



2009-8-EN

CertiLingua®

Label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences

Project description (decision 2009-08)

Economic globalization and continuing European integration require in a special measure the aptitude of young people to deal competently on a high level with the demands of linguistic and cultural diversity and to develop flexibility in their personal plans, further training and professional careers.

The European Commission therefore aims in its notifications and action plans to encourage the extension of plurilingual and intercultural competences in its member states as a part of lifelong learning.¹

This demand has already been implemented in the school systems of countries of the European Union in several state schools. It is part of the pedagogical profile of these schools to impart skills in several languages to students on a high level and to prepare them with adequate educational opportunities for the European dimension of a world that is growing together economically and culturally. Such schools, for instance, offer bilingual classes or use a foreign language as the working language in CLIL, arrange cross-border projects and exchange programmes, and accentuate in their school curricula themes and contents which are of special importance as they prepare students for international courses of studies and for future orientation in their profession and further training on an international level.

However, an internationally transparent and acknowledged certificate which clearly and comprehensibly documents the special linguistic, European and international qualifications achieved at these schools does not yet exist.

¹ Commission's Action Plan for skills and mobility COM(2002)72 final; Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006 COM(2003) 449 final; A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism COM(2005) 596 final; Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on “Key competences for lifelong learning” (OJ L 394, 30.12.2006); Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on multilingualism (OJ C 140, 6.6.2008).

In the multitude of European graduation diplomas, the special quality of bilingual education, for instance, is not yet unmistakably clear for addressees at universities and in the professional domain.

At the moment, such transparent documentation and international acknowledgement are rather attained with school-leaving diplomas and certificates from non-scholastic and private educational institutions. The great public interest in such certification emphasises that the international recognition of graduation diplomas issued by state schools should be strengthened by a transparent documentation of the students' special plurilingual, European and international qualifications.

It a joint project with the responsible institutions of European partner countries a European label of excellence was developed and piloted from 2007-2009. The *CertiLingua*[®] label of plurilingual, European and international competences is awarded in addition to the university entrance diplomas which are a national responsibility. It documents the graduate's ability to act in the European context and internationally in two or, if applicable, further languages besides the graduate's native language.

The initiative for this project was taken by the Ministers for Education of the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia, who discussed in the context of cross-border cooperation the possibilities of international certification for the support of mobility. The resulting project draft for a *label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences* met with great mutual interest and was discussed by representatives of the Ministries for Education of the German federal states, as well as those of the Netherlands, France, Austria, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway and of the Flemish, Walloon and German-speaking Belgian communities and further educational institutes (IQB, Cito et al.) on the occasion of several working sessions. The project is always open to further partners.

The concept in detail

The concept is based on the national baccalaureate examinations and their recognition throughout Europe by the European Convention no.15 on the 'Equality of Diplomas' of 11 December, 1953². Admission to study courses in host countries relies in addition to the acknowledged school-leaving certificate on an adequate knowledge of the host country's language. The *CertiLingua*[®] label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences certifies as an addition to the national school leaving certificate that the graduate has acquired special competences for a

² More than 36 countries have already joined the convention, including non-European countries like New Zealand. European Convention on the „Equality of Diplomas” of 11 December,1953/European Convention on the “Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region” (Lisboa-Convention) of 11 April,1997

continuation of his or her course of education in a European and international context.

The following elements are recommended by the workgroup that is open to all German federal states for the arrangement of this label:

- Requirements

With the *CertiLingua*[®] label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences the following competences are certified:

Linguistic competences:

- The candidates have written and oral command of at least two languages other than their native/first language on level B2 of the *Common European Framework for Languages* (multilingual competences)

and

- They have successfully used at least one of these languages as their learning and working language in one or more CLIL courses over a longer period of time or in several modules. With this language or these languages they have a solid basis at their disposal to continue their own course of education in international contexts (bilingual competences, CLIL, EMILE).

and

European and international competences:

The candidates have successfully used curricular and additional educational opportunities aiming at a European and international dimension and have reached competence level 4 of the *ELOS DRAFT Common Framework for Europe Competence*³. They have given evidence of their intercultural ability to act by their participation in a European / international cooperation project. Thereby, they meet the standards of international universities and business enterprises to a special degree.

Variants to the above mentioned requirements are possible (for instance, the consideration of ancient languages, and a graduated competence profile for further languages).

- Award conditions

³ Common Framework for Europe Competences (2008), vgl. www.certilingua.net/wp-content/uploads/cfec2008.pdf

- The *CertiLingua*[®] *label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences* is awarded by schools and educational institutions which are formally accredited by the highest school authorities either on a national level or on the level of the federal states. The prerequisites for accreditation are the demonstration of the educational provisions which are required for the baccalaureate label as well as proof of target agreements on objectives concerning the quality of these offers or the performance to be attained by the graduate.
- The accredited school awards a graduate the *CertiLingua*[®] *label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences* if he or she has successfully graduated in the appropriate courses and has submitted the required proof thereof. Documentation of achievements on the baccalaureate diploma is a condition. Criteria for the documented European / international project will be developed in cooperation by the international partners.
- The accreditation is to be renewed at regular intervals. Quality control is the responsibility of the school authorities of the respective countries. The participating countries cooperate in an international network on the evaluation and further development of the *CertiLingua*[®] *label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences*.

Details concerning the competence descriptions and awarding requirements of the CertiLingua label of excellence are governed by decisions of the international CertiLingua annual conference.

Advantages and expected benefits

The pilotphase (August 1st, 2007- July, 31st, 2009) clearly demonstrated the following direct and indirect advantages of the excellence label:

- Gifted and ambitious graduates receive an incentive to achieve above-average results in the domains of language and cultural learning, as well as demonstrating social involvement.
- Access to universities abroad and to the international world of business is facilitated for the students.
- The label offers a negotiation option of exemption from language examinations which are required for international university access.

- Existing binational agreements can be integrated and complemented by additional distinguishing marks. For instance, graduates with the double qualification AbiBac who are especially qualified for education and for taking on a leading role in the German-French sphere can give evidence of additional internationally important competences with the *CertiLingua*[®] *label of excellence for plurilingual, European and international competences*.
- Institutions of training and advanced training are given an achievement profile according to international standards that they can use for the integration of applicants into their training courses.
- Schools which have established plurilingual education, bilingual classes/courses (CLIL/EMILE), international projects, exchange programmes and partnerships can distinguish themselves with the accreditation and so obtain an incentive to provide these opportunities in the long term.
- The label enhances to a special degree school development, teacher training and further training with regard to plurilingualism, linguistic competence, bilingualism, European and international involvement and active citizenship, in the way demanded by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.
- International cooperation by schools and school administrations as well as the mobility and integration of students, teachers and language assistants are supported.
- State schools become internationally more attractive through the expansion of foreign language teaching in non-language courses and through a high level of European and international orientation. This is especially relevant in areas with international political and economic relations.
- It facilitates, in connection with advancement in the national language, the integration of children of employees of foreign business enterprises, as well as children of foreign families and migrants, and ensures an international recognition of their secondary school graduation.

Perspectives

For the further development of the project, additional corresponding labels for the *General Certificate of Secondary Education (CERTLINGUA JUNIOR)* and *Vocational Education and Training (CERTILINGUA[®] JOB)* are also planned.

Organizational structure of the international CertiLingua® network

1. The CertiLingua® Network

CertiLingua® members of the network are the highest educational authorities of the partner countries who have signed the memorandum of understanding (Appendix 2). The *Memorandum of Understanding* defines the cooperation of countries in the CertiLingua® network. With the signature of the memorandum, the partner countries declare their willingness to ensure the CertiLingua® quality criteria in participating schools through the use of appropriate instruments. Other interested countries and institutions can collaborate in the CertiLingua® network. Accession of a country to the CertiLingua® network is possible at any time by handing in the signed Memorandum of Understanding to the CertiLingua® steering group.

The CertiLingua® network meets at least once a year for the annual CertiLingua® conference. During the annual conference, the members of the international steering group are nominated and elected by the CertiLingua® network.

All members of the network CertiLingua® commit themselves to evaluate the label of excellence and support the further development of the label.

2. The annual CertiLingua® conference

The annual meeting is usually convened once a year. Each member country of the CertiLingua® network can act as host, the partner countries rotatively take over responsibility. The annual conference is convened and conducted by the international steering group. The main target of the annual conference is the coordination, evaluation and further development of the label of excellence with the goal of improving quality measures. During the pilot phase all the decisions of the annual session are taken unanimously. Entitled to vote are those countries which have signed the memorandum. Other interested countries and institutions can participate as advisers without voting rights in the annual conference. The annual conference elects the members of the international steering group.

3. The international steering group

The international steering group is appointed by the CertiLingua[®] – annual conference. It assumes the coordination of the CertiLingua[®] network and is especially useful for the preparation and implementation of the decisions of the CertiLingua[®] international annual conference. The International steering group represents the interests of all CertiLingua[®] partner countries for the period between annual meetings.

4. The CertiLingua[®] sponsors group

The importance and success of a label of excellence accompanying school leaving examinations depend to a great extent on its familiarity and acceptance by the public. It is intended that a Sponsors Group be established to propagate the special significance of the CertiLingua[®] label of excellence among industry, commerce, schools, universities, institutions and the public at large, and, acting through other associations (e.g. Chambers of Commerce and Industry, entrepreneurial and university associations), to ensure a greater degree of familiarity for the label of excellence. This support will also strengthen the interest and commitment of students and their schools.

Membership of the Sponsors Group entails no costs whatsoever and has the sole function of promoting familiarity with and recognition of the CertiLingua[®] label of excellence in commerce, industry and universities, possibly offering work placements to CertiLingua[®] applicants and contributing reports on experience with the employment of CertiLingua[®] certificate holders.

First renowned universities, institutions and companies and have joined the sponsors group already. A recent overview of the CertiLingua[®] sponsors group can be found at: www.certilingua.net