

**Department of Modern Languages and Cultures
Student Staff Liaison Committee
Joint Meeting (Online) for all language sections
Thursday 9 April, 13:00
Minutes**

PART 1 – Preliminary items (Chair and Convenors)

1. Welcome

Tom Wilks (TW), Elena Moreira (EM) [Minutes], Maria Encinas-puente (ME), Martina Deny (MD), Elsa Petit (EP), Nadezda Bragina (NB), Laetitia Calabrese (LC), Robert Gillet (RG), Chrisanthi Symeonidou (CS), Menat Alla Ahmed Mostafa Abou El Nasr (MEN), Georgina Marie Hutt (GH), Jessica Anne Turner (JT), Anastasia Korovina (AK), Anastasija Aleksandrova (AA), Rishika Manimendran (RM), Jesse Thomas Grainger (JG), Alice Louise Barron Bushell (AB), Olivia Charlotte Sayers (OS), Millicent Grace Crawford (MC), Andrea Ciocci (AC), Malgorzata Joanna Goli (MG)

2. Apologies for absence

Pedro Manuel Gois Pereira, Samuel Anthony Wills

3. Responses to actions from last sectional meetings

All minutes received will be posted in the File section of the group on SharePoint (via MS Teams)

French: No comments

German: No comments, MD still to get in touch with IT re Student cards

ILAS: All action met

Russian: No comments

PART 2 – Student reports (Student Representatives)

4. Reports from student course representatives (First, Second and Final Year) covering any matters not addressed below.

The Chair reminded Representatives that module-specific concerns, which were raised in several written reports, should be referred in the first instance to the relevant language section convenor. Some module-specific concerns were raised orally: where these are not identified below, they have been presented to convenors and the Chair, so that the most appropriate staff can be contacted. Distinctions need to be drawn between those matters for which a convenor or tutor is responsible, and those which relate to processes or policies within the Department (or beyond, in the case of modules offered or organised beyond MLC).

4.1 French

First Year (JT): Students would like more information to help with making module choices. Perhaps an information fair

RG: A session was held to present options, but we can look at how this is promoted

Second year (MEN): Students have concerns about the Year Abroad next year. It appears that students choosing work placements have been contacted to select a student placement. Can exceptions be made this year? For example, working for a Francophone company in the UK?

MD: This back-up is for semester one only at the moment. We are monitoring

the international situation. This is so that we can nominate students for study placements before the deadline. The deadline for semester 2 nominations is much later, so currently there is no need to add back-ups. If anything changes, we will be in touch. The aim of a Year Abroad is full immersion however we are taking the current situation into account and thinking about alternatives. These may become an option, but not yet. If you have specific concerns, contact your YA coordinator.

Second year (GH): A survey with responses from about half the cohort shows overall students are happy, reporting that the teaching is OK or good. The Year Abroad was this biggest area of concern. Students would like a mixer for 2nd years to meet students returning from their year abroad. An informal session that allows for chatting as opposed to the hour-long meetings that take place throughout the year. Generally, students would like more communication throughout the year about the Year Abroad.

MD: A session took place in Semester 1 but was not well attended. MD asked for suggestions that would help with attendance. Social media promotion was suggested. It was suggested that WhatsApp would be an appropriate vehicle. It was suggested that there could be a QMplus area that can be used by reps to post information. EP explained this is possible for French. Course reps can also be reminded of events and they can help with 'shout outs' in class. A clear programme of events promoted early is helpful. Events could be live-streamed for all students.

ACTION: EM to contact QMSU about guidance for using WhatsApp for course reps communications

ACTION: EM to set up a Course Rep area on QMplus for the School.

Second year (CS): Generally, students are happy and positive about their experiences. Comms are good and students are happy with the use of MS teams. As a whole they felt the transition to online teaching was smooth and that the changes to assessment are helpful. Students feel that QMplus announcements are a good way to communicate with students; they feel they are better than emails as it is less overwhelming and people can process them in their own time. The French teaching team was praised, while LC was highlighted for particular praise.

4.2 German

First Year (AK): Generally everything is fine. Students would like more exam style questions for practice. A suggestion was made about the range and depth of study material in one module. There is an issue with that module on QMPlus, and the assessment is not clear. The ab initio students value the texts provided in English. All students recognised the support provided at this difficult time.

MD: Issues need to be raised with the Module Organiser. The QMPlus issue has already been raised with the Module Organiser.

Second Year (AA): German II intensive students raised points about the curriculum and workload. One student raised the point that assignments should be set earlier (not all students recognised this issue). Students reported that Staff office hours are not always convenient. Others noted that if students cannot make office hours they can email the staff to arrange an alternative time. Now that students are working with QMPlus more regularly they are becoming more accustomed to the layout; it can be difficult to navigate if there is too much information on one page, dropdown menus can be helpful. Feedback is very clear and the recent assessment changes have been explained clearly.

MD: Will follow up actions once she receives the notes.

Final year (RM): Will email module-specific comments. International students have reported difficulty in 'attending' online classes and would value

them being recorded. There is confusion, particularly from joint honours students, about the lowest 30 credits change. Students noted that it took some time for changes to assessment to be communicated.

EM: This year when all students' grades are confirmed at the end of the academic year after the exam boards, we will look at which modules have the highest grades to calculate the year average. Normally we calculate the year's average on all the modules (or 120 credits) – this year we will calculate it on the highest modules worth 90 credits. Just to clarify there is no suggestion that 30 credits are 'dropped' – it is that the lowest 30 credits this year would not be included in the calculation of the average. We therefore encourage students to continue working on all their modules to give themselves the best chances of success. If anything is unclear students can contact the School on slf-assessment@qmul.ac.uk with questions.

4.3 ILAS

Second year (OS): Students reported concerns about whether they would get support in finding work placements for their Year Abroad. Students reported that they had trouble with in getting responses to emails to the Year Abroad inbox. Are students for specific languages prioritised for certain study placements? For example, a Catalan student at a Barcelona university?

MD: Any students needing support in finding Work placements should contact Brigitta Hall, Birgitta will always posts possible placements on QMplus. Students shouldn't feel disheartened as there is plenty of time available after semester 1 for work placements and some volunteer placements are still recruiting.

EM: We can ensure that we acknowledge emails received from students

ME: Students of specific languages are prioritised for certain study placements.

Final Year (MC): Generally, students are satisfied, but there was a bit of a difference between the ab initio students and others. The ab initio students did not learn the subjunctive before their year abroad and they felt that it made this year difficult. The others felt that the pace is a little slow and they have not been challenged. There are positive comments about the oral class although those that have six students in a class feel that is too big. Xelo was singled out for particular praise. Spanish III has 3 contact hours when other languages appear to have more hours.

ME: Unavoidable timetable clashes made the groups uneven. Russian has 4 contact hours, but all other languages have 3 hours.

4.4 Russian

First year (AC): As it is a smaller cohort it is easier to communicate with the other students. All the students seem to be happy, even in these difficult circumstances. The organisation and teaching is great, thanks to the Russian teaching team. There is an issue with one Russian Module, but she will raise it with NB separately.

Second year (MG): The transition to online teaching was smooth but some students have issue with Wi-Fi and IT equipment. There are lots of questions from students about what will happen if they cannot go away in the first semester. There is some speculation from students that the year abroad is going to be cancelled.

NB: Short tests were transferred online, but they can be taken at any time. If students need help, they should get in touch. All the students due to go on a Year Abroad have been nominated for the first semester and the semester 2 nominations are underway. Of course, we are monitoring the international situation and will support the students however we can in relation to any necessary changes.

EM: If students are facing financial difficulties due to the crisis, they can find out about the Financial Assistance Fund and make an application for

financial assistance at:

<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/students/finances/bursaries-grants-scholarships/financial-assistance-fund/>

Reports may be presented later in the meeting by reps. who are only available after 14:00; and will be presented by the Chair where reps. who are absent without substitution have sent them.

PART 3 – Programme delivery and other matters (Student Representatives)

Many of the items below could not be discussed due to lack of time: but they can be revisited at a future meeting.

5. Communication

5.1 Use of email

5.2 Use of platforms and applications (Communicate, MS Teams etc.)

6. Learning, teaching and assessment

6.1 Cancellation of on-campus teaching and replacement with online provision

MEN: Students are very happy with the way in which emails have been responded to (particularly by EP).

CS: Students raised issues with a module which crosses all languages – this discussion needs to be taken forward outside this group (EM/TW: note that the module is officially part of the Language Centre, not MLC)

GH: There are positive points about the communications during the strikes, but students did ask questions about the timing of the strikes.

Students can find updates about the ways the university is addressing the Covid-19 pandemic on <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/coronavirus/>

6.2 Assessment changes

6.3 Impacts of recent UCU industrial action

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)

8. Academic and pastoral support

9. Organisation

9.1 Timetabling

9.2 Other administration matters

10. Date and configuration of next meeting

ACTION: TW to identify possible dates/times for a further MLC-wide meeting to address outstanding items and matters arising. A poll will be conducted after the replacement examination timetable has been finalised. It is proposed that MS Teams be used again unless a better suggestion is put to TW.

11. Any other business

None