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e-language
learning for adults
a hybrid model

The report of a joint project by
BBC Factual & Learning and the Nuffield Languages Programme

Compiled by Alwena Lamping and Joan Keevill
and incorporating a summary of *An evaluation of the BBC/Nuffield prototype hybrid courses*
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Contents

"I think you should try to learn … and speak to people in their language. … My daughter's learning Spanish at school but my son has given it up so hopefully I can do a little bit."

Dave, a machinist who left school after O-levels. He regularly goes to Spain on holiday with his family.

Foreword

The Nuffield Languages Inquiry pointed out that: "The need for language learning does not stop with full-time education. As horizons continue to widen, adults need to extend, update or maintain existing language skills, and to acquire new languages to take advantage of new opportunities."

One compelling reason for adults to learn languages is highlighted as the government embarks on implementing the National Languages Strategy for England which will enable children to begin to learn languages in primary schools. Travel abroad is increasingly a normal feature of family life in the UK and the linguistic experience of children on foreign holidays will vary greatly, depending on their parents' attitude and skills. It is not difficult to see how children whose parents make an effort to enjoy the local culture and use the local language on holiday will find more meaning in their school language classes than children whose parents simply assume that English is enough.

The internet too is increasingly a part of everyday life in the UK. Figures from December 2002 show nearly half of all households online and over 60% of adults having accessed the internet at least once. The trend is reflected in demand for the BBC languages website, which has more than doubled the number of page impressions each year for the past four years.

It was in this context that BBC Factual & Learning and the Nuffield Languages Programme joined forces to explore the potential of e-learning in enhancing opportunities for adults to learn languages. This report describes their joint venture.

On behalf of the Steering Group of the Nuffield Languages Programme and BBC Factual & Learning, we would like to thank the project team for their work and to register our appreciation of the involvement of the many people who have in various ways contributed to the project and to this report.

Sir Leonard Appleyard KCMG

Co-Chairman, Nuffield Languages Programme

Paul Gerhardt

Acting Controller, BBC Learning

Introduction

The Nuffield Languages Programme and BBC Factual & Learning share a common aspiration - to widen participation in, and improve access to, adult language learning.

The Nuffield Languages Programme[1] is funded by the Nuffield Foundation, one of the UK's best known charitable trusts, to support the development of languages in the UK. It does so by supporting and encouraging a range of initiatives that help translate the Nuffield Languages Inquiry's recommendations into policy and practice.

BBC Factual & Learning has for many years produced courses for adults in a range of languages as part of its public service educational provision. It currently offers beginner level materials both on television and online. The BBC's languages website[2] has grown rapidly since its launch in 1996 to reflect increasing demand for online learning. As well as providing language learning resources to get people started, the BBC aims to help them follow up their interest by indicating learning opportunities outside the BBC. In this context, it is keen to enhance the usefulness of its courses by exploring how they can be linked more closely to local provision.

The Nuffield Languages Programme and BBC Factual & Learning therefore joined forces in May 2002 to explore the potential of e-learning in enhancing the opportunities for adults to learn languages. They set up an action research project to develop an innovative language learning model for adult beginners, combining the flexibility of online materials with opportunities for learners to interact with a tutor and with other learners. The objectives of the project were:

1 To test the model by running a prototype course, based on the BBCi online course Spanish Steps[3], in four areas between September and December 2002, with adults who wished to learn Spanish from scratch, with support but without committing to a traditional weekly taught course.

2 To evaluate the effectiveness of the model, looking particularly at its perceived flexibility, the impact on learner motivation and the role of tutor support, and produce a report of the findings.

3 To use these findings to support the eventual development of a more generic model which, if adopted by providers, would help widen opportunities for adults to learn languages.

4 To disseminate the findings to policy makers and practitioners in the field of adult language teaching and learning.

5 To inform the future design of online provision.

[1] http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/languages
[2] http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages
[3] http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/spanish/lj/

To advise the project team and help interpret the findings in a wider context, a project Steering Group was brought together, with expertise in languages and in adult learning (see Annex 1 for details). This group met several times from May 2002 throughout the duration of the project.

Dr Neil Selwyn, from the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences where his research and teaching focus on technology and society, was appointed to lead the research team evaluating the effectiveness of the prototype courses.

Once the evaluation was completed, the findings were presented at a consultation seminar to a group selected to represent the adult language teaching and learning community.

The project report

This report is in three parts:

Part 1 provides a summary of the project and places it in the context of current national developments in languages and e-learning.

Part 2 is a summary of the Cardiff University evaluation of the prototype courses, which were delivered between October 2002 and March 2003.

Part 3 explores the key issues arising from the wider project, derived from the research findings, feedback from tutors and providers, the Steering Group meetings and the consultation seminar.

This report, and the Cardiff University full report, *An evaluation of the BBC/Nuffield prototype hybrid courses*, can be downloaded in pdf format from the Nuffield Languages Programme website[4].

Part 1: The BBC/Nuffield project

National context

The government's plans for a revitalised post-compulsory learning and skills sector were published in November 2002 in the document *Success for All*[5]. Their purpose is to secure the long-term social, political and economic well-being of the UK. A recent paper from the EU Commission[6] spells out how raising participation in learning other languages contributes to that agenda.

> "The act of learning and speaking other languages encourages the learner to open himself up to other people and begin to understand other cultures and outlooks; essential skills in a world menaced by racism and xenophobia.
>
> Learning other languages improves general cognitive and metacognitive skills, reinforces understanding of one's mother tongue, strengthens reading and writing and develops general communication skills.
>
> Intercultural communication skills are assuming an ever-larger role in global marketing and sales strategies. Companies continue to lose business because they cannot speak their customers' languages.
>
> The worker with language skills is better able to take advantage of his freedom to work and study (in other EU countries)".

The government formally recognised the importance of languages in their National Languages Strategy for England: *Languages for All: Languages for Life*[7], published in December 2002. The Strategy states that: "In the knowledge society of the 21st century, language competence and intercultural understanding are not optional extras; they are an essential part of being a citizen", and outlines plans to achieve a step change in national language capability and inspire people of all ages to learn languages throughout life.

The main focus of *Languages for All: Languages for Life* is on the schools curriculum, based on the premise that "transforming language competence in this country means first of all transforming language learning in schools". There is little in the Strategy about adults, either as learners or as role models for children learning in schools. The Nuffield Languages Programme has commented that this is an opportunity missed, since success in our schools is likely to depend as much on the attitudes of parents, grandparents, teachers and public figures as on education policy. Evidence is beginning to emerge of a close link between negative parental attitudes to languages and lack of enthusiasm by their children in secondary schools.

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[5] http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/SfA_DfES-Strategy.pdf
[6] http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/consult/consult_en.pdf
[7] http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languagesstrategy/

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Adult language learning: the current situation

Much has been said about the low level of linguistic competence amongst UK adults and the damaging effect this has on business, employability and job mobility as well as more general cultural attitudes and engagement in European citizenship. However, times are changing and there is evidence that adults increasingly recognise the value of knowing other languages. Various surveys (EU, NIACE, NOP et al) over the past five years have consistently recorded high percentages of respondents showing positive attitudes towards languages.

Although reliable statistics on adult language learning are hard to come by, we know that large numbers of people are sufficiently motivated to buy language books, CDs, CD-ROMs, videos: every year some £16 million is spent in the UK on these materials. Language television programmes shown at night on BBC Learning Zone and the BBC languages website both regularly attract large audiences. We know too that many adults choose to learn in classes organised by Adult, Further and Higher Education institutions. An informal snapshot of enrolments in September 2002 showed that numbers of new adult learners had increased in all the centres consulted, with languages classed as 'minority languages' becoming viable in several centres for the first time. Many centres reported unprecedented numbers wishing to start learning Spanish.

Despite such an encouraging picture, surveys still show a huge gap between the numbers claiming to be interested in learning a language and those actually learning. The reason would seem to lie with current provision, which is failing to attract large numbers of potential learners. According to the 2001 Eurobarometer[8] survey, only 30% of UK adults interviewed believed that the availability of language courses was good in their area. The majority of current public provision for adults is structured in 60-hour courses: two hours a week from September to June, heavily focused on accreditation. They tend to be labelled as 'vocational' for historical reasons relating to funding criteria.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the people who enrol in a class do so because they value the imposed structure, the social interaction, the opportunity to use their new language with other learners, and the availability of the tutor to monitor progress and give feedback. However, adults have to accommodate their language learning alongside work, family, social and other commitments, and many find it hard to attend a class on a regular basis. Having missed a class or two, they give up their course. Evidence suggests that many people who learn on their own also give up after a short period. Their reasons usually relate to the isolation of the learning experience, the difficulty of maintaining the discipline of regular study and, in particular, the difficulty of learning to speak a new language confidently without opportunities for communicating with others.

E-learning and hybrid learning

Both *Success for All* and *Languages for All: Languages for Life* refer to the potential of ICT to enhance learning. *Success for All* refers to the growing importance of e-learning and indicates that the aim should now be to "improve quality, raise standards and increase coherence". This reflects the conclusions of a

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[8] http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/ebs_147_summ_en.pdf

major report produced for the Learning and Skills Council by the Distributed and Electronic Learning Group[9] (DELG), which brings together the themes likely to inform the future thinking of the Learning and Skills Council on e-learning.

Stressing that e-learning is neither a panacea for all the challenges facing education nor a replacement for existing forms of learning and teaching, the DELG report paints a picture of "learning opportunities powerfully enriched, extended and varied by the judicious, expert and high-quality deployment of e-learning". It advocates a shift in perspective from technology and systems to a focus on the requirements of the learner. The report explores the concept of 'hybrid' or 'blended' learning, highlighting the role of the 'sociabilities' of learning – opportunities for face-to-face contact and informal exchanges with fellow learners – in strengthening the learning experience.

It could be argued that the sociabilities of learning are especially relevant to language learning. Certainly, many expert commentators claim that language learning does not effortlessly translate into e-learning given the complex nature of what is being taught and learnt. In particular, some would say that the technology does not easily support the development of speaking skills. However, a hybrid approach, blending technology and face-to-face teaching and learning, could provide a rounded learning experience. This is not a new conclusion: the Open University Language Centre[10] has conducted significant research into distance language learning combining ICT and face-to-face teaching; research is currently being conducted in Higher Education; the internet offers many examples of hybrid courses for English as a Foreign Language. However, it seems that relatively little has yet been done in the UK for adults wishing to learn languages other than English from scratch outside a work context. This is probably the biggest market in the UK for language learning – and providing for this group differs markedly from providing for people with an existing level of language proficiency or for full-time students.

The infrastructure with the potential to support hybrid language learning for adults is already being put in place. The past two years have registered a growth in many areas of local learning centres for adults, usually the result of local partnerships. Until recently, the centres have tended to focus on learning to use ICT, but many are now seeking to move beyond this towards using ICT to learn.

However important the role of public learning centres, many adults seeking flexibility in their learning will be more likely to seek online resources from home. The proportion of households in the UK with access to the Internet continues to increase. In December 2002, 11.4 million UK households (46% of all households) were online, compared with 39 per cent in 2001. 28.6 million adults (62% of UK adults) had accessed the internet at least once, an increase of 5% since July 2002 (Oftel[11]). However, the level of access varies greatly between different parts of the UK and depends strongly on income – a vital issue to consider in relation to widening participation in e-language learning.

[9] http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/Dist_Electronic_Group.pdf
[10] http://www.open.ac.uk/education-and-languages/research/areas/area6.cfm
[11] http://www.oftel.gov.uk

The prototype hybrid Spanish course

It was in this context that the BBC/Nuffield joint project created a model hybrid course for adults who wanted to learn Spanish, who had not previously studied Spanish, and who could or would not commit to a weekly course.

Spanish was chosen because of the recent meteoric rise in its popularity in the UK, and the model course was based on the BBC online course Spanish Steps, available free to the user on the BBC's public service website. This is a self-contained course written for adults, specifically designed to give complete beginners a motivating first experience of learning Spanish. It is structured in small 'chunks' of learning, using a range of media and approaches. Each learning stage has a clear set of learning objectives and ends in a 'Challenge' to check progress. Spanish Steps takes the beginner approximately to Entry level.

In addition to the online materials, learners were to be provided with access to an experienced tutor who would organise three face-to-face group sessions to provide contact with other learners and an opportunity for practising speaking skills. Additional practice activities, *A Step or Two More*, designed to consolidate and extend spoken Spanish during these classroom sessions, were created specially for the course by Chris Ball and Keith Williams, and published on the CheshireNetword website[12], courtesy of Cheshire County Council's Adult Learning Service.

Between classroom sessions, in addition to following the course on the Spanish Steps website, learners would be supported by the tutor by email and telephone. They were also encouraged to contact each other for support and practice.

There was no intention to offer accreditation on these prototype courses. Consideration was given to using the European Language Portfolio[13], but as the lead-in time was short and tutors were not familiar with the Portfolio, a learner log was created instead as part of an induction pack (see Annex 3) to encourage learners to record their own progress during the course.

Four providers agreed to trial the hybrid course.

● The Brasshouse Language Centre in the centre of Birmingham, which provides a wide range of part-time daytime, evening and weekend language courses from beginner to post-degree levels. They offer 28 languages in all.

● The No Limits centre in Cheshire, which promotes learning opportunities through ICT to a rural community in South West Cheshire. Situated on the same site as a specialist Language College, it offers 60 computers on site with radiowave technology and outreach to community and village halls.

● Mid Essex Adult & Community College, which provides a languages curriculum of 42 courses in French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish. All language programmes run for 30 weeks for two hours per week.

● The Stoke on Trent BBC Open Centre, which is located inside BBC Radio Stoke in Hanley town centre, and is open to members of the public as a drop-in learning centre. They have 16 computers in total and offer a range of courses for adults.

More information on the centres is provided as Annex 2.

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[12] http://cheshirenetword.org.uk/spanishsteps
[13] http://www.cilt.org.uk/projects/europortfolio.htm

It was planned to run the hybrid courses from October to December 2002, with each provider recruiting 10 to 12 learners. Given the providers' ethos of widening access to education and training, there were no entry requirements for the courses; they were to be open to anyone, regardless of whether they had existing computer skills. The providers decided their own procedures for recruiting learners; these included local radio, local press, posters and leaflet distribution.

The providers also undertook their own recruitment of tutors but they were encouraged to engage tutors already interested in, or using aspects of, technology to support their teaching. The four tutors selected were then offered a day's training in the Brasshouse Centre on 14 September 2002. This enabled them to familiarise themselves with the Spanish Steps course and the additional CheshireNetword materials. The tutors also had the opportunity during the training session to discuss concerns about the potential additional demands on their time and the skills required to support online learning and give personalised email and telephone support.

The prototype hybrid courses were evaluated in all four centres by the Cardiff University research team. Their brief was to monitor the learners' experiences and evaluate the effectiveness of the courses. A summary of their evaluation follows as Part 2 of this report, and their report is available in full on the Nuffield Languages Programme website[14].

[14] http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/languages

"I find increasingly that I'm going to parts of Spain that are less English orientated …

It's very difficult to commit to every Tuesday evening, or Thursday … you inevitably know that for whatever reason you'll miss classes so this seems a nice ideal balance."

Paul, 56, a self-employed independent financial advisor, who often travels to Spain, occasionally on business but mainly for pleasure.

Part 2: Evaluation of the prototype hybrid courses

Dr Neil Selwyn and Dr Nina Smalley: Cardiff University

Introduction

The principal aim of the evaluation was to evaluate systematically the prototype hybrid course, as implemented in four different sites, in terms of the following criteria:

- the *educational* effectiveness of the prototype in terms of its flexibility for learners and tutors, the appropriateness of the online content for the learner and tutor and the impact on learning outcomes and learner motivation;

- the *technological* effectiveness of the prototype in affording ready access to learning materials, facilitating communication and support between learners and their tutors;

- the *social* effectiveness of the prototype in facilitating a shared learning culture/community amongst participants, stimulating a disposition to participate in further learning and in overcoming existing barriers to learning (i.e. situational, institutional and dispositional).

In order to gauge the effectiveness of the prototype hybrid courses, a comparison group of autonomous internet-only learners also learning Spanish with the Spanish Steps website, was recruited. The evaluation used a combination of questionnaires, focus group interviews and individual telephone interviews with learners and tutors. In particular, the evaluation also aimed to examine the following areas:

- the nature of the learning experience for participants, how this was mediated by prior experience of learning, prior technological experience etc.;

- pedagogical issues associated with the online/offline hybrid delivery, ease-of-fit of online and offline modes for learners and tutors;

- examples of 'best practice' from the groups.

Evaluation sample

The four sites offering the prototype courses were selected to be diverse in terms of institutional background (i.e. one language learning college, one adult education college, one BBC Learning Centre and one distributed ICT learning centre) and geography (rural, town and city). Although in theory each site was to recruit 10 to 12 learners (henceforth referred to as 'hybrid learners'), in practice only 32 learners were recruited to the first group sessions. Similarly, although 70 'online' learners volunteered to participate in the comparison group in response to a request for volunteers on the BBC website, only 31 actually returned the initial questionnaires. The on-going ephemerality of the online learners, not all of whom were accessing the site from the UK, was a notable aspect of the evaluation - reflecting the non-

committal manner in which many of the online learners appeared to approach the course. As such, the small numbers of hybrid and online learners who took part in the evaluation do compromise the generalisability of the findings as well as the sophistication of the data analysis. This limitation of the small numbers involved must be borne in mind throughout this report.

Evaluation Findings

i) Learner characteristics

It was clear that the hybrid courses were attracting learners who, it is likely, would not have used the Spanish Steps website in a purely online capacity. When compared to the autonomous online learners, the hybrid learners were noticeably older, less well-educated and with a less extensive technological background. Both methods of learning were attracting individuals who tended to be (i) established learners and (ii) established language learners. In line with what we know about 'conventional' language learning courses, and in the light of how the learners were recruited, both the hybrid and online courses were tending to attract 'repeat learners' rather than absolute beginners. Thus, whilst the hybrid courses could not be said to have widened participation to learning in general, they would appear to have widened participation in e-learning activities.

ii) Learner motivation and recruitment

A range of motivations to learn Spanish was cited. Whereas the hybrid learners were more likely to be motivated by visiting Spain, buying property etc., the online learners were more likely to either have very specific work/emigration aims or were looking at Spanish learning from a purely general interest or general curiosity perspective. The motivations for taking the Spanish Steps course (in either hybrid or online form) as opposed to other Spanish courses also varied. Whilst more of the online learners were attracted by the ability to learn online, the hybrid learners were more likely to be attracted by the course's specific features (e.g. the fact that the course did not follow a rigid weekly structure whilst also not being a completely solitary distance learning course).

In this respect there was a sense that the hybrid courses were attracting some individuals who had previously found conventional adult language classes difficult to commit to - learners who could be referred to as 'tippers', because the nature of the course tipped them into starting to learn. The low institutional demands of the Spanish Steps courses (i.e. in terms of weekly attendance, time and money spent on the course, lack of formal assessment or end-of-course certification) were attractive to these learners. That said, some learners were attending the hybrid courses having tried and failed to enrol on 'traditional' courses in the same institution. This factor had implications for these learners' sustained use of, and commitment towards, the Spanish Steps course.

iii) Learners' use of the Spanish Steps website

The hybrid learners who followed the course through to the final classroom session were more successful than the autonomous online learners in completing the six stages of the Spanish Steps website, demonstrating the 'added value' of the classroom sessions in imposing a 'structure' in the learners' minds. In short, the hybrid model of online learning with supporting classroom sessions allowed

a group of learners to learn online at levels above and beyond what could be expected otherwise. In comparison, the online learners, who could be referred to as 'dippers', appeared to dip in and out of the website and use it more as an on-going resource than a course.

In terms of how learners used the website, the frequency of use was comparable between the two sets of learners, with most accessing the site on a weekly basis. Differences were apparent in terms of *when* the website was accessed by learners, with the online learners more likely to be evening users of the site. Hybrid learners, in contrast, were more likely to be lunchtime and morning users. Although learning could not be said to be taking place on a truly 24-hour basis, these patterns do reflect the flexibility of self-study and the '24/7' nature of the web. It must be stressed that these were typical patterns of use and, in most cases, were not sustained throughout the duration of the evaluation. After ten weeks many of the hybrid learners' use of the site tailed off - with some attending the final sessions having not used the site for a month or so. These patterns of use can also be linked to learners' motivation and discipline, with the most successful learners appearing to be those who managed to set themselves a 'regime' of use.

Both sets of learners predominantly reported to be accessing the website from home, followed by the workplace. Those hybrid learners who did not have home access to a computer and relied on the open access in learning centres were hindered by the public access facilities.

iv) Technical issues in learners' use of the Spanish Steps website

The technical problems most commonly cited by the learners related to video, sound and length of time spent downloading material. There would appear to have been several reasons for this: learners not used to accessing multi-media websites did not have the 'plug-ins' required to play the video and audio components of the site, nor were they able to download them easily. In addition, as most of the learners accessed the site using a 56K modem, they were unprepared for the length of time they needed to stay online to use the course.

The technical difficulties seemed to be exacerbated in the public learning centres, where computers were not necessarily enabled to have sound (or had sound but not headphones), display video, handle state-of-the-art websites and where support staff were not familiar with the Spanish Steps site. Use of the website in public sites was also curtailed by non-technical factors, such as the limited time learners were able to use a computer (therefore limiting the flexibility of use) and the non-conducive environment to learning and practising speaking skills. For the most part, the elements of the site which learners were unable to use were quickly discarded and ignored on subsequent visits to the site.

v) Learners' evaluation of the Spanish Steps website

Aside from the technical difficulties, most, if not all, of the online and hybrid learners were impressed with the overall feel and presentation of the website. In this respect the website fulfilled a role as a motivating and engaging medium of learning. That said, there was a sense amongst some of the more experienced Spanish learners on the hybrid courses that they also wanted some 'traditional' language learning content - in particular more emphasis on formal grammar and the 'rules' of Spanish language. This, in part, reflects

the level of the hybrid learners' prior experience of learning Spanish and the fact that some were taking the hybrid course as a substitute for a weekly classroom course. It may also relate to the age profile of the learners, reflecting changes in language teaching methodology over recent years (moving from what Milton, in Literature Review in Languages 2002[15], calls a 'grammar translation model' to a 'communicative, task-based, problem solving approach').

The tendency for 'non-beginners' to be using the Spanish Steps website and attending the hybrid courses was also reflected in the learners' evaluation of the difficulty levels of the website - with no learner reporting that they found the course too difficult for them.

vi) Use and evaluation of the Spanish Steps classroom sessions

The three classroom sessions – available to the hybrid learners only - were originally planned to run from October to December but there was some slippage and some had to be scheduled to run in the New Year. Overall levels of attendance diminished over time. At the first session, the hybrid learners were enthusiastic about the idea of attending sessions to sustain their motivation, seeing it as an important and valuable part of their learning experience. Yet the fact that a relatively high proportion of learners did not attend all the sessions suggests that these good intentions were not sustained. In this respect, a few of the non-attendees concluded that only weekly courses would create an obligation to attend.

Those learners who did attend the classroom sessions found them to be, on the whole, useful and motivating - allowing them to pace their learning and acting as a 'prompt' to those who were maybe losing momentum. Most learners seemed to welcome the chance to interact with the tutor and other learners, to demonstrate and reinforce their learning, as well as to correct any confusion that had occurred between the classes.

vii) Other forms of learning

A notable aspect of all four hybrid courses was the very limited use made of the tutor outside of the classroom sessions. Whilst the tutors were diligent in contacting learners by email and telephone, there was little reciprocal attempt made by learners to contact the tutor for support or speaking practice. Some learners were uneasy about telephoning the tutor, with learners not wanting to 'be a nuisance' or 'bother' the tutor. Other, more linguistically adept, students simply did not feel the need to contact the tutor, as all the language help they needed was contained in the website.

There was little evidence that 'learning communities' were being created outside the classroom. Although expressing a willingness to communicate with each other during the span of the course, there was little, if any, communication and self-help amongst the learners between the classroom sessions, although they obviously benefited from talking to each other during those sessions.

viii) Learner dropout

For many of the online and hybrid learners the lack of obligation and commitment involved in the course meant that Spanish Steps was a lower priority in their lives than other more pressing issues. People did not attend the classroom sessions and did not complete the six stages of the website for a range of reasons. At one extreme, some of the hybrid learners suffered serious personal and family bereavements and illnesses, which left Spanish Steps as a low priority. Other hybrid learners started the course with long holidays to Spain and America planned for December (hence their original attraction to a course which finished before Christmas). The situation obviously changed with the eventual slippage of the classroom sessions into the New Year. Other learners experienced lifestyle changes which meant that Spanish Steps was no longer convenient. These reasons ranged from having to spend extra time in work and/or changing work routines, which meant that accessing the website from work was no longer possible, to having concurrent Spanish classes cancelled leading to a drop in motivation.

There were signs that a few learners had signed up for the Spanish Steps hybrid courses without knowing the nature of the course. The use of the internet and the requirement to stay online while learning was obviously a deterrent to some, as was the use of the computers during some of the classroom sessions. Given the slightly rushed nature of some of the centres' enrolment of learners, it is clear that some learners felt that being given a clearer indication of what the course entailed before embarking on the course would have improved retention. There was also a sense of a lack of commitment and obligation towards the course amongst some of the learners given the lack of financial cost involved and the lack of weekly sessions. From this perspective the Spanish Steps prototype was something which was easily entered into and easily dropped.

ix) Learning outcomes

For those hybrid learners who finished the three classroom sessions, learning outcomes reflected the content of this Entry level course, i.e. primarily at the level of learning words and short phrases, as well as consolidating prior knowledge. Learners reported being most confident in simple greetings, saying a few words about themselves, reading a menu and buying railway tickets. These outcomes must be set against the fact that some learners were starting the course from a 'competent novice' rather than absolute beginner level.

It is also worth considering the Spanish Steps course in terms of the future activities of the learners who completed the course. Most of the learners who completed the final evaluation questionnaires intended to carry on using the Spanish Steps website. As such, it constituted a valuable reference resource and consolidation tool which could be used well beyond the final classroom session. Some online and hybrid learners intended to enrol on classroom Spanish courses. However, it is important to bear in mind that many had planned to do so (or were doing so) before they took part in Spanish Steps. It is therefore safer to conclude that Spanish Steps had not necessarily created a new desire in the learners to take subsequent courses, more that it was part of a much wider, already established 'learning journey'.

[15] http://www.nestafuturelab.org/reviews/lang08.htm

Discussion

As a whole it should be concluded that the 'e-language learning for adults' prototype was a qualified success. Aside from the technical problems experienced, those learners who followed the hybrid courses through to the third session were impressed with the Spanish Steps package and the classroom sessions offered alongside them. In hindsight it may well be that many of the 'negative' findings from this evaluation are to be expected and, indeed, some should be expected in the future. However, it is likely that if the issues surrounding recruitment and technical support are addressed, many of them could be allayed. One of the key conclusions to take away from the prototype courses is that the educational community needs to shift its expectations and assumptions about e-learning towards a more realistic basis. In particular five areas arise from the findings of the present evaluation:

i) Recognising how learners use e-learning and hybrid learning

It is necessary to recognise that these learners were using the Spanish Steps courses like any other learning resource and were not making best use of the 'new' forms of learning offered in the blend (such as email-based communication between learners and tutors). For this group, hybrid learning was perhaps less of a new, inherently motivating and engaging form of learning than another form of learning which learners added to their repertoire of learning sources. In this way, many of the learners were appropriating the Spanish Steps courses in established and 'traditional' ways. Spanish Steps seemed to play a supporting, rather than a guiding, role in individuals' learning. For some learners it could be seen as akin to a textbook which learners felt able to draw upon to consolidate prior learning. Although, in the long term, this gives Spanish Steps longevity as a learning tool, in the short term it would appear, crucially, that learners did not have the e-skills, self-discipline and the obligation or compulsion needed to complete the course. This led to learners not attending the classroom sessions, thus highlighting the inherent tension in the hybrid model, which was not successfully resolved for some of the Spanish Steps learners, i.e. the difficulty of marrying a rigid structure of classroom sessions with a flexible model of online provision.

ii) Recognising the over-riding importance of motivation and obligation on the part of the learner

As with all adult learning, the key factor underlying the relative success of the Spanish Steps courses was the motivation and 'learning discipline' of the learners. Given that Spanish Steps did appear successful in attracting some learners who were unsure of taking part in traditional learning and were attracted by the flexible nature of the course (such as the small number of classroom sessions), it could be said that the courses had attracted people for whom they were not best suited. In terms of establishing and maintaining high levels of motivation in the learners, it appeared that there was little which could be done about this. It could, therefore, be argued that some learner 'dropout' from e-learning courses is accepted as an inevitable extension of the flexible ethos under which the courses are provided.

iii) Recognising discrepancies between 'low-technology' learners and 'high-technology' educational providers

There is a definite and widening gap between the technological ability of educational providers to develop 'high-tech' and 'high-spec' online learning materials and the relatively 'low-tech' resources which a number of learners and tutors have to access them (i.e. computer hardware/software and skills/experience). There is a danger that educational providers continue to over-estimate what learners are capable of using ICT for. Supporting these less experienced learners and teachers and giving them every assistance to overcome the technological barriers is an important responsibility for the providers to take on.

iv) Importance of getting institutional factors right in the hybrid learning model

It should be also remembered that there are key institutional effects on hybrid courses such as this prototype Spanish Steps course. Indeed, the institutions in which the courses were delivered had a key influence on the effectiveness of the courses. Factors which were perhaps overlooked in the development of the prototype proved, with hindsight, to be crucial. For example, the different ways in which the institutions enrolled the learners, the times of day the sessions were provided, the time allowed to the tutor, and the conditions of learning during the sessions were all key factors in the attraction and retention of learners to the courses, as well as in introducing the learners to the online resources and framing their subsequent use.

v) Increasing rather than widening participation

There is a tension throughout the current e-learning agenda between merely *increasing* levels of participation in education and *widening* levels of participation in education. There was evidence that the Spanish Steps hybrid courses were increasing levels of education by attracting learners who would not have learnt via the website otherwise. However, there was little to suggest that participation was being widened to include other disadvantaged groups. This reflects the emerging consensus in the academic literature that there are more fundamental problems to participation in education than purely technical and infrastructural issues. Of concern here is that the overwhelming attention being paid to ICT may be acting as a distraction or impediment to more prosaic (but arguably more effective) interventions aimed at altering patterns of poverty and social disadvantage, or encouraging rather than destroying non-certificated learning opportunities. We therefore need to be realistic about what ICT can and cannot be expected to achieve if we are to harness its educational potential.

Concluding questions

The evaluation findings raise issues that will benefit from further exploration beyond the scope of this particular project.

- Although hybrid courses like Spanish Steps appear successful in widening participation in e-learning, how can hybrid learning be developed to widen *rather than increase* participation in language learning and learning in general?

- How does this hybrid model of online and offline provision need to be changed to make it more effective?

- What institutional conditions would enable hybrid language learning courses like the Spanish Steps prototype to work well in the future?

- What is the most effective balance between the flexibility of e-learning and the imposed structure of traditional language learning models, bearing in mind that the requirements of the learner should be central to the process?

- To what extent can e-learning be expected to impact upon people's existing motivation and disposition towards language learning? How else can government and providers positively impact upon people's motivation and disposition towards learning in general and language learning in particular?

"I've enjoyed the Spanish Steps course …. made some good friends. I'll continue to learn Spanish at home with my tape and phrase book. … I don't have a computer of my own so the Learning Centre is wonderful for me. I'll continue to go there and log onto other Spanish Programmes. Thank you for everything."

Elizabeth, retired and engaged in voluntary work. She learnt to use a computer at her local learning centre then decided to combine her computer learning with learning Spanish.

Part 3: Key issues

Selwyn and Smalley conclude their evaluation of the prototype courses by suggesting areas of research that would explore further the role of e-learning and hybrid learning in adult education and, in particular, in adult language learning.

Possible answers to some of the questions they pose emerged from the wider findings of the BBC/Nuffield joint venture. These derive from feedback from tutors and providers, from the Steering Group discussions, and from the consultation seminar held at the Nuffield Foundation on 24 March 2003. They are illustrated, where relevant, by comments (verbatim) from learners and tutors.

This section considers the issues raised, grouped into 5 main areas:

1 Recruitment, motivation and retention

2 Issues relating to ICT

3 Hybrid course structure

4 Staff development

5 Issues relating to policy

Recruitment, motivation and retention

Recruitment

The intention of the project was to recruit adults who wanted to learn Spanish, who had not previously studied Spanish, and who could or would not commit to a weekly course. The centres that delivered the Spanish Steps hybrid courses chose their own methods of recruiting learners, which followed a well-established pattern involving local press, posters in the centre and leaflet distribution. The BBC Learning Centre was in the fortunate position of being able to use local radio to attract potential learners to a 'taster' session some weeks in advance and indeed, ended up with far more people (around 80) than could be accommodated on the course. This was followed up by the involvement of the learners in a live programme during one of their classroom sessions.

Feedback from the organisers indicated that advertising the hybrid courses alongside traditional class-based courses led to a certain confusion, and that the recruitment methods and timing impacted on the types of learners who signed up. In particular, publicity accessible only by 'traditional' learners (e.g. via posters in a centre, seen only by people already familiar with the centre) resulted in some people seeing the hybrid course either as an inferior alternative or as a back-up to classroom-based provision.

Choosing a start time different from that of weekly classes would avoid confusion and would also widen opportunities for people to start learning. Currently in some areas, the only option open to someone missing the September start is to wait until the following September.

Concise pre-course advice is essential if a hybrid course is to match the potential learner's expectations. **Learners need to understand fully what they are committing to and how it differs from a traditional class. Detailed information provided to front-line staff would enable them to advise interested learners effectively**.

All four centres witnessed the phenomenon of 'repeat beginners', well known in adult beginner language learning classes. To widen participation and attract non-traditional language learners, centres could consider running taster sessions and recruiting through non-traditional routes including local radio and the internet.

> "I think the idea of having a taster session is fantastic, so people get to know about the course and everything related to it (and even have a go!). Also, it's another chance for students to get to know each other which could help afterwards, once the course starts, to motivate them to keep in touch between them; something that hardly happened this time…." [Tutor]

Motivation

It was felt that encouraging learners to record their achievements during the course would aid motivation, and consideration had been given to using the European Language Portfolio. However, as time was short and the tutors were not familiar with it, a bespoke learner log was provided instead as part of the induction pack (see Annex 3). In the event, the extent to which these were widely used by the learners to record progress is not clear; however, it should be borne in mind that learners' experiences were already being monitored in depth, so they may have felt it unnecessary to keep an additional record.

There was agreement by both the Steering Group and the consultation group that **recognition of learner achievement is important, although this does not necessarily imply certification**. The new system being developed by the DfES as part of the National Languages Strategy will allow recognition of progress in language learning at an earlier stage than is currently feasible and should be a significant factor both in the organisation of language provision at beginner level and in motivating learners.

Retention

> "I haven't actually completed the course but I feel it's a course you can complete at your own speed."

Retention rates in traditional language learning classes have been a cause for concern for some time, and it was anticipated that retention rates would be positively influenced by the flexibility of the hybrid model. The fact that this appeared not to be the case prompted wide discussion of the issue and, given the evidence, **a questioning of the use and negative overtones of the term 'dropout', since many learners did not interpret their behaviour in this way. Rather than having 'dropped**

out', several had, for pragmatic reasons, decided to put their learning on hold – encouraged to do so by the flexible nature of the course. Several experienced adult educators commented that, at beginner level, many adult language learners seem content with relatively small chunks of language learning, and are happy to come back for more at a later date. The hybrid model seems to be more able to accommodate this pattern of learning.

Issues relating to ICT

"I had no knowledge whatsoever of computers when I started the course, but the Centre has tutors on site for information. This was good, but having no-one on site that knew of the specific programme we were doing has made the course difficult at times."

The project team was aware that a lack of e-skills (i.e. competence in using ICT) might adversely affect learning outcomes. The consultation group commented that, in the longer term, the Basic Skills agenda should lead to a higher level of e-skills nationally but that, in the short term, a balance needs to be struck between learners' technical skills and the course they are taking.

"I personally think we need a kind of 'filter', some 'requirements' people need… to be able to do this kind of course. It's not good if we waste a great deal of time (especially at the beginning) explaining how email and the internet in general works..." [Tutor]

To try to offset any imbalance during the Spanish Steps course, learners were given an induction pack at the start, including a BBC WebWise CD-ROM, although it is not clear how effectively the packs were used. Some centres were able to offer all learners an ICT induction session, with ICT tutor support on site, at various times before their first meeting with the Spanish tutor, and this proved to be effective. **The introduction of an initial session to gauge the e-skills of potential learners, followed by an ICT induction programme to equip them with the necessary ICT skills and information, could make all the difference to the success of subsequent language learning**. Increased confidence/competence in ICT skills could then be an additional transferable learning outcome on completion of the Spanish Steps hybrid course.

Early feedback from tutors indicated technical difficulties being experienced both in centres and by learners at home, due to the particular demands of the multi-media Spanish Steps website and the CheshireNetword materials. This highlights the dilemma of producers, who are encouraged to develop "high quality, well-designed materials, which make effective use of sound and pictures as well as text"[16] – which users are keen to use but then often fail to access because of the basic nature of their hardware and internet connections. During the courses, where tutors or ICT staff were not able to resolve problems, learners were encouraged to email the BBC languages website for assistance. The BBC was aware of the difficulties some website users were experiencing in downloading 'plug-ins' and had already created 'low tech' alternatives, but these were less attractive to learners.

[16] http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/Dist_Electronic_Group.pdf

During the prototype courses, some learners reported problems stemming from lack of facilities in local centres to listen to sound files or to practise speaking. **Such issues, specific to language learning, will need to be resolved by community learning centres and libraries if, as seems likely, e-language learning emerges as a popular, appropriate next step for learners who have mastered basic ICT skills and are ready to put them into practice**.

> "It would have been good if I could speak to it (the website) and check my pronunciation. One of my grandsons tried the French Steps which he thought was good."

Hybrid course structure

> "Everybody has enjoyed the course a lot. We are meeting again... going to a Spanish tapas bar to practise what they have learnt. It has been great and the atmosphere in the class was wonderful." [Tutor]

The course structure aimed to strike a balance between having too few meetings of learners and their tutor – and risking that the learners would lose motivation or not have the self-discipline to continue their studies, and too many – reducing flexibility which was, after all, one of the key components of the model. **Experience showed that it would have been a good idea to define the dates of the classroom sessions in advance**: leaving them open to negotiation between the tutor and the learners proved to be very problematic.

The evaluation showed that the tutors were very proactive in contacting their learners but that managing a hybrid learning group requires tutors to have a specific blend of skills. One of the tutors communicated difficulties in "managing a group that you did not meet very often and therefore did not get to know so quickly".

Learners proved very reluctant to contact the tutor between face-to-face sessions.

> "They didn't 'use' me a lot but they knew they could, and that back-up 'relaxed' them a bit, at least they knew they wouldn't get stuck if they didn't want to (just an email away, as I say!)." [Tutor]

At the consultation seminar, examples were offered showing that this reluctance was not confined to this project, nor indeed to adult learners. However, it emerged that additional problems arose in this case because many of the learners were not confident email users and did not use it routinely in their everyday lives. Neither did they feel they knew the tutor well enough. **It was suggested that, if the number of face-to-face sessions early on in the course were increased, it would help to build a sense of community within the group before the start of the remote learning**. Learners who had had time to get to know the tutor and each other would be more likely to make contact between sessions. This would also provide more time to pre-empt potential technical issues.

The consultation seminar discussed the issue of online communities in language teaching and learning and the extent to which chat rooms and message boards might be appropriate. The development of online communities is dependent on a range of factors, not least having powerful 'drivers' to encourage online communication and facilitate knowledge sharing. Adults not used to participating in an online community are not likely to gravitate towards them for learning purposes. And, although they are of value to more advanced language learners, who can use them to communicate in the language with native speakers and to improve writing skills, they tend to be less immediately relevant in this sense to beginners. The usefulness of online communities of tutors has great potential for staff development and it would be useful to learn from existing email networks for language teachers such as Lingu@net[17] or Netword forum[18].

Staff development

The four tutors were already interested in, or using aspects of, technology to support their teaching before being recruited for the hybrid courses. They had also attended a day's training in the Brasshouse Centre in September 2002, where they were able to discuss their perceptions of hybrid language learning and familiarise themselves with the Spanish Steps course and the additional materials *A Step or Two More*.

> "CheshireNetword exercises were very well accepted, … and students found them particularly useful because they are directly related to the Spanish Steps website." [Tutor]

However, it became clear that there was a lot still to be learnt about the crucial role of the tutor on hybrid language learning.

> "I realised I wasn't exactly sure what was expected of me as tutor...
> I missed the face-to-face contact. It's difficult to measure how much time I spent as it was very 'bitty'." [Tutor]

Tutors running a hybrid course need a wide range of skills: in addition to the interpersonal and facilitation skills required in the classroom, they need good ICT skills and an understanding of the specific issues relating to supporting distance learning. It was noted at the consultation seminar that funded programmes are running to update teachers' ICT skills, but that many still lack confidence in the use of ICT. Tutors are likely to need specialist training in the other aspects of e-learning and hybrid learning, e.g. strategies to enable them to engage and retain students and help them to recognise and counteract any negatives likely to arise. It was also noted that the Learning and Skills National Learning Network (NLN) has mentors who have both subject matter expertise and ICT skills and can advise on the use of online resources. To date, they work mostly in key skills and

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[17] http://www.linguanet.org.uk
[18] http://www.mailbase.org.uk/lists/netword-forum/

vocational skills – and languages are not represented. However, **the NLN mentoring scheme could prove to be the ideal structure to provide the necessary support for tutors delivering hybrid language courses.** It could also support centres by providing guidance to ensure that they recruit tutors with the right balance of skills.

Issues relating to policy

The issue of funding arose time and again during the project and it became apparent that, with recent changes to funding mechanisms in the post-16 sector, perceptions differ as to the options available to those who might wish to build on the model and offer hybrid language courses in the future.

The recommendations from the Learning and Skills Council's Distributed and Electronic Learning Group in this area specifically state: **"The LSC's funding system should allow for non-formula funding streams, managed by local LSCs, to build capacity, target resources where most effective, encourage e-learning development and fill gaps."**[19] There is no reason to suppose that the method for calculating the appropriate funding level for a hybrid language course would be very different from hybrid courses in other disciplines.

Providing evidence of learning is a key factor. The Steering Group was advised that **unaccredited courses, delivered as part of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision, are eligible for funding by the LSC**. However, although accreditation is not a requirement, the Common Inspection Framework, operated by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, presupposes that **evidence of learner achievement should be demonstrable – whether by formal accreditation or by a robust learning outcomes procedure**.

Phased in from 2003/04, LEA services will, like FE colleges, receive a proportion of their funding against demonstrable achievements – providing an incentive to have in place a means of recording achievement. The European Languages Portfolio, co-ordinated in the UK by CILT[20], could offer the mechanism for this, and it is expected that the new recognition scheme for languages, outlined in the National Languages Strategy and to be trialled from September 2003, will also offer accreditation and certification opportunities hitherto unavailable.

Evidence of achievement should be linked to identifying progression routes from any future hybrid course for beginners to other language learning opportunities. It is likely that the new recognition scheme will help in national and local mapping to support learners in making an informed choice if they wish to progress.

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[19] http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/Dist_Electronic_Group.pdf
[20] http://www.cilt.org.uk/projects/europortfolio.htm

Conclusion

The project detailed in this report was experimental, relatively small-scale and offered in Spanish only. It came across a number of barriers in attempting to introduce more flexibility to adult language learning – yet has attracted widespread support for the concept of hybrid language courses, not least from those involved in the delivery.

The project provided a major learning experience for all concerned, and the knowledge and information gained offer a sound basis for including languages in mainstream Learning and Skills Council development of hybrid learning.

Some of the lessons learned support and strengthen existing knowledge and current research. Attempting to widen participation by offering innovative provision will require innovative recruitment procedures. Public learning centres offering language courses will need to ensure facilities for listening and speaking. Learners need at least a minimum level of e-skills to cope with an e-language course. Sophisticated multi-media online materials are less effective when accessed with slow internet connections.

Some have a clear parallel with traditional language provision for adults. Pre-course information and guidance has to be concise, clear and available. Tutors need high-quality training opportunities and support structures. Equipment must be up to date and accessible. Courses designed for absolute beginners are rarely wholly appropriate for those with existing language skills.

Others were less predictable. Flexibility was the driving factor for the hybrid course, yet there was consensus that a series of group face-to-face sessions at the start of the course would have helped to create more cohesive learning communities, better able to benefit from a hybrid language course.

Learning lessons and gathering information constitute valuable exercises in themselves. However, changing the status quo needs application of that learning and information. All concerned with the project agreed that hybrid learning has considerable potential to enhance the languages provision for adults. Making hybrid courses widely available would require innovative rethinking of systems and structures, including developing new training courses for language tutors (ideally themselves following a hybrid model), integrating languages into the National Learning Network mentor scheme, linking into national e-learning development to iron out institutional barriers to flexibility, and using the European Portfolio and the new languages recognition system to record learners' progress.

All were also in agreement that this is a feasible proposition. It would need leadership and collaboration by a range of national organisations. The National Languages Strategy has called on all stakeholders to play their part in building the success of the Strategy. There is an opportunity here to do just that.

Annex 1: The Project team

Project management team

Alwena Lamping currently co-ordinates the Nuffield Languages Programme, having been a member of the Nuffield Inquiry and joint editor of its report *Languages: the next generation*. She is a specialist in adult language learning, and her experience includes teaching, curriculum management and staff/curriculum development. She has published a variety of learning materials, covering a range of media and languages, as well as publications relating to staff development. She was a member of the Languages National Steering Group.

Joan Keevill was Manager of the Project. She is currently Interactive Learning Adviser in BBC Training & Development, where her role is to identify learning objectives for online and hybrid learning courses being developed for all BBC staff. Previously, Joan worked on the BBC languages website. She has recently completed a CIPD/Sheffield College Certificate in Online Learning course.

David Wilson is Executive Producer for Languages, BBC Factual & Learning. Director/producer of many television language series for adults, and editor of associated books and other materials – including A Vous la France!, España Viva, México Vivo and The French Experience – David is now responsible for this area of the output. He created the BBC languages website in 1996 with Joan Keevill and maintains involvement in online and interactive development.

Members of the Steering Group

Chris Ball coordinates the CILT Netword group for Cheshire and edits www.cheshirenetword.org.uk, the virtual staffroom for language tutors in adult and continuing education. She has considerable experience of teaching, assessing and supporting French and Spanish learners and of designing high quality teaching materials. She regularly leads staff development workshops on adult language teaching.

Chris Fairlamb is Curriculum Co-ordinator at Mid Essex Adult Community College, one of nine former 'external institutions' maintained by Essex County Council, serving Brentwood, Billericay and Ongar. She co-ordinates the languages curriculum which provides 42 courses at various levels in French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish.

Dr Henriette Harnisch has been teaching languages in this country for over a decade, during which time she has developed programmes and materials for a variety of target groups. Since 1999 she has been Head of Languages at the Birmingham Brasshouse Language Centre, and within this role has managed all aspects of curriculum and staff development for a busy and vibrant department.

Val Lewis is Development Officer for Cheshire ICT Learning Centres. Working on behalf of Cheshire Learning Partnership and Cheshire County Council's Adult and Community Learning team, Val has the remit of supporting the development of the 22 community-based ICT learning centres across Cheshire. Her role includes encouraging centre workers to network, share success, ideas and information, and learn from each other to develop a provision that meets local needs.

Judith Summers has held senior positions in further and adult education and is a former Chair of NIACE. She has a long-standing interest in adult learning policies at national and international levels. She was a member of the Kennedy Committee on widening participation and in 2001 was the co-author of a study for the European Union on adult learning projects in the Socrates programme. She is a consultant working with Cheshire County Council Adult and Community Learning and others, and writes on developments in adult learning.

Alistair Tranter has been involved in the management, development and delivery of adult and community learning for about thirty years. He has held posts as principal of an adult education college; as head of faculty in a college of tertiary, further and higher education; and as an LEA adviser and Inspector. He has contributed to many task/advisory/steering groups with organisations such as the Basic Skills Agency, NIACE, OFSTED, FEFC and the local Learning Partnership and Learning & Skills Council. In March 2002 he retired as the County Adult Education Manager with Cheshire County Council. He was appointed to the Cheshire and Warrington Learning and Skills Council in November 2002.

Mick Webb is Editor of the BBC languages website. His responsibilities include development of broadband and interactive TV as well as the Languages narrowband site. His previous experience spans many years as Radio and TV producer of factual and educational programmes, including flagship BBC brands such as The French Experience, España Viva and Italianissimo. Before that he was a teacher of MFL and EFL.

Annette Wiles is a member of the BBC's Education Policy team, with a key focus on adult learning. This group has responsibility for monitoring the external education policy arena and advising the BBC on how this affects its education strategy, forming strategic partnerships, as well as supporting the process of gaining editorial and commercial policy approval for new initiatives within the BBC.

The research team

Dr Neil Selwyn is a lecturer in the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences where his research and teaching focus on technology and society. While a lot of his early work concentrated on technology in educational settings he is now moving towards a wider critique of technology across a range of public and private settings. He is currently researching the role of ICT in adults' everyday lives, which is leading to a range of writing on social exclusion and digital divide(s), public and community access to ICTs, older adults and technology, ICT and self-education/informal learning.

Dr Nina Smalley is currently a Research Associate at the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences. She has previously worked for the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Glamorgan and the Trinity/Mirror Group in the areas of ICT, education and social inclusion. Her recently completed PhD research examined the use of simulations and role-playing in secondary school settings. She has edited and written a number of books and articles on education, technology, simulation and gaming.

Annex 2: The course providers

The **Brasshouse Language Centre** in the centre of Birmingham is a one-stop shop catering for all adults' language needs. It offers part-time daytime, evening and weekend courses from beginners to post-degree levels. It encompasses MFL, EFL, Business Language Services and Translation, Interpreting and Access to Information Services. The MFL department teaches around 5000 adults every year in one of the 28 languages taught. The Birmingham Spanish Steps classroom sessions were offered on Tuesday evenings between 6.30 and 9.30 p.m.

The **Cheshire centre**, called **No Limits**, is situated in a rural community in South West Cheshire and is based on the same site as a high school, which has been a specialist Language College since 1996. The No Limits Centre caters for all adults in the community within a 15 mile radius of the centre. It offers 60 PCs on site with radiowave technology and outreach to up to 12 community and village halls to increase the opportunities for access to ICT for all. The ethos of the centre is to promote the widest possible range of learning opportunities through ICT to the community, thus removing the barrier of rural isolation from many aspects of learning. The Cheshire Spanish Steps classroom sessions were offered on Thursday evenings between 6 and 9 p.m.

Mid Essex Adult & Community College is one of nine Essex County Council maintained former 'external institutions', serving Brentwood, Billericay and Ongar. Apart from the main Bishops Hill site, the college offers provision mostly in community locations - mainly schools and village halls. They have in excess of 7,500 enrolments annually and offer a languages curriculum of 42 courses in French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish. All language programmes run for 30 weeks for two hours per week and are accredited; learners can progress from complete beginners to advanced. The Mid Essex Spanish Steps classroom sessions were offered on Saturday mornings between 9.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m.

The **Stoke on Trent BBC Open Centre** is located inside BBC Radio Stoke, in Hanley town centre, and is open daily to members of the public as a drop-in learning centre. There are 16 computers in total, including 4 in the reception area where people can come in and surf the net for free, and 12 in the adjoining Learning Centre where people can sign up for all sorts of courses ranging from 'Computers for Beginners' to learning how to create their own website. They also run a variety of creative taster sessions, usually on a Wednesday afternoon, where learners get the chance to try out something a little bit different, like building robots or gardening with Alan Titchmarsh. BBC Open Centres aim to connect closely with the community and offer better value for licence fee payers. The Stoke Spanish Steps classroom sessions were offered on Thursday afternoons between 2 and 5 p.m.

Annex 3: Sample paperwork for the prototype courses

An induction pack was distributed to the learners. It contained:

- general information about the Spanish Steps course
- contact details
- a BBC WebWise CD-ROM
- guidelines on how to make the most of the course
- a learning log to keep track of progress

The guidelines and the learning log are reproduced on the following three pages

How to succeed at e-language learning

- Set aside time for your Spanish and try to stick to your plan. It's easy to let time slip by and not get around to logging on. As you get used to the course, you're likely to find yourself managing your learning better and better.

- Be realistic. Learning a new language takes time and practice; so don't expect to be fluent by Christmas.

- A few minutes every day is more effective than a long spell online once in a while. It can be very tiring working at the computer for long periods, more so if you're not used to it.

- Don't expect to remember all the Spanish words and phrases after working through a unit once. You may well need to go over something several times before it sinks in.

- Say things out loud when you practise your Spanish. It's much more effective than saying them in your head … and it doesn't matter if no one's listening.

- Communicate regularly - for example, by email - with your tutor, even if you think that you have nothing particular to say. No communication (silence) might be taken to mean, for example, that you're ill or not able to log on for some reason.

- Try to arrange to make regular contact with (some of) the other learners. You'll gain a lot from the contact with someone in the same situation as yourself.

- Don't compare your progress with anyone else's. We all learn in different ways.

- Don't worry about making mistakes – you'll learn from them and you'll make progress much more quickly if you have a go.

- Use whatever method works for you when you're learning and remembering new words and phrases. But be open to new ideas and, if you find something that works really well, share it with the others.

- Expect to understand more than you can say yourself. That's quite normal.

- Think about how you'll organise your work. You might want to print out some pages to study later or for reference (and also to give you a break from reading off the screen).

- Ensure you're comfortable at the computer. Adjust the height of your chair if possible so that your hands, wrists and arms are relaxed, your elbows form a right angle and your level of sight falls just below the top of the monitor.

- Find out if there's someone at the centre who can help you with tasks that are new to you. It's very frustrating if you hit a technical problem on your own and don't know how to resolve it.

And finally …

- Enjoy your course. We hope you'll be delighted with the progress you make.

The Spanish Steps Learning Partnership

Learning in this way relies on a working partnership between learner and tutor.

Do try to bear in mind the following guidelines:

The learner should:

- keep in regular contact with the tutor as agreed, to feed back on progress
- take advantage of the opportunities for learning and practice offered by the tutor
- keep a learning log
- complete the questionnaires from the researcher
- contact the tutor in the case of any problems with the course or with any queries related to learning
- continue with the course to the end of the period agreed

The tutor will:

- reply to any communication within 48 hours wherever possible
- make regular contact by email as agreed
- provide support and guidance to enable you to complete your course within the agreed time
- provide opportunities to practise and consolidate the language learned
- help to evaluate and record the progress made
- maintain confidentiality about anything that is discussed, or that takes place during the course

Learning Log (Page 1 of 6)

This allows you to keep a record of the Spanish Steps units as you work through them. The 'Comments' column is for you to jot down any thoughts at all you might have about the unit – but you may find that you don't need to fill it for each unit.

	Date completed	Time spent online	Comments
Stage 1: Finding your feet			
Taking a taxi from the airport to the city centre			
Booking into a hotel			
Ordering a snack and a drink in a cafeteria			
Finding and checking out tourist attractions			
Challenge			

Acknowledgements

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"The ability to understand and communicate in other languages is increasingly important in our society and in the global economy. Languages contribute to the cultural and linguistic richness of our society, to personal fulfilment, mutual understanding, commercial success and international trade and global citizenship.

Our vision is clear – we must provide an opportunity for early language learning to harness children's learning potential and enthusiasm; we must provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities to equip our young people with the skills they need to access opportunities in the world of travel and work; we must provide opportunities for lifelong language learning; we must recognize language skills as central to breaking down barriers both within this country and between our nation and others.

That is why we must transform our country's capability in languages."

Languages for All: Languages for Life
A Strategy for England

Department for Education and Skills

e-language
learning for adults
a hybrid model

The final report of a joint project by BBC Factual & Learning and the Nuffield Languages Programme. Compiled by Alwena Lamping and Joan Keevill, and incorporating a summary of *An evaluation of the BBC/Nuffield prototype hybrid courses,* written by Neil Selwyn and Nina Smalley.