



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERPRETATION

INTERPRETATION SERVICES MANAGEMENT & PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT
Multilingualism and Knowledge Development

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Support to universities: Academic Year 2019 – 2020

The mission of DG SCIC is to facilitate the multilingual democratic decision-making process in the EU. In order to do that it must ensure that a sufficient number of conference interpreters are trained to the standards required by the EU Institutions. To achieve this objective, whilst respecting the subsidiarity principle under which interpreter training is the sole competence of Member States, DG SCIC implements a programme of pedagogical and financial support activities for universities training conference interpreters and their students. Support is provided, as a matter of priority, to interpreter training for the official EU languages and the languages of Candidate Countries. However, assistance is also provided for interpreter training for the languages of Pre-candidate Countries and, where justified by DG SCIC needs, for non-EU languages. This report only covers EU and Candidate country languages.

Allocation of Support

Support is allocated depending on the needs of the service and on the basis of the yearly language priorities. Requests for support are made through the Europa website (see below for details). Selection Committees, where different parts of the service are represented, meet formally to decide on the award of financial support (grants and bursaries), as well as the allocation of pedagogical support (pedagogical assistance and virtual classes) in line with the needs of the service, and their results are approved at the highest level.

Conference interpretation in international organisations is very specific and different from other forms of linguistic mediation. Experience over many years of in-house training and of testing university graduates has led to the conclusion that an interpreting course must meet very high standards if it is to impart a usable professional skill up to the standards required by EU Institutions. In order to be eligible to receive support universities must fulfil a number of key criteria in terms of the conception and running of the interpreting courses.

Good conference interpreting training is a highly selective process that starts with screening the potential of the candidates (mastery of mother tongue and foreign languages; communication, presentation and analysing skills; general knowledge etc.) and is not strictly academic in nature nor is it intended for learning languages, but focuses on developing practical analytical and interpreting skills.

Therefore, Universities and Higher Education Institutes (hereafter referred to as ‘universities’) are encouraged to follow these guidelines, based on the European Master in Conference

Interpreting ([EMCI](#)) curriculum, and developed jointly by leading universities and the EU Institutions:

Criteria to start/continue cooperation with universities training conference interpreters applied by DG SCIC

- Courses should be organised at *Masters or Postgraduate* level (preferably structurally independent of language or translation departments).
- The curriculum and other relevant information about the course must be public and posted on-line.
- Admittance to the course should be open to suitable graduates from all areas of study with appropriate language knowledge and subject to passing a specific aptitude test; criteria for admission and successful completion of the course should be governed exclusively by principles of quality and not of quantity.
- Courses should consist mainly of practice activity in both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting.
- Interpreting training should be given by professional interpreters, preferably accredited as conference interpreters to the EU Institutions or other international organisations.
- The course coordinator should also be a practicing professional with the pedagogical autonomy to ensure these conditions and having direct influence on the design and monitoring of the course curriculum.
- Final examination juries must be composed of trainers from the programme and external assessor(s) who are also practising conference interpreters.
- Graduates must pass exams in both interpretation modes at the same time to obtain a diploma.
- The quality of the graduates should be appropriate to meet the requirements of an accreditation test in the European Institutions.
- The graduates must be eligible to apply directly for interinstitutional accreditation tests.

Since the reframing of cooperation in 2018, there are now new **criteria for differentiating support** to universities by DG SCIC.

Generally, the decision by DG SCIC to differentiate or end cooperation will be based on a number of important factors, for example:

- Whether the course gives direct access to the EU inter-institutional accreditation test for free-lance interpreters.
- The number of applicants to and the success rates at tests (taking into account the number of tests and test slots available).
- The actual language profiles taught by universities and the extent to which they address DG SCIC's needs.
- Significant changes to either the curriculum of the interpretation course or the teaching staff.

- Strategic choices for the EU Institutions in interpretation terms (e.g. linked to political priorities or upcoming presidencies).

A further consideration is the extent to which universities are willing to cooperate with one another in projects with a European dimension.

For languages where there is only one university training conference interpreters, DG SCIC will take into account this university's special status as sole provider of conference interpreter training for their language.

Cooperation with a given university could stop or be limited to the bare minimum if the required criteria are not met over a period of several testing cycles.

COVID-19

The 2019-20 academic year has been exceptional, due to the COVID-19 crisis. The information contained in this report is based on the outcome of the above-mentioned selection committees, which were held before the outbreak of the pandemic. Therefore, it reflects what was allocated, not what actually took place. Precisely because of the lockdown from mid-March 2020 onwards, alternatives had to be found to any support involving travel as restriction to mobility were applied following the recommendations of the Commission (especially for pedagogical assistance and study visits). For more information on what DG SCIC did, please see each heading below.

Types of Support

A. Pedagogical Support

Pedagogical Assistance (PA)

PA is a system for giving teaching assistance *in situ* in the universities with whom SCIC cooperates and who are training conference interpreters with the combinations and to the standards needed by the EU Institutions. There are three different types of PA: training for students, training for trainers and presence at examinations – aptitude, mid-term or final. The PA trainers are staff interpreters who have been trained in-house to train students and/or trainers.

Universities request teaching modules per semester and these are then examined by the Head of the Interpreting Unit before being forwarded to the PA Selection Committee, which takes place twice a year, normally in June and December. On average 350 days of PA are awarded every year.

COVID measures: all universities due to receive PA were asked if they wanted to/could host the training online instead. Most did.

Virtual Classes (VCs)

VCs are training sessions, lasting 2/2.30 hours, organised by videoconference with partner universities. DG SCIC interpreters with training experience are assigned to specific sessions as trainers and speakers.

Requests for VCs are dealt with in the same way and at the same time as requests for PA.

Around 60 VCs are organised every year.

COVID measures: all the VCs organised during the sanitary crisis involved the participation of all interpreters from their respective homes instead of the usual gathering at DG SCIC's premises.

Study Visits (SV)

Groups of maximum 12 students per university visit the interpreting services of the European Institutions. The duration of the visit varies: it can be 1, 2 or 3 days. In cases where the University is invited to visit the European Parliament (EP) as well, the duration of the visit will always be 3 days in total (1 day of which concerns a visit to the EP). Every year around 60 different groups of students visit DG SCIC and they are welcomed almost every week of the academic year; the period January-June is particularly popular amongst the universities.

Universities are invited to send in a SV request twice a year, by the 1st of May for the first semester of the following academic year, and by November 1st for the second semester.

COVID measures: all study visits were cancelled from March 2020 on, and where possible, replaced by a Webinar led by 1 or more staff interpreters from the relevant booth

More information and application forms for these three types of pedagogical support can be found [here](#).

Academy of Trainers

Week-long seminars are run once or twice a year for trainers from universities in Member States, candidate and third countries. The 'basic seminar' is for inexperienced trainers and its purpose is to assist and advise universities and trainers on teaching interpretation techniques, designing and running a course, candidate profiles, aptitude tests and examinations. The 'advanced seminar' on the other hand is for experienced trainers and a different theme is chosen each time. In principle, a SCIC moderator animates an exchange of best practices among the participating trainers. The maximum number of participants per seminar is 14.

Universities are asked to put forward trainers from their institutions. As demand always outstrips the number of places available, Heads of Interpreting Units give their input on the merits of each candidate and a decision which universities to invite is taken jointly by different parts of the service. Unsuccessful candidates are placed on a waiting list and considered for the subsequent course.

COVID measures: the September 2020 advanced seminar to be a follow-up on last year's and will be held virtually.

B. Financial Support

Grants to universities

The grant scheme is a financial support tool for universities training conference interpreters. Co-financing is given to individual universities to help run their MA courses and to consortia of universities working on projects that foster the interpreting profession, promote quality interpreter training and enhance cooperation among postgraduate courses. It also targets projects contributing to interpreter training as a whole or creating synergies with other types of interpreting training.

Universities or consortia of universities apply once the [call for proposals](#) is launched on Europa (at the end of March). The applications are evaluated at the Grants Evaluation Committee which takes place in July.

An average of €400 000 is earmarked for this in the budget assigned for the interpreter training activities, and on average 10-12 grants are awarded each year.

Student bursaries

Annual provision of financial help to the most promising students with language combinations in demand at DG SCIC, who are enrolled in a fee-paying master or post-graduate in conference interpreting. The awarded sums are the equivalent of the administrative fee (tuition or entrance fees) paid by the students for the academic year concerned, with a ceiling of €2.400 per student.

Students [apply](#) for a bursary using the SPIRIT application, and their applications are evaluated by the Bursaries Evaluation Committee, which takes place in autumn.

Around 60 bursaries are awarded each year.

SCIC Universities Conference

Once a year DG SCIC organises a conference where representatives of universities training conference interpreters from Europe and beyond, representatives of other Institutions and Organisations with interpretation services and other relevant actors are invited to exchange views and ideas about the evolution of the profession and interpreter training trends.

More than 60 universities are regularly invited to the event.

Signed

Javier Hernandez-Saseta

Head of Unit