



Education Departments' Superhighways Initiative

Group F: Additional Projects

Interim Reports

Educational Internet Providers Project

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Lingu@NET – A Virtual Language Centre

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Multimedia Portables for Teachers Project

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Evaluation of additional projects

Educational Internet Service Providers Project

1. The evaluation in this report is based on the four core schools, those that have received the local area networks purchased by NCET on behalf of the DfEE. Information has been collected by questionnaire, interview and visits. The full report, scheduled for publication in 1998, will also include information gathered from the 50 'focus' schools that have been nominated by the EISPs, through questionnaires and some follow-up interviews, and approximately 300 volunteer schools who will be sent a questionnaire in September.

Lingu@NET

2. Since Lingu@NET is a developmental project, there is no formal evaluation element and no evaluator was appointed. Moreover, the project has seven more months to run. This Interim Report, however, aims to give a subjective indication of what the project has achieved to date.

Multimedia Portables for Teachers

3. The Interim Evaluation is based on the result of a survey of over 1000 participating teachers and more than 30 school visits. The final evaluation, due later this year, will contain detailed results and recommendations.

LINGU@NET - A VIRTUAL LANGUAGE CENTRE

Description of the project

2.1 Lingu@NET is a UK developmental project led by two Government-funded organisations, the National Council for Educational Technology (NCET) and the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT), to develop a World Wide Web site of quality-assured resources for language teachers. Its address is www.ncet.org.uk/linguanet. The Lingu@NET project began in January 1996 and is DfEE-funded until December 1997. Site income and European funding are being sought to enable the project to be self-financing. The project and the budget are managed by NCET, reporting to a steering group consisting of representatives of DfEE, CILT and NCET. NCET and CILT jointly design and structure the site, define the criteria for inclusion of materials and promote the site. Lingu@NET is the UK's contribution to the G7 Information Society Initiative: Theme 3 - Tel*Lingua, and Lingu@NET played an important part in modelling a 'global network of language and culture servers', culminating in a UK contribution to all the work packages and a significant UK presence at the October 1996 Turin consensus conference, thanks to EU funding. The ISI is a set of 10 transnational initiatives to harness collectively the benefits of superhighways to improve and co-ordinate trade, information services, emergency services and the well-being of citizens.

Aims and outcomes

2.2 The aim of the project is to establish a Web-based language centre, based on networked information technology, providing UK language teachers with quality-assured information, INSET materials and expert advice. The objectives of the project are to:

- test the concept of an on-line education support centre as a replicable model
- provide material for education professionals, related to the teaching and learning of languages on a World Wide Web site
- obtain evidence relating to networking, quality control, user needs and commercial opportunities
- set up a high-performance Sun Netra server.

2.3 Since Lingu@NET is a developmental project, there is no formal evaluation element.

2.4 The project has met its four aims, in some respects exceeding them:

- The site contains over 50 documents not available elsewhere and has links to over 150 other sites. The documents include those in English, French, German, Spanish and Welsh.
- The site includes an on-line enquiry service and opportunities for feedback. By December 1997, there will be a discussion group and more links to materials supporting professional dialogue.
- Through the on-line feedback form, reports from the user groups, discussions with CILT and publishers and those with experience in setting up the server, there is now a clearer picture of what language teachers want from the Internet, an understanding of commercial and

quality-assurance issues in a new medium, and a deeper appreciation of server and connectivity issues.

- The Sun Netra server is now running and performing to specification. A secure transaction system is expected to be live in 1997.

2.5 The following outcomes have been achieved:

- The Lingu@NET Web site is established on a high-performance server.
- A network of formal and informal user groups has been set up.
- Partnerships are in place between Government-funded organisations, the public and private sectors, providers and users, and the UK and other countries.
- There is considerable interest among publishers, and NCET and CILT have assisted them in going on line and reaching a market outside the UK.
- Further evidence has been gathered of how the Internet is truly a global phenomenon, with implications for how the UK education service functions.
- A prototype of on-line support for other curriculum areas has been developed.

2.6 Evidence is emerging that Lingu@NET works for language teachers. Up to 200, and never less than 100, different users visit the site every week, using the full range of connectivity (mostly dial-up). An on-line feedback form has been completed by 37 users of the site. The main points from those replying are:

- The site receives a mean rating of four stars, using a scale similar to hotel gradings, with one to five stars.
- Most people stay on the site for between six and 20 minutes.
- The site is 'well laid out', 'useful, 'easy to navigate', 'has clear language', and is 'attractive and has good potential for expansion. It saves having to go to CILT or ALL.'
- Suggestions for improvement include 'more input from language teachers, describing activities they have used in the classroom', 'more details about courses, flash cards, repromasters, etc.', 'more information from/about Austria', and 'a section for practical classrooms ideas, particularly at the end of term'.
- Most respondents were teachers or lecturers but some questionnaires were completed by students, publishers and senior managers. They tended to be in secondary or higher education institutions. Most people were from England or another European country. The modal age was 35-44. All but two respondents describe themselves as IT competent or expert. All but two access using a single computer and modem; the other two had network access.

2.7 User groups in Cornwall, Leeds, Lancaster, Leicester, Wales, the Association for Language Learning and a 'virtual language department' have been funded to provide feedback on the use of Lingu@NET and to contribute materials and ideas. Their reaction to Lingu@NET has been positive, as shown in these examples:

- The site ‘abounds with quality advice, ideas and materials which are worthy of investigation by all teachers and students of modern languages’.
 - Information is ‘comprehensive’ and ‘the presence of over 30 CILT and NCET information sheets in electronic form, all conveniently drawn together on one site, has obvious advantages’. ‘Why not download some of these sheets to your word-processor, discuss, edit and adapt the text to your own school’s particular circumstances, and incorporate them into your departmental handbook ready for the next inspection!’
 - The CD-ROM reviews on the NCET site were ‘well worth a visit before considering spending finite capitation’ and ‘from them it is possible to see clearly that, for my school, *En Route* is a better buy than *Ecoutez Bien: dix lecons de francais interactives*’.
 - The Web site for languages is a ‘very convenient way of linking through to other sites, for example the Trois Suisses catalogue can provide the teacher with a useful source of clip art’.
- 2.8 There is no reason why the model could not work for other curriculum areas and other countries, for example there is now a Lingu@NET-NL in The Netherlands, based on the UK model. The potential of on-line professional support is vast. There is much more to do, notably in the areas of peer-to-peer networking, for example by SENCOs, teachers as publishers, on-line tutorials and international partnerships.

Sponsors and other parties

- 2.9 The project has been 100% funded to March 1997 by the DfEE. From April 1997 to March 1998, DfEE funding is 50% of total costs, the balance being met by income, sponsorship, NCET and CILT. EU funding is also being sought. Other parties, in addition to NCET and CILT, are publishers, including BBC Education, French Embassy, Authentik, LCP, Reed International and Camsoft, and international partners in G7 and other countries.

Cost and cost benefits

- 2.10 Lingu@NET is only as far away as a telephone line. Users in Cornwall, Lancaster and Wales are not disadvantaged by the distance to CILT and NCET as they are if they need to travel to a conference or exhibition. The quality and authority of the materials are not diluted if the school lacks local guidance or expertise in languages.
- 2.11 Everything on the site is free of charge to the user. Since there is no training or support element, there are no additional costs as more people access the resources and so the more accesses, the more cost effective. Whether people would pay to access Lingu@NET is yet to be determined; the resources offered would be free of charge if obtained from NCET, CILT, the Association for Language Learning (ALL) or collected from an exhibition, but on-line access is more convenient and has fewer travel or time overheads.
- 2.12 Where Lingu@NET really begins to save travel time, then money saved could be moved into equipment and access provision both in school and at home. However, of course, a visit to a virtual language centre and publishers’ exhibition can never recreate the bonds forged at a real event.
- 2.13 Lingu@NET uses standard Internet tools and norms; it has no proprietary features or requirements. This is particularly important for novice and overseas users. The

site, and others in English, should perhaps welcome people and explain itself in other languages, as is the practice on non-English sites.

- 2.14 As a means of national organisations reaching their target audience, Lingu@NET would be cost effective if more teachers were on line. The on-costs of preparing a page of information are about £40 and that page can be seen by thousands of people.
- 2.15 Lingu@NET could be commercially viable if it could bring customers to product suppliers, who would pay for suitable materials to be showcased on the web site, generate its own income through product sales, or enable existing funding for an organisation's work to be redirected, for example from a telephone/letter enquiry service to an on-line 'self-service' information-provision service and thereby to more efficient ways of working. Signs are emerging that this is possible.