

Languages at Work: A new means of assessing and comparing language competence at work all over Europe

Our aims:

The use of foreign languages is becoming more and more important at work as well as outside. This brochure, published by the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Federal Association of German Private Schools and WBT, the examining body for The European Language Certificates, has the aim of increasing awareness of The Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning and Teaching and to emphasize its importance for industry and personnel.

A unified Europe can only exist if there is improved communication between Europeans. The Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning and Teaching (CEF) is a step towards this goal. The Common European Framework of Reference was designed to encourage cooperation between educational institutions all over Europe and in particular to provide a means of assessment of language competence which would be valid throughout Europe. The international labour market makes it essential to have a common means of describing and assessing language skills at work. This description must relate to a common European system of competence levels. The publishers of this brochure have set out to give examples how the CEF can be used for the description

and evaluation of communicative situations at work. The CEF descriptions of competences have been adapted to show how they fit in with language skills in work-related contexts.

and spoken, what really lies behind these and how well the applicant will be able to cope with the language demands made on him at work. This has all been changed by the CEF. In future it will be possible

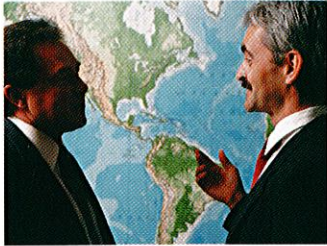


Up to now there have only been incomplete and inconsistent ways of assessing language skills and these have often been based on arbitrary judgements. Heads of personnel and staff trainers can only assume from such statements as ENGLISH – fluent, SPANISH – good, FRENCH – very good, written

to provide precise answers to the question: How well does the applicant really know the language concerned?

The Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning and Teaching (CEF) was developed by The European Council for Cultural Cooperation (CDCC), commissioned by The Council of Europe. The Common European Framework provides firm guidelines for the assessment of language competence. With the help of the CEF





categories provided as the basis for the description of language competences. Classification is based mainly on the four traditional language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. Within these four areas the CEF defines a framework of language tasks ex-

for any job applicant. The language needs of the company concerned can then be related to the content of language courses, thus making teaching and learning closely work-related. As well as this, the CEF provides language certificate examining boards and further edu-



a detailed and clear description can be made of how well a member of staff can cope with particular business situations (meetings/telephone calls/correspondence using e-mail or fax etc.)

The CEF can also be used to make international comparisons as examination systems can use the



tending over six internationally comparable levels. Using this framework it is possible to build up an accurate profile of competence

education institutions with standards for clearly defining their qualifications and making these internationally comparable.

If, for instance, a member of staff is to work as a sales representative abroad, then he or she must be able to understand written messages in the foreign language well



and be able to respond to what is being said. On the other hand, the rules of business correspondence are of less importance to him/her than they would be, for instance, to someone working in sales management or marketing.

The CEF provides the means of distinguishing between these different language skills and measu-

ring them objectively. Thus, the CEF provides the basis for task-oriented foreign language teaching, so language teaching can be related directly to the work to be carried out. As well as this, the validity of the CEF all over Europe means that job applications from different European countries can easily be compared with each other.

