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The Alan R. King Chair at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David kicks off with an educational day on changing language habits

- Part of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (CAWCS), the Chair focuses on research and academic collaboration in Basque and Welsh sociolinguistics, language planning and language policy.

On 13 October, the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the Etxepare Basque Institute held the opening ceremony of the new Basque Studies Chair in Aberystwyth, Wales, UK, in honour of the linguist Alan R. King. Imanol Larrea from the Soziolinguistika Klusterra research centre is the programme's first researcher. Larrea gave a lecture to present his six-week research activities revolving around sociolinguistics and the Basque language.

Larrea was joined in the presentation by Etxepare Basque Institute director Irene Larraza; Etxepare Basque Institute director of Basque Language Promotion and Dissemination, Garbiñe Iztueta; Director of the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones; Basque authors Beatriz Chivite and Juan Kruz Igerabide, and Welsh poets Ifor ap Glyn and Aneirin Karadog.

The new chair, based at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (CAWCS), will promote research and academic collaboration in sociolinguistics, language planning and Basque and Welsh language policy. Each year, a visiting professor or researcher will spend six weeks at CAWCS to conduct a research seminar and give lecture open to the public.

The programme for launch of the Chair included both an academic and a cultural component. Larrea, director of the technical office at Soziolinguistika Klusterra, provided the keynote address for the first part, with his talk on 'Sociolinguistic research to change language habits in Euskal Herria: various experiences/Euskal Herria and Wales: jointly building sociolinguistic research to change language habits'. He explained the work they do at their research centre and provided insight to better understand the Basque context.

“Research is essential to revitalising our languages. We need applied research, with a bottom-up perspective, in tune with the communities and organisations that promote minority languages. In addition to analysing and understanding the sociolinguistic situation, appropriate methodologies are needed for effective improvement. At Soziolinguistika Klusterra, we feel that sharing experiences between the Welsh and Basque communities is fundamental, because in many aspects we are very similar. The Alan R. King Chair provides us with a great opportunity to make this exchange real,” Larrea explained.

Elin Jones and Garbiñe Iztueta agreed with Larrea. Jones pointed out that the Chair will serve to "generate the strategic stability necessary for academic cooperation in sociolinguistics, language policy and language planning between Wales and the Basque Country", adding that it is a fundamental step toward "the future of linguistic diversity and the processes of revitalisation of our languages".

Iztueta stressed that the bond and exchange between the Basque and Welsh communities, which began some 40 years ago with Alan R. King himself, will be reinforced through the Chair. “In this first edition, it was very important for the University and the Etxepare Basque Institute to create a solid groundwork. Thanks to Larrea's project, this year we'll be able to work on the big picture of the process of revitalising the Basque language and the most important challenges facing Welsh and Basque speakers today," she added.

Etxepare Basque Institute director Irene Larraza opened the cultural component of the day, highlighting the diversity and identity of the Basque and Welsh cultures: “As Alan King would say, ‘language is what makes us what we are and our languages need us to work for them’. This is why University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the Etxepare Basque Institute want to work together in the areas of education and research in sociolinguistics, language planning and policy, literature, culture and languages in the Basque context and in Wales.”

The Etxepare Basque Institute is starting three new university chair programmes in 2022-2023. The Elbira Zipitria Chair was launched in September at McGill University in Quebec; the Frank Bidart Chair will soon open at California State University Bakersfield, USA, and the Alan R. King Chair has just been presented at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. These three chairs reflect some of the Institute’s areas of work: the creation of international cultural connections, the development of the diaspora and the promotion of linguistic research.

Alan R. King Chair

This new chair in Basque studies, named after Alan R. King, linguist, minority language activist and member as of 2003 of Euskaltzaindia (Royal Academy of the Basque Language), will consist of lectures and seminars promoted at the postgraduate programmes of the University of Wales and in the research forums at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (CAWCS).

Based in Aberystwyth, this chair aims to promote research and academic collaboration in the fields of sociolinguistics, language planning and Basque and Welsh language policy, and to foster mutual understanding between the two languages and cultures.

Each year, a visiting lecturer or researcher selected through an open call will undertake a six-week residency at the University of Wales CAWCS.

As part of this residency, the selected applicant will conduct a research seminar, give a lecture on language policy and planning, lead several sessions for students at the

university's postgraduate programmes, and conduct a seminar on Basque language or grammar for linguists.

Alan Roy King was born in 1955 in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, England. With a PhD in Linguistics from the University of London, he spoke Basque, Yiddish, Welsh and Nawat, among other languages, and worked for minority languages in different parts of the world. He taught Basque courses in Aberystwyth, where he gained a reputation for connecting Wales with the Basque Country.

Defending minority languages and linguistic diversity was an intrinsic part of his mission as a linguist: he had the gift of making languages easy to learn. He also invested in cultivating awareness and skills in speakers and potential speakers, so that they would not only know how to speak their language, but how to keep it alive for the future.

This brings the number of Etxepare Basque Institute international chair programmes in Basque language and culture to twelve. The chairs are an instrument to promote specialised teaching and academic research focusing on Basque studies. The programmes are based on residencies conducted at universities by specialised teachers or artists and creators.

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