

## **Employability Panel**

**David Frost (Chief Executive of the British Chambers of Commerce)**

**Theo Koutroubas (Director General of the European Council for the Liberal Professions)**

**Isabella Moore (Director, CILT, the National Centre for Languages)**

**Teresa Tinsley (Assistant Director – Communications, CILT, the National Centre for Languages)**

### **Teresa**

We are taking as our theme the Lisbon agenda, which is the agreement that all EU countries signed up to in the year 2000 to create the most successful, most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. From that, spring the education and training priorities of the EU. The Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs was renewed last year with a renewed impetus behind it, and here are just some of the objectives there where I think languages have a very important part to play and are perhaps underrated in the role that they can play in all those different areas.

- Creating an effective internal market
- Skills and adaptability of the workforce
- Promoting mobility of labour and professions
- Removing barriers to growth
- Stimulating job creation and enterprise
- Innovation, research and development
- Social cohesion, personal development

So starting off with you David, how do you see languages supporting growth and jobs in the UK?

### **David**

Well my role as the Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce is to represent the interests of some 100,000 businesses in the UK, ranging from the very largest to the very smallest. So I start with a very simple premise that unless you have a strong, powerful business base in this country then you will not have wealth creation, and if you do not have wealth creation then you won't have the people to pay the taxes which create the high quality public services that we all want. So at the bottom of everything that we want to do, underpinning everything in the UK, we must have a successful business base. Now what I have seen over recent years, over the last decade, is very strong macroeconomic stability - we've seen a substantial number of new businesses created. But when you look at our economic performance measured against some other countries, not least in terms of export performance which interests me, then our performance is not particularly good. When we compare ourselves to Germany for example, Germany which is presented by the media and certain people in the treasury as being a basket case, is far from it. Germany is a very powerful,

successful exporter. I go round the world, I see the Germans, I see the French, very strongly promoting their own business and their own industry. And from being a powerhouse of exports in the UK, we have a weak position at the moment – you'll see some figures out next week from us which show a not particularly good picture.

So where does this link with languages? Well languages is only one component but it is an important component. In both 2003 and 2004, when Isabella was in fact president of the British Chambers of Commerce, we undertook two major pieces of research amongst business members of the British Chambers of Commerce as regards export, issues of influence and particularly languages, and there were some important points which came out of that. One, experts very strongly supported the drive to get modern languages introduced at a primary school level, they thought it vitally important. They understood that English was the international business language, but if we were going to get into new exports then we did clearly need some language skills that we do not have at the moment. When we started to then further track and look at the nature of those businesses and exporters, we saw there were four broad categories that came out: Anglocentrics, opportunists, adaptors and enablers, and what we saw, crudely speaking, was that those companies that were not performing well, that were not developing their export potential, were the ones who did not have good language skills. The ones that were really flowing had a comprehensive, coherent export strategy and a key element of that was languages, so in principal that is the fundamental of why we see languages as important.

**Teresa**

From a university perspective, from a languages perspective, I think those of us in the languages field sometimes feel that employers are not giving a high enough priority to languages. Obviously you've identified in your survey a slice of exporters who really do value language skills, what do we do to get through to the rest, do you think employers in general do give sufficient priority to languages?

**David**

Employers have got a number of issues that are there at the moment. One of them is, first of all, trying to survive, making a success of the business, and then attempting to grow it, and languages is only one part of that. I think what we've got to have is a stream of young people coming through not only from schools but from higher education who've got those language skills. I don't think it's any good turning around to employers and then saying "Well, actually, you have the responsibility to give those people the language training". I think there's got to be that strong, structural preparation for young people that employers can then build upon.

**Teresa**

And do you see that happening with current policy?

**David**

No.

**Teresa**

Theo, could you comment from a European perspective on whether policy makers are giving a high enough profile to languages?

**Theo**

Not at all unfortunately, not at all. We had, in our sector, in the liberal professional sector, which brings together medical doctors, lawyers, architects and accountants, two very important directives which are not only for us but for the whole services sector. The first one was the directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, which is already adopted and is going to be implemented by all the EU member states, including of course this one, next year. And then the somehow controversial directive on the internal market of services which is now on its way to being adopted. Two big pieces of legislation, which are providing for the internal market to be completed. What is there on languages? Only one article, regarding the mutual recognition, article 53, I'll read it for you:

“persons benefiting from the recognition of professional qualifications shall have knowledge of languages necessary for practicing the profession in the host member state. The member states shall ensure that where appropriate the beneficiaries acquire the language knowledge necessary for performing their professional activity in the host member state.”

Nothing else! In two big pieces of legislation! So the question is, how are these people going to move? How are these people going to be motivated to offer their services in the host member state if they ignore the language of the host member state? You are aware of the fact that, for example, the European constitutional treaty was rejected in France and the biggest argument of those who were against it was, the Polish people are going to come over and take our jobs. But then nobody ever thought, we can also go to Poland and offer our services, we have the know-how to go to Poland, to the Czech Republic, to Slovakia and offer our services. Why? Because the idea of learning languages is not there, and because when it comes to legislation, languages are ignored.

**Teresa**

So have you got any advice on how we should lobby for a higher profile for languages?

**Theo**

I think that if universities lobby alone, or if professionals lobby alone, we will not succeed. My idea is that we could eventually reach an agreement between language centres, professional bodies, service bodies and universities and create something of a forum, an umbrella body, and then try to plead mainly for new funding, of course, for programmes which would be designed to raise awareness on the importance of language learning amongst professionals, and secondly create specialised programmes, because a professional – I mean, I am also a linguist by training, but it is also elementary to know – a professional cannot learn in the same way as a 20 year old, and then a professional has specific needs, the jargon is extremely important. But for this we need I think to create not a lobby but a forum, an umbrella group, bringing together universities, professional bodies and language centres.

**Teresa**

I think that's a very interesting idea and we could come back to that later in the panel. Coming back to the Lisbon agenda and the weight given to multilingualism in the European policy, as we know last year the EU published a new framework document on multilingualism, and you, Isabella, have just recently been appointed to a Higher Level Group on multilingualism to advise the Commissioner. Perhaps you could tell us a bit about that?

### **Isabella**

I don't think I'd like to be quite as despondent as Theo is. I think before I say anything about this particular project, I think there is a growing awareness now among employers of the element of competitiveness that language skills bring to an organisation, but not only employers, but also regional organisations are also waking up to that fact, it's just, how do we implement it? Which perhaps we'll talk about later. CILT is currently involved in two very interesting European projects, one that has been commissioned by the European Commission, looking at what the lack of language skills is costing EU member states' economies and, in some ways, it's the next instalment to the project that David mentioned. It's again trying to make the economic case for languages and trying to look at different sectors, the size of a company, what are the issues and how language skills make a difference to those organisations, and that will be a survey going across all of the EU member states and we are really looking forward to the results. I think that will give us good platform to then develop the findings from that into individual research projects, again drilling down into what that means. The other project that Teresa mentioned, this High Level Group that has been created, has a commissioner, Ján Figel' who is a Slovak, who has been given responsibility for implementing this strategy. And that in itself I think is an important step forward because there are three strands to this.

Firstly, the big problem in the EC is that they have got the biggest translating and interpreting services in the world! Over 20 languages, everything has to be translated and this is I think the message that we have to take back – there aren't enough translators and interpreters with English as a native tongue. And they really have a big problem with that. So again it's looking how to introduce new technology – computer assisted translation, everything that can be brought together to develop this service, to ensure that all the countries are communicating with each other. Because in fact coming back from Brussels it was interesting, the best discussions are always over dinner, and the discussion was that English is not enough. Some of the new member states are saying they understand English, but actually what's happening is that some of these discussions which require huge specialist knowledge are not being done justice because everyone is trying to communicate in English and nobody wants to admit that their understanding of English isn't good enough. And so they are slowly now beginning to accept that they need interpreters, because it just facilitates – their specialist knowledge doesn't come out as it should do.

The second strand, and is one that I'm very pleased that CILT has been commissioned to do, is looking again at the impact of language skills to the European economy, and I hope that will be able to take the ELAN survey and the findings from that one step further. And here I mentioned this issue of implementation, the area that I would be particularly interested to explore is how to reach that at a regional level, because the implementation of that has to happen at a regional level. So I wouldn't be quite as despondent as Theo. The fact that there is a huge growing acknowledgement of the importance of language skills – not only inter-trade between the European member states, but also obviously outside of Europe with other countries. And bearing in mind that as David said, in Europe, German is spoken by 18% of the population, we forget that, Polish is spoken by I think nearly 10% of the population, so these are things we have to remember.

### **Teresa**

Thank you, and I think we can certainly rely on you, Isabella, to make a very strong case, you've got the commissioner's ear there, and perhaps persuade them to take their policy beyond education and training, into some of the other Director Generals there.

We talked about mobility in Europe, and I think that's the next big theme that I'd like to come on to. There were a few wry smiles when Theo talked about the Poles taking people's jobs, because of course Isabella is half Polish! But coming back to the UK, David, to UK business, how important is the mobility of labour to UK business, both incoming and outgoing?

**David**

You need to understand there is massive change going on in the UK at the moment. The level of inward migration from central eastern Europe is way beyond any figures that are being published. I spend my life on the road talking to businesses, and whether it be Aberdeen, Barnsley or Carlisle, the common message I get from talking to businesses of any size is that they are now relying heavily on central European migrant labour, primarily from Poland, and also to a degree from Lithuania, and it is on a scale that is vast. And the reasons why they are doing that? They are doing that firstly because they say that the locals have no desire to work and secondly they are saying that the Poles in particular have a work ethic and level of skills beyond anything that exists at a local level. And quite frankly I am absolutely fed up with waiting for the next endless skills strategy to be produced, the next regional skills strategy to be produced, the next glossy document from some working group. British business has to deal with the here and now. The blunt issue is that the education system is failing half the population of this country. And as a result of that, white male working class is now being left behind. There is no role for them and what is happening is British business is filling that gap with migrant labour.

On Monday of this week I was in Luton in Bedfordshire and I was talking to a successful company there, who is now finding it more practical, more economical, to get the HR director on a plane, to put him in Warsaw, having done an advert and worked with a local contact, to interview, to recruit, and bring over Polish labour – skilled Polish labour – finding it more practical and cost effective to do that than to run an advert in the local paper. And as the word spreads amongst employer groups you will find that this will continue on an ever bigger scale, and as long as the education system up to the age of 16 fails the young people, that will continue, and I think, while I'm on my hobby horse with this one, what really depressed me about the school inspections bill going through was that all the debate was about whether they would be trust schools. There was not one piece of debate in parliament about the standard of education provided for large numbers of young people. And until we deal with this you will see that continue. And British businesses, they have got to deal with the here and now. That's why I say they can't wait for the next skills strategy to come along, they've to go to deal with it. If they find that migrant labour has the right skills, the right language, the right drive, they will just continue to employ them. And well done to them. With regards to movement the other way, to be frank I don't see much of it. But having two young daughters myself, the message both my wife and I have given to them is to be quite honest that if they want a future they've got to look global, not just the UK. But what I see at the moment is just a huge movement inwards.

**Teresa**

I think that's a very important message, Theo, you work specifically looking at labour mobility in the professions. Can you tell us a little bit about what you actually do and what the situation is on a Europe wide level – I mean, is what you're seeing reflecting that picture?

**Theo**

I'll try not to be so dark this time! Sometimes the situation obliges me to.

The professional sector – I'm working with the liberal professions, so I'm working with what we say in Brussels are the 'intellectual professions'. And what I see is that the figures on mobility are very, very low. Liberal professionals have the tendency to stay at home, they have the tendency to stay in their local communities, and there is an ever bigger tendency for them to support restricted measures, hoping that this way they would prevent others from coming along and challenging their "monopolies". Again, languages is very important here. Another thing that is very important is, the liberal professionals are neither employers nor employees. They are somehow employers, yes because they employ people – every, lets say, medical doctor has a secretary and probably a small team. But then they are not just employers, sometimes they are employees because a medical doctor can work in a hospital or his own study. But what is characteristic in this category is big regulation, which is restrictive regulations and sometimes, and this might be interesting for you, languages are used as a restrictive means. So regulations, which were designed sometime in the Middle Ages, and then have been strengthened up with the years, provide for a level of language learning which is very difficult to obtain. But yesterday, at the beginning of this conference, in a brilliant speech, Mike Kelly underlined the impossibility of reaching mother tongue level status. Yet the European Commission is now calling for deregulation, but they are not so gracious as to bring up a directive proposal on the regulation. There are some communications calling for this, the professional organisations are very reticent and again there is a need to raise awareness that mobility is healthy, if we are to reach the Lisbon Agenda objectives, and there can be no mobility without motivated people who are going to move! And there the issue of languages comes up again.

**Teresa**

How important is it that the liberal professions move to support the Lisbon Agenda?

**Theo**

I think it is capital, because we tend to ignore it, but the liberal professions represent approximately 15% of the active population. You have in Britain approximately 1,250,000 nurses. It's huge – it's a big sector.

**Teresa**

You can see obvious advantages for the individual as well.

**Theo**

This is why you need specialised campaigns for this! You need campaigns not to reach the enterprises as you do in other sectors, but you need campaigns designed to reach each and every professional individual. You can do that through registries, but you need to make sure that the message will reach every professional individually.

**Teresa**

Picking up on the outlook for individuals, Isabella, I know you speak up very strongly, very often, about the outlook for graduates who don't have language skills and the outlook for graduates who do.

**Isabella**

Yes. Well, picking up on what Theo said, I mean this issue with the services directive and the opportunities which are coming out of that, I think sometimes businesses think this is a threat, that we are going to have all these people coming in, but you should be thinking the opposite. These are huge opportunities for our service industries to be going out into Europe. And because it's a service industry, and you're not selling a

widget, it is even more important to have language skills. So that's the message we need to get across.

But talking about individuals, the issue that David raised about young people not going over to Europe, this is something about being out of your comfort zone, this is not just about language skills per se, it is about the confidence you have if you have been exposed to another culture, and if you look at the Erasmus figures now, where you see there's nearly twice as many graduates or undergraduates coming over to this country than the opposite, is it something about a comfort zone? Is it the fact that they need to use language skills that they don't have? And I think that's important. The other thing I read recently is an article about a report that's just come out to say that only one in four graduates are working in jobs that fully reflect graduate skills. Now is that something then about added value? What do you need to do to get that better job? It's the suite of additional skills that you have which will convince the employer to take you on against the other, and I think that language skills here play an important part of that added value of the individual, and certainly one of the surveys we undertook last year, 'Talking Sense', when we looked at what major employers are doing about solving their language skills problems, and as David said, they have a problem. They are thinking about their bottom line, they need the people, they need the skills, and they go wherever they are. And that is about creating a level playing field for our young people when they are looking for the same job, and that I think is a hugely important message.

The other project that we are heavily involved in is a project with the Skills for Business Network, working with the Sector Skills Development Agency. And this is looking at how languages can be embedded in the various sector skills frameworks. And the importance, looking at it from your perspective, is those young people. Because it's about ensuring that language skills are embedded in all levels of an organisation, this is not just about senior management having language skills, but this is about accountants having language skills. You might have done business in English, but when you're chasing money your customer very soon forgets their English language skills! So it's about ensuring that language skills are embedded at all levels of an organisation and so for those young people that are, for example, taking vocational work, the ability to progress their language studies through in to higher education, for example in foundation degrees, that progression issue I think is very important.

### **David**

Can I just pick up on one point that Isabella said about the big number of people coming over here as opposed to British young people going over to Europe. I've seen some figures on that and read some of the reports, and I think one of the interesting things, the reasons for that, is because the UK is a really exciting place to be. It is a very, very open country, a very, very open society, and if you're living in a country, graduate or not, where you're running 12%, 13%, 15% unemployment as you are on continental Europe and you're a bright graduate I'm damn sure you'd want to come to a country where there's no unemployment and it was a really good place to live, and I think that's why we see a lot of – in particular in London – becoming a very, very strong cultural mix, attracting a huge stream of very capable, intelligent, multilingual young people from across the world and I think that will continue.

### **Isabella**

I forgot to mention the lifelong learning programme, and that's a new strand of funding that will begin in 2007, the European programme, and here there is a transversal seam again in acknowledgement of the need for language skills in relation to mobility and there will be opportunities, again at a regional level, at FE colleges especially, to get

together other regional organisations to ensure that that is embedded. The opportunities are there, and what I see is that difficulty of just getting that going and finding the methods to do that.

**Teresa**

David, we'll move on now to the role of universities, what role universities can play. You gave a very scathing assessment of the education system up to 16, what do employers want and need from graduates? What are the employability skills you look for, with languages amongst them we hope? What else do you value that language graduates have?

**David**

Well on a wider note, I myself recruit a number of graduates and I have to say I'm really impressed by the quality of young people leaving British higher education, there is really no question about that at all. There are large numbers and it's very difficult when, for example, I'm advertising for an economist and I may get 200 applications come though, all with good degrees, so what you've got to do is to try and pull out how one person is better than another and I think that takes you into a much wider field. It's about attitude quite clearly; it's about having the ability to work as part of a team; it's about being enterprising in its wider sense, having good analytical skills, and I think a desire to learn; it's looking to draw enthusiasm out of that as well.

I'll just give you one practical example. Two years ago, I was recruiting for an economist and we pay a starting salary of around £24,000 to £25,000, and we found one for that, but one guy who was there was working for the DWP and he was great but I saw this missionary zeal. If he'd stayed in the civil service for another year it would have killed him. I said, "I've got to get you out of here, but I can't pay much, I'm going to pay you £16,000 if you come and work for me, because you've got something, I know you've got that spark, that desire to learn, that enterprising whatever" and he said I'll do it, and he moved from the North East to London for £16,000. Two years later, and he's just left me for a job on £43,000 so it shows the ability.

And when it comes to languages there is a weakness, undoubtedly. I have about 9 graduates working for me and only one of them has a language, so I know when we get a phone call – we're the British Chambers of Commerce and people ring up from all over the world – and the cry will go out, "Where's Charlotte? I've got someone with a foreign voice on the phone!" And poor old Charlotte has to come to the phone and pick up in either French or German. So the graduates that we've got are very good at what they do but there is only one with any language skills!

**Teresa**

I'd like to come back to this question of how we can strengthen languages and take up your point, Theo, but before that, Isabella, you started to touch on the regional agenda, what role can universities play on a regional level?

**Isabella**

I'm particularly interested in this issue, I sit on the board of a Regional Development Agency in the West Midlands. The Regional Development Agency is the body in the region that shapes the economic strategy for that region. Hugely powerful, huge amounts of money go through that organisation. As part of developing that strategy they look at the skills that are needed for the region. And they also host a body that I know David hasn't got a lot of time for, but it's the Regional Skills Partnership, which brings together a whole host of organisations, the skills and the demands side of it together.

And I do think that there is an important role to play in engaging these organisations, just bearing in mind that there is this huge amount of money going through, I mean the Regional Development Agency in the West Midlands have a budget of over £350 million and leverage for a lot more, but there is a case to be able to engage with them, to be able to identify what the specific language skills for a particular region are, and each region will have a different need. It might be one region has a lot of companies with German connections, others growing Russian connections, Chinese, and apart from the programme that you have, it's just engaging and being able to identify particular needs.

The other area where I think that you have huge knowledge is the inter-cultural competence – I don't think you sell that enough at a regional/local level. Organisations need that inter-cultural knowledge. It's linked very closely with languages and you in your various departments have got a huge host of real knowledge and I don't think you sell that enough. There are organisations, companies that would really benefit, but it's the ability to be flexible, organisations won't acknowledge that there are summer holidays, and I know that a lot of the universities already do that but I think you could do a lot more. The other thing which I would like to say is the importance again of linking languages with enterprise. Again, huge amounts of money being put into supporting entrepreneurial culture and enterprise in schools. David is chairman of the Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship. A huge amount of resources going into that, and why can't we link languages to that? The same sort of skills: confidence, analytical thinking, good communication skills, these are all the things that you can link in to what employers want, so I think there is a case there and the implementation of that has to happen very much at a regional level. It won't happen nationally, because as David said, these policies and papers come out by the suitcaseful but it's actually getting it happening on the ground.

### **Teresa**

Theo, give us some advice for how we can strengthen languages in UK universities?

### **Theo**

I have a feeling that the general universities in big EU member states do not give a big importance to language learning when it comes to the normal curriculum. If for example you enter law school in Belgium – and I guess it would be the same thing in the UK – there's a beautiful, very strong, good education which would give you all the knowledge to be a very competent lawyer or jurist, but languages are either not compulsory or if they are compulsory, most of the students will be encouraged just to take a course in a language they already know, because it counts to the central mark, and they don't want to have a low mark. So if you already have a knowledge of English and there is a compulsory foreign language in your undergraduate curriculum you'll have the tendency to take English as the foreign language in order to ensure that your marks are going to be high. There is a lot of work to be done here, I do not know much about your universities, so I will have to speak for what is going on at the university where I am teaching, and it is a big one, the University of Louvain, there we have the problem of French, French being also a language which was in the past dominant, and what does this mean? That most things a scientist needs to know are translated already in this language. So there is no stimulation for learning another language – other than English, I mean. Nowadays everybody learns English, thankfully. But there is no stimulation because whatever is there to learn for your science is already translated into your language and you, because of competitiveness, because of the way the market works, you are focussed on good marks.

Now universities need to raise awareness at the undergraduate level about the need to learn – and I'm speaking for our part of the Union – of the need to learn another language than English. And I guess, if I understand your system well, another language than French or German. They need to raise awareness on the fact that we are now a single market, that this single market – as Isabella said very correctly – is not a threat, in fact it is a huge possibility, and the way to realise this possibility passes through languages. So it's not up for me to say how they are going to do that – maybe by making two languages compulsory, or just by intelligently designed awareness-raising campaigns. But the reason for us, for Belgium, for France, for our part of the world to learn another language than English, to make sure they speak a language other than English when they finish their degree, and I guess there is a need for you to realise that there are other languages out there than French and German.

### **Teresa**

In a minute I'm going to ask you to give one key take-home message from each of our panellists, but first of all I think we've got a few minutes to take a few short questions from the floor.

### **Ceri James, CILT Cymru**

Could I ask if you could communicate these views locally, directly to the assembly members in charge of both education and knowledge development and give me the details later on. Because we now have the opportunity in Wales to bring these two together; we have language strategy; we have economic strategy, but I don't think there's always been joined-up government in terms of bringing those together, because I think there's a willingness of the Welsh Assembly to actually talk within departments.

We've just had a bonfire of quangos in Wales. the WDA's been brought into the government, and we need to speak to these people now because they are starting on new roles and I think the messages you put forward would arrive at just the right time. We have a big job in Wales breaking down misconceptions that have built up amongst careers advisors and so on, because of the Future Skills Wales Survey. I don't know if you're aware of that survey, but it's a survey conducted by the WDA over 4,000 randomly selected businesses in Wales. They tend to be skewed very much towards the small and medium-sized enterprises just because of the numbers involved, and every time this survey is conducted, every 2 or 3 years, top of the list of skills for the future comes "communication: knowing the needs of your customer". Bottom of the list comes MFL. Second from bottom, Welsh.

Now we all see that as hugely contradictory but we need to drive that message home with policy makers to make sure that that is addressed in future years, because we all know that mobility of labour at the moment is one-way and we've got to equip our young people to actually beat that.

### **David**

It's interesting, I was speaking at UWIC just down the road from here about 3 weeks ago, and I was told that the amount of people actually learning Welsh was growing. Now I was staggered by that because I thought, "Well, what's the point?" [Gasps from audience] The businesses in Wales are working in a globalised economy, the WDA was a world brand for bringing in overseas businesses into Wales. One of our concerns is whether that shake-up is actually going to lose some of the focus or the edge. If you looked at the stream of companies that flowed into Wales in the 80s and the 90s they were from all over – a huge Japanese invasion of companies came. And the businesses that are operating right across Wales, I would suggest are competing not

with businesses three or four miles away but businesses on the other side of the globe. And if they're going to do that, and do it successfully, I would suggest if they're going to learn a second language, Welsh is not going to best equip them to do that. Are you going to run me out of here now?!

**Ceri**

Well I think a lot of businesses now are realising the good sense in doing business in Welsh as well as English and other languages. Signage and services are available in Welsh as well – it's good business for shops and so on.

**David**

Good business for the people who paint the signs!

**Isabella**

Teresa, can I just make one comment on what Ceri's saying? It's the way you ask the question in the surveys, which as you know we've found at CILT – If you ask that question, "Do you need French skills?", to an employer, or in the priority of their needs, that will go down at the bottom of the list. And it's how you ask that question, and I think that is what we have to influence – the way it is formulated.

**Marina Orsini-Jones – Coventry University**

A difficult question: we've all just been laughing and being happy, but I want to ask a sad question. You're very influential people, who work so hard, everyone on the panel sitting there. You've all been very positive towards languages. But I don't agree with what Mike Kelly said last night, that languages are taking us ahead of the pack in the HE sector. What makes me very sad, and I wonder whether you could help, whether you could convince the government, is that we're losing a lot of expertise and skills. Because a lot of vocational places, where we used to teach skills and languages in a vocational way, just to name a few, Oxford Brookes, Westminster, Brighton, Anglia Ruskin, Coventry... They're all closing language departments altogether. And what makes me sad is that in our case we were offered the chance to do four languages and we did it, but we're being penalised now, because of what is happening with languages. And there's nothing coming from the government to save us. And what makes me sad is that we're losing. My good friend was teaching Norse and Beowulf and is now retraining in English, and can you, who are so powerful, do something?

**Isabella**

I share your concern, but I think it's really important that we get the message to departments other than the DfES. I had recently a few weeks ago with our chairman Dick Bunker a meeting with David Bell [Permanent Secretary at the DfES] and we concentrated very much on actually making the points that you've just said, and as a result he's meeting with his counterparts at the DTI and I'm preparing for him literally in the next few days a brief with all this sort of information for him. Because what is important, is that, for the other departments, languages are just not on their radar screen.

If you go to the treasury with anecdotal evidence, with sort of, "We've heard this; we've heard that", they go, "Oh yes, fine" but what they want, these people, is hard facts. What it's costing our country not having language skills, how you reach that, the formula behind it, that's what they're interested in.

It's sad because all the good things about learning languages, all the positive – about social interaction, about inter-cultural knowledge, all the good things that we all know –

for us it's a no-brainer, but for those people there, they want hard facts. They've got a list of priorities, "In my region, 20% of the workforce have no basic skills". So where do languages fit in? How important is that? But when you go to them and say, "Look, it's costing us this, this and this. This is what it's costing our country".

And look at community languages, for example, the huge value that community languages have as a way of social inclusion, the treasury is very interested in that, of adding value, of helping international trade. That's the sort of information that has to go to the other government departments. It's through someone like David Bell and we were fortunate in preparing that brief and I'll sit on him to make sure that he delivers it, that's all I can say!

**Teresa**

Is that your key message, Isabella?

**Isabella**

No. My key message is that Germany, and I go back to football, during this World Cup, they were very successful in laying to rest some national clichés about Germany. Now we have an opportunity. 2012 is coming up and we have an opportunity for laying to rest one of the clichés that everybody thinks about us, that we don't speak foreign languages and I think we should take hold of that and use that!

**David**

The key message I have is that we have to understand that we live in a globalised world, and five years ago a business in Birmingham thought it was perhaps competing with one in Wolverhampton, or maybe at best Barcelona, now it finds day in and day out it's against Beijing. And if it's going to have a competitive edge, it seems to me that language skills have got to be central to that. But if we are going to do that it's no good putting emphasis on the employer, we've got to take it right back to primary school, we've got to enthuse kids at primary school, get it on the curriculum at primary school and then let it flow through the system after that.

**Theo**

My key message is that we need your help. We need the help of the universities, we need the help of the language centres, to lobby with the commission for more programmes designed for awareness-raising for language learning with professionals, and for more specialised programmes for language learning designed for professional people. At the same time we need your help at an awareness-raising level with the future liberal professions and with those who are getting lifelong training where they are already in the profession. So we need to work together.

**Teresa**

Thank you very much to all three of you, thank you for not being afraid of being controversial!