

National Report (BE) BILC Conference 2007

Languages taught

Belgium offers four different languages in three language centres: Dutch, French, German and English. This report brings English into focus.

New material development and number of graduates

The last 'old style' courses, which were not directly transposable to the standardized NATO qualification system, took place in the spring and the early summer of 2006. They complied with the most urgent statutory needs, but the first hybrid courses, which would trigger a one year transitional period, first cropped up in September and October of that year. They were built upon the council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001), linking it to *STANAG 6001* (2003). Reading-pronunciation shifted to reading-comprehension and listening-comprehension broke away from artificial discourse. Task-based writing and peer writing replaced decisively the superseded writing methods.

Belgium put the *Oxford Placement Test* into use in order to determine the level of the learner prior to a course or an SLP test. An overtaking manoeuvre which started in November 2006 will have led to a quick cross level placement of about one thousand soldiers by May 2007. The Ministry of Defence plans to put all the military to the *Oxford Placement Test* in not too distant future. This shortlist has the great advantage that whenever the necessity of availability occurs, each of these testees can be easily related to his expected level by shifting the testing from post course achievement to more global language proficiency.

To be able to assign both a higher reliability and a true validity to its new testing system, Belgium participated in a BILC Language Testing Seminar in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (GE) in February 2006. Belgium now awards true SLP certificates and during the past year, two hundred and fifty soldiers successfully took a preparatory course to obtain either the SLP 1, 2 or 3 certificate.

Special projects

The teacher training is active on two fronts. To start with, BFLC aims for a pedagogical in-service training. The new approach which consists in both receptive and productive skills requires a readjusting to the problematic nature of teaching and testing and can only thrive within a school in which the educational staff makes up a team of reflective practitioners. These are assumed to be continually working on their learning process and on the improvement of their practice. The revitalised project ‘teaching the teachers’ passes a tailored, workshop-based in-service training to those teachers who are still struggling with the practical integration of more active teaching methods in the classroom. Learning as an (inter)active process of knowledge construction merits particular attention. Our groups differ enormously, depending on the age and the context of the learner, but in spite of these differences, having learners work in groups not only fosters interaction, but at the same time provides opportunities for practicing social skills and to learn from each other.

Secondly, teachers are encouraged to get extra training in Teachers’ Colleges in their neighbourhood. Therefore it may be assumed that the competence for test development is lurking in the different understaffed language centres (e.g. the absence of native speakers to partake in test development).

Quality management

Belgium fine-tuned on the EFQM Excellence Model and put it into use as a management tool. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a critical attitude towards themselves, applying self-evaluation when possible and doing so continuously improve their performance.

Within this framework, the BFLC has an EVALC (consultant) at its disposal for quality control. Initially this consultant systematically checks all global activities, which eventually leads to an understanding of the strong points and the opportunities opposed to the weaknesses and threats within the organization. After having mapped all this processes, attempts are being made to improve them according to the Plan – Do – Check – Act cycle. The implementation of these principles has been adopted for the personnel as well (cf (self-)evaluation, teachers’ training project).

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