

## Make languages work for you – leading the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages at Queen Mary

The Common Framework of Reference for Languages across Europe (CEFR) is an initiative devised by the Council of Europe to provide a means of developing language teaching in Europe, by finding a way to compare the objectives and learning outcomes in different international contexts. It would mean that students applying for a language qualification in Italian, for example, would obtain a grade which could be recognised by a potential employer in Sweden. This is similar to the Bologna process, a European wide initiative to make degree levels recognisable to all member states. But CEFR is restricted to modern languages courses and the qualifications apply at all levels, from basic to advanced.

In a bid to be at the forefront of this exciting and controversial enterprise Queen Mary ran an event entitled, 'The Implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in UK Higher Education Institutions – Chances and Challenges,' which aimed to analyse the significance and practicality of CEFR in language teaching in higher education, and offered a forum for discussion among UK colleagues.

The School of Modern Languages led a debate that will have wide-ranging implications in the area of language acquisition and proficiency. It was agreed that a forum should be set up by Queen Mary for the language teaching community to continue to explore this area.

Other outcomes included a pledge by the School to present a series of events that will cover both theoretical and practical issues of the topic in the future in recognition of the demand for more conferences and workshops for language teachers in higher education institutions.

The importance of this area was reflected in the unexpectedly large number of participants from all parts of the UK, Ireland, Belgium and the United States. Representatives also attended from organisations such as the Department for Education and Skills, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Association of Languages Teachers in Europe.



The conference programme, which included some theoretical guidance on the nature of the CEFR by Dr Alan Dobson, former schools inspector for modern foreign languages, and two hands-on reports by practitioners from other international institutions such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Goethe-Institute, explored the question of whether this framework could be a useful tool for setting clear-cut standards in the language learning process, and could offer both educational and occupational mobility for speakers of foreign languages in an open European market. They also queried whether universities and other higher education institutions could take advantage of the European Language Portfolio as a marketing strategy to attract more students to study languages and provide them with an internationally recognised certificate of proficiency.

The event was organised by Dr Falco Pfalzgraf and Ms Susanne Frane from the Department of German. Through organising an HE forum to debate this issue, Queen Mary's involvement in this

“The importance of this area was reflected in the unexpectedly large number of participants from all parts of the UK, Ireland, Brussels and the United States.”

exciting and controversial area places the College at the forefront of the modern languages discussion and reflects the ongoing debate across the entire education sector on how to give students genuinely recognisable skills which are of use in their own right and to potential employers.

For further information please see the Conference website: [www.modern-languages.qmul.ac.uk/events/cefr2006.html](http://www.modern-languages.qmul.ac.uk/events/cefr2006.html).

If you want to join in the debate, please log on to the discussion forum: <http://cefr.myfastforum.org/>