

(Revision 10)

So, I finally have my conference interpreting degree – now what do I do?

Introduction

You've worked hard for a long time, and you should congratulate yourselves – it wasn't easy getting a conference interpreting degree! I would also like to congratulate you, and I am truly happy for you. However, "This is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is the end of the beginning", as Winston Churchill didn't say about interpreting! You haven't reached the finish line yet; a new life, as complex as it is fascinating, awaits you, and you still perhaps have little or no idea what the pitfalls are. Why don't we try and take a look at them together...

The goal of this short aide-mémoire is to try and spare you any missteps or problems that could undermine your budding career. I would like you to be able to spread your wings and take flight, to be happy and fulfilled in your great new life as a conference interpreter.

There are no magic spells or guarantees that will help you to succeed in this new career, which is yet another reason why I would like to help you to have as much solid ground under your feet as possible. You must understand that providing high-quality interpretation (which is essential, isn't it, and you should already be able to do this!) on its own is not enough to succeed; there are a host of other things to keep in mind.

I would also like to note that, if you have or are planning on adding, a '**B**' language, please read my paper on that subject, as it will help and guide you in your professional

development. It will also help to ensure that what you can offer and what the markets demand are brought more into line. I would be happy to e-mail you a copy in English or French.

I should also explain (you probably already know this, but there is no harm in saying so...) that your new degree may be compared to a driving licence: a licence allows you out on the road to start driving and, little by little, after some experience, a small accident (if you are lucky!) or a few scrapes, you will be able to say that you are finally a competent driver and road-user. In the same way, your conference interpreting degree does not yet make of you a professional, capable of handling any situation. Your learning curve is going to be fairly steep!

To a greater or lesser degree there exists, and will always exist, a gulf between the level of interpretation a recent graduate may provide, and the level necessary to be able to express oneself with ease, accuracy, and confidence in working conditions that rarely resemble what you are used to at your interpreting school. The world speaks English more and more, and international conferences are following the same trend. This means that a large number of delegates are speaking a second language that they know only very imperfectly – I could even say that the interpreter's job has become more difficult than ever at a time when few decision-makers and players on the international stage avail themselves of the opportunity to speak their native language.

But don't lose heart! We have all had to build our own bridges over this gulf, and throughout our careers, we are all looking for the Holy Grail of the perfect half-hour...

So here are a few personal observations, the fruit of more than 20 years of teaching and working with young interpreters, that I hope will be useful at a time when you stop being a student and you are becoming a professional interpreter.

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I) Where do you want or need to live? (Go where you are special...)

Before building your career, the first question to ask yourself is where do you want to live? You may have family or emotional ties to a certain country or city, in which case you know the answer to your question. If you don't have these ties, if you are ready to go anywhere the work is, think very carefully about your language combination and make your decision based on that.

Leaving all other considerations aside, the cities where you will find the largest conference interpretation markets are (more or less in descending order): Brussels, Paris, Geneva, London, Rome, Berlin, Vienna, Strasburg, Ottawa, Madrid, Barcelona, New York, Washington DC, and Montreal. Keep in mind that in some of these markets, a large part of the work is given by official entities, which will require that you be of a certain nationality before they can employ you.

Now you need to think about your working languages, your personal preferences, your financial situation and a host of other factors that all may influence your choice of where to live.

Do not forget that it is perfectly possible to physically reside in one city, and to have a "professional address" in another. For example, you may live in London but work in Paris or Brussels; you may live in the south of France and work in Paris. In all these cases, you must obviously pay for your travel and living expenses in the city of your professional address. You do not need to have an actual physical address in the city of your professional address; you simply declare that you will be professionally based in that city.

This may mean that only contracts of a minimum of two or three days at a time will bring in any money, but at the beginning of your career you should accept contracts for even just one day, knowing that your salary will only cover your travel costs. This is how you will make yourself known to clients, and in this way they will become familiar with, and appreciate, the quality of your work and your professional behavior. You will hear about interpreters who are "local" in any city where they receive work; this type of unfair competition is seen very badly by members of our profession! If the moral issue doesn't make you stop and think, then do remember that everything gets out, and there are no secrets!

One useful consideration for a beginning interpreter is to think about living somewhere where your native language is not found on every street corner, which more often than not means living abroad. You may also decide to perfect one of your languages, or to add another language to your combination, in which case you will certainly want to spend some time in one of the countries that speak that language.

II) Apply for a post as lector/assistant (in an interpreting school) abroad, or as intern in a consulate or embassy

There is an excellent solution for most of you who would like to perfect one of your working languages, often to make it into a 'B' language, or who wish to live abroad for personal reasons.

You should propose your services as a speech-reader, or language assistant, to an interpreting school in the country of your choice. These schools need people with 'A' languages that match what the school and the students offer, to give language classes, act as delegates during mock conferences, write and read speeches for classes and exams, etc. etc. As an interpreter with a degree, your offer will be even more attractive for the schools, as you already know this extremely specialized area, with its demands and its peculiarities.

In exchange, you could ask for either a small remuneration, or an exchange of services, such as access to their equipment and archives, classes, and student housing. All this should be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and depends on the demand and on what you yourself can offer.

This is an excellent move, as it will allow you to immerse yourself in a specialized and high level language register; it also allows you to make contacts with a number of interpreters (for example, visiting professors in these schools). Most schools have long-term arrangements with certain interpreting schools abroad, but needs vary and as an interpreter with a degree you have an extra card to play.

You may find a list of interpreting schools, broken down by country, on the AIIC website (www.aiic.net). This list is far from complete, however, as it only includes those schools that have responded to the AIIC questionnaire. If you would like details of schools in the United Kingdom, contact me and I will be happy to send you a complete list.

A second option is to obtain a job as language teacher in a language school in the country of your choice, in a city housing one or more interpreting schools, and to use the monies thus earned to fund attendance (for one or more terms, as either an external or fully paid-up student) on a Master's course in conference interpreting. Signing up as a 'free' student can be advantageous, in that it may be all you need to strengthen or add a 'B' language, and it will be cheaper – there is no real requirement to meet the university's criteria to take final diploma exams, as the experience and practice alone are what are required, given that you will already be in possession of a Master's in interpreting into your 'A' language.

Another excellent idea is that of applying for an internship (usually of about six months' duration) in one of your country's consulates or embassies abroad. This can be a most positive experience for a young interpreter, as you would spend time working with those who are active in the field of geopolitics, and who use language register and vocabulary which

are particularly useful in our profession.

There can in addition be no denying that such an experience is a very positive addition to any curriculum vitae...

III) If you must work to live, keep practising interpretation – use it or lose it !

I understand completely that not everyone has the spare time (or the financial wherewithal!) after having received your diploma to spend years looking for work and slowly building up an interpreting career. Most of us have to work to eat, and many make use of their translation qualifications to help make ends meet while looking elsewhere for interpreting jobs that pay the rent.

At this stage of your career, you may plan on working as an interpreter in non-conference situations: for the social services, police departments, immigration services, the justice system, etc. This is called 'public service interpreting,' and the professional and intellectual demands of this side of the profession are usually lower, even if the stakes for your clients are immensely important. This is a paradox, as it is in this context that a professional interpreter really makes sense, where questions of life and death, or at least of freedom or incarceration, all depend on good interpretation. This means that there is no question of working less well or of relaxing when you are helping those who need you. In order to be considered for these types of jobs, you must contact the appropriate organizations, take a short test, and sign the forms. This lack of rigor in selecting interpreters is to be regretted, but it will play in your favor...

My long experience of working with young interpreters moves me now to give you a warning: in the beginning of your career and while waiting for your specialized skills to be well-grounded, every day you don't practice means a step backwards in your abilities. It may be that you need work immediately because you have to eat! If so, and you take a job unrelated to interpreting, be aware that it will be extremely hard (if not actually impossible if your willpower and physical stamina are sufficient) to work and maintain your newly-acquired skills. Be aware that at beginner level, the technical simultaneous and consecutive skills are not yet sufficiently deep-rooted to survive without maintenance. The only salvation for you is to make a training and practice plan for each day and week, so as to enable you to keep your abilities at the level required to avoid a complete (and career-destroying) collapse during your first long-awaited contract. I have drafted a document to help guide student and young interpreters in their practice and in setting up an individual training plan, and would be happy to send you a copy if you so request.

As Tony Bourdain says of newly-qualified chefs: ".The minute you graduate from school – unless you have a deep-pocketed Mommy and Daddy or substantial savings – you're

already up against the wall. Two nearly unpaid years wandering Europe or New York, learning from the masters, is rarely an option. You need to make money NOW. If that imperative prevails, requiring that you work immediately, for whomever will have you – once you embark on a career dictated by the need for immediate cash, it never gets any easier to get off the treadmill.”

So if you say to yourself that you will leave your temporary job as a secretary or bartender as soon as the first interpretation contracts arrive, but you are not practicing on your own, you may be simply deluding yourself. If you do not maintain the skills that you have acquired with so much difficulty, I guarantee that you will lose them! Then what happens? You sign your first contract for your first conference, and you do a mediocre job, since you are still not at the stage where interpreting reflexes can be counted on. Your reputation will be that of an interpreter who can't cope. Your career will wither on the vine.

I would be truly sorry if your dreams were broken in this way, and I have seen it happen to so many others over the years. To avoid this sad fate, practice regularly – sight translation, simultaneous interpretation from MP3 files on an iPod or Walkman, and tape yourself. Try and make up a small group of beginners who may practice together, since you need to have objective feedback, without taking into account that we all keep to a practice schedule better when we aren't alone! Don't worry because with experience, we all arrive at a stage where leisure time is not synonymous with a decline in abilities – you will even be able to have a life while still being an interpreter!

My esteemed friend and colleague Federica Mamini has had the vision and energy to set up a formal practice group for young interpreters in Brussels, and in the following description she generously shares her experience – I strongly encourage you, wherever you are, to draw inspiration from this initiative and to launch something similar without delay !

Interpreters in Brussels Practice Group is a practice group for professional interpreters or recent graduates based in Brussels, aimed at honing both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting techniques through group practice and mutual feedback. It relies upon the commitment of each participant who has the opportunity to practise both techniques and in return gives speeches in their mother tongue. Moreover, each participant receives and gives peer feedback on the interpreting performance. Being a voluntary group, everyone plays a key role and can provide suggestions in order to meet specific needs and participate actively.

The idea behind the group took shape when I first moved to Brussels and I was looking for fellow colleagues to practise simultaneous and consecutive skills over the year. Thanks to the great response from professionals and the invaluable support of some EU accredited conference interpreters, I decided to further develop the idea and set up the group.

Chris Guichot de Fortis
Senior Interpreter, NATO
Interpreter Training Resources

The Hogeschool Universiteit Brussel (HUB: it.ly/1bYtbvu) provides the interpreting lab, fully equipped with standard interpreting booths and TELEVIC units with virtual recorder VACS and MP3. Colette Storms is the Head of the interpreting department at HUB.

The group meets twice a month: the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The groups are organised according to the number of participants and their language combination, thus guaranteeing everyone to practise both simultaneous and consecutive skills.

We usually prepare eight speeches per session covering at least four languages, i.e. four speeches 12-15 minutes long for simultaneous practise and four speeches 8-10 minutes long for consecutive. When we don't have a native speaker, we use online videos or online speech repositories.

We record all our speeches and upload them on Interpreters in Brussels Practice Group Youtube channel (bit.ly/18DSM6Q) and Speechpool (www.speechpool.net), an online learning tool developed by Sophie Llewellyn Smith, an AIIC member.

We also have a Facebook page where we share any information and/or questions relevant to our profession: on.fb.me/1bH30b3

The content of the practice session depends on the participants themselves and varies according to their needs and objectives. Participants can request to work on a specific topic or terminology and practise their return. Moreover, senior interpreters working for international institutions or on the private market often participate in our sessions by giving speeches and providing targeted feedback.

The composition of the group is varied but always proficient and high-quality, ranging from EU ACI interpreters, international organisation staff interpreters, freelancers and recent graduates.

I spoke about temporary agencies, and this is actually a good solution for a young interpreter who must eat and pay the rent, since you will still be available and you may react quickly when offers of work flow in. Translation contracts have the same advantage, as you may accept them or not depending on how much interpreting work you have on the books.

Finally, don't forget to eat well, to drink enough water while working, and to sleep as much as you need – I can assure you that during the first months of your career, you will only interpret and sleep...

IV) Acquire or improve, ASAP, the specific technical and professional skills which you may well still lack !

As a newly-qualified interpreter you now have the green light to go out into the world of professional conference interpretation and endeavour to navigate its many complexities. However, to a greater or lesser extent (depending largely upon the quality and policies of the

interpreting school which you attended) you are still lacking many skills which are essential for any successful practicing interpreter.

The beginning of your career is a perfect time – given that in the first few months (or sometimes longer) time will be available while you await professional liftoff ! – to make good the most egregious gaps in your professional armoury, so as to be able reach perfect working condition by the time the first precious contracts arrive.

To be quite frank, the skills I describe below are very much taken for granted by the experienced professionals alongside whom you will now begin to work, and you will need to master most of them in short order if you are to earn your daily bread in conference interpreting. For each of the headings below I give only a very succinct description of how to proceed, but I have specific detailed texts or slideshows available for most and would be happy to send them to you on request. A few of these resources are also available on www.interpreters.free.fr

So, here are some of the skills which are usually weakest (if they exist at all!) among beginners ; if many or all do not apply to you, I ask you to forgive my presumption, but the curricula and quality of interpreting schools are so varied that I am attempting to cover all possible scenarios. As always, my only goal is to ‘give you the tools to do the job’ (look it up !) and help launch your new career with brio and success.

a) *How to help, and accept help from, one’s booth colleagues*

This is a truly basic skill, but it is rarely taught as such by schools, few of which give their students regular opportunities to work as a team in the booth ; even if these facets of our work are mentioned theoretically, it is rarer still for students to have the chance to learn their practical and effective application in realistic interpreting situations.

The first step is to learn how to offer assistance – what and how to note, how to distinguish between essential and optional corrections, and how actually to present such help in a constructive fashion, thinking always of the success of the entire team, which of course sinks or swims together..

Next – and believe me this does not go without saying ! – it is essential to learn to accept and assimilate assistance provided by your booth-mate, and to integrate it into your interpretation in real time. Here also, it is important to be able, while interpreting, to

distinguish between essential and urgent corrections, and those that are optional or that can be applied a little later.

The problem is that, for the inexperienced interpreter, any further factor or intellectual demand on top of the the process of listening and interpreting is actually a distraction rather than an advantage. The extra concentration and intellectual load imposed by the requirements of team-work can sometimes be the straw that breaks the back of the stressed-out and over-extended new interpreter. Paradoxically, it is the young interpreter who is so easily overtaken by events in the booth who has the most need of a booth-mate's assistance, but is the least able to take in and take advantage of this aid! This is an oft-neglected skill at the outset of a career, but we are talking about a truly non-negotiable ability.

So, wherein lies salvation? In practising giving and receiving assistance, working as a pair with a trusted and like-minded colleague, and splitting attention as this exercise requires. Don't forget, before beginning, to agree together on the requirements of both interpreters and the methods to be employed during interpretation.

Here are a few tips for assisting a colleague who is on mike :

- Systematically note figures, names and titles
- Place your note-pad centrally between interpreters
- Write in capital letters
- Strike through 'used' notes as interpretation progresses
- Quickly decide on translations for neologisms, and offer these to your working colleague
- Help your colleague to decipher terms employed by speakers whose linguistic, syntactic and grammatical skills leave much to be desired
- Help your on-mike colleague find the speaker's place in a written text, especially when the speaker dips in and out of the written brief
- Take charge of all interaction with other meeting protagonists, while your colleague is working

b) ***Microphone handover (in both directions) in the booth***

This is truly a basic and essential component of booth work, which is taken entirely (and rightly !) for granted by experienced interpreters, but which is often problematical for young interpreters. For a practicing interpreter this skill is non-negotiable, but there are many

factors at play and various techniques to be mastered if success and professionalism are to be achieved.

In brief, the technique consists of first agreeing on the basic working 'turns' or 'slots' and on the timepiece to be used as a reference (through constructive and transparent communication within the team before the meeting begins), then by employing simple previously-agreed hand signals and eye contact, flexibility and assiduous listening. It is sometimes also possible to press the cough button into service to assist handover. It goes without saying (but I will say it anyway!) that for the client the only indication of interpreter handover should be the change of voice in his or her earpiece.

c) ***Simultaneous interpretation with a text***

This technique is of supreme importance, especially when interpreting within an international organization or other large formal structure, where written briefings are legion and speed increasingly of the essence. To acquire this skill, as is so often the case there are no real shortcuts or possible improvisation, so many tens of hours of in-booth practice are essential.

In this case, as the French say « Qui peut le plus peut le moins »: once the technique has been learnt and solidly anchored in your brain, you have the option of working from the written text in the booth, or deciding not to do so. This judgement will depend upon the chemistry of the moment, the character of the speaker and the text, and many other possible factors which I describe in the relevant Powerpoint slideshow

Given that many interpreting schools completely fail to teach this technique, and that it is one of the cornerstones of professional conference interpretation, it is of crucial importance that this skill be acquired as fast as possible. Furthermore, until the ability to work from a text in the booth becomes second nature, the availability of such a text is more of a hindrance than an advantage if excellence is to be achieved.

At the start of an interpreting career, one of the greatest difficulties encountered is that of being capable of providing what can often be summarised as « on-sight translation with a speaker », while managing the twin spectres of digression and speed of delivery. Here again, there is truly no substitute for extensive practice!

A good learning technique, to learn to manage texts in simultaneous interpretation, usually read with digressions and at speed, is as follows :lay your hands on a video or audio recording of a speech, and the text of the speech or a written transcript (easier to find but less useful in that there will be no digressions.); First practice interpreting with headphones

on, basing yourself on the text and with the speech playing in the background at very low volume, to give you and any audience an idea of the speed at which this 'semi-on-sight translation' needs to be accomplished. Next, do the same thing but with the speech played at normal volume, to begin to accustom your brain to maintaining concentration and splitting your attention and mental processing power between listening, reading and speaking; Be aware that very few young interpreters can manage this complex task from the outset, but persist and things will fall into place –good luck !

d) ***Learning to cope with speed***

The technique described in c) above will help you acquire the ability to master fast speakers, who unfortunately are fast (!) becoming the rule rather than the exception, in meetings where time is money.

Managing the phenomenon of the rapid speaker (who very often is reading a text) obviously entails many hours of practice, but you will also need to learn to prune intelligently in real time and to choose those parts of a speech which are indispensable and those which are perhaps of secondary importance. During the first few years in our profession, you will only rarely be in a position to render every syllable and every nuance, so it will be essential to prioritise – it is not acceptable to 'keep and discard' without due understanding and reflection, as whatever happens the essential thrust of a speech must always be respected and rendered. Recognising what ideas are non-negotiable requires a deep understanding of the speaker's status, the context of the speech and the nature of the audience, among many other factors.

As is so often the case when learning new skills, it is not acceptable to improvise and indispensable to spend many hours in training.

e) ***Coping with 'extended turns' and maintaining quality***

Interpreting turns of 30 minutes have become the norm in conference interpreting, but it is perfectly possible to obtain an interpreting diploma without once having worked for 30 minutes at a stretch. It must be said that the training practices of most schools do not allow for such 'professional-length turns'.

In an ideal world the quality of our interpretation would be uniformly high from the first to the 30th minute in the booth, although it has been shown by recent AICC studies that errors

multiply after some 25 minutes, while increasing exponentially after around 35; in such situations the interpreter has also been shown not to recognise the drop in quality. Of course a young interpreter will have even more difficulty maintaining acceptable quality, even for more than 15 minutes. It is a hallmark of the beginner that quality levels can vary wildly from minute to minute, and this is one more weakness which needs to be eliminated in short order if one is to earn one's living as a conference interpreter. Here again, practice makes perfect, and it is useful to train oneself to manage for up to 40 minutes, on the principle of 'qui peut le plus peut le moins'.

f) ***The 'limp home' mode and managing one's effort***

This is a strategy which will be of enormous help to you once mastered, but it requires no little amount of thought and extensive practice (again!) if it is to be employed successfully and professionally. The term I have coined to describe this technique comes from modern motor vehicle ECU programming, which is frequently designed to shut down non-vital systems in the event of sensor or other failure, while allowing the driver to reach assistance at reduced vehicle performance.

Here, it is a matter of defining and applying a mode of interpretation which makes fewer demands on the interpreter's brain, thus allowing him or her to continue to provide professional interpretation (even at minimum service level) in the event of unforeseen difficulties or if obliged to provide an abnormally extended period of interpretation. There are manifold examples of such situations: a colleague falling ill or being victim to some unexpected logistical difficulty, a communication failure within the team, the on-mike interpreter being under the weather or having slept badly, an unexpectedly fast speaker, a particularly technical speech, a speaker with appalling mastery of the language used, extremely poor sound (perhaps in a video conference), a last-minute change of meeting and therefore insufficient preparation, the absence in the booth of a text being read etc.

In all these, and other, cases, timely application of the 'limp-home' mode will save your skin and perhaps the meeting itself! The main characteristics of this interpreting mode are as follows :

- Loosen your clothing to avoid any physical constraints
- Increase booth ventilation, for example by the simple expedient of opening the door
- Reduce your own speaking volume (very helpful in combination with the above !) and therefore the incoming headphone volume

- Sit more comfortably, even if this entails sacrificing your habitual 'professional' posture in the booth
- Interpret as if the speaker were reading out summary bullet points in a Powerpoint presentation)
- Use simpler syntax and less complex grammatical structures
- Employ vocal range, emotion and emphasis to replace modifiers or adjectives
- Use simple structures and vocabulary, as if one were interpreting into a 'B' language
- Accept that, 'discretion being the better part of valour', the overall goal is in this exceptional case better served by removing redundancies and accepting that some nuances may fall by the wayside, the better to protect the essence of the speaker's message....

The above list is far from exhaustive, and your own discernment and imagination will be of assistance in finding further and better ways of implementing this essential strategy..

g) *Concentration – total and immediate*

I have very often observed that young interpreters have the greatest difficulty in reaching their 'cruising speed', or rather a professional level of interpretation quality, from the first seconds of a half-hour stint ; this phenomenon is all the more evident as tiredness sets in towards the end of a day in the booth.

This is a serious problem as, at a typical meeting where most delegates have at least a smattering of the floor language, a goodly proportion of your potential clients will assess their interpreter in the opening seconds or minutes of his or her work, and a shaky beginning may well 'lose' you those clients, who will resign themselves to listening to the original. To add insult to injury, the average consumer of interpretation will not 'return' to an interpretation once it has been judged to be of no added value.

The ability instantaneously to concentrate 100% is something which has to be learnt, but which is not usually facilitated, analysed or taught by interpreting schools, so it is now up to you to practice until you have acquired the ability to 'turn on' interpreting mode just as you would throw an electrical switch. Practice jumping in with immediate effect, practice narrowing your world vision until only the speaker and the next idea exist for you. As interpreting schools tend to tolerate a short 'ramping up' time before top quality is attained (and of course even a beginner's best work is not equivalent to that of an experienced interpreter!), you need to understand at a deep level that delegates are usually not so inclined nor so patient, as time is money. In addition, international conferences tend to bring

together players who are close to the top of their respective professions and subjects, which means that consistent quality is very much taken for granted among all meeting protagonists, interpreters included....

This faculty of instant concentration is of even more importance in the average English booth, or that of any language used by the majority of speakers at a conference, as interventions in that language tend to be short, to arrive after long periods of inactivity for the interpreter, and to be listened to by most of those present! A similar phenomenon tends to occur during very high level meetings (such as summits involving Heads of State and Government), where interventions can be very brief, but where every word uttered has been weighed, honed and scripted beforehand – nobody ever said it was easy !

h) *Managing (both physical and mental) distractions*

My experience of working with young interpreters, and of observing them in dummy booths, is that they are exceedingly easily distracted and put off their stroke by the distractions typically present at meetings, both formal and informal. Some examples of distractions which will bombard you regularly: secretaries, minute-writers or janitors noisily entering your booth, various staff members passing your booth while talking (if for example your booth is set up in a heavily-trafficked corridor, as was the case at the meeting I interpreted only yesterday!) and/or pushing trollies, colleagues confusing your booth with theirs, delegates hoping to observe the progress of the meeting prior to entering the room etc. etc.

In this particular context there is a golden rule – once you are on mike and have not been told by a qualified official to stop interpreting, it is your bounden duty to continue to interpret until an earthquake occurs, you are dragged away from the microphone or your colleague drops dead beside you (in which case it is usually acceptable, after giving due warning to the meeting participants, to turn off your microphone and begin resuscitation..).

Furthermore, if somebody foreign to your team enters the booth, DO NOT turn to them and politely greet them, as you are paid to interpret and a client cannot hear an interpreter whose back is to the microphone, just as you cannot discern the words of a delegate who does the same thing while speaking! It is to your credit that you remain polite in the face of intrusions into your work space, but it is for your non-speaking booth-mate professionally, politely and quietly to manage such incidents..

So, your ability to concentrate must remain impervious to distractions (including those created by your colleague in the booth!), and it is more than wise to learn to interpret

adequately with only a percentage of your full mental faculties, given that this will be the situation on many occasions when distractions rear their heads. In such a case, do not panic, rail or complain, but continue to work calmly, and once your turn is concluded proactively seek out those persons who can effectively prevent future distractions from occurring, and (politely and calmly) do what needs to be done to make it so...

i) ***Learn conference terminology***

Logic dictates that, as a conference interpreter, you will be called upon to interpret at conferences ! Now, throughout the world large formal conferences tend to be organised along similar lines, involving similar structures, similar procedures and similar vocabulary – mutatis mutandis, all these factors are pretty much standardised.

This being the case, the specialised vocabulary used is more or less constant throughout the world, but the relevant terminology cannot be invented, guessed at or improvised, as it is the daily bread of all meeting protagonists. Therefore, you must know these terms in all your working languages, passive and active.

You will by now have guessed what I am about to say – the problem is that most of the world's interpreting schools do not teach this vocabulary, and often do not even possess glossaries or dictionaries which will assist the young interpreter. We are talking here about terminology, protocol, practices and procedures according to which all formal organisations hiring interpreters will routinely function.

This indispensable knowledge can be acquired by attending dummy booths within International Organisations and by searching out glossaries and dictionaries which may cover general conference terminology or be specific to a particular Organisation (although even here some 80% of terms will be common currency). Unfortunately such publications are few and far between, the best known being 'Conference Terminology', a dictionary published in years gone by by Elsevier, but currently out of print. Most experienced interpreters possess their own glossaries of this type, which they may see fit to make available to you if asked politely!

V) Acquire a USP!

Just as in other areas, you will stand out if you have a USP, or 'Unique Selling Point.' Interpreting schools are producing more and more degreed interpreters of varying quality,

just as the schools themselves are of varying quality. Demand is still firm, but only for those who bring added value, through their ability to cope with anything or through their specific, rare and needed abilities. This could mean having a very rare language; a 'B' language that is somewhat rare but that one finds rarely in combination with your 'A' language; a degree as an engineer, an accountant, a lawyer or a doctor, etc. etc.

Of course it would be fatal to your career to say that you have specialized knowledge when you only have a superficial familiarity with a subject (for example, interpreting in legal, medical or marine areas is quite a challenge for a generalist); moreover, mastering a language of limited diffusion is only advantageous in certain markets and at certain times!

I will close this section by reminding you that a conference interpreter in the 21st Century must have English, and at an excellent level. Offering English as a 'B' language is an even better card to play.

VI) Your professional arsenal: resume and CV, business cards, mobile phone or Blackberry, passport, long-term e-mail address...

Now that you are an official conference interpreter, you will need a small arsenal of equipment to ensure that you are always prepared to deploy your entire range of talent!

It may seem obvious, but let me beat the dead horse: when your career takes off, you will be called on regularly to work in different countries, often with little notice. Therefore, you will need to have a valid passport, which will allow you to leave the Schengen area! You should also keep an eye on the dates of validity, and renew it at the right time, even if this means juggling your departures and your contracts as a function of the administrative steps you must take. It may seem completely obvious to you, but I personally know three young interpreters whose careers slowed down, if not stopped entirely, because they were not present at the beginning of a conference that they had accepted. Why? Because each of them ended up stuck at the Brussels airport when they found out that their national identity card was not enough to take them to far-away countries! You will easily understand the reaction of the conference organizers and colleagues when they found out about this lack of forethought, and the speed with which the news spread, all to the detriment of these interpreters' professional lives...

You could start by drawing up a résumé or curriculum vitae that is as professional and impressive as possible. It would be useful to have a short version (one side of a page of A4 paper) for employers in a hurry, which may be followed by an appendix that shows your professional experience in more detail. As your career develops, you could even come up with several different appendices, targeted at different fields, which would be sent only to

people concerned in that field. You should make your CV 'exceptional' to attract a tired or distracted reader – a logo, a touch of color, or even a photograph could help.

Our next stop is your business card, where you should mention: your first and last name, 'conference interpreter' followed by the name of the school that gave you your diploma in parentheses, your languages (with possible arrows to indicate your language combination), and a telephone number and/or an e-mail address that will not change in the near future! Do not put 'translator,' as colleagues and employers subscribe to the philosophy that 'he who grasps too much loses everything;' if you want to offer your services as a translator, make up separate business cards. Here, too, try and add a 'special' touch, either in the design, a logo, colors, a fold, etc.

It goes without saying that you need a mobile telephone, and something on the lines of a 'Blackberry' or other smartphone is the preferred option, since you will need to react very quickly to job offers. In fact, at the beginning of your career, and so as to make your clients loyal to you, you should not turn down any work contract (as long as you are able to work at an acceptable level of quality). You should also understand that a contract can slip through your fingers in just a few minutes, as an employer or recruiter who needs interpreters will not wait...

As to your e-mail address, try to have one that is not with a free supplier, since these scream 'student!' Make sure also that your address does not have a sexual or humorous second meaning (yes, yes, it happens)! You should also ensure that the address will not change, and that your mailbox has a large capacity (as files and images that your employer may send you tend to be large).

Now think about earphones: it is really too bad to see that even experienced interpreters often use the basic ones provided by the (unknown) equipment provider, where the hygiene and quality are questionable at best. You are the Olympic athletes of languages. Do you think Roger Federer would risk going to Flushing Meadows or Roland Garros and ask the organizers to lend him a second-hand racket that someone left in the cloakroom? So why should you do the equivalent? Just as the best race car in the world puts all its power on the road through just a few dozen square centimeters on the four tires, your years of work and your numerous intellectual qualities are linked to your consumers only through your microphone and your earphones.

Earphones can be divided into three categories:

- 1 those which are perfect for music, and which isolate you from any outside sound; they usually have very large and padded earpieces, and are usually worn over the head;
- 2 those which fit inside your ear (like earbuds for a 'Walkman' or iPod). There are hundreds of models of about the same listening quality;
- 3 those which hang on your ear (like a pair of glasses), but are very light with a minimum construction.

The first category should not be used, for reasons of weight, ungainliness and sound insulation (which we don't want). The second category works well for interpreters, and you can find them cheaply – say for between €10-70; on the other hand, some people do not appreciate an earphone that fits inside your ear. Some say that this type of earphone damages your hearing, but my own experience using earbuds for 15 years is that this is not true. The third category is also something good for interpreters, and for many represents the best choice.

Of earphones, the best performers (when you look at how well they are made, how well they may adapt to different people, and how good their quality is) from any of the categories are those made by Bang and Olufsen, but these cost about €150! Besides that model, the best earphones available are about 85% of the quality of the B&O, while costing about 25%. Whatever your choice, look for one with a cable of 1.2 meters long (the standard length is 1 meter, and this is not enough for the booth), and also make sure you have a small-to-large stereo jack adapter.

There are also wireless earphones (infrared or bluetooth), some of which are light and not bulky, but they are costly, and they are not to be recommended, as any breakdown in the connection is a disaster when working in the booth. There may also be a security consideration here, depending upon circumstances.

You have certainly understood, this is one of my favorite topics !

Finally, get yourself some binoculars or folding opera glasses, to ensure you can see slides projected on a wall far from the booth ; highlighters to prepare texts; tape to paste up agendas and delegate lists; all types of audio jacks possible (small to large stereo jack, jack to DIN, a single to double jack, etc.), pencils and pens, a small notebook that you can fit into your pocket for consecutive note-taking during dinners and receptions...

If your budget permits, a laptop or small tablet or notebook computer, with your own glossaries, as well as those provided by the organizer or colleagues, or to download speeches from a delegate's USB key, can be invaluable in the booth. Load a rapid search program (such as 'Google Desktop'), and try to find one with a quiet keyboard, for obvious reasons! Many have found that the iPad is user-friendly, has excellent graphic quality and is best at manipulating multi-page documents in the booth.

VII) Understanding the market and competition

The interpretation market resembles many other markets where skills are specialized and technical, and quality is essential but difficult to judge. Your competition may also play hardball or be unfair. However, you are now a professional, and you must not only convince

yourself of that, but your clients and colleagues as well, every second of the day.

It is true to say that in the world of interpretation, “you can run but you can’t hide”, as after only a few minutes (or even seconds) in the booth, clients and colleagues will know if you can or cannot do the job, however many or few degrees you may have. As Tony Bourdain says of high-level cooking: Male, female, gay, straight, legal, illegal, country of origin – who cares? You can either cook and omelet or you can’t. You can either cook 500 omelets in three hours - like you said you could, and the job requires – or you can’t. There’s no lying in the kitchen. The restaurant kitchen may indeed be the last, glorious meritocracy – where anybody with the skills and the heart is welcomed. But if you’re old, or out of shape, or you were never really sure about your chosen path in the first place, then you will surely and quickly be removed. Like a large organism’s natural antibodies fighting off the invading strain of bacteria, the life will slowly push you out or kill you off. Thus it is. Thus it always shall be”.

As to relations with colleagues, it is safest to presume (until the contrary is proven) that any interpreting colleague will try to get all the work out there, leaving nothing for you. But you should act as if this colleague will behave as correctly and fairly as you will, both as a person and an interpreter. It is inevitable, human nature being what it is, that some well-established colleagues will not look kindly on the arrival of a young interpreter, impatient to show their stuff in the booth, and overconfident from a recent degree! Once you know whom to trust, do as Polonius (the Royal counselor in Hamlet) recommends to his son: “Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, grapple them to your soul with hoops of steel”.

VIII) Free-lance or staff interpretation?

Your first big decision needs to be made: if we leave aside any thoughts of tests, do you want to be a freelance interpreter, or would you rather throw your lot in as a staff interpreter? About 90% of interpreters in the world are freelancers; the remaining 10% are employed by an international organization or a business, and are therefore staffers, with a salary.

It is much more realistic for you to aim for the freelance life, even if salaried staff positions exist and represent a reasonable ambition, probably after a minimum of a couple. You should also know that among the large organizations that employ staff interpreters (in descending order the EU, the UN, NATO, the Federal Government of Canada, the OECD...), policies are moving towards cutting back the number of staffers, and recruiting more freelancers, as it is felt that the costs of health insurance and pension, among others, would thus be reduced.

Your choice should be based on the relative inaccessibility of staff positions, and on the large differences in lifestyle between staffers and freelancers: for example, the freelancer will have to travel more frequently, work with a wider range of subject matters, but will also have more administrative and financial constraints....In order to become a staffer, you will almost

inevitably be required to pass a rigorous test. Moreover, you will be expected to be available all the time, you won't usually be able to choose which missions to go on, or when to go on vacation. So there are pros and cons on both sides.

As food for thought, here is a comment on a freelance linguist's life by Tony Beckwith, published in the American Translators' Association chronicle (April 2012): "During the years that I coveted the freelance life, I entertained a naïve yet insistent fantasy that it entitled one to work as little or as much as one wanted, whenever one wanted. As every established freelancer knows, that amusing fiction is entirely dependent on things like a mortgage and putting food on the table. Fishermen know that you put out your nets when the fish are running, and you keep working the nets until you have caught all the fish and it is time to go home. And when you are not fishing, you are mending nets and painting the boat".

IX) Administrative steps for freelancers

Be careful – if you decide to be a freelance interpreter, you will not be able to avoid a number of rather tedious administrative steps. Each country has its requirements, but you must almost always register for a VAT number and be included on an official list of freelance workers; moreover, there will also be requirements for health insurance, and perhaps also for a pension fund. It would be wise to find yourself a (specialized) certified accountant who knows the interpretation world, who could become a precious ally in your work! Your AIIC region can recommend some accountants to you.

The following is a summary and guide (written by my dear and admirable Brussels-based friend and colleague Julie Sommereijns, to whom I am profoundly grateful – as you the reader should also be !) of the administrative steps to be taken by freelance interpreters based in Brussels. It is reproduced in the original French, for obvious reasons :

« Pourquoi cette section? Terra incognita, incertitudes, questions restées sans réponse. Voici donc un petit article ayant pour but de faire la lumière sur quelques unes de ces interrogations.

Lorsque vous sortez de l'école d'interprétation ou lorsque vous décidez de vous lancer sur le marché de l'interprétation, vous vous sentez peut être perdus car la formation en interprétation de conférence ne fournit pas de manuel expliquant comment procéder, à qui s'adresser. De plus, généralement, vous êtes sans le sou.

Pour remédier à ce problème et gagner de l'argent, vous allez devoir obtenir un statut qui vous y autorise au regard de la loi belge. La profession d'interprète de conférence sur le marché privé requiert de votre part, que vous soyez en mesure de facturer vos services, de déclarer vos revenus et donc de payer vos impôts.

Les options qui s'offrent à vous et vous permettent de satisfaire à ces conditions sont malheureusement assez limitées : acquérir le statut d'indépendant à titre principal, acquérir le statut d'indépendant à titre complémentaire, créer une entreprise, s'inscrire auprès d'une société au portage.

*Le **statut d'indépendant à titre principal**, constitue l'option la plus logique. La majorité des interprètes bien implantés sur le marché libre ont ce statut. Être libre de ces mouvements, pouvoir facturer, déclarer des frais, récupérer la TVA, gérer son temps de travail. Le bonheur. En théorie. Car la réalité n'est pas aussi rose. Je dirais même qu'elle vire vers le gris très sombre.*

L'indépendant, en Belgique doit cotiser pour le système de sécurité sociale alors que lui-même ne jouit que d'une protection sociale au rabais. Il n'a cependant pas le choix, il doit participer à la manne commune. Voir ce site, pour plus d'informations :

<http://www.asti.partena.be/FR/legislation/lois-sociales.html?smenu=4>

Si vous choisissez cette voie, vous devrez vous rendre auprès d'une caisse d'assurance sociale pour indépendants (ex : Partena - <http://www.partena.be/fr/independant.aspx>), qui va vous inscrire auprès de la Banque Carrefour des Entreprises (BCE) , vous fournir votre numéro de TVA (= numéro d'entreprise) et assurer le suivi du paiement des charges sociales (= cotisations sécurité sociale).

*Concrètement, vous vous rendez auprès d'une **caisse assurance sociale**, vous justifiez vos compétences de gestionnaire (= montrer votre diplôme universitaire), vous vous acquittez des frais administratifs d'enregistrement et vous patientez une semaine ou deux, le temps d'obtenir votre numéro de TVA. Dès que vous l'avez, vous êtes autorisé à facturer vos prestations.*

Voici quelques « détails » sur les cotisations sociales:

L'indépendant doit régulièrement faire deux choses : payer ses cotisations sociales et reverser la TVA à l'État.

Les charges sociales se paient trimestriellement. Les trois premières années vous bénéficiez d'un taux forfaitaire « automatique », une sorte de « prix d'ami ». La première année, vous payez un peu plus de 600 euros tous les trimestres. Dès que la période de grâce se termine, les charges sociales se calculent sur base de vos revenus réels. Le système va vérifier, trois ans en arrière, ce que vous avez réellement gagné au cours de la première année de votre activité donc. Si vous avez dépassé le seuil correspondant au minimum pour les charges sociales, vous payez le montant supérieur prévu, qui correspond à ce que vous avez gagné. Vous payez cela au cours de la 4ème année. Si vous avez gagné moins, pas de chance, vous payez quand même le minimum qui est de 600 et des poussières, pas de rabais. L'année suivante, le système regarde votre deuxième année d'activité et ainsi de suite.

En d'autres termes, au cours d'une année juteuse, si vous avez plein de travail et que votre compte en banque est bien garni, vous devez TOUJOURS considérer que cet argent ne vous appartient pas. Il appartient à l'Etat. Et il le réclamera. Donc, les années de faste, vous devez mettre un maximum d'argent de côté, pour les périodes de vaches maigres.

En réalité, vous devez vous-même « anticiper » les années aux charges sociales élevées, en payant directement le montant plus élevé. En 2009, si au cours de l'année vous constatez que vous avez énormément de travail et que vous risquez de dépasser la barre des 75 000 euros, mettez de côté 4 x 4066 euros pour 2012 ! Parce que si vous ne le faites pas et que 2012 s'avère être une mauvaise année pour vous, ou si vous tombez malade ou que sais-je et que vous ne pouvez pas payer les cotisations, vous aurez un problème.

*Outre les charges sociales, vous devez également remettre une **déclaration TVA trimestrielle**. Le système TVA est en fait une belle idée trouvée par l'État : il vous oblige à jouer le rôle de « percepteur d'impôts » à sa place. Vous vous occupez de récolter la TVA pour l'État, et de la lui reverser tous les trimestres. Comme l'État ne vous rémunère pas directement pour ce service, il s'accorde tout de même à vous faire « un cadeau » en échange. C'est à dire que vous avez le droit de récupérer la TVA sur les frais que vous encourez. Tous les trimestres vous devez donc calculer la différence entre la TVA sur toutes vos prestations et la TVA que l'État vous doit, c'est-à-dire la TVA de ce que vous avez acheté pour exercer votre activité.*

En même temps que vous déclarez les montants impliqués, vous devez également enregistrer tous les numéros de TVA de vos clients, d'une part ; et des entreprises auprès desquelles vous avez encouru des frais, d'autre part.

Une déclaration TVA spéciale doit aussi être rendue pour tout ce qui concerne les numéros de TVA dits « intra-communautaires » (= tva européenne, mais non belge). Par exemple, si vous êtes engagés en tant qu'interprète, par une entreprise néerlandaise, vous leur facturerez votre cachet + une TVA de 0%, car ils ont, pour vous, un n° de tva intracommunautaire. Vous devez cependant le signaler clairement sur votre facture et déclarer ces n° de tva, pour que les autorités fiscales puissent effectuer leur travail de contrôle. (Vous avez également la possibilité de vérifier la validité des numéros de TVA via le site internet suivant :

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/vies/vieshome.do)

Le secrétariat pour indépendants vous envoie les factures pour les cotisations sociales, mais ne s'occupe pas de la TVA. Vous devez soit acheter un lecteur électronique de carte d'identité et les logiciels nécessaires à la déclaration tva en ligne, ou bien vous adresser à un comptable. Tenez compte du fait que les comptables sont onéreux, comptez, en moyenne, un minimum de 200 euros /trimestre pour votre déclaration TVA. Vous avez la possibilité de minimiser les frais en leur mâchant le travail un maximum, car ils facturent à l'heure. Tenir vos comptes en ordre est primordial !

La caisse des indépendants joue également le rôle de mutuelle (en tous cas chez Partena). Attention cependant, la caisse recommande fortement de souscrire à des assurances complémentaires (notamment l'assurance hospitalisation). Voir leur site pour plus d'informations. Parmi celles-ci, la pension complémentaire est capitale. En effet, les charges sociales que vous payez ne vous donnent pas droit à une pension au même titre qu'un employé de banque, par exemple, tout l'argent que vous placez sur ce fonds de pension est déductible fiscalement.

Le service de la caisse sociale pour indépendants s'arrête là. Celui-ci ne fournit aucune prestation comptable, aucun conseil commercial, nada. A vous de vous débrouiller.

L'histoire n'est pas terminée. Une fois tout cela effectué et payé, il vous reste un peu d'argent sur votre compte en banque et cette somme représente votre revenu sur lequel vous allez être taxé. Et les indépendants sont saignés à blanc. Aucun cadeau.

Le but du jeu est donc de faire baisser au maximum la somme imposable. Comment ? En cotisant pour votre fonds de pension et en déclarant un maximum de frais. Tout doit y passer : la voiture, le carburant, location de local, téléphone, livres, dvd, café, restaurant, cartes de visites, site internet, lunettes, ordinateur, papier à photocopier, bics, papier toilettes (certaines choses ne peuvent pas passer dans les frais, cependant. Ex : les vêtements). Dès que vous en avez la possibilité, demandez une facture en magasin et faites passer le tout dans vos frais. Cette méthode est votre seule marge de manoeuvre.

Inutile de dire que vous ne gagnerez jamais suffisamment, au cours de vos premiers mois sur le marché, pour pouvoir assumer un tel régime (sauf si vous êtes un génie de la prospection ou si vous avez une chance monstre). Alors comment faire ?

*La meilleure solution est d'être **indépendant à titre complémentaire**. Car si vous observez les barèmes (<http://www.asti.partena.be/FR/baremes/act-compl.html>), certes vous devez toujours payer des cotisations sociales, mais elles sont bien plus faibles. L'État considère que l'indépendant à titre principal va tout de suite gagner suffisamment pour payer les cotisations de base. Hors, ce n'est pas vrai dans le cas de l'interprétation de conférence. Percer sur le marché demande du temps et surtout, requiert de la part de l'interprète en herbe, que celui-ci continue de pratiquer ! Pas question de travailler 2-3 ans histoire d'économiser de quoi subsister pendant les premières années « d'indépendantisme ». Si vous faites cela, vous pouvez dire adieu à l'interprétation. Vous perdrez toutes vos aptitudes à interpréter et remonter en selle sera beaucoup plus douloureux a posteriori. Le bon plan, vous disais-je, est donc de devenir indépendant à titre complémentaire.*

Vous n'avez le droit de recourir à cette option, que si vous pouvez justifier un contrat de travail d'un minimum de 20 heures / semaine. Pas une minute de moins. Si au cours d'une semaine, vous retombez sous le seuil des 20 heures, vous basculez automatiquement vers le statut d'indépendant à titre principal, avec tout ce que cela implique. Bien évidemment, le plus dur sera de trouver un patron conciliant et souple qui vous engage à 20 heures/semaine et qui accepte que vous preniez un congé (sans solde) dès que vous vous

dégotez un contrat d'interprétation. Bonne chance. Personnellement, j'ai été engagée dans une ONG où j'avais négocié cette flexibilité avant de signer le contrat et le patron s'est empressé de me mettre des bâtons dans les roues quand j'ai eu ma première proposition de réunion. J'étais encore en période d'essai et je suis partie sans demander mon reste.

En tant que jeune professionnel(le), vous devez non seulement disposer d'un statut qui vous permette de facturer vos services, mais vous devez également veiller à gagner de quoi subsister (« A girl has got to eat »), tout en manoeuvrant pour vous maintenir à niveau.

Une troisième option existe : la **société au portage** (dans mon cas, je travaille via la SMart). Le principe est simple : lorsque vous trouvez un client, ou qu'une agence d'interprétation vous contacte pour une mission, vous concluez un contrat tripartite. Le client/agence devient « le donneur d'ordre », la société au portage devient « l'employeur » et vous devenez « le prestataire ».

Vous négociez avec le donneur d'ordre tout ce qui est d'ordre tarifaire, conditions de travail etc. Vous déclarez les jours de travail auprès de la société au portage, qui les déclare auprès de l'État belge. La société au portage vous déclare comme étant son « employé » pour les jours de travail prestés. Le donneur d'ordre (votre client) paie le montant que vous avez négocié à la société au portage. La société au portage vous reverse le montant NET (net du précompte professionnel également, que vous avez la possibilité de fixer).

La SMart propose deux modes de gestion : la « gestion de contrat » et la « gestion d'activité. La première option est simple et reprend les grands principes énoncés ci-dessus. La gestion d'activité est un peu plus complexe. En quelques mots : la Smart crée une « micro-entreprise » au sein de sa structure. Vous utilisez encore les contrats avec les clients, mais au lieu de vous reverser l'argent directement, la Smart met le montant dans un « budget » que vous pouvez gérer de diverses façons. Vous pouvez vous rémunérer, déclarer certains frais, conclure des contrats de vente de propriété intellectuelles,... Je vous renvoie vers la Smart pour plus d'informations et des explications plus détaillées.

Avantages :

- Les cotisations sociales ne sont pas aussi astronomiques que celles des indépendants.
- Vous n'avez pas besoin de comptable.
- La société s'occupe de rappeler vos clients à l'ordre, de leur envoyer des rappels et éventuellement de les poursuivre en justice en cas de non-paiement.
- Vous avez accès à toute une tripotée de formations : marketing, prospection, négociation,...
- Vous n'êtes pas exclu du système de sécurité social traditionnel : possibilité de toucher le chômage (sous certaines conditions), soins de santé, obtention de fiches patronales,...

- Même si le donneur d'ordre ne paie pas tout de suite, la société au portage joue le rôle de « tiers-payant » et vous paie à l'avance, quelques jours après la date de réception du contrat.

Inconvénients :

- Plus fastidieux pour le client, qui doit signer « une fiche d'identification » et un contrat/bon de commande ; la gestion d'activité exige également plus de démarches telles que signer des contrats de prestation pour débloquer le budget et vous rémunérer.

- Vous disposez de moins de liquidités sur votre compte en banque (ce qui est en réalité un avantage, car vous ne risquez pas d'avoir de mauvaise surprise au cours d'une année plus creuse)

- La Smart prélève 6,5% du montant total négocié avec le client.

- Vous devez quand même facturer la TVA (21% en Belgique), bien que ce soit la Smart qui s'occupe des déclarations TVA et autres.

- Moins de souplesse dans la déclaration des frais (ceux-ci ne pouvant être déclarés que si vous souscrivez à la branche « Gestion d'activité »)

La dernière option, selon moi, est de **créer une entreprise et de se constituer salarié** de celle-ci. N'ayant pas encore exploré cette voie, je ne peux malheureusement pas apporter un quelconque témoignage en la matière. Je sais cependant que la constitution en société requiert un capital de départ assez conséquent.

Conclusion:

Personnellement, je pense que la Smart est une bonne façon de se lancer sur le marché, tant que le débutant n'a pas une base clientèle suffisamment solide pour assumer tous les frais liés au statut d'indépendant. A moins de jouir d'un soutien financier extérieur (parents, conjoint,...), le statut d'indépendant à titre principal est extrêmement difficile à maintenir sans job d'appoint, impliquant le risque de se retrouver coincé par un patron peu flexible.

Au delà d'un certain seuil, l'interprète aura probablement tout intérêt à devenir indépendant, afin d'être plus flexible dans ses mouvements. Selon les informations fournies par la Smart, le statut d'indépendant devient réellement rentable à partir d'un chiffre d'affaires annuel de minimum 35 000 euros ».

The main 'portage' company in France can be found at the following website ::

www.missions-cadres.fr

My friend and free-lance interpreter colleague Jenny Taylor has drafted a short guide to her experiences in setting-up a small business in Belgium, and here she shares this information with you:

Dear interpreters-to-be, good luck with any exams and with starting out in the profession!

Part 1: Being self-employed in Belgium

When I decided to become self-employed in January 2012 (six months before passing my interpreting exams), I was unaware that there were any other options out there, so I just jumped in the deep end and became “indépendante à titre principal” - with all the administrative burdens that implies (quarterly VAT declarations, cotisations sociales payments, keeping detailed records of my clients, invoices, expenses and any VAT collected...). Although this may all sound very daunting, it was certainly the right choice for me and I have not regretted it. Here are the main reasons why:

- ***Once you have a VAT number, you can invoice clients!*** This may sound obvious, but it is such an asset. Once I had that VAT number, I suddenly realised that the world of money-making was my oyster! It was quite remarkable how many people I discovered in my network, without having to venture much further, to whom I could sell services such as language teaching, translation, proof reading or copy writing as a way of funding my final six months of studies. This also meant that once I had my interpreting degree in hand and the first clients started coming along, I was able to hit the ground running.
- ***Invoicing clients for other services is a great way to keep the wolf from the door while building your interpreting client base and honing your skills.*** According to experienced colleagues I have spoken to, it can take up to four years for a young interpreter to be making enough money off interpreting to survive. Hence, you need another source of income in the interim. For me, being self-employed and billing for other services allowed me to organise my time as needed in order to maintain and improve my interpreting skills, break into the Brussels interpreting market and not starve in the streets while doing it. Of course, the age-old standard of professionalism applies: only accept money for a job you can actually do at a high professional standard. I discovered there were many things I was good at and that could make me money - and I'm sure the same applies to you! All you need is a bit of creativity, imagination and self-confidence.
- ***Other professionals respect you.*** When dealing with other professionals, be they interpreting colleagues or potential clients, having a VAT number gives you credibility and makes you look respectable. It shows that you are serious about your work and not just dabbling in it. It shows that you are organised, committed and professional. Once people find out you have a business number, they immediately respect you more and are less likely to question your rates and conditions.

In her text, Julie mentions that becoming self-employed (independent) is only really worth it once you are making €35,000 gross per year. I would tend to disagree, since I did not make remotely that much money in

my first year as indépendante, but it was still worth it. You do need to plan in at least €1000 per quarter for your cotisations sociales and your accountant fee (unless you have a background in accounting yourself, hiring one really is essential!) and make sure that any money you do not spend is put back for future tax payments. Here are a few tips that I found helpful when starting out as an indépendante:

- **Believe in yourself and dream big:** *if you don't think you're going to make enough money as an independent and that therefore it's not worth it, then you almost certainly won't.*
- **Attend a course on how to run your business:** *There are many courses out there designed to help new freelancers find their feet and avoid common mistakes when starting out (useful links to follow).*
- *Exploit your already existing **network** and be creative about expanding it.*
- **Don't spend all your money at once:** *The money people pay into your account is not there to be spent all at once. Some of it is going to be for taxes, so bare that in mind. Always.*
- **Maximise your business expenses:** *You only pay tax on money you didn't manage to deduct as a business expense. So the aim of the game is to spend as much of your hard-earned money on professional expenses (including on training courses such as the Cambridge Conference interpreting course!) as possible.*
- **Hire an accountant:** *This will not only avoid you running into problems with the Belgian tax people, but your accountant will also have good advice on how to increase your business expenses and will know when it might be worth your while changing your business structure. For my first two years as an indépendante, my accountant cost €75 per month - a worthwhile investment, I can assure you!*

Part 2: Creating a business

Once you are making more than €35,000 gross per year, it is in fact worth thinking about setting up a business. The reason for this is that as an indépendante/e, all income from your contracts is considered your own, personal income and you are taxed accordingly. At €35,000, about 45-50% of every new Euro you earn will go straight to the tax people. Not that attractive. As a company, all your income is company money, which is taxed at a corporate tax rate of 25% to a maximum of 29% - no matter how much you make. So that's good. Your business then pays you a salary, which (if kept reasonably low) will always be taxed less than if you had remained indépendante. I set up my business at the end of 2013, which is the system I currently operate under.

There are several different types of businesses in Belgium - the two most common ones are the SPRL (société privée à responsabilité limitée - so a limited company) and the SC (société coopérative) of which the SCRIS (société coopérative à responsabilité illimité et solidaire) is the one my fiancé and I opted for. As the name implies, a société coopérative has more than one associate who work together and who get paid salaries. The advantage of the SCRIS over an SPRL is the speed and ease with which it can be set up. In order to set up an SPRL you need a starting capital of about €20,000

and you need to pay a notary a substantial amount of money. I have recently discovered that there is such a thing as an SPRL-S (Starter), specifically aimed at helping young entrepreneurs without a huge start-up capital. This is not something I have looked into much, so just be aware that it exists and that it may be a good option for someone not willing to go down the SC route.

If you are interested in the procedure for setting up an SCRIS and in the implications of it, I am happy to talk to or meet with any one of you. Usually, setting up a business is only really advisable once you have a bit of experience as an indépendant/e under your belt and are making a reliable and reasonable income.

My main piece of advice for you would be to always ask! If you are thinking about any of the options mentioned in my email or Julie's text, get together with one (or preferably several) people who have done it and who know what to expect. There are no stupid questions and it's so important to get a good overview of what you're letting yourself in for before taking any decisions.

X) Rates and tariffs

This is a sensitive and complex issue, but I will try and give you an idea of what the issue looks like, to guide you a bit in your expectations and in the steps you will have to take when working as an interpreter.

It goes without saying that if you succeed in getting a staff job, as a beginner you will not be able to negotiate your salary. Any number I give in this paper should be taken with caution, with caveats, with a grain of salt, for various reasons. But I would like to give you a ballpark idea of what you may expect. Among the Coordinated Organizations (which all have a common agreement with AIIC), you will probably be offered a contract paying approximately €5500 monthly. This number could be higher or lower, as a function of your experience, age, marital status, number of dependents, and many other factors. The amount is not always taxable, but this may vary; within the EU, for example, they have community deductions from this gross salary. In every case, health insurance and pension plans are also deducted from your gross salary.

You must keep in mind that, in most cases, a staff contract presupposes that you will be available 24/7, even if only theoretically. I will attempt the impossible and give you an idea of the average amount of work a staff interpreter does: if we look at all the organizations together, a staff interpreter would work about 8 sessions a week, with a session being the equivalent of a half-day, or 3.5 hours. However, you may count on at least 20 working days of vacation annually, to be taken mainly during the slow summer period.

For freelance contracts, the picture is much less clear! What we used to call 'the AIIC rate' hasn't existed for at least a decade, and you may not use this term for a number of reasons. Everything will depend on many factors, including your negotiating skills. Also don't forget

that any daily rate that you negotiate does not always represent simply one day of work, since there are many factors that are not reimbursed: neither your travel time (though sometimes you may receive this during negotiations), nor your billing and accounting time, nor your research time, nor your time discussing the subject with the client, nor the time spent in preparing for your meetings, nor your health insurance, nor your pension plan. None of this is factored in automatically. Some of these elements may be covered in a clause in the contract, mutually agreed upon by both parties. On the other hand, there are employers, especially those who deal with highly legal subjects, who will always add preparation time into a contract.

You will find excellent information on how to calculate your daily rates based on all these 'hidden' costs on the AIIC website; on the top right click on 'Communicate!,' choose the Sept.-Oct. 2007 issue, and read Julia Böhm's article 'Budgeting time and costs for professional conference interpreters : who wants to be a millionaire?'. This issue of Communicate! is devoted to the private market sector, and has other useful information on client-interpreter relations.

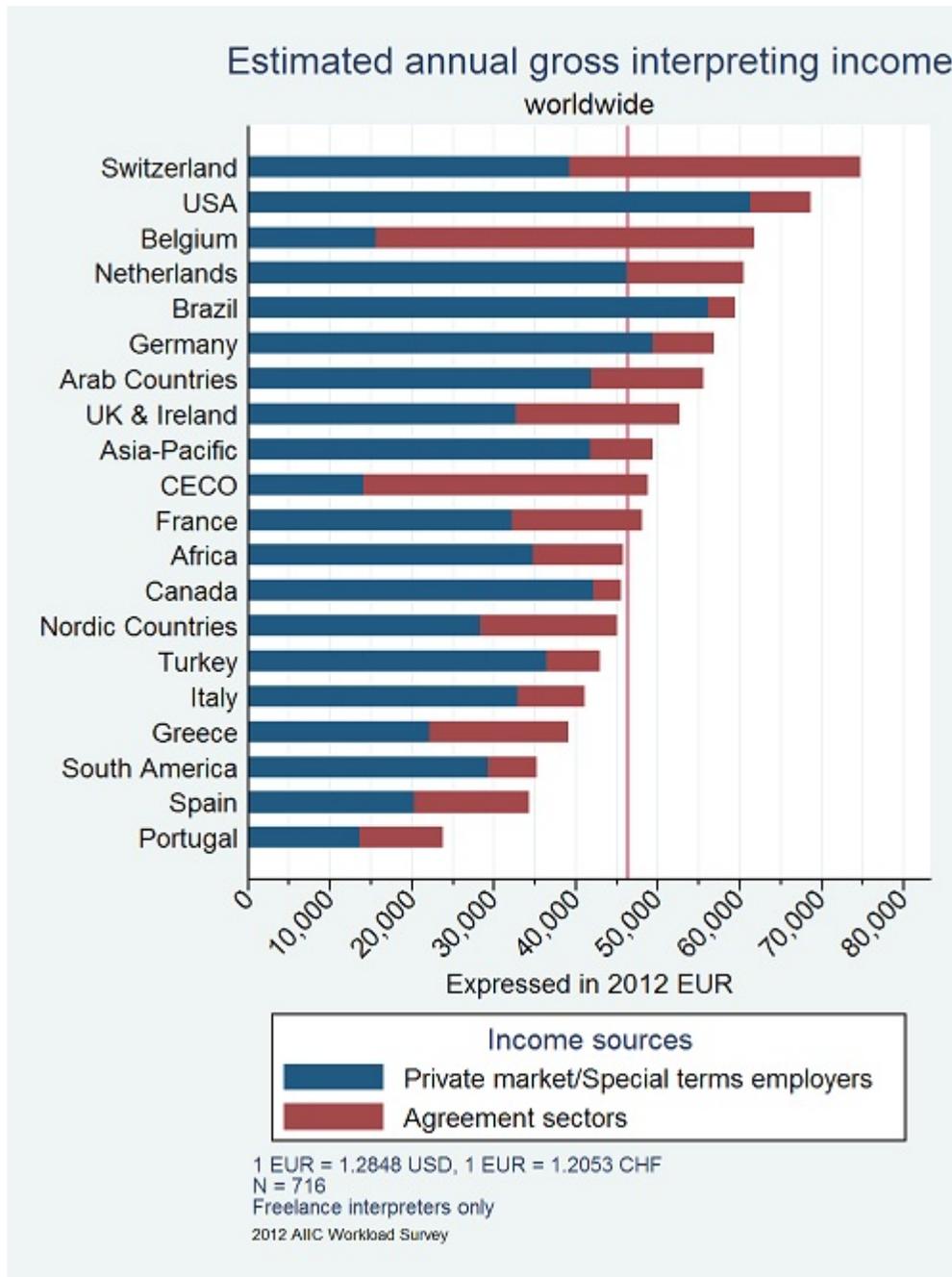
You will need to add on to these considerations the fact that you will have to deduct from your daily rate all those various costs about which I spoke in the 'staffer' section above, including those linked to your personal equipment and your office.

Another consideration is that we usually do not bill for a period less than a half-day, and even a half-day rate is rare. Almost all of the time, our rates are for entire days.

As to the numbers, which you must take with the same caution, caveats, etc. as above, and are never set in stone, I will simply mention the lowest and highest rates which I personally have heard of. For a qualified interpreter working in acceptable conditions, depending on the country concerned, a daily rate could be as low as €400; in the best of cases, an experienced interpreter who is also a good negotiator, and has a language or a language combination in demand, could ask for (and receive!) a daily rate of €900 or more.

In the case where an International Organization hires freelance interpreters and rates are not fixed, daily rates can vary from, overall, about €230 (UN, beginner's rate) to about €800. Most employers offer two rates for the more experienced interpreters, a low and a high rate, paid based on the number of people in the team, the difficulty of the meeting, etc.

For what it's worth, here is a table drawn from the 2102 results of the annual AIIC workload survey, showing average freelance interpreter earnings throughout the world :



I must specify here that you will only work in teams of two or three people (depending on many different factors – see the AIIC website for a more detailed explanation), and that you will soon have to learn the terms that will come up in contract negotiations. Key words are: availability, option, confirmation/firm offer, travel days, professional address/domicile. Here are the definitions:

- availability: the employer is trying to find out when you are free in general, or whether or not you are free for a specific period, without this implying an offer of work. If your availability changes for time periods specified by the potential employer, you should advise them of the change;

- option: a specific offer of work, on specified dates, which implies that without further confirmation the employer is not required to pay you if the offer is rescinded. If you should receive another option for the same time period, you must tell the second recruiter of your pre-existing option. If the second offer is a firm offer for the same time as the first option, before accepting it you must contact the recruiter from the first option to ask if it can be confirmed or if you can be released from your option. It goes without saying that if the first option is then confirmed at your request, you must turn down the second offer.

- firm offer/confirmation: this implies the existence of a contract, either oral or written, or of a letter of confirmation. In this case, the employer is required to pay you the interpretation costs (only), even if the contract is cancelled. If the firm offer comes from a private market client, never accept it without having a signed contract, and refuse the job if the contract is not forthcoming!

- travel days: fees are paid for your travel days, usually at the rate of 50% of a full day rate (in Europe), and 100% of a full day rate (in the U.S.). These payments are systematic in International Organizations. It is usual (in the private market) not to pay these costs if the travel time does not cover office hours, and agencies tend to want to avoid paying travel days.

- professional address/domicile: see chapter 1) above.

XI) Professional behavior and ethics

Throughout this vade mecum, I have freely used the words 'professional' and 'professionalism' – this is not by chance! In fact, in your previous life you have been a young person, then a student, living a 'normal' life; now you are a member of a specialized and complex profession, which is subject to certain requirements that are not known by those with whom you will be interacting.

The profession of conference interpreter is not (yet) regulated the way lawyers, doctors or certified accountants are; nevertheless, it is essential that you understand the milieu in which you are called upon to work, and that at all times your behavior reflects the values, behavior and ethical standards that have been defined for our profession over several decades. Your actions as an interpreter are not dictated solely by our profession's code of behavior, but

also by codes of other professionals of all types – people with whom you will be working during various diplomatic, commercial or technical conferences and international meetings.

At first, it will be difficult to navigate around the pitfalls that await a beginning interpreter, but there are a few simple rules of behavior that will perhaps help!

- 1) The very first thing that an interpreter worthy of the name must always be is present (in the room or the booth), ready to work as soon as the meeting starts – anything else is subordinate to this absolute requirement! Think about the most attractive car with the best performance in the world, but that won't start; a humble diesel car with an engine that turns over immediately is a much better deal. Of course, the 'nec plus ultra' would be a Ferrari that is always reliable...
- 2) Make sure you know who is the head of team, and remember that any contact between you and the delegates or organizers must pass through the head of team. This covers issues of working conditions, use of new communications technologies, rates, recording the interpretation, delegates wanting your card to hire you personally later, etc.
- 3) Keep in mind the key words that describe an excellent interpreter, appreciated both by colleagues and clients: calm, politeness, dignity, discretion, certainty, humility, skill, savoir-faire. That interpreter respects, understands and applies, inter alia, ethical requirements, including professional secrecy...
- 4) Master the ins and outs of what we call 'booth manners,' make sure that they become second nature, and apply them! This covers your approach to the booth and to colleagues, and your presence at your workplace. You should, for example, learn to work as a team, and to give and use help, as well as understanding when your presence in the booth is welcome, or not. In case of doubt – and doubt will be forever present when you are navigating these murky waters – consult the AIIC website, which has links to various documents on this subject. Here again, let your attitude be one of respect and politeness to all, making sure to encourage working conditions that will allow you to express yourself (in the widest sense of this word), to be respected as the professional that you are, and to participate in the successful communication that is wished for by all the players at the event.
- 5) At every conference, find out immediately who your relays will be, and go introduce yourself. Then make sure you know how to work your consoles, the cough button (which you will make sure is working by listening to yourself on relay on your own channel), and the switches that give you access to the relays...

- 6) Never forget, before, during and after the conference, that your goal is the same as those participating in the meeting; everyone wins if they work together, and not against, one another. The big difference between you and the non-interpreters present is that you are a professional in communications, and you have studied this with intelligence and consistency; help those who have need of your specialized skills with generosity and elegance!
- 7) Consult the AIIC website often (www.aiic.net), where you will find a large number of useful documents for your professional life:
 - on the home page are documents on the: 'code of ethics', 'professional standards', 'professional secrecy'
 - under 'quick links' for everyone there are documents for the: 'budding interpreter', 'junior interpreter'.....

You will also find a section that is aimed at those who are beginning in various markets (www.aiic.net/vega), as well as a list of recruiting interpreters.

- 8) It is possible that, during the conference, one of the delegates or organizers may ask you to make photocopies, to do a written translation, to bring some coffee, etc. Your answer is "no", and you will say it in a very polite, firm way, since you are neither the secretary nor the conference usher, you are a conference interpreter and were hired as such. If you do not respect yourself, others will certainly not respect you. Having said this, nothing should stop you from helping your interlocutor to resolve the problem he has come to you with, by directing him to the appropriate person. In the same way, it is essential that you take care of your relations with all the other players at the conference; some may ask you for things that are not appropriate to your job, and it is up to you to decline with firmness and elegance. On the other hand, it is perfectly acceptable to offer to photocopy a speech or other document, in order to distribute it to your boothmates, so as to save the organizers time and help you colleagues.

XII) Wardrobe

Now that you have become a professional, everything about you must exude professionalism, starting with your wardrobe. Even though you are just at the beginning of your career and aren't rolling in money (yet), you must have one or two appropriate, well-made outfits since, as Polonius (yes, him again!) says, "Th'apparel oft proclaims the man."

Your interlocutors assume that you know how to interpret, since you were hired to do so, and in any case they are incompetent to judge your skill in this field. On the other hand, everyone can appreciate the quality of an outfit, and no one will hesitate to look at what you are wearing during your meetings. Everyone will assume, unless they get contrary information, that there is an absolute correlation between your wardrobe and the quality of your interpretation. So what do you do? - invest as much as you can in an appropriate wardrobe since, whether or not you like it, this is one way you will be judged...

XIII) Consortia, secretariats and/or agencies

In most countries where conference interpreters are needed, they usually work through consortia, agencies and/or secretariats; the latter act as a type of 'booking agent' for a freelance interpreter.

While in the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, for example, agencies (see below) and consortia have the lion's share of the market, in other countries such as Belgium they play a smaller role. In Paris, employers turn almost always to the handful of secretariats that act as booking agents, and represent the vast majority of interpreters active on that market.

It would be very useful to send your (excellent and professional) CV to these different entities, showing why they should hire you rather than anyone else. Then, marketing protocol requires this to be followed up with a telephone call or a personal visit after a reasonable period, say three weeks to a month.

In most markets, there are also recruiting or consulting interpreters, who are freelancers with a solid reputation among employers and a large number of professional contacts. These consulting interpreters act as recruiters to make up interpreting teams. It would be to your benefit to show what you are worth, both personally and professionally, to these kingpins of the profession.

In closing this section, I would like gently to warn you about (some) interpretation agencies. Often, this is the first contact between a badly-informed employer and the interpretation world (through the yellow pages or the telephone book, for example). This leaves the field open to behavior that is not always in line with the practice of an experienced, conscientious conference interpreter. When beginning your career, you should find out about the reputation and behavior of an agency before working with them – for example, do they only take on only qualified interpreters, and pay within a reasonable amount of time – and do not work with an agency unless you know that they have a good reputation, and behave well to both clients and interpreters.

Agencies have a leading role as regards volume of work, but not quality, either in working conditions or in interpretation services. You should refuse any payment rate which appears to be lower than that offered to other team members – remember that, although you are a beginner, you will be doing the same work as your experienced colleagues, and that this work will in fact demand of you a greater effort! Refuse also, even more firmly, what is sometimes termed a ‘free trial meeting’ : here, your services will still be invoiced to the client, and your fee find its way into the agency’s pocket !

When negotiating with agencies, endeavour to think of everything: travel costs, ‘approche-déproche’ costs, meals (covered or not ?), fees, document availability, subjects, passive/active languages etc. In many markets such negotiations will often be oral, with neither contract (see Annex 1 to this text) nor hiring document, but you **MUST** ensure that a contract is signed, not least as a sign of your interlocutor’s good faith.

Make sure at all times to uphold the professional and ethical standards that you have learned during your training, and never give way to pressure to do otherwise. Do not forget that a good professional reputation is difficult to acquire, and very simple to lose. Take as your guide Shakespeare’s Polonius (yet again!): “This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man...” .

XIV) Volunteer jobs: working for NGOs

An excellent intermediate solution for young interpreters is to work as a volunteer for NGOs. The larger organizations such as MSF, Oxfam, Amnesty International, the Red Cross, Emmaus International, etc. can always use volunteers. Everyone knows that the quality of the work will be somewhat lower than that of an experienced interpreter, but in exchange the new interpreter (and his/her more experienced colleagues) offers his or her services without charge and benefits from some precious experience and professional cross-fertilisation. Everyone wins!

The languages most sought after for these types of jobs are French, Spanish and English. The usual habit is that the NGO will pay for all travel, room and board.

Even when working as a volunteer, you should uphold acceptable working conditions (if you are unsure, ask a more experienced interpreter), and make sure you are respected as the professional that you are. So, for example, for psychological and professional reasons, you could inform the NGO that you accept working for them at an acceptable rate, which you then donate back to the organization (i.e. no money changes hands, but the idea is planted). It has been proven that consumers attach much more importance to an expensive item than to one that is free!

One of the numerous advantages (apart from helping to better the quality of life for other human beings, and building a more equitable world) of working as a volunteer is that you will often work beside other, more experienced, interpreters, some of whom may be recruiting interpreters. This will give you an occasion to impress your colleagues, who will then be able to call on you for other missions.

It goes without saying (but I will say it anyway!) that, for obvious reasons, you will put as much effort into working well as a volunteer as you would if you were being richly remunerated. Moreover, I hope you already understand that any commitment to any employer, for a volunteer or a paid job, is written in stone.

Make sure that you are not trapped in the volunteer world, so that you are only seen as a 'student-volunteer' and not as a professional interpreter. One way of avoiding this trap is to alternate or mix volunteer and paid contracts within the same NGO as long as you explain it clearly.

It is important, even when working as a volunteer interpreter, to ensure the provision of acceptable working conditions, and to this end you should consult an experienced interpreter and/or the AIIC website (see 'links' below). It is essential that you learn to ensure that you are accorded the respect due a professional. Along these lines, it might be useful, for reasons of psychology and professionalism, to inform the NGO that you agree to work for an acceptable rate which you will quote, but that you will offer this amount to the organisation as a donation. It is true to say that consumers tend to attach greater importance and respect to a costly good or service than to a cheaper or free equivalent..

One last consideration is that AIIC does not seem to overly appreciate volunteer jobs, and recommends that you check the financial status of the NGO first, and make sure there are no local interpreters who could be taken on for the job.

XV) Contact any and everything 'bilateral' that uses your language combination

When looking for work, and for contacts to find work, you must be imaginative and creative. Think about any businesses or institutions that come from countries where you speak the language and that have offices in the country where you live. In the other direction, try and find business, political and administrative entities that have dealings with the countries whose languages you speak.

Some examples? Chambers of commerce, energy companies (especially if you have Russian in your combination), embassies and consulates, concierges in large hotels,

interpretation equipment suppliers, cultural entities, multinationals, etc. For those who work with English and French, businesses such as GDF and EDF invest a lot in other countries; if you have these languages in an 'A' <> 'B' combination, then think about everything that is happening in Africa. If you have Russian and English, especially bi-actively, think about any oil or gas company.

You could also contact various ministries and diplomatic missions for the countries whose language you speak (keeping in mind that they will most probably want bi-active interpretation); they are often in need of reliable interpreters, and often turn to freelancers. With these potential clients, you need to show (as long as this isn't just wishful thinking) that you have experience and skills to work with diplomats and policy-makers, as well as your ease in consecutive interpretation, which is frequently used in this context.

XVI) Accreditation tests for major international organizations

Unfortunately, even though you have your diploma, there will still be tests to take as your career evolves, if you wish to work in the world's major International Organizations. You are certainly aware that, in order to gain employment as either a freelance or a staff interpreter for these organizations, there is no option but to secure and pass some form of accreditation test. For the purposes of this guide, it is more or less fair to assume that the procedure, format and standards applied in such tests are extremely similar if not identical, be they for freelance or staff employment.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that such formal interpreting tests are rarely required for access to the private, or open market, although some smaller institutions 'piggy back' on results gained at higher-level tests in order to gauge interpreters' probable suitability for employment as freelancers. On the other hand, your first meeting with any colleague is effectively a (slightly more forgiving) test...

The psychological stresses inherent to the test format itself (perceived high stakes, presence of apparently hostile 'judges', tendency by candidates to feel personally as well as professionally judged, competitive atmosphere, first contact with big international institution..) are often extremely difficult to manage in themselves, which very frequently results in under-performance by even very able candidates, but I am hoping that your experience of interpreting school will at least partially have prepared you for this. I have a couple of texts on this side of things, which you may find on interpreters.free.fr, or which I can send you on request.

Turning to the tests themselves, these vary to some extent in content, but a constant is simultaneous interpretation. While consecutive is tested by almost all bodies, the UN is a

notable exception. Most tests also include approximately 6-7 minutes of consecutive interpretation, while some (e.g. NATO) will include on-sight translation. A small number of institutions will use a dummy booth session as a test equivalent (e.g. the OECD, at least until very recently), while for others, notably in an emergency and/or for unusual language combinations, such things as AICC membership or word-of-mouth recommendation will suffice.

It is almost impossible to characterize the level of interpreting skill required for such tests at international level, but as a very rough guide, here are some equivalencies between diploma examination results and probable accreditation test outcomes:

- If you achieved average results of **12/20 or 60%** in consecutive and simultaneous interpretation during school final exams, it would not be fatally detrimental to your psyche or your professional reputation to request a test, but it is most unlikely you will pass unless you perform even beyond your own expectations.
- If you achieved average results of **14/20 or 70%**, there is a reasonable chance that you will pass, unless your nerve fails you!
- If you achieved average results of **16/20 or 80%**, you should pass the accreditation tests.

As regards the actual test configurations, these vary from institution to institution:

At the EU, there tends to be very little context and lead-in to speeches, and these (read by members of the exam board) can be very eclectic in content. Each board will include a 'consumer' who has no knowledge of the source languages and will therefore judge the interpretation as would a true client. The candidate may choose the language direction and mode of the first test, but each interpretation is eliminatory. If one's language combination is sufficiently attractive and rich, it is also possible to pass the test overall, while failing one language combination. If one can offer a second 'full booth' (ie into a B from both C and A) this is a big advantage, and may secure you a test despite a fairly common language set.

At the UN, (freelance) tests are arranged on a more ad hoc basis, by contacting the head of booth for each language and at each main duty station (New York, Vienna, Geneva and Nairobi) separately. UN tests do not include consecutive, and are usually on the basis of video recordings, although this can vary. The candidates' performance will also be assessed off-line, from recordings.

NATO tests consecutive, simultaneous and on-sight translation in both active languages, and preference is given to 'double A' combinations, while any B must be extremely strong. A good deal of context is provided, while coping with speed is an important part of the test.

XVII) AICC Pre-candidacy

A very useful step is to apply for AIIC pre-candidacy, which can be done at a reasonable cost (about 150 CHF per year). You need the signatures of three AIIC interpreters, from any language combination, ready to sign your pre-candidacy form (downloadable from the AIIC website) to confirm that you intend to work as a conference interpreter.

Once your candidacy is accepted, you will have three years (with a possible fourth, if you so request) to become a candidate for active membership in AIIC.

What are the advantages of pre-candidacy ?

- Your name will be published in the next AIIC 'Bulletin,' which is studied carefully by all members ; your name will also stay up on the AIIC members-only site, for two years.
- You will be informed of meetings taking place in your regional branch of AIIC and you will have the right to attend, and therefore to have the opportunity to meet recruiting interpreters, potential colleagues, and people who have influence in your region. It goes without saying that, when you attend these informational or training meetings, whether they be routine or not, that you will dress (suits are not required!) and behave appropriately, so as to impress your colleagues, and that you will ask many intelligent questions...

At all times, you should behave as a competent and serene professional in all your contacts, and in the reasonable hope of finding enough work to be able to finalize your candidacy within the timeframe AIIC has indicated.

XVIII) The list of major employers in the AIIC yearbook

The details of all International Organizations that have recourse to interpreter services are printed on the 20 opening pages of the AIIC Yearbook. This is a rich mine of information for those whose language combination allows them to work as a freelancer or staffer in these organizations. This information is not on the AIIC website, but most members possess several issues of the yearbook, and would agree to lend or give you an older issue. I have an electronic scanned copy of this precious information, and would be pleased to send it to you if requested.

If, in addition, you can lay your hands on a copy of the Yearbook, it will serve you in good stead on more than one occasion!

XIX) If I fail to obtain my diploma, can I still hope to work as a conference

interpreter?

The answer to this question is at once complex and simple!

Considerations of morality, professionalism, ethics and honesty all require that you be able to serve your client at an acceptable level. Therefore, it goes without saying that you should claim to be a conference interpreter only if you possess the many specific qualities and skills which allow you to live up to your client's legitimate expectations. Such abilities can, except in some exceptional cases, be acquired only by following an exhaustive specialised university-level course of studies.

However, it is perfectly possible to have completed such studies, and therefore to have learned to interpret at an acceptable level for a young professional, without managing to demonstrate the qualities and skills acquired in front of an external examining board at an interpreting school. This may be due to a variety of personal reasons, of a psychological or physiological nature, linked to stress, fatigue, health or simply luck.

If you can do the work to a high and consistent level then by all means launch your career, but if you cannot, be aware that the future of conference interpretation lies increasingly with those who are truly and thoroughly competent. As Tony Bourdain says of today's difficult financial climate: "If there's a new and lasting credo from the Big Shakeout, it's this: people will continue to pay for quality. They will be less and less inclined, however, to pay for bullshit!".

It is extremely rare for any private client to request a copy of any diploma, but these clients may well be influenced by the quality of your CV. Also, while the International Organisations that employ interpreters usually require a university diploma (or equivalent) to pre-select you for an interpretation test, to my knowledge none require that you have a conference interpretation degree.

Among the strictest of criteria to be shortlisted for a freelance or staff test are those of the European Union's SCIC (le Service Commun d'Interprétation de Conférence):

"TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SUCH A TEST, YOU MUST:

- HOLD A RECOGNISED UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN CONFERENCE INTERPRETING OR**
- HOLD A RECOGNISED UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN ANY SUBJECT AND A POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION IN CONFERENCE INTERPRETING OR**
- HOLD A RECOGNISED UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN ANY SUBJECT AND HAVE DOCUMENTED EXPERIENCE IN CONSECUTIVE AND SIMULTANEOUS CONFERENCE INTERPRETING."**

In addition, here are a couple of short official descriptions of the conditions governing the UN interpreting tests :

The UN interpreter examination is usually held once a year or once every two years, depending on needs to renew the interpreter staff. Whatever languages you may speak, you should always speak 2 UN official languages (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese) in addition to your native language, or what the UN refers to as your "best working language".

Before you take the test, you should find out whether you are eligible to take the test or not. The UN requires that you have a degree in interpretation -not translation- or that you have at least one year's worth of training in interpretation in college or grad school.

Connaissances linguistiques requises : Une parfaite maîtrise de l'une des langues officielles de l'Organisation des Nations Unies. Les interprètes de langue anglaise, espagnole, française ou russe doivent également avoir une excellente compréhension orale de deux autres langues officielles. Les interprètes de langue arabe et chinoise doivent également avoir une excellente connaissance de l'anglais ou du français, selon les besoins.

XX) Study the openings in the (non-conference) world of non-conference Interpreting.

Trainee conference interpreters often overlook the fact that there are many possibilities and openings for interpreters outside the field of conference interpreting. The two main categories here are general business/communications interpreting, and what is variously known as 'community interpreting' or 'public service interpreting (PSI)' – the terminology has yet to be standardised.

In these contexts the stakes for the client are often very high, yet the remuneration for linguists is considerably lower than in international conferences, as the sector is as yet undeveloped, unregulated and (with some honorable exceptions) little known either to trained interpreters or to the schools that train them. The good news is that there are multiple opportunities in these fields, and an interpreter with some common sense and marketing skills has every chance of making his or her mark. Furthermore, this work is extremely rewarding and satisfying for its practitioners, even if the financial rewards are markedly lower – in my opinion, this in no way reflects the relative importance to society of the two distinct

worlds of interpretation.

It is also worth noting that, in the PSI world, it is acceptable to work biactively between a 'C' and an 'A' language (as pure simultaneous interpretation is almost unknown here, and the neurological demands are therefore lower and/or less urgent), such a combination being of course unacceptable in conference interpretation.

So, what to do ? Given that there are no formal or standardised procedures for entering this market, it is up to the individual interpreter to think laterally in order to identify potential clients.

In no particular order, here are a few possibilities which I find promising :

- Hospitals
- Police stations
- Ministries of Justice
- Ministries of the Interior
- Luxury hotels
- Prisons
- Asylum offices and authorities
- The courts
- Embassies and consulates
- Social services
- NGOs

In fact, the only limits are those imposed by your imagination, and time can fruitfully be employed with the Yellow Pages (paper or on-line) to find other bodies who might require the services of a competent PSI interpreter. Put together a convincing and professional curriculum vitae, tailoring it to the field targeted, and hone your public relations and dress skills !

The important factor is to identify the relevant interlocutor within the body concerned, and to understand the internal hierarchies and reporting lines – for example, in the country concerned, which agency deals with asylum interviews, and under which ministry does it function? With police services, each country's structure is different, and where separate paramilitary and civil police forces work together, each will have a separate hiring policy. Think also of hotel concierge services and of hospital administrators. Keep in mind that, while you may have found someone to contact in a hospital, they may have contracts with specific agencies already, in which case you should never try to make an end run around already-existing contracts but try and get yourself onto the list for that agency.

The qualifications required for public service interpreting are not always codified, and may not even exist ! A rather summary test may be required, but required standards are

surprisingly (in light of the stakes for potential clients) low. However, it might be worthwhile, if you can identify a short course in community of public service interpreting, to acquire this qualification, which may well help overcome any administrative hurdles which may exist in the country of your choice. Such courses are shorter, less demanding and less stressful than the Master's in conference interpreting which you have just left behind, so take heart! Possessing both a PSI and a conference interpretation qualification is a true trump card for a young interpreter, as very few colleagues cover both markets, which makes this dual approach an excellent starting strategy!

To conclude, a short warning : there is next to no communication between conference and PSI interpreting, while the standards of quality and ethics expected and applied tend to be very different, even if this is not of course inevitable. It can be difficult, given the sensitive nature of this last disparity, to move seamlessly between the two environments (although, paradoxically, the more proficient and professional interpreters move between the two worlds, the less any reservations will be justifiable on the part of the conference interpretation profession as a whole). During the first couple of years of a professional interpreter's career, however, being seen as active in both these markets will not irrevocably hamper the development of your career, as it is increasingly recognised that a young interpreter has a very real need of subsistence, while conscientiously nurturing his or her growing conference interpretation skills. It may of course be that, after acquiring experience of the PSI or community interpreting environment, you prefer this method of earning your living, given the various pros and cons I refer to above – this would be a perfectly honourable and justifiable choice, and if it is yours I wish you all possible luck and satisfaction in your endeavours...

As is the case on each occasion, the key is to work well and conscientiously, to respect and apply the codified ethical and professional values of conference interpretation, and to remain humble and reliable...

XXI) Useful links

www.aiic.net

A vast and rich source of all types of resources for interpreters.

www.interpreters.free.fr

A French site offering many tips and articles of all types, for young interpreters – very useful !

Chris Guichot de Fortis
Senior Interpreter, NATO
Interpreter Training Resources

www.interpreting.info

New forum and FAQ site, launched and managed by AIIC – extremely interesting.

www.nationalnetworkforinterpreting.ac.uk

Very varied UK site, full of information for students and teachers.

bootsinthebooth.blogspot.com/

A funny and very informative blog run by a handful of young and enthusiastic interpreters.

www.theinterpreterdiaries.com

Eclectic and fascinating site.

www.ted.com

Truly excellent professional site, constantly updated, containing (mostly) 18-minute speeches of all sorts, in English, delivered by leading thinkers and figures. Transcripts also available from the site. Many of these speeches are also on YouTube

www.ted.com/tedx

As above, but organised as independent events and offering a choice of languages. Production quality not always as good as with TED proper.

www.thersa.org

Similar to the TED structure and configuration, but with speeches of up to 90 minutes.

www.apple.com/support/itunes-u

Chris Guichot de Fortis
Senior Interpreter, NATO
Interpreter Training Resources

iTunes U contains hundreds of classes, videos and conferences of a very varied nature. I BELIEVE that this can only be accessed from an Apple platform, but am not certain...

www.nato.int (> 'organisation' > 'member countries')

General site featuring MP3s and MP4s, with links to the sites of Member States' government organisations.

www.natochronicles.org

Good documentary films on NATO's operations and missions.

www.podcast.ft.com/index

Podcasts on various current topics.

www.ft.com/lexicon

English=English dictionary of specialized financial terms.

Now, go out and build and enjoy your career, the wonderful brain you are developing with care and effort, the colleagues and friends who will help you to survive in your new,

Chris Guichot de Fortis
Senior Interpreter, NATO
Interpreter Training Resources

fascinating life, and learn pride and humility!

Try to keep in mind two of my favourite dictums:

« If it can be said, I can interpret it.»

« Knowledge is vital, but knowledge is nothing without understanding. »

Chris Guichot de Fortis

(Brussels, March 2008, updated Nov. 2013 and Nov. 2014)

I am keen sincerely to thank my wife, Julia Poger-Guichot de Fortis, and my dear colleagues Christine Vanstalle, Julie Sommereijns and Jenny Taylor for their very valuable advice and assistance in drafting this document.

Other texts written by Chris for student interpreters, most being available on the

www.interpreters.free.fr website, and all on request from defortis@skynet.be :

IN ENGLISH

B languages

gap-filler phrases for simultaneous

shadowing

EN FRANCAIS

les langues 'B'

les difficultés psychiques de l'apprentissage de l'interprétation

les expressions explétives, pour 'meubler' en simultanée

guide d'entraînements et d'exercices pour les étudiants-interprètes

comment gérer le stress des examens diplômants

conseils concernant le mémoire écrit et la combinaison linguistique

Name and address of interpreter:

Name and address of Client:

.....
.....
.....

.....
.....
.....

Hereafter : "The Interpreter"

Hereafter: "The Client"

Standard Individual Contract

(model form approved by the International Association of Conference Interpreters - AIIIC - version xxx 2011)

Services provided by the Interpreter

1. **The Interpreter** shall provide an oral interpretation of the spoken proceedings in the working languages specified below for the following conference:

Title:

Date(s):

Times:

Venue:

Conference Languages:

Working Languages:

Mode:

2. **The Interpreter** shall observe the strictest professional secrecy and shall perform to the best of her/his knowledge and ability.

3. **The Client** shall provide a complete set of documents to the Interpreter at least two weeks prior to the opening of the conference.

FINANCIAL TERMS

4. Fees:

Allowances:

..... (place), (date)

..... (place), (date)

Contractual Conditions

1. **Contracts** shall always be concluded **directly** between the interpreter and a "Client" who shall be either the conference organiser, or an intermediary duly entrusted by the conference organiser with the contractual and financial responsibility of recruiting interpreters.
 2. **The functions of the interpreter** shall exclude the written translation of texts; they shall therefore be confined to the interpretation of spoken proceedings and shall not cover any event not specifically provided for in the contract. The interpreter shall be **bound by the strictest professional secrecy**. The interpreter shall be morally responsible for the integrity of his or her work and shall not bow to any pressure in performing it. Persons not belonging to the team of interpreters may not be used as interpreters to complement that team, or otherwise make use of the interpretation channels of the simultaneous interpretation equipment without the prior consent of the consulting interpreter or head of team. The distribution of work among the members of the team will be established by the interpreters themselves.
 3. **A day's interpretation** shall constitute two periods of 2½ to 3 hours each and be separated by a break of at least 1½ hours. If this length of time is likely to be exceeded, the convenor shall authorise either the reinforcement of the interpreters' team in advance, their replacement by a fresh team or the payment of the overtime established herein.
 4. **Recording:** The services of the interpreter shall be provided solely for direct and immediate use by the listeners. No recording may be made, either by the listeners or anyone else, without the prior consent of the interpreters concerned. Copyright and all other intellectual property rights in the interpretation shall be vested in the interpreter. The interpretation may not be broadcast on radio, television, the Internet or any other medium without the prior written consent of the interpreters concerned. Any re-use of the interpretation, including availability via the Internet, shall be subject to written agreement between the organiser and the interpreters. The organiser shall indemnify the interpreter against any claims arising from the re-use of the interpretation.
 5. **For their technical and terminological preparation** the organiser shall send the interpreters **a complete set of documents** (programme, agenda, minutes of the previous meeting, reports, etc.) in each of the working languages of the conference as early as possible, but not later than 15 days before the beginning of the conference.
- If a text has to be read aloud** during the conference, the organiser shall see that the interpreters receive a copy of it beforehand (see previous paragraph). The speaker shall be warned by the organiser that the **reading speed** for a text for which interpretation is to be provided must not exceed 130 words per minute (3 minutes per double-spaced typewritten page). **The interpreter shall be under no obligation to provide interpretation of written statements if he or she has not received the text of the statement in sufficient time to study it.** If **films** are shown during a meeting, no interpretation of the sound-track shall be provided unless the sound is transmitted directly to the interpreters' headphones and unless the script has been supplied to the interpreters beforehand and the commentary is spoken at a normal speed.
6. **The remuneration**, allowances and conditions for their payment are set forth on page 1 of this contract. The remuneration shall be paid unless otherwise provided by law, net of withholding tax.

7. **Liability:** The interpreter shall ensure that s/he is covered by an appropriate worker's compensation policy, health and accident insurance or other

form of protection for the duration of this contract and in any case holds the Client harmless with regard to any claim that may arise.

8. **Travel conditions** should be such that they do not impair either the interpreter's health or the quality of her/his work following a journey.

9. **ISO standards 2603 and 4043** lay down the requirements for built-in and mobile booths and simultaneous interpreting equipment. If these standards are not complied with and the interpreter responsible for liaison with the organiser considers that the quality of the booths and technical equipment is not good enough to enable the team to do its work satisfactorily, or that they represent a danger to health, the team shall be under no obligation to provide simultaneous interpretation. The use of television screens, either in order to improve the direct view of the speaker and the hall, or even, in exceptional cases, as its replacement, is only acceptable with the advance consent of the interpreters involved.

For cases where **remote interpretation** is used (any form of teleconference or videoconference requiring the use of a video screen or monitor), the conditions stipulated in ISO 2603 shall be met, with particular emphasis on article 7.1 regarding sound. In the case of ISDN transmission, organizers shall ensure that the whole range of frequencies between 125 and 12,500 Hz is being provided to the Interpreter.

10. **If for serious reasons the interpreter should ask to be released from the present engagement**, he or she shall arrange to be replaced on the same conditions by a qualified colleague who has been approved by the organiser and, where an interpreter recruited the team, by the recruiting interpreter.

11. **It is expressly agreed that any disputes which may arise in connection with the present contract shall be subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the courts of the place of the interpreter's domicile. The law of that country shall be applicable.**