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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Education Committee

"Language Learning for European Citizenship"

Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.
A Common European Framework of reference.

A User Guide for Quality Assurance
and Quality Control

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Preface

The Common European Framework is designed

- to stimulate practitioners in the field of modern languages learning, teaching and assessment to consider the full range of options to them when taking decisions at various levels;
- to enable them to inform other practitioners and users more fully and effectively as to the nature of the products and services they offer to learners.

We assume that all practitioners will wish to consider and state what learning objectives they are setting. The core of the draft Framework proposal is therefore an attempt to identify the many different aspects of communication which a language learner would need to master in order to be a fully proficient user of the language concerned and to describe the ascending stages or levels of proficiency through which learners may be expected to pass.

Inevitably, this leads to an apparatus which is detailed and complex in its description of learning objectives - perhaps more so than any one user may need to make explicit or wish to take responsibility for.

On the other hand, there are matters other than learning objectives and general teaching/learning methodology which particular categories of practitioners must take into consideration, and on which they have to exercise options and inform clients and colleagues accordingly. Thus, course designers need to think about the number and frequency of lessons and the ordering of content; examiners have to think of test types, rubrics and conditions, etc. A Framework which attempted to include such user-specific information would become extremely unwieldy.

For this reason, we have decided to limit the Framework to the issues all practitioners may have to address and to accompany it with a series of ten User Guides addressed to a particular specialised class of users. The role of each Guide is to facilitate the use of the Framework by

- setting out, as far as possible, the options specific to the speciality which practitioners will need to consider and inform clients and colleagues about in as transparent a manner as possible;
- helping the specialists concerned to make the best use of the descriptive apparatus provided by the Framework itself in their special field.

The second Draft Framework Proposal, after submission to the Final Conference of the Modern Languages Project (April 1997) and the appropriate instances of the Council of Europe, and following any further revisions, will be piloted in member States together with the user Guides as appropriate. This practical use of the Framework will provide the occasion to further develop the accompanying General Guide and specific user Guides. The present series of Guides, which represents a first draft intended to facilitate further reflection and discussion, will then be revised in the light of feedback obtained in the pilot project. In addition, new Guides will be developed as the need arises.

A User Guide for Quality Assurance and Quality Control

Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference (Draft 2)

Introduction

“Quality” is one of today’s fashionable words. A consumer society promotes the idea of getting value for money; economic recessions prompt people to want to ensure they are spending time and money wisely; busy executives seek ways of making the brief time they spend with partners and children “quality time”; quality labels, charters and guarantees influence many of the choices we make when we acquire goods or services. Language learning and teaching are an element of contemporary society and are affected by its concerns.

Quality has also become a policy cornerstone of many European governments’ policies and agencies. Article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty states, inter alia, that member states undertake “to contribute to the development of quality education”. The 1996 White Paper on education and training, “Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society” often refers to quality as a pivotal component in future language learning and teaching (e.g. pp68 and 69 proposals for a quality label). It seeks to encourage the transfer of best practice (see p14 of this guide) as a mechanism for quality assurance.

The purpose of this guide is to explain the general concepts and principles related to quality assurance and quality control, to show how these can be applied in the context of language teaching and learning. The Common European Framework provides a coherent and transparent set of definitions and descriptions which can be applied to establishing quality assurance procedures and quality control systems and the guide will illustrate in practical terms the uses of the Framework for these purposes.

The first question the authors of a user guide need to answer is “who are the users?” Practically everybody involved in language teaching and learning is interested in questions of quality assurance and quality control. The learner - where s/he has the choice - wants to choose a language provider of "quality"; teachers want guidelines on how to do their job well; producing language services of quality is the major priority for those managing educational institutions; school inspectors and educational administrators are directly responsible for judging quality issues in the institutions they run. There are numerous associations and organisations whose main function is the auditing and inspection of schools. Examining boards and publishers work in competitive markets where their real and perceived quality is decisive in their results. In this guide a deliberately broad approach has been chosen - the main emphasis will be on quality assurance and quality control as they affect the principal actors in the language learning and teaching process - the teachers and the didactic managers of schools and other institutions.

In addition, we attempt to provide points of reference and contact which will be useful to “quality professionals”- administrators, auditors and inspectors.

The structure of the guide is straightforward. There are two main parts:

Part I – the Principles and Practice of Quality Assurance and Quality Control

- I. a general description of how quality assurance and quality control were developed in industrial production and service contexts; the principles behind Total Quality Management (TQM);
- II. an examination of the relevance of these principles to language learning and teaching, showing both the similarities and dissimilarities;
- III. a guide for different users on how to implement quality production and management in different language teaching contexts.

Part II – The Uses of the Common European Framework for Quality Assurance and Quality Control

- IV. an illustration of the parts of the Common Framework most relevant to quality issues and of how it can be applied in practice

The conclusion (chapter V) and appendices will give additional reference points for further information and action on quality matters.

Part 1

Chapter I

A general description of how quality assurance and control were first developed in industrial production and service contexts; the principles behind Total Quality Management (TQM)

What is quality? The origin of the word is from Latin “qualis” – of what kind. An early use meaning “excellence” is from Shakespeare when Hamlet asks the Players

***“Come, give us a taste of your quality
Come, a passionate speech.”***

So, what is quality?

- “quality is that which meets the customer’s expectations”
- “quality is that which exceeds the customer’s expectations”
- “a quality product is not an average product or a minimal product. Would you want to be operated on by an average surgeon?”
- “there can be no improvements where there are no standards”

Readers may like to explore their own behaviour as customers in their daily lives: they could take an everyday transaction - shopping, in a bank or post office, having repairs or other services done - and analyse what elements of service satisfy them, please them, irritate them.

- *What is meant by “meeting expectations” and by “exceeding them”?*

Readers might also like to reflect on the concept of standards

- *How does it relate to “customer satisfaction”?*
- *Do they consider language learners as customers?*

1.1 The concepts of Quality Control, Quality Assurance, Total Quality Management (TQM) originated in industrial contexts, initially during the Second World War where the reliable production of armaments and aeroplanes was a major concern. Ways of reducing the number of defects were developed through a systematic study of design, of production processes and of quality control. The techniques were developed further in the post-war renaissance of Japanese industry and have now spread to generalised use in industry and have been extended to service industries, where the concept of satisfaction with services provided is introduced.

In this User Guide, distinction is made between **Quality Assurance (QA)** and **Quality Control (QC)** (terms underlined in bold are to be found in the Glossary). By Quality Assurance we mean those systems and mechanisms which are put in place to ensure the achievement and maintenance of quality - the “before” and “during” function, if you like; by Quality Control we mean the checks, monitoring and inspections which ensure that the quality systems are (a) in place and (b) working properly to the agreed specifications - the “after” function.

This User Guide relates to the Framework in both functions: in Chapter 3 the issues of Quality Assurance are addressed whilst in Chapter 4 part 3 the Framework is utilised for Quality Control. However, the thrust of this User Guide is towards Quality Assurance. It sets out to illustrate how non-experts may use the Framework to establish and monitor quality in the teaching of Modern Languages. It is hoped that this might prove the first step towards a Common European Interface for the Establishment, Monitoring and Management of Quality in Modern Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment. (EEQM)

1.2 Quality Assurance - the Process and the People

In **Total Quality Management (TQM)** a distinction is made between the techniques employed to establish quality and the people who have to carry them out. Quality has to be ensured both technically and humanly.

1.2.1 In manufacturing industries, QA is achieved technically by a series of processes of which the main ones might be summarised as follows:

- (a) thorough analysis of function
- (b) careful design of components
- (c) ensuring that suppliers, or sub-processes, also follow QA systems
- (d) working to agreed standards and measurements
- (e) standardisation of the process of production
- (f) checking the finished product
- (g) finally, vitally, seeking, listening to, and acting on customer feedback

1.2.2 QA is enhanced humanly by means of

- (a) informing all members of the team of the common aims and objectives
- (b) ensuring that all members of the team are working to common standards
- (c) encouragement of small teams where
 - considerable scope is given to self-organisation
 - individual initiative is welcomed
- (d) flexibility of work
- (e) team responsibility for their own Quality Control i.e. from within

1.3 However, in the service sector, in which teaching can be included, strict measurement of production processes, which is a sine qua non for the industrial sector, is rarely possible and even more rarely appropriate or applicable. In the service sector the pivotal notion is that quality assurance can only be obtained through the rigorous development of the concept of satisfying customer expectations, which *must* be met or exceeded.

The idea of meeting or exceeding the customer's expectations is central to the development of quality assurance in service industries. It assumes that customers choose providers on the basis of how far their needs are met. This concept is quite complex in a language teaching context. In state school systems, most learners have no choice of teacher, method or content. Is the customer the child, the parent, or more broadly the society expressed through government policies? In the adult sector, many learners are financed by their employer and there can be conflict between satisfying the needs of the individual with the specific requirements of the one who is paying.

Nevertheless, the concept of customer and the concomitant analysis of his / her needs is a central one to the design of language teaching programmes and one to which the Council of Europe's modern language projects have made major contributions.

The additional concept of internal and external customers* is one which can also be used productively in language teaching activities. They are never isolated initiatives, but require the contributions of experts, administrators, teachers, and publishers, examining boards. A rigorous analysis of who are the internal clients of each link in the chain, of the needs of those for whom services are being provided and of systems for feedback to check that this is happening would be an important contribution to the achievement of improved quality.

* external customers are those from outside an organisation who purchase or use a service. Internal customers are those within an organisation who provide a service to colleagues and contribute in the service chain to the quality of the service delivered. In this definition everybody in an organisation provides and receives a service for/ from someone

<i>Readers may wish to explore the concept of internal and external customer in educational contexts. Who provides services for whom? What are their needs, their expectations? Where are the decision points?</i>			
<i>Category of customer</i>	<i>Need</i>	<i>Expect</i>	<i>From</i>
e.g. adult language learners			

The quality of services is often defined by promises or guarantees to customers – a customer charter or service contract which tries to specify the way in which needs are being addressed.

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Here is an example of a charter for students designed for adult language learners:

Schools guarantee:

high teaching and educational standards
professional conduct and integrity
regular independent inspections to maintain quality

total accuracy and veracity of all information, including:

- a stipulated number of taught hours per course
- a stipulated maximum number of students per group
- a specified age-range for courses
- a clear description of the cost of tuition and other services and materials

efficient administration and auxiliary services
suitable premises and facilities for language learning

- accurate placement testing to determine language competence
- a structured course of studies that is divided into levels and appropriate to students' needs
- appropriate and effective teaching methods
- appropriate regular assessment, report, end-of-course assessment procedures leading to a certificate of attainment
- experienced competent teachers working under the supervision of an appropriately qualified academic manager
- regular observation of the teaching activity
- opportunities for obtaining information and advice about your course of studies

Readers may wish to reflect on this charter - is it clear? is it specific? Can it be verified? What changes would be needed to make it applicable in their own teaching / learning environment?

1.4 There are several other differences between industry and service sector approaches to quality assurance apart from the issues of strict measurement stated above. Some of the key elements from the sphere of industry either do not hold true for service sectors or they require radical redefinition.

The notion of “zero defects” is bereft of meaning in the context of Modern Language Learning and Teaching. Indeed, good language teachers often exploit error to the great benefit of the learner as a tool for rapid language improvement. The notion of “getting it right the first time, every time” needs to be reworked for our sector. We need to be clear in our definitions of “standards” and “standardisation” and that the acceptance of the one does not imply or require the adoption of the other. We believe that Modern Language teaching requires clearly defined standards; never, ever the dull and dulling conformity of standardisation where all scope for individual needs and expression is disregarded. We look to the Framework as the mechanism to allow us to construct our own clearly defined pan-European standards.

1.5 The customer is our first, and most critical, inspector of standards.

Chapter summary:

Quality assurance and control

began in industrial production

had zero defects as aim

achieved technically

- **through analysis of required functions**
- **through careful design of components**
- **through thorough testing in design phase**
- **through standardisation of production processes**

achieved “psychologically”

- **through encouragement of both individual responsibility and team work**
 - “quality circles”
- **through achieving flexibility of skills and job rotation, instead of**
 requiring production line zombies

“for workers.. to do quality work, they must be managed in a way that convinces them that the work they are asked to do satisfies their needs. The more it does the harder they will work.”

Was developed in service industries through the idea of satisfying customer needs and the concept of internal and external customer

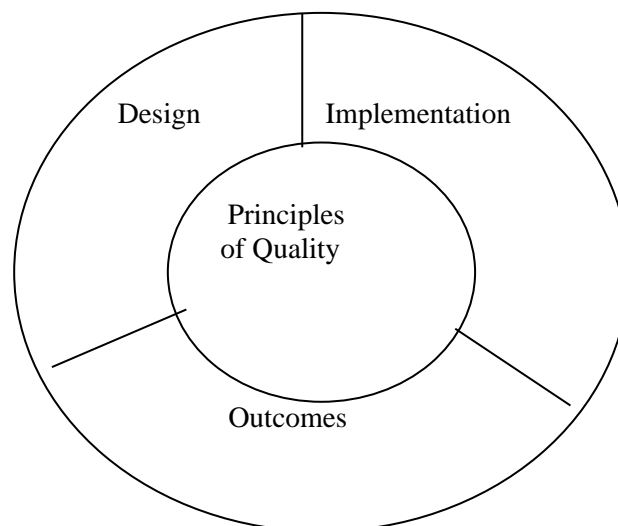
Chapter 2

The concepts of TQM, quality assurance and quality control applied to language learning and teaching

2.1 Elements of similarity

There are clear areas of analogy between quality management principles in industrial production and the service industries and the fields of language learning and teaching. The “production cycle” of language teaching activities involves the design of components, the implementation of processes and the assessment of outcomes, and one way of achieving coherence and transparency is to look at them in these terms.

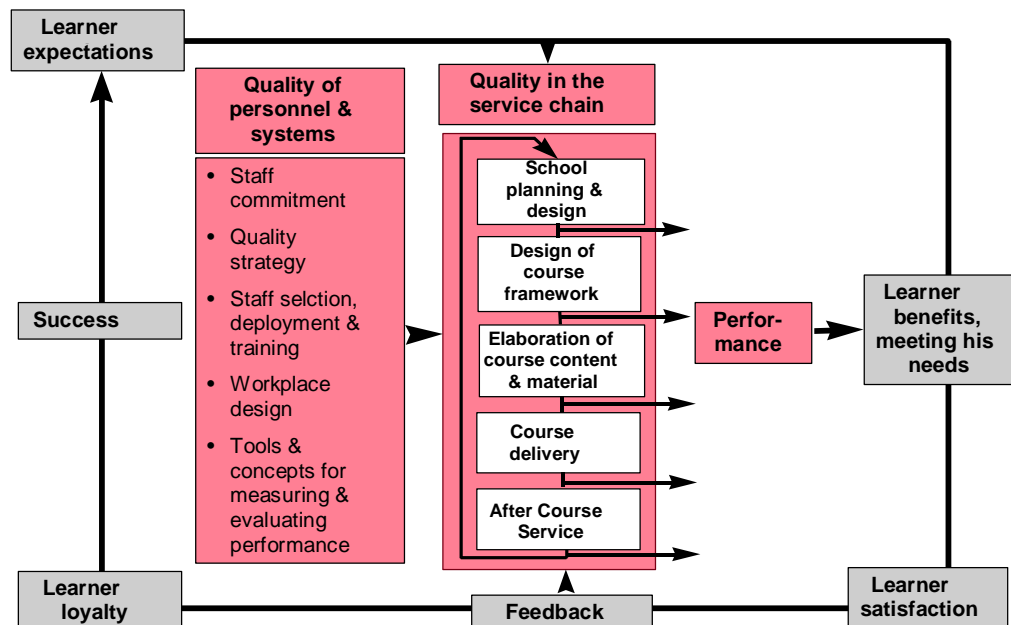
In “A Quality Guide for the Evaluation and Design of Language Learning and teaching Programmes and Materials”, produced for the European Commission Lasnier, Morfeld, North, Borneto and Späth illustrate the process as follows:



They list the principles of quality, together with sub-principles as follows:

Principles	Sub-principles
Relevance	Learner centredness Accountability Appropriateness
Transparency	Clarity of Aims Clarity about Achievement Clarity of Presentation Clarity of Rationale
Reliability	Consistency Internal Coherence Methodological Integrity Linguistic Integrity Textual Integrity Practicality
Attractiveness	User friendliness Interactivity Variety Sensitivity
Flexibility	Individualisation Adaptability
Generativeness	Transferability Integration Cognitive development
Participation	Involvement Personal Interest Partnership
Efficiency	Cost effectiveness Ergonomy
Socialisation	Social skills Intercultural awareness

Alternatively the quality process can be seen as illustrated below (Paul Menniss Eurocentres):



2.1.1 School planning and design - the components of the language learning process can seem as complex as a sophisticated engineering process. The environment in which learning takes place is an important component. What would be the criteria for a perfect classroom?

- Good lighting
- Comfortable seating
- Adequate working space
- Audio transmission and recording
- Proper acoustics
- Proper whiteboard / OHT projector
- Display place on walls
- Internet access?
- Video?

Readers may wish to reflect on standards for quality of the classroom environment. What are the minimum standards acceptable? What would the ideal classroom consist of?

2.1.2 Design of the course framework is the outcome of reflection and analysis of - and this is not an exhaustive list - the needs and wishes of the learners; the linguistic tasks they will be required to carry out; the linguistic competencies needed to carry out these tasks and the grammatical, phonological, syntactical knowledge they will have to learn; the analysis of the skills required, the strategic and pragmatic competencies involved in the communicative situations they will need to cope with. Questions of instructional design, of choice of media, of production of appropriate teaching materials, of how the classroom or other learning environment is arranged are all elements which need to be resolved. In most language learning activities, relatively little coherent thought has been put into the overall analysis and design of the components and the Common Framework's contribution to creating a shared vocabulary and a shared set of principles is a major step forward in making a more systematic approach possible.

Readers may like to consider the following extract from a guide for quality assessors of private schools.

Code of practice	Focus points	Points to check
1.1 All members are committed to providing opportunities for language study within a clearly organised curriculum framework .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • underlying principles • content • structure and clarity • accessibility to teachers • intelligibility to learners 	<p>Is the curriculum available? to teachers? to students? Does it show sensible planning? Does the school check that it is implemented?</p> <p>[there should be a written statement of curriculum available and known to teachers]</p>

Are these helpful quality criteria for a curriculum framework? Are they specific enough? Are they verifiable?

2.1.3 Implementation of teaching / learning processes - a similar application of quality assurance principles can be made to the “language learning production process” - in other words, what happens in the classroom or other learning environment? There are requirements for analysis and choice of alternative teaching methodologies, for optimising the learning / teaching processes, for choice of text, balance of linguistic practice and communicative expression, for development of relevant skills. The affective features of successful learning need to be recognised and motivation fostered. The ways in which teachers can best co-operate and receive feedback and support are frequently left to chance and there is often little attention paid to how the overall teaching process can be made more effective. The principle of “say what you are doing”, transparency, is often not respected - learners do not always receive clear, transparent descriptions of the learning objectives and content. “Do what you say” equally should mean proper processes for learner feedback to make sure objectives and implementation of them are consistent. The nature of the learning contract and the guarantees between teacher and learner are often not explicit - or even implicitly- shared.

<i>Readers may like to consider the following extract from a guide for quality assessors of private schools</i>		
<p>(a) high teaching and educational standards and: (b) appropriate and effective teaching methods [For judgement on overall impression of teaching inspection – inspectors should show no preference for particular methods or trends, but to meet criteria school should provide a good chance for students to make efficient progress in language learning, in an interesting and motivating way.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specification of methods - in publicity and to students • staff awareness of methodology • planning of teaching - liaison among teachers • class management • attention to individual needs • effectiveness and appropriacy of methods in relation to students' aims • teachers' classroom expertise • use of resources 	<p>Can principal, head of studies specify what the methods are? Do they make sense in context of the announced aims? Are they applied? Is there proper liaison where there is more than one teacher? Do they correspond to what is stated in publicity material? Are there appropriate teachers' notes?</p>
<i>Are these helpful quality criteria for the teaching process? Are they specific enough? Are they verifiable? Should methodology be specified?</i>		

2.1.4 Assessment of outcomes - an essential feature of quality assurance is the assessment of the results of the process. Much work has been done in the language teaching field to develop a coherent cycle of proper evaluation of entry levels, of in-course assessment and of final examination and certification of achievement. This has led to a multiplicity of assessment systems, of level descriptors, of certificates. The Common Framework and associated initiatives such as the proposed European Language Portfolio offer an extraordinary opportunity to bring these together in a way, which could promote co-operation and establish shared standards and vocabulary.

In Chapter 4, the specific ways in which the Framework can provide descriptions and guidelines to enable institutions to set up systems for quality assurance and make informed choices in design, production processes and evaluation of outcomes are explained.

2.2 But language learning and teaching aren't mechanical production processes

Readers may well protest that the analogies which are being drawn between industrial and commercial activities and learning / teaching are reductive and inappropriate. And it is important to state clearly that there are distinct differences. Learning / teaching is a two-way interactive process, not an industrial production line. Much classroom research tells us that learners have their own agendas and do not always learn what the teacher thinks s/he is teaching. The process is a relational one, influenced by the feelings of the learners towards each other and towards their teacher; it is affected by current events, by personal experiences completely external to the classroom. The concept of zero tolerance of error is foreign to the language learning process and total standardisation of materials, methods, syllabi would be stultifying.

These dissimilarities are acknowledged and accepted - the Guide attempts to explore the ways in which the principles of TQM and quality management can help us to do things better. It does not present them as a solution to all language learning problems, but as a contribution to a coherent and transparent framework in which the creativity of learner and teacher can be best stimulated and productively used.

2.3 What is the contribution of TQM to language learning and teaching?

In spite of the limitations of the industrial and commercial concepts raised in 2.2 above, we believe that the application of these principles in a systematic and disciplined way can bring significant improvement to most language teaching activities. Standardisation where it is feasible can save precious resources and time - the language teaching wheel has been re-invented far too often. The development of a common set of definitions and a common vocabulary can facilitate coherent progress rather than piecemeal initiatives. The next chapter shows how the Common Framework can be a professional basis for applying quality assurance to language teaching ventures.

Chapter Summary

The principles of quality design and implementation can be applied in an analogous and helpful way to the design and implementation of language learning and teaching programmes.

Examples of systematic approaches to quality definition, description and processes are shown

Chapter 3

A Guide for different users on how to implement quality production and management in different language teaching contexts

The objectives of quality assurance and control are to:

provide language teaching of the very highest quality. Providing the right quality means to meet customer needs in terms of designing and producing our services, delivering them to customers and building up and maintaining relationships with our customers. Thus, quality *management* focuses on having the right quality throughout the service chain through

- effectiveness (doing the right things)
- efficiency (doing a defined thing well with optimal employment of resources) and
- flexibility (adapting quickly when customer needs change or are not met).

This requires

- Defining, setting up and using quality standards
- Training in order to control the processes involved and to self-assess efficiency and effectiveness
- Helping to define procedures for:
 - taking up the needs of the customers and the class
 - evaluating the fulfilment of these needs through feedback during the course.

3.2 Quality Control from within

The ideal form of Quality Control is the team which is capable of adjusting its quality performance through its own monitoring. Awareness and self-correction provide both a basis for future development and the speed of response required by modern customers.

3.2.1 Self-help and Teamwork

This requires some understanding of communicative language processes (CEF2 4.5) and the strategies (CEF2 4.8) that a language user employs and in particular reception, production, interaction and mediation in order to be able to assess the quality of the language learning environment and the activities taking place therein.

Team teaching, observation and peer teaching all require clearly laid out standards to work towards in order to avoid misunderstandings, input gaps or overlap. Teachers need to address questions such as “how does a learner learn?” (CEF2 6.5) as well as methodological implications (CEF2 6.7).

The concept of the open classroom implies not only access and availability but also a shared understanding of clearly stated common objectives. An open classroom is not simply a teacher-focused exercise but has profound implications for the learner and that, in turn, requires standard techniques for seeking, monitoring, and, where appropriate, acting upon, learner feedback (see Appendix 3 for sample feedback questionnaires).

Reflective practice requires common standards and shared processes. The outcome may well be widely differing, but the understanding of results - based on scaling and levels (CEF2 8) and the systems of assessing (CEF2 9) a learner’s progress must have shared standards otherwise the system will fail. This, in turn, leads on to the possible use of self-analysis

processes. Here, associations have an important role to play in setting standards amongst peers.

If applied systematically, by using techniques borrowed from the industrial world such as **benchmarking**, can lead to the general raising of standards of language teaching by highlighting what is “**best practice**” in our sector. Best practice, its identification and incorporation into our own teaching is the single activity most likely to improve quality in the short term. It is also the most cost-effective. Benchmarking requires standard systems, standard measures but not standard applications.

It is the nexus where quality assurance meets quality control through the mechanism of quality observation. Put simply, benchmarking and its belief in best practice helps transfer quality criteria quickly and efficiently. It may not be poetry in motion but it certainly is quality in motion. Quality management involves change, which involves learning and organisations producing high quality services are usually **learning organisations**.

Readers may wish to assess their own internal quality assurance procedures with the following checklist:

- *Is there a clear, explicit commitment to producing quality in teaching / learning programmes?*
- *Are there regular meetings in which quality issues are addressed?*
- *Are there procedures for internal auditing/observation of classes, with constructive feedback sessions?*
- *How open are your classrooms to visits, observations etc.?*
- *Are there opportunities for peer observation of teaching?*
- *Do teachers work as isolated individuals or are there organised opportunities for team teaching or co-operative project work?*
- *Are there regular and systematic ways of getting feedback on quality from learners*
- *Are there procedures for sharing experience and analysing best practice?*
- *Is benchmarking practised and are there procedures for assessing own performance with benchmarks?*

3.3 Quality Control from the outside

At the other end of the spectrum is the concept of quality control seen through auditing - quality seen from the outside as opposed to the inside. It is our contention that the two systems are not mutually exclusive but instead provide synergy and a sense of balance and proportion that is otherwise difficult to achieve. Auditing has several clear implications.

These are, *inter alia*:

- the notion of “outside” a system or team
- independence
- objectivity
- the need for experts
- the need for common standards
- criteria against which to audit
- charters, guarantees or other public documents in which the criteria are clearly stated
- a common system of feedback and reporting

3.3.1 Inspection schemes require criteria, and in order to maintain face validity they further require transparency and consistency. Transparency inevitably means that the criteria must be

published and easily accessible, both in terms of availability and ease of comprehension. Criteria couched in arcane terminology are effectively rendered inaccessible. Consistency means both vertically, within the scheme itself, and horizontally - across languages, frontiers, learning contexts and so on. Inspection schemes also require inspectors, who need training and continual updating, together with a reporting mechanism that can be understood by all members of the team being inspected. Inspection further implies a measure of external objective analysis. In the state sector especially, there is sometimes confusion between the inspection of teaching operations and the inspection of individual teachers for career purposes. It is clear that individual job assessment is an important part of quality assurance, but inspection schemes can usefully distinguish between observing the overall systems and quality of a teaching operation and the evaluation of individuals. Judgements based on a visit to a single class are extremely unreliable, whereas systematic sampled observation of a school can give a more reliable picture. A number of schemes involve detailed questionnaires with a high degree of self-evaluation, with the internal assessment being checked by the outside auditors

3.3.2 There are numbers of inspection schemes in both state and private language teaching and there is a list of references to some of the schemes at the end of the guide.

At this point readers may wish to assess their own operations with regard to outside quality assurance:

- *Is their operation part of an independent outside quality audit or inspection scheme?*
- *If so, what do they see as the benefits of the scheme?*
- *What elements in the scheme are problematic?*
- *What criteria would they set to judge the quality of an outside quality audit scheme?*

3.3.3 Quality audits often contain a measure of in-house monitoring and personnel. “Outside” might mean from outside the organisation itself (hence inspection) or from a different part of the same organisation (audit).

3.3.4 Self-referencing schemes such as ISO (International Standards Organisation) 9000 do not necessarily define quality with reference to any external system or criteria, and tend to place emphasis essentially on procedural matters. They concentrate on whether the mechanisms for quality assurance are in place – procedures for checking defects, putting faults right, proper regulations on processes and procedures. They are “content neutral”, not specific to any particular sector, so are sometimes difficult to apply in a teaching/ learning environment because so much of our work is bound to external scaling and assessment (by examination boards) and to system descriptors (the Framework itself). They involve commitment of time and resources, but ISO certification has been achieved with success and benefit by a number of both state and private language teaching operations. ISO 9000 provides interesting and useful mechanisms (such as an internal quality handbook) which have useful applications in the world of teaching and learning modern languages. Moreover, many of the terms in the Glossary owe their origin to definitions laid out in the first issue of ISO 9000 (1987)

Summary of the chapter

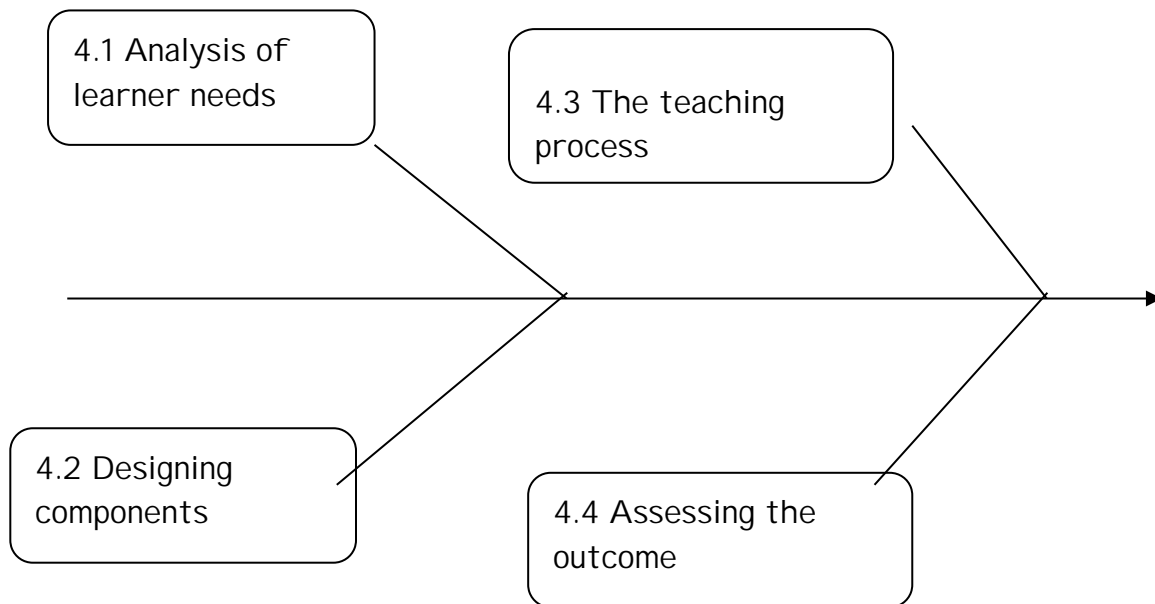
Quality assurance is based on a commitment to self-help for achieving quality internally, whilst quality control is based on external auditing and inspection. There are numerous procedures for setting up proper quality assurance procedures and in the private sector for choosing an appropriate outside audit or inspection system.

Part 2

Chapter 4

The relevance of the Common Frame of Reference to quality assurance in language learning and teaching

A possible model for the construction of quality language learning programmes could be as follows:



F.I.S.H. (Framework Interactive Systems Holostean)

This simplified flow chart is further illustrated in greater detail in the Case Study outlined in appendix 2

4.1 For analysis of learner needs

Chapter 4 of the Common European Framework (CEF pp 18 to 62) gives a comprehensive account of language use and the needs of the language learner. Of particular relevance to needs analysis is the diagram in CEF 4.1 concerning the context of language use, which provides the categories by which the learners' use and therefore learning objectives can be described. The concepts of domain - personal, public, occupational, educational - and the descriptive categories of location, institution, persons, objects, event, operation and text provide a framework for the design of needs analysis questionnaires and for the definition of outcomes.

Section 4.2 describes communicative tasks and purposes and refers to the Threshold, Waystage and Vantage Level descriptions which give comprehensive accounts of communicative tasks at different levels of linguistic competence.

Section 4.5 describes the communicative language processes and describes the three major processes of Production, Reception and Interaction and 4.7 describe the general competencies required by a language learner.

Chapter 8 on Scaling and Levels provides a description of issues concerning levels and how they can be described and the appendix to the CEF provides a large range of “Illustrative Scales of Descriptors” which relate learners’ needs to descriptions of level and therefore help designers put needs in the context of progress needed to achieve the objectives corresponding to the needs.

Readers may wish to consider how the instruments in chapter 4 and the appendix can be used to provide a standardised framework for needs analysis.

It is suggested that they choose an actual group of learners whose needs they must analyse and apply the categories and concepts of the framework to design a needs questionnaire and to use this to define the needs of the group of learners.

4.2 Designing the components

Chapter 3 of the Framework outlines an action-oriented approach to the categories involved in language use and language learning. The definitions of the five major concepts related to language learning are crucial to the definition of the components of language instruction activities. These are: *Communicative language competence; (specific language activity; text; domain; strategy and task*. The distinction (3.2.1 of the framework) among existential competence (savoir-être), declarative knowledge (savoir) and skills and know-how (savoir faire) are essential for understanding that the learner is an actor (or a component?) in the process.

4.7 defines these general competencies further and defines the components of linguistic competence (lexical, grammatical, morphological, semantic, phonological); of socio-linguistic competence (social markers, politeness conventions, register, dialect and accent); pragmatic competence (discourse, functional and schematic design competence).

4.8 deals with strategies and strategic competence under 4 main categories of reception; production; interaction and mediation, each involving four main processes - planning, execution, evaluation and repair.

Chapter 7 deals with the more political elements of curriculum design, asking questions like:

What level of competence is it reasonable to aim at?

What do we mean by plurilingualism?

When do partial competencies provide suitable objectives?

How can learning of different languages be made complementary?

How can profiles and portfolios help promote motivation for language learning and the portability of acquired language skills and knowledge?

Chapter 7 is particularly relevant to those planning curricula in the context of state school systems.

The analyses and descriptions in chapters 3, 4.6 to 4.8 and chapter 7 provide a set of guidelines and instruments which permit the kind of detailed definition of components that would be applied to fairly complex industrial products. By relating the results of the needs analysis, specific definitions can be made of the different competencies required by a particular group of learners.

Readers may wish to test how the ideas contained in these chapters can be applied practically to the design of language programmes:

For example:

Teachers may wish to check how far their teaching programmes cover the different types of competence required to achieve learning aims. Is their teaching limited to linguistic competence or does it also cover strategic and pragmatic competencies? How comprehensive is the coverage of the different elements of linguistic competence?

Curriculum designers and textbook or material writers may wish to test their curricula or books for comprehensive coverage of the different components of the language learning process. How far are the different categories of competence made explicit and transparent? Is it clear how the different elements combine to form a coherent description of the activities to be carried out and the tasks to be accomplished? Do these relate to the development of overall competencies? In short, does the curriculum provide a frame for learning what learners need to learn? Does it communicate this frame clearly to teachers and learners?

4.3 Implementing the teaching processes

CEF Chapter 6 (pp.79 to 94) deals with the processes of language learning and teaching. It distinguishes between learning and acquisition and points out that the learning process involves both the learning and acquiring of competencies but the “ability to put these competencies into action in the production / reception of spoken utterances / written texts to express and understand meanings, to interpret and negotiate meaning in context and to engage in communicative activities” (CEF6.2.1 pp79)

It outlines in 6.5 the various theories on how languages are learned - the debate as to whether it is a more or less innate human information processing activity, requiring only exposure to language and those who believe that explicit teaching and study are needed or accelerate the process. The place of conscious learning and structured practice is discussed. It is clear that the analogy with quality criteria in industrial and service design apply with far more relevance if the view is taken (the authors of this guide do so) that instructional programmes can be designed which contribute to the efficiency of language learning.

Section 6.7 describes methodological options for modern language learning and teaching. It examines both general approaches, including the uses of L2 alone or a combination of L1 and L2 in teaching, and specific aspects of the language learning and teaching process. These include the following elements:

- texts
- tasks and activities
- roles of teachers, learners and media
- general competencies
- linguistic competencies
- socio-linguistic competencies

- pragmatic competencies
- strategies

Each section describes the options open to teachers and learners in the area concerned and the parameters which can influence teaching / learning success or failure.

Section 6.7.3 deals specifically with errors and mistakes and the different options open to teachers in treating errors and mistakes as tools to promote learning.

Chapter 6 provides a useful guide to teaching processes and the options open to teachers. It is closely related to the descriptions and categories which will have defined the needs analysis and the design of the components. It does not, however, give strong guidelines on how the different options can be combined in a coherent process - the Framework does not seek to be prescriptive - and those responsible for ensuring quality in the implementation of the teaching / learning processes will need to choose their options in specific areas, but also to articulate the various processes into a unified and flexible approach.

Readers may wish to use the concepts in chapter 6 as a checklist of their practice.

Learners could explore how far they are aware of their own general options and the options chosen by their teachers in specific areas.

Teachers could reflect on how far their choices are conscious ones and whether the expliciting of alternative options might lead them to change their practice

Academic managers or inspectors may wish to reflect on their own awareness of the different options. Do they implicitly judge teaching from pre-defined options? Is a clear line and set of choices necessary or should more freedom be left for creativity and individual initiative?

4.4 Assessing the outcomes

Assessment is the final element in the quality cycle. The needs to be addressed have been analysed; the components have been defined and designed; they have been applied in a coherent, transparent process. We now need to know whether the whole process worked. Did learners learn what they needed to know? Could they apply their knowledge? Was the process economical in the use of time and resources? In order to answer these questions we need to have criteria for measurement and instruments to do the measuring.

Chapter 8 deals with Scaling and Levels and examines the issues related to describing learner proficiency. It describes the difficulties involved in producing level descriptors which clearly distinguish between different levels, which are comprehensible to the learners and other users and which contribute positively to the learning process. Distinction is made between user-oriented scales, designed for learners, employers and other judges of level reached - they tell us what the learner can do - and assessor-oriented scales, which guide the evaluator and tell you how well the learner performs. The chapter explores the issue of the optimal number of levels for different purposes. It concludes that it is possible to produce understandable, meaningful, measurable scale descriptors and proposes a set of Common Reference Levels, defining Basic Users, Independent Users and Proficient Users, each divided into two levels.

The common reference levels are key elements towards the achievement of a common vocabulary and a common set of standards for talking about language knowledge, skills and

achievement and as such they are an important factor in assuring proper quality and measurement of it. The appendix provides an important set of specific scales with comprehensive coverage of the different components of competence in language knowledge and use.

Chapter 9 deals with Assessment and describes in detail the different options which need to be taken into account in the development of language learning / teaching activities. It distinguishes between norm- and criterion-referenced assessment, between achievement and proficiency testing, between formative and summative assessment. It raises the problems of how to measure communicative as well as linguistic competence and quotes examples of different approaches to these.

Taken together, chapters 8 and 9 provide a comprehensive guide to achieving meaningful, rigorous and comprehensive assessment of language achievement and proficiency. The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) has also carried out considerable development of quality criteria related to language and, for the most commonly learnt languages at least, there are now sets of reliable and valid examination and testing systems. ALTE is at present (early 1999) in the process of validating “Can do” statements of language performance which will provide a valuable tool to help define and refine descriptions of language objectives, levels and assessment.

Readers may wish to consider their own practice in relation to the scale descriptor and assessment principles contained in Chapters 8 and 9 of the Framework.

Learners may wish to analyse their foreign language skills against the categories of the Common Scale of Reference. Is it clear and meaningful to them? Does it help them to set objectives or targets for future language learning?

Teachers can assess their own assessment practices against the categories of the scale - are they aware of the distinctions between different assessment objectives? Do they make these clear to their learners?

Employers or purchasers of language systems could examine the different scales to see how far they provide a framework by which they can commission language training more coherently and can measure the success of programmes on a more consistent basis

In conclusion, the Common Framework of Reference provides an indispensable set of principles and descriptions, which make a more systematic approach to quality assurance in language teaching feasible. If the common criteria, descriptive categories and proposals for scales of reference can be generally adopted, it will become possible to carry out sensible standardisation of needs analyses and definition of the components of language learning activities. It will facilitate informed choice of options in the implementation of language teaching processes and establish a common vocabulary for describing achievement and its measurement. It does not, however, deal with the practical aspects of quality assurance - how to promote working environments in which the actors can contribute to self-help in achieving quality; how associations of teachers and schools can promote standards in the profession; and how external quality control and inspections schemes can be implemented and improved to enhance standards in the profession. Chapter 4 will deal with these practical aspects of quality control and assurance.

Chapter summary

The Common Framework provides descriptions of quality issues and describes the options available as follows:

Issue	Common framework reference
analysis of learner needs	Chapter 4 (passim)
designing the components	Chapters 3, 4.6 to 4.8, 7
Implementing the teaching processes	Chapter 6 (passim)
Assessing the outcomes	Chapters 8 and 9

Conclusion

This user guide is, by its very nature, but a limited and partial overview of the issues generally involved in quality assurance and quality control in modern language teaching and learning, more specifically with using the Common European Framework as a key quality tool.

The authors have set out to illustrate the proposition that both quality assurance and practical use of the CEF are within the reach of all members of the profession and that the essential notions and tools are, and should always be, within everyone's grasp – teachers, learners, parents, administrators alike. There should be no mystique and no mystifying jargon.

To this end a simple glossary has been added to explain the basic meanings attributed to technical phrases employed. They have also added a Case Study which is based on a simple syllabus at Breakthrough Level, entirely based on the CEF and drawn up by practising teachers. These teachers are, admittedly, skilled and highly dedicated but they are by no means abstract academicians. This is to underline the premise that the CEF is both approachable and accessible and can be used in everyday practicality.

As a further aid there is F.I.S.H. This analytical tool was drawn up by a small team in a language school in Trieste who used it in conjunction with the Breakthrough syllabus mentioned above. It is essentially a quality management tool which can be used to apply quality assurance and assess the outcomes in a systematic manner. It is offered as a simple example of one way forward, not the only one. It does have the merit of being simple, inexpensive, transparent to the whole team, and easy to use and administer.

The inclusion of the Case Study, therefore, is to stimulate discussion, to encourage feedback (there is a discussion forum on the Council of Europe website) and to show what can be done and how it can be done. We hope it will get the CEF off the bookshelf and into the classroom.

*“Come, give us a taste of your quality
Come, a passionate speech.”*

Quality assurance begins with a public commitment to excellence; to doing things better.

Appendices

Appendix I

Conducting quality assurance and quality control schemes

The steps in quality assurance initiatives include:

1. Making a public statement of quality standards and what is promised to the user / learner:
Here is an example drawn from the ALTE Code of Practice

▪ **Developing Examinations**

Members of ALTE undertake to provide the information that examination users and takers need in order to select appropriate examinations.

In practice, this means that members of ALTE will guarantee to do the following for the examinations listed in the ALTE Document 1, European Language Examinations.

1. Define what each examination assesses and what it should be used for. Describe the populations for which it is appropriate.
2. Explain the relevant measurement concepts as necessary for clarity at the level of detail that is appropriate for the intended audiences.
3. Describe the process of examination development.
4. Explain how the content and skills to be tested are selected.
5. Etc.

It will be seen that this is a guarantee and an undertaking and that it states an aim and a clear statement of what this means in practice.

2. Expressing the quality standards in operational terms.

Here is an example of descriptions of standards for classroom teaching used in a group of language schools:

PROJECTION	SENSITIVITY	TECHNIQUE	LANGUAGE AWARENESS	RAPPORT
Inspires students' confidence. No difficulty in commanding attention of the class	Shows considerable sensitivity to the different moods of the class and responds to students needing help effectively	Appropriate lesson phasing. Shows ability to set up activity and monitor it effectively	Handles the complete range of levels with confidence. Gives clear grammatical explanations to classes at all level	Good rapport. The students clearly identify with him/her
Keeps class attention fully when using appropriate material	Is generally sensitive to the class as a whole and encourages students to participate	Competent phasing of teacher-directed activity and student-student interaction	Handles difficult grammatical questions adequately but not always comprehensively	Generally good rapport with the class as a whole
Experiences some difficulty in maintaining full attention	Tends to focus on the more dominant students and to overlook quieter members of the group	Has some difficulties in timing and phasing of the class activities	More confident with intermediate levels. Explanations restricted to high frequency structures	Some problems with rapport. Doesn't always deal effectively with potentially difficult students

Difficulty in commanding attention of students	Doesn't notice the mood of the class or when a student needs help	Phasing is determined by materials rather than the teacher. Little variation of activity	Has clear difficulty in answering grammatical queries	Little relationship with the class. Distance is apparent
Unable to command attention of students	Lacks sensitivity towards the class as a whole	No planned phasing is evident	Makes no attempt to answer grammar queries	No apparent relationship with the class

Ten related performance standards <i>The teacher evaluator completes this after the lesson.</i>		
1	The teacher makes clear the relationship of this lesson to the day's work and the overall course unit	
2	The teacher ensures that students are motivated by an interesting and enjoyable lesson	
3	Attention is paid to all students during the lesson	
4	The lesson is well prepared and has distinct phases	
5	Language introduced is relevant to the practical communicative needs of the students	
6	Grammar queries are dealt with competently and appropriately	
7	Creativity and curiosity are stimulated and encouraged	
8	There is an appropriate selection of teacher-class, teacher-student and pair- or small group activity	
9	The activity is purposeful at all times	
10	Errors are corrected in appropriate phases of the lesson. Students are informed how and when this will be done	

This example attempts to describe suitable criteria for classroom observation in clear specific terms.

3. Providing checklists for quality auditors

See Section 2.1.3 for an example from the EAQUALS auditors' checklist which attempts to put the standards in operational, and as far as possible in objective terms.

Appendix II

A Case Study illustrating the use of the Common European Framework as a tool for curriculum design

Presentation

F.I.S.H. has been designed (by the British School of Trieste) as a quality assurance tool for use with the Common European Framework.

The acronym stands for:

F = Framework, in this case the Common European Framework Draft 2

I = Interactive, in that all members of the team can interact with each other

S = Systems, all systems of the teaching-learning cycle are represented simultaneously

H = Holostean, a loan word from zoology meaning a fish that is only bones

a) because it describes the herring-bone shape of the diagram

b) it is holistic

c) it has no fixed skeleton, hence no limitations to the number of bones and spines that can be added; it is truly open-ended system

It is based on an Ishigawa graph, as modified by Fukuda et al, which was originally designed as a tool for visualising and organising the processes in heavy manufacturing industries. It has been further modified by the team (in Trieste) to operate specifically in the field of modern language learning and teaching and was up-dated in 1997-1998 with the CEF Draft 2 to hand.

It has, we believe, the merit of being simple, pencil-and-paper or board based, inexpensive, transparent to the whole team, and easy to use and administer.

That said, it must be emphasized most clearly that this is very much work in progress. At present (December 1998 - January 1999) it is being used during the preparatory stages of designing a syllabus to cover an intermediate zone between Threshold and Vantage. Therefore, it is imperative to re-iterate that this is the first live application of F.I.S.H. to a CEF-based project from its inception. Moreover. It has been used for a relatively modest sample of students (467).

However, the first results have been extremely encouraging and it is with these to hand that this Case Study is offered.

CASE STUDY

This case study is based on 467 Italian military servicemen who attended English as a Foreign Language courses from July to October 1998 in Friuli-Venezia Giulia (north-east Italy). The courses were financed by the Italian Ministry of Defence and the European Social Fund. They were co-ordinated by a small academic management team based at the British School of Trieste.

The course proposals had to be made in the face of several constraints:

- *there was little time (just a few hours initially) to draw up the operational syllabus*
- *classes were probably mixed ability, but no-one could tell us for certain*
- *some students had serious L1 difficulties*
- *many had had limited schooling, though by no means all*
- *motivation was anticipated as being similarly mixed*
- *the courses had to be intensive to extremely intensive*
- *maximum length allowed was 50 contact hours*
- *in some instances this had to be covered in just seven days*
- *there had to be a formal end-of-course test, calibrated to the syllabus*

Above all, this was a new experience for the team and as they had never faced anything remotely like it before, and certainly not under such severe scheduling, they had no previous similar experience on which to draw. Moreover, information about the students themselves, their possible levels, previous studies, motivation and expectations was scant to non-existent.

In the light of these concerns, some real, some anticipated, some discovered after a few hours lessons, three key decisions were taken by the team:

- the Common European Framework would be used to -*
 - produce an initial skeletal syllabus*
 - act as a guide for revision after some classroom experience had been gained*
- the skeletal syllabus would be pitched at "Breakthrough" A1*
- it would need to be revised in a systematic manner after the first pilot group has completed its 50-hour module.*

Attached are:

- 1) the initial stripped down Breakthrough syllabus for the first group(s)*
- 2) F.I.S.H.*
- 3) the quality spiral*
- 4) the resulting "enhanced" Breakthrough syllabus*

Discussion and Experience Gained

Some do's and don'ts:

- *do keep it simple the first time(s) it is used - 4 to 6 spines are ample*
- *do name/select/elect a project co-ordinator*
- *do use colour coded cards*

we used the following

always to the left of the spines

yellow = problems the team anticipated would need to be faced

pink = facts that teachers noted, usually problems or mis-matches, or the unexpected

always to the right of the spines

green = solutions, suggestions, ideas, contributions from any member of the team

green cards placed either as extensions of yellow or pink cards or on their own
- *don't restrict access to F.I.S.H.: it works best when everyone can see and speak*

it has a secondary function of keeping everyone up-to-date on all issues
- *don't use a small board - even a 1.80m x 1.20m board can get cramped with an enthusiastic team:*

Glossary

The terms come from the domain of management – but the applications to language learning and teaching have been explained in the guide.

Benchmarking: the seeking and identification, not necessarily only from within the profession, of the best possible practice and adopting such practice as the standard to introduce, or strive for. It requires openness and transparency in which to operate as well as the desire and determination to transfer knowledge or activities. It thus becomes the standard by which all others are measured. It requires three processes, (a) a thorough understanding of one's own operational activities, (b) identifying leader organisations or practices, (c) incorporating the best into one's own organisation or project.

Best Practice: see Benchmarking above

F.I.S.H. *:** An analytical tool developed for the Common European Framework. The Framework Interactive Systems Holostean is a simple graphical device, available to the whole team involved in any given project based on the CEF on which the aims and components of a project are laid out in a herring bone graph. All members of the team can monitor progress, all can list problems or difficulties encountered, and all are invited to provide solutions (see the Case Study for further details)

Learning Organisations *: organisations with a long-term view to improvement and quality and that have, furthermore, the energy and vision to encourage change in their professional environment(s) and activities. Learning organisations are typically (a) reactive - especially in difficult situations, (c) pro-active - in that they initiate and encourage innovation, (c) adaptive - their ability to foresee change and prepare for it, (d) generative - they themselves are part of the on-going process of learning, often through best practice. Learning organisations involve system and systematic thinking (the CEF offering major advantages here), personal mastery of the overall objective, a shared vision amongst the whole team, and - essentially - team learning.

Quality Assurance **: all those planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that the language service will satisfy given requirements for quality.

Quality Control **: the operational techniques and activities that are used to fulfil requirements for quality. These have a dual function: (a) monitoring processes and (b) eliminating causes of unsatisfactory performance at relevant stages of the quality circle (better still, quality spiral) in order to achieve a twin result (1) ensure user satisfaction by meeting or exceeding their expectations and (2) obtain a more economically effective performance.

Quality Management **: that aspect of the overall management functions that determines and implements the quality policy. This can be done in teams. It requires the commitment and participation of all members of the organisation.

* Derived from Prof. Peter Senge, former Director of the Organisational Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S.A.

** These terms, in current daily use, have to a large extent been derived from the International Standards Organisation ISO 8402 and ISO 9000 (first published 15th March, 1987)

*** derived from the work of Prof. Fukuda at the University of Kobe, Japan, who is often seen as the "father" of Total Quality. F.I.S.H. is essentially a modified Ishigawa graph, similar to CEDAC. Service sector applications were illustrated by prof Fukuda in a workshop, sponsored by EAQUALS, and held at the Area Science Park, Trieste, Italy in November 1993.

Quality System **: the organisational structure, responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources for implementing quality management.

Total Quality Management *:** the concept of quality management extended to include all the sub-components, and activities, that might impinge upon the successful outcome of a project or service and not simply the service itself. The essence is that the client, the student, is paramount. Her/his needs and expectations must be met or exceeded.

References for contact, help and further development

Inspection schemes / quality audit schemes

- The British Council, English in Britain recognition scheme:
Bridgewater House
Whitworth Street
Manchester
- ALTE
UCLES
1 Hills Road,
GB - Cambridge
- ACELS : The Advisory Council for English Language Schools
36 Lower Baggot Street
IRL - Dublin 2
Ireland
- SOUFFLE:
Jean Petrisans
B.P. 133 / 83 957 La Garde cedex - France
- AISLI
C/o the British Council,
via Saluzzo 60
I – 10125 Torino
- The Hungarian Association of Language Schools
Rath György u. 24
H – 1122 Budapest
- PASE – the Polish association for Standards in English
C/o ELS – Bell
Ul. Polanki 110
80308 Gdansk
- The Romanian Chamber of Language Schools
C/o PROSPER-ASE,
Calea Grivitei 2, etaj 2
Bucaresti 1
- CEELE, Spain
- The European Association of Quality Language Services (EAQUALS)
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