

## **UK and Ireland Region of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) - Written evidence (FTS0051)**

### **1. Introduction:**

**On AIIC:** AIIC is the only global association of conference interpreters and has over 3,000 members in 100 countries. Set up in 1953 and headquartered in Geneva, it has negotiated agreements on the working conditions and pay of freelance interpreters with a number of international organisations, including the United Nations.

AIIC members are vetted through a rigorous peer review process on the basis of their experience and performance. They are widely considered to be the top tier of interpreters (or 'translators' as we are sometimes called) in the world, and AIIC is a hallmark of interpreting quality in many countries.

A number of AIIC committees and working groups produce guidance and policies on a wide range of issues, from health to training, most recently on Covid-related remote interpreting. Our members are conference interpreters (translating the spoken word, as opposed to the written word) who work in simultaneous interpretation (in normal times in an interpreting booth), consecutive interpretation (taking notes), or whispering (for example, in high-level political meetings).

### **AIIC UK & Ireland:**

Our UK and Ireland branch of AIIC has 120 members, some of whom work for EU Institutions and the United Nations (especially the London-based International Maritime Organisation), while the rest are freelance professionals working for government agencies, multinationals and conference production companies. Many of our members travelled for work to the EU almost every week before the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the current travel restrictions and the general impact of the pandemic on the conference sector, we have not yet been able to ascertain the full magnitude of the impact of Brexit and the provisions of the very recent Trade and Cooperation Agreement on the services we offer.

**Our profession:** Our profession has played a major role in international diplomacy and multilateral institutions (one only needs to think of the Nuremberg trials or the United Nations, to name but two examples). However, it is also unique and small-scale. As such, the specific demands of our profession and the challenges our members face are often poorly understood. Conference interpreting in the UK is also under threat at the moment for different reasons. We have reason to believe that the current Brexit-related uncertainty, and probable additional obstacles, could prove **very detrimental to AIIC conference interpreters based in the United Kingdom compared with their counterparts in the EU.**

Sadly, for the reasons laid out above, we do not have definitive answers to your questions. Therefore our evidence will be a summary of concerns and questions, rather than hard facts, which are still lacking. We hope that our submission will nonetheless be of interest and relevance in your work, for which we are very grateful.



## 2. Questions

In the list of professions mentioned in your call for written evidence, conference interpreters, interpreters or even translators, as we are often called, are not mentioned specifically, but we feel they would most probably fall under the category of **professional services** (most of us are self-employed professionals).

We have a number of questions about the impact of Brexit and are currently looking at engaging legal experts to provide advice to our members on a range of issues. We believe them to be connected to **your questions 2, 3, 10 and 14**.

Please find below a summary of our main points.

**2.1 Question 3) on Mobility:** will our ability to travel freely and offer our services to clients based in the EU be affected? Some of us hold an EU passport, whilst others are UK citizens. Will we be able to continue to travel to EU countries to work for very brief but frequent periods of time, as we have been accustomed to do? An exemption seems to be granted to our profession under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (Annex Servin-3, para 8.k) but some countries could / will still require an **economic needs test**.

**Questions 2 and 10)** If that were the case, we do not know who would have to prove the economic case (recruiter, ourselves?) and what the administrative and financial costs would be.

Of course, the uncertainty is compounded by the fact that we are unable to travel at the moment because of the pandemic, with most international conferences and congresses having been cancelled or taking place virtually. Therefore, we are not able to 'test the waters' in the new regime.

We therefore seek certainty on those points. Ideally, we would like to be able to travel unhindered to EU countries. Indeed in normal times, as mentioned before, we travel extensively; it is in the nature of our job. Interpreters need to go where international gatherings are taking place.

**2.2 Tax** implications: Both income tax and VAT could be affected in different ways, and we thought it might be relevant here, although it is not formulated as one of your questions.

- **Income tax:** Our income from EU institutions is taxed at source and, as such, is exempt from national taxation. We are not sure what the impact of the end of the transition period will be in this respect. There also seem to be some bilateral initiatives to renegotiate or amend double taxation agreements, which could have an impact on our work for clients other than the EU institutions.
- **VAT:** Our VAT situation might change, depending on our VAT status and that of our EU clients. We are uncertain of the new VAT arrangements in all cases.

Again, on **income tax**, we need certainty. We assume it is unlikely that the EU will cease to deduct Community tax from our salaries, so would want to know that the UK Government will not be taxing that income as well, as this would in effect mean double taxation on our EU income. Similarly, in the case of our members working for private-market clients in the EU, double-taxation agreements are important to ensure that tax is not deducted from their earnings at source but rather is declared on their UK tax return.

On **VAT**, we would welcome a simple system, easy to understand and implement. Indeed, as self-employed professionals or very small limited liability companies, we tend to deal with a lot of very small transactions, and a cumbersome system would be daunting for us, but also, and more importantly, for our customers, putting us at a disadvantage vis-a-vis our EU competitors.

**2.3 Question 14: Data protection and data flows:** We are unsure what will happen after the end of the data adequacy bridge period. Will we be able to hold data on our customers, or will there be some restrictions? And we do not know what needs to be done to bring us into compliance with any new legal situation.

On data protection and data flows, we need clarity and ideally, we would need to be able to handle our customers' data as before.

### **3. Conclusion**

In the light of all the above, our members are very concerned about the potential impact of Brexit and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement on our profession, which requires frequent business travel often at short notice, and the distinct possibility of finding ourselves at a disadvantage compared with our EU colleagues, as well as the potential implications for taxation.

At this stage, the level of uncertainty is such that we have decided to hire the services of lawyers and accountants to help us navigate the new reality. This will result in expenses that are significant for a non-profit entity like ours. We would welcome clearer and more detailed guidance on the Government website.

We regret that we are not able to submit real case studies but only general concerns and questions at this time since our members have been unable to work at in-person events, and in some cases to work at all, for almost a year. However, we would very much like to be included in any future fact-finding and consultation exercise, and we would like to reserve the right to submit concrete evidence at a later stage, when we will be in a better position to understand the real implications of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement for us.

*February 2021*