

CEL/ELC Workshop, Berlin 28.11.2013

Modern Language Degrees

Young people graduating from university know that it is increasingly important to be able to work in different linguistic and cultural environments. As a result, students of many different subjects are taking up language learning. At the same time, specialist degrees concentrating on language studies are coming under significant pressure in many European countries. In some countries, language departments are closing and the future of language degrees is called into question. Important social changes have affected the study preferences of students, often accelerated by the economic crisis of the last four years. There have been changes in schools, in career expectations for students and in government priorities.

The recent ELC report on the future of language degrees (2012) found that language degrees were established to meet a variety of needs, particularly for translation and interpreting and for teaching and research in languages and cultures. It suggested that further research is now needed to establish more precisely what the new needs are that language degrees can meet. And it suggested a growing need for cultural mediators, and a growing number of careers that require a high level of intercultural awareness.

In this workshop we will address the rationales for specialist language degrees in terms of their cognitive value, their contribution to personal development and the careers opportunities for which they prepare. We will address new approaches to the language curriculum in European universities and explore ways in which future development can be enhanced.

In order to spark the discussion among the participants, we have invited the following colleagues to share their experience and the results of their work in this field:

Introduction to the workshop

Michael Kelly, University of Southampton (UK) Chair of the CEL/ELC working group on language degrees

The cognitive and personal value of language degrees

Boris Vejdovsky, Université de Lausanne

The value of language degrees for careers

Elaine Rees, Université de Rennes II

These presentations will be followed by discussions and a panel session to draw out lines of future action in this area.