NETPhon: Network for Education and Training in Phonetics

Final Report to DfEE

January 1996

Jill House, Coordinator
University College London

NETPhon is a Higher Education Discipline Network supported by the Department for Education and Employment and coordinated at University College London.

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1. Background

1.1 The ED/DfEE initiative

In the summer of 1994, the Employment Department (ED) (now part of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)), invited bids from Higher Education Institutions to establish a number of "Higher Education Discipline Networks". Contracts were to be for one calendar year, and funded at a fixed level of £15,000 per network. In the event, out of some 70 bids received, 24 such networks were selected for funding, including the Network for Education and Training in Phonetics (NETPhon), coordinated at University College London. This particular contract ran from 1 January - 31 December 1995.

The ED's agenda in Higher Education was "to ensure that graduates (at all levels) are able to make the maximum contribution to the economy and workforce" [1]. Its aim in funding Discipline Networks was "to help academic staff within a given discipline to undertake dissemination and curriculum development activities which would help HE institutions to increase the employability of graduates" [2]. They were thus designed to complement and extend the work of the institution-based Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) programme. The ED/DfEE philosophy is reflected in NETPhon's aims and objectives.

This report summarises and evaluates the activities and achievements of the phonetics network at the end of its foundation year, during which it has received contractual support from DfEE.

1.2 Defining the discipline: NETPhon's scope

1.2.1 The discipline

The discipline of phonetics involves a range of practical skills and a considerable and growing body of theoretical knowledge. A study of phonetics is an essential component of a qualification in speech communication, speech technology or linguistics, as well as playing a major role in all the multi-disciplinary degree courses leading to the Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) qualification.

At the outset, it was decided to direct the network towards phonetics for SLT,

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[1] Stephen McNair, *Discipline Networks: a first report*, June 1995

[2] Stephen McNair, *Discipline Networks in Higher Education: an interim evaluation*, August 1995

since the clear professional orientation allowed us to tackle learning issues and liaise with employers in a focussed way. Although this focus seemed relatively narrow by comparison with many other disciplines, in reality our interests overlap with a) phonetics teaching more generally; and b) other disciplines (e.g. linguistics, psychology) involved in the SLT qualification. In the longer term, we have always envisaged expanding our network into these related areas.

1.2.2 NETPhon membership

Core membership of the network currently consists of a consortium of higher education departments engaged in teaching theoretical and practical phonetics to students of speech and language pathology and therapy (SLT); employers are also represented on the Steering Committee by practising therapists, including a speech therapy manager, and by the Academic Officer of the professional body, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists; student representatives also serve on the Committee. Full details of the Steering Committee are given in Appendix A. Some 16 HE institutions, including one which started during 1995, are now involved in SLT training in the UK (Appendix B). Phonetics constitutes an important and obligatory component of all qualifying courses. Some of the departments represented are dedicated to SLT training; others have a broader base, teaching phonetics to students following a variety of other, non-clinical, undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

This core membership has never been seen as exclusive: we have, in fact, welcomed non-SLT phoneticians as participants in our activities, and have deliberately included phoneticians working in non-SLT fields in our mailing and electronic lists. We have exploited links with existing professional or research associations, such as the British Association of Academic Phoneticians (BAAP), and the International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association (ICPLA); international links have been established with the ERASMUS network in Phonetics and Speech Communication.

2. Aims, objectives and methodology

2.1 Aims

NETPhon's aims are:

- to encourage the development of good practice in the teaching and assessment of phonetics, specifically in the context of speech and language therapy (SLT);
- to foster the collaborative development of innovative teaching methods and materials;
- to promote closer links between the academic and professional worlds.

2.2 Objectives

In support of these long-term aims, our objectives for 1995 were:

- to provide a forum for discussion and curriculum development within the discipline;
- to encourage active participation in consortium activities by all eligible individuals;
- to provide a formal means for disseminating information, and developing and sharing materials among consortium members;
- to report on current practice in the teaching and assessment of phonetics at member institutions;
- to share and critically evaluate our experiences of both traditional and innovative teaching and assessment methods, and to promote **Enterprise** initiatives;
- to reach some consensus on what constitutes good practice in the teaching, learning and assessment of phonetics for SLT.

2.3 Methodology

In order to fulfil our objectives, we undertook the following activities in our 1995 programme:

- we established a Steering Committee to take responsibility for the running of the network;
- we set up an information network: an electronic mailing list, which also acts as a forum for discussion, supplemented by a traditional mailing list;
- we organised four workshops, each with a specific and well-defined brief;
- we conducted a survey of current practice among member institutions;
- we set up a working party to coordinate cross-institution collaboration in the collection and development of teaching materials, and to investigate how they may be most effectively shared;
- we set up a further working party to address issues of good practice, and to draw up a set of guidelines.
- we distributed questionnaires among consortium participants, to identify priority areas for the network's attention, and to evaluate the progress and usefulness of the network during its first year.

3. Summary report on 1995 activities

The first Steering Committee meeting was held on 10 January 1995.

3.1 Electronic list

The electronic list -- phonet@mailbase.ac.uk -- was set up early in the year, with initial membership compiled from e-mail addresses of members of BAAP, ICPLA etc. It deals specifically with phonetic issues, unlike other current lists. The number of subscribers is currently 161, a net increase of around 30 over the year. The list has been used both for disseminating information about NETPhon activities, and for generating discussion on specific topics. For dissemination purposes, there is a supplementary mailing list of around 84 named individuals. It was the intention to ensure that all SLT training sites were adequately covered,

together with the RCSLT, plus individual therapists and students who expressed an interest. Many non-SLT phoneticians are included via the electronic list.

Inevitably, electronic coverage has concentrated on the academic community; it will be some years yet before speech therapy clinics are networked as a matter of course, though we look forward to RCSLT coming on line in the near future. Most academic phoneticians do now have access to the electronic network, though for some this is patchy and unreliable. However, this type of facility is increasingly being taken for granted, as is access to the World Wide Web, and NETPhon will continue to exploit it.

As a means of disseminating information, the *phonet* list has been cheap and efficient, bearing in mind current coverage limitations. As a discussion forum, in common with many lists of this type, activity has fluctuated, periods of inactivity alternating with bursts of lively discussion on particular topics. Continued experience with this and other lists will guide future decisions about whether the list should be more actively moderated.

3.2 Survey of current practice

Based on a questionnaire distributed to all 16 UK HEIs involved in SLT education and training, this survey provided a revealing picture of the place of phonetics in courses leading to SLT qualification. It showed large discrepancies between institutions with regard to staffing and other resources, and also in respect of hours allocated to phonetics teaching. In interpreting the results, it is important to note that the boundaries of the discipline may have been differently set by different respondents: more "peripheral" aspects may have been classified (say) as linguistics, psychology, physiology or speech pathology.. However, there was wide variation in resources even in indisputably "core" components such as practical phonetics, where there was a strong feeling that small-group teaching was highly desirable, and that even highly structured self-learning materials cannot entirely replace traditional teaching methods.

The survey is reported separately: *Report on NETPhon questionnaire: current practice in phonetics teaching for speech and language therapy*, by Janet Mackenzie Beck (QMC, Edinburgh).

3.3 Workshop 1: Curriculum

This was held at UCL on 26 April, 1995. It attracted an attendance of over 30, including therapists and therapy managers, students and non-SLT phoneticians, as well as academics from the core HEI membership.

The meeting covered two main questions:

1) What sorts of programme of study are currently in place, and how do institutions differ in their offerings?
2) What programme of study is most useful for practising speech and language

therapists?

In response to the first question, we heard about the system followed by University College, London (presenters Evelyn Abberton, Valerie Hazan, and Ginny Wilson), looked at the variety of programmes elicited by a NETphon questionnaire (Janet Beck), and critically reviewed a possible coursein phonetics as oulined in Wells and Colson's book Practical Phonetics (Linda Shockey). We also heard about an initiative to list and describe all phonetics study in Europe, from which has come a book, *European Studies in Phonetics and Speech Communication*, edited by Bloothooft el al, (presented by Val Hazan).

On the practical side, we heard what managers are looking for in the way of phonetic skills for speech therapy (Joe Reynolds) and got a glimpse at what it is like to use these phonetic skills in the field from a practising therapist (Sue Pethers). Two major things became obvious from these last two presentations:

a) Therapists feel insecure about their grasp of phonetics because they equate phonetic knowledge with having mastery of all symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. They don't take into account that they use their phonetic knowledge daily for evaluation of articulation problems, in conjunction with their knowlege about other aspects of language and communication. From this, we took the message that phonetic skills are not tied to a particular transcription system and should not be made to seem to have this indissoluble bond. We also noted that phonetic skills are not exercised independently of other skills, and thought perhaps more integration in teaching methods might be called for.
b) Many practising therapists feel the need to "touch base" about their phonetic knowledge from time to time, and we should therefore offer refresher courses and self-study courses designed to give them easy access to the information they need.

The workshop is reported separately in: *Report on Workshop 1: The Curriculum*, by Linda Shockey (Reading), Workshop Convenor.

3.4 Workshop 2: Teaching and assessment methods

This was held at UCL on 27 April, 1995. It attracted a similar attendance to workshop 1, with a similar mix. There was an overlap of around 20 between the two workshops.

A challenging presentation on innovations in teaching and learning by a speaker from UCL's Academic Enterprise Unit (Myszka Guzkowska) stimulated a lively question-and-answer session at the beginning of the day. The value of fostering independent and experiential learning, and of using problem-solving techniques, was made clear to us all, and methods of achieving this "deep learning" with limited resources were discussed. Subsequent presentations in the morning included illustrations of innovative approaches currently in use: a problem-based

approach to clinical practical phonetics (Sara Howard, Sheffield); a confidence-building approach to teaching and assessing listening skills in practical phonetics (Michael Ashby, John Maidment and Evelyn Abberton, UCL); and a clinically integrated assessment procedure for children's vowel systems (Sally Bates, Edinburgh, and Jocelynne Watson, QMC).

In the afternoon, further presentations by SLT academics included one from UCL (Ginny Wilson and Mark Huckvale) on their course in acoustic phonetics, which highlighted the importance of integrating theory with laboratory work and of encouraging students to become increasingly independent in their learning; Martin Duckworth (Plymouth) and Helen Pandeli (Cardiff) showed how practical skills, understanding and confidence could all be developed over time in a carefully structured, case-orientated course; Janet Beck (QMW) presnted further findings from the survey of current practice (3.2), and discussed ways of overcoming the "fear of phonetics", and of integrating phonetic knowledge across the curriculum; a further presentation on acoustic phonetics (Allen Hirson, City) again stressed the importance of integration across disciplines. The use of audio-visual material and/or laboratory equipment featured strongly in several presentations. The value of developing tools for independent learning was ably demonstrated by Don Friend (St Andrews), who works outside the SLT field but has developed an interactive computer package for learning the English Phonemic Alphabet; it was clear that packages of this type could be readily adapted to SLT purposes.

Issues of motivation, self directed learning, experiential learning and learning which aimed to develop a real understanding of phonetic principles were the focus - directly or indirectly - of all of the day's presentations, and demonstrated that as an academic community we were very much in sympathy with the Enterprise educational philosophy outlined in the first talk, and enthusiastic about innovations which could enrich our teaching.

The workshop is reported separately in: *Report on Workshop 2: Teaching and assessment methods*, by Martin Duckworth (College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth), Workshop Convenor.

Recent rapid advances in technology, particularly in the domain of acoustic phonetics, have led to the development of important new tools for teaching, research and clinical practice. During both workshops 1 and 2, there was the opportunity to attend demonstrations of a variety of computer-based teaching and learning packages, including "hands-on" experience. NETPhon has recognised that it is crucial for the discipline to keep up to date with developments (3.5).

The second Steering Committee meeting was held after the second workshop.

3.5 Working party on Teaching Materials, and Workshop 3: Materials

The 3rd NETPhon workshop took place in Newcastle upon Tyne on 13 September 1995. There were around 20 participants, many of whom were involved in teaching

phonetics for SLT, but also including non-SLT phonetics teachers and students. The workshop was organised by the NETPhon Teaching Materials Working Party; the primary aim of the day was to report on the activities of the working party, and allow the presentation of materials which have been successfully used in the field. An additional focus to the programme was a talk from Stephen McNair (NIACE adviser to DfEE) about the Department's agenda and the prospects for future network funding.

3.5.1 Materials

Gerry Docherty (Newcastle), on behalf of the Teaching Materials Working Party presented an account of the activities of that group, whose aims have been to collate information on the nature and availability of materials designed for teaching phonetics (broadly defined); to enable as far as possible the wide dissemination of this information among the phonetics teaching community; and to promote collaborative development of materials to meet perceived needs. He described the findings of an internationally-distributed questionnaire, which encouragingly indicated widespread willingness to share materials at minimal cost. It also highlighted significant gaps in teaching materials provision, particularly in relation to clinical speech, prosody, and regional or "non-standard" varieties of English. The information collated is primarily to be disseminated via the World Wide Web NETPhon site: *http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/netphon/*, supplemented by postal distribution of hard copies to sites without WWW access. As a first collaborative effort, it was agreed that the working party would organise the copying and distribution of a limited amount of pre-existing material, and coordinate, before the end of the NETPhon contract, a collaborative scheme for generating and distributing new material on regional varieties of English.

Demonstrations of state-of-the-art computer-based systems included a presentation of the Laryngograph PCLX system (Adrian Fourcin, UCL), the Dr Speech Science system (Colin Watson, Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh), and adaptations to the Kay Elemetrics CSL system (Martin Ball, Ulster). All served to emphasise the valuable possibilities of multi-media technology.

An afternoon discussion session focussed on ethical issues pertaining to obtaining clinical data from recipients of speech and language therapy with a view to using it for teaching purposes. No clear guidelines exist, and it was agreed that a further investigation of this area would be a valuable future activity for NETPhon.

3.5.2 NIACE presentation

The presentation from Stephen McNair, NIACE's HE Advisor to the Department for Education and Employment, was followed by a lively discussion. The speaker focussed firstly on changes in the graduate labour market which had motivated the DfEE's network initiative, and the Enterprise philosophy underlying it; secondly, since bids for continued funding were imminently due, he suggested a set of criteria against which applications would be judged. Primary criteria for continued funding were:

- is the network achieving its declared objectives?

- is it addressing graduate employability [3]?
- can it become self-sustaining?
- is a proper evaluation process in place?

Although it was unlikely that all existing networks would receive continued funding, he implied that all were in with a chance and that success would depend on the quality of the bid.

The workshop is reported separately in: *Report on Workshop 3: Materials*, by Gerry Docherty (Newcastle), Workshop Convenor.

3.5.3 Collaborative project

Since the workshop, all SLT sites have been circulated with a request for recordings of specified accents of English to be made, following a detailed protocol. At the time of writing, 8 sites have already complied with this request. A master tape will be compiled at UCL and distributed to all sites. An existing video-based teaching package prepared by Martin Duckworth (College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth) has also been copied for distribution.

3.6 Working Party on Guidelines, and Workshop 4: Plenary

Workshop 4: Plenary was held on Thursday 14 September in Newcastle upon Tyne, and convened by Evelyn Abberton (UCL). It again attracted an attendance of around 20, partly overlapping with workshop 3, and including a representative from RCSLT. The workshop had three main strands: (i) to consolidate and evaluate progress to date; (ii) to discuss the preliminary results of the Working Party on Guidelines for Good Practice; (iii) to consider plans for the future. The third Steering Committee meeting was held after the workshop.

In the morning session, convenors of workshops 1-3 gave summary reports of their respective workshops, and there was useful discussion of what they had achieved and the issues raised.

The afternoon session began with the discussion on Guidelines for Good Practice, led by Janet Beck (QMC) on behalf of the working party. Such guidelines are of particular interest to RCSLT, the professional body responsible for accreditation of SLT training courses. Issues relating to staffing, curriculum and resources were discussed in detail. The points raised during these discussions informed the compilation of a set of draft guidelines, which were subsequently circulated for comment over *phonet*; further comments and suggestions have led to the revised

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[3] In September 1995, a report by Diane Bebbington was published describing the career patterns of SLT graduates 1983-1989. Entitled *Recruitment, Retention and Returners*, it presents the findings of a research project initiated by RCSLT and funded by the NHS Women's Unit. It shows that of 1989 graduates, 89% were currently employed in therapy, compared with 76% of 1983 graduates; some 13% of this cohort were now in other paid employment.

guidelines included in a separate report: *NETPhon: Guidelines for Good Practice in the Teaching of Phonetics within the Education of Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs)*, prepared by Janet Beck, under the following headings:

1. Aims of phonetics teaching within the education of Speech and Language Therapists
2. Teaching Staff (including qualifications and complement)
3. Curriculum (presented at this stage as a preliminary discussion document)
4. Teaching methods
5. Integration
6. Assessment

The implications for both Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes are considered.

The final workshop session consisted of a discussion led by Jill House (UCL) on plans for the future. There was unanimous support among participants for continued NETPhon activity. and many suggestions for future activities were offered for discussion. On the basis of these discussions, the deliberations of the Steering Committee, and a preliminary analysis of evaluation questionnaires (see 4), a proposed programme of activities was subsequently drawn up and included in the application to DfEE for further funding. These proposals are presented and discussed in section 5 below.

The fourth and final Steering Committee meeting was held at UCL on 14 December 1995.

4. Internal evaluation

A questionnaire was circulated among all those who had participated at one or more of our workshops, and had thus demonstrated an active participation in NETPhon events. In the end we received 26 completed questionnaires. Since only one of these was anonymous, it was possible to establish that replies were received from representatives of at least 10 of the 16 HEIs in the UK teaching Speech & Language Therapy, and at least five other HEIs where phonetics is taught within other degree programmes. Many people had taken the trouble to provide thoughtful and constructive comments and suggestions, and we are particularly grateful for these.

Replies are summarised below. Note that totals within each question may add up to more than 26 (100%), since possible answers were not mutually exclusive.

4.1 Personal backgrounds

Table 1: personal background of respondents

teacher of phonetics: to SLT students	18
teacher of phonetics: to non-SLT students	17
student: undergraduate	1
student: postgraduate	3
practising therapist	7
other:	
teacher of speech & language processing	1
director of speech tech co.	1
speech therapy manager	1

We thus have a heavy weighting in favour of academic participants, and considerable overlap between categories. It was interesting to see that replies had come from almost as many teachers in the non-SLT field as the SLT one; closer inspection showed that 11 of these taught **both** SLT **and** non-SLT students.

4.2 Source of information

Table 2: where did you first learn about NETPhon?

phonet electronic mailing list	6
postal mail shot	6
RCSLT Bulletin	2
Other	13

The "other" category included mainly personal communication of various types.

4.3 Evaluation of workshops

Table 3: summary evaluation

event	no. of respondents attending	very useful	fairly useful	not very useful
workshop 1	17	13	4	0
workshop 2	16	14	2	0
workshop 3	14	11	3	0
workshop 4	12	6	4	0

This represents a response rate of around 55% for workshops 1 and 2, and 60-70% for 3 and 4, though attendance figures fluctuated during the workshops, as not all participants were able to stay throughout the day. All workshops were considered useful by all respondents who had attended, with perhaps greatest enthusiasm expressed for workshop 2.

Respondents were invited to specify any aspect of the workshop they found particularly useful. Their replies are summarised below:

Workshop 1: curriculum

The report on current practice, presented by Janet Beck, was most widely cited (8); it was of great interest to find out how the curriculum varied across institutions, and the different allocations of time and resources to different aspects of the curriculum.

Other positive aspects to be mentioned more than once:
• the opportunity to establish contacts;
• discussion of a "core" curriculum;
• the employers' and practising therapists' perspective
• the general discussion.

Workshop 2: teaching and assessment methods

Comments were many and diverse. Respondents were generally enthusiastic about the opportunity to share ideas about teaching, to learn about innovative teaching ideas, and to come away with positive ideas for improving their own practice (5).

Of the individual presentations, that by Ashby, Maidment and Abberton on "Analytic Listening" was most frequently commended (4).

Other positive aspects mentioned more than once:
• computer packages and demos;
• discussion of the need to integrate subject areas in SLT teaching.

Workshop 3: teaching materials working party report

Issues most frequently mentioned included:
• the project to establish a database/pool of materials (including regional data) (5);
• discussion of ethical issues (4).

Other positive aspects mentioned more than once:
• demos;
• survey of existing materials;
• address by Stephen McNair.

Workshop 4: plenary/guidelines for good practice

- The reviews of other sessions;
- discussions on guidelines;
- discussions on future developments

were all cited more than once.

4.4 Reasons for NOT attending workshops (where applicable)

Table 4: reasons for not attending

it was of less interest/relevance	2
pressure of work	14
date clashed with another event	3
couldn't afford it	0
other (including "didn't know about it")	2

Unsurprisingly, pressure of work was a major factor. It was gratifying to see low or null responses in the other categories.

4.5 Funding arrangements in the future

Table 5: position regarding future funding needs

could find expenses elsewhere	10
could afford registration fee of c. £20	11
totally dependent on NETPhon funding	5

It was encouraging to see that only a few respondents felt they would be totally dependent on NETPhon funding. However, they were a significant enough minority for it to be clear that it will be important to find funds to support such participants -- particularly as they included the student respondents. Several of those who said they COULD find alternative funding qualified this with a "probably", or pointed out that it would be at the expense of other meetings and conferences.

4.6 Collaboration in developing teaching materials

Table 6: collaboration intentions

willing and able: new material	14
willing and able: existing material	12
interested in buying results (nominal charge)	19

The positive response here was particularly encouraging (though several of the good intentions were qualified by "in principle"). There is clearly plenty of good will to be exploited.

4.7 Future plans

Table 7.1: scope of network

scope	highly desirable	desirable	undesirable /unimportant
same as now: phonetics for SLT	13	3	3
widen to include linguistics for SLT	9	9	5
widen to include non-SLT phonetics	9	9	4
other: include phonology non-SLT linguistics	 1 1		

Respondents did not necessarily rank the options in order, but sometimes gave them equal rank.

Opinions were very split.

• Those who wanted to preserve the status quo valued the clear focus that this gave to the network.

• An advantage of including linguistics for SLT would be the opportunity to develop integrated, problem-solving teaching methods which would develop skills which are vital to SLT practitioners as well as being highly transferable. It would retain the SLT professional focus, while increasing penetration among teaching staff, and could ultimately involve the other disciplines (psychology, speech pathology etc) involved in SLT education.

• An advantage of expanding into non-SLT phonetics would be the increased penetration among HE institutions. It would thus disseminate innovative ideas more widely. The employer base would have to be correspondingly widened. In the short term there might be a loss of focus.

Table 7.2: future activities

activity	highly desirable	desirable	undesirable/ unimportant
informal workshops	21	5	0
formal conference	2	10	10
on-going collaboration over materials	21	5	0
handbook	12	9	3
regular newsletter	7	13	4
in-service training/ clinical support	15	7	1

• Informal workshops and continued collaboration in developing teaching materials were both considered highly desirable.

• There was some enthusiasm for providing in-service clinical support as a NETPhon activity, and for producing a handbook.

• There was muted enthusiasm for a newsletter, and some distinct lack of support for a formal conference.

4.8 Suggestions for topics to be addressed at future workshops

The list of suggestions from respondents was long and varied; all are recorded in summary form below. There is some overlap with topics raised under section 9, where again, all are included since they represent a useful pool of ideas.

• the teaching/learning of prosody and voice
• the teaching/learning of phonology
• integration of phonetics and linguistics in a problem-solving framework
• development of a core curriculum
• curricular needs of SLT vs non-SLT phonetics
• development of self-learning tools
• assessment of student transcriptions of real clinical speech
• developing appropriate, problem-solving, non-exam-based assessment methods
• study of transferable skills within phonetics and linguistics
• bridging the gap between academic curricular demands and reality of clinical practice
• developing protocols for non-therapist phoneticians to get access to patients
• developing the concept of "clinical phoneticians" (advisers), and how to

incorporate into career structure
• more on new teaching materials
• overview of structure of wider discipline and how taught.

Under this heading, too, though not specific topics, the following suggestions were made:

• widening links outside UK
• more input from practisng therapists
• more input from students.

4.9 Other suggestions for future activities

• investigate teaching methods in the wider discipline (beyond SLT)
• study of role of self-study methods: how far can you realistically go?
• open out discussion on *phonet* to include phonology
• select a topic and collect together existing materials from all sites
• assemble a set of good pathological data that can be pooled
• assemble video library of clinical cases
• survey of opinions of practitioners and educators
• clarify a "standard" versus "clinical" curriculum
• investigate the possibility of clinical advisers to SLTs, who are specialist phoneticians/linguists/speech scientists
• establish a separate linguistics network
• establish a London regional network
• address employment issues **either** by widening scope to include other SLT disciplines, **or** to include phonetics and linguistics generally.

The wealth of ideas listed in sections 8 and 9 above suggests that the network framework is seen as fulfilling a very real need. All the suggestions require discipline-wide cooperation, and input from graduates, practitioners, employers and current students is widely welcomed. Despite differences of opinion as to what the scope of the network(s) ought to be, responses reflect a general enthusiasm to be questioning current practice, and a willingness to modify it to meet the changing needs of employers and the skills needs of students. There is very little complacency.

5. Future Plans

The programme proposed in our application to DfEE for continued funding is reproduced below. It assumes a level of funding comparable to that received for

1995. Since the application was unsuccessful [4], we shall in the short term have to scale down or postpone some of the planned activities, but it is a programme which with the help of alternative funding (see below) we would still support.

It assumes that NETPhon will continue on a similar basis, with the same core HEI membership, similar aims and objectives, and the SLT focus. However, a further aim was to expand the network by explicitly including the linguistics component in these SLT courses. Following the arguments in 4.7 above, it was seen as a way both of consolidating the work of the existing network and of encouraging an integrated, problem-solving approach to teaching within degree courses with well-defined clinical objectives. We would expect considerable interest from non-SLT linguists, just as we have in 1995 attracted many non-SLT phoneticians. By demonstrating the value of what we were doing within SLT we could expect to generate wider interest amongst phoneticians and linguists generally, and in the longer term expand the network accordingly. The Steering Committee felt that at the level of funding offered, a more limited expansion was the soundest option at this stage.

The proposed 1996 programme was as follows:

5.1 Workshops

Workshop A: Learning through problem-solving

One day, April 1996

As a technique for learning, problem-solving develops skills of observation and analysis, the ability to identify relevant questions, and to integrate knowledge from different sources, including different strands of the curriculum. We envisage a format in which groups of participants work together to "solve" a pre-determined problem, defined over some aspect of spoken language. This direct experience will give academic participants an insight into how best to incorporate the technique into their own teaching. The tasks will be set by colleagues who are experienced in using the technique; we would also be interested in inviting a speaker from another discipline network which has addressed this problem.

Outcomes: We hope to attract a wide variety of participants, particularly inviting linguistics colleagues, but also welcoming students and qualified therapists. *(Report)*

Workshop B: Assessment

One day, September 1996

Most courses use a wide variety of assessment methods, but there is widespread feeling that there is "too much of it", especially within modular course structures. This workshop will address the issue of how to ensure that our assessments are effective and appropriate, and consider how core personal skills may be incorporated into assessment. Besides pooling information about current practice

[4]We are actively pursuing alternative funding, including a new HEFCE initiative for discipline networks, and the possibility of involvement in a much larger international network under the EU Socrates programme.

collected through the network (see 5.3), we would draw attention to the findings of the Atkins report, and aim to invite expert speakers (backgrounds in e.g. education theory, Enterprise, HEQC, other disciplines with a record of successful innovation in assessment).
Outcomes: A better awareness in the community of the issues and the range of assessment possibilities. Again, we would like to encourage a mix of phoneticians, linguists, students and therapists to attend. *(Report)*

Workshop C: Employment issues
One day, September 1996 (consecutive with workshop B)
This workshop is designed to have a largely SLT focus. It will include feedback from our study days (5.2), and from questionnaires circulated among SLT managers and post- qualifiers, inviting their perceptions of how learning procedures and materials, and in-service support may be tailored to their real world needs. Two or more speech therapy managers will be invited to speak. If possible, we would also like to hear from SLT graduates currently employed outside the profession.
Outcomes: Closer cooperation between academics and the profession; heightened awareness and understanding of employment issues and the personal transferable skills being taught. Feedback to the working party about packs for independent study. *(Report)*

5.2 Study days
Probably 4 x half-days, before August 1996, locally organised at different venues.
We would like to organise these in conjunction with Departments of Continuing Education in the home institutions. Practising therapists in a particular catchment area will be contacted and asked to identify a particular phonetics-related topic on which they would like to focus for a study day. We would see this as the first stage in setting up local networks. NETPhon would explicitly support student and post-qualifier attendance, which we would expect to be higher at local rather than national events.
Outcomes: Opportunity for increased participation from students and therapists. Establishment of sub-networks and better understanding of networking. *(Representatives to report back to workshop C (5.1)*

5.3 Working party on materials development
There will be continued collaboration over materials development, coordinated by the working party, who will also take responsibility for updating the database compiled in year 1. Specific areas for year 2 will include: (i) collecting information on current practice and materials for assessment; (ii) identifying requirements for self-study packs, and initiating and supporting collaborative development of these.
Outcomes: Further opportunities for sharing and disseminating good teaching materials. Progress in developing packs. *(Report at end of year)*

5.4 Handbook of resources
An editor will be appointed to coordinate the compilation of this and find a publisher.
Outcome: Publication *(eventual, but probably post-1996)*

6. The networking experience

The Higher Education Discipline Network initiative has fulfilled a very real need, by encouraging the formation of formal links between institutions for the discussion and dissemination of ideas relating to education and training within a particular discipline, as distinct from academic research. The initiative was especially timely, in that it coincided with a period when many member departments were undergoing, or preparing for, their teaching quality assessment. We are grateful to DfEE for the funding which gave us the opportunity to get things started and carry out the programme reported above.

6.1 Achievements

We feel we have been largely successful in meeting our objectives. The opportunity to meet together at workshops has proved stimulating, generating enthusiasm and ideas. In the future we would like to encourage greater involvement from employers and former students.

Our achievements include the following:

- We have provided a **support network** for HEI staff, many of whom work in isolated and under-resourced circumstances.
- We have **raised the consciousness** of HE staff about issues relating to curriculum, **teaching and assessment methods**.
- Representatives of the **professional body, employers, therapists, students and "enterprise" specialists** have contributed to the debate.
- Member institutions now know there is a **forum within which discussion and development of good practice can take place**.
- Having a responsibility towards other members of a group gives us the **incentive** to tackle the pedagogic issues which we all know are important, but which tend to get shelved because of competing academic pressures.
- We have laid the foundations of **something that can be built on long-term**.

We believe that the work we have started will contribute directly to the DfEE's agenda by:

- involving **employers and the professional body**;
- listening to the experiences and suggestions of **recent graduates**;
- explicitly advocating **innovations** in curriculum and teaching/assessment methods which focus on ensuring **deep learning and understanding**;
- investigating, within the working party, what already exists, and what could be collaboratively developed, in the way of self-study packs, multi-media/interactive software etc -- **learning** materials to supplement more conventional teaching methods, and to encourage independent study.

We have always envisaged 1995 as a foundation year. The network's impact must

be measured over a longer time-scale: pedagogic imnnovations need time to be developed and become established; the professional competence of graduates benefitting from such innovations will not be in evidence for some years yet.

Meanwhile, we are enjoying very positive support from RCSLT, and have aroused considerable interest in the idea of networking in the wider academic community. The multi-disciplinary nature of SLT training provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of our phonetics network and encourage academics in other disciplines to benefit from our experiences.

6.2 Network management and support

6.2.1 The network concept

In setting up the network, and in defining our own model of networking, we felt very much that we were starting from scratch, since there were few precedents to guide us. Other networks were probably in the same position. Some opportunity to share ideas about networking, right at the planning stage, would have been helpful. Negotiating the contract itself was breaking new ground for both parties. Once our application had been re-cast in contractual terms, we were of course committed to that programme. In the event, the format we adopted, based round workshops, working parties and the electronic list, worked successfully.

The July meeting in Sheffield, the "Discipline Networks Workshop", was helpful, since coordinators were able to compare notes about the scope and activities of their networks, as well as addressing specific employment issues in the workshop sessions. The cooperative and enthusiastic atmosphere was slightly clouded by the realisation that we would very shortly have to prepare new competitive bids for continuation funding, well before the end of the contract period.

The report produced by Sally Fincher (Kent) [5] on different models of networking was also illuminating. Further studies on these lines would be useful as formal networking develops.

In the future it will be important for networks to be able to learn from each other, to see what works, and what pitfalls to avoid. This could be achieved through meetings such as the one in July, and even by encouraging "observers" from other networks to attend occasional events.

6.2.2 Budgeting, financial constraints

Inevitably there were many uncertainties about how best to allocate the fixed budget. With hindsight, we originally underestimated the amount of staff time for which we would want to claim; fortunately, within the constraints imposed by the financial year boundaries, DfEE was flexible in allowing virement between budget

[5] Sally Fincher, *Promotion and Dissemination of Good Practice: Discipline Networks*, October 1995

headings.

We were proud of what we achieved within the budget itself (£15,000). It was particularly useful to be able to fund travel and accommodation at workshops, and subsidise collaborative materials development. However, running the network and the various activities was extremely demanding of staff time (both academic and administrative), and although our departments have been able to claim for this as replacement staff costs, it has not in practice been possible for NETPhon workers to drop other commitments in lieu. NETPhon has been an additional commitment; time spent on it, though undoubtedly worthwhile, must have been to an extent at the expense of research time. A level of funding which would allow a coordinator/ administrator to be employed by or seconded to the project, even part-time, would be potentially very productive.

DfEE have proved understanding and supportive during the contract period; we were most grateful to them for a month's extension for writing this final report and submitting final budget claims.

6.3 Network continuation

We were disappointed that our bid for continuation funding was unsuccessful, as we had taken care to prepare an application which met the requested criteria (see 3.5.2 and 5 above, and Report on Workshop 3). It had not been made clear to us that fewer than half the existing networks would receive renewed funding (only 11 of the original 24 were successful). Informal feedback from DfEE suggests that although our bid was a good one, its weakness was primarily in terms of penetration (we were not expanding our base sufficiently). Nonetheless, we believe that we have given good value for money, and will seek alternative resources so that we can continue the valuable work. The Laryngograph Trust has already promised a small grant. We are actively exploring new discipline network initiatives, notably through HEFCE, and as part of a large international network under the EU's Socrates programme.

Though we have not been able to benefit ourselves, we applaud the fact that new networks are to be funded by DfEE for two years rather than one, which will allow them a more realistic time to get established.

Jill House, UCL, January 1996

APPENDIX A

NETPhon STEERING COMMITTEE

Project Coordinator	
Jill House	University College London
Project Manager, DfEE	
Delyse Webster	Dept for Education & Employment, Sheffield
Secretarial support and accounts	
Judith Crompton	University College London
Publicity Officer and Convenor of Workshop 1	
Linda Shockey	University of Reading
Convenor of Workshop 2	
Martin Duckworth	College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth
Coordinator of working party on teaching materials and Convenor of Workshop 3	
Gerry Docherty	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Convenor of Workshop 4	
Evelyn Abberton	University College London
Preparation of report on current practice	
Janet Beck	Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh
Other academic staff	
Ginny Wilson (DEC)	University College London
John Wells (HOD)	" " "
Nicole Müller*	University of Central England, Birmingham
Student representatives	
Belinda Oz (UG)	University College London
Nicola Young (PG)*	City University
Jeni Butler (UG)*	University College London
CSLT/employer representatives	
Marcia Beer	Academic Officer, CSLT
Deirdre Pacey	Speech Therapy Manager, S. Kent Community Health Care NHS Trust
EHE representative	
Lesley Black	AETU, University College London

*co-opted during the year

APPENDIX B

HEI Institutions involved in training for Speech and Language Therapy in the UK

Cardiff Institute of Higher Education

Central School of Speech and Drama, London

College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth

City University, London

De Montfort University, Leicester

Leeds Metropolitan University

Manchester Metropolitan University

Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh

University of Central England in Birmingham

University College London/National Hospital's College of Speech Sciences

University of Manchester

University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne

University of Reading

University of Sheffield

University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

University of Ulster, Jordanstown