

## **REVIEW OF the 19<sup>th</sup> AULC CONFERENCE:** The Future of Language Learning within the UK Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges.

The 19<sup>th</sup>AULC conference was hosted by Sheffield Hallam University in Sheffield on Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th January 2018. It brought together a large audience of professionals working in UKHE as well as exhibitors promoting new educational technologies and online learning platforms.

As announced, this AULC conference questioned the future of Language learning in Higher Education in the UK. Paper presentations raised important issues pertaining to language and language education policies. These stressed the necessity and benefits of promoting and facilitating linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the UK since pluri/bilingualism research showed that multilingualism enhanced, amongst other things, mental flexibility, learning capacity and cultural awareness, as *Dr Brian Fox* highlighted in his paper.

The necessity to value modern language education for this teaching and research field which is clearly understated compared to other academic disciplines was also underlined. Addressing these matters seems to have become an utmost urgency in the context of Brexit and of the current disregard for language studies as shown by the low levels of participation and achievement seen in languages taken at GCSE. This could create long-term difficulties to businesses in the country wishing to work internationally and remain globally competitive post-Brexit.

This critical situation has prompted University Languages Centres in the UK to question their role, organisation and place. Indeed their collective action can influence Language policy in the UK. Two types of answers have been put forward during the AULC conference: a pedagogical one and an organizational one.

In terms of pedagogical proposals, *Elissavet Amanatidou* pointed out language teaching practices that merely focus on functional competence, when cultural and symbolic competences should also be taken into consideration. In order to value learners' individual language repertoire, as the CECR recommended, she fosters the development of multilingual and intercultural approaches incorporating transcultural content and translingual reflection at every level.

Then, in order to tackle students' misconception about what it means to learn a language Dr Ulrike Bevendiek suggested advising students to find the correct language to learn given their verbal repertoire. She proposed to encourage them to learn related languages to benefit language transfers and language learning strategies, and not taking intensive training when they have no experience of language learning. Being better informed of the challenge they will face this could keep motivation levels up and develop more realistic aims.

Finally, Dr Geraldine Crahay encouraged the use of digital supports to promote learners' autonomy and deal with multicultural and multilingual heterogeneity in the language classroom. Students can thus work at their own pace, focus on specific skills and knowledge. This requirement implies having very well equipped centres.

When it comes to developing multilingual and intercultural approaches, this implies a culture that values research more and support language teachers to develop research competence as Dr Rasha Soliman explained. This view is also supported by Professor Terry Lamb who is deeply convinced that the challenges facing language learning and teaching in HE in the UK have to do with language teachers' status. He advocates the recognition of their pedagogical and language research, not valued enough by the institutions.

As for the structural proposals, Mark Critchley has presented a project supported by the British Academy whose aim is to formulate a common design framework for language courses that is consistent with the Common European Framework in those languages. This provides a University IWLP with a reference framework based on guidance on recommended input study hours to design language courses of different formats, durations and contact hours in order to progress from one CEFR band to the next. This is very important to implement this project so that language programmes offered will be slightly equivalent in terms of levels across Modern Languages Centres in the UK. They would be able thus to deliver a certificate of recognition enhancing the value of students' language learning. This is what *John Morley and Catherine Chabert* are currently working on with the UNILANG certification scheme.

The next AULC conference will be hosted by King's College London on 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> January 2019.