

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN THE AREA OF LANGUAGES NATIONAL REPORT – France

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Foreword

Until quite recently, the very concept of "quality enhancement" was restricted in French universities to the improvement of the teaching and research environment: the *Plan Universités 2000* initiated in 1990 by Lionel Jospin, the then Minister for Education, and implemented by his successors, was almost exclusively concerned with much needed new buildings and equipment, the priority of the day at a time of rapid expansion in student and staff numbers. Although peer assessment of research has long been a well accepted central feature of academic careers, any suggestion that one's teaching should in any way be assessed according to quality criteria is still to a large extent anathema in many sections of the French academic community, especially if such goals are seen to derive from European recommendations.

However, the concept of quality enhancement in higher education as a whole and in language teaching in particular is now considered relevant by an increasing number of decision makers and players within the area, for several reasons:

1° The increased demand for foreign language skills, now seen as a pre-requisite for many job applicants, means that the provision of foreign language tuition in higher education now extends well beyond traditional language courses. The 141,000 students majoring in modern languages (including around 36,000 enrolled in *Langues étrangères appliquées* programmes),¹ now represent less than 10% of the total number of university and "IUT" students (1.42 million)², most of whom study at least one foreign language). A full picture of foreign language provision in French Higher Education must now include not only the traditional "languages, literature and area studies" departments (found in around 50 universities), but also the 40 or so "LEA" departments and the many language centres and departments found in other universities, *IUTs*, engineering and business schools etc.

2° Due to the increased demand and provision, "academics" in the traditional sense now share the responsibility for language or language related courses with a wide range of players, including many "non-academic" teachers in full-time employment in higher education, foreign associate lecturers and *lecteurs, professionnels associés* (seconded from business and industry) and part-time external tutors. According to ministry figures, of the 80,000 or so full-time teaching staff in Higher education, *Maîtres de conférences* and *Professeurs* (i.e. *Senior lecturers and professors*) represent less than two thirds of the total (see Appendix Table 2). In the area of languages, the proportion is likely to be lower, given the higher than average percentage of staff with secondary education status (*Professeurs agrégés and certifiés*) employed in this subject area, and lower still when compared to the total number of teachers involved in language courses overall.

3° The extension of European partnerships and the growing numbers of foreign students now studying in French HE establishments have prompted comparisons and highlighted differences in levels of foreign language learning achievement between French students and some of their foreign counterparts, particularly from northern and eastern Europe.

4° The overall stabilisation of student numbers, and the significant fall in numbers in many traditional language departments, in line with the trend now noticeable throughout most of Europe, have led as elsewhere to increased competition between institutions and departments and to a growing concern among politicians that public funding should not be wasted through "inefficiency" and the unnecessary duplication of courses. This concern was clearly voiced in the report published by the French *Sénat* in 2000 prior to discussion of the 2001 HE budget³, which states:

En effet, la demande d'enseignement supérieur diminue, alors que l'offre progresse. Dans ces conditions, les étudiants sont de plus en plus en mesure de choisir, ce qui peut se traduire par des mouvements de désaffection rapides et massifs envers certaines formations, ou certains établissements. Il convient donc d'anticiper au maximum ces évolutions en conduisant résolument une politique d'amélioration de la qualité des enseignements.

Although this comment was initially prompted by the decline in science students, it is of course relevant to the university system as a whole, including foreign languages.

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

¹ *Langues étrangères appliquées* courses involve the study of two or more modern languages on an "equal" footing, in combination with a number of other subjects (economics, law, accountancy, specialised translation, etc...).

² Les effectifs universitaires par établissement, site, cycle et discipline, 1999-2000, Ministry of Education web site: www.education.gouv.fr

³ Rapport législatif, Budget 2001, Chapitre II: Le contexte du budget de l'Enseignement supérieur pour 2001

I.1 THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE CONTEXT

Article 2 of France's written Constitution, as revised in 1997, states that "French is the language of the republic". For many years, regional languages such as Alsatian, Breton, Basque, Catalan, Corsican, Flemish or Occitan⁴ were denied any official recognition and were even actively discouraged by the education system and disparaged by politicians, the intelligentsia and the media. France's economic and demographic revolution of the 1950s and 60s, which brought about rapid change in many traditional rural communities, hastened the decline of such languages. Only in the last 20 years have any real attempts been made to salvage what could be saved of France's linguistic heritage, thanks to the perseverance of voluntary groups and timid advances in the state education system. Regional languages are now used as the main medium of education in a number of primary and secondary schools (mainly those run by private organisations such as Diwan in Brittany), may be chosen as optionals up to "baccalauréat level" in many state secondary schools, chosen as majors in a number of universities and have even made inroads into the modern media (via cable or digital TV channels such as TV Breizh for instance). In October 1998, the Jospin government announced France's intention of signing and ratifying the European Charter on regional languages and minority cultures, despite the reservations expressed by the Constitutional Council regarding the legality of certain provisions of the Charter in view of France's Constitution. The issue is constantly obscured by ideological and political arguments, and accurate figures regarding the number of speakers and pupils involved are hard to come by. For the latter, they lie somewhere between the 13,000 state secondary school pupils studying regional languages in 1995-1996, acknowledged by the Ministry of Education in its annual statistics, and the 335,000 pupils recorded in the "Poignant Report"⁵ in 1998 (pupils receiving some form of tuition in regional languages in state-funded, denominational, private fee-paying or voluntary schools at whatever level). Whatever the true figure, they are a drop in the ocean compared to the 5 million or so pupils who study foreign languages in French schools.

I.2 Foreign language learning in schools

The study of at least one foreign language has been part of the compulsory secondary school curriculum for the past forty years and foreign language study is now actively promoted as an essential part of the learning process from primary through to higher education. Just before leaving his post as Education Minister, in March 2002, Jack Lang made the following statement in a speech devoted to teacher training colleges:

La formation aux langues : tout élève de l'école devra, de plus en plus tôt, être initié à une langue vivante. C'est un objectif essentiel à l'heure où nous rentrons de plein pied dans l'Europe, indispensable aussi pour qu'il n'y ait pas que quelques privilégiés à bénéficier de cette compétence indispensable à l'homme de demain. Il faut donc former nos maîtres à l'enseignement des langues, il faut faire en sorte qu'ils maîtrisent au moins une langue étrangère. Le dispositif visant à rendre obligatoire un certificat de compétence en langues de l'enseignement supérieur, se mettra en place progressivement. En tout état de cause, à partir de la rentrée 2002 tout candidat qui n'aura pas choisi l'épreuve de langue vivante au concours de professeurs des écoles et qui ne sera pas titulaire d'un certificat de compétences en langues suivra obligatoirement un enseignement en langues en 2ème année d'IUFM.⁶

Whether this particular goal will be achieved remains to be seen, especially in the light of the most recent developments.⁷ However, today, virtually 100% of secondary school pupils have tuition in one foreign language, while over 70% (nearly 90% in years 3 and 4) study a second foreign language and around 10%, a third. Although percentages may vary from year to year and from school to school, very few pupils (apart from those with extreme learning difficulties) now leave school without any knowledge of a foreign language and culture.

Not surprisingly, by far the most popular language studied is English (nearly 9 out of 10 now chose it as the first foreign language). German has now been overtaken by Spanish as the main second foreign language learned (around 60% of 3rd year pupils chose Spanish, 20% German). Italian stands in fourth place overall, and third in some areas in the South, but comes first when it comes to choosing a third foreign language, as some pupils may do in their 5th year. Russian and Portuguese come a long way behind.

⁴ With the creoles spoken in France's "overseas territories", these make up the main regional languages still understood and spoken by a significant number of people. A recent report found 24 regional "languages and dialects" in all, in mainland France, and 56 counting all the overseas departments and territories.

⁵ Bernard Poignant, maire of Quimper, was asked by the Jospin government to produce a report on the state of regional language learning in France.

⁶ *La rentrée 2002 dans les IUFM*. Discours de Jack Lang, ministre de l'Education nationale - 13 mars 2002.
<http://www.education.gouv.fr/thema/langue/langue.htm>

⁷ The extension of foreign language awareness and learning activities to all 7-8 year-olds in 2003, now seems to be in question.

I.2.1 Responsibility for language teaching

The French education system is highly centralised, in that most primary, secondary and tertiary education is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, a huge national administration employing over 1.3 million "fonctionnaires" (including over 880,000 teachers). The rationale is that education is first and foremost a "public service", a "right" to which every citizen must be given equal access from an early age, irrespective of social or geographical origin. The service provided is thus deemed to be of equal quality throughout France (including in the overseas *départements* and territories). Although opinions may vary as to the degree of autonomy which should be allowed at the local or regional level (particularly as regards the teaching of regional languages), the "egalitarian" ideal is seldom challenged by any, whatever their position on the political spectrum. The only concessions to local or regional diversity, introduced in the wake of the "decentralisation" policies of the early 1980s, have been the devolution of responsibility for new buildings and maintenance of primary and secondary establishments to local authorities (primary schools to the *communes*, *collèges* to the *départements* and *lycées* to the regions) and a tentative move towards greater flexibility in the organisation of the school week and school holidays at the primary level. However, the present government is looking at ways of also transferring the responsibility for ancillary staff (supervisors and certain non teaching jobs) to the local authorities.

The same centralised administration largely determines what is taught in schools (via the *programme*) and how pupils are taught (via the teacher training institutes _ one in each *académie*). France (including overseas *départements* and territories) is divided into 28 *académies*, each headed by a *recteur d'académie* responsible for implementing educational policy and ensuring that the principle of "republican equality" is applied. The responsibility for primary education is delegated to *Inspecteurs d'Académie* in each *département*.

In the area of languages, as in other subject areas, teaching policy and practices in primary and secondary education are therefore very much determined by decisions taken at the national level. Although foreign language assistants had been present in primary schools on an experimental basis in several parts of the country since the early 1980s, the extension of foreign language learning to all primary schools was decided by a ministry of education "decree" in 1995, which has been regularly updated by successive Ministers. The number of hours taught and a detailed list of objectives to be attained are published in the "Bulletin Officiel de l'Education Nationale" (B.O.E.N.).

As regards teaching staff, the "*Education nationale*" employs all full time teaching and non-teaching staff in the state funded education system throughout France, and even pays the salaries of those who work in the so-called *écoles privées sous contrat* (i.e. denominational schools, mainly run by the Catholic Church) which cater for up to 40% of secondary school pupils in some areas (e.g. Brittany). Teachers are recruited via national competitive examinations (called *concours*), the "C.A.P.E.S."⁸ and the "Agréation", which offer a fixed number of places in each subject, set by the government each year. The two exams are similar in content (to the extent that part of the "programme" or syllabus that candidates must study is common to both), but the agrégation is both more all-embracing and more exacting than the CAPES (150 places for 1095 candidates in English in 2001 for the "*agrégation externe*", open to university students, and 62 places for 1290 candidates for the "*agrégation interne*" organised for practising teachers, compared to 1170 places for 6280 candidates for the "CAPES". The latter comprises a series of formal written exams testing the candidate's knowledge and understanding of several literary works and area studies themes and his/her capacity to translate both literary texts and more general media texts into and out of the foreign language, a test of the candidate's aural and oral ability in the language, and a specific "pre-professional" test of the candidate's capacity to analyse and exploit foreign language material for teaching purposes. Preparation for the latter is under the responsibility of the "IUFM" or teacher training college, to which candidates must first have been admitted on the basis of their "licence" results, their motivation and an interview, while the knowledge based tuition is largely the jealously guarded preserve of university language departments. Candidates who succeed in the exam then undergo a second year of practical training and hands-on experience at the teacher training college. Candidates for the "agrégation" must hold a *maîtrise* degree and are not required to be admitted to the "IUFM" prior to the exam, but must complete a year's professional training once qualified. Once teachers have completed their training and are fully qualified, they become civil servants, paid by and answerable to the *Education nationale* and not to local authorities or to the institution where they are appointed.

Steps were taken in the late 90s to make the "CAPES" more professionally oriented by awarding more importance to testing of candidates' oral ability and to the "pre-professional" examination. However, in 1998, the ministry's attempts to replace one of the "dissertations" testing candidates' knowledge of literature and area studies by a more thorough testing of aural and oral skills met with strong resistance on the part of many academics, who lobbied the ministry via their professional associations. A tentative reform of the exam was introduced in English in 1999, but in January 2002, a joint meeting of the Societies of English, German, Spanish and Italian lecturers demanded that the ministry review the present weighting of the various components of the CAPES exam on the grounds that it is too biased in favour of the "pre-professional test" at the expense of "academic knowledge in the subject area".

⁸ *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle à l'enseignement secondaire*

1.3 The higher education system

1.3.1 Basic features and organisation

Because HE is to a large extent part and parcel of the *Education nationale*, it shares two of the basic features of the system mentioned above:

- Access to HE, and to universities in particular, is seen as a "right" for all holders of the "baccalauréat".⁹ As a consequence, France has a relatively high level of access to HE (over 40% of 20 year-olds in HE in 2000) : 2.1m students in HE and FE in 99/2000 out of population of 60m).
- HE is essentially run as a centralised state funded system: universities and most other HE institutions receive a large part of their funding from central government or other public bodies and most of their staff are paid by the state and have "fonctionnaire d'Etat" status. Private institutions only account for a very small proportion of HE students: only 22,000 students were enrolled in "private" universities in 99/2000, and around 100,000 in various fee-paying "écoles" and institutes. Although universities are in theory autonomous "public establishments", governed by their own elected bodies and headed by an elected executive *Président*, the *Recteur d'Académie* also acts as *Recteur Chancelier des Universités*, and may be called upon to take over the running of a university in the event of financial mismanagement or failure of the university authorities to appoint a *Président*. Major investment programmes, and particularly new buildings, are still supervised by the *Rectorat*, even though universities have in recent years been given more responsibility in this area.
- University qualifications are deemed for the most part to be "national qualifications" awarded within the framework defined by the Ministry. Universities may also award their own "Diplômes d'universités" for certain specific courses, but these generally remain less popular and less well recognised than "national diplomas".

Beyond the basic principles, HE actually encompasses two fundamentally different systems:

- an open system in which selective entry is forbidden by law: the universities (82 institutions) catering for 1.3 million students in 99/2000 (down from a peak of around 1.4 million in 1995-96)
- a restricted-entry system embracing a wide range of subject areas, levels and institutions, in which entrance examinations and numerus clausi are officially sanctioned and encouraged. The main institutions are:
 - "engineering schools" ("Ecoles d'ingénieur"), offering around 85,000 places, a quarter of which are in schools outside the state funded system ; those with the most demanding entry conditions (access via the gruelling "classes préparatoires" system and admission through the highly competitive entrance examinations) are classed as the elitist "Grandes écoles";
 - business schools, with 56,000 students in 99/2000, generally run by Chambers of Commerce or private institutions (e.g. H.E.C.);
 - other "écoles" and institutes, including "Instituts d'études politiques", schools of journalism, architecture, art, public health, etc. funded by the state or run by private bodies;
 - IUT (technology institutes – 111 in 2002, accounting for around 120000 students). These institutions are in theory attached to universities, but are in practice autonomous and receive their own government budget allocation;
 - STS ("*sections de techniciens supérieurs*" or post-baccalauréat technology courses), catering for approx. 240,000 students. Although these courses are post-secondary and therefore classified as "further or higher education", they are not run by specific HE institutions but by "lycées", and classes are taught by secondary school teachers.

Both the IUT and the STS offer short, two-year vocational courses and have seen a rapid expansion in student numbers since the early 1990s.

1.3.2. Language provision in HE (other than for language "specialists")

According to official policy, all students, including *IUT* students, are in theory given the opportunity during their first two years in HE to continue studying at least one of the languages learned in secondary school. In practice, this is not always the case, as some institutions choose to concentrate their language teaching resources on 3rd or 4th year students, while some departments manage to bypass the obligation altogether. In the vast majority of cases where foreign languages are an integral part of the curriculum, the language chosen will be English, though German and Spanish are usually offered as alternatives in the larger institutions. In multidisciplinary universities, the range of languages on offer will be much wider, with students being offered a choice of up to 25 or 30 different languages, many of which at *ab initio* level.

Language tuition is normally organised on the basis of 1.5 to 2 hours a week, though *ab initio* languages usually require 4 hours a week. The way tuition is organised may vary enormously from one institution to another. While many still offer traditional language classes, where 30-40 students sit in a room for an hour and a half or two hours a week with one tutor, others offer a

⁹ In 2000, over 61% of 18-24 year olds obtained the *Bac*

combination of classroom "teaching" and modular activity based learning in resource centres, and others still have moved over completely to assisted or self-study learning in dedicated language centres, with free access at certain times for all students.

In some cases, language resource centres are also open to mature students and "life-long learners". Most universities with full-blown language departments or faculties will offer continuing education courses in one or several languages. These may or may not be organised by the same language centres organising language provision for students and usually rely partly on in-house teaching staff and partly on external tutors.

1. 4 and I.5 Accreditation of new programmes and of new higher education institutions

As can be expected in a centralised state-funded system, all new courses leading to a nationally recognised qualification must be approved by the ministry. Accreditation is usually granted for four years and must be renewed on expiry. The basic structure and requirements of all courses are determined by the ministry after consultation with the relevant bodies. Official course definitions are published in the B.O.E.N. and specify general requirements (such as the need for all courses to include the study of at least one foreign language and the existence of major and minor subjects) and course specific requirements such as the minimum numbers of "contact" hours, basic study areas or the recognition of work placements. Detailed course contents and organisation are left to each institution.

Universities may also set up courses leading to "local" qualifications ("Diplôme d'université"), which do not require ministerial approval. These must be funded by the university through its own resources and are generally fee-paying vocational courses. This type of qualification is generally awarded for short (one-year) courses outside the mainstream of higher education.

For the past 30 years, national qualifications have been awarded after successful completion of two, three, four or five years of study (the D.E.U.G., Licence, Maîtrise and D.E.A or D.E.S.S respectively). At the Sorbonne conference in **xxx**, Jack Lang, the then Minister for Education, stated that France must move towards the two-cycle structure recommended under the Bologna Process. This rapidly became known in HE circles as the "3-5-8" system (i.e. 3 years for a basic degree, a further two years for a "Masters" type qualification, and three further years for a doctorate. The logical implication would be the disappearance of the intermediate level qualifications particular to the French system (the two-year "DEUG" and the four-year "Maîtrise"). Discussions were then undertaken with the statutory consultative body (the "CNESER") and Ministerial decrees were published shortly before the spring elections, introducing the principle of a three-year "Licence" cycle followed by a two-year "Master" (which can be either research oriented or professionally oriented). These new qualifications will gradually be introduced by the universities as they submit new courses for accreditation by the ministry.

New institutions are created by central government. Few universities have been created in recent years (in the 90s, the only new universities were generally local "branches" of existing institutions which were given full university status (often to boost the ego and re-election chances of local dignitaries), or *I.U.T.s* created as consolation prizes for towns which were too small to warrant having a full-blown university. Regional councils have been trying to increase their involvement in higher education and may now be given more leeway in promoting new HE institutions. Locally, some "Conseil généraux" (departemental councils) have financed "campuses" and tried to attract private and state-funded HE institutions.

I. 6. Quality assessment / evaluation

I.6.1. Management and "governance"

Higher Education as a whole is subject, like every other area of public spending, to the annual scrutiny of **Parliament** prior to and during budgetary discussions and debates, as exemplified in the *Sénat* report quoted above. One section of the report is entitled "*L'efficacité de l'enseignement supérieur*" and pinpoints a number of "quality criteria" applicable to higher education. Although the assessment is in fact mainly quantitative, which is fitting in a budgetary report, it is nevertheless relevant to our theme in that it provides the background against which true quality criteria must be judged.

One of the criteria used is the staff/student ratio, which has seen a significant improvement since the mid-90s, falling from a mean figure of 22.6 students per faculty member in 1995 to less than 19 in 2001. Of course, such figures conceal significant variations, both between institutions ("IUTs", for instance, are allocated funding on the basis of smaller teaching group sizes than universities) and between subject areas, disciplines or types of teaching (e.g. first year lectures in law or psychology delivered in front of 500 or more students, translation "practicals" in English or Spanish with 35-40 students or lab work with a dozen or so chemistry or biology students...). Furthermore, it must be said that this overall improvement simply means, in most cases, that an untenable situation in certain areas (for instance, language "practicals" with 50 or 60 students per class) has now become more bearable (30-40 per class), while still remaining largely unacceptable in terms of creating an environment conducive to real quality enhancement.

Another favourite measure of "efficiency" in the education system (particularly popular with politicians) is the number of qualifications awarded and success rates achieved. The report focuses on a well-known drawback of the French system, where unrestricted access for "baccalauréat" holders leads to high drop-out rates in the first year of HE. According to the report, of the students who entered the first year of a university course in 98/99 (including IUTs and engineering "schools"), only 46% were enrolled in second year in 99/2000. Of those who failed to make it into 2nd year, 29% repeated their first year, while one in four left the university system. Among the latter, a number went on to do non-university FE courses (such as STS), while others left to do their military service (which was still compulsory for male students at that time). Again, the overall figures conceal radically different situations: over 70% of IUT students automatically go straight into second year, while at the other extreme, only 10% of medical students have access to the second year, due to the highly selective "concours" taken at the end of year 1. In the mainstream of university courses, passage rates vary from 34% in "AES" (a multi-disciplinary economics, administration and business studies course) to over 50% in literature, arts and linguistics.

As regards foreign languages, of the 34,000 students who entered a language studies course in 98/99, just over 40% went into the second year of their course the following year, while 25% repeated a year (6.7% in a different course) and 31.8% left the university. These national figures appear to be substantiated by local figures for foreign language studies in Rennes (xxxx).

As the *Sénat* report itself stresses, it is now an accepted fact of French university life that for a growing number of students, the first year at university is often by choice a transitional year, pending admission to other non-university courses. In the area of languages, this is particularly the case in L.E.A., where up to a third of students apply for places on vocational *BTS* courses. However, this should not be used to gloss over the fact that a significant number of students in language studies, as in other areas, drop out of university either because they fail to reach the standards expected of them or because they do not find the course contents and teaching methods meet their expectations or objectives.

At the **institutional level**, the University President is accountable to the Ministry, either directly or via the **Recteur Chancelier**, although central government "supervision" is not usually exercised in a hierarchical fashion but rather in the guise of a partnership based on mutually agreed commitments. These are redefined every four years in the "**Contrat d'établissement**", which sets out each university's objectives in terms of overall policy, new course development, building projects, international relations, etc. The human and financial resources required for the fulfilment of these objectives are then negotiated with the Ministry before being finalised. Building and equipment projects may also be partly or entirely funded via the **Contrat de Plan Etat-Région**, in partnership with the relevant regional and local authorities. Central government can of course use these exercises as an incentive for the implementation of official HE policies by "ring fencing" certain funds and making additional funding available for particular schemes (e.g. the introduction of the first year "*tutorat*" system, or the creation of "language centres", etc.). The limitations of such an exercise lie in the lack of any real penalties imposed on any of the partners in the event of failure to meet the commitments made: not surprisingly, universities have often found that innovative schemes implemented with government backing have left them having to find alternative funding because the teaching or administrative posts promised have not materialised within the duration of the "contract". Conversely, failure to meet a commitment to introduce certain innovations (as described below) has rarely (never?) been sanctioned by reduced funding or human resource cuts in the institutions concerned.

The need for more rigorous assessment of performance and results led to the creation in 1984, of the **Comité national d'évaluation**. This independent but state-funded body, consisting of 17 appointed representatives of the academic community and "haut fonctionnaires", conducts regular audits of HE institutions, looking at financial management, overall course management and examination results, human resources, buildings, etc.

Finally (or in the first instance, depending on one's perspective) each university's executive (the Président and his team of vice-présidents) are to varying degrees accountable to the statutory bodies (the *Conseil d'Administration*, *Conseil Scientifique* and *Conseil des études et de la vie universitaire*), consisting of elected representatives of the faculty, technical and administrative staff and students. The latter are especially well represented on the "*CEVU*", which has an important consultative role in examining new course proposals, course modifications, and examination and assessment systems, before they are put to the "CA".

I.6.2. Research evaluation

Research funding is traditionally more closely linked to the quality of the work produced and university research groups and laboratories receiving public funding must submit regular reports and be assessed both at the university level (by the "*Conseil scientifique*") and by ministry experts (though some of the larger research teams have "C.N.R.S." status, receiving their funding directly from the national research body, and are therefore subject to their own separate assessment procedures and controls). The submission of detailed annual reports by each research group or team and the negotiation by each university of a four-yearly research development plan (the *Plan quadriennal*) are major exercises in the academic year. The number of these completed and submitted is another factor which is taken into account in university funding criteria. However, the penalties associated with poor collective research performance are again mitigated by the fact that in areas such as languages, where

few research groups reach a size which allows them to employ a significant number of technicians or research assistants, jobs are not usually at stake. Most academics in traditional areas of arts, humanities and languages will be more concerned with the assessment of their individual research achievements, than with collective research efforts. However, the scale and the scope of language research has been rapidly developing as IT and language engineering have introduced different research methods and resource needs...

At the individual level, research remains an important factor in the career advancement prospects for "enseignants-chercheurs". Individual research performance is essentially subject to peer assessment, both within the institution itself (via the Conseil d'Administration Restreint (i.e. restricted to faculty representatives), and the *Conseil Scientifique*) and at the national level, via the relevant section of the "**CN.U. or Conseil national des universités**", a nationally elected body consisting of academics chosen by their peers in the same subject area. However, for *enseignants-chercheurs* (*Maîtres de conférences* and *Professeurs*), this assessment process now only really applies to the 10% or so who are sufficiently advanced in their career to qualify for promotions to a higher salary scale or to MDCs submitting an "*Habilitation à diriger les recherches*" in order to apply for a professorship. It has no bearing on progression within the respective standard salary scales for MDCs or Professors, where increments are still largely, if not entirely, based on length of service (which is the case throughout the *Fonction publique*). No government has yet dared finger this highly sensitive "hot potato", which raises fundamental questions about the whole issue of "fonctionnaire status" and the life tenure which goes with it.

I.6.3 Teaching skills assessment

As mentioned earlier, little had been done until recently either to monitor or to enhance the quality of teaching in HE. Unlike secondary school teachers, who may be "inspected" in their classroom several times in the course of their career, academics are not formally required to submit to any form of external or internal assessment of their teaching. The prevailing feeling is still that "teaching" ability, although important for the lecturer's standing with the students, is not a fundamental requirement in an academic, and that in any case, at least in many science and humanities subjects, applicants for HE posts will already have proven their capacities in this field by passing the competitive secondary school teaching qualifications described above (the "agrégation" being an unofficial pre-requisite for applicants to HE posts in certain subjects, particularly languages) and by having acquired at least some classroom experience in secondary education.

On the other hand, in some subject areas (again particularly in the area of languages) up to 20% of university posts are defined as teaching posts and open to "Professeurs agrégés" or "certifiés" (secondary school teachers holders of the Agrégation or CAPES) who are not required to take part in research activities.¹⁰ Most of the 8500 or so appointed in HE institutions will have had prior experience of classroom teaching in "lycées".¹¹ Unlike their counterparts in secondary education, teachers appointed on these positions are not subject to inspection, but their "teaching ability and performance" must in theory be assessed each year by the head of department and Dean of the Faculty, and a short report forwarded to the relevant authorities at the Rectorat. In practice, this is often a purely formal exercise which has little or no bearing on the individual's promotion or career prospects...

Recruitment procedures, whether for full-time *enseignants* or *enseignants-chercheurs* posts at whatever level, do not normally include any formal assessment of teaching skills, and rely very much in this area on interview performance, reputation or hearsay. The only recourse against notoriously poor teachers, once past their probationary year, is peer pressure, or, in some extreme cases, student protest. The principle of annual course assessments by students was formally introduced by A. Bayrou, the Education Minister, in 1997 and in theory became mandatory as from 1999. Implementation, however, has been slow and haphazard in many universities, where it is has met with strong resistance on the part of the more conservative sections of the faculty. Even where implementation has gone ahead, any suggestion that "course assessment" must necessarily imply an evaluation of the teacher has been studiously avoided and any initiatives in this area are generally left to individual members of staff.

By a strange paradox, teaching skills are often much more likely to be a determining factor in the recruitment of part-time external tutors, particularly those taken on to teach non language majors or adult learners. The renewal of their contract will often hang on the perceived quality of their teaching and their ability to help students meet learning objectives.

I.6.4 Ranking of departments or programmes

¹⁰ They are however increasingly encouraged to do so, and recent measures have introduced sabbatical terms or semesters for *professeurs agrégés* who undertake a doctoral thesis.

¹¹ In 1999, some teachers were experimentally seconded on a part-time basis to universities. This practice does not appear to have caught on, presumably because of the organisational difficulties involved.

Official ranking of departments or programmes has been avoided for the same reasons as teaching assessment, i.e. on the grounds that the quality of courses leading to national qualifications is in theory identical throughout France. This despite the fact that courses differ notoriously in content and quality from one university to another, and that conditions and levels of equipment vary considerably from institution to institution, even though the basic organisational structure and rules may be identical. The ministry does however collate and analyse success or failure rates in different universities and courses, and is now tentatively beginning to release information for public consultation.¹² While differences could be ignored or glossed over when student numbers were rising, they have become more obvious with the overall fall in student numbers, and the significant decline in certain subject areas such as traditional language courses. The lifting of the rules which often prevented first year students from enrolling at a university outside their home region, if the course was offered by an institution in the area, has led to increased competition between departments and institutions, even though few would be willing to acknowledge the fact. The media have been quick to capitalise on the growing comparative trend in the educational field and now regularly publish "league tables" of *les meilleures fac*. One criteria which students and the media readily focus on when drawing comparisons is the success rate in the "concours" (national competitive examinations for access to secondary school teaching). Reputations are often built on the numbers of students passing the "CAPES" or the "Agrégation". Given that only 10 to 20% of candidates actually succeed overall, the criterion is highly questionable, but perhaps not surprising in a country which manages to reconcile the highly elitist system of "grandes écoles" and open access to the university system.

1.6.5. Student assessment

The concept of "average" achievement as a standard of success (la "*moyenne*") is sacrosanct throughout the French education system. From an early age pupils are used to working out their "*moyenne*" over a term or year in a given subject or range of subjects, and success in most exams, from the *baccalauréat* to the *concours* is judged on an overall "pass" mark achieved over a range of exercises and subject areas. The most common "pass" mark is a *moyenne* of 50% (10/20) and students achieving higher standards are awarded *mentions* (*Assez bien*, *Bien* and *Très Bien* for *moyennes* of 60, 70 and 80% respectively). However, success in a competitive examen (*concours*) will depend on the lowest *moyenne* which the examination board is prepared to accept, given the number of places allocated and the standards which the board have set.¹³

Such a system is not really conducive to learning by objectives and assessment by attainment levels in so far as it may amount to acknowledging as "success" a student's failure to satisfactorily reach 49.9% of the goals set for a given test of skills or knowledge. Moreover, a fundamental weakness in a key area may be cancelled out by a "strength" in one particular field, or by average achievement across the board. Conversely, an *L.E.A* student who has demonstrated his/her knowledge, ability and personal qualities in a key professional area, may fail to reach the overall standard required for a pass in a given year of the course because of a particular weakness in his/her "C" language or another subject area.

Attempts have been made in some areas to move towards different systems of assessment. A binary scheme may for instance be applied to specialised translation, where it may be considered that a piece of work either meets or fails to meet the quality standards defined in the specifications (i.e. one major mistake invalidates the whole translation). Language certification (see below) has also helped to develop different standards of assessment, by introducing the idea that the same learner may be awarded recognition for different levels of achievement in the same type of test or series of tests taken at different periods in time.

1.7. University funding

Total public spending on HE in 2001 amounted to almost 11.3 billion euros. Out of this total, some 9.8 billion were spent by the Ministry of Education, and universities, IUTs and other mainstream HE establishments accounted for 8.1 billion (including salaries).¹⁴

Because 94% of university staff are paid directly by the state, annual budgets do not include salaries other than those funded by the university itself. University resources consist of an annual central government grant, student fees and any additional resources generated by the institution itself. The latter represent between 20 and 40% of university funding, depending on the dominant subject areas in the university, links with industry and university policy in areas such as continuing education. Universities are not free to set tuition fee levels : these are strictly controlled by the government and as in many other countries, are a highly sensitive political issue. Annual tuition fees for an undergraduate student are only nominal (around 130 euros in 2001-2002), and even postgraduate fees are limited to around 300 euros a year. This can be set against the actual annual cost of HE per university student (6300 euros in 1999).¹⁵

The government current expenditure grant (*Dotation globale de fonctionnement* or *DGF*) is based on a number of parameters (formerly known as the "*normes SANREMO*"), including student numbers (variable according to type of course and level of

¹² Figures for the "DEUG" are available on the Ministry of Education web site mentioned above.

¹³ In last year's "C.A.P.E.S. externe" in English, for instance, the threshold *moyenne* for admission was set at 6.67/20 !

¹⁴ Rapport législatif, Budget 2001, Chapitre II: Le contexte du budget de l'Enseignement supérieur pour 2001

¹⁵ A "bargain" when compared to the cost of a BTS student (10,000 euros) or an engineering student (12,000) !

study), numbers of teaching, research and administrative and technical staff, square meters of buildings, the number of doctoral theses submitted, etc. The actual amount allocated is often well below the allocation which the institution would be entitled to on the basis of the reference criteria (most universities receive between 62 and 90% of their theoretical entitlement). In 2002, the total "DGF" for universities stood at around € 352 million. In recent years, attempts have been made to introduce an element of qualitative assessment in what is essentially still a "number crunching" exercise, as already mentioned above.

I.8 Admission of students

Any holder of the "baccalauréat" is in theory entitled by right to a first enrolment in the first year of any undergraduate course in a state-funded university. Universities that have tried to introduce even reasonable pre-requisites for certain courses (for instance a minimum amount of musical ability for students wishing to enrol for musical studies...or minimum linguistic ability for someone wanting to study languages) have had to back down when challenged in the administrative tribunals. In practice, this right is only upheld if the student enrolls at the nearest university to his/her place of residence offering the course in which he/she wishes to enrol. Subsequently, the student is automatically admitted into the next year of the course, providing he/she has obtained an overall pass mark in the course exams (marks in one subject may be compensated by marks obtained in another). Students wishing to change courses or universities must submit their request to an admissions committee, which may refuse admission on grounds of numbers already enrolled on the course or may ask the student to catch up a number of subjects. The only courses which may apply a strict "numerus clausus" are those, like medicine, where admission to second year is via a competitive examination on the basis of numbers set each year by the ministry, or postgraduate courses, which are free to set their own admission criteria (tests, interviews, etc).

The universities are alone in the HE system in being denied the right to select students on entry. Yet another paradox of the system is that institutions offering shorter vocational courses (IUT or schools running BTS courses) are entitled to implement a numerus clausus and admit students on the basis of their school and "baccalauréat" results. This is of course also the case for "Grandes écoles", which are by definition highly selective institutions selecting their students after two years of intensive post-baccalauréat cramming, on the basis of competitive entrance examinations.

I.9 Student fees and student support (means-related and quality-related grants)

As mentioned above, tuition fees for most courses are nominal (around 130 euros per year), and universities are (in theory) not allowed to introduce extra charges for various services (use of computer facilities, etc.). Student support is still mainly in the shape of non-repayable government grants, but only 10-20% of students (depending on the catchment area, the university and the course) are entitled to receive this support, on the basis of parental income (or own income if no longer receiving parental support). *Boursiers* are not required to pay tuition fees (these are paid for by the government) and are automatically entitled to a room in a hall of residence, but may forfeit their grant if they do not achieve results within a given length of time...

I.10 Departments / units in higher education institutions in charge of language programmes and courses

The responsibility for language programmes and language teaching lies principally with two types of departments :

- "specialist" language departments, responsible for degree programmes and postgraduate courses;
- language centres or "non-specialist" language departments, responsible for the language components of other courses or for life long learning tuition.

"Specialist" language departments may run traditional language degree courses or "*langues étrangères appliquées*" courses or both, as the case may be. The older "LEA" departments often have their own staff, while more recently established "LEA" courses may be partly or entirely run with staff from traditional language departments.

Most universities and *IUTs* now have language departments catering exclusively for non-language majors, although this is seldom the case in the dozen or so establishments where the dominant subject areas are languages, arts and humanities. Many of these departments are entitled "language centres" and may or may not also run courses for adult learners as part of the "life-long learning" process. An increasing number run language resource centres for self-study and have often pioneered the use of IT and multimedia resources in language teaching. Those language centres which have their own permanent staff often employ a large proportion of "professeurs agrégés and certifiés" and have only in the last few years begun to be allocated university teaching and research posts. This has often meant that such departments found it extremely difficult to make their voices heard in decision-making circles and were often at a disadvantage as regards resource allocation. Things have begun to change for the better since the mid-90s, thanks to the proactive role played by key players in this area who were keen to promote innovation and quality in HE language learning and to assert the academic status of research in the area (see below).

2. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITY MEASURES RELATED TO DEFINING AND DESIGNING COURSES AND PROGRAMMES IN THE AREA OF LANGUAGES

2.1 Specialist language courses

2.1.1. Language, literature and areas studies

The general framework of all university language degree courses is determined by official definitions published in the "*Bulletin Officiel de l'Education Nationale*". However, the syllabus is couched in only the vaguest of terms, as illustrated in the following extract from the official framework document (1997) defining the third year ("licence") of language and literature courses (numbers of hours refer to annual "contact" hours):

Contenu et mentions de la licence :

350 heures minimum d'enseignement, dont 250 heures au moins réparties entre les matières suivantes :

. langue écrite et orale faisant place aux langues de spécialité;

. linguistique, littérature et civilisation.

Ces enseignements se réfèrent pour moitié à l'étude des sociétés, des économies et des cultures contemporaines.

The text specifies that additional specialisations may be included, such as

a) Mention Français, langue étrangère

didactique du français, langue étrangère;

histoire, civilisation, langue et littérature françaises dans le cadre du français, langue étrangère;

apprentissage théorique et pratique d'une langue seconde.

Other specialisations cover "comparative literature", "regional languages", "documentation" or "automatic language processing".

Within this framework, each university is free to organise the syllabus and course contents. In practice, most syllabuses of "traditional" language degree courses are very much "concours-driven" in the sense that students are trained from year one or two of their course in exercises which are essentially designed to prepare them for the type of skills they will need for the CAPES and the Agrégation, i.e. formal grammar, phonetics, the translation of literary or journalistic texts from and into the foreign language, aural and oral skills, "civilisation", literature and, in years three and four, linguistics. Given the relatively small number of contact hours allowed by the official framework, little room is left for innovation or experimentation in the core syllabus, although students may take advantage of the modular system introduced in many universities to branch out into other subject areas or to acquire specific skills. The "optionals" offered to students within the core syllabus itself are often permutations of different authors or themes, frequently derived from those included in previous sessions of the "concours".

Candidates for the "concours" (generally fourth year students for the CAPES and fifth year students for the "agrégation") generally follow specific preparatory lectures and practicals determined by the "programme", i.e. the list of literary works or "civilisation" themes set each year by the ministry, in consultation with a number of academic advisers, which all candidates throughout France will be expected to study for the following session. In some cases, several departments within a same region may pool their resources in order to cover all the authors or area studies themes required. The set syllabus and the type of skills that candidates are required to demonstrate will determine the objectives and contents of the preparatory courses: much emphasis is placed on document and text analysis and commentary as well as formal dissertation techniques. Written and oral translation also figure prominently in the preparation. As mentioned above, more professionally oriented exercises have now been introduced alongside the formal academic exam, but preparation for the latter is the responsibility of teacher training colleges and not university language departments. However, attempts have been made in an increasing number of universities over the last few years to introduce optional modules devoted to language teaching theory and practice, including an introduction to the use of IT technology and multimedia applications.

The drop in student numbers in many university language courses has prompted an increased awareness of the need for the diversification of the career prospects offered to foreign language majors. Although language teaching remains the main career prospect mentioned in course prospectuses, and diversification may be limited to different types of language teaching (primary schools, adult learners, French as a foreign language, etc), areas such as tourism, the media, information management, or multimedia resources are now more frequently mentioned. However, diversification in terms of syllabus contents and new learning outcomes is more likely to be found in the large number of postgraduate vocational "D.E.S.S." courses being offered by more and more language departments. At the degree level, traditional "language and literature" courses are restricted in the introduction of new course objectives and contents both by the relatively small number of "contact hours" available, and by the existence, generally in the same institutions, of *L.E.A.* courses focusing on the languages and business or translation studies sectors. Moreover, few traditional language departments appear to have attempted to compensate for the relatively low number of contact hours by developing student and resource centred learning. Attempts to innovate in these areas are often hampered by rigid work load definitions (both for lecturers and students), based purely on student contact hours, the often inextricable system of "*modalités de contrôle*" (the term itself is highly significant), rendered even more unwieldy by the semestrial system, and the lack of workstations available for teaching purposes and self-learning.

2.1.2 Langues étrangères appliquées

The general framework for the "LEA" *Licence* is marginally more detailed than the one prescribed for "traditional" language degree courses, but the *Maîtrise* is, if anything, even more vaguely defined:

La maîtrise de langues étrangères appliquées est assortie de l'une des mentions suivantes :

Affaires et commerce;
Traduction spécialisée.

Elle comprend 375 heures minimum d'enseignement, dont :

- l'enseignement à parts égales de deux langues et celui des sciences et techniques de l'expression et de la communication française;
- des enseignements portant sur le domaine défini par la mention.

Un tiers au moins de ces enseignements doit être assuré par des professionnels qualifiés et sous des formes pratiques.

La maîtrise de langues étrangères appliquées comporte en outre un stage ou un travail d'étude et de recherche faisant l'objet d'un mémoire donnant lieu à soutenance.

The vagueness of the official framework means that there are almost as many variations on the LEA Maîtrise syllabus as there are LEA departments, even though the core syllabus of language skills for special purposes in French and in two foreign languages is a common feature determined by the framework. The "*mentions*" themselves are sufficiently open to allow all kinds of combinations and specialisms. In the "*affaires et commerce*" sector, the emphasis will be placed both on languages for business purposes on the one hand, and on marketing, accountancy, commercial law, financial management or international commerce, or a combination of several areas on the other, according to the course objectives defined, and to a certain extent, the teaching resources available in the institution or locally. "*Traduction spécialisée*" ranges in fourth year, from a mere introduction to the translation of special purpose texts (in those departments which do not allow students to specialise at an earlier stage), to comprehensive translation studies courses covering everything from commercial, technical, legal and media translation to subtitling and the use of IT translation and terminology management tools. Interpreting techniques may also be included at an introductory level, for students wishing to specialise in this area at a later stage.

In defining subject areas and learning outcomes, longstanding LEA departments which have built up a network of contacts and partnerships in business and industry have usually been able to draw on those contacts to make sure that students acquire the kind of knowledge, skills and know-how that will equip them for future employment, either in an international business context or in the area of translation and other "language industries". Feedback from students on work placements is often a vital element in defining and redefining such courses, as they paint an up to date picture of the knowledge areas and the type of personal and professional skills required by the sectors which will provide future employment. Another important source of information and advice lies in the "qualified professionals" who should account for at least a third of all tuition. These are either occasional contributors to the course, through talks and seminars or lectures, or part-time members of the department, recruited on specially created and government funded PAST posts (i.e. Professionnels associés).¹⁶

2.1.3. Postgraduate vocational qualifications

"D.E.S.S." courses, open on a numerus clausus basis to students holding a "Maîtrise", offer even more variety as they are not subject to nationally approved denominations, even though courses are accredited by the Ministry through the usual channels, and the qualification itself is a fully recognised "national diploma". A sample of course titles taken from the list of DESS courses offered in the area of languages¹⁷ shows the variety available:

Correspondant de presse en pays anglophone mention journalisme français anglais
Etudes ibériques et latino-américaines appliquées à la gestion des entreprises
Européen langues étrangères appliquées au commerce international
Industries de la langue et traduction spécialisée
Ingénierie de formation linguistique : diffusion des langues-cultures et francophonie
Interprétation de conférence
Langues et techniques (traduction spécialisée anglais-français)
Langues orientales et commerce international
Négociateur trilingue du commerce international
Politiques linguistiques technico-éducatives et didactique des langues étrangères
Traduction éditoriale économique et technique
Traduction littéraire professionnelle (anglais français)
Traduction, sous titrage et doublage des productions cinématographiques et audiovisuelles
Traduction, traductologie de l'écrit pour l'édition et le marché du livre

¹⁶ Applicants for PAST posts must be in salaried employment outside the university or be self-employed, and are usually recruited on three year renewable contract and on half the pay of a senior lecturer or professor, according to their qualifications

¹⁷ See the ONISEP's online *Annuaire des formations universitaires* at http://www.onisep.fr/national/atlas/atlas_sup/minihomesup.htm

These courses are explicitly designed to provide students with advanced professional skills in a specific area, and as is the case in the LEA Maîtrise, a significant number of teaching hours (up to 50%) must be devoted to practising professionals in the field and the course must include a work placement of 4 to 6 months. Successful and attractive DESS courses are therefore those which maintain close links with their professional environment and are able to keep course contents and learning approaches in tune with the needs of that environment. DESS courses are naturally concerned with immediate employability and quality is often assessed on the basis of the proportion of students entering employment immediately after (or sometimes prior to) graduation. Although no detailed breakdown of the national figures is available for DESS graduates in the area of languages, overall figures for 1999 show that of the 19,000 or so students who graduated at this level in "Human and social sciences" in 1996, over 92% were in employment three years later, with a mean monthly salary of 10,000 francs (1520 euros) compared to 89% of "Maîtrise" holders (mean monthly salary: 8,800 francs).¹⁸ These findings are substantiated by the local survey conducted over the same period at Rennes 2 University under the auspices of the "*Observatoire de la Vie Etudiante*", which shows that over 90% of DESS graduates in Translation were in full-time employment within 3 months of leaving the university, with starting salaries of up to 12,000 francs (1800 euros) a month.

Student centered learning and project or objective based activities are more frequently found at this level, thanks to smaller group sizes, heightened motivation, and more generous resources (often supplemented by the fees paid by "mature" students under life-long learning schemes). As mentioned earlier, the future of DESS courses is at present in the balance, as they must now be merged into the new two-year cycle "Master" courses presently going through the accreditation process. One fundamental issue is whether or not the numerus clausus principle can be maintained at fifth year level (entry into fourth year, i.e. the first year of Master courses).

2.1.4. Course objectives and learning outcomes

While "learning outcomes" and objectives have long been a central feature of official language curriculum descriptions for primary and secondary education, traditional HE course descriptions still tend to give priority to "course contents" or to the number of hours spent on a given type of academic language exercise.

However, vocationally oriented courses and those with well defined professional objectives, such as DESS are more likely to define detailed learning objectives (e.g. in the area of translation, the ability to translate documents of a certain type and length to different quality standards, the use and degree of knowledge of different types computer assisted translation tools, the ability to compile, design or manage terminology resources, etc.) and to give particular weighting in assessment schemes to the essential professional skills required.

More attempts are now being made in certain universities to extend the same rationale to all programmes, on the basis of a "skills and competence analysis" undertaken for each course by the student Careers Office (the *Service universitaire d'information et d'orientation* or S.U.I.O.).

2.2. Language courses for students majoring in other areas

As described above, language tuition for students other than those majoring in languages has often been limited at best to a couple of hours a week. The teaching staff responsible for providing this tuition were (and often still are) traditionally left very much to their own devices, particularly if they happen to be external part-time tutors. Course or class descriptions were few and far between, and text-based work (reading and translating newspaper and magazine articles, preferably related to the students' subject area), remained the run of the mill of this kind of tuition.

However, a major shift in emphasis is now under way, both in the number of hours devoted to actual language practice and in the definition of contents and objectives. Over the past fifteen years, innovative research and experimentation have been conducted, particularly in Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Nancy, Paris and Strasbourg¹⁹, in areas such as the use of audio-visual and IT learning resources, the definition of language for special purposes, distance learning, language centre design and implementation, student centred learning, and language certification. Bordeaux 2 University was often in the vanguard, both in the area of LSP research (the GERAS research group) and in experimenting innovative uses of language materials (for instance, the "Vifax" network, making use of fax and later the internet to distribute transcripts and teaching applications based on English language TV news and current affairs). Thanks to the efforts of leading academics in these institutions and elsewhere, language didactics and LSP have gradually gained acceptance as bona fide academic disciplines, and research findings and applications have begun to filter through into mainstream language teaching and learning for students specialising in other areas. At the institutional level, there is a growing awareness that language learning is far too important to be left simply to the linguists... This has prompted many universities to develop and implement "language policies", which are now part and parcel of the university's development plans.

¹⁸ Survey conducted by the *Centre d'études et de recherche sur l'emploi et les qualifications* (CEREQ) in 1999, with a panel of over 10,000 students.

¹⁹ A list of pioneers and innovators in this area would necessarily include leading academics such as Michel Perrin, Alain Cazade or Claude Springer, to name but three of the most prominent.

A significant development in this area and one which should have a major impact on language learning and teaching for non language majors throughout HE, was the creation in May 2000 and the future implementation of a national "*Certificat de compétences en langues de l'enseignement supérieur*" (or *CLES*) open to HE students throughout France, .

The official ministerial order creating the *CLES* states that:

"Le CLES atteste la capacité des étudiants spécialistes d'autres disciplines que les langues d'utiliser une langue étrangère en liaison avec les études poursuivies.

*... la mise en œuvre du C.L.E.S. est progressive dans l'objectif d'offrir à l'ensemble des étudiants, sur tout le territoire, les moyens d'acquérir et de voir reconnues leurs compétences dans deux langues vivantes étrangères."*²⁰

Awarded on the basis of three levels of competence in the four basic skills, the *CLES* clearly refers to the Council of Europe scale (levels B1, B2 and C1) and is designed to offer an alternative to the international language certificates which have become more and more popular among French students. It has already been tested experimentally in three languages (English, German and Spanish) in five different universities.²¹ Although the *CLES* is not designed to be a substitute for "normal" language exams and assessment schemes, by developing the idea of skills objectives, language use for special purposes and flexible testing (a student can resit the test for a given level several times during the course of his/her studies), the certification system should affect the whole perspective of HE language learning for specialists of other disciplines.

However, a number of key questions remain: who will design course materials and test papers, how will quality standards be enforced, what resources is the ministry really prepared to make available for the general implementation of the system, will the goal of making the *CLES* level 2 mandatory for all future primary school teachers be maintained...? Many HE language experts who initially embraced the idea with enthusiasm, have expressed their doubts about the practicalities of the scheme if no real support is forthcoming in terms of additional resources.

Despite doubts about the feasibility of the current scheme, a number of universities have already been active in developing student-centred language learning, thanks to the development of resource and self-learning centres and on-line language sites (see below).

2.3 The European dimension

Many of the qualifications now being or soon to be accredited under the new "Master" denominations in the area of languages are expected to refer to the European dimension. Some are designed to be fully integrated study programmes designed with partner institutions, providing for at least one semester of study abroad, international work placements, and "European" modules taught by visiting lecturers.

3. Description and analysis of quality measures related to the process of teaching and learning

3.1 Language teaching and learning resources

Since the early 90s, significant improvements have been recorded in many HE establishments in the quality and availability of language learning resources. This was one of the most visible results of the "*Plan Université 2000*" and of other investment programmes. In a number of universities, dedicated language buildings and language resource centres have been developed, offering multimedia resources, self-tuition programmes, flexible language teaching facilities allowing modular group work ("*Espaces langues*"), etc.

In terms of language teaching materials, increased access to world-wide language resources via the internet has of course had a major impact on language teaching in French HE as elsewhere, enabling teachers to access a much greater variety of source documents, particularly in LSP areas. As regards audiovisual materials, an agreement signed between the BBC and the French ministry of education in December 2000 appears to have lifted some (though not all) of the obstacles which appeared to threaten the expansion of the use of audiovisual resources in language classes. This issue is now rendered even more complex both by the download capabilities now available to most users and the arrival of digital TV with the corresponding technical issues that this raises. On the didactic level, increased access facilities open to all, including language students, will have and already is having an impact on the way students relate to audiovisual and multimedia materials: this impact has still to be measured and taken on board in course design and teaching methods.

Although mainly designed for secondary school teachers, the portals and web sites created and maintained by the French Ministry of education, by the *I.N.R.P. (Institut national de recherche pédagogique)*²² and by teaching resource agencies such as the *C.N.D.P.*²³ and its regional *C.R.D.P.* branches provide a precious source of information for all those involved in foreign

²⁰ Arrêté du 22 mai 2000 – NOR: MENS0001199 A, art.1^{er}.

²¹ Claude Springer (Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg) was responsible for coordinating the experimental phase between April and December 2001 and reporting the results to the ministry.

²² <http://www.inrp.fr/publications/accueil.html>

²³ <http://www.cndp.fr>

language learning research and development. Both the "foreign languages" pages of the Ministry site already mentioned and the special EDUCNET site (<http://www.educnet.education.fr/dossier/langues/pratiques.htm>) offer a wealth of information and links related to language learning (including French as a foreign language). More specifically devoted to research in the area of languages and IT, *ALSIC*,²⁴ the on-line scientific review, publishes many articles on current lines of research and a library of recent doctoral dissertations in the area.

Associations such as *RANACLES*²⁵ have been instrumental in disseminating information and promoting the development of language resource centres. The following extract from the latest *RANACLES* annual conference report sums up the organisation's approach:

Parallèlement aux cours de langue traditionnels qu'imposent les textes réglementaires, nos universités et grandes écoles éprouvent de plus en plus le besoin de mettre en place des structures de formation en langues capables de répondre à toutes les demandes complémentaires : renforcement de la formation des étudiants de langues, possibilités d'apprentissage et de perfectionnement "à la carte" pour tous les étudiants, et pour le public de la formation continue interne et externe, développement de l'autoformation guidée, sessions intensives axées sur la compétence de communication, notamment en langue de spécialité, mise en oeuvre des nouvelles technologies, constitution d'équipes de recherche en didactique et ingénierie des langues.

*Les centres de langues sont et seront de taille et de conception très diverses : depuis la maison des langues interuniversitaire fédérant les potentiels de toute une région jusqu'à la petite entité propre, par exemple, à un département d'IUT, une UFR ou une section de grande école.*²⁶

Significant examples of language learning resource implementation include the Nancy 2 or Strasbourg 2 language portals or the Bordeaux 2, Paris 9 Dauphine, Grenoble or Strasbourg Louis Pasteur language centres, to name but a handful. The latter caters for instance for 8,000 students in five 50-seat language resource centres staffed by teaching staff and language monitors (27 "PRAG" and 3 lecteurs), and all 3rd and 4th year language learning takes place in the resource centres. Language provision is funded by the university (to the tune of 220,000 euros a year, excluding salaries) and is free for all students enrolled at the university.

Teaching methods and organisation are gradually being tailored to make best use of the new resources available, and in the more innovative institutions, a number of full-time language teaching staff have been redeployed in the design and production of multimedia language resources. However, more traditional language departments or universities are not always prepared to recognise that student centred language learning is desirable or efficient and that it warrants the allocation of or the redeployment of teaching resources, equipment and floor space. Nor must it be forgotten that many HE language departments still have a long way to go in terms of IT or multimedia resources.

3.2 Language practice outside the language "classroom"

Both language specialists and students specialising in other disciplines have an increasing number of opportunities to come into contact with the foreign language outside formal language class or resource centre situations. The development of Erasmus exchange programmes and "free movers" means that most universities now have an annual contingent of native foreign language speakers mixing with French students in and outside lecture halls and seminar rooms. Around 30,000 French students also avail themselves each year of the opportunity to spend one or two semesters in foreign partner institutions.²⁷ Special language and cultural awareness programmes, particularly for less widely taught languages, are now organised in some universities for non language specialists wishing to study abroad.

HE business and engineering schools have pioneered the teaching of various course components in a foreign language, often by native speakers employed as permanent or associate professors. This practice is still fairly rare in universities outside modern language departments, where there is a long tradition of associate professors being invited to teach literature or linguistics courses. The main obstacle to the development of the practice with non language specialists is often aural proficiency, though the introduction of lectures and seminars in a foreign language (generally English) is usually a strong incentive to improve one's language performance and can be combined with the actual language learning process.

²⁴ <http://alsic.org/>

²⁵ The *Rassemblement national des centres de langues de l'enseignement supérieur*, founded in 1992, is the French branch of the European CERCLES association. President Alain CAZADE <http://ranacles.cjb.net>

²⁶ Cécile POUSSARD, *Compte-rendu du Congrès RANACLÈS 2001*, Université Montpellier 3, France, <http://ranacles.cjb.net>

²⁷ It remains to be seen whether student mobility will benefit from the impact of the recent success of "L'Auberge espagnole", a light-hearted comedy relating the experience of a French Erasmus student in Barcelona...!

3.3 Measures designed to facilitate learning in the area of languages in general

3.3.1. New methods facilitating quality learning in language teacher education

Many in traditional language departments would argue that "language teacher education" in France has always been of the highest standard, especially at the "concours" level, and that "new methods facilitating etc..." are therefore superfluous. They stress that high standards of written and oral language competence are expected of any student aiming for the *concours* and that this in itself provides a safeguard against poor quality in language teachers. However, few would deny that advances were necessary and have been made in the area of actual professional training for language teachers (as opposed to language skills and knowledge based learning). These have largely been implemented in the new style teacher training colleges set up in the early 90s, where future teachers are given a grounding in didactic theory and skills and the design and use of teaching materials, particularly the audio-visual and multimedia materials which are now standard in the classroom.

3.3.2. New methods facilitating quality learning in the training of translators and interpreters

This area was explored in detail in the TNP1 report devoted to the training of translators and interpreters published in 1997 and updated in the TNP-D project carried out in 2000. Since that date, technological change has advanced apace and has accelerated changes in course design and training methods in the more innovative translation departments. Training in the use of Internet resources, IT translation and terminology tools and standard presentation and desktop publishing software is now an essential component of any specialised translation course, as are the acquisition of sub-titling or localisation skills. Project management, workload organisation and quality control procedures are acquired via the implementation of large scale translation tasks using authentic materials. These innovations require both dedicated IT rooms and resources and a kind of work organisation which often requires the traditional concept of clearly defined "timetables" and "classes" to give way to periods on intensive project based work. A number of universities such as Rennes 2, Paris 7, Strasbourg ITI-RI, or Grenoble, have been active in introducing and promoting these methods and the close integration of theory and practice in translator training programmes, while "Ecoles" such as *ESIT* and *ISIT* have continued to maintain their tradition of excellence, notably in the training of interpreters. Attempts have been made at setting up a consortium of French translator training institutions sharing similar goals and methods, in partnership with European institutions working along the same lines, in order to promote good practice and quality in translator training.²⁸

4. Description and analysis of quality measures relating to the training of higher education teachers and trainers working in the area of languages

4.1 Recruitment and vetting procedures

As mentioned above, full-time permanent university staff working in language programmes may be recruited either as *enseignants-chercheurs*, i.e. full-time academics expected to be involved in both teaching and research, or as *enseignants*, (*professeurs agrégés* or *professeurs certifiés*) seconded from secondary education on special full-time university teaching posts (PRAG and PRCE). Both these categories are employees of the state and as such are guaranteed tenure of employment. Language departments will also have a number of temporary or part-time staff: "ATER" (post-graduate doctoral students completing a thesis), associate professors from partner universities, foreign lecturers, "maîtres de langues", and external teachers employed for a number of hours per week, generally to teach non language majors or adult learners in continuing education language courses. Different procedures apply to each category.

"Enseignants-chercheurs" are recruited via a rather complex two-tier process, first at the national, then at the local level. Any holder of a doctorate wishing to apply for a position in HE must first be "qualified" by the relevant section of the "C.N.U." (Conseil national des universités) on the basis of the quality of his/her doctoral thesis and of any articles or papers published at the time of application. The percentage of applicants "qualified" by this body varies according to the sub-section of the subject area involved, but is generally between 35 and 65%. This qualification does not of course automatically entitle applicants to a post in higher education, but allows them to submit their application to the local *C.S.E.* (*Commission de spécialistes d'établissement*) of the universities where posts have been advertised. A similar process exists for professors, who must first complete their *habilitation à diriger des recherches* and be "*habilité*" by the "CNU" on the basis of their research record.

The "CSE" consists of Professors and Maîtres de conférences, elected by their peers for a period of four years, and includes a number of external members. The testing of language ability or of language teaching skills is not formally required as part of the recruitment process for "enseignants-chercheurs". Doctoral theses submitted in French universities are written and defended in French, not in the language of the author or country studied. Applicants could therefore in theory be qualified by the CNU and recruited by the local "CSE" on the basis of their specialism and the quality of their research alone. In practice, most "CNUs"

²⁸ Professor Daniel Gouadec of Rennes 2 university has been the driving force behind most of these initiatives.

and "CSEs" also expect applicants to have passed one of the competitive secondary school teaching examinations (CAPES or "agrégation" and preferably the latter), as proof of their high degree of proficiency in the language. "CSE" recruitment will also generally interview short-listed applicants and will conduct at least part of the interview in the foreign language. Teaching ability is only assessed on the basis of the prior experience which the applicant has acquired either in higher education as an "ATER" or in secondary education. No specific testing of the applicant's teaching skills in an academic context is deemed necessary. Successful applicants for "maître de conférences" posts are recruited initially as "stagiaires" for twelve months (or 2 years if the applicant is not already a "fonctionnaire"): it is in theory possible for a person not to be confirmed in the post after the trial period, if they have demonstrated their inability to work with students. In practice, such a decision is extremely rare and would have to be substantiated and defended before the university senate.

"Enseignants", i.e. *PRAG* and *PRCE* are recruited by an ad hoc committee at the local level. The committee consists of the head and members of the department where the post is advertised, including members of the "CSE" and at least one other "professeur agrégé", plus representatives of the sector where the person will be teaching, if the post has been created to meet the language needs of a particular sector within the university. Again, prior experience, performance in the job interview and the fact that applicants must by definition be "agrégés" or in some cases holders of the "CAPES" are deemed to be sufficient proof of language proficiency and teaching ability.

Once recruited and confirmed in their post, teaching staff are secure in the knowledge that their salary will increase in line with those of other state employees at regular intervals, according to the particular "salary scale" applicable to their status, regardless of subject area, specialisms or teaching performance. Current monthly salary scales range from approximately 1960 euros to 4170 euros for Maîtres de conférences (with only 8-10% reaching the higher pay scale) to 2850 to 5720 euros for professors (with only 10-15% reaching "classe exceptionnelle" at over 5000 euros/month). The figures quoted are before social security and pension deductions (18-20%) and income tax (not deducted at source and based on many different parameters, including family size). The MDC pay scale is almost identical to that of "Professeurs agrégés" seconded from secondary education, although the latter are expected to teach twice as many hours (384 hours per academic year against 192, i.e. 14-15 hours a week, against 7-8 hours). Agrégés in secondary education are paid on the same salary scale as their counterparts in HE, and may actually be better off thanks to various bonus payments and fast-track access to the higher pay echelons. Administrative responsibilities are usually recognised in the shape of reduced teaching load, rather than additional payment, though all teaching staff are entitled to payment for hours taught over and above the statutory minimum (at a rate of around 38 euros/hour, which is also that paid to external part-time tutors). This may in some cases amount to a substantial income supplement, although most universities now limit the extra teaching load which any member of staff may take on.

For a "maître de conférences" promotion prospects may be through the "CNU" or via the local university senate. The former will be almost entirely based on research performance, but the latter may take into account other aspects of the person's CV, including administrative responsibilities and the type and number of courses taught. At no point will the person's teaching performance be assessed *per se* or openly discussed. Any suggestion that student evaluation should be taken into account would be anathema in most institutions. "Professeurs agrégés" are assessed annually by the Dean of the faculty in which they teach, but again this does not include any detailed appreciation of teaching performance. Unlike their colleagues "teaching in secondary schools, "PRAG" are not inspected and therefore cannot hope to reach the "fast track" salary scale which good teachers can expect.

The CSE is also responsible for vetting most other recruitments, even though formal interviews for temporary external tutors are rarely conducted. In this case, native speaker status, the individual's record as a student in the department, his/her success in the "concours" or reputation, are often considered as important as the actual qualifications produced by the applicant.

4. 2 Prior and ongoing training

While trainee secondary school teachers are given every opportunity to acquire teaching methods and techniques, both in theory and in practice, little or nothing is done on an official level to help future university lecturers acquire the "tricks of the trade" and to set quality objectives for their teaching. The C.I.E.S (*Centre d'initiation à l'enseignement supérieur*) set up in each *Académie* provide practical information and advice to doctoral students on careers in HE, and organise seminars and conferences for those already engaged as part-time teaching and research assistants, but no real training is provided in new teaching and learning approaches, group dynamics or the use of new technologies. As was the case in secondary education before the inception of teacher training colleges, hands-on experience is generally *ad hoc*, often acquired through the one- or two-year part-time A.T.E.R posts²⁹ open to doctoral students completing their thesis.

Ongoing advice and training for practising HE staff and the updating of skills and knowledge is left very much to the choice and initiative of individual institutions and of the individuals themselves. In the past few years, however, extra resources and effort

²⁹ *Attachés temporaires d'enseignement et de recherche* have a reduced teaching load and are expected to complete their thesis within two years at the most.

have been put into organising IT training courses, which have met with varying degrees of success. This is carried out either by the local branches of the U.R.F.I.S.T., a government funded agency designed to promote IT skills, or by university staff. Language courses for non language specialists are also now very much in demand, as more and more French academics aim for international recognition. Again, these are organised very much on an ad hoc basis by individual institutions, departments and language centres. International staff exchanges, an area in which language departments are naturally active, are also increasingly used as a means of confronting one's own experience and teaching practices with those of colleagues in other countries, and of improving language proficiency for non language specialists.

Conversely, a number of university language departments specialising in certain specific areas have offered the opportunity for young foreign language teaching staff, particularly from Central and Eastern European countries, to gain experience in new skills and teaching methods and to take part in new course development seminars and workshops. This has been the case particularly in the area of translation and interpreting, where Ecoles and Institutes such as ESIT (Paris) or ITI-RI (Strasbourg) and university departments in Lyon II, Paris VII, Rennes II, have been active in promoting partnerships and joint programmes.

4.3 "Good practice"

An increasing number of initiatives for the sharing of experience and the promotion of innovative practice and quality assessment have stemmed from professional associations. The more traditional professional organisations (Société des anglicistes de l'enseignement supérieur, Société des américanistes de l'ES, Association des germanistes de l'ES, Société des Italianistes de l'ES, Société des Hispanistes français de l'ES, etc.), though still very much centered on research and the maintaining of high standards of excellence in the "concours", have begun to allow more room for the discussion of research into language teaching and learning issues. The latest SAES annual congress (Metz, May 2002), for instance, had three workshops devoted respectively to "New technologies for research and teaching in the area of LSP", "English learning in higher education" and "English acquisition and didactics".

Associations catering specifically for LSP specialists and language teachers in departments and institutions outside the area of languages have been in the vanguard as regards teaching innovation and quality. Research groups such as the GERAS,³⁰ or ACEDLE,³¹ on-line resource networks devoted to IT and language learning such as ALSIC,³² and professional associations such as APLIUT or UPLEGESS³³ have all contributed in their own areas. Several recent conferences and workshops have been devoted to the question of quality in language teaching and learning.³⁴ This year's APLIUT annual conference, for instance, was entitled: "*Vers une démarche qualité dans la formation en langues ?*", and its introduction and aims aptly sum up the issue of quality enhancement in language teaching and learning across a large spectrum of HE:

"Depuis plus de deux décennies, le secteur de la production, puis celui des services, se sont attachés à définir un ensemble de normes, de pratiques et de procédures visant à observer une démarche rigoureuse et balisée dans la recherche d'une qualité totale.

La formation n'échappe pas à cette préoccupation, mais il est indispensable de prendre en compte ce qui fait sa spécificité, et montrer qu'elle n'est ni un produit fini, ni simplement un service, mais un « construit » social qui dépend largement de la « qualité » (compétence, motivation, aptitudes, ...) des acteurs à l'intérieur du processus.

Le Congrès de l'APLIUT se propose (...) d'évoquer ce que peut être l'approche qualité dans cette matière privilégiée qu'est la formation en langues en IUT, puisqu'elle se situe à la croisée des chemins (formation initiale/formation professionnelle, objet culturel/outil, expression / apprentissage...)."35

³⁰ *Groupe d'étude et de recherche en anglais de spécialité*, founded by Michel PERRIN, Bordeaux 2 Président: M. PETIT <http://www.langues-vivantes.u-bordeaux2.fr/GERAS/geras.html>

³¹ Association des Chercheurs et Enseignants Didacticiens des Langues Étrangères, Lyon 2 <http://acedle.u-strasbg.fr/>

³² ALSIC, Apprentissage des langues et systèmes d'information et de communication <http://alsic.u-strasbg.fr/Num8/poussard/default.htm>

³³ Association des professeurs de langues des IUT and Union des professeurs de langues étrangères des Grandes Ecoles et des établissements supérieurs scientifiques

³⁴ The latest at time of writing is the « journée d'études » being organised on September 23rd 2002 in Chambéry by the Centre d'Étude des Langues et Cultures Étrangères de l'Université de Savoie and the GERAS on the theme of « L'Évaluation en langues dans le supérieur », including a paper entitled « La vision qualitative » by Claire Bourguignon (Université du Havre) & Jean-Paul Nancy-Combes (Université de La Rochelle).

³⁵ XXIV^{ème} Congrès de l'APLIUT IUT de Lyon B - 6, 7 juin 2002, on the APLIUT web site at <http://www.apliut.com>

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Evolution des emplois budgétaires recensés par le ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (en milliers)

Rentrée	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Enseignants	55,4	58,4	64,5	68,0	69,1	70,2	72,8	74,2	77,1	78,6	79,8	80,4
IATOS	40,8	41,7	44,8	46,0	46,1	47,0	48,4	47,0	51,3	52,2	52,8	53,8
Total	96,2	100,1	109,3	114,0	115,2	117,2	121,2	121,2	128,4	130,8	132,6	134,2
Etudiants 1198	1310	1387	1504	1554	1591	1575	1547	1526	1523	1518	1517	

Source : Ministère de l'Education nationale

Table 2

Personnels enseignants de l'enseignement supérieur par catégorie 1998-1999

Catégorie	Nombre	% du total
Professeurs	18,353	23
Maîtres de conférences	31,576	39
Second degré (PRAG et PRCE)	13,194	16
Attachés temporaires d'enseignement et de recherche	5,484	7
Associés	2,689	3
Moniteurs (*)	4,271	5
Assistants hospitalo-universitaires	4,096	5
Lecteurs et maîtres de langues	1,020	1
	80,683	

Source : MEN, DPD novembre 2000 (précision à environ 1300 personnes près)

- *Moniteurs* are usually 4th year or postgraduate students on part-time contracts. It is surprising to find them counted here among "*personnels enseignants*". This may partly explain the disparity with the figures given above.