

‘CAN DO’ STATEMENTS PROJECT SUMMARY

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 of programme levels, assessment criteria etc;
- 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.

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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 a 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.

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 CALS and before they have reached the ‘terminal’ level and expressed as ‘can do’ statements.

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 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.