



University College Dublin

Review Group Report

Periodic Quality Review

UCD Applied Language Centre

April 2009

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Appendix 1: UCD Applied Language Centre Response to the Review Group Report

Appendix 2: Schedule for Review Site Visit to UCD Applied Language Centre

1. Introduction and Overview of the UCD Applied Language Centre

Introduction

- 1.1 This Report presents the findings of a quality review of the UCD Applied Language Centre (ALC), at University College Dublin. The review was undertaken in April 2009.

The Review Process

- 1.2 Irish Universities have collectively agreed a framework for their quality review and quality improvement systems, which is consistent with both the legislative requirements of the Universities Act 1997, and international good practice. Quality reviews are carried out in academic, administrative and support service units.
- 1.3 The purpose of periodic review is to assist the University to assure itself of the quality of each of its constituent units, and to utilise learning from this essentially developmental process in order to effect improvement, including :
- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning opportunities
 - To monitor research activity, including: management of research activity; assessing the research performance with regard to: research productivity, research income, and recruiting and supporting doctoral students.
 - To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards
 - To provide a framework within which the unit can continue to work in the future towards quality improvement
 - To identify shortfalls in resources and provide an externally validated case for change and/or increased resources
 - Identify, encourage and disseminate good practice – to identify challenges and address these
 - To provide public information on the University's capacity to assure the quality and standards of its awards. The University's implementation of its quality review procedures also enables it to demonstrate how it discharges its responsibilities for assuring the quality and standards of its awards, as required by the Universities Act 1997.
- 1.4 Typically, the review model comprises of four major elements:
- Preparation of a Self-assessment Report (SAR)
 - A visit by a Review Group (RG) that includes UCD staff and external experts, both national and international. The site visit normally will take place over a two or three day period.

- Preparation of a Review Group Report that is made public
- Agreement of an Action Plan for Improvement (Quality Improvement Plan) based on the RG Report's recommendations; the University will also monitor progress against the Improvement Plan

Full details of the review process can be found on the UCD Quality Office website: www.ucd.ie/quality.

1.5 The composition of the Review Group for UCD Applied Language Centre was as follows:

- Professor Jim Phelan, UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science (Chair)
- Ms Joan Mullan, UCD Quality Office (Rapporteur)
- Dr Eilís Hennessy, UCD School of Psychology
- Professor Ken Hyland, Institute of Education, University of London
- Professor John Klapper, Centre for Modern Languages, University of Birmingham
- Professor David Singleton, Centre for Language & Communication Studies, Trinity College Dublin

1.6 The RG visited the unit from 21st April to 23rd April 2009 and had meetings with ALC staff and a representative group of students. The RG also met with staff from other units in the University including the College Principal; representatives of the ALC Management Board; School of Languages and Literatures academic staff; a representative group of cognates/partners and representatives of the International Office. The ALC's response to the Review Group Report is attached at Appendix 1. The site visit schedule is attached at Appendix 2.

1.7 In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the RG considered documentation provided by the unit and the University including the draft UCD Internationalisation Strategy; module and course documentation; sample exam scripts; financial reports; draft position paper on English competency, amongst others.

Preparation of the Self-assessment Report

1.8 The School set up a Self-assessment Co-ordinating Committee in accordance with the UCD Quality Office Guidelines. The members of the Co-ordinating Committee were:

- Mary Ruane – ALC Director & Chairperson of the Self-assessment Co-ordinating Committee
- Una Condon – External EFL courses/Examinations/Pre-sessional admissions
- Mary Fitzgerald – English language (general courses)

- Ciara Madden – English language/Examinations/Graduate Certificate TESOL
 - Anna Nunan – Foreign languages
 - Hugo O'Donnell – Centre Management/Administration/Facilities & Resources
 - Brian Rice – Administration/ Foreign language modules
 - Noelia Ruiz – Foreign languages
- 1.9 The Co-ordinating Committee met 10 times between September 2008 and the review site visit.

The University

- 1.10 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origin dates back to 1854. The University is situated on a large, modern campus, about 4km to the south of the centre of Dublin.
- 1.11 The University Strategic Plan (currently being re-drafted) states that the University's Mission is:

“to advance knowledge, pursue truth and foster learning, in an atmosphere of discovery, creativity, innovation and excellence, drawing out the best in each individual, and contributing to the social, cultural and economic life of Ireland in the wider world”.

The University is organised into 35 Schools in five Colleges;

- UCD College of Arts and Celtic Studies
 - UCD College of Human Sciences
 - UCD College of Life Sciences
 - UCD College of Engineering, Mathematical and Physical Sciences
 - UCD College of Business and Law
- 1.12 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community. There are currently over 22,000 (14,000 undergraduates) students registered on University programmes, including over 3,000 international students from more than 110 countries.

UCD Applied Language Centre (ALC)

- 1.13 Founded in 1989, the ALC is a teaching, research and resource unit based in the College of Arts and Celtic Studies. It has built up a national and international reputation for quality and innovation in the field of second and foreign language pedagogy. The ALC is housed in a customised language teaching space located in the first floor of the Daedalus Building, which is centrally based on the UCD Belfield campus.

- 1.14 The current mission of the ALC is to develop the learning and teaching of languages to students across the whole University and in the wider community. Its activities are underpinned by research and its application. The ALC's approach aims to combine the enhancement of academic standards with the practice of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- 1.15 The ALC has a highly diverse range of activities, which include:
- Provision of foreign language electives to undergraduate and graduate students
 - Provision of English language courses to prospective and current UCD students
 - Provision of taught graduate programme in TESOL (Cert/Grad Dip/MA)
 - A research and innovation programme
 - English language programme for external students
 - English language testing unit for International English Language Testing (IELTS) and Cambridge ESOL
- 1.16 Although the ALC is a relatively small unit, it supports a high volume of student numbers. In a typical year, there are approximately 2,300 student module places, 1,000 international students taking English, and, 3,200 examination candidates for IELTS and Cambridge ESOL.

2. General Comments

- 2.1 The RG wishes to compliment the ALC on the quality of the Self-assessment Report. It was very detailed, highlighting all of the major issues and provided a very useful basis for discussions during the review visit. Relevant supporting material was provided on-site and additional documentation requested during the site visit was supplied immediately to allow the RG to obtain a full picture and explore all ALC activities in detail.
- 2.2 The schedule for the RG visit was well-planned and provided access to all key individuals relevant to the work of the ALC. Facilities provided for the visit were excellent. The RG appreciates the courtesy and hospitality shown by all.
- 2.3 The RG also wishes to thank all of the participants in meetings during the visit for their time and genuine openness and commitment to supporting the future positive development of the ALC. The RG appreciates the courtesy and engagement shown by the University staff and students who they met during the visit.
- 2.4 The RG recognises the central role to be played by the ALC in supporting the strategic goals of the University with regard to internationalisation. It is an essential requirement for all key stakeholders to work together in a planned, open and transparent fashion to achieve these strategic goals.

- 2.5 The RG commends the considerable contribution of the ALC to date in the provision of language teaching to meet a variety of student and programme needs.
- 2.6 The achievements of the ALC to date are significant in terms of both the scale and variety of activities, particularly given its dependence on temporary staff and its anomalous position within normal UCD structures.
- 2.7 The discussions with students and the quality of assessment material supplied to the RG suggest that the academic provision of the ALC is of good quality and that the ALC is student-focused in its delivery of teaching and learning.
- 2.8 The RG acknowledges that recent years have been difficult for the ALC. However, the review was conducted with a forward-looking focus, recognising the key role for the unit in the University's vision of, and need for, internationalisation.

3. Management and Organisational Structures

- 3.1 The issue of organisational structure and governance of the ALC proved to be central to almost all of the discussions during the RG's site visit. It is clear that the putting in place of organisational structures that are fit for purpose, and the development of functional relationships between the ALC and all stakeholders, are key to actualising the potential demonstrated by the achievements of the ALC.
- 3.2 The current Board of Management structure, while clearly welcomed by those within the ALC would not yet appear to have significantly addressed key issues of governance within the ALC.
- 3.3 The RG has a concern that the Board of Management structure, as currently conceived, while clearly having a role in development of the ALC, may in time present a threat to optimum development of the ALC by confusing lines of governance and responsibility between the ALC and the College of Arts and Celtic Studies, thus making it more difficult to apportion responsibilities and designate foci of authority.
- 3.4 Having explored the possibility of a conjunction between ALC and either the School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore and Linguistics or the School of Languages and Literatures, the RG's conclusion is that neither of these options is likely to be viable at this time. Given that there is no obvious solution in terms of integrating the Centre into a school within the College of Arts, the conclusion is that the Centre should continue to function as a separate unit.
- 3.5 The significance of commercial activities to ALC development both financially and educationally are recognised by the RG. However, the RG felt that there is a need to align these activities more directly with the Centre's academic strategy deriving from the University's current vision of internationalisation. It is important that an appropriate financial system be established to support these developments and remove concerns about financial sustainability.

- 3.6 There are differing views about the centrality of commercial activity for the ALC. The different perspectives may reflect the history of the Centre's development and different understandings of the role of this Centre. The re-absorption of the ALC surplus into University funds was a contentious issue and was seen to damage the ALC's capacity to be enterprising. The current financial model does not appear to the RG to be adaptive to the future strategic direction of the ALC. The RG formed the view that financial issues are at the heart of many of the difficulties that have been experienced by both the ALC and others in the University with regard to the work and the administrative profile of the ALC. A fair-minded root-and-branch effort to address together the issues of funding and financial governance would be in everybody's interest.
- 3.7 While the ALC has capitalised on opportunities to attract external funding for courses, changing circumstances dictate that UCD must now establish and implement a new funding model for the Centre to facilitate the next stage of its development. The RG believe it is imperative that the University addresses this issue as a matter of extreme urgency. A system of top-slicing (or other appropriate funding mechanism) for this service should be considered while recognising the importance of income-generating streams in support of core activities.
- 3.8 The RG at times found it difficult to align the diverse and sometimes contradictory information presented to the Group by different sections of the University regarding operations of the ALC during the visit, particularly with regard to finances. The RG is firmly of the view that such conflicts need to be resolved collegially as rapidly as possible, in order to dispel the elements of suspicion and distrust that are all too evident in the current situation.

Commendations

- 3.9 The University has attempted to address issues of structure and governance in a forward-looking way, by putting the Board of Management in place and including key stakeholders in this structure.
- 3.10 There appears to be willingness by all stakeholders to move forward with the ALC in a constructive way.

Recommendations

- 3.11 The ALC should continue to function as a separate unit within the College of Arts and Celtic Studies.
- 3.12 The ALC should be managed in such a way as to clearly function in an equivalent manner to the other constituent units of the College.
- 3.13 The Review Group recommends that, in the short term, the ALC should be guided by the Board of Management. The composition of the Board should be enriched by senior users of the Centre's services, and the inclusion of an additional senior academic from a relevant area (e.g. the Professor of Linguistics). The RG perceives the role of the Board of Management as being to bring to a resolution the current difficulties and uncertainties and manage the transition towards adaptive structures and governance that will enable the ALC to develop its primary relationship with the College.

- 3.14 The Review Group strongly recommends that, in the medium term, the Board of Management should be replaced by a Steering Committee. This Steering Committee should continue to give strategic oversight and ensure that the views of key stakeholder groups (e.g. Registrar; schools who are key service-users; International Office, etc.) are represented in decisions about developments within the ALC. However, the RG's view is that the ALC's primary management relationship should be with the College of Arts and Celtic Studies, as is the case with the other constituent units of the College.
- 3.15 The composition of the future Steering Committee should, in the unanimous opinion of the Review Group, include the ALC Director; a representative of the International Office; a representative of the School of Business; a representative of the School of Languages and Literatures, and a representative of each College representing in each case the profile of a key user of ALC.
- 3.16 A more adaptive financial model for the ALC is required - options on alternative approaches to funding should be explored, particularly in the context of the emphasis on the ALC as a service-provider for the UCD community into the future.
- 3.16 There needs to be greater transparency about the financial situation of the ALC so that all parties share a common understanding of key financial data.
- 3.17 The strategic goals of the ALC need to be clearly articulated. ALC goals should support University goals and in turn the ALC should be supported by the University in achieving its goals – the commercial activity of the Centre should be complementary to its strategic focus.
- 3.18 The ALC and other parties need to resolve difficulties that have overshadowed some of the ALC's activities in the past as collegially as possible and to move ahead in a spirit of co-operation that will allow both the ALC and University goals to be successfully achieved.

4. Staffing

- 4.1 Staffing issues present one of the greatest threats to the success of the ALC's future development and to its capacity to support UCD's achievement of the University's strategic goals.
- 4.2 The full-time staffing complement is inadequate for the current size of both English language and Foreign Language programme provision. While feedback from students, academic partners and course evaluations all suggest the quality of classroom teaching is high, it will be difficult to convince key stakeholders of the quality of ALC work if staffing issues are not addressed as a matter of urgency.
- 4.3 Besides bolstering staffing for Foreign Language and English language teaching, the Centre's activities require stable administrative arrangements which are currently not in place. Existing staff have demonstrated a high level of expertise and commitment to their roles and the Centre needs to be able to retain their competence by offering them open-ended contracts.
- 4.4 There is a lack of clarity regarding the type of contract most suitable for language tutors in UCD and it appears to be the case that members of staff

teaching languages in different areas of the University are employed on different terms. In the long-term this is likely to prove problematic and is a potential source of grievance.

- 4.5 The lack of a clear staffing structure has proved de-motivating for both academic and administrative staff. Both categories of staff have suffered from the repeated use of short-term contracts. Besides the quality issues this raises, the ALC and the College will need to consult carefully with Human Resources over the implications of the Part-Time Workers' Act.

Commendations

- 4.6 The Director is energetic and highly committed to her role, and she enjoys the trust and support of her staff.
- 4.7 There is a clear sense of collegiality amongst the staff of the Centre, who identify strongly with the aims and work of the ALC and invest a great deal in seeking to provide excellent courses for students under difficult circumstances.
- 4.8 The Centre's tutors are, on the whole, well qualified for the work they perform. Many of them have considerable experience and display great enthusiasm and professional commitment. They are clearly also committed to the success of the ALC.
- 4.9 Administrative staff show commitment to the Centre and provide excellent support for its academic activities.
- 4.10 Notwithstanding challenges with regard to quality assurance process and governance arrangements outlined elsewhere, working relationships appear to be very good and there is evidence that communication between key staff (e.g. in language areas) works well.

Recommendations

- 4.11 The ALC needs to devise a realistic staffing plan for both its English Language and its Foreign Language modules, including, as a priority, a Senior Language Co-ordinator post with responsibility for all quality assurance matters across *Horizons* languages and stages. In due course, this post should be supported by Language Co-ordinators, initially in French and Spanish, who might typically take responsibility for co-ordinating their own and for overseeing and providing support for tutors of one or two of the less commonly taught languages in the Centre. As languages such as Chinese and Japanese grow, they will also require co-ordination by a full-time member of staff.
- 4.12 There is an urgent need for the appointment of a core of full-time academic staff to coordinate existing programme offerings and to develop the EAP support programmes. The Centre has done an excellent job with current patterns of staffing, but this is not sustainable in the longer term.
- 4.13 As part of the move to a new staffing structure, arrangements should be put in place for staff development review and opportunities for tutors to engage in pedagogical development and to enhance their scholarly profile.

5. Teaching and Learning – Foreign Languages

- 5.1 The introduction of *Horizons* has helped ALC to fulfil its role of offering foreign language (FL) modules to most of the campus; the Centre currently attracts students from 50 different programmes. Making good use of UCD's highly effective and generous electives programme, the Centre has expanded provision in this area over the past two years, and soundings taken during the Review suggest there is potential for still further growth.
- 5.2 It is important that as soon as possible ALC's FL modules be subjected to normal University/College module approval processes in order to assure quality and sustain confidence in the Centre's provision.
- 5.3 It was noted that the ALC's *Horizons* modules are not subjected to the scrutiny of external examiners. Rectifying this will be a crucial element for the ALC in building trust and credibility within the University. A first or interim step might be to seek the advice of an external examiner on quality issues.
- 5.4 There is a commitment in ALC to the notion of plurilingualism, that is, to allowing students to choose modules from a wide range of languages at different levels and thus to sample different languages. There is a danger, however, of a low-level 'pick and mix' approach being adopted by *Horizons* students across a three-year degree. The Centre might wish to consider the desirability of emphasising more clearly to students the long-term nature of language-learning, while not restricting students' choice, should they wish to sample different languages in different years of their degree.
- 5.5 The ALC may wish to consider the extent to which their FL *Horizons* programme is catering to the whole University, whether there are any internal barriers to take-up of language modules in certain Schools and how they might best raise awareness of their services. It is interesting to note the relatively low rating on student satisfaction surveys for 'My degree programme encouraged me to study a language' (SAR, p. 12).
- 5.6 Assessment is common across *Horizons* modules and involves a coherent mix of continuous assessment, including a portfolio of student work, tests, and marks for class participation and attendance; all four language skills are assessed as part of this process.
- 5.7 There is a slightly anomalous distribution of marks at the upper end of the scale for FL modules which does not conform to the standard 'bell curve' distribution. While some might see this as a reflection of a lack of rigour or indeed quality in the ALC's modules, this outcome is not at all unusual for a language centre offering a large number of modules at low levels of proficiency. The ALC is aware of this issue and is committed to monitoring it. External examiner input will be important in this.
- 5.8 Student satisfaction rates suggest that the use of Moodle is a less uniformly successful aspect of provision. Focus groups also indicate variable application of the Moodle VLE across languages (SAR, p. 13). The deployment of VLE applications has enriched the ALC's provision and is consistent with the way language teaching is developing elsewhere. However, the successful use of VLEs depends, in part, on tutors' enthusiasm for the medium as well as their confidence with computers and e-learning

more generally. Given the importance the Centre attaches to this element of its provision, staff attitudes towards and capacity to use Moodle are issues which need to be addressed as part of a review of staffing and CPD issues.

- 5.9 Within its limited resources, the Centre provides some academic induction for hourly paid tutors, including a session on the use of the VLE and a tutors' handbook for the use of Moodle which is coherent, well organised and informative.
- 5.10 It is regrettable that other developments have got in the way of the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2005 Review of Language Teaching at UCD. Both the ALC and the School of Languages and Literatures (SLL) have indicated a desire to move forward from past troubled relations and to establish a more satisfactory mode of co-existence. The two units now need to initiate discussions aimed at a clearer demarcation of activities. This might mean reducing duplication of electives provision, where feasible and desirable, creating a more equitable platform for the promotion of both the ALC's and the SLL's elective modules in Orientation Week and exploring potential for collaboration on postgraduate programmes (e.g. revisiting the idea of an MA in Translation Studies and involving ALC in the MA in Second Language Acquisition).

Commendations

- 5.11 The FL modules reflect good practice in second and foreign language pedagogy, including aspects of independent and blended learning, communicative and task-based methodology, and use of portfolios.
- 5.12 The FL programme is highly efficient in terms of its system of common levels across languages, its approach to module design and its assessment procedures.
- 5.13 Courses are pegged to the Common European Framework and prerequisite and exit language levels are clearly advertised.
- 5.14 Student learning packs for individual languages and supplementary materials, such as vocabulary support booklets, are well organised and provide good support to learners.
- 5.15 Attendance rates at class are high. This is all the more commendable in view of the inevitable need to timetable many modules at less popular times. The high attendance rates are consistent with the positive student feedback received by the Review Group.
- 5.16 There is a high response rate for student course questionnaires. These provide evidence of high satisfaction ratings for teaching, especially for the tutors' interactive approach. This positive feedback is supported by the personal testimony of students with whom the RG met. Students are content with the amount of contact they have with tutors, they value access to native speaker teachers, are grateful for the support they receive, and praise tutors for their availability, prompt responses to email queries and other requests for help.
- 5.17 Feedback on the FL programme from academic partners/client schools across campus is very positive. Schools appear to value highly the courses

which ALC provides for its students, seeing them as an inherently valuable educational opportunity for their students as well as acting as a recruitment tool. In this sense, ALC's FL modules serve the important function of supporting academic programmes across the whole of UCD.

- 5.18 The ALC's Director has made every effort to learn from good pedagogical practice in language centres across Europe and has been most effective in disseminating lessons learnt to the Centre's teaching staff.
- 5.19 The Centre has played a significant role in the development and use of the European Language Portfolio.
- 5.20 The ALC has been quick to respond to developments in the world of language teaching, has made a number of sound strategic decisions and has enjoyed a degree of success in attracting external funding for specific projects.
- 5.21 The ALC contributes significantly to the internationalisation of the University.
- 5.22 The Centre's website is clear, informative and well organised, acting as an effective marketing tool.

Recommendations

- 5.23 The Management Board, in collaboration with the College of Arts and Celtic Studies, should ensure that all existing FL modules undergo normal academic approval processes and that this becomes a standard procedure for all future modules.
- 5.24 Until a more satisfactory staffing structure and more transparent quality assurance procedures are in place, the ALC should be cautious about further expanding the FL *Horizons* programme but should focus on supporting students to make informed module choices about progressing to higher levels of FL achievement and on recruiting students from across all schools.
- 5.25 The Centre should introduce an appropriate number of external examiners for FL modules.
- 5.26 The ALC and SLL should establish a forum to clarify respective areas of activity and to explore potential future collaboration. This should be an incremental process and in the short-term should focus on avoiding overlap in the provision of language elective modules and improving the advertising of all UCD language electives.

6. Teaching and Learning – The Teaching of English and Graduate Programmes in TESOL

- 6.1 The ALC, as evidenced in the SAR and with meetings with clients of the Centre on the site visit, is to be commended for its attention to both the delivery of its programmes and to the students' experience of these programmes. The Centre's teams of well qualified and experienced part-time tutors have a very good record of delivering high quality and diverse General English and EAP courses to high levels of student satisfaction.

- 6.2 Student questionnaires are very positive in terms of the quality of teaching, course content, support and feedback and the students that the review group met were vocal in their praise. Satisfaction is also evidenced by the uptake on the courses offered and from discussions with Schools or sections who were significant users of ALC activities.
- 6.3 The Centre also has well-regarded and established graduate TESOL programmes which provide a firm basis for a new MA and a flourishing IELTS and Cambridge ESOL testing centre. The Director of the ALC should be congratulated on the part she has played in developing the Centre and establishing its success over several years, both in terms of its programmes, relationships with Schools and its generation of income.
- 6.4 The ALC's desire to become professionally accredited by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) should be supported by the University. This would provide an internationally recognised benchmark for the ALC's English language support activities and help underpin UCD's Quality Assurance procedures.
- 6.5 While the commercial activities of the Centre have been central to its work and development, they are likely to be less important as the Centre moves forward. This will allow it to expand its current role in support of the English language and academic literacy needs of UCD students.
- 6.6 UCD has prioritized internationalisation as part of its Strategic Plan and the ALC is well placed to play a leading part in this. It should be recognised that insessional programmes may not be self-financing and must be supported. Given the strategic intent and the University's intention to establish language entry requirements, a strong ALC is central to the University's infrastructure both as a support resource and recruitment and retention tool. The ALC and the International Office will need to work closely to realise the institution's strategic objectives.
- 6.7 The RG was surprised that the University has not established systematic quality assurance mechanisms for English language and EAP provision (an Academic Board or similar structure). While there is no cause for alarm at present, it is important that these courses are included in the University's QA procedures, both to ensure quality and to provide a firm foundation for the Centre's activities.
- 6.8 The RG views the dilution of English language teaching in the University with some alarm. The ALC has considerable expertise and experience in the field and is the natural site for such teaching.

Commendations

- 6.9 The Centre provides a very wide range of English language programmes at undergraduate level and an innovative graduate pathway of nested courses for teacher education in TESOL.
- 6.10 The Centre has been successful in securing external funding and in developing income-generating programmes which have met a demand for general English and graduate teacher education in the field of TESOL. These require continued support, particularly in terms of rooms for summer teaching.

- 6.11 The Centre has established an efficient administrative system for managing large numbers of part time staff and copes with large numbers of students and test-candidates.
- 6.12 The Centre has established itself as the leading IELTS testing centre in Ireland and not only attracts considerable income, but also contributes to the profile of the ALC and the University itself.
- 6.13 The commercial unit of the ALC has been successful in its outreach activities and in establishing links with universities and individuals overseas through its summer English programmes. These connections are of considerable potential value to the University.

Recommendations

- 6.14 The RG recommends that the ALC should restructure its commercial activities so that they become ancillary to its core role of supporting UCD students. Self-funding should continue to play a role in the provision of pre-sessional support, EFL programmes, English language testing, and postgraduate TESOL programmes while surpluses from this commercial income stream will enable the Centre to develop its infrastructure and technological needs.
- 6.15 The ALC needs to work with key stakeholders to support internationalisation through provision of pre-sessional and insessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. It should be recognised that insessional programmes may not be self-financing and must be supported.
- 6.16 The ALC should progress its objective of becoming professionally accredited by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP).
- 6.17 The RG recommends that the University recognises the ALC as the sole provider of English language courses and is of the view that other University units who provide similar courses (e.g. the Irish Institute for Chinese Studies) should end provision.

7. Research and Innovation

- 7.1 The research aspirations of the ALC are well-conceived. A moderate number of research publications have already been generated by the Centre's research activities. The Centre has engaged in a small number of collaborative research ventures and has built up a variety of national and international research connections.
- 7.2 Clear opportunities are presented by ALC's activities for research in language learning, language teaching and language testing. Under more favourable conditions – including administrative integration and stability, financial security, and institutional support/recognition – the ALC could generate a research output that could significantly contribute to UCD's international reputation.
- 7.3 The issue of progressing the ALC's research objectives requires careful attention. If its research profile is to improve in the longer term, the ALC will require more staff capable of leading/conducting research and generating

innovative ideas. It will also require on the ALC's part a willingness to maximise its collaboration with cognate units within UCD and with external collaborators. There appears to be uncertainty in relation to institutional recognition of ALC's research and innovation achievements to date. There is little evidence of institutional support for the ALC's conception of itself as a unit striving to be fully research-active.

- 7.4 The Review Group views research as an important dimension of the ALC's future development. However, the Review Group takes the view that given ALC's current structures and the pressing demands of internationalisation, its immediate attention should probably focus on teaching and learning issues.

Commendations

- 7.5 Even within constraints identified, the ALC has managed to be research active and achieve moderate research output.
- 7.6 The Centre has identified appropriate research intentions about areas for investigation.
- 7.7 The scope of activity in the ALC provides many opportunities for research. Researchers external to UCD currently access the rich data generated through ALC activity.

Recommendations

- 7.8 The immediate priority for the ALC should be to strengthen its organisational capacity and academic credibility by getting appropriate structures and staffing in place.
- 7.9 The ALC's research intentions would be well served by identifying and collaborating with partners both internal and external to UCD as appropriate, who may have the capacity to enhance the ALC's research potential.
- 7.10 The ALC should be encouraged and supported in developing its research capability over time as structures and staffing allow.

8. Management of Quality and Enhancement

- 8.1 The ALC currently offers twelve languages at different levels of proficiency. The Centre uses the Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio for the development of their language modules. The Centre also draws on theories and research from applied linguistics and is committed to research-based practice and external benchmarking in language teaching and learning activities.
- 8.2 The ALC uses a number of methods to monitor student satisfaction with teaching and learning. These processes include end-of-semester surveys of student satisfaction with course content, teaching and administrative support. English language students are also asked for feedback on the quality of the social programme and of the accommodation arrangements. Qualitative feedback is sought from all students through open-ended questions on the questionnaire and in focus groups.

- 8.3 The RG met a number of students from *Horizons* foreign language and English language classes and they expressed their appreciation of the quality of the teaching they received and the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff.
- 8.4 The ALC indicated that their students are surveyed to establish the level of interest in other languages. There did not appear to be any routine information-gathering from the wider student community to establish what the language teaching needs of non-ALC students might be.
- 8.5 As part of its quality enhancement process the ALC tracks participation rates in all modules. Student performance in foreign language modules is scrutinised at internal board meetings and is also compared with University-wide reference grades.
- 8.6 The language testing for international students (IELTS) and Cambridge ESOL is quality assured through the British Council and Cambridge. An informal system of advice has been used in establishing the elective language modules within *Horizons* and to other non-*Horizons* students (e.g. students in the Smurfit Business School). At present external examiners are not involved in developing and assessing these modules and, since the modules offered are elective only, they fall outside the module enhancement process and the scrutiny of programme boards.
- 8.7 New members of teaching staff are provided with an induction programme and have access to UCD's library resources. There are regular meetings of teachers to ensure compliance with the common languages curriculum of the ALC but staff expressed a need for more training/workshops.
- 8.8 The presence of a Student Forum or some way for students to signal concerns midway through the delivery of modules was not evident.

Commendations

- 8.9 The ALC employs a range of evaluative processes to monitor students' learning experiences.
- 8.10 Students commented favourably on the quality of the staff and the modules that they had taken. There was some concern that language modules are scheduled at lunch time or in the evenings from 6pm to 8pm.
- 8.11 The development of foreign language modules is informed by theories of applied linguistics and with reference to European-wide standards in language teaching and learning.
- 8.12 The ALC is clearly aware of quality issues regarding staffing, and how the absence of language coordinators may impact on the quality of their teaching.

Recommendations

- 8.13 A system needs to be put in place to ensure external validation of the quality of the modules and their assessment processes. This may include an overview of newly developed modules at the level of the UUPB and of existing modules through the module enhancement process. The quality of

all modules needs to be monitored through the appointment of external examiners.

- 8.14 The appointment of Language Coordinators to give oversight to language teaching is critical – the lack of such oversight in the current situation, where large numbers of hourly paid staff are involved in the delivery of modules, presents a threat to quality.
- 8.15 The current practice of administrative staff taking on roles that would normally fall to academics should be regularised appropriately as soon as is practicable when staffing issues are addressed.
- 8.16 The ALC should develop a system for ensuring that the information that is collected from students in the form of end of semester questionnaires/focus groups on teaching quality is fed back into the enhancement process. Information on this system should be made available to staff and students of the ALC.
- 8.17 The ALC should consider establishing a student forum that would allow students to raise issues of concern.

9. Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

a. Management and Organisational Structures

Commendations

- 3.9 The University has attempted to address issues of structure and governance in a forward-looking way, by putting the Board of Management in place and including key stakeholders in this structure.
- 3.10 There appears to be willingness by all stakeholders to move forward with the ALC in a constructive way.

Recommendations

- 3.11 The ALC should continue to function as a separate unit within the College of Arts and Celtic Studies.
- 3.12 The ALC should be managed in such a way as to clearly function in an equivalent manner to the other constituent units of the College.
- 3.13 The Review Group recommends that, in the short term, the ALC should be guided by the Board of Management. The composition of the Board should be enriched by senior users of the Centre's services, and the inclusion of an additional senior academic from a relevant area (e.g. the Professor of Linguistics). The RG perceives the role of the Board of Management as being to bring to a resolution the current difficulties and uncertainties and manage the transition towards adaptive structures and governance that will enable the ALC to develop its primary relationship with the College.
- 3.14 The Review Group strongly recommends that, in the medium term, the Board of Management should be replaced by a Steering Committee. This Steering Committee should continue to give strategic oversight and ensure that the

views of key stakeholder groups (e.g. Registrar; schools who are key service-users; International Office, etc.) are represented in decisions about developments within the ALC. However, the RG's view is that the ALC's primary management relationship should be with the College of Arts and Celtic Studies, as is the case with the other constituent units of the College.

- 3.15 The composition of the future Steering Committee should, in the unanimous opinion of the Review Group, include the ALC Director; a representative of the International Office; a representative of the School of Business; a representative of the School of Languages and Literatures, and a representative of each College representing in each case the profile of a key user of ALC.
- 3.16 A more adaptive financial model for the ALC is required - options on alternative approaches to funding should be explored, particularly in the context of the emphasis on the ALC as a service-provider for the UCD community into the future.
- 3.16 There needs to be greater transparency about the financial situation of the ALC so that all parties share a common understanding of key financial data.
- 3.17 The strategic goals of the ALC need to be clearly articulated. ALC goals should support University goals and in turn the ALC should be supported by the University in achieving its goals – the commercial activity of the Centre should be complementary to its strategic focus.
- 3.18 The ALC and other parties need to resolve difficulties that have overshadowed some of the ALC's activities in the past as collegially as possible and to move ahead in a spirit of co-operation that will allow both the ALC and University goals to be successfully achieved.

b. Staffing

Commendations

- 4.6 The Director is energetic and highly committed to her role, and she enjoys the trust and support of her staff.
- 4.7 There is a clear sense of collegiality amongst the staff of the Centre, who identify strongly with the aims and work of the ALC and invest a great deal in seeking to provide excellent courses for students under difficult circumstances.
- 4.8 The Centre's tutors are, on the whole, well qualified for the work they perform. Many of them have considerable experience and display great enthusiasm and professional commitment. They are clearly also committed to the success of the ALC.
- 4.9 Administrative staff show commitment to the Centre and provide excellent support for its academic activities.
- 4.10 Notwithstanding challenges with regard to quality assurance process and governance arrangements outlined elsewhere, working relationships appear to be very good and there is evidence that communication between key staff (e.g. in language areas) works well.

Recommendations

- 4.11 The ALC needs to devise a realistic staffing plan for both its English Language and its Foreign Language modules, including, as a priority, a Senior Language Co-ordinator post with responsibility for all quality assurance matters across *Horizons* languages and stages. In due course, this post should be supported by Language Co-ordinators, initially in French and Spanish, who might typically take responsibility for co-ordinating their own and for overseeing and providing support for tutors of one or two of the less commonly taught languages in the Centre. As languages such as Chinese and Japanese grow, they will also require co-ordination by a full-time member of staff.
- 4.12 There is an urgent need for the appointment of a core of full-time academic staff to coordinate existing programme offerings and to develop the EAP support programmes. The Centre has done an excellent job with current patterns of staffing, but this is not sustainable in the longer term.
- 4.13 As part of the move to a new staffing structure, arrangements should be put in place for staff development review and opportunities for tutors to engage in pedagogical development and to enhance their scholarly profile.

c. Teaching and Learning – Foreign Languages

Commendations

- 5.11 The FL modules reflect good practice in second and foreign language pedagogy, including aspects of independent and blended learning, communicative and task-based methodology, and use of portfolios.
- 5.12 The FL programme is highly efficient in terms of its system of common levels across languages, its approach to module design and its assessment procedures.
- 5.13 Courses are pegged to the Common European Framework and prerequisite and exit language levels are clearly advertised.
- 5.14 Student learning packs for individual languages and supplementary materials, such as vocabulary support booklets, are well organised and provide good support to learners.
- 5.15 Attendance rates at class are high. This is all the more commendable in view of the inevitable need to timetable many modules at less popular times. The high attendance rates are consistent with the positive student feedback received by the Review Group.
- 5.16 There is a high response rate for student course questionnaires. These provide evidence of high satisfaction ratings for teaching, especially for the tutors' interactive approach. This positive feedback is supported by the personal testimony of students with whom the RG met. Students are content with the amount of contact they have with tutors, they value access to native speaker teachers, are grateful for the support they receive, and praise tutors for their availability, prompt responses to email queries and other requests for help.

- 5.17 Feedback on the FL programme from academic partners/client schools across campus is very positive. Schools appear to value highly the courses which ALC provides for its students, seeing them as an inherently valuable educational opportunity for their students as well as acting as a recruitment tool. In this sense, ALC's FL modules serve the important function of supporting academic programmes across the whole of UCD.
- 5.18 The ALC's Director has made every effort to learn from good pedagogical practice in language centres across Europe and has been most effective in disseminating lessons learnt to the Centre's teaching staff.
- 5.19 The Centre has played a significant role in the development and use of the European Language Portfolio.
- 5.20 The ALC has been quick to respond to developments in the world of language teaching, has made a number of sound strategic decisions and has enjoyed a degree of success in attracting external funding for specific projects.
- 5.21 The ALC contributes significantly to the internationalisation of the University.
- 5.22 The Centre's website is clear, informative and well organised, acting as an effective marketing tool.

Recommendations

- 5.23 The Management Board, in collaboration with the College of Arts and Celtic Studies, should ensure that all existing FL modules undergo normal academic approval processes and that this becomes a standard procedure for all future modules.
- 5.24 Until a more satisfactory staffing structure and more transparent quality assurance procedures are in place, the ALC should be cautious about further expanding the FL *Horizons* programme but should focus on supporting students to make informed module choices about progressing to higher levels of FL achievement and on recruiting students from across all schools.
- 5.25 The Centre should introduce an appropriate number of external examiners for FL modules.
- 5.26 The ALC and SLL should establish a forum to clarify respective areas of activity and to explore potential future collaboration. This should be an incremental process and in the short-term should focus on avoiding overlap in the provision of language elective modules and improving the advertising of all UCD language electives.

d. Teaching and Learning – The Teaching of English and Graduate Programmes in TESOL

Commendations

- 6.9 The Centre provides a very wide range of English language programmes at undergraduate level and an innovative graduate pathway of nested courses for teacher education in TESOL.

- 6.10 The Centre has been successful in securing external funding and in developing income-generating programmes which have met a demand for general English and graduate teacher education in the field of TESOL. These require continued support, particularly in terms of rooms for summer teaching.
- 6.11 The Centre has established an efficient administrative system for managing large numbers of part time staff and copes with large numbers of students and test-candidates.
- 6.12 The Centre has established itself as the leading IELTS testing centre in Ireland and not only attracts considerable income, but also contributes to the profile of the ALC and the University itself.
- 6.13 The commercial unit of the ALC has been successful in its outreach activities and in establishing links with universities and individuals overseas through its summer English programmes. These connections are of considerable potential value to the University.

Recommendations

- 6.14 The RG recommends that the ALC should restructure its commercial activities so that they become ancillary to its core role of supporting UCD students. Self-funding should continue to play a role in the provision of pre-sessional support, EFL programmes, English language testing, and postgraduate TESOL programmes while surpluses from this commercial income stream will enable the Centre to develop its infrastructure and technological needs.
- 6.15 The ALC needs to work with key stakeholders to support internationalisation through provision of pre-sessional and insessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. It should be recognised that insessional programmes may not be self-financing and must be supported.
- 6.16 The ALC should progress its objective of becoming professionally accredited by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP).
- 6.17 The RG recommends that the University recognises the ALC as the sole provider of English language courses and is of the view that other University units who provide similar courses (e.g. the Irish Institute for Chinese Studies) should end provision.

e. Research and Innovation

Commendations

- 7.5 Even within constraints identified, the ALC has managed to be research active and achieve moderate research output.
- 7.6 The Centre has identified appropriate research intentions about areas for investigation.

- 7.7 The scope of activity in the ALC provides many opportunities for research. Researchers external to UCD currently access the rich data generated through ALC activity.

Recommendations

- 7.8 The immediate priority for the ALC should be to strengthen its organisational capacity and academic credibility by getting appropriate structures and staffing in place.
- 7.9 The ALC's research intentions would be well served by identifying and collaborating with partners both internal and external to UCD as appropriate, who may have the capacity to enhance the ALC's research potential.
- 7.10 The ALC should be encouraged and supported in developing its research capability over time as structures and staffing allow.

f. Management of Quality and Enhancement

Commendations

- 8.9 The ALC employs a range of evaluative processes to monitor students' learning experiences.
- 8.10 Students commented favourably on the quality of the staff and the modules that they had taken. There was some concern that language modules are scheduled at lunch time or in the evenings from 6pm to 8pm.
- 8.11 The development of foreign language modules is informed by theories of applied linguistics and with reference to European-wide standards in language teaching and learning.
- 8.12 The ALC is clearly aware of quality issues regarding staffing, and how the absence of language coordinators may impact on the quality of their teaching.

Recommendations

- 8.13 A system needs to be put in place to ensure external validation of the quality of the modules and their assessment processes. This may include an overview of newly developed modules at the level of the UUPB and of existing modules through the module enhancement process. The quality of all modules needs to be monitored through the appointment of external examiners.
- 8.14 The appointment of Language Coordinators to give oversight to language teaching is critical – the lack of such oversight in the current situation, where large numbers of hourly paid staff are involved in the delivery of modules, presents a threat to quality.
- 8.15 The current practice of administrative staff taking on roles that would normally fall to academics should be regularised appropriately as soon as is practicable when staffing issues are addressed.

- 8.16 The ALC should develop a system for ensuring that the information that is collected from students in the form of end of semester questionnaires/focus groups on teaching quality is fed back into the enhancement process. Information on this system should be made available to staff and students of the ALC.
- 8.17 The ALC should consider establishing a student forum that would allow students to raise issues of concern.

UCD Applied Language Centre Response to the Review Group Report

The ALC staff welcome the Review Group (RG)'s report on the Centre's role and achievements - in particular its endorsement and commendation of the ALC's strategies and activities. The ALC staff have benefited from the different stages of the quality process so far. The site visit enabled them to engage in constructive debate with the members of the panel about the Centre's work and its options for the future. They have also been able to raise matters of concern.

One of the key factors in making the process so successful was the RG's knowledge and experience of language education planning in an international higher education context. The discipline of modern languages has changed greatly in recent years and faces many challenges. Choosing the right strategies is essential if academic and financial goals are to be attained. The ALC wishes to thank the RG for engaging so thoroughly with the Centre's specific features and its UCD context. This assured and succinct report has captured the essence of the main issues and sets out the areas for action. Its comments and recommendations will serve as significant reference points and benchmarks for many years to come.

The RG report acknowledges that recent years have been difficult for the ALC, but its findings confirm that the Centre's decision-making has been strategic and effective. It commends the ALC's overall approach as being aligned with international best practice and as being fully sustainable. The Centre has initiated a large-scale and successful expansion in its multilingual programme for students across all Colleges. It has created an innovative graduate pathway for the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Its research activities, though small in scale to date, are well-conceived and should be supported - particularly in the areas of language learning, language teaching, and language testing. It has a successful record of external revenue generation.

Despite these achievements, the RG clearly confirms that the Centre faces a number of threats to its future. The overwhelming threat is a long-standing shortage of staff across both the academic and administrative areas. The current staffing structure is quite inadequate to enable the Centre achieve the university's strategic goals in internationalisation and related areas. This matter needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency, and funding needs to be provided directly by the university rather than from the ALC's commercial activities.

One of the RG's principal recommendations to the university is to actualise 'the potential demonstrated by the achievements of the ALC'. The Centre welcomes this proposal and looks forward to playing a role in its implementation. As part of this process, it will continue to build constructive collaborative relations across the university and work towards the establishment of a revised management structure which, in the RG's term, would be 'fit for purpose'.

In the time allocated, and in light of its remit, the RG could not examine all aspects of the Centre's activities and operations. The ALC notes that some issues which were raised in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) process did not feature in the RG report. It is hoped that these can be examined in the next stage of the process which is the preparation of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Finally, the ALC wishes to reiterate its gratitude to the RG for its commendations and guidance, and for its attention to the details of the Centre's circumstances and achievements. It also wishes to record its thanks to the Director and staff of the UCD Quality Office for their support and patience throughout the process. It looks forward to working with them in the next phase of this constructive process.



Site-Visit Schedule

UCD Applied Language Centre
21 – 23 April 2009

DAY 1: Tuesday, 21 April 2009

Arrival of the Review Group

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 17.00-18.30 | Review Group (with UCD Director of Quality) <i>only</i> meet at hotel to agree final work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days. |
| 18.30-19.10 | Meeting with representatives of the ALC Management Board |
| 19.30 | Dinner – hosted by UCD Registrar and Deputy President |

DAY 2: Wednesday, 22 April 2009

Venue: Room 3, Daedalus Building

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|-------------|---|
| 08.45-09.15 | Private meeting of Review Group |
| 09.15-10.45 | Meeting with Head of ALC (including 5 minute presentation) |
| 10.45-11.00 | Break |
| 11.00-12.00 | Meeting with a representative group of ALC staff |
| 12.00-12.15 | Break |
| 12.15-13.15 | Meeting with a representative group of students |
| 13.15-13.45 | Lunch |
| 13.45-14.05 | Meeting with Professor of Linguistics, School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore & Linguistics |
| 14.05-14.15 | Break |
| 14.15-15.00 | Meeting with a representative group of cognates/partners |
| 15.00-15.15 | Break |
| 15.15-15.45 | Meeting with representatives from the International Office |
| 15.45-16.00 | Break |

16.00-16.45	Meeting with College Principal
16.45-17.00	Break
17.00-17.45	Private meeting of Review Group – to review findings, identify aspects to be clarified and finalise tasks for the following day
17.45	Review Group depart

DAY 3: Thursday, 23 April 2009

Venue: Room 3, Daedalus Building

08.30-09.15	Review Group Meet
09.15-10.00	Meeting with a representative group of academic staff from the UCD School of Languages and Literatures
10.00-10.15	Break
10.15-10.45	Tour of ALC facilities
10.45-11.00	Break
11.00-12.15	RG available for private individual staff meetings (on request to UCD Quality Office)
12.15-12.45	RG meeting with Head of ALC – sweep-up meeting
12.45-13.00	Review Group – private meeting to review findings
13.00-13.30	Lunch
13.30-16.30	Review Group work on first draft of Review Group Report and prepare headline comments for exit presentation
16.45	Exit presentation to available staff of the unit
17.00	Review Group depart