



Master

2011

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Guidelines for Recent Graduates in Conference Interpreting

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How to cite

HAMMACHER, Astrid, TUCCIO, Chiara Rita. Guidelines for Recent Graduates in Conference Interpreting. Master, 2011.

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:20412>

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MA Thesis, Maîtrise en interprétation de conférence

Université de Genève, ETI

March 2011

Guidelines for Recent Graduates in Conference Interpreting

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Abstract

While conference interpreting MA programmes such as the one provided at ETI may offer perfect conditions for students to acquire interpreting skills, graduates often leave school with a diploma but only limited knowledge about which steps to take next in order to start a career as conference interpreters. This paper is designed as a manual which shall help recent graduates to understand the practical and administrative implications of the profession they have chosen and thus complement the knowledge and skills they have acquired during the training programme.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Tatiana Chauvet, Carmen Delgado, Konstantin Ivanov, Dominique Leveillé, Prof. Barbara Moser-Mercer, Ian Newton, Shérazade Poursartip, Peter Sand, Prof. Kilian Seeber, and Viviane Vaucher who, with their knowledge and advice, made a substantial contribution to this paper.

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1 Introduction

This paper is meant to help graduates who are new to the profession of conference interpreting to gain ground and to manage their career. While on the training programme, students' attention is completely absorbed by the effort of acquiring interpreting skills. Once the programme has been successfully completed and the basic interpreting skills have been acquired, however, recent graduates might find that they lack practical information on how to start a career.

The biggest concern of recent graduates obviously is how to find work. Therefore, the first part of this paper (chapter 2) shall be dedicated to information on how to obtain the first contracts. This part includes advice on writing a CV, as well as information on the work of consultant interpreters (recruiters) and so-called agencies, on how to start working with the UN and the EU, and on what a contract should look like. Talking to experienced interpreters, we have also come to realise that there are a number of practical issues on how to approach and conduct oneself on the first job, which are often ignored by beginners. These shall also be treated in chapter 2.

All in all, this chapter is written in a less formal style than the rest of the paper, since it offers very practical advice to mostly young people and its main purpose is to give clear indications as to what to do, rather than to explore a theoretical topic.

The following chapters, however, are more formal. Chapter 3 treats certain administrative issues that graduates should be aware of when starting a career as freelancers. Especially when reading chapters 2 and 3, readers should remember that this paper is aimed mainly at graduates who choose to stay and work in Geneva after graduation. Of course, other scenarios are possible, but it would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them. Much of the information provided, however, offers at least a starting point for graduates who choose to work somewhere other than in Geneva.

The last chapter covers AIIC – the professional association that every conference interpreter should be acquainted with – and the association’s stance on working conditions and on professional ethics, although on this point, mention shall also be made of other associations’ views.

As far as methodology is concerned, we chose two different types of sources. Most of the information in chapter 2 and part of chapter 3 was obtained from interviews we conducted with experienced conference interpreters, some of them recruiters and all of them members or former members of the ETI teaching staff. We developed a set of five questions to put to each interviewee and asked each of them to answer with regard to a certain market: the Swiss private market, the UN and organisations of the UN system and the EU institutions. These were the questions we asked:

- How do I start looking for work once I have my diploma?
- What should I include in my CV? Who should I send it to?
- How much can the average graduate expect to work during the first year? Would you recommend looking for another job in the meantime?
- How do I maintain my skills?
- Is there anything recent graduates should absolutely avoid while looking for work?

In case we felt that our interviewees could provide information that we had not explicitly requested we kindly asked them to provide it so we could include it in our handbook. This is how we learned about certain facts regarding booth manners, taxation and the professional domicile for example.

The remaining information is taken from the internet, mostly from the AIIC website, which provides a vast amount of very useful essays and documents. Hence, even documents such as the AIIC Code of Professional Standards shall be referred to by their URL.

2 Starting a career

In this chapter, we will explain the practical steps you should take after graduation in order to find work as a conference interpreter, as well as certain points you should pay attention to – particularly as a beginner – before, during and after a conference.

2.1 How to start looking for work

After obtaining your diploma at ETI, you might want to talk to your teachers and ask for advice about the most suitable market for you according to your language combination. In Geneva you can work as a freelance interpreter on the private market or with the UN and the organisations of the UN system. In this handbook you will also find information on the European Union, because the EU constitutes a major market for freelance interpreters in Europe and you might want to apply even if you decide to have your professional domicile in Geneva. The first thing you need to bear in mind is that you are a professional and of course wish to make a living from interpreting, yet you need to be humble as you have no experience and still have a lot to learn, especially from more experienced colleagues. Thus, you need to be self-confident and introduce yourself to chief interpreters and recruiters but you should try not to be too pushy and impatient. A list of recent graduates is sent out each year to the chief interpreters at the UN and other organisations of the UN system, the European Union and other international organisations. This allows chief interpreters to contact any recent graduates having a language combination that meets the needs of their organisation.

2.2 Curriculum vitae

The first thing you might want to do when you start looking for work is prepare your CV. You need to bear in mind however that you will be hired on the basis of short-term contracts and are not applying for a permanent job. Thus, recruiters are not necessarily interested in getting an idea of your overall personality. You do not need to list all your hobbies for

instance, although it might be worth mentioning one or two that might be interesting for recruiters. If you have a passion for marine biology for instance, you should write it in your CV because it might be useful in case a conference in that field comes up. It might also be a good idea to include a photo, especially if you are looking for work on the private market, because recruiters like to “put a face to a CV”. Your CV should therefore be short and contain the following information:

- Your diploma at ETI, without mentioning any grades. The simple fact that you have completed your studies at ETI is a guarantee of the quality of your work.
- Your language combination as stated on your diploma.
- Your professional domicile.
- Any relevant experience, in case you have worked as a translator or a volunteer interpreter for instance. You should keep this information as short as possible though, mentioning only the names of your employers without details about the assignments.
- Any relevant technical knowledge, for example a law degree or a degree in biology would be extremely interesting for a recruiter.
- Any stays abroad, especially for long periods. They guarantee your mastery of your working languages.
- Any languages you know that are not part of your combination and you might add in the future.
- The names of one or two teachers who can recommend you, although you need to remember to contact them first and ask if you can include their names in your CV.
- In case you have passed the UN or the EU accreditation test, you should definitely mention it.

Your CV does not need to be tailored to each organisation, but you should not start sending it out before obtaining your diploma.

2.3 Working on the private market: consultant interpreters, agencies, Officinter and other intermediaries

As far as the private market is concerned, you need to be very careful. There is a considerable number of actors on the private market who might ask for your interpretation services at unacceptable conditions, that is conditions that are not in line with those set by AIIC which we shall describe in chapter 4.2. Therefore, you need to be well aware of adequate working conditions and how to distinguish between recruiters and agencies you can trust and those who would not guarantee minimum working conditions.

Consultant interpreters – also called recruiters – are professional conference interpreters who liaise between the client, for instance a conference organiser, and the interpreters needed for an event. More specifically consultant interpreters advise the client on the composition of the interpretation team, provide a quotation for the interpretation service, recruit interpreters, prepare interpreters' contracts, forward conference documents to the interpreters and advise the client on interpretation equipment. Being interpreters themselves, they know how to compose a quality team and they defend AIIC standards (see Chapter 4) with regard to working conditions. Some consultant interpreters have set up business structures such as agencies, cooperatives, partnerships or economic interest groups. If you are recruited by a consultant interpreter, you will sign an Individual Contract with the conference organiser directly. The contract is prepared by the consultant interpreter, who also signs a contract with the conference organiser, the Master Contract. That process ensures absolute transparency because the client – event organiser – knows exactly the conditions and rates at which the interpreter is working. Some recruiters will give you a chance to prove yourself by offering you a contract, especially if they know you through your teachers. Thus, word-of-mouth recommendation is very important. As you know, some of the teachers at ETI are recruiters

themselves, they know you because they had a chance to listen to you during your studies and they may sooner or later offer you a contract.

The word “agency” comprises business structures that may differ substantially from one another. A group of consultant interpreters may set up an interpretation agency, in which case the recruiting process resembles that of individual consultant interpreters. You might also find, though, that translation agencies often offer a “full range of interpretation services anywhere in the world” and that they manage a network of hundreds of interpreters worldwide, professionally trained in hundreds of different languages. However, that is rather improbable because conference interpreter training programmes around the world do not cover hundreds of languages (see http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=628#11). Unfortunately, many agencies are unaware of professional requirements and the necessary working conditions in professional conference interpreting.

Whether you decide to concentrate on the private market or the UN organisations system, if you want to work in Geneva it is advisable to sign up with Officinter. Whenever they need an interpreter or a team of interpreters, both organisations and recruiters call on Officinter and ask for the list of all the interpreters with a certain language combination available on a certain date. That is why it is essential to keep Officinter up to date on your availabilities. However, Officinter does not recommend interpreters to recruiters; they play a neutral role in the recruiting process. In order to sign up, you need to pay 120 CHF plus VAT a month and you will be charged for the telephone calls and emails you receive.

2.4 Working with the UN and the organisations of the UN system

The UN (UNOG) is the only organisation within the UN system in Geneva that requires freelance interpreters to pass an accreditation test. Other organisations might require dummy booth practise before hiring you, the head of your booth will then listen to you and decide when you are familiar enough with the topics and the terminology of the organisation to be

assigned to a real meeting. You should therefore start off by sending your CV to the chief interpreters of the organisations you wish to work for and make a follow-up phone call asking if you could introduce yourself. If you wish to work for the UN (UNOG), you should contact the head of your booth in order to receive detailed information on how and when you can sit the accreditation test. Once you have passed the test, it is advisable to inform the other organisations of the UN system because, although the test is not a prerequisite for them, it is a good way of proving that you are a good interpreter. It might be worth contacting the organisations of the UN system even if your A language is not one of the official UN languages because missions are sent to other countries on a regular basis and the rapporteurs need interpreters who speak the languages of those countries.

Although reference letters are usually not needed, it is very useful to know more experienced interpreters who can speak positively about your work. After receiving the list of recent graduates from ETI, chief interpreters often call ETI teachers to find out more about graduates and the quality of their work.

2.5 Working at the European Union Institutions

If you wish to start working as a freelance interpreter at the EU institutions, you must first apply to sit the inter-institutional accreditation test. You only need to pass one test in order to work for any of the European Institutions because they have a joint database of accredited freelance interpreters. Not all candidates are invited to the test. To be eligible you need to fulfil the following conditions: a Master's Degree in conference interpreting and at least 3 passive languages or 2 passive languages if one of them is the language of a "new" member state, that is a member state which joined the EU in 2004 or thereafter.

To apply for the test, you need to go online (http://europa.eu/interpretation/index_en.htm). There you will indicate your language combination and any other language you have started working on in order to add it at some point in the future. You might be asked for a timeline

regarding the language you are planning on adding. They might also suggest you learn an additional language. On http://europa.eu/interpretation/accreditation_en.htm you will find a tentative schedule indicating possible test dates.

At the test, you will be asked to interpret speeches in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (around 6 minutes for consecutive and around 10 minutes for simultaneous) from your passive languages into your active language(s), in accordance with the language combination you are offering. It is therefore important to maintain your consecutive skills, too. The speeches you will be asked to interpret are usually about topical issues and you will not be given any time for preparation. It is thus very important to keep abreast of developments in the world by reading or watching the news on a regular basis.

If you pass the accreditation test, you will be attributed a certain number of points. Those depend first and foremost on your language combination, then on the quality of your interpretation and on your professional domicile. There are three categories of professional domicile: Brussels proper – that will give you the maximum number of points; a place close to Brussels – that is called “domicile proche”; or elsewhere. Bear in mind that the EU does not recruit exclusively for meetings in Brussels, many conferences are held in the country of the Presidency; furthermore the plenary sessions of the Parliament take place in Strasbourg and other EU institutions have their headquarters in other cities, such as the European Court of Justice, which is based in Luxembourg. Therefore, if you pass the accreditation test, you might be offered contracts even if your professional domicile is in another city or country. The Commission uses fewer languages and is more reluctant to recruit outside Brussels or the “domicile proche”, unless the conference is held in a different country.

2.6 What to do while waiting for interpreting work

The amount of work you will have in the first year after obtaining your diploma depends mainly on your language combination and more specifically on your A language. If your A-

language is truly sought after – English, for instance – you will probably start working fairly soon, because there are not enough English interpreters on the market and English is one of the official languages of all the International Organisations. In the case of other A-languages, the situation might be much more difficult, unless you pass the accreditation test at the European Union and are ready to move to Brussels. Even if you are lucky enough to start working right after graduation, you might not have enough work to live solely off interpreting. You can still make use of your mastery of languages and your communication skills in many other ways to supplement your income.

For instance, most interpreters also work as translators. Translation is one of the most flexible work activities because it allows you to work anywhere, any time. Furthermore, it gives you the opportunity to become acquainted with technical terminology and international jargon, especially if you work for an International Organisation. You can also apply for proofreading jobs.

Very interesting opportunities are offered nowadays by a new technique used by broadcasters: respeaking. Respeaking has only been introduced recently in order to produce subtitles in real time from a live input for deaf or hard of hearing. The respeaker listens to the speaker of a conference or a TV programme and simultaneously reformulates what (s)he hears for a computer equipped with speech recognition software. It is essential to be able to speak in a clear voice and re-elaborate the content of the speech so that it can be fully understood by the reader. To do so, the respeaker also dictates punctuation marks. In analogy to simultaneous interpreting the speed of the original has an impact on the output of the respeaker. The situation in this case is more complex though, because it takes more time to read subtitles than to listen to an interpretation. The respeaker needs to take that into account and summarise when necessary. Simultaneous interpreters can offer those skills; that is why they are often employed when respeaking is needed (see www.afacantu.it/x-atti/2007/atti-sottotitoli/eugeni.doc).

If you want to live abroad for a while, possibly in the country where one of your C-languages is spoken or in order to activate one of your working languages, you should also consider becoming a speech-reader in an interpreting school. A list of interpreting schools is available on the AIIC website, although it is not complete. A more comprehensive list can be found on www.ciuti.org. A list of schools members of the European Master's in Conference Interpreting Consortium can be found at www.emcinterpreting.org. You should contact the schools directly because this kind of arrangement varies from one school to another. You can, for instance, offer language classes or prepare speeches for the students to interpret and you can ask for a small remuneration or access to the equipment or to classes in exchange. As a recent graduate you are even more interesting for them because you know this area of study very well. You, in turn, will find yourself in the best environment to perfect your language knowledge, being able to listen to a variety of registers. Furthermore you will be able to make useful contacts for your interpreting career, through teachers or visiting professors to the school (see de Fortis, 2008, p. 5).

If you live in Geneva you can also apply to become a tourist guide at the UN. As you can see there are many different possibilities.

2.7 How to maintain one's skills

During your studies at ETI, you will have acquired the required level of competence interpreting, but you need to bear in mind that you have no – or very little – experience and you still have a lot to learn. You therefore need to keep **practising** in order to maintain and further improve your skills. That does not mean you should be interpreting many hours a day, even a couple of hours a week might be enough, if done properly. You should always record yourself and listen to your interpretation, exactly like you did during your studies. It is also a good idea to ask a colleague to listen to you in order to have feedback different from your own. After some time it might be difficult to get organised and find the motivation to keep

working on your own. Thus, it might be useful to try and work in a group with other beginners, for instance other recent graduates from ETI. In any case, all the material you need is available on the internet, from conferences to the public sessions of some international bodies. You can follow for instance the UN General Assembly or the Plenary Session of the European Parliament live on their websites.

Do not forget that you need to keep working on your general knowledge, too, you should **read** a variety of publications, newspapers, magazines on a wide range of topics. That will give you the solid background knowledge you need in order to become an excellent interpreter. It is also essential to keep up to date in different fields because you might be offered a contract at the last minute and would not have enough time to prepare thoroughly if you did not have at least some basic knowledge of the topic

Dummy booth practise is highly valuable, too, although it has become increasingly difficult to obtain permission for it because usually there are few free booths and priority is given to students. You should contact the chief interpreters of the various organisations in order to find out if and how you can work in the dummy booth.

Another way of maintaining your skills and gaining some interpreting experience is offered by **volunteer work**. You need to be cautious though when accepting work as a volunteer interpreter because there are organisations and agencies ready to use your services without guaranteeing appropriate working conditions. Teachers at ETI know which organisations to trust and work for as a volunteer. If you are offered an unpaid job and you want to avoid unpleasant surprises, you can ask them for advice before accepting. Even experienced professionals offer their interpretation services to some reliable NGOs such as Oxfam or the Red Cross, thus this kind of assignment would also give you the opportunity to make contacts and be listened to by your colleagues. The amount of volunteer work you can find depends on your language combination, with English, French and Spanish being the languages most sought after. One more piece of warning: at the beginning of your career, it

might be frustrating having to wait month after month for your first contract and you might be tempted to accept as many unpaid jobs as possible in the hope that this kind of experience will then lead to paid contracts. Things do not work that way. If you work only for free, you will always be considered a “student-volunteer”, whereas you are a professional, even though you are only starting out. In conclusion, volunteer work is a valuable source of experience but you need to alternate it with paid contracts.

If you are ready to move to Luxembourg for a few months, you can apply for an **internship** at the European Court of Justice. This institution offers paid interpreting internships that last 3 months and start three times a year. In order to be eligible for it, you need to have a Masters’ Degree in interpreting and at least two passive languages. You also need a good knowledge of French because it is the language of most documents. Needless to say, this kind of experience would be valuable for any beginner, even more so if you wish to apply for the EU accreditation test. Other organisations might offer unpaid interpreting internships. You should ask your teachers for advice before accepting them though, because you might end up working full-time in the place of a staff interpreter.

2.8 The first job offer

2.8.1 From the first contact to the written contract

As soon as you start looking for work, you need to become acquainted with the terminology regarding contacts and contracts. You can be contacted in three different ways: you can receive an inquiry, an option or a firm offer.

In the first case, you will be asked for your potential availability on a certain date for a certain job, but neither the recruiter nor the interpreter undertake any obligations. It is simply a request for information.

If you receive an option, you are offered a potential job but the offer has yet to be confirmed by the recruiter. That means that the recruiter undertakes the obligation of

confirming the assignment or releasing you from the option as soon as (s)he can. The interpreter, in turn, needs to contact the recruiter if (s)he receives a firm offer from another recruiter. At that point the first recruiter must either confirm the assignment or release the interpreter from the option.

If you receive and accept a firm offer, you are committing yourself to a certain assignment. A firm offer is binding for both the interpreter and the recruiter and it can be made and confirmed orally or in writing, including by email. The step following a firm offer is the signature of the written contract. It is important to include in the written contract an explicit cancellation clause stating your fees in case the assignment is cancelled or modified in any way.

Therefore you should always ask the recruiter whether you are being presented with an option or a firm offer, so you know your obligations. You should also remember to keep your diary up to date and write down whether you received an inquiry, an option or a firm offer and the name of the person who contacted you and keep track of any development of the contact (an option becoming a firm offer, the cancellation of an option, etc...).

As stated before, even if you have received your assignment through a recruiter, you will have to sign an Individual Contract with the conference organiser directly. The recruiter, in turn, will sign a Master Contract with the conference organiser. You can find in the annex a standard contract that has been prepared by AIIC. Before signing the written contract, you should make sure that the contract contains all the terms and conditions of service, the working conditions and a cancellation clause. You can either suggest that the AIIC model be used or ask the recruiter to add the second page of the AIIC Individual Contract, “General conditions of work”. In that case you also need a clause stating that the provisions on the page added are an integral part of the contract and both parties “are familiar with them and agree to abide by them”.

2.8.2 Important questions

When you receive your first option, there is a certain number of questions you need to be asking, especially if you do not know the recruiter or the agency that has contacted you.

The first question you will want to ask concerns the topic of the conference. As a recent graduate, you might find that some fields of knowledge – for instance legal or medical – are particularly difficult for a beginner unless (s)he has a law degree or some kind of relevant experience. In order to be professional and ensure the best possible quality of your work, you should therefore not accept contracts requiring a considerable amount of experience in a specific field. If recruiters know you are a beginner, they will probably not assign you to a highly specialised medical conference. In case you were contacted for such a conference, though, you should always be professional and explain that it is important for you to be able to do a good job and you feel you do not have enough experience or enough time for preparation – if you are called upon on short notice – to ensure a high quality interpretation, thus you have to decline the job offer. On the other hand, you need to remember that you will never feel thoroughly prepared for a conference, especially at the beginning of your career, and you might be offered your first contract as a replacement for an interpreter who has fallen ill at the last minute. Starting a career in interpreting requires you to be brave when necessary and seize opportunities when they are offered. It will be up to you to find the right balance between caution and courage.

Another important question concerns the venue of the conference. You might be busy in a certain place in a certain country the day before the conference and you need to make sure you will be able to travel to the conference venue in time.

Other questions concern working conditions more specifically. If you know the recruiter - in case the recruiter is one of your teachers – (s)he will ensure the necessary working conditions such as working hours, technical conditions (booths, visibility, equipment) and manning strength as set out by AIIC. However, if you do not know the recruiter/agency, you

need to verify working conditions in advance. Thus, it might be a good idea to prepare a checklist of questions to put to him/her that comprises:

- Topic, dates and venue of the conference;
- Working hours and manning strength;
- Technical conditions (booths, visibility, equipment);
- Whether the interpretation will be recorded and/or broadcast;
- Professional fees, travel expenses and accommodation;
- Terms of payment.

It is also useful to contact the head of team and your boothmate – whose names will be stated in your contract – to share any information about the availability of documents and how to divide work in the booth.

2.8.3 Preparation

As you know from your studies at ETI, your preparation must be as thorough as possible.

You can rely on three main sources for preparation:

- (i) conference documents;
- (ii) internet, books and experts you may know;
- (iii) pre-conference briefing.

(i) The expression “conference documents” includes a variety of texts that includes the programme or agenda of the conference – the most important document for conference interpreters – the speakers’ list, the list of participants and the texts of the speeches or PowerPoint presentations. The kinds of document that will be available to the interpreters will be different for each event and depends on the conference and the organisers. Not all documents are always available to the interpreters and sometimes they are only available at the last minute. The recruiter is responsible for sending them out as soon as (s)he receives

them from the conference organiser. If the texts of the speeches are not available, it might be a good idea to ask for drafts, so as to have an idea of what the speaker is going to say. You also need to bear in mind that documents are often sent out by email, thus you need to make sure that your inbox is large enough to receive large attachments.

(ii) The second source for your preparation – Internet, books, experts – you already know from your studies. When you receive an assignment, it is important to gather as much background information as possible about the topic without getting lost in the World Wide Web. Most meetings nowadays are highly specialised and if you are not an expert in the specific field, you can start by reading basic textbooks for school students or short manuals – even the series of manuals for dummies can be extremely useful sometimes! You should also remember that preparation does not only mean understanding the conference topic, it also means research on the speakers for instance or general background knowledge of the conference venue. If you work for an organisation for the first time, it is important to read its basic texts such as the Charter or Constitution, the Rules of Procedure etc... in order to become acquainted with the jargon of that specific organisation. Furthermore, you should make sure you know how to pronounce the delegates' names which you will find on the list of participants.

(iii) A pre-conference briefing is essential for interpreters but is rarely organized these days. It gives the interpreter an opportunity to better understand technical concepts and ask informed questions.

All the knowledge you have gathered through your personal research and the conference documents will help you draw up your glossary. This can be on paper or on your computer according to your preference, in any case it must be easy to consult because you need to be able to retrieve the terms you need as quickly as possible. This is another reason why it is important to know who you are sharing the booth with. In case it is a more experienced

colleague, they might have worked at the same conference already and they might be willing to share their glossaries and knowledge with you in return for your contributions and findings, which will help them keep their glossaries up to date.

2.8.4 At the conference

The first rule interpreters need to abide by when working at a conference is to be on time. This means that the first day you should arrive 1 hour early, whereas the next days it will suffice to be on location around 30 minutes early. That will allow you to find your way to the booth on your first day and to set up properly. On the following days you might receive documents or reports just before the beginning of the meeting; it is therefore important to arrive in advance.

Moreover, you always need to remember to bring everything you might need, that is not only your glossary and pens, but also binoculars or folding opera glasses in case you need to read slides from a distance and a notepad in case you need to work in consecutive unexpectedly.

As soon as you arrive on location, you should introduce yourself to the head of team. The head of team or team leader is a more experienced interpreter who is in charge of liaison between the interpreters and the delegates. If for instance any new documents are distributed in the meeting room, (s)he is the one to ask whether it is possible to obtain copies for the interpreters as well. In case of problems, you should always refer to the head of team.

The first day of the meeting you should also introduce yourself to the colleagues you do not know and also to those who might not know you – even if you know who they are. It is a good habit to also introduce yourself to the technicians because they are contributing in an essential way to the smooth running of the conference.

2.8.5 In the booth

It is important to check the team's language combination so you can set the relay switches accordingly once you are in the booth. Booth manners are a well-known but sometimes ignored topic among interpreters. As a beginner you should make sure to follow a few basic rules that will allow you and your colleague to collaborate in the best possible way.

First of all you need to bear in mind that the booth is a confined space, therefore you should avoid wearing jewellery such as wrist bangles that can make noise and disturb your colleague while (s)he is working. For the same reason you should also remember to switch off your mobile phone, also because it can interfere with the equipment. Wearing too much perfume can be disagreeable for your colleague, too.

Always dress appropriately, being professional also means presenting yourself in a professional way and your outfit is part of that.

Remember to stay calm in the booth. Whatever happens, it will not help either you or your colleague if you get nervous or panic in a difficult situation. If for instance a delegate has forgotten to turn her/his microphone on, you can politely ask the delegates who are listening to you to report the problem.

As we already mentioned in the section on preparation, team work is important in interpreting and therefore you should be ready to help your colleague not only before the beginning of the conference but also in the booth. As a beginner you might have less work and more time to prepare, it helps not only your work but also your reputation if you share what you know with your boothmate. You can also help by writing down names and numbers or pointing to information on a document. You should do this in a discreet way without being intrusive and distracting your colleague.

When you are not interpreting, keep quiet. Do not read the newspaper during your half-hour pause. Some experienced interpreters might do that but you should not follow their example. First of all, the noise you make while turning the pages might distract your

colleague. Secondly, even if you are not interpreting, you need to pay attention to what happens in the meeting room and listen – you will learn new terminology and concepts by simply following what is happening. Moreover, following the debate will allow you to better anticipate what might be said when it is your turn to work; as you know, anticipation is vital in interpreting. Thirdly, delegates looking into the booth will have the impression that the interpreters are not taking their job seriously if they read their newspaper, you will therefore damage the reputation of the profession as well as your own.

Try not to leave the booth for a long time and if you need to do so, turn the volume on your headset down because it would be disturbing for your colleague to hear the speaker through your headset, too (see http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=1676).

Social occasions such as coffee breaks might give you the opportunity to talk to delegates. You should always remember to be professional and you should act in the interests of the profession, not just your own; talking to delegates and showing an interest in the topic of the meeting, will help this. On the other hand, you should not take up too much of their time and monopolise their attention. Always be tactful when giving out your business cards! If a delegate is particularly happy with your work, compliments you on it and asks for your business card, you can give them your contact details and your recruiter's and you should tell them to contact you through the recruiter. You should also inform the head of team about it. If you do a good job, there is no reason why your recruiter should not call on you again next time.

2.8.6 After the conference

At the end of the work day it would be a nice gesture to thank the head of team, your colleagues – especially your boothmate and those who provided relay – and the technicians. Furthermore, one of the first things you need to do once the conference is over is to return or destroy all confidential documents. You will then need to prepare your invoice.

After the conference, you should also update your glossary and add any new terminology entries that you have acquired while working. It is important to keep your glossaries up to date because it will facilitate your work next time you have to prepare for the same conference.

2.9 DOs and DON'Ts

We have already pointed out how important it is for a recent graduate to give a professional impression at all times. You should always show potential employers that you are both professional and reliable. Here are some pointers:

- Do not use email accounts such as ...@hotmail.com. You do not need a funny email address, because it would not be professional. Furthermore, you need to make sure that your account allows you to receive big attachments, because conference documents will often be sent to you by email.
- The message on your answering machine needs to be clear, stating you will call back as soon as possible and giving further contact details such as your email address.
- You need to have a business card stating your language combination, phone number, email address and the fact that you have an interpreting degree.
- Make sure to answer your phone and check your emails on a regular basis, you should answer as soon as possible if a recruiter contacts you.
- Do not be pushy. If you try to contact a recruiter and (s)he does not reply immediately, do not start sending them a lot of emails. Recruiters are interpreters themselves and they can be busy working.
- Do not contact clients such as multinationals directly. Large companies usually have their own recruiters, therefore you would be “stealing” somebody else’s client.
- Do not try and organise the interpretation service for an event acting as a recruiter, it is a difficult job requiring years of experience!

- Be polite to everyone. Being professional also means being respectful not only of the chief interpreter or your colleagues but also the technicians and the chief interpreter's secretary.
- You need to be careful about the kind of personal information you post on the internet if you use social networks like Facebook. Potential employers do check these out sometimes.
- Do not accept badly paid jobs, undercutting rates does not only affect the market negatively – it creates a “grey market” – it also damages your reputation and you need to remember that with the amount of money you earn, you also need to pay taxes, health insurance, pension fund, etc., thus in the end you would not have enough money left. As we have already said, voluntary work is acceptable if working conditions are adequate, but make sure you work professionally even if you are not paid and do not start working for free on a regular basis. Few people will offer to pay you once they realise they can have your services for free!
- Do not work into one of your C-languages, as one bad interpretation can be enough to destroy your reputation and colleagues will think you are not professional.
- Be aware of professional standards and the working conditions set out by AIIC (http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=205).

3 Working as a freelancer – administrative issues

As a beginner, you will most certainly work as a freelancer, which means that you will have to follow certain administrative steps that do not apply to staff interpreters. While the information that follows might seem less interesting than the content of the previous chapter,

it is just as important in order to work correctly and professionally from the beginning of one's career.

3.1 Professional domicile

Interpreting is a profession that by nature requires travel on a regular basis in order to reach the multiple places where multilingual conferences are held. The notion of a professional domicile, or professional address as it is sometimes called, allows for certain rules to be applied in connection with the practical implications of the need to travel. Not only trips around the world, but also journeys across Europe are time consuming and cost money. Hence, interpreters cannot agree to travel to wherever they are needed without being reimbursed and receiving compensation. Employers are required to pay expenses when they hire an interpreter from far away. The professional domicile is used to calculate those expenses.

It is important to know that there is a difference between an interpreter's professional domicile and the private one. They do not necessarily have to be identical. The private domicile is the place where the interpreter lives, her/his postal address, the address used for communication with clients. The professional domicile in turn is the place from where the interpreter will calculate the cost of a journey to the conference venue, i.e. the place where (s)he is considered local on the market. It is not a specific address, but simply a city.

Each interpreter can have only one professional domicile. Being local in different places at the same time would be a way of undercutting, since of course one can offer one's services at more attractive conditions to employers if one does not ask them to pay travel and subsistence expenses. However, that would be unfair behaviour which undermines solidarity among interpreters.

Graduates will have to choose a professional domicile before accepting their first contract, and the choice should be made carefully, bearing in mind one's language combination and

which market it is suitable for, but also other factors such as one's personal situation (e.g. family, relationship). The various possibilities can best be illustrated by way of examples.

If an interpreter graduates at ETI in Geneva with a language combination that is suitable for the market there, and if that graduate likes Geneva as a city and already has a flat there, it would be sensible for her/him to stay there and have both her/his private and her/his professional domicile in Geneva. In that case, (s)he would not be paid any expenses for contracts in Geneva, because there would be no need to travel there.

If, however, the ETI graduate – who still has a language combination suitable for the Geneva market – decides not to stay there, but to move to London, for example, because of personal ties to that city, (s)he can move, but still have the professional domicile in Geneva. In that case, (s)he would be local in Geneva, which would mean that employers in Geneva would not have to pay for her/his journey from London to Geneva or for her/his accommodation or meals in Geneva. That interpreter would not be able to offer her/his services as a local in London, however. Employers in London would have to pay the cost of a journey from Geneva to London and back as well as a daily subsistence allowance in addition to the interpreter's fee, which of course means that that interpreter is not very likely to be offered a great number of contracts in London. In spite of that, it might still be the best option to have the professional domicile in Geneva, because with her/his language combination, this interpreter can find enough work there and thus earn enough money to pay for the necessary trips to Geneva.

A third scenario would be that of an ETI graduate who decides to move to London, for example, and to have her/his professional domicile in another city, such as Brussels. If that interpreter then receives a contract in Geneva, the employer would have to pay expenses for a supposed journey from Brussels to Geneva, while the interpreter would actually travel from London to Geneva.

The decision is up to each graduate, however, it is not binding for life. The professional domicile can be changed after a minimum period of six months. That is why it could also be sensible to consider having a certain professional domicile for 6 months and another one during the remaining six months of the year, depending on where most conferences take place during which months.

Once a graduate has picked a professional domicile, (s)he has to inform potential employers or recruiters with whom (s)he is in touch. It is also advisable to state one's professional domicile on one's CV and on one's business card, as well as in one's email signature. AIIC members register their professional domicile with the association and the information is published by AIIC.

3.2 Insurance / retirement provision

Most conference interpreters work as freelancers and as such they are responsible for their own social security. The most important type of insurance that they need to think about immediately after graduating is of course health insurance. Apart from that, however, freelance professionals do not automatically take part in a pension scheme as it is usually the case with employees. It might seem too early to think about retirement right after graduation, but it is highly advisable to do so, since retirement provisions cannot be made once retirement is imminent. There are numerous possibilities with regard to health insurance and pension funds for freelancers and the choice will depend on a number of factors, among others the place of residence. This paper shall focus on graduates who choose to stay in Switzerland, but the general advice that graduates should start thinking about issues related to social security as early as possible is of course valid for everybody.

The Swiss social security system consists of three pillars. The first one is made up of the Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance (AVS according to its French initials) and the Invalidity Insurance (AI according to its French initials). Contributions to this pillar are compulsory for

everybody living in Switzerland, including freelancers. The second pillar consists of certain occupational pension plans and an accident insurance, and it applies only to employees, not to self-employed professionals. The third pillar in turn is voluntary and refers to individual pension funds or other savings schemes one can pay into in order to increase one's income after retirement. Furthermore, every Swiss resident must have a basic health insurance. (see [http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Specials/Switzerland: How to/Work Life/Social security payments.html?cid=29236972](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Specials/Switzerland:_How_to/Work_Life/Social_security_payments.html?cid=29236972)).

In other words, conference interpreting graduates who are planning to work as freelancers in Switzerland are obliged to register with and pay into the AVS and AI schemes and to sign an individual health insurance policy. For the latter, there are several options and insurers, even though they all offer the basic policy required by Swiss law as the minimum coverage. However, additional options are possible and in the end each person must decide which one is best for them.

As for AVS and IV, freelancers in Geneva need to register with the Caisse cantonale genevoise de compensation (<http://www.caisseavsge.ch/>). The Swiss authority in charge is the Federal Social Insurance Office (Office fédéral des assurances sociales – OFAS – in French), on whose website more information can be found: <http://www.bsv.admin.ch/themen/ahv/aktuell/index.html?lang=fr>. In addition to that – or instead, for conference interpreters outside Switzerland – there are two pension funds designed specifically for interpreters: the Caisse de pensions des interprètes et traducteurs de conférence (CPIT) and the Caisse de prévoyance des interprètes de conférence (CPIC).

CPIT was founded by AIIC and AITC (Association internationale des traducteurs de conférence), and CPIC by AIIC only. Both are open to free-lance conference interpreters who are members of or candidates to AIIC and who work for at least one of the major international organisations. In some cases, however, it can suffice to provide proof that one works as a conference interpreter even if one is not or not yet an AIIC candidate. In general, these funds

require a contribution from the interpreter who will then receive either a monthly pension or a one-off payment (with a certain return on capital in each case) following retirement at a certain age (between 60 and 70). More detailed information can be found on the respective websites of the two funds, www.cpit.ch and www.cpic.ch.

Of course, these are not the only options, and it is highly advisable, as mentioned above, to invest the necessary time and energy in order to gather information and in the end make the right choice.

3.3 Taxes

This is a topic where no universal answer can be given. One thing, however, is certain: Everybody must pay taxes somewhere. The details depend on factors such as the interpreter's place of residence and her/his nationality to begin with, and since those differ for each graduate, it is not possible to provide useful answers for everybody in this paper. In general, self-employment implies the obligation to register with the tax authorities, the need for a VAT number, and the duty to submit tax declarations on a regular basis. It is highly advisable to consult with an accountant who is acquainted with the profession of conference interpreting in order not to make any mistakes that could then lead to painful fines and additional payments. Your AIIC region might be able to offer advice (see de Fortis, 2008, p. 10).

3.4 Rates

The question of rates is among the greatest concerns of graduates with little or no experience on the market. For reasons that will partly be explained in chapter 4, AIIC does not establish rates on the private market. Hence, outside the agreement sector rates are always the result of negotiations between the interpreter and the employer or, as the case may be, between the interpreter and an intermediary. When negotiating, interpreters need to keep certain points in mind.

First of all, conference interpreting is a profession that requires extensive training. Even after graduation, interpreters need to work constantly in order to expand their general and more specific knowledge and to maintain their language and interpreting skills. Furthermore, interpreting is a highly demanding and stressful activity. This has been proven by a study carried out by AIIC in 2001 (see http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=888). Apart from that, a contract involves much more than the work an interpreter does on the day of the conference. Preparation is part of the interpreter's job and every conference requires a certain amount of research to be done ahead of the actual day of work. Then there is the time spent with administrative procedures such as invoicing and accounting. Finally, interpreters should also be aware that they will have to invest in social security as described above (see de Fortis, 2008, p.11).

All of these factors play a role in negotiating rates, and that is why an interpreter's service can seem rather expensive to people who are not acquainted with the profession. It is also important to know that rates are negotiated for whole days (see de Fortis, 2008, p. 11). The reason why there is usually no such thing as an hourly rate is simple: A contract for only one or two hours means that potentially the interpreter loses a whole day of work, because it is unlikely that another employer will offer a contract for the remaining time of that day. Since the one- or two-hour contract still implies a considerable amount of time spent preparing and all the other factors mentioned above still apply, it would not be financially viable for the interpreter to accept less than a whole day's rate.

The information provided in this section should serve as a basis for graduates to negotiate their rates. In addition to that, it is of course useful to know what the average rate on the market is in order to avoid undercutting, and some colleagues will surely share advice on these issues.

4 Professional standards

This chapter includes more general information about the profession of conference interpreting, the conditions that need to be provided in order for conference interpreters to be able to deliver the best possible service, as well as the role of the interpreter, its implications and the obligations that arise from it.

4.1 Defining professional standards – AIIC

Conference interpreting is a relatively young profession that has developed rapidly over the past 60 years. The profession as we know it today, where most of the assignments involve multilingual conferences with simultaneous interpretation from and into several languages, emerged after World War II, the Nuremberg Trials having been the first major event where simultaneous interpretation was used. As an emerging profession, conference interpreting was completely deregulated in the beginning and very soon the need arose to establish certain rules in order to protect both providers and consumers of interpreting services. As one of the consequences of this need, certain schools began to offer training programmes and in 1953, an international body that would represent conference interpreters all over the world was founded: AIIC (Association internationale des interprètes de conférence). To this date, AIIC remains the most important association of conference interpreters. It has almost 3000 members.

AIIC began to establish the rules that were needed in a profession that is mainly made up of independent professionals who work as free-lancers for a great number of employers, and it contributed and still contributes to the profession becoming recognised and respected.

In the past, AIIC used to fulfil a function similar to that of a trade union. However, in 1995 a court case in the USA led to substantive limitations to the scope of the work of the association. The US Federal Trade Commission brought AIIC to court for distorting competition (restraint of trade) on the private market, since the association was not only

championing working conditions for interpreters but also speaking openly about minimum rates for interpreting services, as well as other issues concerning remuneration, such as travel expenses, payment for non-working days or pro-bono work. The rules established by AIIC in these areas were seen as an impediment to free competition. In the end, the association had to abandon its ambition to establish set rates for the profession. However, AIIC was allowed to continue to define working standards and to encourage conference interpreters to insist on those working conditions. These include manning strength, the length of a work day or standards for the quality of technical equipment. While it is true that the lawsuit took place in the USA, the case affected AIIC's work in all countries due to the association's legal structure (see <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/1997/03/aiic-cd.shtml>). The case did not, however, affect any of the agreements negotiated by AIIC with several international organisations, it only dealt with the association's role on the private market.

Today, AIIC's aim is to represent the profession of conference interpreting and to defend and improve working conditions for all conference interpreters, irrespective of whether they are members or not. AIIC established a list of professional standards and a code of ethics that its members are obliged to adhere to. However, every conference interpreter, even non-members, should respect them, since those two documents are at the heart of the idea of professionalism in conference interpreting. In this context, mention must also be made of the agreements negotiated by AIIC with several international organisations, some of which shall be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.2. They lay down working conditions and regulations concerning remuneration for interpreters who work for those organisations as freelancers. These agreements were negotiated by AIIC on behalf of the profession as a whole and are thus binding for all conference interpreters, not merely for members of the association. Hence, every conference interpreter benefits from the work of AIIC.

Requirements for becoming a member of AIIC include a certain amount of work experience in every language pair of one's combination, as well as references from several

members of the association. Since it will take graduates a few years to meet those criteria, AIIC membership shall not be treated in this paper, which is designed to provide an outline of the very first steps to take after graduating as a conference interpreter. However, it could be useful to apply for pre-candidacy shortly after graduating. That means that the graduate needs to find three AIIC members who will confirm that (s)he is currently working as an interpreter and aiming for AIIC membership. Then, the pre-candidate has three years to meet AIIC membership conditions and become a full member. Some of the advantages of pre-candidacy are that it allows candidates to familiarize themselves with the association, and that their names will be printed in the AIIC Bulletin. Furthermore, pre-candidates are allowed to attend training or information meetings organised by AIIC, where they can improve their skills as well as meet recruiters and expand their network in general (see de Fortis, 2008, p. 17).

4.2 Working conditions

Interpreting is different from most other professions in that it requires high levels of concentration over sustained periods of time, which inevitably leads to increased physical and mental fatigue (see http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=888). That is why, in order to be able to provide high-quality services, interpreters need certain working conditions that differ considerably from the requirements of other professionals. Those conditions are laid down in the agreements negotiated by AIIC with certain employers. However, on the private market, or rather the non-agreement sector, it is the responsibility of the consultant interpreter to negotiate with the organiser the exact conditions for a particular conference. If interpreters are recruited directly and individually by a client, each of them will have to explain their requirements in order to try and obtain the best possible working conditions.

These requirements shall be discussed in the following. The second and third part of this sub-chapter will consist of a summary of the AIIC-brokered agreements with the UN and the

EU, since these are the most important, and the agreements brokered with other organisations contain similar provisions.

4.2.1 Working conditions on the private market: The AIIC Code of Professional Standards

The prospect of having to negotiate with clients on these issues might seem rather intimidating to beginners who are often overwhelmed when asked to take a firm stand on working conditions when they have only limited experience both in negotiating with clients and in assessing which conditions would be acceptable. The AIIC Code of Professional Standards provides useful guidance on what to ask for and what to pay attention to.

What follows is an overview of the main aspects of the AIIC Code of Professional Standards.

Contracts:

Contracts should state the exact conditions of the assignment. They also need to include clauses on cancellation, non-working and travel days, rest days in cases where the interpreter is required to undertake a long journey or one with time shifts, as well as travel, accommodation and subsistence arrangements. When interpreters are recruited by an intermediary, they should make sure the conference organiser knows their names and how much they are paid. Furthermore, contracts should state that interpretation will not be recorded without prior consent of the interpreters. This particular condition is based on international copyright agreements such as the International Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention for the Protection of Artistic and Literary Works. These agreements state that translations are treated as original works and translators as their authors. Recording an interpretation means fixing it in material form which turns it into a translation that is protected under the agreements mentioned above. Hence, in order to obtain permission to record an

interpretation, the employer must sign a contract with each interpreter concerned (see http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=58).

Manning strength:

Simultaneous interpretation: In general, there should be one booth per active language and each booth should be manned with at least two interpreters. The use of relay interpretation should be a last resort, although this provision is slightly unrealistic nowadays with the European institutions becoming increasingly multi-lingual and already using up to 23 languages. With such a large number of languages, relay interpretation is unavoidable, but, as the Code of Professional Standards states, in cases where relay interpretation is necessary, there should be at least two interpreters in the team who are able to provide relay for the same language. If the booth providing relay is a two-way booth, it should be manned with at least three interpreters.

Consecutive interpretation: For interpretation from two languages into two, two interpreters are needed. For interpretation from three languages into three, three interpreters are needed.

Whispered interpretation: For interpretation from one or two languages into one, at least two interpreters are needed.

There are certain exceptions to these general rules. For further information read the AIIC Code of Professional Standards (<http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page205.htm>).

Length of the working day:

An interpreter's working day should be made up of no more than two sessions of 2,5 to 3 hours each.

(see <http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page205.htm>)

Of course, a vital part of an interpreter's working conditions is made up of the technical equipment the conference organiser chooses to use. It is important that booths meet the respective ISO standards (ISO 2603 for fixed booths and ISO 4043 for mobile booths), and that every interpreter can see the conference room from their booth. Furthermore, there should be a technician acquainted with the equipment and in charge of it during the conference (see <http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page44.htm>). Of course it is often impossible to know what the booths look like and how a particular conference room is designed before the beginning of the conference, let alone before accepting a contract. Hence, the advice to check these factors applies, in a way, to an ideal situation which does not occur in real life. However, the AIIC standard contract states details about the technical equipment to be used and the company that will provide technical support, so at least those issues should be known to the interpreter beforehand.

It is the interpreters' responsibility to explain their requirements to the employer, which implies of course that the interpreters must know at least the basics of how the simultaneous interpretation equipment works. Some employers have never worked with interpretation before and they might not be aware of the implications of holding a multilingual conference. If working conditions for interpreters are poor, it will be a frustrating experience not only for the employer and the conference participants, but also for the interpreters who want to deliver a high-quality service but are unable to do so. Hence, graduates should not be afraid of taking time and energy to negotiate with employers. In some cases, however, those efforts may be futile and the employer will refuse to provide even minimum professional standards. It is strongly advised not to accept such contracts (see http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=628#14).

4.2.2 The AIIC-brokered agreement with the UN

The agreement between AIIC and the UN is applicable to conference interpreters – irrespective of whether they are members of AIIC or not, as explained in chapter 4.1 – and to all organisations within the UN system worldwide. A detailed list of the organisations party to the agreement can be found in annex D. The current version entered into force in 2007 and it is valid until 31 December 2011. Negotiations will be held in order to broker a new agreement for the time following the expiry of the current one. The agreement lays down certain provisions for the employment of free-lance or short-term conference interpreters, as they are called in the document, ranging from appointment and cancellation of appointments to working conditions, as well as remuneration and social security.

The UN undertakes to recruit interpreters in a non-discriminatory manner (according to its Charter and other rules), and to provide them with a so-called letter of appointment, i.e. a contract, stating details such as “(a) the place of work; (b) the relevant dates; (c) the net salary rate; (d) the gross salary equivalent, where staff assessment is applicable; (e) a reference, if possible, to ‘Caisse’ and accident and sickness insurance, and the percentage to be deducted; (f) whether daily subsistence allowance is payable, and in what form” (Art. 7). During the period of their appointment, interpreters are UN officials and have the responsibilities, but also the privileges and immunities that come with that status. Of course, interpreters must apply the principle of professional secrecy whenever they work in non-public meetings.

Interpreters who are not members of AIIC are obliged to declare their professional domicile to the UN when they apply for or accept contracts with the organisation. Every AIIC member’s professional domicile will be published in the AIIC yearbook.

In case an interpreter’s appointment has to be cancelled, there are several possibilities. If the reason for such a cancellation is for example “ill health, abandonment of post, misconduct or unsatisfactory service” (Art. 9), the organisation will apply its own rules for short-term staff. If an appointment is cancelled for any other reason, the interpreter may be entitled to

remuneration, namely 50% of the salary if it is cancelled more than 30 days before the beginning of the contract and 100% of the salary if it is cancelled less than 30 days before the beginning or even after the beginning. However, interpreters shall try to find another contract for that period of time, and if they are able to do so, remuneration will only be paid for the additional days of work that the UN appointment might have provided.

As far as remuneration is concerned, it is important to know that interpreters are classified in two groups: experienced interpreters, or Group I interpreters, and beginners, or Group II interpreters. The latter are paid two thirds of the rates for Group I interpreters. After 200 days of work for the UN, a Group II interpreter can apply for reclassification into Group I. Apart from the group, another factor that determines an interpreter's salary is the location of his or her professional domicile. In general, daily rates can vary between approximately 300 and 700 US Dollars, and they can be paid in different currencies. Details on rates can be found in annex A. During an appointment that lasts several days, each day is paid, including weekends and public holidays. The rates paid by the UN are net of taxes.

When an interpreter is hired to work at a location that does not coincide with her/his professional domicile, (s)he is entitled to reimbursement of travel costs, a daily subsistence allowance, and an indemnity for time spent travelling, provided the journey cannot take place on a work day, i.e. the first or last day of the appointment. If the interpreter has to travel to the conference location the day before the beginning of the appointment, (s)he will receive 50% of the daily rate for that day. The same principle applies to the homeward journey the day after the end of the appointment.

As to travel arrangements, the UN has rules for staff that also apply to free-lance interpreters. In general, the necessary arrangements are made for interpreters who are required to leave the location of their professional domicile, and they will be stated in the contract. In addition to that, a daily subsistence allowance is granted by the UN. The exact amount depends on the city the interpreter will have to travel to. In cases where the journey is

particularly long and tiresome, rest periods have to be included in the appointments and each rest day will be paid, even the ones immediately after the interpreter's return to her/his professional domicile.

The UN also contributes to social security payments for free-lance interpreters. 9% of the rates set out in the agreement constitute the employer's contribution which is included in the amount payable to the interpreter. However, interpreters can request that those 9% as well as another 4,5% – their own contribution – be deducted from their salary and paid into the Caisse de pensions des interprètes et traducteurs de conférence or the Caisse de prévoyance d'interprètes de conférence (the two pension funds mentioned in chapter 3) in their name. Furthermore, interpreters have the possibility of paying into a loss of earnings insurance and a sickness insurance to cover the period of their appointment, and as far as sick leave is concerned, each organisation has general rules for short-term staff.

The next point covered by the agreement is working conditions, but these shall not be discussed here, since the respective provisions are completely in line with the AIIC Code of Professional Standards which was discussed earlier in this chapter (<http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page205.htm>).

Finally, the agreement lays down certain rules regarding discipline and the settlement of disputes between interpreters and the UN organisations or between AIIC and an organisation. One last thing that might be interesting for the purpose of this paper is the fact that interpreters who work for the UN on a regular basis have the possibility, under certain circumstances and if no costs arise for the UN, to participate in training programmes that are organised for staff interpreters.

(see http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=2700)

4.2.3 The AIIC-brokered agreement with the EU

The agreement between AIIC and the EU applies to the EU institutions and conference interpreters – AIIC members and non-members – who have passed the EU accreditation test for free-lance interpreters. It entered into force in 1999 and is valid for an unlimited period of time. However, it can be amended and negotiations take place on a regular basis. The provisions basically touch upon the same issues as those in the agreement with the UN, namely recruitment, the cancellation of contracts, working conditions and remuneration.

Any interpreter who has passed the EU accreditation test may be recruited by the institutions, which shall, as far as possible, try to recruit with a certain regularity, and to avoid any sudden halt in recruitment. Contracts shall be made directly and individually with each interpreter. In case a contract is cancelled, the interpreter is entitled to 100% of the daily rate for each day stated in the contract if it is cancelled less than 60 days before the beginning of the assignment. Otherwise, no compensation will be paid.

Interpreters, for their part, need to be prepared to work both in simultaneous and consecutive mode, unless they have a physical disability that prevents them from doing so. Furthermore, they must observe the principle of professional secrecy when working in non-public meetings.

With regard to remuneration, the EU applies a policy similar to that of the UN in that interpreters are divided into two groups. Any interpreter who has less than 250 days of work experience with the EU institutions is considered a beginner and will earn 72% of the daily rate established for experienced interpreters. These are in turn determined with relation to the salaries for permanent staff. Interpreters' pay is subject to community tax, which will be deducted from the daily rate, and exempt from national tax. The exact figures are stated in a separate document called AIIC-EU Agreement Rates, which can be found on the internet (http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=279). Net daily rates range from about 305 to 393 Euros. With regard to taxation, it is important to know that interpreters who pay taxes in

Switzerland will have to follow a special procedure when declaring their taxes, since Switzerland is not a member state of the EU. Usually, they will have to request a certificate from the EU which states that their revenue has already been taxed. They will then hand in that certificate to the Swiss tax authorities in order not to avoid double taxation.

As for the professional domicile, provisions in the agreement with the EU are similar to those in the agreement with the UN. Interpreters who are not members of AIIC shall declare their professional domicile to the EU institutions when they accept their first contract. Travel arrangements from that location to the workplace need to be made by the interpreter who shall try to obtain the best possible cost-benefit ratio. Travel costs will be reimbursed upon presentation of the respective receipts. For each day spent travelling, interpreters shall receive 50% of their daily rate, with special compensations for tiresome long-distance journeys. In addition to that, a daily subsistence allowance will be paid to interpreters whose professional domicile is more than 60 km away from the workplace. These are calculated according to the institutions' rules for permanent staff members. These include a ceiling for hotel costs which varies according to the city.

If interpreters accept two successive contracts and the time between them does not allow them to return to their professional domicile, they shall receive the daily allowance mentioned above, as well as two thirds of their daily rate during that time (with a maximum of three days).

The agreement also contains provisions regarding social security which consists of two elements: retirement provisions and sickness and accident insurance. As far as retirement provisions are concerned, interpreters can choose a pension fund which must, however, be accredited by the EU. Contributions are made up of 16,5% of the salary payable by the EU on one hand, and another 8,25% payable by the interpreter on the other, which will be deducted from the salary. As for a sickness, accident and loss of earnings insurance, the EU shall arrange coverage during each assignment, and the interpreter shall pay a certain contribution.

As far as working conditions are concerned, the provisions laid down in the agreement resemble those of the AIIC Code of Professional Standards (<http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page205.htm>) and shall thus not be treated in this section. One article however, article 27, is interesting in this context. It deals with recordings that are published, for example on the internet. In these cases, it must be stated that interpretation is merely a means to facilitate communication in the conference room and that interpreters cannot be held responsible for any mistakes in their rendition of the original. Finally, the agreement contains a reference to another agreement between AIIC and the EU, which lays down certain standards and working conditions for remote interpreting (http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=2779). According to this agreement, remote interpreting – for example in the form of videoconferences – shall be a last resort and acceptable only under exceptional circumstances. When it is applied, standards with regard to workload and technical equipment are more stringent than those set out in the Code of Professional Standards.

(see <http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article2218>)

4.3 Professional ethics

In addition to the Code of Professional Standards, AIIC also developed a Code of Professional Ethics, which touches on certain ethical considerations with regard to the profession of conference interpreting. However, AIIC is not the only association that established such a code. There are numerous national and international associations of translators, court interpreters and medical interpreters – to mention only a few – who have drawn up codes of ethics. Since conference interpreters are likely to work in those fields as well, it is important for them to be well-acquainted with the provisions of those codes of ethics, as well as the one by AIIC. Often there are only minor differences though, since the basic ideas underlying all of the codes of ethics in the different fields are the same, namely

“integrity, professionalism and confidentiality”
(<http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article24.htm>).

In order to fully understand the necessity for such codes and the importance of adhering to them, it is indispensable to define the notion of ethics and ethical behaviour in the first place. Although it is true that ethics plays a role in most scientific domains, as a discipline it is usually considered a branch of philosophy, because it is not based on factual knowledge. It is rather a matter of answering questions about what would be the right or wrong behaviour. In fact, ethical considerations are thoughts that characterise human beings and distinguish them from animals, as the US National Council on Interpreting in Health Care explains in the introduction to its code of ethics. Ethical behaviour is thus “behaviour that corresponds to the accepted and idealized principles expressing what is considered right and wrong” (<http://www.gbrinterpreting.com/resources/Medical%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>).

These principles in turn are general standards that reflect certain overriding moral values. These standards, formulated as rules, can then serve as a basis for practical decision-making. Of course, the underlying values need to be as general as possible, because they need to be accepted by and applicable in all types of societies and cultures, a fact that is of particular significance in the profession of interpreting where the interaction between members of different cultures is a daily occurrence.

The dilemmas and questions that may arise during an interpreter’s daily work are numerous and manifold. They rank from considerations such as, “Is it ethically right or wrong to accept an assignment when we know we do not have the necessary knowledge of the subject to do a good job?” to “Is it ethically right or wrong to leave an interpreting assignment early?” or “Is it ethically right or wrong to ignore our team colleagues and not to share with them information that is necessary for the job?” (http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=352). With regard to our responsibility towards the client, another set of questions arises, for example “How do we behave in order not to

abuse our position of power in the conference room?” or “How do we behave in order not to interfere with our own beliefs and values?” or “Might it be necessary, under certain circumstances when it is for the benefit of our client, to disclose information that should in principle remain confidential?” (see <http://www.gbrinterpreting.com/resources/Medical%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>).

The need for a set of ethical principles arose in the 1950s with the professionalisation of conference interpreting and interpreting in general. Without such rules, “it is impossible to set standards that regulate the exercise of a profession and distinguish it from amateurism or quackery”. (http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=352) These rules are set by professional bodies, the most important one being AIIC, the only international association of conference interpreters.

The AIIC Code of Professional Ethics is a relatively short document with very clear indications that refer to the essential notions of professional ethics. It was adopted when AIIC was founded in 1953 and there have hardly been any changes to it since then. What follows is an overview of its most important provisions.

Professional secrecy: Information obtained in any non-public meeting at any time during an interpreter’s career must not be disclosed to anybody. Furthermore, interpreters must not use any piece of this information for their own benefit.

Professionalism: Interpreters shall not accept assignments they are not qualified for, and they shall never accept more than one assignment for a certain period of time. The same principles are valid for recruiters.

Dignity of the profession: Interpreters shall always be aware of the fact that they represent the profession of conference interpreting and act accordingly.

Collegiality: Interpreters shall offer moral support and assistance to colleagues whenever needed.

Quality: In order to provide the best possible quality, interpreters shall always make sure their requirements with regard to working conditions – as laid down in the Code of Professional Standards – are met. This includes the composition of teams, technical requirements, documentation and information. Furthermore, at a given conference, interpreters shall not carry out any task other than interpreting.

(see <http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article24.htm>)

In general, these principles are also shared by other associations of interpreters in their respective codes of ethics. In the following, reference shall be made to the Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care established by the US National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (<http://www.gbrinterpreting.com/resources/Medical%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>) and to the model code of ethics established by the US National Center for State Courts (http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res_CtInte_ModelGuidePub.pdf , chapter 9). In addition to the provisions stated by AIIC, these codes of ethics stress the following issues.

Medical interpreting: According to the Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care established by the US National Council on Interpreting in Health Care, interpreters must be impartial. They may interfere as a counsellor or advocate only in exceptional cases, when the patient's health, well-being or dignity is in danger of being compromised. Furthermore, interpreters shall always be aware of the different cultural backgrounds of the people involved in an assignment, including the way biomedical issues are treated in those cultures. At the same time, interpreters shall always be working to improve their knowledge and skills (see <http://www.gbrinterpreting.com/resources/Medical%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>).

Court interpreting: The following rules were taken from a model code of ethics established by the US National Center for State Courts whose objective is to “articulate a core set of principles, which are recommended for incorporation in similar codes”, but also to

“serve as a reference, which may be consulted or cited by interpreters, judges, and court managers where no other authoritative standards have been adopted” ([http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/ Res_CtInte_ModelGuidePub.pdf](http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res_CtInte_ModelGuidePub.pdf), chapter 9, p. 197). According to this code of ethics, in addition to most of the provisions mentioned above, interpreters shall provide the client with details about their professional training and experience before accepting an assignment. They shall not accept an assignment if it might give rise to a conflict of interest for them. Furthermore, they shall behave in a modest way, according to the dignity of the court. If for some reason an interpreter believes that he or she cannot deliver the service in an adequate manner, they must inform the respective judicial authority of their impediment.

(see http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res_CtInte_ModelGuidePub.pdf , chapter 9)

In order to complete this overview over the provisions of different codes of ethics relevant to conference interpreters, one last document shall be mentioned here: The Staff Interpreters’ Charter established by AIIC. It refers specifically to interpreters who are employed by one organisation on a permanent basis. Of course that does not mean that staff interpreters are exempt from adherence to the provisions of the Code of Professional Ethics, which applies to each and every conference interpreter, but the Staff Interpreters’ Charter states a few additional rules that are applicable only to staff interpreters. For example, staff interpreters shall always be loyal to the organisation they work for. Furthermore, they should inform their superior if they feel unqualified for an assignment they have been entrusted with. Cooperation with free-lance colleagues is another point of the Staff Interpreters’ Charter. Apart from that, staff interpreters shall accept additional contracts as free-lancers only if their employer agrees (see <http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page1081.htm>).

5 Conclusion: Checklist for recent graduates

- Have I decided where I want to establish my professional domicile (see chapter 3.1)?
- Is my Swiss residence permit still valid (see <http://www.geneve.ch/ocp/>)?
- Do I have the required health insurance (see chapter 3.2)?
- Have I registered with AVS and AI (see chapter 3.2)?
- Have I verified where, when and how I need to pay taxes (see chapter 3.3)?
- Do I have a professional email address (see chapter 2.9)?
- Do I have a professional message on my answering machine (see chapter 2.9)?
- Have I written my CV (see chapter 2.2)?
- Have I decided to whom I intend to send it (see chapters 2.3 and 2.4)?
- Have I contacted the chief interpreters of the organisations I hope to work with in order to introduce myself appropriately (see chapter 2.4)?
- Have I printed my business cards (see chapter 2.9)?
- Have I verified when the next major conferences will take place (e.g. the ILC) and have I applied for a badge in order to do dummy booth practice (see chapter 2.7)?
- Have I checked when the next EU accreditation test for my language combination will take place (see chapter 2.5)?
- Have I decided whether or not to sign up with Officinter (see chapter 2.3)?

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7 Annex

AIIC Sample Contract

Name and address of conference organiser:

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

Name and address of interpreter:

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

Individual contract

(form approved by the International Association of Conference Interpreters - AIIC - version January 2002)

I. Following our conversation/correspondence with,
we hereby confirm your engagement as a conference interpreter
from at a.m./p.m. to at a.m./p.m.
for
to be held at (address)
The following dates are scheduled for briefing meetings:
From at a.m./p.m. to at a.m./p.m.
The maximum duration of meeting will be from a.m. to a.m./p.m.
in the morning and from p.m. to p.m. in the afternoon (see § 3 overleaf).

II. The Conference languages are
The interpretation will be consecutive in room(s), and simultaneous in room(s).
You will be required to provide consecutive/simultaneous interpretation from into

The team of which you will form part will comprise conference interpreters.

Names of the other interpreters:
.....
..... will be responsible for liaison between the team of interpreters and the organisers.

III. The simultaneous interpretation equipment will be fixed/mobile (see § 8 overleaf).
Make: Name of technician responsible:

IV. The interpretation will/will not be recorded (see § 4 overleaf).

V. TRAVEL

1. Travel arrangements:
2. Accommodation and subsistence:

VI. **MISCELLANEOUS** (non-working days, travel days, rest days, ...if applicable):.....
.....

VII. CANCELLATION CLAUSE

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

The provision of services for the duration of the engagement as set out in § I above shall be subject to the following conditions:

		TOTAL
VIII.	REMUNERATION
IX.	ALLOWANCES
X.	EXPENSES
	TOTAL
XI.	METHOD OF PAYMENT We shall pay you the sums due to you not later than the day prior to the end of your engagement, either by a cheque drawn in your favour or in cash to you personally, in the currency of your country of domicile or in transferable and negotiable convertible currency which you will be permitted to export to the country in which you are domiciled, or by another way agreed upon in advance with the interpreters.	

XII. GENERAL CONDITIONS

The general conditions of work are printed on the back of this contract. Both parties are familiar with these conditions and agree to abide by them.

REMARKS

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

The Conference Organiser
(stamp of organisation and authorised signature)

The Interpreter
(signature)

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

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

General conditions of work

1. **Contracts** shall always be concluded **directly** between the interpreter and either the conference organiser, or else 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 not normally last for longer than two periods of 2½ to 3 hours each and 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, or else their replacement by a fresh team.
4. **The services of the interpreter** shall as a general rule 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 100 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 and the allowances are determined by mutual agreement. The remuneration shall be paid unless otherwise provided by law, net of withholding tax.
7. 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.
8. 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), it is absolutely necessary to respect the conditions stipulated in ISO 2603, with particular emphasis on article 7.1 regarding sound, and to ensure that the whole range of frequencies between 125 and 12,500 Hz is being provided in the case of an ISDN transmission.

9. **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.
10. **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.**