

# Language Training for the Employees of the Municipality of Bologna Italy

Language Training



## Good Practice Executive Summary

The programme aims at **creating/enhancing the English language skills of the employees of the Municipality of Bologna**. The programme's objectives can be positioned to cover three EU policies since it:

- **promotes lifelong learning and learners' mobility** – though this last one is not the main objective of the programme;
- it is oriented to the **improvement of the quality and efficiency of provisions and outcomes** of the promoting organization (the Municipality of Bologna);
- it aims at ensuring the **provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work**.

The main target groups of the programme are the employees of the Municipality of Bologna assigned to front-office tasks and to tasks implying contacts with foreign visitors. The programme provides English language training to an average number of 60 persons per year out of a target of 456 potential trainees.

The targeted competence levels reach the C2 level of the CERFL. This implies the provision of courses whose target groups may be:

- absolute beginners (to enable them to reach the A1 level);
- elementary learners (to enable them to pass from A1-A2 to B1 level);
- lower intermediate learners (to enable pass from B1 to B2 level);
- upper intermediate learners (to enable pass from B1 to B2 level);
- proficient learners (to consolidate and update C1 and C2 level skills).

The average length of each training course is 40 hours in face-to-face modality.

The quality assurance procedures for the programme are quite simple and consist of a customer satisfaction questionnaire and an assessment of the learners' competences at the end of the course.

The programme is carried out thanks to funds of the Municipality of Bologna for the training of staff; it does not benefit from any public financing on a regional or national level. Therefore its sustainability depends on the yearly availability of resources for the personnel sector.

## 1. Description & Objectives of Programme

The programme lasts **three years** and it is based on an **agreement stipulated between the Municipality of Bologna and the University of Bologna's Centre for Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (CILTA)**.

The objective of the programme is to optimize the processes of professional qualification of the staff of the Municipality in order to improve the quality of interaction between the front-office staff and the foreign visitors. This aims at improving the performances of the Municipality as well as providing quality services to the citizens and visitors of Bologna.

Another objective of the programme is to improve the quality of the interaction between the Municipality of Bologna and the international institutions through an improvement of the language skills of the staff assigned to the international relations department.

The agreement is sustained by funds of the Municipality of Bologna assigned to the training of staff and has a yearly cost of 18.500 EUR. The average number of courses carried out in a year is 6.

The main innovative aspect of the programme lies in the strengthening of the relationship between the two institutions of the city, the Municipality and the University. The agreement offers the possibility to research, design and test services for specialized language training addressed to staff of the Municipality having different job profiles, different language learning needs and different cultural background.

The training provided is cross-hierarchical in the sense that the classrooms are formed by people belonging to different departments/services and having different roles. It reaches the members of the Municipality staff who need their English language skills – mainly front-office staff having regular contacts with foreign visitors (e.g. staff of museums, social services, immigration services, general front-office services) and staff who work on international projects.

The creation and consolidation of the language skills of the trainees is based on the peculiarities and requirements of their job profiles. After the end of the course the language skill acquired by each trainee is

assessed according to the activities actually carried out and according to the relevant job profiles.

The process is the following:

1. request of English course made by the Department/Service manager;
2. entry test (absolute beginners are signalled directly by the Dept./Service managers;
3. attendance to the course (max 10 participants per each course);
4. exit test (aimed at gaining access to the upper level course).

The programme involves only the Municipality of Bologna and the University of Bologna. No stakeholders are involved except for trade unions, who take part in the survey and identification of the employees' competences associated to each job profile. The skill identification system must be approved of by the trade unions. It is used once a year. When the office manager identifies a skill gap he requests one or more positive actions to fill the gap. The positive actions may be represented by training, self-training, tutoring, organizational changes. The office has to carry out the positive actions towards the employees before the evaluation session of the following year.

## 2. EU Policy the Training Implements

The programme's objectives can be positioned to cover three EU policies since it:

- **promotes lifelong learning and learners' mobility** – though this last one is not the main objective of the programme;
- it is oriented to the **improvement of the quality and efficiency of provisions and outcomes** of the promoting organization (the Municipality of Bologna);
- it aims at ensuring the **provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work.**

The delivery of the training is assigned to the University of Bologna (CILTA) and the oversight of the whole operation is assigned to the Municipality of Bologna through a quality questionnaire administered at the end of the courses. When a specific course is requested (this happens once a year during the official survey on the staff's skills and competences) the need is satisfied and when the following year the employee is evaluated and the skill gap has disappeared, this mean that the objective has been achieved.

The training takes place only in the city of Bologna. Each training action is proposed by the Training Manager and formalized by an agreement signed by the Personnel Manager.

The programme has a mid-term duration (3 years which may be renewable depending on the funding available. Rather than sector-driven, it is competence-driven since it is related to job descriptions.

Each course costs 7,70 EUR per trainee and the cost is entirely sustained by the Municipality. The impact of the programme is of 60 trainees per year out of a potential of 456 requests for training.

### 3. Main target groups, numbers targetted and trained

The programme addresses employed people of both genders.

The number of people targeted (number of requests) is 456 which can be divided by sector as follows.

Total target: **456**

#### **Target by sector:**

Environment dept.: 11

Trade dept.: 1

Housing dept.: 2

Public relations dept.: 41

Culture dept.: 122

Staff of the Mayor and related offices: 46

Tenders dept.: 2

Education dept.: 6

Mobility dept.: 7

Treasure dept.: 1

Personnel dept.: 7

Sub-councils.: 151 (in the municipality of Bologna there are 9 sub-councils)

Family services dept.: 1

Security dept.: 16

ICT dept.: 20

Social services dept.: 7

Municipal Council staff: 3

Urban policies dept.: 12

The courses do not offer a formal certification though they issue an attendance certificate only for internal use (it is to be underlined that the procedure of formal certifications in Emilia Romagna is still in progress and not yet complete).

According to the needs analysis carried out, English is the most requested language for training by the employees of the Municipality – according to the

yearly survey on training needs carried out by the officers/managers in charge of the various services/departments of the Municipality - and for this reason the language training initiatives carried out are focussed on English.

As regards the Tourist Information office, where a higher number of languages is requested, the Municipality is analysing the possibility to extend the existing agreement by enrolling single employees in language courses carried out at the University of Bologna.

#### 4. Targetted Levels & Competencies based on CEFR

Targetted levels & competencies based on the CEFR											
Languages		Targetted Competencies									
L1	Target Language	Understanding				Speaking				Writing	
		Listening		Reading		Spoken interaction		Spoken production			
		level	Competency or partial competency	level	Competency or partial competency	level	Competency or partial competency	level	Competency or partial competency	Level	Competency or partial competency
IT	EN	A1	P.C.	A1	P.C.	A1	P.C.	A1	P.C.	A1	P.C.
IT	EN	A2	P.C.	A2	P.C.	A2	P.C.	A2	P.C.	A2	P.C.
IT	EN	B1	P.C.	B1	P.C.	B1	P.C.	B1	P.C.	B1	P.C.
IT	EN	B2	P.C.	B2	P.C.	B2	P.C.	B2	P.C.	B2	P.C.
IT	EN	C1	P.C.	C1	P.C.	C1	P.C.	C1	P.C.	C1	P.C.
IT	EN	C2	P.C.	C2	P.C.	C2	P.C.	C2	P.C.	C2	P.C.

“P.C. = Partial competence” was chosen as target competence since the courses are not aimed at improving the trainees’ English language skills on a general level, but they aim just at providing language skills strictly related to the trainees’ operational sectors and job profiles.

## 5. Length of Training

Each training course lasts 40 hours. performed 100% face-to-face.

The number of training hours is realistic, since the training is limited to the language skills that are strictly necessary for the trainees to carry out their activity in the Municipality and has no further objective. The length of the courses could of course be extended, but it has currently been estimated that 40 hours are enough to guarantee the necessary periodical update of skills for the Municipality staff in their specific sectors.

## 6. Quality Assurance of Training

The quality of the service is measured by means of two tools:

1. a customer satisfaction questionnaire that is administered to the trainees at the end of the course – a section of the questionnaire is devoted to the proposals and suggestions of the learners concerning the possible ways to improve the service;
2. an assessment of the language skills acquired during the course, carried out by the service/department managers by means of practical assessment of the on-the-job language performance as compared to the skill gaps identified during the yearly skill analysis.

The quality assurance of the training is monitored by the Training Manager of the Municipality of Bologna.

The training does not issue either qualifications or formal certification. The learners undergo a test at the end of the course; if they pass the test they are admitted to the course for the upper level and receive an attendance certificate that includes the skill level they attained.

It is to be underlined that the skill levels applied by CILTA are slightly different from the CERFL levels, and precisely:

- Absolute beginner
- Elementary (corresponding to A1-A2)
- Intermediate 1 (corresponding to B1)
- Intermediate 2 (corresponding to B2)
- Advanced (corresponding to C1-C2).

The Training Manager of the Municipality carries out periodical meetings with the service provider to monitor the progress of the activities.

The teaching materials are mainly textbooks that the Municipality buys and that are provided to each trainee free of charge. For this reason they have not been subject to quality assurance procedures.

## 7. Sustainability Options

The training programme is carried out and financed with own funds of the Municipality for the training of staff; it does not benefit from any public financing on a regional or national level. Therefore its sustainability depends on the yearly availability of resources for the personnel sector.

The courses are carried out at the premises of the Municipality, which offer equipped multimedia rooms, and the textbooks are bought by the Municipality and made available to the trainees free of charge

## 8. Transferability

The programme in the way it was conceived is fully transferrable since it does not imply strict obligations connected to regional and/or national and/or European rules, regulations, and qualification frameworks.

The only aspect for which the programme could be improved from the point of view of transferability is the connection to the CEFRL – actually the providing institution CILTA applies competence levels that are the same applied by the University of Bologna and which are not completely consistent with the CEFRL.