

Sir Vernon Ellis

Opening address

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I'm delighted to welcome you to the ninth Annual EFNIL Conference which is this year hosted in partnership with the British Council.

You have come to our little island from all parts of Europe. From Iceland to Cyprus, from Finland to Malta, and together we represent the national language institutes of over 20 European countries.

The British Council is the UK's principal cultural relations organisation. We were established in 1934 to promote cooperation and trust between the UK and other countries and undertake to achieve this through our work in the arts, education and society *and*, by promoting and teaching the English language.

The global demand for English is growing rapidly. By 2015 it is estimated that there will be two billion learners of English, more than double the number nearly twelve years ago.

This year the British Council directly taught English to 294,000 learners in 80 centres in 49 countries all over the world.

Beyond the borders of the EU, but still in Europe, young countries are still trying to connect with the rest of the world, and this is also driving the current demand for English to which we are responding.

But we do not see ourselves competing with other European languages. Far from it, we actually collaborate with our European partners, often under the EUNIC banner. An example of this is the shared British Council/Goethe-Institut operation in Kyiv, where we are teaching English and German side by side.

The large-scale 'Language Rich Europe' multilingualism research and networking project is co-funded by the EU, the British Council and the Goethe-Institut and early next year moves into results publication and country-by-country launches.

We are keen to do more work like this with partners across the region, and with the UK constituency.

Our key objectives in Europe are in support of the development of effective language policies with the adequate provision of resources and positive attitudes to language learning. We will increase our support to the training and professional development of teachers of English and will provide quality learning opportunities and materials for students of English through our teaching centres and through digital and print media.

At the heart of good international relations is communication, and the first step to understanding each other is finding a common tongue. This may be a shared interest in art or music but, more fundamentally, it is about learning each other's languages.

The British Council and the Oxford English Dictionary are proud to continue to be the official UK delegates to EFNIL.

I congratulate EFNIL President, Dr Gerhard Stickel and his committee and wish the conference every success in its proceedings and deliberations.