

for students and practitioners of interpreting, and is a valuable reference text for students and practitioners of case law.

## REFERENCES

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L. Robinson (1994) *Handbook for Legal Interpreters*, Sydney: The Law Book Company. xv + 170 pp. ISBN 04 55 212252.

According to the author, who is both a practising barrister and an educator, this book arose out of a deficiency that was highlighted by many of her students of legal interpreting, namely the absence of 'texts or glossaries written specifically for legal interpreters'. Dr Robinson has attempted to 'rectify this deficiency by providing a practical handbook . . . in which information is presented as clearly as possible', including a legal glossary in which 'where possible the terminology has been defined in plain English'. Also on her agenda is promoting the recognition of legal interpreting as a profession, notwithstanding the absence of a formal professional association with the power to control entry by setting minimum standards of education and competence, and the power to impose disciplinary control over its members.

With a mere ninety-two pages devoted to an explanation of the Australian legal system there is not a great deal that can be covered in any detail – especially given that there is a separate legal system for each of the eight States and Territories as well as the federal system. The author has opted for an introductory overview approach, appearing to have interpreters from a migrant background in mind more than interpreters of indigenous Australian languages.

Much of the material is as one would expect in a high school text on legal studies. On the positive side the result is an easy to understand picture

of the Australian legal system. On the negative there is inadequate attention given to making the picture clear for each State and Territory. As one who operates in the context of the Northern Territory I found it irritating that it was commonly overlooked. On the one hand Robinson uses the term 'State' throughout the book to include the Northern Territory (this usage is made clear on p. 23), despite the fact that it has not been granted this status by the Commonwealth Government. On the other hand, the description of the hierarchical structure of the State courts completely omits any reference to the situation in the Northern Territory.

Apart from mistakes of omission, another cost to be borne as a result of excessive simplification is some loss in accuracy. Thus, in explaining that all 'States' except Queensland have upper houses of parliament, Robinson has failed to include the Northern Territory as another exception. The reader is also misled in Chapter 1 which reviews the system of Commonwealth (federal) courts, where the Family Court is described as having 'numerous judges and registries and sittings in all major cities in Australia'. It is not until Chapter 6 that the reader discovers the true situation, namely that 'Western Australia has its own State Family Court, which has jurisdiction to administer the Commonwealth legislation'.

The second part of the book deals with aspects of the interpreting profession and rights to an interpreter. It comprises fifteen pages, many of which focus on professional aspects of legal interpreting. Chapter 13 opens with the line: 'Interpreting is a profession and an interpreter is a professional'. While it is clear that some interpreters, such as those with a university degree in interpreting behind them, are professional in stature, it is also true that there are others with minimal or no qualifications and even without accreditation or registration, practising as courtroom interpreters. If we could be sure of legal interpreting as a profession, with associated standards of competence and training, then this book would be pitched at too low a level for the practising interpreter (though not for an interpreting student).

It is the use of the term 'handbook' in the title that is worrisome since it implies a book centred on providing a readily accessible compendium of practical and specific information that relates to day-to-day occupational needs. The forty-four page glossary of legal terms is in this category. However, even this is limited in scope, with too many omissions to rely upon it to the exclusion of a legal dictionary.

As a text for students of legal interpreting, this book is certainly useful. As a handbook for members of the legal interpreting profession, it falls short.

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