Second medium-term programme of activities 2004-2007

Project A4 – CHAGAL – Set Up
European Curriculum guidelines for Access programmes
into higher education for under-represented Adult Learners

Central workshop report 2/2005

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The report is accessible in English and in French on the ECML website: **http://www.ecml.at**

The Executive Director of the ECML should be informed about any full or partial translation of the report and a copy of the translation should be sent to the ECML for information.

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Context

The ECML CHAGAL-Set up is a complementary project of the Grundtvig 1 *CHAGAL Project* that, over the period 2002-2004, developed Curriculum Guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for underrepresented Adult Learners. The CHAGAL target group includes adult learners from ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and applicants from developing countries. The Grundtvig 1 project carried out studies at various preparatory institutions and analysed the background of the learners and the competencies required by universities. Furthermore, theoretical concepts for teaching adults were developed and pilot projects were conducted to demonstrate good practice on the methodological and institutional level. The result was a set of 12 Curriculum Guidelines that should help preparatory institutions to provide a conducive learning environment that gives CHAGAL students the opportunity to thrive and that eases their integration into university life to become as smooth and successful as possible.

Aims of the workshop

The aims of the CHAGAL-Set Up project's central workshop were to

? disseminate the Curriculum Guidelines to instructors of preparatory courses
? promote the benefits of student centred approaches
? exchange and discuss examples of good practice
? develop a plan for further networking

Programme

The first day of the workshop was dedicated to the setting of the scene. After an introduction of the project, the participants presented themselves, their institutions and the contexts of their work. It became obvious that the participants' working contexts and also their target groups were rather diverse. In the afternoon five CHAGAL pilot projects were presented. A paper presentation showed how the Curriculum Guidelines might be put into practice when addressing the needs of Chinese students.

On *the second day*, after introducing the CHAGAL concept of the student-centred approach, the focus was on examples of "good practice" provided by the participants. The merits and the added value were demonstrated as well as the relation to the CHAGAL principles / the Curriculum Guidelines. A presentation highlighting the impact of multilingualism of international students and a display of materials closed the afternoon session.

On *the third day* participants were split up into smaller groups and reflected the inputs of the previous days. The results of the group work (see below: group discussions - outcomes) referred to methodological and implementation aspects. The results were presented and discussed in a plenary session. Apart from the fact that the CHAGAL-team members had applied for a Grundtvig Thematic Seminar in March 2005 (to prepare a Grundtvig Thematic Network), various dissemination options were discussed, including the forthcoming ECML CHAGAL-Set Up publication.

Group discussions - outcomes

A summary of the group works' outcomes shows the participants' understanding and appreciation of the Curriculum Guidelines, raises important questions and provides starting-points for further discussion:

Group 1 dealt with each of the 12 Curriculum Guidelines in depth. The participants regrouped the guidelines in terms of the **addressees:** guidelines no 2, 3, 4 and 9 address teachers; no 6,10 and 11 address institutions and guidelines no 7 and 8 address the students/learners. The meaning of some of the **central terms** used in the guidelines was not easy for some workshop participants to grasp, a fact that was considered to be due to the widely different political and social situations, the teaching and learning traditions and biographies of the people involved. So the connotations and interpretations of the term "learner-centred approach" were somewhat widespread and so were the terms "key competencies" and the issues of applying "autonomous learning" in heterogeneous groups of learners.

Consequently the terms used in the Guidelines must be defined more accurately and examples must be used to illustrate possible ways of adaptations for different target groups and different learning styles **before disseminating the Curriculum Guidelines** on a larger scale.

Group 2

All participants agreed that the student-centred approach is being adopted only reluctantly. In order to replace the habitus of instruction by one of facilitating and mediating, teachers have to change their role and acknowledge students as self-confident adult personalities. It is a matter of attitude and mindset. The provision of adequate teacher education and in-service training is a precondition for achieving such a change of attitude.

The question was raised as to whether the student-centred approach might be beneficial also for other target groups than CHAGAL students. The answer was 'yes", keeping in mind that the diversity of learners' social, cultural and educational backgrounds is an asset in itself. Since this was in fact exactly what participants themselves were experiencing during the workshop, the merits and transferability of the student centred approach was evident. Some feared, however, that the requirements of final exams might not be met if the student centred approach was adopted. But if adopted properly, the course goals and learning objectives are established in a common effort and the student-centred approach will enable the students to involve themselves in learning activities and to understand what final exams are aiming at.

Group 3

The discussion in group 3 covered several topics:

Teaching adults is difficult for a variety of reasons, in spite of the fact that adults are often better motivated than young learners. Adults are more independent and if teachers are aware of their specific learning styles they easily can play a facilitating role.

It is sometimes difficult **to motivate teachers to change** their teaching styles. In order to present a convincing argument, the economic market approach might be adopted successfully - by saying "Your life will be easier if you apply …". The change of methodology is only a

result of a change of perspective and attitude. It simply does not work if it is imposed on teachers. (The same goes for students.)

We believe we could create a suitable learning environment for CHAGAL students, but is that possible and realistic and to what extent? We can at least **use the Guidelines regularly for our own self-evaluation**.

Bridging strategies between the educational systems of the countries of origin of CHAGAL students and the educational systems in the host countries should be developed further and applied carefully.

Discussion techniques are very effective to encourage students to talk/speak. Exchange of teaching materials for this purpose was suggested.

Alternative financial sources (e.g. European funds and programs, NGO cooperation) should be sought and projects' applications should be developed in order to improve and upgrade the CHAGAL students' integration and education.

The participants propose to **motivate University managers** to improve the organisational and educational environment and make it more welcoming and positive for CHAGAL students. The managers' attention might be drawn on the financial argument: incoming students pay tuition fees, which are indispensable for universities. So there is good reason for providing good integration measures. It is, again, an economic market approach - in order to achieve a holistic and humanistic goal.

Group 4

Group 4 felt there was a need to think through the CHAGAL guidelines in a holistic manner. This means considering the contextual tiers that both individuals and institutions operate within:

?   The individual student comes with a unique personal history and heritage and is located within a family and community. The individual lives within a specific locality but has links and connections at regional, national, European and global levels. This is particularly true for CHAGAL students.

?   The classroom is located within an institution. All institutions now have some form of relationship, links and connections at regional, national, European and global levels. By nature of mission these will vary between institutions.

The group termed the word Glocal to capture this.

GLOCAL

Institution					
Classroom	Locality	Region	Nation	Europe	Global
Individual					
Family & Community					
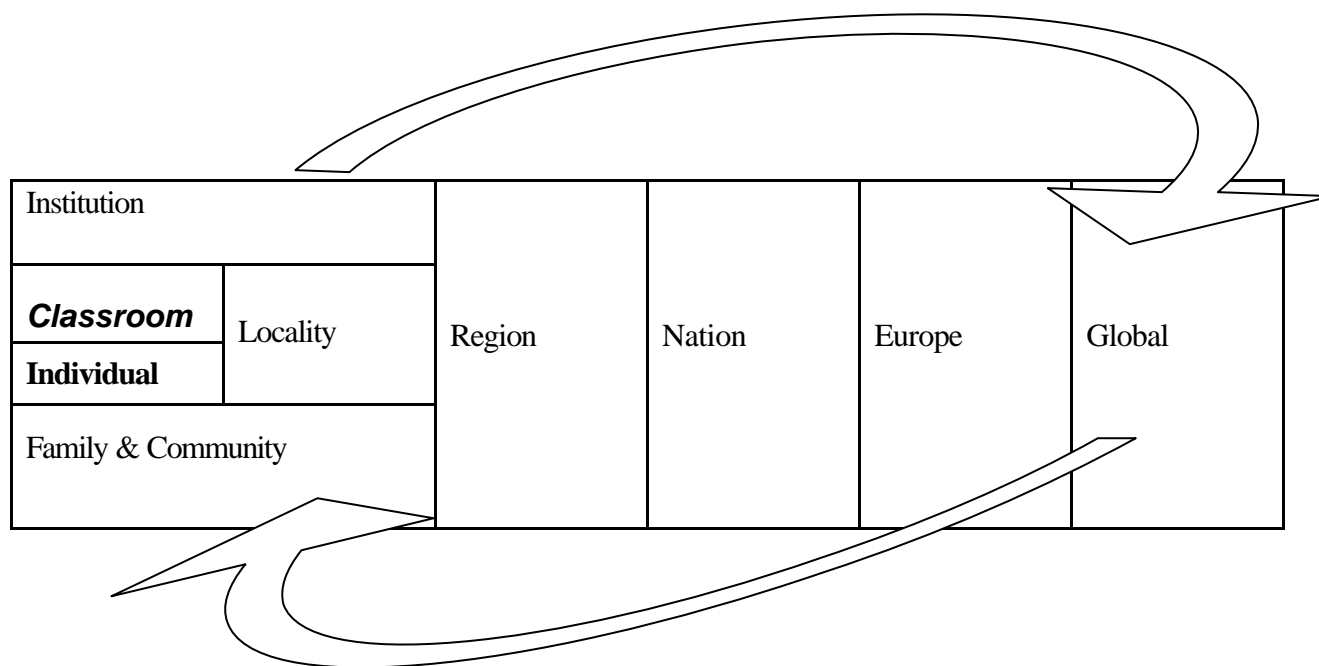
In order to implement the CHAGAL guidelines and to provide a student-centred learning approach, these two contexts need to be considered in a holistic manner.

? The learning process needs to take a holistic approach to the learner and to be able to be informed by and respond to their learning needs. For example listening to and understanding the learning requirements of students with a visual impairment may require the response of providing materials for that individual student in a large print format.

? In order to deliver the CHAGAL guidelines, institutions need to be able to learn from their students. A student-centred approach requires a Learning Institution. This requires a student-centred approach backed up by policies, staff development and underpinned by information, including student feedback.

Conclusions and the way forward

Feedback from participants was very positive; they felt that they had had the opportunity to actively participate and contribute during plenary and work group sessions. They also liked the diversity and practicality of the content and the inclusive atmosphere, with the right balance between programme and social activities.

Most encouraging of all, the workshop participants were prepared to disseminate the CHAGAL principles and curriculum guidelines in their respective countries, and to shift to a more holistic and student-centred teaching methodology. Their future plan is to disseminate the workshop topics among their colleagues in order to inform and influence them. It is hoped that with the forthcoming ECML publication, the CHAGAL approach could be taken another step further and higher, to the decision-makers' level, in order to encourage policy change.

Proposed initiatives for dissemination of the Curriculum Guidelines by the participants:

? Distribute reports on the workshop to colleagues/ at meetings, on various occasions
? Publish workshop report in national magazines, newsletters
? Disseminate Curriculum Guidelines through existing networks
? Write letters to the head of the participants' institutions to acknowledge their contribution to the project
? Publish materials (description of projects, teaching materials) on different websites.

Appendix:
Curriculum guidelines for Access Programmes into Higher Education for Underrepresented Adult Learners

First guideline
Embrace diversity, acknowledge the positive contributions of international students and convey the message appropriately.

Second guideline
Define the content and goals of the curriculum by establishing the students' needs.

Third guideline
Develop a curriculum with clearly defined key areas of competences but be aware of the competences students already possess.

Fourth guideline
Identify different ways and methods to help students develop and achieve the relevant competences.

Fifth guideline
Negotiate with the university to formulate a suitable curriculum with achievable goals to maximise student potential.

Sixth guideline
Provide full institutional support for teachers in the implementation of a student-centred curriculum.

Seventh guideline
Implement the curriculum on the basis of individual student´s needs via regular analysis, taking into consideration the socio-cultural background, age, and gender aspects.

Eighth guideline
Establish the course goals, objectives, and delivery methods with the students.

Ninth guideline
Put in place a mechanism for monitoring procedures through student feedback and assessment.

Tenth guideline
Provide appropriate staff development training for teachers to help them implement the student-centred curriculum.

Eleventh guideline
Provide adequate support in terms of facilities, staff, and financial resources for the effective implementation of the student-centred approach at preparatory institutions.

Twelfth guideline
Involve other organisations in the creation of a welcoming and supportive environment conducive for learning for the benefit of all students.