

**CONSEIL EUROPEEN POUR LES LANGUES /
EUROPEAN LANGUAGE COUNCIL (CEL/ELC)**

**Strategies for innovation in higher education language
teaching and learning**

WORKSHOP

*held at the Sprachenzentrum of the Freie Universität Berlin on
10-11 October 2008*

**Words of welcome by Professor Christine Keitel-Kreidt, Ph.D., Hon. Doc.
Vice President of the Freie Universität Berlin**

Distinguished guests,

colleagues, CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of the Presidium of the *Freie Universität Berlin*. I am doing so in my capacity as vice president with special responsibility for teaching and study.

This is the second ELC meeting this year I have the honour of opening. Back in February, the *Freie Universität Berlin* hosted the launch meeting of the MOLAN project. As I said on that occasion, I am particularly interested in MOLAN because of its aim to promote collaboration between universities and schools. I am personally committed to promoting school-university cooperation – albeit in hard sciences and mathematics. I hope that the experiences my colleagues and I have gained over the past few years will be of use to the MOLAN project team in their planning of future activities.

Collaboration at local and regional level is fine; it is important. But we are also becoming increasingly aware of the importance of internationalisation, of the internationalisation of higher education and research. As most of you know, FUB has seen itself as an international university since it was founded 60 years ago. Over the years, we have concluded cooperation and partnership agreements with some 140 universities in all five continents. But we are also aware of the fact that Europeanisation and internationalisation have assumed new dimensions in higher education – and in research.

For a long time, one of the main pillars of our internationalisation strategy was European and international horizontal student exchange and mobility within the frame of bilateral agreements, and of programmes such as Erasmus. We have every intention of continuing to play a major role in European and international student exchange and mobility.

However, it is now our aim to go much further. In the Initiative for Excellence competition launched jointly by the federal and state governments, we presented ourselves as an International Network University. We are determined to achieve an international level of excellence in both research and teaching. We are keen to attract highly qualified students, teachers and researchers from around the world. We have introduced – and we shall continue to introduce – internationally competitive master's courses and structured doctoral studies. We have opened offices in Beijing, Moscow, New Delhi, and New York, and we are soon going to have our own office in Brussels.

Why am I telling you all this?

Well, it seems to me that the internationalisation strategy which we have adopted, and which we are now further developing and implementing, is creating new needs as regards language learning and the acquisition of intercultural competence. I think at one stage people and organisations calling for, and promoting the internationalisation of higher education institutions in this country thought that English would be a kind of magic wand. If only all our courses were to be taught in English, one of the greatest obstacles to internationalisation would have been removed.

I think we now know better than that. For one thing, teaching courses in English raises all kind of quality issues. For another, do we really think that young people coming to us from all four corners of the world in order to follow courses offered in English should not be encouraged to learn German? I was intrigued to see that in your Workshop you are going to address these and related issues. I was particularly pleased to note that you are also going to look at the teaching and learning of languages of the wider world. If we want to attract students and young researchers from China – to mention just one of the countries in question – we should encourage our own students to learn Chinese. This is one of the reasons why we have now included Mandarin Chinese in the general professional skills strand of our bachelor programmes, which I talked about at some length back in February. If I may add a personal note here, my husband and I some time ago decided to learn Chinese – and we have never had any regrets.

To return to the issue of the teaching and learning of the language of the host country, I am very pleased that our Language Centre is currently engaged in designing a new concept for the teaching of German to master and doctoral students, to postdocs, and to newly appointed academic

staff. I am aware that universities in the Nordic countries have gathered valuable experiences in these matters, and I was pleased to note that they are willing to share their experiences with colleagues from other parts of Europe attending this Workshop.

Those of you who attended previous ELC workshops, and project meetings hosted by the Freie Universität Berlin may remember that FUB was the first major German university to implement the Bologna structure across the board. Not only that. Many of our departments used the change-over to Bologna for curriculum innovation. Moreover, we used the introduction of our new bachelor programmes to improve the quantity and quality of our language provision. I was pleased to note that at this Workshop no fewer than three teachers from our Language Centre will be making presentations on our new language programmes and offerings.

Last week, I visited a number of top universities in the United States. What impressed me most was the quality of their teaching. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not wish to give the impression that we in Europe do not know what constitutes quality in teaching. In fact, I am convinced that in the course of the Bologna process we have identified a number of key quality issues. It's not so much a matter of lack of awareness, than of lack of willingness and enabling conditions. Over the past few years we have got used to Bologna terms such as learning outcomes, learner-centricity, lifelong learning and so on – I doubt, however, that the principles expressed by these terms – principles that are directly relevant to the quality of teaching – have generally taken root in universities across Europe. I am all the more pleased that this workshop is going to look at some of the issues that are particularly relevant to the quality of language teaching and learning in higher education institutions. I was also pleased to learn that one of the network projects launched from within the ELC is devoted to the issue of quality in higher education language studies.

In April this year, Wolfgang Mackiewicz presented our Language Centre before the highest body of this University, the *Kuratorium*. I think I can rightly say that members were greatly impressed by what they heard on this occasion. Without any doubt, the success of the Centre can be attributed to a variety of factors – particularly to the commitment and the professional attitude of the Centre's staff. However, Wolfgang Mackiewicz left us in no doubt that the inspiration drawn from European collaboration was a major factor in the Centre's constant drive for innovation and quality.

I should like, therefore, to take this opportunity to thank the members of the ELC Board present, and colleagues from other member institutions for their long-standing collaboration and support. I know that the ELC is about to enter a new phase – with a new membership structure, a new journal, a global outreach, and a new mission statement. Let me conclude

by assuring you that the Freie Universität Berlin will continue to support the ELC in its activities. I very much look forward to opening yet another of your meetings in the not too distant future.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.