - sign the document in the UK;
 - state a certification (e.g., “I hereby certify that ...”);
 - state the action they have taken e.g.; witnessed, certified a copy, confirmed as original;

- (if applicable) include an original embossed/wet ink seal;
 - clearly print or stamp their name and the details of their firm, including company address; and
 - include the date of certification.
3. sent to the FCDO to be apostilled.

It is worth noting that neither a solicitor nor a Notary Public will be certifying the translation itself, as they are unable to attest that “it is true to the original”. They only certify the translator’s signature.

If the translation is bound together with a copy of the original, the legalisation request must clearly indicate that it is the notarised translation that should be legalised, and that the copy of the original document is solely for information purposes. The FCDO also accepts notarised translations without a copy of the original document for legalisation.

Why must a solicitor or Notary Public certify the translation before legalisation?

A Notary Public is a legally authorised public official who can witness and certify the signing of legal documents, administer oaths, and perform other official acts. The Notary Public serves as an independent and impartial witness to the signing of the document, verifying the identity of the signer and ensuring that the signer understands the contents and implications of the document. The Notary Public then affixes their official seal to the document, certifying that it has been properly executed and is a true and accurate representation of the original.

The only time that the FCDO would be able to legalise a translation that did not meet the above criteria is if it has been produced by a local council and signed in wet ink and dated by the council official who produced it.

For translations of General Register Office (GRO) issued documents and criminal records checks, the above guidance is required, and the translations cannot be presented attached or alongside photocopies of these documents as we do not legalise photocopies of these document types under any circumstances.

Translation authenticated by a relevant authority. In the UK, documents are legalised with a stamped official certificate (an “apostille”) by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’s (FCDO) Legalisation Office.

Note a translation must first be notarised before it can be sent to the FCDO for legalisation.

See more information at <https://www.gov.uk/get-document-legalised>.