

## **A University Programme at Advanced level (Masters-type) in Conference Interpreting**

### **Participating Institutions**

Karl-Franzens-Universität, Graz (AT)

Hogeschool Antwerpen/Universitair Centrum Antwerpen, Antwerp (BE)

Universite de Geneve, Geneva (CH)

Karlova Univerzita, Prague (CZ)

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Mainz (DE)

Handelshojskolen i Kobenhavn, Copenhagen (DK)

Universidad de la Laguna, La Laguna (ES)

Turun Yliopisto, Turku (FI)

Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris III), Paris (FR)

University of Westminster, London (GB)

Eotvos Lorand Tudományegyetem, Budapest (HU)

Università degli Studi di Trieste, SSLMIT, Trieste (IT)

University of Warsaw, Warsaw (PL)

Universidade do Minho, Braga (PT)

Stockholms universitet, Stockholm (SE)

### **INTRODUCTION**

In early 1997 the European Commission's Joint Interpreting and Conference Service (SCIC) and DGXXII approached the Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages (SOCRATES-ERASMUS Programme) about the possibility of launching a European pilot project for the joint development of a university programme at advanced level (Master's type) in Conference Interpreting to remedy the shortage of highly qualified conference interpreters, particularly with language combinations which include less widely used and less taught languages. As a result of this initiative, in late April, the TNP Coordinator circulated a pilot project proposal amongst higher education institutions specialising in the training of conference interpreters, inviting them to submit expressions of interest. The proposal and expression of interest form were also publicised on the SCIC and TNP Web sites. In a further development, the Interpreting Service of the European Parliament also became involved in the initiative.

Out of a total of 30 institutions that had come forward by early June, seven were invited to form a working group to develop a core curriculum for a 'European Master's' in Conference Interpreting, with an eighth joining subsequently. The selection was made on the basis of such principles as geographical spread and pooling of expertise. The project partners met in Brussels on 20 June 1997. At that meeting the coordination of the pilot project was entrusted to the University of Westminster and at the request of the other members Ms. Ingeborg Smallwood (University of Westminster) became chairperson of the group. Financial support was pledged by the SCIC and the European Parliament.

Between September 1997 and February 1998 the members of the working group, who were assisted in their deliberations by representatives of the SCIC, DGXXII, the European Parliament and the TNP, held a total of five meetings at which they identified a number of key issues, reviewed current programmes and agreed a number of elements regarded as being essential to a programme of this kind. They drew up a draft core curriculum which was circulated amongst all institutions that had expressed their interest in the project and all participants in the second SCIC-Universities Conference in December 1997; it was also publicised on the SCIC Web site. All interested organisations were invited to comment on the working draft. After careful analysis of the comments received the group produced a revised draft which is printed below.

Even in its revised form, the paper still represents a draft requiring further development. However, any future revisions and refinements will not change the basic format of the paper, which is that of a curricular framework rather than a detailed syllabus. The eight institutions intend to trial and further develop the curriculum within a curriculum development project for which funding was requested from DGXXIII within the framework of the Institutional Contract of the SOCRATES-ERASMUS Programme. In line with the aims of the SOCRATES Programme, the partner institutions undertake to promote the recognition of the new qualification in accordance with national rules and procedures.

The group sees itself as an open partnership. It is keen to continue and expand the dialogue with other institutions which was opened at a meeting held in Brussels on 20 March 1998. It hopes that this dialogue will lead to a progressive increase in the membership.

## **I Aims of the Programme**

Within the framework of the European Union's drive towards the promotion of knowledge through wider access to specialist education and of the objective of improved employability through the acquisition of specialist competence, this intensive programme is designed to equip young graduates with the professional skills and knowledge required for conference interpreting. It seeks to meet the demand for highly-qualified conference interpreters, particularly in the area of the less widely-used and less-taught languages and in view of the expansion of the Union and of the Union's increasing dialogue with its non-European partners. The curriculum was developed in consultation with the European Institutions and continuation of this cooperation is an integral part of the programme.

In developing the programme, the participating institutions combined their individual expertise, and it is their aim to optimise their use of resources through transnational cooperation in the delivery of the programme.

In order to honour their commitment to quality maintenance, the participating institutions will regularly review changing needs and new developments and permanently update the programme. The Programme will make use of new technologies where appropriate and will contribute to the dissemination of their application.

The partner institutions will pursue a common policy on student recruitment and assessment, based on the aims of the programme and on the quality criteria which underpin the core curriculum. The participants aim to contribute to spreading good practice across Europe.

After the pilot phase, the programme will be open to other institutions committed to the aims, objectives and quality requirements of the programme.

## **II Core Curriculum**

This curriculum sets out those elements agreed by participating institutions as being essential to a programme in Conference Interpreting at advanced level.

The content of the programme will comprise the following:

- The theory of interpretation
- The practice of interpretation
- Consecutive interpretation
- Simultaneous interpretation
- The EU and international organisations

These need not be discrete modules.

In addition, a range of optional courses may also be offered.

### **II.1 The theory of interpretation**

Students will be made aware of the distinctions between translation and interpretation; theoretical aspects of interpretation; aspects of research findings in disciplines that have a bearing on interpretation, for example, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, communication and discourse studies.

### **II.2 The practice of interpretation**

In order to prepare the students for their future professional careers, the programme will include elements such as communication skills eg voice coaching, public speaking etc; conference preparation techniques such as terminology, information retrieval and other uses of information technology; professional ethics; conference procedures; working practices and conditions.

A week's study visit to the European Commission, the European Parliament and/or international organisations will be organised by the universities in order to familiarise students with the working environment of conference interpreters.

### **II.3 Consecutive interpretation**

At the end of the programme students will be capable of giving a fluent and effective consecutive interpretation of a speech lasting at least 10 minutes into the target language, accurately reproducing the content of the original and using appropriate terminology and register.

Training in these skills will require a variety of exercises, such as content analysis and memory exercises, consecutive interpretation without notes, summarisation, sight translation and note taking techniques. Speeches used will confront the students with a diversity of subject areas, styles, and registers, and their length, information density and degree of technicality and specificity will increase as the programme progresses.

### **II.4 Simultaneous interpretation**

At the end of the programme students will be able to provide a fluent and effective simultaneous interpretation of speeches of at least 20 minutes into the target language, accurately reproducing the content of the original and using appropriate terminology and register.

While training in these skills will build on the same kind as those used to practise consecutive interpretation, additional exercises specifically designed to establish and consolidate the skills will be required. Furthermore, students will be trained in booth techniques and team interaction. Speeches used will confront the students with a diversity of subject areas, styles, and registers, and their length, information density and degree of technicality and specificity will increase as the programme progresses. Once they have acquired simultaneous interpreting skills, students must also be taught how to interpret with the text in front of them.

### **II.5 The EU and international organisations**

In studying the EU and International organisations the focus must be placed on how these institutions operate in order to familiarise students with institutional processes and procedures.

### **III Course structure and workload**

This intensive full time study programme is designed to correspond to 60 Credits (i.e. the equivalent of one year of full time study) under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

The programme will normally offer no fewer than 400 class contact hours, of which a minimum of 75% will be devoted to interpreting practice. In addition, students will be expected to devote time to group practice of simultaneous and consecutive interpreting and other self-directed learning (i.e. background reading; use of information sources eg radio, TV, Internet; preparation of glossaries etc). The programme is based on the expectation that the number of class contact hours, group work hours and self-directed study may total no less than 1,000 hours.

Interpreting sessions will be conducted by practising/experienced conference interpreters with teaching skills. Where simultaneous interpreting is taught into B, the class will be conducted by an interpreter with an 'A' in the target language.

### **IV Admission to the programme**

Participating universities are committed to encouraging applications from candidates with less widely-used and less-taught languages.

#### **IV.1 Candidate profile:**

In order to be eligible for admission to the programme candidates must

- hold a recognised University degree or equivalent (in any subject)
- have an excellent command of their mother tongue (A language) over a wide range of topics and registers
- have an in-depth knowledge of their working languages (B and C)
- offer at least one of the following language combinations\*  
A-CC or A-BC or A-A (where the language combination is offered by the University concerned)  
A-B(sim) may be offered for less widely used languages and in the light of market requirements  
\*cf definition of A,B and C languages given in Appendix I
- have a good overall knowledge of international affairs and be well-informed of the economic, social and cultural background of the countries in which their working languages are used.

In addition, candidates will be expected to have

- good powers of concentration, analysis and synthesis
- good communication skills
- a high degree of motivation
- the ability to work under pressure
- a readiness to accept advice.

#### **IV.2 Aptitude Tests**

Admission to the course is subject to success in an aptitude test which is designed to assess their suitability for the programme.

The test panel shall

- include a majority of professional interpreters and interpreter trainers
- represent all the languages for which a candidate is to be tested and include at least one assessor with the candidate's A-language
- arrive at a decision by consensus

One member of the panel shall normally be present throughout to ensure consistency in decision-making.

The complete aptitude test shall include

- the oral reproduction of short and structured speeches (2-3 minutes) from the candidates C and B languages into A and, where appropriate, A into B
- a general knowledge test
- an interview with the candidate.

Additionally the test may include

- sight translation
- a brief oral presentation by the candidate on a subject chosen by the panel
- written tests.

## **V The final examinations**

The students will be assessed at the final examination in both consecutive and simultaneous modes of interpreting into their A language(s) from all the other languages in their combination. Candidates offering a B language in an A-B-C combination will also be assessed in consecutive interpretation from their A language into their B language.

Candidates who offer an A-B combination must pass both consecutive and simultaneous sections in that combination.

In order to be awarded the degree, candidates will be required to pass each section of the examination at one and the same session.

However, candidates who do not achieve a pass in interpretation from additional C languages or into their B language in an A-B-C combination may be awarded a degree with an A - C - C combination.

The degree certificate shall clearly state the language combination for which it has been awarded.

### **V.1 Assessment**

The examinations should comprise speeches on a variety of subjects in different registers. The speeches will be prepared to a standard commonly encountered by professional interpreters and delivered as if impromptu by practised speakers. Speeches will be approximately 5 minutes for consecutive interpretation and 10 minutes for simultaneous.

Candidates will be assessed on the mastery of their target language(s), comprehension of their source language(s) and on their interpreting skills, using the criteria defined in the Curriculum (sections II.3 and II.4). They must demonstrate sufficient competence to be able to join a team of professional conference interpreters.

Tape recordings of the final examinations will be kept for one year.

### **V.2 Assessors**

The panel shall be composed of a majority of experienced interpreters of whom at least two must have the mother tongue of the candidate in their combination, including one who is a native speaker of the target language of the examination.

The panel shall also include at least one external examiner. The European Institutions, other international organisations, and other member institutions of the consortium will be invited to send a representative.

If necessary, the panel may invite speakers or observers who are entitled to take part in the deliberations without voting rights.

The final decision on the candidates' performance shall be taken by consensus.

## **VI Mobility**

In order to foster exchange of information and experience and also the dissemination of good practice participating universities welcome visits from staff and students from partner institutions.

## **VII Joint intensive programmes**

Partner institutions propose to organise joint intensive programmes bringing together students and staff of different partner institutions.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **DEFINITION OF WORKING LANGUAGES**

#### **ACTIVE LANGUAGES**

- A:** The interpreter's native language (or another language strictly equivalent to a native language), into which the interpreter works from all her or his other languages in both modes of interpretation, simultaneous and consecutive.
- B:** A language other than the interpreter's native language, of which she or he has perfect command and into which they work from one or more of their languages. Some interpreters work into a 'B' language in only one of the two modes of interpretation.

#### **PASSIVE LANGUAGES**

- C:** Languages, of which the Interpreter has a complete understanding and from which she works.