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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Survey on

The Provision for English for Speakers of Other Languages and Modern Languages in Further Education

Inspected: April-June 2005

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

PART ONE

ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 Over the last 30 years the Further Education (FE) sector has played an important role in providing education and training for members of all communities in Northern Ireland (NI). Further Education has gained significant experience in enabling all students from diverse cultural, religious, social and economic backgrounds to work and learn together. Equally, the FE sector has played a pivotal role in widening participation, in increasing employability and in improving access to employment among its learners.
- 1.2 This report, on the provision for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Modern Languages, is written against the background of the changing nature and the diverse needs of the workforce in NI. It acknowledges the increased opportunities for employment, travel and socially related mobility in Europe as a whole. The report considers both curricular areas within the wider context of institute development planning.
- 1.3 The implementation of the “Essential Skills for Living” policy in NI, aimed at improving the skills base of individuals and of the local workforce, has coincided with a significant increase in the numbers of migrant workers entering the workforce in NI. Ten accession countries joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004 and workers from many of these states have now entered the NI workforce. These workers contribute positively to the economy. Moreover, these citizens have formed increasingly more visible and willing learning communities in the FE institutes and have brought a welcome richness in cultural diversity to society in NI. At the same time, these learners have

brought a new range of challenges for the sector, namely organisational, social, teaching and learning.

- 1.4 Local learners have benefited from increased opportunities to travel, holiday, work and study in a wider Europe; some have availed of the opportunities offered by institutes to study languages and to develop their language skills in a second or third language.
- 1.5 The FE sector is required to be responsive to the needs of the communities it serves and to align its curriculum to the increased requirements of the local, regional and global economy.
- 1.6 The report is presented in two sections. Section one deals with the provision for ESOL and section two addresses the Modern Languages provision. It has implications for tutors, co-ordinators, middle and senior managers, those who work with and for community support organisations and those who work in strategic partnerships with FE.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a survey of the provision for Modern Languages and ESOL in institutes of further and higher education between April and June 2005.
- 2.2 The survey took the form of an on-line questionnaire, distributed to 16 colleges, of which 15 submitted returns. In addition, the evidence base for the report is supported by findings from visits by inspectors to teaching and learning sessions of modern languages and ESOL in 10 institutes and their outreach centres. During the visits, the inspectors looked at planning, observed teaching and learning sessions, examined learners' work, engaged in dialogue with learners and spoke with tutors and managers about the provision.
- 2.3 Forty-seven visits were made to teaching and learning sessions in ESOL and Modern Languages.

3. MAIN FINDINGS: ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

3.1 STRENGTHS

The main strengths are the:

- ◆ effective partnerships between a majority of institutes, local business and industry, and between a significant minority of community support organisations;
- ◆ high levels of motivation of the majority of the learners and the well-developed learning dispositions of a significant number of the learners;
- ◆ strong ethos of tutor support for the learners and the commitment and hard work of the tutors;
- ◆ improved social confidence and language competence among a majority of those who complete their programme; and
- ◆ increased awareness at senior management level of the requirements the provision in ESOL to meet the social and personal needs of the learners, and the needs of the economy.

3.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The main areas for improvement are the need for:

- ◆ greater strategic planning by management and curriculum leaders, based on liaison with business and industry and appropriate agencies, for the development of the provision for ESOL;
- ◆ further development and implementation of a clearly articulated vision for ESOL and its contribution to the economic, academic, civic and social aims for further education, as set out in FE Means Business (2004);

- ◆ more effective use of a range of assessment strategies and the recording and tracking of learner progress across the provision;
- ◆ more formal and appropriate accreditation that recognises different routes and rates of progression;
- ◆ more suitably qualified tutors, and increased opportunities for appropriate and on-going continuous professional development (CPD) to ensure that tutors can meet more fully the diverse needs of the learners;
- ◆ greater use of differentiation in teaching and learning approaches, and more effective use of Information and Learning Technologies (ILT), to reflect the wide variety of learning dispositions and abilities of the learners;
- ◆ higher rates of retention and achievement; and
- ◆ more rigorous and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the provision by tutors and management.

4. PROVISION AND PROFILE OF ESOL STUDENTS

4.1 The survey of the provision of ESOL was carried out between April 2005 and June 2005. At the time of the survey, the data provided by the institutes indicated that 3,726 ESOL learners were enrolled across 15 FE providers. However, a minority of colleges indicated that accurate data capture in this area is difficult because of the irregular pattern of the enrolments. In addition to the adult learners, there were also 2,056 pupils, for whom English is not the first language, enrolled within schools in NI in 2004; this figure represents an increase of 35.5% on the previous year.

4.2 The learners come from a wide variety of geographical backgrounds. Learners from 45 different countries were enrolled across the institutes.

- 4.3 There has been a significant increase in the number of ESOL learners in the last two years, particularly among learners from the new accession states of Eastern Europe. One institute reported an increase of 461% in ESOL enrolments in the one year period from 2003-04 to 2004-05. The majority of other institutes report increases, although of smaller proportions.
- 4.4 Survey data indicates that migrant workers now form a significant proportion of the ESOL cohort of learners; these learners have become an increasingly visible learning community in the majority of institutes. Data to record and track accurately specific categories of ESOL learners is, however, poorly maintained.
- 4.5 In NI there is now a wider pool of skilled and semi-skilled workers and an increased capacity for jobs.
- 4.6 The survey data indicates that institutes have established industrial and business links across a number of areas. They cater currently for ESOL learners across a wide range of learning settings including textiles, horticulture and farming, as well as local engineering and construction companies, nursing homes, hospitals, primary and manufacturing industries, poultry and meat processing factories and firms, and hospitality industries. In addition, institutes report new links with the National Health Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to provide training in interpreting skills.
- 4.7 English for Speakers of Other Languages learner groups are rarely static or homogeneous. The survey data, revealed that ESOL learners can be characterised in six broad bands, namely:
- i. learners with poor skills in English across the skills range and low levels of general academic achievement across the curriculum in their country of origin;
 - ii. learners with poor skills in English across the skills range and high levels of general academic achievement across the curriculum in their country of origin;

- iii. learners with skills deficits in specific areas of English, such as writing, and high levels of general academic achievement across the curriculum in their country of origin;
- iv. learners with poor skills in English across the skills range and high levels of academic achievement in general third level education;
- v. learners with poor skills in English across the skills range and high levels of achievement in vocational education; and
- vi. learners with under-developed skills in English but with highly developed capacities for learning, and, who have achieved high levels of academic or vocational education in other countries.

4.8 The effective use of focused, individualised learning plans is poor in a majority of institutes. In the majority of cases, these plans do not reflect the learning backgrounds and styles, existing skills, employment record, skills development and learner achievement in first and other languages. Consequently, the setting of learning objectives and the identification of pathways to attainment is also poor in the majority of institutes. The planning for learning in ESOL and the tracking and recording of learning and progression remains significantly under-developed.

4.9 Language can be a barrier to the successful capture of this data and a minority of institutes have responded positively by recruiting reception, interpreting and link staff to assist in this capacity.

5. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

5.1 All FE institutes involved in the survey have been responsive to the growth in ESOL provision, and all provision is inclusive, in that almost all learners who present for enrolment are able to participate.

5.2 The quality of the relationships within the ESOL classes ranges from good to excellent. The tutors are committed to their students and offer

pastoral as well as educational support. Almost all of the learners observed demonstrated a positive attitude to their learning.

- 5.3 The majority of ESOL learners achieve satisfactory standards of work in some components of language development. Standards achieved in reading are satisfactory to good. However, much of the reading material in the classes visited was derived from textbooks, and there was an absence of more contemporary textual material drawn from media or magazine sources. In a majority of the reading activities, the tasks were overly structured; learners would benefit from more imaginative uses of text, including the use of inter-textual stimulus materials.
- 5.4 There is a wide variety in practice within and across the institutes, in respect of the use of the target language. In the majority of sessions visited, there was insufficient emphasis on the development of oral skills and there was little evidence of sustained use of English, even for those who were able to manipulate extended language structures. Effective rehearsal and reinforcement of the language by tutors was not always used to best advantage and, in a significant minority of cases, this resulted in poor progress towards fluency. English for Speakers of Other Languages sessions need to reflect more fully the social nature of language learning. Moreover, tutors should consider the uses and purposes to which learners will put their language skills and to the possibilities for formal and informal learning both inside and outside the classroom.
- 5.5 In the development of writing skills, a majority of the tasks set were narrowly focused and provided few opportunities to develop extended, applied skills.
- 5.6 A significant minority of the organisations visited provide their learners with advice on routes to progression. For example, in one institute out centre, the co-ordinator makes arrangements for the institute's careers and education advice and guidance officer to visit the centre and meet with the learners. Most learners have limited access to independent advice and guidance in order to assist them to make informed choices

on both vocational and ESOL related routes of progression. Routes of progression for ESOL learners beyond level two are very limited and curricular links to vocational programmes are substantially under-developed. In a significant minority of provision, accreditation routes within ESOL are at an early stage of development. A significant minority of institutes indicated they had undertaken internal reviews of the ESOL provision and had identified issues of accreditation and progression.

- 5.7 Across a majority of providers, the retention rates are a cause for concern. The drop-out rate within the provision is frequently high and the attendance patterns are irregular in a significant minority of the sessions visited. These factors can prove very challenging for tutors, particularly those working in partnerships with local business and industry. It is common to find that attendance of ESOL learners is affected negatively by such factors as changes in shift patterns, increased seasonal work requirements, fatigue and family demands, in addition to a mismatch between learners' expectations and needs. At the upper end of this sliding scale, for example, one tutor reported a drop out rate of 97.5%. Difficulties in finding appropriate child care facilities and issues of transport to the main institute campuses also impact adversely on retention.

6. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

- 6.1 All the tutors observed have a keen interest in the learners' work and well-being. The tutors work hard to put their learners at ease and to create a supportive environment that is conducive to learning. However, where initial class sizes prove to be much bigger than anticipated by the tutors, where attendance is irregular, or where group members join and leave mid-way through the course, tutors find it difficult to plan meaningfully and to map progress and achievement.
- 6.2 The learning settings visited included training rooms in local businesses and industries, FE institutes and one community venue. The majority of sessions visited took place in the evening. The quality

of the accommodation for ESOL within the institutes is variable. In one of the sessions visited, learners benefited from a well-equipped Information and Communication Technology (ICT) suite. This facility enhanced the learners' capacity to work at their own pace and to benefit from self-directed learning. Other accommodation, however, made it difficult for the tutor to undertake a range of teaching strategies appropriate to the tasks.

- 6.3 In the community visited, ESOL learners benefited from conversations with the centre co-ordinator in addition to the tutor. In this venue, the opportunities for increased social interaction in an informal setting, coupled with a convivial learning atmosphere, contributed significantly to a positive group learning dynamic and a high rate of retention at 90%. Within this centre, a group of young male learners, traditionally at risk of disaffection from language related study, demonstrated high levels of engagement.
- 6.4 All of the teaching and learning sessions observed were well organised. Useful resources were available to support the teaching and learning activities planned for each session.
- 6.5 Nearly all of the tutors are highly committed to the work that they do, and are well organised for their lessons; they spend a considerable amount of time preparing their work and related tasks. In a minority of cases, however, the aims and objectives of the sessions were too general and clear learning targets and learning outcomes were not well identified. In such cases the planned learning did not take sufficient account of the learners' prior achievements.
- 6.6 Most tutors carry out some form of initial assessment for a majority of their learners on entry to the provision. However, a minority of learners, who join a programme late, frequently do not have the opportunity to participate in initial assessment. Moreover, the attendance patterns and ongoing changes in group compositions impact negatively on formative and diagnostic assessment and on the tutors' recording of assessment in general. The tutors need to be more aware of the need for more rigorous diagnostic assessment to

identify accurately the strengths and areas for improvement in learning. Where initial assessment is carried out, most tutors do not use the findings to plan effectively for learning. In most of the institutes, the monitoring and recording of the learners' starting points and progress is insufficiently rigorous.

- 6.7 The quality of teaching ranged from satisfactory to good in the sessions visited. In the better sessions observed, the tutors used a suitable range of teaching approaches and allowed time for the learners to work independently or in small groups which facilitated peer learning. Where the teaching and learning were good, the tutors had taken account of the profiles of their learners including the age, personality, motivation, previous learning achievements and learning styles and had endeavoured to incorporate suitable learning strategies into their lesson planning and teaching.
- 6.8 Where the teaching was satisfactory, the learners complied passively with the tasks rather than participating actively in their learning. Some of the learning tasks set were narrow and repetitive. In a significant minority of sessions, whole class teaching predominated and little account was taken of the quality of the learners' response. In such cases, there was undue emphasis on task completion, sometimes at the expense of learning. In a significant minority of sessions, little account was taken of the contexts for learning and the uses made by the learners of their new language knowledge. In these cases there were too few opportunities for learners to engage in collaborative learning activities, to work in groups and, through such interactions, to challenge and broaden their social and learning perspectives.
- 6.9 In the sessions visited, the use of ILT was limited. Where ILT was used to assist learners to prepare for on-line tests, learners worked at their own pace and the tutor offered effective individual support. Data from the on-line questionnaire indicates that only a small number of institutes are offering their ESOL learners the opportunity to avail of ICT training in addition to their language studies.

7. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 All relevant leaders and managers within FE are familiar with the increasing demands of this curriculum area and have worked hard to respond appropriately. Eighty per cent of respondent colleges cite new and increased links for ESOL with local business and industry. In order to meet demand, one institute had facilitated weekend provision and three other institutes plan to provide opportunities for weekend study in 2005/06. This growth places increased demands on the staff, and managers need to ensure that all staff are appropriately qualified and supported. Managers report that a review of funding is needed to reflect the changing needs of the ESOL provision.
- 7.2 For a majority of the institutes, the growth in ESOL provision has proved to be a significant staffing challenge. One institute addressed the issue successfully through providing professional development for some of its modern languages staff, and subsequently redeploying them into the curriculum area of ESOL. Other institutes are up-skilling their existing ESOL staff to meet the increased demand.
- 7.3 Many institutes rely on part-time staff who work in relative isolation. Although they have ongoing contact with the institute managers, they have little opportunity for professional development to meet the challenges posed by the ESOL learners. Managers also need to ensure that new staff are supported adequately.
- 7.4 Quality assurance procedures and practices within this curriculum area are insufficiently rigorous in a majority of institutions. There is a lack of data to monitor the retention, achievement and progression rates of learners. Where data exists, there is insufficient evidence that it is analysed and used to effect improvements. Self-assessment processes need to provide more evidence of informed judgements on quality, which, in turn, inform discussion with industrial/business partners, and the planning and future provision.
- 7.5 While managers of the provision have sought to respond to immediate needs on an operational level, the strategic management of growth

and forward planning for future expansion is underdeveloped. Moreover, the planning for ESOL within the overall strategic focus of the institutes needs to be reviewed in terms of the role of FE in supporting the skills agenda, the social cohesion agenda and the needs of the workforce of the 21st century. One-fifth of the respondent colleges have made a start to the process of internal review, resulting in the further expansion of the provision. These institutes plan to offer, for example, a variety of tutor qualifications, family learning programmes, full and part-time intensive ESOL programmes at higher levels. One institute intends to offer Business English for ESOL learners in the academic year 2005-06.

- 7.6 A majority of institutes are beginning also to use the languages of their ESOL learners in their marketing materials; this adds to the ethos of welcome and inclusion. However, institutes need to be more proactive in their quest for market intelligence through partnerships and inter-agency links, so that they may target needs more effectively. A majority of institutes have engaged in activities to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of the ESOL learning community.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The survey of ESOL provision in 15 colleges of Further and Higher Education in NI reveals that the institutes have worked hard to respond to the increased demand for provision. Managers now need to review rigorously the ESOL provision and to take improvement forward at a more strategic level. This review needs to take cognisance of the policy agenda for FE at local level and regional level and of the inter-relationships between the skills agenda and the learning needs of ESOL communities.

9. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 There is a need, at both sectoral level and individual institute level, to put in place a strategy that will aim to address a number of important areas. These are:
- a. the gathering, analysis and subsequent use of data to determine accurately the numbers of learners at regional and local level and the extent of the learners' needs;
 - b. the development of the capacity to make suitable provision available for ESOL learners and their families;
 - c. the strengthening and development of links between local businesses and industry and further education to monitor training and language needs;
 - d. access for ESOL learners to training in areas of skills shortages within the Northern Ireland economy;
 - e. the provision, monitoring and evaluation by the FE sector of comprehensive learning pathways in language development and vocational skills development for ESOL learners and their families;
 - f. the development of family learning opportunities within FE and potential links with schools;
 - g. the continued development within FE of policies, procedures and practices which ensure that all staff and learners are aware of the benefits of a multi-cultural, responsible society and fully subscribe to its implicit necessity for diversity and equality of opportunity for all;
 - h. a review by the Department of Employment and Learning of the funding mechanisms and allocations pertinent to ESOL.

PART TWO

MODERN LANGUAGES

10. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

10.1 In addition to addressing the demand for ESOL provision, many Institutes of Further and Higher Education have begun to address the changing needs of adult language learners in NI. The advent of ‘globalisation’ and the increasing opportunities for our citizens to travel more often and further afield in a ‘smaller world’, has led to an increase in demand for the introduction of customised modern language courses. Courses in the use of languages for social, holiday, property buying and business purposes are more prevalent than the more traditional, academic or vocational type of language learning programmes. The institutes currently offer 360 holiday and leisure language courses, mostly on a part-time basis. In contrast, there are 34 academic language courses and 29 language options provided in vocational programmes.

10.2 A parallel development is the revival of interest in the Irish language, and to a lesser extent, Ulster-Scots. This has resulted in a growth in adult, part-time evening and day classes provided in a wider range of locations. Many adults who enrol for conversation classes do not seek formal accreditation for their efforts.

11. MAIN FINDINGS

11.1 The main strengths are:

- ◆ the good relationships and strong, supportive ethos characterised by the sense of camaraderie among the learners within many of the classes;
- ◆ the high levels of motivation of the learners;

- ◆ the comprehensive lesson and course planning;
- ◆ the good response of the learners to the challenging lessons and linguistic situations presented;
- ◆ the extensive use of the target language for instructional and communicative purposes in a minority of lessons;
- ◆ the good teaching observed in several lessons and the examples of good practice;
- ◆ the commitment of the hard working lecturers;
- ◆ the satisfactory standards achieved;
- ◆ the increasingly flexible, organisational approaches and responses to the changing needs of the learners through, for example, community outreach; and
- ◆ the effective, formal links with partner institutions in continental Europe established by a few colleges.

11.2 The main areas for improvement include the need to:

- ◆ expand provision in modern languages, and, in particular, increase the number of full-time learners;
- ◆ widen the range of teaching approaches and resources;
- ◆ use the target language more consistently in lessons;
- ◆ integrate more fully ILT into the learning and teaching of modern languages;
- ◆ develop further meaningful links with partner colleges throughout Europe;
- ◆ apply more systematic and robust quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures to language learning and teaching;
- ◆ improve the quality of leadership in modern languages in the majority of the colleges;

- ◆ provide further continuous professional development and contact across the colleges for part-time lecturers; and
- ◆ improve the accommodation in order to take account of new technologies.

12. PROVISION

- 12.1 The number of part-time courses in Modern Languages exceeds greatly the full-time provision offered by the institutes. Holiday and leisure courses, in particular, for Spanish, French and Italian, predominate. In all but two of the colleges, Holiday and Leisure Spanish attracts most learners. The growth of and revival in Irish is reflected also in the large number of classes, with ten of the fifteen colleges (that responded to the on-line questionnaire) including some one hundred Irish courses in their language programmes. General Certificate of Education (GCE) A and AS level courses in the five main modern languages of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) have declined in recent years; of the 34 courses offered across all organisations, only seven are provided for full-time students and mostly in French. This is not counter balanced by an increase in vocational language courses. In fact, there is low uptake, with only 29 vocational courses offering a language dimension. While most of these are full-time vocational programmes, the language component is offered at levels 1 and 2. One institute reports an increase in demand for Spanish to be included in several vocational areas, including, Leisure and Travel, Business and Management, Airline Studies and Hospitality. The majority of institutes do not appear to recognise modern languages as a key competence or ancillary skill to be developed in conjunction with other linked vocational and occupational courses.
- 12.2 A few institutes report that day time, part-time provision for modern languages is problematic and that more flexible and appropriate approaches have been introduced. These positive developments include lunch-time provision and Saturday morning classes. In

addition, there is a range of outreach classes, out-centre usage and, one college makes use of Mobile Training Units to facilitate off-campus provision.

13. STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES

13.1 Within the language classes visited, the majority of students are challenged, interested and supported in their learning. The colleges have identified outcomes, both accredited and non-accredited for the learners; most language learners are clear about their learning goals and are well motivated to attain them. A minority of learners have been attending language classes in the colleges for some years and are making good progress. Furthermore, a minority of adults, with no other formal qualifications, have made exceptional progress in their language learning; in many cases, they have been encouraged to embark on other and more challenging academic pathways. In the best practice, where the tutors have high expectations and expose the students to sustained and effective use of the target language, they make sound progress in listening and can speak using extended language. Effective rehearsal and reinforcement of the language by the tutors, accompanied by intensive paired work, is not always a feature of the lessons, and in a minority of cases, resulted in the learners displaying low levels of confidence and fluency in their oral responses. A majority of the adult learners appreciate and benefit from the development of language in meaningful situations which meet their specific needs and interests. In these instances, the quality of the learning is good and with high levels of learner engagement and enjoyment of the language. A majority of the tutors respond successfully to the different levels of prior learning within the group and design their materials for this purpose; in a minority of instances the potential of the learners is not achieved due to insufficient account taken of initial assessment, the slow pace of the learning, or when progress is inhibited by inappropriate course content. The standard of the learners' work, overall, ranges from poor to good. A majority of the learners achieve satisfactory competence. Within modern languages,

retention rates range from satisfactory to good and of those who are retained a majority is successful in gaining external accreditation.

14. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 14.1 The quality of the relationships ranges from good to excellent. Sessions are characterised by a relaxed atmosphere and often there is good use of humour to motivate the learners. A clear sense of community and camaraderie exists in many long established classes where the learners have attended for several years; they know each other and the tutor well, and they have formed a social circle. The good rapport and the informal atmosphere established contribute to the sense of enjoyment observed in many of the lessons. The students show great interest in their learning; they work with confidence and they are supported well by their tutors.
- 14.2 There is wide variation in practice within and across the institutes in respect of target language usage. In the best practice, the tutors conduct their classes in the target language for sustained periods and at an appropriate level, allowing the learners to follow and extract the main points. In these instances, effective use of the target language promotes good quality language learning; the learners have opportunities to respond to a series of oral questions using several phrases or to take part in role plays or games. The learners work in groups and are able to produce sentences based on the tutor's model. More often, however, too much English intrudes and the students are not able to recall simple, key phrases, as they do not rehearse them sufficiently during the lessons.
- 14.3 Planning for the language programmes is good and most tutors have developed detailed documentation and clear lesson plans for the courses. Most tutors provide useful text-based support for learning such as handouts and worksheets. It will be important for the tutors to plan for a wider range of teaching approaches to meet the needs of the differing abilities among the learners. In the majority of colleges

visited, there is a strong sense of collegiality and clear evidence of joint working and planning.

- 14.4 Although tutor led, whole-class teaching approaches predominate, there are good examples also of group and paired work in which the learners participate fully in the lessons. Where classroom organisation and management are effective, and the tutors provide challenging and stimulating lessons, conducted at a suitable pace, the learners respond well to the tutors and, they learn from one another. A variety of suitable strategies are exploited. These include the use of entertaining and competitive card games to consolidate the learners' knowledge of verbs and tenses, the presentation of new material using the overhead projector (OHP) and the enactment of everyday scenarios through role-play. One tutor uses contemporary magazines in the target language successfully to enliven the lesson and to assess orally the learners' understanding of the written text. Other lessons were narrow in their focus and overly structured; this constrains the learners' confidence in the use of the target language and inhibits their opportunities to make extended oral responses. Several tutors tend to rely too heavily on worksheets as the sole resource rather than enliven the lessons with more imaginative approaches.
- 14.5 The use of ILT to enhance the learning of modern languages is under-exploited in most of the institutes. There is insufficient use of the Internet, e-mailing and multimedia presentational software to broaden the teaching approaches and extend the experiences of the learners. In one of the institutes visited, ILT was well integrated into the GCE A level language provision, and in another instance, the inspectors observed an example of a lively lesson where the tutor used an electronic whiteboard as an effective stimulus for oral work. Although language tutors in the majority of institutes report that they have undertaken staff development in the use of some aspects of ILT, currently, a majority of providers currently make little or no use of e-learning features to enhance the quality and flexibility of the learning in language courses.

- 14.6 In the majority of language classes, there is some initial assessment supplemented by ongoing diagnostic work. However, the outcomes of both could be used more carefully to plan and inform teaching strategies. In a few institutes, the learners keep a portfolio to record their progress. One college has developed its own graded levels of attainment and this system has proved helpful in assigning learners to an appropriate class, and in tracking their achievement and progression through the different stages of their language courses. Open College Network (OCN) accreditation is used by some colleges to provide a formal qualification and gives the tutors and learners a useful framework for assessment. The institutes should consider implementing recent assessment innovations, including the introduction of the Languages Ladder Assessment Scheme, which provides accreditation options for all ages and abilities or the European Language Portfolio for Adult and Vocational Language Learners, which promotes language learning as a lifelong process and records language learning competences and cultural experiences.
- 14.7 Classes are held mostly in general purpose rooms devoid of any language learning identity. One lecturer has produced a range of portable, attractive visual stimuli which she brings to her teaching bases. There were, however, a few examples of designated language teaching areas, which contain target country and language related posters, maps and magazines.
- 14.8 Few colleges have designated, modern and fully-equipped language centres. Overall, there is scope for improvement in the use of ILT, audio-visual and, in particular, commercially produced, pre-recorded, adult language learning programmes. There was limited evidence of the learners engaging with self-access materials for modern languages. With few exceptions, resources are limited to textbooks and work sheets.
- 14.9 Nine institutes in NI do not employ any full-time lecturers for modern languages and six of these do not have any associate lecturers. One institute employs six full-time lecturers; this is almost half the

complement of 13 full-time lecturers for modern languages in the 16 colleges. There is an over-reliance on part-time staff; of the 140 part-time languages staff, over two-fifths are native speakers and many do not have appropriate teaching qualifications.

- 14.10 The majority of the full-time staff and associate lecturers are suitably qualified and experienced. Almost all have engaged in CPD. In contrast, in one third of the colleges, none of the part-time staff have been involved in in-service training. The ongoing training of tutors in the methodology of teaching languages and the provision of suitable resources are important areas for development.
- 14.11 With the exception of one institute, there is no systematic approach to the staff development needs of part-time lecturers. One large institute, however, organises 'twilight' sessions for part-time staff on a range of important aspects of language learning, for example, the use of resources, including ILT and virtual learning environments (VLE), and blended learning approaches. These development sessions have resulted in a consistency of approach across the many part-time lecturers engaged in language teaching.

15. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- 15.1 A majority of institutes apply quality assurance procedures to their provision for modern languages. The depth of approach, however, varies greatly: in some cases, the formal recording of team discussions about quality can be traced to single line comments in course reviews. In one institute, the provision is subjected to more systematic and robust self-evaluative procedures; a development plan has been formulated; feedback is sought from examination boards; good use is made of the annual college cycle of measuring progress against the performance indicators outlined in Improving Quality: Raising Standards (IQ:RS); learner evaluations are analysed. The Centre Manager monitors uptake, trends and retention rates in order to inform future planning and provision. Almost half of the institutes are unable to quantify their expenditure in respect of their provision for

modern languages. Leadership in modern languages is good in a minority of colleges. In these instances, strong and cohesive teams comprising committed language specialists work hard to promote languages and to ensure quality, often despite the contraction in full-time learner numbers in recent years.

- 15.2 Few institutes have established real contacts or virtual links with their co-learners in other countries of continental Europe. Two colleges make good use of their partnerships with the target countries by accessing opportunities afforded by the Grundtvig and Comenius European programmes to enhance language learning in their courses. Another college has established useful links with two local primary schools to promote the learning of French. One college organises an annual exchange programme for the learners taking GCE A level French, and, in another, those learners studying for the Diploma of Spanish as a Foreign Language visited Malaga, Spain. In almost every instance where the learners had the opportunity for a period of immersion in a language, in its natural surroundings, there were marked benefits to both motivation and competence.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 In a world where bilingualism and plurilingualism are commonplace, the study of modern languages is an important element in the context of leisure and recreational travel, and plays an increasing role in terms of life-long learning. Second language offers opportunities for personal mobility, employment, education and access to information. Above all, language learning helps to develop tolerance and understanding between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Socially, but also importantly, economically, societies need linguistically competent individuals to sustain equal relations with nations and peoples who do not speak the same native tongue.
- 16.2 In respect of this wider dimension of language learning, given our remote geographical location, it is essential that the FE sector promotes the acquisition of other languages in a much more concerted

and coherent manner in order that NI becomes more outward-looking and develops a better modern languages skill base. Capability in other languages is crucially important for a flourishing NI and can help balance mobility in employment between people from other countries and local learners. It will be important for the sector to introduce measures to safeguard and promote our existing linguistic heritage, ethnic minority languages and mainland European and other languages.

17. KEY PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

17.1 There is a need at both sectoral and individual institute level, to put in place a strategy that will aim to address a number of important areas. These are the:

- ◆ recognition of languages skills as an important key competence for all citizens;
- ◆ promotion and marketing of languages in order to meet the changing needs and context of the learners, and to enhance employability;
- ◆ study of global languages for the growing internationalisation of business life and to increase our competitiveness;
- ◆ adoption of recent innovations in assessment of and accreditation for modern languages;
- ◆ training and recruitment of suitably qualified modern language staff;
- ◆ exploitation of the considerable investment in information technology infrastructure, and the creation of modern and fully-equipped language centres.

Appendix 1

COLLEGES OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION INVOLVED IN THE SURVEY

Armagh College of Further Education

Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education

Castlereagh College of Further and Higher Education

Causeway Institute of Further and Higher Education

East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education

East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education

East Tyrone College of Further and Higher Education

Fermanagh College of Further and Higher Education

Lisburn College of Further and Higher Education

Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education

North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education

North East Institute of Further & Higher Education

North West Institute of Further and Higher Education

Omagh College of Further Education

Upper Bann Institute of Further and Higher Education

Link to the online questionnaire:

http://www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/ETI_lq/angques1a_partone.asp?id=17

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