

AVIDICUS INTERNATIONAL Symposium

An international symposium on Videoconference and Remote Interpreting in Legal Proceedings was held in London on 17-19 February 2011. The Symposium ended the EU Criminal Justice Programme (Project JLS/2008/JPEN/037) called AVIDICUS (Assessment of Videoconference Interpreting in the Criminal Justice System), co-ordinated by Dr Sabine Braun from the Centre for Translation Studies, University of Surrey. Among the partners besides the University of Surrey (UK- project leader) were Lessius Hogeschool Antwerp (Belgium), Local Police Antwerp (Belgium), Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands, Legal Aid Board (Netherlands), TEPIS Polish Society of Sworn and Specialised Translators (Poland); Internal Evaluator: Mrs Ann Corsellis, OBE.

The AVIDICUS project addressed the issue of the viability and quality of videoconference and remote interpreting in criminal proceedings by identifying and assessing the situations where videoconference interpreting would be the most efficient from a criminal proceedings point of view. To that extent a survey among legal practitioners and legal interpreters as well as tests involving the integration of interpreters into the videoconference communicative situation were conducted.

The use of videoconferences in criminal proceedings, especially for hearing witnesses or experts, has been allowed under EU legislation since 2000 (Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters between EU countries, Art. 10) and made one of the priorities for future work in European e-Justice. However, the training for legal practitioners and interpreters on VCI/RI has been almost non-existent. Therefore, among the objectives of the Project was the development of training modules for practicing interpreters and legal practitioners based on the project findings and the implementation of the modules.

The London Symposium offered a forum for discussion on these issues. It brought together representatives of legal professionals and public service providers, practising interpreters and interpreting service providers, representatives of interpreting service users, researchers in the field of legal interpreting including spoken-language and sign-language interpreting, specialists in the use of videoconference technology, representatives of educational and training institutions

Among the invited speakers was Caroline Morgan (European Commission, DG Justice) who presented the new European directive on the rights to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings; Aki Hietanen (Ministry of Justice, Finland) who talked on the e-Justice Initiative of the EU and the role of videoconferencing in the e-Justice Action Plan; Miriam Shlesinger who dealt with the challenges of legal interpreting and the implication for remote interpreting in the legal settings; Christine Wilson (Harriot Watt University, UK); Jamina Napier (Macquarie University, Australia).

The Project partners reported on the results of two European surveys and comparative studies conducted by them as well as presented training modules tailored for legal practitioners and interpreters. The Project coordinator, Dr Sabine Braun, closed the symposium by voicing the recommendations for best practice in VCI/RI based on the comparative study and surveys. All the participants of the symposium also had a unique opportunity to visit Dimension Data, a London company, and see the impressive video conferencing and tele presence equipment, as well as be in the Virtual Meeting Room where live links were made with remote sites.

(more info on the AVIDICUS project and the symposium at the website:

<http://www.videoconference-interpreting.net/Avidicus.html>

Zofia Rybinska