

CAN DO PROJECT REPORT FOR BALEAP, November 2007

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1.0 History

- The '*Can Do*' *Summary and Proposal* (see Appendix 1) was prepared in May 2006. This document outlines the rationale and outcomes of the project. The document also includes a projected timescale. Subsequently, it has been necessary to adjust this timescale due to pressure of other work commitments amongst the working party members from the four institutions involved. However, progress has been made as indicated below.
- Applications to be involved in the project were submitted and after consideration a working party was set up consisting of Carmel Roche (University of Manchester), Diane Schmitt (Nottingham Trent University), Moira Calderwood (University of Glasgow), Colin Campbell and John Slaght (University of Reading).
- Sarah Brewer (University of Reading) has been employed as a research assistant to carry out a review of the literature.
- Outcomes include:
 - (i) a full working party meeting at Nottingham Trent University on 7 December 2006.
 - (ii) a full working party meeting at the University of Manchester 2 February 2007.
 - (iii) the following working party members (Carmel Roche, Moira Calderwood, Diane Schmitt, Sarah Brewer and John Slaght) addressing BALEAP delegates at the Salford University PIM held on 3 February 2007. During their address the background to the project, phase 1 of the project – the literature review, phases 2 and 3 of the project, the intended outcomes of the project and the potential benefits to BALEAP members were explained. This generated a number of questions and considerable interest was expressed by BALEAP representatives from various institutions.
 - (iv) a review of the literature carried out by Sarah Brewer (see section 2 below)
 - (v) A draft questionnaire (see appendix 2) and interview procedure (see appendix 3) have been prepared which will be trialled in the Autumn term with selected academic lecturers at all the participating institutions (see section 3 below). The main focus of the questionnaire is to elicit lecturers' opinions on the language and academic skills required for academic study (initially at Masters' level, but the scope of the project will be extended in future to consider undergraduate and PhD students).

2.0 Literature review

The review of relevant literature and documentation is well underway (see appendix 4 for full report). Work undertaken has included:

- initial consultation with academic staff in other HE institutions with experience of working in this area.
- identification of relevant policy and consultative documents including
 - government reports
 - higher education reports and research publications (HEA; UKCOSA, QAA)
 - CEF research and publications

(Areas covered include assessment; analysis of key skills/transferable skills; internationalisation of higher education.)

Work on the academic literature is continuing with an expected completion date for the review of March 2008.

3.0 Piloting questionnaire and interview procedures

All the participating institutions have identified a number of academic lecturers, from a wide range of Faculties (see below) to take part in the piloting stage. These members of staff have been approached, and have agreed to take part in this piloting stage. In some cases (e.g. at the University of Manchester), some interviews have already been held. The remaining members of staff at all the institutions will be sent questionnaires and be interviewed by the end of 2007.

After the interviews have been conducted the lecturers will be asked to comment on both the questionnaire and the whole interview procedure.

Departments and participating institutions:

University of Glasgow:	Accounting and Finance, Business, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine
University of Manchester:	Law and Life Sciences
University of Reading:	Food Sciences, Applied Linguistics, Business and Economics
Nottingham Trent University	Art & Design, Journalism, ELT

4.0 Post-piloting

A meeting of the full working party has been provisionally planned for February 2008. The purpose of the meeting is:

- 1) to evaluate the quality of data obtained in the pilot stage
- 2) to evaluate the questionnaire and interview procedure in the light of the data collected in the piloting stage
- 3) to suggest any necessary changes to the questionnaire and interview procedure in order to obtain fuller data
- 4) to decide how many interviews the team can realistically carry out in the next, and main, phase of data collection
- 5) to assess how much time will be needed to analyse the interview and questionnaire data collected in the next phase
- 6) to prepare a formal request to BALEAP for additional funding for a researcher (see 6.0 below) to be submitted by the beginning of March 2008.

(At the end of this meeting it is hoped that we can invite experts in the field of qualitative research to evaluate the questionnaire, and interview procedure and suggest any further amendments).

5.0 Main phase of data collection

After the February meeting the institutions participating in this project will conduct the main stage of data collection by interviewing a wide range of academic staff from all the institutions.

6.0 Future financial support from BALEAP

Although it is envisaged that data will be collected by all members of the working party, once the data collection stage is complete, the project will need the services of a researcher to analyse the data collected, and to produce a detailed inventory of 'can-do' statements, based on the views of the academic staff.

Having one person do the whole analysis will reduce the level of subjectivity involved, and be more practical than having the data analysed by the whole working party. It will also allow this stage to be completed more quickly than if the working party had to do this in tandem with their other work commitments.

It is envisaged that data analysis, and compiling the inventory of can-do statements, would be done during the autumn term of 2008/9, and a written report would be ready by January 2009, for circulation to all BALEAP institutions.

7.0 Validation by BALEAP institutions

Once the inventory of can-do statements has been prepared other BALEAP institutions will be asked to validate the statements against their own experience, and the views of both EAP staff and subject academics in their own institutions.

It is envisaged that a conference will be held to provide a forum to

- 1) discuss the statements
- 2) set up projects to design assessment tasks, and materials based on the statements.

This conference could be held in the Autumn of 2009.

Draft report prepared by:

Members of Can do Project working party, November 2007

Rationale

There has been discussion among BALEAP members for some time that it would be useful for member institutions to agree on a set of 'can do' statements to describe the language skills and academic study skills appropriate to following degree courses in UK higher education. This reflects activity within the broader context of higher education, where a number of projects at both national and institutional level are auditing and providing for transferable skills development. While the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) attempts to describe language proficiency, the descriptors it uses are too broad for the specific context of preparing international students for academic study.

Outcomes

A commonly agreed set of descriptors relating to language and study skills competence for degree level study would contribute to the following areas of EAP activity:

- 1) curriculum and syllabus design and specification;
- 2) materials design and development;
- 3) development of formative and summative assessment task specifications;
- 4) a framework of reference for research and development purposes;
- 5) a framework of reference for comparative analysis and evaluation;
- 6) a common understanding of specific levels of competence in English language and academic study skills, and their meaning within the framework of UK higher education;
- 7) more effective, comprehensible and standardised reporting on students.

Proposal

To set up a Working Party consisting of representatives from 3-4 BALEAP member institutions to devise and implement methodology for the collection, validation, categorisation and dissemination of 'can do' statements at exit and intermediate levels of pre-sessional English for academic study. The attached project proposal describes a possible project framework for the Working Party to consider.

Funding

The deliberations of the Working Party and its final version of the project proposal will identify areas where funding from BALEAP could be considered. Initial expenditure is suggested as follows:

- Funding for a research assistant to identify relevant sources for the literature review, which forms an important early stage of the project. Costs involved are £8,158 detailed in spreadsheet approved by BALEAP Executive Committee on 5 May 2006.

Timescale

The project is likely to take 2-3 years to complete, so funding could be spread over a number of years.

Action needed

- 1) BALEAP Executive to consider and evaluate the proposal and possible funding.
- 2) If approved, institutions interested in joining the Working Party need identifying.
- 3) Working Party to be set up.

For further information, please contact Ros Richards via email: r.j.richards@reading.ac.uk

Project proposal involving collaboration among 3-4 BALEAP member institutions: 'Can do' statements for prospective degree level international students.

1.0 Statement of main phases of Project together with outcomes.Phase 1

Compile a list of Terminal¹ ‘can do’ statements validated by subject teachers and EAP teachers (for use as final assessment of students at the end of pre-sessional studies and immediately prior to beginning a degree programme).

(This phase would also include a **review of literature** on the rationale, outcomes, and transferable skills associated with postgraduate education, and the difficulties both native and international students have on such courses).

Phase 2

Compile a list of waystage² ‘can do’ statements to distinguish different levels among students (for use on pre-sessional courses).

Phase 3

Development of assessment tasks related to different waystage and terminal levels.

2.0 Likely Timescale

Phase 1: to the end of Academic year 2006-7.

Phases 2 and 3: these are likely to go on for a number of years but an initial framework of ‘waystage’ statements and sample assessment tasks for at least some of the statements could be in place by the end of academic year 2006-7.

3.0 Project outcomes

- lists of terminal and waystage statements which will facilitate:
 - more effective and comprehensible reporting on students;
 - syllabus design and material production;
 - needs analysis;
 - a common understanding of specific levels of competence in English language and academic study skills
- a set of assessment exemplar tasks related to statements;
- closer contact and cooperation with academic subject departments in the BALEAP member institutions involved in the project;
- a framework of reference for EAP research and development purposes.

4.0 Detailed description of phases

Phase 1

Step 1: prepare a questionnaire and interview schedule to be used with academic lecturers from different departments of the BALEAP member institutions involved in the project.

These tools will concentrate on the following questions:

- What can good students do (both international and home students)?
- What do weaker students have problems with?
- What specific things can international students not do well?

The questionnaire will probably take the form of a set of academic scenarios together with expectations of what students should be able to do. The respondents will be given some examples of

¹ ‘Terminal’ refers to the competences considered to be necessary for students at the beginning of their postgraduate courses.

² ‘Waystage’ refers to the different levels reached by students during their studies at in UK HE and before they have reached the ‘terminal’ level and expressed as ‘can do’ statements.

these expectations and will be asked to comment on their importance and add others. The questionnaire will be given to respondents **before** the interview and the interview will be used to **clarify and expand** on their responses.

Example:

tutorials:

- students can ask their supervisors for help in finding specified sources;
- students can discuss the proposed topic of their dissertation and understand and record possible directions for their dissertation suggested by their supervisor.

Other scenarios would include:

- Seminars.
- Lectures (e.g. can respond quickly, appropriately, clearly and comprehensibly to lecturer's questions during an interactive phase of a lecture).
- Essays.
- Producing written work (e.g. can show through their writing (in their own words) that they have understood and fully addressed the question; have identified, read and understood the relevant sources).
- Giving presentations.
- Group work.
- Responding to written or oral feedback.
- Making notes.
- Examinations – (what are they expected to show? e.g. can demonstrate that they have understood key concepts presented in lectures and supported in recommended reading).
- Participation in asynchronous online discussion.

Step 2: trial the questionnaire and interview schedule with 2 or 3 academic subject staff known to the EAP staff involved in the project.

Step 3: review the data obtained and, where appropriate, modify the questionnaire or interview schedule.

Step 4: administer the questionnaire to and interview up to 20 academic subject teachers.

Step 5: compile a list of terminal can do statements based on teachers' responses.

Step 6: circulate list to EAP teachers at the BALEAP member institutions involved in the project for their comments.

Step 7: review and, where appropriate amend or expand list of statements in light of comments from EAP teachers.

Phases 2 and 3

Phases 2 and 3 will be conducted within the universities involved in the project over a period of years and detailed procedures have not yet been elaborated.

The basic idea, however, is that waystage statements and assessment tasks will be developed, piloted and amended within the BALEAP member institutions involved in the project, with a view to wider dissemination among other BALEAP member institutions.

The Working Party will report regularly to the BALEAP Executive and Business Committees, and information relating to the project will be disseminated to all BALEAP member institutions.

Appendix 2

CAN DO QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACADEMIC STAFF

Draft set of questions to ask members of the academic staff community known to be supportive of the work carried out with international students by the EAP department at the University of Reading.

1. Can you comment on the strengths and weaknesses³ of international students' performance in the following areas?
 - completing written assignments
 - coping with the reading load
 - taking tests
 - following lectures
 - participating in seminars
 - completing group tasks
 - interacting with native speakers versus other international students
 - being supervised
 - study skills
2. What can native-speaker students do which international students can't do?
NB prompt 4 skills areas and study skills
3. What can international students do which native speakers can't do?

Appendix 3

CAN DO PROJECT INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

The procedure for carrying out initial interviews with academic staff for the Can Do Project is as follows:

Stage 1: An interview date is arranged and copies of the initial questionnaire (see Appendix ii) are distributed to the relevant academics a few days ahead of the interview date. The questionnaire is intended to function as a prompt for lecturers to think about the issues before, and during the interview.

Stage 2: Initial interviews of approximately 1 hour are held using the questionnaire outline as a prompt for discussion. It is also envisaged that there is time for lecturers to raise other issues not covered by the questionnaire. Interviews are audio recorded and notes are also made if appropriate.

Stage 3: At the end of the formal interview, lecturers are asked to reflect on the interview procedure and how it might be improved.

Stage 4: Key points from the interviews are noted and a bank of key points is developed.

Appendix 4

Report on research for Literature Review/Annotated bibliography

Five areas of interest were identified as of particular relevance to the research on and development of the Can Do statements. These were:

1. relevant policy and consultative documents, including:
 - a. CEF statements and descriptions, rationale and methodology of developing these.

- b. UK government reports on rationale and objectives of Higher Education and Upper Secondary Education

2. academic literature on:

- c. transferable skills and predicted generalisable outcomes of HE
- d. study difficulties experienced by native and international students in the transfer to and during their HE experience.
- e. new demands placed on students by the changing demands of educational technology, e.g. IT

Some of the documentation and literature relating to these five specific areas has yielded more of interest and relevance to the research project than others. The specific categories are also less clearly differentiated than appears from the listing above and there is overlap with other areas of research interest which were not specified, e.g. the CEF with ALTE and Dialang.

Relevant policy and consultative documents

The research carried out initially investigated government documentation but was extended to include documents and research reports produced by a range of Higher Education bodies. This documentation covers more than the categories indicated in items 1a and 1b. providing much useful material on item 2d and an emphasis on the internationalisation/globalisation of education which is not specifically identified above, but on which there is a large corpus of literature.

The development of the CEFR is well documented and there is a considerable body of material evaluating the Framework and subsequent projects attempting to link assessment to it, which has been identified and reviewed.

UK government reports on the rationale and objectives of Higher Education and Upper Secondary Education have yielded less relevant information than research funded by higher education organisations such as the Higher Education Academy, UKCOSA, the Council for International Education, and the Quality Assurance Agency, and the publications that have documented this.

The HEA's network of subject centres has generated a considerable body of research publications, many of them relevant to this research project. In particular the most significant publications of the Subject Centre for Language, Linguistics and Area Studies have been identified. These include articles reviewing the progress made in mapping assessment (in the UK and elsewhere in Europe) to the CEFR and evaluating the progress made by the various signatories of the Bologna Process. Further work reviewing research and publications of the other subject centres would be valuable, however. The HEA also funds the Pathfinder programme and the e-learning benchmarking exercise. These projects are not yet complete, but are likely to yield useful findings in determining the changing demands on students in terms of the integration of educational technology, which will need to be reflected in Can Do criteria. Finally the HEA also funds individual research projects. In terms of this review of literature, the most significant of these is an important but as yet unpublished report and literature review on the Internationalisation of UK Higher Education (Caruana and Spurling).

Research funded by UKCOSA is limited but has provided a useful study on the experiences of international students, covering both published material and 'grey' literature. Caruana and Spurling's report supplements and builds on this earlier publication.

The QAA has generated a large body of benchmark statements mainly at Honours' level and has completed statements for a limited number of Master's degree courses. These provide a useful context or framework against which to view the Can Do statements, though they themselves are descriptive and analytical rather than operational.

Other useful research findings have been produced by the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, in particular, work done by LearnHigher, the largest HEFCE funded CETL and a partnership of 16 universities. This group have already produced reports, literature reviews and annotated bibliographies of varying lengths on a number of relevant areas including assessment, oral communication, listening, writing and information literacy.

Academic literature

Work on the academic literature is ongoing. There is a large and still growing body of material on transferable skills, previously more often referred to as 'key skills'. Study difficulties at HE level is an area of research which appears to have generated less literature and the focus is more from the overseas student's perspective. The demands of education technology is again an area of burgeoning interest with a large and growing literature. Key monographs and journals have been located and identification and review of materials is continuing.

Sarah Brewer 4.11.07