



## **QUALITY ASSURANCE/QUALITY ENHANCEMENT**

### **UCC LANGUAGE CENTRE PEER REVIEW PANEL REPORT**

***ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-18***

***MARCH 2018***

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## List of Panel Members

Name	Position/Discipline	Institution
<b>Professor Nuala Finnegan</b> <i>Chair</i>	Head, Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies	University College Cork
<b>Ms Anne Gallagher</b>	Director of the Centre for Irish Language: Research, Teaching and Testing <i>and</i> Head, School of Celtic Studies	Maynooth University
<b>Ms Beatrice McCarthy</b> <i>Student Reviewer</i>	Department of Government	University College Cork
<b>Ms Colette McKenna</b>	Director of Library Services	University College Cork
<b>Professor Ray Satchell</b>	Director, Sussex Centre for Language Studies	University of Sussex
<i>Ms Deirdre O'Brien</i>	<i>Panel Secretariat</i> <i>Quality Enhancement Unit</i>	<i>University College Cork</i>

## Methodology

The composition of the Panel brought together national and international expertise, and the involvement of a student as a full Panel member provided a valuable student perspective. The entire Panel contributed to the production of the final Report. Secretariat support from the Quality Enhancement Unit (QEU) was provided to the Peer Review Panel throughout, to facilitate the conduct of the review and support the Panel in formulating and agreeing the final Report.

## Site Visit

The Panel met over three days from 20 to 22 February 2018 (the timetable of the site visit is attached as Appendix 1). The site visit was well organised and while the schedule was very full, it did enable some flexibility when required by the Panel. There were no obvious gaps in the timetable and it allowed for comprehensive engagement with staff and internal and external stakeholders.

## Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was comprehensive and informative and clearly laid out the Language Centre's aims and objectives. The SER provided clear evidence of the wide range of activities undertaken in the Language Centre. The majority of staff engaged with the process and student focus groups were consulted. A co-ordinating committee met regularly as part of the centre planning meetings. The SWOT exercise was wide-ranging and edifying in its analysis. The University of Liverpool was chosen for the benchmarking visit due to the similarities between the Language Centres in both institutions. The outcomes of the benchmarking analysis were useful to the Panel in their deliberations.

The Panel would like to commend the management team of the Language Centre for the substantial body of work undertaken since the previous quality review; there is evidence of considerable progress since the last review took place in 2001/02. Given the length of time elapsing since then, as well as the considerable structural changes in the unit, the Panel did not think it relevant to comment on the substance of the previous review report.

### **Overall Analysis**

The process of review has come at an opportune time for the Language Centre, particularly in light of its clear potential to contribute to the University's key strategic mission and priority actions. Moreover, its activity is clearly aligned with one of the key priority actions of the University's new Strategic Plan (action point 5) which emphasises the University's aim to strengthen international engagement and recruit additional international students. It was evident to the Panel that the Language Centre has a critical strategic role to play in delivering this University priority. The Panel strongly believes that the Language Centre is an asset for the University that is currently under-utilised. It was also clear to the Panel that the Language Centre is prepared for change and that there is a strong view among staff that change is both welcome and necessary.

The Panel heard from stakeholders, both internal and external, of the professionalism of staff and the respect in which they are held across the University. The Panel was impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm of staff which was apparent in their passion for their work and in the breadth and depth of activity and training. Both administrative and teaching staff have made important contributions in the University. These include participation in the academic mission in terms of the development and delivery of academic programmes, the crucial integration of the international student community, as well as the generation of important external income.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are both evident among staff, and the Panel was impressed by the foresight and strategic thinking displayed by all staff members. The Summer School is a model of good practice and students are particularly positive about its vibrant cultural programme. Across all programmes there is evidence of outstanding commitment to the student experience. Students of the Language Centre are ambassadors for UCC and indeed the Panel heard evidence from current students that they had chosen UCC on the recommendation of past students.

It was apparent to the Panel that visibility across the University is a crucial issue that requires some consideration. While there was widespread evidence of excellent activity, it was less clear how this was communicated and perceived by the university community more widely. The Panel recommends that the Language Centre should collaborate more closely with other offices across the University, particularly the International Office given the synergy of operations. There are also many offices that provide a service to students and pastoral resources that are under-utilised by the Language Centre (for example, the Admissions Office, the Student Experience Office). Collaboration with these offices may reduce the pastoral care workload for staff members and further integrate the Language Centre into the wider operations of the university.

The Language Centre appears to have many different streams of revenue but not all potential income reaches the Language Centre. For example, staff teach on degree programmes across the University, however, the corresponding FTE income does not directly benefit the Language Centre. Given its

designation as an administrative unit, it cannot, under current structures be allocated income on the basis of FTEs. The Panel believes that there is scope for a clearer financial model and recommends that financial modelling is undertaken to reflect the entire extent of the Language Centre activity. This should provide the basis for a meaningful cost benefit analysis and ultimately lead to the development of a sustainable business plan.

Staff in the Language Centre appear to be operating under difficult conditions; individuals are unclear on their employment status; some staff have no contracts or job security. There is a lack of transparency with regard to workload models and there appear to be different models in use. There is also a lack of clarity around the duties involved in hourly paid work. Greater clarity is needed for staff on these and other related issues, such as administrative loads and exemptions from teaching and/or other duties. The employment status of staff is a matter of grave concern to the Panel and a clear risk for the University. The Panel recommends that the Deputy President and Human Resources work together to review current contractual arrangements and recruitment procedures.

The Panel found that general working conditions are poor, offices are overcrowded and there is a chronic shortage of space. The Panel heard that even simple measures such as securing a UCC email address and accessing rooms appear to be beyond the reach of certain staff members. It was clear to the Panel that staff are somewhat demoralised, which makes their continued and enthusiastic contribution to the education of the students all the more commendable. The Panel would urge that immediately solvable issues, for example, ensuring that all staff have a UCC email address, are resolved forthwith.

## **Findings of the Panel**

### ***Communication, engagement and impact***

The Panel was informed of good internal communication across the unit, with regular staff meetings taking place.

The staff of the Language Centre engage widely across the University and to great effect. However, the profile of the Centre needs to be raised and the Panel would see this issue as key for the incoming new Head of the Language Centre. The Centre should also raise its awareness of, and continue to avail of, the services offered by other university offices, the Student Experience Office being one such example, and enhance communication with these areas.

External communication, engagement and impact appear to be positive and the centre seems to have a wide reach externally.

### ***Student support & impact on the student body***

The Language Centre delivers an essential service for international students and the Panel was impressed by the close pastoral relationship in evidence. Small classes promote a close relationship; students appear to have good access to staff and receive detailed feedback of their performance.

### ***Staff development and workload***

The Panel recommends that a comprehensive staff development programme continues to be developed to ensure that all staff can gain access to career enhancement opportunities. Given the current contractual arrangements in place for most staff there is limited opportunity for development.

There is a lack of transparency with regard to workload models and there appear to be different models in use. There is also an over-reliance on extra, sometimes voluntary work. Greater clarity is needed for staff on related issues, such as administrative loads and exemptions from teaching and/or other duties.

### ***Resources***

The physical and technical resources available to the Language Centre present a clear difficulty and investment is required to bring them to an acceptable standard. The physical infrastructure is lacking, the office spaces are inadequate and overcrowded; not all staff have access to an office and a common working space is badly needed as a bare minimum. The language labs are in need of upgrading. The accommodation in general is wholly unsuitable as a first point of contact between international students and the University.

Investment is also needed in systems administration. The current system utilises Excel software to register and track students. This is unsuitable, inefficient and also inappropriate in an era in which compliance with data protection legislation is required. In light of this, a centralized, updated system needs to be identified and resources provided. The Panel recommends that the Language Centre work with IT Services on this matter.

### ***Engagement/compliance of the Unit with external policy drivers***

There is a high level of compliance with professional bodies such as Cambridge Assessment.

### ***Local quality assurance and enhancement activities, including those for feedback and evaluation of services***

The Language Centre is regularly evaluated due to its high level of activity with external examining bodies. It is a recognised centre for CELTA, DELTA and Cambridge English examinations. There is also evidence of a high level of internal monitoring.

### ***Collaborative partnerships***

There are some internal partnerships in place and the Panel would commend this activity. There is great potential to develop this area and promote partnerships and alliances with central offices and academic units across the University.

Highly developed external relationships are in place, such as those with organisations and institutions in Japan. There is huge potential to expand international collaborations and increase the number of international students coming to UCC. The resourcing of international trips whereby Language Centre staff might form part of high level university delegations to Asia, Latin America and elsewhere is

recommended. This would help to develop a strong sense of partnership with the International Office and lead to increased synergies in terms of recruitment.

### **Recommendations for Enhancement**

#### **Recommendations for Enhancement made by the Language Centre**

The Panel found the recommendations made by the Language Centre to be realistic and in line with the findings of the Panel.

#### **Recommendations for Enhancement made by the Panel**

##### ***Recommendations to the University***

- The Panel recommends the immediate appointment of a full-time Head of the Language Centre. The University should ensure that the new Head of the Language Centre is a member of Academic Council.
- The Panel recommends that an urgent review of current contractual arrangements and staff recruitment procedures is undertaken by the Deputy President and Human Resources.
- The Panel recommends the establishment of a Language Centre Board with representational membership and key external stakeholders to aid in the creation of a strategic vision.
- The Panel recommends that the University consider including the Language Centre in its action plan for delivery of the Strategic Plan, with a particular focus on internationalisation.
- The Panel recommends that the Finance Office works with the Language Centre to map the entire extent of the financial activity of the Centre. This should enable the new Head of the Language Centre to undertake a cost benefit analysis of all activity and to develop a sustainable business plan.
- The Panel recommends that the University consider the strategic positioning of the Language Centre within the University with specific reference to its location in the structure of the University. Potential locations could include Teaching and Learning and/or cognate academic units under a hybrid or shared model arrangement.
- The Panel recommends that the University works with the Language Centre to upgrade the inadequate physical resources (office & working spaces).

##### ***Recommendations to the Language Centre***

###### ***Staff***

- The Panel recommends that a comprehensive staff development plan continues to be developed to ensure that all staff are supported in their continuing professional development. Further to this, the Panel recommends collaboration with relevant professional bodies such as the Association of University Language Centres (AULC) and the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CERCLES), and increased collaboration with BALEAP which supports the professional development of those involved in learning, teaching, scholarship and research in English for Academic Purposes.

- The Panel recommends that the Language Centre take immediate steps to ensure the parity of the staff experience, including but not limited to, securing UCC email addresses for all staff members and ensuring equal access to all rooms.

#### *Strategic Vision*

- The Panel recommends that the new Head of the Language Centre work with staff to create a vision and strategy for the Language Centre. The name of the Centre and the clarification of its mission should be considered in this process.
- The Panel recommends that measures are taken to increase visibility both internally and externally. Internally, there should be a focus on signage and brand identity.
- The Panel recommends that the new Head of the Language Centre should collaborate with the International Office with a view to sharing and developing a marketing strategy for Language Centre courses and building on co-operation with the International Office regarding the recruitment process.

#### *Systems*

- The Panel recommends that the Language Centre work with IT Services to source appropriate systems software for registering and tracking students.
- The Panel recommends that administrative processes be reviewed, drawing on insights from LEAN practices and approaches.

#### *Strategic partnerships*

- The Panel recommends that the Language Centre work to increase visibility, create new linkages and develop existing linkages with areas such as Teaching and Learning, Adult Continuing Education, the Alumni Office and the International Office.
- The Panel recommends greater co-ordination with central offices providing pastoral resources that are under-utilised by the Language Centre (for example, the Admissions Office and the Student Experience Office).
- The Panel recommends working closely with the Library and exploring the resources available for staff and students.

#### *Portfolio of courses*

- The Panel recommends further development of new modules and programmes, the new pre-Masters is one such commendable example. The Panel also recommends that the Centre considers further developing modules in English for Academic and Specific Purposes/English for Speakers of Other Languages, which could potentially contribute to many current UCC programmes.
- The Panel recommends that the introduction of foundation programmes be considered subject to adequate resourcing.
- The Panel recommends collaboration with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) unit internally and encourages the Language Centre team to explore the possibility of offering the non-credit bearing evening courses as part of the CPD suite of programmes.



- The Panel recommends that, should the Centre consider re-introducing the IELTS Testing Centre, a cost benefit analysis is to be carried out in advance.

## Appendix 1 - Panel Site Visit Timetable

Tuesday 20 February 2018	
13.00 – 13.30	Convening of Panel members. Briefing by Director of Quality Enhancement and Panel Secretariat, Quality Enhancement.
13.30 – 14.15	Private meeting of Panel <i>Panel agree issues to be explored in meetings with Head of Centre, Language Centre staff and Stakeholders.</i>
14.15 – 14.55	Meeting with Head of Language Centre <i>Discussion regarding developments to date, strategic priorities of the Centre and overview of educational provision.</i>
15.00 – 15.25	Meeting with Language Centre Administrator
15.30 – 16.00	Private meeting of the Panel <i>Panel agree tasks and prepare for meetings with Language Centre Staff and Stakeholders</i>
16.00 – 16.50	Meeting with Language Centre Staff <i>Discuss issues such as strategy, communications, research &amp; education, staffing, teaching &amp; learning, curriculum &amp; assessment.</i>
17.00 – 18.00	Meeting with Stakeholders <i>The Panel meets with various language schools and other stakeholders as appropriate to discuss views on the quality of education received and the quality of the graduates' attributes.</i>  Butlers Bus Tours, Cobh – 2 x representatives Irish Dancing Teacher, Carrigaline Academic Manager, Active Centre of English Training Representative from ASE Cultural Exchange Ltd., Aupair Service Europe, Berrings Host Family, Ballintemple, Cork Representative from Cork English World Japanese Agent, Nichiai Ltd. Cork Host Family, Model Farm Road, Cork
19.00	Informal dinner for members of the Panel & staff members of the Centre

Wednesday 21 February 2018	
08.45 – 09.00	Convening of the Panel

09.00 – 09.40	Meeting with Deputy President and Registrar <i>Panel discuss strategy, priorities and positioning of Unit. The links between the Centre's financial resource allocations process, staffing resources and infrastructure.</i>
09.40 – 10.00	Meeting with HR Business Manager
10.00 – 10.20	Meeting with Financial Analyst
10.20 – 11.00	Private meeting of the Panel
11.00 – 11.30	Meeting with Academic Secretary
11.40 – 12.20	Tour of Language Centre facilities
12.30 – 13.30	Private meeting of the Panel
13.30 – 14.00	Meeting with Students <i>International students:</i> Student representative - PG6021 Student representative - Level 6 C1 Academic English Visiting Erasmus student currently in LC1002 and LC1003  <i>Full-time EFL students:</i> Student representative - Japanese - Group 2 B2 Level Student representative - Argentinian - Group 6 B2+ Level Student representative - Kuwaiti - Group 1 C1 Level
14.00 – 14.30	Students on Teacher Training programmes
14.45 – 15.15	Meeting with UCC staff members Head, Department of Italian Deputy Director, International Office Interim Vice President for Teaching & Learning Programme Director for MA Teaching
15.15 – 15.45	Private meeting of the Panel
15.45 – 16.30	Meeting with part-time hourly paid teaching staff
16.30 – 17.15	Meeting with Programme Directors for programmes offered by Language Centre  EFL teacher and teacher trainer Head of Teacher Training Academic Module Co-ordinator (EFL Teacher and Teacher Trainer) 2018 Summer School Director (contracted) Full-time Course Co-ordinator Marketing Director (EFL Teacher and Teacher Trainer)
18.00	Working private dinner for members of the Panel to commence drafting the report.

Thursday 22 February 2018	
08.45 – 09.00	Convening of the Panel
09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with Director, UCC Language Centre <i>Clarification and discussions of main findings by Panel.</i>
09.45 – 10.30	Private meeting of Panel
10.30 – 11.00	Exit presentation <i>Exit presentation to all staff, to be made by the Chair or other member(s) of Panel as agreed, summarising the principal findings of the Panel. This presentation is <u>not</u> for discussion at this time.</i>
11.30 – 12.00	Meeting with Deputy President & Registrar
11.00 – 14.00	Further work on drafting the final report