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EAC.A3/ACP/SP

REPORT

Meeting of the NA's Consultation Group on Language Preparation Brussels, 1st July 2013

Chair: Ana Carla Pereira (EAC A3)

Participants: Directors and delegates of the following National Agencies: Croatia, Cyprus, FYROM, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, UK (British Council).

Representatives of the European Commission: Peter Birch (EACEA), Kristina Cunningham (EAC A3), Vanessa Debiais-Santon (EAC C1), Mariann Klingberg (EAC D1), Gillian McLaughlin (EACEA), Sonia Peressini (EAC A3), Sylwia Sitka (EAC B.4), Felix Rohn (EAC B2)

Objectives of the meeting

The second meeting of the NAs' Consultation Group on Language Preparation was aimed at describing possible workflows and financial implications of linguistic support. NAs were consulted on some key issues related to work and financial flows in order to provide the Commission with feedback and input for a final proposal. A discussion paper¹ was distributed to structure the debate. In addition to the members of the group, all NAs received the paper and were asked to send their comments by **12 July 2013**.

Main points under discussion

The Commission presented a proposal for workflows and financial flows both for centralised (online) and for decentralised linguistic support together with some figures on a survey carried out in 2013 on language courses real costs in LLP. The specific situation of each sector (VET, Youth and Higher Education) was presented, mainly for the decentralised system and financial support of language learning (through lumps or OM grants).

After a fruitful discussion, NAs presented their suggestions for the online licence distribution policy and raised a few issues that the Commission will examine more in depth as a follow-up to the meeting.

¹ See Annex I.

Main issues raised by the NAs

- **Assessment:** some concerns were expressed on a possible political problem with levels assessed through the online system. In some countries, at the end of secondary school students are expected to have reached a pre-defined language level, for example B2. There is concern that assessment results may conflict with such pre-defined assumed levels. The Commission explained that assessment serves the purpose of measuring improvement in language skills during mobility according to a common methodology and is not a certification of language competences.

The issue of assessment for all languages (including those not offered online) according to a common methodology was also raised. Poland proposed that EC/EACEA and NAs could provide common guidelines/standards for the languages not catered for by the centralised system. If assessment were provided at national level, the question of validity of measurement would be an issue as some languages would be offered centralised assessment and others not.

The issues of accessibility of the online system was raised, together with the need to cater for different language skills needed by different categories of participants.

- **Language learning:** NAs seem generally convinced that most participants would ask for linguistic support in addition to mandatory assessment. The Commission mentioned possible budgetary constraint in the first year(s) of implementation of the new programme.
- **Possibility of getting credits:** the issue of getting credits for language courses followed during mobility was raised. The Commission is not in a position to decide on this matter. However, institutions may propose that some credits are allocated to participants who complete language courses; this could be done in the context of learning agreements.
- **Roles of NAs - Licence distribution policy:** NAs wish to have a role in allocating online licenses. All NAs seem to agree that online accesses/licences are distributed to NAs according to the grants allocated per country. They also agreed that the Commission sets general principles (mainly coverage of all sectors and coverage of both staff and learners), while **each NA can decide how to allocate accesses/licences to the organisations** in the different sectors according to the respective needs and contexts of their countries.
- **IT tools:** NAs enquired about the state of development of IT tools. When asked if it were possible to determine the estimated number of licences needed, several NAs stated that this could be possible but some flexibility should be ensured in case, for example, of change of language or if estimate do not correspond to actual figures.
- The issue of **support for the host country language** was raised, in particular for VET and Youth, where projects may be carried out in two languages (language of tuition/work and language of the country in parallel). In such cases, it may be up to the organisation to decide which is the language of instruction/work. The

Commission does not prevent institutions from supporting learning of the host country language, but due to budgetary constraints it is difficult to cover such support by the centralized system or by lump sums allocated to support for the language of instruction/work.

Some NAs illustrated projects going on in their countries to support their own language. Where such projects exist, for example in the form of online language courses as mentioned, they could be made available for participants in mobility.

Portugal is working on an online training for the Portuguese language and asked the Commission if their system could be integrated into the online centralised scheme offered by the Commission in case the service provided through the tender does not cater for Portuguese. The Commission will investigate this possibility taking into account the constraints linked to the publication of the call for tenders.

The UK raised the issue of English-mother tongue participants (mainly HE) going abroad to follow courses in English. The NA would very much welcome the opportunity for such participants to have access to courses in the languages of the host countries, in particular the other four languages which will be included in the on-line system from the start.

- **Inclusion of short-term mobility.** NAs showed an interest in extending linguistic support to some short-term mobilities. The Commission is currently investigating this possibility for VET learners.
- **Coverage of linguistic support by OM in higher education:** NAs expressed some concern about the use of OM grants to finance linguistic support as the level OM grants might be insufficient to cover necessary linguistic support. Moreover, there might be no correlation between OM grants provided and real needs in terms of linguistic support.

Input from other National Agencies

In order to have the largest possible input on its proposal for linguistic support, the Commission invited all National Agencies to send a contribution in writing on the discussion paper distributed to them. In addition to some NAs who were present at the meeting, 15 NAs sent their comments and suggestions on several issues mentioned in the paper. The Commission welcomes the involvement and the constructive feedback of NAs on the new initiative.

Supplementary issues raised

- **Online support for EVS:** one NA expressed concern for on-line language assessment in the case of informal and non-formal learning activities such as European Voluntary Service (EVS) as this might be perceived as an additional obstacle for participants to get involved in the programme. Concerns were also expressed about link between assessment and selection for mobility and the definition of level of language competence.

A NA expressed concerns on how to check if participants actually had assessment.

Some NAs think online support might not be appropriate for young people with fewer opportunities and propose to revert to the system in place.

- **Assessment:** questions were raised on hardware and software needed and on how to assess languages not offered online. The issue of checking the identity of participants to be assessed was raised in relation to possible cheating.
- **Expertise in language teaching by participating organisations:** some concerns were expressed on the provision of language courses by participating organisations, which might not necessarily have expertise in the field. One NA proposed to have host organisations to organise courses.
- **Assessment by NAs:** several concerns were raised on the provision of assessment by NAs for languages other than those offered online as proposed by one NA during the meeting.
- **Offer of five languages:** concerns were expressed about the provision of online language support only in five languages. Future developments for other languages would be welcome. The issue of support for the host country language was raised again.
- **Licence distribution:** National Agencies should be able to assess the needs and to prioritise among eligible applicants, especially if linguistic support could not be offered to all participants. One NA proposed to distribute licences depending on the number of mobilities. Guidance on number of licences available should be provided. One NA proposed inserting a special field in the application form so that beneficiaries might provisionally inform the NA and the EC on their linguistic needs.
- **IT tools:** concerns were expressed about the workflow, which in some cases was considered too complex. In order to simplify the workflow, some interface should be envisaged between the service provider and E+Link.
- **Data protection:** the issue was raised about use of data/assessments. Need for anonymity and safety of data was highlighted. Actors should be informed if data is handled anonymously or based on ID numbers to ensure that the Privacy Policy is kept. The information can be included in the programme guide.
- **Consequences of reduced licence use:** the issue was raised of possible consequences for the participant or the beneficiary organisation when finalising the project if an organisation is not using the number of licences allocated.
- **Lump sums/OM grants:** it is proposed that lump sums are used to support linguistic support in languages other than the main five. For the use of OM in higher education, concerns were raised by several NAs about the amount of OM: as they are not linked to linguistic needs, it might be difficult to cover all participants with OM grants. One NA proposed to fix a percentage for linguistic support within OM, another that HEIs receive an extra amount of OM funding for language courses offered for incoming students. Doubts were also raised on how to check amounts spent on linguistic support by HEIs.
- **Training of NAs:** as the scheme is new, one NA stressed the need for training.

Commission's feedback

Some of the issues raised by NAs were discussed during the meeting. In particular, the Commission would like to stress that assessment is not to be considered as an obstacle to mobility; **participants are selected before the assessment** which can be intended solely for statistical purposes or to support those who would specifically need a linguistic preparation to get the most value out of the mobility period. Moreover, where applicable, when beneficiaries estimate their linguistic needs they are not required to mention any level of language knowledge. The online system provided will try to cater for the needs of a varied target population. Exceptions or alternative solutions can be found for participants with special needs.

All languages will be available for support, although through different delivery mechanisms. Ideally, most languages should be available online in the mid-term. As linguistic support is mainly meant to improve the quality of mobility, the scheme is focussed on the language of instruction and work. An important feature of the service is that it is provided centrally and that the same methodology is used for all languages that are covered through the on-line system. Other languages will be subject to tailor-made solutions, subsidised through a fixed lump sum or OM grants for higher education. The Commission is currently examining the possibility of increasing OM to cater for linguistic support. Work on this issue is ongoing. In the new programme grants will be allocated to the sending organisation or institution. If organisations do not have the inhouse expertise to provide language courses, participants can turn to the market, to their national peers or agreements between sending and host institutions may be found.

The Commission will try to simplify the workflow as much as possible and is examining whether a request for a specific number of licenses is necessary in all cases. In any case, there will be no need to mention the specific language of instruction/work already at the application stage. Estimates can refer to the global estimated requests for the languages offered online on the one hand and for all the others on the other hand. The system will also allow for some flexibility if licences are not used or in case of drop-outs. As for the protection of personal data, the Commission is well aware of the constraints and is taking the necessary measures to ensure that the system is compatible with the regulation in force.

Within the training activities the Commission is planning to have on the new programme, some will be devoted to linguistic support in order to explain the process and tools involved more in detail. A communication action will also be carried out.

Operational conclusions

- The Commission will take into account the suggestions made by the group concerning the **licence distribution policy**. The Commission will set some general principles to properly cover all sectors and types of mobility and NAs will distribute online licences according to sectors' needs.
- The Commission will examine the issue of **potential conflicts** between national provisions for language levels to be reached by secondary school students and level assessed centrally online.
- The date proposed for the next meeting on the **communication strategy** will be 22 October 2013.

ANNEX I

Brussels, 18 June 2013

EAC.A3/ACP/KC/SP

Erasmus for All: linguistic support for mobility activities 2nd meeting of the Consultation Group – Discussion paper

The first meeting of the Consultation Group on linguistic preparation took place on 27 February 2013. The main features of the scheme were presented and NAs provided their feedback on the general principles. This paper develops the Commission's initial ideas on implementation of linguistic support and describes possible workflows and financial implications. All National Agencies, including those that are not part of the consultation group and will not attend the meeting, are invited to react on the questions raised in this paper in writing by July 12th to the functional mailbox created for the purpose: EAC-NA-WG4@ec.europa.eu.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the new programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport for 2014-2020, the Commission proposes to offer systematic linguistic support. The operational objective of the initiative is twofold:

- (1) gather information on the level of language skills among participants in mobility actions and
- (2) offer appropriate linguistic support to those in need of improving their competences in the language(s) of instruction/work before or during the mobility stay abroad and on a voluntary basis.

The approach proposed by the Commission would be based on some **basic principles** already presented to the Agencies at the previous meeting on 27 February 2013. Linguistic support should be encouraged for **all types of mobility** but it **should not be an obligation** for the participants in the mobility activities nor a pre-condition for mobility itself. It should be the result of an **agreement** between the partners involved. A **differentiated approach** is proposed for the **different types of mobility** included in the new programme with the main focus on long term mobility activities. A differentiated approach is also proposed for **the language of instruction/work**, that is, the language in which the participants study or work. **Language assessment** is a crucial aspect to accompany mobility. A language assessment test should be held before mobility and another assessment should be carried out at the end of the mobility activity to monitor

and measure progress in language learning. According to the data available on mobility activities from LLP, **five languages** are the most widely used in the EU by participants in mobility (i. e. English, French, German, Italian and Spanish). For these languages the mechanism chosen to deliver linguistic support would be online courses. For **other languages**, online courses, if available, or **other** types of courses would be offered.

2. **WORKFLOW AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CENTRALISED ONLINE SUPPORT**

2.1 **Workflow for centralised online support**

Centralised linguistic support will be offered at central level to participants in mobility activities whose language of instruction/work is English, French, German, Italian or Spanish and thus ensure consistent quality of the service and monitoring of results. In order to implement the scheme efficiently and integrate it into the programme cycle, several actors would be involved with different roles. In particular, the main players will be the European Commission, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the National Agencies, applicant institutions or organisations (which will be the beneficiaries of the EU support once the projects presented are accepted), the online service provider(s) and the participants in mobility, who will actually benefit from the online service(s).

The workflow for the 5 languages covered by the centralised facility would be based on a number of prerequisites, as follows:

- The Commission establishes a **policy** to govern the National Agencies' **distribution of accesses/licences** to the online services in the event that demand exceeds the budget. The policy is communicated to and agreed with the National Agencies. The proposal for the distribution policy could take into account **criteria** such as:
 - Number of licenses per country in proportion to the grants available per country for mobility, where relevant in relation to the estimated level of demand and taking into account the budget available for linguistic support.
 - Coverage of all sectors in proportion to the budget allocated to each sector.
 - Coverage of both staff and learners.
- The Commission includes the necessary provisions in the Delegation agreement/Guide for National Agencies, in order to enable EACEA to exchange data with NAs.
- Where applicable, the **applicants** (beneficiaries) determine the (estimated) level of demand for linguistic support in the 5 languages of the online system in the eForms (**application forms**). As assessment is mandatory for all long-term mobility in such languages, the maximum level of demand for online assessment will be equal to the number of participants in a project. For on-line language

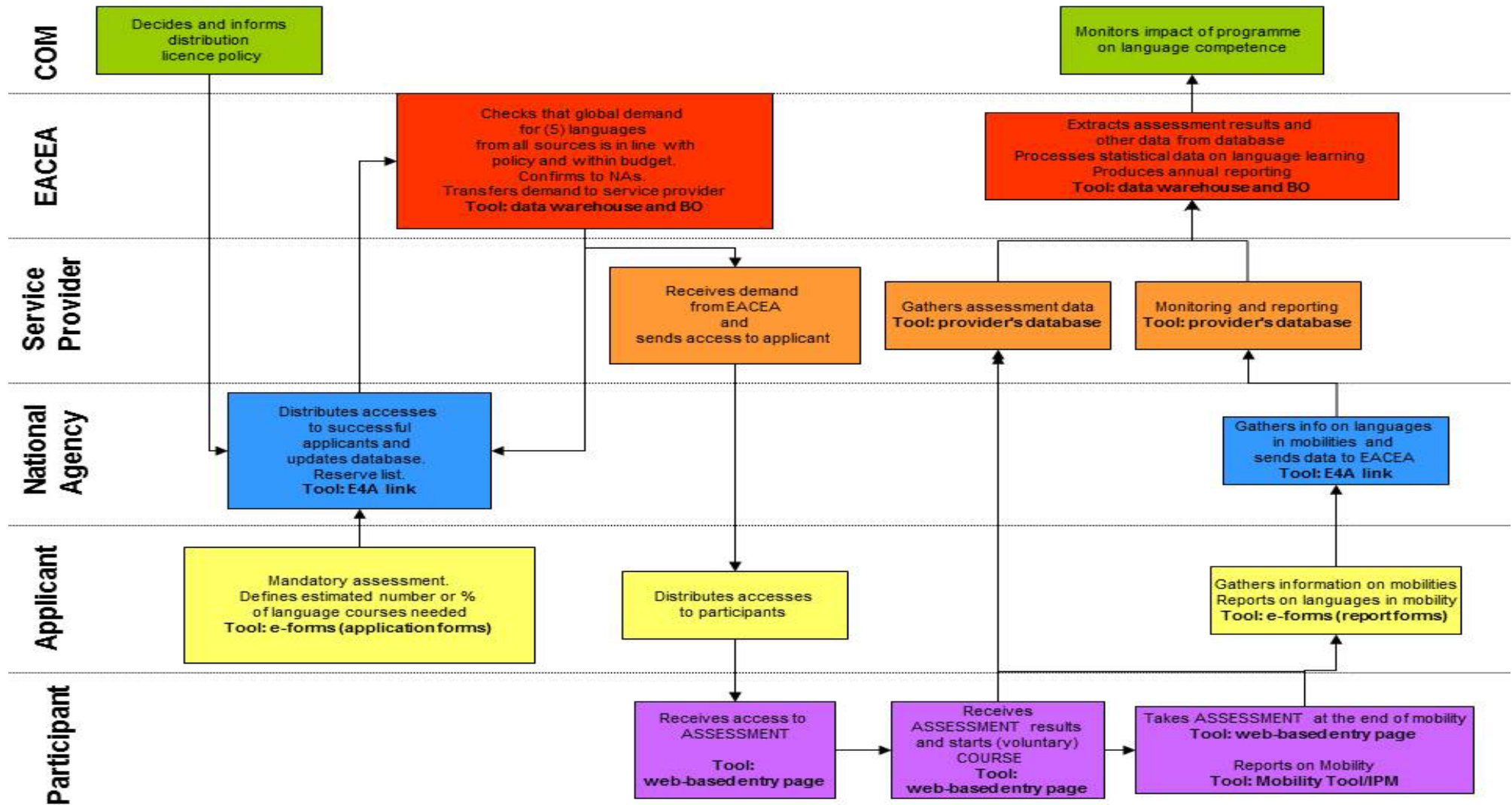
courses, information on number or % of language courses needed will be provided through the application forms.

The eForms for KA1 and KA2 and E4ALink include the facility enabling National Agencies to establish the level of demand for eligible actions and also to confirm which applicants will have access to the assessment tests and to the online courses once the award decision has been made and based on the policy for distribution as defined above².

- A BO output from E4ALink will enable the core data from the successful applications to pass **via the Executive Agency to the successful tenderer's system**, enabling accesses/licenses to be issued as defined by the National Agencies.
- The **service provider gives access/licences to the beneficiary organisations**, who then distribute them to participants. The **service provider also monitors** the take-up of services available from their system and provides **reports** to EACEA.
- **Participants** receive access to assessment and start assessment via one single **web-based entry page**. Interfacing with other tools, if any, will be ensured by the provider. This shall be defined after feasibility analysis.
- **Results of (mandatory) assessment** are communicated electronically to participants and can be **extracted in reports and provided to by EACEA**.
- **Participants** take online courses on a voluntary basis. At the end of the mobility **all participants** in a mobility activity have another mandatory assessment. **The results of final assessment** are communicated electronically to participants and will be provided by the supplier to EACEA.
- At the end of the mobility period participants will report on their activities in the Mobility Tool/EU survey for a qualitative assessment of the support. The quantitative data is made available via BO to EACEA to enable reports to be established.
- **Beneficiaries** gather information on mobility activities and report on qualitative aspects of the linguistic support in the **report forms**, which are sent to NAs.
- **National Agencies** gather information on language learning. E4ALink captures relevant data from the reports and this is made available to EACEA via BO.
- **EACEA** will compile reports on language learning during mobility from the service provider's system, from E4ALink and from the Mobility Tool/EU survey.
- **EACEA** will report to the **Commission** who will be able to **monitor** the impact of the programme on language learning.

² EACEA will verify that demand is in line with the policy and the budget and send confirmation to NAs.

LINGUISTIC SUPPORT - CENTRALIZED SYSTEM (Online) WORKFLOW



2.2 Financial implications of centralised support

The provision of online linguistic support (assessment and language courses) **does not imply any financial flow** from the Commission to NAs and beneficiaries as the financial aspects of the service would be managed centrally.

The budget available through the new programme will be used to support both assessment and language course with the objective of achieving 100% coverage of mobilities for assessment by 2017.

Points for discussion

- A. Would the criteria proposed for licence allocation meet the needs of participants in the different sectors?
- B. Would the tasks proposed by the Commission for the NAs and the beneficiaries be feasible and appropriate? Do NAs foresee any additional roles or tasks for themselves or the beneficiaries?

3. WORKFLOW AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF NON-CENTRALISED SUPPORT

3.1 Workflow for non-centralised linguistic support

Linguistic support for languages other than English, French, German, Italian and Spanish would follow a (partly) different workflow from the centralised system as it will not be provided by an online system made available at EU level and will be financed through grants. However, such a workflow will most probably evolve over time depending on the developments of online language learning tools for languages other than the five main ones used in mobility.

The main actors will be mostly the same as for the centralised support (European Commission, National Agencies, applicant institutions or organisations, participants in mobility), with the exception of EACEA. The management of linguistic support and the choice of language course providers will be made at decentralised level.

In order to ensure non-centralised linguistic support, the **Commission** will define the grants to be funded either as a separate cost item from the EU funds for grant support or as part of the cost item "organisation of mobility" (HE).

The non-centralised workflow would be as follows:

- The **applicants** (beneficiaries) will establish the (estimated) level of demand for language support through the eForms (**application forms**)/E4A link.
- **NAs** will select projects and provide **beneficiaries** with **grants for mobility**, including for linguistic support requested (E4A link).

- **Beneficiaries** inform participants of linguistic support available.
- If **participants** decide to carry out linguistic preparation, they will use the grant for self-study, follow a course on the market or they will follow the course, if any, organised by the beneficiaries with the grants received.
- At the end of the mobility period **participants** will report on linguistic support (questionnaire) via the Mobility Tool/EU survey. Information will mainly deal with qualitative aspects of the service provided.
- **Beneficiaries** gather information on mobility activities and report on linguistic support in the **report forms**, which are sent to NAs.
- **National Agencies** gather information on language learning through E4A link and report data, including on amounts spent on linguistic support, to the **Commission** who will be able to **monitor** the impact of the programme on language learning.

3.2 Financial implications for non-centralised linguistic support

The provision of linguistic support for less frequently used languages in mobility **affects the financial flows**. Linguistic support outside the centralised online system will be financed through grants. This situation will mainly apply in the early stages of the programme when the online system will not be completely developed to cover all languages.

As the situation in the various sectors is quite different as regards language needs, number of participants and budget available, different options are proposed for financing linguistic support. If linguistic support is financed through a separate cost item, NAs will receive grants from the European Commission for the mobility of individuals and award such grants to the successful applicants (beneficiaries) who will then support the mobility of the selected participants.

3.3.1 VET, Youth, School education and Adult education

In LLP a system of lump sums is in place to cover support for languages for VET, School education and Adult education. However, historical data available from LLP does not necessarily refer exclusively to linguistic preparation: for example, lump sums are provided for linguistic, cultural and pedagogic preparation in Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig.

In April 2013 a survey was carried out among participants in Comenius and Grundtvig assistantships, in-service training and visits. From a first analysis of data, differences emerge among real costs per language, per Member State and per type of course.

On the basis of the data available, a lump sum value will be proposed as a contribution to real costs of linguistic support. This value will be established according to principles such as equal treatment, non profit and need to ensure cofinancing.

3.3.2 Higher education

In the current LLP programme, linguistic support for higher education participants (Erasmus) was mainly supported through Erasmus Intensive Language Courses (EILC) and grants for mobility organisation (OM).

Erasmus Intensive Language Courses – which are not included in the activities supported under the new programme - were targeted at a reduced number of participants and concerned all languages except the most frequently used in mobility. Other linguistic preparation was offered to higher education students and staff through the higher education institutions' grants for mobility organisation (OM), although no figures are available on the exact amounts spent. In the context of the new programme, monitoring investment on linguistic support should be one of the aspects to be ensured by the exercise.

In order to minimise the costs and ensure a flexible support according to eligible participants needs, in the new programme it is proposed to use of the grants given to HEIs for organising mobility (OM) for linguistic support, without any predefined percentage. This proposal should cater for the fact that needs might be different from one country to another and from one HEI to another.

In this context, the workflow presented in page 9 is slightly revised:

- **Beneficiaries** inform participants of linguistic support available and finance it from the OM grant.
- At the end of the mobility period **participants** will report on linguistic support (questionnaire) via the Mobility Tool/EU survey. Information will mainly deal with qualitative aspects of the service provided.
- **Beneficiaries** gather information on mobility activities and report on linguistic support in the **report forms**, which are sent to NAs.
- **National Agencies** gather information on language learning through E4A link and report data, including on amounts spent on linguistic support, to the **Commission** who will be able to **monitor** the impact of the programme on language learning

In relation to the financial flow, the fact that no pre-defined budget allocated for linguistic support is established and support would be possible through the OM grant means that NAs would not need to gather the needs from applicants. It would be up to the applicant to define the best support to provide to the participants, from the OM grant. Information on the support provided would be gathered from the participants' and beneficiaries' reports.

Furthermore it is foreseen to strengthen the quality of the linguistic support for long-term mobility by a stronger reference to the linguistic support in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). By signing the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, HEIs wishing to participate in the Programme commit themselves to the following:

- Ensuring that outgoing mobile participants are well prepared for the mobility, including having attained the necessary level of linguistic proficiency in the

language of instruction/work (as agreed between all parties in the learning agreement);

- Providing appropriate linguistic support to incoming mobile participants.

This will be monitored by National Agencies.

5. THE CASE OF SHORT-TERM MOBILITY

Linguistic support will mainly focus on long-term mobility (from two months up), as this will ensure the best return on investment. The possibility of extending linguistic support, both centralised and non-centralised, to some VET learners for mobility stays from **one month or over** is currently being investigated.

6. IMPACT OF LINGUISTIC SUPPORT ON IT TOOLS

In order to set up linguistic support within KA1 and KA2 and ensure yearly gathering of data for monitoring the indicator established in the legal base, some tools commonly used in the programme need to be adapted to include information on language learning. The tools described below will be mainly affected.

E4ALink is the new management tool that covers the whole lifecycle of a project, from application to reporting. Several functionalities such as eForms will be instrumental for linguistic support at the time of award decision and reporting. In particular, E4ALink will play an important role in providing **information and data on requests for linguistic support, results and other data** on language learning in mobility activities.

eForms will allow exchange of information on mobility projects. The **application forms** for eligible actions should **therefore include a section to request linguistic support** (both centralised and non-centralised). In order to measure the impact of the financing provided by the programme and progress in language learning, **report forms** should also contain a reference to language support.

In addition to the statistical data on language learning that will be extracted by E4ALink and the service provider's database(s), it is important to also have some qualitative feedback on this activity, although subjective. Therefore, the **Mobility Tool/EU** survey should have a **dedicated section that would enable participants to provide information on the languages learnt (course followed, language, level etc.) and a qualitative assessment**.

The **online assessment tool** and the **online language learning tool** will be made available by the service provider who will have to ensure a single access point for the users and ensure the technical interlinkages between the two platforms. The platforms will have to provide data on assessment and language courses that can be read and manipulated by the tools used in EACEA and beyond.

7. ADAPTATIONS TO THE PROGRAMME DOCUMENTATION

Some documents used within the programme will also have to be adapted to cater for linguistic support.

Several sections of the **programme guide** should clearly refer to multilingualism and linguistic support. As the document is mainly targeted at beneficiaries, the different steps and rules to be followed to have access to linguistic support should also be described. The guide should include information on what (type of) linguistic support is available for which actions, and if possible for which languages.

The **Delegation Agreement/Guide for NAs** have to include the NAs' tasks and responsibilities in relation to the management of linguistic support for decentralised actions, such as the criteria for the allocation of online accesses/licences, probably the number of licences to be allocated to the NA and other details concerning the new scheme.

The new **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education** mentions linguistic support. **Recommended** levels are included in the **inter-institutional agreements** between institutions.

Points for discussion

- C. Would the workflows proposed ensure proper monitoring of linguistic support by NAs and beneficiaries? Are there additional steps or measures that NAs or beneficiaries could take in this respect?
- D. Are there additional modalities to put in place or other forms of documentation, training and background information that would be useful for NA's in relation to the implementation of linguistic support for mobility?