



Network project for the decentralised and centralised dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

SYNTHESIS REPORT “NORTH” (SUB- PROJECT 2)

Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour markets

Recent developments on the Nordic and Baltic labour markets and their effects on Higher Education (HE) curricula and on the communication and intercultural competences needed by HE graduates

Introduction

This synthesis report portrays briefly some recent societal, economic and labour market developments in the Nordic and Baltic regions and what new communication challenges are caused by these developments for graduate competence building and employability. Moreover, initiatives taken by the HE institutions in the regions to meet the new challenges and to identify and prepare for potential future needs will be described. The report is based on the national report updates submitted by TNP3-D participants in March and April 2007.

Economic, societal, and labour market developments

The most obvious and overarching general phenomena in the development of all countries involved are rapid internationalisation, or globalisation, pervasiveness of ICT, and growing economic prosperity. In the more recent EU countries, Latvia and Lithuania, these developments together with the opening up of the European labour market have caused substantial mobility of the workforce, strong foreign investment, decrease of unemployment (partly due to emigration) and heightened needs for language and communication skills in order to cope with the multilingual and multicultural contacts in basically all professions. The most imminent new need has concerned translators and interpreters, but naturally also business enterprises, banks and public administration require their staff to be able to communicate in foreign languages.

As regards the Nordic region, then, globalisation of the economy has brought about increasing outsourcing, investment, cross-cultural mergers, and strategic alliances, along with improving employment. The last development is, in fact, such that serious shortages of the workforce are beginning to emerge in certain

fields particularly in Denmark, but also in other Nordic countries. For instance in Iceland, the number of incoming foreign workers is growing constantly due to non-existing unemployment in the country. The service sector is also internationalising and growing very rapidly. The domestic markets in these countries are relatively small, which means that foreign markets attract not only investment and production but also R&D activities to be spread around the globe. In Finland, this is particularly true of ICT-related fields, as well as other key technologies, where the growing markets in China and India in particular continue to be the focuses of these developments along with some European countries. This means that the workforce are increasingly dependent on interaction with foreign partners, competitors, clients and consumers, which presupposes good skills in international networking and problem-solving, as well as solid cultural and written and oral communication competence in both English and in the local languages. Multidisciplinary expertise, media literacies, and life-long learning skills are also listed as important qualifications for future graduates.

Various kinds of reactions have occurred at the national level in the countries involved in the present report to the developments described above. In Latvia, for instance, there are serious concerns about the fact that potential workforce have increasingly moved or are moving to live and work abroad. The challenge presented to education, and higher education in particular, by this fact is acknowledged, as is the need to intensify and diversify foreign language instruction for domestic purposes. As the latter is of immediate concern, several ministries, as well as banks and technology enterprises are organising a wide range of in-service courses in different languages. As regards the educational sector and HE, the present labour market in Latvia is seen to require well-educated and flexible specialists who have good communication skills in several languages and well-developed skills for life-long learning and use of ICT. English is not considered enough, rather, the true competitive edge for these specialists is derived from their competence in, say, Arabic and Asian languages.

In Iceland, on the other hand, the educational sector has not yet taken steps to meet the emerging new needs in foreign language competence building or to cater for the incoming workers' studies in Icelandic. The companies are organising their own language studies, and in many cases English has been taken as the second corporate language. Language professionals see participation in European projects as an important means to increase the awareness and insight of both decision-makers and educators and students of the importance of systematically developed foreign language skills for the country's successful development.

In Denmark, there have been two government initiatives which relate to reacting to the new developments in society and on the labour market. In November 2005, the Ministry of Education published Denmark's first "National

Competence Report". In the presentation of this document, the minister wrote that it is the Danish government's aim to create the best education system in the world. For this reason the government detailed in this document the Danish population's key competences in a number of areas – in order to see to what extent these match the current and future needs of the labour market and to provide the background for possible changes in the education system. One of the key competences mapped in the document was intercultural competence, including language skills and competences. Intercultural competence is defined in the document as: "An individual's insight in and ability to understand cultural complexity and the ability to communicate freely with people from other cultures." Using that definition, the document shows that 5% of Danes have a high intercultural competence, 29% a median and 66% a low level of intercultural competence. In the area of language competence, the said document details that 51% of Danes are able to use a foreign language other than English, Swedish or Norwegian; that just 13% speak English on a daily basis at work and that Denmark still has a considerable distance to cover before the goal of mother tongue plus two foreign languages is fulfilled. The National Competence Report does not, however, contain any recommendations as to how the situation in the areas of intercultural communication and language competence may be improved.

In April 2006, then, the Danish government published its "Globalisation Report" which was the result of extensive work in and around a Globalisation Council set up by the government to prepare a strategy for Denmark in the global economy. This document also identifies intercultural competence and language skills as important for the workforce and Denmark's international competitiveness in the future. However, concrete actions towards preparation for these new challenges are missing or tend to even work against what is presented in the reports and public speeches. For instance, there seems to be an implicit belief in Danish society that English will be enough, regardless of what representatives from the world of work claim. Furthermore, the new secondary school reform of 2005 has made it possible for pupils to "avoid" learning a second or third foreign language besides English, which will, in turn, greatly affect HE provision particularly in the future.

A somewhat similar development can be detected in Finnish general education. Although all reports and surveys indicate that English will continue to be a key competence of graduates also in the future, it is also acknowledged that the real competitive edge of Finnish graduates, will be derived from their proficiency in local languages, whether European or Asian. In addition, the proficiency level required in English will increase particularly in written communication. Simultaneously, however, the language education at schools is becoming fragmented because of changes in the curricula and operational culture, and the development of plurilingualism – which used to be a fact – is left more and more to tertiary level institutions. This is one of the greatest concerns of language

professionals in Finland because of simultaneously increasing pressures of productivity at these institutions. Because of the productivity requirements, the structures of HE institutions are also undergoing a substantial change. Since the total number of these institutions is 50 (20 universities and 30 polytechnics; all state institutions with no tuition fees) – which is very high in proportion to the 5.5. million population – the structural development will mean mergers of institutions or much closer co-operation in order to avoid unnecessary overlapping in programmes. This is already taking place and will affect the contents of degree programmes at all levels. Although the basic requirements of compulsory studies in the mother tongue, the second national language, and one or two foreign languages in all HE degrees will not change, their orientation may well change substantially in the near future.

Developments in HE curricula and new needs

While there are similarities in how the environments of higher education institutions have developed in the Baltic and Nordic countries, the developments in higher education curricula to meet the new language and communication needs are quite different. In Lithuania, there has been a substantial increase in translator and interpreter training at both Bachelor's and Master's levels. In Latvia, the focus of development has also been on pedagogical issues, including the Latvian version of the European Language Portfolio for Adults, use of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, as well as moves towards more specific-purpose language instruction, interactive and ICT-enhanced methodology, and content and language integration. New study programmes are also being designed to address intercultural competence issues. The number of modern language degree programmes has also expanded to include e.g. Asian languages in addition to European ones. However, in other than language degree programmes, English is becoming more and more dominant in both Baltic countries as the main foreign language.

As was mentioned above, the situation in Iceland is that although foreign language skills are gaining in importance, there have not been any substantial changes in the HE sector to increase or diversify language-related programmes or to include language studies in the curricula of non-language programmes. Language studies are considered more like a hobby and thus they have low prestige compared to subject-specific studies and are in general not accredited as part of degrees. Business faculties, however, do offer opportunities to include a language module in their Bachelor-level programmes, but only some students make use of these opportunities. In theory, this kind of a module is offered at the University of Iceland in all 13 foreign languages of the Faculty of Philosophy. At the Reykjavik Business School Spanish and English are available, but there is a need to expand to also offering German and French as options. One recent development, which is different from the other countries

described here, has taken place, namely, a new experimental Bachelor-level programme in Community Interpreting has been started. This programme is offered to foreign residents in Iceland in order to educate interpreters of various languages to work in health care, in court, and in schools. Furthermore, interest in collaboration between language departments and non-language departments is also growing, as is an increased need for translators and interpreters in general.

The developments in Denmark show different trends in the sense that the number of students applying for modern language degree programme has been in constant decrease. Particularly large European languages like French, Italian and German have been affected, whereas English and Spanish are still doing comparatively well. Area studies programmes, in which one or sometimes two foreign languages form part, are doing well in terms of student numbers, but there is a strong bias towards English in these programmes, too. Moreover, the school reform mentioned above has already during its first year had an effect on what languages are chosen in secondary school, and the number of students choosing French, German, Spanish, Italian, or Russian dropped in 2005 by 30-50%. The reform is one indication of the fact that there is no consistency in Denmark in combining findings on foreign language skills needs and education planning. The new needs on the globalising labour market are not being met by higher education, particularly also because foreign language studies are not part of university degrees in general. The dominance of English is very strong and an increasing number of programmes and courses are taught through English. Although there have been debates about introducing language policy legislation, the debate has concentrated more on protective measures for the Danish language than on diversifying student competences in foreign languages during higher education.

Although English is also the dominating foreign language in Finland and numerous degree programmes are offered through English by both polytechnics (only Bachelor's level) and by universities (only Master's level), the developments in HE curricula have taken another direction from what the situation is in Denmark. This is understandable in a situation where language and communication studies have been compulsory components of all HE degrees for over thirty years and the infrastructure of language centres, which offer these discipline-specific studies, has also existed for thirty years. Despite the fact that there are continuous cuts at the school level due to tightened public funding, the general HE degree requirement of studies in both domestic languages and in one or two foreign languages at an academic level remained the same in the adoption of the three-tier degree system in 2005. All curricula for the language and communication studies required from non-language students were adjusted to meet the needs of students in each cycle. This was done through conducting core analyses in national networks of e.g. Polytechnics (providing bachelor level professional programmes), in field-

specific national groups (e.g. humanities), and at each language centre. Special attention was also paid to what might be required in the workplace after the first cycle and what might be required in later cycles for becoming an “academic expert” (e.g. research communication). One important outcome of the implementation of the Bologna process has, thus, been the fact that comparability, cross-curricular negotiations and networking between institutions and with the labour market have become even more prominent than before.

As regards modern language degree programmes, there is a growing awareness of the existence of new employment markets, and resulting new professional profiles, which also means changes in the contents of the BA and MA programmes offered. This, however, is a slower process than what is taking place at the language centres, because the latter are in a closer dialogue with working life and also with non-language subject departments, as well as more accustomed to reacting to changes in graduate needs. In general, there seems to be no decrease in the number of students wishing to study foreign languages whether in modern language degree programmes or as part of their non-language degrees.

Recent surveys of labour market language and communication needs in Finland emphasise strongly both written and oral mother tongue skills and well-developed written skills in foreign languages, because the language of reporting in the workplace is more and more often some other language than Finnish. The intercultural communication competence needed is considered to include the ability for active participation in interaction in a manner which projects confidence and respect and creates trust in the expertise of the speaker.

Collaboration between HE institutions and their social partners

Consultation and collaboration between HE institutions and employers and alumni is the most structured in its approaches in Finland, where language needs in the workplace have been surveyed since the 1970's when language and communication studies were made compulsory in the non-language degrees. More recently, these surveys have become more focussed and address specific professional groups rather than the labour market as a whole. Most higher education institutions co-operate today at the regional level with employers. With the polytechnics such co-operation is very well established because most Bachelor-level degrees of the polytechnics require traineeship periods. The results of this dialogue are used for curriculum development. At universities such traineeships and commissioned projects are common in certain fields but not in all. Language centres also have consultation projects and collaboration with employers as does the national Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), which surveyed the significance and value of mobility in recruitment among some 700 employers in 2005. As a particular merit in recruitment was students' engagement in fieldwork related to local

circumstances within the host country, which also meant learning the language of the country. This was particularly useful for languages and cultures that are not within the usual repertoire of Finnish graduates.

As regards collaboration with alumni and alumni organisations, the surveys in Finland are usually carried out by professional associations and the results are fed back to institutions for curriculum development and pedagogical development. In general the aim of these surveys is to see how HE programmes have prepared graduates for working life.

In the past three years, structured consultation between HE institutions, alumni and the labour market has also started in Lithuania, where Students' Career Centres have been set up in the largest universities. The aim of the centres is to maintain close ties with different enterprises, to survey their needs, and to organise regular seminars or consultations for students. There are also annual Career Days where representatives of enterprises meet with students and explain about their preferences concerning potential employees – e.g. Kaunas University of Technology held such an event in March 2007 with representatives from 84 enterprises. Proficiency in foreign languages (English, Russian) was often mentioned as a key competence, as well as technical translation. The initiative is supported by numerous companies and the university authorities.

Lithuanian students also have an Alumni Club in their Union. Its aim is to stay in contact with the former active members of the Students' Union and to share their experiences and life observations with present-day students. Most universities have had such clubs for several years.

The need for structured consultation and collaboration between institutions and their social partners is also acknowledged in Denmark, Iceland and Latvia, but there is no system yet to implement it in practice. Small steps have been taken in Iceland in this direction and, for instance, the experimental programme in Community Interpreting is an outcome of obtaining external funding from stakeholders.

Future prospects and needs

The new needs projected for higher education in both the Baltic and the Nordic countries are much in line with what the findings of the TNP3 subgroup 2 consultation with employers and graduates revealed. The future needs in HE provision relate to the kind of language and communication competence that will be needed when the greatest change in the professional profiles of the whole workforce will be its internationalisation and globalisation. Although there will be country-specific differences in the pacing and directions of this process, the basic challenges to HE will be similar. More modularisation and flexibility of educational programmes will be needed to provide for lifelong professional development. Diversity of expertise will also be required in both modern

language degree programmes and in non-language programmes, which implies setting up more interdisciplinary programmes and interaction between different fields. Due to mobility and increasing competition between educational institutions, the educational market will also internationalise. Effective immigrant education will gain in importance. Professional profiles in practically all fields are changing and new kinds of labour markets are being created. Continuous consultation and collaboration will be important for ensuring graduate employability. All these requirements relate mainly to the first and second cycles and to continuing education. As regards skills and competences, then, the very basic requirements in the forthcoming situation will be extensive communication and multicultural competence needed for interacting and networking with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds either in face-to-face or in virtual contacts. In addition, excellent ICT skills, presentation skills, and problem-solving and team working skills will be a necessity – all of them also closely related to language and communication. With all these future developments and needs in place, it is extremely important that efforts are also taken at the European level to produce and disseminate information and recommendations for higher education decision-making and action in the various European countries.

Case studies on the enhancement of graduate competences

Two case studies related to enhancement of graduate competences are presented below. One concerns new study programmes established through consultation, and the other one concerns consultation and collaboration with the labour market to serve curriculum development and orientation of graduate competences.

1. LATVIA: New study programmes in translation, interpretation and technology

Expert submitting the case study

Name: Ilze Kangro

Position in institution: Professor, Teacher Education Department, Head;

Expert's institution: Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Latvia

Date of completion of case study: 20 March, 2007.

1. New curricula or modules.

Although the number of Latvian translators in EU institutions has increased recently, the quality of translation has not visibly improved. The problem stays the same: an insufficient number of full-time translators, a large part of translations done by freelancers (with considerably varying quality, including misinterpretations of the meaning and the use of unauthorised and controversial terminology). There is an increasing demand for highly trained professional translators not only because of rapidly growing international contacts, but also due to the EU membership. Therefore new study programmes were introduced in:

- Ventspils University College. Professional Master in Translation and Terminology. Extent: 2 years, part time. Accredited in 2006.
The planned output of the program – high qualified translators with deeper knowledge of LSP and terminology management – fully corresponds to the current needs of Latvian society and domestic and international labour market.
- International Higher School of Practical Psychology. Professional Master in the Technology of Translation. 2 years. Accredited in 2006.
- Higher School of Economic and Culture. Professional Bachelor in translation and interpreting; Translator, Interpreter. 4 years. Full time. Accredited in 2003.

The essential difference in the quality of carrying out these study programmes has to be stressed. The programmes at the government institutions of higher education are regularly renewed and supplemented, study courses are improved and new courses are introduced, and also students' surveys are done (the University of Latvia, Faculty of Modern Languages and Ventspils University College).

However, the programmes of private higher education establishments are often just better or worse copies of the ones at the government higher education institutions. Moreover, the lecturers and professors who work with students in these programmes (at government and private institutions) rather often are the

same. This means that they are overloaded and tired and due to that the quality of new study programmes suffers.

2. Consultation / collaboration (established in the last 3 years) between higher education institutions and organisations / companies in the language industry / professions

At the stage of designing the Professional Master in Translation and Terminology Programme (2003) at Ventspils University College the development group conducted a poll among experts and some employers on the necessity and basic features of such a programme. Different suggestions were expressed by graduates, translation experts, and potential employers from government and municipal institutions, and private translation agencies to advise the content. The programme is carried out in close cooperation with the Translation and Terminology Centre, which is gradually transforming into a central institution for terminology development and standardisation in Latvia. There was also close cooperation with educational establishments training translators and interpreters in other EU countries, e.g. School of Applied Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Mainz, Flensburg College, Agder University College etc. Thus, this new Master program is an added value product of international cooperation, especially between “old” and “new” EU countries.

Source: Self-Assessment report on the professional higher education programme “Translation and Terminology” for obtaining the MA degree. Ventspils University College. <http://www.aiknc.lv>

2. FINLAND: A national project monitoring early work careers and employability of university graduates

Expert submitting the case study

Name: Anne Räsänen

Position in institution: Senior Lecturer in English

Expert's institution: University of Jyväskylä Language Centre

Date of completion of case study: 15 March, 2007

(Source: Korhonen, Päivi & Juha Sainio 2006. Viisi vuotta työelämässä. Monialayliopistoista vuonna 2000 valmistuneiden sijoittuminen työmarkkinoille. Helsinki: Aarresaari 2006).

Description:

“Viisi vuotta työelämässä - Five years in working life” – was a **career monitoring project** done in 2006 by the national network of academic career and recruiting services, which is engaged in monitoring early work careers and employability of new graduates. Each university has its own agency responsible also for disseminating the findings. Thus, both a national report and a university-specific report has been prepared.

Respondents:

- 4 500 graduates from nine multidisciplinary universities; graduation year 2000 (N.B. specialised universities such as business schools are not included in this survey)
- Response rate 58 % (total of graduates some 8 000)

Findings: Work situation and language-related skills needed:

- 83 % working, 75 % of them in full time permanent positions
- some 60 % in the public sector, 30 % in private enterprises and 8 % in other organizations
- 65 % working in positions directly related to training and 30 % in positions related to some aspect of training
- 75 % working in own academic field where the formal requirement is a graduate degree and some 20 % working in some new market of their own field (N.B. changing profiles)
- Their experience of working life has been that some of the main language-related skills needed in the workplace are problem-solving skills, team working skills and social skills, presentation skills, and mother tongue communication skills, as well as well-developed ICT and information management skills and ability to work independently. More foreign language skills than just English is a merit.

- Of these skills, university education does not seem to place enough emphasis on developing team working skills, presentation skills, or project management skills.

Recommendations: Respondents also gave advice to today's students. In addition to field-specific advice their recommendations, regardless of their field and workplace, included the following:

- A more extensive module of language and communication studies, including the mother tongue, should be included in the degree (i.e. in addition to what is already required as a compulsory component of all degrees).
- Much attention should be paid to specific communication and presentation skills, ICT skills, and project skills related to working life.
- Critical thinking, prioritisation, and time management are important.
- Students should focus particularly on building solid skills in both the mother tongue and in foreign languages as well as on internationalisation in general.

Relevance for TNP3: Relates directly to SP2 and the findings of its consultation. The results of the Finnish project are fully in line with the European findings and with the recommendations made in SP2.

Anne Räsänen, Jyväskylän yliopisto (University of Jyväskylä, FI) May 2007

Sources used in the synthesis report: Updates of national reports by Ole Helmersen (Denmark), Oddný Sverrisdóttir (Iceland), Ilze Kangro (Latvia), Anne Räsänen (Finland), and Jurate Zdanyte (Lithuania).