Interpreter

Interpreters translate the spoken word, on the spot, from one language into another language. This allows people who do not share the same first language to understand each other.

The Work

There are three main types of interpreting:

- simultaneous or conference interpreting
- consecutive or business interpreting
- liaison or public service interpreting.

Simultaneous or Conference Interpreting

You could be:

- working at large international conferences and meetings
- instantly translating speeches into another language
- sitting next to a client and whispering the translations to them
- passing on the translated version through headsets to those attending the conference while listening to, and mentally interpreting, the next part of the speech.

Consecutive or Business Interpreting

You could be:

- working at smaller meetings, sitting at a table with those attending
- translating for a speaker after each sentence or paragraph
- taking notes from what the speaker says, before translating into more than one language.

Liaison or Public Service Interpreting

You could be:

- assisting people in their dealings with government organisations or legal and health services
- working at a private meeting or interview between two or more people who speak different languages
- translating into and out of each language after each person has spoken.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual salaries may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of the company or organisation you work for

- the demand for the job.

Freelance work is very common where rates can vary and can range between £14.00 per hour to £35.00 per hour. Annual salaries can range from around £23,000 to £35,000 a year.

Staff interpreters at the European Commission start on grade AD5, which has a salary of around £5,183 to £5,864 a month. Senior interpreters on grade AD7 earn around £6,635 to £7,507 a month.

Conditions

- Your work location would depend on the type of interpreting you are doing.
- You might work in conference centres and meeting venues in the UK or overseas, or in the offices of commercial companies, government departments, the law courts or the health service.
- You might be sitting in a booth, wearing earphones within a conference hall.
- You may be working under intense scrutiny part of the time.
- You may have to travel long distances, sometimes overseas, at short notice.
- The hours of work are often irregular and may be long.
- Many interpreting projects are for short periods, such as a two-day conference or one day in a law court.
- You might take on 'ad hoc' or occasional work, such as helping a person with no English to deal with public authorities – hospitals, doctors, law courts. This is especially common with community languages such as Urdu, Punjabi or Polish.

Getting In

- You must be an excellent speaker of your native language and fluent in at least one foreign language (preferably two).
- Most interpreters either have a degree (SCQF Level 9) in interpreting and translating, or two foreign languages, or a foreign language combined with another subject. You normally need 4-5 good Highers for entry. You do not always need a Higher in each language, as long as you can demonstrate good language ability.
- Heriot-Watt University offers MA Honours degrees in Modern Languages (Interpreting and Translating) and Applied Languages and Translating. Entry requirements are 4 Highers at AABB including a relevant language at A plus National 5 English.
- Many interpreters also have a Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) (SCQF Level 11) in Interpreting and Translating. Several universities in the UK offer these, including Heriot-Watt University.
- The Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIoL) offers several qualifications, including the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI), for those working in law, healthcare or local government.
- It is an advantage if you have knowledge of an area such as law, business, computer studies or engineering.
- If your degree is not in languages you may be still able to become an interpreter if, for example, you have been brought up to be bilingual (fluent in two languages) or have lived abroad. This may be particularly true for less common languages.
- You should have knowledge of the culture of the country's language you speak.
- Entry is very competitive and only skilled and persistent people will succeed.

Most work is with European Union (EU) organisations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the

United Nations (UN). The EU organisations employ around 800 interpreters, but also use freelance interpreters.

Making contacts is very important. Make yourself known to businesses, organisations and interpreters groups, both locally and further afield. Send your CV with a covering letter to any potential employers.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- good hearing and a clear speaking voice
- an excellent knowledge of your own language and preferably at least two others
- the self-confidence to speak in public and adapt to a wide range of situations
- excellent concentration to listen and speak during lengthy interpreting sessions
- an excellent memory
- good stamina, since the work can be demanding.

You need to be:

- self-reliant and able to work on your own initiative
- able to work under intense pressure
- discrete and able to respect confidentiality
- a quick thinker, to find the precise translation
- committed to accuracy at all times
- impartial and objective in your approach to the topics you translate.

Training

- You will need to keep up to date with developments by attending short courses and seminars.
- The Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIoL) and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) both run short courses and weekend workshops for updating skills and professional development.

Getting On

- There are limited full time opportunities for interpreters and there is a lot of competition for posts. Most full time posts are in international organisations with a well-organised career structure and promotion opportunities to senior posts.
- There are some openings in public sector organisations, for example with the NHS, law courts, the police, the immigration service or local government. There is no standard career structure for interpreters in these organisations and promotion prospects are fairly limited.
- Most interpreters find their freelance work through agencies. They often do additional work such as part time teaching or translating (converting written text) to increase their income.

More Information

The Association for Language Learning website has information on careers with languages, 'Why

Study Languages?'.

Check the Institute of Translating and Interpreting bulletin for job vacancies (available online).

You can find out more about interpreting careers in the European Union (EU) by visiting their website.

The rise in the number of EU citizens coming to work in the UK, and the need to make sure that they have equal access to public services, is increasing demand for part time interpreters of community languages. In Scotland community languages include: Arabic, Cantonese, Gaelic, Hindi, Kurdish, Polish, Punjabi and Urdu.

The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) occasionally runs an entry level competition for English interpreters, with a view to recruiting staff interpreters. The frequency of this depends on their staff requirements.

Contacts

Association for Language Learning
Tel: 01332 227779
Email: info@all-languages.org.uk
Website: www.all-languages.org.uk
X: @ALL4language
Facebook: www.facebook.com/alllanguages.org.uk

Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI)
Tel: 01908 325250
Email: info@iti.org.uk
Website: www.iti.org.uk

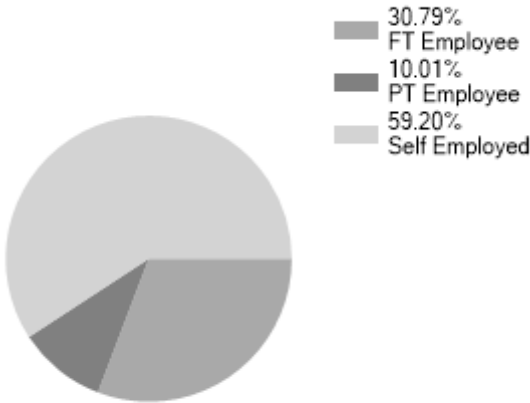**SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages**
Tel: 0141 444 8163
Email: scilt@strath.ac.uk
Website: scilt.org.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/sciltscotland
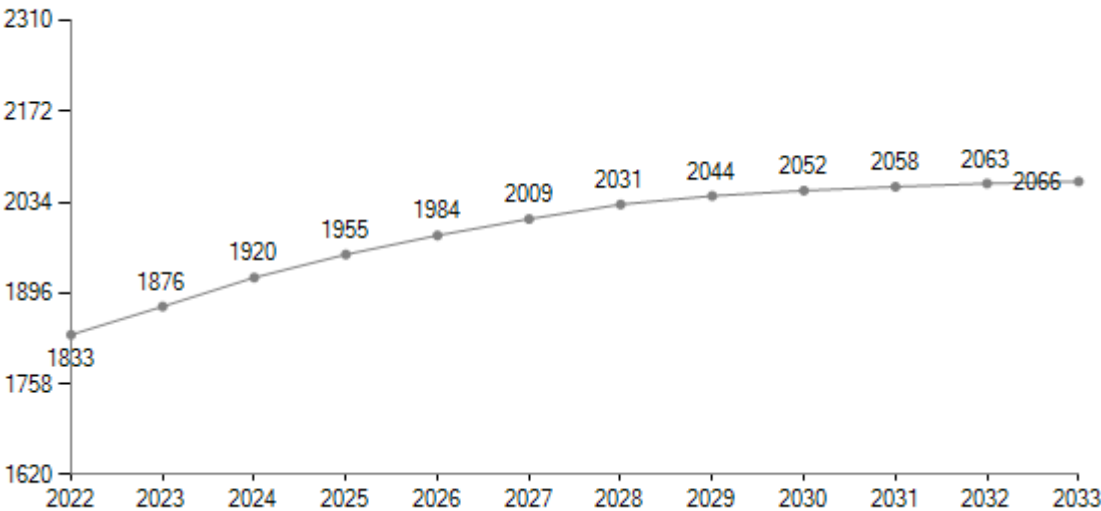
Statistics

Employment Status UK %

30.79%
FT Employee
10.01%
PT Employee
59.20%
Self Employed

LMI data powered by LMI for All

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment in Scotland

LMI data powered by Lightcast