News

Marketing Languages: the Languages Box

The Languages Box was launched at a reception held on 26 September, the European Day of Languages. The event provided the opportunity for the Subject Centre team to display the contents of the box to colleagues in Southampton and to invited guests from as far afield as Leeds, Bath and Canterbury. Staff from the French and Dutch embassies were also able to join us for the event. Six embassies in total had played a key role in the development of resources for the box.

More than 130 boxes have been sent to date, mainly to modern languages departments in HEIs across the UK. The PowerPoint presentation, 'Why Study Languages' is an important component of the box and has been presented to groups of students in many schools. There is a huge demand from schools for university teachers to visit and give talks about languages in Higher Education. The Languages Box has been advertised on the websites of the Association for Language Learning (ALL) and the Centre for Information on Language Teaching (CILT); both of these sites are heavily used by school teachers. As a result, the Subject Centre has had more than sixty requests from schools for information about the Languages Box and we have been able to put many of them in touch with a contact in the modern languages department of their local university. It is likely that there will be a feature on the Languages Box in the TES in January so we are expecting another surge of interest from the secondary sector.

The Subject Centre website has a list, advertised on our website, of schools liaision contacts in fifty institutions:

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/schoolscontacts.aspx.
If your institution is not listed, please email the Subject Centre to give us the name of your local contact. We hope that this initiative will be the start of a growing trend towards more interchange across the sectors.

Future strategies for marketing languages will be the focus of a Subject Centre workshop in the spring. Check out the website and Subject Centre e-bulletins for more details.

At the launch of the languages box - *left to right: Liz Ashurst, John-Paul Martin (French Embassy), Michael Kelly, Philippe Mogentale (French Embassy)*

News in Brief

Website

Becky Jennings, Subject Centre web editor, and the team of consultants in Electronics and Computer Science at the University of Southampton have redesigned the Subject Centre website. The website is database driven, resource rich and, we hope, easy to navigate. Go to **www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk** to browse the resources, particularly those in the Materials Bank and the Good Practice Guide.

2002 Conference: Setting the Agenda

A collection of papers from the 2002 Manchester conference are available on the new Subject centre website: **www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/conference2002.aspx**
A publication of the proceedings under the theme of policy is being produced by an editorial team with representatives from the Subject Centre, CILT, UCML and SCHML.

LTSN International

Michel Kelly, Director of the Subject Centre, has been asked to head an international working group looking at gathering evidence of good practice internationally as well as establishing some kind of LTSN presence abroad. This initiative has generated huge interest amongst other subject centres.

Review of Quality Enhancement Agencies

A review, led by Ron Cooke of HE quality agencies, the Cooke report, is to be published in January and will propose a realignment of the responsibilities of HESDA, LTSN and ILT to avoid risk of overlap.

DELPHI Website Launched

DELPHI (Development of Language Professionals in Higher Education Institutions)is a project sponsored by HEFCE's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. It aims to provide web-based staff development materials for all colleagues teaching foreign languages in Higher Education. For further information and free access to the materials please go to: **www.delphi.bham.ac.uk**

LTSN Generic Centre

The Generic Centre has been redeveloping its website: **www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp.**

The centre has a large number of publications and resources relating to specific themes and topics which can be accessed via the resources database on the site. There are resources available on such themes as peer observation of teaching, part-time teachers, continuing professional development and pedagogy.

In addition to the four main themes of assessment, employability, e-learning and widening participation, the Generic Centre is active in a number of other project areas.

Each activity area has a range of outputs such as conferences, workshops, mailbases, discussion groups, publications and web resources. Visit the website to find out more.

University of Hull

Following the departure of Janet Bartle, the full-time Learning Technology Adviser at Hull, the University has decided that it will no longer be able to carry out its role in the Subject Centre. The University of Hull withdrew from its partnership in the Subject Centre at the end of December 2002. The Subject Centre is currently discussing how the work carried out by the Hull team will be covered in the short and long term. We are grateful to the Hull team for the work they carried out in promoting the use of learning technologies in learning and teaching.

Join our mailing list today and you will benefit from:

- our monthly e-bulletin alerts to forthcoming events
- regular mailings of this publication
- a subscription to the Subject Centre Journal, Liaison

You can join online at
www.lang.itsn.ac.uk/mailinglist/mailinglistregfrm.aspx

Agendas for Change

The January White Paper has set an agenda for change in higher education, which many of us will be exploring for some time to come. But it is worth recalling another policy document, which appeared a week before Christmas, when the government published its strategy for languages in England.[1] It attracted some comment on the day, mainly for the suggestion that undergraduates might be drafted in to help language learners in schools. But what the languages strategy says about higher education more broadly is that universities are an important resource to be shared with other sectors, which should benefit more directly from access to our facilities and our expertise.[2]

The emphasis is on partnerships, and we can welcome the encouragement of links that universities are already forging with schools and with the wider community, especially in supporting and promoting languages. As an academic community, we know that the future of languages, linguistics and area studies depends on what happens in school, and on public attitudes towards our subject areas. We have developed marketing materials and gone out to schools, and in some cases we have offered them a taste of university study. We are now being invited to take this further by playing a more integrated role in language learning in schools and colleges, and in lifelong learning. Sending our students to help out with conversation classes is a minor aspect of this. We shall need to develop a more concerted approach to making our learning resources and facilities open to a wider range of users. And we shall need to engage more vigorously with the developing regional initiatives in cross-sector collaboration.

Of course, vice-chancellors will want to ensure that the real cost of these forms of outreach can be matched by the benefits they bring, including new income streams. They may point to the declining numbers of students in languages and area studies degrees as evidence that the scope for action may be limited. We shall also need to be alert to the danger of 'hollowing out', in which our core academic activities are gradually replaced by a growing range of initiatives around the margins. However, the strategy for languages in England does offer opportunities for development that our academic community needs to grasp. It echoes some of the dynamism of last year's language strategy for Wales, and suggests that colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland might add their weight to pressure for government strategies in their areas.

For our part, the Subject Centre team will continue to help our community in setting national agendas where possible. We will do our best to inform you of policy developments, and help you respond to policy initiatives. We shall, however, ensure that the core of our work remains what it has been since we were established three years ago: to be a resource base for information, a network for cooperation and a catalyst for enhancing education in our subjects.

Michael Kelly
Subject Centre Director

[1] "Languages for All: Languages for Life. A Strategy for England." 44pp. London: Department for Education and Skills, 2002, available on the DfES website, www.dfes.gov.uk/languagesstrategy/.

[2] A more detailed briefing on the strategy is available on our website: "Language Strategy: The Implications for Higher Education" www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/implications.aspx

News

New Partnership in Scotland

The Subject Centre is delighted to announce the signing of a partnership agreement with Scottish CILT (Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research. Colleagues in Scotland have always attended our workshops and seminars and will, we hope, continue to do so. But we wanted to establish an information centre in Scotland and provide opportunities for the community in Scotland to discuss issues of particular importance to them. Staff at Scottish CILT will organise workshops on our behalf and develop an information centre at their headquarters at the University of Stirling. They are currently convening a Subject Centre Scottish Advisory Group which will draw its membership from our three constituencies and from across the universities north of the border. John Joseph, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh has agreed to chair the group which met for the first time in January. More information about Subject Centre activities in Scotland will appear on our website and in future issues of *Liaison*.

At Scottish CILT, University of Stirling - *left to right: Liz Ashurst (Subject Centre Manager), Joanna McPake (Deputy Director, Scottish CILT), Dawn Ebbrell (CILT/Subject Centre HE Information Officer), Dick Johnstone (Director, Scottish CILT), Michael Kelly (Director of the Subject Centre)*

Event Reports

HE Progress Files and Personal Development Planning

The Dearing Report recommended the introduction of the higher education progress file which would provide students with a record of their learning. These 'should consist of two elements: a transcript recording student achievement which should follow a common format devised by institutions collectively through their representative bodies; a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development' (National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education; 1997). The second element relates to the process of personal development planning, or PDP, defined as 'structured and supported processes to develop the capacity of individuals to reflect upon their own learning and achievement, and to plan for their own personal educational and career development' (QAA Guidelines for HE Progress Files).

Whilst most universities are currently introducing transcripts which provide records of achievement, the move towards a common approach to PDP seems to be much slower - Universities UK suggest that PDP should be operational across the HE system by 2005/06. However, the need to support students and provide them with ways to think about and plan their learning has perhaps never been greater.

There is much interesting work going on in the area of PDP, both as components within individual courses and as planned parts of whole programmes. The Subject Centre recently held a joint event with the British Council to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Talks covered staff development, support for independent learning, residence abroad including assistantships and the European Language Portfolio. Presentations from this event can be found on the Subject Centre website. We are planning to run a sequel to this event in the Spring.

Further details on aspects of progress files can be found on the QAA website (Guidelines for HE Progress Files, February 2001) and on the website for the Centre for Recording Achievement which contains a number of interesting case studies. The Subject Centre web site also links to the staff development materials produced by the CDELL project (Centre for Developing and Evaluating Lifelong Learning, University of Nottingham) which cover the introduction of key skills and PDP. [1]

[1] The Subject Centre is distributing the CERCLES European Language Portfolio (ELP) request form for all members of AULC (Association of University Language Centres). This can be downloaded from our website. However, please note that within the UK and Ireland only fully paid up members of AULC are eligible to receive the CERCLES version of the ELP. More information about all versions of the ELP can be found at http://culture.coe.int/portfolio

Using Virtual Learning Environments to Support Language Learning

The latest in a series of resource-related sessions took place on 4 December 2002 at CILT. Jane Hughes and Jannie Roed (University College London) and Barbara Scott and Christine Lyne, (Sheffield Hallam University) spoke about their experiences using WebCT and Blackboard respectively at their institutions.

Jane Hughes' and Jannie Roed's presentation focused on the experiences of the *The Virtual Departments for Minority Languages (VDML) Project* - a two-year project which aimed to develop a framework to support students and teachers of minority languages using Danish as a pilot language. Jannie Roed took us through some of the materials that the project has developed and made available via the virtual learning environment (VLE), WebCT. Materials making use of a range of media and incorporating assessment exercises enable more time for communicative tasks. A range of materials at different levels means that exercises and activities can be tailored to meet the needs of individuals in what are usually small groups. The project has developed templates in English which provide a springboard for ideas for tutors of other languages. Jane Hughes gave participants an insight into key issues for consideration when planning a project of this type including investigating the support available within your own institution.

A list of resources and support materials are available on the project website **www.ucl.ac.uk/epd/herdu/vdml**

Barbara Scott and Christine Lyne reported on experiences at Sheffield Hallam using the VLE Blackboard to support their institution-wide language programme. A wide range of materials incorporating audio and video are available to students in a range of languages. The materials were designed to link in explicitly with the curriculum rather than being stand-alone self-study materials and also counted towards assessment to encourage students to take the activities seriously. Activities were mainly focused around receptive skills allowing contact time to be dedicated to productive skill development. Institutional funding was available to the project – vital to allowing teaching staff the time to develop the materials. With regard to student reactions to the on-line study packs, students enjoyed using them and their tutors had a clear impression that students were putting more hours into their studies. From the teacher perspective, there was more pressure in terms of marking time, and plagiarism became an issue in the writing task. In light of this, the number of activities were reduced and the writing task was removed from the self-study packs.

The next resources information day will take place at CILT on 4 June 2003 and will focus on resources for linguistics.

Issues in Postgraduate Training for Linguistics

The Subject Centre, on the advice of its Specialist Advisory Group for Linguistics, held a meeting on 6 December to discuss a number of issues that have been raised by colleagues with regard to the provision of training for postgraduate students of Linguistics. The meeting, chaired by Dr Keith Brown was attended by some 25 colleagues who represented both large departments of Linguistics and individual colleagues working within Modern Languages or English departments. The group identified two main areas of concern: working with the funding councils - especially problematic as Linguistics falls between social sciences (ESRC) and arts/humanties (AHRB) - and providing training collaboratively across departments and institutions. Participants shared experiences (both positive and negative) with regard to gaining recognition by ESRC, defining and achieving a 'critical

mass' of students, providing both generic and subject specific skills training and working together as a community to provide appropriate and adequate training. The work being done by the North West Centre for Linguistics (NWCL), led by Diane Blakemore at Salford and funded by HEFCE as part of the Collaboration Programme in Modern Languages (see page 3 of this newsletter), provided an excellent case study on how a collaborative venture can be successful in providing much needed content and skills training for postgraduate students who may be both isolated within an institution or who may not have a background in the subject. It was generally agreed by the group that the outcomes of this meeting should be further disseminated and that further support for a possible national continuation of NWCL be sought. To this end the Subject Centre will be setting up a Special Interest Group for Postgraduate Linguistics and facilitating a further meeting on 3 March 2003 to which we plan to invite colleagues from the major funding bodies to discuss some of the issues raised at this meeting.

Subject Centre Projects

The Area Studies Network

On 11 December 2002 the Subject Centre launched its new forum for the discussion of issues relating to the teaching of Area Studies. This initiative forms part of an LTSN funded project which aims to extend our coverage of Area Studies by working with colleagues in those disciplines that most frequently contribute to Area Studies programmes. To do this we will be collaborating with several other Subject Centres, namely those covering Geography, History; Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Politics and English. Each Centre will be organising events on Area Studies issues that are most closely related to their disciplines as well as contributing to a final mini-conference that will be interdisciplinary and intercultural in nature. Other project activities will be the development of an electronic resource centre for Area Studies (hosted by this Subject Centre) and the production of a newsletter. As for the Network, this is to be a key communication tool for the project as well as an attempt to bring colleagues together across areas and disciplines. At the initial meeting of the Network it was strongly felt that a sense of 'community' in the field would be of great value in helping to address some generic issues such as marketing, recruitment, interdisciplinary learning, programme design coherence, progression and non-specialist learners. If you would like to find out more about the project or to join the Network please send a message to Marie Weaver (project secretary) on M.Weaver@soton.ac.uk.

Pedagogic Research Fund in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies

The Subject Centre has received additional funds from the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) for 2002-2003 to support a *Pedagogical Research Fund for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies in Higher Education*. The project is managed at the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) by the CILT/Subject Centre Higher Education Information Officer. Following an enthusiastic response to the call for the proposals which was released in November 2002, six projects have been offered support under this initiative. The successful projects will be announced in the New Year. A workshop on pedagogic research methods to support the successful projects to be led by Professor Rosamond Mitchell of the University of Southampton will take place at CILT on 26 February 2003. A limited number of additional places will be available to other colleagues engaged in a pedagogical research project.

For further information contact CILT on 020 7379 5101, Ext. 231.

Join the Club: Community Language Clubs

Project partners from Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden and the UK are working together on this Lingua-funded Project which aims to establish a network of community based language learning clubs for non-traditional language learners. We have set up two clubs in the Southampton area: a monthly club for secondary and sixth-form teachers of Spanish which is being facilitated by the Consejería de Educación; and a weekly French club for Southampton City Council employees. In the coming year, we aim to set up more clubs and develop a database to enable clubs to register their details and find partners. For further information about Join the Club, visit the project web-site: **www.jointheclub.net**

Collaboration

In Issue 5 of Liaison (June 2002), we reported on the ten projects which comprise the Collaboration programme in Modern Languages in Higher Education. Twenty four HEIs are involved in some way in the programme and the languages and subjects covered are Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Linguistics. The programme aims to contribute to the maintenance and development of specialist provision of Modern Languages in HEIs in England and to help develop a culture of inter-institutional collaboration in modern languages. Funded by HEFCE's Restructuring and Collaboration Fund, this programme is unique in that it represents collaboration at subject rather than at institutional level. Each project tests a different model of inter-institutional cooperation; the benefits of and challenges to collaboration experienced by the projects are of significant interest to the funding council. The projects aim to work collaboratively in four broad areas: undergraduate honours degree programmes; postgraduate taught courses; research training; producing support resources.

The Collaboration Programme has strategic importance not only for modern languages but for HE provision, particularly in minority subjects. The challenges of collaboration identified by the projects include the incompatibility of technology across institutions, notably platforms for VLEs and the variations in quality assurance processes. Project leaders have noted that a shared project can carry a heavy burden of management and administration for the project leader. The benefits of collaboration tend more towards the intangibles and include the opportunity to pool expertise, share good practice and offer mutual support. Such projects should also help to overcome the sense of competition between institutions at a time of shrinking resource. It must be said that all projects have, with their project partners, organised activity, created modules or developed resources in a way that could not have been achieved by a single institution. More information about the individual projects and the programme as a whole can be found on the Subject Centre website: **www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/collaboration.aspx**

Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages 2 (TNP2)

85 universities and 7 academic associations across Europe have formed a network, funded by SOCRATES, to develop proposals for improvements in languages in higher education. So far the 3 sub-projects, on Curriculum Innovation, New Learning Environments and Quality Enhancement, have produced a series of detailed national reports from which synthesis reports have been compiled on the Europe-wide patterns that have emerged. TNP2 is now in its third and final year and focusing on producing a final report which will feed into new thinking in universities as well as informing the Bologna process of HE convergence, and EU policy in the area of languages. Its findings will be disseminated at the European Language Council Conference in Aarhus, 26 - 28 June 2003. Details of the Conference will appear shortly on the ELC website: **www.fu-berlin.de/elc/.** For further information about TNP2, visit the project web-site: **www.fu-berlin.de/elc/tnp2/.**

Extending good practice in less widely used and less taught (LWULT) languages

The Subject Centre has received funding from the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) to work with language practitioners to disseminate and transfer innovative practice in LWULT languages. A call for bids for project funding was issued in December 2002, the deadline for submission being January 2003. Details of the projects funded will be given in the next issue of *Liaison*. A project to disseminate the work of the projects will be held in January 2004.