

Strategic subjects and the market

The strategic importance of Languages and Area Studies has been vigorously argued by the subject communities over recent years, and there is now evidence that policy makers are listening. The highly market-driven model of higher education in the UK is beginning to reveal its limitations. These have been highlighted in the recent spate of closures in the Physical Sciences, which have sparked public alarm that the country's science base may be under threat. The limitations of the market are equally clear in the uncoordinated closure of degree programmes and departments in Languages and Area Studies.

University leaders respond to the changing demands of customers, particularly patterns of student demand, but also to the system of incentives and penalties put in place by funding bodies. The latter, especially funding councils and research councils, are recognising that they have a responsibility to safeguard the interests of the country. And there is a dawning recognition that the interests of regions are also in need of attention.

The strategic importance of Languages and Area Studies has been dramatised over the past few years in the shifting pattern of world events. The UK has found itself struggling with diminished capability to understand regions of the world, such as the Middle East and Africa, at times when those regions assumed high importance internationally. And it has found itself unable to communicate effectively with large numbers of people within our own borders, whose first language is not English, French or Spanish.

Of course, it is difficult to predict what future academic demands will be provoked by the flux of geo-politics over the next few years. And the provision of academic expertise requires

relatively long time scales. However, the disaster in the Indian Ocean has again reminded us how directly we are now affected by events in countries 'far away, of which we know little'. We no longer think of any part of the world in the way Neville Chamberlain spoke of Czechoslovakia in 1938. No country is now 'far away', and we cannot afford to pride ourselves on our ignorance.

On the contrary, knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, and of different parts of the world, is now a source of competitive advantage on the world stage, and the UK needs to maintain and develop its traditional capability in new ways. Most vice-chancellors are increasingly aware of the internationalisation of their universities, in student recruitment and in research partnerships. Research councils are increasingly engaging with international groupings, not all of which are dominated by the English-speaking countries. In our own hinterland, for example, the Bologna process is beginning to harmonise higher education programmes, and the new European Research Council is beginning to take shape.

Over the next few years, these will give new opportunities to UK universities, provided we have the ability to understand other countries and their cultures, and that some of us at least are able to speak to people from elsewhere in their own language. The Subject Centre is aware that this will pose challenges to the academic community, but we also believe there will be significant benefits in placing wider social requirements at the centre of our academic planning.

Michael Kelly
Director of the Subject Centre



reasons for studying languages

New research by the Subject Centre has identified more than 700 reasons to study languages. This research will be particularly useful for marketing languages and should help educators to promote language study and design courses.

The 700 reasons are freely available in an online searchable database and as a printed report.

For further information, visit:
www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons

... go on, pick one

What does 'international' in HE courses mean?

This paper was presented at the Subject Centre seminar:
The place of Languages in the curriculum, 6 December, 2004

With all the pessimistic talk about the crisis of Languages in the UK, I think we are facing something of a paradox. On the one hand, there is no doubt that Languages in HE are in considerable difficulty: universities have been closing departments, or engaging in a huge range of activities ('intensive plate spinning') to stem the decline. On the other hand, 'international' as an adjective (and indeed its synonyms like 'global', or 'world') is increasingly important in higher education. Firstly, and most obviously perhaps, because 'international' is a code word in HE for Overseas Students ('International Students') who are an essential part of the financial system of UK Higher Education. Secondly, because 'international' has become a popular course descriptor in degree titles all over the academy at undergraduate and postgraduate level, in departments often very far removed from Schools of Languages. To a casual observer, then, it might appear as if 'Languages' are going down at precisely the moment when 'international' is on the up, vital to institutions and vital to the curriculum.

As if to emphasise this importance of the 'international', the DfES has recently launched its own International Strategy for Education (International Strategy for education: putting the 'world' into world class education, 2004, www.teachernet.gov.uk/internationalstrategy). The DfES's line is that 'international best practice' suggests to us that there are identifiable generic skills for the global economy, skills with which we should be equipping all our citizens. These focus primarily on the cultural dimension of the 'international':

- the ability to work comfortably in multi-national teams
- knowledge of different business methods, legislation and ways of working
- understanding and appreciating different cultures
- feeling confident when working in and with other countries

A review of the curriculum of HE courses which have 'international' in their titles indicates, however, that, with honourable exceptions, the majority have no explicit exploration of the cultural skills which the DfES pinpoints, and of their implications for professional practice. In other words, 'international' as applied to a variety of subject areas (Business, HR Management, Leisure/Hospitality, IT, Science, Engineering, Politics, Law, the Media, Visual Arts, Music and Fashion) does not necessarily (or indeed often) imply that students will engage with the sort of cultural reflections which the subject

'Languages' most obviously provokes; namely understanding the difficulties of crossing cultural/communication borders, engaging with the implications of translation/interpretation, experiencing what it is like to be 'a foreigner' for others. The insights of the discipline of 'Languages', and the adjective 'international' seem to inhabit entirely different domains in many of our universities.

What we might describe as this anglicisation of 'international', this cultural colonising, is to some extent mirrored in the apparent isolation of 'international students' in some of our universities. The recent UKCOSA Report (International Students in UK universities and colleges: broadening horizons, 2004, www.ukcosa.org.uk) pointed out that one of the largest complaints of overseas students in the UK is that they find it very difficult to integrate with home students, to get home students to accept that different (non-English) ways of being and perceiving are equally relevant. As one Indonesian postgraduate described his UK colleagues: 'there's a lot of barriers to get close to them. Sometimes UK students underestimate international students' capabilities, and it's hard work in a team because they always feel that they are on the right side in terms of opinion, and in the way of thinking'.

If this is the case, it is surely at least partly due to our failure to incorporate the type of cultural 'international' skills which the DfES advocated into the curriculum of all of our UK domiciled students, as a matter of course. There is a real imperative to do this now. As Ivor Crewe, the former president of UUK expressed it, if UK universities want to stay competitive in overseas students, they will 'need to bring an international dimension to all aspects of their work, rather than simply viewing overseas students as a "cash cow" '(THES, 10.09.04).

The proposition is not that every 'international' course in HE, and every institutional international policy, necessarily has to have a language element. Rather, the point is that the adjective 'international' surely has to have some demonstrable cultural effect on pedagogy and course content, no matter what the subject. We need to use this year's opportunities of the UK's presidency of the G8 and of the EU to take the offensive and claim 'international' as part of the conceptual country of Languages. Languages and the cultural understandings they offer are far too naturally 'international' for them to be locked away in some attic of the university. It is high time to start reconnecting 'international' and 'Languages' in higher education.

Hilary Footitt

Sometimes UK students underestimate international students' capabilities



Event reports Autumn 2004

Summaries of events hosted by the Subject Centre

Full reports including presentation slides (made available by the speakers) are available at www.llas.ac.uk/events/archive

First year undergraduate courses in English Language and Linguistics

In October 2003 the Subject Centre ran a seminar on English Language 'A' levels and their relation to first year undergraduate Linguistics programmes ('From A to BA'). In October 2004 we ran a complementary event focusing on curriculum issues at first year undergraduate level.

The event consisted of a number of short presentations from university departments which considered:

- why is some particular aspect of Linguistics taught at their institution?
- what sort of linguistics should be taught to support their approach to Linguistics?
- how does this relate to entrance requirements and to any pre-university training students bring to their course?

Issues relating to Linguistics and the English Language 'A' level were also raised in presentations from 'A' level teachers who discussed the problems and possibilities of the English Language 'A' level in the context of Linguistics at university.

An outcome of this meeting has been the setting up of a Subject Centre SIG for Linguistics at A'level, chaired by Billy Clark (Middlesex).

New methods in literary Linguistics

This event considered the question of how literary study may accommodate linguistic approaches. It was organised by Nigel Fabb (Strathclyde) who began the day with some thoughts on the ways in which Linguistics methodologies may contribute to, and possibly also conflict with, those used in the teaching and study of literature.

There followed three presentations which looked at Pragmatics and its application to the teaching of literature - specifically the use of Relevance Theory (Barbara MacMahon, Sheffield Hallam); working with poetic metre - 'bracketed grid theory' (Nigel Fabb, Strathclyde) and language change and the grammar of poetry - exploring pre-1900 texts using concordancing software (Sylvia Adamson, Manchester).

Questions relating to the status of Linguistics within literary study and the tensions between what seem to be generally opposing methodologies were also explored in the final discussion. This raised questions of language, status/curriculum, teaching and theory.

The disciplinary identity of Area Studies

When the Area Studies Project was conceived in 2002, it was evident that the disciplinary identity of both teaching staff and students was a key concern. This event presented an opportunity to revisit this issue shortly after the project ended in July 2004.

The result was six papers that engaged with Area Studies from a variety of disciplinary perspectives:

- History (Colin Brooks)
- Development Studies (Balasubramanyam Chandramohan)
- Geography (John Canning and Carl Griffin)
- English (Jonathan Gibson)
- Politics (Keu-Cheng Huang)
- European Studies (Jeremy Leaman)

The range of disciplines represented at the event is testimony to the success of the Area Studies Project in reaching out to practitioners throughout the Humanities and Social Sciences. We look forward to furthering our interdisciplinary activity through our continuing Area Studies work, which includes an event on globalisation planned for April 2005 (see page 4).

The place of Languages in the curriculum

This event focused on current opportunities to promote the importance of Languages in the curriculum and reported on the findings of a series of recent research projects.

Presentations included:

- a paper on a project which examined the content of courses with the word 'international' in the title
- an update on the recent Languages Work initiative launched by CILT (The National Centre for Languages) to raise awareness in schools of the importance of languages for employability
- an overview of the large numbers of students of other disciplines who are studying languages as part of an IWLP
- a report on a project which set out to improve student awareness of the relevance for employability of the skills developed on Language degrees
- a summary of recent statistical data which shows that Language graduates continue to have above average rates of employability
- a description of research findings into reasons for studying Languages which found that students in both the 16 to 19 and university sectors value the benefits of language learning

Making sense of copyright

This workshop aimed to address a number of key copyright issues in developing online teaching and learning resources for Languages.

The event consisted of a series of presentations, discussion sessions and case studies from the field. Interest in the topic was sufficiently high (the event was oversubscribed) that it may be possible to run a similar event in the future. The Subject Centre has also put together a copyright page, available at www.llas.ac.uk/copyright, which includes a downloadable booklet.

More details of our programme are available on our website www.llas.ac.uk/events

17 February • CILT, Covent Garden

New technologies for teaching Linguistics: Tips and tricks for teaching Linguistics with technology

A free event for tutors in higher education which will present examples of some of the ways in which new technologies can enhance the teaching of Linguistics.

25 February • CILT, Covent Garden

The future of Phonetics

A one-day workshop exploring the issues and problems we face in training the phoneticians of the future. How can we continue to maintain standards and traditions against a shrinking resource base (funding, staffing and time)? How can we attract people into a subject which is perceived as difficult and even to be avoided by many younger students? This workshop will explore these issues, offer suggestions and, most importantly, listen to your experiences and ideas.

11 March • St Andrews University

Bridging the gap

This is a one-day seminar hosted by the Subject Centre, in conjunction with the University of St Andrews and Scottish CILT. The general theme is 'teaching foreign language literary and cultural studies' and the target audience is university and college lecturers in Modern Languages.

18 April • CILT, Covent Garden

Teaching globalisation: Developing interdisciplinary pedagogies for a changing world

This conference aims to address pedagogic issues surrounding the study of global and local issues. How are these issues addressed in different disciplines? How can practitioners draw on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives to enhance student understandings of globalisation?

6 May • Woburn House, London

Why study Languages? Cross-sector collaboration

This event will examine opportunities for, and examples of, good practice in promoting Language study across different sectors of UK Education.

“Excellent papers and a refreshing lack of guff!”
- Conference attendee

Forthcoming activity

Reading Project

In response to requests from colleagues teaching on literary and cultural studies courses, the Subject Centre is currently conducting research into attitudes to reading among undergraduates on Modern Language degree programmes.

This project aims to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data on the following themes:

- the nature and frequency of students' reading in both L1 and L2
- students' attitudes to, and motivation for, reading in L2
- students' previous experience of reading in L2
- students' perceptions of their competence as L2 readers
- students' definitions of what is constituted by the term 'literature' and the contexts in which they have previously talked about reading and literature
- students' awareness of L2 reading strategies

On completion of a review of relevant literature, a questionnaire will be designed and piloted. This will then be issued to students in years one and four in six HE institutions. The research findings are expected to be available for dissemination in the Autumn of 2005.

It is hoped that the survey will provide an insight into students' experiences of reading on Modern Language programmes and that this information will prove useful to those involved in the teaching of reading and literature.

Collaboration in Modern Languages in higher education

Over the last three years there have been regular reports in *Liaison on the progress of this Programme, which is managed by the Subject Centre on behalf of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML).*

The Programme comprised ten projects, each of which involved collaboration between two or more institutions. The aims of the projects were to develop resources for undergraduate teaching, create programmes at Masters level, coordinate postgraduate training or produce support resources for the HE Modern Languages community.

All the projects are now complete but it is hoped that the activity will continue to be significant for the departments involved. The Steering Group, with the help of the Programme's evaluator, Dr Alison Piper, is now looking at the lessons to be learned from the projects with a view to drawing up guidelines for effective collaboration.

These will form part of a publication which will be printed in March and will be available on our website.

The evaluation report states that:

“...the Programme has shown that small co-operative partnerships can be both highly academically productive and personally rewarding...”

We hope that the Programme has contributed to a culture of cooperation among colleagues across the sector.

For more information about the work of this Programme visit: www.llas.ac.uk/collaboration

Join our mailing list

www.llas.ac.uk/maillinglist and receive:

- this newsletter
- other Subject Centre publications
- our monthly ebulletin