Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages III

SUB-PROJECT ONE:
LANGUAGES FOR LANGUAGE-RELATED INDUSTRIES AND PROFESSIONS

NATIONAL REPORT / United Kingdom

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PART I THE STATUS QUO

Introduction – the British context

It has become a cliché to refer to the UK as a service economy and trends in current turnover figures for commerce, energy and industry broadly bear this out. In the year 2001-02, manufacturing production fell by 2.3% (despite an 11.6% increase in chemicals and man-made fibres), while distribution and services showed increases of 1.89% and 4.38% respectively, with education growing by 11.8% and health and social work 9.7% (financial services and public administration were not included in these tables)[1]. Against this, turnover in the construction industry grew by 8.25%. The figures mark the culmination of a tendency which is amply reflected in the seasonally adjusted employment statistics. These show that since 1978, employment in UK manufacturing has declined by 50% and in agriculture by 51%, while in distribution, the number of jobs has increased by 26% over the same period, in services by nearly 30%, and in banking and finance by a massive 50%. Employment levels in construction (despite a marked fall in the early 1990s) and transport are virtually the same as they were 25 years ago.

The shift towards service and support, combined with the globalisation of communication evidenced by the expansion of e-commerce and international call centres, the growth of tourism and migration, the pressure to export on companies of all sizes, but especially SMEs, have all been arguments adduced by agencies promoting language provision in the UK for strategic action to be taken. **Contrary to common belief, national interest within Britain in the relationship between foreign language proficiency and economic performance has been intensive during the last few years**. Action has extended from 'language professionals' and the institutions representing them to state institutions and regional government.

This response is due in part to an 'inverted' reaction to the position of English as a 'world language' and alarm at the concomitant fall in the levels of language learning in British schools[2], and in part to government concern that knowledge of foreign languages and cultures and export success appear to be linked[3]. The privately funded *Nuffield Languages Enquiry* (2000), drew attention to 'the chronic shortage of people at all levels with usable language skills' and the lack of coherence behind the UK government's approach to the issue[4]. The subsequent publication of the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) *National Languages Strategy for England* (2002) and the recent appointment of a national 'Director for Languages' can be read as a qualified response to what many language professionals within education and some managers see as a crisis. Amongst the report's recommendations has been the further development of *Regional Language Networks* (RLNs). Initiated by government as a response to the Nuffield Inquiry findings and increasingly supported by sponsorship from regional economic, trade and skills development agencies, the 12 RLNs in the UK[5] act as a catalyst for raising awareness about the value of languages and culture for the business and employment community. They are a mechanism for co-ordinating regional language strategy and a virtual sign-post to products and services designed to support business, industry and the public sector. As such, they audit the relationship between demand and educational supply in different areas of the country.

The very existence of a UK-wide infrastructure for languages supports the view that if there is a crisis in foreign language provision in the UK, it is at least being confronted by those involved. In addition to the RLNs, *CILT: the National Centre for Languages*[6] and the *National Subject* Centre *for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies* co-ordinate and disseminate good practice in educational provision at the national level and monitor the relationship between government, educational institutions

[1] 'Annual Business Inquiry, 2002 provisional results' *www.statistics.gov.uk*, December 2003
[2] M.Kelly and D.Jones *A New Landscape for Languages* (2003), London: Nuffield Foundation, 2003 and D.Graddol *English: History, Diversity and Change*, London: Sage, 1996.
[3] See for example S.Hagen 'What does global trade mean for UK languages?' in Alan Moyes (ed.) *Where are we going with Languages?* Consultative Report of the Nuffield Languages Enquiry, London: Nuffield Foundation, 1998, pp.14-23.
[4] www.wmin.ac.uk/ssh/nuffield/findings/htm
[5] 'Language Network' in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, recognising the devolved status of the nations within the United Kingdom.
[6] CILT, *The National Centre for Languages*, was formed in 2003 by the merger of the Languages NTO and the Centre for Language Teaching and Research.

and the private sector. They do so in partnership with a subject-based *Learning and Teaching Subject Network* (LTSN).

The LTSN was itself the outcome of a systematic national quality audit between 1992 and 1997 of all disciplines in all British HE institutions and a carefully monitored programme: the *Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning* (FDTL), whose role was to disseminate good practice throughout the sector. A small consultative *Higher Education Employability Group*, established in 2003 by CILT and the Subject Centre, records developments relating to HE language learning and employment. It acts as a conduit of information, most notably from the *Higher Education Statistics Agency* (HESA), the *University Council for Modern Languages* (UCML) and associations representing professional groups such as the *Institute of Translation and Interpreting* (ITI), the *Institute of Linguists*, the *National Qualifications Framework* (NQF) and the *Qualifications Curriculum Authority* (QCA). In the meantime, reports commissioned by *The Nuffield Foundation* and the on-line publications of CILT and the Subject Centre such as CILT's *Higher Education Bulletin* and The Subject Centre's *Good Practice Guides* (GPGs) offer insight into the latest trends in language education.

The authors of these reports are themselves practitioners, operating within a system driven by student demand, who are keen for the most part to promote a closer relationship between language and language-related learning and vocational skills. Their work can be set alongside data from specific government-led investigations such as the *Translators and Interpreters Workforce Research Survey*[7], conducted by the *Foreign and Commonwealth Office* (FCO) and CILT, reports commissioned by the *UK Trade and Industry Board* (UKTIB), organisations such as *The Royal Society of Arts* (RSA), *The British Chambers of Commerce* (BCC) or the *Confederation of British Industry* (CBI) and research conducted independently by university-business consortia such as the *Midlands Enterprise Initiative* (MEI)[8] to cite just one example.

1. Language-related industries (LRI) and professions (LRP) in the British labour market

1.1 Sources and definitions

In principle, the most indicative original sources of information on the relationship between demand on the part of employers and the supply of appropriately qualified human resources include *inter alia*:

- *Department of Trade and Industry* (DTI) and the *UK Trade and Industry Board* (UKTIB) statistics on economic sectors definable as 'language-related' with particular emphasis on export growth. These are published on the internet by the *Office for National Statistics* (ONS);

- *BLIS Jobs*, a virtual vacancy exchange, co-ordinated by CILT and the RLNs which enables insight into the employment capacity of companies of different size, skills sought, etc;

- *Regional Language Skills Capacity Audits by the former Languages NTO (LNTO)*[9] *and CILT*;

- *Higher Education Statistics Agency* (HESA) data 2000/2001, including in particular 'First destinations of University Graduates';

- a plethora of websites mostly accessible via the *British Chambers of Commerce* showing jobs on offer in different countries worldwide.

For the purposes of this study, a distinction is made between (a) the overall type of organisation or sector to which the organisation belongs ('language-related industry'- LRI) and (b) the job or occupation itself

[7] P.Schellekens (ed.) *Interpreting and Translation*, London: FCO/CILT, 2004.
[8] see for example S.Hagen, *Language and culture in British business. Communication, needs and strategies*, London: CILT, 2004 (forthcoming)
[9] CILT, the National Centre for Languages was formed in 2003 by the merger of the Languages NTO and the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research.

('language-related profession' - LRP) which may or may not correspond to the organisation responsible for employment.

1.1.1 LRIs present at the national level: type and organisation

For the purposes of this report, 'Language-related industries' are defined as 'industry sectors comprising companies in which foreign language communication is either itself the principal commodity or plays a central role in determining the economic viability of the organisation'[10]. This definition includes first translating and interpreting agencies, firms offering skills training in language, international e-communication or intercultural mediation, specialist publishers in language learning material, international consultancy firms. The second type of LRI could be said to include commercial activities such as travel and tourism, import/export agencies, customer services and call centres and providers of information on global markets. While in the former type, language and intercultural skills are integral to the firm's operations, the latter type of organisation might be expected to need them in order to perform satisfactorily.

1.1.1.1 LRI's in the private sector

In the absence of reliable comparative national statistics on the numbers of UK companies in either of the above categories or on their current levels of profitability, two readily available sources of information on the 'presence' and 'type' of language-related industries in the British economy are technically the *Regional Language Skills Capacity Audits* and *BLIS Jobs*.

In practice, the precise character of the companies and valid criteria for defining them as 'language related' can only be deduced with difficulty. For the *East of England Language Skills Capacity Audit* for example, 4,697 companies were identified as potential or actual exporters[11]. Of these, 329 produced reliable returns, the majority from the categories 'Other services' (21.9%), 'Other manufacturing industries' (17.9%), 'Distribution, hotel and catering' (12.5%), 'Engineering and metal manufacture' (10%)[12]. In itself, this tells us little about the exact nature of a 'language-related industry' and hardly defines what proportion the category represents of exporters in the region as a whole. A breakdown of each of the above categories would be needed as well as more data on regional variation. This level of detailed information is increasingly available though the RLNs but is not published in report form. Not surprisingly, manufacturing is much more prevalent in the North-West, with 'Other Services' and 'Distribution, hotel and catering' representing 20% of an overall sample of 303 'international' companies against 35% in the East. At the time of writing, the RLN for the London metropolitan area has not published its report, yet it must be assumed that the capital represents a substantial proportion of the national profile of 'language-related' industries. On the basis of current data, the overall map reflects the general shift towards the service sector and a qualified need on the part of manufacturing companies for language support.

An alternative source of information on the demand side on what constitutes a 'language-related industry' and its 'presence' in national economic activity is *BLIS jobs* (www.blis.org.uk). *BLIS Jobs* is an on-line vacancy exchange, branded as 'the job site for people with languages'. It is co-ordinated by CILT and supported regionally by the RLNs. It is theoretically possible to map the profile of firms offering language-related jobs through *BLIS Jobs*, though take-up of the service depends on the links between companies and RLNs and is still expanding. An analysis of the jobs advertised on *BLIS Jobs* nationwide helps to identify the practical implications for the British employment market of the shift towards communication and offers a snapshot of the 'language-related professions' which are currently prevalent.

1.1.1.2 LRIs in the public sector

[10] The definition is mine, though based on the recommendations of the TNP3 meeting of January 2004
[11] This information was derived from local Chamber of Commerce lists, the *Dun & Bradstreet Corporation*, the *National Exporters Database* and *Invest East of England*.
[12] *East of England Language Skills Capacity Audit* 2003, London: CILT, 2003, Appendix p.xi.

Taking account of the overall character of employment in the UK, 'the public sector' is interpreted as covering Education, Health and Social Services and Public Administration Insofar as Education is identified with provision rather than demand, public sector LRIs can be said also to include liaison and coordination agencies such as CILT and the LRNs themselves, units responsible for international relations and export within Chambers of Commerce and the newly established Regional Assemblies and Regional Development Agencies, national government departments such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the external services of the Department of Trade and Industry and The British Council. No list of public institutions using foreign languages could hope to be comprehensive. However, At the regional level, the survey data of the RLN audits give a flavour of the type of organisation involved: 'Institute of Export', 'Regional Language Network', 'Trade Partners UK', 'Dialogue Language Services', 'Business links', 'Federation of Small Businesses', 'Confederation of British Industry', 'Invest East of England', 'North-West Development Agency' and so on. The category could also be said to include language sensitive posts in standard government services such as local authority housing departments, Courts, Customs and Excise and the *Immigration Appellate Authority*.

Some of the above are private agencies serving the public sector. Most if not all employ international liaison officers for whom knowledge of at least one foreign language is generally a requirement. Because of a lack of longitudinal data, it is difficult to express their presence in relative terms, but the impression gained from BLIS and electronic recruitment websites such as *CORDIS* and *Cannon* Persona which advertise on the *British Chambers of Commerce* (BCC) website suggest that the sector is increasing in volume in both the private and the public spheres.

1.1.2 Language-Related Professions (LRPs)

1.1.2.1 'Pure-play' LRPs

The findings of the RLN CILT / LNTO audits and the recently concluded workforce development research on interpreting and translation undertaken by the *Foreign and Commonwealth Office* (FCO) and CILT[13] demonstrate that there is an active demand for translators and interpreters in the private sector. In at least 3 of the audits (East of England, North-West and South-West), between 35 and 40% of companies use professional translation/ interpreting services, with a bias towards translation. It is evidently a key aspect of companies' international activities. Access to professional support is facilitated by directions on the CILT website to the main national associations: *The Institute of Translation and Interpreting* (ITI)**,** *The Institute of Linguists* (IoL) and *The Association of Translating Companies* (ATC). The site also has links to the *National Standards in Translation and Interpreting* and *BLIS Professionals*. *BLIS Professionals* is a quality-assured, on-line data base of language service providers – including translators, interpreters, language trainers and cultural briefing consultants. This too offers a crude indicator of the level of demand for interpreting and translation services. In addition, RLNs provide comprehensive information on provision in their regions[14]. However, despite the existence of national and regional professional registers and recognised levels of qualification, the CILT/FCO survey paints the picture of an active but highly fragmented and unregulated sector, dominated by free-lance supply[15].

1.1.2.2 'Ancillary' LRPs

The term 'language-related professions' is as difficult to pin down as 'language-related industries'. Again, the most reliable data comes from RLN CILT / LNTO audits, job vacancies on the BLIS Jobs, BLIS and BCC interactive web-sites, and independent surveys such as the *e-skills: language skills analysis report* conducted by Interact International which a distillation of the evidence in the skills capacity audits[16]. Comparative figures from the East of England and South-West show an exactly similar profile of employees having linguistic

[13] P. Schellekens (ed.), *Interpreting and Translation*, London: CILT, 2004

[14] See for example the *South-Yorkshire Sub-Regional Study* web-site which offers an interactive map of language service providers for interested companies, *www.rln-yh.com/news*, p.1.

[15] P.Schellekens (ed.) *op.cit.*.

[16] Interact International, *e-skills: Language skills analysis report*, Newcastle: 2003; www.interact.com .

skills, with senior managers at the top (38%) and, surprisingly, technical/engineering (15%) and secretarial/admin (14%) above sales/export managers (11%)[17].

However, the above figures are not in themselves reliable indicators of need or expertise. The level of top managers' linguistic proficiency is generally low and varies according to age. For example, in the national IT and telecommunications sector, two thirds of senior managers had only 'basic' to 'intermediate' language skills (ie up to GCSE – 16+ level)[18]. Against this finding, a high percentage of linguistically proficient employees are native speakers (48%) whilst 14% are language graduates, suggesting that 'language ancillary' needs such as cultural mediation are often capable of being met 'ad hoc' by internal resources and are integrated into the main transactional functions of the organisation. In the IT/ telecommunications sector for example, the foreign language proficiency levels of sales/export staff are almost exclusively 'bi-lingual' or 'fluent'[19]. Not surprisingly, the main situations in which languages are used are telephone (30%), meetings (27%), correspondence (12%) and negotiating (11%). On the basis of the RLN audits, it remains difficult for the time being to separate 'cultural mediation' services from translation and interpreting, or to say with certainty whether the demand for 'language-related' professions *per se* is in fact increasing in the UK private sector. Other sources however, such as the 2004 survey conducted by the *Federation of Small Businesses* 2004, tend to support this view.

As has been suggested above, however, there is strong anecdotal evidence in the UK, borne out by the type of jobs advertised on BLIS Jobs

- **that the skills involved in 'international liaison' are recognised as distinctive for a variety of purposes by organisations at all levels of the public and private sectors,**

- **that if the facility is not available 'in-house' to individual companies, direct or network support is available.**

The fact that 'cultural mediation' is mentioned at all as a label on, for example, the South Yorkshire RLN website already referred to, suggests that the category of employment has achieved a certain profile and that the electronic means of access to such provision is adequate. As already noted, *BLIS Jobs*, co-ordinated by CILT, was initially launched in the North-West, North-East, Yorkshire & Humberside and South-West regions. The service was extended nation-wide in September 2003 and is expanding. In April 2004, 145 vacancies were advertised. The number of vacancies fluctuates daily. The figure of 145 is clearly only the tip of the iceberg[20] but it offers a broadly representative profile of the market. It should be noted that the service has not to date been promoted in London or the South East where significant demand is expected. Apart from language tuition support, translating and interpreting , the types of job offered include titles such as 'Customer Service Representative', 'Telephone Research', 'Publicity Co-ordinator', 'Account Executive', 'Multilingual Customer Care Agent', 'Technical Support Agent', 'Export Sales Administrator', 'Export Sales Liaison Assistant', 'Helpdesk Advisor', 'In-house Language Administrator', 'Marketing Assistant', 'Regional Executive Interface between Customers and SMEs'. All of these jobs clearly involve electronic data collection and communication. Most, but by no means all, imply skills which go beyond 'pure language'. They confirm commonsense intuitions and the findings of the RLN audits that the sector is buoyant on the demand side and almost certainly expanding.

1.2 Language graduate employment in the language-related professions

When calculating the patterns of employment of language graduates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in attempting to identify 'language-related professions' within types of work undertaken, a number of factors need to be taken into account:

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[17] RLN CILT East of England language Capacity Audit, p.30
[18] Interact International, p.13
[19] Interact International, p.16
[20] The service has not yet been promoted in London and the South-East where significant demand can be expected.

- the pool of graduates studying languages ‘to degree level’[21] is falling dramatically and showed a decline of 22% between 1997 and 2001. The percentage of language graduates in different forms of employment is therefore calculated against a smaller total than in the recent past;

- the fall in volume of ‘specialist’ language knowledge amongst UK graduates is substantially offset by an increase in the number of students studying foreign languages in an ‘ancillary’ capacity, as part of their degree or on an extra-curricular basis[22]. Graduates of the latter type do not feature in the HESA statistics as ‘language graduates’, but they may be adequately qualified to respond to the type of vacancies mentioned above, although level of attainment is generally restricted to levels 1, 2 or 3 of the National Language Standards (max. Level B2 of the Common European Framework)[23];

- despite the detailed breakdown of HESA statistics by ‘standard industrial’ and ‘standard occupational’ classification criteria, they do not allow for ‘language-related professions’ other than translators and interpreters to be easily identified;

- HESA statistics represent graduates’ first destination and are gathered in the year following graduation. The figures do not necessarily correspond to medium to long-term employment patterns.

Despite these qualifications, a number of significant findings emerge from the HESA data. Of the 8076 language graduate respondents to the HESA annual survey for 2001-2, 1678 (21%) were employed in Education. By way of comparison, 428 (5.3%) had jobs in sales and retail, and 82 (1%) in computing and computer-related work24. When these sector-specific figures are translated into ‘professional’ categories, a similar picture emerges. Education dominates as the overwhelming first employment destination of language graduates (1551/19%). By contrast, in 2001-02, translation and interpreting accounted for only 133 graduates (1.6%). Further data is required to know whether this figure is increasing. The following indirectly related statistic suggests that it may be:

Since 1999, the number of students following specialist ‘taught’ programmes to MA level has increased from 2475 to 2665 (7.7%) implying that, in the UK, a larger volume of ‘linguists’ with ‘specialist professional’ levels of proficiency (Common European Framework levels C1/2) is probably being generated[25].

Broadly speaking, the above figures confirm the findings of the CILT / LNTO language capacity audits and the balance of vacancies on BLIS Jobs vacancies list. Amongst those language graduates who are not going into education as a first destination, a significant proportion are taking up jobs in communication-related ‘professions’ in the private and public sectors in which foreign language proficiency is a valuable accessory skill. Translation/ Interpreting remains a minority activity for graduates, but demand for the skill exists and it seems that the numbers of language graduates opting for specialist taught masters programmes which focus on foreign language proficiency is increasing.

1.3 New developments and new professional demands in the language and language-related industries

[21] the term ‘degree level’ is a broad term and is susceptible to variation across the UKHE sector. It can be said to imply that the student has studied at least one foreign language as a major, combined-major or minor component of his/her degree and may be assumed to have reached a proficiency level of at least B1 of the Council of Europe *Common European Framework*.
[22] See M.Kelly & D.Jones, p.12
[23] Even so, levels of attainment are generally restricted to levels 1,2 or 3 of the National Language Standards or B2 of the Common European Framework.
[24] Obviously, if the figures for industry as a whole are rounded up, the proportion of graduates opting for education appears less startling. It may be due to the incentives currently offered by the UK government to attract graduates in Modern Languages and Mathematics into teaching which are being taken up by graduating students as a means of repaying debts incurred during their undergraduate degree.
[25] HESA statistics, 2001-02, as rounded by CILT, February 2004

1.3.1 The impact of European integration and of globalisation

The findings of virtually all recent reports and publications26, notably the recent CILT / /LNTO language capacity audits, support the principle that the combination of European integration and globalisation is impacting on perceived company performance. The common orthodoxy is that UK companies are losing trading opportunities as a consequence of staff's linguistic/cultural deficiencies and that more needs to be done to redress the situation. It nevertheless remains difficult to establish a correlation between export performance and language skills, although the May 2004 survey by the British Chambers of Commerce provides evidence for such a link. On the basis of the CILT / LNTO language capacity audits, the studies directed by Stephen Hagen since 1993, and the InterAct International Reports already cited, the following broad generalisations can be made:

- between 50% and 70% of companies surveyed in the RLN audits claim to use at least one foreign language, though it should be borne in mind that the survey only covered companies actually or potentially 'export-active' and that respondents were self-selecting. It is also interesting to note that the figure was lower for e-skills companies (40%) which can be explained by the more widespread use of English in the electronic communication sector[27];

- on average, 45% claim to have experienced 'language barriers' in their business dealings, against 40% in the e-skills sector[28];

- between one in five and one in four companies have encountered 'cultural difficulties'. In a context where France, Germany, Spain and Italy are still the major trading partners, France is cited as the country most frequently giving rise to cultural and linguistic barriers. The data supports the axioms that geographical and historical proximity does not necessarily diminish cultural difference and that linguistic knowledge and cultural understanding are directly related;

- German is increasing in importance as a language in respect of communication with the countries of the enlarged European Union, and because of Germany's central role in the European context, for example in the finance sector;

- companies are ill-equipped linguistically and culturally to meet the challenges of the new world markets in Russia, India and China, as well as the existing levels of exchange with Japan and the Middle East;

- the lack of staff having appropriate language/ international communication skills/experience is a common obstacle to international expansion for SMEs.

As already suggested, the combined evidence of the BLIS Jobs vacancies and the CILT/LTNO audits is that European integration and increased levels of international activity have enhanced the profile of international liaison within export departments. This is combined with the move by larger organisations to outsource retail and information services, as evidenced within the UK by the growth of call centres, on-line sales, technical support such as web design and so on. As revealed by the FCO/CILT workforce development report on *Translation and Interpreting* already referred to, this tendency includes translation/interpreting services. Theoretically, these developments should provide more opportunities for graduates with language-related skills. The high employment levels in retailing suggest that this is the case. However, what proportion of these actively use their foreign language skills as part of their job is not clear. The RLN data shows that companies often look abroad or to foreign natives resident in the UK to meet their needs for foreign language skills.

1.3.2 New professional demands

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[26] see S.Hagen (ed.) *Business communication across borders. A study of language use and practice in European companies*, London: CILT, 1999; *Language and culture in British business: communication, needs and strategies*, London: CILT, 2004 (forthcoming)

[27] Interact International, p.3

[28] *ibid*., p.4

As we see it, in the light of the above data, new professional demands are likely to be fourfold:

- an increased demand in the private sector for (on-line) professional translators (interpreters)/ communications advisors, especially in 'less familiar' languages (Russian, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese and the languages of the countries recently acceding to the EU);

- the need for a wider range of managers/technicians and frontline employees for whom enhanced communication/FL skills are an integral part of their qualifications;

- a growth in the call for 'refresher'/language up-grade courses for export managers and chief executives of SMEs;

- an increased need for foreign language speakers within the security services and related sectors such as immigration.

1.4 Contacts/co-operation between LRI and HE institutions

As the FCO workforce report makes clear in respect of translators and interpreters, specialist language provision in the British HE sector is conditioned above all by student demand, which is in turn a function of the number of pupils studying languages post-16. As it states, 'few course providers made use of employers and/or freelance professionals to verify that course requirements met industry standards'[29]. This is almost certainly true of the majority of specialist HE provision in the UK, despite rigorous internal auditing, scrupulous nationally regulated quality control structures, and an effective system of external examining. The British system is extremely professionally run. However, with very few exceptions, it operates according to nationally established criteria which are internal to the state education service and mediated by autonomous institutions.

The newly established *Regional Language Networks* and the strong co-ordination by *The National Centre for Language/CILT* and the *National Subject Centre* of information relating to language learning are playing a crucial role in matching demand on behalf of potential end-users and provision by Higher Education/Further Education institutions. The CILT / LNTO audits indicate that current HE provision is insufficiently responsive to private sector demand. However, the RLNs are at a relatively early stage in their development and flexibility has long been a hallmark of the HE sector in the UK. Moreover, despite the audits' findings, the precise level of demand for language and culture courses by the national workforce community remains unclear. Other networks such as Leonardo make a limited contribution to the presence of foreign language expertise within companies through student placements, but how effectively these are combined with the activities of RLNs almost certainly varies. The establishment within England of Regional Assemblies, state funded Development Agencies and regional, university-industry consortia is currently causing the issue of regional coordination of language provision to be more closely addressed.

1.5 Impact of developments in language-related industries and professional demands on specialist HE provision

As far as languages are concerned, the character of HE provision is changing radically as a consequence of (a) the different demands and levels of qualification of students entering the sector, (b) the continuing development of new types of degrees combined with languages, (c) the concomitant restructuring of language teaching provision within HE institutions and (d) the greater pressure to engage in 'income-generating activities' by offering language and culture support services to regional clients on a commercial basis. Many of these developments go back some 30 years, but due to the fall in student numbers, they are now affecting the sector as a whole. As the post-16 numbers decline, an increasing number of students are embarking on degree-level language programmes without having specialised in language to 18+. Many combine HE language study with a major in another, often 'vocationally orientated' discipline such as management, law or engineering. Their degrees often involve work-placements – at home or abroad. Their 'starting level' proficiency combined with their

[29] V.Davies (ed.), *FCO Workforce development report*, p.5

more explicit vocational needs are irreversibly modifying the content and mode of delivery of language and 'language-related' curricula offered by language departments or 'language centres'.

Meanwhile, the delivery of *Institution-Wide Language Programmes* (IWLPs) is becoming a core activity of specialist Language Centres. The numbers of students studying languages outside the 'standard' degree curriculum is increasing and is extending the provision of practical language skills within HE. It also broadens the range of languages available. Simultaneously, limited external demand by regional firms combined with internal financial pressures are renewing the tendency for British universities to 'turn outwards' and to offer short-term courses which satisfy immediate professional needs.

These developments are inevitably impacting on the definitions of learning outcomes and the nature of skills learned, even within mainstream language provision, especially in the assessment of oral skills, translation, written composition and the integration of cultural awareness into HE language programmes. There is a growing emphasis on aural comprehension, oral skills in defined situations, simulation, group presentation, report writing and ethnographic analysis, combined with autonomous learning. Parity in standards of proficiency is largely maintained by regulating the form of syllabus definitions and learning outcomes and using external examiners.

However, effective as it is, the present system is feeling the strain caused by the greater diversity of HE language courses on offer, against which there is no nationally recognised standard of proficiency more precise than the nomenclature of the BA degree. The internal regulation of the British HE degree structure at undergraduate and graduate levels has not so far allowed for the integration of national or international benchmarks, despite the availability of such instruments as the Council of Europe's '*Common European Framework*', professionally regulated standards in translation and interpreting, and the nationally recognised qualifications offered by the *Institute of Linguists* (IoL). Attempts to encourage HE institutions to benchmark their language provision to a common standard by establishing a *National Recognition Scheme* has met with limited response from universities anxious to defend their academic autonomy. This is undoubtedly an issue which will be addressed further as the diversity of provision in HE language programmes continues to increase.

In terms of resources, the two major tendencies within the UK are (a) the growing significance of technically supported central language provision within HE institutions and (b) the reliance on teaching staff employed on a part-time, 'academic-related' basis. Despite much closer legal regulation, their conditions of employment remain less stable than those of 'core' academic staff. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that university language centres generally rely on external income which enhances the need for regional co-ordination since they often compete within the same market.

PART II NEEDS AND CONSTRAINTS

2.1 Co-operation between LRIs and HE institutions

As the above analysis suggests, intra-regional co-operation is high on the current political agenda in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A great deal has already been done, but the institutional networks are still new. The communication infrastructure is excellent in principle and it is reasonable to predict that as the RLNs become further embedded, the relationship between demand and provision will find its own balance. It must be assumed that as the RLNs promote their role as facilitators and develop a closer working knowledge of the demand in their regions, their profile as 'brokers' will strengthen. In all likelihood, the educational providers will respond accordingly, if they have the facilities to do so. This 'optimistic' scenario depends on the RLNs, the Department for Education and Skills and the Regional Development Agencies' sustaining their current level of pro-activity – with support from the National Language Centre/CILT. It also depends on university administrations' financially supporting language learning resources within their institutions. Theoretically, competition between providers should enhance quality. In practice this does not follow, since each detracts from the profitability of the other. But however hypothetically attractive rationalisation might appear, universities' first obligation is to their own students and institutions are sufficiently diverse that resource sharing cannot currently be considered a viable option. Here again, it is only through discussion at regional level that such issues can be resolved. The *Virtual Language Community* set out in the *National Languages Strategy for England* and understood to rely in large part on the RLNs and the HE institutions in a given region is a collaborative model which some regions are already beginning to explore.

2.2 Identification of needs for curriculum innovation

As has already been seen, the HE language curriculum in the UK is currently undergoing a period of significant change, largely in response to student demand. The pressures from the external market have been largely indirect, mediated as they are by the school curriculum and student perceptions, but are no less strongly felt. There is a general shift towards language learning at the expense of cultural history and towards learning more than one foreign language. There has been a growth in the number of taught MA programmes in language learning for professional purposes, notably language teaching, translation and interpreting. To a large extent, the methodological modifications proposed by such publications as Higgins and Sewell (1996) and King (2000) are being implemented, though to different degrees and in different ways at different institutions. These changes are fully monitored through the CILT/ Subject Centre on-line 'good practice guides' already referred to, newsletters, conferences and workshops and are debated in the fora of national associations such as the *University Council for Modern Languages* (UCML) and the *Association of University Language Centres* (AULC).

In order to satisfy the needs identified by the data examined in this report, it remains important for HE in the UK to generate a proportion of professionally qualified linguists who are proficient to degree level in at least two foreign languages and whose knowledge extends to the history and culture of the countries concerned. Although in the UK, the undergraduate pool from which such students are drawn is presently diminishing, the decline is unlikely to be terminal[30]. Meanwhile, the HE provision of *ab initio/*post-16+ foreign language learning will probably continue to expand. It is these graduates who will continue to supply the taught MA courses in translation/interpreting. Many of the others are taking up short-term employment in teaching and, if they remain in the profession, will lay some foundation for the future, supplemented by qualified native-speaker immigrants. The work of CILT and the Subject Centre is sustaining quality levels in curriculum design and delivery. This vigilance – a hallmark of British HE – together with the continuing transfer of responsibility to 'language centres' should enhance professionalism in the delivery of even specialist language courses, but it must be hoped that this will not be at the expense of students' cultural understanding – an essential attribute of the 'language professional'.

In this context, the provision of foreign languages as a major or minor component of HE undergraduate degrees should be in a position to supply the medium-term need for 'language-related professionals' identified above. This is based on the assumption that the language programmes concerned attain 'degree-level' proficiency levels, whatever students' entry qualifications, that the languages offered are sufficiently diverse, and that students have the requisite technical/managerial qualifications. In order for this to happen, institution-wide language programmes will need to become more firmly established. Nevertheless, it will be important for them to subscribe to the same - or at least equivalent - 'degree-level' regulation procedures as at present. The diversity of the languages they offer will need to be more widespread amongst HE institutions and their functions extend beyond their immediate HE clientele. This 'positive' (*sic.*) prognosis, outlined with great clarity by Kelly & Jones (2003), depends, however, on the support of university administrations for whom financial considerations are presently the main priority. It also implies greater standardisation in 'content-valid', criterion-referenced proficiency levels, an objective which could be achieved through the more widespread adoption of the '*Common European Framework'* and/or in conjunction with the *National Language Standards*, which are based on the CEF and expressed as competence statements, the benchmarks against which criteria are established.

Finally, the success of the above scenario depends on proper certification of 'extra-curricular' language learning within undergraduate degree programmes. This is particularly true of languages such as Polish and Russian, 'non-European' languages such as Arabic, Japanese, and Chinese, and the major languages of sub-Saharan Africa. Such provision will inevitably entail recourse to more or less 'casual' teaching resources, supported by appropriate technical facilities.

[30] see M.Kelly & D.Jones, p.33

2.3 Needs for future Projects, Studies and Research

- Conduct systematic comparisons between member states' infrastructures such as those being conducted within the context of TNP3;

- follow-up monitoring and electronic recording of companies' 'real' language learning needs… their relationship with current demand and provision – building on the CILT / /LNTO audits and early research on a sub-regional level by the RLNs and local *Learning and Skills Councils*;

- further research into intercultural communication in commercial environments and the wider dissemination of good practice as currently represented by the *Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research* (SIETAR);

- commission national audits into curricula and outcomes of taught MA programmes in translation/interpreting and build on best practice in relating taught curricula to experience in the workplace;

- closer analysis of recruitment statistics to 'language professions' (translation/interpreting);

- further national study of the financing and provision of HE language centres, further to the 1997 '*Translang Survey*[31];

- impact study of the effects of IWLP on language learning methodologies, standards of qualifications obtained and student supply;

- feasibility study of the potential for regional cooperation between foreign language providers;

- closer study of the interaction between public and private sector foreign language learning provision at FE/HE levels and beyond;

- enhanced study and dissemination of quality assurance systems in the qualifications and training of language teachers in different members states;

- systematic international study and evaluation of on-line language learning facilities;

- further adaptation of the *BLIS Jobs* vacancy exchange to enable a more detailed insight into the UK languages labour market.

PART III RECOMMENDATIONS

- introduce a standard, criterion-referenced benchmark for language proficiency levels (nationally and internationally within the EU);

- closer regulation of the curriculum content and modes of assessment of foreign language proficiency from 16+ to 18+ (national);

- establish nationally recognised certification criteria for 'free-standing', institution-wide language learning as a component of HE degrees;

- refine existing inventories of FL learning provision at regional level (regional/national);

[31] TransLang, *Survey of non-specialist language provision in Further and Higher Education in the UK*, London:1997

- further extend research and catalogue regional needs for foreign language proficiency (regional/national);

- develop the ELC website so as to enhance access to national centres for information on foreign language provision within EU members states, particularly that relating to the language professions.

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REPORT

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