

Responding to the CEFR Alignment Handbook: Sharing experience of alignment activities and reflecting on lessons learned

In February 2020, a conference entitled “The CEFR: Towards a Road Map for Future Research and Development”, co-sponsored by EALTA, UKALTA and the British Council, was hosted by the British Council in London (O’Dwyer, Hunke & Schmidt 2020, Little & Figueras 2022).

Participants in the conference agreed on the need for a new handbook to support the alignment of language education with the CEFR and its Companion Volume. Accordingly, the three organizations behind the conference together with ALTE developed [Aligning Language Education with the CEFR: a Handbook](#), publishing it online in April 2022 (Figueras, Little & O’Sullivan 2022). In the expectation that the *Handbook* would generate new interest in CEFR alignment practices, the editors stated in their foreword that they planned to organize a conference in 2024 to give language education professionals an opportunity to share their alignment projects and reflect on the usefulness of the *Handbook*.

The conference was held on 18 and 19 October 2024 at Blanquerna – Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona. It was hosted by Cristina Corcoll and her colleagues in the GREDA research group at Blanquerna and organized by the *Handbook* steering group (Neus Figueras, David Little, Barry O’Sullivan, Nick Saville, Lynda Taylor). Notwithstanding the travel restrictions imposed by many academic institutions and the political situation in Europe and beyond, the conference attracted more than 120 participants from 24 countries and four continents. The programme comprised six plenary sessions, 35 presentations and eight posters. The presentations included case studies from China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ireland, Japan, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia and Italy. Presenters’ PowerPoint slides are available [here](#).

In the opening plenary, David Little and Constant Leung set the scene in a conversation that addressed the CEFR’s foundations and the challenges that the CEFR and CEFR CV present. David Little drew attention to the CEFR’s double inheritance – the language user/learner as autonomous social agent and the scaled description of L2 proficiency designed to facilitate cooperation among Council of Europe member states. He argued that this double inheritance implies two possible approaches to alignment, one that starts from the learner as plurilingual social agent and one that starts from communicative language activities and competences, levels of proficiency and scales. Constant Leung focused on relevant research in related fields – community interpreting, medical and professional communication, interactional competence, scenario-based assessment – which suggests that there is a good educational and intellectual case for the cohabitation of the two orientations identified by David Little.

Of the remaining five plenary sessions, three addressed CEFR alignment from the perspectives of the publishing industry, artificial intelligence and different educational contexts and systems, and two were used for general discussion and feedback at the end of each day. The plenary at the end of the first day presented participants with the following list of topics covered and issues raised:

- The history of the CEFR, its legacy and its evolution
- The emerging/evolving nature of the construct/s of language & communication
- The value of cross-disciplinary engagement
- The need for adaptation, customization, tailoring of the CEFR
- The critical importance of ‘context’

- The importance of shared understanding, language and discourse
- The CEFR - & CEFR alignment - as an instrument for social justice

The plenary at the end of the second day considered these three issues:

- The role that technology might play in the near future
- How context shapes alignment processes and CEFR uses in Europe and beyond
- Dissemination initiatives reinforcing collaboration

In the course of the conference it became clear that the *Handbook* provides useful guidance but also that it needs to be more widely disseminated. The notes made by the session chairs, the reactions from participants to the presentations, and the contributions from the audience in the plenary sessions indicated that further work on the *Handbook* should include reflection on changing linguistic and cultural topographies, additional “navigational” advice on how to get from A to B, and alternative alignment methods, modes and tools (online, digital, corpora, AI, etc). There was general agreement on the importance of maintaining terminological coherence across languages. The *Handbook* has been translated into Spanish by the Cervantes Insitute and German by the Goethe Institute; Greek and Arabic translations are in progress.

Drawing on the rich body of work shared at the conference, the steering group plans to revise the *Handbook*, adding scenarios, case studies and practical resources. It hopes to be in a position to share details of this work before the end of 2025.

References

- Figueras, N., Little, D & O’Sullivan, B. (2022) Aligning Language Education with the CEFR: A Handbook. *CEFR Journal* 5: 5–10.
- Little, D. & Figueras, N. (eds.) (2022) *Reflecting on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its Companion Volume*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- O’Dwyer, F, Hunke, M & Schmidt, M. G. (2020) The EALTA UKALTA “Roadmap” conference – The CEFR: a road map for future research and development – meeting overview. *CEFR Journal* 2: 89–97.