

The Italian National Language Olympics – One challenge, two responses in times of Covid-19 crisis

Synopsis

The National Language Olympics (NLO) (<https://cndl.uniurb.it/>) are a contest in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, organized and run by the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy. It is aimed at final-year secondary school students and their language teachers throughout the country.

The competition - that wishes to strengthen ties with secondary schools through a fruitful interplay - is designed to assess students' language skills in English, French, German and Spanish, and is structured in ascending order of difficulty, from level B2 to level C1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In recent years, the NLO have witnessed an exponential growth in terms of the success of the event and its resonance at high school level and in the academic world and they have been included for the past four years by the Ministry for University and Research in its annual programme to promote educational excellence.

In early March 2020, when it became clear that the Covid-19 crisis would not be over quickly, the University of Urbino decided to cancel the 2020 competition and over the following months work began on drawing up regulations for the 11th Language Olympics scheduled for the 2020-2021 academic and school year.

In keeping with the motto "*Put the Competition on hold and our expertise on show*", the University opted not to host the traditional and long-awaited competition but to devise a programme of academic activities and teaching content, available online for free.

The talk will concentrate on how schools and universities have come together, integrating and effectively forging synergies, and will describe how the health crisis - besides being a human and health catastrophe of gigantic proportions - has highlighted the advantages of cooperation and has also succeeded in meeting the challenge of distance learning for higher education.