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## Enhancing the student academic experience

The new academic year begins, as always, with the annual miracle of a new cohort of students, arriving with high expectations and an enthusiasm to learn. Our challenge is to maintain their enthusiasm and exceed their expectations in the daily confrontation with new knowledge, new ideas, and new ways of working. And the challenge of enhancing the students' academic experience is about to get tougher.

Our UK and European students are getting much more diverse than ever before, and the growing proportion of international students brings a wider range of cultural and linguistic differences into play. Our funding is changing, with increased tuition fees now firmly on the horizon in England. The prospectuses we are about to prepare for entry 2006 will go to applicants who will pay the new fees. We must use the additional fee income wisely to give students an even better learning experience. Some of the extra money will be used to remedy the historical under-funding, which has left many departments in financial difficulties in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies. And some will be used to improve staff-student ratios, where over-large classes and over-stretched teachers have left students with a thinner experience. We shall also need a determined and sustained effort to renew and refresh our teaching practices.

In part, this requires the systematic mechanisms of continuous improvement, reflecting critically on what we have done and

how we can do it better. Most departments have tried and trusted processes of course review, student evaluation, peer observation, quality circles and the like. In part, the renewal of our teaching requires a better awareness of what is done elsewhere, and how we can learn from it. Many colleagues are now alert to benchmarking and seek opportunities to exchange ideas and share good practices. It is a major part of the Subject Centre's role to support our academic community in this.

The crucial part of our effort to renew and refresh must be innovation and development. The Subject Centre has done a good deal to promote and disseminate this already, but we are well aware that it requires significant investment. Initiatives in different parts of the UK over the years have provided large investment streams, and the new Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning will provide another. We need to learn from teaching-related research initiatives, to build up the basis of evidence for further improvements. And, as higher education settles into the global age, we particularly need to monitor teaching and learning developments internationally so that the UK academic community can learn from, and contribute to, the best student learning experiences around the world.

**Michael Kelly**  
Director of the Subject Centre

## New branding for LLAS

From May 2004, all LTSN Subject Centres became part of the Higher Education Academy. The Academy is a new UK-wide organisation set up to support quality enhancement in teaching and the student experience in higher education. The legal owners of the Academy are Universities UK and SCOP. This is to ensure that the Academy is a sector-owned body, independent of Government and the funding councils. The Chief Executive of the Academy is Professor Paul Ramsden, formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) at the University of Sydney, Australia. The Academy website can be found at [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk).

In due course, all materials produced by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS), including the website, will carry new branding to reflect our membership of the Academy. The logo seen here (right) will now replace the hexagon (top left of this newsletter). Despite these changes, the

strategy of the Subject Centre remains unchanged; through our programme of activities

(workshops, conferences, networking events and resources), we aim to serve the community of academic and related staff who provide teaching and support for learning in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies. We have an exciting programme of workshops planned for this year – some information about these is in this newsletter. We are also looking forward to allocating funding to colleagues for materials development projects and pedagogic research. We look forward to working with you.

**More information about our workshops and our project funding can be found on our website ([www.llas.ac.uk](http://www.llas.ac.uk)).**



### Conference 2004

This year's Subject Centre Conference (organised jointly with CILT in collaboration with ALL, AULC and SCHML) took as its theme 'Navigating the New Landscape for Languages'. This conference, in somewhat difficult times for languages, aimed to be forward-looking and positive which was certainly the atmosphere that, for the most, part prevailed. Papers presented covered good practice and innovation in the learning and teaching of languages, strategies for developing cross-sectoral initiatives to attract more learners into languages, collaboration between institutions and European initiatives in assessment. These themes were also reflected in the keynotes which looked at current policies in learning and teaching (Liz Beaty, HEFCE policy; Lid King DFES National Languages Strategy), new frameworks for assessment (Kate Green, DFES Languages Ladder; Carol Taylor Torsello Italian implementation of the Common European Framework) and the relationship of language learning, literacy and Linguistics across sectors (Dick

Hudson, UCL). Following the success of this conference, we are looking forward to an even more stimulating and uplifting conference in 2006 where we hope to hear that we have not only navigated the new landscape for languages but have settled into it and built some solid foundations for the future.



### Area Studies Update

The Area Studies Project came to an end in July. Our external evaluator reported that the project had successfully reached out to a wider group of practitioners beyond those in Modern Languages and had increased the awareness of teaching staff concerning the challenges of teaching on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary degree programmes. Atlas: the bulletin of the Area Studies Project and the Area Studies section of our website also received good reviews.

However, the end of the project does not mean the end of our Area Studies activity. On 29 November, we have a one-day conference on 'The disciplinary identity of Area Studies'. If you would like to register for this conference, go to the events section of our website. Another interdisciplinary conference will be held in Spring 2005 and a third edition of Atlas: the Area Studies Bulletin will be published in March 2005. To keep up to date, please visit the Subject Centre website and click on 'Area Studies'.

### Languages Update

#### **Residence Abroad**

Following on from last year's focus group and workshop on residence abroad, the Subject Centre is in the process of collating a list of weblinks which colleagues in Modern Languages departments have identified as useful in preparing and supporting students who are undertaking a period of residence abroad. These will soon be available on the Subject Centre website.

For an overview of issues in this area, see the Good Practice Guide article, Residence Abroad, by Professor Jim Coleman: [www.llas.ac.uk/gpg](http://www.llas.ac.uk/gpg)

#### **Reading in Modern Languages**

The Subject Centre will shortly be undertaking research to investigate attitudes to reading among language undergraduates. This follows concern from colleagues working in literature and cultural studies about resistance to the study of literature on Modern Language undergraduate programmes. The Subject Centre will design, pilot and disseminate a questionnaire which aims to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data from learners on their attitudes to and experience of reading both in the target language and in their first language. Research findings are scheduled to be published in July 2005.

### Linguistics Update

Our Linguistics activities in 2003/4 ended with an inspiring and entertaining presentation by Dick Hudson (UCL) on literacy, language-learning and Linguistics at the Subject Centre conference in July. This year will see our Linguistics activities continue to thrive, diversify and we hope inspire. We begin the year with a follow-up to the seminar 'From A to BA' (October 2003). This year's event focuses on the first year undergraduate programme and on issues of progression from school to university study. A representative selection of institutions will share information on their first year curricula and there will be discussion of potential developments of the 'A' level with colleagues from QCA and exam boards. The event on Linguistics and Literature (26th November 2003), however, couldn't be more different as this will present both theoretical and practical applications of Linguistics to literary study. Planned for 2005 are events on the Teaching of Phonetics and on IT resources for Linguistics (organised jointly with CILT).

# Higher Education and The National Languages Strategy

Earlier this year, the DfES commissioned a study as part of the implementation of the Higher Education element of the National Languages Strategy (Languages for All: Languages for Life – DfES, December 2002). The aim of the Higher Education part of the strategy is to increase the numbers of students learning foreign languages in Higher Education.

The research for the project was directed by Hilary Footitt on behalf of the University Council of Modern Languages. It was managed by the Subject Centre. The analysis of data was undertaken by CILT, the National Centre for Languages.

### The aims of the project were to:

- map national/ regional trends in HE languages provision
- establish institutional factors which promote and extend language learning in HE
- map trends in the development of professional and vocational language routes in HE

### The project used four main sources of information:

- HESA data
- interviews in 6 case-study universities with key senior players in the institutions to establish institutional factors which promote and extend language learning in HE
- undergraduate and postgraduate course descriptions at the 131 HE HEFCE-funded institutions to map trends in the development of professional and vocational routes in HE degrees
- a pilot project at one institution to explore the motivations of non-specialist language-learners taking courses uncredited in their degree programmes.

The report contains detailed data on the decline in national and regional capacity in languages, and indicates which languages and which English regions are most seriously affected. It is clear from the report that the institutional pattern of HE language provision in England is significantly different from that in 1998/9. The report suggests possible factors which affect the development of languages provision in universities. It will also contain a number of clear recommendations.

We hope to be able to disseminate the report and the recommendations through the Subject Centre in the New Year.

# The Subject Centre in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

The Subject Centre for is a UK wide organisation supported by all the higher education funding councils. However, we are gradually rolling out a programme of additional initiatives to support those working in our subject areas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Scotland

Our colleagues at Scottish CILT, based at the University of Stirling, have established a Subject Centre Scottish Advisory Group, which has been meeting for almost two years. The group organised a most successful event in March 2004 – Scotland, Languages in Higher Education and the future. A link to the report written by the team at Scottish CILT can be found in the events archive of our website:

[www.llas.ac.uk/events/llaseventsarchive.aspx](http://www.llas.ac.uk/events/llaseventsarchive.aspx)

The Advisory Group met in early October to plan activity for the coming year. There is an event on English and Modern Language teaching in January 2005 at the University of Edinburgh. In February 2005 there will be a Literary Studies event at the University of St Andrews. More information can be obtained from Lottie Gregory at Scottish CILT ([c.w.gregory@stir.ac.uk](mailto:c.w.gregory@stir.ac.uk)).

## Wales

The Subject Centre Advisory Group for Wales has only recently been established but held a very interesting and productive meeting at the offices of CILT Cymru in Cardiff in July. The group is convened by CILT Cymru and Keith Marshall at the University of Bangor will oversee the programme of events in Wales. To launch this programme CILT Cymru is planning an event in early 2005, the focus of which will be the Strategic Review of Modern Languages in Higher Education, which has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly.

## Northern Ireland

At the end of October, Mike Kelly, Director of the Subject Centre, and Liz Ashurst, Subject Centre Manager, will be meeting colleagues from the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast to discuss how the Subject Centre might most effectively give additional support to colleagues in Northern Ireland. The outcome of these discussions will be published in our next newsletter but if you would like more information before then, please contact Liz Ashurst, Subject Centre Manager ([eja@soton.ac.uk](mailto:eja@soton.ac.uk)).

# Forthcoming Activity

## Rationales

Following recommendations for the development of a taxonomy of rationales for language learning to 'enhance the attraction of languages and lead to a wider social and academic profile' (A new landscape for languages, Kelly and Jones, 2003), the Subject Centre has been conducting research into different reasons for language study. The outcomes of this project are due to be published shortly.

Information for the Rationales Project has been collected from existing research literature as well as from undergraduate and sixth form language learners. Questionnaires and focus group interviews of learners have identified a wide range of personal as well as some social and political reasons for language learning. Recurrent themes include:

- Communication
- Employability
- Enjoyment
- Friendship
- Intercultural Competence
- International Relations
- Key Skills
- Language Awareness
- Mobility
- Multilingualism
- Values

A detailed set of Rationales will be made available on our website later in 2004. The Subject Centre will also be producing a report on the research and a promotional poster and postcard.

Join our mailing list today and you will benefit from:

- Our monthly e-bulletin advertising forthcoming events
- Regular mailings of the Subject Centre bulletin
- Free copies of other Subject Centre publications

You can join online at:  
[www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/maillinglist](http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/maillinglist)

For more information  
on our events go to  
[www.llas.ac.uk/events](http://www.llas.ac.uk/events)

## Subject Centre Events Autumn 2004

Date and Location	Event
29 October 2004 CILT, Covent Garden	<b>First year undergraduate courses in English Language and Linguistics</b> A follow-up event to the 'A to BA' event in October 2003, focussing on curriculum issues at first year undergraduate level and how these relate to admissions requirements. It will include discussion of the English Language A Level
13 November 2004 Dublin City University	<b>Subject Centre Pedagogical Forum</b> at the conference of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) This forum, sponsored by the Subject Centre, will be dedicated to pedagogical research and practice, with a focus on innovation in the field of intercultural education and training.
24 November 2004 CILT, Covent Garden	<b>The tangled Web — making sense of copyright in developing and exploiting on-line resources</b> This workshop will address a number of key issues in using third party copyright materials in developing teaching and learning resources. Speakers include Helen Pickering from HERON (national HE copyright clearance service).
26 November 2004 SOAS, London	<b>New methods in Literary Linguistics and their relevance for Linguistics and Literature students</b> This event will consist of four presentations that will give a short account of the intellectual base for the field together with discussions on practical applications of linguistic techniques to literary studies.
29 November 2004 CILT, Covent Garden	<b>Disciplinary identity of Area Studies</b> This conference aims to discuss the nature of Area Studies and its value to its composite disciplines, its contribution to teaching and research and most importantly whether Area Studies itself is, or can become a discipline.
6 December 2004 SOAS, London	<b>The place of languages in the curriculum</b> This event will present research findings from our rationales project and will seek to promote the wider personal, social and political value of language study.