

Johann Fischer (2008–2012)

Expanding the network, increasing visibility

CercleS is about networking, exchange and collaboration among university language centres in Europe with the aim of increasing the quality of our work. The responsibilities, structure and working conditions of language centres vary from one country to another, or even from one university to another. This “unity in diversity” allows us to learn from each other, and together we are stronger.

When taking over the Presidency from our previous President, Carol Taylor, in 2008, the focus of our work was on continuing the initiatives launched by the previous Executive, i.e. a) on expanding the network and b) on increasing the visibility of CercleS by organising more workshops and seminars, as the “Executive wished to involve its members more in how CercleS should work”¹ and to make “CercleS’ voice heard in Europe”².

As far as membership is concerned, the integration of ReCles, the then newly founded Portuguese association, as a full member in 2010 was a major step in enlarging our confederation. Furthermore, the closer contact with partner associations such as the ELC/CEL and LICOM and the establishment of the “Professional Network Forum”, also in 2010, initiated by the ECML, led to more networking. Due to increased cooperation and networking, our confederation

also started to get more strongly involved in EU and ECML projects, such as PICTURE, [EXPLICS](#), [LETTP](#), [GULT](#), [LUCIDE](#) or Lingu@net World Wide.

In order to increase the visibility of CercleS, the Executive started organising more seminars and workshops, which then filled the gap in the years between the biennial CercleS conferences. We continued the CercleS seminar series on the ELP and the CEFR, initiated in 2007 with a first seminar taking place in Dublin, and organised three more seminars on this topic in Padua (September 2009), Groningen (November 2011) and Braga (April 2012).



2009 was an extremely intensive year for CercleS as it saw the launch of three new CercleS initiatives:

- In January 2009 the first meeting of directors of university language centres took place in Frankfurt (Oder) and Wulkow, which has since become the famous annual Wulkow meeting; these meetings have led to the publication of several Wulkow memoranda

and new projects.

- In October 2009 we also started the Göttingen workshops on the task-based approach to testing and teaching, which aim at disseminating and implementing the task-based approach at university language centres in Europe.
- In November 2009 a first meeting to launch the CercleS Focus Group initiative took place in Toulouse, which has since become a regular CercleS activity; since the launch of this initiative, some of the CercleS focus groups have been more active at certain times, some meet at more or less regular intervals, some have closed their activities and others have been newly set up.

These workshops and seminars as well as the work of our focus groups have allowed CercleS members to take a more active role in the activities of CercleS, bringing in their individual knowledge, skills and competences to shape the future of our confederation.

A major milestone in the history of CercleS was the launch of its new academic journal *Language Learning in Higher Education* with Mouton DeGruyter, with its first edition being published in 2012. This project, initiated by my predecessor Carol Taylor, has since become a real success story of CercleS and has increased the reputation of our confederation.

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Apart from the activities mentioned above, the focus of the Presidency was on quality assurance in language teaching, learning, testing and assessment, as well as certification and on professional development activities. Starting from the CercleS focus group on "Language Testing and Assessment", first steps were made towards the development and integration of more language certification systems of the individual national associations and their mutual recognition across our network, which have finally led to the creation of NULTE, the "Network of University Language Testers in Europe", in 2018, i.e. six years after the end of my term of office as President of CercleS.

Recently, due do the COVID-19 pandemic, communication and interac-

tion within our CercleS network have moved to virtual meetings. As a consequence, distance has become less relevant, borders only exist for travelling but no longer for meetings. The new situation has in fact led to an increase in interaction and exchange not only at national but also at European and international level. We should therefore take advantage of the momentum, keep the positive outcomes of the "new normal" and strengthen our ties even more closely. CercleS is all about networking, exchange, communication, interaction, cooperation and collaboration, which helps us to overcome new challenges and to improve the quality of our work.

Over the past 30 years, CercleS has had a positive impact on the quality of our work at university language centres across the continent and has

boosted professional development. The cooperation has not only had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and assessing language skills at university, but also on the quality of curriculum development and of language centre management. Learning from the achievements and challenges of our colleagues in other parts of Europe has helped us to better understand current trends and better manage challenges we have to face. CercleS has become more active than ever, our network has become tighter and has strengthened the role of university language centres.

Johann Fischer

1. See minutes of General Meeting on 03 September 2010 in Helsinki.
2. See minutes of General Meeting on 19 September 2008 in Seville.



From the LETPP Conference in April 2010 (where CercleS was a partner), the graphic minutes of the conference.