

The Elp-DESK Project: Tools to Promote and Disseminate the Europass Language Passport

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Abstract

The idea of a standard European document to indicate levels of linguistic competence in a universally recognised format was first developed in 1998 as part of the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio. The document, known as the Language Passport, was subsequently integrated into the European Union's Europass initiative and is now known as the Europass Language Passport (ELP). With the ELP, individuals can describe their language ability using a six-step scale based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (levels A1-C2), and indicate not only formal, examination qualifications, but also experience and expertise gained through non-formal or informal learning (e.g. work and/or study abroad, self learning, social contacts). The main aim of the Passport is, therefore, to ensure that language abilities are presented in the fullest and most effective way so that they can be easily understood by those responsible for assessing these skills. However, although an official EU document, the ELP has, unfortunately, achieved only limited application within teaching and employment communities. Responding to a specific call within the 'Key Action Languages' section of European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), the elp-DESK project (www.elp-desk.eu) is an international network seeking to raise awareness and recognition of the ELP and to identify means and tools to disseminate and promote the use of the document throughout Europe. The project, which began in 2009 and is funded for 2 years, has so far undertaken work and delivered products in the following areas:

- analysis of current awareness and use of the ELP among various user groups in the partner countries;
- provision of web-based support and guidance for those wishing to use and/or evaluate a Passport;
- assessment and implementation of the ELP in school language teaching and training;
- prototyping and pilot studies of the use of the Passport in business contexts (recruiting and language auditing);
- design and realisation of hardware and software resources and media to encourage and facilitate the adoption and recognition of the ELP;

In particular, two highly innovative implementations of Information Technology to support the ELP have just been completed:

- a USB-stick based application which adds typical Electronic Portfolio characteristics to the basic Passport, so allowing users to keep a concise record of their language learning and, most importantly, to prepare and save concrete evidence of their performance (in text, audio, video form, etc.);
- an Apple approved iphone application with which users can complete and update a Europass Language Passport on the mobile device and e-mail the finished document to any address.



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Through the activities of the elp-DESK project, it is hoped that the Europass Language Passport may become a recognised benchmark to present linguistic competence in a modern electronic form, so enhancing the recognition of all forms of language learning, training and qualification.