

# ECR

## Export Communication Report

### UK

#### Language Policy



## Executive Summary

The ECR is a national programme developed by UK Trade & Investment and delivered in England and Wales by the British Chambers of Commerce. Its role is to help companies develop their international communications strategy by first conducting a review of both their language and culture strengths & weaknesses and the linguistic resources which they already possess. During 2010 two versions of the ECR became available, the 'traditional' ECR covering all areas, and an alternative version focussing on the company website internationalisation.

Across England & Wales the review has 2 stages. In the East of England there are 3 stages. Stage 1 is an initial telephone dialogue between the ECR consultant and the company to gain an overview of their export strategy and the overall linguistic ability of the company staff. This is accompanied by desk research, such as a study of their website. The second phase is a half-day visit to the company to view literature, product packaging, manuals & instruction leaflets and to review staff language competence. This is accompanied by a detailed report. Stage 3 is an aftercare service provided by RLN East, whose role is to work with the company on the recommendations arising from the report and to support on a practical level the implementation of these, including upskilling in language & culture competence.

The ECR is directly linked to employment context, as it analyses and makes recommendations via specific actions based on the company's actual circumstance and export market plans. The review includes a report which outlines these areas:

- A table of strengths and weaknesses of their current communications against international best practice
- Practical recommendations, tailored to the company and summarised in an action plan
- Information about possible suppliers and costs to implement the recommendations
- How-to guides, with more detailed general advice on how to implement recommendations

Each year the East of England UKTI export awards includes a category for 'International Communications'. Winners of the award (one per year) at regional level need to demonstrate the difference that investing in language & culture capability has made to their business export performance. Case studies are produced regularly by BCC and are placed on the website [http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/zones/export/export-communications-review/an-export-communications-review-really-works\\_1.html](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/zones/export/export-communications-review/an-export-communications-review-really-works_1.html). These can be filtered by UK region, industry sector, ECR consultant or continent of focus. During

discussion of the staff language skills, the company is provided with an A4 horizontal format table outlining the CEFR competences. The consultants and the company representatives then review staff skills based on these descriptors.

## 1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

- √ promotes a wider knowledge and use of all languages throughout the Union
- √ promotes lifelong learning and learner mobility
- √ ensures the provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work

### Acronmys:

BCC: British Chambers of Commerce

ECR: Export Communications Review

ITA: International Trade Advisor

PIMS: Programme Impact & Monitoring Survey

UKTI: UK Trade & Investment

The ECR is a national programme developed by UK Trade & Investment and delivered in England and Wales by the British Chambers of Commerce. Its role is to help companies develop their international communications strategy by first conducting a review of both their language and culture strengths & weaknesses and the linguistic resources which they already possess.

The total target for 2010-11 is 265 companies undertaking an ECR. This has been over-achieved, with 363 company ECRs to end Feb 2011. The ECR costs £500, of which the company currently pays £150, although this has recently increased to £250. Top performing regions are Yorks & Humber, South East and East. During this year two versions of the ECR are available, the 'traditional' ECR covering all areas, and an alternative version focussing on the company website internationalisation.

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RLN East, whose role is to work with the company on the recommendations arising from the report and to support on a practical level the implementation of these, including upskilling in language & culture competence.

The ECR is driven by policy to support economic growth through international trade, in particular exports. It is part of the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills international trade strategy. UK targets of companies recruited to the scheme are divided by region and allocated to the business support organisations which deliver UKTI trade services. These organisations employ international trade advisors (ITAs) who in some regions also have individual ECR targets. These ITAs are encouraged to raise awareness of the need for companies to effectively structure their export communications planning and the series of actions which is needed to implement that planning. The ECR advisors are language & culture specialists employed on a consultancy basis by BCC and who are sometimes accompanied by ITAs during the visit to the company as the communications review is undertaken.

The scheme is driven entirely by company representation, as companies cover 50% of the cost (previously 20%) of the review and sign up for the scheme. It is a long-term scheme as actions are supported through the 2-year Passport to Export (P2E) and 1-year Gateway to Global Growth (G3) programmes, which together last 3 years. ECRs can be repeated by companies as circumstances and target export markets change over time. P2E is designed for companies who are novice exporters (with less than 25% of revenue achieved from export sales), and G3 for companies who are more experienced exporters (with more than 25% of revenue achieved from export sales).

Companies are given the choice of taking the ECR, with the exception of Yorks & Humber, where it is offered as a standard service to P2E clients. The ECR is open to companies from all sectors. However, UKTI strategy places greater emphasis on particular sectors which it identifies as priorities, with its mainstream programmes promoted more heavily to these sectors. These are listed below.

There are 18 priority sectors, which fall into five groupings. These sectors, identified in the recent review, are underpinned by two cross-cutting areas – Technology and Low Carbon – whose breadth means that they drive, and enable, all the other sectors.

Advanced Engineering	Defence and Security	Infrastructure	Healthcare and Life Sciences	Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aerospace</li> <li>• Agrifood</li> <li>• Automotive</li> <li>• Chemicals</li> <li>• Energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defence</li> <li>• Security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction</li> <li>• Environment and water</li> <li>• Transport (airports, marine, ports, railways)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• Industrial biotechnology</li> <li>• Pharmaceuticals and medical technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative industries</li> <li>• Education, skills and training</li> <li>• Financial Services Professional and business services Retail</li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>				
<b>Low Carbon</b>				

The impact of the programme is based on increased export sales through reduced barriers to trade. This information is captured via the national PIMS feedback system. PIMS stands for Performance Impact & Monitoring Survey. The 2010-11 figures rate Quality of service at 77% and Satisfaction with service at 75%. In the East of England this was complemented by a separate independent evaluation in 2009 commissioned through UKTI of the aftercare support for ECR.

ECR consultants undergo a strict recruitment and training process prior to appointment.

## 2. Includes incentives to enhance and sustain language learner motivation and employment benefits

The ECR is directly linked to employment context, as it analyses and makes recommendations via specific actions based on the company's actual circumstance and export market plans. The review includes a report which outlines these areas:

- A table of strengths and weaknesses of their current communications against international best practice (addressing written, telephone, face to face and electronic communications)
- Practical recommendations, tailored to the company and summarised in an action plan
- Information about possible suppliers and costs to implement the recommendations
- How-to guides, with more detailed general advice on how to implement recommendations

The benefits of the scheme are highlighted to companies as follows:

- They help increase export business
- It helps make the business more competitive

- It provides a practical action plan for improving communications
- It improves relationships with overseas distributors, partners and customers
- It builds confidence to trade with new and challenging markets

The ECR is promoted through a range of channels, the most effective of which are direct recommendation by ITA and through the 9-minute video of interview with 3 companies. This video is presented at the Passport to Export training workshops which companies are required to attend and is also posted on [www.youtube.co.uk](http://www.youtube.co.uk) under 'Export Communications Review – Don't be Lost for Words'.

The video, made and piloted in the East of England, covers these areas:

- What triggered the need for an ECR?
- First steps
- How the review has helped our business
- The impact and the outcomes
- The broader benefits
- The process

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Informal learning in the East of England takes place through all language training funded under the ESF 'Beyond 2010' project, as the training is delivered in the workplace. A total of 100 companies are targeted to undertake training on this scheme, and as of May 2011 a total of 82 had signed up.

Case studies are produced regularly by BCC and are placed on the website [http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/zones/export/export-communications-review/an-export-communications-review-really-works\\_1.html](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/zones/export/export-communications-review/an-export-communications-review-really-works_1.html). These can be filtered by UK region, industry sector, ECR consultant or continent of focus. In total there are approximately 60 case studies. The main ECR website is

<http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/zones/export/export-communications-review>.

### 3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

The dossier needs to reflect the extent to which the language policy builds on overall regional policy and the level of expected response to current regional priorities.

Each region in England and Wales is tasked to deliver the ECR as part of its government-backed international trade strategy. SMEs are given particular support through the 50% grant subsidies provided by UKTI. Non-SMEs are also eligible for an ECR, however they pay the full cost of £500.

The traditional ECR is between 25 and 35 pages long and covers these areas:

- Summary of recommendations
- Fit with company export strategy
- International sales process
- Website observations & recommendations
- Promotional materials
- Conferences & overseas visits (incl. trade fairs)
- Language skills
- Cross-cultural skills
- Strengths and areas to develop
- Appendices

The appendices include a list of local translation & website localisation agencies, a list of local freelance interpreters & translators, lists of upcoming cross-cultural training workshops, suggested training providers, and a guide to general expected costs for use of these services.

As part of a Passport company's initial trade review with their ITA, a series of questions are asked which companies and advisors together score (in a similar way to the scoring of a Lilama BP). Two questions on language & culture are included.

In the East of England an aftercare service is provided. This is designed to help support and finance the implementation of actions highlighted within the ECR consultant's recommendations. A total of 60 companies are currently targeted for support. This support ranges from advice & provision of business culture information, financing & practical support for language training, culture training focussed on specific export markets, support for translations, re-packaging and website development, and responses to specific market questions where culture or language are a factor. This is financed through UKTI East of England and co-financed through a range of other funding

sources. An effective system of linkages between these sources of revenue enables a stronger focus on international trade development of the region's businesses.

The aftercare support includes visits to companies, telephone support, referrals, funding and provision of resources including access to RLN East and UKTI export communications support including language training and materials and culture workshops and reports. The support involves a high degree of face-to-face contact with visits to individual businesses, meetings held with small groups of 2-3 businesses and larger groups, for example businesses attending culture workshops. Activities conducted with each business can be categorised as intensive support, regular support and 'light touch' support. Intensive support is delivered to those businesses where a number of actions had been identified and the company has the resources and desire to implement those changes.

The independent evaluation in 2009 measured the effectiveness and impact of the ECR aftercare in the East of England. Interviews conducted with the Programmes and Marketing Manager, UKTI, and three International Trade Advisors that have worked with the Director of RLN East over several years, stated that the aftercare support provided good value for money. This related to the quality and level of support provided to ECR business participants and other UKTI clients, including both one-to-one support and culture workshops and the additional funding and support resources generated.

Businesses interviewed had found it helpful that they had been contacted and given advice about the ECR and range of language and culture activities available. This proactive approach appeared to have helped motivate them to develop their export communications strategies.

The businesses interviewed had participated in a range of activities to meet their diverse export communications requirements. Businesses had undertaken language training including Italian, Hindi and Arabic; attended culture workshops including French, Spanish, Indian and Japanese, cultural business events; had marketing materials and packaging translated into various languages including French, Italian, Spanish, Arabic and Dutch; and in some cases redesigned their websites and added translations. One business is currently reviewing their website in order to make it suitable for developing trade with China, following advice received through the aftercare support.

Business participants spoke very positively of both the ECR process and the ongoing aftercare support provided by RLN East, stating that the assistance had been extremely useful.

*"It was excellent. Very practical information and advice". Aftercare business participant.*

*“The assistance has been crucial in starting overseas trade”. Aftercare business participant.*

All the businesses interviewed stated that having the ECR conducted and the aftercare support assisting in the implementation had improved business performance and success in developing overseas trade opportunities, with several businesses reporting that they had secured export contracts as a direct result of the support and activities they had participated in. For example, one of the companies interviewed had already secured a contract in Saudi Arabia as a direct result of the improvements to the company’s communications, including translating marketing materials into Arabic and attending a useful culture workshop.

Another company had received a telephone call from a consolidator in the Middle East on the morning of the evaluation feedback interview, to discuss confirmation of a contract secured with a United Arab Emirates supermarket chain. One business stated that export sales currently represented 10% of total sales, and this figure had doubled over the previous year since completing the ECR and receiving the aftercare support. These positive outcomes for the business participants are an important finding and demonstrate the value of the package of support being delivered between UKTI, the British Chambers of Commerce and RLN East in increasing the level of export trade by businesses across the East of England.

In addition both the businesses and ITAs stated that the implementation of the ECR recommendations and development of export trade, resulting from the improved export communications skills within the companies, had occurred more quickly with the aftercare support than if it had not been available and ongoing.

*“The support we received was brilliant. It has all happened much more quickly than if we had tried to develop an overseas market without the help. I am definitely expanding the operation in Australia and am now seeking investment to put the plans into practice”. Aftercare business participant*

Referrals between UKTI and RLN East operate in both directions and this maximises the benefits to the businesses, which gain access to a wide range of support activities. The Director of RLN East and the ITAs reported the value of exchanging knowledge and good practice.

#### **4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources**

The ECR does not specifically have a section related to migrant communities. It does, however, have a section related to the language competences of the company’s workforce, which often include non-UK nationals. A link between

these nationals and their potential contribution to the company's export actions is then made. An example from an actual ECR (names removed):

*"[Name of staff] is a German native-speaker, speaks fluent French and has very good knowledge of Spanish (Reading C2, Writing and Speaking A2/B1, Understanding B1/B2). She feels that she is lacking the sector vocabulary required for her job in all languages and would like to brush up her Spanish, again with emphasis on sector vocabulary".*

There are an increasing number of East European and Asian staff who have started to work in UKTI client companies, and their language skills are recognised through the ECR. One such case study is Solvair, a manufacturer of cutting equipment, which employed a Czech national who could subsequently also handle business from Russia. Media coverage by the East Anglian Daily Times wrote "Within weeks, Libor Hnilička, a 24 year old business student from the Czech Republic, joined the Solvair's Ipswich team on a six month placement. His first task was to handle negotiations with a distributor in his native country and neighbouring Slovakia, a job he managed so well Chris Davies kept him on!" Staff language skills such as those possessed by Libor are automatically picked up through the ECR.

## 5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

Almost all company staff involved in implementing the ECR recommendations are required to travel overseas to visit clients or attend other business functions. Those involved in the ECR meeting are usually senior staff of the company responsible for business development and export growth. The ECR takes fully into account forthcoming planned visits to overseas markets and makes recommendations based on these visits, where they complement the company's trade strategy as agreed with their ITA.

Most periods of time spent abroad range from 3-12 days. These visits are frequently supported by the UKTI OMIS (Overseas Market Information Service) scheme, which is frequently used to identify potential contacts in-market and facilitate meetings with these contacts. A further programme used frequently by businesses is the EMRS (Export Market Research Scheme), where companies plan and implement an in-market research visit to establish in person in the target country whether there is a market for their product/service and possible market entry options. OMIS and EMRS are often combined. The EMRS and ECR services are both delivered by the British Chambers of Commerce, whereas the OMIS service is delivered by UKTI staff based in the trade sections of the British Embassies and Consulates overseas.

Under EMRS the costs of market visits (including travel & subsistence, interpreter fees and admin costs) are funded at approx 50% of eligible expenditure agreed in their EMRS plan.

## 6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

During discussion of the staff language skills, the company is provided with an A4 horizontal format table outlining the CEFR competences. The consultants and the company representatives then review staff skills based on these descriptors. An example from the sample ECR is provided below. This sample is provided to trade advisors, ECR consultants and companies. This sample is based on a genuine company ECR.

### *5f. Language skills and staffing*

[Company Name] have a good range of language skills in their Sales and Marketing department. [Employee A] speaks German at Level C2, French at Level B1 and survival Polish. [Employee B] speaks French at an advanced level and has been involved in the proposal for the French client and worked with the technical team in France. [Employee C] and [Employee D] both speak Spanish at beginner level – they have taken a course over the last 1.5 years at the University of XXX, which was funded by LSC. This course has now come to an end. [Employee E] speaks reasonable French and very little Polish. He will accompany [Business Development Manager] on his trips to Poland. [Employee F] speaks French and was involved in the company's initial contact with their French agent company. Apart from that the company have an Italian native speaker and a half-Polish engineer, who would like to improve his Polish. They have also just employed an engineer who is a Polish native speaker. He could be used as an interpreter on those occasions when [Company Name] has Polish visitors. [Company Name] take language skills into consideration when employing new staff.

Appendix D of the ECR is the language skills audit & self-assessment grid. Although the company staff themselves make an assessment of their linguistic ability, this is refined with input from the consultant and later verified by training providers to tailor training to company staff ability & potential.

## 7. Can be readily & usefully implemented

The ECR can be readily implemented, however it requires the financial backing of government and the match funding from business. The latter is not usually an issue, as the ECR and its 'sister' programmes provide a direct commercial benefit to the company. To successfully implement the ECR service a national (if so chosen) or regional (if so chosen) network of

professionally-trained international communications consultants needs to be made available.

Delivery of the support overseas (such as OMIS) requires the existence and collaboration of government trade staff in-market, although this is not strictly part of the ECR.

The ECR model is one which is straightforward and easy to replicate, as business needs across the world are similar. A regional or local version of the ECR can be adapted from the UK national version, where local authorities or business support agencies believe this can be modified for the businesses in their location.

***Recommendations for transfer:***

- Generate the buy-in from business support intermediaries to raise awareness of the importance of language & culture capability
- Leverage buy-in from companies through a partial grant system (ideal is 70% grant 30% company investment)
- Offer a choice of types of ECR depending on the linguistic focus of the company