



Lifelong Learning Programme | Leonardo da Vinci Partnerships Project 2012-1-PT1-LEO04-11978 1 “Work of Art”

Final Recommendations of the Project Partnership

01. Introductory principles

During the 24 months of the Work of Art project, the partnership had a unique opportunity to get to know the museum sector in Europe and the people who work in museums in several different EU member states. The various forms of contact and the different studies carried out during the project allowed our research to become thorough, realistic, transversal and reliable, in the sense that it was carried out in several different types of museum, with several different perspectives on, and approaches to, the same tasks, with several different categories of workers and in several different countries. It can therefore be described as a relatively accurate image of the “state of the art” (no pun intended) regarding languages in museums in Europe in 2014, and as such its findings and results may be used immediately to conduct diagnostic evaluation in any museum wishing to prepare its Museum Visitor Services Team (MVST) in terms of language training with a view to improving the level of service provided to the visiting public who speak other languages. Besides this, our project also provides a proposal for language learning contextualised within the specific working environment of the MVST and a strategy for the appropriate blending of teacher-led learning (or Face-to-Face “F2F” learning), with potentially useful e-learning solutions.

It appears that this is the first time that serious in-depth research into the needs of this population concerning this particular area of training has ever been carried out. We would like to express our profound gratitude to all the museums and MVST staff who in some way contributed towards the success of this project for their help and assistance, but also for their clear enthusiasm for our work and their motivation in relation to how it may help them to make their working lives easier and more rewarding for both themselves and for the visitors they come into contact with every day. A reference to these museums can be found on our project website www.workofart-project.eu.

02. The current situation of the use of foreign languages among MVST staff at museums in Europe today

Our findings are based on several studies carried out during the lifetime of the project, all of which can be consulted in detail on our website www.workofart-project.eu. It is not therefore within the scope of this document to enter into a detailed analysis of these studies, but rather to extract from their results the main implications for organisations preparing language training for this target population, and the conclusions which the partnership have drawn regarding the most effective and efficient way to implement language training for MVST staff.

The studies included a diagnostic of the current profile of the MVST staff, a diagnostic of their language learning needs within their specific professional context, *in loco* visits to museums in all of the partner countries including observation of MVST staff at work and interviews with Human Resources managers, pedagogical research into what works (and what has not worked) in teacher-led training at museums, pedagogical research into the degree to which e-learning solutions may or may not be beneficial in helping the target population to learn languages and a reflexion on the potential extension of the project’s work, both into other professional areas at work in museums and also in terms of the future, taking into consideration the opportunity



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to develop the project through a second stage, in which the partnership will create learning content and materials for MVST language learning.

02.1 The professional profile of MVST staff

- a) This study shows a sector which is, without doubt, currently undergoing a process of change. The results show different interpretations in different museums of the profile of MVST staff, ranging from security guards, whose task is essentially to “protect the exhibits from the public” to proactive fully-trained guides, whose aim is to enrich the visitor’s experience, with several other positions along the continuum between these two poles.
- b) The process of change appears to correspond to a gradual but essentially generalised paradigm shift underway in museums, moving a little further away from protection and a little more towards customer service. More recent, thematic museums, especially those with “interactive facilities” in which visitors can, for example, actually touch the exhibits, tend to employ younger MVST staff with higher qualifications and existing (if often unidentified) language competence, whereas the more “established”, more prestigious museums, often those with much more valuable (not to say priceless) exhibits on display, have usually employed their staff for much longer, which frequently implies a generally lower level of qualification and, crucially, a generally lower level of expectation in their own abilities.
- c) Nevertheless, the survey confirms the Gallery Assistant, or Visitor Assistant, as the main target of our work, given the fact that this category is the most frequently found, and also given the fact that his/her language competence is generally assessed, and/or self-assessed, as being low or non-existent. S/he works shifts, is between 40 and 55 years old, has held the same job for several years, is not especially enthusiastic about the advantages of training in general and is not especially computer-literate. S/he also often cannot see the relationship between improving her/his skills in terms of communicating with foreign visitors and an improvement in her/his working conditions, even though this relationship may indeed be real. In spite of this, s/he comes into contact with visitors from other countries on a very regular basis. Some of the museums we visited showed percentages around the 80% mark when referring to visitors from other countries.
- d) The project has therefore been carried out at a time when museums are beginning to think about the Gallery Assistant in a different way. As mentioned above, the paradigm appears to be shifting from the protection of the building and the safeguarding of exhibits during visiting hours, towards the provision of customer service to the visitor. There can be no doubt that language competence is a key skill in the provision of customer service. Many museums visited told us they were currently considering the concept of customer service in a serious way for the first time, and it is therefore clear that this fact has made a substantial contribution towards the very high level of interest our project has kindled among operators in the sector.

02.2 The language learning needs of MVST staff



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- a) This study produced a clear idea of the contexts in which language learning should take place and in which the learning programme should be developed, given the almost unanimous adherence to the contexts proposed by the partnership to the museums (see the results of the Language Learning Needs Questionnaire) and the fact that only one major area (emergency procedures) was added by a significant number of museums.
- b) On the contrary, therefore, to the professional profile, the learning context research produced almost entirely common results, independent of the size or type of museum, independent of the country.
- c) The contexts identified were also found to be of use to other workers in the MVST, i.e. gift shop assistants, cloakroom attendants, ticket sales staff, etc., in addition to their priority focus on the gallery assistant.
- d) Our priority is evidently beginner to elementary level (A1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), as the vast majority of museums evaluated their MVST staff at this level and this was frequently confirmed by partners during visits to different museums (see “Museum Stories”)
- e) We also found that the acquisition of essential communicative competence with the visiting public does not require an enormous learning curriculum or prolonged period of continuous training over several years. Our proposed programme takes the learner from A1 to A2 level within a specific set of contexts during the space of around 90 to 120 hours, and may then be followed up by further training of a similar length so as to reach a general level of around B1.
- f) While English is clearly the most common need identified, other languages ranging from Spanish to Chinese are also indicated as priorities, and in this area the geographical location of the museum, its level of prestige and its visitor base would clearly seem to be determining and distinguishing factors.

02.3 Implications for the development of the learning programme:

- a) The priority target of the learning programme is therefore the Gallery Assistant, although the programme makes an attempt to provide content which can also be used by other museum staff in contact with the visiting public, such as those mentioned above in 02.2 c).
- b) The contextual areas to be covered will include the following 11 situations:
 - (i) Responding to requests about and providing information on the museum and its building(s).
 - (ii) Responding to requests about, and providing information on, a particular exhibition, collection or emblematic work of art.
 - (iii) Giving directions within the building.
 - (iv) Responding to requests about, and providing information on, the services available at the museum.
 - (v) Responding to requests about, and providing information on, subjects of a general nature (locations, local transport, cash machines, etc.) around the museum.





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- (vi) Responding to requests about, and providing information on, tickets and admissions.
 - (vii) Dealing with thanks and complaints.
 - (viii) Giving instructions to visitors and providing assistance.
 - (ix) Providing assistance for disabled visitors.
 - (x) Giving instructions in the case of an emergency.
 - (xi) Ensuring that premises are adequately secured, and exhibits safeguarded.
- c) The learning content should be situated at A1 and A2 level, taking into account the fact that the existing level of skills is, generally speaking, either unknown or considered to be low, as is the overall level of qualification.
- d) The previous point, together with the apparently conflicting need for a relatively high level of register when dealing with visitors, suggests that the language structure included should be simple and that polite register should be transmitted through a combination of basic and replicable structures, and lexis.
- e) The geographical variety of the partner countries and the emergence of new language priorities (e.g. Chinese visitors) suggest that the learning programme will most probably have to be adapted into several different languages. For the purposes of the Work of Art Partnership, and in the interests of simplicity and practicality, it was decided to present the programme proposals initially in English, and from the point of view of learning English as a foreign language.
- f) The apparently low level of ICT skills identified in the Professional Profile, and the uncertainty and lack of confidence of both the target population and the HR departments of the museums in relation to their aptitude for learning languages, initially appeared to suggest a preference for teacher-led language learning. This was confirmed by the experience of Centro Europeu de Línguas in organising language training for 3 museums in Lisbon, and by the experience at MNK (National Museum of Krakow) in organising elementary training for their staff in Krakow. During these experiences, the crucial role of the teacher as a learning motivator and facilitator appeared decisive to the success of the learning process, given the need to overcome self-imposed learning barriers and learn that it is in fact possible, and not at all as difficult as was originally expected, to acquire basic communicative competence in another language. It was clear from both these experiences that MVST staff, given the chance to learn, quickly found out that learning was much easier than they had expected and also much more fun. Levels of motivation in relation to the whole idea of language learning subsequently increased enormously with a motivating teacher able to show them that they are capable of success.
- g) However, the difficulties described by the museums in organising teacher-led courses (shift timetables, staffing shortages, unwillingness or inability on the part of staff to attend courses after working hours, etc.) would seem to clearly indicate obstacles to teacher-led training. Some sort of e-learning support, or perhaps a b-learning solution, would therefore seem to form at least part of the solution, despite the initial reservations of both the HR departments and the MVST staff themselves concerning the viability of this kind of support. Among the several reasons mentioned, the lack of a computer at home, the restrictions on using computers at work, a general feeling of





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difficulty in relation to the computer as a whole and the idea that learning languages is difficult enough without having to “learn computers” at the same time.

02.4 The viability of using ICT and e-learning support in language learning for MVST and the realistic proportion of ICT content in blended learning solutions

- a) This study was carried out by the e-learning centre at AGH, the technological university of Krakow, and therefore specialists in this area.
- b) The idea of an e-learning component grew in importance following the results of the professional profile (see 02.1 above), especially given the issues of shift work, of difficulties with after-work training, of obstacles related to the cost of teacher-led training, etc.
- c) The report (also available on our project website www.workofart-project.eu) begins with the assumption referred to in the previous section, i.e. that with a target population such as the MVST, teacher-led or F2F learning is essential in terms of ensuring learner confidence, but also indicates that a carefully designed e-learning component provides fundamental reinforcement, with the additional advantage that it can be used and repeated as often as the learner wishes, including after the end of the course *per se*, and can also be used for on-the-job consultation.
- d) AGH then produced a certain number of prototype e-learning units, designed to help MVST staff acquire or consolidate communicative competence in professionally relevant contexts. These prototypes can also be viewed and used by accessing our project website. The prototypes were then tested with a group of MVST staff in Poland, so as to observe the reaction of the target population. Among the many results which the report contains, we should stress the following: the users really liked the materials; they were genuinely appreciative of the fact that material had been prepared specifically for their professional area; they found it easy to use (exploding the myth about ICT being too complicated); they liked the idea of being able to repeat it whenever they wanted to; they felt more motivated in relation to the idea of learning languages, and they felt that if the whole course were based on e-learning they would need to be supervised.
- e) Far from being an obstacle to learning a language, the results of the study show that e-learning can, if appropriately designed and carefully supervised, become a facilitator and a motivator to the language learning process.

02.5 Conclusions and recommendations

- a) In general, the partnership therefore proposes a “dual system” of teacher-led or F2F training and an e-learning component, providing sufficient flexibility for different situations, different learners and different learning conditions. In practice, this would involve a parallel course programme (teacher-led and ICT-based self-learning), allowing learners to use either or both. The “dual system” would therefore provide a solution for every situation encountered during the project: learners with timetable or shift



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work issues; learners who can attend F2F training this week but not next week; learners who need the extra confidence provided by being able to repeat as often as possible outside the class; learners who need the motivation and guidance/supervision of a qualified language teaching professional, learners who need to check a quick reference while on the job, etc.

- b) A b-learning platform, to be created in a subsequent project under the new Erasmus+ programme (KA2 Innovation), would therefore aim to contain learning materials for both teacher-led learning (printable materials, downloaded from the platform and used in the classroom, such as those demonstrated by the University of Glasgow team) and a parallel e-learning route which would mirror and/or reinforce the teacher-led programme.
- c) The crucial factor would seem to be the articulation of the two systems, so as to allow users to opt between one or the other, or alternate between the two, or choose both, reinforcing what has been learned through using one system by also using the other.
- d) The e-learning component would take the form of an interactive decision-making game, similar to those described by AGH (see the report mentioned in 02.4 above), presenting users with a series of simulations of common visitor interaction at a museum and inviting them to choose appropriate language to respond to the situation. Immediate feedback will be produced through the response of the visitor, as happens in the prototypes produced, where the facial expression and the thoughts of the visitor are visible to the user.
- e) Wherever possible, the material should attempt to follow the chronology of a visit to a museum, as this contextual factor will clearly help learners as a result of their familiarity with the scenarios which commonly occur at the museum.
- f) The learning programme in both forms must, above all, appear accessible, attractive, simple to use and directly relevant to the learners’ everyday needs, and should also make the idea of learning a language appear easy.
- g) The e-learning component should not attempt to “swamp” the user with too much information, but should provide practice of the essential for professional communication, and provide a link to further material if the user wishes to discover more about the language. This is considered to be particularly important when approaching structure.

02.6 Extra Components

In addition to the main b-learning platform referred to above, the end product should also contain three additional components:

- a) A glossary of vocabulary related to welcoming the visitor at a museum (already available on the project website).
- b) Based on the presentation by MNK on “Flipped Learning” at the Isparta meeting, users of teacher-led learning could benefit from pre-recorded video messages explaining language issues in a particular unit, and how best to use the equivalent e-learning unit





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in order to catch up, in the event of a student being unable to attend a particular F2F class. This, to a certain extent, would represent a third strand of learning support.

- c) Based on a recommendation by Vörderband, an application for mobile phones could be produced, with a picture-driven vocabulary resource and useful expressions, both of which would be accompanied by sound.

02.7 The extension of the project

- a) The project website also contains an engaging document prepared by MNK on the extension of the project to other areas. In this document, the MNK team approach the concept of extension from two different points of view: “extension” in terms of other professions at work in the museum, and “extension” in terms of the future of the project.
- b) Regarding the first issue, the conclusion is that while our main focus continues to be the MVST and especially the Gallery Assistant, the course programme produced by the partnership aims to include learning strategies and contexts which will be relevant for other MVST staff such as ticket sales, cloakroom attendants, gift shop staff, security staff, etc.
- c) Besides the MVST, the project has stimulated interest among the museums in other professional areas such as reception staff, and staff involved in the preparation of exhibitions (who often have to communicate with colleagues in other countries). On another level, there also appears to be a demand for language learning contextualised in accordance with the needs of museum guides and educational staff, although the cultural level of these workers would seem to suggest a separate project all by itself.
- d) As far as the future of the project is concerned, the report draws interesting conclusions from the experience of the last two years which will be extremely valuable for the future initiatives of the partnership, among which are the following: firstly, that when the MVST learners realise they really can learn a language (through the various pilot experiences held at the museum), motivation rockets, satisfaction with both training and work in general increases, confidence in one’s own ability to move forwards grows and relationships at work develop and improve; secondly, the future of the project would ideally include a mobility component for MVST language learners to the country where the language they are learning is spoken, therefore providing not only a rewarding consolidation of the language learning process but also, simultaneously, an opportunity to exchange experiences and good practice; thirdly, staff have become aware of the benefits for the museum and, subsequently, for themselves, of improving the level of service provided to the visiting public; fourthly, the growing importance of customer service means that progress in language competence should be monitored by HR departments and should be linked to HR performance appraisals; finally, and perhaps most importantly, there can be no doubt, given the findings of this partnership project, of the clear and unequivocal link between the development of language competence and the improvement of the standard of service provided to the visitor. In turn, a higher standard of service will bring more visitors, leading, in the ultimate analysis, to economic growth for both the



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museum and its local community, the potential for which was so very clear during our visit to Isparta in Turkey.

03. Recognition/Certification

The integration of the learning content within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages facilitates the easy recognition of the level of learning accomplished and obviates the need for a memorandum of understanding among the participating museums.

The final product could potentially be integrated into the ECHOCAST vocational training system for museum workers, should an understanding in that sense be reached with the members of that system. Such an understanding would clearly reinforce the future impact of the Work of Art project, but if it is not possible, the partnership has discovered that the project has gained so much impetus and has attracted so much enthusiasm that it can, if necessary, stand alone in its contribution to qualification for MVST staff.

04. Learning Objectives

The proposal for a Course Content Programme provides details on the partnership's recommendations concerning learning objectives and content. The following provides a brief summary of these conclusions:

04.1 Skills to be developed:

Focus on speaking and listening language skills, so as to enable students to communicate with visitors and also to quickly gain confidence in their own learning capacities.

04.2 Context:

- a) security, including emergency
- b) customer care
- c) the museum and its exhibitions

04.3 Main Objective:

To introduce elementary structure (progressing from A1 to A2 level) together with lexis to cover the above needs, practised essentially through speaking and listening activities and delivered with a friendly but polite level of register.

04.4 Programme Considerations:

- a) Level : A1/A2
- Register: friendly, welcoming but professional



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Type of learning: blended: parallel progress via either teacher-led and/or e-learning, allowing the opportunity to choose, alternate or use both.

Methodology: communicative learning directly related to the learners’ daily professional needs (the important motivating factor is to make classes and/or e-learning sessions both interactive and relevant to the learners’ work, in order to leave them feeling that they have acquired useful skills every time they use the course).

b) Professional Learning Contexts: see the Language Learning Needs Questionnaire, available on the project website.

c) Additional Communication Skills:

In addition to the professional learning contexts, the following communication strategies have also been found to be important for MVST language learning:

Greetings

Identifying people and objects

Asking for and giving information

Telling the time

Short questions and answers

Numbers

Giving instructions

Giving directions

Making suggestions

Requesting and offering help and assistance

Asking for repetition and/or clarification

Expressing possibility/certainty/impossibility

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The Work of Art Partnership

John Walker, Director of Studies, Centro Europeu de Línguas (project co-ordinator)



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