

Chapter 2

A Chronological Account of the English Examination Reform Project: the Project Manager's Perspective

Nagy Edit

Pre-history

The idea of examination reform in Hungary has been in the air since the early 1990s. The first step was the setting up of a joint Hungarian-Dutch research project in the Országos Közoktatási Intézet – OKI Budapest – from 1993 to 1995, the results of which were planned to contribute to the new school-leaving examination. Although the project initially included three school subjects only (English, Mathematics, Biology), later Mother tongue and Arts education were added and they were to serve as models for other school subjects. The OKI-CITO project had two main objectives for each subject, namely to start the building of a joint item bank with the Dutch exams centre and to provide the Hungarian Ministry of Education with 'Test Models' that would suit the Hungarian school population.

The English part of the OKI-CITO project had the following outcomes:

- 1) The analysis of the current School-leaving examination papers confirmed that the exam is neither reliable nor valid, and nothing can be said, based on the exam, about the test takers' level of English, since the exam is not skills-based;
- 2) The pilots showed that the Hungarian School-leaving population's level of English is equivalent to that of the CITO exam that is taken by 16 year-old vocational students in Holland;
- 3) The Hungarian students were enthusiastic about skills-based tests (listening and reading skills were measured) and were not at all intimidated as some teachers had expected;
- 4) A collection of 400 calibrated items (200 listening, 200 reading) is available for the Hungarian school-leaving population. This is in the possession of OKI Budapest.

Origins of English exams reform

The Ministry of Education and both OKI Budapest and Szeged continued discussions and work on examinations. The idea of a joint English examination reform project with OKI Szeged and OKI Budapest, supported by the British Council, was first raised in May 1996 when Charles Alderson made a 2-day visit to Hungary to negotiate with representatives from OKI and the Ministry. He met Kádárné Fülöp Judit, a senior official in the Ministry of Education, who was at the time responsible for secondary education, who thought it was a good idea to visit the Basic Examinations Centre in Szeged and start work with them. Vándor Judit, the Year 12 team leader from OKI Budapest, was also present at the discussions in Szeged with Nagy József, head of the Basic Examination Centre and Csapó Benő, head of the Department of Education at Szeged University. It was agreed that it was a good idea to maximise co-operation and collaboration across Years 10 and 12 and to set up a joint English project with the British Council, so that the two examinations would be similar to each other in terms of principles and procedures. It seemed practical and cost effective from the Council's point of view that the members of the two test construction teams and future item writers would receive the same training.

In autumn 1996 OKI Budapest set up their Year 12 team, initially five people, who would then, at a later stage, bring along their colleagues, so by February 1997, when the Project had its first BC workshop at OKI Budapest, the Year 12 team consisted of 12 people.

In November 1996 Nikolov Marianne, the Year 10 team leader, and Major Éva, the Year 12 academic director, (a person other than the OKI Year 12 team leader) paid an official visit to Lancaster University to start negotiations with key experts in language testing and project management. Apart from discussions of the Hungarian context and needs, they had the opportunity to meet testing specialists from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, who were in Lancaster on an official study trip as part of their Examinations Reform Project (supported by Lancaster University). While in Lancaster, the Hungarian visitors identified general needs (eg analysing existing documents, defining responsibilities and posts, establishing communication channels between the two teams, the preparation of budget plans), training needs, necessary documents (a Baseline Study and project documents like a Project Framework, an Implementation Plan, Test Specifications, Guidelines for Item Writers, etc).

Also in November 1996 Charles Alderson met Mátrai Zsuzsa, the head of the Centre for Evaluation Studies in OKI, who was very supportive of the joint project, and who confirmed that the reform process was underway and that the main focus was on the standardisation of the written examination, centrally devised and administered, retaining, at the same time, local flexibility through school-based assessment, particularly of the oral examination. At that time a two-level Year 12 school-leaving examination was envisaged, but decisions had not yet been made about the relationship between compulsory and optional subjects in the written examination. The English Year 12 team had just had a visitor from the Baltics project (organised and funded by the British Council) whose contribution was said to be very helpful. (The team had previously expressed the need for contacts and networking with people outside Hungary working on similar projects.) The team was working on the Year 12 Detailed Requirements Document, the first draft of which was due to be finalised by December 1996, and was planning to follow the structure of Specifications as recommended in 'Language Test Construction and Evaluation' (Alderson et al, 1995). Major issues were the following: the Use of English paper, what it might contain, suitable tasks for Speaking and Listening and the definition of levels. It was recommended to the team that they should collect samples of students' writing and speaking performances to illustrate the description of levels. The need was expressed for a week's training in developing Specifications and levels, especially for criterion-referenced tests.

Formation of a project and team building

The above-mentioned planned training workshop, which took place in OKI Budapest in February 1997, run by Charles Alderson, was the first opportunity to discuss the implications of a joint project, and so both Year 10 and Year 12 team members, the German Year 12 team leader, as well as experts from the State Foreign Language Examinations Board (Rigó utca) were invited, along with three members of a newly created team of item writers in OKI Budapest, whose brief was to develop a range of multiple-choice items to supplement the CITO-project-related Item Bank. (This group of item writers was invited to all subsequent workshops, but never attended any). Unfortunately, nobody from OKSZI (responsible for producing the current Matura) was able to attend.

This workshop presented major opportunities for team building, the creation of a common knowledge base about the origins of the reforms, discussions of progress made and plans for the future. Although the main aim of the workshop was to discuss test specification issues, it seemed sensible to widen the aims and content of the workshop to

cover the new and rapidly developing and changing situation. It was clear that language testing was 'new' in Hungary: experts were literally non-existent; except for one or two people who had received some training before, most team members lacked even basic training in testing. The workshop was very intensive, with lively group and plenary discussions during the day and reading tasks overnight (draft of the Year 12 Detailed Requirements, the Year 10 General Requirements for Foreign Languages, the English version of the National Core Curriculum and articles on criterion-referenced language test development).

The main outcome was the formation of a joint project team for English, with a common understanding of developments, a common ownership of problems and plans. It was agreed that the two teams would continue to develop their various plans separately, but regular meetings and joint training sessions would be held. It was also agreed that a Baseline Study should be designed and the team members would need training in order to conduct such a study. The item writer team agreed to postpone the planned piloting of draft items for the CITO-related item bank until their role and that of the item bank had been clarified. It was felt to be essential that there should not be separate item writer teams who were not involved in the production of the Specifications, and teams of writers of test Specifications who would never write test items: the development of Specifications and that of items should happen at the same time. Later we discovered that the item writing continued and new tasks were piloted.

During this workshop Richard West held a session informing the teams about the training of trainers for language testing which he was conducting with BC support. Those teachers taking the standard Manchester distance module in language testing were to develop IELTS-style training materials to help teachers assess writing and speaking skills in class or in school-based examinations. This was thought likely to provide valuable input and support to the English Examinations Reform Project. Discussions between Richard West and Charles Alderson were held on possible cooperation between the Universities of Manchester and Lancaster and the British Council Hungary. These discussions led to the next workshop on project design two months later.

Workshop on project design and management

This important workshop for Year 10 and Year 12 team members, the leader of the German Year 12 team, the BC English for Special Purposes project members and in-service advisers took place in OKI Budapest in April 1997 and was run jointly by John McGovern from Lancaster University and Richard West from Manchester University. It was agreed that in the future Manchester would be responsible for the delivery of a distance learning module on testing between October 1997 and March 1998, consultancy services and training within Hungary for trainers for the marking of the subjectively scored components of the tests, either centrally or locally marked. Lancaster would provide the UK-based training in test development and in-country project management training and external quality control.

The participants received an in-depth introduction to project planning, project management, the importance of clear roles and responsibilities and the nature of projects. Apart from the draft project documents that were produced by the participants during the workshop (Project Framework, Draft Project Proposal Document, with clear project goals and objectives, inputs and outputs, The Implementation Plan, Job Descriptions, Organisation Chart), the most important outcome of the workshop was the further strengthening of the teams, the development of project ownership, a clear understanding and acceptance of common aims and the sharing of common problems.

During the workshop the BC arranged a meeting in the Ministry of Education with the Deputy State Secretary for public education, the Deputy State Secretary for foreign relations, the two British experts, representatives of the project and the BC. The Ministry was very supportive of the idea of an English project operating within OKI, as it was seen by the Ministry officials as a prototype subject, a possible model for other foreign languages in the development of a new exam and a vehicle for reform of subjects across the curriculum in terms of project management. It was clear, though, that there were major gaps in the project structure. No Ministry personnel were identified as a contact or liaison person, much less somebody who would have responsibility for the Project in the Ministry. Since the two teams were based in two different towns, it was considered crucially important to appoint a project manager who would coordinate the work of the two teams, liaise with the Ministry and the BC.

It was also recommended that the planned Baseline Study would be the signal of the official start of the Project, after signing a Letter of Agreement.

Further developments

Soon after this workshop key people in the Project, the proposed manager, the academic director of Year 12 and the team leader of Year 10 submitted a Letter of Agreement to the Deputy State-Secretary for Public Education in the Ministry of Education without informing the BC and OKI. The BC found out about this two months after the document had been sent. Understandably, there was no response from the Ministry. The Agreement between the Council and OKI or the Ministry was not yet signed and problems now began to present themselves. OKI Budapest always insisted that they wanted to have only five people in the Year 12 team as that was a manageable number and had indeed contracted five people only to do the job, but the team members had brought their friends and colleagues because they thought each skill needed two people to work on it (as two levels were planned for each skill). Other experts, like people from the State Foreign Language Examination Board and the chief adviser from the Budapest Pedagogical Institute, were invited to participate as potential item writers as it was hoped that once the Project was officially given the green light, there would be a great demand for a large pool of trained item writers, and these people had enormous expertise. (The Council also invited the leader of the German Year 12 team to all in-country workshops as well as to UK training events, and she participated in all events until summer 1999. Unfortunately, this invitation was never reciprocated, Project personnel were never invited to attend meetings of the German team, and so cooperation with German was virtually non-existent.) It is noteworthy that OKI Szeged had contracted only one person, the Year 10 team leader for English (not five, as in the case of OKI Budapest) ; the other Year 10 team members never had a contract except for one concrete job, to work out the General Requirements Document.

Unfortunately no Agreement was signed for well over a year after people had started to work in and for the Project. The main problem was, as it turned out somewhat later, that despite the fact that most non-residential in-country workshops were held in OKI Budapest and both the English and German team leaders were present, there was no communication with the management of OKI. OKI management were not informed about developments in the Project and the Project team members were not informed or not well informed about OKI policy. Some of the information that reached the Project was confusing, so were the deadlines, and it was often not clear what exactly the team members were required to do in terms of documents, or what the latest state of affairs was. There was no guidance from the Ministry either concerning the status and role of the Year 10 exams. The teams continued working on both the Basic examination for

Szeged and the two-level School-leaving examination for Budapest. It was believed at the time that only the English teams worked together, and that in the other school subjects, except for History, there was no cooperation between the Year 10 and 12 teams. Later it became clear that the two institutions, despite both being OKI institutions, wished to work independently, and cooperation was not only not encouraged, but rather was actively discouraged. Discussions with Year 10 management in Szeged was done by OKI management in Budapest: there was no occasion when the managers or key people could have a meeting of the planned Project Board. When such a Board meeting was suggested, uncertainties concerning the future of OKI meant that the Budapest management felt they could not contribute to the long-term planning of the Project.

The first visits to the Baltics

In May 1997 the OKI Year 12 team leader paid a visit to Riga and the academic director of Year 12 and the BC project manager went to Vilnius in June to observe the newly introduced written and oral examinations. The lessons to be learnt were manifold: public relations were extremely important, those schools and teachers who were involved in the piloting or some other activities turned out to be much more supportive of reform than those who just followed the instructions. The role of the media was also crucial in preparing the public and avoiding the spread of false information. It was very important to have item writers from all over the country, not just from particular regions. Central marking of the writing papers was felt to be extremely important if reliability was to be ensured, otherwise the exam would lose its value. The importance of publicity, openness and the provision of proper information at regular intervals was emphasized. As for the exams themselves, the centrally broadcast Listening test (both on TV and radio) seemed to work well, as did the paired oral exams.

Richard West paid a visit to OKI Budapest in early June as a follow-up visit to the April workshop. The main purpose was to work with the two examination development teams to finalise the drafts of four vital project planning documents, The Organisation Chart, The Job Descriptions, The Project Framework and the Project Implementation Plan before the BC project manager went to Lancaster to finalise these as well as the budget planning. This June workshop was the first time when the teams started to work on level setting: producing a matrix of different international and national examinations, their levels and the planned levels of the Year 10 and 12 exams. The level-setting exercise involved not only different approaches and mechanisms, but also the broader concerns of national and international standards. The lack of information about current national standards (what percentages achieve each Matura grade), national expectations (what percentages are expected to achieve such grades), curriculum objectives, the parallel reform of standards in other languages all represented areas of uncertainty which would have to be addressed by the Baseline Study.

The 'Baseline Study' workshop took place at OKI Budapest and the Budapest Pedagogical Institute in late June 1997 and was run by Charles Alderson for members of the proposed English Examinations Reform Project. Unfortunately, the OKI staff member who was the designated team manager for the Year 12 team was not present at any of the sessions; the German team leader on the other hand was present.

Before the workshop started, there was an opportunity to discuss project issues with the head of the newly renamed Evaluation and Examinations Centre in OKI, in charge of both the Year 12 Project and the OKI Item Writing Project. She indicated that there were difficulties in the Ministry, namely the lack of personnel: there was no person responsible

for examination reform at the Department of International Affairs or the Department of Public Education. Her intention was to get somebody in the Ministry to sign the Project contract with the BC and she confirmed that this would indeed happen, but did not know when.

The main aim of the workshop was to design the content of the Baseline Study. An overview of different types of baseline studies was given, with their different purposes, content, methodology and outcomes. It was agreed that the Hungarian Baseline was not a feasibility study, since the need for examination reform had already been agreed, activities were underway and a British-supported project had already been designed, but it was more of an investigation of the status quo. After identifying the main areas the study should deal with, participants worked in groups to decide what each chapter should contain. The draft chapters were as follows: Context (to describe the broad context of foreign language education, by collecting data and documents), The Teaching Situation, The Testing Situation, Levels of Pupil Performance, Attitudes and Expectations of Stakeholders and Teacher Training. It was decided to conduct the study in two phases to ease the pressure on people. After this workshop two people from the Year 10 team and all Year 12 team members, the German Year 12 team leader and the two associated 'outsiders' were contracted by the Council to work on certain chapters of the Baseline Study. Plans were also made to draft and produce the instruments, which were discussed on several occasions in small groups.

In early September 1997 the BC sent five members of the Project to the Riga Conference on Examination Reform in the Central and East Europe region. The Hungarian team summarised the main lessons that they had learnt from this conference: 1) the importance of public relations, 2) the importance of an examinations centre to be responsible for the production, printing, distribution, security, administration, marking and analysis of examinations, 3) the importance of external examination systems in the development of national standards and quality examinations, 4) the importance of involving and training large numbers of teachers, 5) the importance of training of markers of writing and assessor and interlocutor training for the speaking skills.

In late September 1997 both teams had separate sessions with Richard West to revise their Detailed Requirements documents. Time was devoted to the crucial issue of level setting and a preliminary table was drawn up showing the proposed levels of the new examinations and their relation to the frameworks of the Council of Europe and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. This framework of levels was presented at the IATEFL Hungary conference by the two team leaders in early October 1997.

During the autumn and winter 1997 both teams were **collecting data for the Baseline Study**. The teams continued working on documents; Year 12 on the Detailed Requirements Document for Year 12, the Year 10 team on the General Requirements Document for Year 10.

The first UK training, run by Dianne Wall and Jayanti Banerjee, took place in Lancaster in January 1998 with the participation of both teams, the teacher training team and the German Year 12 team leader from OKI. Prior to this training, the Manchester distance modules in testing were intended to give a common grounding to all participants. The Lancaster training involved 1) principles and practice of public examinations, 2) hands-on training in item writing, leading to the development of sample papers, 3) initial training in

statistics and item analysis for selected members of the teams, 4) training in trainer-training leading to the development of training packages. It was reported by several people after the course that there had been problems in Lancaster: several participants confirmed that the attitude of the Year 12 team members was rather superior, and the other two teams felt that they were being looked down on. This was the first time that signs of personality problems within the teams started to manifest themselves.

The drafting of a new Agreement

Although all project documents had been finalised by the teams by September 1997, it turned out that senior officers in OKI had not been shown the documents: project members were under the impression that the OKI Year 12 team leaders had constantly informed their line managers about developments in the project.

OKI managers were reportedly not happy with the Year 12 team and, when they finally saw the project documents, they were not satisfied with them: they did not think that it was necessary to have job descriptions and wanted to have a much shorter and less detailed Implementation Plan. As a result, a new Agreement was drawn up by OKI in early 1998, which was not signed until May 1998. This caused feelings of insecurity and considerable disruption among the Year 12 team members, as well as the Year 10 team. At the time it was expected that everybody involved would have a contract and it was hoped that the Council would pay all item writers and a monthly top-up for those contracted by OKI. The fact that the Year 12 team was larger than OKI planned caused OKI management serious concern, as they said that they did not wish to work with 12 people.

The four-year Agreement was signed in OKI in May 1998. It states that the two OKIs (Budapest and Szeged) and the BC will collaborate in the development of the new English school examinations: the Basic Exam at Year 10 and the two-level School-leaving exam at Year 12. This new examination was planned to measure global language competence, it would be skills-based, and unlike the current exam, it would be valid and reliable. The main aim of English examination reform was to ensure that the new examinations would have value and would reflect good, up-to-date teaching practice. The Council's responsibility, according to the Agreement, was all the training events, both in-country and in the UK, the provision of books and materials, and the commissioning and payment of item writers to write tasks. OKI was mainly responsible for the documents, setting up the pilots, creating the test booklets and analysing the data.

Recruitment of Project Adviser

At the time of the signing of the Agreement, the BC was already recruiting an English native-speaker project adviser with international expertise in language testing and evaluation, who would be based at OKI and would advise OKI on professional matters. The job description for the post was approved and welcomed by the head of the Evaluation and Examinations Centre in OKI. In June 1998, Charles Alderson was appointed to the post of Adviser for two years with effect from September 1st.

Also in June 1998 two representatives of the Project attended **an evaluation workshop in Riga** of the English Examinations Reform of the three Baltic States. The basis for the workshop was a report written by Charles Alderson, the external quality assessor to the Baltics Project. In-depth discussions were held on the role of examination centres, on how public relations should and should not be treated, how external marking – a serious requirement in quality assessment – is done, how item writing is handled in the different

countries and how training (for item writers, markers, invigilators, interlocutors) was managed. The importance of pre-testing and piloting every task was emphasized, as was the need for constant testing awareness training courses for teachers.

The working out of the Project's item production system

It was important to establish a system of item production, editing, vetting and item payment before the first intensive item writer training. Charles Alderson, who was in Hungary at the time on sabbatical leave and was already exercising an advisory role informally, wrote to more than 20 examination boards all over the world to find out about their systems of item production. The findings were compiled (see Appendix D), and a proposal was written. This proposal was discussed and accepted by the two team leaders, the academic team leader of Year 12 and the British Council. Since item writing was the Council's responsibility, it was considered crucial that a good system of item production be put into operation. The idea was to experiment with the system: everybody was expected to write two tasks for each level and each skill over the coming summer, so that we could find out who was good at what, and to be able to come to a consensus at the end of the exercise on rates of payment. There had been constant disagreement among Year 12 team members about the amount of work involved in writing different tasks for different skills at different levels. It was clear that the only way to find a solution which was reasonable and would be accepted by everybody was that everybody needed first-hand experience of writing tasks at all levels for all skills.

The proposal was sent out by the Council to everybody under the name of the two team leaders, the academic director of Year 12 and the British project adviser, with a request in the cover letter by Nagy Edit, BC project manager, that any serious objections should come to the Council before the contracts for item writing were drawn up. Nothing came in for three weeks. Two days before a very important workshop was due to commence in June, a letter was brought to the Council, signed by the Year 12 team members, saying that they could not accept the generous conditions that had previously been accepted by the team leaders and the academic director without any reservations. The counter-proposal was unacceptable to the Council, since it presented no rationale, demanded more money for less work, presented no proposals for quality assurance or for equity of payment, and thus provided no basis for discussion. The counter proposal was also presented with unfortunate timing, two days before the workshop and was therefore rejected.

The Council insisted on the conditions that had been agreed upon: an urgent message was sent out to all Year 12 people who were presented with two choices: either to agree to the proposals originally agreed by management, or not to attend the workshop, and therefore lose eligibility to contribute to examination development. The Year 10 team and the teacher trainers all declared themselves satisfied with the original proposal. The Year 12 team members chose not to attend the workshop and were, therefore, considered to have opted out of the project.

The workshop in June 1998 was held in Erdőtarcsa as the first event after the official launch of the Project and was seen as a new phase of the Project. The original aim of the workshop had been to revise the Specifications and items produced in Lancaster, to draft Guidelines for Project item writers and to do planning for the coming year.

The withdrawal of the Year 12 team was potentially disruptive and there was some confusion on the first day of the Erdőtarcsa workshop among the participants (the Year 10 team members, the teacher trainers, and the chief foreign language adviser of the Budapest Pedagogical Institute). A meeting of Hungarians only was held to discuss the

Year 12 problem (the minutes of the meeting give a detailed account and can be found on BC files) and those present unanimously condemned the attitude and behaviour of their former colleagues as unprofessional and unacceptable. A decision was made by those present that by not attending the workshop, the Year 12 team members had excluded themselves from the Project. Those present agreed unanimously that they could not work with the Year 12 people in the Project any more and asked the Council project manager to accept their view and to act accordingly in the future.

The workshop itself was run by Charles Alderson and Richard West. The main aim was to put together a document, Guidelines for Item Writers, so that item production could start straight after the workshop, as OKI's intention at the time was to have a large pilot either late September or early October, for which it was crucial to have a number of good tasks in each skill. Participants had intensive plenary discussions on the Specifications and the sample tasks that had been produced in Lancaster back in January were critiqued and revised twice.

The Year 10 Specifications were generally in good order, well prepared and edited according to a standard format. It was agreed that after minor adjustments, the document would be distributed by the team leader in agreed draft form by mid-July so that item writing could proceed over the summer.

Although a good deal of work had been done by the Year 12 team, their Specifications were found to be in disarray. They had not been drawn up according to a standard format, contained gaps and serious inconsistencies, and, in the case of Speaking Specifications, were found to be quite unworkable.

To avoid any further delay in the Project and to ensure that good Specifications would be available for the Year 12 item writers, it was decided by all present that these Specifications needed to be re-drafted as a matter of urgency. The OKI Year 12 team leader and Richard West spent a whole day in order to produce -- with considerable input from the Year 10 and the teacher trainers' teams -- revised, extended Specifications in the agreed format. These Specifications were reviewed again and it was agreed that the Year 12 team leader (without a team at the time) would distribute them by mid-July.

After revising the draft tasks produced in Lancaster, draft Guidelines for Item Writers for Basic, Intermediate and Advanced tasks were produced by the Year 10 team and the teacher trainers' team. All this required strenuous work from the participants throughout the whole week.

After the workshop, the former Year 12 team members complained to the BC that they had been excluded from the workshop by the Project Manager, and subsequently expressed their wish to come back to the Project and to accept the conditions set by the Council, which they had refused before the workshop. By now this was, of course, impossible, since the Erdőtarcsa participants had unanimously agreed that the former Year 12 team had excluded themselves from the Project. Furthermore, OKI made it clear that they did not wish to renew the contracts of the four who had previously been contracted (the rest never had a contract with either OKI or the Council). Instead, OKI decided to recruit new Year 12 team members and in addition it was agreed that the Council would advertise nationally to recruit new item writers. None of the former Year 12 team members applied.

All Year 10 team members and the teacher trainers spent **summer 1998** writing items for OKI so that the first pilot could take place. In late August an advertisement for more item writers appeared in *Köznevelés*, which is distributed to every school in the country, and

was sent by the Council to all English departments at universities and colleges. Each applicant was required to produce sample tasks for at least two levels and two skills.

The first Teacher Training workshop was held in Szeged in August 1998. It was the common understanding of all those involved in education reform that teacher support was crucial to the success of the Project and the Examination Reform and that it was essential to get more and more teachers involved in the process and to prepare them for the change. The aim of this workshop was to develop initial ideas for the design, approach and content of the teacher training courses that would familiarise teachers with the principles of the reformed exam and best practice in the testing of skills.

The workshop was run by Philip Glover, BC in-service adviser, and two members of the teacher training support team, Torda Márta and Együd J. Györgyi and was supported by Charles Alderson and Richard West. It was attended by the British in-service advisers, the teacher training team, counterparts who had previously been identified as members of the in-service testing interest group, the leaders of the Year 10 and Year 12 teams (this latter team still under recruitment), the director and the director of studies of the Bell Schools -- Matheidesz Mária and Tímár Eszter-- as they had previously been involved in designing and running similar courses. The head of the Basic Examinations Centre at OKI Szeged, Nagy József, also paid a visit to the workshop on the final day and gave an account of the plans for and progress of the Basic Examination.

The participants had pre-course tasks to do: documents about washback and the implementation of innovation to be read and some preparatory tasks to complete.

A considerable amount of time was spent discussing information about the Examination Reform Project and progress to date. There were discussions on the draft Baseline Study Report, the Detailed Requirements Document and the newly introduced in-service regulations concerning the accreditation of courses. Participants' expectations about the new examinations, together with their hopes and fears were gathered. Advice for trainers was also gathered as part of the series of preparatory sessions. The participants concentrated on developing a draft framework within which a training course could be designed (including audience, developers, aims, mode, duration, content, methods, outcomes and follow-up). Participants then divided into four working groups representative of the various areas of experience and expertise present, and drafted a design for the training course. These four course outlines were merged by the teacher training team into one draft course outline after the workshop, taking the strong points from each outline. It was felt by the end of the workshop that firm foundations had been laid for further course development.

In early September 1998 **the first items** came in, written by the Year 10 team members, the teacher trainers and three invited professionals. Arrangements were made at the Council for item editing, revision and vetting.

The main aim of **the second workshop in Erd•tarcsa in October 1998** was for the Editing Committee to look at every anonymised task and to have round-table discussions about them in front of those who had produced the items. The idea was to show the item writers how item editing was done, the importance of what 'new eyes' could see. Item writers could take notes and ask questions at the end of each editing session. This process was considered to be very useful, despite the fact that it was time consuming and hard work. During the discussion of the tasks, Year 10 team members were asked to take notes that could be important in the revision of the Specifications and the Guidelines for

Item Writers as these documents would need constant revision and fine tuning. Part of the workshop was attended by the OKI German Year 12 team leader.

During the workshop a new document called '**The Working Document**' was produced as the OKI English Year 12 team leader confirmed that all documents produced up to that date were considered 'confidential' by OKI management, and therefore could not be shown to teachers. The members of the Project felt that it was important that teachers were informed about the progress of examination reform and therefore this document included important parts of the Requirements and the Specifications, but did not include some details that might undergo change. It turned out much later, at a meeting in OKI in September 1999, that in German, for instance, all documents were public, therefore it had been unnecessary to produce a 'Working Document'.

The first pilot of Speaking and Writing tasks was administered in Szeged, Pécs and Budapest secondary schools in December 1998. The feedback from the students was unanimously positive; they were very pleased with the tasks and wished they had similar tasks in the érettségi (see Chapters 10 and 11). Assessment criteria for the evaluation of performance on writing and speaking tests were also developed and refined. Students' performances on the speaking test were videoed. These videos were used when drawing up assessment criteria and the scales and will later be used for examiner and interlocutor training.

The second UK training took place in Manchester in January 1999. The participants were the Year 10 team members, the teacher training team (the OKI Year 12 team still did not exist) and the German Year 12 team leader in OKI. The English Year 12 team leader from OKI did not attend, as she was in the progress of leaving OKI, therefore quitting the Project.

Lukács Judit, the head of the School-leaving examinations teams at OKI and Kapitánffy Johanna, the foreign languages coordinator from the Ministry of Education, joined the group for the second week, for the visits to examination boards. The course for the test construction team was designed and run by Richard West and Charles Alderson and focussed on two main areas: the assessment of speaking and writing skills and level definitions. These definitions were rewritten and new scales were constructed, using the Council of Europe scales as a point of reference. The Guidelines for Item Writers were revised again and Guidelines for Interlocutor Training were drafted. There was initial thinking about an assessor-training pack using the handbook and video of the Oxford International Business English Certificate as a model. For the teacher training team the course was conducted by Jane Andrews from the University of Manchester and Philip Glover, national English in-service adviser in Hungary and focussed on the development of the teacher training package for the examination awareness courses to be run by the teacher trainers.

Visits were organised to two examination boards; the Scottish Qualifications Authority in Dalkeith and the Northern Examinations and Assessment Board in Harrogate to find out about planning, organising and administering national language examinations.

During the workshop in Manchester the head of the School-leaving examinations teams in OKI Budapest discussed with the Year 10 team members the problems between the two teams and she thanked the Year 10 team for their contributions to Year 12 documents as well as for all the work they had done for OKI Budapest when the Year 12 team did not exist. Soon after this there was an official discussion with her, the German

Year 12 leader, the Year 10 team leader and the project manager of the Council to make future plans. It was emphasized by OKI Budapest that they wanted the future work of the Year 12 separate from the Year 10 and Szeged, because the two institutions were conducting work independently. Promises were made by non-OKI people that they would keep to this requirement and the BC would not encourage joint work and would organise joint training sessions only. It was agreed, though, that the item writers, trained and managed by the BC, would be writing items for both Budapest and Szeged.

The first piloting of Reading, Listening and Use of English tasks was postponed by OKI from September-October 1998 to April 1999 as the OKI Year 12 team leader was reported to have failed to identify schools for the pilot. The April pilot was organised by the new Year 12 team leader, Öveges Enikő, who came on board shortly after the Manchester training. Schools were identified and approached by OKI (see Chapter 4). In this interim period, the German Year 12 team leader in OKI was contracted by the Council, at OKI's request, for a five-month period, to help the work of the new team leader and the new team. The new team leader managed to identify new Year 12 team members shortly after she had started to work in OKI. The team members are experienced teachers, they had all been trained in language testing and they are all committed to the Reform.

The Baseline Study was published in spring 1999 and it describes the state of English language education in Hungary, gives an account of current policies and practices in language examinations, examines the nature of teaching in schools and measures the level of achievement of the English-learning population in schools (Fekete et al, 1999). The Baseline Study was distributed to all contributors, Year 10 team members, teacher trainers, BC advisers, in-service counterparts, English departments at universities and colleges, libraries, Resource Centres, all those who were involved in the training events, international contacts, and, at a later stage, to all BC offices in Europe.

The 'Examinations Awareness Teacher Training Course', which was developed by six teacher trainers under the supervision of Philip Glover, was first piloted in Eger in March-April 1999 (see Chapter 18) and was run by two team members, Együd J. Györgyi and Gál Ildikó, supervised by Philip Glover and advised by Charles Alderson. Key project members had initially paid a visit to Eger schools and talked to teachers about the course. The course is about preparing teachers and students for new, skills-based examinations, since it is very important to familiarise teachers all over the country with skills-based testing, even before the new School-leaving exam is approved by the Ministry and even before details are clarified and decisions are made.

The first item writer workshop for the newly recruited project item writers was run by Dr Caroline Clapham of Lancaster University at the Agro Hotel in Budapest in May 1999 with the participation of the new item writers and the newly recruited Year 12 team. The intention of this workshop was to augment the item writing skills of item writers, who had been recruited after nationwide advertising. The participants first took tests themselves, discussed them, identifying good and poor features of each subtest. There were group and plenary discussions on the tasks the item writers had produced and brought to the workshop: all four skills were covered.

Training in the interpretation of statistical data was also run by Dr Clapham in Pécs in May 1999 with the participation of those team members whose job in the project was

to manage and analyse data. Work was done on test equating, using Item Response Theory and traditional techniques to calibrate pilot test tasks for the project; comparisons were made of internal test difficulties and the calibrated CITO reading and listening items. The team members used SPSS to calculate descriptive test statistics for the test pilots that took place in April. There was also a demonstration of the use of the IRT programme Big Steps, as well as the use of Iteman to analyse test items (see Chapters 8 and 15).

Visit of team members to UCLES, June 1999

The title of the training was 'The history of an Item' and the main aim of the visit was to look at the workings of a large testing agency: how items are commissioned, how editing committees operate and how they are managed. Some of the important messages UCLES managers conveyed were the following: the importance of the setting up of **systems**, the importance of being open and public so that teachers would understand and contribute rather than suspect, undermine and reject, the importance of constant training, revision and fine tuning, the importance of a huge pool of trained item writers so that there would be a sufficient number of good tasks available and there would be no need to make do with less good items and the importance of careful planning for years in advance. The visit also provided a good opportunity to discuss what type of input UCLES could provide to the item writer training course the following month.

While the Year 12 team leader and other team members were attending this workshop at UCLES, problems arose in Hungary. The head of the German Year 12 team, who had been contracted by the Council to support the work of the new Year 12 team, was officially asked by OKI Szeged, on the recommendation of the Year 10 team leader, to give feedback on the Year 10 Detailed Requirements document. Before submitting her review, she wrote to the director of OKI in which she accused the Council of representing views that were different from those represented by OKI, which, in the given context meant interfering. She sent this letter without prior discussions with the English Year 12 leader, the British Council project adviser or the project manager.

Second item writer residential training in Dobogókő, July 1999

All item writers, Year 10 and 12 team members and teacher trainers (except for those doing a residential MEd course in Manchester) attended. The first three days were run by Charles Alderson and were devoted to reviewing the outcomes of the piloting in April, the interpretation of statistical data gathered from this pilot and the analysis of the results of the student questionnaire. Participants received an intensive training in basic statistics.

The rest of the course was run by Nick Kenny from UCLES. He gave a presentation of UCLES policies and procedures in relation to materials production. Sessions were devoted to in-depth discussions of the testing of the four skills and Use of English. As part of their preparation for the course, the participants had been asked to produce tasks: they had been given texts photocopied from UCLES handbooks but the accompanying tasks had not been distributed. Item writers had been asked to construct tasks around those texts, without knowing the source of the texts. At the workshop they compared their tasks with those in the handbooks and item-writing issues arising from this exercise were discussed.

The rest of the summer of 1999 was spent by the Year 12 team members giving formative feedback to every item writer on every task (approximately 200 tasks had been submitted). This was an enormous task and the work the team members did was very impressive.

Autumn and winter 1999 were spent by the Year 12 team members revising and translating the project documents into Hungarian; the Detailed Requirements, the Guidelines for Item Writers and the so called 'zero' version of the Hungarian Specifications as it had been decided by OKI that all documents should exist in Hungarian only.

In September 1999 the first ever Project 'management' meeting was held in OKI Budapest, with the participation of the leader of school-leaving examinations teams, the leaders of the English and German Year 12 teams, the BC project adviser and the BC project manager. Although OKI was still uncertain about the future of the institution, they wanted to continue with the Project and they confirmed that they expected future contributions from the Council in training events, materials and item writing. They expressed their concern again regarding joint work with Szeged and said that OKI Budapest was keen to work independently from Szeged.

The second pilot of the 'Exams Awareness Teacher Training Course' was held in Debrecen in October-November 1999 and was run by a local teacher trainer Kissné Gulyás Judit and Együd J. Györgyi and Gál Ildikó. The feedback from the participants was very good and they all thought the course was extremely useful (see Chapter 18).

In addition to direct contributions to the work of the English examination reform, the Council also organised **a study trip for six senior Ministry officials** in September 1999 to UK examination boards. They visited the Scottish Qualifications Authority in Dalkeith, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in London, the Associated Examining Board in Guildford and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. They heard how test Specifications are developed, how items are commissioned, edited, pre-tested and revised, and how test papers are compiled. They gathered information about how a modern examination centre is run, including the logistics of printing, delivering, administering, collecting and arranging for the marking of the test papers, as well as the issuing of valid certificates. They were interested to learn how external raters are used to guarantee national standards, and how they are trained and monitored.

UK-based training of the new Year 12 team members took place in UCLES, Cambridge in January 2000, with the exception of the team leader, who was not able to attend. Instead, the leader of the English University Entrance Examination Team attended. The main aim of the visit was to draw up scales for writing and speaking with the help of UCLES specialists in the respective skills. The scales have since been translated into Hungarian (see Chapters 6, 10 and 11).

The BC commissioned item writers in January and February to write new Speaking and Writing tasks in preparation for a second OKI pilot in April 2000.

It was crucially important not only for the Project but for any future work in examinations reform that standards be set, therefore a **standard setting exercise** was designed and managed by Charles Alderson in January-February 2000 (see Chapter 16). This meant that student performances, and the test tasks themselves, were compared to the levels of the Council of Europe Common European Framework of reference. The team has also developed procedures that can be used in future standard-setting exercises, to help determine the levels of test tasks and ensure that they meet Council of Europe standards.

The third item-writer training was held in March 2000. Participants were required to produce formative feedback on the writing and speaking tasks that had been submitted before the workshop. The intention was for item writers to face the difficulty and challenge of giving useful feedback to item writers. Those item writers present had the opportunity to learn about the editing process, to see the items and the problems with the items through the eyes of an editor. After this workshop, item writers were then given 10 days to revise their items in the light of the formative feedback, and to submit them to the Editing Committee. The Editing Committee decided which items should be rejected, and which could be used, with or without revisions. Those items selected were then sent to UCLES for an external professional review, and very helpful feedback was received, which was taken into account in the final preparation of the items for piloting in April/ May 2000.

The piloting of new Writing and Speaking tasks was carried out in April / May in secondary schools in Budapest and Szeged. The Speaking performances were videoed, and will be assessed, together with the Writing performances, at a July training workshop, to be held in Visegrad. UCLES specialists on Writing and Speaking will run the workshop, together with the Project Adviser. The main aim of the workshop is for Project members to experience professional procedures for the standardisation of markers of productive tests, to apply and revise the marking scales, as well as the piloted tasks, and for the Project to begin to develop appropriate training procedures for markers of Writing and Speaking.

Personal reflections on the Project

It has been very exciting to be able to manage or coordinate the Project on behalf of the Council. My perspective is unique in the sense that I myself worked for OKI for over 13 years and was responsible for teaching English at both primary and secondary levels. My work involved curriculum and textbook development, in-service training, school examinations, writing all exam papers for the English exam, coordinating the work of county language advisers. Later, still within OKI, I was involved in the CITO Project until 1995. I gained first-hand experience in test construction, in working with people in the Hungarian context, I had a broad overview of the Hungarian educational system, teachers' needs and views. During the CITO research project I also gathered first-hand experience in working with an internationally acknowledged examinations centre. Soon after I joined the Council, I started work on putting a project together, which I thought would serve the interests of the country, the Hungarian institutions and partners, the teachers and the students, as well as of the Council. The last three and a half years have been rather mixed: there were moments of high enthusiasm, optimism and great satisfaction after a successful workshop or after certain jobs had been done properly, and there were moments of great despair, sadness over bad communication, misinterpretations and misunderstandings, pessimism over an inability to reconcile different interests and personal agendas. A lot of time has been spent on liaising with people, trying to ease tension, to keep people on board, trying to understand the agendas. It has been very difficult to cope with attempts to undermine the project. Those people who have been involved in the project from the beginning, from late 1996 or early 1997, have found it extremely frustrating to see some individuals enjoying many benefits of the Project (for example, training in testing and project management) and then turning against the Project. Uncertainties about the future of Hungarian institutions and their structure and responsibilities, and uncertainties about the future roles of their staff have also been rather demoralising and destructive.

Other countries, like the Baltic States, have had similar problems, but despite all the hardships, they managed to introduce their new exams on schedule three years ago. Their foreign language exams are up-to-date, they follow good testing practice and reflect good teaching practice and they are reliable and valid. Colleagues in the Baltics have managed to introduce central marking with trained markers and assessors (still a big question in Hungary) and managed to ensure that the exam covers a wide range of student proficiency (another important unresolved issue in Hungary, as the whole school-leaving population is defined as 'Intermediate' at present).

We continue to make efforts and proceed with professionalising the new exam, because we still think it is worth taking the trouble, in the hope that Hungary will have a fair, valid and reliable School-leaving exam, which will have value in the outside world, in the hope that professional matters will be handled professionally.

I am convinced that despite all hardships, the Project has produced up-to-date, professionally developed documents, and has created a large group of professionals who understand the principles of language testing and are capable of the further work which the Project needs so much. Despite numerous problems, the commitment of the vast majority of those with whom I have worked is enormously impressive, and this alone makes the effort worthwhile.