



**AULC Conference**  
**Queen's University, Belfast**  
**Thursday 19 – Friday 20 January 2006**

After a brief housekeeping announcement, Pam introduced **Professor Peter Gregson, Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast.**

Professor Gregson welcomed everyone to the University, particularly those from outside Northern Ireland. He said that it was the second time Queen's had hosted an AULC AGM and noted that with the planned programme there were prospects for a stimulating meeting. He emphasised the importance of the AULC with its crucial role across the HE sector to promote the use of languages for students and staff. He stressed that Queen's University was totally committed to internationalisation and believed that proficiency in languages was essential for careers in the future. It was University policy that all students have the possibility to 'upskill' in languages to equip them for life in our global knowledge-led economy. He introduced Hilary Footitt, Chair of UCML and author of the governmental research report 'The National Language Strategy in Higher Education'.

**Hilary Footitt: 'Languages at the Front Line'**

Hilary began by saying that AULC has done an enormous amount for languages in HE and has a great contribution to make in the future.

Her paper dealt with what she called the 'hidden language history' of international events. She claimed that the study of languages is not just about employability and citizenship, but that it is a matter of national and personal survival. She referred to a quote from Jack Straw: "Foreign affairs are no longer foreign", and the view that the events of 9/11 might have been prevented if more translators had been available.

Hilary gave a fascinating insight into the lives of the 2 million British, American and other English speaking troops involved in the liberation of France during the Second World War, who were given a pocket guide to France in an attempt to teach them survival language skills. The 'Parlez-vous' for GIs included phrases such as:

'Je suis américain.'

'Je voudrais manger.'

'Voulez-vous promener avec moi?'

She moved on to outline some of the strategies employed by the US during hostilities in Iraq, which included the dropping of leaflets in Arabic, the sending of text messages and the use of electronic 'phraselators'. Information was passed on to the local population through daily Arabic broadcasts there was a recognition that Iraqi civilian interpreters would be required for the reconstruction of the country. During the first invasion however, soldiers had

no interpreters when they came into close contact with the civilian population, nor did they have much understanding of Iraqi hand gestures. Incidents at checkpoints contributed to a recognition that better preparation was required and that there was a critical lack of interpreters. There were also security implications in the use of locally-based non-professional interpreters and there was a move towards bringing in interpreters whose first language was English.

This led to something of a recruitment drive in the UK, an awareness of the need for 'intelligence on the ground' and a more linguistic tone in government agencies. The FCO for example set up an 'in-house' Islam awareness course and are working with CILT on a workforce development plan. MI5/6 have also increased their recruitment of staff with languages skills. The DfES are promoting alternative qualifications and are moving to safeguard entitlement to languages at KS4. HEFCE have noted the decline in the number of students studying languages and studying abroad, have recognised the need to 'influence demand' and are providing funding for 5 year collaborative projects in vulnerable subjects.

Hilary noted two areas of room for improvement, firstly in public rhetoric where there is little about languages in select committees and parliamentary debates and secondly in the definition of the much-used term 'international'. She expressed the view that it should be more than just a 'one-way street' in the HE sector. She had reached the uncomfortable conclusion that there was a 'deeply colonial attitude' towards what constitutes 'international'. She talked about the different levels of language use – survival skills, specialist skills, cultural understanding etc – and put forward the view that languages should be part of the package of being a good graduate.

During the discussion following Hilary's paper, a representative from the FCO provided more information about the languages aptitude test taken by candidates for posts. There is a project investigating the relationship between test results and later proven ability. The FCO is also looking into sharing expertise with the MOD and CGHQ. Other points raised included the need for translating/interpreting courses, the role of the BBC and the possible needs of Aid Agencies.

### **David Johnston, Head of School of Languages, Literatures and Arts, QUB**

Pam introduced the next speaker who is Professor of Hispanic Studies as well as a professional translator. She emphasised the fact that he genuinely works closely with the Language Centre.

Professor Johnston gave an extremely witty and inspirational talk on the personal benefits of language learning, which complemented the perspective of the previous speaker. He said that speaking another language opens up something about ourselves and about how others see us and he emphasised the importance of language policy in HE institutions. He talked about the skills, aptitude and flair involved in language learning and referred to language

as a weapon for peace and understanding. He touched on the relationship between language and reality and expressed the view that monolingualism is a form of blindness, a type of fundamentalism that is a dangerous simplification of the world.

He spoke about the setup of the Language Centre at QUB, pointing out that it forms part of Information Services but that it works closely with the Languages Department.

After the two keynote talks, both of which were very much appreciated, there was a call from the floor to make both available in full on the AULC website.

### **Kate Green, DfES: The Languages Ladder**

Kate gave an update on the Languages Ladder. It is already being used to motivate Primary School pupils, for assessment at the end of KS3, for accreditation at KS4 and in the ACL and FE sectors. Development is now focusing on defining the higher levels and devising statements for Advanced, Proficiency and Mastery with the collaboration of HE institutions such as Aston, LSE and Manchester. Trialling and pre-testing continues in various languages. There is interest in developing immersion courses leading to Asset accreditation and in the use of Asset for IWLPs. During the next phase 2006/2007 Arabic and Russian are due to be added to the list of available languages. Pre-testing of Advanced level tests in three languages is about to begin and delegates were encouraged to take part in these trials at no cost. 2008/2009 should see the addition of Proficiency and Mastery and again pre-testing will be required. Kate showed delegates a new pack of publicity materials featuring the 'Cando' statements for the four skills. These can be obtained by contacting the DfES on 0845 602 2260 . The codes for the materials are: LL Pack: DFES-1505-2005 Poster:DFES-1691-2005. Anyone interested in getting involved in pre-testing of materials can contact Kate at: [kate.green@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:kate.green@dfes.gsi.gov.uk) .

### **Ray Satchell: The State of Languages in Europe**

Ray talked about CercleS, the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education, which represents 250 Language Centres in 21 countries. Ongoing projects include the European Language Portfolio, Lingu@net, LATE (Language Audits - Tools for Europe) and PICTURE (Portfolio Intercultural Communication - Towards Using Real Experiences). Details of these projects and information about the 9<sup>th</sup> CercleS conference in Frankfurt an der Oder in September 2006 can be found on the CercleS website at: <http://www.cercles.org/> .

### **Nick Byrne: The State of Languages in UK**

Nick reported on a recent meeting of the UCML, where there was discussion of intervention by the DfES to ensure that all secondary schools have at least 50% of students studying a MFL at KS4. Schools are to set their own individual basemark somewhere between 50% and 90%.

### **Mary Ruane: The State of Languages in Ireland**

Mary reported on changing patterns in language learning in Ireland. Languages are well provided for in the Irish education system. Irish is taught as L1 and L2, English as L1 and other modern languages are long established as part of a broad second level curriculum. The National University of Ireland has an entrance requirement of Irish and a modern language, while other universities require Irish or a MFL. There are opportunities for language study at third level for both specialists and non-specialists. At the primary level there is Irish medium teaching.

The rapid pace of change in Ireland and the growing importance of languages other than Irish and English has led to an increasingly crowded curriculum. While there has been a significant decline in the number of students learning German and a certain decline in numbers for French, other languages are gaining in popularity. Languages remain vulnerable because there is no languages education policy, language curricula are not integrated and there is a need for alignment with European language policies.

Mary also talked about the Council of Europe Language Education Policy Profile, the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland). She highlighted a need for public and political awareness raising and the revitalisation of professional associations, commenting that Ireland has not had a national centre for the learning and teaching of languages for a while.

#### **David Newton: CILT Update**

David reported that the Languages Work promotional material produced by CILT had been well received and further materials commissioned by the DfES for HE are due in March 2006 and will include case studies from graduates. He said that it was proving hard to get to senior management in HE to push the National Languages Strategy. He talked about the European Award for Languages, the Talking Sense project to promote links between HE and business and publicised the 'Talking World Class' Languages Conference in Cardiff 2006.

#### **Greg Toner, University of Ulster: Learning Technologies in Languages**

The University of Ulster Centre for Excellence in Multimedia Language Learning was established by the DfES last year. Greg outlined the features of the Robotel labs used at UU and talked about a survey carried out by the Centre into the types of technology currently being used in HE. He said that multimedia labs are prone to the same problems as were familiar to users of analogue labs, namely technophobia, repetitiveness, dullness and the lack of the human touch. He also described the TOLD (Technology and Oral Language Development) project which set out to promote oral language development and monitor results with reference to a control group.

Ongoing CEMML projects include:

- Teaching for transition
- Task-based learning
- Pronunciation development
- Translation studies

Task-based learning involves real life activities where the language is used to complete the task, for example creating a quiz using Hot Potatoes, adding subtitles to a video clip, making bookings for the Year Abroad, compiling a directory of online resources for the YA or preparing a presentation on studying languages.

### **David Newton: Subject Centre Update**

David reported that new materials due to become available soon in the materials bank include:

- English language
- Varieties of Italian
- Spanish and French grammar
- Photostories for BSL
- Life in the UK for international students

He said that the OdLL (Opening the door to language learning) guide to good practice had now been published and is available for downloading from the LLAS website: <http://www.llas.ac.uk/projects/odll.aspx> . He also gave a demonstration of the updated 'Why study languages?' PowerPoint presentation and resources which should be sent out to contacts in HE very soon.

### **Seán Ó Cuirreáin: Irish Language Commissioner**

Anne Gallagher introduced Seán Ó Cuirreáin who provided an overview of the position of the Irish language in the Republic of Ireland. He started with a brief history of the Irish language, part of the Gaelic branch of the Celtic languages. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century only 1% of the population were monolingual Irish speakers. The Gaelic League was established in 1893 and Irish became the 'national language' under the constitution of the Free State in 1922. In 1937 it became the '1<sup>st</sup> official language', with English the '2<sup>nd</sup> official language'.

Irish is the dominant language in areas in 7 counties (the Gaeltacht), mostly on the western seaboard and the position of these areas is backed up by the courts. From 1 January 2007 Irish will become the 21<sup>st</sup> official language of the EU. Irish is compulsory in schools from Infants to the leaving certificate. It has a dedicated government minister, a national radio service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and a TV channel with 6 hours of broadcasts in Irish a day.

2006 is likely to be very significant as it is a census year and a vision statement is expected from the government. The last census in 2002 showed that 1.57 million of the population 'have Irish' and that 337,000 were daily users, of whom 100,000 used Irish each day outside education. In Northern Ireland 10.35% of the population have some knowledge of Irish.

The Gaeltacht areas are due to be redrawn, based on the use of the language for specific purposes, for example religious ceremonies, community meetings etc. This will reflect language pressures caused by youth culture, immigration and other factors.

The commissioner closed what was a very informative talk by describing his role in monitoring implementation of the Languages Act. He remarked that in 2000 there were 6,809 recognised languages in the world of which 90% were endangered. State support and the continuing 'large' number of Irish speakers mean that Irish is not amongst those that are at risk.

**Alan Titley, St Patrick's College, Dublin City University**

Anne Gallagher introduced Alan Titley as an academic, lecturer, writer and raconteur. He said that he would speak not as a linguist but as an observer and proceeded to give a very interesting and entertaining perspective to the position of the Irish language in Ireland today. He commented that English has been the language of business and commerce in Ireland for a long time and posed the question: 'What chance does Irish have against the huge juggernaut of English?' Queen Elizabeth I may have recognised the value of Irish but it is becoming increasingly difficult to get across the reasons for learning Irish to the younger generation who will ultimately only learn and use it if they want to.

**Barry O'Sullivan, Roehampton University**

Barry O'Sullivan spoke about the work of the Centre for Language Assessment Research, starting with a history of language assessment. The beginnings of formal testing were in China 1800 years ago and a remarkable picture was painted of a fully functional, formalised system with all the features we would recognise today, including different levels, testing centres, anonymity, certification and cheating. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century the idea of assessment had been adopted in the west, though it was very crude. Formal testing in Oxford and Harvard consisted of a couple of oral questions. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however almost all tests were written.

Barry continued to trace the development of English language tests, from the CPE in 1913, through early EAP tests on both sides of the Atlantic, to TOEFL from 1964 to the present day. ELTS and IELTS were introduced in 1980 and have changed over the years. The point was made that where appropriate and possible we should never rely only a single measure, but strive towards a 'triangulated learning system', consisting of curriculum, materials and assessment. Assessment should include as many aspects as possible: teacher's estimates and self/peer estimates, based on summative and formative tests, project work and presentations. In future work should be continued on measuring the validity of tests and 'gain', by tracking students after testing. The final comment was that we should 'test little but well, rather than often and badly'.

Val Boyle  
Hon. Secretary  
Jan 2006