

Piloting new descriptor scales from a proposed extended version of the CEFR illustrative descriptors

Background

Fifteen years after its publication, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) remains one of the best known and most used Council of Europe policy tools. While the status of the CEFR will remain unchanged, the Language Policy Section intends to build on the dynamic created by its widespread use by incorporating specific relevant work on descriptors developed since its 2001 publication and by developing descriptors for areas not treated in 2001. The intention is that updates to the 2001 descriptor scales, plus the new descriptor scales, will provide an extended version of the illustrative descriptors that would complement the original set contained in the body of the CEFR text.

The areas for which new descriptor scales have been developed are the following:

- a) phonological control (an analytic scale replacing the 2001 one)
- b) online interaction (2 scales), plus using telecommunications: total 3 scales
- c) interaction strategies (2 scales)
- d) mediation activities (15 scales) and mediation strategies (5 scales)
- e) reading as a leisure activity, plus two scales on reactions to literature (total: 3 scales)
- f) plurilingual/pluricultural competences (3 scales, plus a scale included under mediation “Creating pluricultural space:” total 4 scales)

The main documents can be found in [English](#) and [French](#).

These new scales were created following the methodology used successfully to develop the original illustrative descriptors. Validation took place in three different phases, in which 140–190 institutions and some 1300 individual took part between February 2015 and February 2016. A report on the conceptualisation and validation processes is available.¹

Following a pre-consultation phase with over 50 consultants and experts, a full consultation process is being launched in October 2016 in which users of the CEFR were invited to consider and evaluate the proposed extended version of the illustrative descriptors in an online survey (deadline February 15th 2017). The Language Policy Section now invites teachers and institutions to pilot some of the descriptors. The provisional timescale foreseen is as follows:

Piloting by individual teachers and institutions able to pilot in the academic year 2016-17	October 2016 – February 2017
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Further piloting – e.g. by state schools – in the academic year 2017-18	October 2017 – March 2018
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¹ North, B. and Piccardo E. (2016) Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) / Elaborer des descripteurs illustrant des aspects de la médiation pour le Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (CECR).

What does piloting involve?

A pilot can be from small-scale – e.g. using the appropriate level(s) of one scale with one class – to large scale (e.g. piloting the mediation scales with a several classes in a department or programme). Both are welcome.

The basic piloting idea is outlined in the following steps:

1) Select one area to focus on: choose between:

a) online interaction and/or using telecommunications		2 scales for online 1 for telecommunications
b) interaction strategies		2 new scales
c) some scales from mediation activities and/or mediation strategies		For piloting, best seen as follows (see diagram “Mediation Scheme 2”: EN p49; FR p58”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural and social: 2 scales - conceptual: 2 scales - textual & linguistic: 9 scales - strategies: 5 scales
d) reading as a leisure activity, and/or reactions to literature		2 scales for literature 1 for reading as a leisure activity
e) revised scale for phonological control		an analytic scale replacing the 2001 one
f) plurilingual/pluricultural competences		3 scales (plus “creating pluricultural space” = 4 scales)

- 2) Select those descriptors that appear to be potentially useful additions to learning aims
- 3) Think up an activity that will involve the points described in a cluster of several descriptors (or several such activities)
- 4) Carry out the activity/ies with a class. During the activity, focus on a couple of students. Either during the activity or soon afterwards, consider the performance of those students you focused on, and judge whether they behaved as described in the descriptors, the extent to which the descriptors captured their performance
- 5) Refine the activity – and possibly the choice of descriptors
- 6) If possible, arrange for a colleague to repeat the activity
- 7) Decide which descriptors to propose as additions to curriculum aims
- 8) Describe the experience briefly (one to two pages, with the selected descriptors and/or materials in an appendix), with contact details

If you are intending to pilot descriptors, please provide the following information:

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Please fill out this table and cut and paste it into an [email](#).

Country	
Timing	By June 2017 / Academic year 2017-18
Name	
Email	
Institutional/Personal	Are several classes, and/or a curriculum change involved (Institutional) – or is this you with your class (Personal)?
Institution	Your institution (even if you said "Personal" above)
Area	Which of the six areas (a to f) on the previous page?
Descriptor scales	Which scale(s)?
Level(s)	Which level(s)

Please send the email to Brian North, Project Coordinator

e-mail : bjnorth@eurocentres.com

Thanking you in advance