

ESF Exploratory Workshop on
**Development of Theoretical and Practical
Guidelines for the Adaptation of the
Common European Framework of
Reference (CEFR) to Sign Languages**

Translation of this report in sign language available [here](#)

Zurich (Switzerland), September 16-18, 2011

Convened by:
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SCIENTIFIC REPORT

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Co-sponsored by

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Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW),
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1 Executive summary

The last 15 years have brought a substantial change in foreign language learning and teaching as well as in the examination of attained language skills. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was established as a benchmark in Europe for teaching, learning, and assessment of a foreign or second language. It is in use in all European countries in different areas of educational systems of higher learning of foreign and second languages in schools, universities, and further education.

The only language areas that had received little to no attention were the numerous sign languages of the deaf communities of Europe. The ESF-Exploratory Workshop *Development of Theoretical and Practical Guidelines for the Adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to Sign Languages* intended to close this gap. Its general idea was to bring together deaf and hearing researchers of Europe working on CEFR-related issues to exchange ideas, coordinate research, and to build up networks on teaching, learning, and assessing knowledge of signed languages in Europe.

The workshop's three major aims were

- to exchange information about experiences in transferring the CEFR to sign languages and observing the consequences for sign language teaching, learning, and assessment
- to specify the theoretical aspects of sign languages that need to be investigated in order to coordinate the development of sign language versions of CEFR
- to plan future European collaborations (research projects) on establishing a CEFR framework for sign languages (referred to as "CEFR4SL" in the following)

In addition to presentations, three (sub)workshops focusing on assessment, training, and teaching of signed languages were held in parallel on Saturday afternoon. The results of these expert and interest groups were presented on Sunday morning, thereby providing the basis for the following final discussion.

The ESF-Workshop was held from Friday afternoon, September 16th, to Sunday noon, September 18th, 2011 at the University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education (HfH), Zürich, Switzerland. The 29 workshop participants (not including the ESF representative) originated from 16 different European countries. 14 of the participants were deaf and 15 hearing. Sign language interpretation was provided in British, German, Irish, and Swedish Sign Language as well as in International Signing.

The overall workshop atmosphere was warm and positive. There was ample time provided for presentations and discussions both in a formal and more informal context. During the two days there was time for discussions within the program as well as in more informal contexts, such as during a wine-reception on Saturday evening that offered an opportunity for exchange and social interaction. Lunch and coffee breaks presented an additional opportunity for detailed questioning and networking.

As a major outcome of the workshop the participants agreed to establish a EU-wide network to install the CEFR4SL, thereby enforcing educational equality of deaf communities in terms of language learning, teaching, and assessment. This development will support the realization of the EU's ratification of the UN-Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/convention/index_en.htm).

For future ESF-Workshops we recommend to allocate extra funding for sign language interpreting purposes, namely during the workshop in order to facilitate communication among deaf and hearing researches, and to distribute information in video format in order to put the EU's barrier-free communication strategy into practice (see: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/disability-strategy/index_en.htm).

2 Scientific content of the event

2.1 Goals and means

The ESF-Workshop was intended:

- to exchange information about experiences in transferring the CEFR to sign languages and observing the consequences for sign language teaching, learning, and assessment,
- to specify the theoretical aspects of sign languages that need to be investigated in order to coordinate the development of sign language versions of CEFR
- to plan future European collaborations (research projects) on establishing a CEFR framework for sign languages (referred to as “CEFR4SL” in the following).

These major goals were achieved through a number of plenary presentations, three (sub) workshops on specific topics and plenary discussions on presentations, workshop results, future collaboration, communication networks and strategies.

All ESF-Workshop participants were invited in advance to submit questions on issues of particular interest to be discussed in the three parallel workshops. Feedback from these parallel workshops were the basis for the final discussion and are part of this Scientific Report which will be translated into International Signing and will be made available online at the ESF and the homepages of several universities. This will make it equally accessible for deaf and hearing people interested in this topic.

A workshop agenda was defined in advance in order

- to make information available to all participants clarifying the state of the CEFR-related developments in different national research groups

- to coordinate interests and facilitate communication in the workshop and to sketch the outlines for the next steps of our coordinated research and interests

-to subsequently produce a comprehensive result and position paper, i.e. this report, summarizing the outcomes of the ESF-Workshop and the subworkshops, thereby making details available to interested non-participants.

2.2 Topics of presentations

In the CEFR, mastery of a language is seen as mastery of the successful use of language in social, cultural and practical contexts using adequate linguistic means. The objective is not to acquire an isolated domain of knowledge but to nurture the ability to integrate numerous linguistic and non-linguistic sources of knowledge and to put these to use in contexts of differing demands. Consequently, it is a synergy of “savoirs” (declarative, domain knowledge), of “savoir-faire” (skills, know-how of how to act/functional knowledge), of “savoir-être” (existential knowledge of personal traits and attitudes), and of “savoir-apprendre” (ability to learn) that is applied in language use. The acquisition of a particular non-mothertongue language is seen as the process of acquiring additional linguistic, socio-linguistic, and pragmatic competences of the particular language, embracing and also broadening all other sources of knowledge. The method to support language learners in their course of language learning, therefore, is action-oriented in essence.

However, as the development of the CEFR for languages concentrated on spoken languages, the particular linguistic characteristics of sign languages, their uses in communities, their modality specific language activities, and their functions in deaf communities were disregarded. The core issue of level descriptions in sign language characteristics, i. e. the development of CAN-DO-descriptors, was not taken into account.

In his opening keynote, Thomas Studer addressed these topics in giving an overview of the developmental milestones and the three main objectives of the CEFR for languages, namely

the establishment of a descriptive metalanguage for language education and assessment of attained foreign language knowledge, the agreement on six common reference levels and the focusing on activity-oriented teaching methods. Studer pointed out the need for an equivalent tool for learning, teaching and assessing sign language acquisition. He urged the participants to launch research on and collaboration in the development of modality adequate CAN-descriptors and to align these in an appropriate CEFR4SL-scale.

Studer further reflected on the limitations to scaling devices, as not everything needs to be scaled, is scalable or can be scaled. So a CEFR4SL will not automatically solve all issues that are important in language learning. For example, the CEFR does not contain CAN-descriptors for the large domain of occupation or for adequate sociolinguistic communicative behavior. Also, second language learning as opposed to foreign language learning is not covered by CEFR. Therefore, given a CEFR or a CEFR4SL, we need to bear in mind the risk of neglecting certain learning processes or domains by focusing on the scaled and tested outcomes of learning.

Studer closed his keynote with two recommendations: Firstly, we should not conceptualize learning processes as linear processes, and secondly, we should go forward and develop descriptors for language objectives.

In their presentation, Christian Rathmann and Okan Kubus reported on the development of a performance and error reduction test for sign language learners of German Sign Language (DGS) and on preliminary suggestions of CAN-DO-descriptors for the levels A0 – B1 of a conceived CERF4SL. The goals of their research group are to locate the areas where learning and progression are most erroneous or slow and to isolate the contribution of different variables that interact in complex communicative tasks.

On the basis of a Sentence Reproduction Test, 31 students' productions of sentences were analyzed for phonological, morphological, syntactic and prosodic errors. An analysis revealed several significant differences between the groups of beginners, intermediates and advanced learners.

As the tests are still in an early phase, final conclusions cannot be drawn at this point in time. In the longer run, however, the findings could provide information on the validity and reliability of the delimitation of levels in SL-acquisition and guide the development of teaching materials.

The research group of Rathmann and Kubus also suggested an additional level A0, which would lead to a significant increase of instruction hours for beginners in sign language courses. This level is intended to help hearing learners to cope with some of the modality specific demands of sign languages, such as the discrimination of deictic pointing vs. linguistic indexing. Learners should be prepared in A0 to begin signing in A1. In the plenary discussion this issue was addressed again.

Following the argumentation of Franz Dotter and Jörg Keller, the participants agreed that any communicative task either requires verbal (linguistic) or non-verbal competences (or a combination of both). If verbal competences are required, their mastery is a matter of A1 or higher and the goal should be described by CAN-DO-descriptors; if not, it is beyond anything the CEFR4SL-scale should include.

This leaves the possibility open that more general courses intended to help learners cope with modality specific, non-verbal prerequisites are developed and offered to students. The results, however would not need to be assessed in the CEFR4SL. This is analogous to a situation found in hearing learners of spoken languages who need e. g. an (adult) literacy education before they can pass an A1-level conforming to the CEFR. Such a script learning course too, precedes any A1-certificate-course.

Carmel Grehan's and Lorraine Leeson's contribution addressed the issue of sign language curriculum alignment to the CEFR4SL referring to Irish Sign Language. In the CEFR and in the CEFR4SL learners are autonomous. Language learning is learner centered and the learner's communicative needs receive highest priority. One instrument to support autonomy and lifelong learning is the introduction of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), a self-administered documentary of competences attained (e. g. certificates, examples of best practice, including a CEFR-derivative scale for the student's self-assessment of progress). Language learning is not separated from the broadening of other competences. For example, the CEFR vocabulary advances by themes of communicative importance and the notions needed for a successful handling of such situations rather than by preset vocabulary lists or artificial subjects. Curricula must reflect this change. Hence one of the challenges they see is how to appropriately map the sign language curricula to the CEFR4SL – and vice versa. Of course, as they pointed out, the assessment of progress needs to be aligned to the CEFR accordingly, namely students need not know more or different things than are required for the corresponding stage.

Based on the understanding that success of language teaching is governed by the learners' involvement, the learners' reflection, and the target language's use, the CEFR along with the European Language Portfolio (ELP) are instruments to foster this change of perspective. Drawing on their curriculum concept of teaching Irish Sign Language (ISL) that has been devised up to level B2, Grehan and Leeson claimed that logically e. g. the introduction of fingerspelling, a particular skill used heavily in ISL, could be introduced at any level in the CEFR4SL. The practical usefulness, however, would make it necessary to learn this earlier rather than later. In general, receptive, productive, and interactional activities would have to be used at all levels in a curriculum as well as in assessments.

One ISL-example that raised much feedback was the reference to female and male forms of signs (THEATER, SHOPPING) according to the sex of the person using them. The existence of sign variants (genderlect, sociolect, regiolect etc.) highlights the need of research on the interplay between socio-cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic competence and the proper introduction of these domains in teaching and assessing competence levels.

In the United Kingdom, the introduction of a CEFR4SL is not unequivocally supported, as Clark Denmark noted in his presentation. One argument against it is that teaching and learning have worked well without the framework in the past, whereas people in favour argue that it provides a common framework of the standards to expect of sign language learning throughout Britain and Europe in general and parallels the instruments developed for European spoken languages.

Up to date, no common framework for the teaching or assessment of British Sign Language (BSL) in Higher Education exists. As Denmark stressed, rather the contrary is true - the standards have deteriorated. Adopting the idea of a CEFR4SL, Denmark and his research group developed the webbased curriculum guide and resource location for the study of BSL: the BSL QED (<http://bslqed.com/>). At present, the BSL QED curriculum reaches from levels A1 to B2. Teachers are guided via video and text to apply appropriate productive, receptive, and interactional activities of BSL relating to themes and communicative competences. Another recurrent topic of the ESF-Workshop was the question of how to deal with reading and writing skills that are required in the CEFR for spoken languages but have no equivalents in sign languages. Denmark proposed to substitute the receptive reading activity with the reception of sign language "literature" presented in video-format. Writing would either be removed altogether or be substituted by video-recorded story telling. The multiple discussions of dropping or substituting reading and writing skills in a CEFR4SL did not lead

to mutual consent. Most researchers were inclined to replace both with sign language particular communicative activities such as fingerspelling or speech reading.

An open discussion moderated by Jörg Keller concluded the first day of presentations. Apart from the topics mentioned above, i. e. beginner level A1, dimensions of sign variations, and development of descriptors, numerous interests of the participants were introduced into the plenary discussion demonstrating the large need of a European communication platform for an exchange of ideas on the CEFR4SL.

One prominent topic was the question of the place of culture in sign language and whether it is a subject in its own right. The delimitation seems quite straightforward for common hearing cultures but is much less obvious in local deaf cultures where existential, cultural, social and sign language competences are intimately interdependent. Nevertheless, cultural knowledge as such should not be an issue for the development of assessment scales. Cultural knowledge that is reflected in sign communication (e. g. genderlects, sociolects, vocabulary, politeness, discourse behavior), however, should be.

Some reflection was spent on the role of deaf communities in the development of the CEFR4SL. Despite the genuine academic nature of such a task, several participants emphasized the necessity to involve the deaf communities in the process. The merits of a CEFR4SL should be spread and support from communities and deaf organizations should be sought. The CEFR4SL-project should not be manifested as an education tool for only a few higher-education research groups but as a constitutive step of recognition of signed and spoken language equivalence in the educational systems of Europe which should lead to standardized teaching and assessment methods and action-oriented learning materials. All participants agreed on the value and need of additional contact-time not only in terms of guided teaching hours but also with respect to the deaf community.

In their opening presentation of the second day, Franz Dotter and Pilar Fernández Viader introduced SignLEF, a collaborative project of Italian, Catalanian, and Austrian research groups. SignLEF intends to adapt the CEFR to the sign languages of Italy (LIS), Catalonia (LSC), and Austria (ÖSG) and to develop course materials accordingly to establish complete comparability and functional equivalence with spoken languages. To guarantee authenticity, all course materials shall consist of original sign language texts excluding translations from oral language texts. The advantage hereby is the intrinsic inclusion of information and values of deaf culture and communication manners in the materials. Consequently, sign language texts are produced by deaf colleagues only.

Knowledge about deaf culture is a domaine of savoirs, but as themes do not make communicative functions as such, hence they will not be explicitly mentioned in the CEFR4SL.

However, some practical problems need to be solved, for example the proper relation between video curricula vs. printed ones (also see BSL QED), the amount of materials needed for a full-fledged curriculum, or the place of oral language in instruction.

Turning to communicative competences, all grammatical descriptions in SignLEF are formulated as independent of linguistic models as possible. Dotter, Fernández Viader, and their colleagues conceive communicative functions and speech/signing acts as the only acceptable basis for any comparison between languages. Therefore, in order to achieve the SignLEF-goals, the research groups adhered to a straight-forward strategy: adapt all CEFR-related structures and contents developed for spoken languages as they are unless they contradict communicative functions that are particular to sign languages.

By and large this strategy was uncontroversial. But the proposed procedure more clearly marked the direction towards the development of new descriptors by linking them to

communicative functions on a microscale. Thus this could be a guideline for the collaborative work in the collection of CAN-DO-descriptors for sign languages. This is what makes the SignLEF-project conceptionally particular: it explicitly addresses the question of how to map the CEFR for oral languages to the CEFR4SL, it proposes a criterion as a guideline and thus a practicable answer to it for any particular goal. The details may be disputable, what is not, however, is the message that we need criteria that must be met in the development of new CAN-DO-descriptors.

The development and introduction of the CEFR4SL will alter learning and teaching practices, yet many materials may have to be newly aligned in the CEFR4SL, some may remain usable for learning microfunctions and many of the communicative-functional teaching practices will survive the reconception of signing curricula in an action-oriented framework. The situation is different for assessment; it must be newly developed and the current procedures completely reviewed.

The concepts needed for standardized assessments in a CEFR4SL were outlined in Tobias Haug's presentation. He pointed out that only few valid tests on sign language proficiency are available today and even fewer exist to assess the attainment of sign language acquired as a foreign language, such as the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI).

Addressing the genuine test criteria of the materials used (e. g. videos, interviews, themes), the contents to be tested (e. g. communicative competences), the communicative activities involved (productive/receptive/interactive language uses), the rating methods, the examiners' qualifications, and the test environment, namely the criteria of reliability, validity, and objectivity, Haug forecasted a laborious effort to meet the needs of suitable CEFR4SL-assessments. He proposed to define quality procedures to evaluate teaching within the framework and to concentrate on the development of webbased test formats. In addition, ELP-related checklists for self-evaluation would help students to determine their progress. Overall, the scarcity of tests and the meager data on foreign sign language acquisition demand research on adequate test formats and objectives.

Authenticity and action-orientation are two core topics of the CEFR. Joel Backström reported how these are already being implemented in the teaching of Swedish Sign Language (SSL) by way of a high amount of interaction between students on topics related to their interests. To ensure active participation in a larger group, a subdivision of the group was recommended, as this would duplicate the amount of signing time per student with every division.

Backström emphasized that active communication was the key to development, so two thirds of the SSL-curriculum is devoted to productive and receptive language skills and delivered in SSL. The remaining third is delivered in spoken language or mediated by an interpreter, the topic of the latter being grammatical structure. However, Backström also reported a very high rate of dropouts in the three stage SSL-courses: 30 students might register for the first course, whereas only 15 do so for the second and only 5 for the third.

In the final presentation Beppie van den Bogaerde and Joni Oyserman laid out how the curriculum for the Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT) was redesigned to comply with the CEFR. Based on the teaching hours estimated for foreign language teaching by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), the research group represented by van den Bogaerde and Oyserman designed a curriculum for NGT as second language (L2) totalling in nearly 3000 hours of learning (including self-paced studies), making this curriculum the one with the highest number of learning hours of all curricula of sign languages developed so far.

Currently the improvement of teaching and interpreting qualities, a life-long learning program as well as the development of a national Dutch curriculum for NGT teaching are goals of research. Best practice materials will be exchanged as they become available and a register for NGT-teachers will be established.

2.3 Subworkshops

The afternoon of the second day was reserved for three subworkshops. These three parallel subworkshops were offered with different topics. Each workshop lasted for three hours. The workshop leaders were asked to provide a summary of the workshop results on Sunday morning and to provide a written summary of the results, which also formed the basis of the final discussion on Sunday morning and were incorporated in the Scientific Report.

The three subworkshops were:

- Workshop 1 *The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Teaching in Higher Education*
- Workshop 2 *The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Interpreter Training*
- Workshop 3 *The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Assessment*

Workshop 1 was lead by Patty Shores (CH), workshop 2 by Lorraine Leeson (IR) and Beppie van den Bogaerde (NL), and workshop 3 by Jörg Keller (CH).

All participants were informed in advance about the general objectives of the ESF-Workshop and the three subworkshops. They were provided with some “leading questions” in order to prepare for their specifically assigned workshop. The objectives of the three subworkshops were linked to the overall objectives of the ESF-Workshop as stated in the executive summary.

The questions for all three subworkshops were:

- 1) Which issues for the development of the CEFR4SL need to be researched?
- 2) What are the equivalent competences for reading/writing in a sign language? Should a L2 learner of a sign language learn a notation system?
- 3) How should we all and other partners in Europe collaborate regarding the CEFR4SL, e. g. regarding regular networking meetings, regarding a European-wide research project?
- 4) What are our next steps on the national and European level? How can we support each other?

The results of each workshop including major aspects of the discussion (see listing in Appendix I) were presented by the workshop leaders on the third day of the ESF-Workshop.

2.4 Summary of final discussion

The final discussion lead by Trude Schermer (NL) concentrated on the key issues selected in mutual agreement of all workshop participants.

One major agreement among the participants was the initiation of a *CEFR for Signed Languages European Program* realized as a virtual network. A first issue of this long-term network should be the definition of common objectives and milestones in the development of the CEFR4SL. This will guide the submission of additional research projects needed for the realization of these objectives and will also help to determine the individuals, research groups, or countries that will take the responsibility for a particular domain, such as the CEFR-curriculum (of some level), the standards of assessment, the best practice materials, the teacher or interpreting training, or relating to particular gaps in our knowledge, such as second sign-language acquisition, modality-typology interfaces, verbal vs. nonverbal communication in sign-languages, issues of the substitution of literacy etc.

Common agreement was achieved for the network idea as was that for various domains of knowledge and data that should be exchanged, such as an online repository of data where different materials are provided for all involved in this European network. For example, an exchange of best practice materials in sign language teaching will enhance the adaptive production of new materials greatly.

Several participants also voted for a life long learning programme/CPD for interpreters. In relation to sign language interpreter training, the development of a CEFR-aligned curriculum for language interpreting skills including the milestones for progress in interpreting skills as well as best practices materials was proposed.

The establishment of a network will not only help in the creation of higher quality signing texts for classes e. g. by offering an opportunity to exchange software resources and share experiences with digital materials used in the development of materials, but will also contribute to a common understanding of the standards of the various levels of the CEFR4SL in general.

In particular, to establish reliable and objective CEFR4SL-assessments an inventory of descriptors is indispensable. Despite of not being statistically verified in terms of content or reference frame levels, several curricula have been adapted to a quasi CEFR4SL-standard already. The establishment of a European network will allow for an international exchange, appropriate ramification, and sophistication of these materials.

Expert groups need to meet in “real-life”-workshops, but exchanges via online-conferences through the network can help to reduce the number of meetings, costs and expenditure of time. Still, there was mutual agreement that regular meetings such as the ESF-Workshop should be organized not only for special interest groups (see Figure 2 below), but also for sign language teachers to exchange experiences teaching a signed language within the CEFR4SL, to exchange best practices relating to changes and revisions of existing materials transferred to the CEFR, and to provide training and develop ongoing professional services for teachers. This support the introduction of appropriate standards in didactics required to develop teachers’ role changes from classic language instructors to language teaching coaches and thus secure quality standards in teaching an action-oriented curriculum.

One of the core questions concerned the development of new descriptors particular of sign learning tasks. This issue had come up repeatedly in earlier discussions. The participants did not come to a final decision as much hinged on the appropriate substitution for reading and writing skills and the resources available to carry out this endeavor. A major outcome of workshop 3 was a clearcut statement of the merits and shortcomings of the development of new descriptors reproduced in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Merits and shortcomings regarding new descriptors for sign languages

Do we need new CAN-DO descriptors?

No: **We use oral language descriptors (with modality adjustments only)**

Pro: fast and least costly
total correspondence with oral languages & the CEFR

Contra: : no adaptation with respect to typology/grammar
no adaptation with respect to progression and learning time
reading und writing equivalences & deaf culture make
amendments necessary

Yes: **We introduce descriptors (where needed on the basis of research)**

Pro: most suitable to modality and typology
aspects of progression and learning times enter content : level
mapping
equivalencies for reading/writing and deaf culture make
amendments necessary

Contra: lengthy and costly
less correspondence between CEFR4SL and CEFR
deaf culture may be a curriculum issue

3 Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

1) Assessment of the results

One of the main achievements of the ESF-Exploratory Workshop was to gain an overview on the current CEFR-related sign language projects across Europe, both on the European but also on the national level.

The presentations, time for discussion, the three parallel workshops, and the final discussion provided an overview of the issues that need to be addressed and solved in the future, including defining/agreeing on priorities for the future.

2) Contribution to the future direction of the field

The main contribution to the future direction in this field is to establish a *CEFR for Signed Language European Program* (Figure 1), which will provide a very good basis for future collaboration, exchange, and development in this field.

Another equally important contribution to this field is to bring deaf and hearing experts from across Europe together to initiate a (long-lasting) network as the basis for future collaboration.

3) Outcomes

With the aim in mind of establishing a *CEFR for Signed languages European Program* it was decided during this workshop that the first step was to establish a virtual network. The structure and aims of the network/program are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The virtual network will be set up at www.cefr4sl.eu once funding has been secured. The convenors of this workshop are currently searching for funding options.

This virtual network will have different special interest groups (research, teaching, materials, assessment, interpreting, and communication/public relations), which will be introduced in the program Website (see Figure 2). A mailing list for this network has already been established by the convenors.

Figure 1: CEFR for Signed Language European Program

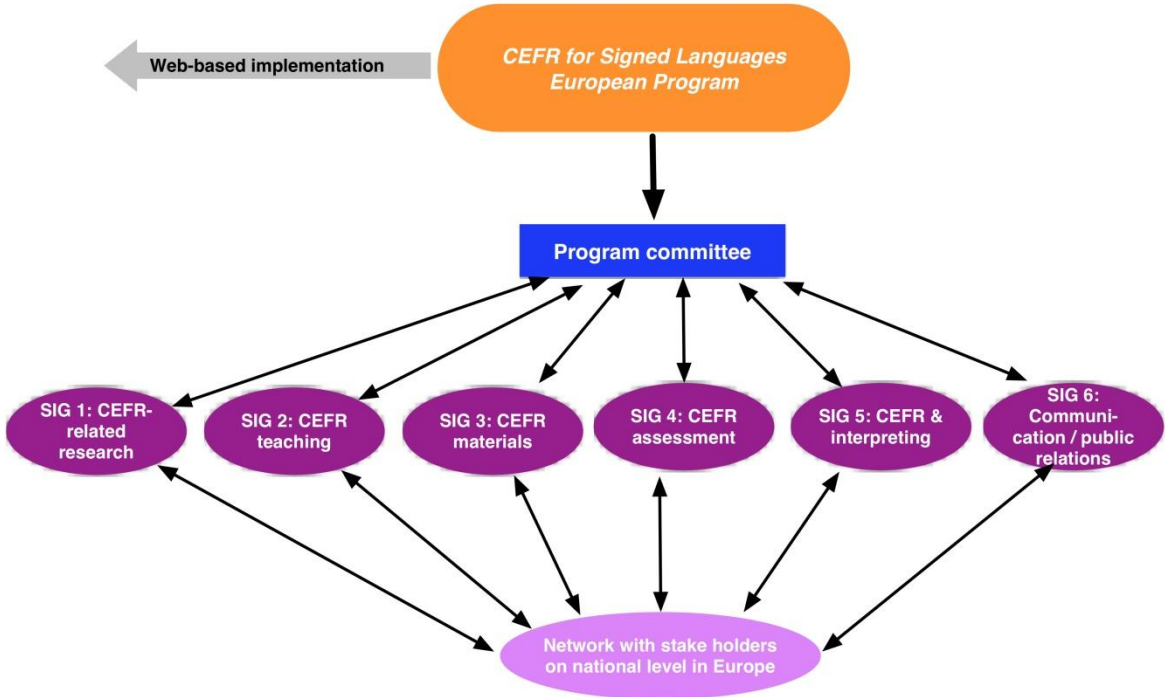
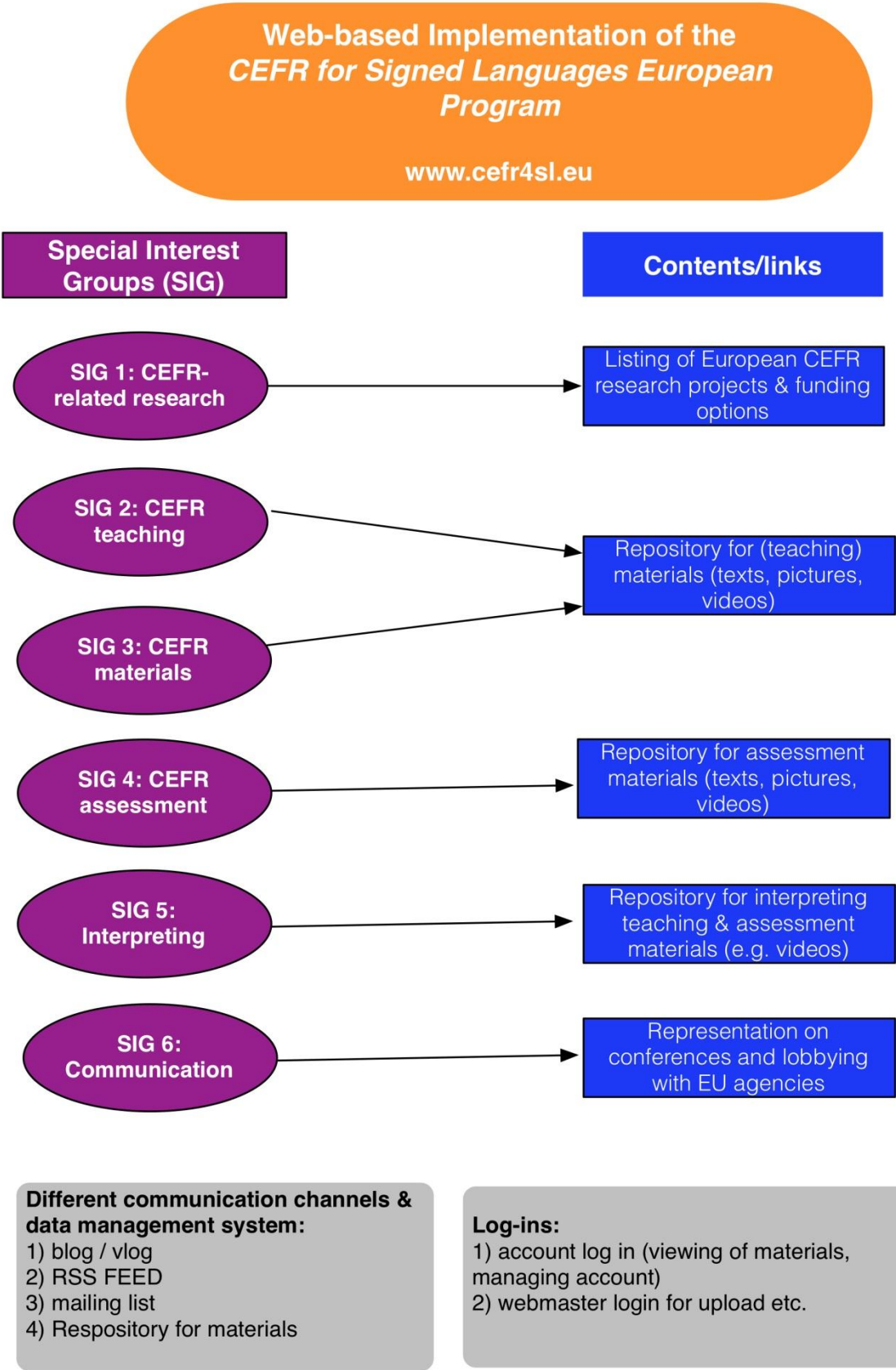


Figure 2: Web-based Implementation of the CEFR for Signed Languages European Program



The overall picture is promising but fragmentary: research groups of many European countries acknowledge the benefits of an alignment of sign language learning, teaching, and assessment to a Common European Framework of Reference for Sign Languages (CEFR4SL) akin to the CEFR for oral languages. Several groups have already adapted or are in the process of adapting the existing curricula to the CEFR-requirements. This adaptation has relied on experience in education, expertise in research and teaching, intuition, and analogy. No group has brought to discussion any CAN-DO-descriptors for communicative competences in sign language, no CAN-DO-descriptors have been validated, no assessments have been developed yet, and no group has proposed an uncontroversial solution for the substitution of reading and writing skills required in the CEFR for oral languages. These are issues to be addressed in research, the results of which need to be discussed in future workshops and the proposed special groups of interest.

As a final remark, it may be noteworthy to recall that the development of the CEFR for languages was initiated by Günther Schneider and Brian North in Switzerland in the early 90es. The particular plurilanguage context of Switzerland seems to be beneficial to such initiatives as, now again, with the financial funding of the ESF-Workshop, Switzerland initiated the European kickoff meeting for the development of a CEFR for sign languages.

4 Final programme

Friday 16 September 2011

Morning to noon *Arrival*

13.00-14.00 **Registration and Coffee/Tea**

14.00-14.15 **Welcome by Convenors**

Tobias Haug (HfH, Zurich, Switzerland) and
Jörg Keller (ZHAW, Winterthur, Switzerland)

14.15-14.30 **Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)**

Csaba Pléh (Standing Committee for the Humanities - SCH)

14.30-14.45 **Welcome Note by Sponsoring Partners/Universities**

Christian Rathmann (Hamburg University, Hamburg, Germany),
Urs Strasser (HfH, Zurich, Switzerland), and
Katja Tissi (VUGS, Zurich, Switzerland)

14.45-18.30 Afternoon Session: Adapting the Common European Framework of Reference to European Sign Languages – Methodological, Cultural, and Linguistic Issues

14.45-15.15 **Key note “The CEFR and its Implication for Foreign and Second Language Teaching, Learning, and Assessment in Europe”**

Thomas Studer (University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland)

Each 45' slot includes 25' for presentation and 20' for discussion

15.15-16.00 **Presentation 1 “CEFR Assessment of German Sign Language: The German Sign Language Reproduction Test”**

Okan Kubus (Hamburg University, Hamburg, Germany) and
Christian Rathmann (Hamburg University, Hamburg, Germany)

16.00-16.30 *Coffee / Tea Break*

16.30-17.15 **Presentation 2 “Toward a CEFR-aligned Curriculum for Irish Sign Language”**

Carmel Grehan (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland) and
Lorraine Lesson (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland)

17.15-18.00 **Presentation 3 “Developing a Curriculum for British Sign Language for Higher Education within the CEFR: Report from the QED Project”**

Clark Denmark (University of Central Lancashire, Preston, United Kingdom)

18.00-18.30 **Open Discussion and Summary of the Day**

Jörg Keller (ZHAW, Winterthur, Switzerland)

20.00 *Dinner (self-organised)*

Saturday 17 September 2011

- 09.00-12.15** **Morning Session: Teaching and Assessing Sign Language (Competences) within the CEFR and its Consequences for E-Learning**
- 09.00-09.45 **Presentation 1 “SignLEF – Report from a European Project in Progress”**
Franz Dotter (University of Klagenfurt, Klagenfurt, Austria) and **M Pilar Fernández Viader** (University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain)
- 09.45-10.00 *Coffee / Tea Break*
- 10.00-10.45 **Presentation 2 “Developing Sign Language Assessments: Methodological and Theoretical Issues”**
Tobias Haug (HfH, Zurich, Switzerland)
- 10.45-11.30 **Presentation 3 “Teaching Swedish Sign Language, using an interactive sociolinguistic perspective, according to the CEFR”**
Joel Bäckström (Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden)
- 11.30-12.15 **Presentation 4 “Implementing the CEFR to the Curriculum for Sign Language of the Netherlands”**
Beppie van den Bogaerde (Hogeschool van Utrecht, Utrecht, Netherlands) and **Joni Oyserman** (University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands)
- 12.15-14.00 *Lunch*
- 14.00-17.00** **Parallel Workshops: Workshops 1-3**
- 14.00-15.00 **Workshop 1 “The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Teaching in Higher Education”**
Patty Shores (HfH, Zurich, Switzerland)
- Workshop 2 “The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Interpreter Training”**
Beppie van den Bogaerde (Hogeschool van Utrecht, Utrecht, Netherlands) and **Lorraine Leeson** (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland)
- Workshop 3 “The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Assessment”**
Jörg Keller (ZHAW, Winterthur, Switzerland) and
- 15.00-15.30 *Coffee / Tea Break*
- 15.30-17.00 **Continuation of Workshops 1-3**
- 17.00-17.30 **Open Discussion and Summary of the Day**
Christiane Hohenstein (ZHAW, Winterthur, Switzerland)
- 19.00 *Apéro riche*

Sunday 18 September 2011

- 09.00-13.00** **Morning Session: The Next Steps: A Collaborative European Approach for the CEFR and Sign Languages**
- 09.00-09.30 **Summary of Workshop 1**
Patty Shores (HfH, Zurich, Switzerland)
- 09.30-10.00 **Summary of Workshop 2**
Beppie van den Bogaerde (Hogschole van Utrecht, Utrecht, Netherlands) and
Lorraine Leeson (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland)
- 10.00-10.30 *Coffee / Tea Break*
- 10.30-11.00 **Summary of Workshop 3**
Jörg Keller (ZHAW, Winterthur, Switzerland) and
- 11.00-12.45 **Final Discussion: Concrete Steps Towards a Collaborative European Approach**
Trude Schermer (Nederlands Gebarencentrum, Bunnik, Netherlands)
- 12.45-13.00 **Closing by Workshop Convenors**
Tobias Haug (HfH, Zurich, Switzerland) and
Jörg Keller (ZHAW, Winterthur, Switzerland)
- 13.00 *End of Workshop and departure*

5 Final list of participants

Convenors:

1. **Tobias Haug**
University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education Zurich, Switzerland
2. **Jörg Keller**
Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland

ESF Representative:

3. **Csaba Pléh**
Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Hungary

Participants:

4. **Joel Bäckström**
Stockholm University, Sweden
5. **Lynne Barnes**
University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom
6. **Clark Denmark**
University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom
7. **Carolien Doggen**
Lessius University College, Belgium
8. **Franz Dotter**
University of Klagenfurt, Austria
9. **Dra Maria del Pilar Fernández Viader**
Universidad de Barcelona, Spain
10. **Carmel Grehan**
Trinity College, Ireland
11. **Kate Groves**
Istituto Statale per Sordi di Roma, Italy
12. **Christiane Hohenstein**
Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland
13. **Daniel Holzinger**
Konventhospital Barmherzige Brüder, Austria
14. **Simon Kollien**
Hamburg University, Germany
15. **Okan Kubus**
Hamburg University, Germany
16. **Lorraine Leeson**
Trinity College, Ireland
17. **Louise No Myrup**
Center for Tegnsprog, Denmark

18. **Radka Nováková**
Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic
19. **Joni Oyserman**
Universiteit van Amsterdam, the Netherlands
20. **Antroulla Papakyriakou**
University of Nicosia, Cyprus
21. **Adrien Pelletier**
Swiss Federation of the Deaf, Switzerland
22. **Christian Rathmann**
Hamburg University, Germany
23. **Trude Schermer**
Nederlands Gebarententrum, the Netherlands
24. **Krister Schönström**
Stockholm University, Sweden
25. **Patty Shores**
University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education, Switzerland
26. **Thomas Studer**
Universität Freiburg, Switzerland
27. **Ritva Takkinen**
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
28. **Beppie van den Bogaerde**
Hogeschool Utrecht - University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands
29. **Anne Vanbrugghe**
INSHEA, France
30. **Myriam Vermeerbergen**
Lessius University College, Belgium

6 Statistical information on participants* (incl. ESF representative)

1. Home Institution

University/college: 24
Research institution: 2
Other: 3
ESF Representative: 1

2. Level of profession

Senior/professor: 11
Senior/lecturer: 8
Senior/researcher: 1
Junior/lecturer: 4
Junior/Ph.D. candidate: 2
Deaf education specialist: 2
Other: 2

3. Country

Austria: 2
Belgium: 2
Cyprus: 1
Czech Republic: 1
Denmark: 1
Finland: 1
France: 1
Germany: 2
Hungary: 1
Ireland: 2
Italy: 1
Netherlands: 3
Spain: 1
Sweden: 2
Switzerland: 6
United Kingdom: 2

4. Deaf - hearing participants

Deaf: 14
Hearing: 15

5. Gender

Female: 16
Male: 13

6 Languages at the workshop

British Sign Language
German Sign Language
International Signing
Irish Sign Language
Swedish Sign Language
English (spoken)

*The eight sign language interpreters were not included in the statistics.

7 Interpretation

We understand that the ESF policy is that the workshop language must be English and that ESF funding cannot cover any interpretation costs for other spoken languages. The situation for sign languages is different, however. Sign languages have been recognized in many European countries as well as by the EU parliament as languages in their own right. But the accessibility to information by and the participation of deaf researchers in scientific workshops as well as the cooperation of hearing and deaf scientists crucially depend on the availability of sign language interpretation.

Besides, the EU has ratified the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities¹. Based on this ratification, the EU is responsible that European events need to be accessible for persons with a disability. Therefore it would be desirable that instruments to ensure accessibility within the frame of the „European Disability Strategy 2010-20“² be developed and introduced soon.

At the ESF-Workshop, the deaf-hearing ratio was nearly 50:50. To make participation possible for our deaf colleagues, an extraordinary amount of additional work for the convenors and extra financial support for interpretation by third parties (7000.- EUR) were necessary.

In order to simplify access to the ESF programs for other research groups in the future, we strongly recommend that the ESF as well as other European agencies that promote scientific research in Europe introduce a supplementary funding for sign language interpretation.

¹ In the Internet: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/4>
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/convention/index_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/disabilities/disability-strategy/index_en.htm

8 Appendix I: Summary of the three sub-workshops

Workshop leaders were asked to structure the results of the discussions relating to the

- 1) State of the art of current work on the CEFR4SL
- 2) Problems that need to be addressed
- 3) Actions to be taken

In the following, the results are listed accordingly.

Workshop 1: *The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Teaching in Higher Education*

1) State of the art

- a) Teaching: In the past 30 years of sign language teaching, different teaching approaches have been used. It is understood that sign language instructors function as learning coaches. The goal is action-oriented teaching in practice.
- b) Teaching materials: A lot of teaching materials have been developed over the course of the last decades. These materials match up-to-date teaching approaches and implementation of new media/ICT.

2) Problems

- a) Matching/transferring the existing materials to the CEFR structure and its consequences for teaching; development of new materials.
- b) Reaching sign language instructors in the field on the national level to provide continuous professional development (CPD) related to the CEFR and establishing a life-long learning culture for sign language instructors on the national level.

3) Actions

- a) Ensure sign language instructors' training and CPD for deaf people on the national level.
- b) Include/involve sign language instructors in the field implementing the CEFR.
- c) Develop/adapt teaching materials that reflect implicitly and explicitly the culture of the sign language users.
- d) Establish a European network for exchanging experiences transferring the CEFR to sign language and its implementation into teaching practice.

Workshop 2: *The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Interpreter Training*

1) State of the art

- a) Entry level of sign language competences of prospective students prior to entering interpreting training varies across Europe.
- b) Intralanguage interpreting skills are taught in the L1 (e. g. translation, transliteration, summarizing) before introducing L2L1 or L1L2 interpreting skills.

2) Problems

- a) Timing of the introduction of L1=>L2 and L2=>L1 interpretation depending on the language level.
- b) Different sign language and interpreting skills depend on the domain of interpretation. - What are the consequences for training?
- c) Ensuring quality control after graduation through CPD and a registry for interpreters.
- d) Lack of training programs for deaf interpreters.

3) Actions

- a) Strengthen the self-assessment competences of interpreting students in training as the basis for quality control after graduation and steering of self-development. A good starting point would be the Irish *Core competences for fitness to practice* or the Dutch end qualifications formulated in the handbook. From these we could perhaps draft CAN-DO statements for interpreting as a starting point for a CEFR4SL.
- b) Draft a EU-framework of reference for interpreting skills and check its reference/overlap with the CEFR.
- c) Develop an inventory of texts in spoken, written and signed language that matches the different CEFR-levels and make a comparison as to level of language and complexity / type of texts used.
- d) Involve more deaf teachers in the training of sign language interpreters.

Workshop 3 *The CEFR and its Impact on Sign Language Assessment*

1) State of the art

- a) Assessments are not yet standardized. However, the common goal is to cooperate to harmonise language assessment of sign languages as foreign language/L2-competences in a „CEFR4SL“.
- b) Prior experience and reports on test development, assessment, training of examiners, and best practice materials exist. There is an agreement to assemble materials and collaboratively develop common standards.

2) Problems

- a) Know-how transfer from the development of CEFR of (spoken) language and adaptation of guidelines and procedures.
- b) Development of national tests and evaluation procedures progress slowly mostly because of funding shortage.
- c) Establishment of a national clearinghouse for CEFR testing does not exist.
- d) Evaluation of national tests, international comparability of these tests (validity, reliability, usability, equal opportunity, and media) are recognised as follow-up problems.
- e) Training of examiners by use of software.
- f) Establishment of a European institution that coordinates, validates, and certifies national tests and aims at EU-wide recognition of national certificates issued by accredited test developers.

3) Actions

- a) Set up a virtual EU research institute for sign languages.
- b) Set up a permanent CEFR4SL-group of experts (with subdivisions of interest-groups).
- c) Start lobbying on EU-level to gain support in education policy and in the funding of CEFR4SL-developments.
- d) Spread the word of the outcomes of the ESF-Workshop regarding the CEFR for sign language at other conferences.
- e) Set up a repository of information materials.