

## **Quality Implementation Plan for the Department of German**

**This plan was approved following a meeting of the President and Head of Department on 8 April 2011**

### **1. Recommendations which the Department could implement unaided**

**Recommendation 1.1:** Against the backdrop of their already successful work in this area, the members of the Department are encouraged to continue their efforts to integrate even further their research into their teaching (e.g. theory of translation, linguistics), where this is practicable. Students welcome this insight into backgrounds and/or possible future areas of work at an early stage (p. 9).

**Response of Department:**

It is difficult to integrate research into teaching much more than is already being done at present, mainly in the MA modules, but as far as possible in the BA programme, too. The reviewers mention specifically ‘theory of translation’ and ‘linguistics’ where practicable. Neither theoretical linguistics nor theory of translation are actual research areas of staff members. Those teaching the modules have acquired expertise so as to be able to offer these courses and to contribute to interdisciplinary modules. While linguistics is being taught in two modules in final year (GN318 and GN328) the Department does not have the resources to roll out linguistic modules in second year. Considering the range of optional modules already on offer in second year, it is also questionable whether additional options are needed.

As far as translation theory is concerned, this is taught already at postgraduate level (GN611, GN621, and particularly ID621). However, simple aspects of translation theory could be introduced into the practically oriented translation modules GN312A and GN322A.

**Action:** The issue of integrating research into teaching activities will be kept under ongoing review.

**Recommendation 1.2:** The use of electronic media can and should be implemented and intensified, but the reviewers are well aware, as members of the Department are, that in language-learning and the teaching of literature/culture there is no effective substitute for person-to-person contact and for using the language and discussing (inter)cultural issues with native speakers and experienced practitioners. Correspondingly, electronic media will largely have a role in providing additional practice for autonomous learning or offering a means for such exercises as pronunciation or listening comprehension. The learning-platform Moodle could serve as a source of information to coordinate further the use of such media, in a way that would also be welcomed by students (p. 9).

**Response of Department:**

As the peer reviewers have remarked, electronic media such as Moodle have only a supportive function for autonomous learning; they cannot replace the teacher and direct student-teacher interaction, particularly in language classes. Staff are already using Moodle and other electronic media extensively, such as Power Point Presentations, in modules where they are considered to have the potential to provide additional materials for practice (e.g. in language-related modules).

The peer reviewers mention specifically exercises in pronunciation or listening comprehension. Both are being offered already in the Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) Centre of the Language Centre where students have free access to these media.

**Action:** The response of the Department was approved.

**Recommendation 1.3:** The reviewers congratulate the members of the Department on their efforts to maintain academic standards such as attendance rules, the ‘technical fail’ rule, and recommend that such policies continue, for as long the Department considers them to be viable. After all, lowering expectations or softening guidelines would inevitably lead to a lower level of language competence, and of linguistic and literary competencies, which would in turn lower the Department’s reputation in teaching and research. At the same time, the Department is realistic about what can be achieved across a three-year degree, not least where a period abroad is not a compulsory part of the curriculum (p. 9).

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes the unequivocal support of the peer reviewers in continuing to operate the attendance rule of 70% and the technical fail rule as instruments to maintain academic standards in the Department.

**Action:** A letter will be sent informing the Registrar on this issue to be forwarded to the T&L Committee and Academic Council for information.

**Recommendation 1.4:** The Department is encouraged to keep up its current enthusiasm for pro-active initiatives in approaching other departments and programmes to enhance and strengthen the presence of German within the academic programmes and the campus life of NUI Maynooth (p. 10).

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation and, despite of frustrations suffered in the past, will continue to persist in pro-active initiatives as mentioned.

**Action:** The response of the Department was approved.

## **2. Recommendations which the Department could implement only with assistance from other bodies within the University and without cost implications**

**Recommendation 2.1:** Within the context of the School of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, it is recommended that active consideration be given to the possibility of establishing an extended Postgraduate Colloquium for training in research, teaching, and professional skills (including MAs), which would build on and give greater visibility to already existing efforts to provide support and guidance, so that graduate students develop a sense of a common endeavour and purpose as they work towards their MA, M. Litt. or PhD.

**Response of Department:**

The German Postgraduate Colloquium is now under the umbrella of the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures (SMLLC); it is also a component of the structured PhD programme in German. At the last SMLLC meeting in June 2010 it was decided that a MA module will be created which will address the enhancement of research skills. For PhD and MLitt students, the Generic Skills modules, coordinated by the Graduate Studies Office, are fostering the development of research and professional skills.

Teaching skills cannot be addressed specifically in the Department of German because of lack of resources. However, the MA modules GN612 (Methodology of Teaching/Learning German as a Foreign Language) and GN622 (Didactics of Teaching German as a Foreign Language) do address this subject area, and they are open to PhD and MLitt students.

**Action:** The response of the Department was approved.

**Recommendation 2.2:** The reviewers recommend that every effort be made to maintain the good working relations among colleagues within the context of the new School of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures.

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to Faculty.

**Action:** Faculty will be informed of this matter.

**Recommendation 2.3:** The introduction of the School of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures will allow for a reorganisation of room allocation, including appropriate accommodation for secretarial and administrative support staff (as well as respecting Health & Safety implications of current document storage), as well as accommodation for part-time teaching staff. One specific desideratum that might easily be met would be the creation of dedicated German Seminar Room (p. 10).

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to Faculty. New offices for academic and administrative staff have already been allocated. A dedicated SMLLC Seminar Room has also been allocated.

**Action:** The response of the Department was approved. No further action is necessary as the offices of all members of the Department have been moved in September 2010.

**Recommendation 2.4:** Cooperation with the Language Centre, a natural partner of departments of foreign languages, is professional and efficient. At the same time, the question arises whether the existing one contact-hour per week which the Learning Centre is providing for the German language modules would be integrated more usefully into the learning process of the students, if integrated into one of the courses of the German Department (for instance, as an additional conversation opportunity or an additional grammar class). At the same time, this would mean that funding for this contact hour would be transferred to the German Department. The creation of a School of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures might also give rise to fresh

opportunities for reconfiguring the relationship between the Language Centre and the various language departments, to the mutual benefit of all parties concerned.

**Response of Department:**

All provision by the Language Centre for German in the BA programme forms part of a language module of the Department of German. The Department is happy with the current arrangements with the Language Centre but within the new context of the SMLLC the relationship between the Language Centre and the various SMLLC Departments might be reconfigured in the medium to long term.

**Action:** This issue will be considered along with the Peer Review Report on the Language Centre.

**Recommendation 2.5:** With the introduction of the School of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, there will be fresh opportunities in research and teaching, but it is not quite so clear that administration will be reduced. In this context, it would be counterproductive for the University to consider a reduction in administrative positions, simply because it is felt that the merger might create administrative synergies; on the contrary, new administrative burdens could well arise from new tasks following the merger. How administrative responsibilities are shared and divided across the administrative support staff will require careful consideration, and the reviewers' recommendation would be to ensure that all parties be fully consulted in the development of a new administrative structure (p. 11).

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to the University.

**Action:** This issue should be considered by the Senior Officers in the context of the Employment Control Framework with a view to secure the positions of the three administrative staff in the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures. The University will try to implement a pilot project on simple and safe monitoring of student attendance so that the workload of administrative staff will be reduced.

**Recommendation 2.6:** The reviewers are firmly of the view that creating a stable working environment for secure and sensible planning will result in a constantly high performance. Too many or hasty changes in administration or programmes, which do not leave (enough) time for progress and development, would, on the other hand, inevitably result in frustration or even burnout, which would be detrimental to this high-performing department.

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to the University. In particular, the emphasis on the negative impact of change in administration and programmes on valued research-time is welcomed because the relentless pace of change, reflected in curriculum development and heavy administrative burden, puts a heavy strain on research and publication commitments.

**Action:** The Department is encouraged to explore the potential of the workload model. In addition, Faculty could become more active in developing administrative synergies to support the work of Heads of Departments.

**Recommendation 2.7:** In order to fulfil its tasks appropriately, a department needs reliable support services such as a functioning library. Aside from the objective fact of the comparatively low budget allocated for the purchase of German materials, the reviewers gained the impression that, in addition, colleagues felt that book acquisition and book cataloguing procedures in the University Library took longer than might be expected, with the result that purchased books are not readily available for use in teaching and research. Although it was not possible, within the constraints of the timetable for the visit, to meet a representative of the Library to discuss these issues, clearly a research-led university would wish its library service to operate at maximum level of efficiency (p. 11).

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to the University.

**Action:** The Department will write a letter to the President outlining the case for a more substantial library fund allocation.

**Recommendation 2.8:** In order to make language-learning possible, reliable and stable provision of teaching accommodation is vital, including a designated Postgraduate Seminar Room. This would also include teaching or seminar rooms which can be heated; the reviewers did not expect to see seminar rooms (in the annexe) which were used by classes, despite temperatures around 0 degrees and despite the fact that there is no effective heating (pp. 11-12).

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to the University.

**Action:** The issue of a designated Postgraduate Seminar Room for the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures should be considered by Senior Officers in the context of the provision of space for the whole School. The Director of Corporate Services, Frank Fitzmaurice, will be informed to this effect.

**Recommendation 2.9:** German is a popular combination subject for certain areas such as history, philosophy, music, law, or business. Due to timetabling constraints, only a few of these very useful combinations are possible after year 1. The reviewers would recommend that the University investigate the possibility of extending the range of subjects available for combination with German, especially those which would be taken by students (such as Law or Philosophy) (p. 12).

**Response of Department:**

The Department strongly welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to the University. Over the years, the Department has repeatedly made representations on this matter to senior administrators and to other departments (e.g. letter to the Faculty of Science re. German for Science students and letter to the President and the School of Law and Business re. DAAD Law Lektor) and will continue to do so.

**Action:** This issue will be referred to the Registrar and Timetable Committee for investigation.

**Recommendation 2.10:** The University might also consider raising awareness in other departments that 5 ECTS can be taken in other subjects and that the inclusion of languages enhances any programme, especially in respect of the employability of students. It would be disappointing if, as seems to be the case, not all departments encourage their students to take these 5 ECTS outside their own departments, and do not support them in seeking an opportunity to gain insight into other useful disciplines that might broaden the students' horizons.

**Response of Department:**

The Department welcomes this recommendation which is addressed to the University. The Department of German offers several modules well suited to students from other disciplines but so far the uptake has been rather disappointing.

**Action:** The T&L Committee will be informed of the availability of respective modules in German.

### **3. Recommendations which the Department could implement only if additional resources are provided by the University**

(For each recommendation, list under "Response of Department" the actions required to implement the recommendation, state if the recommendation has already been implemented, and if not, what resources might be required, including an indication of the level of capital or recurrent expenditure involved)

**Recommendation 3.1:** The reviewers would support the Department, if it decided to reapply for a DAAD-Lektorat (or other similarly funded) post. Applying for such a post would involve comparatively minimal financial cost (appr. €25,000 per annum), but gaining a maximum impact (= a full-time position) in improving teaching-provision and support for students. Of course this recommendation would need to be considered by the University as well as the Department. At the same time, the reviewers noted the excellent work carried out by the Austrian Lektorat, and would urge that every effort be made to protect this precious teaching and cultural resource (p. 8).

**Response of Department:**

The Department of German would welcome the re-establishment of the position of DAAD- Lektorat. This is a junior German language lecturer with relevant qualification (usually at least at MA level) who will spend up to four years teaching at NUI Maynooth. NUI Maynooth is the only university in Ireland not availing of the DAAD Lektor scheme.

The cost involved for the university would be commensurate with the pay scale agreed for the Austrian Lektorat and the Language Support Assistants in the Department of Spanish, i.e. under €25,000 per annum.

The Department will contact the President's Office as to the viability of financing this post before making the application to the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service).

**Action:** The Department will apply to DAAD for a Lektorat to be re-established at the University. The funding by the University has been granted for a minimum of four years but with a view of establishing a long-term cooperation with DAAD.

## **Appendix: General departmental response to the Peer Review Report**

The Department of German emphatically welcomes the findings and recommendations of this very positive and constructive Peer Review Report which was authored by Prof. Britta Hufeisen (Technische Universität Darmstadt) and Prof. Paul Bishop (University of Glasgow). The Department is pleased that the research and teaching efforts of the permanent staff members have been noted very favourably, as has the strong sense of community between staff and students which, as the peer reviewers have experienced during their visit, clearly enhances the environment of learning.

The Department shares the concern of the reviewers with regards to the restriction of certain subject combinations, most notably Philosophy and German, and Law and German. It also shares the concern regarding the relentless administrative and curriculum-development burden which has the potential to undermine opportunities for fruitful research. The Department hopes that these concerns will be addressed by the University which already has supported constructive measures applied by the Department, such as the ‘technical fail’ system and the ‘attendance rule.’

The Department notes the peer reviewers’ assessment that German at NUI Maynooth is, in terms of research and teaching, one of the, if not the, leading Departments of German on this island. The Department will, however, not rest on its laurels but it will continue to strive for excellence in research and teaching.

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**Professor Tom Collins**  
**President**

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**Dr Arnd Witte**  
**Head of Department**