

**The Origin of Man, Language and
Languages (OMLL)**

**Consensus Statement OMLL Review Panel
(Final Evaluation)**

Evaluation of the programme on the basis of its scientific achievements

The OMLL Review Panel rates the OMLL programme as “Excellent” in this respect. The programme has established itself as a world-leader in the area of interdisciplinary research relating to the linguistics, genetics, archeology, anthropology etc. of early anatomically modern humans and their subsequent dispersion. It represents an ideal instantiation of interdisciplinary research in that the results achieved could not have been reached by each discipline working in isolation and in that the scientists from different disciplines (and different European countries) have worked together with respect for each other's methods.

The cross-fertilization across the various research fields has not always been easy, but the OMLL programme has well accomplished this enormous challenge and has been successful in catalyzing collaboration and contact across a wide variety of fields. The programme has also offered good opportunities for cooperation with non-western partners. A vital precondition of its success has been the fact that the OMLL grafted onto awakening enthusiasm for collaboration among the various disciplines, enabling the programme to achieve so much in such a short period.

In this regard, the Review Panel wishes to point to the necessity of paying close attention to the integration of the various disciplines and communities from the very start of the programme. The Networking activities supported by the programme offer the right tools to work on this issue, and we will come back to this in the next paragraph.

For successful integration – and hence, for a successful programme - the selection of the topic, scope and width of the programme is all important. The Review Panel emphasizes the importance of this selection stage in the development of the programme and stresses that a balance should be maintained between a programme that is sufficiently ambitious as to enable a larger perspective, coupled to a choice of topics with enough focus as to allow for an optimal cross-fertilization.

The main weakness of the OMLL programme concerns its funding mechanism, which has been thoroughly dealt with in Midterm evaluation. The panel is glad to learn that the lessons learned from the OMLL programme - as the first EUROCORES programme to be launched - have been incorporated in the general EUROCORES scheme procedures. The panel also expresses the hope that with these growing pains behind us, more countries will commit themselves to EUROCORES programmes in the future.

The panel happily concludes that the OMLL programme not only greatly contributed to creating pan-European synergy in her own, multidisciplinary, research field but that moreover the first experiences of the programme have also proved fruitful for other research communities and that success of the OMLL programme is illustrated by the establishment of the EUROCORES format as a major instrument for trans-national, collaborative research.

Evaluation of the programme on the basis of networking, training and dissemination

The OMLL Review Panel rates the OMLL programme as "Between good and excellent" in this respect. The programme proved its strength not only in linking different disciplines within particular projects, but also in providing links across and beyond projects. In doing so, the Collaborative Research Projects have successfully engaged in successful collaborations outside their own projects, both with members from other projects and with new, external partners. As witnessed by the reports of the project members and their own experiences, the panel concludes that in this way, the OMLL programme has created a stimulating environment with positive long-term effects in terms of contact and exchange of ideas.

The panel mentions in particular the online, virtual workshop on mirror neurons. This format has proved to have many advantages and the example deserves to be followed by future programmes. Also the invitations to external experts outside the OMLL programme to OMLL activities have been beneficial; both for creating the right synergistic contacts as referred to above, and for the dissemination of the OMLL work outside the OMLL framework.

Returning to the issue of integration, the panel notes that especially at the start of the programme, the networking activities have an important role to fulfil in creating a common language. Before the projects start executing their workplans and collecting data, the cross-project activities should serve as a platform to discuss the various methodologies, explain the central concepts and share the same background knowledge. The panel recommends that in future programmes even more attention is being paid to this aspect, especially in programmes as ambitious and as wide in scope as OMLL.

The training has not been the emphasis of the OMLL programme and this area might be taken up more vigorously by future programmes. Having said that, the programme clearly did succeed in creating a context to enrich the participating PhD students and young scholars. For example, the OMLL programme offered opportunities for PhD students and junior scientists to participate in networking activities within an international context. The programme also supported the participation of students in fieldwork training, including the training of (doctoral) students from the local community. Finally, the involvement of the junior programme members in the publications is mentioned.

For future programmes, the OMLL Review Panel recommends the training to first take place at the national level, offering students the building blocks of their own discipline. The subsequent interdisciplinary training would ideally be part of a bigger, pan-European, programme in which high-level, thematic, interdisciplinary summerschools at post-doc level could be organized. These training facilities would offer attractive opportunities for talented young researchers, also in view of countering the braindrain.

The Review Panel is impressed by the quality, and number, of the excellent publications resulting from the programme – with even more to be expected in the next two years. In particular, the relative high number of publications in high-impact journals like *Nature* and *Science* – also by people from disciplines who traditionally are not well-represented in these journals – is an important outcome of the programme and eminent means of dissemination. The panel does however note the disparity between the various projects, both in their productivity and in the quality of the journals they publish in. The panel sees here a challenge for future programmes to have young projects integrate with well-established research groups in joint publications and sharing their publishing experiences.

The panel strongly approves of the present efforts within the OMLL programme to publish a joint volume. Such a publication would especially be important if this would be more than a compilation but would in addition have an introductory, synthesizing chapter. The panel identifies professor Jean-Marie Hombert as the ideal author of such a chapter.

Evaluation of the realization of the programme's potential

In general, the Review Panel feels that the participants have made excellent use of the programme, in order to carry out cutting-edge interdisciplinary research that has substantially advanced our knowledge in a number of areas, as well as providing networking that will be invaluable for future research.

The OMLL programme has opened up a significant number of new, future funding opportunities in this direction which, together with the creation of an established network, ensures a long-term impact of the programme.

The panel notes that the general organization of the programme has been satisfactory, within the limits posed by EUROCORES format. The panel in particular remarks that within the international funding model – notwithstanding its problems - the individual partners in each of the Collaborative Research Project, almost without exceptions, did better than what could be achieved within the financial restrictions of the funding agencies. This may be a special incentive for researchers from small countries with a limited research budget to participate in these joint (EUROCORES) programmes.

The strength of the OMLL programme lies in the fact that it built on albeit limited existing cooperation across the disciplines involved. The OMLL programme has successfully taken this further by creating new points of contact between the various disciplines and methodologies and hereby creating a momentum that did not exist before. In doing so, the panel concludes, OMLL programme has succeeded in generating an international network with international visibility.

Summary of main recommendations

For successful integration – and hence, for a successful EUROCORES programme - the selection of the topic, scope and width of the programme is all important. The OMLL Review Panel emphasizes the importance of this selection stage in the development of the programme and stresses that a balance should be maintained between a programme that is sufficiently ambitious as to enable a larger perspective, coupled to a choice of topics with enough focus as to allow for an optimal cross-fertilization.

Especially in programmes as ambitious and as wide in scope as OMLL, the challenge of integrating the disparate disciplines and methodologies falling under the programmes' umbrella, cannot be sufficiently emphasized. The OMLL Review Panel wishes to point to the important role for the networking activities – in particular at the start of the programme – to serve as a platform to create a joint language.

As to the training of young scientists, the OMLL Review Panel recommends a first, disciplinary education at the national level, offering students the building blocks of their own discipline. The subsequent interdisciplinary training would ideally be part of a bigger, pan-European, programme in which high-level, thematic, interdisciplinary summerschools at post-doc level could be organized. Also joint publications of young scientists with well-established research groups should be encouraged.