

Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

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The European Council has approved a series of Conclusions regarding the proposed establishment of the “European Indicator of Language Competence”. Recalling the principle that all European languages are, from a cultural point of view, equal in value and form an integral part of European culture/civilisation, the Council reaffirmed that:

- foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and contribute to the competitiveness of the European economy;
- periodic monitoring of performance through the use of indicators and benchmarks is an essential part of the Lisbon process, allowing good practice to be identified with a view to providing strategic guidance and steering for both short and long term measures of the “Education and Training 2010” work programme.

The Council accepts that measures are needed to remedy the current absence of reliable comparative data vis-à-vis foreign language teaching and learning. Any measures used to gather such information, however, must be done through objective tests and they must be delivered in such a way as to ensure the reliability, accuracy and validity of the data.

In its Conclusions the Council also stresses that the development of the Indicator should fully respect Member States prerogative for education and that the Indicator should impose no undue administrative or financial burdens on the institutions concerned. Further, the method for data-gathering should take account of previous work in the international field.

As far as its timing is concerned the Council states that the Indicator should be put in place as soon as possible and that it should be based on common terms of reference – for example, a common set of tests administered to a representative sample of the target population in each of the EU Member States and from a representative sample of pupils.

The Council also invites the Commission to set up, as soon as possible, an Advisory Board (the EILC Advisory Board) whose mandate will be to advise the Commission on matters such as the tender for the creation of the testing instruments, assessing the work of the contractor and the necessary arrangements for data gathering.

The Board will be asked to assist in bringing forward the timetable for work to begin as well as offering a more detailed description of the construction and administration of the tests such as: sample sizes; preferred testing methods; preferred arrangements for administering the tests; and the minimum sample size needed to determine whether a test for a particular language shall be made available to the Member States. The Commission is asked to report back, in writing, to the Council by the end of 2006 on progress.