



*Sub-Project Two*

*Languages for enhanced opportunities on the European Labour Market*

**Synthesis report**

## Structure

### **I. Key issues**

- statement on the aims of the report
- foreign languages at the heart of new EU educational policies
  - foreign languages in the context of the Lisbon Strategy
  - foreign languages among the new basic skills
  - multilingual and intercultural competence as precondition for an increase in mobility (both between jobs and geographical mobility)
- relevant trends on the European labour market (information to be requested from DG Employment)
- links between TNP3 SP2 and previous TNs and ENLU

### **II. Languages and the issue of employability – trends across Europe**

- new linguistic demands in the private and public sectors resulting from European integration and globalisation: languages and skills / competences
- formal and informal linguistic and intercultural qualifications sought after on the national labour markets / the European labour market
- validation of learning, assessment, certification – what does the labour market recognise and value?
- communication / co-operation between HEIs / public authorities and the world of work – aims and structures

### **III. Needs and recommendations based on the above two sections – in table format**

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## I. Key issues

The overall background of TNP3-SP2, and thus of this synthesis report, is that the European Union has a politically formulated goal of working towards ensuring individual competence in three languages – mother tongue plus two foreign languages – for all its citizens<sup>1</sup>. However, not a great deal is done to make this a reality. The current project thus aims to focus on these problems, at the level of university education and interaction between university education and the world of work, and to present a number of recommendations for improvement of the situation – recommendations which require action at European level, at national level, at university level and at company level.

It is difficult to make safe long-term predictions about how the development in the area of languages will be in the future. It is a basic recommendation emanating from this project that we know too little about these issues across Europe, and that more empirical research needs to be done in order to give the right answers to the challenges facing Europe in this respect.

The national reports whose results are synthesised in this report have been undertaken as part of the TNP 3 project in the Area of Languages, sub-project 2. They focus on the relationship between languages and employment on the current European labour market and examine the implications for language studies. The report will indicate key tendencies in labour market trends across the different member states of the EU and the candidate countries, and the implications that these may have for the study of languages.

This first section of the report will introduce the project, whose importance is underscored by the recognition by Europe through policies and statements of the key role which languages must play in fostering economic health and mutual understanding within the Union both now and in the future. An outline of certain broad tendencies on the European Labour market serves to highlight the role that must be played by language studies attuned to the needs of the twenty first century. A brief reference to projects undertaken in earlier years indicates the extent to which current work is part of a continuum of reflection and arises from and builds on studies and discussions that took place at previous stages

The second chapter of the report will focus more closely on the linguistic requirements of the European Labour market with a study of new linguistic demands in the light of enlargement and the process of globalisation as well as increasing integration and internal migration in Europe. This will be complemented by a consideration of the linguistic and intercultural qualities sought by employers and the types of certification and qualities valued by them. Finally, co-operation and communication between HEI's, public authorities and the world of work will be discussed.

The last section of the report comprises an outline of some needs and recommendations arising from the work featuring in this report.

### **Foreign Languages in European education**

As Europe works to fulfil its aim of becoming 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' with 'a greater social cohesion' while at the same time remaining true to the

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<sup>1</sup> „Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006“ Commission of the European Communities.

principle of 'Unity in diversity', languages have assumed an increasingly strategic role within its educational policies set in place as part of the implementation of the Lisbon vision. Increased mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications are essential to the optimum utilization of the workforce and have been facilitated at inter-governmental level by the Bologna process and signposted by meetings and resultant communiqués: Sorbonne; Bologna; Prague; Berlin and shortly Bergen. Mobility cannot be truly effective without adequate language competence and the study of languages fosters too the mutual respect and tolerance essential for good understanding among diverse traditions and countries as well as the maintenance of a harmonious and cohesive Union. European policies have emerged from a range of fora and discussions (building in many instances on earlier work), including the Working Group *Improving Foreign Language Learning* and the Action plan on *Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity* approved by the Commission 24 July 2003. There is also a concern to ensure the transparency and inter-Union legibility of language qualifications among stakeholders, crucial to mobility, as was recognized by the Barcelona Council with their call (2002) for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator. The multi-pronged approach adopted by Europe in its policies covers the early learning of languages in primary school; the promotion of linguistic diversity and the mother-tongue plus a minimum of two concept; the recognition of the need to increase hours of language contact at secondary school (potentially facilitated by the teaching of content in particular subjects through another language: CLIL/EMILE); the improvement of language learning and the training of teachers; the acknowledgement that language learning is an ongoing process in lifelong learning beyond formal education; the importance of including opportunities for the acquisition of intercultural sensitivity and understanding within the curriculum.

### **Key economic and employment trends**

While there are differences between various groups of European countries, it is evident that, despite this, trends which are very clearly visible in relation to EU15 are also beginning to emerge in the new member states and candidate countries, despite their different economic situations.

European countries have seen a strong shift towards the service industries with that sector being the largest one in terms of share of the economy and employment (the range is from approximately two thirds to three quarters). Even if agriculture remains important in certain countries, employment in the sector has shown a decrease (and sometimes it is very marked). Manufacturing also too shows a decrease although it holds a larger share of the economy.

While developments in the accession and candidate countries are to some extent conditioned by the shifts effected in their economic systems, lower rates of pay and less favorable living conditions, it is clear that there too the trend is towards an increase in employment in the service sector and reduction elsewhere. However, in these countries manufacturing and agriculture retain an importance and the decrease is in some cases quite small. These changes are accompanied by the spread of new technology and the move to a knowledge based economy.

In a globalised world, companies and investments cross national boundaries to reach the locations perceived as most advantageous to them whatever their sphere of activity. The countries of EU15 see both outward and inward investment with some variation as between years and conditioned too by their economic interests and actual or potential trading partners. Despite the general affluence of these countries and the positive financial flows, their good living conditions and high labour costs have led to a movement of labour intensive manufacturing processes towards lower cost countries meaning that they are likely to retain only high value processes. Certain office functions and services are also in process of being off-shored. The trend is projected to be a continuing one with implications for the nature of employment available. While there is and will be demand in highly skilled occupations, less specialized

and low paid employment continues to be available in the service and care sectors (in catering and domestic services, for instance). Globalisation is also leading to less permanence in employment and more flexible working patterns.

The investment and employment pattern is somewhat different for accession and candidate countries who have on account of their lower costs been able to profit from the movement towards globalisation and who are experiencing a growth in inward investment with location, development, costs and stability being conditioning factors. However, they are by no means the only beneficiaries and countries outside Europe such as China and India are profiting from off-shoring due to the even more advantageous pricing levels which they are able to offer.

There are variations in employment levels in EU countries and, within countries, between regions of the country concerned. In general, there is slight variation in employment around the European average depending on the country and the year. While accession and candidate countries have experienced relatively high unemployment levels with the restructuring of their economies, in general unemployment in them is beginning to fall, however slightly. Their specific problem is, however, economic emigration due to better salary levels and conditions in more advanced economies and this exodus concerns, among others, skilled and educated members of their workforce who may either find it difficult to get employment within their own country or who are attracted by higher salary levels in neighbouring countries. While this benefits the Union as a whole, the countries concerned regret the loss of the contribution which such workers might make to their developing economies.

EU 15 countries have an aging population, apart from Ireland but even there the birth rate is beginning to show a decline. Accession and candidate countries also report some drop in the birth rate (even if small) and in the proportion of the population under 15 which has considerable implications for the future, for growth and for standards of living.

In order to remain competitive in the face of global competition, there is a concern to increase productivity and to create high performance workplaces with some countries performing better than others in this respect. Given demographic shifts, there is also a need to increase labour force participation rates so as to draw full advantage from existing human resources.

While large companies and multinational corporations offer considerable employment opportunities throughout Europe, small and medium sized enterprises remain important providers of employment within the countries of Europe (and indeed are dominant in certain countries) and a number of measures have been taken to support them. While patterns in accession and candidate countries are shifting, it looks as if there too the small and medium sized company will play an important role in the economy. Educational providers must therefore take account of the needs of these companies who – depending on their sphere of activity - may also be active exporters.

For European countries, the highest proportion of their trade is carried out within the EU and accession and candidate countries have experienced a growth in EU trade (as was earlier the case for EU15 countries as they joined the Union). However, in addition to this intra-European trade, there is also a sizeable volume of trade with countries outside the union which is for certain countries very substantial and represents in all cases an important source of wealth creation.

The employment and economic trends revealed by studies of individual European countries show a consistent pattern in response to the current economic situation and must influence the approach of higher education institutions to the programmes they offer.

## **An on-going process**

The present work follows on from studies undertaken by earlier stages of the thematic network project. Arising from the first Sigma project (09/06-08/09) which in its consideration of language learning in member states laid the basis for future work, the first *Thematic Project in the Area of Languages* (TNP1) focused in depth on a variety of issues central to the teaching and learning of languages. Of particular relevance was the work of the sub-group on *Language Studies for Students of Other Disciplines* which signalled the importance of a better understanding of the needs of the labour market and held a workshop on *Second Language Needs in the Professional World* in Madrid in October 1998. Also of relevance were sub-projects one and two on *Multi-lingualism and the Less Widely Used and Less Taught Languages* and *Intercultural Communications*. TNP1 concluded with a dissemination year (TNP-D 01/11/99 – 31/10/00) where the labour market concerns were integral to both themes. In *Languages, Mobility, Citizenship* sub-theme one focused on *Mobility and Co-operation: the Needs of Students and of the Labour Market* while in the other theme *Language Studies for Professional Life* Sub-theme 6 had as its remit: *Language Studies at Advanced Level for non-language Professionals*. The results of this work was disseminated and discussed at a conference in Brussels in September 2000.

The second *Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages* concentrated on improvements and innovations in higher education programmes and learning modes, focusing on three themes in particular: *Curriculum Innovation; New Learning Environments* and *Quality Enhancement in Language Studies*. These themes were informed by three horizontal issues reflecting European strategy and also pointing forward to the third Thematic Project, namely *Universities as Actors in Lifelong Learning; The European Dimension* and most closely related to the current project: *The Relevance of Language Studies to Professional Life*.

The following chapter turns more specifically to the crucial question of languages and employability.

## II. Languages and the issue of employability – trends across Europe

### Introduction

The general trends on language and the issue of employability across Europe presented in this section are based on the analysis of the national reports prepared as part of the project. Various sources of information representing different perspectives (those of employers, employees and specialists in the subject area) have been used by the authors of the national reports to seek out data such as: communications from labour Ministry and employment offices, from employers, employers' organisations in the private and public sector, international organisations, analysis of company academic recruiting and career guidance literature, interviews with job recruiters, human resource managers, employees, surveys on professional insertion of graduates after some years of having finished their studies, surveys on language needs of unemployed done by labour offices, news reports in the press, and studies and research.

Different information about the different countries is available. In some countries (Finland, Germany, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland) various surveys and studies have already been conducted over the past years and quite precise and distinctive information on language needs in the regional, national, European and international labour market, with specific regard to non language graduates (or language graduates working outside language related industries and professions), is available. In other countries the information remains more general. For specific information and information sources on the different countries, the please consult the national reports on the website of the TNP3/2 project (<http://www.fu-berlin.de/tnp3>).

### **New linguistic demands in the private and public sectors resulting from European integration and globalisation: languages and skills/ competences**

All the reports claim that there are definitely new and growing linguistic needs and demands resulting from European integration and globalisation with specific regard to non-language graduates due to economic changes. That is to say, the move from an agricultural industrial society to becoming a society where services are the dominant activity, and the change toward a knowledge-based society which is related to the rapid evolution of communication and information technology, and implies increasing complexity and internationalisation as well as restructuring in both the private and public sectors. These changes go along with an increase in and change of broadly communicative tasks and functions.

#### What kind of language competence in general is needed and why?

First of all, there is a growing awareness on the part of all stakeholders - students, universities, professionals, employers, government - of the vital importance of language and intercultural skills and experiences and life long language learning skills.

The following factors are mentioned to explain the increase of the importance of linguistic and intercultural competences.

The enlargement of the EU and its progressive opening-up to the outside has an impact on the range of markets or intensifies business relations with suppliers, providers, customers and other partners inside the EU and all over the world. This requires better communication competences as well as competences for interpersonal and strategic communication including intercultural competences whether in face-to-face or virtual contexts.

The mismatch of the linguistic and intercultural competence of graduates and the real needs of the labour market have negative consequences on the labour market. Linguistic and cultural problems are a

reason for low quality of work and mistakes in the work process and in its objectives, and also cause loss of business and a barrier to trade. The lack of precision in translations, the incapacity to discuss details or to sign agreements in the language of partners, the inability to follow opportunities and the reluctance on the part of employers to enter markets where linguistic skills are required can constitute a major reduction in the potential markets available for companies. High reliance on outside language professionals can slow down response time to materials written in a foreign language compared to other competitors.

European integration and internationalisation produces changes in the relationships at the workplace; the teams become more international, multicultural and interdisciplinary, with flatter hierarchical structures going along with the decrease in professional monocultures. This calls for more team work and networking which implies more interaction, negotiation and exchange. Graduates need a broad range of communicative competencies in their mother tongue as well as in other languages.

In fact, the important contribution of employee input in project teams and work groups is often lost because workers do not have adequate linguistic and intercultural competence or self-confidence to take part in discussions, even if this seems to be improving with the younger generation. Productivity can decrease due to different value systems even if there is a common language, e.g. in a high percentage of mergers the productivity is worse afterwards due to cultural differences that are ignored and lead to misunderstanding among customers and employees, problems of motivation and conflicts.

Economic changes with increased flexibility and productivity intensify the pressure on employees. Job uncertainty or unemployment increases professional and geographical mobility, and the demand in relation to language competences is reinforced. As linguistic and intercultural competences in one or more languages in the world of work have become an economic factor, employers are more concerned about the language skills of their employees than before. Foreign language skills and competences constitute a factor which largely increases the opportunities for employability. There is even a tendency that these skills are expected to be part of any academic profile.

Rapid and constant change of professional profiles and the arrival of new professional profiles due to the dynamic evolution of knowledge and technologies require increased flexibility and the capacity for life-long learning in general, and the ability to continue to learn new languages and to adapt language and intercultural competences to changing needs and situations.

Generally speaking, this implies a more extensive view of the concepts than traditional "knowledge of language". The concept refers to both the mother tongue and to other languages, and covers skills and competences which are more often identified as cognitive or psychological than language-dependent. "Linguistic demands" is interpreted as a broad concept including:

- knowledge of the system of language
- know-how regarding the use of that system in various contexts and for various purposes, which implies that languages and communication competence is related to both generic competences for interpersonal and strategic communication and subject- specific competences
- capacity to up-date linguistic and intercultural competences on a life-long basis.

#### What languages?

There is a consensus that English as an international language, as a tool for providing access to important sources of information, and as an instrument of communication, is becoming more and more important.

Although in several countries English is indispensable, a good command of English alone is not enough. In most countries with more than one national language, in countries with less widely spoken and taught languages and in Eastern European countries (especially the Baltic countries) graduates are expected to have a high level of language competence in different languages and the ability to use them in an efficient and flexible manner in many communication situations. Since a graduate's good command of English is, on the whole, being taken for granted more and more, it no longer constitutes a competitive edge. As the number of people with high English proficiency grows, their market value decreases. In some cases the command of two or more languages is obligatory irrespective of the position sought, at least in international companies. In other countries, a second language is a useful add-on or tends to be considered useful only in specific locations. In any case, another language will make university graduates more qualified in what has become a very competitive national and European job market. Languages can be a factor for career development, for professional promotion and for financial advantages. The knowledge of other languages, cultures and systems is also proving to be a reliable indicator of the key generic qualities, skills and abilities that are being sought in the national, European and international markets.

English is followed by the languages of the main economic partners, and as for nearly all EU countries the most important partner economies pertain to the European area: the languages which are the most frequently used are German, French, Spanish and Italian.

But for countries with more than one official language the other main national language is often the first language that follows English. The Eastern European countries seem more concerned with learning the languages of the countries that are investing in their country so as to attract investors from other European countries. Russian is also still very important in these countries and seems to be regaining ground in other countries such as Finland. With the enlargement of the EU, Eastern European languages seem to slightly gain importance.

As well as Europe, North America and Japan Asian countries are clearly gaining ground as global economic players, and the economic relation of the EU to the Middle East, Africa, Russia, and Latin America is also intensifying competence in non-European languages, which are becoming an important economic asset. They point to the intensification of a particular need for Chinese, but also Spanish and Portuguese; Japanese and Arabic are also mentioned. Depending on economic partners and activities, any language can be of importance.

#### New linguistic demands in the private and public sector

Within this general trend, it can be said that there are differences between economic sectors and types, sizes and departments of companies and the different positions occupied, even though there is not yet much information about the real use of language in different professional contexts. It also seems that the higher the position of the employee, the more English dominates among the languages used. The number of different languages used is also higher with larger enterprises.

#### Multinational companies

Even though most internationalised companies use English as their corporate language, often in parallel with the national language, and despite the fact that good English proficiency is required for nearly everyone working or applying for a qualified function in these corporations, possession of English skills at an advanced level for all situations of communications is not enough to ensure international success. The situation is more complex and depends on the language-use situation. In fact, English is used as the working language in several domains, especially where are multinational teams for communication between staff members and communication with customers such as reading specialised literature. According to the real competences of the employee group, which often includes a significant percentage of foreign staff, national languages or a mix of languages are used both in meetings and in informal

situations. English is mainly reserved to middle to top management positions currently active at an international level such as executives and marketing departments, including the functions of customer relations and technical/engineering staff. Communication with customers preferably takes place in the language of the customers. Here other language requirements come to play a role depending on the location of their branch offices and business partners. In this context, intercultural competences are also highly important. The amount and the intensity of foreign language needed have been shown to depend on the share of foreign businesses relative to total business volume. Different linguistic variants for different situations seem to be an advantage in managing complex situations. Some companies employ specialised in-house linguistic services charged with translations of official texts and brochures or give them to external translators.

#### National companies

In national companies English is less important. It plays a role only in highly specialized departments with an international workforce. If there are more than one national language, these can be more important than English. The group of enterprises according little value to foreign languages mostly comprises small enterprises and companies oriented towards local or regional markets. But as regards economic internationalisation, activities transcending national borders are now not only common to large corporations, but are also becoming part of the business strategies of small and medium sized enterprises more and more.

#### International organisations

With regard to university graduates in international organisations, very high proficiency in spoken and written English and competences of different levels in at least one (and often more) other official language of the organisation is required. The levels of reference are defined as excellent fluent (perfect mastery written and oral), working knowledge (capability of working independently, preparing all kinds of documents, participation in professional meetings and discussions) and limited knowledge (ability to phone, to understand work-related texts, follow meetings and discussions, and intervene in the language). In addition, the ability to establish and maintain work relations with people of different nationalities and from different cultural backgrounds plays an important role.

#### Public sector

This sector has not been treated in great detail in most of the reports; it seems, nevertheless, that membership of the EU has greatly influenced the job profiles of civil servants, especially in higher positions such as members of the executive and legislative bodies, high officials in economic, social, political and military units, specialists in higher education and research and any other civil servant involved in the integration process. English has become more important. Language-use situations, requirements, and competency levels have risen; this concerns both spoken and written competence related to meetings, negotiations, international projects, networking and documentation. Language and communication skills in different languages are a stronger aspect in career development than before.

#### Language graduates working outside language related industries and professions

With the general internationalisation of working life, language graduates are also increasingly working outside language related industries e.g. in the corporate sector in positions requiring language expertise as technical writers, webmasters, translators, interpreters, or in the marketing, public relations, human resources and management departments, etc. Broadly speaking, this entails tasks that demand multiple skills. The typical content of language graduates' programmes is too narrow to provide for the skills needed in working as an expert in multidisciplinary teams. There is a need for a broader profile for easier access to market. In order to prepare language graduates for new types of jobs, their education should also include, for example, systematic development of teamwork and project management skills, technical communication, documentation, translation and the development of strategic and intercultural

communication competence. There are increasing opportunities for language graduates who have additional expertise in some non-language field. Combinations of language studies and subjects from domains other than the humanities (such as economics, geography or a technical field) seem to be attractive qualifications as regards the labour market.

In addition, language teacher education needs to widen its scope to include more opportunities to specialise in adult language education and its pedagogical practice.

#### Foreign staff

In proportions varying according to the country concerned, there is recruitment of highly qualified foreign personnel, but this is either only partly for linguistic reasons or languages constitute a lesser motive. Another important motive lies in knowledge of foreign markets.

This is especially true in the UK, where there are certain specific problems linked, to the role of English in the global market place, particularly in a linguistic context. The widespread use of English in international business persuades both certain companies and a sizeable part of the population that they can very well make do with English even though the government and leaders of business organisations are not necessarily of this opinion. National deficiencies in languages are being supplemented with recourse to native speakers for a variety of tasks and functions. The employment of native speakers is seen as a strategy for avoiding language and cultural barriers. In connection with this, some companies are employing native speakers for their different markets. The use of native speakers in the UK has risen notably in recent years, which is ascribed to the increasing mobility of the workforce, particularly in Europe.

#### **Formal and informal linguistic and intercultural qualifications sought after on the national labour markets and the European labour market**

According to the different documents analysed, the changes in the labour market require graduates to have extended communicative ability including foreign languages and their mother tongue in various situations of use. Languages really have to be sufficient for competent and credible oral and written communication, for the ability to develop and maintain face to face and virtual relationships over cultural borders. In this context, besides professional knowledge and know-how, a massive increase in the importance of a series of generic cognitive and social skills and competences can be observed for almost all professions. These have traditionally not necessarily been associated with language skills but they are closely related to languages and communication and can be achieved only through language.

The language and communication skills and competences sought after can be described according to categories drawn by a Task Force specifically for the TNP3 project to illustrate a more extensive view of the concepts than the traditional knowledge of language. For this context, the following categories and core skills are relevant: generic competences for interpersonal and strategic communication, language specific communicative competences, profession-specific communicative competences for non-language professionals and generic language learning competences. They form - in various combinations - a part of the professional profiles of the academic workforce.

#### Generic competences for interpersonal and strategic communication (for both mother tongue and foreign languages)

These generic competences and skills are valid for all professional functions and fields and enable employees to handle professional situations effectively. They are often considered by employers and employees as important as professional know-how because they are the key to functioning interaction with others and to more rapid and frictionless access to changing knowledge in a specific field. These core language and communication skills are needed on one side for interaction, working in teams and

groups, making decisions, solving problems collaboratively, networking, intercultural communication and on the other side analysing for organising, sharing, and presenting information both orally and in written form, search, analyse and evaluate information, to interpret, compare facts and make conclusions, etc.

### Language specific communicative competences including intercultural competences

#### Communicative competences

This roughly means action-oriented speaking, writing and reading and listening skills in a given language as defined in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It emerges from the reports, that all skills are sought after, but the most needed skills on average are spoken communication skills; at the managerial level written skills are also needed and technical staff also need good reading and also listening skills. The requirement for writing increases among university graduates. Employees need workplace communication in foreign languages. The level of competence needed in a given language may vary according to the job requirements.

For spoken communication and understanding, the most often-mentioned skills are the ability to take part in work-related face-to-face conversations and discussions, the ability to talk on the phone and to use the language for purposes of travel, socialising and in different formal and informal situations, for professional presentations and meetings. Reading mainly constitutes professional literature for updating expertise and understanding work-related texts. The main expected writing skills are correspondence (letters, emails, and faxes), reports, project plans and other documentation and the ability to edit and assess others' compositions. Mediation skills like translations and interpretation are also very important and there is an increasing need for it. The importance of precision in translation is stressed.

#### Intercultural competences

There is a consensus that language skills also have to be underpinned by cultural skills to guarantee communicative success when interacting in multicultural contexts. This means the awareness of intercultural differences in communication and the ability to create a common ground in interaction: it is the ability to establish and maintain personal or work relations with people of different nationalities and from different cultural backgrounds. In particular, successful negotiation in an international context requires awareness and understanding of one's own values and the ways in which cultural background can affect negotiating styles and tactics, and the ability to deal with conflict, also by toning down language and using persuasive strategies. Intercultural communicative competence, though, presupposes developing the cognitive (knowledge and attitudes), affective (emotional) and behavioural skills necessary to communicate effectively with members of other cultures.

Knowing cultures and systems is an indicator of the key generic qualities and skills that are required in the national, European and international markets: flexibility, openness, a sense of personal and professional ethics, organisational ability, propensity toward innovation, desire to learn and grow. There also seems to be strong link between cultural diversity and exceptional performance. Intercultural competence is seen as part of becoming an expert in the field, as a component of knowledge management and tacit knowledge, as well as a source of competitive advantage and added value.

#### Profession-specific communicative competences for non-language professionals

Inasmuch concerns profession-specific language and communication skills, they are needed at international workplaces, international and intercultural work contexts at home or abroad and for international networking (including virtual interaction and collaboration), e.g. those required of an international lawyer, research scientist, journalist, project manager and staff, sales manager, marketing professional, health personnel, PR officials.

There seems to be a special need for lawyers with profession-specific communicative competences. Law firms need professionals who know European legislation and foreign legal systems and can

function in English, although French or other languages are also sometimes considered an asset. They will need to do the following: read and analyse legal material to understand the law and how it applies to the case in question, manage telephone communication, participate in and conduct meetings including giving oral presentations, explain another legal system (including the translation of points of law) to a colleague or client, update clients on a case, both orally and in writing, negotiate/bargain, employing strategies and gambits for interrupting, clarifying, rejecting a position, etc., arrange documents according to the requirements of a certain country's legislation system, draft all kinds of legal documents, from memoranda and correspondence (also via email) to briefs and contracts.

#### Generic language learning competences

This ability allows employees to use appropriate learning strategies both for language learning and for using language as a tool for information management, knowledge construction. It includes skills for independent and self-directed language learning, that is to say, the capacity for life-long learning which has become essential in a complex, increasingly interdependent and rapidly evolving world. Many company-specific, business-specific, and profession-specific communication skills cannot be catered for to an adequate degree during the educational careers of the graduates but only evolve from their actual job requirements and operational environments. Generic language learning competences enable continuous development and allow employees to expand languages repertoires and intercultural competences at any moment of their lives in response to changing professional or personal needs, to evolve in the profession and to maintain employability.

Promotion of the multilingual and multicultural competence and diversification of the communicative competence (including mother tongue communication) of university graduates is very important in view of the future labour market.

#### **Validation of learning, assessment, certification – what does the labour market recognise and value?**

Only in a few countries (such as Finland) which have a well-established infrastructure related to compulsory degree language requirements with clear definition of levels and learning outcomes and degree certificates that have transcripts as their attachments, do employers have a relatively good idea of what job applicants can do linguistically on the basis of their formal education. In many other cases university language examinations or marks, ECTS or diploma supplements are rarely mentioned or used by the employers to be proof of language skills.

Nearly all the reports mention external international language certificates as additional formal validation for graduates, but they are not systematically valued. Seemingly, employers are not willing to rely solely upon standard forms of certificates and tests even if they are increasingly gaining territory in some countries. In the end, foreign language certificates are among the items drawn upon for sorting out candidates among the incoming applications.

International expertise, such as study and internship periods, travel and work experience abroad, is highly valued in all countries because it is often considered the best external indicator of language competence. It is also supposed to broaden horizons, and to develop openness to different ways of doing things, flexibility in adapting to change, and also sometimes better knowledge regarding socio-political, economic, financial and legal systems of other countries.

A certain number of employers use their own language tests for assessing whether the candidates' abilities correspond to their own needs and for verifying applicants' self-declared language competence. But more informal ways of exploring the extent of pragmatic language competence of graduates (e.g. interviewing in the foreign language, a group role play or simulation) are more common today than in-

house tests. This is considered a way to test language competence along with communication ability, social behaviour, organisational skills and stress management potential.

Individual portfolios compiled by graduates are sometimes used in connection with CVs but the European Language Portfolio (ELP) of the Council of Europe is still largely unknown among students and employers even though the level and competence descriptions of the Council of Europe are becoming progressively better known and appreciated in the world of work because they create common understanding between employers, educators, and graduates of the composition, scope, range and levels of language skills and indicate what the student can really do with the language.

Some employers show interest in the European Language Portfolio because there is a need for transparency and lifelong documentation of language and intercultural competences and experiences. And the ELP responds to this need: it enables all language proficiency (acquired within or outside formal educational settings) and intercultural experience to be presented in a comprehensible, complete, and internationally comparable way. It also contains guidelines for reflecting on one's own language learning and for planning and monitoring further learning.

### **Communication/co-operation between HEIs/public authorities and the world of work – aims and structures**

It is generally agreed that there is a growing awareness of the importance and the need for more collaboration between workplaces and educational institutions to bridge the gap between study and work. This has been particularly boosted by the profound structural changes in the higher education sector initiated by the Bologna Declaration. The creation of the European higher education space which goes along with the political, social and economic European integration process aims, amongst other things, at the construction of a dynamic, internationally competitive European knowledge-based society and thus puts a greater emphasis on the promotion of employability, especially by developing first-cycle programmes leading to a degree relevant for the European labour market.

At a national and political level, new university acts in different countries integrate the objectives of the Bologna Declaration and emphasise close cooperation between research, curriculum development and the labour market. Now, there are often representatives of the economy represented in higher education bodies leading to the participation of employers and their organisations in the process of decision making in educational matters.

In some member states considerable attention has more recently been given to developing closer networking and collaboration between labour market actors and HE institutions particularly at the regional level, stressing the societal function of the universities in relationship to regional development.

Cooperation between higher education and industry takes place, for example, in research projects or in regional, national and international projects. This way the world of work has an indirect influence on contents of study programmes and increases the scope of innovative programmes.

It can also be mentioned that efforts are being made to integrate the real needs of the workplace into higher education programmes, e.g. the process of introducing new study programmes with bachelor and master degrees includes measures for warranting quality assurance. A crucial instrument for attaining quality consists in the procedure of accrediting study programmes. Among the criteria for evaluating study programmes are that the programme has to take into account data collected from former graduates about the adequacy of studies and the workplace, or has to present a concept for the fields of professional activity that graduates qualify for, and that predictable developments in professional fields are to be taken into account. But the accreditation of programmes is not obligatory.

A growing number of initiatives to coordinate collaboration between universities and the world of work lead some faculties to take the needs of the labour market (e.g. medicine, economy) into account more consciously. But contacts are still rare and there are not yet systematic and formalised structures of regulation to integrate systematically the present and future language and intercultural needs in the higher education curricula. This aim requires a continuous dialogue between institutions and employers in determining their respective roles and in designing course contents and assessing success in the workplace. Transparency on both sides is a prerequisite for success.

University job placement services are quite widespread. They coordinate internships, work placements, opportunities for further training, give career advice and create databanks – the online establishment of contacts between graduating students and prospective employers, companies and non-profit organisations, public administration, professional associations both local and national, and, in some cases, European institutions. Additional services are offered too, with computer software and tutors that match supply and demand with varying degrees of personalisation. There are career information days for students in higher education institutions in order to familiarise the future graduates with their career opportunities and options and the requirements corresponding to the respective positions and also offer companies the opportunity to meet promising students and graduates during company presentations, workshops and similar events. Universities and local associations support initiatives by students and professors to start up new businesses. There is a tendency to monitor both study and work careers. But the data collected in these contexts has no impact on the curriculum and does not remedy the mismatch between the linguistic and intercultural competences of the graduates and the real needs and expectations of the labour market.

There also seems to be an increase of surveys among HE graduates done by university services, national institutes of statistics, university consortiums, etc. They normally look at the time span between the end of studies and the start of work as an indicator of difficulty entering the job market or of the situation of graduates some years after their studies. These may contain more detailed questions in order to obtain more refined information, e.g. what kind of training graduates are missing, an insight that would have enhanced career prospects. The surveys can also concern employers and often contain suggestions of how to improve transferable skills for students.

Needs analyses are carried out so as to be more informed on the real requirements in a specific domain, and studies are done to determine trends in employment related to the area of study or other aspects. The information obtained is still rarely taken into account in curriculum design to ensure adequate qualification integrating the language and intercultural needs of the labour market.

While there are many new developments and opportunities for collaboration between government, universities and economic stakeholders there still appears to be little specific information being generated about language competences and intercultural skills which would enable a clearer understanding of the language and language-related needs arising from European integration and globalisation within higher education.

### III. Needs and recommendations

Based on the national reports submitted for this project, and on the results of the TNP3 questionnaire-based consultation, there seems to be no doubt that there is a massive need for many types of action within individual countries as well as across Europe if the aims of making languages play a key role in creating enhanced opportunities for graduates on the European labour market are to be fulfilled. The reports document that action is required as regards strengthened consultation between academia and the world of work, and as regards increased cooperation among institutions of higher education.

The following is an attempt to set out the most important recommendations and specific areas of action that may be made on the basis of the work so far in the project. However, these recommendations and suggestions for action will probably need revision after the completion of the consultation phase. It is against this recognition that the recommendations must be seen – and followed up on at institutional, national and European level.

It is important to be aware that recommendations in the area addressed by sub-project two are very complex, due to the variety of university graduates it deals with and the consequent multitude of different types of skills and qualifications are needed. It is important to deal with these problems through a combination of bottom-up and top-down dialogue and that dialogue with employers in the future work in this area is strengthened. Universities cannot improve the situation on their own.

#### **IMPROVEMENT OF DIALOGUE WITH EMPLOYERS**

##### **Recommendation 1: Language/communication profile of university graduates**

<b>Issue<sup>2</sup></b>	European integration and globalisation lead to increased language/communication needs – especially for non-language graduates. There is frequently a mismatch between the linguistic and intercultural competence of graduates and the real needs of the labour market due to insufficient dialogue between universities and employers in this area. If these needs are not addressed there is a risk that Europe will lose out.
<b>Recommended action</b>	In order to address this issue, the curricula of language and intercultural training for these graduates must be based on real workplace needs. This requires continuous dialogue, e.g. through the proposed Virtual Consortium, between institutions and employers in designing course contents and assessing the success of these in the workplace. In this connection it is recommended that also attention is devoted to developing professional mother tongue communication skills and competences.
<b>Level of action</b>	Primarily universities and companies/employers' associations and similar organisations.

<sup>2</sup> Issue here covers a factor/state of affairs/problem area which is pointed out in several of the national reports as something which needs to be addressed.

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### Recommendation 2: New forms of organisation of work

<b>Issue</b>	European integration and globalisation lead to changes in workplace organisation and to relations between employees becoming increasingly multicultural, multi-lingual and interdisciplinary (e.g. in connection with cross-border mergers). This may lead to decreasing efficiency and productivity, which European business cannot afford in the global competition. Employers increasingly seem to be concerned about their employees' language skills.
<b>Recommended action</b>	It is recommended that further empirical research on this particular issue in the national reports is carried out at a European level, i.e. through a collation of what is already there in various reports and surveys, possibly supplemented by new up-to-date reports on the current situation. The possibility of applying for European funding for such research should be explored. It is further recommended that a permanent forum be set up to bring together academics and public and private sector employers and employees' organisations in order to ensure realistic language and intercultural communication training for professional life.
<b>Level of action</b>	Selected universities (probably including researchers with expertise in work place organisations alongside language experts) in cooperation with the level of companies as well as labour market organisations, i.e. employers associations and trade unions.

### Recommendation 3: The role of English – and of other languages

<b>Issue</b>	<p>The special role of English is an issue to which attention is devoted in all national reports and in most discussions of language related issues in general. Opposite claims like 'English - as a lingua franca - is not enough' and 'In practice only (good) English is required' are abundant.</p> <p>There is no doubt that there is a strong and increasing correlation between the dominance of English worldwide as the language of business, science, entertainment, etc. and the dominance of English as the preferred foreign language taught and learned in schools and universities. This development is likely to continue to accelerate and the special status of English will dominate discussions also in the future.</p>
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<b>Recommended action</b>	<p>More empirical research, and not least solid forecasts of what the current status of English and other languages and 'march of English' will mean in the future. What will be the status of English in a generation from now.</p> <p>Every member state and every university should be encouraged to draw up language policies to address the issues of language needs of their population, workforce and students in the future. The current prevalent laissez-faire approach in the area will not be sufficient if Europe's ambitions to be a leading economic area are to be fulfilled.</p>
<b>Level of action</b>	All levels – European level, national government level, company level and university level.

**Recommendation 4: Better empirical data on the state of play in specific sectors, types of companies, etc**

<b>Issue</b>	The language needs vary a great deal from business sector to business sector as well as between levels in organizational hierarchies. I.e., not all employees need the same language competences. This is borne out by the questionnaire-based consultation among graduates and employers which has been carried out as part of the project.
<b>Recommended action</b>	In order to target the efforts to equip employees with the right language competences closer investigation in most countries would be required.
<b>Level of action</b>	Company level

## UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE POLICIES

### **Recommendation 5: Languages as part of all degree programmes at European Universities**

<b>Issue</b>	<p>In only a few European countries are the development of language and communication competence integrated in university programmes outside specific language programmes.</p> <p>This is an unsatisfactory situation in relation to pertinent issues of mobility and employability of university graduates across Europe.</p>
<b>Recommended action</b>	<p>It would add greatly to the fulfilment of the political aims behind this project and the Commission's paper "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity", if language competences were integrated in all university study programmes with specific numbers of ECTS-points in connection with the continued implementation of the Bologna process. The Council of Europe's 'European Language Portfolio' would be a recommended tool for this action.</p> <p>The drawing up of university language policies is an important tool in this area.</p>
<b>Level of action</b>	European, national and university levels.

## CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, SELF-LEARNING RESSOURCES

### **Recommendation 6: Development of self-study learning resources as a road towards life-long learning**

<b>Issue</b>	<p>In order to strengthen and implement recommendation 3 it will be of paramount importance for universities to develop self-directed, self-access resources for students to acquire language competences in various forms of guided, self-directed or blended learning (i.e. to use new learning environments).</p>
<b>Recommended action</b>	Students are in many ways becoming fairly 'independent of time and place' in their

	<p>study behaviour, which in itself has a beneficial impact on their learning. This should be exploited also in the area of language learning. Provision of independent learning possibilities should be promoted as an integrated part of language modules integrated in the students' degree programmes.</p> <p>It is important to stress that various forms of e-learning will not work in isolation but have to be used in combination with revised curricula where attention to language and communication competences are integrated in the teaching of other subjects and disciplines.</p> <p>Key parameters in this process are teacher qualifications and support facilities and resources for development of new self-access resources.</p>
<b>Level of action</b>	<p>Primarily the level of universities. However, a special action under the European Union research and educational programmes would probably strengthen this development, and above all, ensure that best-practice is shared among universities in different countries.</p>

### Recommendation 7: Non-European languages

<b>Issue</b>	<p>Europe's competitiveness also depends on economic relations outside Europe. This requires competences also in non-European languages.</p>
<b>Recommended action</b>	<p>This is a largely un-examined area, which requires research.</p> <p>The student exchange programmes of the European Union which have resulted in massive numbers of university students spending a term or two at other European universities should be expanded to include countries outside Europe, e.g. in Asia and the Arab world.</p> <p>Instruments to achieve this would be to better promote and disseminate the possibilities offered under the Erasmus Mundus programme and to support the implementation of Erasmus Mundus Initiatives at national and university levels.</p>
<b>Level of action</b>	<p>European national government and university level</p>

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