



# Council of Europe - European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)

## First ECML Regional Event in the UK A newcomer's first encounter with the international ECML-community

*The International Learning and Research Centre was pleased to host this three day event and to welcome international and national representatives to the region, including Susanna Slivensky, the new Deputy Executive Director of the ECML. The event was sponsored by the British Council (ETG), Etech Group, The International Learning and Research Centre, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and The Sir Bernard Lovell Language College*

This ECML Regional Workshop was officially opened by Rosalind Morton from the British Council (ETG) and included representatives of the following national and international organisations: The National Association of Language Advisers (NALA). The Teacher Development Agency (TDA), The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), the French Ministry of Education, European and English Universities and Institutes, Language Centres and schools.

There are lots of surprises when you are about to start working with the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz. Positive surprises I mean, since we are talking about a Council of Europe institution dedicated to the implementation of innovative ideas and methods for more effective foreign language teaching and learning.

And in fact I was quite surprised to find myself on a mission to Bath on the third day after taking up my duties at the ECML. Luckily, I was accompanied by a very experienced colleague, Michèle Bergdoll, who patiently introduced me into my new role as a representative of the ECML. I learned that the Bath event was a so-called "Regional Event" and even the first regional event to have taken place in the UK, even though there is a long history of cooperation between UK language experts and the ECML, it was only in 2002 that the UK formally joined the Centre. Another feature that made

the trip special was the topic of the project the event was part of: training for quality assurance in the field of language education. It is an important issue as I know from my previous experience as Head of the International Study Centre of the University of Kassel (Germany). At the same time it is a very difficult issue to deal with in practice since although there is a lot of awareness about quality management in car production, for example, there is little in the language education field. To sum it up,

I went to Bath with ambiguous feelings since I had high expectations and at the same time I felt that there was hardly anything I could contribute to the seminar since I was not familiar with my "role" at all.

Unpacking a present was what I really did in Bath. A perfectly wrapped present into the



*The Right Worshipful The Mayor of Bath, Councillor Peter Metcalfe, welcomes delegates to a Reception in the Guildhall.*

organisation of which Mary Rose and her staff had put a lot of time, resources and energy. The social highlights included the Mayor's reception at the Guildhall, the visit to the Roman Baths, dining in Bath, chats with language experts from eleven different countries during coffee breaks and lunches at the International Learning and Research Centre, all of it enhanced by the hospitality of the organizers.



*Professor Laura Muresan on the terrace of the Roman Baths before the Welcome Dinner*

*“...the organisers of the Workshop managed to create a congenial atmosphere most favourable to good practice sharing and also to international relationships within Europe – from that point of view the use of the Roman Baths, a cultural reference more or less common to all countries represented (except Latvia and Norway) was most significant ....”* (from a participant’s evaluation)

Inside the wrapping I discovered an excellent workshop characterized by intensive discussion sessions and exchange of experience between the UK and international participants. Thanks to the preparatory work of the project coordinator, Laura Muresan, and her team, the sessions were well structured and the participants were provided with background information about quality issues and practical questions relating to teacher training. These covered the full range from a broad perspective *“What does quality mean to you personally?”* to a close-up *“What are my institution’s most significant skills and capabilities?”*. Without going into content details I would like to point out some of my observations:

- With the venue being located in the UK and there being a relation of seven international to eleven UK participants, there was naturally a strong emphasis on British perspectives and developments.

For successful seminar management it is important to recognise the different cultural and language backgrounds and expectations and I noted that the project team managed to actively involve the perspectives of the international participants which is not a matter of course and most probably the result of long experience in international cooperation.

- The basis of the discussions was draft material prepared by the project team. In the course of the seminar this material was critically reviewed by the participants, including discussions about relevance, feasibility, accountability etc. This approach turned out to be highly stimulating for participants.
- It has to be taken into consideration that even though there is literature about quality training, there is very little concerning the field of language education that teacher trainers can refer to. So various concepts of quality training will have to evolve with regard to the specific profiles of language institutions.



*Members of the Qualitraining team with Michèle Bergdoll and Susanna Slivensky.*

- I felt a strong consensus among the participants that quality training is a core issue for staff development despite not being a well established standard in language institutions. A crucial point for the



*National and international delegates in the workshop sessions.*



*Delegates reviewing the materials.*

implementation process seems to be the building of knowledge and awareness about quality training, the ability to adapt models and materials for individual contexts and to create motivation to put relevant concepts into practice. With this objective in mind, it would be very interesting to have a follow-up seminar perhaps in two years time to discuss progress and achievements.

With the Bath experience in the background, I am looking forward to forthcoming regional events. And that is another of the impacts of the seminar: since the topic of quality management is an issue in any profession, I am now well aware of its implications for my own job.

Finally, I have a recommendation for anyone interested in discovering good work in progress on quality management: go to Bath, visit the International Learning and Research Centre and the Sir Bernard Lovell School, find out about the Kingswood Partnership and you will learn about an environment any language institution would want to be a partner of.

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The next ECML regional event for 'Qualitraining' will take place in Sofia, Bulgaria in December 2005.