

# Thematic Network Project in the area of Languages

## Subgroup 8: Language Studies for Students of Other Disciplines

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### SURVEY ON STUDENT MOBILITY AND THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL PREPARATION OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Sub-project 8: Language Provision for Students  
Of Other Disciplines

Survey on student mobility and linguistic and cultural preparation

Appendix to the Final Report for Year Three

# SURVEY ON STUDENT MOBILITY AND THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL PREPARATION OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS IN EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## INTRODUCTION

When addressing the issue of the kinds of language studies that should be offered in European Higher Education (HE) Institutions to students of non-language disciplines in order to meet the challenges expressed in the White Paper on education and training, TNP subgroup 8 identified the following main aims for these studies:

- to enhance mobility and through this the learning of a variety of European languages;
- to facilitate academic study and to develop skills directly applicable in the specific disciplines;
- to enhance professional development and to prepare students in terms of their social and communication skills for their future careers; and
- to promote the development of skills needed in life-long learning.

(Subgroup 8 Report, 1997)

In the ECCLiPS (European Conference on the Cultural and Linguistic Preparation of Exchange Students) conference held in Antwerp in 1996, a number of important proposals aiming at an enhanced mobility experience and the development of the students' language and communication skills were presented and the significance of adequate preparation emphasized. The ultimate purpose of both these efforts is to arrive at a common agreement and coherent policy on the linguistic and cultural preparation of exchange students in order to increase tolerance and understanding of cultural differences, to benefit both the host and the home country in the development of an integrated European dimension, as well as to learn languages (including less widely taught languages) and intercultural communication skills needed in social, academic, and professional contexts.

The survey reported here in a very concise form is one of the efforts of TNP subgroup 8 in its pursuit for the establishment of recommendations and common guidelines in HE language instruction for students of other (than language) disciplines.

## PURPOSE OF SURVEY

The purpose of the survey was to investigate how incoming and outgoing exchange students are prepared for their stay at institutions of Higher Education across Europe by means of targeted language and culture training programmes, as well as other support systems. In addition, the aim was to get an overview of student mobility in general in each institution. The survey questionnaire was intended for the International Relations Offices of European HE institutions and the providers of the linguistic and cultural preparation (e.g. language centres). The survey was carried out in autumn 1998, and the findings were reported upon at the 2<sup>nd</sup> ELC (European Language Council) conference arranged in Jyväskylä, Finland, on July 1-3, 1999. (Full survey questionnaire is appended.)

## DATA COLLECTION

A total of 150 survey questionnaires were sent to International Relations Offices, ECCLIPS participants, and TNP participants all over Europe. The response rate was approximately 30 % (45 questionnaires processed and analysed), however, there were answers from all countries involved. It should be borne in mind that since, in the case of the majority of countries, no official policies or regulations exist for linguistic and cultural preparation of exchange students for mobility purposes, great differences can be expected between HE institutions even within one country. Therefore, what follows is an overview of the situation in Europe in general and not a statistically validated research study. Nevertheless, the findings indicate certain overall trends and practices which provide insight into what recommendations for best practice might be established.

## SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

### 1. Most popular (European) countries (top 15) for outgoing students (N = 9240)

|                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| U.K                | 1454 (15.7%)   |
| France             | 1255 (13.6%)   |
| Germany            | 883 (9.6%)     |
| Spain              | 759 (8.2%)     |
| Italy              | 459 (5.0%)     |
| The Netherlands    | 389 (4.2%)     |
| Sweden             | 380 (4.1%)     |
| Belgium            | 234 (2.5%)     |
| Ireland            | 173 (1.9%)     |
| Austria            | 141 (1.5%)     |
| Denmark            | 99 (1.1%)      |
| Norway             | 90 (1.0%)      |
| Portugal           | 73 (0.8%)      |
| Finland            | 73 (0.8%)      |
| Greece             | 71 (0.8%)      |
| (Other than above) | (2707) (29.3%) |

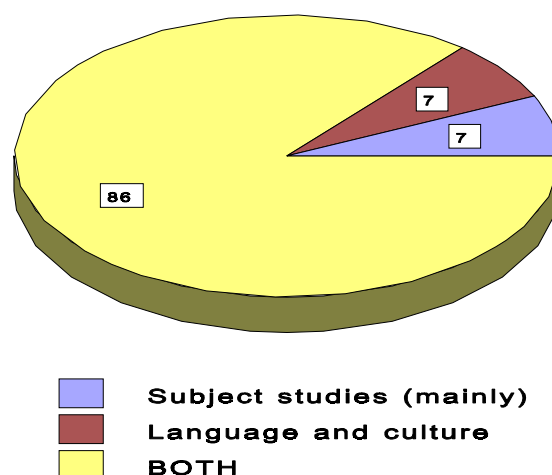
2. Most common home countries (top 15) of incoming students (N = 8775)

|                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| Spain              | 862 (9.8%) |
| France             | 802 (9.2%) |
| Germany            | 772 (8.8%) |
| Italy              | 682 (7.8%) |
| U.K.               | 566 (6.5%) |
| Belgium            | 242 (2.8%) |
| Sweden             | 212 (2.4%) |
| The Netherlands    | 196 (2.2%) |
| Austria            | 131 (1.5%) |
| Greece             | 117 (1.3%) |
| Finland            | 103 (1.2%) |
| Denmark            | 98 (1.1%)  |
| Ireland            | 94 (1.1%)  |
| Portugal           | 91 (1.0%)  |
| Romania            | 54 (0.6%)  |
| (Other than above) | 3753 (43%) |

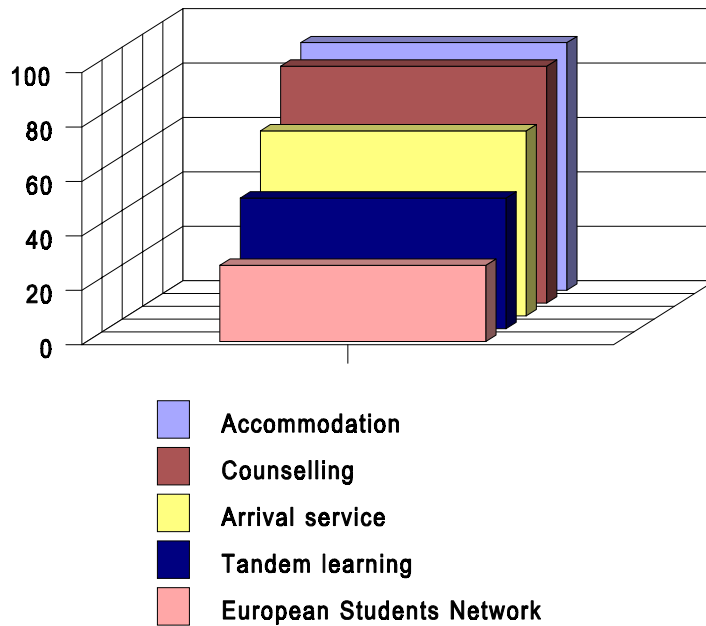
3. Average number

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <i>* of incoming students per institution</i> | <b>209</b> |
| 21 % of whom language majors                  |            |
| <i>* of outgoing students per institution</i> | <b>220</b> |
| 23 % of whom language majors                  |            |

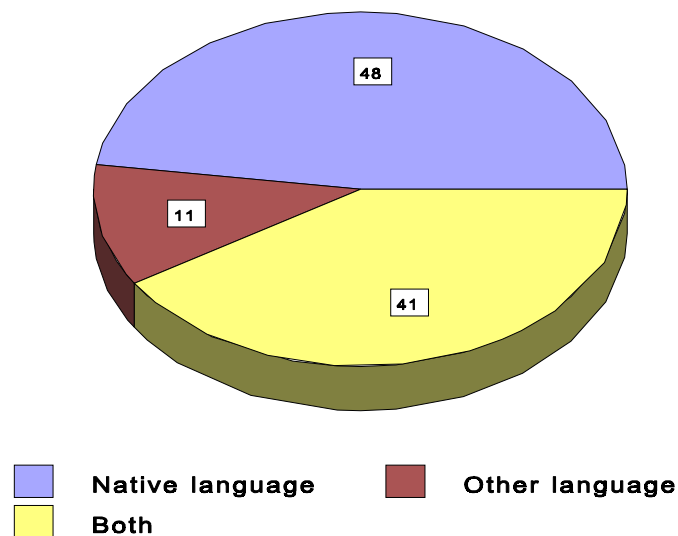
4. Students' reasons and motives for participating in an exchange programme



### 5. Most common services provided for students:



### 6. Language of instruction at the host institution:



In about half of the cases instruction is given in the native language of the country, but often also a combination of the local language and some other language (usually English) is used as a medium of instruction. The respondents consider linguistic and intercultural preparation of students studying through a foreign language very important (58 %) or important (39 %).

## 7. Provision of special courses in the language of instruction:

|                                  |      |
|----------------------------------|------|
| * yes, survival skills           | 46 % |
| * yes, productive skills         | 57 % |
| * yes, academic study skills     | 52 % |
| * yes, subject-specific language | 32 % |
| * no                             | 11 % |

## 8. Provision of special linguistic and intercultural training for students participating in the exchange programmes:

|                         | YES  | NO   |
|-------------------------|------|------|
| * for outgoing students | 62 % | 43 % |
| * for incoming students | 81 % | 17 % |

(N.B. the discrepancy in the total % is due to *yes and no* -answers, i.e. the answer depends on the language in question)

The main reasons given in cases of no provision were **lack of funding and time**. Outgoing students received training in Spanish, English, French, German and Italian, and in a few cases in Dutch, Swedish and Russian. Incoming students received training in English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian). In most cases (90 % / outgoing and 95 % / incoming) the **courses were optional**, and organized by either the language centre (57%/52 %) or the language departments (33%/ 37%). The courses for incoming students were usually funded by the host institution.

As regards the aims of the courses offered at present, the situation is shown in the table below. The main differences in the instruction given is indicated with highlighted percentages.

| <i>AIMS OF COURSES</i>                  | <i>OUTGOING STUDENTS</i> | <i>INCOMING STUDENTS</i> |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Receptive skills</i>                 | 70%                      | 74%                      |
| <i>Productive skills</i>                | 80%                      | 79%                      |
| <i>Study skills</i>                     | 67%                      | 40%                      |
| <i>Subject-specific language skills</i> | 52%                      | 32%                      |
| <i>Integrated with culture</i>          | 64%                      | 79%                      |
| <i>Separate cultural component</i>      | 10%                      | 18%                      |

As indicated, the incoming students are more often expected to master study skills and subject-specific language prior to coming in as exchange students. Yet, these areas are included in only 52-67 % of the preparatory courses offered before leaving the home university.

### 9. Use of language proficiency as a criterion for selection in the exchange programme:

|                          |      |
|--------------------------|------|
| * <i>yes, explicitly</i> | 44 % |
| * <i>yes, implicitly</i> | 41 % |
| * <i>no</i>              | 18 % |

(N.B. discrepancy due to the number of languages involved)

The problem arising from not using language proficiency as a criterion has in some cases resulted in the students' not having sufficient skills for engaging in subject studies in the host university.

### 10. Evaluation of student success and experience in exchange programmes

| <i>Form</i>                          | <i>systematically</i> | <i>occasionally</i> | <i>never</i><br>9 % |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Through ECTS</i>                  | 44 %                  | 24 %                |                     |
| <i>Student debriefing</i>            |                       |                     | 3 %                 |
| <i>Staff debriefing at home</i>      | 41 %                  | 18 %                |                     |
| <i>Staff debriefing at host uni.</i> | 12 %                  | 38 %                | 12 %                |
| <i>Employer debriefing</i>           | 24 %                  | 29 %                | 9 %                 |
|                                      | 12 %                  | 6 %                 | 24 %                |

The area of evaluation is perhaps the least formally developed area in the exchange programme system. What also causes concern is the fact that evaluation through the ECTS system does not appear to be more systematically used, which probably affects accreditation of the studies done abroad.

When asked to comment on the **potential value of linguistic and intercultural preparation** for exchange students, the respondents suggested that training is necessary for:

- establishment of valuable, personal contacts;
- adaptation to the new culture;
- social and cultural integration;
- understanding of one's own culture and other cultures; and
- understanding of conflicts of value.

They also felt that basic skills in the local language are necessary for survival and adaptation, as well as an integral part of the exchange experience. Mastering academic discourse and study skills in the language of instruction was also considered important.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

The survey findings and other information collected will be used as one part of the basis for drawing recommendations on what kinds of language studies would promote student mobility and enhance its experience, as well as benefit higher education students in their pursuit for professional careers in the European labour market. Subproject 8 has also addressed employer and employee views on language learning needs for various professions. All the information gathered will be used to suggest common guidelines for tertiary-level, specific-purpose language instruction for students of non-language disciplines.