

European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages



## What is the EPOSTL?

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a document intended for students undergoing their initial teacher education which encourages them to reflect on the didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, helps them to assess their own didactic competences and enables them to monitor their progress and to record their experiences of teaching during the course of their teacher education. The EPOSTL consists of three main sections:

- a **personal statement** section, to help students at the beginning about to begin their teacher education to reflect on general questions related to teaching
- a **self-assessment** section, which contains lists of 'can-do' descriptors relating to didactic competences
- a **dossier**, in which students can document progress and record examples of work relevant to their teacher education and their future profession.

The EPOSTL also includes a glossary of terms and a users' guide.

## How was the EPOSTL developed?

The EPOSTL was developed for the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe by a team of teacher educators from five different countries (Armenia, Austria, Norway, Poland, UK). It arose from a project initiated by the ECML, 'A Framework for Teacher Education', which had the overall aim of addressing the broad question of harmonising teacher education across Europe.

The EPOSTL builds on existing documents already developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe – *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* and the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* – as well as the European Commission-financed project *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference (European Profile)*.

Draft versions of the EPOSTL were presented at two ECML workshops, attended by student teachers and teacher educators from more than 30 countries. The EPOSTL is used at a large number of institutions across Europe and also in Asia and North and South America.

## What are the aims of the EPOSTL?

The main aims of the EPOSTL are:

- to encourage students to reflect on the competences a teacher strives to attain and on the underlying knowledge which feed these competences
- to help prepare students for their future profession in a variety of teaching contexts
- to promote discussion between students and between students and their teacher educators and mentors
- to facilitate self-assessment of students' competence
- to help students develop awareness of their strengths and weaknesses related to teaching
- to provide an instrument which helps chart progress

<http://epostl2.ecml.at>

# The self-assessment descriptors

At the heart of the EPOSTL are the 195 descriptors of competences related to language teaching which comprise the self-assessment section. These descriptors may be regarded as a set of core competences which language teachers should strive to attain.

Each descriptor is accompanied by a bar, which helps students to visualise and chart their competences according to their own assessment. Self-assessments may take place at different stages of their teacher education.

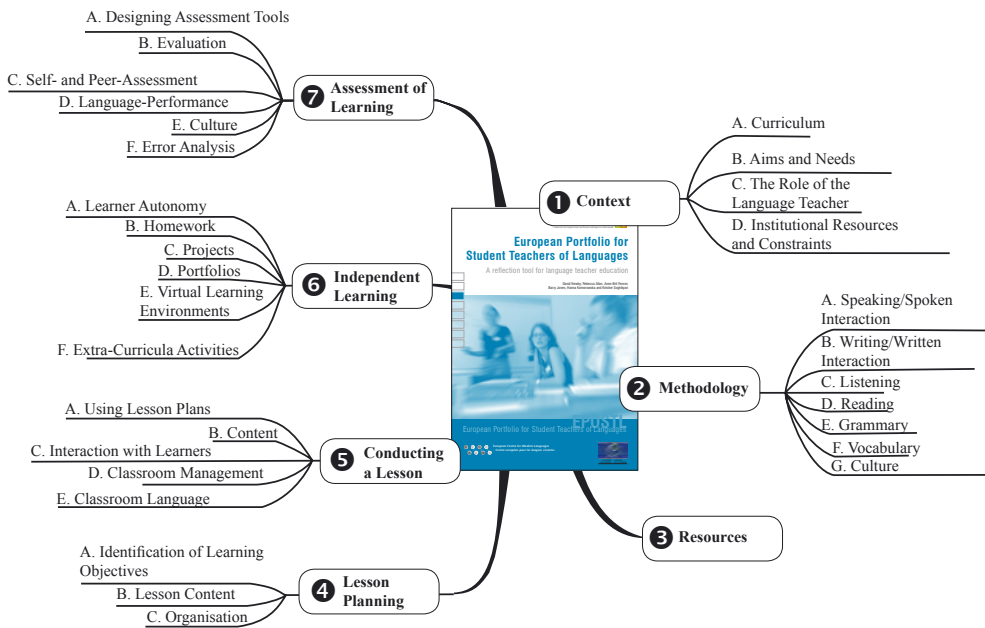
*'I can create a supportive atmosphere that invites learners to take part in speaking activities.'*



In the above example a student has made self-assessments at three stages of her teacher education and added the date on which these assessments were made so that her growing competence may be charted. The arrow indicates that competence development is a life-long process which continues throughout one's teaching profession.

## Categories of descriptors

The descriptors are grouped into seven general categories. These represent areas in which teachers require knowledge and a variety of competences and need to make decisions related to teaching. Each heading has been sub-divided as follows:



## Competence descriptors: examples

CATEGORY		COMPETENCE DESCRIPTORS
CONTEXT	Curriculum:	I can understand the requirements set in national and local curricula.
	Aims and Needs:	I can take into account differing motivations for learning another language.
	The Role of the Language Teacher:	I can draw on appropriate theories of language, learning, culture etc. and relevant research findings to guide my teaching.
METHODOLOGY	Speaking/Spoken interaction:	I can evaluate and select a range of meaningful speaking and interactional activities to develop fluency (discussion, role play, problem solving etc.).
RESOURCES		I can select and use ICT materials and activities in the classroom which are appropriate for my learners.
LESSON PLANNING	Lesson Content:	I can structure lesson plans and/or plan for periods of teaching in a coherent and varied sequence of content.
CONDUCTING A LESSON	Interaction with Learners:	I can cater for a range of learning styles.
	Classroom Management:	I can create opportunities for and manage individual, partner, group and whole class work.
INDEPENDENT LEARNING	Learner Autonomy:	I can help learners to reflect on and evaluate their own learning processes and evaluate the outcomes.
ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING	Evaluation:	I can assign grades for tests and examinations using procedures which are reliable and transparent.

## How can the EPOSTL be used?

The EPOSTL is a flexible resource which can be integrated in a variety of ways into existing teacher education courses and programmes. The EPOSTL is the property of the student teacher and is an instrument to promote professional growth through reflection and dialogue. As such it can be seen as a means of enhancing autonomous learning. This does not mean that the role of the teacher educator is not important: he or she will need to provide guidance as to when and how the EPOSTL might best be used. The EPOSTL should be made available to students at the beginning of their teacher education and it should accompany them throughout their teacher education, teaching practice and into their profession.

### The EPOSTL may be used as follows:

- Used over a period of time, it will help student teachers to chart progress and growth.
- It can serve as the springboard for discussions, topics for term papers, research projects etc.
- It can provide support to teaching practice and assist in discussions with mentors. This will help mentors to provide systematic feedback.
- It can help teacher educators in the evaluation and design of curricula by making aims and content transparent.
- As with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* it provides a common basis by means of which teacher education programmes and courses can be compared.

There is no single way of using the EPOSTL. Teacher educators from many countries are currently exploring different options. How to use the EPOSTL is the focus of a project carried out by the ECML 'Piloting and Implementing the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages' (EPOSTL2). You can read about the outcomes of this project in an ECML publication (2011). Details are available at the following website: <http://epostl2.ecml.at/>.

## The EPOSTL and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The EPOSTL draws on insights from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* and shares similarities concerning aims and functions, approaches and principles and criteria. The introduction to the CEFR states that it 'describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively' (p.1). Much of what is stated with regard to the learner and learning in the CEFR can be formulated with regard to the teacher and teaching and applied to the EPOSTL. Thus, the above statement can be reformulated as follows:

*The EPOSTL describes in a comprehensive way what language teachers have to learn to do in order to teach learners to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to help learners to develop so as to be able to act effectively.*

Some principles shared by the two documents are:

- A reflective mode of learning and teaching
- 'I can' self-assessment competence descriptors
- An autonomous view of both learning and teaching
- Life-long learning – a recognition that just as learning a language is a life-long process, so is 'learning to teach' a process which will accompany teachers throughout their professional career

## Where is the EPOSTL available?

Various language versions of the EPOSTL have been produced, most of which can be downloaded from the ECML website: <http://epostl2.ecml.at/>. These include: English, French, German, Polish, Romanian, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Greek, Italian, Russian and Spanish. There are no restrictions on photocopying the EPOSTL.

## Resources, links, contacts

### Resources

- Downloadable information about the EPOSTL is available from the 'Resources' section of the EPOSTL2 homepage. This includes information materials, an article on the EPOSTL and PowerPoint presentations.

### EPOSTL/ECML

- EPOSTL website: <http://epostl2.ecml.at/>.
- ECML: [www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at); [information@ecml.at](mailto:information@ecml.at)
- Further information on the EPOSTL: [david.newby@uni-graz.at](mailto:david.newby@uni-graz.at)

### CEFR/ELP

- Informations on the GERS and the ESP:  
[http://www.coe.int/lang/T/E/Cultural\\_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language\\_Policy/](http://www.coe.int/lang/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/)

### European Profile

- Kelly, M. & Grenfell, M., European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference, Information: <http://www.lang.soton.ac.uk/profile/index.html>

<http://epostl2.ecml.at>



### European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages

A reflection tool for language teacher education

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