

# IoT Language Policy & Planning Network

In February 2006 the Royal Irish Academy “*Language Policy and Language Planning Conference*” was held in Dublin Castle. As a result of debate at this conference, the idea of a Language Policy Workshop for the Institutes of Technology (IoT) sector was developed and organised by Kristin Brogan (IT Tralee) and Dr. Riana Walsh (IT Tallaght, Dublin). Given the current situation of Modern Languages within the IoTs, this topic presented a viable opportunity for inter-institutional collaboration amongst IoT language lecturers and other stakeholders in the area of Language Policy and Planning. The initiative for the initial Language Policy Workshop was also influenced by the results of a questionnaire issued by the National Steering Committee in 2005 and a follow-up meeting which examined ways of addressing the decline in numbers of students taking languages.

The **IoT Language Policy & Planning Network** is an initiative by IoT language lecturers and builds on existing language expertise within the IoT sector. Our initial focus is to create awareness of Good Practice and to promote language learning by designing and adopting internal Language Policies within the various IoTs. Inter-institutional collaboration is encouraged in order to support and facilitate the formulating of such policies and to thereby create opportunity for innovation within both the teaching and learning of languages.

The aim of this IoT Language Policy & Planning Network is to adopt a pro-active approach to language learning and teaching and to foster greater inter-institutional collaboration for languages within the IoT sector to the benefit all participants. Some IoTs already have Language Policies in place, while other colleges are currently discussing the possibilities or formulating a policy. This is therefore an excellent time to work together as IoT language lecturers in order to further research in the area of Language Policy & Planning, with a view to exploring aspects of existing Good Practice and examining the extent to which a college Language Policy can be a successful tool in the promotion of languages and other skills relating to the learning of languages.

The first IoT Language Policy & Planning Network Workshop took place in May 2006. Language lecturers from 7 of the 14 IoTs attended the Workshop at ITT Dublin and exchanged ideas in relation to Language Policy for the IoT sector. A total of 12 **Action Research Groups** were established. The objective of these groups was to research a variety of topics deemed relevant to Language Policy & Planning. These Action Research Groups are:

TEFL/EFL/ESL; Language Awareness; Intercultural Competence; Learning Styles; Transferable Skills; ELP; CEF; Report Research (National and International); European Commission websites; CLIL; Life Long Learning / Open & Distance Learning; Work placement/study abroad programmes.

The second Workshop of the IoT Network took place on October 10<sup>th</sup> in Athlone IT and on this occasion language lecturers from 9 of the IoTs attended. The findings of 8 Action Research Groups were presented. The information provided in these presentations will support the design of internal Language Policies and new syllabi within the language study area. Dr. Muiris O’Laoire (IT Tralee and member of

Language Policy Expert Group 2006), as guest speaker, provided an update on key issues in policy and planning and described the current status of Language Policy & Planning in Ireland and also within the broader European context.

The relevance and success of this Network is dependent on creating new dialogue and adopting a pro-active, collaborative and inclusive approach involving all stakeholders, both language and non-language specialists, practitioners and management from all domains. Network participants are cognisant of the necessity to involve all stakeholders and to refer also to the expertise of non-linguists in order to widen the discussion and foster motivation for initiatives within languages in the IoT sector.

It is a very opportune time to further develop the impetus created by the Network as there is a general consensus amongst language lecturers that we can be participants in bringing about positive change and that college language policies are a valid instrument in this process. There is a genuine interest among language lecturers to adopt a cohesive and pro-active approach to addressing the various problems and opportunities and to actively promote the learning of languages, and transferable skills related to language learning, within the IoT sector. The emerging linguistic and cultural diversity so evident within the educational context today can be planned for strategically within a relevant IoT Language Policy.

From the outset, it has also been our agreed aim to be as inclusive as possible and involve all stakeholders. We were invited to address the meeting of the Heads of School of Business & Humanities of the IoTs in IT Carlow December 2006. At this meeting we presented the outcomes of a Questionnaire issued to Network participants at the request of HoSs. The questionnaire elicited information on modularisation, its impact on language learning and teaching and new opportunities. HoSs commented positively on the proactive approach of Network participants and the innovative ideas emerging in the questionnaire responses.

All HoDs of Business & Humanities were invited to attend our third Workshop February 2007 at ITT Dublin. On this occasion Prof. Angela Chambers (UL) addressed the Network and provided an international perspective to Language Policy & Planning. A European dimension was presented by Dr. Tanja Greil (University of Salzburg) speaking on the Common European Framework. Again, well supported by language lecturers, a further two Action Research Groups were presented and we also arranged a practical workshop on formulating an internal Language Policy.

On 15th May 2007 the Network held a fourth meeting at Dundalk Institute of Technology. At this meeting participation extended beyond language lecturers, HoDs, HoSs as agreed by the Network at the outset. An "Expert Panel" of speakers from a range of domains, representing both language and non-language related interests e.g. Business, Engineering, Science, Education etc. were invited to discuss and present their views and perspectives on "*the future of languages in the IoTs*". Speakers included Fáilte Ireland, IDA, RIA, Council of Directors. The remaining two Action Research Groups presented.

At this point in time all 12 Research Action Groups have reported and all Network participants have awareness and knowledge of the practicalities of formulating an internal Language Policy. Guidelines for the formulating of internal language policies

have been collated and issued to Network participants. As the Network has provided IoT language lecturers with a new opportunity for collaboration and has been very well supported the consensus is to continue as a forum for inter-institutional collaboration, with a focus on language related topics, including language policy but also broadening the outlook. The next meeting is planned for 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007 at ITB and this event will feature guest speakers from e.g. IBEC, Forfás, DES, HEA, Enterprise Ireland. The May 2008 meeting will be held in LyIT and based on Best Practice models in language policy and planning.

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Podcasts, video and updates relating to the Network can be located at:  
<http://www.learningcontent.edu.ie/modlang/blog/>

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