# Bulletin

Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur
European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education
Europäische Konföderation der Hochschulsprachenzentren


## The University Modern Languages Certficate: UNIcert®


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Die Themen Qualität und zeitgemäße, nicht-zentralisierte Zertifikationssysteme im universitären Fremdsprachenunterricht sind nicht nur zentrale Themen der Internationalen CercleS-Konferenz in Antwerpen im Herbst. Seit 9 Jahren stehen diese Themen im Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit und der Aktivitäten von UNIcert®: der zentralen Akkreditierungsagentur für den nicht-philologischen Fremdsprachen-unterricht im Hochschulbereich der Bundesrepublik. Der Artikel von Silke Hausdorf und Bernd Voss beschreibt die Organisations-struktur des überregional gültigen, sprach-und institutionsübergreifenden Ausbildungs-und Prüfungssystems UNIcert®, stellt seine Kriterien der Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung vor, zieht Bilanz und macht mit aktuellen Projekten im Bereich des Sprachtestens bekannt.

Les thèmes de qualité, et de certification non-centralisée de compétences langagières chez les non-spécialistes en langues, seront sans doute au coeur des préoccupations des congrésistes à Anvers cet automne. Pourtant, depuis neuf ans déjà ces thèmes ont été centraux dans la mission de UNIcert®– organisme d'accréditation d'études non-philologiques de langues pour les universités en Allemagne. Dans cet article Silke Hausdorf et Bernd Voss décrivent la structure organisationnelle du système UNIcert®et son opération trans-régionale et inter-universitaire. Cette structure permet l'application de critères d'assurance-qualité et d'accréditation (consentis par un conseil scientifique) dans un cadre qui favorise des développements dans le domaine de l'évaluation sommative des compétences en langue.


There is no great claim to originality in the assertion that the graduates of today need to find their place in a world more and more characterised by globalisation, by growing mobility and by an increasing internationalisation of industry and science. The resulting need for university graduates of all diciplines to acquire practically useful language skills has produced various efforts within and outside Germany to create appropriate foreign language training programmes and certification systems. However, these mainly apply only to individual languages or institutions. Why, one may ask, is there no common certification system that covers *all* languages and *all* competences? It is as an answer to this question that the AKS (The Association of Language Teaching Centres in Germany) initiated UNIcert® in 1991.

Quality and high-standards, non-centralised assessment-schemes in language learning at institutions of Higher Education, the Portfolio passport scheme – these will be the buzzwords at the CercleS International Conference in Antwerp in September. For UNIcert® these issues have been the main concerns for many years now. From very modest beginnings UNIcert® has developed into Germany's major accreditation agency for non-specialist language teaching, providing – long before the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language Teaching and Learning* became available, but certainly not incompatible with it – a common framework of reference for practically all languages taught at German universities.

The UNIcert® system of certification is based upon ▶

## Editorial

David Bickerton

Ich freue mich, dass die Verbandsmitglieder in diesem CercleS *Bulletin*, der nun zum letzen Mal unter meiner Redaktion erscheint, Informationen finden werden, die all jene ermutigen sollen, die an die Ziele und das Potential des Verbands glauben.

Das *Going for Gold*-Feature der Oktoberausgabe hat ein enormes Echo gefunden. Auch in dieser Ausgabe berichten Kollegen, wie sie in Maastricht und Leeds ihre Vermarktungsziele erreichen. Weitere Berichte wurden uns aus Finnland versprochen. Ohne die 'Gold'-Metapher überstrapazieren zu wollen, sind wir wohl auf eine Quelle bzw. ein Thema gestoßen, das für viele europäische Sprachenzentren ein wirkliches Anliegen zu sein scheint, und das gerade im richtigen Moment, da LINGUA offenbar entschlossen ist, sein Programm auf den lebenslangen Lerner auszudehnen (siehe Wolfgang Streubel, S. 15).

Die in der Oktoberausgabe vorgestellte CercleS-Initiative zur einheitlichen Leistungsbeurteilung hat ebenfalls gute Fortschritte gemacht. Eine in Italien gegründete Gruppe hat die Aufgabe übernommen, ein Leistungsbescheinigungs-system auszuarbeiten, das die Förderung der Mobilität der Studierenden zum Ziel hat. Diese Initiative wird von CercleS unterstützt. Informell haben wir von ähnlichen Initiativen in Frankreich und Spanien erfahren. Bernd Voss, auf dessen Arbeit zugunsten des AKS-Bescheinigungssystems sich der Leitartikel dieser Ausgabe bezieht, hat die Koordinierung einer Expertengruppe übernommen, die vor und während der Antwerpener Konferenz tagen wird. Das *UNIcert*-Modell soll den Mitgliedern eine Vorstellung von der Tragweite eines Europäischen Bescheinigungssystems vermitteln, würde ein solches von den europäischen Sprachenzentren angewendet werden. Desgleichen ist CercleS, wie auch im Vorstands-protokoll festgehalten (siehe S. 8), entschlossen, einen bedeutsamen Beitrag zum Portfolio-Projekt des Europarates zu leisten und zwar durch Instrumente zur Leistungsbeurteilung und -dokumentation nicht-philologischer Studierender.

Und schließlich verfügen wir nun auch über ein Steering-Komité zur Ausarbeitung einer Geschäftsordnung, die es Spanien erlaubt, einen Antrag auf CercleS-Vollmitgliedschaft zu stellen. Der jüngste Besuch des Vorstands in Salamanca (siehe S. 7) zeigte, dass die spanischen Universitäten entschlossen sind, Sprachlernprogramme für nicht-philologische Studierende auszuarbeiten, die von allen Universitäten anerkannt werden sollen. Einen ähnlichen Prozess konnten wir in den letzten fünf Jahren auch in Frankreich und Italien beobachten.

Ich hoffe, dass der im kommenden September in Antwerpen zu wählende Vorstand diese und andere Initiativen in den Jahren 2001 und 2002 vollends verwirklichen wird. ▶

the use of a common policy document. It covers modern language course programmes appropriate for university education, i.e. programmes which do justice to the special requirements of university learners, to their objectives, and to the working modes appropriate for learners with an academic background. It aims to standardise the grades awarded by universities for various levels of modern language competence, to promote greater homogeneity between university language courses and thus to confer a certificate which is valid and acceptable also beyond the university context, as an indication of real practical foreign language ability as required by academically trained personnel.

The certificates are issued under the auspices of the AKS. The above-mentioned policy document, along with examination guidelines and sample course programmes, sets out the basic philosophy as agreed by the member institutions. Institutions interested in joining the scheme devise their own specific course and examination regulations based on UNIcert® guidelines. This is intended to allow for a desirable and appropriate degree of variation to accommodate local conditions and special institutional profiles. An Advisory Committee, set up by the AKS, is responsible for the accreditation of submitted course programmes and examination procedures. This committee has members from a variety of academic institutions and is also responsible for all other UNIcert®-related issues. More technical details can be found in the scheme handbook (Eggensperger & Fischer 1998)

As more and more graduates have come onto the market with its certificates – there are more than 6.500 holders at present – UNIcert® has become a well-recognized concept within language teaching centres and also in industry and businesses in the Federal Republic. Presently, UNIcert® has 29 member institutions in all parts of Germany, with a considerable number of accreditations pending, including institutions from abroad.

The UNIcert® Office co-ordinates all related issues, e.g. accreditations, workshops in the field of language testing for our accredited institutions, initiation of trans-national research projects and co-operation, material exchanges, public relation issues etc..

Why has this scheme been so successful over the years? Perhaps because UNIcert® supports high, up-to-date standards in language learning without paying the price of uniformity. Perhaps because it is the result of an initiative by those actually involved in language teaching and testing, not imposed upon us from above. Perhaps because it is flexible and open to development: there are yearly internal policy meetings to keep things up to date. Perhaps because it provides leadership and in-service training in the field of language testing for which, certainly in Germany, little overt training is available: Potsdam University will host the first large-scale in-service workshop – on the issue of calibration by C-test – on 20 May 2000. Perhaps because quality, both in teaching and in assessement, is really the main and underlying concern of all our efforts. And that is increasingly being recognised.

Maybe that is also the reason why CercleS sees UNIcert® as providing an interesting model of an accreditation system. As such it appears able to promote good practice and also has the potential to provide a blueprint for similar initiatives on a European scale.

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http://rcswww.urz.tu-dresden.de/~unicert/index-english.htm (English version)

**Further reading:**

Eggensperger, K.-H. & Fischer, J. (eds) (1998). *Handbuch UNIcert®*. AKS-Verlag, Bochum.
Voss, B (1997). UNIcert®: the foreign language certification system for German universities. In: Little, D. & Voss, B. (eds), *Language Centres: Planning for the New Millenium*. Plymouth, CercleS. ■

## Éditorial

(Continued from page 1)

Je suis heureux que dans ce *Bulletin*, le dernier publié sous ma direction, les membres puissent trouver des informations sans aucun doute très encourageantes pour tous ceux qui croient au but et au potentiel de notre Confédération.

Notre article *Going for Gold* en octobre a suscité un intérêt considérable. Nous publions ici d'autres témoignages de collègues de Maastricht et de Leeds sur la façon dont ils ont atteint des objectifs commerciaux, et nous en recevrons bientôt de Finlande. Sans vouloir abuser de la métaphore de 'l'or', il semble que nous avons découvert un filon d'un intérêt réel pour de nombreux Centres de Langues Européens. Cela arrive à un moment propice puisque LINGUA paraît destinée à étendre ses activités pour y inclure l'apprentissage à vie (voir Wolfgang Streubel, p. 15).

L'initiative d'évaluation de CercleS, présentée dans l'Éditorial d'octobre dernier, est aussi en plein essor. En Italie, un groupe s'est créé dans le but d'établir un système d'attestations pour faciliter la mobilité des étudiants, et ceci est soutenu par CercleS. Des entreprises semblables auraient aussi vu le jour en France et en Espagne. Bernd Voss, dont le travail pour le projet d'accréditation de l'AKS est présenté dans l'article principal de ce numéro, a accepté de coordonner un groupe d'experts qui se réuniront avant et pendant la Conférence d'Anvers. La familiarisation avec le modèle *UNIcert* permettra aux membres de réfléchir aux implications d'un système européen d'accréditation, dans le cas où les Centres de Langues Européens choisiraient de le mettre en pratique. Par ailleurs, ainsi qu'il est mentionné dans le compte-rendu du Comité Exécutif (p. 8), CercleS est sur le point d'apporter une contribution importante au programme du Portofolio du Conseil de l'Europe, sous la forme d'un dispositif pour enregistrer les compétences de l'étudiant non-spécialiste du tertiaire.

Enfin, nous avons aussi maintenant un groupe directeur actif en train de mettre sur pied une Constitution qui permettrait à l'Espagne de devenir éventuellement membre à part entière de CercleS. La visite récente du Comité Exécutif à Salamanque (voir p. 7) nous a montré que les universités espagnoles étaient prêtes à se lancer dans le développement de programmes accrédités par leurs universités pour les étudiants non-spécialistes, comme nous l'avons vu en France et en Italie au cours des cinq dernières années.

Que le nouveau Comité Exécutif, qui sera élu à Anvers en septembre, puisse voir ces initiatives et d'autres porter leurs fruits en 2001 et 2002.

Continued p. 4 ▶

# The use of the ELP at university level: Pilot Project at the University of Calabria in Italy

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Le Portfolio européen des langues (ELP), dont les principes de base ont été décrits par Barbara Lazenby Simpson dans le *Bulletin* 11 (p. 17), a été mis à l'essai par le Centre de Langues de Calabre à Cosenza. Le Portfolio, qui s'appuie sur le *Cadre européen commun de référence* élaboré par le Conseil de l'Europe, et comprend trois parties (le Passeport de langues, la Biographie d'apprentissage et le Dossier), a été favorablement accueilli aussi bien par les professeurs que par les étudiants calabrais. Ceux-ci ont été sensibles à son impact structurisant sur leur motivation et leur capacité d'auto-évaluation, mais ils auraient souhaité aussi que les descripteurs soient plus élaborés et mieux ciblés sur leur situation d'apprentissage.

Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio, dessen Grundsätze von Barbara Simpson (im *Bulletin* 11, S. 17) beschrieben wurden, ist am Sprachenzentrum von Kalabrien, Cosenza getestet worden. Dieses Portfolio, das sich an einem vom Europarat entwickelten gemeinsamen Referenzsystem orientiert und aus den drei Elementen Sprachenpass, Lernbiografie und Dossier besteht, wurde von den Lehrenden und Studierenden gleichermaßen gut aufgenommen. Die Letzteren begrüßten die Förderung der Motivation und der Selbstbeurteilung, wünschten sich aber genauere Kursbeschreibungen, die ihre spezifische Lernumgebung stärker berücksichtigen.

## The Setting

At the University of Calabria, experimentation in the use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) is being undertaken within the Faculty of Economics, which requires two official exams in any two of the four foreign languages offered (English, French, German, Spanish) as an integral part of the curriculum. In this setting, the final, official evaluation rests with the institution.

Language courses are intensive and span two semesters. Once they have achieved their language requirements, students usually abandon the study of languages in favour of other subjects and do not make use of the many facilities for self-practice available free of charge in the Language Centre.

Due to the traditional setting in schools, our students come with a passive attitude towards language learning, expecting the teacher to do most of the work. Also, their competence level on entering university is usually quite low – pre-intermediate to intermediate – depending on the kind of secondary school attended. Some may be complete or false beginners.

## Objectives of the Project

Given the context outlined above, our objectives were mainly of a pedagogical nature:

- to promote self-directed language learning amongst 'non-specialist' university language learners
- to develop reflective learning and self-assessment, emphasising learning to learn in foreign languages in view of life-long (self-) education
- to develop negotiated learning strategies and learner commitment.

In other words, in piloting the ELP we wanted to find out whether its use could help make our students more responsible learners, capable of taking charge of their own learning process. In particular, we thought that the practice of self-assessment using the European Framework descriptors of ability – at different levels of competence for different skills, in breaking down the object 'language competence' into its many components – would help clarify the stages and the different abilities and skills involved in the language learning process. This, we thought, would in turn help students perceive their own strengths besides their weaknesses, thus setting in motion mechanisms of self-confidence and self-esteem, motivation, awareness and planning, with positive effects on the learning process. We also anticipated that working with the Portfolio, helping students through self-assessment in terms of 'being able to behave linguistically', would change our teaching style and our way of perceiving students' individual needs.

## The Pilot: First Phase (March-June 1999)

The ELP was first introduced in March 1999 to 90 students taking courses of English, French or German and who volunteered to take part in the project after a general presentation was given to all students enrolled. The number was kept low so that we might follow the students through subsequent years when they have already met the official requirements for the language.

The ELP format adopted was a slightly revised version of the Portfolio adopted at Trinity College, Dublin for similar types of students (see *Bulletin* 11, p. 17). Changes were made to the descriptors to account for competence in academic skills, specifically taught in the courses, in a clearer way than in the original Framework grid. Competence in academic skills, hinted at but not clearly specified in the original grid, was therefore isolated and given a separate slot at every level of competence and for each skill.

## Teaching Staff

In the first phase we assigned the piloting to experienced teaching staff, already conversant with issues in the holistic approach to language learning and in autonomous learning, who enthusiastically agreed to take part in the project. Data were gathered from four principal sources:

- reports by the teaching staff at scheduled meetings (three during the semester, two in the Autumn)
- the two Council of Europe questionnaires for teachers and students (given end of March and mid-May)
- structured interviews to students, during the course, in order to investigate the impact the use of the Portfolio has on the learning process in terms of motivation, awareness, planning, accomplishment and self-confidence
- a post-course questionnaire (given in mid-October) meant to detect any changes in attitude which might have taken place after the official language requirements had been met.

## Some Preliminary Findings

The results after the first phase were generally positive. As stated in the presentation of our piloting at the AICLU Conference in Udine last May, on the whole our students showed a positive attitude towards the Portfolio. They considered it to be an important pedagogical tool for the improvement of their language learning and at the same time they appreciated its reporting function and the possibility it offers to overcome cross-cultural barriers. From the pedagogical point of view, from the structured interviews and informal out-of-class meetings, it seems that the use of the Portfolio had set in ▶

motion (a) a sharper awareness of their personal identity as language learners (they perceived more clearly their points of strength and the weak points which required extra work), (b) an increase in responsible participation in the learning process and in perception of language learning as a self-planned, individual process, (c) a clearer understanding of individual learning goals and of the progress made towards them (A. F. Bilotto, Quale Apprendimento/Insegnamento Linguistico nell'università Italiana del 2000?, *Proceedings of the AICLU Conference at Udine, 20-22 May 1999*, in press).

On the negative side, a number of students (30%) found the descriptors too rigid and in some cases not clear enough. In their comments, they mentioned the fact that sometimes they were uncertain about the level they were at ('I can place myself at one level for one aspect but not for others'), stressed the need for an extra level between Levels B and C, and felt the need for concrete examples of the situations of language use envisaged in some of the descriptors.

The follow-up questionnaire given in October confirmed this trend. In the section meant to enquire about students' views on how to implement the Portfolio, the most common comments were about the need for clearer descriptors and more detailed instruction or guidance on the use of the Portfolio, but there were also requests to create possibilities of exchange with students using the Portfolio in other universities/countries. In the section about the perception of the pedagogical function of the document, to the question 'What, in your opinion, is the main asset of the Portfolio', together with answers such as:

- it guarantees the level of competence reached
- useful for working purposes

we also got the following:

- it helps you set clear objectives to be reached
- it provides a constant monitoring of learning
- it motivates learning and helps setting clear goals to be reached
- it helps to self-evaluate one's learning
- it makes you aware of your own progress and of the aspects/elements that have influenced the learning process

This does show that students had understood and benefitted from the pedagogic features of the Portfolio.

Furthermore, 77% said that through the use of the Portfolio they had become aware of the learning objectives to be reached; for 68% it had helped to establish their learning objectives, 45% said they had managed to meet their objectives while 23% said they still had to work on them. 77% had found a close correlation between the abilities described in the grid and the ones developed in the course, and, finally, 73% said they had never had an opportunity to check and evaluate their own language ability before. 54% of these students are enrolling in a different language course in the academic year 1999-2000 so they will continue using the Portfolio, possibly helping new students to understand its use and value.

## The Pilot: Second Phase (November 1999–June 2000)

In the second phase, a new group of 90 students will be involved in the piloting while the previous group will be followed by means of both set and informal meetings and of questionnaires. The new group is going to work with the Portfolio through the two semesters. Based on the feedback from the first group of students, we feel the need to further refine the descriptors so as to make them totally clear for self-assessment.

We are also going to introduce new teachers in the project under the supervision of the more experienced staff. This will give us an idea of the impact the use of the Portfolio has on the quality of teaching and on teachers' attitudes about individual learners' needs. We hope, through the use of the ELP, to have an additional, positive effect on our language teachers' professional growth.

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## Editorial

(Continued from page 1)

I am glad that in this, the last CercleS *Bulletin* to be published under my editorship, members will find information which must be of great encouragement for all those who believe in the purpose and potential of our Confederation.

The response to the *Going for Gold* feature in October has been considerable. Here we publish further accounts of how colleagues in Maastricht and Leeds are meeting commercial objectives, and further write-ups are promised from Finland. Without wishing to extend the 'gold' metaphor beyond breaking point, we do seem have tapped a seam which is of real concern to many European Language Centres. This comes at an appropriate moment as LINGUA seems set to extend its actions to encompass the lifelong learner.

The CercleS assessment initiative, flagged in last October's Editorial, is also developing well. A group has been formed in Italy to establish a certification system to facilitate student mobility, and this has received CercleS support. We have also learned informally of similar initiatives in France and Spain. Bernd Voss, whose work for the AKS accreditation scheme underlies our lead article in this issue, has agreed to co-ordinate an expert group which will meet both before, and during, the Antwerp Conference. Familiarisation with the *UNIcert* model will enable members to reflect on the implications of a European accreditation scheme, were such to be operated by European Language Centres. Also, as is recorded in the Executive minutes (p. 8), CercleS is poised to make a major contribution to the Council of Europe's Portfolio scheme in the shape of instruments for recording the achievements of the non-specialist learner in Higher Education.

Last, but not least, we now have an active steering group putting together a Constitution to allow Spain to apply for Full Membership of CercleS. The recent visit by the Executive to Salamanca (see p. 7) indicated to us that Spanish universities are poised to make the same leap forward in runnning language programmes for non-specialist learners, accredited by their universities, as we have seen in France and Italy in the last five years.

May the new Executive, due to be elected in Antwerp next September, see these and other initiatives to full fruition in 2001 and 2002.

### Subscriptions to the *Bulletin*

Complimentary copies of this *Bulletin* are sent automatically to all member and associate member institutions.

As from 2000, CercleS is able to accept general subscriptions to the *Bulletin* (e.g. from individuals and non-university institutions). For an annual fee of £10.00, suubscibers will receive two *Bulletins* per annum.

# Some features of foreign language provision for 'non-specialist' students in European universities: Issues of particular interest to the Council of Europe

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Reprenant les thèmes traités dans un article précédent (*Bulletin* 11, pp. 14-16), David Little aborde ici des questions d'ordre stratégique pour le Conseil de l'Europe: l'impact sur les compétences langagières de la transition entre école et université; la valeur de l'apprentissage des langues minorisées; la validité pour les étudiants universitaires de programmes visant l'acquisition de 'compétences partielles'. La similarité entre la mission des Centres de Langues et les objectifs du Conseil de l'Europe permet d'envisager un rôle important pour CercleS: coordonner les efforts pour promouvoir l'introduction du Portfolio au niveau universitaire.

David Little führt hier ein in einem früheren Artikel (*Bulletin* 11, S. 14-16) behandeltes Thema weiter aus und erörtert Fragen, die für den Europarat von zentraler Bedeutung sind: Welche Auswirkungen hat der Wechsel von der Schule an die Universität auf die Sprachkompetenz der Lerner? Welche Bedeutung hat der Unterricht von Minderheitensprachen? Welchen Wert haben Programme zur Förderung des Erwerbs von Teilkompetenzen? Die Parallelen zwischen den Aufgaben der Sprachenzentren und denen des Europarats erlauben es CercleS eine wichtige Rolle wahrzunehmen, und zwar in der Koordinierung der Tätigkeiten, die die Einführung des Portfolios an den Universitäten zum Ziel haben, berichtet.

## Introduction

In the autumn of 1998 the Council of Europe invited me to prepare a preliminary study of foreign language provision for 'non-specialist' students in European universities. The study was mostly based on a survey of CercleS members that was conducted in two phases. First, a questionnaire was distributed to all participants at the 5th CercleS International Conference, hosted by the University of Bergamo in September 1998; and secondly, a revised questionnaire was sent by e-mail to language centres affiliated to CercleS.

In the last issue of the CercleS *Bulletin* I provided a summary of the responses to questions designed to elicit information about the general nature of foreign language provision in language centres:

- How many students learn foreign languages?
- To which disciplines do these students belong?
- Are language courses compulsory or optional?
- Which languages are taught?
- How are languages taught and assessed?
- To what extent is language teaching embedded in programmes of research and development?

In the present article I summarize the responses to those questions that focused on issues of particular concern to the Council of Europe. Extracts from the study are reproduced by kind permission of the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Section.

## What happens to foreign language proficiency in the transition from school to university?

The Council of Europe's interest in this question arises from its general concern to promote the learning of languages for communicative purposes. In recent years its modern languages projects have focused chiefly on the school sector. This gives rise to two questions when the focus switches to the university sector:

- To what extent do university students maintain the foreign language proficiency they have developed at school?
- To what extent do university curricula build on the foreign language proficiency that has been developed at school?

Some respondents understood the question as referring to the period between leaving school and beginning university studies. For example, a Belgian colleague pointed out that in her country some students attend summer camps or travel abroad in order to improve the foreign language skills they will need at university. This clearly reflects the importance attached to foreign language proficiency in (at least some sectors of) the Belgian university curriculum.

Those respondents who interpreted the question as referring to continuity or lack of continuity between school and university identified two problems. First, some dissatisfaction was expressed with the level of foreign language proficiency that school leavers typically achieve. One respondent in France noted: 'Most students come from school with a lower intermediate level [of English]. Most of them cannot communicate on everyday subjects and have no basic ESP skills for science (describing an object, giving its position in space, etc.).' Similarly, a respondent in Spain commented that although incoming students have had seven or more years of English, it is necessary to do a lot of remedial work with them because 'they are not used to free expression (written or spoken)'. Clearly, the communicative aspirations of successive Council of Europe projects remain unfulfilled in many schools. On the other hand, the same respondent in Spain and a respondent in the United Kingdom both made the point that even though students often lack communicative proficiency, they typically retain a substantial receptive knowledge of their foreign language(s), and this provides a basis for developing communicative skills at university.

The second problem that a number of respondents identified is that there is often a gap of several years between the end of language learning at school and the beginning of language learning at university. For example, in the United Kingdom the majority of students stop learning foreign languages at school when they take their GCSE examinations at the age of 16, two or three years before they go on to university. And in cases where foreign languages are learnt to the end of schooling, a similar gap may be created by the way in which the university curriculum is structured. Thus one French respondent reported that at her university there is no foreign language provision for students in their first year, but a course in English is compulsory in their second year. Similarly, a Polish colleague reported that students at her university are not required to take foreign language courses until their third year. Those who mentioned this problem noted the tendency of students to forget their foreign languages during the gap thus created. This apparently widespread phenomenon suggests that the foreign language proficiency developed at school is rarely used to any significant extent outside the classroom.

## The teaching of less widely used languages

In the responses to the e-mail questionnaire, the term 'less widely used languages' is interpreted in two quite distinct ways. First, it is taken to refer to languages that are used in the host community but rarely used or taught outside that community. Examples of this are ▶

courses for foreign students in Dutch, Polish, Finnish and Swedish in Belgium and the Netherlands, Poland, Finland and Sweden respectively. Secondly, "less widely used languages" is taken to refer to major world or national languages that happen not to be much taught in the educational system in question. Languages thus classified by respondents in various countries are: for Finland, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish; for Belgium, Italian and Spanish; for Germany, Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Russian; for Hungary, French; for the Netherlands, Arabic, Italian and Russian; for Spain, French and German; for the United Kingdom, Arabic, Chinese, Czech, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian. Of course, different respondents in each of these countries might have produced different lists of languages.

In the Council of Europe's work, the term 'less widely used language' has been used in particular to denote the languages of ethnic minorities. In the responses to the e-mail questionnaire, only one such language is mentioned: Tornedal Finnish, by a respondent in Sweden.

## The development of partial competences

The functional-notional approach to the specification of language learning objectives was first devised by the Council of Europe as an antidote to the tradition of defining objectives in grammatical terms. Essentially, the functional-notional approach was founded on a recognition that it is not necessary to know the whole of a language's grammar in order to use the language as an effective instrument of communication. The concept of partial competences derives from the same insight and is reinforced by a recognition that all curricular planning requires that we decide what to exclude as well as what to include. The complex nature of communicative proficiency as it is elaborated in, for example, the *Common European Framework of Reference* (second draft, Council of Europe, 1996) should alert us to the fact that partial competences must be specified with a high degree of psycholinguistic sensitivity: some elements of communicative proficiency can be developed only on the basis of other elements. Nevertheless, it is clear that the concept of partial competencies is an important one in a world that seems to present us with more and more things to learn but less and less time in which to learn them.

Over half the respondents to the e-mail questionnaire reported that they were concerned with the development of partial competences. In most cases they interpreted the term to mean 'languages for specific purposes' – for example, English for students of economics (Belgium), English, Japanese and German for business (the Netherlands). Usually they indicated a focus on particular skills: for example, making telephone calls (Belgium), developing writing skills for science and technology (Germany), developing academic reading skills in German for classicists or French for historians (United Kingdom), and learning how to read a balance sheet in French or German (United Kingdom). However, it seems likely that these examples referred not to attempts to develop partial competences in the sense defined in the Common European Framework of Reference, but to particular skills that were based on a general communicative proficiency.

## The role of new technologies in international communication and language learning

As I reported in my earlier article, most respondents to the Bergamo questionnaire (81%; 29/36) reported that they were using new technologies to support language learning. Of the respondents to the e-mail questionnaire, 20/30 (67%) made the same report (the lower percentage may be due to the higher proportion of replies from eastern Europe), and 13 of these 20 (65%) reported that they were using computer-mediated communication to support learning. For the most part, this meant using e-mail for tandem language learning or surfing the Internet in search of target-language texts and information. Only three respondents to the e-mail questionnaire mentioned courses that focus specifically on the linguistic demands that are made by new technologies as channels of communication: 'a special course in e-mail and Internet language' (Russia); 'Internet communication in French and Italian' (Sweden); 'an electronic newspaper in which our journalism students write stories in more than one language' (United Kingdom).

## Conclusion: involving the university sector more directly in the modern languages work of the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe's interest in the teaching and learning of languages has always been closely associated with its political and more general educational goals. Specifically, proficiency in foreign languages has been seen as a means to individual mobility and international co-operation and understanding. Much the same view underpins the provision of language learning opportunities for 'non-specialist' students at university level, where the intention is to develop students' capacity to access information in languages other than their mother tongue and to operate academically, and in some cases professionally, in countries other than their own. Clearly, there is much common ground between the Council of Europe's work in modern languages and the kind of foreign language provision that is the central concern of CercleS.

There are three obvious focuses for the greater involvement of the university sector in the modern languages work of the Council of Europe: the application of the *Common European Framework of Reference* to curriculum design and the assessment of learner proficiency; the use of the European Language Portfolio to support reflective learning and provide an internationally transparent record of individual learning achievement; and the elaboration of pedagogical procedures apt to promote the development of autonomy in foreign language learning and use. Each of these focuses overlaps to some degree with the other two. In the university sector international organizations often provide better communication than local networks, and I have argued elsewhere that CercleS is well placed to mediate between the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Section and the European university sector. The lack of significant funding to support collaborative projects is no doubt an obstacle, but it may not be insuperable, especially if the same projects can be sponsored by another relevant international organization besides the Council of Europe.

**dlittle@tcd.ie**

# Minutes of the CercleS Executive Committee Meeting held in Salamanca on Saturday 18 March 2000

**Present:**

Prof David Little, President (TC Dublin)
Prof David Bickerton, Secretary General (Plymouth)
Prof Bernd Voss, Treasurer (Dresden)
Prof Maurizio Gotti, Deputy Secretary (Bergamo)

DL opened the meeting at 10.00 a.m.

## 1. Apologies

Prof Michel Perrin, Deputy President (Bordeaux)
Ms Jolanta Urbanikowa, Deputy Treasurer (Warsaw)

## 2. Minutes

The minutes of the CercleS Co-ordinating Committee Meeting held in Prague, 16-17 September 1999 (published in *Bulletin* 11, pp. 5-6), were approved.

## 3. Matters Arising

The Secretary General reported that it had unfortunately proved necessary to instigate disciplinary proceedings against the Administrator which were likely to result in dismissal. As a consequence, all communications to the Secretariat were being channelled either directly to the Secretary General or through the Department of Modern Languages Office in Plymouth. The committee discussed the lessons to be learned and the implications for the workload of officers until September 2000.

Action: Members of the Executive would brief their successors on employment procedures which could help avoid a recurrence of this situation.

## 4. Financial Report

The Secretary General reported that a clerical error had resulted in overpayment of the Administrator's salary throughout 1999, and this had led to a small deficit (approx. 8% of turnover) for the calendar year 1999. He tabled a balance sheet for the period 1 August 1999 to 14 March 2000 which showed that CercleS was nevertheless able to meet its printing and publishing commitments. Assistance would be sought from the University of Plymouth in the preparation of an audited account of CercleS's financial position for presentation to the General Meeting in September.

Action: BV to write to Plymouth to seek redress for the overpayment of salary.

Action: DB to submit a financial statement for the year 2000, with supporting documentation from the University of Plymouth Finance Office, to the Treasurer, for verification.

Action: Outstanding balances on subscriptions from Full Members for the current year to be collected by the new Secretariat after September.

Action: Executive to hold a preliminary discussion of recommended fee levels for 2001-2002 at its next meeting.

## 5. Spanish Initiative

After a lengthy process of consultation with Associate Members in Spain, the University of Salamanca had been invited to host a meeting of representatives from Spanish University Language Centres. This had taken place on Friday 17 March, and had allowed members of the Executive to brief those attending on the background and function of CercleS, its statutes, modes of operation, and on recent experience in the formation of Full Members (in Italy and Switzerland in particular). It was reported at the meeting that from a total of more than 40 universities in Spain, 24 had Language Centres, some of which were of very recent creation, and this appeared to be a growing trend in Spain.

The meeting was well attended, with delegates being both geographically and institutionally representative of language teaching to non-specialists in Spanish Higher Education. They were drawn from more than 10 universities, and expressions of interest and support had been received from many others. The 'Jornada CercleS' in Salamanca had proved to be a welcome opportunity for delegates to meet and explore many issues of common concern.

Accordingly, a steering committee was formed from amongst the Spanish colleagues present which would report back to their respective universities, circulate proposals for the formation of a Spanish Full Member of CercleS, and hold a follow-up meeting in Salamanca on 19 June. It was hoped to create an association in time for approval by the CercleS General Meeting in Antwerp on 15 September.

Members of the Executive recorded their thanks to the *Servicio Central de Idiomas*, University of Salamanca, for their warm welcome and their support in furthering the Spanish initiative.

Action: DB to liaise with Spanish group over drafting of Statutes.

## 6. Antwerp Conference

The Executive noted with pleasure that NUT had moved swiftly to create a conference committee, identify a keynote speaker, draw up advertising material, and create an impressive conference web site at **http://www.taalnet.rug.ac.be/tqila**. It was felt that the new section convenor arrangements may not, however, have helped stimulate the proposal of quality papers from outside NUT's sphere of influence. A draft t'Qila brochure was examined and had been discussed by the Secretary General and Prof Pol Cuvelier. It was agreed that (a) the brochure should be commercially printed and widely disseminated using the CercleS postal mailing list and national conferences, (b) a brief electronic version would be mailed worldwide, (c) conference papers should not be published on CD-ROM, and the Proceedings should follow the customary CercleS format. A second call for papers should now be issued to coincide with the deadline for early bird conference registrations (1 May). Executive's visit to the conference location would be re-scheduled for 22-25 June to permit meetings to be held with the local organising committee, final vetting of conference papers, and initial vetting of nominations for the new Executive.

Action: Confirmation of Executive visit by NUT

## 7. EUROCALL Research Policy Statement

The President retraced the gestation of a policy statement on research in CALL by EUROCALL, CALICO and IALL. Discussion at EUROCALL conferences in Dublin (1997) and Besançon (1998) had led this organisation to fund a seminar in Essen (30 April 1999) which had resulted in an attempt to clarify the claim that CALL is a research discipline in its own right. It was felt that members of CercleS would wish to discuss the view that CALL research had theoretical or methodological specificity, and the Executive concluded that it should certainly encourage wider discussion of the issues by publishing the latest version of ▶

the statement (http://www.eurocall.org) in the *Bulletin*.

Action: DB to seek approval from Graham Davies, President of EUROCALL, for this purpose.

## 8. Publications

*Bulletin* 11 and the *Proceedings* of the 5th International Conference at Bergamo (1998, edited by David Bickerton and Maurizio Gotti) had both appeared, on schedule, in the late autumn, and were received. The Secretary General reported brisk sales of the latter. The improved quality of both the printing and binding of the *Proceedings* was noted. DB also tabled a draft document containing the revised Statutes of CercleS (as agreed at Bergamo, 18 September 1998, in English, but still requiring revisions in French and German), the statutes of all Full Members, and guidelines on the creation of new national or trans-national associations.

It was agreed that this document should be published and distributed to all individual members to mark the end of the present Executive's period of office (16 September 2000). In addition it was agreed that the official list of members should be printed separately and distributed from Dublin. The Executive agreed a strategy for the publication in April of *Bulletin* 12 in the absence of an Administrator.

Action: MP to provide French revisions and check the RANACLES text.
Action: BV to provide German revisions and check the AKS text.
Action: MG to provide Italian revisions of the AICLU text.
Action: DB to collate the texts of the statutes of Full Members.
Action: DB to liaise with Gertrud Aub-Buscher regarding the inclusion of a historical introduction.
Action: DL to provide assistance with mailing (through CLCS, Trinity College Dublin), if necessary.

## 9. Events and New Developments

a) Full Members' Activities

It was noted that national conferences had taken place of AICLU (Rome, September - Proceedings in press), RANACLES (Lyon, November 1999), AULC (Edinburgh, December 1999), AKS (Saarbrücken, March 2000). Organisers reported particularly good attendances in Germany and Italy (e.g. AKS had 250 delegates). AICLU's regional seminars were attracting much attention. AICLU meetings scheduled for 2000 include Bologna (5-8 April), Trieste (9-10 June) and Rende (Cosenza, Calabria, 29-30 September), Siena (May 2001); an AKS *UNIcert* seminar is planned in Potsdam (May); AULC's Annual Conference will be in Dublin (7-8 April); RANACLI[illegible]ext meets in Nice (November).

b) New Init[illegible]tives

The Secreta[illegible] General explained that it had not proved [illegible]propriate to submit a bid (by 1 March) for [illegible]NGUA funding in order to enable a Wo[illegible]ing Group on Assessment to meet. Howe[illegible]r, it had seemed helpful to hold discussions at the Executive on an AICLU initiative whereby the University of Padua would apply to run a three-year government-backed project (CERCLU: *Certificazione di Competenza Linguistica dei Centri Linguistici Universitari Italiani con Riconoscimento Internazionale* – Certification of Linguistic Competence by Italian Language Centres and its International Recognition, co-ordinated by Carol Taylor Torsello (taytors@ux1.unipd.it)). MG explained that nine Italian and two international partners were involved, it being proposed to investigate and develop a language certification scheme, at Threshold and Vantage levels and initially in English and Italian, which would facilitate student mobility. The Executive expressed broad support for this initiative, and it was felt appropriate that CercleS should help co-ordinate its international dimension and encourage such activities.

It was agreed, in addition, that CercleS should actively canvass those within the Confederation with some expertise in language testing to come together to hold exploratory discussions with a view to ***developing proposals for an accreditation and/or certification scheme which might be used by members for the mutual recognition of student competence.*** The Treasurer agreed initially to co-ordinate this activity by convening a meeting between April and September, to be followed by further discussions at the Antwerp conference.

Action: DL to confirm CercleS's support for CERCLU to the Università di Padova (Padua).
Action: BV to convene experts in assessment through the chairs of the Full Members.

## 10. Applications for Membership

The *Centro de Lenguas Modernas* of the University of Granada (Minerva Alganza, Director) was admitted as an Associate Member for a period of 5 years.

## 11. Time and place for next Executive

It was agreed that the final meeting of the present Executive would take place during the preparatory visit to Antwerp on 22-25 June. Time would be set aside to meet with the NUT conference committee on 23 June.

## 12. Timetable for Elections to Executive

It was agreed that the timetable for the elections of the CercleS Executive to serve from September 2000 until September 2002 would be as follows:

- nominations to reach the Secretariat with the support of Full Members by 16 June
- vetting for eligibility by the Executive on 23 June
- circulation of nominees' details to the membership to allow discussion at national level (June-September)
- election of a new Executive by the Co-ordinating Committee in Antwerp, 14 September
- confirmation of the President by the General Meeting on 16 September

It was noted that all those who belong to an institution with paid up membership of CercleS for 1999-2000 are eligible to stand for any office; those with Associate Membership must be supported in their nomination by a Full Member. Present members of the Executive are eligible for re-election except for the President and Secretary General.

Action: Members to be contacted either by the Secretary General (Associate Members) or by National Associations, for nominations for all six places on the Executive.

## 13. AOB

DL reported on progress being made by groups piloting the European Language Portfolio, and on the impact this was having throughout Europe. It had become clear that improved documentation was necessary if educational bodies were to produce ELP's which could be validated by the Council of Europe. It was agreed that (a) the General Meeting should be invited to take a policy decision on promoting the ELP, (b) CercleS should devise mechanisms for monitoring local variants thereof, and (c) by June 2001 the Confederation should be ready to launch an ELP which would meet the needs of its members.

After discussion it was agreed that the Working Group on Assessment would require immediately to establish a watching brief on CercleS's ELP activities so that testing, accreditation and certification could move forward harmoniously.

There being no further business DL closed the meeting at 8 pm.

David Bickerton
Secretary General
1 April 2000

# Discussion Paper on CALL Research

The 'skills mix' required of staff (cf Mike Jones, *Bulletin* 10, pp. 16-19), and the role of research, are key related issues for Language Centres. In publishing here a recent policy statement by EUROCALL, CALICO and IALL, the Executive (see Minutes, item 7, p. 7) hopes to help focus attention on one important aspect of the debate for the CercleS membership.

## Joint Policy Statement
### arising from a
## Research Seminar on CALL
### 30 April to 1 May 1999
### University of Essen, Germany

## Introduction

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a relatively new and rapidly evolving academic field that explores the role of information and communication technologies in language learning and teaching. It includes a wide range of activities and initiatives in materials development, pedagogical practice, and research. CALL as a field began when the limitations of the computer narrowly limited the pedagogy that could be implemented with it, and consequently some people still believe that CALL refers only to drills and mechanical exercises. Today, however, CALL includes highly interactive and communicative support for listening, speaking, reading and writing, including extensive use of the Internet. Materials development, pedagogy and research have developed in intellectual sophistication to the point where the status of CALL as an academic field of studies requiring special consideration should be seriously considered. CALL is no longer either a straightforward pedagogical application of a new medium, nor simply a practical extrapolation of theoretical work in some other discipline.

CALL is sometimes regarded simply as a sub-section of Computer Assisted Learning (CAL), but because CALL deals specifically with language learning it is both inherently multidisciplinary and academically substantive. It can be said to belong to the field of Applied Language Studies and, within that, is most closely related to Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which is itself a rapidly evolving discipline. CALL and SLA are related to sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics. In addition, CALL is related to work in education, computer science, natural language processing, cognitive science and psychology, linguistics, cultural studies, and media/communication studies. It is influenced by, and in turn influences, theory and research in all these related fields.

## The aim of this document

This document has been drafted by a group of twenty CALL theorists, researchers, developers and practitioners from Europe and the USA in order: (i) to establish a clearer understanding for departments, institutions, professional associations and decision-making bodies of the range of activities represented in the field, and (ii) to provide an organised and consistent perspective on the rubrics under which these activities should be evaluated.

Assessment and academic recognition of work in CALL presents difficulties not only because of the rapid evolution of the field but also because of the emergence of new theoretical and methodological paradigms.

CALL work can be categorised as research, development, and practice. Research may be separate from development, in that a researcher may explore the effects of using technology-based tools or materials developed by others, e.g. formative evaluations, or may focus entirely on theory development. In CALL the progression often begins with pedagogical practice or learner needs driving the development of technology-based materials, techniques, or environments. This development effort may then later lead to research, which in turn may or may not be used to generate theoretical implications. Nonetheless, in establishing criteria for evaluating CALL work for purposes of academic recognition and reward, it is important that the distinctions between these activities be clearly articulated.

## Academic standards in CALL

In CALL the term development may refer to the creation of pedagogical materials (including design, programming, and incorporation of actual lesson content), or the development of tools and applications into which others can insert language content. In academic contexts where the development of pedagogical materials is typically not rewarded, CALL development is often portrayed as research especially when it is based on previous research and/or includes formative research, in which the materials are tried out on learners and feedback is sought as part of the developmental process. Conversely, however, some research projects exploring the feasibility or validity of technology use in language learning are labelled as development when funding agencies explicitly proscribe research because they want to support the creation of immediately applicable pedagogical materials. Appropriate evaluation of CALL development work depends crucially on the recognition that not only technical expertise and pedagogical expertise are required – both of a high order – but that in addition this work is a kind of professional activity that is without precedent in the field of language education, and not simply more time-consuming than creating exercises or reading materials. Evaluation of such work must be done by those who can distinguish the levels of expertise required.

When research is mentioned in connection with CALL, the assumption is usually that the term refers to studies of the efficacy of technology use in a language learning task that would otherwise be undertaken without it. Data collection and analysis in CALL research may be qualitative or quantitative, experimental or ethnographic, and is published in CALL journals and those of related fields, which naturally include very respected Web-based journals. Crucially, of course, CALL research also includes developmental and prototypal computing. CALL research is moving into new areas, drawing on theories from related fields and creating its own theoretical and methodological paradigms. It is indeed a sign of maturity that CALL has now standardised its terminology, identified its points of reference, and includes a significant number of sub-branches of activity. The design expertise required is of an entirely different kind than that involved in the development of [illegible] materials.

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# Quality Issues for European Language Centres
# 6th CercleS International Conference
# Antwerp, 14-16 September 2000

## FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT and 2nd CALL FOR PAPERS

Members will recall that previous biennial conferences were held in Bordeaux (RANACLES, 1992), Hull (DULC, 1994), Dresden (AKS, 1996) and Bergamo (AICLU, 1998). The 6th CercleS International Conference will be hosted by NUT (Nederlandstalige Universitaire Talencentra) at the University of Antwerp/UFSIA in central Antwerp. The chosen theme promises to produce a quality event, and the conference will be held in what is a superb venue. The theme will enable CercleS members to consider how best to build quality into their provision.

Antwerp is particularly easy to reach by road, rail and air, and its proximity to Brussels means that international flights are both frequent and relatively cheap. Antwerp was European City of Culture in 1993, and is a popular and historic Dutch-speaking Belgian city.
A more detailed programme can be seen on the conference web page (http://www.taalnet.rug.ac.be/tqila), together with registration forms and additional guidance for those wishing to read papers.

Conference Committee: Pol Cuvelier, Valère Meus, Guust Meijers, Annie van Avermaet, Charles van Leeuwen, Kris Vandepoel, Bert Weltens.

Whilst the Conference will adhere to the established format for CercleS international conferences, arrangements have been slightly modified in the light of past experience. The key features are as follows:

**Themes**

Papers are invited on all subjects of concern to CercleS members, and in particular on quality issues in the following priority areas:

- Incorporating Intercultural Communicative Competence
- Languages for Special Purposes
- Less Widely Spoken Languages/Languages of New Member States
- New Challenges for Language Centre Management (new technologies, distance learning, ...)
- Quality and the European Framework/European Language Portfolio
- The Changing Role of Language Trainers

Members of NUT will convene the six sections once papers have been selected in May.

**Sessions**

There will be one plenary address by John H. A. L. de Jong and some forty 20-minute slots in several parallel sessions. Any person may propose a paper, but preference will be given to speakers from member institutions, and to papers of high quality and suitability.

**Proposals for Papers**

Proposals should consist of an abstract, preferably written in English, 200 words in length on a single side of A4 paper, and including full contact details. Abstracts may be submitted by mail, email or fax. They must be of a standard appropriate for publication in the Conference Programme.

**Deadline for Abstracts**

Abstracts will not be considered after 1 May 2000. The organising committee and CercleS will examine proposals for papers. Those proposing papers will be contacted by convenors before the end of June.

**Proceedings**

Authors will be invited to submit their papers for publication by 31 October 2000. Papers will be fully refereed, and selected papers will be edited and published by CercleS in September/October 2001. They will follow the style established in previous published Proceedings.

**Conference fee**

- 100 Euros for delegates from members of CercleS's national and transnational affiliates and for Associate Members
- 50 Euros for students
- 120 Euros for all other participants

Discount of 25% for early-bird registration (by 1 May); 75 Euros for delegates from 'soft' currency countries.
The fee will cover admission to the conference, lunches and refreshments, coffee breaks, and a copy of the published Proceedings. Additional charges will be made for the conference dinner and the cultural programme.

**Conference Secretariat**

From 15 April onwards, a conference office will help delegates book their accommodation and plan their journeys, and will maintain information on a conference web site.

**CercleS CC**

The Co-ordinating Committee will meet before the start of the conference on Thursday 14 September. One of its main tasks will be the election of Officers for a period of two years.

**CercleS General Meeting**

The General Meeting will take place on Friday afternoon, 15 September 2000 (time and date subject to confirmation).


NUT Nederlandstalige Universitaire Talencentra

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# Targeting both academe and business: Which comes first? Maastricht University

Charles van Leeuwen
Worldneth Language Centre
Maastricht University

An den universitären Sprachenzentren gibt es offenbar den Trend, den Markt zu entdecken und den Umsatz zu steigern, indem man sich am Markt orientiert. Einige Sprachenzentren werden sogar privatisiert, weil man annimmt, dass sie auf diese Weise die Bedürfnisse des Marktes besser erfüllen können. Bringt dieses Vorgehen den Sprachenzentren tatsächlich – auch in finanzieller Hinsicht – so große Vorteile, wie es zunächst scheint? Welches Image sollen die Sprachenzentren anstreben, um einen Wettbewerbsvorteil zu haben?

Une nouvelle tendance fait son apparition dans les Centres de Langues universitaires : découvrir un créneau commercial et essayer d'augmenter son chiffre d'affaires en le ciblant. Certains Centres sont même privatisés parce qu'on croit qu'ils seront ainsi plus en mesure de répondre à la demande. La question qui se pose est la suivante : cela leur est-il bénéfique et cette activité est-elle aussi rentable qu'elle le paraît à première vue? Et quel profil devraient se donner les Centres de Langues pour avoir un avantage commercial?

## The Challenge

It seems a trend at university language centres: discovering a commercial market and trying to increase turnover by targeting it. Some centres are even privatised because it is thought they can meet the demands of the market better that way. The University administration, too, is aware of this possibility and, pointing to the opportunities of the market, they feel no qualms about reducing subsidies for their language centres. These have to pull their weight more and more these days and can no longer operate on the safe margins of their academic hosts. They are almost forced to go commercial. The question is: does this really benefit them and is this activity really as profitable as it seems at first sight? And what profile should the university language centres create for themselves to gain a competitive edge?



**Language teachers welcoming customers in the Inner Court of the University Language Centre**

Ten years ago, when the language centre of Maastricht University was founded, its mission statement was actively to seek opportunities to provide courses for companies, for the government, and activities for a larger public. The institute was given the name **Worldneth**, a compound of WORLD and THE NETHERLANDS: for many Dutch people, language study gives access to the world, and the institute also offers initial access for many foreigners to the Netherlands, if they want to come and study or work there for a longer period of time. The name **Worldneth** also reflects the ambition to work for more than just the university: the services of the institute should be relevant to the whole world. Over the years the commercial portfolio has proved to be worth 1/3 of the turnover, so it has proved to be of considerable importance.

## Advantages

The advantages for a university language institute of being market-oriented can be summarised as follows. There are straightforward business considerations: turnover is increased, overhead costs can be divided over a larger number of courses and certain investments will in principle become more accessible. Another aspect concerns teaching content: working for businesses adds a certain expertise which may be relevant for the teaching of students, particularly in faculties like Economics and Law. If students are to be well-prepared for their future professional life, it is an advantage if they can be taught by language teachers familiar with the world of business from teaching in it. There is also a personnel aspect to consider: teachers may enjoy being active in several fields; and they may have an opportunity to develop a particular specialism, at least theoretically. Finally, it is also a matter of image: just in the way that the profile of a university can be attractive to certain companies, others can in turn be good customers for the university. The fact that multinationals and leading companies purchase language courses from our university is considered to be of great interest, at least by university administrators, even if the actual advantages are not always immediately clear.

## Some Drawbacks

Although the advantages of operating both at the university and in business may be clear in theory, in practice it is actually rather difficult to put this combination into effect. It is by no means a matter of course that quality is delivered in both areas or even that activities for both customers are profitable or even cost-effective. Also, numerous logistical and organisational problems have to be solved before expertise in both markets is achieved. First of all the product has to be clearly and attractively defined for companies. In Maastricht, a choice was made to take an LSP-approach, with language teaching designed to meet specific needs indicated by the customer. During a short period of time, for instance 20 hours, the customer is taught the linguistic skills needed in everyday work, preferably with the help of materials provided by the customer themselves. To be able to offer a tailor-made course, the institute uses a lengthy enrolment procedure (involving needs analysis and placement tests, and provided free of charge, based on the idea that this attracts customers). Some advantages of this approach are its flexibility and the fact that companies indeed feel that the teaching fulfils a need. A disadvantage to the Language Centre is that each course has to be created separately and that in most cases existing material cannot be used. For this reason these relatively short courses have proved very time-consuming; apart from the extensive enrolment they also require much preparation. These preparations do not ▶

yield a substantial return to the rest of the institute, as the materials used belong to the customer, have to be treated confidentially and sometimes may not even be taken away by the teacher. It is also time-consuming in that this type of course often has to be given on the company premises, and the teachers are constantly on the road. Attempts are made to charge for the extra time, but this is not always possible, as the price must, after all, remain competitive. This results in the costs of extra travel time often being borne by the teachers.

A second drawback is that it can often prove difficult to find sufficient teaching staff for developing such activities. Not every university lecturer is suitable for working in companies as well, and those who do have the right profile appear to have a very large teaching load already or run a business of their own on the side. Timetabling problems become even more complicated because many companies expect the language teacher to be flexible, which results in classes having to be cancelled or rescheduled and given at different times. The composition of the group having the class can also change. All this means that high demands are made upon teachers and their time management. A director has to face the question whether he/she actually wants to withdraw the best lecturers from university teaching to use them for companies and whether they can actually be burdened with the extra stress that comes from working for companies. It is rarely the case that courses for companies solve problems due to overstaffing. On the contrary, one has to maintain a larger pool of teachers with the risk that hours remain that are not worked but do need to be paid for. This risk can become even bigger in the long term, as the turnover of companies depends directly upon the economic climate: during a recession the turnover from language training declines rapidly, and one is confronted with overstaffing, unprofitable investments etc..

A third complication presents itself at the level of the legal, financial and fiscal regimes within the institute. For optimal flexibility on the market a suitable legal form has to be chosen, and this is usually different from the status of a university institute, with all its cumbersome bureaucracy. Worldneth has been given the legal form of a 'Non-profit Foundation': language teaching in itself can be formulated in such a way that it is VAT-free, but for other services, such as translating, consultancies and sometimes also research, a VAT-regime does come into play. Tax dealings for business courses thus have repercussions on the intra-university management as well. Worldneth, for instance, had to deal with VAT on numerous university services (e.g. telephone, rent, computer networks, use of personnel) and the commercial turnover was not sufficient to make up for these extra costs.

When a sharp cost-benefit analysis of commercial operations was made, the conclusion had to be drawn that this work constituted a considerable share of the turnover, but that the courses at companies themselves were hardly profitable due to the high demands they made on time and personnel. Furthermore, they had a cost-increasing effect on teaching within the university itself. To some of our staff members, who had been rushing out to companies year after year, this outcome came as something of a shock. The return on the expansion of our activities in the commercial area was in fact disappointing. Apart from this, the risk of employing extra personnel had to be taken into account, as well as a general business risk, for not all companies appeared to be very good payers and certain agreements had not been laid down in sufficiently strong and secure terms in contracts (e.g. translation risks, another commercial activity that is difficult to make profitable within a university language centre). A consultant's calculation showed that offering language courses for companies would only become profitable once they could make up approximately half of the turnover: only then would the extra investments (which included the necessary advertising and provision of a public relations employee) be recouped.

## Solutions

These things led to a change, of course. Worldneth was forced to adopt another fiscal regime, a regime which is most profitable for the largest share of the turnover, namely the university element of ▶



In-company training at Maastricht

our work. At accounts level we try to get a better picture of the costs and benefits of the university and business shares, at any rate to prevent the public sector from becoming a sponsor to the private, as happens only too often. Activities for companies are taken on as and when they arise, but without us applying a clear policy to try and acquire new business at all cost. This means that the commercial share in the turnover is reduced slightly, but without this having repercussions on the profitability. The use of the digital learning environment for language teaching, that was developed for the university, is one of the attractive aspects of our teaching. Companies need access to this computer support, a service for which, naturally, they pay fees. In terms of the content of our teaching we aim for a better return on our work than in the past. We sometimes ask permission to use certain materials for students and also try to offer all our teaching staff the chance of being active in both areas of teaching, without turning it into a specialism for a separate team. And we are trying gradually to bring business teaching back to (compact) standard courses, such as training days in 'professional English', in which people from companies take part together with people from the government sector and the university. We prefer to organise these activities at our own centre and not on company premises: thus we make better use of our infrastructure and we familiarise those attending with our computer network as well.

In this way our commercial activities also help to reduce the costs of rent, infrastructure etc. It turns out that people actually like to 'shop' for a day at the university: it makes it easier for them to make time for language lessons than when they stay at work. Incidentally, for a number of large companies we do continue to offer to teach on their premises. Although these courses for employees of multinationals are not always particularly profitable, as explained above, it still is the case that extra students are recruited for the open courses in Dutch via these channels – the family members of the international employees for instance. Whereas we explicitly presented ourselves as a commercial institute in the past, also within the university itself, we have now chosen to present ourselves with emphasis on our university profile. It appears that the customer actually perceives this as an added value. The course members get the same highly qualified lecturers as the students, they like to be in a group of people attending higher education and they derive a certain social satisfaction from it.

We might summarise this development as follows: whereas in the past we did our best to adapt ourselves as a university institute to meet the demands of the market and, as it were, tried to bring the universtiy to the business world, we now prefer to put greater emphasis on opening up the university and inviting a number of other sectors to come in.

**www.worldneth.unimaas.nl**

■

# A Strategic partnership: The Leeds Language Project Leeds Metropolitan University

Graham Webb
Centre for Language Study
LMU

Le Centre de langues de l'Université Métropolitaine de Leeds offre des cours de formation linguistique aux entreprises du Yorkshire depuis plus de quinze ans. Cet article présente certaines des stratégies adoptées, basées sur leur expérience en entreprise, et décrit l'approche unique de plusieurs centres de langues qui ont combiné leurs efforts et leur expertise afin de rehausser l'image de l'apprentissage des langues dans la ville de Leeds.

Das Centre for Language Study an der Leeds Metropolitan University organisiert seit 15 Jahren Sprachkurse, die speziell auf die Bedürfnisse der Kunden zugeschnitten sind. Dieser Artikel umreißt einige der Strategien, die aus unserer langjährigen Erfahrung entstanden sind und beschreibt die einzigartige Art und Weise, mit der eine Reihe von Sprachschulen gemeinsam an der Profilierung von Fremdsprachentraining in Leeds gearbeitet haben.

Sandra Kremer of the University of Surrey has given an excellent account (*Bulletin* 11, pp. 1-4) of how she developed a Business Language Services unit to market and deliver tailored language courses to local companies using the staff and facilities of the university's Language Centre.

Here at Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) our own Centre for Language Study has been in this market for over 15 years, during which time we have won DTI National and Regional 'Languages for Export' Awards and developed an extensive client base. We were also the first language training provider in the public sector to gain ISO9001 quality assured status in 1992. We provide Tailored Language Courses in a wide range of languages on our premises or in-company and support them with comprehensive facilities in our Open Access Centre at our Beckett Park Campus.

Despite the length of time we have been delivering business language training we do not profess to have 'all of the answers', but our qualified success over that period does demonstrate that there is a market that can be successfully exploited by language centres. Furthermore, in the last 18 months we have been involved in a rather unusual enterprise that may be of interest to other language centres. The aims of this article, therefore, are:

- to share some of the strategies we have developed, based on our experiences gained over 15 years, in the hope they may be of use to other universities who currently offer or who are thinking of offering business language courses
- to describe the unique way that local language training providers in Leeds have combined their resources to promote language learning via the Leeds Language Project

In reading Sandra's account of the issues she faced and the solutions she arrived at in developing a product and devising a marketing strategy I was struck initially by how similar they were to our experiences. To some degree, though, this similarity in our products and approach is to be anticipated, as the basic issues surrounding language training for companies must be the same throughout the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

Over the years, we have tried many approaches to generating business, including advertising in a variety of publications, mail-shots to target groups (with or without telephone follow-up), breakfast meetings, seminars etc., but the number of new courses sold from these proactive methods has been very disappointing. As Sandra points out, these activities frequently uncover a business *need* but seldom convert it into actual *demand*.

However, from the detailed records we keep of all enquiries received, proposals issued and courses delivered, we find that our ability to convert these incoming enquiries into courses is exceptional, with a conversion rate of over 60%. When analysing the enquiries themselves it appears almost invariably that the company or individual has for some reason already convinced themselves they need language training and is looking for a flexible solution to fit in with their business commitments. So, our response is not to sell the need for language skills but to show how we can understand what they want and provide it in the most flexible way. Far from being a hard sell approach, we find ourselves in the position of 'consultants', helping clients to determine what their precise language needs are and advising them of the best way to proceed.

We also believe that the 'tone' we adopt with clients is important. As with Sandra's Language Centre at the University of Surrey, we want to portray the quality and professionalism of our service. But, being sensitive to the perception of some people that universities are only for purely academic or high-level study, we want to emphasise our practical, results-oriented approach to business language courses, using our experience, gained from delivering many courses to offer guidance regarding the duration, timing, content and methodology of the training.

This approach is clearly appreciated by corporate clients who need to be reassured that there will be an identifiable return for the investment in language training, and it has served us well in recent years. However, the fact remains that in relation to the number of businesses in West Yorkshire that we know are involved to some degree in international trade, the number of courses we run is still very low. So, we return to the thorny question of how to convince more businesses they need to undertake language training.

As with most language training providers we do not have the resources, financial or otherwise, to mount significant advertising campaigns to stimulate demand in our target markets. The strategy we have adopted, based on our experience outlined above, has been to raise our general profile among local companies through PR activity and low cost publicity, place comprehensive entries in Yellow Pages and provide a rapid and focused response to all enquiries to sell new courses. In order to make a major impact on the profile of language training in the region it would clearly take more resources than we, alone, could supply. Remarkably, the opportunity to do just this has come over the past 18 months from an interesting source – a strategic partnership with our direct competitors.

As part of an ongoing initiative of Leeds City Council to make Leeds a modern, attractive 'European' city, it was recognised that language skills should be part of a strategy to attract tourism and business. The City Council's External Relations Department created a forum to which I and representatives of all local language training providers were invited, in order, initially, to ascertain the level of language training activity and potential within the city.

Although most participants in the early meetings knew each other by sight or reputation, these were nevertheless rather tentative, nervous events as the people around the table represented direct competitors for a fairly small language training market. We were all concerned not to divulge too much about our own products and strategies. However, it soon became clear that what united us strongly was a clear desire and sense of mission to raise the profile and take-up of language training in general in the city. The more we focused on this common ground the more we realised the potential for combining resources and efforts in the 'general cause' to the advantage of all concerned.

The underlying and shared belief was that, rather than continue to compete between us for a relatively small slice of an existing cake, we could and should all work together to expand the cake itself. In this way it was felt that everyone would benefit; the training providers would get more business, local companies would get the training they need to become more effective internationally; and the city would become more prosperous as a result.

These may seem high ideals but, in essence, they represent the mission of the Leeds Language Project (LLP), formed as a result of the vision and determination of Leeds City Council and the main language training providers in the city: Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Leeds, Trinity and All Saints College, Park Lane College, Instituto Cervantes, the Goethe Institut and the Alliance Française, together with support and financial backing from the Leeds Training and Enterprise Council.

The broad aims of the LLP support those of the wider 'Vision for Leeds' as part of the city's Economic Development Strategy:

- to improve foreign language skills throughout the city to enable Leeds to compete in a global economy through world class standards and a well-informed population
- to make the most of the people of Leeds, providing education and training to world class standards, so that all citizens are equipped with the relevant skills to contribute to a competitive economy
- to improve the quality of welcome to the international visitor, creating openness to foreign languages and sensitivity to other cultures

Working within these stated aims the key objectives of the Leeds Language Project are:

- to encourage language training within Leeds businesses with a view to increasing Leeds's international trade and co-operation
- to improve the language skills of front-line staff working in key organisations with a high degree of exposure to international visitors
- to promote foreign language learning to the post-16 age group

As can be seen, the project does not focus wholly on languages for business because it was felt that language skills should be promoted in those areas where they could have most impact over both the short and longer terms.

During its first full year of existence the Project's priority was to increase business language training among front line staff (hotel receptions, staff in shops, tourism outlets and transport facilities who might come into contact with foreign tourists or business people) and among businesses involved in importing or exporting. The funds invested in the Project by the participants paid for the professional design of a logo and the production of leaflets which were then distributed to over 600 bodies and companies from a range of databases obtained. A launch event was held with Leeds City Council providing a 'neutral' venue where all providers had display stands. Key speakers highlighted the value of language training in their areas and to the cultural and economic development of the city as a whole.

At all times it was made clear that the Project was there to raise the profile of language training and provide a clear path to the existing providers. The Project itself has no staff and provides no courses. The publicity material concentrates on selling the benefits of language skills and provides a single phone number for further

information. Phone enquiries are routed to the Leeds Careers Guidance Service where details are taken. Each enquirer then receives a pack of information containing general advice on language learning and details of all of the different courses and facilities offered by local providers. It is then up to the enquirer to choose which provider(s) they contact for a proposal. In this way, the Project seeks to raise interest and facilitate initial enquiries without affecting the 'competitive' nature of the institutions involved.

In the information pack sent to enquirers are details of how to ascertain what language skills are already held within an individual company. To encourage firms to undertake a basic internal language audit we produced a set of self-test criteria which staff could apply to themselves to determine their personal language skills. Anyone meeting all the key criteria would be presented with a Leeds Language Project badge, depicting the national flag of the country whose language they spoke.

In order to gauge the success of the Project, specific targets were set in relation to the volume of enquiries generated, the number of Project badges issued and the overall increase in business language courses delivered by the Project members. At the end of the first year all of our targets had been met so we resolved to continue for a second year.

Among the Project's key successes were gaining language training commitments from the Leeds Bradford International Airport and from Gateway Yorkshire, both of which deal with high volumes of overseas visitors and see language skills as a fundamental part of delivering high quality customer care. The attraction of high profile companies to the scheme allows further PR exposure to be gained for the Project and for language training.

In its second year the LLP's focus is on encouraging language take-up in schools beyond the compulsory stage. Our strategies for this include running a competition among schools to highlight and reward particularly innovative and effective language teaching. The marketing to businesses will continue and we are now specifically targeting business intermediaries (Chambers of Commerce, Business Links etc) who, we believe, will encourage their contacts to consider language training.

Although all participants in the LLP take a thoroughly professional and commercial approach to their activities, it has become clear that they also share a strong personal commitment to the promotion of language training at all levels. The value of the LLP is in being able to reach a wider audience by combining resources, enabling us to transmit throughout the city our enthusiasm for and belief in the social and economic values of language skills. Certainly for the Centre for Language Study the LLP has proved a valuable forum in which to share ideas with others involved in the same activity, as well as stimulating additional enquiries which we have converted into new courses.

I hope other language centres might be encouraged by our positive experiences to persevere in the development of their business language services and to consider ever more resourceful and innovative ways of encouraging language training in their region.

**g.webb@lmu.ac.uk**

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| DTI | Department of Trade and Industry (UK Government) |
| LMU | Leeds Metropolitan University |
| LLP | Leeds Language Project |
| CLS | Centre for Language Study |
| BLS | Business Language Services |

# New Action under LINGUA: New role for language resource centres?

Wolfgang Streubel
Universität Bremen

Local or regional language resource centres could play a vital part in a new LINGUA action, as a meeting of experts on access to language learning resources, at the offices of the Directorate General for Education and Culture in Brussels, found out in March.

More and more citizens will have to undertake language learning throughout their lifetimes. Therefore, apart from the continuation of the former action D, some totally new actions will be launched under Lingua for:

1. raising of citizens' awareness about the advantages of language learning, and motivating the citizen to undertake language learning (including learning how to learn languages); providing him/her with information on the methods and opportunities available (via, for example, information campaigns, competitions, actions in collaboration with cultural institutes or associations of language schools, TV, radio and Internet language courses).
2. widening the citizen's access to language learning (e.g. by making existing language learning resources more accessible to the general public, such as those in university centres, libraries, schools, local or regional language resource centres)
3. dissemination and exchange of information amongst political and administrative decision-takers concerning innovative approaches and key themes in the field of language learning; (example: innovations in language learning techniques, policies, methodologies; didactics, research) with the aim of making easier the introduction of innovations into formal and informal education systems in order to increase the supply of opportunities for citizens wishing to learn foreign languages.

Local or regional language resource centres, as mentioned in paragraph 2, could play a vital part in this action. Types of activity will also include the networking of language resource centres – for a variety of purposes related to the facilitation of access by individuals to language learning. Stress was laid on the aspect of widening access to language learning to a wider public and thus going beyond traditional high school/university students.

First applications will be possible in November 2000.

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## Book reviews

Books, conference papers or reports in any area of language education of concern to institutions of higher education may be submitted for review. Items for review may be written in any of the main languages of national associations affiliated to CercleS. Reviews will appear in either English, French or German.

# News from national associations

## RANACLES



**Compte-rendu du 7ème congrès RANACLES (Rassemblement National des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur)**

**INSA de LYON**
**18-20 Novembre 1999**

Malgré une météo plutôt défavorable et une grève des transports urbains lyonnais, le congrès organisé cette année par **Jérôme Richalot** et l'équipe des linguistes de l'INSA de Lyon fut l'occasion d'échanges fructueux et de rencontres intéressantes.

Le thème du congrès 'Technicité et humanités', a été décliné en 3 conférences plénières, 16 communications en ateliers et une table ronde. **André Béraud**, Directeur de la maison du Livre, de l'Image et du Son de Villeurbanne et ancien directeur du Centre des Humanités de l'INSA de Lyon, dans une conférence intitulée : 'Dire et Faire, humanités et technicité', a fait un bref historique du concept d'humanisme en soulignant notamment qu'il s'était développé en dehors des universités. Aujourd'hui l'étude des langues est ce qui reste de l'héritage humaniste. Quand on apprend une langue, on structure sa pensée, on apprend une culture, une histoire. Il a ensuite rappelé les convergences entre l'héritage humaniste et les techniques, en plaçant la perspective dans le contexte des écoles d'ingénieurs.

La conférence de **T. Lancien**, de l'Université Paris 8, 'NTIC : entre mythe et réalité. Quelle place pour l'usager' rappela l'existence de ce que P. Breton, dans un ouvrage intitulé *L'utopie de la communication*, appelle des 'postulats menteurs', à savoir la croyance par exemple que chaque nouvelle technologie est supérieure aux autres et PLUS efface QUE les autres. Selon T. Lancien au contraire, l'heure est plutôt maintenant à l'appropriation et à l'individualisation des pratiques de communication. Mais il nous met en garde contre le risque de non-socialisation dû aux nouvelles technologies. Selon lui, les NTE utilisées dans l'apprentissage aggravent les inégalités sociales.

**Jacques Perriault**, Professeur en sciences de l'information et de la communication à l'Université Paris X (Nanterre), établit ensuite un panorama plutôt sombre des mutations provoquées par les industries du savoir au niveau des universités, et des challenges posés aux acteurs de l'enseignement par Internet, le développement des cours en lignes et la multiplication des ressources éducatives électroniques diverses. Il argumenta sur la nécessité pour les universités de s'associer aux laboratoires privés et aux entreprises, de se 'mettre en boucle', afin de diffuser plus largement leurs savoirs. En outre, il mit l'accent sur l'importance de groupements thématiques d'universités, ou d'organisations du type RANACLES, pour proposer des produits et prendre des parts de marché.

Les communications en ateliers, 2 ou 3 en parallèle à chaque fois, ce qui malheureusement obligea les participants à faire des choix, furent très intéressantes et donnèrent l'occasion de découvrir de nouveaux produits et/ou moyens d'utiliser des produits existants, ainsi que des expériences pédagogiques originales utilisant les NTIC. Les résumés qui suivent sont un reflet des ateliers auxquels nous avons assisté.

Le projet présenté par les équipes des INSA de Lyon, Rennes et Toulouse, 'Détournement de PowerPoint pour la création de briques interactives d'anglais à caractère professionnel' nous permit ainsi de constater qu'un outil informatique grand public relativement simple pouvait être utilisé comme environnement auteur et donner lieu à des créations pédagogiques attrayantes pour les apprenants.

**Jean-Jacques Hochart** de l'Université de Reims, dans un atelier intitulé 'Mise en multimédia de cours existants' nous a ensuite montré comment, grâce au système auteur Toolbook, on pouvait utiliser les possibilités des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication pour aider les enseignants à exploiter le multimédia dans le contexte de leurs propres cours.

Lors d'une communication intitulée 'Anglais de gestion en multimédia à distance', **C. Vaillant** de l'Université de Toulouse 3 nous fit part d'une expérience de DUT multimédia à distance, opérationnel depuis 1991 et qui se fait en 3 ans. Dans le cadre de ce DUT, l'anglais représente une UV, divisée en trois modules. Chaque module représente 11 semaines de travail (les étudiants étant regroupés 5 fois à intervalle de 15 jours, et travaillant à distance le reste du temps). Le programme pédagogique proposé comprend des outils divers tels que didacticiels fermés, vidéodisques, didacticiels ouverts, cours de

## CercleS Membership

To join CercleS contact either your national association or

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CercleS Full Members are listed on page 9.

## What can be obtained from the Secretariat

- Membership list (centres and people - Members only)
- Confederation publicity leaflets
- *Actes* for Bordeaux conference (on disc or down loadable)
- Constitution (at the moment in English only)
- Minutes of latest executive meetings
- *Proceedings* of Dresden conference (£12.00)
- *Proceedings* of Hull conference (£15.00)
- *Proceedings* of Bergamo conference (£12.00)

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# News from national associations

## RANACLES (Continued)

révision grammaticale glanés sur Internet ... Tous ces outils sont répertoriés sur le site du Département (http: //www. geapx.iut-tlse3.fr). L'expérience est globalement positive, avec un bémol cependant, pour le moment : du fait des vitesses de connexion insuffisantes, les étudiants ne peuvent pas réellement travailler chez eux, ils doivent le faire depuis des centres de ressources situés près de chez eux (médiathèques municipales ...).

Jean Sabiron, de la Maison des Langues de Poitiers, nous vanta dans un atelier consacré au 'format MPEG3, diffusion et téléchargement' les qualités de ce format qualité CD, stockage de son de 45 mn, volume initial réduit jusqu'à 1/12 de sa taille...), combiné à l'utilisation d'un outil récent – le baladeur Internet – outil très simple, relativement peu onéreux (de l'ordre de 500 à 1000 frs), et permettant divers types d'utilisation (écoute individuelle, écoute à 2, diffusion collective). Cet appareil, offrant la possibilité de bénéficier de la qualité sonore du MPEG3, offre des potentialités didactiques multiples.

Le Pr. M. Perrin, Président de RANACLES, nous présenta ensuite un système auteur d'utilisation simple développé sur Macintosh par l'équipe du CRIFEL Acquitain. Ce système, appelé Sigm@X permet à partir de documents vidéos de créer automatiquement des exercices. Des aides sonores, visuelles ou textuelles peuvent être apportées aux étudiants. Grâce à sa simplicité l'outil permet une créativité pédagogique pleine et entière (cet outil est consultable et téléchargeable sur le site du DLVP).

Alain Ginet, de l'Université Stendhal à Grenoble, nous fit part du 'Potentiel pédagogique du DVD' en indiquant la fin programmée des magnétoscopes et des lecteurs de CD Roms. La plupart des ordinateurs étant maintenant équipés de lecteurs de DVD Roms, les potentialités de l'outil (un DVD contient 7 à 30 fois la capacité de stockage d'un CD Rom) devraient pouvoir être exploitées avec profit dans le cadre d'enseignements de langues. Un inconvénient actuel est à souligner cependant : l'absence d'uniformité dans les standards.

La table ronde, animée par N. Bucher-Poteaux, (ULP, Strasbourg), P. Fade Université Nancy 2), J. Sabiron (Maison des Langues, Poitiers) et J. Walski (Université Bordeaux 2) sur les 'Carnets de bord, fiches de suivi et prise en compte de l'étudiant' fut l'occasion de rappeler la nécessité de rendre tout apprenant conscient de son apprentissage et permit aux participants d'échanger des points de vue sur les pratiques en cours dans leurs Centres de Langues respectifs : feuilles de route, carnet de bord, contrat, ou portefeuille de compétences du conseil de l'Europe (lire à ce sujet l'article de B. Lazenby Simpson dans le *Bulletin* 11 de CercleS, p. 17).

Trois principaux axes de réflexion sont définis lors de la réunion plénière de synthèse:

- La mutualisation des ressources existantes : cette question préoccupe l'ensemble des membres de RANACLES. La mutualisation ne doit pas s'entendre en terme de 'concurrence' entre les universités mais en terme de 'complémentarité'. Certains Centres de Langues disposent d'une base de données dans un domaine précis et l'idée avancée est que le site de RANACLES héberge les liens qui vont vers les autres sites.
- DESS de formation de formateurs en langues : la réflexion sur l'élaboration de la maquette d'un tel DESS est lancée. Il semble nécessaire d'apporter aux Capésiens des connaissances dans le domaine lansad, le multimedia ... La possibilité de fédérer plusieurs établissements pour créer ce diplôme est envisagée.
- Profil des nouveaux 'métiers' à définir: il est très difficile actuellement d'obtenir des postes non-enseignants pour les Centres de Langues. Il est nécessaire de définir des profils nouveaux de postes (ex : technicien intégrateur de ressources, technicien multimedia pour les langues) et de faire de nouvelles propositions au Ministère.

La date et le lieu du prochain congrès furent fixés lors de l'assemblée générale. RANACLES, 8ème congrès aura donc lieu les 30 novembre – 2 décembre 2000 à la Maison des Langues St Jean d'Angely à Nice.

A. Chateau (CRELENS-UHP)
P. Fade (SCELV-Nancy 2 – **fade@clsh.univ-nancy2.fr**) ■



## AICLU

In recent months the activity of a group of members of AICLU, the national association of Italian University Language Centres established in 1997, has centred on a plan for the creation of a system of certification of linguistic competence for Italian university students. The group has already met three times for workshops at the Language Centres of the Universities of Verona and Padua. At this stage the framework of the project, named CERCLU (Certificate of the University Language Centres), has been outlined and it will be discussed at the next general assembly in Bologna. The CERCLU Project proposes to combine the different systems of certification used by Italian language centres and to adopt a new kind of certificate with national and international acknowledgement. (See also under CercleS Minutes, p. 8, item 9b.)

The general assembly in Bologna will also discuss the application for admission to AICLU of three new university Language Centres: CIRDiL (Centre for Linguistic Research and Language Teaching, University of Teramo), CLBA (Centre for Linguistic and Library Services, of the Free University S.Pio V in Rome), and IUSM (Istituto Universitario di Scienze Motorie, in Rome).

On 2 September 1999, at the University of Rome 3, the second AICLU workshop took place. 'Language testing at the universities' was the general subject, and in his introductory address the President of AICLU, **Maurizio Gotti**, stressed the importance of a good testing system for a good teaching program and urged members to consolidate the testing criteria of their Language Centres. **Gino Schiavinato** (University of Venice) discussed the features of a multimedia software application for adaptive testing designed for both training and testing in reading/listening comprehension skills. **Anthony Jennings** (University of Rome 3) demonstrated how a subjective evaluation of writing and speaking tests may sometimes be more effective than an objective one based on a cloze procedure.

**Cesare Zanca** (University of Siena) discussed the results of experimentation on the use of the Cambridge Preliminary Test for testing English at Threshold level. The employment of the Cambridge PET has highlighted the low linguistic competence of most students and the need for a very high number of hours of study and linguistic immersion. On the one hand, at the European level, there is a tendency to standardise the assessment procedures but, on the other hand, Italian language centres demand a diversification in accordance with the different requirements of each discipline. **Doris Conrad** of CILTA, the Centre for Theoretical and Applied Linguistics of the University of Bologna, discussed the reasons for adopting the C-Test for diagnostic testing exercises.

The validity of the use of video materials for assessment and self-assessment tests was examined by **Giuliana Ladomery** (University of Rome 3). ▶

# News from national associations

## AICLU (Continued)

She also listed some criteria for the selection of authentic materials able to express the complexity of real communication and to monitor both listening and viewing comprehension. **Polly Walsh** (University of Florence) analysed the interactions in standardised tests for speaking assessment. The speaker pointed out that even standardised, well-structured tests accepted world-wide like the Cambridge First Certificate, PET and the American OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview), are unable to monitor the real communicative abilities of the student.

The workshop ended with two talks about the typology of the qualifying test worked out by the language centre of the University of Rome 3. In the first part of the talk **Peter Douglas** discussed the selection criteria for the choice of reading comprehension texts. In the second **Charles Lambert** examined problems relating to test administration.

The 3rd AICLU Workshop (*Linguistica e informatica: multimedialità, corpora e percorsi di apprendimento*) will take place in Bologna on 7-8 April 2000 (see below under Forthcoming Events, p. 20). For this workshop thirty-seven papers are planned; the speakers come from ten Italian universities and three foreign universities. Professors J. Goldman and F. Lys, of the University of Chicago, will be connected by video-conference. The papers deal with a wide range of subjects: multimedia approaches and new technologies in language learning/teaching, current issues in corpus linguistics, internet and self language-learning, artificial intelligence and language learning, multimedia approaches to language testing, computer conferencing software, the problem of copyright in language centres.

The 4th AICLU Workshop (*L'apprendimento autonomo delle lingue straniere. Filosofia e attuazione nell'università italiana*), to be held on 29-30 September 2000 (information from CLA-Language Centre of the University of Calabria, e-mail: c.argondizzo@unical.it) will have papers covering three different areas of independent learning of foreign languages in Italian universities: theoretical bases, changing roles for people and structures, and educational aspects.

The theme of the AICLU Conference at the University of Trieste will be *The future of university language programmes: business and culture training, testing and the new technologies* (9-10 June 2000, e-mail: cla@univ.trieste.it).

**gagliard@chiostro.univr.it** ■



## Association of University Language Centres in the UK and Ireland

Since its inaugural meeting in Bristol in April 1999, AULC has been active in organising two full meetings in Scotland and Ireland.

In December 1999 the venue was the University of Edinburgh under the theme 'Open and Distance Learning'. The guest speaker was **Dr Robin Mason**, Head of the Centre for Information Technology and Education at the Open University. Dr Mason's presentation gave particular emphasis to the use and effectiveness of computer conferencing and other means of on-line communication to create virtual learning environments. Separate meetings of the special interest groups took place and proposals were put forward to disseminate the results of the SMILE project through AULC. Following on from the Edinburgh Conference, a special meeting of the Technical and Resources SIG was organised at the University of Coventry in February 2000 to demonstrate the Digital 'DAVID Virtual Recorder' and 'Speaker' software.

A meeting has been organised for April 2000 at University College Dublin in preparation for the CercleS Antwerp Conference. The theme will be 'Tailoring Resources to Quality'. The keynote speaker will be the President of CercleS, **Professor David Little**. Guest speakers will include **Maureen Fleming**, Chair of the BALEAP Quality Assurance Accreditation Scheme for Courses in English for Academic Purposes in Higher Education.

For information on all AULC activities, you are welcome to visit our website at:
www.aulc.org

**ray.satchell@bristol.ac.uk** ■

## Conference Proceedings

Copies of the **Bergamo Proceedings** may now be purchased price £12.00 pounds sterling

Complete sets of all three Conference Proceedings (**Hull** (1994) ed. Aub-Buscher, **Dresden** (1996) ed. Little & Voss, **Bergamo** (1998), ed. Bickerton & Gotti) are available priced £30

Please send a cheque made payable to the UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH, signed, with name and address printed on the back, and drawable on a UK bank, or make a bank transfer to:

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# Election of New CercleS Executive

The procedure for electing members of the Executive (who will serve for a period of two years from 16 September 2000) is laid down in Standing Orders. All who belong to an institution with paid up membership of CercleS for 1999-2000 are eligible to stand for any office. Those holding Associate Membership must be supported in their nomination by a Full Member.

Officers may serve two mandates consecutively. As a consequence all members of the current Executive may be re-elected except for David Little (President) and David Bickerton (Secretary General). The Executive is elected by the Co-ordinating Committee, and the office of President is confirmed by the General Meeting.

The timetable for the election in September 2000 is as follows:

- nominations to reach the Secretariat with the support of a Full Member by 16 June
- vetting for eligibility by the Executive on 23 June
- circulation of nominees' details to the membership to allow discussion at national level (June-September)
- election of a new Executive by the Co-ordinating Committee in Antwerp, 14 September
- confirmation of the office of President by the General Meeting on 16 September

There are no official nomination forms. Anyone seeking nomination must simply submit a short declaration of their intentions and qualifications for office, and indicate the institutional support they will receive, through the Chair of a Full Member for consideration by the association. This must be done in time for those applications supported by Full Members to have been discussed nationally, processed and forwarded to the CercleS Secretariat by 16 June. Voting at the Co-ordinating Committee is by secret ballot. Members may vote for themselves, and proxy voting between representatives of Full Members is permitted, if formally notified.

The offices of President, Secretary General and Treasurer involve a significant range of duties and activities and are felt to be incompatible with holding similar office in a national association.

This is the first time CercleS has conducted Elections on this basis. The Confederation's intention is to ensure complete transparency in its procedures and to offer opportunities as widely as possible for responsibility in CercleS. I will be pleased to advise, and consult with the present Executive, on any issues which may arise during this election process.

David Bickerton
Secretary General
cercles@plymouth.ac.uk

**Membership of the Co-ordinating Committee and Voting Rights (as at April 2000)**
**Names of Chairs are listed on page 9**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| President | – | 1 vote |
| Secretary General | – | 1 |
| Treasurer | – | 1 |
| AICLU | Italy | 2 |
| AKS | Germany | 1 |
| APOCLES | Portugal | 1 |
| AULC | UK and Ireland | 2 |
| GI-EHLE | Switzerland | 1 |
| LINGAL | Poland | 1 |
| NUT | Dutch-speaking Belgium and the Netherlands | 1 |
| RANACLES | France | 3 |
| Total | | 15 votes |

# Forthcoming events 2000

7 APRIL - 8 APRIL 2000 3rd AICLU Seminar: *Information technology applications in linguistics: multimedia, corpora and individualised language learning*, Bologna, Italy. Information: Organisng Committee, Interfaculty Centre for Theoretical and Applied Linguistics at the University of Bologna (CILTA), Piazza San Giovanni in Monte, 4, 40124 Bologna, Italy. Email: ciltambx@cilta.unibo.it, URL: http://www.cilta.unibo.it/Aiclu.html

5 MAY - 6 MAY 2000 1st CERLIS Conference, *Modality in Specialised Texts*, Università degli Studi di Bergamo. Information: Dipartimento di Linguistica e Letterature Comparate, via Salveccio, 19 - 24129 Bergamo. Tel: +39 035 277421, Fax: +39 035 235136, email: cerclis@unibg.it, URL: http://www.unibg.it/cerclis/home/htm

30 MAY - 3 JUNE 2000 CALICO 2000, Tucson, USA
Information: CALICO, 214 Centennial Hall, Southwest, Texas State University, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 786666 USA. Tel: +1 (512) 245-1417, Fax: +1 (512) 245-9089.

30 JUNE - 2 JULY 2000 Language World, Derby, UK. Information: Educational Exhibitions, 14 Gainsborough Gardens, London N12 8AG. Tel: +44 (0) 181 445 1757, Fax: +44 (0) 181 446 8214

3 JULY - 5 JULY 2000 *Teaching Languages in Higher Education in the 21st Century*, Nottingham, UK. Information: Alison Cutler, Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, 20 Bedfordbury, London WC2 4LB, Tel: +44 (0) 171 379 5101 240, Email: alison.cutler@cilt.org.uk, URL: http://www.cilt.org.uk

20 - 22 JULY 2000 TaLC 2000, Graz, Austria. Information: Prof. Mag. Dr Bernhard Ketteman, Institut für Anglistik der Universität Graz, A - 8010 Graz, Heinrichstrasse 36, Austria. Tel: + 43 316 380 2488, 2487, 2474, Fax: +43 316 380 9765. Email: talc2000@gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at, URL: http://www gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/talc2000

29 JULY - 1 AUGUST 2000, 4th International Conference on Foreign Language Education and Technology (FLEAT IV), Kobe, Japan. Information: Prof. Jun Arimoto, Kansai University of International Studies, 1-18 Sijimi-cho Aoyama, Miki, Hyogo, 673-0521 JAPAN. Tel: +81 0794-84-3572, Fax: +81 0794-85-1102, Email: fleatQ&A@kuins.ac.jp

30 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 2000 *Innovations in Higher Education 2000*, Helsinki, Finland. Information: Sari Lindblom - Vlanne, Conference Manager, Ph.D. / Bettina Lindfors, Conference Officer, M.A. Innovations in Higher Education 2000, Development of studies, P.O. Box 3, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland. Tel: +358 9 191 22963, Fax: +358 9 191 22192, Email: inno2000@helsinki.fi, URL: www.helsinki.fi/inno2000.

31 AUGUST - 2 SEPTEMBER 2000 *EUROCALL 2000*, Dundee. Information: EUROCALL, CTI Centre for Modern Languages, University of Hull, Hull HU6 7RX, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1482 465872, Fax: +44 (0)1482 473816, Email: EUROCALL@Hull.ac.uk

14 SEPTEMBER - 16 SEPTEMBER 2000 6th CercleS International Conference: *Quality Issues for European Language Centres* (t'Qila) UFSIA University, Antwerp. Information: Valère Meus, Talencentrum RUG, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 136, B-9000 GENT, Belgium. Tel: +32 9 264 36 93, email: talencentrum@rug.ac.be, URL: http://www.taalnet.rug.ac.be/tqila

30 NOVEMBER -2 DECEMBER 2000 RANACLES Annual Conference, Centre de Langues, Université de Nice. Information: DVLP, Université Victor-Segalen Bordeaux 2, 3, place de la Victoire, F-33076 BORDEAUX Cedex. Tel: +33 (0)5 57 57 18 03, Fax: +33 (0)5 56 31 86 17, Email: michel.perrin@lv.u-bordeaux2.fr, URL: http://www.langues-vivantes.u-bordeaux2.fr

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CercleS *Bulletin* Issue 12
April 2000
ISBN 1-84102-065-6

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Editor: David Bickerton
Translation: Sandra Marchl & Sylvie Roberts
Printing: E J Rickard Ltd
Price: £5.00