

## Lingua “Opening the Door to Language Learning” Project

### Proforma for partners’ evaluative reports

Please use this proforma to write an evaluative report of your phase 2 activities to be sent to Paula by 10<sup>th</sup> September 2004. Where you worked with national collaborators, please remember to report on their activities as well as your own. Please attach any materials you have developed for the project (including feedback forms) and any other materials you have used and are prepared to share.

On this form, please fill in your answers in the grey fields.

#### 1. Context

*You and your collaborators? Also mention the national collaborators you have worked with.*

| Name             | Role   | Institution   | Type of Institution  |
|------------------|--|---|--|
| Alison Dickens   | Project Director   | Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, University of Southampton, UK | Publicly funded service, providing UK-wide support and services for higher education |
| Paula Davis      | Project Manager  | Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, University of Southampton, UK | Publicly funded service, providing UK-wide support and services for higher education |
| Marie Weaver     | Project Secretary  | Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, University of Southampton, UK | Publicly funded service, providing UK-wide support and services for higher education |
| Richard Ashman   | Principal lending librarian. National collaborator                   | Southampton Central Library, UK   | Public library   |
| Mark Illingworth | Principal reference and information librarian. National collaborator | Southampton Central Library, UK   | Public library   |

*What did you do? (i.e. what model did you test?)* Please indicate in the following table which model you tested. Eight models are described, please indicate with the word “**Main**” which model fits your tested model best. You might have used elements from other models, please indicate this with the word “**Elements**”. Also fill out the Learner Training, Learner support and Learning resources sections for each model.

|              | <b>Models</b>  |  | <b>Independent Learning</b>   |   |  |
|--------------|--|--|---|---|--|
|              | <b>Home</b>  | <b>Away</b>  | <b>Learner training</b>   | <b>Learner support</b>  | <b>Learning resources</b>  |
| <b>One</b>   | <b>a. Open Space:</b><br>opening up an institutional resource centre to the community, making host staff resources available to the community. | <b>b. Create Space:</b><br>setting up a resource centre in the community or using an existing community resource centre, e.g. library. | Short course of "reActivating" sessions for developing language learning skills and techniques with trainer/advisor; self-study materials for developing language learning skills | Meetings with language advisors, native speakers and peers; printed study guide (the reActivate handbook), including resource discovery, learning tips, etc | Mainly physical, e.g. books, audio, video, DVD, CD-ROM, but access to virtual learning language-specific study packs |
|              |  | <b>Main</b>  |   |   |  |
| <b>Two</b>   | <b>a. Open Virtual Space:</b> making electronic tools and materials held on an institutional server available to the community.                | <b>b. Create Virtual Space:</b> setting up a website for, or delivering electronic materials/learning opportunities to the community.  | Online self-study materials for developing language learning skills   | Online study guide for learners (reActivate web pages)  | Web-based  |
|              |  | <b>Elements</b>  |   |   |  |
| <b>Three</b> | <b>a. Host Study Groups:</b><br>providing staff and space for the community to meet as a group to learn together.                              | <b>b. Community Study Groups:</b><br>facilitating the setting up of study groups in the community.                                     | Training for learners from trainer/facilitator/advisor on how to run the group, how to learn with others, etc; training for facilitators, native speakers, etc                    | Group facilitators/native speakers work with learners face-to-face; printed or electronic guides/ideas for activities, games, etc                           | Selected by learners and/or facilitators and can be physical or virtual, e.g. board games, films, websites, etc      |
|              |  | <b>Elements</b>  |   |   |  |
| <b>Four</b>  | <b>a. Open Days:</b><br>run language taster sessions, exhibitions, demonstrations etc. in the host institution.                                | <b>b. Roadshows:</b><br>language taster sessions, exhibitions, demonstrations etc. in the community.                                   |   |   |  |
|              |  |  |   |   |  |

What was the profile of your learners? (e.g. number, age, previous language learning experience, qualifications and identified needs including special needs).

- **Number** of Learners: 26

- **Age group** (please state the number of learners in the age groups):

| 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65+ |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| 6     | 6     | 1     | 4     | 9     | 0   |

- **Gender** (Please state numbers)

| Female | Male |
|--------|------|
| 18     | 8    |

- **Educational experience** (Please state numbers)

| Primary Education                    | Secondary Education  | Higher Education / University  | Post-HE / Post-University (Further education) | Adult Education | Evening Classes (not only languages) |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Question not asked but assume all 26 | 26<br>NB some people only ticked their highest educational experience, so this figure assumes that everyone with post-secondary education experience has experience of secondary education | 19<br>NB some people only ticked their highest educational experience, so this figure assumes that everyone with post-HE/University experience has experience of HE/University | 9 postgraduates                               | 14 AE/FE        | Question not asked                   |

- **Language learning goals** (Please state how many times the reason was mentioned by your learners)

| Goal  | Number |
|---|--------|
| I just like to study languages  | 12     |
| I have studied the language and want to refresh my knowledge                  | 18     |
| I am interested in developing a greater degree of independence in my learning | 8      |
| I have been advised to improve my language skills by my employer              | 1      |
| I like the country where this language is spoken                              | 15     |
| In order to meet other people and socialise                                   | 12     |
| I have relatives in or from the country where this language is spoken         | 2      |
| I want to be able to use this language when I'm on holiday                    | 16     |
| I want to be able to read books, papers and magazines in this language        | 17     |
| I want to be able to use this language in letters and/or e-mails              | 12     |
| I want to be able to watch TV and listen to the radio in this language        | 14     |
| I want to live/work where the language is spoken                              | 13     |
| I am looking for a good way to use my free time                               | 7      |
| I have a holiday home in the country where the language is spoken             | 0      |

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| For professional purposes  | <b>6</b> |
| <b>Other reasons:</b>  |          |
| No particular reason   | <b>1</b> |
| "My pronunciation is very poor and I need to improve this"             | <b>1</b> |
| "I have friends in and from the country where this language is spoken" | <b>1</b> |
|  |          |
|  |          |

- **Please write short summaries of the answers on the more open questions.** (Use words rather than sentences.)

| <b>Aspect</b>                                    | <b>Summary</b>   |
|--|--|
| Occupation                                       | Variety of occupations including teachers, administrative/secretarial workers, students, homemakers, a writer, a barmaid and a yachtsman. Several retired people and one unemployed.   |
| Previous occupation if not currently working     | Several ex-teachers/lecturers and a variety of other occupations, including computing/engineering and alternative medicine.  |
| Why choose this way of learning?                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convenience</li> <li>- Alternative to classroom-based learning</li> <li>- Flexibility and working at own pace</li> <li>- New approach</li> <li>- To learn how to learn independently</li> <li>- Meets individual needs*</li> <li>- Stimulating</li> <li>- It's free!</li> <li>- To learn about resources</li> </ul> <p>* While we did not specifically ask learners to report special needs during the application and registration process, several special needs came to light at this time and subsequently. In addition to two learners with hearing difficulties, one of our learners has Asperger's Syndrome, one has ME and another suffers from severe depression.</p>  |
| Language learning experiences and qualifications | <p>Qualifications (figures indicate number of people who specified they have this qualification, not the total number of qualifications, e.g. if someone has two language GCSEs they are only counted once)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proficiency certificate (1)</li> <li>- GCSE/O level (14)</li> <li>- AS level (2)</li> <li>- A level (5)</li> <li>- BA/university level study ( 6)</li> </ul> <p>While some of our learners had studied (other) languages to degree level, many agreed with the comment made by one participant that in their reActivate target language they were at the level of "being able to buy a beer but not complain about it!"</p> <p>Other formal study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studied the language at school but no exam taken (7)</li> <li>- Adult education/evening classes (7)</li> <li>- Basic course - unspecified (1)</li> <li>- Goethe Institute course (1)</li> <li>- Part-time study in university language centre (1)</li> </ul> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Private classes (1)</li> <li>- Summer course abroad (1)</li> <li>- Work based (1)</li> </ul> <p>Informal/self-study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lived/worked abroad (5)</li> <li>- Visits/holidays (5)</li> <li>- Language club (1)</li> <li>- Friends (1)</li> <li>- Tapes (1)</li> </ul> <p>NB the data in this section is incomplete as we asked learners an open question about their language learning experiences and qualifications, and most of them only reported on their qualifications rather than their experiences.</p>                  |
| Native/first language                  | <p>English (21)<br/> English/Italian bilingual (1)<br/> Hungarian (1)<br/> Mandarin &amp; Cantonese (1)<br/> Polish (1)<br/> Spanish (1)</p>   |
| Target language                        | <p>French (10)<br/> Italian (6)<br/> German (4)<br/> Spanish (4)<br/> French and German (1)<br/> Portuguese and Spanish (1)</p>  |
| What other languages known and levels? | <p>Scale based on Council of Europe level descriptors A1-C2</p> <p>Arabic<br/> Level A1 - 1 person</p> <p>Czech<br/> Level A1 - 1 person</p> <p>Dutch<br/> Level B1 - 1 person</p> <p>English (for non-native speakers)<br/> Level C1 - 2 people<br/> Level C2 - 1 person</p> <p>French<br/> Level A1 - 2 people<br/> Level A2 - 2 people<br/> Level B1 - 7 people<br/> Level B1/2 - 2 people<br/> Level B2 - 4 people<br/> Level B2/C1 - 1 person</p> <p>German<br/> Level A1 - 2 people<br/> Level A2 - 3 people<br/> Level B1 - 3 people<br/> Level B2 - 2 people<br/> Level C2 - 1 person</p> <p>Italian</p> |

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
|                                  | <p>Level A1 - 1 person<br/> Level A2 - 2 people<br/> Level B1 - 2 people<br/> Level B2 - 1 person<br/> Level C1 - 1 person</p> <p>Polish<br/> Level A1 - 1 person</p> <p>Portuguese<br/> Level A2 - 1 person</p> <p>Punjabi<br/> Level A1 - 1 person</p> <p>Russian<br/> Level A2 - 2 people</p> <p>Spanish<br/> Level A1 - 3 people<br/> Level A2 - 5 people<br/> Level B1/2 - 1 person<br/> Level B2 - 1 person<br/> Level C1 - 1 person<br/> Level C2 - 1 person</p>  |
| Why do you want to take part?    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To improve general and specific language skills</li> <li>- To spend time in the target language country</li> <li>- To increase confidence</li> <li>- Advice on independent learning</li> <li>- Enjoyment</li> <li>- For conversation practice</li> <li>- Career development</li> <li>- To help children's language development</li> <li>- An alternative to classroom-based learning</li> <li>- The European dimension</li> </ul>   |
| Computing skills/experience      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Common MS Office applications (Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint were mentioned most)</li> <li>- Email applications and Internet browsers</li> <li>- Graphic applications (Quark express, Photoshop, DTP)</li> </ul> <p>All learners reported that they are computer literate, with two having worked in computer systems and three having computing qualifications (CLAIT and NVQ). Many people reported that they use computers on a regular basis at work and/or at home.</p> |
| Where did you hear about scheme? | <p>Library leaflet (18)<br/> From Southampton City Council staff (2)<br/> From University staff (2)<br/> Radio advertisement (1)<br/> Southampton City Council French club (1)<br/> University staff club (1)<br/> Unspecified (1)</p>   |

## 2. Delivery / implementation

Please use **short** answers!

- Give a brief description of your activity, i.e. what exactly did you do and where did you do it? (max 100 words)

**We have been working in collaboration with Southampton Central Library to run a language “reActivation” programme for non-beginners, providing learners with training in autonomy and with access to independent language learning resources, fellow learners and native speakers. We ran a series of generic “reActivating” sessions at Southampton Central Library, which included advice on choosing materials, and tips and strategies for successful independent language learning. Learners were then grouped by language (French, German, Italian and Spanish) to form study groups facilitated by native speakers. Outside of the formal session/study group times, learners worked independently at home or in the Library.**

- How does your phase 2 model differ from your phase 1 model? If your phase 2 model is a refinement of another partner’s phase 1 model, how does it differ from their model?

**In phase 1 we opened the door inwards by inviting members of the public in to use our language resource centres. For phase 2, we opened the door outwards by making our resources (materials and expertise) available in the local public library.**

**This is a refinement of Spain's phase 1 model, and differs from the Spanish model in that our target learners were adults, not children.**

- What were your aims and objectives and how did you set about achieving them?
  - to encourage learners to "reactivate" their language learning through publicising the scheme in local public libraries
  - to provide a taster of the range of language learning materials available by devoting a reActivate session to choosing resources
  - to provide and support independent/autonomous language learning via the reActivate handbook, web pages and the support of the project team and native speakers
  - to put learners in touch with native speakers by setting up language-specific study groups
  - to monitor learner progress via weekly tasks, email contact, observation/comments at reActivate sessions and native speaker feedback
  - to collect feedback on the impact of the experience for learners through feedback forms and tape-recording the final reActivate session
  - to gauge demand for non-traditional language learning from number of application forms received and learner comments
  - to develop links with the local community by targetting non-traditional learners (i.e. those outside the traditional student body) and working in collaboration with Southampton Central Library
- How did you publicise your activity and recruit your learners?

**There were two stages to our publicity. Firstly, in consultation with our web editor/designer, we produced posters and leaflets (in the form of a folding bookmark). We delivered these to Southampton Central Library, which circulated them to the other public libraries in Southampton. Unfortunately, this produced a poor initial response. We therefore decided to issue a press release via our University Press Office, as unlike newspaper advertisements this was free. Although the press release was broadcast on a small, local FM**

radio station, we don't think it was printed in the local newspapers so unfortunately this wasn't very successful either (only 1 learner was recruited this way). However, in the meantime people were beginning to respond to the publicity in the Library and some Council and University employees had also heard about the scheme through work colleagues.

People who were interested in joining the scheme were sent an application form. In total 26 applications were received and accepted - we vetted all application forms to ensure that people were suitable for the scheme but as we had been quite specific about requirements in the advertisement, everyone who applied was eligible. We deliberately targeted learners with some knowledge of the target language rather than complete beginners, as we felt that beginners would not be able to participate effectively in the language-specific study groups. Although the number of applicants was slightly less than our target of 30, it did mean that we were able to avoid the awkward situation of having to turn people away.

Although we were happy with the total number of learners recruited in the end, we have learnt several valuable lessons from the process:

- we underestimated the amount of time it would take to design, produce and distribute the publicity materials
- maybe leaflets are only really effective if you physically hand them out to people. Relying on your target audience seeing a few strategically placed leaflets and posters in a local library is a bit hit-and-miss.
- a press release is worth trying but you are dependent on the local media picking up the story, so it is advisable to have a back-up plan

- How did you organise and manage the activity, e.g. how many sessions and how often, who lead these sessions, what was the content?

We split the learners into two groups according to the preferred times specified on their application forms: a Tuesday evening group and a Thursday morning group. There was a mixture of target languages in each group: French, German, Italian and Spanish. The sessions were led by the project director and were accompanied by a comprehensive reActivate learner handbook and web pages, which were researched and written by the project director and designed by the Subject Centre's web editor/designer. Each session ran for 90 minutes and sessions were held in the seminar room of Southampton Central Library.

Session 1 - 20<sup>th</sup> (Group 1) and 22<sup>nd</sup> April (Group 2) - lead by project director and library staff with project manager and project secretary assisting  
"Getting started" - introduction to the project, meet the reActivate team and each other, outline of programme and reActivate handbook, and a tour of the Library's language learning facilities.

Session 2 - 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April - lead by project director with project manager assisting  
Self assessment and setting targets - assessing your learning and motivation style, finding your level (including demonstration of Dialang), setting goals and planning your learning.

Session 3 - 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May - lead by project director with project manager assisting  
Choosing resources - how to find, select and use resources. What materials have you used before, what is available? Learners were shown a selection of language-related websites and shared information on materials they have found particularly useful. A selection of materials was brought in for learners to browse.

**Session 4 - 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May - lead by project director with project manager assisting**  
**Taking control - how to be a successful language learner. Examples of self-study tasks and tips/techniques for studying languages. Learners shared their favourite tips and techniques.**

**Session 5 - 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May - lead by project director and language tutor/language club facilitator from the University with project manager and native speakers assisting**  
**Working with others - setting up a study group, the role of the facilitator, taking and sharing responsibility, choosing activities/topics, planning the group, setting goals. The language tutor gave a presentation on what makes a successful language club/study group, which included an ice-breaking activity - "Find someone who." Learners then split into language-specific groups with native speakers to discuss how they would organise their study groups.**

**Inbetween sessions 5 and 6, most learners joined study groups, which were facilitated by native speakers and met once a week at a venue of their choice. Learners were also encouraged to keep in regular contact with the project team by emailing the project secretary with progress reports and queries.**

**Session 6 - 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July - lead by project director with project manager assisting. Project secretary assisted at 8<sup>th</sup> July session and Francis Note, Belgian project partner attended 6<sup>th</sup> July session as an observer**  
**Reflecting - feedback on the scheme and next steps. This session took the form of a group discussion which was tape-recorded for evaluation purposes.**

- What learning and support resources did you use? (equipment and human!)

#### **Equipment**

- reActivate handbook
- reActivate web pages with links to useful language learning websites
- DIY Tips for Language Learners - CILT publication
- Existing language learning resources in the public library, e.g. books, audiocassettes, video, DVD, CD-ROM, supplemented by resources purchased by the project specially selected for the target learners
- Foreign language news broadcasts

#### **Human**

- Project director, project manager and project secretary
- Web editor/designer to design reActivate web pages and publicity material
- Native speakers to facilitate study groups (one French, German and Italian and two Spanish)
- University tutor/language club facilitator to lead a session on how to set up a study group
- Southampton Central Library staff to give learners an introductory tour of the library and to answer library related queries

- What was the timetable for your activity? (refer to your work plan)

#### **Our original timetable was as follows:**

- December 2003: initial contact with public library
- January 2004: discuss and finalise plans with public library
- January-February 2004: advertise, design, produce and distribute publicity materials
- February 2004: select learners
- April-June 2004: carry out trial

- June-mid September 2004: collect and synthesise learner feedback and write report

In the main, we kept to this timetable although there was slight slippage with learner selection delayed until the beginning of April. The reActivate sessions therefore started later in April than originally planned, which meant that the final sessions ran into July. This was for two reasons:

- the project director was summoned for jury service
- the advertisement/recruitment process took slightly longer than anticipated.

However, we achieved our aim of finishing the trial before the summer vacation, as one of the main lessons we learnt from phase 1 is that it is not practical to run this type of scheme during the summer.

- How did you monitor your learners, i.e. how were you kept informed about their progress?

- An attendance register was taken at each reActivate session
- Observations and verbal feedback during reActivate sessions
- Learners were asked to complete the weekly tasks in the reActivate handbook and to hand these in so that photocopies could be taken and the originals returned to them. (We stressed that these sheets would not be "marked.")
- Learners were asked to keep a learning log during the 6 weeks between sessions 5 and 6
- Email updates from learners to the project secretary
- Verbal and email updates from native speakers who were facilitating the study groups
- Tape-recording of the final reActivating sessions
- Written feedback forms which learners were asked to bring to the final session, or post to us if they were unable to attend the final session

### 3. Outcomes

Please use *short answers!*

- What was the attendance rate for your activity? How many people attended all sessions?

Session 1 - 23 (11 Tues + 12 Thur)

Session 2 - 20 (9 Tues + 11 Thur)

Session 3 - 19 (9 Tues + 10 Thur)

Session 4 - 18 (8 Tues + 10 Thur)

Session 5 - 20 (8 Tues + 12 Thur)

Session 6 - 14 (6 Tues + 8 Thur)

**10 people (5 from each group) attended all reActivate sessions.**

**Weekly study group meetings between sessions 5 and 6 were also well attended.**

- What was the retention rate, i.e. number of learners at the end compared to the number of learners at the start of the test phase? How many people gave you feedback? What reasons did learners give for dropping out?

**No of completions: 23 in first session (11 Tues + 12 Thur), 14 in the last session (6 Tues + 8 Thur)**

**No of feedback forms: 16**

**Reasons for drop-outs:**

- new job meant time was no longer convenient
- family illness (2)
- new job in Japan meant had to focus on learning Japanese in spare time
- not enough time to commit to scheme
- business appointment clashed with session time
- leaving the country

- Please give details of any products/materials you have developed for the project and, if possible, attach examples in the original language (i.e. no need for translations).

- reActivate learner handbook (Appendix I)
- reActivate web pages ([www.opendoor2languages.net/reactivate](http://www.opendoor2languages.net/reactivate))
- Advertising leaflet (Appendix II)
- Advertising poster (Appendix III)
- Application form (Appendix IV)
- Registration form (Appendix V)
- Feedback form (Appendix VI)

- How did you / will you disseminate your results?

**The project director presented the project at the Association for Language Learning (ALL) Conference at Oxford on 2nd April 2004 and at the Subject Centre Conference at SOAS, London on 30th June 2004.**

**The project director and project manager will present key findings and showcase products/materials from phase 2 at the forthcoming Lingua project coordinators meeting in Brussels.**

**Results will be disseminated to project partners at the next transnational meeting in October 2004 and to the wider community via the project handbook, the project website and at a national workshop planned for Summer 2005.**

#### **4. Evaluation**

*Please write a 1500 word evaluation of your phase 2 experience. This should include discussion of the following:*

- *Learner feedback and what this revealed about the learners and the scheme e.g. language learning gains, response to the scheme, future plans*
- *Tutor/facilitator feedback e.g. What went well, what challenges were encountered/overcome, what was gained in study group sessions?*
- *Evaluation of model e.g. did you meet your aims and targets (refer back to section 2), what worked and why; what didn't work and why not; what changes did you make; what future revisions to the model would you make?*
- *Comparison of your phase 2 model with phase 1 e.g. What did you learn from phase 1 (from your own model and from other partners' models) that helped you in phase 2?*
- *Impact on language learning, i.e. what was the effect of learning in this way? (Base this on comments from learners and your own observations on how this programme contributed to language learning, raising awareness, equal opportunities, widening / increasing participation, etc.)*
- *Results of working with national collaborators , e.g. what have you learnt from this experience about yourself, your own institution, language learning and teaching, working with non-traditional learners, your own country and other countries? What did you/your institution gain from the experience?*
- *Continuity and sustainability: how do you see this model developing? Do you have any ideas for taking it forward?*

Please also include quotes (translated into English) from learners and tutors and other evidence in support of your evaluation.

#### **Learner feedback**

Learners were asked to complete a satisfaction ratings grid, which is summarised in Appendix VII. They were also asked to provide qualitative feedback under the following categories on the feedback form. (Summaries of verbal feedback obtained at the final reActivate sessions are also included under these headings - for the transcripts of these tape-recorded sessions see Appendix VIII).

#### **Language learning gains**

“I regained confidence in my abilities to learn a language again, and feel that having a go “on my own” has benefits.”

Several learners reported that the scheme increased their confidence, motivation and commitment to language learning. Although motivation was an area of great difficulty for most learners, the reActivate sessions were seen as motivating and encouraging as was the goal setting (even if goals weren't always achieved). Some felt that the shortness of the scheme made it more motivating than a longer course. Participants in the scheme are now more aware of available resources and strategies for success. Learners did not immediately identify themselves as having a learning style or set of strategies but in the course of the sessions and feedback discussion they revealed that they had reflected considerably on how they preferred to learn and what strategies they used. These ranged from doing mainly aural work, keeping vocabulary lists, listening to music with transcripts, social aspects of language learning and watching films. Some learners mentioned gains in particular aspects of language, e.g. increased fluency, improved grammar and vocabulary; and several commented on the benefits of intercultural exchange with native speakers. People also reported increased independence although one commented, “I am not an independent learner.”

#### **Particularly enjoyed**

“Being part of such an interesting and innovative scheme.”

The language-specific study group was the most popular aspect of the trial, with learners really appreciating the opportunity to work with enthusiastic native speakers. Learners also enjoyed the reActivate sessions, which enabled them to meet others in a similar position as themselves, e.g. struggling with the language. Many learners felt that the initial sessions served to create a group dynamic, indeed some bonded so strongly as a group that they felt non-plussed when extra members joined. Learners made new friends and several have arranged to remain in contact with each other now the scheme has ended. The variety of languages and levels were generally seen as an asset rather than as a disadvantage. Some learners reported that they enjoyed using particular resources such as films, tapes and books, while two particularly liked written work. Learners also reported that they enjoyed working independently at their own pace.

#### **Progress**

“Certainly more confident and willing to try.”

Only one learner reported that he/she had made no progress. Although others felt they had made little progress when discussing what they had done it was clear that they were more focussed on learning and on the language, and had some strategies/support in place to help them progress. Several reported progress in all areas or in specific areas such as improving listening, speaking and reading skills, and improvements in grammar and vocabulary. Learners also reported increased confidence and time management skills.

#### **Language difficulties**

“Spoken language sometimes deserts me.”

Four learners reported no language difficulties at all. The most common difficulty was speaking, particularly in a large group situation. Several learners reported problems with grammar and remembering vocabulary, while individuals had difficulty with

business language, checking written accuracy, listening to speech at “normal” speed, a particular French textbook and lack of time.

#### Meeting targets

“I don’t think it matters if you don’t achieve the targets as long as you attempted to achieve them as you can always re-target.”

Although the majority of learners reported progress, opinion was fairly evenly divided as to whether they had met their targets – 7 saying they had and 9 saying they hadn’t.

#### Useful/interesting resources

“I wouldn’t have known about all the resources if I hadn’t come to the sessions.” Native speakers were cited as the most useful/interesting resource. Many learners felt they had been introduced to new materials and new sources of materials by the scheme, either through the Library or through the facilitators/website. Several learners also commented on the usefulness of the Michel Thomas (appreciated for its “different” approach) and Pimsleur language courses, and the reActivate materials (handbook and website). The web was a “new” source of material for some and those that tried the Dialang diagnostic appreciated the experience. Individuals cited the CILT publication, “DIY Tips for language learners”, a music CD, CD-ROM and Linguaphone CDs as being particularly useful resources.

#### Problems using library/Internet

“There is plenty out there but not enough available in the library.”

Seven learners reported no problems at all with using the Library and the Internet. Most people found the Library staff very helpful but in many cases it was evident that they had not been briefed about the scheme. Several learners commented that there were not enough language learning resources in the Library and there was often a long waiting list for popular resources. A couple of learners reported that they did not have time to use the Library outside session times. Learners had problems accessing Dialang at the Library and, although the Library has a number of computer terminals, some learners reported a long wait.

#### Support

“I know that there are lots of people I can go to if I have any queries.”

All but one learner felt they had received adequate support.

#### Would have liked to have done but were unable to

“The six weeks that we had with the native speakers should have been longer.” Several learners commented that they would have liked more meetings/practice with native speakers, with one commenting that she would prefer to meet in a smaller group. Due to waiting lists at the Library learners could not always obtain the resources they wanted. Many indicated that time constraints prevented them from looking at as many resources (including the Internet) or study as much as they would have liked. However, several acknowledged that this is often a convenient excuse and there are aspects of learning that can be done in short periods of time or while doing other things, e.g. listening to CDs/cassettes while driving. Some suggested that less frequent meetings would have been preferred. It was noted that the shortness of time was what kept some going – manageable chunks of learning.

#### How did the study group work?

“I attended all meetings and I enjoyed every minute.”

Two learners reported that they were unable to join the study group meetings but those who joined the groups reported that they met regularly (weekly) with the native speaker acting as group leader.

#### What was particularly enjoyable/useful about the study group?

“Going to the pub and listening to everyone speaking has been so much more enjoyable.”

Most learners found the opportunity for speaking practice and free conversation in a relaxed atmosphere the most enjoyable aspect of the study groups. Individuals

commented on meeting in different surroundings and a team quiz as being particularly enjoyable, while another commented on the usefulness of advance preparation.

#### **Native speakers**

**“Best thing on this course.”**

This was the most appreciated aspect of the scheme and the area that had the most immediate impact. The study groups were unanimously enjoyed and the native speakers all held in high regard. The relaxed atmosphere and small group attention were other aspects that had an impact on learners. All learners who commented on this aspect agreed that the native speakers were very helpful and very important, e.g. for pronunciation, vocabulary extension, increasing confidence and motivation, and correcting mistakes.

#### **Personal gains**

**“I certainly feel I can take more responsibility for my language learning – also the advantage of dipping into many resources to avoid “learning fatigue!”**

In general, learners felt more confident and motivated as a result of the scheme. Learners found out things about themselves, such as that they were not as focussed on communicative tasks or that they were not as good at independent learning as they had envisaged. Some found their learning style and others found that learning is a personal challenge for which they ultimately have to take responsibility. Some learners found that the scheme reaffirmed their love of a particular language and all seem to have reinforced their interest in language learning.

#### **Plans to continue**

**“Most definitely – it has already been arranged.”**

All learners plan to continue with their language learning, either now or at a later date. Several learners mentioned starting formal courses, joining/continuing with study groups/language clubs, visiting the target language country, using the Library, and studying at home (including using the Internet and listening to foreign language radio).

#### **Tutor feedback on study group sessions**

Verbal feedback was obtained from our native speaker study group facilitators at a lunchtime meeting towards the end of the study group sessions, and email feedback was received from the French, German and Italian facilitators at the end of the test phase. Feedback was given under three main headings:

##### **1) What went well?**

- overall organisation of the scheme
- the enthusiasm of the learners
- group dynamics
- learner confidence in speaking aloud
- group participation in activities
- friendly, informal meetings meant learners could talk in a relaxed way without being afraid of making mistakes

##### **2) What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?**

- adapting conversation/activities to the needs of learners with special needs, i.e. with hearing difficulties and Asperger's syndrome
- the informal setting of a pub for the French group meetings didn't allow for movement around the table as in a traditional class, but the facilitator tried to divide her time between pairs/small groups
- would have liked more time allocated to the study group sessions and less to the generic reActivate sessions, maybe by running them in parallel

##### **3) What did you and your study group gain from the sessions?**

- Learners gained greater confidence in the target language, e.g. in speaking and in trying out new structures, reactivation of vocabulary, small gains in grammatical proficiency and they also had fun doing the activities and meeting new people

- One facilitator reported gains in her own confidence in dealing with a variety of language structures at once while another commented that she enjoyed the diversity of the learners

#### **Evaluation of model**

**How far have we come towards meeting our aims and objectives?**

- to encourage learners to "reactivate" their language learning

While our publicity didn't reach as many people as we had hoped, those who joined the scheme were certainly motivated to reActivate their language learning, and all those who gave feedback reported that they would continue with their language learning after the scheme had ended, including some who had dropped out early on.

- to provide a taster of the range of language learning materials available

We gave learners a taster of the materials available at the third reActivate session, although it was a limited taster in the time available. Several learners reported that they had previously been unaware of the range of Internet resources available for independent language learning.

- to provide and support independent/autonomous language learning

This aim was achieved via the reActivate learner handbook, the accompanying web pages, and the human support of the project team and the native speaker study group facilitators. With just one exception, learners reported that the support they received was good to excellent.

- to put learners in touch with native speakers

We achieved this aim by setting up the language-specific study groups, which the majority of learners joined, and which was the most popular aspect of the scheme.

- to monitor learner progress

This aim was only partly achieved as not all learners handed in their weekly tasks or provided regular email updates. However, we were also able to monitor learners through their attendance and comments at the reActivate sessions and feedback from native speakers.

- to collect feedback on the impact of the experience for learners

Final feedback was received from 17 of the 26 people who started the scheme via the feedback forms and/or learner comments made at the final reActivate session. As 5 people withdrew from the scheme in the first two weeks, this was a good return rate.

- to gauge demand for non-traditional language learning

As our publicity did not reach as many people as we had hoped, we have not been able to truly gauge demand. However, those who joined the scheme were certainly enthusiastic and we have received several enquiries from people who saw the publicity too late to join.

- to develop links with the local community

We have achieved our aim of reaching non-traditional learners (i.e. those outside the traditional student body), many of whom had not had any previous contact with the University. We have also strengthened our links with Southampton City Council through our collaboration with Southampton Central Library.

#### **What worked and why?**

- study groups – as people had an opportunity to get to know each other during the generic reActivate sessions, they were more at ease with each other when it came to forming their language-specific groups

- native speakers – all the learners welcomed the opportunity to practise their language skills with a native speaker and this was the most successful element of the scheme

- the reActivate sessions – these sessions were well-planned and provided support in a range of independent language learning skills and strategies

- reActivate materials, i.e. handbook and website - time-consuming to put together but well worth the effort

**What didn't work and why not?**

- our publicity did not reach as many people as we had hoped. We had underestimated the amount of time it takes to design and distribute publicity materials and we were relying on people just seeing the publicity leaflets in passing.  
- some people who joined the French study group felt slightly intimidated by the large number of people in the group, and were surprised to see people from the other reActivate session present

**What future revisions to the model would you make?**

- publicity - newspaper advertisements seem to be the most effective way of reaching a large number of people but are costly. If we were to use advertising leaflets in future, we would physically hand them out to people. We would also allow longer for the design and distribution of publicity materials.  
- introduce the study groups at an earlier stage, maybe running them alongside the generic reActivate sessions  
- limit the number of people in each study group, e.g. by splitting the French group in two  
- ensure library staff are properly briefed

**Comparison of model with phase 1 (lessons learnt from phase 1 that helped in phase 2)**  
Two of the main lessons we learnt from phase 1 are that independent language learners benefit from some form of structured support in the initial stages and that learners need to work together. The successful "activating" sessions carried out by our phase 1 national collaborators at the University of Durham and the learning circles implemented by the University of Hull were an inspiration for the reActivate scheme.

We also learnt the importance of making the nature of the learning experience clear to the learners, and the fact that no-one dropped out because the scheme wasn't what they were expecting indicates that we achieved this.

During phase 1 we also learnt not to attempt to run a trial during the summer months. Although we started phase 2 slightly later than planned, we made sure that we had finished by the summer vacation.

From the phase 1 external evaluation, we learnt that in order to carry out a more focussed test, we should reduce widespread activity by working with fewer national collaborators. For the phase 2 trial we decided that we would work with just the one collaborator, i.e. the Library. The evaluation also taught us that we should collect more focussed data on our learners, which we have done via the application and registration forms.

Participants were able to borrow materials from the Library, which they were not able to do from the language resource centres in phase 1 – this was another point made in the evaluation and which phase 1 learners had reported difficulties with.

One lesson we perhaps should have learnt from phase 1 is that leaflets and posters are not the most effective way of recruiting learners.

**Impact of the activity**

"This scheme has provided a launch pad and without it I would never have got started."

The trial has been successful in:

- contributing to language learning: most learners reported progress in general or specific areas of language learning and all those who provided feedback intend to continue with their language learning now it has been reActivated  
- raising awareness: learners felt they had developed an insight into a different way of language learning, a wider range of materials, and how to find and use materials

- equal opportunities: more women than men participated in the scheme and some learners had special needs
- widening and increasing participation: the learners covered a broad range of occupations and ages, and several had no experience of higher education

#### **Working with national collaborators**

Our collaboration with Southampton Central Library was very successful and fortunately we did not experience any of the difficulties encountered by our Spanish partners during phase 1 in developing a working relationship with the Library. We directed the collaboration and the Library met with all our requests by providing a regular meeting space for our learners; conducting a tour of the Library; and housing the reActivate resources. Following the initial exploratory meeting we kept in regular contact with the Library via email and face-to-face on reActivate session days.

From our work with the Library we gained experience of working with people we hadn't worked with before, new ideas and an appreciation of the language learning facilities now available in public libraries. We hope that this collaboration will continue in some way in the future (see "continuity and sustainability" below).

#### **Continuity and sustainability**

"This programme needs to be developed in future and should continue on a larger scale."

Several of our learners and others who were unable to join the reActivate scheme have asked whether a similar programme will be offered in the future. The reActivate web pages remain available to support learners with independent language study. However, many learners also need the support of their peers, learning advisors and native/fluent speakers in order to help them with motivation and to develop their speaking and listening skills. The project has been able to fund staff time for developing the reActivate materials, running the sessions and facilitating study groups, but in order to take this model forward alternative sources of funding need to be found. Our external advisor has informed us that Local Education Authorities are now required to demonstrate how languages feature in their long-term development plans. The project director and project manager have therefore arranged to meet Southampton City Council's Executive Director for Lifelong Learning and Leisure to discuss whether the Council would be interesting in adopting the model, or elements of it. In addition, we have agreed to put our reActivate learners in touch with student native speakers when the new University term starts. This will provide them with conversation practice at little or no cost, as in return they will be able to help the students with their English.

**Report written by Paula Davis, Project Manager  
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