

Title of example of practice: Institutional approaches to Quality Assurance in language provision

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Institution and initiating department/faculty

(i.e. where example of practice takes/took place):

University of Ulster (institutional example of quality assurance at university level which impacts on languages); University of Warsaw System of Language Provision, Charles-de-Gaulle University– Lille 3; (examples of bottom-up approaches to quality assurance)

Departments/faculties in which initiative implemented/to be implemented:

UK: Quality Assurance co-ordinated centrally is implemented in all departments of the University of Ulster;

PL: providers of language courses to non-specialists: Language Centre, Faculty of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Modern Languages, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Centre for Foreign Language Teacher Training and European Education, Centre for Open and Multimedia Education of the University of Warsaw;

FR: all departments of the Charles-de-Gaulle University - Lille 3.

Abstract

(QA question: What are/were you trying to do?)

UK: The aim is to ensure at different levels: University of Ulster; faculty; subject/course; module, that procedures to ensure quality and standards are in place and to monitor that they function effectively.

PL: The aim is to ensure and enhance quality of language provision by implementing specific measures, at the level of the University of Warsaw units providing language courses within the University System of Language Provision, compatible with broad QA recommendations of the Academic Senate and the Quality Unit.

FR: The aim is to make a move towards a QA system at Charles- de- Gaulle University–Lille 3 in the teaching and learning of foreign languages for non-specialists.

Background – contextual issues giving rise to the initiative

(QA questions: Why are/were you trying to do it? / What are/were the aims and objectives?)

UK: In setting up their measures for ensuring the maintenance of standards and the enhancement of quality, universities are responding to national requirements as mediated through the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which has responsibility for ensuring quality in UK HE as a whole and which conducts regular audits of all HE providers. While it expects all institutions to have a robust system in place, each institution is able to create processes for ensuring quality that meet its needs. All HE institutions in the UK thus have systems for ensuring quality and standards but there are differences between institutions in the nature of the systems used and in their application. There is also modification and development on an ongoing basis both nationally and within institutions in relation to quality systems to respond to evolving needs.

The QAA conducts regular audits of universities, looking at procedures and systems for the assurance of quality and how these impact on the quality of provision and the student experience in subject areas. It has sets of written guidelines for different aspects of university work and interaction with students. These are described as ‘the academic infrastructure’. Universities are expected to take account of these in framing their own procedures and regulations. There are 4 main areas to their advice:

Frameworks for higher education qualifications: which describe the achievement represented by higher education qualifications at different levels.

Codes of practice: being guidelines on different aspects of academic practice (eg: assessment; work-based learning and placement; admissions; students with disabilities etc.)

Subject benchmarks for the different areas of study: which set minimum expectations about degree standards in the different broad subject areas They indicate key features of particular disciplines and the abilities and skills that graduates develop. They are not intended to lay out a curriculum but rather to offer a framework allowing for some flexibility and innovation. They are thus stated in quite general terms. Language study is covered by the subject benchmark for Languages and Related Studies. In devising programmes, institutions are expected to adhere to the general principles set out in these subject benchmark statements.

Programme specifications: outlining the main outcomes from a programme as well as how they are achieved and demonstrated.

A further aspect of the QA Framework is the **National Student Survey**. This questionnaire is organized under the aegis of HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council) which has commissioned Psos-MORI, a market research organization, to conduct the survey and the associated marketing campaigns. It is completed by students in the final year of their programme in which they comment on aspects of their experience. The results are reported back to institutions who are expected to take account of them in their monitoring and management activities.

Whereas in the UK there is a substantial framework for quality assurance that universities will follow,

in Poland and in France the university units are free to design their own quality assurance and enhancement measures compatible with very broad QA institutional requirements.

PL: The Law on HE provides that language education constitutes a compulsory part of all first cycle degree programmes and like the entirety of provision it should be quality assured.

The quality assurance and enhancement measures instituted in the University System of Language Provision, established by a Resolution of the Academic Senate, have been designed to take into account the Resolution of the Academic Senate on Quality of Teaching (on information on curricula & syllabi, assessment criteria, classroom observations, induction of newly employed teaching staff, and student surveys) and the Resolution on the Quality Assurance and Enhancement System at UW setting a framework for the QA system constituted by mechanisms, procedures and measures implemented at the level of individual organisational units of the University. The Resolutions have been inspired by the Bologna Process objectives and actions lines incorporated into the Law on HE and neighbouring regulations.

The aim of the QA measures at the level of the USLP is to ensure conditions of transparency, openness, comparability (of LOs), equal access to broadest possible offering (language- and levelwise, regarding the needs of students, incl. of students with disabilities with a view of supporting students' and graduates' academic and professional mobility, employability and lifelong learning. The QA measures are related to the "Standards and guidelines for QA in the EHEA" and comprise the following aspects: policy and QA procedures, approval, monitoring and periodical review of programmes and outcomes, assessment of students, QA of teaching staff, resources and support for students, IT support systems, publication of information.

FR: In 2002 it was decided at national level that the study of at least one foreign language is compulsory in the new BA and MA programmes - requirement extended to PhD programmes as well, at institutional level - which meant that learning outcomes had to be identified, as well as modes of assessment, and the relation between the teaching and learning of the main subjects of study and the teaching and learning of foreign languages had to be considered.

As part of the language policy, Charles -de-Gaulle University – Lille 3 plays an important part in coordinating the teaching/learning of foreign languages in the six universities that form The Academy Nord - Pas de Calais. It is the academic staff, the language policy official representative, who is in charge of the coordination.

Description of activity or initiative

(QA question: How is/was the activity/initiative implemented?)

UK: The University of Ulster assures the standards of its courses and monitors and enhances quality through a number of processes. In addition the University continues to reflect on, develop and trial particular aspects of its practice. Current procedures are outlined below with a brief indication of how they impact on languages.

Evaluation and Revalidation of Course provision: the Evaluation procedure ensures that new programmes are appropriate while Revalidation is a periodic review of existing programmes at intervals of five years. In both cases, the subject team present their programme(s) in a document for review by a panel including specialists in the area concerned from outside the University as well as internal representation. Staff discuss their provision in a meeting with the panel. While there is obviously ongoing modification to programmes, these exercises offer an opportunity to review and revise current programmes in more depth, while also providing evidence to the University that programmes of study remain up to date and at an appropriate level. To prepare for the revalidation of their programmes, languages in the University have held meetings and away days to reflect on the nature of their provision.

Yearly monitoring: an exercise is conducted yearly looking at subject reports and statistics to allow Departments, Faculties and the University to assure themselves that there are no serious problems or

that, if there are, they are being addressed.

Currently the University of Ulster is operating two schemes; a more traditional one and a pilot.

In the more traditional scheme, programmes and subject areas write a report, looking at a number of key factors. This is considered by a Faculty panel which then makes a report to a central university group. Reports are thus made within languages as within other areas. Any issues revealed by this exercise will be addressed by the area. Factors for consideration include entrance statistics; results; student issues brought to the committees for student consultation which exist for each course; interaction with employers; placement activities (as appropriate); programme developments during the year.

The pilot system is based more fully on the work of the team delivering a programme and its discussion and actioning of issues within the course management team. This approach uses existing documentation for the purposes of monitoring, to lighten the process, avoid the writing of additional reports and stress the responsibility of teams for their own provision. It requires that course teams minute carefully their discussion of all the areas of work and reflection that are involved in teaching and managing programmes of study (there are clear guidelines for teams as to the topics and issues that the university would expect to see discussed).

Standards monitoring at subject/programme level: all UK universities are expected to have one or more external examiners: an academic in the specialism concerned from another institution who monitors levels of work and the standards achieved.

Staff are also expected to cross-check each other's marking levels internally to ensure that marks are consistent between markers with double marking of a certain proportion of student work undertaken both of coursework and examinations (examinations are anonymous: the student's name is not known at the time of marking).

Enhancement activities: a range of support from a staff development unit (advisers on teaching and learning who support staff and offer training). A Centre for Higher Education Practice in the University provides a forum in which staff can discuss and develop their practice. Within languages the University includes a Centre of Excellence for Multimedia Language Learning whose role is to develop and disseminate language teaching approaches using multimedia. This is funded by a national initiative whose role is to support the development of innovative and effective approaches to teaching in higher education.

PL: Quality assurance and enhancement measured developed and implemented at the University of Warsaw organisational units level results from very broad provisions established in the Law on HE and neighbouring regulations and a number of the Resolutions of the Academic Senate.

Programmes and outcomes: programmes of teaching are based on the CEFR subject to approval by the programme Board of the Language Centre and Boards of respective units, language courses providers; syllabi of modules/courses are designed by groups of teachers or individual teachers and submitted for approval by heads of language sections; syllabi are reviewed upon feedback from students and the Certification Board; learning outcomes are defined in terms of CEFR; courses and examinations (also external ones) are credited (ECTS); B2 is a minimum examination level, a pre-requisite for a Diploma.

Assessment of students: Assessment criteria and procedures are agreed and published; a test is administered on completion of each 60-hour unit; ECTS credits and local grades are awarded; the same rules apply in case of home and in-coming students; Transcript of Records and Diploma Supplement quote language achievements (level, grade);

QA of teaching staff: criteria for employment are specified in the Law – an open competition is mandatory; criteria for promotion and extension of employment constitute a competitive procedure: teachers are reviewed every 4 years; they undergo observation by a head teacher and/or a member of the Observation Team. Peer observation is an element of the procedure, as well as students' survey

and obligation of professional development.

Resources and support for students: students are entitled to 240 hours of tuition and consultations (each teacher is available for 2 hours per week); tandem learning is organised by the ESN; on-line placement test is offered before registration for courses; Dialang is recommended for formative purposes;

IT support system: University System of Study Support allows for on-line registration for courses coupled with on-line placement test and on-line registration for examinations; it is also a data-base of students' records, grades and credits, which allows for automatic print-out of TRs and DSs

Publication of information: Information on courses and examinations & Information on the results of students' surveys is published on University System of Language Provision website, Language Centre website, University Certification Board website; ECTS course catalogue is available on-line.

All the above initiatives have been implemented by the Chairs of language providers with the participation of the teaching staff. Active commitment of the staff in the process of elaboration and implementation is vital for successful operation. It is also necessary to co-operate with the Students' Self-government in this respect. The funding is provided by the University budget.

FR: At Charles- de -Gaulle University –Lille 3 a system of reference points has been devised to enable self evaluation, an important stage in the enhancement of quality of language provision. The following being the focus of the reference:

The learning outcomes in language programmes are based on the analysis of the needs and interests of the students linked to their further studies or professional integration. The teaching staff and professional bodies (the improvement council, the research laboratories etc.) are involved in identifying learning outcomes, shared by the students.

Organization of foreign language programmes: each module is described in a clear manner in the university guidebook (in terms of skills, knowledge, duration, ECTS credits, modes of assessment), cohesion among various modules of the foreign language programme over the semesters is provided; courses are designed and structured by teachers, those teaching the same programme closely cooperating, in terms of learning outcomes according to the curriculum; foreign language teachers handle efficiently the heterogeneous groups of students (different abilities, skills, different work pace, learning strategies etc.) by making use of electronic resources and teaching methods that help develop student autonomy.

Resources: language resource centres allowing for on-line access with an adequate number of individual computer stations have been opened to provide modules for self-training or guided training.

Language level is based on the CEFR; the size of the groups depends on the learning outcomes and division into groups reflects students' personal aims and objectives

International mobility is offered to 3rd year BA and MA students; out-going students as well as incoming students are offered language and culture courses, and joint supervision of PhDs is being developed.

Student assessment: a placement test is carried out to help arrange students into groups; a formative evaluation takes place during the term; a summative evaluation is carried out at the end of a cycle with delivery of a certificate (CLES) or a diploma (DUFL); an external summative evaluation (TOIC etc) has also been put forward.

Programme evaluation: each module of the foreign language programme and a programme as a whole are evaluated by the students, the results being analysed and made use of.

Evaluative comments

(QA questions: What are/were the outcomes? What is/was the impact? Is/was the activity/initiative successful? How do you know whether or not it works/worked?)

UK: There is a system in which the practice of universities is informed by national guidelines but where there is room for the development of processes that reflect local needs and concerns within a given institution. Where curricula are concerned, there are national guidelines but there is as well scope for individual and innovative development. Universities also support the ongoing enhancement of practice.

Conformity and effectiveness are ensured: nationally through the audits that are conducted of universities; within universities by their monitoring and evaluation and revalidation systems which look at the work of faculties; departments; subjects and programmes.

PL: The QA system at the University of Warsaw System of Language Provision has a work in progress status and may change dynamically in order to reflect needs of the students and graduates as well as initiatives coming from individuals and/or central QA unit. It is constantly monitored by a Quality Team nominated by the Programme Board, fed back by the University Certification Board, advised by the Students' Self-Government and the Senate Committee on Students and Teaching and Learning. The proof of the success is in the enrolment numbers, positive examination results, more recognition of the University Language Certificate, positive feedback from the students, positive evaluations of the teaching staff by the Staff Review Committee, results of the students' survey, evaluation of incoming students.

FR: The language policy at Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3 University focuses on quality assurance and so far it has been successful in the organisation of foreign language programmes, in offering learning resources for students, and in organizing the international mobility. Even if the standards and guidelines could still be refined, they have already contributed to the enhancement of the quality of the foreign language programmes, which is at the core of our university policy.

To sum up:

The following key elements constitute the QA in language provision in the University of Ulster and nationally and in most UK universities,

- monitoring of University procedures by an outside body
- a national academic framework for qualifications
- guidelines for dealing with various aspects of the organisation of study programmes (eg admissions; work-based learning and placements; distance learning; assessment; students with disabilities)
- general guidelines as to what should be included in particular areas of study
- national consultation of students in the final year of their undergraduate programme with the results fed back to each university
- national funding of specific projects in teaching and learning

The beneath mentioned QA elements are shared by UK, PL, and FR institutions:

- training of new lecturers
- assessment criteria
- in-house university student surveys of their areas of study
- evaluation procedures for new programmes
- revalidation of existing course provision after a specific period of years
- annual monitoring of provision
- relevant information is held for purposes of monitoring
- IT support systems are used both for teaching and learning and for administrative purposes
- monitoring of marking levels.
- Syllabi are designed by staff and there is a process for approving changes to them

Advice to others

UK: This part of the case study is looking at a national system which conditions the type of quality mechanisms that are applied at a local level. It has merit in ensuring a certain degree of standardisation while still offering scope for local initiative and developments.

PL: Although the University QA framework does require setting up standard QA procedures and mechanisms in all University units it has been recognised that in order to provide for comparability of outcomes it is necessary to network, to share good practices not only within the institution, but also nationally and internationally. In order to be successful in creating a quality culture all teaching staff has to be involved and be motivated to initiate and develop quality assuring and enhancing measures which have to be acknowledged and possibly rewarded by the authorities. The sense of ownership is the most significant motivation for individual successful implementation of the initiatives.

FR: Given the encouraging results that have been obtained so far at BA level, the guidelines and standards developed at Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3 University could be generalized to the teaching/learning of foreign languages to all the non-specialist students in our university at both BA and MA level. Exchange of feedback would be of great help in the endeavour to enhance quality. At the same time cooperation with other institutions in France and abroad could be envisaged.

Reflection/any other comments

QA question: Is/was that the best way to do it? Why/why not? What improvements or adjustments are needed?

UK: Ongoing monitoring within universities: the danger is a burden of report writing and repetition of paperwork and a culture of control and monitoring rather than empowerment of staff. It is for this reason that, for instance, the University of Ulster is (as described above) trialling a different approach to ongoing monitoring which would be less administratively heavy but would achieve the same aims. This will also allow the University to focus more fully on specific areas of concern.

Approval of new programmes and periodic review of existing provision: in general, this works well and the input of specialist staff from outside the university provides a very valuable contribution.

PL: More coordination is needed within the consortium of USLP. Some of the constituents are more advanced than the others (eg. Language Centre) and not all measures are implemented equally successfully in all the units. This may be difficult because the constituting units are autonomous and the USLP coordinator has not got powers to impose certain measures – soft means can be used or a Rector's regulation, which is not always the most effective instrument.

FR: As this is work in progress at Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3 University, feedback and information is necessary to help refine the standards and guidelines in the QA process. There is still scope for development and initiative.

Further details

e.g. web links; relevant references/publications; alternative contact names

UK: for national guidelines and practice, see www.qaa.ac.uk;
for University of Ulster see www.ulster.ac.uk

PL: <http://www.szjo.uw.edu.pl>
<http://www.jezyki.pelnomocnik.uw.edu.pl>
<http://www.uw.edu.pl/student/certyfikaty/egzcert.html>