Remote Aptitude Testing for Conference Interpreting in Europe During and After the Pandemic
Expedience or opportunity?

Clare Donovan

ESIT (Ecole supérieure d'interprètes et de traducteurs, Sorbonne Nouvelle) and ISIT (Institut de management et de communication interculturels, Paris-Panthéon-Assas)

donovan.clare@isitparis.eu

ABSTRACT: There is general agreement that adequate entrance selection to conference interpreting courses is key to ensuring successful outcomes, as well as to guaranteeing a wise use of limited resources and satisfactory class dynamics. Indeed, entrance selection is one of the key quality assessment criteria for membership to the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI).

Conference interpreter training programmes (CITPs) in Europe use a range of written and oral exercises to identify suitable candidates at entrance. The core test procedure is usually a series of "gist" or recall exercises, in which candidates are required to re-express in another language the ideas conveyed in a short presentation.

Prior to 2020 these exercises were for the most part held with a panel of assessors and the candidates in an interview room at the host university. The COVID-19-related restrictions introduced in Europe since March 2020 in effect led to an enforced experiment with a new mode of test delivery, as stringent travel and meeting restrictions forced many programmes to switch to remote selection. This was initially seen as an unfortunate temporary expedient, but we would suggest that it might be an opportunity to take a fresh

look at aptitude testing procedures. Despite the lifting of restrictions, a number of programmes continue to conduct their entrance tests in remote mode.

It would be premature at this stage to draw conclusions about student outcomes, but it is worth considering trainer, student, and course coordinators' perceptions of and experience with the new procedures.

The article focuses on the CITPs in the EMCI, a consortium of 15 members at time of the outbreak of the pandemic. The data examined have been collected through a series of questionnaires and interviews. Student questionnaires have been collected mainly from the two Paris-based programmes, ISIT and ESIT; panellist questionnaires and interviews from ISIT, ESIT and Herzen in St Petersburg. 15 course coordinators in the EMCI have been consulted and 11 interviewed. The viewpoints of each of these three groups differ. The likely reasons for these differences are presented and discussed.

The views and experience compiled and analysed are intended to feed into a broader discussion about aptitude testing.

논문초록: 적절한 수준의 통번역과정 입시 절차가 높은 수준의 교육 성취도 담보, 제한된 자원의 현명한 가용, 만족스러운 수업 진행의 필요 조건이라는 것에는 전반적으로 합의가 이루어진 상태이다. 실제로 적절한 수준의 입시 절차를 갖추는 것이 회의통역 전공 유럽석사(EMCI) 가입을 위한 핵심 평가 항목 중 하나이다.

유럽 회의통역 교육 프로그램(CITP)은 다양한 구두 및 필기 전형을 통해 적합한 입시생을 선별한다. 입시 전형은 주로 글의 요점을 설명하거나 기억하는 것으로 지원자는 짧은 발표문의 내용을 다른 언어로 표현해야 한다.

2020년 전까지 이러한 입시 전형은 해당 대학교의 면접실에서 평가위원과 지원자들이 모여서 진행하였다. 2020년 3월부터 유럽에 도입된 코로나19 관련 제약으로 인해 의무적으로 새로운 입시 전형 방식을 실험하게 되었다. 여행 및 모임이 엄격히 제약되며 많은 기관에서 원격으로 입시생을 선별하게 된 것이다. 처음에는 불가피하게 도입한 임시 방편으로 여겨졌으나, 본 연구에서는 적성 평가 절차를 재고해볼 기회라고 주장한다. 이제 제약은 풀렸으나 다수의 통번역 교육 기관에서는 여전히 원격으로 입시 전형을 진행한다.

학생의 성취도에 대한 결론을 내리기에는 이르지만, 새로운 입시 절차에 대한 교원, 학생, 학과 코디네이터의 의견과 경험을 살펴볼 가치가 있을 것으로 사료된다.

EMCI는 팬데믹 초기 15개 회원 기관으로 이루어진 컨소시엄이었으며 본 연구는 EMCI

내 CITP를 살펴본다. 데이터는 일련의 설문조사와 인터뷰를 통해 수집하였다. 학생 대상 설문조사의 대다수는 파리에 위치한 ISIT와 ESIT에서 진행하였으며 평가위원 설문조사와 인터뷰는 ISIT, ESIT, 상트페테르부르크 게르첸 대학교에서 진행하였다. EMCI의 학과 코디네이터 15명의 자문을 구하였으며 11명과 인터뷰를 진행하였다. 세 집단의 의견과 경험이 달랐으며 본 연구에서 그 원인이 무엇일지에 대해 논의한다.

본 연구에서는 참여자의 견해와 경험을 통합하고 분석하여 입시 전형에 대한 전체적인 논의에 기여하고자 하였다.

핵심어: 회의통역 교육과정, 적성평가, EMCI, 원격동시통역 (RSI), 회의통역 (CI)

1. Introduction: Entrance Selection in Conference Interpreter Training Programmes (CITPs)

1.1 General Considerations

The importance of selection at CI training intake has been highlighted in many previous studies. Entrance testing has always been seen as a crucial requirement for EMCI Masters programmes, as indeed elsewhere. Careful selection ensures that high standards are maintained, during the course itself but also subsequently within the interpreting profession when graduates seek employment from international organisations and other high-level recruiters, such as ministries. An entire issue of the specialised publication *Interpreting* (*13*(1), 2011) is devoted to the subject of aptitude testing. As Russo notes, "the need for some admission criteria was stressed as far back as the very first conference on interpreting, the 1965 Paris colloque" (Russo, 2011, p. 9). And in the same volume we read "what everyone would agree with is the need for selection" (Timarová & Salaets, 2011, p. 32). Experience shows that not all candidates have the proficiency or aptitude required to become high level conference interpreters. "Even the best course cannot turn every applicant into a good interpreter" (Donovan, 2003, p. 18). At a practical level, programmes do not have the resources to provide training for all candidates. Seen from this perspective, selection of candidates is "not only a practical necessity … but also an ethical requirement" (Russo, 2022, p. 308).

Despite broad recognition of the importance of selection, aptitude testing is an area with many questions unanswered (Roziner & Shlesinger, 2010; Russo,

2022). In the following article, we will attempt to address one new question, the relative merits and drawbacks of remote versus on-site entrance testing. The scope is the 15 EMCI institutions from 2020 to 2022 when COVID-19-related restrictions led to increased recourse to remote testing procedures. The tools used for this purpose were a series of questionnaires and interviews, with separate questions addressed to course coordinators, to panel members and to students.

1.2 Entrance Selection within the EMCI

The EMCI is a consortium of graduate programmes, formally set up in 2001. It aims to define best practice in CI training, including election at intake. Programmes have a duration of at least one year and a maximum of two. Membership of the consortium is restricted to those programmes that comply with the guiding principles and best practices. These include inter alia a minimum number of teaching hours, basic curriculum outlines, and the obligation for interpreting classes to be taught by practising conference interpreters. Compliance with clearly defined selection procedures, at entry, mid-term and graduation is also required. The principles and recommendations were initially defined by a working group of interpreter training programmes assisted by EU institutions. Five meetings were held in 1997 and 1998 where the participants "identified a number of key issues, reviewed current curricula and agreed a number of elements regarded as being essential" to ambitious interpreter training (EMCI, 2021).

Since then, the principles and curriculum have been refined through discussions over many meetings. Programmes that wish to join the consortium are subject to careful scrutiny during a quality assessment procedure. The quality assessment includes verifying compliance with entrance testing guidelines.

Regarding entrance selection, the same basic principles apply for all members, but the practicalities are influenced by local circumstances. Those programmes located in countries whose official language is not used in international fora, other than the EU institutions, tend to have smaller intakes. Typically, applicant numbers do not exceed a couple of dozen. Others are located in countries whose national language is used

more widely, including in international settings. They offer a wider range of language combinations. The intake, as would be expected, is broader, often international, with students coming from abroad to follow the tuition. They receive up to 200 applications every year. However, there are exceptions to this breakdown. Italian is not widely used internationally and yet the two Italian programmes also receive large numbers of applicants. Pass rates at entrance selection across the EMCI programmes are typically 15% to 20% (Donovan, 2003; Setton & Dawrant, 2016).

The EMCI home page states a commitment to defining common standards for intake recruitment:

> The member institutions pursue a common policy on *student recruitment* and assessment and are committed to quality maintenance and regular reviews of the programme to adapt to changing needs and new developments (EMCI, 2021; our italics).

Indeed, the first common standard set out on the website is a requirement that EMCI programmes have selection at entry, as defined in the core curriculum which includes a detailed description of aptitude testing. The testing must include at least three components: firstly, an interview; then, general knowledge questions or test; and, finally, "gist" or recall tests. The recall tests are defined as follows on the website (EMCI, 2021):

> The oral reproduction of short and structured speeches (2-3 minutes) from the candidate's C and B languages into A and, where appropriate, A into B. This is to test applicants' ability to listen to, understand, process and reproduce a short speech on a general topic. They must show that they have understood the message and are able to communicate it (Section 5.2).[1]

These recall exercises are sometimes referred to as "short consecutives" (Russo, 2022), but this is somewhat misleading, as the candidates are not

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[1] The A language is the interpreter's mother tongue (or its strict equivalent) into which they work from all their other working languages…. A B language is a language in which the interpreter is perfectly fluent, but which is not a mother tongue…. A C language is one which the interpreter understands perfectly but into which they do not work (AIIC, 2021).

usually allowed to take notes and are not expected to give a complete, detailed rendition, but rather convey the general message. Follow-up questions can be asked to elicit more detail or to clarify specific points. Thus, such tests are intended to identify aptitude and skills for interpreting by setting a task that mimics an interpreting situation with the re-expression of a message in another language, but that is still feasible for candidates without prior experience of interpreting. As indicated in the definition above, these tests are designed to test for recall, language comprehension and expression, as well as analysis, communication skills and resilience to stress.

Thus, the EMCI conference interpreter programmes all have a common core of testing procedures to select candidates with the necessary language proficiency skills and aptitude. This standard was adopted on the basis of longstanding practice in key training institutions at the time the consortium's principles were defined. Indeed, these three tests, and particularly recall tests, turn out to be those most widely used in a group of 18 interpreter training institutions. 16 used recall tests, 10 used interviews and 9 general knowledge testing (Timarová & Ungoed-Thomas, 2008, p. 36). A range of empirical studies have to some extent confirmed the validity of the recall test by correlating marks awarded at entry with subsequent final exam outcomes (Arjona-Tseng, 1994; Donovan, 2003; Timarová & Ungoed-Thomas, 2008). Within the EMCI, the interview may be conducted separately or at the same time as the recall tests and can also be used to gauge candidates' general knowledge. The general knowledge tests are often done in written mode.

The core exam is frequently supplemented, preceded, or completed by a range of written tests, including written translation, summaries, paraphrasing, sight translation, and short presentations on a given topic, depending on the institution. Following a survey of EMCI institutions conducted by the author, ESIT, ISIT, FTI Geneva, Ljubljana, Comillas Madrid, Stockholm, Bogazici in Istanbul, Prague, and Ljubljana all used written tests, including translations, paraphrasing, text comprehension exercises, and in one case a cloze test (informal survey, May 2022). Several programmes use the written tests as an eliminatory phase, in a two-tier testing system: a pre-selection stage, with the written tests, and for those who succeed at this stage a second round with an interview and the recall exercises. It could be argued that written tests are not ideal to identify interpreting aptitude and oral language proficiency, but,

apart from the practical advantages of being easier to organise and requiring fewer human resources, they can test for general knowledge, and screen in a preliminary phase for analysis, paraphrasing capacity and at least some language proficiency. A vivid first-hand description of such tests is provided by a former candidate, and current leading trainer (Hoff, 2011).

The present study focuses on the oral tests only, as the choice of remote or on-site delivery of these tests seems more critical than for written tests.

From the above description, it is apparent that EMCI entrance testing procedures focus almost entirely on "hard skills" such as language proficiency and memory. Yet, many interpreter trainers consider soft skills to be important. AIIC provides a list of aptitudes for interpreting which includes many soft skills alongside language proficiency and analysis, for instance "mental agility", "a lively mind", "ability to keep calm under pressure" or "sufficient self-confidence to speak in public" (AIIC, 2022, "What it takes"). A detailed study of aptitude tests in 18 Institutions concluded that soft skills should be integrated into entrance selection (Timarová & Ungoed-Thomas, 2008). On the basis of broad consultation with trainers, Setton and Dawrant provide a lengthy description of the "ideal candidate" which is composed almost entirely of soft skills such as "ready to accept instruction and advice", "has a sense of humour", "is capable of empathy" (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p. 69).

To some extent, soft skills are undoubtedly assessed implicitly during the interview and recall tests. Suggestions that they be tested explicitly have not really been taken on board, probably in part for practical reasons but also because of uncertainties as to the direct correlation between specific characteristics or personality traits on the one hand and interpreting ability on the other. We will return to this issue in the discussion.

In sum, the EMCI entrance tests are centred around three components—recall exercises, general knowledge, and an interview. There is therefore a degree of standardisation but they vary quite considerably, with many including additional written testing and other oral exercises. Their duration and mode of delivery also varies, not just as a result of the pandemic but also prior to any health-related restrictions, as will be seen below.

1.3 Historical Overview of EMCI Aptitude Testing Pre-2020

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, all but one of the EMCI programmes were conducting entrance testing on-site.

On-site aptitude testing reproduces to some extent what is still perceived as the standard or default interpreting situation, with all protagonists, including interpreters, in the same shared space. The advantage for assessors is that they can observe first-hand and close-up the candidate's communication and interpersonal skills, as well as their ability to handle stress. There are however many practical drawbacks to on-site tests. Many applicants need to travel long distances, often from other continents. This is a big investment when their chances of success are actually rather low, and some may encounter difficulties to obtain travel visas. Bringing together assessors is also problematic. They are mostly active conference interpreters with busy schedules and there may be very few potential assessors, if any, available locally for rarer languages.

With hindsight and in the light of these drawbacks, it might seem strange that remote testing was not introduced earlier. An example of remote testing had been available since 2012, as the Master of Conference Interpreting MCI training programme at Glendon in Canada has used online tests from its inception that year. Glendon offers a blended training course, the first year being entirely online and the second on-site[2]. Their aptitude testing is now done entirely asynchronously on a dedicated platform. Testing is arranged as applications come in. The applicants access the different tasks including the recorded speeches for recall tests and their answers are uploaded onto the platform where they are accessed by assessors who communicate via a forum. The reasons for the online testing choice are practical, as candidates can be tested throughout the year without travel constraints for them or for assessors. About 100 candidates a year are tested in this way, with a pass rate of around 20%, in line with rates elsewhere. In an interview on Zoom on December 22, 2021, the coordinators confirmed their satisfaction with the procedures in place and confidence that they are appropriate for selecting the best candidates. However, the procedures are substantially different from

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2   Glendon conference interpreting programme: Retrieved November 17, 2021 from https://www. glendon.yorku.ca/interpretation/.

those used prior to the pandemic by most EMCI courses where the emphasis is on a live test with candidates and assessors present.

Other programmes used remote tests for overseas candidates and one EMCI programme did introduce remote aptitude testing as of 2019. This is the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (Faculté de Traduction et d'Interprétation) at the University of Geneva where all CI aptitude testing was moved online in 2019, before the pandemic. This was thus a deliberate pedagogical and organisational choice. The course receives a large number of applications, currently some 100 per year. A wide range of language combinations is offered, as Geneva is a major CI centre, with many international institutions. All these factors go to explaining the FTI's choice of remote entrance testing. There is currently no intention to revert to on-site testing (interview with Kilian Seeber, September 2021; interview with Lucia Ruiz Rosendo, May 2022; FTI, 2020).

One significant factor for the delay in considering remote aptitude testing elsewhere is the lack of immediate incentive. Most of the institutions suffer from a shortage of technical expertise and resources, so setting up an in-house platform for remote testing was not feasible. Applicants were from multiple sites, often with poor equipment and inadequate bandwidth. The technology for remote interviews and tests on commercial platforms such as Zoom and Teams was available prior to the pandemic, as were WebEx and Skype, but many applicants and trainers were unfamiliar and uncomfortable with such technology and lacked good connexions from home. The lockdowns imposed during the Spring of 2020 and the extended home working measures that followed have provided a major impetus for technical improvement and have led to greater familiarity with such tools.

However, psychological factors and pedagogical considerations probably weighed more heavily still. Most trainers and coordinators are active conference interpreters and identify closely with the profession. Technical obstacles apart, undoubtedly the most significant obstacle to remote selection has been their perception of their activity and of the profession. For many years interpreting was seen as essentially based on a shared physical communication space. Thus, Mouzourakis stresses the need for a "consistent, immersive environment" (Mouzourakis, 2006, p. 58), and Moser has underscored the importance of the physical role of presence and explains how distant communication in a virtual space leads to a

sense of alienation and loss of control (Moser-Mercer, 2005). Body language, contextual information, and non-verbal cues are generally considered by interpreters to be essential to accurate, rapid understanding of the speaker's message, as illustrated by the report of the AIIC health and safety committee representative which highlights the need for a direct view of the whole room to take into account "body language" and the audience's reactions, failing which interpretation runs the risk of becoming mechanical and the quality goes down (Moser-Mercer, 2005; Roziner & Shlesinger, 2010, p. 218). Although remote interpreting is now more wide-spread, interpreters retain a preference for on-site interpreting and a direct view of the whole room is seen as ideal. It is therefore only logical to want to reproduce a communication situation that integrates features related to presence during the aptitude testing. This will be considered further in the discussion.

Thus, a combination of technical and psychological reasons goes to explaining why remote testing was rarely considered in most institutions prior to the pandemic.

1.4 Switching to Remote Aptitude Testing

Measures taken in early 2020 throughout Europe to contain COVID-19 were far-reaching and comprehensive. Restrictions extended to schools and universities. Teachers and lecturers were required to switch to online teaching and assessment overnight, with no prior preparation. Interpreter trainers who had maintained just months earlier that it was not possible to provide quality training online, now had to radically reconsider their own beliefs or to close down their courses mid academic year.

The majority of EMCI training programmes were unable to maintain on-site aptitude testing in 2020. Many attract applicants from all over the world, or at least Europe, and international travel was severely disrupted in 2020 and still unpredictable in 2021. Most university premises were closed for extended periods. In addition to FTI which already had remote testing, 10 of the programmes found themselves forced to devise some form of online selection. Of these, 8 maintained remote aptitude tests in 2021, in two cases with a different design. 6 have retained remote testing in 2022.

As for the remaining institutions, they are mostly smaller programmes

that recruit applicants mainly locally and were thus less impacted by the travel restrictions. Their university authorities were reluctant to authorise a switch to remote mode, and especially hostile to the use of Zoom for reasons of data protection and security. These programmes had three options.

They could try to organise the tests on-site, postpone testing or find an alternative entrance channel. It should be emphasised that these options were not decided freely by the course coordinators. In most cases they were imposed by the university or even national authorities. In one case, this meant accepting candidates on the basis of a written application with an accompanying motivation letter. One institution was allowed to hold a test remotely via Zoom for an applicant living abroad but required to organise the other tests on-site. Another was able to hold all tests on-site after postponing. Some only offer the EMCI Masters every two years and were thus not directly impacted either in 2020 or in 2021.

During this period some discussion and exchange of experience about the design of the remote entrance tests did take place within the EMCI, but mostly informally or in the margins of meetings devoted primarily to other issues. The EMCI organised two events on May 8 and May 25, 2020 to discuss the modalities of final exams in a remote environment and in April 2021 there was a debate on the future of the profession where mention was made of entrance testing. By way of comparison, 13 training sessions or presentations were given about online interpreting platforms between May 2020 and late 2021 (list of EMCI activities provided by EMCI secretariat, June 3, 2022). The EMCI is a small, user-driven consortium, so it would seem reasonable to conclude from this list of events that remote entrance test design was not the main concern of trainers and coordinators during this period where they were grappling with so many challenges.

2. Methodology

The data used has been collected over a period of two years in a series of surveys, questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The process has been iterative, and data collection and analysis have been undertaken simultaneously, in keeping with the basic approach of grounded theory. Three

stakeholder categories have been identified. They are course coordinators, panellists, and finally candidates. During data collection and analysis, certain categories of findings have been identified and then clarified in as far as possible. These categories relate in particular to stress management, technical issues, and ability to communicate, both with the candidates and within the panel. These issues are addressed in each section.

In a first phase, the EMCI course coordinators were contacted to find out if they had used remote aptitude testing in 2020 and 2021. All eleven EMCI institutions that have used remote entrance testing since 2019 were surveyed, first by a questionnaire with a mix of closed and open questions and then with follow-up questions in an interview. Interviews were conducted with 10 of the 11 coordinators who had introduced such testing either during COVID-19 or prior to the pandemic. Interviews were conducted on Zoom and took the form of a series of open questions and lasted between 10 and 30 minutes depending on the length and detail of the replies. Coordinators have been given the opportunity to check the replies recorded in this article and to give their approval for inclusion.

Secondly, a questionnaire was sent out to interpreters who had taken part in at least one remote selection panel in 2020 and/or 2021. The questionnaires were supplemented by follow-up questions in writing and in 15 cases a telephone or video interview was arranged to obtain clarifications and more details, repeating the open questions of the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted on Zoom and lasted between 5 and 30 minutes, depending on the length of the answers. The interviews were carried out in October and November 2021. An attempt was made to enter into contact with trainers in the other institutions, through the coordinators, but this again proved difficult. In most cases, only one reply was obtained, which was considered insufficient for valid inclusion in the study, especially as the author lacked familiarity with the local context. However, 5 replies were obtained from Herzen in St Petersburg and have been included. One of these was based on a long video interview with an assessor. The author also had the opportunity to discuss the entrance testing in a one-hour, online interview with the course coordinator which provided detailed information about the local training context.

Some of the coordinators had also filled out the questionnaire for

panellists, as they also act as assessors during the aptitude testing. Initially, these responses were included in the data for the panellists. However, it quickly became apparent that the coordinators had a very specific viewpoint, different from other trainers. Therefore, their replies have been removed from the assessor group and have been treated separately.

Finally, to elicit feedback from candidates, course coordinators were asked to contact the students who had been accepted on the basis of an online test procedure or to seek the students' permission to be contacted for a survey on online testing. Some 35 contacts were obtained in this way. A second questionnaire was sent out to them. 29 replies were received. The study focuses primarily on the two Paris-based training programmes at ESIT and ISIT, as very few students from the other EMCI institutions could be contacted. The advantage of this selective approach is that a large proportion of the total student population group in Paris could be included. The group also includes three replies from students enrolled at Forlì, Italy or FTI, Geneva who had also sat aptitude tests at ESIT. In ethical terms, it should be stressed that approval was obtained from the course coordinators before contacting the students and student details were provided by the coordinators, as indicated above. Students were informed of the purpose of the study and were guaranteed anonymity. They were asked if they would be prepared to answer subsequent questions. About half indicated that they would, but in fact there was no further contact between the responding students and the author.

Three questionnaires are to be found in the annex to the article. The information obtained is qualitative. It is intended to illustrate trends and inform discussions about aptitude testing.

3. Findings

As indicated above, the remote testing procedures studied here relate to the oral part of the selection process. They are often preceded by pre-selection written tests (some of which had already been put online prior to 2020, for instance at ESIT in 2019). The oral tests comprise interviews, general knowledge questions, and recall exercises, and in some cases giving a short speech or paraphrasing.

In 2020 10 programmes adopted some form of remote testing, in addition to the one that already had online tests. Most opted to continue with the usual testing format, displacing the oral tests from the physical interview room to an online platform. The fact that the test procedures themselves were not modified is unsurprising given the limited time available. Lockdown measures were introduced in March 2020 and many institutions had entrance tests planned for April or May that year.

Table 1: Remote entrance testing in EMCI CI programs

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Remote	1	9	8	6
On-site	12	4	2	7
Blended	1	2	3	3
None	2	1	3	

This meant that in 2020 many programmes organised tests with all participants - applicants, speakers, coordinator, panellists - remote, but otherwise conducted the tests in much the same way as if on-site. Zoom was used in five cases, Google Meet in two and Teams in one. 8 programmes took this approach.

However, it is worth considering two programmes that adopted a new testing procedure, rather than simply transferring the usual procedure to a remote format, one as of 2020 and the other in 2021, after a first experience with remote online testing. The former recorded the applicants' work online under the supervision of an assessor and then sent the recordings to a panel for asynchronous evaluation. Another, after using the standard approach of synchronous remote in 2020, refined and changed the procedure in 2021. The candidates now do the tests remotely in the presence of a single listener and the recordings were then sent to the assessors to be evaluated individually. In the event of a consensus, no further action is taken. If a consensus could not be reached, an online panel is organised to discuss the candidate. This marks a radically new approach to the role of panels in entrance testing. One programme took yet another approach, with the applicants, speakers, and one coordinator on-site, connected up synchronously via Zoom with the panellists. These have been indicated as having a "blended" approach in Table 1.

The other "blended" testing is a programme which always, with the exception of 2020, uses a partially asynchronous procedure. Candidates do the test on the university's premises on computer under supervision. They receive the pre-recorded tests through headsets. Their replies are recorded and subsequently evaluated by the assessors. In 2020 it was not possible for them to travel to the university premises, so candidates did the test from home online. The usual form of testing was resumed in 2021.

3.1 Course Coordinators' Responses

The coordinators were observed to be a distinctive demographic as compared to other assessors. They are on average older. Two are in the 40 to 49 year age bracket; four in the 50 to 59 age group; the others are over 60. They also have more experience with training and have participated in many more panels than the average.

The coordinators are more positive about remote testing than the panel members surveyed. Nine of them expressed satisfaction with the remote testing in terms of both outcomes and practical organisation. All agree, some with a degree of surprise, that the remote testing works in practical terms. None noted any major difference in the quality or motivation of the students selected. The pass rate was also similar to previous years. They do not mention any significant technical difficulties, other than temporary, non-disruptive connexion weaknesses. This is in contrast to the 11 panel members who indicated disruptive technical failings, including one serious enough to require re-scheduling the test (see Table 2 below). Both panellists and coordinators were for the most part working from home, presumably with similar connectivity. The different appraisal of technical difficulties is most likely a matter of perception and broader attitudes to the remote procedure rather than a difference of actual experience.

Of the twenty-four comments made in the open questions in the questionnaire or the interviews, 5 indicate that the tests were easier to organise and coordinate in remote mode. Another 5 refer to the convenience for applicants and assessors who do not need to travel. Two point out that remote can allow for a broader and more diverse panel. Another two indicate that the assessment can be more thorough, as recordings can be checked

Table 2: Replies from coordinators

Coordinators replying	11
Benefits of remote tests	
Organisation and coordination are easier	5
More convenient for panel/applicants	5
Possible to have a broader panel	2
Better assessments (listening to recordings)	2
Less stressful (for applicants and/or panel)	3
Drawbacks of remote tests	
Less interaction with applicant, harder to get to know them	4
More tiring for applicants and/or panel	1
More complicated to organise	1
Applicants might cheat (by taking notes during recall tests)	1

and re-evaluated if required. It should be pointed out that this is contrary to standard practice in interpreting exams, whereby panel members hear the interpretation only once, and it is a matter that requires further clarification if tests are to continue online. If we consider the three sub-groups of issues identified as recurring in all questionnaires/interviews, it is striking that technical problems are rarely mentioned by the coordinators. They express surprise at how smoothly remote tests went on the whole. Regarding stress, three comments from coordinators note that remote is less stressful for the applicants and even for the panel. Communication in remote mode is identified as more of an issue. Of the negative observations, the most frequent (4) relates to the difficulty to interact with the candidates when they are not in the same room, to "get to know them", as one coordinator expressed it (interview on December 20, 2021).

There are 17 positive and 7 negative comments. Therefore, it is not surprising that 7 of the coordinators state a preference for testing remotely and would like to maintain remote entrance selection, mainly for reasons of practical convenience. Three coordinators express a preference for on-site for several reasons: it tests candidates' motivation, communication between assessors is smoother (in one case), or that it is easier to communicate with the applicants face-to-face (two cases). But they all accept that remote could be offered as an option for candidates living abroad and that hybrid panels or blended options could be useful for rarer languages.

The coordinators' viewpoint clearly is specific to their role. They are responsible for the organisation of the entrance testing. The practicalities are complex. As seen above, the testing procedures often involve a mix of tests, both written and oral. All programmes offer a range of language combinations. Candidates have two, three, or even four languages. This requires considerable preparation, planning, and careful recruitment of panels.

Coordinators are accountable to multiple stakeholders: the university authorities, the candidates, the trainers, but also institutional recruiters. They are expected to defend the university's or at least the programme's reputation, to attract promising candidates, to select a diversified intake, and in so doing, to guarantee the viability of the programme. Coordinators are exposed to different, even contradictory expectations. The university authorities are anxious to have sufficient numbers of students, especially if the course is fee-paying. Many programmes can only offer the course if there is a minimum number of students.

Recruiters are also key stakeholders in the EMCI programmes which pride themselves on producing graduates who will go on to work as interpreters at the highest level, and in particular at international and regional organisations. These recruiting organisations have long been concerned about interpreter succession issues and anxious to see an improvement in the standard of graduates from interpreter training programmes (Durand, 2005; Rosendo & Diur, 2017a, 2017b). They therefore make significant contributions to the training provided in the form of pedagogical assistance, teaching tools such as the SCIC speech repository, and participation in exam panels. This means that there is tacit pressure from future institutional employers right through the selection pipeline, starting with selection at intake. Indeed, the EMCI itself was set up with a view to improving the quality of interpreter training and hence the standard of graduates who could then go on to work at the European institutions (Donovan, 2019; Graves et al., 2022).

For all these reasons, coordinators are understandably anxious about the smooth running of the tests and attracting as many good candidates as possible. They are keen to put together sound, diversified panels. They have a macro point of view, whereas panel members' perception is embedded in specific tests, with a focus on the individual assessment process at a micro

level.

One coordinator, in reply to an open question in the written survey, sums up very well the tensions between the two viewpoints:

> As a course leader who has to organise all the logistics I appreciate those advantages greatly and would love to maintain them. As a living person I understand all the colleagues … it is always pleasant to communicate live with colleagues, and in this way more enriching.

3.2 Assessors' Responses

Responses were obtained from 31 assessors through a questionnaire and in 15 cases also a Zoom or telephone interview. The same questions were asked in both cases. All respondents are active professional interpreters. With one exception, all teach or have taught interpreting. None are full-time trainers, but 5 hold a part-time teaching post at their institution. Most teach just one class a week, as needed, depending on their language combination. All consider themselves to be primarily conference interpreters. Replies from course coordinators have been excluded from this section for the reasons given in the previous section, even though they also sit on entrance exam panels.

9 replies are from ISIT, 17 from ESIT, 5 from Herzen. The smaller number from ISIT and Herzen is due to the fact that there were fewer candidates and hence fewer entrance tests in both cases and in the case of Herzen the author had less access to trainers. The 26 replies from the two Paris based training programmes represent a large share of the total population of assessors at remote entrance tests.

None of the respondents is under 30 which is not surprising as most interpreters work a few years before teaching. None is over 65, which again is unsurprising given the retirement age at many universities. The largest demographic is the age group 30 to 39 with 14 respondents, 9 are aged 40 to 49, 5 are 50 to 59, 3 are over 60. The average age is 44.2. It would seem that younger colleagues have a keen interest in transferring skills to the next generation.

The A languages represented are: Chinese, French, English, German,

Table 3: Age, a language and institution of panellists

Age	-30	30-39	40-49	50-59	+ 60
	0	14	9	5	3
Institution	ESIT	ISIT	Herzen		
	17	9	5		
A language	FR	EN	RU	DE	Other
	13	8	7	2	4

Russian, Spanish. French and English As were the largest groups. It should be pointed out that a number of panellists have two A languages. The panels represented tested applicants with the following languages: English, French, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish.

The majority of assessors (18) express a clear preference for on-site entrance selection. 8 say they felt it was much the same: they do not have a marked preference and can see advantages and drawbacks to both. One could not say, having only had experience with the remote testing mode. Four express a preference for remote.

Most of the opinions are actually fairly nuanced. However, 6 respondents have a very strong preference for on-site and two a clear preference for remote.

Let us look more closely at the three groups: those in favour of remote, those in favour of on- site or those who do feel the two are much the same.

The first group includes the four assessors who prefer remote testing. All three programmes are represented. Two respondents have practical reasons for favouring a remote set-up, as it meant they did not need to travel in from another country. The other two respondents in this category are older and have more than twenty years interpreting experience. The average age of this group is 44. 8 felt that remote testing is much the same as on-site. This group is older than the average, at 49. They present a wide range of teaching experience, from just one year of teaching to twenty, with the average being 7.75.

The final and largest group express a preference for on-site testing. The average age of those who prefer on-site testing is 41.3. They have an average of 7 years of training experience, ranging from 0 to 25 years. The 6 respondents who express a very strong preference for on-site testing are diverse, in terms

of age and also testing and training experience, ranging from 31 to 60 in age and from 3 years' teaching experience to 25. These trainers say they would be reluctant to do further remote selection unless there were very pressing reasons to justify this option.

The numbers in each group are small so it would be hazardous to draw any firm conclusions, but it is interesting to note that only one trainer in the 30-39 age bracket preferred remote and this was for reasons of personal convenience. Two assessors in this bracket feel the two modes are much the same. The others all prefer on-site. One might have expected younger interpreter trainers to be more comfortable with online communication and technology and thus more willing to select students in remote mode. Some of the older respondents state that their own preference for on-site is perhaps due to age and unfamiliarity with the new platforms, although this is not compelling given that they had all been teaching in remote mode during the pandemic, albeit perhaps with some discomfort. They suspect that younger colleagues might prefer remote. The survey results do not confirm that hypothesis; rather, the contrary. Given the small numbers involved, the age-related preference cannot be seen as statistically significant, but it might be worth investigating further, with a larger sample group, or over a longer period.

All three institutions were represented in the "prefer remote" and "prefer on-site" groups, so the replies do not seem to be based on institution-specific circumstances.

Apart from the possible age-bias described above, no other correlation was found. The following factors were considered: years spent teaching, experience in selection testing, gender, institution. None of these proved predictive of a preference for remote or on-site.

12 comments are positive. 40 are negative. Regarding acceptance of borderline candidates, two respondents suggest this is less likely in remote, but whilst one considers this an advantage, the other feels it is a drawback.

The most significant drawback from the assessors' point of view relates to impaired communication, whether with other assessors or with the candidate. Half the respondents (15) say they find communications, with fellow assessors or with the candidate, more challenging in remote mode. They feel that communication is impoverished, due to lack of non-verbal clues and context.

Table 4: Replies form panellists

Evaluation of remote testing: Comments made	31
Benefits identified	
It is more convenient, no need to travel	5
It is less intimidating for candidates	1
It allows for broader access, more candidates	4
It allows for broader composition of panels	1
Drawbacks	
It is harder to assess soft skills (personality, attitude, manner, sense of the person)	12
Communication with other panel members is not as good	8
Communication with the candidates is not as good	7
It is not as good a test of stress management and public speaking skills	7
There is less prestige and formality attached to the tests	5
Mixed	
Less likely to accept borderline candidates	2

More than a third of the respondents (12) mention the difficulty in remote mode of assessing soft skills, such as general manner and behaviour, communication skills and a "sense of the person". During the interviews, it emerged clearly that many of the assessors feel that ideally candidates should have a certain profile—be able to stand up to stress, be fairly extraverted, communicate easily. They expressed frustration with remote which, they felt, made assessment of such characteristics harder. This point will be considered in more detail in the Discussion below.

Unlike course coordinators, assessors refer quite frequently to technical difficulties during the tests. There is no correlation between complaints about technical matters on the one hand and age on the other. 14 assessors mention technical problems, admittedly mostly minor. However, one test had to be rescheduled and in another case a panellist's computer broke down completely causing delays. Several (4) respondents indicate that candidates were less comfortable with Zoom (the main platform used) in 2020 and this was less the case the following year.

Finally, several respondents feel that the testing in remote mode is too casual, and not sufficiently stressful, so not a good test of stress management. Some also consider that remote tests are not fully respectful of the candidates

and not sufficiently formal for selection to a quality CI course (see Conclusions below).

In sum, despite the many negative comments, none of the respondents consider that the testing failed to select appropriate candidates or that technical issues were insuperable. 5 respondents acknowledge that remote testing is more convenient for applicants and 4 accept that it opens up testing to candidates from further away who might not otherwise apply. However, the majority opinion is that remote aptitude testing is not as satisfactory, that "something is missing", particularly in terms of quality of communication.

3.3 Candidates' Responses

The questionnaire was sent out only to successful candidates. Clearly, this creates a bias. However, it was felt that a stronger bias still would be created by consulting unsuccessful candidates who might be tempted to blame the testing procedures for their disappointing results. The majority, although not all, candidates enrolled subsequently as students.

29 responses were collected from 4 programmes, including 26 from ESIT and ISIT. This part of the study was conducted between July and October 2021. 7 of the candidates had sat a previous CI entrance test on-site. Three had sat two remote aptitude tests. Nearly all candidates had sat on-site interview-style tests in the past, in the course of their studies or professional experience. 9 of the respondents were male, 20 female.

10 reported technical problems, either encountered personally or by the panel. These were mostly connectivity issues. In a few cases the problems were felt to have been disruptive. Two candidates reported that a speaker/ panellist did not have a camera, so the applicants had to work from an audio feed only. It is the same speaker in both cases. This is problematic, as it violates the principle of equal conditions for all candidates. This is the kind of issue that needs to be identified and corrected if remote testing is to continue (see Conclusions).

The candidates' perception of remote testing was on the whole positive. In the open question about the advantages or drawbacks of remote aptitude tests, the following results were obtained. Respondents could give more than one answer.

Table 5: Replies from candidates

Comments about their experience of remote entrance testing by candidates	29
Benefits identified	
Less stressful, familiar setting	19
More convenient, no need to travel, save time/money	14
Better sound (thanks to headset)	1
Faster and more efficient	1
Would not have been possible on-site	1
Drawbacks	
Harder to concentrate, feeling of being "disconnected"	3
Stressful, anxious when waiting between tests	2
Less realistic of a true communication situation	2

The most frequent answer given highlights the perceived advantage of there being less stress due to being in a familiar (home) setting. 19 students give this answer. Two respondents indicate that waiting for the test on-site would certainly have been more stressful than waiting at home, although one expresses the opposite view.

One might have expected online testing to be perceived as more stressful, due to worries about technical failures, but only one student indicates that this was the case for her. Whereas many professional interpreters describe remote home working without the support of a technician as a source of stress for them, and many of the assessors questioned were bothered by technical problems, this is less true of the applicants' experience of testing. Nine candidates do report technical problems which is almost one third, but they do not associate them directly with greater stress. They consider them as minor for the most part, with two exceptions.

The second most frequent comment given relates to the greater convenience, not having to travel and lower costs. 14 respondents, nearly one half, cite this. One respondent indicates that it would simply not have been possible to sit the exam if it had been on-site, because the distance and expense would have been too great.

Two other advantages of remote testing are mentioned, each by just one respondent. One indicates that the sound was better with a headset than in the same room. This is surprising. Presumably, the candidate was thinking of a large room with poor acoustics. Finally, one respondent, with previous

experience of a similar on-site test, states that the tests were better organised and more efficient in remote mode.

The positive comments about remote testing (36 in all) far outnumber the negative comments (7 in total). The negative comments can be divided into two groups, one relating to the feeling of being cut off ("disconnected") and thus finding it harder to concentrate (5) and the second to an awareness that a remote test is "less realistic", as it does not draw on the usual in situ communication skills and candidates are not forced to overcome shyness (2).

Unsurprisingly, given the above, applicants express a preference for remote testing (23). Two state a preference for on-site and 5 suggest the best solution would be on-site but with the option of remote for those living a long way from the institution.

As indicated above, 7 students had already done a similar entrance test on-site in the past. This sub-group also expresses a majority preference for remote (5), with one in favour of on-site and one on-site with the option of remote. In other words, experience of both modes and hence the ability to compare the two options, does not change the pattern of replies.

4. Discussion of the Findings

The replies to the questionnaires and in the interviews cover a wide range of issues and convey differing viewpoints. Closer scrutiny reveals some interesting patterns. There is quite a degree of convergence within each of the three groups—students, coordinators, panellists. This is particularly true of the students and coordinators, with greater variation amongst panellists.

4.1 Summary of Findings: Differing viewpoints

Remote entrance testing is much preferred by candidates for two overriding sets of reasons. The first relates to convenience and cost. Candidates do not need to travel, often long distances. Access is greatly facilitated for those with languages such as Chinese or Japanese who are applying from their home country. It also means they can sit several entrance tests. The second set of reasons are psychological. Many candidates state that they feel more relaxed

in a familiar setting.

Panel members, all of whom are interpreter trainers, express on the contrary a preference for on-site testing. Some are reasonably happy with remote, as they can see the advantages in terms of convenience and broader access for candidates. However, a significant minority are opposed to remote testing except as a fall-back solution when travel is not feasible. The reasons given are wide-ranging, but centre around difficulties with communication and assessing soft skills at a distance. Many of the respondents admit that what they feel is missing is hard to describe. They acknowledge that the results obtained in terms of student skills are satisfactory.

The coordinators all consider that remote aptitude testing worked well under the circumstances, enabling satisfactory selection of candidates. This is despite the fact that, with one exception, they were forced by circumstance into remote by administrative decisions or national health measures. 7 out of 11 intend or at least hope to continue testing candidates remotely. The reasons given are related to convenience, as it is easier to put together a panel and arrange a time slot if assessors do not have to travel to the institution. This is particularly the case for rarer languages when interpreters may not be available locally. They consider that, in as far as it is possible to judge with so little hindsight, outcomes are as good as usual and, in some cases, better.

Clearly, each group—students, assessors, course coordinators—have their own specific interests and concerns at heart. Candidates are naturally relieved to avoid costly, stressful travel to attend a test for which the pass rate is often no more than 20% (Donovan, 2003). On the basis of their replies, it is clear that assessors enjoy meeting candidates face-to-face, as well as the interaction with colleagues and miss this in remote testing. Course coordinators, for their part, are understandably interested in smooth organisation and are keen to have a broad composition in the panels.

As explained in the Methodology, an attempt was made, on the basis of data results, to identify categories in the findings. The most significant categories are stress management, technical conditions and communication, in that all three are mentioned frequently by the three groups of respondents, but the answers provided differ markedly depending on the group.

4.1.1 Stress management

Stress and stress management are mentioned by all three groups, but from very different angles. For the candidates, the lesser stress of being in a familiar setting, not confronted with a panel of assessors, is seen as an advantage. They experience lower levels of stress and this despite possible technical concerns, such as poor connectivity.

Panellists recognise that remote is probably less stressful for candidates (although not for themselves), but they, on the contrary, see this as a disadvantage. For many, evaluation of stress management skills is part of the testing. They want to see how a candidate reacts when confronted with a public speaking exercise before a panel. Coordinators note that both candidates and panel members are subjected to less stress when in remote mode. Like applicants, they view this as a positive feature.

4.1.2 Technical problems

Another area where specific viewpoints emerge is the assessment of the severity of technical problems encountered during remote testing. To the extent that the same tests are being described by the three groups, one might expect the reports about technical problems to overlap. This is however not the case. Coordinators do not report any significant technical issues. Conversely, 14 panellists, i.e. just under half, do, and these were considered in several cases to be serious and disruptive, including having to reschedule the test or to switch to another platform. Of the applicants, 9 reported technical issues, of which 3 concerned the assessors rather than themselves. None flag these issues as being very disruptive.

4.1.3 Communication

Although not seemingly a problem for them directly, coordinators acknowledge that panellists were less comfortable assessing online, because they find it harder to communicate both with each other and the candidates. And certainly, one of the key complaints voiced by panellists relate to impaired communication when remote. This is a significant issue for many of

them. Some applicants recognise that the communication conditions online do not mimic precisely those in a real-life context, but this is not significant for them.

These three selected issues highlight how the same set of tests are judged differently by different stakeholders, coloured by their specific, role-related perspectives.

4.2 Attitudes to Remote Interpreting and Views of Remote Testing

Interpreters' professional activity, interpreter training and selection procedures, have all undergone a major upheaval over the last two years. Some changes, such as the introduction of remote testing, have been triggered mainly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Others, such as remote simultaneous interpreting, have seen a marked acceleration.

Prior to the pandemic, the uptake of remote interpreting had been fairly slow for conference interpreting, at least as compared to other forms of interpreting (Braun, 2015), although it was gradually becoming more prevalent as technology advanced. Already in 2018 AIIC had issued a Position Paper on distance interpreting in which it was accepted that remote interpreting was becoming more widespread (AIIC, 2018). In an online article, first published in 2019, the AIIC Private market sector standing committee acknowledged "whether we like it or not there is a revolution taking place" (AIIC, 2019).

The health-related restrictions introduced in 2020 led firstly to the cancellation of most meetings, but subsequently to a massive roll-out of existing remote conferencing and interpreting technology and to considerable improvements in the quality of some platforms. It gave a boost to the development of interpreting hubs, new interpreting platforms and different interpreting set-ups. This is a once-in-a-generation change, leading to a radical reappraisal of the interpreter's place and role.

Interpreting has always been seen by interpreters as an eminently social profession based on teamwork and also as being placed at the heart of the communication event, but now it can take place in front of a computer screen in the interpreter's own home or in hubs miles from the conference. The replacement of consecutive interpreting by simultaneous removed interpreters from centre stage, they were still physically on site and potentially

in contact with participants (Donovan, 2017). Interpreters have now had to adjust to their physical removal from many conference settings.

There are clearly parallels between reactions to the shift to more remote interpreting and the adoption by interpreting programmes of remote entrance testing. This point was mentioned in the Introduction to this article. Let us revisit it in the light of the replies received, particularly those of the panellists.

In many studies carried out at the beginning of the century, interpreters report a negative impact on their motivation and sense of involvement when interpreting remotely. This includes loss of concentration and feelings of alienation (AIIC, 2019; Moser-Mercer, 2005; Mouzourakis, 2006, 2003). Moser-Mercer and Mouzourakis suggested that it is the very condition of remoteness or lack of presence that is at the root of such problems. When on site with a direct view of the room, interpreters draw on contextual information, posture and gaze, facial expressions, and interactions as clues to aid cognitive processing and better understand the source message (see also Setton, 1999). Lacking many such clues in remote interpreting, it seems plausible that interpreters are required to make more effort to understand the message. A working document by the International Federation of Translators (FIT) sums up this reasoning: "Successful communication always depends on hearing and understanding what has been said in the full context. In on-site assignments interpreters use all of their senses to gather information, but in different kinds of RI this possibility is limited." And "In RI interpreters have to concentrate much harder than in on-site interpreting to get their work done" (FIT, 2019). AIIC has also equated remote interpreting with "reduced quality and quantity of relevant sensory inputs", thus increasing the cognitive load on the interpreter. This "can be a source of additional stress and fatigue" (AIIC, 2020).

Many of the assessors' comments echo feelings described by interpreters when referring to remote interpreting. These include the sense that "something is missing", "you can't convey empathy" (in remote tests), "it's just a flat image" or "you don't get a sense of the person". Several respondents draw an explicit comparison between their dissatisfaction with remote testing and frustration with remote interpreting. Such views are obviously not expressed by the candidates who are not yet part of the interpreting profession. They are also mainly absent from the comments from coordinators, who are

presumably more focused on administrative and organisational issues.

Although many views of RI continue to be negative, other, more nuanced opinions are increasingly being expressed, accepting, if not exactly embracing, remote interpreting. A detailed case study of a remotely interpreted event held in 2014 showed that interpreters were relatively content with the working conditions offered despite negative expectations (Seeber et al., 2019). Thus, Klaus Ziegler, in an interview with Lourdes de Rioja for her blog, "A Word in Your Ear", states:

> The demand for communication in our society has changed. The way that events are set up nowadays has changed... We can't be the only ones that say that everything needs to be the same as thirty years ago (quoted in AIIC, 2019).

Equally, the panellist respondents in this survey accept that remote entrance testing "works" to the extent that the tests can be conducted as planned, assessments made and that the candidates selected seem to have the expected degree of skill and proficiency. Nonetheless, many complain that the procedure is unsatisfactory in human terms. Communication is harder and the sense of person is diminished. "After all, we are social animals", as one course coordinator puts it, in a Zoom interview with the author (December 23, 2021).

5. Conclusions

If, as seems likely, programmes continue entrance selection in remote mode, then new considerations and principles will need to be integrated into test guidelines, whether within the EMCI or elsewhere.

5.1 Updating Test Guidelines

It is widely accepted that selection procedures should be subject to systematic monitoring and review (Setton & Dawrant, 2016). This has not always been the case, but the forced introduction of remote selection provides an ideal

opportunity to re-examine testing procedures and to consider new options. Issues raised in the course of this study include how to assess recorded tests, oversight of technical conditions, fears of cheating or re-creating a sense of formality.

Both in interviews and then subsequently at an EMCI workshop (Budapest, May 2022) it was pointed out that remote assessment can be more thorough, as panel members can refer back to the recordings. Certainly, given that the tests can be stored easily on a shared platform or drive, assessors may wish to listen several times to the candidates' recordings. This is a deviation from standard interpreting test practice where assessors listen live to the interpretation, and therefore just once. Recordings are usually only kept for administrative reasons, in the event of litigation. If assessors listen twice or more to some recorded tests, but not to others, the principle of equal treatment is infringed. Moreover, the recall tests are no longer assessed as "mock consecutive". This is precisely the kind of issue that calls for clarification if remote testing becomes standard practice.

Several trainers mention their fears that some candidates may be cheating by using external sources as a support, having someone in the room with them to whisper or write down answers or taking notes during the recall tests. These fears were reiterated at the EMCI workshop on remote teaching and assessment held in Budapest in May 2022. The concerns about cheating could not be substantiated, and it is hard to see how this form of cheating would actually help the candidates given the nature of the tests, with the possible exception of taking notes during the recall tests (but then only for candidates with some experience of note-taking). However, as a matter of principle university tests and exams should not be open to cheating, for reasons of equal treatment and credibility. Clearly, it would be helpful if a protocol could be designed to identify and discourage cheating during remote entrance tests.

7 assessors state that the remote tests are less stressful for candidates. This is felt to be potentially a drawback, as it is harder to evaluate candidates' stress management skills. 5 complain also that the online format is less prestigious and less formal than an on-site test. However, it should be pointed out that formality of the testing procedure is not mentioned in test protocols. If this is indeed felt to be a valuable part of the test procedure, perhaps this could be

formalised and a sense of greater formality be introduced into remote testing. This could include use of formal modes of address, recommendations to all participants that they dress in a formal manner and so on. Again, if there is a consensus that some degree of formality is desirable, guidelines could be drawn up and included in remote test protocols.

Finally, as noted above, technical failures and improvisation must be avoided. It is not acceptable that some applicants cannot see a speaker, for instance, if most can. Again, guidelines on testing might need to be updated to take account of the shift to remote entrance tests.

5.2 Remote Testing and Equity Issues

Candidates and coordinators express a preference for remote testing mostly on the grounds of convenience - not needing to travel for the former and ease of organising panels for the latter. However, there may be some other positive factors to consider, notably in terms of equity. The following considerations about fairness of remote versus on-site tests are intended to encourage reflexion and discussion, not to be taken as statements of fact.

On-site aptitude testing has in the past favoured a certain type of applicant: one who can travel to one or several test sites, who is confident with an outgoing personality and good stress management skills. In the following, we consider the consequences of this and of a shift to more remote testing.

The author was struck by the strong insistence amongst many panel members that they should evaluate personality or behavioural features, such as "sense of the person", manners, and the like. The difficulty of gauging such characteristics in remote testing is cited as a drawback. Many assessors state that these features are relevant to interpreting, particularly in consecutive or during contacts with clients. This may well be the case, although perhaps less so in the current interpreting environment. It is however debatable whether and to what extent such features can be assessed fairly in entrance testing, at least in tests as currently designed. As demonstrated by Russo in her comprehensive review of studies on aptitude testing, and as seen above, most tests focus on hard skills - language proficiency, general knowledge, analysis (Russo, 2022, p. 311). Although notions such as "teachability", i.e. the ability to

accept and follow advice, have been discussed within the EMCI in workshops on admission testing, they are not scored formally and there is little consensus on how this might be done. Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas postulate, on the basis of their survey of (on-site) entrance testing procedures, that "'soft skills' such as personality, motivation and teachability already play an implicit, rather than explicit, role in admission testing" (Timarová & Ungoed-Thomas, 2008, p. 42). They are referring to on-site testing. The conclusion they draw is that soft skills should be tested explicitly, but it could equally be argued that, in the absence of formal marking and clear criteria on how to assess soft skills, any such evaluation tends to be subjective and is better avoided. If so, the fact that assessment of soft skills is unlikely to be attempted in remote testing mode may actually be an advantage and make the tests fairer.

A related issue is that of unconscious bias in the panellists' appraisal. The assessment of interpersonal skills may be easier in a face-to-face situation, as advanced by many of the assessors, but it could also be argued that less relevant factors, such as physical appearance, charisma, apparel, might sway the jury one way or the other. Although such factors are not completely absent in remote communication, they are less conspicuous. Arguably, remote testing is in this respect more equitable and gives a fairer hearing to candidates especially those who are shy, less sophisticated, or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Another factor potentially conducive to greater fairness is the ability to put together more diversified panels in remote testing. Rather than having an interpreter with a given A language, simply because she is the only person available on a particular date and time, others from another city with different professional experience can also attend. Panels can be held more easily at weekends or in the evening, so assessors do not need to refuse assignments and are more likely to participate. This may also be more convenient for candidates, many of whom work, although no comments were received from candidates on this point. Availability of assessors is particularly valuable for rarer languages for which there is often only one interpreter, if any, available locally. Remote panels, if composed with a mind to ensuring a diversity of views and a range of experience, can thus contribute to a fairer assessment.

Remote testing allows candidates with limited financial resources to sit for admission to several programmes, as no travel expenses are involved. If

accepted by two or more programmes, they can then choose the one they feel is best for them. This ultimately should encourage healthy competition between programmes. Remote testing also enables candidates living outside the institutions' immediate catchment area to sit the tests. Ideally, this could increase the numbers of students with more unusual language combinations, thus enriching the course by creating a diverse student group. For these reasons remote testing can help create a more level playing field.

5.3 Fit for Purpose?

The trends identified in this study cannot be seen in isolation. They reflect the way interpreters, whether panellists or, to a lesser extent, coordinators, perceive and experience their profession and the ongoing changes. This impacts their views of remote versus on-site aptitude testing.

Despite the differing assessments by the three groups of respondents, as described above, it is apparent that remote aptitude testing in its various forms has proceeded for the most part smoothly, with few major technical disruptions. Even those assessors most uncomfortable with remote testing accepted that it had worked in allowing selection to proceed efficiently.

Of course, it is hard to make definitive statements with so little hindsight and in what is a very disruptive period. However, some preliminary observations are worth considering.

Compared to previous years, pass rates are the same or similar everywhere. Many programmes that have introduced remote testing intend to continue with it. The outcomes of students selected remotely are so far in line with usual expectations. Moreover, this would seem to be part of a broader trend towards more remote testing, at least when large numbers of candidates need to be processed. The European institutions, for instance, have decided as of the second semester 2022 to conduct their accreditation tests in remote mode (European Union, 2022).

In the 2022-2023 test year, both consecutive and simultaneous tests will take place in remote, via a remote testing platform (Section 3).

On the basis of the surveys, interviews, and data collected for this study, it seems fair to say that remote testing is fit for purpose.

That said, other aspects of conference interpreter training and selection

have returned to on-site delivery. A number of programmes were forced during lockdown to hold final exams in remote mode and this went reasonably smoothly, none have chosen to continue to do so. Similarly, teaching has reverted to on-site for most classes, most of the exceptions being classes in rarer languages given by trainers from other cities or classes to teach remote interpreting. Thus, there is a marked preference for on-site for the main mode of training and for the all-important final exams. This would suggest that the reasons for maintaining entrance testing online are specific to aptitude tests and are mostly related to convenience.

Despite the many unanswered questions, the author hopes that this study can contribute to a robust debate about effective aptitude testing for CI training.

List of Abbreviations

AIIC   Association internationale des interprètes de conférences
CI   conference interpreting
CITP   conference interpreter training programme
EMCI   European Masters in Conference Interpreting
RI   remote interpreting
RSI   remote simultaneous interpreting
SCIC   European Commission Interpreting service

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Professional Profile

Clare Donovan graduated from ESIT in 1982 as a Conference Interpreter. She wrote a doctoral thesis on Fidelity in Interpretation. She taught at ESIT from 1984 to 2021 in various capacities, including Director for the Conference interpreting Master. She currently teaches at ISIT and is a consultant for a number of African universities. She headed the Interpretation Service at the OECD for ten years. A founding member of EMCI and of PAMCIT and a registered trainer with the OIF REFTIC network and the African Interpretation Academy (AfIA), she has organised training for trainer workshops and training courses worldwide, with a particular emphasis on curriculum development and the specificities of interpreting into a B language.