Language Network for Quality Assurance

Final Report   Public Part

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Executive Summary

This report on the work of the Language Network for Quality Assurance (LanQua) will be of particular interest to higher education learning and teaching staff with responsibility for designing and evaluating curricula in the field of languages and related studies. It will also be of interest to European funding bodies, agencies and projects, especially those working in the field of quality assurance.

LanQua was a three-year project (October 2007-September 2010) funded by the Commission of the European Communities Lifelong Learning Erasmus Network programme. The main aim of the project was to build on emerging European networks concerned with languages, bringing a wide range of providers and stakeholders together to produce a European quality benchmark for the area of languages, which enables institutions and stakeholders to assure and enhance the quality of provision in higher education.

The network involved 60 partners from 29 countries across Europe. It was coordinated by the UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, based at the University of Southampton. Many members of the partnership consortium had previous experience of working on European Commission funded networks in the area of languages, and several (including the lead institution) had coordinated projects and worked together before.

The project was divided into five thematic sub projects, each with its own coordinator and deputy:
1. Intercultural communication
2. Language teacher education
3. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)
4. Literature and culture
5. Language learning

During Year 1 of the network, each sub project produced a synthesis report mapping their particular subject area with a focus on quality assurance mechanisms. In Year 2, the groups identified learning outcomes specific to their subject area and developed a series of illustrative examples of practice. These aforementioned outputs fed into the final product, the LanQua Toolkit, which was published in Year 3. The downloadable Toolkit comprises a five-stage Quality Model to guide reflective practice; a Frame of Reference providing an overview of languages and related studies in higher education; a series of relevant examples from practice; guidance notes on using the LanQua resources; and the LanQua website (www.lanqua.eu). The Toolkit will be of use to higher education language teaching and quality assurance/enhancement communities, and in the longer term to students, employers and policy-makers.

The Toolkit was launched at the final network conference which was held in the UK in July 2010. It will continue to be made available beyond the lifetime of the project and will be further disseminated at relevant conferences, e.g. the European Quality Assurance Forum, 18-20 November 2010. As a result, it is hoped that other subject areas and sectors will be able to use and adapt the Toolkit to meet their own needs.

Table of Contents

1. Project Objectives

LanQua's principal aim was to bring a wide range of providers and stakeholders together to produce a European quality benchmark in five areas of languages and related studies:
1. Intercultural communication
2. Language teacher education
3. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)
4. Literature and culture
5. Language learning

The main objectives of the network over the three years of the project were to:
- map the field in the five sub project areas focusing on how the area is defined, delivered and assessed, and what quality assurance mechanisms exist (Year 1)
- identify appropriate learning outcomes and develop draft statements of knowledge, understanding and skills to be acquired, i.e. what we expect students to come away with at the end of their period of study, focusing mainly on the first cycle of higher education (Year 2)
- develop a series of case studies: illustrative examples of practice which support the benchmark by highlighting examples of particular approaches, effective practices, new ideas and innovations, lessons to be learned, and issues for reflection (Year 2)
- develop and disseminate the LanQua Toolkit, which encompasses the mapping exercise, learning outcomes and case studies (Year 3)

LanQua supported quality assurance and enhancement by building on earlier, existing and emerging networks in the area of languages, including:
- The European Language Council (www.celelc.org/)
- Thematic networks in the area of languages: TNP1, TNP-D, TNP2, TNP3, TNP3-D (www.celelc.org/ and follow the links to Projects, then TNP Languages)
- Tuning Educational Structures in Europe (http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/)

The project also drew on national and international reference documentation produced by higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, government departments, professional associations, and research and development projects, including:
- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp)
- European Profile for Language Teacher Education (www.lang.soton.ac.uk/profile/)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Quality_Assurance/ESG.pdf)

The project had both an immediate and long-term impact on the members of the consortium, who benefited from the opportunities offered by the network to share experiences and work together on developing the component parts of the LanQua Toolkit. It is intended that the Toolkit, which was launched in the final stages of the project, will enable institutions and key stakeholders to assure and enhance the quality of provision in higher education. The current and potential beneficiaries include:

- Project partners who benefited from the opportunity of having time to reflect upon and explore quality assurance issues in their subject
- Academics and senior managers from individual institutions (both within and outside the partnership), who will find the LanQua Toolkit of use when designing and evaluating their programmes / courses
- National quality assurance agencies
- International networks, e.g. ENQA
- Employers who will have an overview of language students' skills and areas of study
- Students who will have an overview of the subject and the key skills they will acquire

2. Project Approach

The project was coordinated by the UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, based at the University of Southampton. The consortium of 60 partners from 29 European countries was divided into five thematic sub projects, each with its own coordinator and deputy:
1. Intercultural communication
2. Language teacher education
3. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)
4. Literature and culture
5. Language learning

The sub project coordinators and deputies work in institutions spread throughout Europe: Denmark, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Individual partners were allocated to sub projects according to personal interests/areas of expertise and to ensure a geographical spread. This structure of small working groups, a model used by previous thematic networks in the area of languages, facilitated project management and the production of outcomes.

All project partners were invited to a launch event in Riga (April 2008), where they developed a shared understanding of the network and its outcomes, and were able to participate in set-up meetings of the five sub projects. At these meetings and during the subsequent Year 1 sub project workshops, the groups focused on mapping their particular subject area. As a result, each sub project produced a synthesis mapping report with a focus on quality assurance mechanisms. During Year 2, each sub project held a second workshop, where they identified learning outcomes specific to their subject area and developed a series of illustrative examples of practice. These outputs from the first two years of the project fed into the final product, the LanQua Toolkit, which was published online and disseminated during Year 3. The Toolkit comprises a five-stage Quality Model to guide reflective practice; a Frame of Reference providing an overview of languages and related studies in higher education; a series of relevant examples from practice; guidance notes on using the LanQua resources; and the LanQua website (www.lanqua.eu). The Toolkit will be of use to higher education language teaching and quality assurance/enhancement communities, and in the longer term to students, employers and policy-makers.
The final round of sub project workshops held during Year 3 of the project focused on refining materials for the Toolkit and planning for the final network conference in London (July 2010), where the Toolkit was launched.

The work and management of the consortium was evaluated by an external consultant from the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. In addition to evaluating the project, the consultant was well-positioned to offer valuable information and advice on quality assurance issues and to assist with the dissemination of the network outcomes. She was also a member of the LanQua coordinating committee, which included the project management team from the coordinating institution and the sub project coordinators and deputies. This group met once a year to review progress and plan future activity. The external consultant

attended all coordinating committee meetings and network conferences, and was also invited to one sub project workshop per year.

Each sub project had its own internal evaluator from within the consortium, who provided formative feedback to the sub project members, the external consultant and the project management team. In addition, each sub project appointed 'monitors' to look at the documents produced by the other sub projects and identify areas of interest and potential overlap.

During the first two years of the project, LanQua's dissemination strategy focused on raising awareness about the network and its planned outcomes. This was achieved through the project website (www.lanqua.eu), which will continue to be maintained and updated by the project coordinator beyond the lifetime of the project. A publicity postcard was also designed and printed to promote awareness about the network. Dissemination activity increased in the final year of the project following the production of the LanQua Toolkit. This was launched at the final network conference in July 2010, which was attended by project partners and external stakeholders. Throughout the three years of the project Individual members of the consortium also gave presentations and/or discussed the project with colleagues and key stakeholders at a variety of institutional, national and international meetings and conferences.

3.   Project Outcomes & Results

The main outcomes of LanQua were:
- The downloadable LanQua Toolkit comprising a five-stage Quality Model to guide reflective practice; a Frame of Reference providing an overview of languages and related studies in higher education; a series of relevant examples from practice; guidance notes on using the LanQua resources; and the LanQua website (see below). The purpose of the Toolkit is to facilitate curriculum development, improve quality assurance and enhancement, and develop a better understanding among key stakeholders (students, parents, policy makers, government, European Commission).
- LanQua website, which serves a dual purpose of raising awareness about the project and its outcomes and providing a repository of useful documents and links related to quality assurance: www.lanqua.eu. All network products are published on the LanQua website which will continue to be maintained and updated beyond the lifetime of the project.
- Year 1 sub project synthesis reports: mapping the subject area (five sub project reports and an overall Year 1 synthesis report are downloadable from the website). This mapping exercise fed into the LanQua Toolkit (see above).
- A set of key learning outcomes in each of the five sub project areas, and a series of case studies (at least five per sub project) developed during Year 2, focusing on how issues of quality are addressed in particular institutions and member states, and how particular quality requirements can be delivered. These outcomes also fed into the LanQua Toolkit (above).
- A publicity postcard for dissemination purposes to raise awareness about the network and its planned outcomes
- A four-page leaflet/conference programme insert which disseminates the work of the network, presents a summary of the LanQua Toolkit contents including an annotated diagram of the Quality Model, and also includes a summary of the European context behind LanQua written by the project's external evaluator
- The first network conference, held in Riga in April 2008, which enabled members of the consortium to meet each other for the first time and develop a shared understanding of the purpose of the project and the means of achieving it
- The final network conference which was held in London in July 2010, to which a number of key stakeholders were invited. This two-day conference entitled *Languages in higher education 2010: raising the standard for languages* (http://conf2010.llas.ac.uk/) was organised in collaboration with the UK Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (the LanQua project coordinator) and attracted 189 delegates including academics from inside and outside the LanQua partnership and from Europe and beyond. Keynote speakers were Fiona Crozier (LanQua project external consultant and Vice President of the European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies), Professor Regis Ritz (representing the European University Association), Wolfgang Mackiewicz (President of the European Language Council) and Professor Michael Kelly (LanQua project director). The conference featured the launch of the LanQua Toolkit and also included a well-attended LanQua strand in parallel sessions where each of the five sub

projects presented the outcomes and key themes emerging from their participation in the project. PowerPoint presentations and a selection of papers from the LanQua strand are available on the LanQua website (www.lanqua.eu)

- Five sub project workshops per year (one per sub project), where the mapping reports were discussed and drafted (Year 1); the learning outcomes and case studies developed (Year 2); and the Toolkit contents refined, the final conference planned and sustainability issues discussed (Year 3)
- Three coordinating committee meetings (one per year) involving the management team, sub project coordinators and deputies, and an external consultant from the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, to plan activity, identify areas of overlap and common interest among the sub projects, and reflect on progress and achievements.

For further details please contact Paula Davis, the LanQua project manager (tel 0044 (0)23 80593970; pd2@soton.ac.uk).

4. Partnerships

LanQua benefited from the expertise and experience that individual project partners and colleagues from their host institutions brought to the network. In turn, individuals and their institutions benefited from the opportunity offered by a dynamic European partnership to share ideas and experiences in the form of network conferences, sub project workshops, the project website and communication between meetings, e.g. through discussion lists. Many project partners had previous experience of working on European Commission funded projects in the area of languages, and several had worked together before.

The project was endorsed by the European Language Council, and benefited from the network of contacts and experts associated with the CEL/ELC. Many of the institutions participating in LanQua were members of the association. The project director of LanQua presented regular reports to the Board of the CEL/ELC and benefited from the advice and support of Board members. The President of CEL/ELC delivered the concluding plenary speech at the dissemination conference, and the results of the project are due to be reported at the international Forum held by the association in Brussels in December 2010.

The consortium of 60 partner institutions was drawn from 29 countries across Europe and covered all eligible participating nations with the exception of Greece, Liechtenstein and Norway. A consortium of this size presents a number of challenges but the network benefited from the experiences of a multi-country partnership with such wide geographical coverage. Individual partners were allocated to one of the five sub projects according to their areas of expertise and care was taken to ensure a suitable geographical spread in each sub project. Experience and geographical coverage were also factors in inviting partners to adopt the role of sub project coordinators and deputies. Those who were selected worked in institutions in Denmark, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

LanQua also developed partnerships with groups outside the direct consortium. The involvement of the external consultant from the UK Quality Assurance for Higher Education obviously facilitated links with that organisation. Her intervention also led to dissemination opportunities via the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the E4 group on quality assurance, e.g. a workshop presentation at the European Quality Assurance Forum in Copenhagen, 19-21 November 2009. We further developed relationships with these organisations and other external stakeholders (e.g. educators from outside the partner institutions, and European funding bodies and agencies) by inviting representatives to attend our final network conference. Keynote speakers at the conference included Fiona Crozier (LanQua project external consultant and Vice President of the European Association

of Quality Assurance Agencies), Professor Regis Ritz, and Wolfgang Mackiewicz (President of the European Language Council).

The sharing of ideas and experiences within and outside the immediate partnership benefited all concerned, acting as a reservoir of expertise and as a source of new ideas and initiatives.

5. Plans for the Future

All network products have been published on the LanQua website (www.lanqua.eu) which will continue to be maintained and updated after the end of the project.

The LanQua Toolkit (the main output of the network) will continue to be disseminated at local, national and international workshops, seminars and conferences when the opportunity arises. For example, the UK project coordinator has had a workshop paper accepted for the fifth European Quality Assurance Forum in Lyon (November 2010), and members of the consortium will present its findings at the CEL/ELC Forum in Brussels (December 2010).

Our intention was to build on the success of LanQua with a two-year valorisation project, aimed at disseminating and embedding the LanQua Toolkit through four key activities:
- Conference presentations to quality assurance managers, policymakers and staff developers
- Methodology training workshops in applying the Toolkit for subject practitioners
- Institutional pilots to test the Toolkit model in individual departments
- Localising the Toolkit and other project products by translating them into French, German and Spanish.

The application for funding to the Lifelong Learning Programme was not successful but we will investigate other ways of taking the Toolkit to a wider audience beyond languages and higher education. In the first instance, the Southampton team will examine the feasibility of incorporating the Toolkit in professional development workshops and other educational initiatives in the UK. Consortium members will be encouraged to explore similar opportunities in their own countries.

The coordinating group is also examining the possibility of publishing some of its findings in a forthcoming issue of the European Journal of Language Policy/ *Revue européenne de politique linguistique*.

6.   Contribution to EU policies

LanQua addressed a number of current policy priorities in higher education in support of the Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process.

The network addressed the modernisation agenda for universities, in particular in the areas of curricular reform (by developing a set of competence based learning outcomes) and governance reform (by enhancing quality assurance). It contributed a subject-based perspective to reflection within quality assurance agencies.

LanQua supported the realisation of a European Higher Education Area by providing a reference document in the form of an agreed quality benchmark for languages in higher education across Europe. The benchmark will encourage convergence and the mutual recognition of qualifications, and thereby facilitate mobility and exchange. It implements the learning outcomes approach pioneered by Tuning.

The project had a role to play in the 'new skills for new jobs' policy agenda. Clearly articulated learning outcomes are important to employers, students and parents, and the European quality benchmark makes explicit the knowledge/understanding and academic/subject specific skills and competences that higher education students of languages and related studies are expected to develop. Intercultural communication knowledge and competence are central to the policy of new skills for new jobs and one of the LanQua sub projects focused on this area.

During the period of the project, the LanQua network acted as a 'think tank', comprising experts in the field of languages who are well placed to identify innovative practice and future needs, define learning outcomes and quality criteria, act as a testing ground for new ideas, and make recommendations for future policy developments. Efforts will be made to maintain the network of contacts. The project also identified a range of issues for further development, such as the importance of incorporating broader international dimensions into European curricula in the area of languages. Members of the consortium are currently considering whether this might form the basis of further proposals to the Lifelong Learning Programme.