

MINUTES

FLAG Advisory Group Meeting

13th January 2020 at 10am, G13/14

In Attendance:

CAP: Evelyn O'Connor, PO - Chair, Leona De Khors AP, Aoife McGrane EO.
DES: Orla Dowling (International) Joanne Tobin (H.Ed), Maria Lorigan (Inspectorate)
Alan Power, DBEI. Niall Brady, DFA. Karen Ruddock, PPLI. Aoife Dungan, PPLI. Celine Healy,
Maynooth University. Deirdre Kirwan, Language Expertise/TCD. Mary-Elaine Tynan, NCCA. Anne
Marie Manton, SEC. Gerry O'Sullivan, HEA. Emma Grainger, Léargas. Wilma Slevin, TPNs, Dr. Britta
Jung, HEA Invited Guest.

Apologies:

Colin Clarke, ISSU. Regina Butler NAPD.

Evelyn O'Connor welcomed attendees and made introductions.

1. Updates

H.Ed updated the group on the establishment of a sub-group and the potential for a Joint Skills/H.Ed group. .

- a. PPLI gave an update from the FLAG post-primary sub-group.
 - Development is ongoing with regard to the creation of an online teaching manual and tutorials, including digital tools. The continued development and use of Spotlight on schools provides an area on the PPLI website where good practise can be showcased.
 - Communities of Practice continue to be facilitated. 20 meetings were held and over 300 teachers/FLA engaged in Q4 2019
 - Face to face evening sessions were provided for Language Assistants and their co-operating teachers in 7 locations (Cork, Donegal, Dublin (x2), Galway, Limerick, and Navan) and a webinar also developed
 - The PPLI have continued to encourage and support the use of ICT tools in the classroom and innovative teaching methods by adding new resources to the website. A conference was hosted in September in collaboration with JCT.
 - An additional €150K was awarded to 10 schools in 2019/20 (to be awarded over a three year period subject to satisfactory outcomes and reporting) for students to avail of language exchange opportunities.
 - The expansion of CLIL in post-primary schools and higher education is to be explored. 13 teachers have been trained as part of the CLIL pilot which commenced in September, and are now delivering content. An expansion of the Pilot of CLIL for TY where there is teacher capacity is being considered and a set of guidelines for introducing CLIL at post-primary level is being developed.
 - A model for the introduction of new and lesser taught languages is being developed which considers the introduction of full or short courses and shared/classes or blended learning

modules; 6 schools have availed of additional allocation for diversification of FL in curricula (as per circular 0031/2019). CPD for teachers is ongoing.

- An expression of interest form had been distributed to schools re provision for the teaching of Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, and Lithuanian at second level. 18 schools responded, primarily in the Cork, Dublin and Kildare areas but this is likely to increase as additional relevant schools are targeted.
- An Expression of Interest form was also circulated to identify potential teachers and generated 32 responses for Mandarin Chinese, 3 for Lithuanian, 11 for Polish, and the largest no. of 116 for Portuguese).
- An Education Officer had been identified to support the implementation of Chinese and was working part-time pending visa before commencing full-time position.
- The point was raised that as per action 2.E.4, schools and libraries should have books, digital resources etc. available in a variety of relevant home languages. School Library Home Languages scheme offered funding in this regard. A Toolkit for acquiring home language materials in Public Libraries was also developed by PPLI.
- Exemplars of good practise should continue to be disseminated amongst the education and training system.
- The #ThinkLanguages event was held in Q4 as part of the awareness raising campaign involving the participation of 3000 TY students, teachers and coordinators and was attended by 55 schools. Also present were 70 Third Level, Cultural Institute, Embassy, Foreign Exchange/Learning abroad organisations and industry body stands.
- Up to 50,000 TY, 5th & 6th year students, teachers and guidance counsellors visited the Languages Connect stand at a series of student events attended in the Autumn
- A Work experience TY & LCA/LCVP activity pack for students has been developed and is currently being piloted in schools.

Congratulations were offered to PPLI on the #Thinklanguages event by those in attendance.

DK also welcomed grant currently offered to teachers for purchasing books in other languages. c.

NCCA Updated the group on the ongoing work on the development of the new LC specifications (Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese and Lithuanian)

- Public consultation included an online survey available from mid-November to mid-January
- One-to-one consultations were conducted with students from which feedback was received in a number of different formats.
- Overarching Framework – A2/B1 level for Polish, Portuguese and Lithuanian and ‘ab initio’ for Mandarin Chinese. It was noted that Mandarin Chinese does not adhere to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for languages)
- There was a discussion around the role of the portfolio for assessment,
- There was a discussion around the decision to offer simplified Chinese vs. traditional Chinese
- The lusophone approach to Portuguese allows for variation.
- Specifications are being finalised with a view to them being presented for approval by Council in March.

Junior Cycle MFL now in year 3 and CBAs are currently underway. Exemplars have been published in each language.

- Primary Language Development
- Primary Language toolkit is updated and available online
- Draft new primary framework expected to go to public consultation at end of January.

- This is likely to include proposal to include MFL at 3rd – 6th classes (L3) with various options about hours.

There was a general discussion on the updates.

d. Léargas Update

Update on language-related projects involving teachers in School Education (Training Courses, Job Shadowing) funded through ERASMUS+ in the period 2017 – 2019.

- The no. of overall language-related projects has increased from 8 in 2017 to 13 in 2019.
- The no. of primary school projects has risen from 5 – 10 in the same period (2017 – 2019).
- The uptake of primary school teachers has increased from 8 (2017) to 24 (2018), and now to 36 (2019).
- 3 secondary school projects were funded in 2017, 8 in 2018 and 3 in 2019.
- The no. of secondary school teachers increased significantly in 2019, rising from 5 (2017) to 9 (2018), and rising to 53 in 2019.
- The no. of school exchange partnerships involving students funded constituted a rise from 55 to 59 re. the no. of Irish-based schools awarded in KA2 (EACEA's Key Action 2: Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange for good practises).
- The no. of Irish-based students from these projects rose from 1,234 in 2017 to 1062 in 2018 (figures for 2019 were not yet available).
- 83 new schools applied for teacher exchange programmes during this period; 140% increase.
- Regions where this has not happened in the past have now been identified.
- 20 Irish Teachers in partnership for exchanges.
- 101 projects total to date had been funded; this includes 140 teachers availing of language upskilling.
- CPD will happen, but to date has not.

WS commented that The European Day of Languages (held on September 26th each year) has proved to be a strong awareness-raising activity.

KR mentioned the possibilities of partnerships with regard to the promotion of language.

e. Inspectorate Update

Inspectorate Report on MFLs is close to publication. Almost 100 subjects inspected in French, German, Spanish. It includes best practise in terms of Early Years/Mother Tongue acquisition. Areas for improvement. Findings and recommendations denoted that good practise was based on assessment findings

Discussion agreed that the report should support ITE and the use of the target language by teachers.

CH added that in relation to the CLIL project, Guidelines were developed by teachers for teachers including how to bring colleagues on board, due end of February.

Presentation: Dr. Britta Jung: HEA/Léargas 'Study on the Impact of Erasmus+ on Foreign Language Acquisition – Preliminary Findings'

Dr. Jung gave a brief overview of and some general commentary on the report and its findings on language learning.

- From the data gathered from survey of Erasmus participants (609 responses), a more holistic experience of language learning would be welcomed.
- CLIL was widely endorsed was the group in attendance.
- While the majority of students demonstrated a genuine curiosity in foreign languages, several learners felt that there was a lack of agency in this area e.g. often the school they attended did not offer their language of choice/interest and/or timetabling of other subjects posed a problem; both of these negated a personal connection to the language.
- The importance of formal as well as informal meetings regarding the use of languages.
- The need of 'myth-busting' of the widely-held opinion of the Irish not being good at languages.
- There is a distinct lack of faith in the quality of foreign language teachers in Ireland.
- The myth of that only native speakers of a given language make for good teachers.
- Child Protection issues surrounding host families may make them more reluctant to participate in exchanges/home stays.
 - KR interjected in saying that a manual has been produced by PPLI to facilitate the above.
- A language exchange programme serves to drive home that English, even in our globalised world, is insufficient; prior to undertaking an exchange, many had the pre-conceived notion that it was.
- The act of going to a country ensures that the learning and acquisition of the language becomes more personal and less abstract, and the merits of this are evident not just in teenage exchanges or youth projects, but in adult-based programmes also.
- Many develop a newfound appreciation of the Irish language when, for example, confronted with Eastern Europeans.
- There is a reliance on the effort of individuals in schools and organisations to engage with Erasmus+ with the high probability of the network falling away if the particular individual leaves the institution.
- Adult Education and VECs struggle more to integrate mobility into their programmes.

There followed a general discussion about Erasmus and Irish attitudes to language learning and the group agreed there was further need to promote the importance of foreign language learning at all levels.