

Asset Languages – A multilingual proficiency framework that supports learning

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Asset Languages is the system being developed by Cambridge Assessment to implement the Languages Ladder, “a new voluntary recognition system to complement existing national qualifications frameworks and the Common European Framework” which is a major element of the UK’s National Languages Strategy. Asset sets out to accredit functional language proficiency within a can do framework. It is comprehensive, including at least 26 languages: those most commonly learned as “modern foreign languages”, and those spoken by particular communities in the UK. It targets three contexts (Primary, Secondary, Adult), with skills assessed separately. It offers two assessment strands: external assessment at six major stages, and more informally accredited teacher assessment at 17 finer grades.

The challenges of developing this complex framework are not merely technical or logistical: they concern how to design tests and interpretations which enable valid and useful comparison across such widely differing languages and learner groups, and above all how to do this in a way which impacts positively on learning. This leads us to look critically at the framework metaphor in general, and at the Common European Framework in particular; and to propose some conceptual clarification and practical methods for framework construction.