



Nuffield Languages Programme

Policy development projects

With the aim of starting to bridge the gap between vision and policy, the following were identified as key to implementing the Inquiry's recommendations.

A Learning Ladder for Languages

October 2001-July 2002

The Nuffield Inquiry argued for the development of "a unified national standards framework for languages, based on the Council of Europe model...which would introduce coherence and transparency into the system" (**Languages: the next generation**, p28). This national framework "should be couched in terms which are intelligible to non-specialist users, and should in particular be flexible enough to recognise partial competences and the small steps of achievement at beginner level" [idem, p77].

In October 2001 a study was commissioned into the feasibility of developing such a national framework to recognise and define language competence, which would:

- allow people with, or wishing to acquire, language skills to obtain recognition of their achievement without unnecessary complication;
- offer a step-by step approach to language learning;
- provide benchmarks and points of comparison for learners, employers and providers.

The working title chosen for the framework was 'Learning Ladder for Languages' (LLL).

Following an audit of existing language qualifications, the feasibility study began its work in December 2001, under the guidance of an expert steering group* representing a range of sectors and relevant national bodies.

It pursued the following objectives:

- review previous UK and European experience in this field, in order to assess the continuing validity of the graded objectives idea;
- map the extent to which the need for 'step by step' recognition in the UK, particularly at the beginner and intermediate levels of competence, is met by existing schemes;
- assess the extent to which a graded objectives scheme could/should relate formally to existing qualifications structures, or should be free-standing and distinctively different;
- assess likely levels of support from key organisations in the field of assessment and accreditation, from teachers, and from potential sponsors outside education;
- propose a model or alternative models if such a scheme is judged to be desirable and feasible.

The final report of the study is available for download from www.nuffieldfoundation.org.

*The members of the Steering Group were

Peter Boaks

Hilary Footitt

Alwena Lamping

Anne Looney

Chris Maynard

Alan Moys (Chairman)

Brian Page

Pauline Swanton

Joint venture with BBC Education – e-language learning for adults

May 2002-March 2003

The Nuffield Languages Programme and BBC Education have joined forces for a project to develop the e-learning dimension of adult language learning.

With the aim of adding to the range of opportunities for adults to learn languages, they are developing a prototype course for Spanish beginners, combining the flexibility of online learning with opportunities for interaction and support. Based on BBCi's online course *Spanish Steps*, the course is to be piloted in the autumn term with four provider-partners: the Brasshouse Centre, Cheshire Adult Education Service, Mid-Essex Adult Community College and the BBC's Learning Centre in Stoke.

The aim is to add to the opportunities open to adults to learn a new language - not to try and replace class-based learning, since there is evidence that many of those who attend language classes do so precisely because attempts to learn independently have proved unsuccessful. Although it is rather early to evaluate this dimension in relation to online learning, the reasons given by many for abandoning traditional forms of independent language learning relate to the isolation of the learning experience and the wish/need to confer with a tutor, to communicate with other learners on an occasional basis, to practise their speaking skills on a real person and (possibly) to have their achievement formally recognised.

What this project is about, therefore, is responding to these wishes and needs, and adding flexibility to the opportunities available for adults, whose language learning generally has to be accommodated alongside work, family and social commitments.

Piloting the prototype will inform the development of a more generic learning model. The effectiveness of the pilot will be closely monitored and we will be looking at its perceived flexibility, the impact on learner motivation and the role of tutor support. To enable comparison with existing delivery models, the BBC is recruiting a group of autonomous learners signed up to Spanish Steps and will gather detailed feedback from them.

Progress will be widely reported in 2003.

A New Landscape for Languages - the challenges for languages providers

September 2002-January 2003

Languages in higher education are going through a sea change. The long term trends identified in the Nuffield Report two years ago have accelerated, with students deserting

language degrees and entire departments closing, while students flock into language classes accompanying degrees in other disciplines, and into voluntary language study outside their degree programme.

The same pattern is being observed in other countries, and the UK increasingly finds itself in a European and global education market.

As a new landscape for languages emerges from the changes, it is timely to explore its contours and implications. How will higher education reshape its approach to languages? What impact will the changes have on other sectors, especially the later years of secondary school? What can the students of the future expect and what opportunities will be available to them? Will the same market shifts affect schools in the shorter or longer term?

Professor Michael Kelly set out to identify the questions and challenges, and to open up the fresh thinking needed to tackle them. He led a project, designed to focus and inform thinking about the issues involved, and to prepare longer term strategic responses.

The project included:

- research on the detail of changes in higher education languages in the UK over the past five years, including trends in staff and student numbers, programmes and modules offered, modes of delivery, and organisational restructuring;
- research on comparable changes in a selected number of other countries, especially USA, Australia, France, Germany, Spain and Italy;
- research on changes in take up and delivery of languages in secondary schools, post-16, over the same period;
- a literature search on recent academic and policy oriented discussions of the changes.

Professor Kelly and Dr Diana Jones prepared a discussion paper, setting out the results of the above research and identifying implications for higher education and schools. This was presented in November 2002 to an expert seminar of invited specialists concerned with policy for languages in higher education and schools.

A report, entitled *A New Landscape for Languages* was then published, taking into account the discussions of the seminar.

The role of languages in enhancing employability

June 2001-January 2002

Professor Tim Connell of City University was commissioned to write a paper on the link between languages and employability.

The paper is structured around the following key questions:

- What is the evidence that knowledge of languages other than English enhances employability and what are the current trends?
- What are the key obstacles that stand in the way of those who want to acquire language skills to enhance their employment prospects, and employers who want to employ people with these skills?

The paper, which includes reference to the considerable volume of relevant information amassed by Professor Connell during the course of the work, was completed in January 2002 and is published at www.cilt.org.uk.

A language policy for a multilingual society

June-November 2001

This initiative brought together experts in the field of language policy – from the UK and abroad – for a programme of informal and formal discussion between June and November 2001. This was intended to culminate in the publication of a paper outlining a framework and a methodology for the development of an Anglo-specific language policy, which would inform government debate on the subject.

A seven-strong Working Group* formulated the document which was to form the basis of discussions at a meeting of the project Reference Group. Professor Christopher Brumfitt prepared a preliminary draft, which was ultimately revised in the light of detailed suggestions made by the Working and Reference Groups.

The various discussions resulted in the publication of a four-page document 'Agenda for Languages', which was officially launched at the 'festival of languages', coordinated by Cilt, which was held at the ICC in Birmingham on 10 October 2001.

The document was distributed to delegates at the conference and has since been circulated to government, members of the House of Lords and relevant parties at local and regional level.

It provides a vision of languages and language capability as basic life skills and offers key messages which the authors believe are capable of being widely shared within the particular and diverse context of the UK:

- Communication is the key
- Languages are a precious resource
- Multilingualism is better
- A language policy is not a luxury

Agenda for Languages can be viewed at www.llas.ac.uk/events/archive/454

In addition, an eight-page rationale and framework document was produced to accompany and elucidate the shorter paper. This has been distributed to those specifically involved with the development of a national languages policy, most notably the members of the Languages National Steering Group.

The members of the Working Group were:

Professor Chris Brumfitt, University of Southampton
Professor Viv Edwards, University of Reading
Dr Richard Johnstone, Scottish CILT
Dr Lid King, CILT
Terry Lamb, University of Nottingham
Alan Moys, Nuffield Languages Inquiry
Derek Winslow: Languages National Training Organisation

Integrating content and language

September 2001-February 2002

This project, which was funded jointly by the Nuffield Languages Programme, CILT and the DfES, was set up to examine the feasibility of introducing bilingual learning (formally known as CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning) into selected clusters of schools in England.

The final report of this feasibility study was presented to the project Steering Group and to DfES in February 2002. It detailed the current situation and, in the light of very positive reactions from schools, made a convincing case for a pilot project to set up bilingual teaching in a number of primary and secondary schools.

Application was made to the DfES for the funding of a three-year pilot project. Funding has been granted for the first year, and it is envisaged that eight schools will be invited to participate from September 2002.