

AULC Annual General Meeting

**14 – 15 December 2004
University of Greenwich**

Introduction and CERCLES update by outgoing Chair of AULC, Nick Byrne

Nick started by thanking Paula Romero-Lopez for the great organisation and location of the meeting at the University of Greenwich. On the occasion of his last AGM as Chair of AULC, he stressed the value of what is a small-scale but effective body, with the three SIGs at its heart, and spoke of the need to refocus and re-energise for the future. He said that one of the strengths of AULC is the fact that it puts together all the components that make Language Centres work – teachers, managers and technicians.

Delegates' attention was drawn to the latest survey of numbers of students in HE taking language courses other than full degrees. To date, 38 institutions had responded to Nick's request for statistics and the numbers were more or less the same as last year (52 – 54,000 students, with an increase in non-assessed courses). These figures have been passed on to the DfES. Nick highlighted the importance of institutes submitting their figures to him for inclusion in the statistics. These DfES statistics showed the vibrancy and strength of languages being taught in universities while not necessarily taking place in Language Departments but through Language Centres.

Nick noted that AULC membership in Wales appeared to be “dormant”.

In his new role as Treasurer of CERCLES, Nick pointed delegates to the website (<http://www.cercles.org/>) and alerted them to the date and venue of the next conference, to be held in September 2006 at the European University of Vadrina, Frankfurt an der Oder, Germany.

Welcome by Baroness Blackstead, VC of University of Greenwich

Baroness Blackstead said that she was delighted that AULC was holding its AGM at Greenwich, on what is the “best campus in the country”. She spoke of the importance of language teaching and the fact that these are “tough times” for languages in HE. She referred to the difficulties surrounding the current attempt to start language learning earlier, and the even greater challenge of getting boys engaged. She finished by wishing AULC well in “resolving the conundrum”.

VLE group: report from Virtual Learning Environment Group

Hervé Didiot-Cook, LSE Language Centre, reported to delegates on the new VLE group, which held its inaugural meeting, hosted by Marina Orsini-Jones at the University of Coventry, in September 2004. He said that the main aim of the group will be to share information about areas of expertise and development and stressed the importance of research in and funding for the field. He mentioned that the VLE group is currently a standalone organisation, but that the possibility of affiliation with various established organisations (AULC, Subject Centre, Eurocall) is under discussion. He alerted delegates to workshops planned for the end of January 2005 ("Managing and Implementing E-languages" at a SCHML event and a WebCT vs Sanako/Divace training session), and referred to plans to build up a database of VLE users and set up a home page for the group. A JISCMail list has already been set up, and further information can be obtained from Hervé at H.Didiot-Cook@LSE.AC.UK.

Digital Language Labs: a case study by The University of Portsmouth

Paul Edmondson, Technical Services Manager in the Learning Resources Centre at the University of Portsmouth, spoke about the installation of a MELISSI lab in the Centre. He plotted the development of language labs at Portsmouth, prior to 2001, from reel-to-reel systems in the early days, to the setup immediately prior to the installation of MELISSI, when the University had two essentially analogue labs delivering audio and video and one other audio only. With the video side of the labs failing and money becoming available, Paul was tasked with researching the market for digital systems. He examined a number of products, including Tandberg's DIVACE system and CAN8. DIVACE would have been expensive (£25,000 licence, plus the cost of the necessary hardware) and use of CAN8 requires considerable pre-preparation on the part of the teacher. The University of Hull already had at this stage a 16 station MELISSI lab and the features offered by this system, including a subtitling package and Black Box interpreting software led to it being adopted by Portsmouth. A discount in exchange for "showcasing" the lab, input into development of the product and integrated mobile phone technology were other attractive features. In the event it proved possible to retain the existing audio lab and add the MELISSI system side-by-side. Though there were problems when the new lab was first installed in September 2002, these were eventually sorted out, and two years on, Portsmouth now has three MELISSI labs, plus a self-access suite and a teachers' preparation room. Paul completed his presentation with photos and a video clip, showing the facilities in use, and invited delegates to a "Workference" at Portsmouth, scheduled for 9 September 2005.

**An overview of the BUFVC (British Universities Film & Video Council) with
Murray Weston**

Murray Weston gave a demonstration of the services offered by the BUFVC (<http://www.bufvc.ac.uk>), including TRILT (TV and Radio Index for Learning and Teaching), Newsfilm Online (a BUFVC/ITN archive digitisation project) BUND (British Universities Newsreel Database), MIG (Moving Image Gateway) and MAAS (Media Online). Many of these services are available free of charge to staff (and students) at HE institutions which subscribe to BUFVC. Access to web-based resources is authenticated via Athens password. Murray advised delegates of the Learning on Screen 2005 conference, to be held in Bradford 20 – 22 March next year.

SIG Meetings took place over Tuesday and Wednesday (see individual SIG minutes)

Delegates attended workshops on the following topics:

- VLE Group: Hervé Didiot-Cook, LSE
- How do students work with open and distance language learning course materials? Moving from a teacher-led to a student-centred approach: Annett Duensing, OU
- The use of case studies in language teaching: Etain Casey, KCL

Update on Languages Ladder, Kate Green, DfES

Kate Green gave an update on the introduction of the Languages Ladder, which grew out of the “Languages for Life” document, with its three strands, improving the teaching and learning of languages, developing a recognition scheme for languages and increasing the number of people studying languages. Languages are now compulsory at Key Stage 3 (11 – 14); any language may be studied, provided one of French, German or Spanish is also on offer at the school. At Key Stage 4 (13 – 16) there is an entitlement but no compulsion to study a language, so languages at this stage are “in competition” with other subjects. Primary entitlement means that all 7 – 11 year olds should have the opportunity to study a language and should have reached A1 on the Common European Framework at the end of Key Stage 2.

The Languages Ladder seeks to endorse the skills that people have attained and is designed to be applicable for all ages and levels (full details available at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/DSP_languagesladder.cfm). The first pilot tests, developed by UCLES, are due to be rolled out in 2005. By Autumn 2006 many more languages will be on offer, by Autumn 2007 Advanced tests are due to be launched and by Autumn 2008 tests at Proficiency and Mastery levels should be up and running. Six universities and the Foreign Office are currently working on descriptors for language competence at higher levels. There are plans for online testing in the future, as well as for diagnostic tests and work is ongoing to map current the objectives of HE languages modules to the Languages Ladder. Those interested in contributing to this work should contact Kate at kate.green@dfes.gsi.gov.uk . At the end of her presentation, Kate took questions from the floor.

AGM Minutes

Nick commenced the official proceedings of the AGM by emphasising the key role of AULC in gathering and providing information and again referred to the importance of passing on accurate statistics regarding the numbers of non-specialists studying languages. Such statistics help when it comes to lobbying bodies such as the BBC, who, after consultation with AULC, plan after all to produce more low-cost, digitisable programmes in collaboration with universities.

a) Elections

Nick announced that new members had been co-opted onto the AULC Executive Committee, prior to elections in the Spring:

- Tech and Resources SIG Organiser: Peter Glasgow, University of Edinburgh
- Secretary: Val Boyle, Loughborough University
- Chair: Pam McIntyre, Queen's University, Belfast

b) Treasurer's report

Colin Richardson delivered his Treasurer's report, announcing that, with income and expenditure each about £6k, the end-of-year balance remains steady at approximately £6k. There is no need to increase the subscription of £35 per institution, unless it is felt that it is necessary to employ staff to undertake surveys and administrative work. AULC membership currently stands at 78, of which 69 are fully paid-up. Colin urged delegates to ensure prompt payment of fees for 2005, including subscription to CERCLES which is collected by AULC and paid to CERCLES in two instalments each year. Colin thanked Peter Glasgow for auditing the accounts.

c) Rob Kennedy

Rob urged delegates to "spread the word" about AULC and encourage more Language Centres and individuals to join the organisation's mailing lists (details available at <http://www.aulc.org/mail.html>).

d) SIGs feedback

Management and Administration (Pam McIntyre)

Pam reported on the discussions of the Management and Administration SIG, which focused on a draft questionnaire, produced by Colin Connelly and designed to gather information for a survey of Language Centres.

Teaching and Research (Anne Gallagher)

Anne gave a brief report of the discussions of this group. Nick had given a presentation of the LSE's "Innovation Exchange" project and the group had talked about problems in the area of advising for language learning because of poor take-up by students.

Technical and Resources (Peter Glasgow)

The Technical and Resources SIG discussed, amongst other things, off-air recording from digi-boxes, the demise of VHS and problems with French satellite TV reception. Rob Kennedy gave a demonstration of Vortex (a system for remotely connecting DVD/VHS to TV).

e) CILT update

David Newton, HE Development Officer at CILT, who has taken over from Dawn Ebbrell, reported on CILT's current activities, a number of which are undertaken in collaboration with the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies. He outlined the findings of the "Languages Trends 2004" survey of languages at Key Stage 4 (available online at <http://www.cilt.org.uk/key/trends2004.htm>). He alerted delegates to the Languages Work website at <http://www.languageswork.org.uk>, which is designed to raise awareness of the true value of languages and has developed factfiles and publicity materials (posters available free of charge). David also referred to "Piece by Piece", a pack about languages in Primary Schools, the Comenius Network, the CILT Resources Library and "Higher", the CILT bulletin for language teaching and research in HE. From January 2005 onwards, the latter will be shorter and aimed at a wider audience, and will be distributed through the Subject Centre mailing list. The languagesresearch.ac.uk website has been relaunched. It aims to capture as much as possible of the research going on. Users can set up an account, add their own details, which, after approval by the site administrator, will become part of the database. There is no need to register to search the site, which can generate reports and needs wider publicity in order to reach its full potential. CILT organise many events, often jointly with the Subject Centre, and reports are posted on the CILT event archive website.

f) Subject Centre update

Liz Ashurst, Subject Centre Manager, provided delegates with a detailed written report of the year's activities and picked out highlights in her presentation. One of these was the CILT/Subject Centre Conference in June/July at SOAS, which she said was shorter, more narrowly focused, well attended and had received good feedback. Another very successful event was "The place of Languages in the curriculum"; a sequel to this is planned for 6 May in London. An important research project funded by the DfES which examined current provision and trends is due to be published early in 2005. Liz drew delegates' attention to the "700 reasons for studying languages" promotional materials and said that a searchable database

would soon be available. Recent developments include the funding of about 7 materials development projects and a similar number of pedagogic research projects; there are also 2 “Workshops to go” in the pipeline. Liz finished by informing delegates that there is to be a “Languages in HE” presence at next year’s London Languages Show and invited people to contact her if they thought their institutions would be interested in having a stall at a cost of £350.

g) a.o.b.

After presenting Paula Romero-Lopez with flowers and champagne, Nick bowed out with thanks to his colleagues on AULC Executive and to all AULC members for their support over his term as Chair.

Pam confirmed the future pattern of events, with 1 AGM per year (the next could be in Belfast in either late 2005 or early January 2006), plus SIG meetings being held in Spring/Summer. She encouraged delegates to sign up for all the AULC mailing lists and drew their attention to the arrival from the USA of KAPLAN on the UK scene, offering pre-session English courses, which may impact on University Language Centre/ELSU EFL provision.

Pam concluded the meeting by thanking Nick for his work as Chair of AULC. She said that he was the “friendly face of AULC”, someone who knows and has time for everyone. She described him as “enthusiastic, entertaining, eloquent and effervescent”; someone who has “driven the AULC bus” in recent years and will be a hard act to follow. Nick was presented with a plant and champagne in appreciation of his time as Chair.