



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

## **SYNTHESIS REPORT “WEST” (SUB-PROJECT 2)**

### **Languages for enhanced opportunities on the European labour market**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Two of the TNP3-D Dissemination Document presents the most important outcomes of TNP3 along four different axes: changes in the labour market, evolving and emerging language needs as a result of a new labour market context, innovative curricular offerings and consultation/collaboration between higher education (HE) and professional stakeholders to meet the new needs, and recommendations to carry professional language development further. The present Regional Synthesis Paper for Western Europe (alphabetically, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Lichtenstein, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK) offers recent picture of some of the partners — Belgium, France, Ireland, Switzerland and the UK, illustrating and complementing the Dissemination Document<sup>1</sup>. It will be seen through description and examples that within a relatively limited geographic area with a reasonably similar economic context, different socio-linguistic and cultural contexts result in quite diverse recognition of language needs and actions taken thereupon.

#### **1. Economic, societal and labour market developments**

Briefly summarised, the Dissemination Document characterises today's European labour market as, first, being influenced by globalisation and the expansion of Europe itself which has led to a movement of labour-intensive manufacturing processes towards lower-cost countries. Consequently, the demand for linguistically and interculturally well qualified and mobile labour is increasing in highly skilled occupations, calling for increased flexibility, re-training and upskilling. Such mobility may be on a frequent short-term basis, or on a more permanent one. But economic migration also concerns less skilled employment, translating as a need for language competences and intercultural understanding at more basic levels as well. Overall, the business context

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<sup>1</sup> In the scope of the present report, a comparative approach will be adopted, but identical indicators were not available across all countries. Consequently, general trends will be given in most cases, with only a limited number of detailed statistics.

includes trade both within the EU and outside, carried out by large, medium and small companies of both national and multinational natures. Competition, performance and productivity are the driving forces across all countries, encouraging all states to reach optimal levels of participation in the labour market. All of the Western European countries are experiencing economic growth, particularly in the service sector to the detriment of a declining manufacturing base, and international trade plays a key role across the board. But differences in the rate and nature of growth and in socio-cultural contexts translate into varying washback effects on the perception of language needs.

Moving from west to east, the economic context in **Ireland** has changed dramatically in recent years, with one of the fastest growing economies in the developed world (forecast at 5.4% in real GDP terms with an unemployment rate of 4.4%). The increasing number of immigrants has been transforming the society from mono-cultural to evermore multi-cultural, greatly increasing the number of languages spoken. At the same time, there has been a decline in the number of learners of foreign languages in third-level education. Construction and service sectors (notably public service, health and education) are booming, but employment in hotels and restaurants is falling. A number of career sectors are likely to experience skills shortages in the future (engineering, science and systems analysis); growth in these areas could help languages. Overseas companies have become a key driver of the economy, particularly in information and communications technology (ICT), demanding high skill levels and a sophisticated business environment.

The **UK** is described as having a serious investment problem in both physical and human capital, with growth of capital investment being lower than major competitors: 60% behind France, 32% behind Germany. Productivity performance on a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per worker basis is lower than that of these same countries. Like Ireland, migrant labour from new EU member states, and elsewhere, also plays a crucial role in the country's economy, at the same time enriching both the linguistic and multicultural contexts. Finance, business services and construction are the fastest growing sectors. The UK is said to have one of the highest levels of labour force utilisation in the OECD (i.e., hours worked per employee, employment rate and labour force participation rate). New patterns of working are emerging with only 35% of employees working a 'standard' type week with 9 to 5 type starting and finishing times, and nearly 2 million home teleworkers. Exports account for approximately a quarter of the national income. Within Europe, the share of trade in the UK's GDP is roughly comparable to that of Germany, France or Italy. The UK tends to have a balance of trade deficit, but there is a surplus in trade in services, and a comparatively high level of foreign direct investment

While **Belgium** is one of the smallest countries in the EU, its economic strength is far from negligible. Productivity and material prosperity fare well compared to European averages. The public debt, while high, is decreasing, but like in many

European countries, the overall unemployment rate is high (13.2%). A remarkably different picture is found, however in the three regions: 9.4% of the active population in Flanders, 18.3% in Wallonia, 19.6% in Brussels. A very open economy relies on services, transport, trade and industry, with high levels of trade and a strong export profile. Historically, banking and insurance activity have always been closely linked with this commercial activity, and more recently, tourism has been gaining in importance. As a transit and distribution centre for other EU member countries, Belgium has attracted a large number of foreign businesses. This context makes language skills in two or more of the national languages of considerable importance. English also plays a significant role as a lingua franca. As in other Western European countries, agriculture engages only a small percentage of the workforce, and there has been delocalisation of industrial activities to low-salary countries.

In **France**, despite a generally favourable European economic context, the growth rate has remained around 2%. The French industrial base centres on telecommunications, aerospace, electronics, defence, ship and automobile building, construction and civil engineering. Tourism —the most visited country in the world— and agriculture —the EU's leading producer— are also key sectors. Income inequality has remained low compared to other developed countries (notably the UK), and the poverty rate remains one of the lowest in the world. On the other hand, unemployment remains chronically high in the Western European context, hovering near a double-digit level.

More than half (60%) of French foreign trade takes place within the euro zone. In 2006, there was a trade balance deficit of around €30 billion, due partly to the inability of French small and medium enterprises (SME) to export. This may be explained by their too limited size and their insufficient competitiveness. At the same time, most hiring takes place in such businesses: turnover reaches 90% for 23% of SME. The latter also account for the greatest proportion of international business (56%). Yet, the study of jobs offered by SME in the TNP3/SP2 study shows that the mention « foreign languages » does not often occur.

In **Switzerland**, as elsewhere, economic growth favours the tertiary sector over manufacturing and agriculture, but also over construction. International trade contributes most significantly to the GDP; the main trading partners are industrialised countries. Overall, there is active promotion of innovation and of developing a knowledge-based economy. Nearly half of all Swiss firms (43%) have regular business relations with foreign partners in different languages. In this context, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are increasingly important. People must be able to engage in effective oral and written communication, both in direct and virtual environments, across national and cultural borders.

## **2. Evolving and emerging language needs as a result of a changing labour market**

This second question raised by TNP3 points out five key needs. As presented in the Dissemination Document, there is first of all heightened awareness of the professional relevance of linguistic and intercultural competences. The need for such competences implies serious reflection on which languages, which skills and to what levels; English alone is clearly inadequate, but is often taken for granted; as such it indeed has a special status. A second need in the challenge of defining what work-related language competency means: needs depend on many factors such as the language itself, the country, the specific level of job and professional area, etc. More precise needs analyses are clearly necessary, particularly regarding the relation of “general” language to “specific” language. Thirdly, the corollary is then the need to link such perceived situations of professional language use to actual foreign language skills and competences as learning (and teaching) targets. This need leads in turn to refocusing teacher training in order to meet new, lifelong, learner needs. Finally, both for students and for teachers, there is seen to be a need for knowledge of the language learning process itself and of language systems (both “neighbouring” and otherwise).

Along these lines, in **Ireland**, a project to assess foreign language needs and skills of 1,000 small and medium-sized Irish companies (Reflect, [www.reflectproject.com](http://www.reflectproject.com), 2002) reported that the most important languages used are, in order of importance, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Japanese. There is also a growing need for other European and non-European languages. Tasks most commonly identified as necessary are meetings, correspondence, telephone, travel, presentations, exhibitions, socialising, reading technical literature.

In the earlier national report, it was pointed out that fluency in a second language was not generally considered an important transferable skill (but that in so far as respondents had an opportunity to observe this skill, it was rated as relatively satisfactory, Transferable skills project <http://www.skillsproject.ie/>). Such lack of consciousness was again highlighted by the more recent Reflect study which showed that although Ireland’s dependency on exports would indicate a need for foreign languages and an awareness of cultural aspects of international markets, many organisations were indeed unaware of the importance of foreign languages and intercultural skills. Some companies did not perceive a negative impact of relying on English alone, and some acknowledged that they had lost business because of their lack of foreign language skills. There was a positive correlation between the percentage of exports and the number of employees with language skills: 57% of companies who export +50% of their products had employees with language skills. In comparison, results from the other two countries surveyed as part of the Reflect

project showed much higher results for the percentage of employees with foreign language skills: Poland 97%, Portugal 85%.

The brief account given above of the recent changes in **the UK** labour market clearly underscores what was previously suggested in the British national report for SP2, that is, the need for improved language competences to help offset the trade deficit. A survey published in 2004 by the British Chambers of Commerce showed the extent to which languages, including their cultural component, are a barrier to trade: 80% of exporters could not conduct business in a foreign language. It also revealed that businesses which placed the highest value on languages were increasing their export sales by an average of £290,000 sterling per year and that exporters who valued languages least saw export sales decline by an average of £50,000 sterling per year. Going even further, 77% of the companies interviewed claimed to have actually lost business over the 2 years preceding the survey due to language and cultural barriers. A survey carried out in the context of science, engineering and technology points out that lack of language skills also poses a psychological barrier to entering possibly the more lucrative markets where English is less spoken. Companies tend to have a high reliance on outside language professionals, which can slow down response time. The consideration given to language skills in recruitment is traditionally quite low (12-13%, as given in the national report). Only 16% of the science, engineering and technology companies said that they paid for language training.

Which languages are most in demand, for whom and in what context? Four European languages are the most frequently used: French, German, Spanish and Italian particularly by senior management, sales and marketing staff, but also by technical/engineering staff at advanced levels of language and intercultural competence. A major problem area is that of lower hierarchical but functional levels (secretarial) where contact is front line but language skills are often limited. Tasks include both general professional and more specific contexts: telephones, meetings, negotiating, correspondence, travelling, exhibitions, socialising, presentations, handling technical literature.

Yet, certain traditional weaknesses are likely to work against a full acceptance of the need for improved language competences: low investment in human resources, a tendency to focus on short term profitability rather than taking a longer view, a certain inward looking self-sufficiency and, last but not least, the widespread use of English in international business leading many to believe that they can very well make do with English.

As has been seen for Belgium, in both Flanders and Wallonia, contacts with respectively non-Dutch/non-French speaking partners (foreign or non-foreign) are of vital importance for the business world. Almost all companies have contacts in foreign languages; for example, in Flanders, three-quarters of the companies realize a part of their turnover in non-Dutch speaking regions/countries; in small and medium-sized enterprises in Liège, 31.7% of the turnover is

accounted for in non-French speaking regions. There is also a small but increasing need for knowledge of Italian and Spanish (1-3%).

About 15% of Flemish companies admitted that they have lost orders due to a lack of knowledge of foreign language (mostly French or German); almost 20% say that, for the same reason, contacts have been severed. On the other hand, 60.4% of the companies in Limburg confirm that knowledge of foreign languages is seen as a trump card in negotiations. In Flemish Brabant, studies have also researched the point of view of small and medium-sized companies on the importance of foreign languages in the future. Almost all companies (90.2%) are of the opinion that the importance of French will increase, 78.4% predict the same for English and 60.8% for German. The conviction that knowledge of foreign languages is of vital importance is gaining ground in the business world. The same phenomenon occurs in the tourism sector, where the need for languages, particularly oral competences, is recognised. Languages courses in French and German have been set up in several towns for the personnel of tourist information offices.

Thus, it is not surprising to see that in 58.6% of job applications, it is quite frequent that knowledge of foreign languages is required. Quite often an explicit language test is announced, mostly the case for French, to a lesser degree for English and German. Knowledge of foreign language is also seen as one of the factors influencing prospects for promotion: more than 35% of subjects interviewed in Limburg and 78% in Flemish Brabant voiced such an opinion.

In **France**, the question of general language awareness —a “prerequisite” to recognising language needs in the professional context— is both historically and culturally complex, given the role played by the national language itself as a *lingua franca* in the past, the question now of English *lingua franca* and the importance of the *Académie française* as the ultimate national language reference. Official efforts are made to defend the French language (including in France), but at the same time, the teaching of French as a foreign language (notably in HE) is neither clearly recognised (teacher training, status) nor funded. The teaching of regional languages was only recognised in 1951. Emphasis has nevertheless been put on foreign language programmes in secondary schools (and more recently in primary education), but outcome has proved disappointing, notably in English (the language studied by an overwhelming majority of pupils). In a comparison of 15-16-year olds across eight European countries in 2002, competence in listening, writing, reading and grammar/syntax was significantly the weakest, and performance was weaker in 2002 than on the same tests in 1996. In response to this first international comparison, then, a law passed in August 2005 formally introduced the *Common European Framework for Languages* (CEFR) in primary and secondary schools; it is currently estimated that only about 30% of teachers are familiar with it.

In HE, characterised by a two-tier system (on the one hand, highly select schools of excellence and shorter professionally oriented programmes; on the other, chronically under-funded mass education in universities with no student selection, little orientation and high dropout rates), a B2 level (in English) is

required of Master-level engineering school and (semi-)private business school graduates. Employers, however, are on the whole not familiar with what the CEFR levels mean. In the universities, teaching—including foreign languages—is more traditionally of a theoretical rather than a practical orientation, not easily interdisciplinary and not “comfortable” with the concepts of external evaluation, benchmarks, criterion referencing (such as the CEFR) and outcomes. Debate is currently ongoing on the question of language certification, but the position of the Ministry of Education—essential in a highly centralised system of national diplomas—has not been clear.

A very few needs analysis of language use in professional life have been carried out. These have shown that graduates in Economics, Law and Business have increasing needs for language skills (out of 251 respondents, from 42% in 1998 to 59% in 2000). These needs are called upon *overwhelmingly* within France (85%) at levels of B2 and above, most notably in English, with 30% in two languages. Around 25% were hired for their first job thanks to their language competence, proven by a CV in English and an interview (external or in-house tests are given, but their validity is seen to be rather limited).

A survey by the national employment agency for executives in 2006 reflects that 34% of the 122,784 job offers for executive-level positions mention mastery of one or more foreign languages. Those positions specifying language competency are now more demanding—a “confirmed” level » in 81% of the cases, and overwhelmingly so in English; language skills expected from young graduates are first and foremost the ability to carry on professional exchanges in both technical and social registers at a level close to that of native-language competence. Reading and writing skills are also not to be neglected. The same study, in accordance with TNP3, showed that language needs differ from one sector of the economy to another and from one level of responsibility to another. Finally, employers have also recently expressed their dissatisfaction with the language preparation offered in HE.

At present, around 65% of first-year students (non-language specialists in Social Sciences) are at A2 levels in receptive skills; by third year Bachelor’s level, often due to the weaker students having dropped out, a B1 level is not uncommon. So the questions of certification and of needs analysis raise the issue of the virtuous circle washback effect of assessment on teaching, pointing up a real need for improved pre-service training of HE teachers (generally recruited from the secondary sector) and the recognition of the need for in-service training, traditionally unheard of in universities. The challenge of keying needs from the professional sector—including intercultural competence—to language curricula and pedagogy is a rather revolutionary concept, as is the notion of lifelong learning, breaking down the traditional barrier between *formation initiale* (studies formally undertaken in HE) and *formation continue* (continuing education in a professional context).

In **Switzerland**, languages are not always systematically integrated into curricula in the different disciplines, even if the development of a specific plurilingual and pluricultural profile is considered desirable as part of every learner's programme. Educational objectives should not aim simply to develop knowledge about language but rather to develop the capability to use language as an expert in a given domain, interacting and problem-solving in a culturally appropriate manner over time. In this light, it is important to offer a wide range of languages, with English as a tool of international communication, but within the national context—like Belgium—the other national languages are essential for both domestic employability and the nation's competitiveness. Finally, even wider generalisation of the CEFR is necessary, with entry levels and learning objectives being expressed in terms of competences which are comprehensible, comparable and recognisable.

### **3. Curricular innovation and consultation/collaboration between HE and their social partners to meet new needs**

Across most European countries, competence in at least one foreign language is generally a required part of a university degree, and there is a certain evolution in language training, breaking down barriers between modern language degree programmes and those targeting specialists of other disciplines; the former tend to branch out to other disciplines, the latter include increasing exposure to languages. Consequently, it has become ever more necessary to bridge the gap, in a structured manner, between study and work and to describe work-related language use in a comprehensible way both to employers and to non-language graduates. Universities are also increasingly called upon to track their graduates' careers, particularly noting language and intercultural aspects.

On this level, the picture in **Ireland** is somewhat contradictory. The Irish workplace has changed dramatically in the last few years from being ethnically, socially and culturally homogeneous to becoming truly inter-cultural. Yet, while major economic resources have been invested in recruiting foreign workers for the Irish labour market, little planning or policy is dedicated to the integration of these workers into the workplace and the wider society. The Intercultural Workplace Project (IWP) <http://www.dcu.ie/themes/international/iwp.shtml>, as mentioned above, reported that fluency in a second language was not generally considered by graduates to be an important transferable skill. Yet such fluency is reported to be most highly developed in undergraduate programmes, followed closely by written communication, and graduates commonly mention the additional skills of intercultural awareness and flexibility as skills which are both important for students and gained from the study of languages.

For purposes of course validation, third level institutions in Ireland must carry out market research to assess the needs of the marketplace, and the Higher

Education Authority has surveyed graduates one year after graduating. Language graduates, however, have not been distinguished as such.

As was highlighted in the **UK** national report, a series of studies have shown that government and leaders of business organisations do not necessarily share the opinion that English alone is sufficient. On the contrary, the pressing need to promote relevant language learning is recognised. While some good practices are evident, recent reports on the current state of language learning and teaching and on the use of foreign languages by business and industry have in fact shown further decline: increased demand for languages as a supplementary skill accompanied by a decline in the numbers of pupils taking both secondary courses (languages remain optional after the age of 14) and students in HE taking named degrees in languages.

As a reaction, the government department responsible for education has indicated that from September 2007 schools would be required to set a benchmark for the number of their pupils studying languages leading to a GCSE or other recognised qualification, with an expectation that a majority of students would do so. Also proposed have been that this benchmarking be a factor in the league tables of school performance and the development of a voluntary recognition scheme with related assessment that will complement national qualifications frameworks and the CEFR (the "Languages Ladder", with currently 21 languages).

The decline in languages at secondary level has led to changes in the pattern of languages offered at higher education level nationally within the UK and its regions. The University and College Union recently (academic year 2006-07) published a report *Losing our tongues* which indicated that over the last decade the number of higher education institutions offering French has fallen by 15%, those offering German by 25% and Italian by 9%. Their view is that the most serious impact of this drop in provision will undoubtedly be on students from less affluent backgrounds or from ethnic minorities, most likely to wish to take a university course close to home. It is very clear that this situation in HE and the gradual linguistic disenfranchisement of certain sectors of learners has serious implications for the business and trading performance of the UK at a national level.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England has now (academic year 2006-07) launched a major new initiative, *Routes into Languages*, whose aim is to increase and widen participation in language study in higher education. This programme will support and promote languages through a variety of means, in particular, networks of HE providers and other relevant bodies and specific projects.

Within the UK, languages are taught as single subjects and in varying combinations (major, joint, minor) either with another language or with a range of academic or vocational subjects (Business Studies, Computing and other

professional areas). Depending on the course and on the university, language study may be based on the more traditional languages and literature, on languages and area studies, on language itself or on translation and interpreting. Use of ICT in language teaching is widespread and in certain universities, language may be studied with computing.

Taught Master's courses are offered in a range of areas from the more vocational to specialist interest in translation, area studies and literature and culture. A notable example from the University of Southampton is the MA in Transnational Studies which focuses on traffic across national boundaries in a globalised world with particular reference to Spanish, French, German and Portuguese speaking areas (Europe and the Americas). Although not specifically language based, students are encouraged to develop their language skills. This relatively new programme also offers possibilities for continuation to MPhil and PhD levels.

While many of the above developments in BA and MA studies are longstanding, some developments reflect perceived demands in the era of globalisation. UK universities are now expected to indicate the learning outcomes for programmes and modules within programmes in all subjects. Consequently, ongoing updates to programmes, development of new programmes and incremental changes are part of the picture.

Once in the professional world, sustaining what was originally published in the national report, a large proportion of people are at basic or intermediate level (corresponding to two years before the final school leaving examination). In addition, the language skills in companies turn out to be under-used. This suggests that many companies are barely operating at a functional level as regards foreign languages. Recourse to native speakers is a common compensatory strategy. It is also interesting to note that UK language graduates come out as the most immediately employable group. The most favoured sectors are business services (31.9%), manufacturing (12.2%), banking/finance (11%) and wholesale/retail sales (8.6%). Such diversity of employment underscores the importance of offering a range of types of language.

Finally, as indicated in the original UK report, there is a strong tradition of consultation between government, its agencies and relevant stakeholders on a wide range of issues, including languages. This is evidenced by the Quality Assurance Agency which conducts university audits. Higher Education Academy National Subject Centres (charged with the responsibility of promoting and facilitating teaching in subjects in higher education) are also being asked to give some prominence to employer engagement in their work. In a similar vein, as also indicated in the national report, each university has a careers service and is obliged to collaborate with the government on graduate tracking.

For **Belgium**, as in France, it is important to understand the structure of HE. Whether in Flanders or Wallonia, there are two main type of institutions: the

more vocationally oriented *Hautes Ecoles / Hogescholen* have a longer tradition of language teaching to non-language specialists with well-established practice of integrating languages into academic programmes, and traditional universities, which, except for fields such as business studies and economics, do not generally cater in the same way to language learning. Efforts have been made with the advent of the Bologna process and with a greater concern for employability to integrate language learning into the degree programmes of students of all disciplines.

In Flanders, the Minister of Education and Employment presented a new language policy in September 2006 stressing the importance of foreign languages and allowing experimentation with CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and foreign language initiation even in kindergarten. In HE, foreign languages are used when non-Dutch speaking guest professors lecture, but CLIL is rarely used in non-language specialist contexts.

The situation at Hasselt University may be seen to characterise the situation in Flemish universities. Languages, if offered, are mostly taught outside the faculties in language centres staffed by teachers who do not enjoy the same academic recognition as other university teachers. Languages are absent from scientific curricula and hardly present in humanities (other than linguistics and literature). They do, however, play a traditionally important role in Law and Business. Within this context, the Business Faculty at Hasselt University has rethought its offer, making three foreign languages compulsory and introducing a semi-autonomous organisation of blended learning pathways.

The Walloon government launched its renovation in August 2005. The *Plan Langues* (2005) of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) is one example of concrete action taken (see Case Study A).

The **French** response to the Bologna process can be described as somewhat ambiguous: on the Bachelor's level, the law calls for evaluation of the competence of incoming students and appropriately "adapted" language teaching. On the Master's level, it is stated that the diploma cannot be awarded without validating the "aptitude" to master at least one foreign language, and that curricula must include teaching to enable the acquisition of such an aptitude. No indication of what "mastery" entails is given. This is indeed a tall order in a HE context not traditionally geared to evaluation, outcome and pedagogical introspection. Explicit language policies rarely exist, and only a few universities designate a language policy "officer". ECTS credits for non-language specialists are often allotted on a quantitative rather than a qualitative base, and while blended learning exists in some universities, its introduction generally depends on individual efforts and on a successful approach to change management.

CLIL is developing, both for French students and for foreigners: CampusFrance <http://www.edufrance.net/adm/xadm-catanglais.htm> shows 458 courses taught in English, 50% of which are in business and management, 22% in engineering and technology. Similarly, joint language/disciplinary degrees do exist such as

those recently accredited in Toulouse for BAs in Law and Language (see Case Study B).

The spring of 2006 saw widespread student protests over questions of employability; languages, as transferable skills, were part of the picture. Unlike their British counterparts, French language graduates have the lowest overall employment rate and the lowest salaries. The governmental response included a first-time-ever “*Université-emploi*” national consultation among stakeholders on all levels, resulting in the *Rapport Hetzel* (<http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/rapport/rapporthetzel.pdf>). Aside from the positive impact of linking the notion of employability to that of university training (not a given in a Latin society), recommendations concerning languages encouraged, for the first time ever, an obligatory “minimum” level at Bachelor’s level and the use of ITC for blended learning.

Certain direct links do exist with the professional world, and are beginning to recognise language competence. Partnerships are developing between universities and research laboratories and companies, and have resulted in effective collaboration such as professionally oriented diplomas. One new initiative is *Opération Phénix*, planned for fall 2007: seven large multinational corporations, encouraged by the national union of chief executives, have entered into a partnership with Parisian universities to recruit 70 Master’s graduates in literature, humanities and social sciences on permanent contracts, providing them with updates in Economics and finance.

Traditionally, employers’ organisations have marginal contact with universities, participating mainly in orientation forums for students. Alumni organisations are more common in the elitist *grandes écoles*, but are developing to some extent in universities. A certain level of graduate tracking exists with the *Observatoires de la vie étudiante*, but surveys linking language questions and employability are quite rare.

All **Swiss** universities and faculties adopted the three-cycle Bologna structure. Awareness has increased of the need to further integrate language, cultural and intercultural needs born of multilingual and multicultural contexts in professional life. New developments are meeting the demands, but not yet in a systematic fashion. Notable examples are a bilingual “plus” programme in legal language at a C2 level and an MA in the Science and Didactics of plurilinguism in Fribourg, an interdisciplinary and interphilological BA in Eastern European Area studies in Bâle. Nearly all universities have language centres often offering work-related communication-based modules in specific domains in English, German and French as well as other languages.

#### 4. Recommendations to carry professional language development further

The Dissemination Document makes four major recommendations: language training needs to focus on output (language and intercultural competences necessary in the labour market) rather than on the more traditional input (content). This output must be thought of in terms of CEFR levels and descriptors, and must further develop the latter in terms of language for specific/professional purposes, along the lines of the EQF. In order to accurately assess just what this output corresponds to, however, regular career tracking and needs analyses must be carried out, with results then informing the language training offer. Finally, specific thought must also be given to the choice of languages offered, and their levels, in a plurilingual spirit.

Despite the many differences in language policy and practice highlighted for the five Western European countries discussed in the present report, recommendations for the future are very much the same, differing mainly on questions of degree. A paradox observed in nearly all cases is that with the expansion in the number of persons entering HE across Europe —a reflection of the (new) need for a greater number of more highly educated persons in a knowledge-based economy— it is not clear to what extent students have a clear view of their professional / academic goals, including the role of languages

More specifically, from the **Irish** perspective, it would seem advantageous to better “market” foreign languages, to show how they can provide a competitive advantage, linguistically and culturally, for companies. This means improving the general attitude to languages, moving beyond English only in a spirit of lifelong learning. Secondly, more systematic and regular surveys need to be carried out to map changes in language requirements and raise awareness of the desirability of foreign language competence. Two recommendations emerge from the recent **UK** report: although a great deal of collaboration exists between HE institutions and professional and government stakeholders, it would be beneficial to ascertain actual levels of foreign language skill; graduate tracking would be more useful if more specific information were sought on actual jobs or salaries. Key challenges in **Belgium** include learning the other main community language and, as in nearly all of the other countries discussed herein, convincing undergraduates of the importance of language learning. Belgian universities also need to develop strategies to motivate their students (in comparison with the *Hautes Ecoles* where work placements are common). A suggestion is reinforcing the link between language learning and students’ main academic programme (CLIL). In the **French context**, key recommendations focus primarily on raising language awareness and meta-awareness of language learning itself. Knowledge and implementation of the CEFR and of the *European Language Portfolio* are being encouraged as the key tools with which to do so, implying concrete reflection on pre-service and in-service teacher training, needs analysis and certification in terms of CEFR outputs. Systematic graduate tracking is also called for, to create a virtuous circle between HE and

professional stakeholders. Finally, questions of plurilinguism and pluriculturalism are particularly acute in France, where despite a wide ranging offer of languages in secondary school, these notions are not intrinsically rooted.

Last but not least, **Switzerland** stands out as a model in language policy and practice among the Western European countries. Nevertheless, if nearly all Swiss universities undertake effective graduate tracking and carry out regional or national needs analyses which, in turn, have positive washback effects on language curricula, new initiatives are called for: a more permanent and systematic network to handle graduate feedback and analyse data in terms of curricula innovation especially for specific profiles, further development of criterion referencing and common standards of quality, looking out for new tendencies in new professions and in a plurilingual country, better understanding the workings of plurilinguism and its impact on employability.

## 5. Case studies

### A. The *Plan Langues* of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Language teaching has a long tradition in certain parts of the ULB, especially in the areas of business studies and economics. As mentioned above, this is fairly typical in these fields in Belgium, with the favoured languages being Dutch (the other main community language of Belgium, the ULB being a French-speaking university) and English. To give an example which illustrates the importance given to languages in these fields, the *Solvay Business School* of the ULB devotes 30 out of 180 ECTS in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle degree to languages – 15 ECTS to Dutch and the same to English.

In July 2005, however, after a consultation process involving deans of faculty, university management, and language teachers, the ULB launched its *Plan Langues*. The *Plan Langues* extended language teaching to all undergraduate students in the following faculties: Philosophy and Letters, Psychology and Education, Science, and Applied Science. Under the *Plan Langues*, 1<sup>st</sup> cycle students in these four faculties have a total of 8 ECTS devoted to languages. This is structured as follows:

- BA1: Level test to provide students with an evaluation of their abilities in their chosen language. (Students with a weak initial level are offered the possibility of following remedial courses prior to beginning their language courses in BA2.)
- BA2: 4 ECTS (=48h) Main learning goals – receptive skills: listening and reading
- BA3: 4 ECTS (=48h) Main learning goals – productive skills: speaking and writing

Students may currently choose between English and Dutch in the faculties of Philosophy and Letters and Psychology and Education, but by far the greater number of students in these faculties opt for English. The faculties of Science and Applied Science offer only English. Achievement levels are fixed with respect to the CEFR. The minimum target level set for all *Plan Langues* students at the end of BA3 is B1, though higher levels of achievement are aimed at.

## **B. Bachelor's in Law and Language (Université Toulouse I Sciences Sociales)**

- Spanish language and civilisation
- English language and civilisation

### **1) Objectives**

- Train jurists able to master both the tools and the logic of classic legal analysis and offer them training in the concepts and working methods of foreign legal systems. Introduction to the principles of comparative law is not otherwise offered in first or second year of undergraduate studies.
- Enable these jurists to work first and foremost in the European Union, but also in many other places thanks to thorough knowledge of the language and culture as well as the legal systems of those countries where Spanish or English is the native tongue or the language used in legal practice.

Both Bachelor's degrees will train students in operational competences. As French students are generally little familiar with the socio-political and cultural aspects of the Hispanic and Latin-American world, the Spanish Law and language programme will devote a significant part of the curriculum to these issues. Legal terminology rarely poses problems, given the common Latin origin of the Napoleonic Code. In the case of Anglo-Saxon law, however, while French students are generally familiar with the socio-political characteristics of English-speaking countries, they need specific training in the particular nature of the legal culture and its terminology. The accent, in this programme, will thus concentrate on the latter questions.

The programme on the **Spanish-speaking world** includes general language and law courses as well as teaching pertaining to national and regional institutions and major contemporary issues in Spain and Latin America (political, economic and social life).

The programme on the **English-speaking world** includes courses on general language, specific legal terminology and culture as well as civilisation.

**Mobility:** In so far as possible, foreign jurists will participate in the teaching of both language and legal culture. In the third year of studies, a significant part of

the programme will concentrate on cultural questions to prepare students for the obligatory ERASMUS exchange in their final semester.

### **C. Bachelor's in Economics and Language: Spanish language and civilisation**

#### **2) Objectives**

- Train economists able to master both the tools and the logic of classic economic analysis and offer them training in the concepts and working methods of the Spanish-speaking world.
- Enable these economists to work first and foremost in the European Union, but also in many other places thanks to thorough knowledge of the language and culture as well as the economics and legal systems of those countries where Spanish is the native tongue or the traditional language.

The programme on the **Spanish-speaking world** includes general language courses as well as teaching pertaining to national and regional institutions and major contemporary issues in Spain and Latin America (political, economic and social life).

**Mobility:** In so far as possible, foreign economists will participate in the teaching of both language and economic culture. In the third year of studies, a significant part of the programme will concentrate on cultural questions to prepare students for the obligatory ERASMUS exchange in their final semester.

Gail F. Taillefer, Université de Toulouse (Sciences Sociales) June 2007

#### **Sources**

This report is based on:

Updates of national reports by Elisabeth Lillie (University of Ulster, UK), Ian Tudor (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium), Gail F. Taillefer (Université de Toulouse, France), Claire Lecointre (Université de Lille, France), Brigitte Forster Vosicki (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland)

