

FINAL REPORT

SYNTHESIS REPORT

SECTION ONE

PROSPECTS IN LANGUAGE STUDIES

IDENTIFICATION OF NEW NEEDS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

This part of the Final Report is an abbreviated version of the "Synthesis Report on New Needs" prepared for and presented at the Stockholm Conference by Angela Chambers of the Department of Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Limerick in Ireland.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sixteen national reports on languages in higher education reveal a large degree of consensus on the part of the authors on needs in the area of language studies. From even a cursory reading of the reports, it is easy to describe the environment from which they have emerged, an environment which is clearly similar in all the countries concerned. On the positive side, there is an increased appreciation of the need for language skills, with several reports mentioning large increases in the numbers of students. Allied to this is an increase in demand for interdisciplinary programmes combining one or (less frequently) two languages with the study of a professionally oriented discipline, and a rise in the number of students choosing a language as an elective subject. Another positive factor, mentioned in all the reports, is the enormous potential of developments in new technologies for language learners and teachers.

On the negative side, all these developments have come at a time of economic recession in Europe. While references to cutbacks are not unusual in the reports, there is no mention of increased funding in any area. Another negative factor is the apparent absence of strategies and policies guiding the provision of language studies in higher education at a time of rapid and profound change in the language disciplines.

The impact of language teaching in schools on language studies in higher education.

Before examining the situation of language studies in higher education, it is interesting to note the extent to which the content and the level of provision is determined by the situation of languages at secondary level. In this context three issues were raised in several reports.

(i) *The lack of diversity in languages offered by schools.* Lack of diversity, in particular the dominance of English and a small number of other major languages, is perceived as a problem in several reports, both in secondary and higher education. The lack of qualified teachers in the less widely taught languages serves to ensure that this situation is perpetuated.

(ii) *The level achieved in oral and written skills.* Implicit in all the reports, and explicit in many, is the assumption that language study in higher education should commence, ideally, at intermediate or advanced level, and certainly not at beginners' level. Yet in many countries provision at secondary level is such that significant numbers of students will not be available to study certain languages at third level unless they are offered at beginners' level.

Even where languages are studied at secondary level, there is widespread concern that the level achieved is not sufficient for study in a language degree programme at third level, particularly in the context of accuracy in written skills.

(iii) *The number of languages which may be studied.* If national education systems do not facilitate the study of two languages at secondary level, then the universities will find it difficult to provide degree programmes in two languages, unless provision is made for ab initio language study.

(iv) *Liaison between secondary school and university.* While several reports emphasise the problems arising from varying entry levels, only one report, the Netherlands, explicitly defines the need for greater liaison between secondary school and university.

2. LANGUAGE DEGREES OFFERED BY UNIVERSITIES

2.1. Traditional language and literature programmes

It emerges from the reports that there is not a common structure in language and literature degree programmes, nor is there consensus on the nature of the degree and its place in the Europe of the twenty-first century. However, in all the reports there is a clear statement of the type of study which is required if language graduates are to be provided with skills which will be of use in a future career. Five areas of need are mentioned.

(i) *Cross cultural communication.* It is emphasised that there is a need for the language degree to provide cross cultural communicative skills. The need for new expertise in this area, both in teaching and research, is also stressed.

(ii) *Advanced language skills.* The creation of an environment in which students are enabled to acquire advanced language skills is seen as a priority in the vast majority of reports. Far from seeing the present environment as conducive to this goal, there is an acute awareness of the constraints which make it difficult, if not impossible to achieve. These include:

- increasing numbers of students, with no accompanying increase in numbers of staff
- lack of research expertise in second language acquisition
- lack of time, resources and expertise for the development of research and course materials using new technologies

(iii) *Diversity of languages offered.* Many of the reports refer to the dominance of one or two languages, to such an extent that in a very large number of universities only a selection of the official languages of the European Union is offered. It is not only lesser used languages which are affected by this trend. The dominance of English is particularly marked in the Scandinavian countries, and in the Netherlands even German has suffered. The reports agree on the need to guarantee that the diverse European languages are offered for study throughout Europe.

(iv) *Comparability of levels.* The lack of levels of achievement which can be tested and which are recognised nationally and internationally is mentioned in a number of reports. The need for the introduction of systems to ensure comparability of achievement is particularly emphasised in three reports. In the British Report a nationally defined system of levels of achievement against which all qualifications can be measured is deemed necessary. The Italian Report stresses the need for common curricula and certifications throughout the European Union. In the Swedish Report the need

to develop better testing procedures and methods, both as regards language proficiency and other components of language studies, is emphasised.

(v) *Study abroad*. There is widespread support for a further increase in student mobility, with a number of reports recommending that a period of study abroad should be compulsory as part of a language degree.

2.2. Alternative programmes

There is considerable variation in the provision of alternative language degrees, ranging from no provision in some states to a wide variety of degree programmes in others. In most reports it is emphasised that still greater interdisciplinarity is needed.

Areas of need.

The five areas of need identified in the previous section also apply to these alternative programmes (See above, Section 2.1). In addition to these, the following needs have been noted:

(vi) *New needs of members of staff*. There is an awareness that these new degree programmes are creating new needs for expertise in teaching and research by university staff to underpin the new directions in which language studies are developing. Areas of expertise considered relevant include Cultural Studies, European Studies, Second Language Acquisition and new technologies.

(vii) *Staff allocation mechanisms*. In some reports it is stressed that the emphasis on language skills is changing the nature of the work of language departments to such an extent that allocation mechanisms which they share with their colleagues in the human sciences no longer correspond to their role in universities. There is a need for these mechanisms to be reviewed.

2.3. Postgraduate programmes

Two types of need predominate at postgraduate level:

(i) *New areas of research*. Needs in this area are closely related to those identified at undergraduate level. (See 2.2. (vi) above.) Indeed it is the major changes in undergraduate studies in modern languages which are creating the need for research developments in Cultural Studies and Applied Linguistics, particularly Second language Acquisition and Languages for Special Purposes.

(ii) *European co-operation and new structures*. There is a stark contrast between the developing situation in European exchanges at undergraduate level and the lack of such activity in the area of postgraduate programmes and research. Several reports identify a need for major developments at European level in this domain.

The authors of some reports are even more ambitious, identifying a need for postgraduate programmes to be developed at European level, with a period of study abroad integrated into certain programmes.

3. INITIAL AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS

3.1 Initial training

Despite the different structures in the 16 states, there is a high degree of consensus among the authors concerning needs in this area. Seven issues are raised in the majority of reports.

(i) Greater emphasis needs to be given to language teaching methodology rather than to general educational studies.

(ii) More attention should be devoted to ensuring the quality of teachers' language skills.

(iii) Diversity in the provision of European languages is not safeguarded in many states, and there is need to rectify this situation (see 2.1 (iii) above).

(iv) Initial training programmes are not meeting the changing needs of teachers, and more attention should be devoted to areas such as autonomous learning, learning how to learn, and language awareness.

(v) Classroom research should be encouraged to raise teachers' awareness of the nature of the language learning process.

(vi) There is a need for training programmes to ensure a higher level of expertise in the use of new technologies.

(vii) In several reports the authors conclude that EU programmes have no significant impact in the area of initial training for language teachers. The need for the introduction of study or teaching practice abroad is noted in a number of reports.

In conclusion, many of the reports seem to indicate that the initial training of language teachers lacks a clear focus, and that greater co-ordination between linguists and educationalists is necessary, both at national and European level.

3.2 In-service training

Once again the reports reveal a high level of consensus in the needs identified.

(i) Many reports recommend an increase in provision, so that all teachers will have access to in-service training at least once a year, with appropriate replacement teachers and funding.

(ii) The need for in-service training in three areas is highlighted:

- language skills development
- language teaching methodology
- developments in the disciplines in which the teachers have specialised.

(iii) In a number of states existing training programmes are provided by a fairly large number of organisations, and in-service provision is perceived as lacking in focus and co-ordination. This is a need which could be met by action at regional, national and European level.

(iv) Higher degrees can provide in-depth study of subjects which are relevant to the activity of language teaching, in the discipline studied, applied linguistics or a combination of both. The need for the introduction or expansion of such courses is stressed, possibly at European level.

(v) Increased European co-operation in the field of in-service training is a relatively recent development in many states. Initiatives such as LINGUA funding to enable teachers to attend courses abroad are welcomed, although there is a need for further expansion in such initiatives. Developments in distance education and the new technologies are seen as having great potential to contribute to the development of in-service training at international level.

In conclusion, the need for greater focus, co-operation and co-ordination between all those involved in language teacher training in Europe, which was identified as a need in initial training, is also present in the area of in-service provision.

4. LANGUAGE PROVISION FOR STUDENTS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES

According to many reports, this is the domain of language studies in higher education where changes have been most dramatic in recent years, without any accompanying definition or implementation of a strategy in most states or at European level. Among the many needs identified, the following seven appear most frequently:

(i) Greater prestige. The reports highlight the contrast between the low status of this area of study and its importance for the development of mobility and co-operation among professionals in a multilingual European context; they call for greater prestige to be given to studies in this area.

(ii) Needs analysis. The nature of language studies for students of other disciplines must be defined. The importance of cross cultural communicative competence and specialist terminology, of active and passive skills, is assessed intuitively at present, with little or no theoretical and empirical research informing the choices of individual course planners.

(iii) Subject-language integration. The level of integration of the specialist discipline and the language component varies considerably, within states and even within individual universities within the same state. A number of reports identify a need for courses to be delivered through languages such as English, French and German. There is a potential contradiction between this need for greater use of the major languages and the need for diversity which has already been noted.

(iv) Extension of provision. While language study is available to students of all disciplines in a number of states, certain disciplines are more popular in other states, particularly Business Studies, with a focus on Export Marketing and Tourism.

In areas such as Law and Economics, integrated degree programmes exist in some states, and there is a need for them to be introduced in others.

Students of Engineering and Science are much less likely to receive language courses, and the availability of language study to an advanced level in this area is relatively rare.

(v) New needs in research. The need for research in LSP, Applied Linguistics and CALL to underpin this new activity is underlined in several reports.

(vi) Language centres. Language Centres have been introduced in many universities to cater for this new type of teaching. Reactions to this development are mixed. The status of such centres, particularly their contribution to research in applied linguistics, is a crucial factor in the evaluation of their contribution to developments in this area.

(vii) *Internationalisation*. An increase in the number of student exchanges in this area is seen as a priority.

In conclusion, the provision of language courses to students of other disciplines is clearly an area where language centres and language departments, universities, bodies responsible for funding universities and those responsible for the allocation of European funding have failed to design and implement a strategy for the development of what all agree is an important activity. Staffing, research, course design, and the place of the language course in the programmes of study, are all in a state which can euphemistically be described, as in the German Report, as 'unclear'.

5. THE TRAINING OF TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

Needs in this area have much in common with those identified in other programmes and courses, namely:

- (i) Diversity of languages offered (see Section 2.1 above).
- (ii) An increase in the provision of courses.
- (iii) The need for a high level of language skills for those entering these programmes.
- (iv) The need for greater international co-operation and an increase in the number of student exchanges.
- (v) The need for internationally recognised levels of achievement which can be defined and tested.
- (vi) The need for an increase in research in this area.

Areas of need identified which are specific to this area include:

- (i) Professionalization of the activity of translation throughout Europe
- (ii) In-service provision should be increased, including higher degrees and courses delivered through distance education to overcome the problems of peripherality.
- (iii) The training of translators should be clearly distinguished from the training of interpreters.
- (iv) More training in conference interpreting is necessary.
- (v) Training programmes for translators and interpreters should include courses in areas such as law, administration, science, technology and literature to prepare students for specialist translation in these areas.

6. LANGUAGE STUDIES IN NON-UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

While provision in this area differs greatly from one country to another, the needs identified are similar, and they have much in common with the needs which have already been noted in other areas. They include:

- (i) An extension of existing provision. The success of programmes in areas such as business and tourism is noted, while programmes in the areas of engineering, science and technology require the introduction or extension of language courses.

(ii) Standardisation of levels of achievement. It is stated in several reports that provision in this area requires regulation, ideally through the introduction of a system for testing the level of achievement which is recognised nationally and internationally.

(iii) Greater international co-operation and student exchange.

(iv) Integration of developments in new technologies and self-access systems into language courses in this sector.

7. CONCLUSION

The needs described in this synthesis report will already have been identified by the vast majority of linguists working in universities and colleges throughout Europe. However, the systematic identification of these needs in 16 European countries will have served a useful purpose if it reveals to those outside the language professions, particularly those responsible for the development of educational strategies and funding at national and European level, the constraints within which language departments are currently operating. The combination of huge increases in activity in a rapidly changing environment and the lack of a strategy for the development of teaching and research in language studies in new directions limits the enormous potential of this discipline as a force for European integration.