



CASE STUDY: CERTIFICATIONS



Brief

As part of the ongoing development of their capability and capacity to deliver qualifications and their assessments internationally, AAT had been considering the opportunities for and implications of localising content, including translation into other languages. AAT decided to pilot the localisation process, using Arabic as the target language.

Partners

The Association for Accounting Technicians

AAT is a UK-based awarding organisation which provides qualifications for Accounting Technicians, from certificate to diploma level, plus short courses. AAT also provides professional membership services, including CPD, for accountants.

The teaching of the AAT qualifications is delivered at over 500 centres in the UK and internationally, with computer based assessments (CBA) conducted online under invigilated conditions. About 300,000 of these assessments are taken annually by 60,000 students.

Comms Multilingual

Comms has specialised in the translation, localisation and adaptation of certifications, tests, assessments and exams plus related training materials. We were selected for this project due to our very extensive experience in this area.

BTL

AAT utilises the BTL Surpass platform for the development, delivery, marking and management of online assessments.



Preparation is Key

For a project such as this, very detailed planning and preparation are required. Here are just some of the areas that need to be considered:

- Preparation of the business case.
- Scope of the project and planning in enough time for the adjustments that would inevitably have to be made.
- How the partners would work together, i.e. who was responsible for what and which partners were required.
- Allowance for the fact that there would be challenges that would need to be overcome.
- Understanding of the localisation aspect and what was needed to be done there.
- The technical aspects of development and delivery, with particular focus on the issues relating to a right-to-left language such as Arabic.
- The requirements and practicalities of project management for all the partners.

Process Steps

- Glossary creation
- Localisation & Adaptation
- Appointing SMEs
- Translation
- SME review
- QA
- Finalisation

Localisation & Adaptation

Here are just some examples of things we needed to look at in terms of localisation and adaptation of the original so that it would be meaningful for students in Saudi Arabia:

- Currency
- Capitalisation: capital letters don't exist in Arabic
- Decimal points vs. commas when displaying numbers
- Names
- References to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which in the US is known as the IRS (Internal Revenue Service): in order to be neutral, we amended that to read simply "Tax Office"
- References to VAT rates
- Banking system: this is different in Saudi Arabia as compared with the UK
- Actual amounts in the currency so that they were meaningful in a local context (bearing in mind exchange rates)

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Never underestimate the amount of time that will be required for a project such as this. As a starter, ensuring that the chosen platform could handle Arabic had an impact on the timelines of this project.

When planning the schedule for such a project, be sure to allow plenty of time and build in extra time for contingencies as well.

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Subject Matter Experts

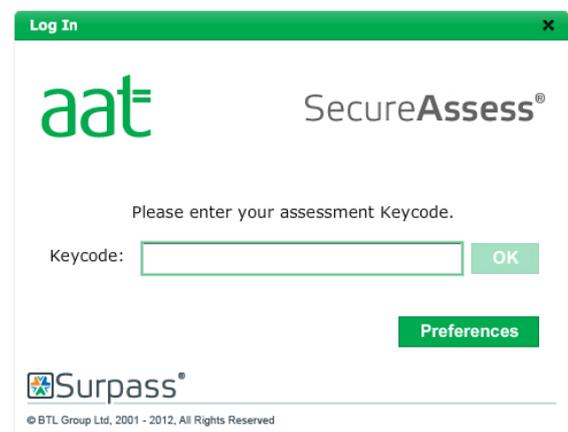
The localisation and adaptation of the selected assessment content, as well as the creation of the glossary of key terms, were carried out together with our subject matter experts (SMEs) prior to the commencement of the translation part of the project.

Selecting the right people as SMEs was very important. Their knowledge of English had to be at a very high level and they had to have proven subject matter expertise.

However, getting two SMEs to agree with each other is a task involving a high level of diplomacy, persuasion and tact. Each SME thinks that they are right and the other person is wrong! You will need to consider how many SMEs you actually need.

Lessons Learnt

- **Planning and Preparation:** these are absolutely vital steps. It is so important to spend time on planning at the beginning in order to get it right and to cover all the angles.
- **Time:** Always allow enough time and never underestimate the amount of time that will be required for such a project.
- **Concept sheets and glossaries:** providing definitions of key terms will ensure that the translation teams understand the meanings exactly and this will ensure a high quality translation.
- **Write new assessments with translation in mind:** when you write new assessments, tests or exams, think about how things are phrased in English to ensure that linguists will be able to get the right meaning.
- **FAQ page:** it is very useful to set up a FAQ page on your web site in the target language as that will preempt many of the questions that you may be asked.
- **Doing it for the right reasons:** doing the right thing and doing the thing right.
- **Expertise and working together:** strategic partnerships are vitally important to the success of a project. Ensuring that you have the right expertise for each step of the project makes the whole project run more smoothly. Good cooperation between the parties at the various stages facilitates things and helps to iron out any of the inevitable issues that will arise.
- **Technical matters:** ensure that the technical side of things will work before translation is started.
 - Can the system handle the character set of the target language?
 - Are there any restrictions in terms of the number of characters permitted within the system?
 - If the exam is to be taken online, what are the Internet connections and technical infrastructure like in the target country?





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Capability first, product second

The priorities for this pilot project were as follows:

- Definition of steps required and creation of a project plan
- Requirements at each step of the journey
- Recording the experiences of the project and the challenges faced by all parties
- Lessons learned
- Building capability

Result

“The fact that the product hasn’t yet gone to market shouldn’t disguise the fact that we have now built this ability to offer localised exams, both technically and linguistically, as a building block in our international capability.

We now have practical experience of the processes, procedures, technical considerations and resource requirement for delivering assessments in languages other than English, and this will inform our approach to any future undertakings.

We have therefore achieved what we set out to do in this pilot project and consider it to have been a very successful project.”

Martin Mackain-Bremner, Head of Assessments, AAT

