



A Learning Ladder for Languages: possibilities, risks and benefits

Report of a feasibility study commissioned by the
Nuffield Languages Programme

June 2002

Executive summary

- In September 2001 the Nuffield Languages Programme commissioned a study into the feasibility of developing a national framework to recognise and define language competence, which would:
 - allow people with, or wishing to acquire, language skills to obtain recognition of their achievement without unnecessary complication;
 - offer a step-by-step approach to language learning;
 - provide benchmarks and points of comparison for learners, employers and providers.

The feasibility study began its work in December 2001, under the guidance of an expert steering group representing a range of sectors and relevant national bodies. The working title chosen for the framework was 'Learning Ladder for Languages' (LLL).

The key conclusions of the feasibility study are:

- A Learning Ladder for Languages (LLL) could motivate, inform and reward learners of all ages and backgrounds, particularly in the early stages of learning. The potential benefits to be derived from 'step by step' approaches are as valid today as when they were recognised by the graded objectives schemes developed in the UK twenty years ago.
- None of the current schemes of public assessment of language competence combines all the required criteria: high profile, national/international credibility, flexibility, recognition of basic competence and user-friendliness.
- A LLL should have a clearly articulated and comprehensive vision, within a coherent long-term national strategy for increasing the UK's capability in languages. It should not become a mechanism to aid the 'de-schooling' of languages, as suggested by comparisons with music grades.
- A LLL should have the dual role of profile raising and of assessment. Profile-raising is arguably the more important, since learners have to be recruited before they can be assessed. Investment in promotion must not therefore be an optional extra: a scheme without an integrated and sustained promotional message would be an opportunity lost.
- A LLL initiative should not enter the field of formal qualifications, but operate alongside it by defining levels and equivalences in accessible terms, and by offering informal certification.
- There should be a single generic LLL, expressed in functional 'can do' terms, based on the Council of Europe model to ensure coherence and transparency. Different presentational style and content could be developed for a range of target audiences, such as children to age 14, students 14-19, workplace learners, lifelong learners and speakers of other home languages.
- A LLL should allow for the certification of separable skills such as speaking or reading, alongside the global award of a level to those who satisfy the criteria across the full range of skills.

- Self-assessment should be encouraged in a LLL, with the option of taking a test for those who wish to receive certification.
- The central responsibility for a national LLL initiative lies with government. However, a partnership between government and other bodies including employers would be particularly valuable in profile raising and promotion.
- A central agency would be needed:
 - to provide the detailed definition and description of the levels within the ladder and of the requirements to be satisfied;
 - to provide exemplar materials for assessment;
 - to appoint and endorse local assessors (mainly, but not necessarily exclusively, teachers);
 - to develop training programmes/specifications for use in local training of assessors;
 - to operate a ‘light sampling’ moderation process;
 - to issue and record certificates;
 - to promote the language learning message at all levels.

The scheme should provide for all languages for which there is demand, by appointing assessors who can assume responsibility for designing and conducting assessments in line with a generic specification provide by the central LLL agency.

- The long-term vision is a national system that provides a common structure for languages at all levels. Achieving this vision must necessarily be pursued in stages, and the logical first step should be to address some well-defined and immediate needs on a pilot basis, focusing on the early stages of learning a new language. This would require the government:
 - to organise the development of levels definitions for initial steps to reach the CEF basic level;
 - to produce versions for young learners and for adults;
 - to conduct pilot schemes in schools (primary and secondary) and for adult learners, with independent monitoring and evaluation.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Nuffield Languages Inquiry concluded that competence in other languages was a key skill, and argued for the development of *'a unified national standards framework for languages, based on the Council of Europe model...which would introduce coherence and transparency into the system, and provide benchmarks and points of comparison for learners, employers and providers'* [Languages: the next generation, p28]. This national framework *'should be couched in terms which are intelligible to non-specialist users, and should in particular be flexible enough to recognise partial competences and the small steps of achievement at beginner level'* [idem, p77].
- 1.2 The Inquiry went on to recommend a revival and reinvigoration of the principles and practice associated with the widespread use of graded objectives in the UK in the late 1970s and the 1980s [idem, p 78], and which had a positive impact on both learners and on the professional development of teachers. This approach, which was initially centred largely on the schools sector, was restricted at the time of the introduction of the National Curriculum, when only a limited number of national qualifications was approved for use in schools. This setback also curtailed the spread of graded objectives approaches into areas such as adult learning.
- 1.3 The Steering Group of the Nuffield Languages Programme commissioned a study to assess whether and in what conditions a national initiative to establish a 'Learning Ladder for Languages' (LLL) could be realistically envisaged. The feasibility study, which began its work in December 2001, was conducted by a part-time coordinator under the guidance of an expert steering group representing a range of sectors together with relevant national bodies. [Annex 1 for list of members].
- 1.4 The feasibility study pursued the following objectives:
- review previous UK and European experience in this field, in order to assess the continuing validity of the graded objectives idea;
 - map the extent to which the need for 'step by step' recognition in the UK, particularly at the beginner and intermediate levels of competence, is met by existing schemes;
 - assess the extent to which a graded objectives scheme could/should relate formally to existing qualifications structures, or should be free-standing and distinctively different;
 - assess likely levels of support from key organisations in the field of assessment and accreditation, from teachers, and from potential sponsors outside education;
 - propose a model or alternative models if such a scheme is judged to be desirable and feasible.

2. Issues explored

The study team identified a series of questions as central to any assessment of feasibility. For each of these questions, the section which follows gives details of the issues raised, the information gathered, the options considered and the conclusions reached.

2.1 What are the potential benefits of a LLL for learners or would-be learners of a new language?

The graded objectives movement (see Para 1.2, above) set out to make language learning:

- more relevant
 - by stressing the ‘real world’ usefulness of language competence in opening doors to new experience;

- more informative
 - by breaking down progression into readily attainable and unthreatening ‘bite-size’ steps;
 - by describing language achievement in terms of ‘I can’ descriptions and levels readily understood by learners;
 - by giving a clearer picture of language competence, more readily understood nationally and internationally, in the context of mobility of employment and study.

- more rewarding
 - by endorsing success through the award of certificates and badges;
 - by giving the learner a measure of ownership and control of the learning process, through an element of self assessment;
 - by achieving public recognition through, for example, press coverage of awards events.

Overall, these effects combined to create a user-friendly and positive approach which was highly motivating. The effect was particularly apparent among school learners, since this is where most of the effort was directed. There was also a strong appeal for adults, many of whom were otherwise likely to bring to their learning memories of past failure in the face of more academic styles of assessment.

The development work associated with graded objectives was well founded in that it involved close contact and collaboration with major long-term development programmes sponsored by the Council of Europe in the field of syllabus definition and levels description for languages – work which has more recently culminated in the Common European Framework of Reference, and the European Language Portfolio.

The feasibility study concludes that the potential benefits to be derived from ‘step by step’ approaches are as valid today as they were twenty years ago. However, it should be stressed that while past experience provides clear evidence of the value of such schemes for beginners or those in the basic stages of learning a language, and particularly for learners of school age, there is less weight of evidence in other sectors. In higher education, for example, where there is a substantial demand for languages among students in other disciplines, the informative value (levels, descriptors) may be slightly more important than some of the other immediate benefits (relevance, rewards).

2.2 Does existing accreditation provide these benefits?

The feasibility study commissioned a mapping exercise [See Annex 2] in order to ascertain to what extent existing national assessment schemes for languages met a range of criteria reflecting the working principles of graded objectives.

Most schemes scored satisfactorily against the following criteria:

- **Clear criteria** - Clear descriptions of what candidates are required to do to achieve an award and levels of performance expected.
- **User-friendly** – clear tasks for assessment with outcomes clearly defined using clear accessible language
- **Reliable and valid** – the assessment/qualification produces consistent results over time and context and the assessment methods used are appropriate for the skill or competence being assessed
- **Clear quality assurance** – there are clear methods of external assessment, moderation or verification procedures governing the qualification or scheme.
- **Covering all skills** (Listening Reading Speaking Writing) – although not all necessarily required for certification, or can be certificated separately.
- **Flexible** – timing for assessment not set, with provision of a variety of techniques for assessment.
- **Manageable for deliverers** – clear procedures with no unnecessary burden of administration.
- **Respect for teachers' professional judgement** – assessment or parts of assessment carried out by teachers.
- **Informative to users** – parents, employers and educational institutions can easily understand what candidates have achieved.
- **Compatible with National/European arrangements** – part of National Qualifications Framework or European Language Standards
- **Clear guidance and training** – written support and guidance and/or training opportunities for deliverers

However, most schemes did not meet the following criteria:

- **High profile** – nationally recognised and widely used.
- **Available for all languages** – including languages beyond the main European and more widely taught non-European languages.
- **Appropriate for all learners** – suitable contexts and range of language for whole age range and variety of learning situations.
- **Clear routes of progression** – covering a number of 'levels' and with routes of progression within the qualification.
- **Formative** – assessment part of teaching and learning; clear goals for next steps provided.
- **Recognition of early stages** – early stages of language learning credited and rewarded.

The feasibility study concludes that while there is a wide range of assessment arrangements for those already learning languages, both at school and beyond, none of the current schemes combines into a single package the essential ingredients identified by the Nuffield Languages Inquiry in its concern for national capability:

- **high profile encouragement to take up languages, coupled with**
- **external rewards and recognition in the early stages,**
- **flexibility of timing of assessment.**

(Ironically, the National Curriculum, which has a high profile, and which incorporates a series of levels, does not provide flexibility by allowing public recognition through GCSE of intermediate grades.)

2.3 What are the potential benefits of a LLL for UK residents whose home language is not English?

The Nuffield Inquiry highlighted the multilingual nature of British society, and recommended measures which would both raise the status of home languages other than English and heighten recognition of the economic and social value which these linguistic resources represent. Government policies on social inclusion also point in the same direction. From the outset the feasibility study therefore adopted the view that any national ladder of competence in languages should aim to be comprehensive in its coverage and to include home languages other than English.

This view has substantial implications if any national scheme is to achieve such an important goal. Three factors in particular need to be taken into account:

- The list of languages to be covered could run into hundreds, given the diversity of home languages within the UK.
- A full range of levels would be required, given the native speaker context, with proportionately more emphasis on higher levels than on beginners or near beginners.
- The profile of competence would need to allow for wide variations between the listening/speaking/reading/writing skills, reflecting different patterns of home language use.

The feasibility study concludes that these complicating factors could be addressed successfully if:

- **a generic model is used (see 2.8 below);**
- **assessment is based on a flexible profile of skills (see 2.9 below);**
- **the LLL covers all levels.**

2.4 Do existing schemes provide for home languages other than English?

Most UK accreditation schemes for languages are designed for candidates learning or using the language as a foreign language. Native speakers of languages other than English are provided for at advanced levels by some qualifications operated by the Institute of Linguists (e.g. in public service interpreting), and the LNTO National Language Standards provide a generic framework which is suitable for the assessment of home languages, but is currently used to provide assessment in only a small number of languages. Speakers of languages other than English make extensive use of mainstream educational examinations (GCSE; AS/A2 level), and in these examinations the range of languages available is fairly wide. However, they are not designed for such use: in particular, they do not provide sufficiently for variable profiles of language competence (e.g. oral competence without written skills).

The feasibility study concludes that speakers of home languages other than English are not served well by the current assessment system in obtaining recognition of their competence in their home language, particularly during mainstream education.

2.5 How should a LLL relate to existing structures of assessment and accreditation?

The assessment of competence in languages is provided for by a range of systems and examining bodies in the UK. The Nuffield Inquiry found that many qualifications in languages were confusing and uninformative about the levels of competence they represented. This issue has been addressed over the last two decades by the Council of Europe, which has conducted a major enterprise to provide a common European framework of reference (CEF) for language qualifications. [It should be noted also that in recent years a National Qualifications Framework has been initiated in the UK, designed to cover all subject areas. However, this initiative is primarily concerned with fixing formal equivalences and with registration of qualifications]

In the light of these developments, it is reasonable to question whether the elaboration of a new range of qualifications for languages, based on a LLL, is needed or can be justified. Mindful of this question, the feasibility study took as its starting point the view that the central role of a LLL was not to offer competing qualifications, but to provide a ladder of levels which would identify broad equivalences with existing qualifications, and which would at the same time seek to define each level in operational terms which would be readily understood by learners and the wider world. The need is not for yet more routes to formal qualification but for mechanisms which will encourage and facilitate access to the first steps in learning a language, and which will provide clear feedback on and recognition of the progress learners make. Time and again, informants from all sectors reiterated this point.

The feasibility study concludes that a LLL initiative should not enter the field of formal qualifications, but operate alongside it by defining levels and equivalences in accessible terms, and by offering informal certification.

2.6 Can a LLL be devised which will be appropriate for all ages and stages?

The feasibility study considered at length whether there should be a single ladder for all learners or a series of ladders for different groups and contexts. If a scheme is to be motivating for the audience it serves, then it must be expressed in terms which are relevant and appropriate. A LLL for children in a primary school must clearly look different from a LLL for other groups such as adult learners or university students. However, these are essentially presentational issues, since the underlying linguistic progression is broadly similar: the essential differences lie in the choice of themes, vocabulary and assessment activities.

The feasibility study concludes that there should be a single generic LLL, expressed in functional 'can do' terms, but with different presentational style and content for a finite range of target audiences, such as children to age 14, students 14-19, workplace learners, lifelong learners and speakers of other home languages.

2.7 What are the likely levels of support in different sectors and stages?

The feasibility study considered the real or potential market for a LLL in different sectors. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of creating new markets by promotion and profile-raising (see Para 2.12 below), the current situation is variable between sectors and stages.

- At Primary School level, the current government proposals to expand provision could lead to a strong demand for the early steps in a LLL.
- In secondary schools, teachers now make constant use of national curriculum levels in their assessments and targets in KS3, and it would be valuable if those levels could be publicly recognised and where appropriate, re-defined in terms of the CEF framework, even though teachers might question the need for new demands on them in the short term.
- Beyond 14, student attainment in languages is mainly related to examination targets, and not to performance criteria in 'can do' terms, except in vocational courses, which follow the lead given by the LNTO in specifying performance in functional terms.
- In Higher Education increasing numbers of students are taking one or two modules of language as credited parts of their degree courses. Whilst it is unlikely that universities would cease to accredit this work within their existing degree schemes, there may be some interest in the concept of a dual form of accreditation within a wider LLL framework.
- In the field of life-long learning, potential demand is complicated by government funding priorities which hitherto have skewed course provision towards vocational qualifications, but there is a substantial audience for a more widely focused LLL, especially among the many learners for whom a formal qualification is not what they are seeking.

The feasibility study concludes that there is substantial potential or latent support for a LLL, but that for the potential support to be converted into demand will require any LLL initiative to be part of a coherent strategy for provision and promotion of language learning.

2.8 How could a LLL provide for a wide range of languages?

The cost and complication of providing for a large number of languages presents a unique problem for assessment/accrediting agencies. Patterns of language use and of language learning mean that only a very small number of 'popular' languages will be economically viable in assessment terms. At the same time, in terms of social cohesion in our increasingly mobile and multilingual settings, it runs counter to national aspirations that assessment should be available only to speakers/learners of those languages for which assessment is economically viable. This is less of a problem for a LLL as proposed here, since the LLL assessment process lies outside the field of formal accreditation. Furthermore, if the LLL is defined not in terms of individual languages, but in generic terms applicable to all languages, it will be possible to appoint and endorse assessors for less commonly taught languages, who in turn could 'translate' the generic specification into assessment tests in the language concerned.

The feasibility study concludes that the aim should be to provide for all languages for which there is demand, by appointing assessors who will assume responsibility for designing and conducting assessments in line with a generic specification provided by the central LLL agency.

2.9 Should competence only be assessed globally, or also by recognition of specific skills such as reading?

One of the central principles of a LLL is that it should be able to recognise, reward and give status to all usable achievement in languages. It follows therefore that a LLL should be able to accommodate different profiles of competence, particularly – but not exclusively – where oral/aural skills exist without equally developed skills in writing.

The feasibility study concludes that a LLL should allow for the certification of separable skills, alongside the global award of a level to those who satisfy the criteria across the full range of skills.

2.10 Who should conduct assessment?

It was one of the strengths of the graded objectives movement that assessment was in the hands of the teachers concerned, and there are well-documented benefits from 'grass roots' involvement of this sort. There are, in addition to these benefits, clear gains to be made in cost-effectiveness if the national agency responsible for a LLL can delegate the assessment role to locally recruited and trained assessors. The national agency would have the role of

- selecting and endorsing local assessors;
- providing a detailed specification for their training;
- monitoring their performance through occasional moderation.

The feasibility study concludes that the task of devising and conducting assessment for a LLL should be in the hands of approved assessors, the majority of whom would be teachers.

2.11 What part can/should self-assessment play in the process?

The benefits of self assessment are well known in a variety of learning contexts. If as is proposed in this study, assessment of achievement in a LLL lies outside the field of formal accreditation, the risks associated with self-assessment do not apply. In addition, many learners will wish to assess their level for purely personal satisfaction, without wishing to obtain external LLL certification of their attainment.

The feasibility study concludes that self-assessment should be encouraged in a LLL, with the option of taking a test for those who wish to receive certification.

2.12 What should be the relative roles of assessment and profile-raising in a LLL initiative?

The need to increase public awareness of the importance of language learning for our personal and national well-being was a central theme in the Nuffield Language Inquiry's report and subsequently in government policy statements. A unique feature of the LLL as considered here is that its purpose is both to assess achievement and - arguably more important still - to make a direct contribution to national capability in languages by encouraging new learners as well as existing ones. With these linked objectives in mind, it would also be vital that the levels in a LLL should be readily understandable by the general public, as is the case with music grades, which have a wide currency. It follows that any investment in developing a LLL must be at least matched in resource terms by expenditure on high quality promotion and profile-raising.

The feasibility study concludes that a LLL should have a dual role, of profile raising and of assessment. A LLL which did not form part of an integrated and sustained promotional message would be an opportunity lost.

2.13 Who should take responsibility for such an initiative?

The feasibility study suggests that the fundamental "structure" of a national strategy for languages needs to comprise 3 strands:

1. Ensuring access to language learning, including appropriate goals (e.g. qualifications etc.) at all levels and in different contexts (primary and secondary schools, colleges, HE, adult education, workplaces etc.).
2. Promoting language learning at all levels (through both statutory and non-statutory means).
3. Providing incentives for both learners and providers.

In the languages annex to the 14-19 Green Paper, the Government declares an intention to develop a national accreditation scheme based on what appears to be a concept similar to the LLL considered here. It is clear therefore that government accepts responsibility for (1) above (at least in the public sector). The feasibility assumes that government has at least a partial responsibility for (2) above, and may wish to assume at least a partial responsibility for (3).

The feasibility study concludes that the central responsibility for a national LLL initiative lies with government. However, there are important potential advantages to be achieved by involving outside bodies (see Para 2.14).

2.14 Is there a role for bodies outside government?

Given the central importance of profile raising, there is a clear case to be made for seeking the active involvement (e.g. as sponsors) of bodies wishing to support the promotion of language skills. The list could include the cultural services of other countries, the European Union and the Council of Europe, charitable foundations and associations. Sponsorship from the business world would be critically important in sending messages about the economic value of languages.

The feasibility study concludes that a partnership between government and other bodies would be particularly valuable in profile raising and promotion.

2.15 What material/professional support would be required for the assessment process?

By using the less costly certification route rather than formal accreditation it would be possible to keep administrative and related costs relatively low. Most costs would be met centrally, but some income could be derived from making a small charge for certificates.

The feasibility study concludes that a central agency would be needed:

- to provide the detailed definition and description of the levels within the ladder, and of the requirements to be satisfied;
- to provide exemplar materials for assessments;
- to appoint and endorse local assessors (mainly, but not necessarily exclusively, teachers);
- to develop training programmes/specifications for use in local training of assessors;
- to operate a 'light sampling' moderation process;
- to issue and record certificates;
- to promote the language learning message at all levels.

2.16 Should such an initiative be a staged development?

It is implicit in the conclusions so far drawn in this report that a LLL needs to be integrated into a coherent national strategy for provision and promotion of languages in education. Given that this feasibility study is intended to further the agenda set by the Nuffield Languages Inquiry, it adopts as a yardstick the extent to which a LLL could enhance our national capability. It concludes that any scheme for a LLL should start from a

comprehensive rather than a narrow vision. To achieve such an aspiration, covering all ages, contexts and languages, is a major task, which cannot be tackled by short-term measures.

The feasibility study concludes that a LLL should have a clearly articulated and comprehensive vision, within a coherent long-term national strategy for increasing our capability in languages. In this context, the process must necessarily be pursued in stages.

3. The risks

The conclusions of the feasibility study indicate that there is a powerful case to be made for a LLL initiative. However, there are risks, perhaps the greatest of which is to see a Learning Ladder for Languages as a miracle cure. More specifically,

- It would be foolish to ignore the wider framework of European and national strategic thinking within which a LLL should be located. In particular, the UK has contributed consistently to the development of the Council of Europe's work in this field, and this investment should be at the centre of future work.
- The feasibility study proposes a wide-ranging and ambitious initiative, covering all sectors, contexts and languages. There is a major risk of a purely sectional initiative, which will add to the existing patchwork rather than contributing to an eventual clarification.
- Profile-raising is arguably more important than assessment, since learners have to be recruited before they can be assessed. Investment in promotion must not be an optional extra.
- Comparison has been made with music grades. While a LLL initiative can draw valuable lessons from well-tried schemes such as music grades, the parallels are limited. Music no longer has the place it deserves in the educational process, and it would be disastrous for our national capability if languages suffered a similar curricular fate. Until government defines what it means by 'entitlement', this risk remains potentially the most sinister.

4. The next steps

The logical first step would seem to be to focus on the early stages of learning a new language. The feasibility study suggests that government should

1. develop levels definitions for initial steps to reach the CEF basic level;
2. produce versions for young learners and for adults;
3. conduct pilot schemes in schools (primary and secondary) and for adult learners, with independent monitoring and evaluation.

The Trustees of the Nuffield Foundation wish to express their appreciation of the work of the Steering Group and of all those organisations and individuals who contributed to the consultation process which was a central feature of this feasibility study.

Annex 1

Steering Group

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Annex 2

Audit of existing language qualifications

Introduction

The following report covers the mapping and audit of a range of qualifications or assessment schemes for languages available in the UK. The range includes general, vocational and vocationally related qualifications covering different target audiences. The evidence reviewed included specifications, websites and in some cases sample assessment tasks or materials and information provided by the awarding body. There are 17 criteria against which the qualifications have been judged. In most cases the judgement is clear, particularly if the qualification has been accredited into the UK National Qualifications Framework. However, in some cases, the information has not been readily available or specimen assessment tasks have not been reviewed and where it is not possible to judge whether a particular qualification has met the criteria or not, this is indicated by 'NI' (no information). Otherwise a tick indicates that according to the information reviewed, the qualification meets the criteria. The definitions of the criteria are outlined on page 2 and there follows a brief description of each qualification indicating how the qualification does or does not meet the criteria.

Criteria Definitions

1. **High profile** – Nationally recognised and widely used.
2. **Clear criteria** - Clear descriptions of what candidates are required to do to achieve an award and levels of performance expected.
3. **Available for all languages** – languages available beyond the main European and more widely taught non-European languages.
4. **Appropriate for all learners** – suitable contexts and range of language for whole age range and variety of learning situations.
5. **User-friendly** – clear tasks for assessment with outcomes clearly defined using clear accessible language
6. **Reliable and valid** – the assessment/qualification produces consistent results over time and context and the assessment methods used are appropriate for the skill or competence being assessed
7. **Clear quality assurance** – there are clear methods of external assessment, moderation or verification procedures governing the qualification or scheme.
8. **Covers all skills** – Listening Reading Speaking Writing, although not all necessarily required for certification or can be certificated separately.
9. **Clear routes of progression** – covers a number of 'levels' and has routes of progression within the qualification.
10. **Formative** – assessment is part of teaching and learning and provides clear goals for next steps.
11. **Flexible** – timing for assessment not set, with provision of a variety of techniques for assessment.
12. **Recognition of early stages** – early stages of language learning credited and rewarded

13. **Manageable for deliverers** – clear procedures with no unnecessary burden of administration.
14. **Respect for teachers' professional judgement** – assessment or parts of assessment carried out by teachers.
15. **Informative to users** – parents, employers and educational institutions can easily understand what candidates have achieved.
16. **Compatible with National/European arrangements** – part of National Qualifications Framework or European Language Standards
17. **Clear guidance and training** – written support and guidance and/or training opportunities for deliverers

Description of the qualifications/assessment schemes included in the audit

Entry level Edexcel (Edexcel Foundation)

Entry level qualification available in French German and Spanish at three levels (equivalent 1,2 and 3 of the National Curriculum). Although designed primarily for use in schools and colleges and linked to the National Curriculum, it is sufficiently flexible in skill coverage and contexts to be suitable for a range of learners. All assessment tasks are externally set, marked by teachers and externally moderated, with a small coursework requirement, which is set by teachers.

Detailed information is available in specification and associated documentation.

Entry level AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance)

Entry level qualification available in French German and Spanish at two levels (equivalent 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum). Although designed primarily for use in schools and colleges and linked to the National Curriculum, it is sufficiently flexible in the contexts to be suitable for a range of learners. All reading tasks are externally set, marked by teachers and externally moderated. All speaking and listening tasks are set and marked by the teacher and externally moderated. Detailed information is available in specification and associated documentation.

Entry level OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)

Entry level qualification available in French German and Spanish at three levels (equivalent 1,2 and 3 of the National Curriculum). All tasks are externally set, marked by the teacher and externally moderated. The range of topics is linked to the National Curriculum, including the topic of school, and are all a requirement to achieve the qualification. Detailed information is available in specification and associated documentation.

Certificate in Business Language Competence (CBLC) OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)

This qualification covers a number of levels of which Entry level and levels 1, 2 and 3 have been accredited for the NQF. Languages available are French, German, Italian and Spanish. The Entry level is available in Russian and Japanese by special arrangement. The assessment is competence based in a business context, with clear assessment objectives and performance criteria for each element. The qualification is externally assessed by the awarding body, although timing is flexible. Detailed information is available on the OCR website and in associated documentation.

General Certificate of Secondary Education GCSE OCR/AQA/Edexcel, WJEC, CCEA)

GCSE covers levels 1 and 2 of the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) and is graded A* to G, depending on the tier entered. Examinations are all set in June and are externally set and marked, although in some languages there is the option of written coursework as an alternative to the writing examination. Languages covered are French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Urdu, Bengali, Portuguese, Dutch, Persian, Turkish, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Punjabi, Polish, Gujarati, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Irish, Welsh. Welsh Second Language. Some topic areas are specifically aimed at 16 year old school students and not necessarily relevant to the full range of learners. The GCSE is also available as a short course in French, German and Spanish, which has half the value of a full GCSE and covers fewer topics, although requires the same levels of language. Certification/examination is available in the summer only. Detailed information is available in specifications and associated documentation.

GCSE modular AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance)

This GCSE covers levels 1 and 2 of the NFQ and is available in French German and Spanish. Some assessments of speaking and writing are marked by the teacher. Other tests are all externally set and marked and carried out at set times over a two year period. Topic areas are identical to the AQA linear specification. Final certification/examination is available in the summer only. Detailed information is available in specification and associated documentation.

GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) Language Units AQA Edexcel OCR WJEC

The units cover levels 1 and 2 of the NFQ and are available in French German Spanish and Welsh. The units are designed for pupils in Key Stage 4, are linked to the National Curriculum Programme of Study and are the equivalent of a GCSE short course in size and range of language required. The units, which make up the whole qualification can be certificated separately. Certification/examination is available in the summer only. They are currently in the process of being revised to bring them in line with revisions to other KS4 qualifications for first examination in 2005. Detailed information is available in specifications and associated documentation.

NVQ Units (specifically OCR, but offered by a number of awarding bodies following the same criteria

The NVQ units cover levels 1-4 of the NQF and are available in French, German, Spanish, Italian, English, Welsh and Irish (other languages may be offered by other awarding bodies). They conform to the LNTO (Languages National Training Organisation) Language Standards 2000. The qualification is designed for accrediting language in the workplace in all four skills and is assessed in real or simulated work situations. Candidates can receive certification for the whole qualification, or may be certificated at individual unit level. Assessment takes the form of a portfolio of evidence, assessed by the teacher and externally verified. Detailed information is available in specifications and associated documentation.

Vocational Certificate in Education (VCE) Units (specifically OCR, but offered by a number of awarding bodies all following same criteria

These qualifications are level 2 of the NQF, graded A to E and are available in French German and Spanish (other languages may be offered by other awarding bodies) and are aimed at post-16 students, usually as optional units within other level 3 VCEs. The entry profile can be ab initio, post Key Stage 3 or post GCSE G-D. The overall qualification comprises two units: unit 1 listening and speaking with the speaking assessed by the teacher and unit 2 reading and writing with writing assessed by the teacher. The external

assessment and certification are at set times in the year (January and June). Detailed information is available in specifications and associated documentation.

Higher Education Accreditation for languages for non-specialist students (HE)

There is little information available regarding the assessment of less specialised language learning in higher education institutions. The information in this report is based on a survey carried out by The University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) in summer 2000. A wide range of languages is available in different institutions, but the main European languages, with French the highest, are studied by most students. Some institutions use the UK National Language Standards and a small number the Council of Europe system or the FLAW (foreign Languages at Work) scheme. The majority however, use in-house scales. The bulk of less specialist language learning is at the equivalent of GCSE level and with about a quarter reaching the equivalent of A level and some beyond this. The outcome is largely dependent on attainment prior to arriving at university. Languages are studied alongside a range of other subjects, with some courses having specific language linked courses, but the majority being generic courses. The majority of courses are assessed formally with some students studying a language as an optional unassessed extra part of their course.

National Open College Network Qualifications

Language qualifications are offered in a very wide range of languages (more can be made available dependant on demand) for adults in a vocational context. The units (credits) are offered at levels 2 and 3 (Intermediate and Advanced) and are linked to the LNTO standards, covering all four skills with a flexible range of contexts. The delivery and assessment is dependent on the accredited centre delivering the course. More detailed information is available on the Open College Network website.

Institute of Linguists (IoL) Language Services Customised Assessment Scheme

This scheme of assessment is offered by the language services subsidiary of the IoL and is not accredited in the NQF and not therefore eligible for funding. It covers three levels, roughly equivalent to pre GCSE, GCSE and Advanced level and all four skills. Languages available are dependent on the availability of examiners, but no limit is defined. Centres can select the topics, levels, skills and style of assessment. All assessment is externally set and marked, but there is flexibility in the timing. More detailed information is available in associated documentation and from the IoL.

Awarding Body Consortium (ABC) Practical languages Preliminary, Foundation and Intermediate

This qualification is based on a generic scheme of assessment, covering three levels of which the foundation and intermediate level (1/2 and 2) have been admitted to the NQF and the preliminary has been submitted for accreditation. The nature of the scheme means it has been used for a wide range of languages with the possibility of it being available in others, depending on the centre and available appropriate staff for delivery. The scheme is competence based in a largely vocational context and is assessed by teacher and externally moderated by the awarding body, with some awarding body set tasks. Individual credit certification is available for those candidates who do not achieve the full award. Detailed information is available in specifications and associated documentation.

London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Examinations Board (LCCIEB) Languages for Business

The qualification offers 5 levels of competence at Preliminary first, second, third and fourth levels. Levels 1-3 are accredited to the NQF. The qualifications offer candidates external examinations in French German and Spanish in reading and writing skills with optional oral

units at levels 2, 3 and 4. The contexts are based in the world of business with the examinations set by the awarding body with some flexibility in the timing of assessment. Detailed information is available on the LCCIEB website and associated documentation.

European Languages Portfolio

The European Languages Portfolio is a Council of Europe initiative to support language learning. It is linked to Common European Framework of Reference and can be used for any language. It has three sections: The *Passport* to provide an overview of proficiency, the *Language Biography* to assist planning and progress and the *Dossier* to provide evidence of achievement, which can include external qualifications. All models of the European Languages Portfolio must be validated by the Council of Europe to ensure consistency. Two models are currently available in the UK: a Junior model developed by CILT for primary language learners and a model for adults with a vocational bias developed by the European Association for Quality Language Services. Detailed information is available on the Council of Europe website.

A summary grid is included below.

SUMMARY GRID FOR LANGUAGE QUALIFICATION AUDIT

Criteria/Qualifications	Entry Edexcel	Entry AQA	Entry OCR	CBLC OCR	GCSE	GCSE modular	GNVQ Units	NVQ Units	VCE Units	HE	Open College	IoL CAS	ABC	LCCIEB	European Language Portfolio	
1. High profile					✓	✓		✓	✓							
2. Clear criteria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
3. Available for all languages											✓	✓	✓			✓
4. Appropriate for all learners	✓	✓														✓
5. User-friendly	✓	✓	✓	NI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		NI	NI	✓	NI		✓
6. Reliable and valid	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		
7. Clear quality assurance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		NI	✓	✓	✓		
8. Covers all skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
9. Clear routes of progression				✓							✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
10. Formative								✓								✓
11. Flexible	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
12. Recognition of early stages	✓		✓	✓									✓	✓		✓
13. Manageable for deliverers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		NI	✓	✓	NI		✓
14. Respect for teachers' professional judgement	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
15. Informative to users	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		NI	NI	NI	NI		✓
16. Compatible with National/European arrangements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
17. Clear guidance and/or training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		NI	NI	✓	✓		✓