

Quality Implementation Plan for the Department of Spanish

This plan was approved following a meeting of the President and the Subject Leader on 25 January 2011.

1. Recommendations which the Department could implement unaided

Recommendation 1.1:

The report recommended that 'the Department instituted a 'language teaching committee', to include all categories of staff involved, which would meet at the beginning of each semester, and at regular intervals thereafter, to ensure that all language groups advanced more or less in tandem, and that the language laboratory classes synchronised with the other types of class in terms of their content' (2.1.1, p. 5; 4.4, p. 10).

Department Response:

- Year Co-ordinators have always held regular meetings with all categories of staff, and all staff are invited to (and non-permanent part-time staff paid to) attend Departmental meetings in recognition of the need to share views, ideas and feedback.
- The recommendation to create a more formal language teaching committee was discussed at Departmental meetings at the end of the last and the start of the current academic year, and was welcomed by the Department. A committee has been established in line with the recommendation. Dr David Barnwell, a Senior Lecturer with considerable expertise in the pedagogy of Spanish language teaching, agreed to take on the role of convenor and co-ordinator of the newly constituted Language Teaching Committee. The work of the Language Committee will begin with a focus on Goals, Methodology and Testing. The membership of the committee includes all year co-ordinators, a representative of the Teaching Support Assistants, a representative of occasional tutors and the Language Centre Spanish tutor (ex officio).

Action: A student representative has been invited to join the Language Teaching Committee. The response of the Department was approved.

Recommendation 1.2:

The report recommends 'raising the bar for deciding progression to the second year in Spanish, and abolishing for all modules the practice of passing in the language 'by compensation' (2.1.1, p. 6).

Department Response:

- As part of the streamlining of UG programmes, the Department had already given serious consideration to the matter of progression into the second year. It was decided to reduce the proportion of continuous assessment to 25% (from 40%) to lessen the likelihood of students getting help with their work; to make the assessment pieces more challenging; to introduce an examination in the January examination period; and to implement the existing rules about late submission of work more vigorously.
- Regarding passing language 'by compensation', the Department already implements a policy of required language modules (SPA102; SPA104; SPA202; SPA204; SPA303; SPA304; SPA331; SPA332), although in the first year, the Semester 1 language modules are not required, as the system in NUI, Maynooth does not allow us to prevent a student proceeding to the second semester modules if they have failed the first semester ones. Therefore, it is only the second semester language modules that

are required. Students must, however, achieve an overall pass in language in order to progress to the second year of study.

- There is another issue with ‘passing by compensation’, however, and this is beyond the control of the Department. The university can decide, at Examination Boards, to allow a student who has failed a subject to pass by compensation (from another subject) in order to progress into a subsequent year, albeit not continuing with the failed subject.

Action: The response of the Department was approved.

Recommendation 1.3:

The assessors recommend that the Department consider how best to follow up on the suggestions made by students (2.1.5, p. 7), and to implement them where feasible.

Department Response:

- The Department is already (as part of the streamlining process planned last year for implementation this year) offering tutorials on Latin American and Spanish literature to supplement lectures. This has had cost implications and this year the Department is paying 168 hours at the Senior Tutor rate for this tuition;
- The matter of encouraging all tutors to ensure the participation of weaker students in class activities, especially in language classes will be dealt with by the Language Committee;
- The setting up of a formalized system of introducing Spanish Erasmus students to NUIM students of Spanish was discussed at both Departmental and School meetings at the start of this academic year. It was agreed to inform students that the SMLLC Resource Room would be made available to them at a specific time for the purpose of allowing these students to meet; the Spanish student society, *Mundo Latino*, is planning events which will encourage such meetings and the Department will support the society where it can. The Department took a decision not to set up anything more formal than what is indicated above, due to workload concerns.
- The Department is unable, due to workload, to take on the role of investigating further options for summer courses in Spain beyond what it already does – notices about such courses are posted on the notice boards when they come in to the Department and the International Co-ordinator recommends summer courses in the universities where we have Erasmus links.

Action: The response of the Department was approved.

Recommendation 1.4:

‘The position of Dr O’Leary as Acting Head of Department should be clarified’ (4.2, p. 10).

Department Response:

- Following consultation with colleagues in the Department of Spanish and the SMLLC, Dr O’Leary was appointed Subject Leader for 3 years from 2010-11.
- Further clarification of this role may become necessary, however, as the term Subject Leader means different things in different Departments, where the Subject Leader may be the Subject Professor and Chair, rather than someone with a role more like that of Head of Department

Action: The President is to investigate this matter further in order to clarify the position of Dr O’Leary.

Recommendation 1.5:

‘that the system of student feedback be further developed and formalised’ (6.4.2, p. 12; 4.6, p. 10)

Department Response:

- Other modes of student feedback were discussed in the first meeting of this academic year and the Department has undertaken to explore ways of giving more structured feedback for assessments and essays. This will also be part of the remit of the newly constituted Language Committee.

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:

‘that the year abroad becomes the default position of the Department for students coming to study Spanish at NUIM, and that those who cannot go away for a full year should be required, as at present, to spend at least three months in Spain.’

Department Response:

- This idea has been discussed at Departmental level in previous years and, while the Department would like to see the year abroad being an ‘opt out’, rather than an ‘opt in’ for students, the fact that the majority of students of Spanish are also doing another subject as part of a double honours or major/minor programme has meant that we have not been able to insist on the year abroad. We will continue to investigate the possibility of making the year abroad compulsory and will continue to make efforts to encourage more students to consider the year abroad as an opportunity that will benefit them in the long term.
- The requirement that students who do not go on a year abroad must spend at least three months in a Spanish-speaking country is, and has always been, the position of the Department of Spanish. It is difficult to monitor, however, and there may be some students who do not fulfil this requirement. We do inform students of this requirement in the handbook and on the website and we also make them aware that a minimum period of three months in a Spanish-speaking country is also a requirement of the Teaching Council of Ireland.
- In recognition of the fact that many of our students are non-traditional and have commitments (family or otherwise) that mean that it is difficult for them to spend lengthy periods abroad, and following up on a suggestion from students entering the final year in 2010-11, this summer the Department asked the Language Centre to run a summer course in Spanish for students who could not get to Spain. This short course (only offered to students entering their final year, paid for by them and run by the Language Centre) was a success and it is envisaged that a longer version (open to more students) will be offered in this academic year.
- The Department has already had discussions with the International Office about internationalization and these are ongoing.

Action: This matter is to be considered by the SMLLC and referred to the Faculty.

Recommendation 2.2:

The assessors consider that it would be helpful if the School could formulate a policy on Erasmus and the Year Abroad (see 2.1.1b, p.6).

Department Response:

- The Department is in favour of this and has begun work on general information for students going abroad that will be placed on the SMLLC webpage, as well as the Department's webpage.
- The Department brought the assessors' recommendation to the attention to the Head of School for consideration and has asked for the matter to be discussed at School level.

Action: Work on the webpage is proceeding.

Recommendation 2.3:

Re. the Salamanca Archive: 'It is crucial that scholars at NUIM, with the possible support of An Foras Feasa, are enabled and encouraged to take intellectual charge of a resource that could benefit the Spanish Department..' (3.4, p. 8)

Department Response:

- The Department of Spanish already has some involvement with this resource, through the NUIM-UAH Irish College at Alcala Collaboration. Further development of the research possibilities of this resource would necessarily involve collaboration with St Patrick's College, Maynooth; The Russell Library; the Department of History and perhaps An Foras Feasa. Contact with these groups regarding this resource is ongoing.
- The Irish Embassy in Madrid has offered some financial support to this NUIM-UAH collaboration this year and will pay for a speaker to go from Maynooth to Alcala. The proposal is to ask the archivist working on the Salamanca Archive to go to Alcala and give a talk about her work. This will give some international publicity to the collaboration and to the archive.

Action: As part of her state visit to Spain in March 2011, the President of Ireland, Mrs Mary McAleese, will visit the University of Alcala where she will be given a medal of honour. As part of the celebrations, Dr Catherine O'Leary (NUIM) and Dr Marisol Morales (UAH) have organised the event *Encuentro Intercultural: Irlanda – España*. Speakers include the Dean of Arts, Dr Thomas O'Connor (NUIM) and Dr Óscar Recio Morales (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), who will discuss historical relations between Spain and Ireland with particular emphasis on the Irish College at Alcala. As the papers from the Irish college at Alcala form part of the Salamanca Archive, it is hoped that this event will highlight this important resource.

Recommendation 2.4:

Re. assistants and tutors: 'A clear statement of application procedures and role descriptions for these posts (assistants and the part-time tutors) would minimise the possibility of future misunderstanding on the part of these categories of staff' (4.3, p. 10).

Department Response:

- The definition of the post and roles of the Language Assistants (now Teaching Support Assistants) was being dealt with in conjunction with Human Resources at the time of the Quality Review exercise. This has now been completed to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The cost implications of this have already been dealt with as part of last year's settlement of the matter.
- The Department does not have specific application procedures for the role of part-time tutors and the definition of their roles depends on what they are teaching. The

Department of Spanish will raise this issue within the School at its next meeting in order to see if a common policy can be agreed.

Action: Discussions on the second matter are ongoing.

Recommendation 2.5:

The assessors recommend a degree combination in Sociology and a Modern Language, to include Spanish and possibly Portuguese (5.3, p. 11)

Department Response:

- This is a timetabling issue that is beyond the control of the Department. The Department would very much welcome the possibility of allowing students to combine Spanish (and Portuguese and Catalan) with Sociology, a subject area with which we have many synergies. The Department will contact the Registrar's Office in Semester I to discuss this possibility.

Action: The possibilities were discussed with the Registrar and a proposal was approved by the President. Discussions on implementation are ongoing within the School.

Recommendation 2.6:

'that the Department liaise with other departments in relation to the development of common or joint modules, especially at postgraduate level' (6.4.2, p. 12)

Department Response:

- The Department is already very involved in interdisciplinary teaching at postgraduate level (and was even prior to the establishment of its own postgraduate programmes). The streamlining at UG level, in addition to the creation and use of existing interdisciplinary modules at PG (and UG) level was necessary given the lack of resources for the creation of new programmes. The Department is very interested in interdisciplinary collaborations and will continue to develop these in order both to create innovative new modules and to improve our existing programmes. The MA in Spanish and Latin American Studies programme contains several modules taught in collaboration with other Departments/ Institutions:
 - SPA611-12 Research Skills I&2 (with input from the Library and the SMLLC Teaching & Learning Officer)
 - ID611 Approaches to Translation Studies (Spanish, French, German, Irish)
 - ID612 (Re)Writing the Early Colonial (Spanish, English)
 - ID622 European Women's Writing (Spanish, French, German)
 - SPA626 Culture and Memory of Spain (Spanish at NUIM and UCD)
- At School level, discussions have begun regarding the creation of a themed MA (Narratives of Conflict), which could also involve input from Departments beyond the School.
- The structured PhD programme also contains various common or joint modules.

Action: The response of the Department was approved.

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

Recommendation 3.1:

The report recommends 'more conversation classes' (2.1.2, p. 6).

Department Response:

- This has been implemented and in fact had already begun last year, and was a key part of the Department's streamlining and strategic planning from last year. The change in the status and roles of the Language Assistants (now Teaching Support Assistants) has led to their involvement in more conversation classes (but fewer grammar/ written expression modules). It does have cost implications for the Department, as we have had to pay for more occasional staff to do work that the Language Assistants previously did. This year the Department will have to pay approximately 240 hours at the Senior Tutor rate to cover language classes that were previously taught by the Language Assistants.

Action: The response of the Department was approved.

Recommendation 3.2:

The assessors recommend that 'greater use might be made of multimedia materials in language classes and of computer-assisted learning packages, and that the latter might be integrated into the language provision programme as an additional learning tool. A wider range of materials might be made available on a self-access basis in the SALL Room, in terms of newspapers, periodicals, etc'. (2.1.3, p. 6)

Department Response:

- Some of this has cost implications (the purchase of multimedia packages, etc.) and some of it can be (and has been) implemented with the support of internal university bodies. Some staff members already use multimedia materials regularly in language classes, while others do not.
- Training in moodle and moodle for languages (as well as other courses offered by the Quality Promotion Office and the Centre for Teaching and Learning) has been offered to all staff, permanent and occasional.
- Teaching Support Assistants were required last year to complete the moodle for languages course, as part of their remit is to prepare materials for sharing (via moodle), a task that they are asked to complete outside the teaching term. Occasional staff members are encouraged to use multimedia materials also.
- Regarding the material in the SALL room, this is the responsibility of the Language Centre, as it comes from their budget. The Language Centre has always been very supportive of the Department in providing materials for use by Spanish students, most recently in the acquisition of materials for the teaching and learning of Catalan and in the provision of multiple copies of films that are on courses in the Department of Spanish.
- In 2010-11, we will undertake to review, with the Language Centre, the materials available in the SALL Room and see what other materials could be provided, bearing in mind the budget restrictions affecting both the Department and the Language Centre. This situation could be greatly improved with an increase in financial support from the university.

Action: The response of the Department was approved.

Recommendation 3.3:

The report expresses the hope that the new Iontas Building will 'improve the physical conditions in which language is taught (2.1.4, p. 6) and recommends 'improvement in the physical conditions of classroom accommodation' (p. 12).

Department Response:

- This is beyond the control of the Department but is a serious concern for us. We teach too many of our classes in unsuitable rooms. We appreciate the fact that those in

charge of the university timetable have a very difficult task, and we have always found them to be very helpful, but the fact remains that the physical conditions in which language is taught are often not fit for purpose. Our discussions with the Registrar's Office about this are ongoing.

Action: The Department has been assigned rooms in the Iontas Building for a total of two hours per week, and awaits further improvement in the rooms allocated for language teaching.

Recommendation 3.4:

The report states that 'providing a mechanism for maintaining contact with past graduates would help enhance the Spanish Department's sense of identity, and also mean that it would be easier to include meetings with former students in the programme of future quality reviews' (4.5, p. 10).

Department Response:

- The Department already maintains a mailing list of past graduates and is in contact with many of them periodically.
- In response to the recommendation, Dr David Barnwell has been appointed alumni liaison officer within the Department. The cost implications are not heavy, but may involve mailing costs and the cost of occasional social events.

Action: The response of the Department was approved.

Recommendation 3.5:

'that the situation of Portuguese be consolidated and that measures be taken to ensure the continued provision of the language upon the retirement of Professor Kinsella' (6.4.2, p. 12)

Department Response:

- The situation of Portuguese is currently dependent on the support of the external body, the Instituto Camões, as well as on Professor Kinsella's expertise. The Portuguese programme is successful and the Department would wish to see it continued after the retirement of Professor Kinsella. This would mean that consideration would have to be given to Professor Kinsella's replacement being someone who could provide modules in both Spanish and Portuguese.
- We have no control over the external provision, but hope that our cooperation with the Instituto Camões will continue to flourish.

Action: The Department wishes to see the continuation of the provision of Portuguese after the retirement of Professor Kinsella.

Appendix: General departmental response to the Peer Review Report

The Department of Spanish generally welcomed the findings of the peer reviewers but were disappointed that the report did not contain a specific recommendation for an increase in staffing levels in line with the growth in student numbers and programme offerings at postgraduate level.

Professor Tom Collins
President

Dr Catherine O'Leary
Subject Leader