Best practices for conference interpreter training courses

1) Level of course/type of diploma

The course will be taught at post-graduate level and result in the award of either a post-graduate diploma or masters degree in conference interpreting

2) Course candidates/aptitude testing

2.1 Candidate profile

In order to be eligible for admission to the course 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[1]:
  - 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;
- 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 shall 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
- and a readiness to accept feedback during training

**** 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.

2.2 Admission Tests

Admission to the course is subject to success at an aptitude test which is designed to assess suitability for training in conference interpreting.

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 admission 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

3) Course content

The content of the course shall comprise at least the following:

- the theory of interpretation
- the practice of interpretation
- consecutive interpretation
- simultaneous interpretation
- the EU and international organisations

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

3.1 Theory of interpretation

Students shall 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, the language and cognitive sciences.

3.2 Practice of interpretation

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

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

3.3 Consecutive interpretation

At the end of the course students shall be capable of giving a fluent and effective consecutive interpretation of a speech lasting at least 10 minutes, 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 shall 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 course progresses.

3.4 Simultaneous interpretation

At the end of the course students shall be able to provide a fluent and effective simultaneous interpretation of speeches of at least 20 minutes, 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 practice consecutive interpretation, additional exercises specifically designed to establish and consolidate the SI skills will be required. Furthermore, students shall be trained in booth techniques and team interaction. Speeches used shall 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 course progresses.

Once they have acquired simultaneous interpreting skills, students shall also be taught how to interpret with the text in front of them.

3.5 EU and international organisations

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

4) Course structure and workload

This post-graduate university course is designed to correspond to between 60 and 120 ECTS (i.e. the equivalent of one to two years of full time study) under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

The course shall normally offer no fewer than 400 class contact hours, of which a minimum of 75% shall be devoted to interpreting practice. In addition, students shall devote time to group practice of simultaneous and consecutive interpreting and other self-directed learning (i.e. background reading; use of information sources, e.g. radio, TV, Internet; preparation of glossaries). The number of class contact hours, group work hours and self-directed study shall total no less than 800 hours.

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

5) Tests (interim and/or final)

The students shall 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 shall also be assessed in consecutive interpretation from their A language into their B language. Candidates who offer an A-B combination shall pass both consecutive and simultaneous examinations in that combination.

Candidates shall be required to pass all examinations for each language pair 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.

6) Assessment

6.1 Examinations

The examinations shall comprise speeches on a variety of subjects in different registers. The speeches shall be prepared to a standard commonly encountered by professional interpreters and delivered as if impromptu by experienced speakers.
Speeches will be approximately 5-7 minutes for consecutive interpretation and 10-15 minutes for simultaneous; their length shall be consistent for all candidates within one and the same training course and examination session.
Candidates shall be assessed by the jury on the mastery of their interpreting skills, using clear marking criteria. They shall demonstrate sufficient competence to be able to join a team of professional conference interpreters.

6.2 Assessors

The panel shall be composed of a majority of experienced interpreters of whom at least two must have the A-language 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 (preferably from the European institutions or other international organisations).
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.