Department of Modern Languages and Cultures
Student Staff Liaison Committee
Joint Meeting (Online) for all language sections
Wednesday 3 June 2020, 10:10
Agenda

PART 1 – Preliminary items (Chair and Convenors)

1. Welcome

The Chair, Dr Thomas Wilks, apologised for a delayed start due to his computer failing, and welcomed members. Gratitude was expressed to **Georgina Hutt** for producing these minutes, which she supplied to the Chair very promptly.

Student Representatives*:
French: Chrisanthi Symeonidou (CS), Georgina Hutt (GH; minutes), Jessica Turner (JT)
German: Anastasija Aleksandrova (AA)
ILAS and Portuguese**: Olivia Sayers (OS), Millicent Crawford (MC)
Russian: Andrea Ciocoi (AC), Malgorzata Goli (MG)

Chair's notes: **gratitude is expressed to those reps. who spoke on behalf of an absentee who represents a different level or programme within a language section.*

**The Chair had not been aware until after the meeting of the separation of Portuguese from ILAS, and apologises for any confusion caused by referring to these two sections as one. The Portuguese section convenor has been copied in to follow-up discussions about matters arising that affect Portuguese, and added to the SSLC contact list.

Language convenors: Dr Elsa Petit (EP): Dr Martina Deny (MD): German, Dr Maria Encinas-Puente (MEP): ILAS; Dr Nadezda Bragina (NB): Russian
Staff in attendance *ex officio*:
Dr Laetitia Calabrese (LC) (SLLF Senior Tutor)
Dr Robert Gillett (RG) (SLLF Teaching Lead)
Elena Moreira (EM) (SLLF Learning and Teaching Manager)
Dr Christopher Phillips (CP) (HSS Faculty Deputy Dean for Education; joined 10:30)

2. Apologies for absence

Menat Alla Ahmed Mostafa Abou El Nasr (French second year); Anastasia Korovina (German first year)

3. Approval of Minutes (9.4.20)

Chair's note: *Apologies for overlooking this item. Necessary corrections include the spelling of 'Gillett'.*
Action: All members, please send any corrections or clarifications to T.Wilks@qmul.ac.uk.

4. Responses to actions from last meeting

WhatsApp- SU will discuss concerns extending beyond MLC, and will set up whatsapp groups officially. French Facebook groups set up.

Module-specific concerns: TW had referred the concerns about a module taught across MLC and the Language Centre to our Head of Department; its convenor and the Language Centre Director are also aware; the module was already not on offer for 2020/21.

Feedback on modules:

    No comment from course reps,
    EP- feedback to convenors but nothing to act upon
   MD- continues to be investigated (Chair's note: the Foundations module is being revised)
    NB- no comment, still no feedback from Final Year Russian
    MEP - actions were taken up, feedback is being awaited from the reps

PART 2 – Programme Delivery and related matters arising (Student Representatives)

5. Communication
5.1 Use of email
5.2 Use of platforms and applications (Communicate, MS Teams etc.)
5.3 Communications about next semester/ next academic year

Year 2 ILAS (OS) - The jump to MS teams had been difficult from QMPlus. Some teachers neglected QMPlus, students couldn't find resources. Any technical difficulties meant class content was shortened. People would be communicating in different "chats" (to teachers directly or to students etc).
Response from Maria EP: Cannot report on specific issues related to Portuguese.
TW: now these issues have been raised, they will be taken forward.
EP: Clearly identify from the beginning which platform everything is on. Creation of forums for next year.
EM: clear guidance will be drawn up, any chat can be exported
Response from ILAS: A centralised place to be set up for homework/ assignments
Action: Language convenors to ensure practices, including those prompted in this discussion by EP and EM, are consistent and communicated clearly within the relevant section.
TW to convey the concerns specific to Portuguese to Professor Else Viera, to be taken up within that section; and to request that Portuguese organise SSLC staff and student representation at the earliest opportunity next semester.

Year 2 French (GH): Some lecturers didn't respond to emails or the response time was long.
Response by EP: EP made students aware of her availability.
Year 2 French: Agree an expected response time with lecturers should online tuition continue into the new academic year.
LC: QMPlus announcements is an agreeable way to convey the most important information. Students need to remember public holidays and weekends, and be made aware of staff work time so that student expectations are reasonable.
Year 2 French: Agree

Chris Phillips joined discussion about the NSS
EP: feedback is always well received in feedback evaluations at module level, so teaching staff do not understand why NSS results are not always good
CP: Respondents tend to remember bad parts, not good parts
Year 2 ILAS: No way of making comments on NSS
Year 2 French: Mostly positive remarks in French section, but by nature we remember negative things when invited to comment
TW: formalised and standardised mechanisms such as NSS and even our module evaluations around Week 11 do not necessarily pick up positive feedback given at other points during the cycle, or shared in the SSLC (cf. 9.4.20 minutes), or between individual students and tutors.

6. **Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

6.1 Outstanding business from last meeting: impacts of cancellation of on-campus teaching and replacement with online provision; impacts of UCU industrial action

6.2 Coursework arrangements

Year 2 ILAS- Students appreciated coursework being more heavily weighted. Rather than rushing an exam performance, they had time to spend on completing work.

6.3 Examination arrangements

Year 2 ILAS- One student reported a computer had broken, cutting off access to any resources. Everything had to be done by hand.

Response by EM: There is a central Financial Assistance Fund, recently boosted, but we need to make students aware.

Response by LC: Communications were made to students, e.g. on 24 April, but we need to make the scope of the fund better known.

Year 2 French - Access to laptop scheme takes too long and is difficult; at least one person had to buy a laptop.

EM: We need to help students, and to be told about issues that staff can seek to address.If we don't know, we can't help.

LC: We need one person at one address for contact such as preliminary queries: *sllf-senior-tutor@qmul.ac.uk*

Action: All student reps. to remind students to use the above address for queries about the Financial Assistance Fund. **LC and EM** to revisit communications about the scheme; and to take forward any problems arising in MLC.

TW to remind MLC Academic Advisers of the scheme's existence and to refer their advisees to sllf-senior-tutor@qmul.ac.uk.

6.4 Examination delivery and overall experience of the examination period.

Year 2 French – 48-hour exams have been well received. Allowed for a better standard of work

Year 2 German- Students felt they were adequately assessed despite different organisation/ style of exam.

7. Central Learning Resources

7.1 Library and E-learning facilities / resources (books, journals etc)

7.2 QMPlus

7.3 Information Technology (software/applications etc)

Year 2 French- QMPlus has been well organised and easy to navigate. Library resources are available and no one found access difficult.

Year 2 ILAS - Some staff uploaded all documents but elected to do no online teaching.

Response by MEP: one-to-ones with students are offered

TW: ILAS-specific response to be taken forward by MEP.

EP: Feedback received and discussed for next year

TW: Re. Zoom, reported as being used variably among tutors and groups: not a platform that QMUL E-Learning can currently support (so staff and student users would have to bear technical risks).

MD and CP needed to leave the meeting at 11:30, so the following business, of concern to them ex officio, was discussed ahead of schedule:

Year Abroad

Year 2 ILAS: Concerned their Year Abroad experience will be online

MD: Too early to divulge any specific information; staff are still in planning and we must all see how the pandemic unfolds. Virtual alternatives (for study placements), also online courses offered by host institutions, would involve studying from home with resources from QMUL. Some people are worried

about authenticity of their year abroad experience, but other prevailing worries about safety need to take precedence for the time being.

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Student Feedback
CP: Concerned that i) students receive relevant feedback; ii) that there is also a 'feed forward' about the quality and appropriateness of the feedback students receive
Year 2 French - All feedback has been good and lecturers are all available should students wish further feedback
Year 2 ILAS - Agrees
CP: Invites students to contact him directly to draw his (the Faculty's) attention to any discussions about feedback. Email: c.phillips@qmul.ac.uk

Discussion progressed to feedback about modes of teaching

RG: Feedback is also sought on experiences and preferences re. synchronous and asynchronous teaching: what do students prefer?
EP: Feedback is also sought about practices of recording classes. [*A technical problem meant that the remainder of the discussion gathered questions for EP, but she was unable to respond in situ. EP responded in writing to the Chair about those points that concern her as Language Studies Coordinators Chair*] :
--language teaching arrangements are currently in the process of being revised, and will take account of guidelines about assessment, which have not yet been finalised.

- Students could choose to join language teaching sessions using audio or audio and video, and ideally the session would be recorded either way. Ideally, the recording of synchronous sessions would be seen as the default setting. Recordings enable students (especially, but not only, those who cannot attend for any reason) to refer back to a taught session; staff would explain exactly what is involved (any oral/video/written contribution would be recorded, including the chat).
- Of course, students cannot be forced to switch on their cameras: but teachers should explain to their students in their first online session together that it is easier for a teacher to see the group he/she is teaching as it's very tricky for a teacher to remain engaging if he or she is just teaching facing a blank screen. The learning and social experience should also be more engaging for students too when they see each other and not just the teacher. Besides, with video, a teacher can detect inaudible clues, e.g. recognising when students struggle to understand, to hear, to take the floor, etc.
- Video will help students get to know each other too and create a better sense of belonging to a group. This will be especially important for 1st year cohorts who have never met, and for encouraging them to stay engaged.
- Students can also choose different backgrounds for their camera output from different platforms (MS Teams, Collaborate, etc.), or blur the background.
- There are distinctions between small groups of up to 9 students, where camera use is more likely to enhance the group dynamic, and larger groups, where it is often standard practice to mute yourself and switch off your camera unless you are interacting.

[MEP *confirmed after the meeting that provision had been made in Spanish for synchronous teaching of all skills, although groupings in Spanish I and II for aural, reading and writing and oral groups would be likely to change due to staffing.*]
EM: Issues are being clarified with the SU and E-learning about how we manage emerging standards of practice that may be set beyond MLC.
Year 2 German (AA)- Asked about voice recording or video recording
Year 2 ILAS: Asked whether all teaching sessions would be recorded

MD: Response to German: up to the student whether you join by audio or video.
Response to ILAS: Recording could be on a selective basis
EM: No way all classes will be recorded by default. Too soon to have this conversation as we don't know how all learning events will be organised.
Year 2 French: Synchronous presentation works well if everyone turns up for language learning online
Year 2 ILAS: Preference widely shared, fitting timetables doesn't work if people have other commitments. Asynchronous works to a certain extent, but exposure is less.
Year 2 ILAS: Raised importance of mental health for virtual learning, especially the effect of synchronous engagement in group activities for well-being.

Actions:
Course reps to seek further views from their cohorts about feedback, and keep Dr Phillips informed, c.phillips@qmul.ac.uk, (e.g. where NSS feedback by Joint Programme students has disproportionately reflected their experiences in departments and schools other than MLC and SLLF).

Course reps to ask cohort how they feel about recording, in particular in practical language classes, and to feed responses back to language convenors.

EM to give Course Reps a list of questions to ask. EM will keep the Committee up to date on what is happening at School level.

Course reps to find out in more detail what the cohort's expectations are for synchronous/ asynchronous teaching (including about terminology that they might find preferable to 'synchronous'/'asynchronous') in core language and optional content modules.

8. **Academic, pastoral and central service support**
TW: Are services demonstrably available, and are students made aware?
Year 2 ILAS: Excellent communication for pastoral and service support
Year 2 French: Pastoral care has been well received

PART 3 – Student Reports (Student Representatives)

Discussion in this section will concentrate on programme-level and year-level experience (i.e. not on specific option modules)

9. **Reports from student course representatives (First, Second and Final Year) covering any matters not addressed above:**
There was insufficient time for discussion by level and language, so representatives selected points of immediate and broad relevance.

Some written reports had been received by section convenors in advance of the meeting; others have followed; all will be uploaded to a Sharepoint folder, accessible in MS Teams.

Actions:
Any reps. who have not yet sent reports to their section convenor, please do so a.s.a.p.

Convenors to respond to any actionable items in reports, which are not covered above or below.

Year 2 ILAS: What will be happening with native level language students? Native Spanish was only worth 15 credits in one term; has it been changed for next year?
Response by MEP: Course has been changed to 30 credits and will have classes in both semesters

RG: Sought more details about difficulties encountered by native-level speakers, to be borne in mind for all language programmes

Year 2 ILAS: Felt like a "guinea pig" year.

[MEP *clarified that the module had been taught the previous year, with the same content, and evaluations reflected a high level of satisfaction.*]

A year's worth of content in one semester. Structural issues in the module. Disappointed in studying a Spanish degree and only having 2 hours of Spanish language a week in second year. The cohort formed a native level class in 1st and 2nd year; but in final year, there is no native level class: hence, perception of a "stagnating level of Spanish".

Response by MEP: Discussion must happen across the board. Native pathways need to be considered up to the end of the degree.

RG: German do a hybrid, including some native-specific work (translation into English in second and final years; précis in final year)

Year 2 ILAS: Native speakers not given support

TW: in response to the student concern that large amounts of material were provided without guidance on volume or timing of usage, observed that current department-wide staff discussions and practical preparations are concentrating on how to utilise blended learning effectively. The aim is to ensure that IT and asynchronous resources are accompanied by suitable tasks, instructions and timing indications.

Action: MEP and TW to remind the Department to continue to investigate Native Speaker pathways throughout programmes.

[Following consultation with EP after the meeting, TW agreed to find out whether post-GCSE French students had offered feedback to JT. JT is in the process of inviting these students to the section's social media platforms. If their feedback points towards a different experience from the rest of the first year cohort's, there may be a need for separate representation of this group on the SSLC.]

10. Arranging representation, handovers and meetings next semester

TW: Excellent commitment and engagement from this year's student reps. make them hard acts to follow. Wherever possible, current reps. should encourage prospective successors, and provide handovers by sharing experiences of good practice.

Thanks to reps. and convenors for their diligence through the year, especially over the past two months.

Year 2 ILAS: Asks if year abroad students can give feedback. At least one existing second year rep. is willing to seek nomination as a YA rep. on next year's SSLC .

Response by MEP: Year abroad student representation needs remain under consideration

Chair's note: Following consultation after the meeting by TW with MD and EP (which enabled them to respond to this strand of the discussion, which had taken place in their absence), the need for Year Abroad students to be represented in staff-student consultations was agreed. MEP reiterated this need for Spanish and Catalan. MD and TW are concerned, however, that the existing department-wide SSLC for all levels is likely to have too much business next semester *in its current form* to accommodate the many pressing and specific needs of the Year Abroad cohort.

Action: MD and section convenors to consider how YA student representation can be arranged next academic year

11. Any Other Business

TW: Students should expect an email about a late item requested by EM, for which there was no discussion time. It will be an invitation to trial a new Extenuating Circumstances reporting programme.

Action: EM to circulate details to all students.