

## Rights of passage

The transition to study at university is a decisive moment in the lives of our students. For young people, it is a big step into adult life, often meaning that they leave home and embark on much greater social independence. For mature students, it is a personal change of direction, often meaning that they step away from jobs or family responsibilities. Student services in our institutions are increasingly well geared to provide the kind of social and material support that incoming students need to cope with this major life change. And we are developing ways to match this with better support for the equally demanding changes in students' learning experience.

The main focus of our response has been to improve the induction arrangements for students arriving at the beginning of the academic year. This is our first contact with them as enrolled students, and their entry point into full-fledged study with us. There are many examples of good practice in this area, as institutions develop more comprehensive programmes for 'week zero' and the first weeks of courses. We are also aware that the academic transition is a continuing process, which requires us to build essential subject-specific and transferable skills into the whole of the first year. And each further year of study brings its own further transitions.

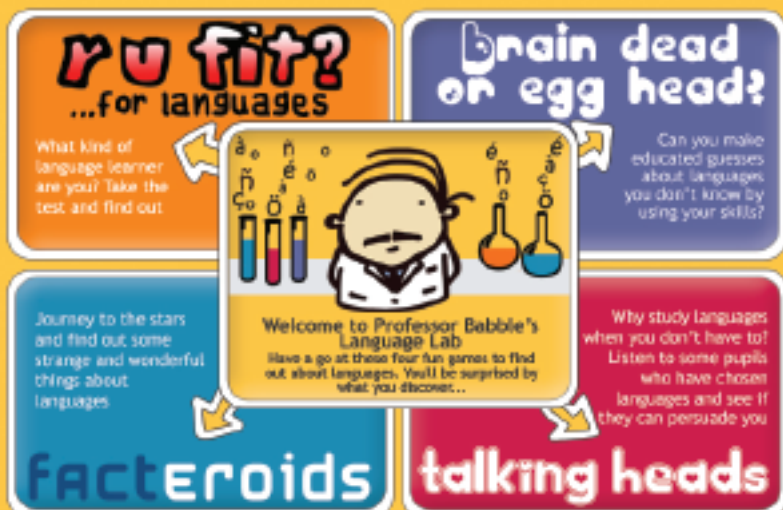
However, there is a growing need for us to pay greater attention to the earlier stages of transition. This particularly requires a closer engagement with the secondary and FE sectors, from which most of our students come. We also have the challenge of the increased diversity of our students, especially with the growing number of students from other European countries and from further afield.

We need particularly to be aware of the significant changes that have taken place in UK upper secondary education in recent years. Teaching methods and facilities have changed, often providing better IT resources, for example, than many HE departments can offer. Students' expectations have changed, often orienting them towards clearer career aspirations. And curricula have continued to change, with new A-level and GNVQ programmes, and new qualifications, like the Languages Ladder.

In order to understand and respond to these changes, we need to work more closely with colleagues in the secondary sector. Most departments already have better links with schools, mainly as part of their marketing and recruitment strategies. It will be increasingly important to expand these links and to develop their academic content. The better we know the academic background from which our students come, the better we shall be able to smooth their transition to higher education. We are likely to learn from the approaches we find there. And we may be able to develop more effective pre-enrolment arrangements.

Colleagues in schools are also engaged in preparing their students for the transition to higher education, and are often very well informed about what their students will find there. In some cases they know more about us than we know about each other. The more we develop links with secondary schools, the more we recognise the benefits of cooperation between universities. The issues of transition that we face are shared ones. And the responses we develop will also need to be shared.

**Michael Kelly**  
Director of the Subject Centre



## Why study languages?

The Subject Centre has launched a new CD designed to excite, educate and encourage young people to continue with their language learning in KS4 and beyond.

This interactive CD contains quizzes, language facts and PowerPoint presentations. In addition there are video clips of students talking about their love of studying language.

The contents of the CD is complemented by an accompanying poster.

To place your order, go to [www.llas.ac.uk/whystudylanguages](http://www.llas.ac.uk/whystudylanguages)

# Event reports Autumn 2005



## 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](http://www.llas.ac.uk/events/archive)

### Routes into reading

This one-day conference focused on issues of reading in the foreign language and transition from school to university.

It included a report on a Subject Centre survey of attitudes to reading among languages undergraduates, which examined experiences of reading both L1 and L2 and covered a variety of text types including literature. Some 601 questionnaires were collected from seven UK universities. The findings will be available in a report to be published shortly.

Evidence from research on transition was also presented. This was conducted by the English Subject Centre and explored transition from school to university studies of English Literature. The study focused on the perspectives of sixth form and year 1 undergraduate

students as well as their teachers and lecturers and was found to have resonance for modern languages.

There were also presentations on strategies for teaching literature. These included teaching literature through a film version of a novel in order to promote closer engagement with the written text. This approach has the benefit of stimulating class discussions, providing new insights into literary works and providing satisfaction and enjoyment.

Finally, a literature module was described which consists of offering students a collection of short texts and which has developed as a response to students' lack of prior exposure to literary texts and their lack of familiarity with the genre. Those teaching the module are very positive about teaching in this way.

### Special interest group on knowledge about language in the school curriculum

The Subject Centre's Special Interest Group on *Knowledge About Language at School* is continuing to meet and is working on a proposal for an A Level in Linguistics.

The group is redrafting four module specifications and developing their proposal in the light of feedback from a series of open meetings held last year.

The eventual aim is to develop an A Level in Linguistics and the group is planning to achieve this by means of a series of stages, including:

- Presenting materials in a small number of schools and at courses for Gifted and Talented students
- Offering one module within an existing AS Level
- Piloting a two-module AS Level in Linguistics

We will continue to consult and discuss with interested groups and welcome comments and suggestions. If you would like to be added to an email list to be kept informed of developments, please email Billy Clark: [b.clark@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:b.clark@mdx.ac.uk)

### Specialist language degrees in higher education

The aim of this seminar was to examine current trends and curriculum innovation in schools in order to inform the future design of specialist language degrees.

Presentations considered the following themes:

- The implications for higher education of recent curriculum developments from Key Stages 2-4 (the impact of initiatives such as the Primary Framework, the Key Stage 3 Framework; the National Curriculum and GCSE; the 14 to 19 agenda and the Languages Ladder)
- The A-level curriculum (a focus on proposed changes to A-level)
- Innovations in teaching and learning in schools (an examination of positive and negative factors influencing innovation in schools and examples of classroom activities that can be employed to develop a range of linguistic and social skills among learners)
- Trends in university applications for languages
- Case studies of schools and universities working together; HE languages and education departments working together and the potential for universities to work with the Association for Language Learning
- Why study languages? (a discussion on the economic rationale for languages as well as an argument for languages as a complex set of disciplines which contribute to global citizenship).

“ lots of good facts and information to help recruiting and examples of good practice ”

workshop participant



## DfES cross-sector collaboration mapping project

The Footitt report 'The National Languages Strategy in Higher Education' recommended that the Subject Centre should survey the range of language outreach activities across universities, and encourage the sharing of good practice in this area. The DfES has implemented this recommendation and commissioned the Subject Centre to carry out a project to map current provision.

The Subject Centre had previously held a workshop (May 2005) on this topic, at which we asked participants to complete a survey listing their activities with colleagues in other sectors. We also asked them to list their main motivations for engaging in cross-sector collaboration activity and the barriers they have encountered.

### Project activities to date

We refined the survey referred to above and added questions on the usefulness of collaboration activities and which activities work best with which age group(s). We then made the questionnaire available online ([www.geodata.soton.ac.uk/llas\\_survey](http://www.geodata.soton.ac.uk/llas_survey)) and publicised it nationally to universities and schools. A total of 171 people responded to the questionnaire and we are now in the process of analysing the data. At the same time, we have been conducting background research into cross-sector collaboration in languages and other subject areas.

### Future project activities

We are now carrying out a small number of telephone interviews with schools and universities that responded to the survey. These will form the basis of case studies for the final project report, which will also include the questionnaire analysis, a comparison with other subject areas, examples of good practice and recommendations to the DfES. The report, which we will be writing in February, will be available on a dedicated section of the Subject Centre website and will also be sent to everyone who completed the questionnaire.

Further information on cross-sector activities and events will soon be presented on our website along with a wide range of resources for promoting languages at: [www.llas.ac.uk/whystudylanguages](http://www.llas.ac.uk/whystudylanguages)

## Interdisciplinary teaching and learning: Why?

Interdisciplinary teaching and learning has been a central discussion point at LLAS events, especially in Area Studies.

Whilst interdisciplinarity is generally regarded positively, it is disciplines themselves that form the building blocks of departments, journals, degree programmes, conferences and quality assurance mechanisms (for example, the Research Assessment Exercise) in UK higher education. Many colleagues in LLAS feel frustrated by institutional and intellectual barriers to teaching (and researching) across disciplines.

Some degree programmes are specifically intended to be interdisciplinary: for example, European Studies and American Studies. Even here there is an important discussion about whether such courses should aim to explicitly integrate disciplines or whether they should be conceived as multidisciplinary courses made coherent entirely by the geographical area of study. The question therefore arises as to whether the task of making these programmes coherent belongs to the student or the teaching staff who have set up the programme.

The importance of engaging with interdisciplinarity goes far beyond the discussion of academic programmes that are clearly intended to be interdisciplinary. Is a language centre course like 'French for Engineers' simply a service provided by the Language Centre to the Engineering department or is it an explicit process of integrating knowledge of a language with engineering? How does learning a language impact upon a student's training in engineering? How does the student's engineering education influence their language learning? These questions are critical to addressing the 'whole student experience'. In the assessment of student learning how do we ensure that students gain appropriate credit for their insights from other disciplines? This question is particularly significant for students on joint honours courses.

Any discussion of teaching and learning in LLAS cannot take place without reference to the discipline of Education. Does the discipline of Education provide us with all the theories and application we need in order to be good teachers? What (if anything) makes the practice of being a teacher of LLAS different from teaching other disciplines? What can LLAS contribute to educational theory? So-called generic education theories have roots in specific disciplines (for example, deep and surface learning has roots in psychology), but such understandings are often divorced from these disciplinary contexts when employed in a staff development setting.

LLAS has received funding from the Higher Education Academy to lead a team of Subject Centres to engage with interdisciplinary teaching and learning. The Project includes funding for two small-scale projects and a conference that will be held at the University of Birmingham on 13-14 July 2006.

More details of our programme are available on our website [www.llas.ac.uk/events](http://www.llas.ac.uk/events)

**9 February • CILT, Covent Garden**

**Introductions to methods for pedagogic research in Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies**

This interactive workshop is a one-day introduction to methods for pedagogic research and will cover the following topics: formulating research questions; questionnaire design and analysis; in-depth interviewing and focus groups; ethics in research; dissemination and reporting.

**12 May • Senate House, University of London**

**The academic implications of the Bologna process**

This seminar will report on the latest developments in the Bologna process relating to the 'framework of qualifications' and will explore some of the key issues concerning the implementation of ECTS in the UK and across Europe. The event will have a particular focus on the Humanities and will report on the latest discussions at European level. It will be of interest to senior managers, international officers, curriculum developers and subject practitioners in the Humanities.

**6-7 July • Cardiff University Conference 2006:**

**'Crossing frontiers: Languages and the international dimension'**

More details about the workshops and themes are available on the Subject Centre website: [www.llas.ac.uk/cardiff2006](http://www.llas.ac.uk/cardiff2006) where there is full information about booking a place at the conference (see opposite).

**13-14 July • University of Birmingham Disciplines in dialogue II: Interdisciplinary learning and teaching**

Organized by the UK Higher Education Academy Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Group, this conference will provide a unique opportunity for discussion about this important, though long-neglected, issue in higher education.

## A wider perspective and more options: Investigating the longer term employability of humanities graduates

This study, to be published in February 2006, looks at how graduates of Languages, Linguistics, Area Studies, English, History, Classics and Archaeology have used their degrees in the workplace, both in terms of their subject knowledge and transferable skills.

## Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Materials from our ESD project can be found on our website at [www.llas.ac.uk/projects/esd.aspx](http://www.llas.ac.uk/projects/esd.aspx)

We are pleased to report that the Higher Education Academy is continuing to support ESD. Simon Smith, from the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is managing this work on behalf of the Network. Look out for announcements in our monthly e-bulletins and on our website.

## Attitudes to reading among languages undergraduates

This report will be published in March 2006. It describes findings from a questionnaire survey conducted by the Subject Centre which investigated attitudes to reading among languages undergraduates in seven UK universities (see page2).

## Conference 2006 Crossing frontiers: Languages and the international dimension

6-7 July 2006, University of Cardiff

This is the third biennial conference organised jointly by the Subject Centre and CILT in partnership with the UCML, SCHML and AULC. It will be of interest to all those concerned with the learning and teaching of languages in higher education both in the UK and nationally.

### Key themes this year are

- 'Working across sectors' including widening participation, community outreach and stimulating demand for languages
- 'The Curriculum' including strategic languages, independent learning, personal development plans and e learning
- 'Teacher education' including supporting new teachers

Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning at the Welsh Assembly will open the conference. Other plenary speakers are Elspeth Jones, Leeds Metropolitan University and Tony Thorne, Kings College London. A number of workshops are also being organised by AULC, ALL and the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

More details about the workshops and themes are available on the Subject Centre website ([www.llas.ac.uk/cardiff2006](http://www.llas.ac.uk/cardiff2006)) where there is full information about booking a place at the conference.

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