



CertiLingua[®]

Label of Excellence for Plurilingual, European and International Competences

Programme Description

Basic Idea

Economic globalization and continuing European integration require in every conceivable way the aptitude of young people to deal with the demands of linguistic and cultural diversity in a competent and sophisticated way and thus to gain flexibility for 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

In the school systems of countries of the European Union this demand has already been implemented in several state schools. As part of their pedagogical profile these schools impart high skills in several languages to students and 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 such topics which are of special importance in order to prepare students for international courses of studies and to provide an international orientation for their future professional life and further training.

However, an internationally transparent and acknowledged certificate which clearly and comprehensibly documents the special language, European and international qualifications achieved at these schools has been missing so far.

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.

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).

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.

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 *CertiLingua Label of Excellence* is awarded by state schools and is free of charge for the students.

Concept Development

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, Finland, Italy 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.

A European label of excellence was developed in a joint project with the responsible institutions of participating European partner countries and piloted successfully from 2007-2009.

The Programme in Detail

The *CertiLingua* programme 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, 1953.²

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

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

leaving certificate that the graduate has acquired special competences for a continuation of his or her course of education in a European and international context.

Requirements

With the *CertiLingua Label of Excellence for Plurilingual, European and International Competences* the following competences are certified:

Language competences:

- The candidates have written and oral command of at least two languages other than their native/first language on level B2 and above 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).

European and international competences:

- The candidates have successfully used curricular and additional educational opportunities aiming at a European and international dimension and have fulfilled the **CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences**. They have given evidence of their intercultural ability to act by their participation in a European/ international cooperation project which has to be documented in the foreign language. Thereby, they meet the standards of international universities and business enterprises to a special degree.

<p>CertiLingua is awarded to students who have demonstrated an outstanding overall competence in the areas mentioned above.</p>
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Conditions for participation

- The *Memorandum of Understanding*, which is to be signed by the highest school authority of a Member State, is the basis for the cooperation and collaboration in the CertiLingua Network. By signing the *Memorandum of Understanding* the Member States declare to safeguard the standards set by suitable measures of evaluation and quality control.

- 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 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 prerequisite. In addition, the CertiLingua Network's criteria for the European/ international project and its documentation have to be met.
- The first accreditation of a school is valid for 3 years and will be renewed for 5 years if the awarding criteria are still met. Quality control is the responsibility of the school authorities of the respective Member States that cooperate in an international network on the evaluation and further development of the *CertiLingua Label of Excellence for Plurilingual, European and International Competences*.

<p>Details concerning the competence descriptions and awarding requirements of the CertiLingua Label of Excellence can be found on www.certilingua.net</p>

Organisational structure of the international CertiLingua® network

The CertiLingua Network

Members of the network are the highest educational authorities of the countries who have signed the Memorandum of Understanding (Appendix 2): the Member States.

The *Memorandum of Understanding* defines the cooperation of countries in the CertiLingua network. With the signature of the Memorandum, the Member States 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. All members

of the CertiLingua Network commit themselves to evaluate the Label of Excellence and support its further development.

The International Annual Conference

The Annual Conference is usually convened once a year. Each Member State can act as host. 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. All the decisions of the Annual Conference are taken unanimously.

Entitled to vote are those countries which have signed the Memorandum, the Member States, which also elect the International Steering Group for a period of three years.

Other interested countries and institutions can participate as advisers without voting rights in the Annual Conference.

The International Steering Group

The International Steering Group 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 Member States for the period between Annual Conferences.

CertiLingua Supporters

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. The CertiLingua Supporters 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), ensure a greater degree of familiarity for CertiLingua. This support will also strengthen the interest and commitment of students and their schools.

Membership of the CertiLingua Supporters 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.

Many renowned universities, institutions and companies and have joined the CertiLingua Supporters already. A recent overview of the CertiLingua Supporters can be found at: www.certilingua.net

Benefits

The annual evaluation of the Label of Excellence clearly demonstrates the following direct and indirect advantages of CertiLingua:

- 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. Certain universities exempt certificate holders from language entry exams or have granted ECTS points in the intercultural domain on the basis of the CertiLingua Label.
- Existing bi-national agreements can be integrated and complemented by additional distinguishing marks. For instance, graduates with the double qualification AbiBac who are especially qualified for further education 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 fosters to a special degree school development, teacher training and further training with regard to plurilingualism, language 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 and their public recognition can be increased. This is especially relevant in areas with international, political and economic relations.

- The obligatory face-to-face projects strengthen the students' ability to act in an international context. For schools they are an incentive to expand their cooperation and exchange activities with partners abroad.
- CertiLingua 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.

Further information, accreditation forms and contact persons can be found on www.certilingua.net

After the successful pilot phase the *CertiLingua Label of Excellence for Plurilingual, European and International Competences* was turned into a programme of excellence by the participating countries. Since 2009 CertiLingua is open to all interested countries in Europe.