



The European Centre for Modern Languages – What do countries gain from membership?

The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria, is an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe, set up in 1994 to provide a practical response to a need expressed by the Council of Europe's member states: the reinforcement of cooperation in the field of language education and respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe. 32 states currently subscribe to the Partial Agreement.

The ECML's mission is to support its member states in the implementation of their language education policies taking account of the recommendations of the Council of Europe. It does so by promoting innovative approaches and disseminating good practice in the learning and teaching of modern languages and in this way addresses issues directly related to good quality education as a pre-requisite for social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and democratic citizenship.

Through its focus on promoting excellence in language education, based on quality, standard-setting and innovation, the Centre is well placed to assist member states in addressing challenges within their national education systems as well as to offer support in improving provision in line with key international developments in education.

The ECML is an initiator and coordinator of European and international cooperation. The Centre runs 4-year medium-term programmes of projects organised in cooperation with European experts in the field of language education.

Through its programmes, consisting of expert meetings, workshops, conferences and research projects to which participants from the member states are invited, the ECML provides a platform for gathering and disseminating information, stimulating discussion and training multipliers in matters related to language education.

It also maintains Europe-wide networks for teacher trainers, researchers and educational administrators.

The following list indicates just some of the reasons why a state may wish to consider becoming a member of the ECML (the numbering system is intended for ease of use rather than conveying relative importance).



1. Addressing challenges in national language education

The ECML's programme is directly determined by its member states. The orientations set therefore reflect national priorities in language education, such as standard-setting and assessment, promoting quality and excellence, the application of ICT, developing skills for a competitive job market and taking advantage of increased diversity in the classroom. The Centre's current programme, Learning through languages, launched in January 2012, focuses directly on the learners' needs in language education in both the formal and non-formal learning contexts. It will seek to develop practical tools and materials and build upon the strengths of the previous programme, Empowering language professionals, and the instruments developed by the Council of Europe in this area.

2. Meeting international standards

Increasing demands are placed on states to conform to international standards in education. The Centre offers support and expertise in improving provision in line with key international developments in education such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the European qualifications frameworks.

3. Providing a comprehensive approach to language education

The Centre works in complementarity and synergy with the Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, thereby offering a comprehensive approach to languages and language education. Specifically, the ECML can offer to provide follow-up support to issues highlighted in language education through the Language Policy Profiles and/or the country monitoring

reports relating to the Charter.

4. Assisting states in benefiting from the effects of mobility

Today's classrooms are made up of pupils from very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Whilst the effects of mobility and migration are often presented in the media from a negative perspective, the Centre seeks both to assist teachers in successfully dealing with this challenge and to reinforce the language competences of children from migrant backgrounds in the language/s of schooling, in order to ensure that they have access to good quality education and can thus participate actively in society. The Centre also seeks to highlight the positive effects of diversity in the classroom for the learner and the benefits which states can derive through the diversity represented within their education systems.

5. Promoting quality and excellence

As a Council of Europe institution the ECML operates within the context of ongoing language education work of the major European organisations. A large number of the projects in its programme therefore build upon existing European language education principles and tools, in particular the Council's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which provides a method of learning, teaching and assessing applying to all languages in Europe. The six reference levels of the CEFR have become widely accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency. The Centre also applies a quality system throughout its work. A set of evaluative tools implemented at the outset of the previous programme provide qualitative and quantitative data on the ECML's services as well as indications of the take-up and follow-up of projects in member states. Four external consultants monitor quality within the programme and identify synergies and any potential overlaps.



6. Supporting exchange of practice

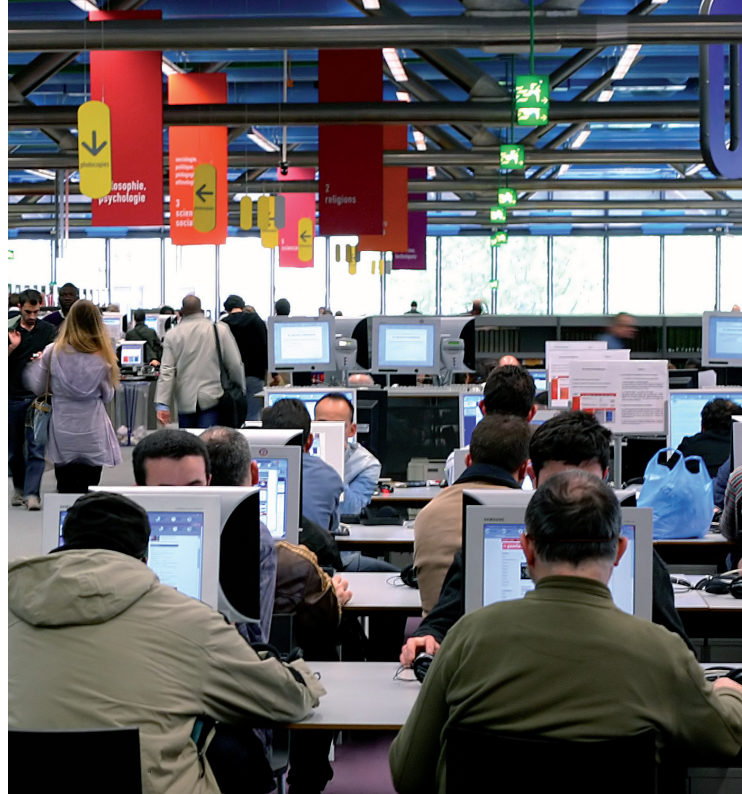
With 32 member states and ongoing cooperation with many more countries in Europe and beyond the Centre offers a vast forum for exchange and dialogue at an international level, from improving literacy to promoting the development of excellence among the best pupils, the Centre is able to call upon an immense resource of experience and know-how. Learning through others' experience and best practice represents a particularly efficient way to improve education systems at a time of financial austerity.

7. Piloting innovation

The Centre acts as a catalyst for innovation seeking to assist its member states in implementing change in practice. Its European projects are frequently recreated at national level in order to fully benefit from the ECML initiated actions. The Centre is at the cutting edge of developments in a number of areas: such as standard-setting and assessment, content-based language education, promoting quality and excellence, the application of ICT in language education and pluralistic approaches to education.

8. Promoting skills for jobs

Many studies based on evidence from companies bear testimony to the fact that enhanced language skills are directly beneficial in attracting trade, yet in some countries young people regard languages, other than English, as irrelevant to their future. The Centre seeks to promote both the cultural and economic value of languages within its programme, going beyond immediate practitioners and specialists and addressing other stakeholders in the wider society, such as employers in the corporate world, associations and parents - and also addressing young people directly through initiatives such as the European Day of Languages.



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9. Developing networks

The dissemination of the major principles and instruments promoting enhanced standards in language education can only be achieved via effective information and communication structures. The sharing of knowledge, ideas and initiatives throughout the wider professional community of practice has a powerful impact on the content and quality of the work of the individual, on overall developments in theory and practice, and on the cohesion of the educational community and its public profile. In addition to its work with its individual project networks, the ECML works in cooperation with a wide range of organisations and networks at national and international level. For example the Centre's network of National Contact Points assist in raising the profile of the ECML at national level, disseminating its results to target groups and in promoting the take up and application of initiatives. The INGO Professional Network Forum initiated by the ECML comprises leading associations and institutions which share common values in language education and assessment. The Forum represents a major pillar of cooperation with civil society for the ECML and potentially provides access to a network of hundreds of thousands of language education professionals.

10. Providing consultancy and assisting in reform processes

In autumn 2012 the Centre launched a new strand of activity within its programme – ECML training and consultancy for member states - focusing in particular on identified priority areas of interest for its members. The initiative seeks to work in close contact with the representatives of ECML member states to provide direct consultation and training in areas of identified needs. Further weight has been added to this initiative through a cooperation agreement with the European Commission, initiated in May 2013, enabling a large number of targeted workshops adapted to states'

particular contexts and needs to be offered in the areas of ICT and Relating language examinations to the common European reference levels of language proficiency.

11. Professional development and capacity building

ECML activities seek not only to encourage teachers and other actors in language education to acquire new knowledge in their field of expertise, but to ensure that this knowledge is put into practice in their working environment. Through this process of professional development the Centre aims to support individual language teachers in contributing to change an innovation in their area. Approximately 750-1,000 language professionals participate directly in ECML-financed activities each year, conducted by leading specialists in the area.

12. Providing information and know-how

The ECML has to date produced over 80 publications, hosts 30 websites dealing with different aspects of language education and recorded over 5.6 million page views of its web platform in 2013. Groundbreaking work has been carried out in a number of areas, such as plurilingual education where the Centre has developed a set of instruments opening ways for implementing pluralistic approaches in classrooms in order to develop the plurilingual and intercultural competences of learners of all subjects and also promote cognitive flexibility.

Procedure for joining

Article 2 of the ECML's Statute (Appendix to Committee of Ministers Resolution (98) 11) describes the procedure for joining the ECML as follows:

'1. Any State which is a member of the Council of Europe or a Party to the European Cultural Convention may join the Enlarged Partial Agreement at any time by notification addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.'

Details of the respective annual financial contributions related to membership are available from the ECML secretariat upon request (information@ecml.at).



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European Centre for Modern Languages
of the Council of Europe
Promoting excellence in language education
Centre européen pour les langues vivantes
du Conseil de l'Europe
Pour l'excellence dans l'éducation aux langues

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