Although this study is primarily set up to provide a synchronic view of the work of EU interpreters, it is essential to take into account that the context in which they exercise their profession is a continuously evolving one. This brief historical account illustrates the variability of the interpreting DGs’ gate-keeping procedures over the past decades by looking at the various ways the colleagues I interviewed gained entry into the community of EU interpreters.

Interinstitutional tests and competitions are the standard have been the standard entry procedures only since 2005. Before this time a wider range of possibilities to gain initial access to either the EP interpreting service or SCIC existed, as the profile data of the interviewees show. The changes in the conditions under which interpreters started working and acquired experience as beginners were caused by two main factors: the historical development of the EU, on the one hand, and the personnel policies of the EU institutions, on the other.

The impact of the first factor is obvious when we look at the institutional environment within which the oldest interpreter interviewed for this study started working. In 1975, the then European Economic Communities (EEC) had 9 member states and 6 official languages. Many of the experienced interpreters active at that time did not have more than the two passive languages with which most trainees graduate. As EEC policy focused on agriculture and the coals and steel industry, these were the main subjects treated in meetings. With the growing number of official languages and steady increase of EU competences, resulting from successive enlargements and treaty revisions, requirements for EU interpreters have gradually expanded. Compared to 1975, interpreters need to have more passive languages\(^1\) and a broader terminological and subject knowledge in order to perform adequately in EU meetings.

The cases of the interpreters interviewed also illustrate the extent to which beginners’ experiences are conditioned by shifts in organizational policies from the very moment of accreditation. Over the time period which the interviewee sample represents, the human resources and training policies of the interpreting DGs have varied considerably.

In Table 1 the procedures through which interviewees became first employed by the EU interpreting services are quantified for three periods, based on the data they provided. This overview is not intended to reflect the statistical distribution of modes of access for a given period, but to illustrate the diverse gatekeeping practices the EU institutions’ interpreting services have applied over the period as represented by the participants in this study.

\(^{1}\) For some booths, candidates with two passive languages are even no longer admitted to accreditation tests, but a minimum of three passive languages is required (Interpreting for Europe web pages 2011).
The first period spans the 22 years from 1975, when the longest-working participant started her career as an EU interpreter, to 1997, when the SCIC in-house training scheme (commonly referred to as ‘stage’) was abolished (DG Interpretation (SCIC) 2008c). Almost half of the participants covered by this period started working after passing an accreditation tests for one of the institutions. The others either became SCIC auxiliary or temporary interpreters after finishing the ‘stage’ or were recruited directly at their final interpreting exams. Until the mid 1990s both the EP service and SCIC used to send representatives to sit in the jury for the final exams of a number of conference interpreting training institutes with which they entertained privileged relations. Successful candidates with at least two passive community languages could be recruited by the EP or SCIC jury members without a further test. Nowadays staff interpreters of both DGs still attend the final exams of some conference interpreting training programmes as jury members or observers, but they can no longer directly recruit graduates.

Due to the abolition of the stage and the revision of the interpreting services’ relations with training institutions, none of the interviewees who started working for the EP or SCIC between 1998 and 2003 were recruited during their final exam or as a result of successfully finishing the stage. In this second period, however, new ways of accreditation appear: SCIC introduced its ‘insertion’ scheme and the first interinstitutional tests were organized. The SCIC ‘insertion scheme’ was a programme set up to grant temporary accreditation to interpreters who had passed an insertion test. Like the standard accreditation test, the insertion test consisted of a consecutive and simultaneous interpreting for each of the language combinations offered. However, the texts presented were less difficult and some of the evaluation criteria for simultaneous interpreting were applied more

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Table 1     Overview of participants’ modes of access to EU accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD 1ST ACCES</th>
<th>FINAL EXAM</th>
<th>SCIC STAGE</th>
<th>INSERTION SCHEME</th>
<th>TEST FOR 1 INSTITUTION</th>
<th>INTERINSTIT. TEST</th>
<th>COMPETITION</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975-1997</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-2003</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2009</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² The discrepancy between the total number of participants and the sum of the numbers for the various modes is explained by the fact that one participant took both an accreditation test for the EP and an insertion test for SCIC.
³ Cf. Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.
Candidates who passed the test worked in the booth for a fixed number of days over a certain period after which they had to take a ‘confirmation test’ to get permanent accreditation.

From 2002 on the first practical steps towards interinstitutional collaboration were taken (Court of Auditors 2005:12). In view of the 2004 enlargement and the need to recruit interpreters for 10 new future booths, the EP and SCIC interpreting services jointly organized tests for so-called ‘accession language’ interpreters. For the ‘old’ booths the recruitment of new interpreters remained separate. For freelance interpreters this meant that each of the institutions had its own accreditation list and interpreters who wanted to be put on both lists had to pass two tests. In most cases interviewees started working for one of the interpreting services after passing a test and would either never apply for an accreditation test with the other institution, or only after having gained some experience with their first employer.

These institutional practices explain the access mode data for the participants who started working in the period 1998-2003: 3 Polish interviewees passed an ‘interinstitutional test’, 3 interpreters got their first access through an insertion test (and passed a confirmation test after their insertion period) and 4 succeeded in a single institution’s accreditation test. One more interviewee, who passed a SCIC insertion test as well as an EP accreditation test in the same month, was included in both relevant columns.

From 2004 on, access procedures were interinstitutionalized: all accreditation tests were now organized jointly by the EP and SCIC and the lists of accredited freelance interpreters (who, from now on, were administratively labeled as Auxiliary Conference Interpreters or ACIs) were merged (European Data Protection Supervisor 2006:3). The SCIC insertion scheme was abolished for financial reasons and, consequently, the standard gateway to interpreting for the EU institutions became the interinstitutional accreditation test from 2005. There are exceptions to this rule, however, as interpreters may also get accredited by succeeding (even partly) in a competition. This was the case for three of the Polish participants in this study. They preferred enrolling for one of the competitions organized for interpreters with ‘enlargement’ languages to waiting to be invited for an accreditation.

**Footnotes:**

4 In their 2002 ‘Guide des tests et concours’ for speakers, assessors and jury members the authors describe the profile of the ideal candidate and add a section about insertion candidates, stating that a certain tolerance should be observed in the assessment of their performance, taking account of their lack of experience: ‘Comme pour les candidats free-lance, le jury fondera son évaluation sur les critères définis par le profil [...] Toutefois, certains paramètres pourront être appliqués de façon plus souple aux candidats à l’insertion en raison de leur manque d’expérience. La tâche des membres du jury consistera donc à bien identifier les imperfections dues à la “fraîcheur” des candidats et qui seront susceptibles d’être corrigées à court terme, notamment pendant la période d’introduction au travail en cabine prévue dans le contrat d’insertion. [...] Par ailleurs, elle ne saurait être de mise pour l’évaluation des épreuves de consécutive, étant donné que les lauréats ne seraient vraisemblablement pas en mesure d’améliorer sensiblement leurs prestations dans ce mode d’interprétation pendant la durée de leur contrat d’insertion.’

5 Both the amount of days and the frequency of the working days offered varied over the course of the period in which the insertion programme was organized. In the first version of the scheme candidates worked for 100 consecutive working days, later on this was modified several times and the number of days was reduced and/or spread over a longer period of time.

6 In some cases (not represented in this study) candidates who failed part of the competition tests have been offered ACI accreditation for the languages for which they passed.

7 The languages which became official EU languages after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, i.e. Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian plus Bulgarian and Romanian (also called so-called EU 10+2 languages).
test (which at that time could take years for some of the ‘new’ booths). As all successful candidates they were put on the reserve list for permanent staff recruitment, but, not having worked for the EU institutions before, they were offered accreditation as an ACI and started working in this capacity awaiting a recruitment offer. All participants in the study who entered the community of EU interpreters since 2004 therefore began their institutional career as ACIs.