

## European Quality and Proficiency Standards

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This plenary talk gave an overview of the mission and activities of EAQUALS, the European Association for Quality Language Services.

The Association was founded in 1991 as a non-profit organisation. It is registered in Trieste, Italy. EAQUALS has participatory status to the Council of Europe for the teaching and learning of languages. Its main mission is to contribute to the development of language education in Europe (and beyond) and has 104 member institutions and 20 associate members in 21 countries. EAQUALS membership includes different membership categories:

- **Founder members** are institutions which established the association
- **Accredited members** are providers which have demonstrated in an inspection that they fully meet the standards of the EAQUALS Charters
- **Associate members** include cultural agencies, national associations, examination boards, etc. which contribute to quality language education
- **Inspector members** are free-lance inspectors with no affiliation to members
- **Project partners are organisations not eligible to full or associate membership**

EAQUALS is special as it is pan-European, it runs the only international accreditation scheme for language education of all kinds, which is rigorous but fair and guarantees quality in all areas of the language teaching provision through inspections. The association has clear and transparent values: it supports plurilingualism and pluricultural understanding. Its activities aim at maintaining and enhancing quality and involve leading professional developments. EAQUALS has been involved in the following European projects:

- EAQUALS / ALTE European Language Portfolio [www.eelp.org](http://www.eelp.org)
- CEFR Quality Management Guide
- CEFR Policy Forum
- CEFR Standardisation
- Working Party on Integration of Adult Migrants
- Quality evaluation of on-line teacher training (Leonardo)

The standards are set out in three Charters: Charter for Course Participants, (course delivery), Staff Charter (qualifications, employment terms) Information Charter (completeness, accuracy). Standards are maintained through three-annual external inspections, carried out by an international team of qualified inspectors, who regularly take part in training and standardisation.

As a professional association for language learning EAQUALS provides considerable

professional support for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). It has been involved in the development of the following products:

- Reference and guidance materials for Members
- EAQUALS-ALTE European Language Portfolio
- Training seminars
- Participation in the 2007 Council of Europe Policy Forum
- Syllabus reference to CEFR levels and ‘Can-do’ statements checked in inspections

The vision manifested in the CEFR is in line with the main features of the EAQUALS inspections scheme: CEFR aims at accessing and assessing quality, encouraging development and good practice, aspiring to pedagogic excellence and differentiating from the competition by demonstrating a European dimension.

The professional significance of CEFR goes beyond the introduction of a coherent level system for all languages. It also initiated a paradigm change in language education, which affects the whole learning and teaching process.

CEFR promotes an action-orientated approach to learning: with the “can do objectives” the main aim of learning becomes to achieve certain performance levels in what learners need to do with the language, so language and content of learning is selected for functional reasons. Accepting partial competences makes it possible to have different skills profiles for learners. The CEFR offers transparency as it informs learners; involves them in setting objectives and in monitoring their own progress and achievement. Self-assessment becomes an important feature of the language learning process and the qualitative aspects of language performance have priority when assessing language ability. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) serves as a source of learning objectives and as a tool to help students to record achievement and progress.

The philosophy and professional approach of CEFR has significant impact on the planning and implementing the learning-teaching process. With the European dimension of the CEFR the curriculum, which describes the educational philosophy of an institution, gains special importance. By the EAQUALS definition the curriculum is “an overall description of objectives, with reference to the levels of the CEFR, including a framework of levels and general statement of means used to achieve these objectives.” The content of teaching and learning is set out in the syllabus, which is “a means of specifying appropriate course content, aims and learning outcomes for teachers and students (e.g. through description of courses); statements of content to be covered in a certain period”.

The EAQUALS inspection has a strong focus on teaching and involves lesson observation as the main source of evidence about standards of teaching and academic management. When looking at standards of teaching EAQUALS looks at the coherence between the curriculum and syllabus and what takes place in the classroom. The inspectors look for evidence of “effective learning” and assess teaching

from the learners' point of view. Below are the main focal points for the standards of teaching:

- efficient organisation of lessons, with written plans and/or records, a logical flow in which students understand what they are doing and how it will help them learn and achieve their learning aims,
- teachers' ability to use a variety of teaching techniques and to organise students in different working groups (individual, pairs, groups), as well as to present information, monitor and provide support, and manage changes of activity efficiently and clearly;
- attention to the needs and interests of individual students as well as of the whole group, e.g. by ensuring that different needs and abilities within the group are catered for without affecting the work of the group;
- use of various teaching media which are appropriate to the age, type, and level of the group and to the aims of the lessons: textbook, board, handouts, audio cassettes etc;

Although the main service EAQUALS provides is the inspection scheme, it is also involved in the development of professional materials and seminar outlines for members, which are made available electronically. These include:

Seminars:

- A Guide to Self-evaluation for Schools
- Quality in the Language School
- Managing the Teaching Team
- Staff Training and Development
- Managing Assessment in the Language School
- Marketing the Language School

Self-help Guides to

- CEFR Curriculum & Syllabus Design
- Managing and Appraising Staff
- Teacher Development: observation, in-service training, performance review.
- Practical (H)elp: The EAQUALS Guide to introducing the European Language Portfolio in schools.

In November 2006 EAQUALS launched Special Interest Projects (SIPs) in the following areas:

- School twinning & networking
- Teacher training (e.g. error, pronunciation teaching)
- Training academic managers
- CEFR Can-do descriptors – review, implementation
- ELP implementation

- Tools to translate EAQUALS materials
- Quality management guide (QMS , ISO 9001)
- Qualitative research
- Accreditation of on-line language learning
- Accreditation of teacher training courses.

For more information visit the EAQUALS website at [www.eaquals.org](http://www.eaquals.org) or contact the EAQUALS Secretariat by e-mail: [info@eaquals.org](mailto:info@eaquals.org).