

Synthesis report: Chapter 4. Measures relating to the training of higher education teachers and trainers professionally engaged in the area of languages

This report is based on the relevant chapter of the following national reports: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

This chapter synthesis has three main parts. The first provides a brief overview of the situation. The second surveys a number of contextual factors which exert an influence on the issue in question and which have emerged either in the national reports or in discussion with TNP2 members. The third surveys some of the main measures described in the national reports and the types of choices which need to be evaluated in the strategic planning of TT.

1. Overview of the situation

On the basis of the national reports surveyed, the overall situation with respect to the TT of HE language teachers may be characterised as follows:

- ◆ It is far less systematic than the TT of secondary teachers. Most countries have a specific TT diploma for secondary teachers, this diploma often functioning as a requirement for employment. No such system exists at HE level, and the provision of TT at HE level varies considerably from one country to another.
- ◆ There is evidence in virtually all of the national reports surveyed that action is being undertaken in the area. There is thus evidence both of awareness of the need to take action with respect to TT, and also of experimentation with practical measures. The actions undertaken, however, vary considerably from one country to another in terms of content, organisation, and rigour.

2. Contextual considerations

The question of the pedagogical competences of HE teachers engaged in LS, and thus of TT, is situated within a much broader context. Certain aspects of this broader context are propitious to the setting up of focused TT measures in the field of HE LS; others are less so and need to be the object of focused advocacy with the relevant decision makers.

2.1 The role of language skills

Enhanced European integration and the increasingly global nature of the economy are placing language skills high on the list of priorities in terms of employability and both academic and professional mobility. The case for the learning of languages is thus fairly well established in the discourse of most European educational institutions and professional bodies – in theoretical terms at least.

2.2 Concern with pedagogical effectiveness

LS is by no means the only field of HE to be showing concern with the pedagogical skills of teachers and, by implication, with TT. Indeed, the general climate in HE institutions is one which, in theory at least, is open to the constructive exploration of the means by which HE teachers' pedagogical skills can be guaranteed and enhanced. Evaluation of the professional development of HE language teachers therefore needs to take account of this increased general concern with pedagogical effectiveness, but also of those factors which are specific to LS, especially in the growing area of the teaching of languages to students of other disciplines.

2.3 The demands of an evolving pedagogy

The demands made on language teachers have evolved considerably over the last three decades. This results in part from developments in the field of language teaching pedagogy per se (in particular the concern for the development of more learner-centred modes of teaching), and in part from practical constraints (the requirement to do more with the same funding). This has at least two implications for language teachers. The first is that it increases the need for

focused pedagogical training and support. The second is that the rapidly evolving nature of the challenges facing HE language teachers creates the need for an ongoing form of professional development, in line with the general concern with life-long learning. Indeed, it is hardly reasonable to expect teachers to foster life-long learning in their students if they themselves are not involved in the same dynamic.

The three points made above are all favourable to the setting up of a systematic approach to TT in HE institutions, including in the field of LS. This, however, needs to be tempered by a realistic assessment of other contextual factors.

2.4 Budgetary concerns

TT programmes can be expensive in two ways. Firstly, they have a direct cost in terms of their organisation, staffing, etc. Secondly, they have an indirect cost in that they remove practising teachers from their classrooms or research work for a certain amount of time.

2.5 Scepticism regarding the results of TT

There is often a mixed discourse regarding TT. On the one hand, most individuals involved in HE would acknowledge that teachers' pedagogical skills are a key factor in the effective delivery of educational programmes. On the other hand, there is a (generally unstated) scepticism regarding the real usefulness or cost-effectiveness of TT programmes. The result is that institutions may be reluctant to invest in such programmes, especially if the funds required by those programmes have to be taken away from more visible investments. There is also the objective fact that quantifying the results of TT is by no means an easy task.

- It is necessary to convince political or institutional decision makers of the need for investment in TT, and to "operationalise" TT within a broader framework of programme goals, planning and investment.

2.6 The perceived status of language teaching in HE institutions

Similar comments apply here, especially with respect to the teaching of languages to students of other disciplines. Language skills are assuming increasing importance in terms of employability and professional mobility. In some cases, however, these are seen as being "added on" to students' main programme with the result that language programmes themselves, not to mention TT for language teachers, enjoy lower status in institutional terms and for this reason may have less bargaining power when it comes to resource allocation.

2.7 Salaries and status of HE language teachers

There is a generalised flight from teaching as a profession which has reached dramatic proportions at secondary level in some countries, with language teaching being one of the worst affected areas as language graduates are frequently able to find apparently more attractive posts in other fields. The same trend may well occur at tertiary level, too. While this does not relate directly to TT, it clearly has a major influence on the quality of teaching. Furthermore, it has a very direct influence on the number of professionally competent and committed persons who will be available to run effective TT programmes. This problem is sometimes exacerbated by the status of language teachers in HE institutions, where some have different aspirations and a different career profile than HE teachers in other fields.

The context in which TT measures are to be taken in the field of HE LS is a complex one. On the one hand, the growing acknowledgement of the importance of language skills, and the general concern with enhancing the pedagogical qualities of HE teachers create a positive climate for the development of a systematic approach to TT. On the other hand, there are a number of both practical and attitudinal factors which, in practice, can hinder the development of a coherent approach to the training and professional development of HE language teachers.

3. Developing a strategy for teacher training and professional development

This section reviews some of the main practical considerations which emerged from the national reports surveyed. It is not always possible to make clear general recommendations as what constitutes the most productive strategy, as this may well vary from one setting to another. The points raised below relate to the type of considerations which need to be taken into account in the development of a coherent strategy for the training and professional development of HE language teachers.

3.1 A pre-experience qualification vs in-service training

No national report mentions the existence of a pre-experience pedagogical qualification for HE teachers (as is frequent for admission to teaching at secondary level). Some form of pre-experience training would obviously be desirable (cf. 3.8, below). However, certain factors argue against such an option, in the short term at least. One is that, for the reasons given in 2.3 above, it is doubtful that such a qualification would be sufficient, and it would in any event need to be complemented by refresher or ongoing professional development programmes. Another is that such a strategy would delay the entry of future teachers to HE posts and could thus serve as a disincentive, especially for those who see a profession in HE primarily in terms of research.

- Most national reports would seem to suggest that, in the short to medium term at least, regular / periodic in-service professional development is the most productive option.

3.2 General vs subject-specific pedagogical training

General pedagogy courses are much cheaper to organise in that they can be offered to teachers working in a variety of subject areas. Their effectiveness, however, is lower in that they cannot address the specifics of a given subject area.

- There is a general trend in the national reports to favour subject-specific professional development.
- It would be an extremely useful to develop a profile of the professional skills and knowledge which HE language teachers need to possess, and to use this as a basis for planning the content of TT and professional development programmes.

3.3 Obligation vs free choice with respect to teacher training

The advantage of making teacher training obligatory is clear, namely that all teachers will receive it. (In Hungary, for example, HE teachers have to participate in in-service training "on a regular basis", which is operationalised as every seven years. In Switzerland, all teachers working at *Centres de Langue* have to follow *formation continue*.) In qualitative terms, however, there is good reason to believe that teachers will derive more benefit from professional development programmes if they chose freely to follow them. However, as is suggested in the Austria report, when attendance is by free choice, it is frequently the most motivated teachers who follow professional development programmes, and these are not necessarily those who need them the most. It should also be borne in mind that participation in in-service professional development is motivating for many teachers by encouraging them to rediscover a sense of professional enthusiasm and thus contribute to the development of a virtuous cycle of further development. The motivational dimension to TT and its potential to combat the widespread phenomenon of teacher burnout should not be underestimated.

- There is good reason to envisage making participation in professional development programmes obligatory as part of an explicitly formulated and transparent ethos of professionalism and ongoing professional development.
- One option might be to have a two tier system - some professional development being obligatory, with teachers being able to undertake more if they wished, this "extra investment" receiving acknowledgement with respect to promotion or in salary terms.

3.4 Top-down vs bottom-up TT strategies

Certain national reports describe TT strategies which are centrally driven (in general on the basis of ministerial decisions and regulations), while others reveal more bottom-up or locally driven initiatives at the level of individual institutions. Such differences will tend to reflect broader political and cultural orientations in the countries concerned and it is probably unproductive to attempt a general comparison in terms of effectiveness. Indeed, various national reports highlight productive instances of both levels of initiative – top-down measures creating a context for TT, and bottom-up initiatives created in response to this requirement. Two points do, however, merit consideration. On the one hand, realism dictates that neither quality enhancement in general nor teacher development as one of its practical manifestations, will occur spontaneously: Some encouragement "from above" is therefore almost essential, if only to place on HE institutions the obligation to organise some form of TT. On the other hand, TT is likely to be more effective if it caters for the real needs of the teachers concerned, and these are often local in nature: For this reason, a locally-based strategy to TT (whether at institutional or regional level) is likely to be more effective.

- It is necessary to evaluate the balance of top-down and bottom-up initiatives which is most likely to be effective in the country or area in question.

3.5 Tensions between pedagogy and research in HE teachers' careers

This is an issue which affects all areas of HE. Traditionally, promotion and the obtaining of a stable post depend more on research and publications than on the quality of teaching, and a number of national reports demonstrate that this remains the case. This situation hardly encourages HE teachers to invest heavily in pedagogy.

- There is a need to accord more importance to pedagogical skills in promotion at HE level.
- It may be useful to think of distinguishing more clearly between HE staff in terms of their relative strengths in academic work, on the one hand, and in pedagogical terms, on the other.
- It is necessary to develop appropriate, transparent, and transferable criteria for evaluating teachers' pedagogical performance.

3.6 Creation of a specific status for HE language teachers

This point is related to the last. While some HE language teachers (especially those working on language degree programmes or involved in the training of translators and interpreters) are full faculty members, many others have a somewhat marginal status. Indeed, some HE language teachers have a different profile from academics in other fields: They may not aspire to the traditional academic path of thesis and publication, and prefer an explicitly pedagogical role. If such teachers are judged on the same criteria as other academic staff, they are likely to lose out or, indeed, fail to receive credit for what they are best at, namely teaching per se. The Belgium report cites one example of the creation of a special status for such teachers – *maîtres de langue*. A status of this nature acknowledges the specifically pedagogical nature of the teachers' tasks, and thus creates a fruitful climate for ongoing professional development, which can, in fact, be written into teachers' contracts.

- There is a need to assess the specific role and responsibilities of HE language teachers, especially those involved in the teaching of languages to students of other disciplines, and to develop an appropriate, rewarding and motivating career profile.

3.7 Organisational criteria

There is a general debate as to the advantages of organising language teaching in a distinct language centre or within faculties or departments. Parallel considerations are relevant with respect to the organisation of TT. In this respect, the Switzerland report points to the advantages of organising teaching within a language centre. Firstly, this facilitates focused, subject-specific training. Secondly, the existence of a single centre can give language teaching a stronger voice in institutional policy making, and can thus facilitate the liberation of resources needed for TT programmes.

- Evaluate the relative advantages of different institutional structures in supporting the professional development of language teachers.

3.8 Support for new staff

As has already been mentioned, no national report mentions a pedagogical qualification that conditions entry to teaching at HE level, even if, in the language teaching field, various criteria are used: Possession of the secondary level teaching diploma or of a Masters in Applied Linguistics, for example, is an advantage, as is prior teaching experience, especially at HE level, and the Finland report mentions evaluation of a teaching portfolio as a criterion for employment. The question nevertheless remains as to how new teaching staff, especially those with no prior teaching experience, can be helped to develop their pedagogical skills and to initiate a reflective approach to their teaching.

There is a trend in the UK for younger staff to be required to take a pedagogical diploma within a set number of years subsequent to employment, which is a positive measure. In Belgium some universities have set up a system of mentoring (*parrainage*) whereby new staff are allocated to a senior language teacher who shadows and advises them in their first year or two. This measure has two advantages. The first is that it provides pedagogical support to the younger teacher; the second is that encourages more senior teachers to re-evaluate their own practice.

- Evaluate the means of providing pedagogical support and training to novice teachers in the first years of teaching.

3.9 Intervention of external agencies

A number of national reports, especially those from countries in Central and Eastern Europe, mention the role played by agencies such as the British Council or the Goethe Institut in organising refresher courses or TT schemes in language teaching methodology. In general terms, measures of this nature can be positive and helpful. Nevertheless, such initiatives are not necessarily linked into a coherent national policy on language teaching or TT. It is therefore relevant to develop strategies for:

- Integrating the work of such agencies into the broader language teaching policy and TT strategies of the country in question.
- Engaging a dialogue between such agencies and the persons responsible for TT at national level.
- (Possibly) Focusing the activities of such agencies around present or potential teachers trainers so that the latter can disseminate insights more widely among national teachers.

3.10 Recourse to private agents / free market TT providers

This is clearly one means of organising TT, and one which gets round the eternal problem of HE institutions' reluctance to employ staff with potentially long-term contractual rights. In other words, non-HE agents may be asked to cater for (aspects of) TT. This strategy has a number of attractions. Equally well, however, it entails a number of risks, relating in particular to monitoring of the qualifications of the trainers involved and of the quality of the service provided. Recourse to non-HE agents can be an option, but one which calls for a close monitoring of the qualifications and also the goals of the agents in question.

- Evaluate the relevance of recourse to private agencies for the provision of TT services.
- (If relevant) Develop quality control and evaluation measures relating to possible private providers of TT services.

3.11 Training the trainers

The effectiveness of TT programmes depends crucially on the competence of those who are delivering them. It thus makes little sense to discuss TT within the framework of quality enhancement without also discussing the means by which the quality of TT programmes can be assessed – and the trainers themselves play a key role in this.

- Develop quality control frameworks which will allow TT client institutions to have an informed insight into the competences of potential TT providers.

- Develop a strategy for building up a corps of experienced and committed language teachers able to assume responsibility for teacher training.

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