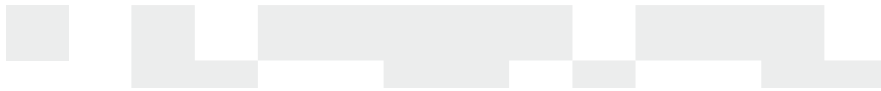


Regional Language Networks

UK

Language Policy



Good Practice Executive Summary

The Regional Language Network (RLN) was created by CILT¹, national organisation in UK responsible for language promotion, and supported by the Regional Development Agencies in the 9 regions and the 3 national states territories (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) in UK.

This joint initiative was financed both by the central government (50%) and regional entities (50%). These regional entities providing funds were allowed to set the priorities to which RLNs would develop their activities related to the promotion of language and cultural competencies in the regions aiming at increasing business competitiveness.

The RLNs created in the 9 UK regions are:

1. Greater London (www.rln-london.com)
2. South East England (www.rln-southeast.com)
3. South West England: (www.rlnsw.com)
4. West Midlands (www.rln-westmidlands.com)
5. North West England (www.rln-northwest.com)
6. North East England (www.rln-northeast.com)
7. Yorkshire and the Humber (www.rlnyh.com)
8. East Midlands (www.rln-eastmidlands.com)
9. East of England (www.rln-east.com)



Generally, **RLNs mission** is “to promote the value of communicating with customers and contacts overseas in their first language to improve business competitiveness” (RLN-East), or put into other words, “to improve business through language skills and cultural development” (RLN-North-West)..

To that end, RLNs develop activities aimed at the following areas:

- to be the **central point of contact** in the region for information and support on all things language and culture related.
- to show **businesses** that they can **increase exports and improve their performance** in international markets by developing a successful foreign language and cultural strategy.

¹ CILT, the National Centre for Languages, was formed in 2003 from the merger of the Centre for Information on Language Teaching & Research and the Languages National Training Organisation (LNTO). CILT seeks to promote a greater national capability in languages, supporting and developing multilingualism and cultural skills in all sectors of society.

The organisation serves education, business and the wider community with specialised, impartial and quality assured information services, expert advice and guidance as well as support for professional development. It manages major national initiatives in support of the National Languages Strategy, and works closely with national partner organisations across the UK and on the regional level through its (Regional) Language Networks ((R)LN).<http://www.cilt.org.uk/home.aspx>

- to **raise skills levels in the workplace** by showing business and individuals the benefits of using foreign languages and being culturally aware.
- to **raise awareness** of the importance of foreign languages and intercultural skills in schools, businesses and other regional organisations.
- to help **language service providers** to get the most out of their profession.
- to create **free resources** and provide **free advice and support** to help with all of the above.

From 2007 on, RLNs did not depend anymore on CILT but depended on Regional Development Agencies (RDAs²), both structurally and financially. This led to greater differences between RLNs' in term of performance, internal organisations, financing, etc. While some Networks might be very active, other might be merely informative or have already disappeared.

Nowadays, RLNs define themselves as non-profit organisations collaborating with RDAs and both public and private partners (from the education, business and language professionals sectors) at regional, national and international level.

Each RLN is responsible for raising awareness in their influence area of the importance of the linguistic and cultural abilities aiming at increasing business competitiveness. In order to achieve these objectives, each region develops different lines of action but generally sticking to the original mission.

RLNs offer diverse resources to prepare and maintain an international communication strategy, providing not only information on language and intercultural issues, but also on services provided by language professionals to business.

“The possibility to talk on a client’s language or to understand his culture is essential to consolidate the business-client relationship and, thus, attract foreign investments.”

Actions and projects carried out by RLNs in their regions respond to the needs of their beneficiaries: regional development agencies, partners, businessmen, SMEs, etc. contributing to:

- Bring language and culture into business commercial strategy.
- Planification of intercultural communications.

² RDA, which depend directly on the central government, foster economic regeneration in UK regions and often collaborate in financing association with the private sector and other public entities in order to:

- Promote business efficiency, investments and competitiveness.
- Foster employment.
- Improve professional abilities
- Contribute to sustainable development in the UK.

- Provide advisory on language training.
- Recruiting staff with specific language, translation, interpreting skills and other services.
- Adapting materials and websites to the international market.

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism.

This initiative agrees with European strategies on multilingualism, a fact reflected on 'Languages for All; Languages for Life', England's Languages Strategy (DfES, 2002).

"Languages for All" has the following objectives:

1. **To improve teaching and learning of languages** (centred on an entitlement to a language learning experience for all pupils in Key Stage 2, with coherent transition to an enhanced and flexible secondary curriculum).
2. **To introduce a recognition system** (a 'Languages Ladder' that would potentially credit a learner's progression through a scenario of lifelong learning and complement existing qualifications frameworks).
3. **To increase the number of people studying languages** (moving beyond schools to further and higher education, and to work-based training, maximizing the contribution of a suitably skilled workforce within a global (and multilingual) economy).

Such an Strategy is embraced by CILT, who is represented at the regional level by its Comenius (education) and RLN (business) networks. Specifically RLNs wide range of services target the **third objective of the strategy**, as they are entitled to **increase the number of skilled workers on foreign languages and contributing thus to their regional economies**.

RLNs,...

... Promote a wider knowledge and use of all languages at England's regions.

RLNs programmes and services address the training on languages learning directly linked to the economic context of each region, addressing both international trade languages (Chinese, Japanese, Arabic), as well as traditional foreign languages. *Example: RLN-East "Bioculture project offers Japanes and Chinese Training to Life Science Sector workers.*

... Promote lifelong learning and learner mobility through a variety of programmes.

RLNs programmes are specifically aimed at workers, enhancing the lifelong opportunities of language learning, and including in some cases mobility schemes. All RLNs offer information on the Lifelong Learning Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci mobility programmes and are linked to "Languages Work Programme"³, promoted by CILT, and which offers information on language learning abroad on work environments.

³ www.languageswork.org.uk

... Ensure the provision of the necessary skills and qualifications for the world of work

RLNs services are based upon the diagnosis of the language skills needs and shortfall on the regional economies. To that end, many RLNs conducted at the beginning of the 00s Language Skills Audits were conducted. For instance, RLN-South West carried out in 2001 a “Languages Skills Capacity Audit”⁴ ranging the language learning from the pre-16 to post-16, higher education and business/commercial sectors, updated in 2008 in the “Talk to Talk. Languages in the South West 2008”⁵ report.

All RLN’s strategies are driven and focused by an **economic priority**, the **internationalisation of regional economies**, as their approach is to enhance the impact of the Languages and Business fields, and are aligned with each region economic development strategies (RES), developed by Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), oriented towards the regional economic competitiveness. All RLNs have a close link and operate under the umbrella of RDAs. Example: RLN-East is aligned with east of England RES 2008-2031⁶.

RLN seeks the alliance and involvement of a wide variety of organisations, both as **providers and targets** of their services:

- Employers: business support and language advisory services are provided to this group.
- Education providers (both organisations and private providers): information on funds, specific training, career opportunities and business support is provided.
- Workers: Available language RL services and offer is disseminated.

RLNs programmes are implemented mainly through the involvement of language providers at the regional level and other business support services. The monitoring of the implemented actions is mainly conducted by each RLN board, made up by public and private bodies directly involved in the development of regional economic strategies at regional level. Example: RLN-East is monitored by East of England Development Agency, CILT and U K Trade & Investment (UKTI, governmental agency focusing on promoting foreign investment on UK and the export of UK companies)⁷.

RLNs are a long term initiative. Nonetheless it should be noted that from 2007 on, RLNs did not depend anymore on CILT but depended on Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), both structurally and financially. This led to greater differences between RLNs’ in term of performance, internal

⁴ [http://www.rln-southwest.co.uk/Downloads/ExecutiveSummary\(SW\).pdf](http://www.rln-southwest.co.uk/Downloads/ExecutiveSummary(SW).pdf)

⁵ http://www.rln-southwest.co.uk/Downloads/LanguagesReport_2008.pdf

⁶ <http://www.eastofengland.uk.com/res/>

⁷ <https://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk>

organisations, financing, etc. While some Networks might be very active, other might be merely informative or have already disappeared.

RLNs approach purports an overall business broad approach but some RLNs have developed sector based approaches taking into consideration the emergent economic sectors of each regions. Example: RLN-East has conducted some sector focused projects and programmes in the Biotechnology, Energy or Agri-food sectors, main economic sectors of East of England.

2. Includes incentives to enhance & sustain language learner motivation & employment.

Regional Languages Networks develop different activities oriented towards language learners motivation, although those activities depend on each Network.

According to research done, RLNs develop and participate in different initiatives developed both at national level and at regional level, aiming at different types of audiences.

Examples:

- **Business Language Champions**, a project at regional and national level, aims to increase the take-up of language learning and the motivation and achievement of language learners in a vocational context. Set up by CILT, recognise the importance of language and intercultural skills for business success and engages employers of all sizes and sectors. It encourages young people to understand the benefits of learning languages and the exciting and rewarding careers available to them with languages⁸.
- **LAFTAS**, Languages and Film Talent Awards is a competition organised by CILT as part of its work to promote the UK's language capability and aims to create a bank of video clips to encourage teenagers to value language learning and to continue with languages to a higher level. www.languageswork.org.uk/laftas/
- At regional level, RLNs do develop their own initiatives as it is the case of RLN-East that promotes **language and culture training** to businesses through the organisation of short courses before UKTI trade missions to foreign countries (up to 16 countries - China, Japan, Poland, etc.).
- RLNs also showcase **career opportunities for language providers**. Some RLNs do have regional databases of language services providers (for example, RLN-West Midlands BLIS Database). All of them also

⁸ http://cilt.org.uk/workplace/business_language_champions.aspx

provide information of the professional specific training courses delivered by CILT, and advise on the contracting by private providers of professional indemnity insurances.

Media coverage of projects and initiatives carried out by RLNs is generalised (TV, newspaper, etc.). Some RLN have participated in initiatives involving Internet tools such as Youtube, where short videos on export and international communication have been uploaded.

Other examples of ICT based solutions are the “Interactive Road Maps” developed by RLN-East for companies to design languages and business strategies, or the “Planner: Talking Solutions” web based platform for business support developed by RLN-London. This RLN also offer the free audio phrases with over 70 simple customer service phrases in 11 foreign languages.

As for the notoriety of the RLNs initiatives at the EU level, it should be noted that this initiative was pointed out as a good example on how to organise business support services on the “LANGUAGES MEAN BUSINESS: Companies work better with languages. Recommendations from the Business Forum for Multilingualism established by the European Commission”⁹

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

CILT is the government's recognised Centre of Expertise for Languages as detailed in 'Languages for All; Languages for Life.', the government's National Languages Strategy (DfES, 2002).

At the regional level, each RLN's services are delivered in the framework of regional languages and Business strategies as well as aligned with the regional strategic development documents. For instance, we can provide the following example: RLN-London implements the “A Language and Cultural skill Strategy for London: Why try harder?”¹⁰.

RLNs develop their activities according to necessities and priorities related to foreign language literacy set out in regional strategic documents. These bonds are visible simply in RLNs websites. Most of the Network shows their linkage to their Regional Development Agencies, some of them do also provide access the strategic papers.

The priorities driving the RLNs initiative related to language training and matching demand and offer of language services (and facilitating access to them) derived from EU, national and regional entities' awareness of the fact

9 http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/davignon_en.pdf

10 <http://www.rln-london.com/pdf/whytryharder.pdf>.

that linguistic and cultural barriers were making European enterprises lose market at international level. As previously mentioned, many of RLNs activities and programmes come out from the development of Capacity Skills Audits developed when the RLNs were created. Thus, RLNs would be the implementing instruments of the projects and actions develop to target the objectives set out according to these priorities.

As RLNs is not a centralised scheme, organisation and development of activities differ from one to another. Some might provide general information on developing a international communication strategy, others might be sector-driven (RLn-East) and some might focus in specific and concrete needs, as it is the case of RLN-London, which focus in the linguistic needs related to the organisation next Olympic Games.

Regarding funding or similar support for language training, it should be noted that RLNs do not directly provide such support, but do offer information on available support schemes at the regional or national level.

As previously mentioned, almost all RLNs do offer information on career opportunities for language providers; generally basic information and advisory services are also provided to business skills brokers highlighting the benefits of language & culture skills.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

As in every other aspect, differences between RLNs approaching certain issues related to language and culture training are great. More active RLNs approach migrant communities and minority languages from two different points of view:

- English language training for migrants in order to incorporate and facilitate their access to the labour market.
- Migrants as a source of *languages and cultural skilled* staff.

In both cases, RLN schemes focus on how they would beneficiate businesses' internationalisation or functioning. For instance we can point out the initiative conducted by the London Skills and Employment Board (LSEB), and the advise from RLN-London which has a programme focusing in 19+ years old English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training¹¹

Notwithstanding, RLNs do not offer direct training on ESOL, but provide comprehensive information on available training and services aimed at migrant ESOL workers and employers. RLN-London website shows a broad links to such available services, such as the Migrant Gateway, or the

¹¹ http://www.rln-london.com/pdf/esol_report_2008.pdf

Diversity Works for London Home¹², which hosts the Gold Standard Diversity System is a free, online resource designed for businesses of all sizes. Combining smart performance measuring tools and practical, business-focused advice from experts in the field, the System is here to help you respond to Britain's rapidly diversifying workforce and unlock its talent and benefits.

Some RLNs have contributed to specific surveys on their regional migrant work force language needs, such as RLN-East Midlands (Migrant Workers in the East Midlands Labour Market (2007) jointly developed with East Midlands Development Agency)¹³ upon which information services have been carried out upon both migrant ESOL pupils and employers.

5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

In order to achieve objectives set by RLNs, activities conducted with their beneficiaries aim at facilitating mobility.

Many projects carried out by RLNs include overseas periods benefiting workers. Each of these projects could be considered to be analysed later within the LILAMA project.

Mobility for language students is considered as beneficial and recommendable by RLNs but they do not offer funding at this level (educational institutions are generally in charge of this).

Regarding network participation, RLNs themselves represent the constitution of a network at regional level permit information and Best Practices Exchange. Besides, RLNs do consider a key element to participate in European projects and international networks in order to achieve established objectives.

6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework with transparent validation/credits

RLNs follow the National Languages Strategy for England (2002) which included in its long term objectives a commitment to deliver a national recognition system for language learning by 2005. RLNs do not have any power in this field, but CILT does.

The qualification framework that operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is the Qualifications and Credit Framework. Regarding languages, some qualifications focus on single skills (e.g. speaking) or a specific

¹² <http://www.diversityworksforlondon.com>.

¹³ <http://www.rln-eastmidlands.com/pdf/Migrant%20workers%20in%20East%20Midlands%20labour%20market.pdf>

combination of skills (e.g. reading and writing); others cover all four language skills. Some are 'general' or academic; others are particularly suitable for those learning languages for work.

The **Qualification Strategy for Languages, Intercultural Skills, Translation and Interpreting** is a major step forward in developing a system of qualifications and training provision that is highly relevant for the needs of employers and learners in the UK. CILT works closely with awarding bodies, regulatory authorities and other sector bodies to ensure that these qualifications meet the needs outlined by employers across a range of contexts.

National Occupational Standards will continue to act as the benchmark for all future qualifications development. CILT is the UK Sector Skills Body for languages, responsible for maintaining and developing National Occupational Standards in languages and intercultural skills for work and Standards for the specialist language professions, interpreting and translation. These have been created through a long process of consultation with language and intercultural professionals and employers, and are approved by the UK regulatory authorities.

The system is intended to complement existing national qualification frameworks and provides a **'ladder of recognition'** from beginner (Breakthrough) to postgraduate or native equivalent (Mastery). There are 6 levels, with three steps within each of the first five levels, two within the final one. It is intended for use by both children and adults.

Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills are assessed separately, and the Languages Ladder includes the use of 'can do' statements. For example, for Speaking:

- Breakthrough grade 1: I can say and repeat single words and short simple phrases.
- At Mastery, grade 17: I can communicate effortlessly and confidently in most situations, showing a command of language which enables me to express finer shades of meaning.

Descriptors align with the National Qualifications Framework¹⁴, National Curriculum levels, national examinations (Entry Level, GCSE, A Level) and the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**. You can see the table of equivalences in the following table:

¹⁴ <http://www.qcda.gov.uk>

Mapping of qualification levels

NQF	NC Levels	General Qualifications	Language Ladder Stages	CEF (approx)
Entry Level	1, 2, 3	Entry 1, 2, 3	Breakthrough: 1-3	A1, A2, A3
Level 1	4 -6	Foundation GCSE	Preliminary: 4-6	B2
Level 2	7- EP	Higher GCSE	Intermediate: 7-9	C1
Level 3		AS/A/AEA	Advanced: 10-12	C2
Level 4-6			Proficiency: 13-15	
Levels 7 & 8			Mastery: 16&17	

Abbreviations:

NQF = National Qualifications Framework

NC = National Curriculum

CEF = Common European Framework

7. Can be readily and usefully implemented

RLNs initiative can be transferred being first adapted to each regional and national context. Nevertheless, some aspects should be thoroughly studied and considered before. (See the Transferability assessment).

8. Transferability assessment

Interviews carried out with RLNs managers in different regions show that this scheme has some strong and weak points to consider when thinking of transferring the initiative.

Strong Points:

- The service offered by RLNs is unique.
- They fill a gap existing in the market by integrating linguistic and cultural capacities into the business dimension in UK regions.
- Promotion of dissemination of their practices has been remarkable.
- They have Developer tools that help enterprises to their international communication strategies.
- They provide strategic intelligence to the regional market by focusing in the linguistic needs of the region, facilitating international investments.
- This scheme benefits and promotes tourism.

Weak Points:

- Staff in the RLNs is generally reduced considering the amount of work to develop in each region and, so, subcontracting to develop some projects is widely used.
- Funding, depending on each region, conditions the work that each network is able to carry out. Besides, in this time of economic decline, businesses are also reluctant to invest in language training for their workers, when this is the moment when this specially offers added value.

8.1. Evidence of transfer

There is no evidence of previous transfer initiatives.

8.2. Innovation

The initiative is innovative as it has not been carried out before. Within each network, initiatives should be carefully studied as the differences between each RLN are great and, while some have almost disappeared, other, such as RLN-East, has been working for more than 10 years and developed its own initiatives not carried out in any other region.

8.3. Dependence on political context

Being public and private entities dependent on public fund sources , socio-political context does affect RLNs financing and, thus, their actions. As mentioned before, cuts in funding and human resources have determined each RLN's performance capability.

There are not many RLNs left in their original form. Even the strong ones, such as Yorks & Humber, have had their funding severely cut. Scotland, N.Ireland, Wales, South-East, South-West, East Midlands and West Midlands have all been either cut completely or become very small in activity.

The only ones really surviving are East, London, North-East (which are all part of the development agencies) and Yorks & Humber, which has limited finance. Not sure what is happening with the North West. These are based in Cambridge, London, Newcastle & Sheffield respectively.

8.4. Flexibility

The range of activities carried out by RLNs is so varied that they can be adapted according to the national/regional context where transferability might be considered.

In order to transfer this Good Practice, certain steps should be followed:

- Contact organism involved in the decision making at the different levels, taking into consideration the interests of all beneficiaries and stakeholders so they support the initiative. "Isolated work" won't take into consideration all the point of view needed to solve economic problems in the region.
- It's essential to encourage enterprises to consider and integrate linguistic and cultural capacities in their strategic plans.
- Actions have to be accessible and businesses should get the feeling that it will be benefiting for them right from the beginning.
- Dissemination and promotion of the organisation should be extensive through websites, newsletters, etc..

8.5 Multi-region transfer

Although this policy has been developed in a regional context, political and territorial organisation of Member States is so varied that transferability of a this initiative at national/multi-regional level cannot be generally assessed. The case of Spain and its *Comunidades Autonomas* could be similar to the UK one.