



University College Dublin

REVIEW GROUP REPORT

Periodic Quality Review

UCD Applied Language Centre

April 2020

Accepted by the UCD Governing Authority at its meeting of 23 June 2022

Table of Contents

Key Findings of the Review Group	3
1. Introduction and Overview of UCD Applied Language Centre	5
2. Planning, Organisation and Management	12
3. Functions, Activities and Processes	17
4. Management of Resources	21
5. Users' Perspective	26
6. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges	29

Appendix 1: Full List of Commendations and Recommendations

Appendix 2: UCD Applied Language Centre Response to the Review Group Report

Appendix 3: UCD Applied Language Centre Review Group Site Visit Schedule

Key Findings of the Review Group

The Review Group has identified a number of key findings in relation to areas of good practice operating within the Applied Language Centre and areas which the Review Group would highlight as requiring improvement. The main section of this Report sets out all observations, commendations and recommendations of the Review Group in more detail. A consolidated list of all commendations and recommendations is set out in Appendix 1.

Examples of Good Practice

The RG identified a number of commendations, in particular:

- The Centre Director, her senior management team and professional administrative staff are skilled and experienced in their respective roles and are committed to ensuring the highest standards and quality of language teaching, efficient administration and assuring a positive student experience. They are also committed to ensuring compliance with all internal and external regulations that govern curriculum and assessments.
- The senior teaching fellows and language teachers are highly committed to their respective languages through their teaching and demonstrate a supportive and personalised approach in their teaching and other interactions with their students.
- The Centre has good relationships with other Schools and units within the University, including the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, and is committed to working with other schools and units across the University to support the University's global engagement agenda.
- Working with UCD HR and the UCD Office of Global Engagement, the Centre leadership is committed to resolving the long-standing difficulties with teacher contracts and to putting teaching staff contracts on a more stable footing, thereby addressing the latent disaffection that obtains among contract teaching staff.
- Notwithstanding the restricted access to the full range of UCD services and supports, the level of student satisfaction is remarkably high, and this is particularly with reference to students' experiences of teaching and the support of teaching and professional staff.
- Both direct and indirect evidence, including student satisfaction, external examiner reports, student average GPA (available for the Pathway Progression programme) and student retention rates, point to high quality of language teaching at the Centre. Examination candidates taking English examinations report positive experiences and evidence from the perspective of the British Council for IELTS and Cambridge English indicates satisfaction with the high levels of compliance with security, administration, supervision and with the Centre as an examination venue.

Recommendations for Future Improvement

The full list of recommendations is set out in Appendix 1; however, the Review Group would suggest that the following be prioritised:

- As part of a review of the Centre in its totality, the Review Group recommends that the Centre reorganise its internal operational management structures, with the view to reducing the number of units and the apparent complexity of reporting arrangements and line management relationships. Specifically, the Centre leadership should reconfigure the Centre into two operations units, one that manages the internally accredited activities and one that manages the externally accredited/income generating activities. The titles of the revised units should reflect their operational functions and should underpin the Centre strategy and that of the *UCD Strategy 2020–2024*. Aligned to this, the Centre should consider the present use of multiple leadership titles, and in consultation with the VP for Global Engagement and the UCD HR Partner, work to agree a single leadership role title, with clarity as to function and consistent with analogous role titles across other support units in the University.
- The Centre should develop and articulate a communication strategy that addresses internal communications and externally-facing communications and stakeholder engagement. (See recommendations on communications in Chapter 2).
- Scrutiny by a qualified subject external examiner in the language field should be a requirement for any module that contributes to the student’s final degree classification. Accordingly, the Centre should consider appointing subject external examiners for each language course.
- To realise its self-articulated vision and the aspirations of a new strategic plan, the Centre should continue to engage with UCD Estates and the Bursar’s Office to ensure that the Centre’s infrastructure is consistent with current best international standards in language teaching centres, and is fit for purpose and future-proofed. The current proposed plan for minor works should be the basis for review and discussions on the Centre’s infrastructure. The refurbishment and upgrading of student spaces and the relocation of administrators’ open-plan office to facilitate this and the development of enhanced language teachers’ facilities should be a priority.
- Linked to the previous recommendation, the Centre should take immediate steps to ensure an optimal student experience, one that supports UCD as Ireland’s Global University. To that end, the Centre should address the registration status of international students to ensure that they are provided with full right of access to the complete range of University resources and social and recreational facilities, similar to all other UCD-registered students. In addressing this issue, UCD Registry should explore a mechanism to ensure that any altered status of the Centre’s international students does not negatively impact on the University’s current efforts to improve the teacher-student ratio. The Centre should also upgrade and enhance the physical space for students, and constitute a Student Forum, at which the Centre Director and staff meet with the students once per trimester.

1. Introduction and Overview of UCD Applied Language Centre

Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a quality review of UCD Applied Language Centre (ALC), University College Dublin which was undertaken from 11 to 14 November 2019. The Centre response to the Review Group Report is attached as Appendix 2.

The Review Framework

- 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 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, and international good practice (e.g. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015). 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 developmental process in order to effect improvement, including:

- To monitor the quality of the student experience, and of teaching and learning.
- 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 identify, encourage and disseminate good practice, and to identify challenges and how to address these.
- To provide an opportunity for units to test the effectiveness of their systems and procedures for monitoring and enhancing quality and standards.
- To encourage the development and enhancement of these systems, in the context of current and emerging provision.
- To inform the University's strategic planning process.
- The output report provides robust evidence for external accreditation bodies.
- The process provides an external benchmark on practice and curriculum.
- 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 procedures 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 and the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

The Review Process

- 1.4 Typically, the review model comprises 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.

The Review Group

- 1.5 The composition of the Review Group for UCD Applied Language Centre was as follows:
- Professor Gerard Fealy, UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems (Chair)
 - Ms Ruth Harrison, UCD College of Business (Deputy Chair)
 - Dr Ana Maria Sousa Aguiar de Medeiros, King's College London
 - Professor John Slaght, University of Reading
- 1.6 The Review Group visited the Centre between 11–14 November 2019 and held meetings with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, the Centre Director and members of the Centre Senior Management Team; members of the SAR Co-ordinating Committee; including teaching and administrative staff; other University staff, including the Vice President for Global Engagement and the Head of School of the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics (SLCL). The Review Group also met with a sample of c.15 students. The site visit schedule is included as Appendix 3.
- 1.7 In addition to the Self-assessment Report, the Review Group considered documentation provided by the Unit and the University during the site visit. This included the Review Group Report of 2009, a small sample of ALC marketing material and the draft University Strategy, 2020–2024.
- 1.8 The Review Group was impressed with the level of engagement with the review process during the site visit and is grateful to all ALC staff and students for the open and honest dialogue that was facilitated throughout the site visit.

Preparation of the Self-assessment Report (SAR)

- 1.9 Following a briefing from the UCD Quality Office representative in 2018, a Self-assessment Report Coordinating Committee (SARCC) was established in January 2019. Committee membership was as follows:
- Rachael Fionda, Chair, Director
 - Anna Nunan, Co-Chair Deputy Director, Senior Teaching Fellow
 - Brian Rice, Operations
 - Joanne Dalton Academic English,
 - Éanna McIntyre, Global Language Modules (GLM)
 - Maria Ramirez De Arellano GLM. Language Teacher with Module Enhancement
 - Seán Gleeson, Pathways
 - Gosia Dynak Exams Unit
 - Gessica Cosi
 - Christopher Pingeon
- 1.10 Representatives from across the ALC were selected for the SAR, to enable them to act as the voice between the committee and the wider team and vice versa. Communications to the wider ALC team also took place via updates to the Senior Management Team and via the regular staff emails and meetings. Meetings of the Committee to prepare the SAR were held monthly until June 2019. Members of the committee, in consultation with staff members, drafted sections of the first draft of the Self-assessment Report. The Director, as report editor, reviewed the report over the summer period and the report was submitted to the UCD Quality Office on 10 October 2019.

The University

- 1.11 University College Dublin (UCD) is a large and diverse university whose origins date back to 1854. The University is situated on a large modern campus about 4 km to the south of the centre of Dublin.
- 1.12 The University Strategic Plan (to 2020) states that the University's mission is: "to contribute to the flourishing of Dublin, Ireland, Europe and the world through the excellence and impact of our research and scholarship, the quality of our graduates and our global engagement; providing a supportive community in which every member of the University is enabled to achieve their full potential".

The University is currently organised into six colleges and 37 schools

- UCD College of Arts and Humanities
 - UCD College of Business
 - UCD College of Engineering and Architecture
 - UCD College of Health and Agricultural Sciences
 - UCD College of Social Sciences and Law
 - UCD College of Science
- 1.13 As one of the largest universities on the island of Ireland, UCD supports a broad, deep and rich academic community in Science, Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, Agriculture,

Veterinary Medicine, Arts, Law, Celtic Studies and Human Sciences. There are currently more than 26,000 students in our UCD campus (approximately 16,300 undergraduates, 7,800 postgraduates and 2,200 Occasional and Adult Education students) registered on over 70 University degree programmes, including over 6,300 international students from more than 121 countries. The University also has over 5,400 students studying UCD degree programmes on campuses overseas.

The UCD Applied Language Centre

- 1.14 The UCD Applied Language Centre (ALC) is a support unit of University College Dublin and is a constituent unit of the UCD Office of Global Engagement. The Centre is located in a dedicated space, occupying all of Level 1 of the UCD Daedalus Building. Established in 1989, the Centre has a university-wide remit to provide teaching, self-study, testing and advisory services across UCD and to the wider national and global communities. This includes the provision of non-UCD accredited courses and activities and courses internally accredited by UCD. The Centre delivers teaching across the following areas: global language modules for all the University disciplines to both undergraduate and graduate students; two pathway programmes, the Pre-Masters Programme and Pre-Sessional Programme; Academic English courses or English for Academic Purposes to the wider community; and two English language pedagogy courses courses in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), namely the Graduate Diploma in TESOL and the MA in TESOL. The Centre courses include Academic English provision for many visa students with the associated regulations, and to partner university students. The Centre is one of Ireland's leading test centres for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examinations and for Cambridge English Exams.

Centre governance

- 1.15 As a support unit of the University, the Applied Language Centre (ALC) exists under the governance of the Global Engagement Board of Studies. The Vice President (VP) for Global Engagement chairs the Board and the Centre Director is a member of the Board. The VP for Global Engagement reports to the University Management Team (UMT) on the development and activities of the Centre.

Academic governance and accreditation

- 1.16 The ALC has two strands of academic activities: programmes and courses that are internally accredited by UCD, and non-UCD accredited courses and activities. The Centre's UCD-accredited courses are governed by the University governance arrangements for academic programmes and the UCD Academic Regulations guide the conduct of curriculum and assessments. One of the five units of the ALC, the Exams Unit manages and conducts examinations on behalf of two external accrediting bodies, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Cambridge Assessment English. Since they are conducted on behalf of external providers, the examinations are subject to strict quality control measures, which are set down by the providers, and which are aimed at assuring examination fidelity and security. In addition, the pre-offer Academic English courses are subject to the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services regulations, under the Department of Education and Skills.

Centre staffing

- 1.17 As a support unit of UCD, the Centre is staffed by a team of senior and junior professional administrators and teaching is delivered by global language teachers, TESOL teachers, and

senior teaching fellows. Planning for the Centre's core activities of teaching is based on recruitment of mainly teaching staff who are engaged on an annual contract basis and assigned teaching duties according to identified need at the commencement of each teaching session. The Centre also employs three senior teaching fellows, two on fixed-term whole-time equivalent contracts and one on a permanent contract, and a small number of teaching staff are also employed by UCD on a fixed-term contractual basis. However, the teaching staff are, in the main, engaged on temporary rolling contracts that are renewed year on year. Data provided by the Centre indicate that the Centre currently engages a total of 30 contract language teaching staff on hourly paid contracts. A more detailed description and analysis of the Centre staffing is presented in Chapter 4.

Finance and budget

- 1.18 The University set income and expenditure targets for the Centre at the time when the present budget model was introduced in 2015. Evidence provided by the Centre indicates that while the Centre has not met its targets over recent years, the Centre is performing well on direct income and the actual income over expenditure means that the Centre is currently generating sufficient income to meet its running costs. The relative contribution of student FTEs to direct income differs across programme offerings, with the Global Language modules representing c.75 per cent of the total fee income for the Centre. A factor that impacts on direct income is the Centre's physical teaching capacity during term times. A more detailed description and analysis of the Centre budget is presented in Chapter 4.

Centre infrastructure

- 1.19 The Applied Language Centre is located in a dedicated space in the UCD Daedalus Building. Occupying all of Level 1 (first floor), the Centre is configured into teaching and administrative office spaces, and includes dedicated spaces for self-study, materials preparation, an audio recording studio, and classrooms for language teaching. Some spaces are designed to provide flexibility of function; this includes a large open-plan room, which is used for both teaching and the conduct of IELTS and Cambridge examinations.
- 1.20 The SAR Report indicates that the Centre facilities, as they currently exist, are 'outdated and not fit for purpose' and not consistent with the Centre's vision to 'offer excellence in a range of supporting activities which promote language learning'. The Centre Director and Unit SMT contend that enhancing the physical facilities of the Centre would underpin its strategy goals and increase revenue, and in a practical sense, would enhance pedagogical practice, such as enabling student group work. The Review Group was provided with a copy of the Centre's draft plan and budget for minor works that, if approved, would result in a major reconfiguration and repurposing of internal spaces. The Review Group understands that, at the time of writing, the application for funding to complete the work was not approved. A more detailed description and analysis of Centre infrastructure is presented in Chapter 4.

Students

- 1.21 Data provided in the SAR Report indicate that the number of students recruited annually to its various language programmes has remained somewhat stable over the previous five years. The five-year trend for student registrations demonstrates relatively stable recruitment patterns in Academic English and the Global Engagement Master's Pathway programme, with a marginal increase in student registrations in the Pre-sessional Programme and the MA TESOL programmes. The notable exception is in the Global Language offerings, where there was a significant falloff in student registrations in Trimester 1 of the 2019–20 academic session; this falloff was of the order of c.25 per cent, when compared to the corresponding trimester in

2018–19, and the fall off was of the order of 27 per cent over the previous four years. The SAR Report indicates that the Centre has set itself a target of increasing student recruitment in all of its programmes.

- 1.22 Data provided by the Centre indicate that student retention is high, with retention rates of upwards on 100 per cent in the previous four years (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Student registrations and retention rates

Year	Semester	No. registered	No. de-registered	Retention (%)
2018–19	2	1,081	1,052	97.31%
	1	1,042	1,038	99.62%
2017–18	2	1,035	1,014	97.97%
	1	1,000	990	99%

The SAR Report indicates that upwards on 2,000 students a year register for the GLM and EAP modules.

- 1.23 Although retention rates for the pre-sessional programmes are excellent, with an average of around 110 students recruited over the previous five years, recruitment is relatively low for a prestigious university with a large student population. Additionally, although the MA TESOL programme is being delivered successfully, the number of students enrolled is also very low with a maximum of just 10 students over the previous four years.
- 1.24 Student completion rates for the Pathway Progression programmes are high. Completion rates for the Pre-sessional programme ranged from 77 to 95 per cent in the previous five years, with most students progressing to a UCD academic programme. Completion rates for the Pre-master’s programme were even higher, ranging from 90 to 94 per cent, with the majority of the students progressing to a UCD master’s programme. The mean GPA for students on both Pathway Progression programmes in the previous three years is in the second-class honours, level 1 (2H1) range.
- 1.25 The SAR Report and information gleaned during the site visit indicate that there are several contextual factors that are giving rise to difficulties for the smooth and effective functioning of the Centre, which in turn, represent a threat to quality. Members of the Centre Senior Management Team and others suggested that the Centre is moving from a difficult and unstable situation to a more stable one and there is evidence that this has occurred in some areas, such as improved staffing, module enhancement, provision of development opportunities for language teachers, and peer observation of teaching. Nevertheless, evidence gathered during the site visit indicated that internal difficulties persist, including human resource challenges associated with negotiations around teacher contracts, interpersonal difficulties and concerns over internal communications, self-identity and the role and place of the Centre within the wider University and its global engagement strategy. These difficulties represent a risk to service quality.
- 1.26 The Centre staff consider that the new provisions in the revised Academic Regulations, which preclude Stage 1 students from taking an elective module in Trimester 1, and the establishment of the English Language Academy represent a threat to both student recruitment and the Centre’ role and identity within the University. In addition, the abiding issue that continues to represent a challenge for resourcing and a source of dissatisfaction within the Centre is the fact that a large proportion of teaching staff are engaged on an hourly-paid contractual basis. Aside from the perceived lack of job security, some teaching staff

contracts exclude them from rights and privileges, such as Library access and parking. These restrictions, in turn, give rise to the view on the part of contract teachers that the University does not value them.

- 1.27 Both the Director of the ALC and the Director of the English Language Academy (ELA) have come together to review and clarify their respective unit remits, with the view to identifying differences and similarities between the two, and with the overall aim of establishing a shared vision for English language teaching. While the ALC is focused on English for Academic Purposes and the Graduate Diploma and MA in TESOL courses, the focus of the ELA is general English, study abroad, study for leisure and it has a distinct commercial remit.
- 1.28 Evidence gathered during the site visit indicates that there is a degree of dissatisfaction with the budget model and the Centre's inability to secure funding for minor works. The Review Group heard evidence of some resistance to the draft plans to upgrade the ALC facilities, including resistance to the planned repurposing of administrative office space for student use and the development of alternative administrative staff desks space in the large open-plan area. The SAR Report identified difficulties in recruiting and retaining administrative staff at the Executive Assistant grade, in part, attributed to the fact that staff who are engaged on temporary short-term contracts tend to seek more long-term contracts within UCD. Evidence gathered during the site visit confirmed this difficulty and indicates that the Centre also experiences difficulties in retaining hourly-paid contract teaching staff. The Centre facilities and staffing are further discussed in Chapter 4.
- 1.29 A major concern for both students and staff is the fact that the students on some ALC programmes are not included in the Register of students and therefore do not enjoy the full range of benefits enjoyed by their counterparts on the GLM programme. Student and staff testimonies indicate that this is a major cause of concern, as it not only excludes students from the use of Library, sport and recreational facilities, but also impacts on their ability to interact with the wider student body and, in so doing, enhance their English language competence.
- 1.30 Students across all programmes expressed high levels of satisfaction with their teaching-learning experiences and with the support that they received from their teachers and Centre professional staff. Student and other user perspectives are further discussed in Chapter 5.
- 1.31 During the site visit, the Review Group took the opportunity to read the previous Review Group Report of 2009 and were struck by the extent to which the issues and concerns that obtained at that time persist in 2019. For example, the 2009 Review Group identified concerns regarding the type of contract most suitable for language tutors and the fact that different contracts existed across the University for language teachers. Additionally, the 2009 Review Group identified 'the repeated use of short-term contracts' as demotivating for both teaching and administrative staff and they forecast that this would 'prove problematic and ... a potential source of grievance ... a quality issue' in the long term. This forecast proved to be accurate. The 2009 Review Group recommended that the Centre should 'devise a realistic staffing plan for both its English Language and its Foreign Language modules'. The present Review Group acknowledges that efforts have been made in that regard; however, there remain issues and challenges that are being managed through established channels, and hence, outside of the remit of the present Review Group to address.

2. Planning, Organisation and Management

General comment/context

Introduction

- 2.1 As outlined in Chapter 1, the Applied Language Centre (ALC) exists as a support unit of the University under the governance of the Global Engagement Board of Studies. The Vice President (VP) for Global Engagement chairs the Board of Studies and the Centre Director is a member of the Board. The VP for Global Engagement reports to the University Management Team (UMT) on the development and activities of the Centre. In addition to being responsible for the ALC, the VP for Global Engagement is also responsible for several other support units associated with global engagement, including UCD Office of Global Engagement; UCD Global; Gaeltacht UCD; and the Confucius Institute.

Strategy

- 2.2 The external drivers of Centre strategy are the national Languages Connect Strategy and the UCD Global Engagement Strategy, and the Centre has indicated its commitment to supporting these strategies. The Centre has articulated statements of mission, vision and values, which aim to guide its activities and internal processes. It has also articulated a long-term strategy in relation to student recruitment in the next decade, with the declared aim of increasing student numbers across all programmes. The Centre also aims to increase engagement across UCD schools, improve Centre facilities 'to match the UCD brand' and offer students 'a more immersive experience when learning a language'. The Centre is currently working on a Strategic Plan, which it plans to launch in 2020 to run concurrently with the term of the new *UCD Strategy 2020–2024 Rising to the Future*, which was launched on 11 December 2019.
- 2.3 The site visit provided the Review Group with the opportunity to meet with all of the key stakeholders, and arising out of the conversations, a number of themes emerged. Several Centre teachers and administrative staff expressed the view that the Centre is not sufficiently visible within the University and is not valued by the wider University. This seems to be a real and abiding concern for the Centre administrative and teaching staff and appears to impact on staff morale, self-identity and visibility as employees of UCD. As noted in Chapter 1, the establishment of the English Language Academy and the revised Academic Regulations are seen as compounding this sense of identity and value. The Centre Director spoke of efforts to establish a stronger 'voice' for the Centre within the University.
- 2.4 Data gathered during the site visit indicates that there is a lack of coherence between the ALC strategy and that of UCD. Given the key role that the ALC plays in recruiting international students, UCD's reputation and continued growth in global markets relies on the quality of its language students' experience; this is especially important, since in many cases the ALC serves as the international students' introduction to UCD. Similarly, in offering elective opportunities to students from across UCD, the ALC is uniquely positioned to showcase excellence in language and culture to enhance the reputation of UCD as a globally engaged university.
- 2.5 The Review Group questions the title of the Centre, believing that the title is unclear and does not fully convey the role or work of the Centre.

Internal governance and operational management

- 2.6 The SAR Report indicates that the Centre underwent a significant restructuring in recent years. This commenced in 2015 when the Centre moved from the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics to the UCD Office of Global Engagement. Following its relocation and the appointment of a new Centre Director in 2016, changes to internal structures resulted in new administrative arrangements and associated functions. At the time of the site visit, the Centre was reviewing work allocations, internal communications, responsiveness to context and future strategy.
- 2.7 A six-member Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for the Centre's internal governance and operational management. Chaired by the Centre Director, the SMT comprises the ALC Deputy Director, the Operations Manager, the International Pathways Officer, the External Relations Officer and the Senior Projects Manager. Aside from the Centre Director and Deputy Director, both of whom hold a doctoral degree, the members of the Centre's SMT are professional administrators holding senior administrative promotional grades.
- 2.8 The Centre's operational management arrangements are conducted through five distinct units, each related to a specific programme and/or administrative function. These are: the Exams Unit; the Academic English Unit; the GLM Unit; the TESOL Unit; and the Pathways Unit. Each unit has a line manager with a designated leadership position and role title who reports directly to the Centre Director. The Exams Unit and the Academic English Unit manage the non-UCD accredited courses and activities, while the GLM Unit, the TESOL Unit and the Pathways Unit manage courses that are internally accredited by UCD.
- 2.9 The SAR Report indicates that the administrative team is structured to support the academic activities, while the Operations Unit provides oversight and support across all areas of the Centre's activity. Evidence gleaned during the site visit indicates that there is some duplication of effort within and among the various units; for example, the Deputy Director has an operational role in four out of the five Centre sub-units.
- 2.10 The line management and reporting arrangements within the Centre indicate a number of parallel and somewhat complex reporting relationships. For example, the GLM teachers report to the Operations Manager for administrative issues, but are line managed by the Deputy Director, and the Academic English teaching team report to the External Relations Officer. Additionally, the two senior teaching fellows report directly to the Centre Director. In terms of upward reporting from the Centre, there are two distinct reporting lines to the UCD Office of Global Engagement. The Centre Director reports directly to the VP for Global Engagement and the Senior Projects Manager reports to the Deputy Vice-President (VP) for Global Engagement. This latter report-to arrangement was identified in the SAR Report and was evidenced in the fact that the Senior Projects Manager has prepared a number of reports that were commissioned by the Deputy VP for Global Engagement.
- 2.11 The Centre convenes sub-committees when certain tasks and activities demand, such as planning for events. The SAR report refers to several committees, including the EALTA Conference Committee, a Communications Committee, a Languages Connect Committee, GLM awareness raising Committee. The Report also references the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) in most units, which are periodically reviewed, and where required, new SOPs are created.
- 2.12 Planning for the Centre's core activities of teaching is based on the recruitment of teaching staff who are engaged on temporary rolling contracts that are renewed year on year. The contracts' duration and whole-time equivalent are based on the identified teaching

requirements for the forthcoming academic trimester. Once engaged, contract teachers are assigned teaching duties according to identified need at the commencement of each teaching session. The senior teaching fellows act in the role of course coordinators and also conduct teaching and assessments.

Internal communications

- 2.13 Information is cascaded downward from the Centre Director, to Line Managers and to each unit and information is cascaded upward through line managers and on to the Centre Director. The Centre Director communicates through team emails and by holding team meetings. The SAR Report indicates that the Director, senior teaching fellows and all professional staff at Senior Executive Assistant grade and above attend the ALC team meetings. In the RGs discussion with teaching staff during the site visit the issue was raised that teaching staff on temporary hourly-paid contracts do not attend team meetings and where they do attend meetings, the practice is not to reimburse them for the time spent in attending. The Unit has indicated that all hourly-paid staff are reimbursed for any meeting attendance, and teaching staff can and do attend all relevant team meetings within their unit. The Director should clarify this with staff. Meetings are scheduled in advance via Google calendar, meeting agendas are circulated, minutes taken and shared via the ALC team drive. The meetings consist of updates on Centre developments and initiatives.
- 2.14 While the Centre SMT disseminates information downward through the usual channels, such as email and a shared Centre drive, teaching staff indicate dissatisfaction with the levels of downward communication, and they report a sense of exclusion from decision making on aspects of curriculum policy and planning.
- 2.15 Evidence gathered during the site visit indicated that regular all staff meetings were not taking place, resulting in some staff reporting that they believe they do not have a voice, and this is resulting in disharmony within the Centre.
- 2.16 The Centre Director has indicated that she lacks full autonomy in certain aspects of her role in managing the Centre; this appears to be related to ongoing interpersonal tensions and conflicts that hinder effective communication and require moderation of the content of communications from the Director to Centre staff.
- 2.17 The Review Group was struck by the status of teachers, relative to professional staff, with the latter appearing to hold a position of pre-eminence in the Centre. This was in contrast to similar language centres in the UK, including Northern Ireland, and was evident in the type of contracts, the overall patterns of internal communications, the configuration of desk space and other Centre resources, the internal governance and administrative arrangements, and the non-participation of teaching staff in team meetings and in decisions on curriculum and pedagogy. The implicit messages, which these structures and processes convey, represent a risk to quality.

Commendations

- 2.18 The Centre Director, her senior management team and professional administrative staff are skilled and experienced in their respective roles and are committed to ensuring the highest standards and quality of language teaching, efficient administration and assuring a positive student experience. They are also committed to ensuring compliance with all internal and external regulations that govern curriculum and assessments.

- 2.19 The Centre leadership team is committed to realising the Centre’s mission, vision and values and to articulating and realising a new strategy to reflect and support the wider UCD Strategy and the national strategy on languages.
- 2.20 The Centre Director is committed to overcoming the Centre’s present difficulties and to bringing the Centre to a more stable position, in terms of staffing, resources and infrastructure.
- 2.21 The senior teaching fellows are highly motivated and demonstrate a strong work ethic, leadership within the teaching at the Centre, commitment to excellence in teaching, and engagement with their stakeholders.
- 2.22 The language teachers are highly committed to their respective languages through their teaching and demonstrate a supportive and personalised approach in their teaching and other interactions with their students.
- 2.23 The Centre has recently instituted a focused marketing campaign and demonstrates a strong sense of the importance of branding to the success of the Centre.
- 2.24 The Senior Management Team has introduced standard operating procedures (SOPs) within and across Centre units, which should promote efficiencies.
- 2.25 The Centre has good relationships with other Schools and units within the University, including the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, and is committed to working with other schools and units across the University to support the University’s global engagement agenda.
- 2.26 The Centre hosted the European Association of Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) Conference in summer 2019. This was an event of very high quality and was very well attended, and the EALTA Conference Committee and all associated with planning the conference are to be commended.

Recommendations

Communications

- 2.27 The University should consider renaming the UCD Applied Language Centre as the ‘UCD Global Languages Centre’ or the ‘UCD English and Global Languages Centre’, and to that end, should engage with and support the Centre in a focused rebranding and marketing campaign to highlight the change of title.
- 2.28 The Centre should develop and articulate a communication strategy that addresses internal communications and externally-facing communications and stakeholder engagement.
- 2.29 The Centre Director should invite the UCD VP for Global Engagement to a town hall meeting of all the Centre staff at the earliest opportunity, to set out precisely how the University positions the Centre within the *UCD Strategy 2020–2024 Rising to the Future*. This should happen soon after the launch of the UCD Strategy, and ideally no later than January or February 2020, and should include clarification of the Centre’s relationship with the English Language Academy and the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics.
- 2.30 The Centre Director should submit an Annual Report to the Global Engagement Board of Studies, to be submitted on or before 31 August each year. The Annual Report should contain reports of the Centre’s activities for the reporting year, including details of Centre staffing and

staff development, internal and external collaborations, student recruitment and retention, statistics on student attainment, student evaluations of their experiences, external examiner reports and recommendations, and so forth. The Annual Report should also include reference to the Centre's plans for the following year.

- 2.31 The Centre should work proactively to increase the visibility of the Centre's role and activities at three levels: internally within the Centre; externally to the wider University; and externally to local, national and international stakeholders and prospective students and global partners.
- 2.32 The Centre Director should maintain a visible presence within the Centre, through regular scheduled team meetings and through meetings with individual staff. This should include regular meetings with all teaching staff and with students and the Centre Director could adopt an 'open-door' policy, so that Centre staff can address issues and concerns directly to the Director. The entire Centre team should support the Centre leadership in working to address internal barriers to effective communication and to enhance quality in the Centre.
- 2.33 All senior teaching fellows and language teaching staff should be visible on the Centre website, with a profile photo and short biography. All professional staff should be similarly profiled on the website with a brief role description.
- 2.34 The Review Group considers that the challenges that the Centre continues to experience arise from a combination of unresolved legacy issues around staffing, uncertainty over role and identity vis-a-vis the wider University, and internal culture. The Centre culture is a product of individual and shared underlying beliefs, assumptions and values and ways of interacting, and these, in turn, give rise to the Centre's social and psychological milieu. Hence, effectively addressing unresolved longstanding challenges will require acknowledgement of the role that culture plays in the Centre's present circumstances and a whole-Centre commitment to resolving the internal difficulties. Effective vertical and horizontal communication and empowerment of all Centre staff to achieve their personal goals and the goals of the Centre are also critical in addressing the Centre's current internal difficulties.

Internal governance and operational management

- 2.35 The organisation of the Centre into five distinct units gives rise to internal reporting and line management arrangements that appear complex. The leadership roles within the Centre give rise to a range of titles; these include 'Director', 'Manager' and 'Officer' and 'Project Manager'. The Review Group recommends that the Centre undertake a review of its internal operational management, with the view to reducing the number of units and the apparent complexity of reporting arrangements and line management relationships. Specifically, the Centre leadership should reconfigure the Centre into two operations units, one that manages the internally accredited activities and one that manages the externally accredited/income generating activities. The titles of the units should reflect their functions. Additionally, the Centre should consider the present use of multiple leadership titles, and in consultation with the VP for Global Engagement and the UCD HR Partner, work to agree a single leadership role title, consistent with analogous role titles across other support units in the University, such as UCD Registry.
- 2.36 The Review Group recommends that the reporting relationship between the Centre and the VP for Global Engagement be clarified and put on an explicit footing. The reporting arrangement should be such that makes explicit that the Centre Director has overall responsibility for the strategic development and management of the Centre. The Review Group considers that, in principle and in practice, there should be one single direct report from the Centre to the University governance board responsible for the Centre. Hence, the

current arrangement, whereby the Centre Director reports directly to the VP for Global Engagement, should continue. With the support and contribution of the Senior Management Team, all written reports submitted to the Centre's governing board should have the imprimatur of the Centre Director.

- 2.37 The Senior Project Manager has had a direct reporting relationship with the Deputy VP for Global Engagement and has prepared a number of reports commissioned by the Deputy VP for Global Engagement. The Senior Project Manager has developed a particular interest and expertise in Asia and the Review Group considers that this role should be located within the UCD Office of Global Engagement. Re-locating the very experienced holder of this post would support the strategic and operational development of the University's Asia remit.
- 2.38 To address the recommended internal operational management arrangements and in working to achieve process enhancement more generally, the Centre leadership should enlist the support of UCD Agile. This would identify both short-term and long-term gains through process enhancement, innovation, and continuous improvement and would also assist in addressing those aspects of Centre culture that act to inhibit Centre effectiveness.
- 2.39 A number of committees exist to support centre activities and functions. The Review Group recommends that the Centre establish the following committees:
- A Centre Executive Committee, comprising the SMT and representatives of key staff, including one senior teaching fellow and two to three language teachers;
 - A School Committee, at which all Centre staff attend,
 - A Teaching and Learning Committee,
 - A Marketing and Communications Committee
 - A Quality Committee, which should, inter alia, maintain oversight of the Centre's examinations function and related activities, and support the Centre leadership in developing the quality improvement plan (QIP).
- 2.40 These committees should have explicit agreed terms of reference and should replace and/or subsume the functions of the following committees, as appropriate: The Communications Committee, the Languages Connect Committee, GLM Awareness Raising Committee. The Centre should also constitute a Student Forum, at which the Centre Director and staff meet with the students once per trimester. The Centre could consider having elected student representatives to attend other meetings at which the student voice should be included. Committees that are constituted as ad-hoc committees, such as the EALTA conference committee, should continue to operate, as and when needed.

3. Functions, activities and processes

General comment/context

Introduction

- 3.1 The Review Group noted that this review is taking place three years later than scheduled and that numerous issues identified in the previous review of 2009 remain to be resolved and are directly linked to the many difficulties that the Centre currently experiences. A key factor in the Centre's ongoing difficulties may be how the Centre is viewed by the University. Constituted as a support unit, may act to hinder the Centre's optimal integration into UCD's wider academic and governance structures and its relationship with other academic schools.

- 3.2 The identity of the ALC is unclear and its centrality to the delivery of key aspect of UCD's global and teaching strategies is not embodied by all ALC staff. The ALC is primarily a teaching unit, but current UCD structures identify staff as either academics or professional administrators and neither category is sufficiently comprehensive to permit proper representation of the ALC as an independent teaching unit working alongside academic schools and this gives rise to a number of impediments to the smooth and efficient delivery of its core activities.

Programmes and modules

- 3.3 The Global Language Modules are a distinct suite of module offerings in an Irish context and are clearly an attractive element of the UCD portfolio. The range of language offerings is impressive; however, range and variety should not be at the expense of quality of language immersion and student competence or student overall experience. The SAR Report indicates that, at present, the modules offered enable students to progress to level B2+ and not to the higher levels of C1/C2.
- 3.4 The Review Group heard evidence that the ALC and the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics seek to collaborate and complement rather than compete in languages provision, with the former concerned with language competence and the latter with the cultural and structural aspects of languages. Nevertheless, there is an inherent risk that, in meeting student recruitment targets, each competes with the other for the same students, and this risk is amplified with the addition of the English Language Academy to the UCD offerings in languages.
- 3.5 CEFR for the GLM is mirrored using the BALEAP TEAP framework for the English for Academic Purposes modules. These are essential frameworks so that students completing these modules can demonstrate a readily identifiable standard. There is a single External Examiner for the various languages offered, and hence, External Examiner reports are limited to comments on procedural and compliance aspects of examinations, rather than the actual content of language teaching and its assessment.
- 3.6 The SAR Report identified a lack of growth in student numbers as being related to timetabling, changes in Academic Regulations and limitations in teaching space, as well as poor communication of the availability of GLM.
- 3.7 The Centre has identified weaknesses and shortcomings in its internal standard operating procedures (SOPs) and has proposed plans to address these and achieve improvements where inefficiencies exist.

Teachers and teaching

- 3.8 Evidence gathered during the site visit indicates that, in a number of cases, language teachers' hours of teaching are at the level of 24 hours per week for extended periods. It appears that the Centre Director was unaware of this, but by way of providing context, referenced similar teaching loads in private language schools. Requiring language teachers who themselves are from non-Irish backgrounds, to work long hours can risk the allegation of complicity in exploitative practices. This could also be interpreted as undervaluing the worth of qualified and experienced language teachers and of undermining the importance of intercultural awareness and foreign languages in Anglophone countries.
- 3.9 In the UK, most language centres provide an important source of income for universities and they are a boon to students who wish to study a language. At the ALC, the precise ratio of teachers to students and teachers to administrative staff is not clear. Comparisons with other

referent universities with a language centre, for example universities in the Universitas 21 Consortium, would be beneficial as a means of benchmarking the level of service provided at ALC. Such analysis would be a proxy metric of quality and could also inform budgetary planning.

- 3.10 EAP provision is vital for the integration and success of international students and the Centre recognises the importance of pedagogically-driven research and of research-led teaching in this field; however, the SAR Report appeared to set EAP in opposition to its 'language service', implying that programmes other than EAP are not subject to pedagogically-driven research or research-led teaching.

Students

- 3.11 As one of Ireland's leading test centres for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examinations and for Cambridge English Exams, the Exams Unit is a key functional unit of the ALC. Evidence gathered during the site visit indicates that the Unit is functioning effectively, in terms of meeting students' needs and global demands, and that its current infrastructure is effective in assuring assessment fidelity and security.
- 3.12 In partnership with the UCD School of Engineering, the Centre runs teacher development courses and oversee teaching at BDIC and Chang'an, two of UCD's China partner institutions; the work to support this activity is currently in development. Through a liaison with UCD China, the Centre has developed a Postgraduate Professional Certificate in TESOL. This was launched in summer 2019, with six students attending. Given UCD's global strategy as it applies to China, the Centre's current China remit represents an important opportunity for growth and enhancement of the UCD-China partnership and enhancement of the Centre itself, but one that will require a deliberate focus, explicit resourcing and a close engagement with the UCD Office of Global Engagement.
- 3.13 During the site visit, the Review Group heard conflicting evidence of practices around the processes associated with language teacher recruitment. While the Centre management gave assurances that all recruitment practices adhered to UCD HR policies and procedures, evidenced proffered during the site visit indicated concern at the composition of boards of assessors, the timing of selection interviews and late communication of the interview outcomes.

Commendations

- 3.14 Capping class sizes at 18 is very important to effective language teaching and is a key attraction for students who may be in disciplines where large lectures form a significant part of their scheduled teaching hours.
- 3.15 Working with the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics (SLCL) to support the Centre's plan to offer Polish to degree level is an excellent example of how the ALC and the SLCL can usefully collaborate to their mutual benefit and provide a greater choice of language courses offered to students at UCD.
- 3.16 The Centre Director and staff demonstrated a clear desire to improve the quality of all language modules and programmes offered and there is an understanding on the part of the Centre staff that the project to assure quality is an essential and ongoing process.
- 3.17 All processes related to the IELTS and Cambridge exams adhere to prescribed regulations and guidelines and language modules are also conducted in compliance with recognised

frameworks and regulations, such as those of the British Council for IELTS and Cambridge English.

Recommendations

- 3.18 With reference to the new UCD Strategy, the University should be explicit in its position on the role and function of the ALC and should communicate to all stakeholders how it positions the Centre within the wider UCD global engagement and language teaching infrastructure. With reference to global engagement and teaching, the UCD strategy and the ALC strategy should closely align, with the latter reflecting and supporting the former.
- 3.19 As a unit that delivers an internationally recognised postgraduate qualification, the University needs to urgently address the ongoing issues of student registration status and student access rights and teaching staff contracts and access rights.
- 3.20 The various units of the University that provide language teaching should avoid competing with each other in meeting student recruitment targets, and each should have an explicit remit in language teaching. This should include an annual published portfolio of offerings for each unit.
- 3.21 The Centre should consider the viability of bringing students up to C1/C2 level in at least some of the languages taught.
- 3.22 The Centre should work to develop closer integration with the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics to enable the development of those languages not specifically taught at UCD SLCL.
- 3.23 Through elective opportunities, the academic programmes across UCD should provide a structured pathway for incremental progression in a language for those students wishing to study a language in addition to their programme major. The development of Polish could potentially be used to explore further forms of collaboration, such as elective language minors.
- 3.24 The Centre should continue to develop close working relationships with all academic units, particularly those that send large numbers of students to the GLM modules.
- 3.25 The Centre should consider appointing subject external examiners for each language course. Scrutiny by a qualified subject external examiner in the language field should be a requirement for any module that contributes to the student's final degree classification.
- 3.26 The Centre Director should review and maintain ongoing monitoring of language teachers' workloads to ensure that workloads are consistent with best practice and to ensure that teachers are provided with time to prepare materials, assess learning and evaluate their teaching.
- 3.27 The Centre should review teacher-student and teacher-professional staff ratios and compare them with those of other referent language centres to ensure adherence to best international standards in language teaching. In this same regard, the University could review reports on teacher-staff ratios and language teacher pay published by other international public and private sector language centres.

- 3.28 The Centre should continue to encourage and promote evidence-informed teaching and support the scholarship of pedagogy and related research across all ALC language programmes.
- 3.29 The University should ensure that the Centre's current China remit, including teacher development courses and overseas teaching at BDIC and Chang'an, are sufficiently resourced. The resource should be located within the UCD Office of Global Engagement.
- 3.30 Recruitment and selection practices for language teachers and other administrative staff should be conducted in strict adherence to UCD HR policies and procedures. Boards of assessors should include one board member external to the Centre, and where feasible, a language teacher in the field of the interviewees. Boards of assessors should not include staff on temporary contracts.
- 3.31 The Centre should consider how to better integrate international students into the UCD community; this could include, for example, free-speaking practice opportunities (organised language tandem); film viewing evenings; coffee hours with ethnic cuisine, weekly surgery hours for staff, language and country-specific mentors, and so forth. Review best-practice evidence in the literature in how best to promote language student integration into the university community and review the work and experience of other universities hosting a language centre in this same regard.

4. Management of Resources

General comment/context

Introduction

- 4.1 This chapter reports on the management of the Centre's human and material resources, the Centre infrastructure and the Centre budget.

Centre budget

- 4.2 To be viable and sustainable, the Centre's activities and functions depend on it being financially secure. The Review Group viewed extracts from the Centre's annual budget over the previous five years and the evidence available demonstrates that the Centre was not meeting its budget targets as set by the University Bursar. The evidence indicates that the Centre is in perpetual deficit on that basis. The data available to the Review Group also demonstrates considerable variability in income and expenditure across the previous five years, and data indicates a steady decline in net fee income over this same period, and with an incremental increase in net expenditure.
- 4.3 The changes introduced to the Academic Regulations in 2019–20, whereby students in Semester 1, Stage 1, no longer take an elective module, indicate that, at fiscal year's end, there will be a further fall in net fee income. A more fine-grained analysis of the Centre budget was not possible, but it is likely that some Centre functions are cross-subsidising other functions. The Centre is working to grow both fee income and direct income across its programmes in response to demands for its services.
- 4.4 Salaries of hourly-paid language teachers are based on administrative grades rather than tutor or academic salary scales, specifically on the Executive Assistant scale. Centre administrators'

salaries are based on the University salary scales for the various administrative grades from the Executive Assistant to Senior Administrative Officer. It appears that the language teachers' salaries are benchmarked to administrative grades on the basis that the Centre is a support and not an academic unit.

- 4.5 Those language teachers that met with the Review Group and who were offered contracts of indefinite duration expressed great dissatisfaction with the salaries associated with the contracts, viewing them as demeaning and insufficient to meet their monthly expenditure and sustenance needs. The contracts offered to language teachers do not encourage staff retention; this contrasts with administrative staff above the EA grade, whose salaries and conditions of employment are seen as more favourable. This disparity in salaries and conditions of employment was highlighted in the previous interim quality review of 2009; however, it remains an abiding source of dissatisfaction among language teachers.
- 4.6 Administered under the UCD brand, the IELTS and Cambridge English exams are generating income for the Centre. The Review Group heard of growing competition for students from other examination centres in Dublin, which could impact on income from this important source.

Human resources

- 4.7 The staff at the ALC comprise a Centre Director, three senior teaching fellows, senior and junior professional administrators, global language teachers and TEFOL teachers. One of the Centre's senior research fellows is employed on a permanent contract and two are employed on fixed-term whole-time equivalent contracts. The Senior Teaching Fellow responsible for the China operation is funded by the School of Engineering rather than the ALC. There are plans to recruit a fourth senior teaching fellow. A small number of teaching staff are also employed on a fixed-term contractual basis. Most of the language teachers are engaged on temporary rolling contracts that are renewed year on year. Data provided by the Centre indicate that the Centre currently engages a total of 30 contract teaching staff on hourly paid contracts (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Contract staff (hourly paid) by unit and language

Unit	Language	Title	Number
GLM	Arabic	Teacher	1
GLM	Chinese	Teacher	2
GLM	ELT	Teacher	1
GLM	French	Teacher	4
GLM	German	Teacher	1
GLM	Italian	Teacher	3
GLM	Japanese	Teacher	1
GLM	Korean	Teacher	1
GLM	Russian	Teacher	1
GLM	Sign Language	Teacher	1
GLM	Spanish	Teacher	4
GLM	Swahili	Teacher	1
PMP	EAP	Teacher	1
Acad. English	English	Teacher	8
TOTAL			30

- 4.8 Several teaching staff have held temporary contracts for many years. These contracts limit their access to UCD services, such as the Library. The Review Group recognises that there is an ongoing process to arrive at a situation whereby teachers' contracts with UCD are placed on a more permanent footing. The rationale for this relates to the fact that the ALC is a support

unit and not an academic unit. The Centre has secured approval to recruit an additional Senior Teaching Fellow.

- 4.9 A number of teachers advised the Review Group that the move to new employment contracts will leave them in a worse financial position than their current hourly-paid contracts. While the Review Group did not review pay rates to confirm this assertion, a number of teachers expressed strongly-held concerns in this regard.
- 4.10 The Review Group does not wish to comment on the *content* of the current negotiations regarding teachers' contracts, which are taking place through industrial relations and workplace relations mechanisms, since it considers these matters to be sensitive. Nevertheless, the Review Group believes that the ongoing and protracted negotiations on teacher contracts and the persistence of multiple temporary contracts as a basis for engaging teachers is giving rise to a number of wider concerns. These include the negative impact on individual teachers and their sense of identity and visibility as UCD employees, the economic burden of low pay, the reputational risk to the Centre and to the wider University, and the negative impact on the Centre's capacity to consolidate and grow its core activities and support the University's claim to be Ireland's Global University.
- 4.11 Continuing professional development (CPD) is essential in any unit of the University, and in the case of the ALC, staff development opportunities would enable both administrative and teaching staff to develop their role competencies and the skills to adapt to changes in the internal and external environment. The SAR Report mentions teacher continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities; however, it appears that these opportunities are incidental and not part of a planned and structured CPD programme, based on self-identified teacher development needs.

Centre infrastructure and material resources

- 4.12 The Applied Language Centre is located in a dedicated space in the UCD Daedalus Building. Occupying all of Level 1 (first floor), the Centre is configured into teaching and administrative office spaces, and includes dedicated spaces for self-study, materials preparation, an audio recording studio, and classrooms for language teaching. Some spaces are designed to provide flexibility of functions; this includes a large open space, which is used for both teaching and the conduct of IELTS and Cambridge examinations.
- 4.13 Centre administrative staff are located in a large open-plan office and more senior administrative staff and teaching fellows are located in individual offices. A single room, containing 'hot desk' facilities and teaching materials and resources, is available for contract teaching staff. Some upgrading of classroom IT and audio-visual facilities has taken place, with the installation of interactive 'smart touch' screens, and there are plans to repurpose some spaces, including the open-plan administrative staff office as a student reception area. A small staff kitchen and rest area were recently installed to the rear of the facility. The Centre teaching activities take place on five days per week, and examinations are generally timetabled but not exclusively scheduled on Fridays and Saturdays.
- 4.14 The Centre operates in the heart of the Belfield campus and this location affords the Centre much opportunity and promise, in terms of visibility and branding. The building has significant potential and this should be maximised for the benefit of the Centre, the wider University and its global strategy.
- 4.15 The SAR Report indicates that the Centre facilities, as they currently exist, are 'outdated and not fit for purpose' and not consistent with the Centre's vision to 'offer excellence in a range

of supporting activities which promote language learning'. The Centre Director and Unit SMT believe that enhancing the physical facilities of the Centre would underpin strategy goals and increase revenue, and in a practical sense, would enhance pedagogical practice, such as enabling student group work. The development of a self-access area is seen as being needed to provide more teaching space and promote language learning, teacher development and ensure visibility of the ALC. The Review Group was provided with a copy of the Centre's draft plan and budget for minor works that, if approved, would result in a major reconfiguration and repurposing of internal spaces. The Review Group understands that, at the time of writing, the application for funding to complete the work was not approved.

- 4.16 The Centre website is a key part of the Centre infrastructure and it is a window on the Centre to the wider UCD, national and global stakeholders and prospective students. It is generally well designed, aesthetically attractive and easily navigable; however, with recommended rebranding and restructuring, as set out in Chapter 2, it will need a redesign.
- 4.17 The fact that the Centre had continued to use the Moodle VLE when the standard University VLE was Blackboard suggests a reticence to change. The Centre subsequently adopted Brightspace VLE in 2018 in common with the rest of the University.
- 4.18 The Centre is considering developing a facility to conduct online assessments and the Review Group was able to view a space that, although rather small and windowless, could be repurposed for this function.
- 4.19 The Review Group observed the placement and dispersal of teaching materials available to students and teachers and the learning spaces for their use. These appeared to be adequate, in terms of quantity; however, the Review Group was not able to analyse the quality of materials, although a cursory review indicated that some teaching materials appeared to be somewhat dated.
- 4.20 While there are concerns at the proposal to incorporate the Centre's teaching rooms into the wider inventory of University teaching rooms, there was evidence of underuse of space while the Review Group visited the Centre.
- 4.21 The SAR Report indicates that it was necessary to compile some statistical information manually, since the ALC is not fully integrated into the University's online reporting infrastructure.

Commendations

- 4.22 While data on the Centre budget indicates that income and expenditure targets have not been met over the previous five years, the Centre is generating income to meet its running costs and the Centre management is working with the Bursar's Office to address budgetary challenges.
- 4.23 Working with UCD HR and UCD Global Engagement, the Centre leadership is committed to resolving the long-standing difficulties with teacher contracts and to putting teaching staff contracts on a more stable footing, thereby addressing the latent disaffection that obtains among contract teaching staff.
- 4.24 The proposal to appoint an additional Senior Teaching Fellow is welcomed, as it will reduce the not inconsiderable workloads of the three existing senior teaching fellows responsible.

- 4.25 The Centre has introduced some improvements in the internal infrastructure, including improvements in classroom A-V technologies and improved staff facilities.
- 4.26 The Centre has invested in upgrading the AV technology in the language classrooms, with the introduction of 'Clevertouch' screens. The Centre has also migrated its local and bespoke online systems to UCD-supported platforms; this has included moving from Moodle to the Brightspace VLE, moving from a local file server to Google Team Drive, and moving the web platforms from WordPress to Terminal 4. These changes have led to efficiencies and should make for more reliable data retrieval and reporting.
- 4.27 The Centre Director and Unit SMT recognise that enhancing the physical infrastructure and facilities of the Centre would underpin strategy goals, increase revenue and enhance pedagogical practice.
- 4.28 The Centre provides a good range of teaching materials to support teaching and student learning and the 'self-access' space is a welcome initiative.
- 4.29 The small class sizes for teaching serve to promote effective teaching and student learning. The establishment of a local online room booking system in September 2017 was a positive initiative in ensuring maximising and efficient management of room space at the Centre.

Recommendations

- 4.30 The University Bursar should review the Centre's current budget model and, where consistent with the UCD budget model, consider re-calibrating the annual budget income and expenditure targets to reflect the current reality of fee income and expenditure, as well as future projections of Centre activity.
- 4.31 The Centre should appoint an educational technologist.
- 4.32 The Centre should review its present offerings with reference to the income and the full economic cost of each programme. This analysis should be with reference to both the sustainability of each offering and the UCD global strategy. While some programmes may be operating at a loss, this does not mean that they should be withdrawn, and cross-programme subsidisation is not undesirable in the context of the wider UCD global strategy.
- 4.33 The University should review the disparity in salaries and conditions of employment between language teachers and professional staff.
- 4.34 The Centre should develop a structured programme of continuing professional development for all staff to meet their self-identified needs. For example, the Centre could collaborate with UCD Teaching and Learning and/or the UCD School of Education, to develop a bespoke continuing professional development programme for language teachers to update them on topics such as innovative pedagogies, blended learning and the use of TEL to support teaching, learning and assessment. This would enable greater integration of language teachers into the University, once teacher contracts have been agreed.
- 4.35 To ensure that the ALC infrastructure is consistent with best international standards for student facilities and best-practice standards in language teaching, the Centre should continue to engage with UCD Estates and the Bursar's Office to ensure that the Centre infrastructure is fit for purpose. The current proposed plan for minor works should be the basis for review and discussions on the Centre infrastructure. The refurbishment and upgrading of student spaces

and the relocation of administrators' open-plan office to facilitate this and the development of enhanced language teachers' facilities should be given priority.

- 4.36 The Centre should continue to engage with UCD Estates to review suitable teaching space beyond the Daedalus building and be open to the advantages of having its own rooms included in the inventory of teaching space available for timetabling across the University.
- 4.37 While the Centre website contains information about the Centre's key functions and activities, it should include profiles of all its teaching and professional staff. As part of the recommended rebranding and internal restructuring of the Centre, as set out in Chapter 2, it will be necessary to redesign the Centre website.
- 4.38 The Centre should conduct cost analyses of per-metre income and the cost of space used for the various types of course and examinations housed at the ALC so as to have significant data when making decisions of which programmes to grow.
- 4.39 The Centre should continue to pursue the plans to develop a facility to conduct online assessments.

5. User Perspective

General comment/context

- 5.1 The Applied Language Centre's primary users are the students who take language courses and examinations, including international students and students from across the University that take GLM elective modules and English for Academic Purposes. The other key users are the external providers of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Cambridge Assessment English. For the purpose of this report, other users include those staff from across the University who interact with the Centre and the internal users, including the Centre leadership and management team, the teachers and professional staff.
- 5.2 The Centre uses a number of direct and indirect methods to elicit the quality of its teaching and English examinations services, including online student questionnaires using Survey Monkey, a comment box available in the reception area, external examiner reports, average student GPA, and student retention rates.
- 5.3 The Review Group met with a sample of students from across programmes and representing a wide range of nationalities, including Polish, Italian, French, Indian, Pakistani, American and Irish. The Review Group was struck by the openness of the students to share their experiences, which were, in the main, very positive regarding learning English or a global language.
- 5.4 Overall, student feedback indicates high levels of satisfaction with their teaching-learning experiences and with the support which they received from their teachers and Centre professional staff. This was evident in several sources, including both student and teacher testimonies during the site visit, and data on student responses to student surveys that were provided in the Appendix to the SAR Report. Students also expressed the view that their teachers were committed to the students, their teaching and to their respective languages. They also expressed satisfaction with the support from the Centre's professional staff. Several staff that met with the Review Group confirmed this high level of student satisfaction. One student elected to study three different languages during her time at UCD and students that

met with the Review Group remarked that they progressed much faster than they anticipated, due to the expert way in which their modules are taught.

- 5.5 Students on the Pre-Masters Programme reported that they greatly appreciated the quality of the teaching, the learning materials and supports, the personalised formative feedback on both written and oral work, and the recently introduced seminar examination component. Students taking the Graduate Diploma and MA TESOL programmes indicated high levels of satisfaction with the teaching and support in their professional development, which teaching staff provided. Students on the Pathway programmes also expressed satisfaction with their experiences. Similarly, students on the Pre-sessional programme indicated a very positive view of their course content, teaching, professional staff, on-campus accommodation, the social programme, the recently introduced seminar examinations, the e-portfolio and the systematic peer review.
- 5.6 Student satisfaction was also reflected in the very high retention rates; for example, on the GLM, where an average of over 1,000 student registrations was recorded over the period 2017–19, the retention rate was over 98 per cent. Data relating to the pre-sessional programme, the Academic English, MA TESOL and Pre-Masters show similarly high rates of retention.
- 5.7 The enduring concern for those students who were not registered to a UCD academic programme was the fact that they do not enjoy the same rights of access to all of the UCD learning resources, including the Library, and recreational facilities. This was compounded by the fact that these students reported that, when making their application to study at UCD, they were unaware of the barriers that exist to accessing these services.
- 5.8 The Review Group met each member of the Centre’s Senior Management Team on a one-to-one basis. Among the concerns that were raised in the course of meetings were lack of visibility of the Centre, the need for a greater appreciation of the Centre across the University, the need to recognise the value of language learning, and a lack of clarity surrounding the role of the English Language Academy (ELA). There were concerns around the actual status of the Centre and these centred on whether the Centre was, in fact, a service unit or an academic/teaching intensive unit. There were also concerns that certain problems were not being addressed in enough time and the effort needed to address the current problems that the Centre is experiencing was much greater than is currently appreciated.
- 5.9 The Centre wishes to ensure greater student diversity, in terms of nationalities represented in its student population, and during the site visit, the Review Group heard remarks from ALC staff that a single ethnic group was over-represented in the ALC student profile. The wish to have greater student diversity at the ALC is laudable; however, while unintentional, the view that one ethnic group is over-represented in the corps of students at the ALC risks propagating a narrative that could be interpreted as disfavouring one ethnic group in recruitment efforts. Discussion around student recruitment and the student profile, therefore, needs to be conducted with sensitivity so that no student cohort is seen as a ‘problem’.
- 5.10 The senior teaching fellows responsible for, respectively, the Pre-Masters Programme and the joint academic programmes in China expressed satisfaction in the role, but are experiencing considerable challenges, in terms of the volume of work, lack of support, and problems with teacher recruitment because of contract issues.
- 5.11 While the pre-sessional and pre-master’s courses were viewed as positive offerings within the Centre, there was concern that these were not currently performing to target. Concerns were

also expressed about the fall in student numbers, the need to offer more care for the language teachers and the students, and more attention to the place of languages in general.

- 5.12 Other concerns seen as demanding urgent attention included the need to reduce the wide range of salary points in salary scales that are presenting significant delays in recruitment and the wide disparity in hourly-paid teachers' salaries when compared to those of professional staff. This latter concern was viewed as a major contributor to low morale and de-motivation on the part of hourly-paid teachers. An example of the disparity was that of an ISL teacher being paid just a third of what an outsourced interpreter was receiving.
- 5.13 Several internal stakeholders spoke of the Centre's visibility. One observed that visibility was somewhat clouded by the label of support unit and that, in terms of quality, impact was more important than visibility, noting that English provision has been very impactful, for offshore students and for those coming on campus.
- 5.14 Part-time contract teaching staff expressed grievances over contracts and conditions of employment, and some expressed the view that their role had been downgraded over the previous five or more years. They also complained about a lack of communication from the Centre leadership, no access to a teaching framework, and they pointed to a loss of good teachers because of these, yet unresolved, issues, which they argued, have been aired extensively at an official level.
- 5.15 The Centre's professional staff expressed the view that being considered employees of the University was a favourable position and they considered that they had 'decent' contracts of employment. They spoke of efforts to empower those professional staff who hold line management responsibilities over a 12 to 18-month period.
- 5.16 The Director of the English Language (ELA) spoke of the need for greater integration between the Centre and the ELA and observed that the sector is currently being disrupted by technology.

Commendations

- 5.17 Notwithstanding the restricted access to the full range of UCD services and supports, the level of student satisfaction is remarkably high, and this is particularly with reference to students' experiences of teaching and the support of teaching and professional staff.
- 5.18 Graduate students from the University, including PhD students, are attending Academic English to improve their English.
- 5.19 The External Examiner has commended the formative assessment measures in use on the Graduate Diploma and MA TESOL.
- 5.20 The Centre's teaching staff are extremely dedicated to their teaching and their languages, and student testimonies attest to very high student satisfaction with their language modules and programmes. The Centre makes great efforts to support students who experience difficulties.
- 5.21 Both direct and indirect evidence, including student satisfaction, external examiner reports, student average GPA (available for the Pathway Progression programme) and student retention rates, point to high quality of language teaching at the Centre.
- 5.22 The Centre's professional staff are extremely committed to assuring effective and efficient Centre administration and student support.

- 5.23 The various University support units and academic schools that regularly interact with the Centre appreciate the range of language offerings, the high level of student supports, the positive interactions with academic and professional staff at the Centre, and the Centre's willingness to meet students' needs.
- 5.24 Examination candidates taking English examinations report positive experiences and evidence from the perspective of the British Council for IELTS and Cambridge English indicates satisfaction with the high levels of compliance with security, administration, supervision and with the Centre as an examination venue.

Recommendations

- 5.25 The Centre leadership should continue to work with the University authorities, through UCD HR, to bring a resolution to the long-standing issue of the language teachers' contracts of employment.
- 5.26 The Centre leadership should continue to work with the University authorities, through UCD Registry and the Bursar's Office, to address the registration status of international students, with the aim of granting them full access to University services and supports. In addressing this issue, UCD Registry should explore a mechanism to ensure that any altered status of the international students at the Centre does not negatively affect the University's teacher-student ratio.

6. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges

General comment/context

- 6.1 The Self-Assessment Report contained a report of a SWOT Analysis and during the site visit, the Review Group explored further the Centre's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Evidence indicated that not all Centre staff were in a position to contribute to the SWOT analysis. This was related to non-availability of staff and/or a decision on the part of some not to contribute. Moreover, the Review Group recognises that it is not always possible to arrive at a consensus when conducting a SWOT analysis. Additionally, evidence gleaned during the site visit indicates that while there were opportunities provided to staff to contribute to the SAR report, a large number did not avail of the opportunity.
- 6.2 The Centre's strengths reside in its skilled language teachers and its committed professional staff. These strengths are complemented by a physical infrastructure, technology and material resources that have much potential to enhance the student experience and the staff working environment.
- 6.3 Another key strength of the Centre is its students, whose commitment to their language studies can be an important marketing resource. Conversely, international students who have a negative experience, particularly as a result of their sense of exclusion from full membership of the UCD student community, can be a weakness and a threat to effective marketing and recruitment.
- 6.4 As outlined in Chapter 1, two key developments in 2019 that are viewed as a threat to the Centre's activities, role and identity among Centre staff; these are the new provision in the

revised Academic Regulations that preclude Stage 1 students from taking an elective module in Trimester 1, and the establishment of the English Language Academy.

- 6.5 Perceived threats to staff morale are the ongoing unresolved issue of language teacher contracts and the inability to retain junior professional staff. The fact that a large proportion of teaching staff are engaged on an hourly-paid contractual basis continues to represent a challenge for resourcing and is a source of dissatisfaction within the Centre. Aside from the perceived lack of job security, teaching staff contracts exclude them from rights and privileges, such as Library access and parking. These restrictions, in turn, give rise to the view on the part of contract teachers that the University does not value them.
- 6.6 The Centre's suite of language offerings represents both a strength and an opportunity for further growth. The Pre-sessional programme is successful, although its success may be threatened by the fact that restrictions placed on its students, such as exclusion from the Library and social and sports facilities, make students believe that they are not full members of the University community. The Partnerships and Pathways programmes remain to be fully 'bedded in', while the Pre-Masters Programme and the joint academic programmes in China are successful, although their success may be threatened by the level of resourcing to match the volume of work involved in their teaching and administration.
- 6.7 The Centre's current financial circumstances, in which it is not achieving its budget targets for income and expenditure, present a significant threat to the Centre's ability to grow and develop its staff and infrastructure.
- 6.8 If not resolved in the short to medium term, the Centre's current difficulties, which have been identified during the periodic quality review, will continue to threaten the Centre's effectiveness and the quality of its services. If overcome, these same difficulties will present the Centre with an opportunity to grow and become a model global language teaching and testing centre.
- 6.9 The Centre is open to engage with the wider University and the fact that the language centre is a part of UCD is seen by the Review Group as a significant strength and indeed an area of immense opportunity. Much can be achieved to ensure that visibility is improved and improve the financial position of the Centre. Having a stand-alone language centre as an integral part of the University is a significant strength.

Commendations

- 6.10 The Centre staff indicated a commitment to address the current challenges that the Centre experiences and to overcome those legacy issues that have threatened internal harmony in the work setting and the Centre's effectiveness.
- 6.11 The Centre demonstrates real commitment to its students, their learning and welfare and the students appear to genuinely appreciate this.
- 6.12 The Centre offers an impressive suite of global languages and is open to introducing new languages.

Recommendations

- 6.13 The Review Group urges the entire Centre community to consider the Review Group's recommendations and to see them as a basis for renewal and to recognise that much that can be done to address the challenges is in the Centre's own power to resolve.

- 6.14 While the proposal to rename the Centre, as outlined in Chapter 2, should not be seen as a panacea for all the Centre's difficulties, it can, nonetheless, represent an important opportunity for revitalisation and can demonstrate a renewed commitment to the Centre's core mission and values and those of the University. Hence, the Review Group recommends that the Centre engage with the University in pursuing this proposal, which will require a marketing campaign in consort with UCD Office of Global Engagement.
- 6.15 The Review Group recommends that the entire Centre community come together in a spirit of collegiality and unity to overcome the legacy issues that have resulted in internal difficulties for the Centre and its staff. The issues that have acted as barriers to effective communication should be a starting point. For example, the Centre should develop an internal communication strategy as part of its quality improvement plan.
- 6.16 The issue of staff contracts will remain a threat to staff morale and Centre effectiveness if not resolved in the short to medium term. Hence, the Review Group recommends that the Centre, in collaboration with UCD HR and the Bursar's Office and the relevant staff representative association(s) work to bring the matter to a resolution to the satisfaction of all parties.
- 6.17 To overcome the threat of reputational damage that is represented by international students' restricted access to University services and supports, the Review Group recommends that international language students be afforded the same access rights and privileges as those of all other University students to promote equity and inclusivity.
- 6.18 With the reduction in the number of Stage 1 students taking a GLM module as an elective, the Centre should actively engage with other Schools in promoting its language offerings. These efforts should be based on an explicit short-to-medium term marketing plan for student recruitment from within the University. Languages Connect is a positive development in languages in Ireland and presents a significant opportunity for the Centre to be a key player in realising a national strategy.

UCD Applied Language Centre – Full List of Commendations and Recommendations

This Appendix contains a full list of all commendations and recommendations made by the Review Group for UCD Applied Language Centre and should be read in conjunction with the specific chapter above. *(Please note that the paragraph references below refer to the relevant paragraphs in the report text)*

2. Planning, Organisation and Management

Commendations

- 2.18 The Centre Director, her senior management team and professional administrative staff are skilled and experienced in their respective roles and are committed to ensuring the highest standards and quality of language teaching, efficient administration and assuring a positive student experience. They are also committed to ensuring compliance with all internal and external regulations that govern curriculum and assessments.
- 2.19 The Centre leadership team is committed to realising the Centre’s mission, vision and values and to articulating and realising a new strategy to reflect and support the wider UCD Strategy and the national strategy on languages.
- 2.20 The Centre Director is committed to overcoming the Centre’s present difficulties and to bringing the Centre to a more stable position, in terms of staffing, resources and infrastructure.
- 2.21 The senior teaching fellows are highly motivated and demonstrate a strong work ethic, leadership within the teaching at the Centre, commitment to excellence in teaching, and engagement with their stakeholders.
- 2.22 The language teachers are highly committed to their respective languages through their teaching and demonstrate a supportive and personalised approach in their teaching and other interactions with their students.
- 2.23 The Centre has recently instituted a focused marketing campaign and demonstrates a strong sense of the importance of branding to the success of the Centre.
- 2.24 The Senior Management Team has introduced standard operating procedures (SOPs) within and across Centre units, which should promote efficiencies.
- 2.25 The Centre has good relationships with other Schools and units within the University, including the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, and is committed to working with other schools and units across the University to support the University’s global engagement agenda.
- 2.26 The Centre hosted the European Association of Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) Conference in summer 2019. This was an event of very high quality and was very well attended, and the EALTA Conference Committee and all associated with planning the conference are to be commended.

Recommendations

Communications

- 2.27 The University should consider renaming the UCD Applied Language Centre as the 'UCD Global Languages Centre' or the 'UCD English and Global Languages Centre', and to that end, should engage with and support the Centre in a focused rebranding and marketing campaign to highlight the change of title.
- 2.28 The Centre should develop and articulate a communication strategy that addresses internal communications and externally-facing communications and stakeholder engagement.
- 2.29 The Centre Director should invite the UCD VP for Global Engagement to a town hall meeting of all the Centre staff at the earliest opportunity, to set out precisely how the University positions the Centre within the *UCD Strategy 2020–2024 Rising to the Future*. This should happen soon after the launch of the UCD Strategy, and ideally no later than January or February 2020, and should include clarification of the Centre's relationship with the English Language Academy and the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics.
- 2.30 The Centre Director should submit an Annual Report to the Global Engagement Board of Studies, to be submitted on or before 31 August each year. The Annual Report should contain reports of the Centre's activities for the reporting year, including details of Centre staffing and staff development, internal and external collaborations, student recruitment and retention, statistics on student attainment, student evaluations of their experiences, external examiner reports and recommendations, and so forth. The Annual Report should also include reference to the Centre's plans for the following year.
- 2.31 The Centre should work proactively to increase the visibility of the Centre's role and activities at three levels: internally within the Centre; externally to the wider University; and externally to local, national and international stakeholders and prospective students and global partners.
- 2.32 The Centre Director should maintain a visible presence within the Centre, through regular scheduled team meetings and through meetings with individual staff. This should include regular meetings with all teaching staff and with students and the Centre Director could adopt an 'open-door' policy, so that Centre staff can address issues and concerns directly to the Director. The entire Centre team should support the Centre leadership in working to address internal barriers to effective communication and to enhance quality in the Centre.
- 2.33 All senior teaching fellows and language teaching staff should be visible on the Centre website, with a profile photo and short biography. All professional staff should be similarly profiled on the website with a brief role description.
- 2.34 The Review Group considers that the challenges that the Centre continues to experience arise from a combination of unresolved legacy issues around staffing, uncertainty over role and identity vis-a-vis the wider University, and internal culture. The Centre culture is a product of individual and shared underlying beliefs, assumptions and values and ways of interacting, and these, in turn, give rise to the Centre's social and psychological milieu. Hence, effectively addressing unresolved longstanding challenges will require acknowledgement of the role that culture plays in the Centre's present circumstances and a whole-Centre commitment to resolving the internal difficulties. Effective vertical and horizontal communication and empowerment of all Centre staff to achieve their personal goals and the goals of the Centre are also critical in addressing the Centre's current internal difficulties.

Internal governance and operational management

- 2.35 The organisation of the Centre into five distinct units gives rise to internal reporting and line management arrangements that appear complex. The leadership roles within the Centre give rise to a range of titles; these include 'Director', 'Manager' and 'Officer' and 'Project Manager'. The Review Group recommends that the Centre undertake a review of its internal operational management, with the view to reducing the number of units and the apparent complexity of reporting arrangements and line management relationships. Specifically, the Centre leadership should reconfigure the Centre into two operations units, one that manages the internally accredited activities and one that manages the externally accredited/income generating activities. The titles of the units should reflect their functions. Additionally, the Centre should consider the present use of multiple leadership titles, and in consultation with the VP for Global Engagement and the UCD HR Partner, work to agree a single leadership role title, consistent with analogous role titles across other support units in the University, such as UCD Registry.
- 2.36 The Review Group recommends that the reporting relationship between the Centre and the VP for Global Engagement be clarified and put on an explicit footing. The reporting arrangement should be such that makes explicit that the Centre Director has overall responsibility for the strategic development and management of the Centre. The Review Group considers that, in principle and in practice, there should be one single direct report from the Centre to the University governance board responsible for the Centre. Hence, the current arrangement, whereby the Centre Director reports directly to the VP for Global Engagement, should continue. With the support and contribution of the Senior Management Team, all written reports submitted to the Centre's governing board should have the imprimatur of the Centre Director.
- 2.37 The Senior Project Manager has had a direct reporting relationship with the Deputy VP for Global Engagement and has prepared a number of reports commissioned by the Deputy VP for Global Engagement. The Senior Project Manager has developed a particular interest and expertise in Asia and the Review Group considers that this role should be located within the UCD Office of Global Engagement. Re-locating the very experienced holder of this post would support the strategic and operational development of the University's Asia remit.
- 2.38 To address the recommended internal operational management arrangements and in working to achieve process enhancement more generally, the Centre leadership should enlist the support of UCD Agile. This would identify both short-term and long-term gains through process enhancement, innovation, and continuous improvement and would also assist in addressing those aspects of Centre culture that act to inhibit Centre effectiveness.
- 2.39 A number of committees exist to support centre activities and functions. The Review Group recommends that the Centre establish the following committees:
- A Centre Executive Committee, comprising the SMT and representatives of key staff, including one senior teaching fellow and two to three language teachers;
 - A School Committee, at which all Centre staff attend,
 - A Teaching and Learning Committee,
 - A Marketing and Communications Committee
 - A Quality Committee, which should, inter alia, maintain oversight of the Centre's examinations function and related activities, and support the Centre leadership in developing the quality improvement plan (QIP).

- 2.40 These committees should have explicit agreed terms of reference and should replace and/or subsume the functions of the following committees, as appropriate: The Communications Committee, the Languages Connect Committee, GLM Awareness Raising Committee. The Centre should also constitute a Student Forum, at which the Centre Director and staff meet with the students once per trimester. The Centre could consider having elected student representatives to attend other meetings at which the student voice should be included. Committees that are constituted as ad-hoc committees, such as the EALTA conference committee, should continue to operate, as and when needed.

3. Functions, activities and processes

Commendations

- 3.14 Capping class sizes at 18 is very important to effective language teaching and is a key attraction for students who may be in disciplines where large lectures form a significant part of their scheduled teaching hours.
- 3.15 Working with the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics (SLCL) to support the Centre's plan to offer Polish to degree level is an excellent example of how the ALC and the SLCL can usefully collaborate to their mutual benefit and provide a greater choice of language courses offered to students at UCD.
- 3.16 The Centre Director and staff demonstrated a clear desire to improve the quality of all language modules and programmes offered and there is an understanding on the part of the Centre staff that the project to assure quality is an essential and ongoing process.
- 3.17 All processes related to the IELTS and Cambridge exams adhere to prescribed regulations and guidelines and language modules are also conducted in compliance with recognised frameworks and regulations, such as those of the British Council for IELTS and Cambridge English.

Recommendations

- 3.18 With reference to the new UCD Strategy, the University should be explicit in its position on the role and function of the ALC and should communicate to all stakeholders how it positions the Centre within the wider UCD global engagement and language teaching infrastructure. With reference to global engagement and teaching, the UCD strategy and the ALC strategy should closely align, with the latter reflecting and supporting the former.
- 3.19 As a unit that delivers an internationally recognised postgraduate qualification, the University needs to urgently address the ongoing issues of student registration status and student access rights and teaching staff contracts and access rights.
- 3.20 The various units of the University that provide language teaching should avoid competing with each other in meeting student recruitment targets, and each should have an explicit remit in language teaching. This should include an annual published portfolio of offerings for each unit.
- 3.21 The Centre should consider the viability of bringing students up to C1/C2 level in at least some of the languages taught.

- 3.22 The Centre should work to develop closer integration with the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics to enable the development of those languages not specifically taught at UCD SLCL.
- 3.23 Through elective opportunities, the academic programmes across UCD should provide a structured pathway for incremental progression in a language for those students wishing to study a language in addition to their programme major. The development of Polish could potentially be used to explore further forms of collaboration, such as elective language minors.
- 3.24 The Centre should continue to develop close working relationships with all academic units, particularly those that send large numbers of students to the GLM modules.
- 3.25 The Centre should consider appointing subject external examiners for each language course. Scrutiny by a qualified subject external examiner in the language field should be a requirement for any module that contributes to the student's final degree classification.
- 3.26 The Centre Director should review and maintain ongoing monitoring of language teachers' workloads to ensure that workloads are consistent with best practice and to ensure that teachers are provided with time to prepare materials, assess learning and evaluate their teaching.
- 3.27 The Centre should review teacher-student and teacher-professional staff ratios and compare them with those of other referent language centres to ensure adherence to best international standards in language teaching. In this same regard, the University could review reports on teacher-staff ratios and language teacher pay published by other international public and private sector language centres.
- 3.28 The Centre should continue to encourage and promote evidence-informed teaching and support the scholarship of pedagogy and related research across all ALC language programmes.
- 3.29 The University should ensure that the Centre's current China remit, including teacher development courses and overseas teaching at BDIC and Chang'an, are sufficiently resourced. The resource should be located within the UCD Office of Global Engagement.
- 3.30 Recruitment and selection practices for language teachers and other administrative staff should be conducted in strict adherence to UCD HR policies and procedures. Boards of assessors should include one board member external to the Centre, and where feasible, a language teacher in the field of the interviewees. Boards of assessors should not include staff on temporary contracts.
- 3.31 The Centre should consider how to better integrate international students into the UCD community; this could include, for example, free-speaking practice opportunities (organised language tandem); film viewing evenings; coffee hours with ethnic cuisine, weekly surgery hours for staff, language and country-specific mentors, and so forth. Review best-practice evidence in the literature in how best to promote language student integration into the university community and review the work and experience of other universities hosting a language centre in this same regard.

4. Management of Resources

Commendations

- 4.22 While data on the Centre budget indicates that income and expenditure targets have not been met over the previous five years, the Centre is generating income to meet its running costs and the Centre management is working with the Bursar's Office to address budgetary challenges.
- 4.23 Working with UCD HR and UCD Global Engagement, the Centre leadership is committed to resolving the long-standing difficulties with teacher contracts and to putting teaching staff contracts on a more stable footing, thereby addressing the latent disaffection that obtains among contract teaching staff.
- 4.24 The proposal to appoint an additional Senior Teaching Fellow is welcomed, as it will reduce the not inconsiderable workloads of the three existing senior teaching fellows responsible.
- 4.25 The Centre has introduced some improvements in the internal infrastructure, including improvements in classroom A-V technologies and improved staff facilities.
- 4.26 The Centre has invested in upgrading the AV technology in the language classrooms, with the introduction of 'Clevertouch' screens. The Centre has also migrated its local and bespoke online systems to UCD-supported platforms; this has included moving from Moodle to the Brightspace VLE, moving from a local file server to Google Team Drive, and moving the web platforms from WordPress to Terminal 4. These changes have led to efficiencies and should make for more reliable data retrieval and reporting.
- 4.27 The Centre Director and Unit SMT recognise that enhancing the physical infrastructure and facilities of the Centre would underpin strategy goals, increase revenue and enhance pedagogical practice.
- 4.28 The Centre provides a good range of teaching materials to support teaching and student learning and the 'self-access' space is a welcome initiative.
- 4.29 The small class sizes for teaching serve to promote effective teaching and student learning. The establishment of a local online room booking system in September 2017 was a positive initiative in ensuring maximising and efficient management of room space at the Centre.

Recommendations

- 4.30 The University Bursar should review the Centre's current budget model and, where consistent with the UCD budget model, consider re-calibrating the annual budget income and expenditure targets to reflect the current reality of fee income and expenditure, as well as future projections of Centre activity.
- 4.31 The Centre should appoint an educational technologist.
- 4.32 The Centre should review its present offerings with reference to the income and the full economic cost of each programme. This analysis should be with reference to both the sustainability of each offering and the UCD global strategy. While some programmes may be operating at a loss, this does not mean that they should be withdrawn, and cross-programme subsidisation is not undesirable in the context of the wider UCD global strategy.

- 4.33 The University should review the disparity in salaries and conditions of employment between language teachers and professional staff.
- 4.34 The Centre should develop a structured programme of continuing professional development for all staff to meet their self-identified needs. For example, the Centre could collaborate with UCD Teaching and Learning and/or the UCD School of Education, to develop a bespoke continuing professional development programme for language teachers to update them on topics such as innovative pedagogies, blended learning and the use of TEL to support teaching, learning and assessment. This would enable greater integration of language teachers into the University, once teacher contracts have been agreed.
- 4.35 To ensure that the ALC infrastructure is consistent with best international standards for student facilities and best-practice standards in language teaching, the Centre should continue to engage with UCD Estates and the Bursar's Office to ensure that the Centre infrastructure is fit for purpose. The current proposed plan for minor works should be the basis for review and discussions on the Centre infrastructure. The refurbishment and upgrading of student spaces and the relocation of administrators' open-plan office to facilitate this and the development of enhanced language teachers' facilities should be given priority.
- 4.36 The Centre should continue to engage with UCD Estates to review suitable teaching space beyond the Daedalus building and be open to the advantages of having its own rooms included in the inventory of teaching space available for timetabling across the University.
- 4.37 While the Centre website contains information about the Centre's key functions and activities, it should include profiles of all its teaching and professional staff. As part of the recommended rebranding and internal restructuring of the Centre, as set out in Chapter 2, it will be necessary to redesign the Centre website.
- 4.38 The Centre should conduct cost analyses of per-metre income and the cost of space used for the various types of course and examinations housed at the ALC so as to have significant data when making decisions of which programmes to grow.
- 4.39 The Centre should continue to pursue the plans to develop a facility to conduct online assessments.

5. User Perspective

Commendations

- 5.17 Notwithstanding the restricted access to the full range of UCD services and supports, the level of student satisfaction is remarkably high, and this is particularly with reference to students' experiences of teaching and the support of teaching and professional staff.
- 5.18 Graduate students from the University, including PhD students, are attending Academic English to improve their English.
- 5.19 The External Examiner has commended the formative assessment measures in use on the Graduate Diploma and MA TESOL.

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- 5.22 The Centre's professional staff are extremely committed to assuring effective and efficient Centre administration and student support.
- 5.23 The various University support units and academic schools that regularly interact with the Centre appreciate the range of language offerings, the high level of student supports, the positive interactions with academic and professional staff at the Centre, and the Centre's willingness to meet students' needs.
- 5.24 Examination candidates taking English examinations report positive experiences and evidence from the perspective of the British Council for IELTS and Cambridge English indicates satisfaction with the high levels of compliance with security, administration, supervision and with the Centre as an examination venue.

Recommendations

- 5.25 The Centre leadership should continue to work with the University authorities, through UCD HR, to bring a resolution to the long-standing issue of the language teachers' contracts of employment.
- 5.26 The Centre leadership should continue to work with the University authorities, through UCD Registry and the Bursar's Office, to address the registration status of international students, with the aim of granting them full access to University services and supports. In addressing this issue, UCD Registry should explore a mechanism to ensure that any altered status of the international students at the Centre does not negatively affect the University's teacher-student ratio.

6. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges

Commendations

- 6.10 The Centre staff indicated a commitment to address the current challenges that the Centre experiences and to overcome those legacy issues that have threatened internal harmony in the work setting and the Centre's effectiveness.
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- 6.12 The Centre offers an impressive suite of global languages and is open to introducing new languages.

Recommendations

- 6.13 The Review Group urges the entire Centre community to consider the Review Group's recommendations and to see them as a basis for renewal and to recognise that much that can be done to address the challenges is in the Centre's own power to resolve.
- 6.14 While the proposal to rename the Centre, as outlined in Chapter 2, should not be seen as a panacea for all the Centre's difficulties, it can, nonetheless, represent an important opportunity for revitalisation and can demonstrate a renewed commitment to the Centre's core mission and values and those of the University. Hence, the Review Group recommends that the Centre engage with the University in pursuing this proposal, which will require a marketing campaign in consort with UCD Office of Global Engagement.
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UCD Applied Language Centre – Response to the Review Group Report

The task of developing the Self-assessment Report was a valuable reflective exercise, which facilitated the UCD Applied Language Centre to review its position from a number of perspectives, highlight and confirm our strengths and opportunities, identify areas of good practice and evaluate our weaknesses and challenges in a systematic way. The Review Group Site Visit was a positive and constructive experience. We welcome the endorsement of the Review Group for our activities through commendations and will carefully consider the recommendations during the Quality Improvement Planning process.

There was a high level of engagement from all staff categories, both in compiling the Self-assessment Report and in interacting with the Review Group during the site visit. UCD Applied Language Centre wishes to thank the Review Group for their time, expertise and constructive comments, both at the visit and in their helpful Report.

With specific reference to the prioritised recommendations identified by the Review Group, UCD Applied Language Centre's response is outlined below:

- (i) **Recommendation:** *As part of a review of the Centre in its totality, the Review Group recommends that the Centre reorganise its internal operational management structures, with the view to reducing the number of units and the apparent complexity of reporting arrangements and line management relationships. Specifically, the Centre leadership should reconfigure the Centre into two operations units, one that manages the internally accredited activities and one that manages the externally accredited/income generating activities. The titles of the revised units should reflect their operational functions and should underpin the Centre strategy and that of the UCD Strategy 2020–2024. Aligned to this, the Centre should consider the present use of multiple leadership titles, and in consultation with the VP for Global Engagement and the UCD HR Partner, work to agree a single leadership role title, with clarity as to function and consistent with analogous role titles across other support units in the University.*

Response: ALC will seek to streamline operations in line with the RG's recommendation of having two operational Units in order to optimize operations and identify potential development opportunities for the Unit. This will include consistency on working titles and roles. This will be addressed in ALC's Quality Improvement Plan.

- (ii) **Recommendation:** *The Centre should develop and articulate a communication strategy that addresses internal communications and externally-facing communications and stakeholder engagement. (See recommendations on communications in Chapter 2).*

Response: ALC will review the communication strategy that is currently in development to incorporate its strategy for internal communications within the Unit, and externally beyond UCD. This will be developed as part of ALC's QIP.

- (iii) **Recommendation:** *Scrutiny by a qualified subject external examiner in the language field should be a requirement for any module that contributes to the student's final degree*

classification. Accordingly, the Centre should consider appointing subject external examiners for each language course.

Response: At present ALCs assessment practices are aligned to broader UCD Guidelines for appointing External Examiners. Regarding the Global Language Modules, ALC is happy to consider the appointment of subject external examiners for each of the languages (where possible) and reflect on this in developing its Quality Improvement Plan.

- (iv) **Recommendation:** *To realise its self-articulated vision and the aspirations of a new strategic plan, the Centre should continue to engage with UCD Estates and the Bursar's Office to ensure that the Centre's infrastructure is consistent with current best international standards in language teaching centres, and is fit for purpose and future-proofed. The current proposed plan for minor works should be the basis for review and discussions on the Centre's infrastructure. The refurbishment and upgrading of student spaces and the relocation of administrators' open-plan office to facilitate this and the development of enhanced language teachers' facilities should be a priority.*

Response: The Director will continue to work with ALC colleagues, UCD Estates, and Finance Manager on upgrading existing space and this will be addressed in the QIP.

- (v) **Recommendation:** *Linked to the previous recommendation, the Centre should take immediate steps to ensure an optimal student experience, one that supports UCD as Ireland's Global University. To that end, the Centre should address the registration status of international students to ensure that they are provided with full right of access to the complete range of University resources and social and recreational facilities, similar to all other UCD-registered students. In addressing this issue, UCD Registry should explore a mechanism to ensure that any altered status of the Centre's international students does not negatively impact on the University's current efforts to improve the teacher-student ratio. The Centre should also upgrade and enhance the physical space for students, and constitute a Student Forum, at which the Centre Director and staff meet with the students once per trimester.*

Response: The ALC Director and relevant unit heads have previously liaised with units across UCD to request access to the necessary services for the external English language students. We will continue to work with the relevant units to ensure that all of our students have full access to UCD resources. We welcome the proposal for a Student Forum and will work to enhance the use of our space for the students.

- (vi) **Recommendation 4.5:** *"Those language teachers that met with the Review Group and who were offered contracts of indefinite duration expressed great dissatisfaction with the salaries associated with the contracts, viewing them as demeaning and insufficient to meet their monthly expenditure and sustenance needs. The contracts offered to language teachers do not encourage staff retention; this contrasts with administrative staff above the EA grade, whose salaries and conditions of employment are seen as more favourable. This disparity in salaries and conditions of employment was highlighted in the previous interim quality review of 2009; however, it remains an abiding source of dissatisfaction among language teachers. "*

and

"A number of teachers advised the Review Group that the move to new employment contracts will leave them in a worse financial position than their

current hourly-paid contracts. While the Review Group did not review pay rates to confirm this assertion, a number of teachers expressed strongly-held concerns in this regard."

Response: The proposed salaries for teachers guarantee that each teacher receives at least a 6% uplift compared to what they would receive on an hourly paid basis. Senior Management and UCD HR will continue to work with teaching staff on clarifying and resolving this issue.



UCD Applied Language Centre

Quality Review Site Visit

11 – 14 November 2019

TIMETABLE

Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit

17.00-19.00	Review Group (RG) meet to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the site visit
19.30	RG Working dinner hosted by the UCD Registrar, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Deputy President

Day 1: Tuesday 12 November 2019

Venue: Daedalus Building, Room 15, First Floor, ALC

08.30-09.00	Private meeting of Review Group (RG)
09.00-09.30	RG meet with HR Partner
09.30-10.00	RG meet with Finance Manager
10.00-11.00	RG meet with ALC Director
11.15-11.30	RG tea/coffee break
11.30-12.00	RG meet with ALC Deputy Director
12.00-13.00	Lunch – RG only RG break
13.00-13.30	RG meet with Area Heads: Operations Manager
13.30-13.45	Break
13.45-14.15	RG meet with Area Head: Senior Project Manager

14.15-15.00	RG meet with Area Head: External Relations
15.00-15.30	Area Heads: Partnership and Pathways
15.30-15.45	RG break for key observations
15.45-17.00	RG meet with representative staff from ALC support team
17.00-17.15	RG break/leeway for observations
17.15-17.45	RG Visit to core facilities of the Unit
17.45-18.15	Meeting of Review Group to identify any remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day
18.15	RG depart

Day 2: Wednesday 13 November 2019
Venue: Daedalus Building, Room 15, First Floor, ALC

08.30-09.00	Review Group meet to prepare for day
09.00-09.30	RG meet with VP Global Engagement (via Skype)
09.30-10.00	Break
10.00-10.45	RG meet with GLM Teaching Team
10.45-11.00	RG meet with the Pathways Teaching Team
11.00-11.15	RG tea/coffee break
11.15-12.15	RG meet internal University stakeholders – e.g. UCD Estates, UCD Registry
12.30 -12.50	RG team meet with Head of UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics
12.50- 13.00	Break for key observations
13.00-14.00	Working lunch for Review Group – meeting with representative of students e.g. UG student electives,(Global Language Modules) Masters students (TESOL), Pathways Students and Academic English students
14.00-14.15	RG break for key observations
14.15-14.45	RG meet with the Academic English Teaching Team
14.45-15.15	RG meet with Director, English Language Academy
15.15-15.30	RG tea/coffee break
15.30-16.00	RG meet with Senior Teaching Fellows

16.00-17.00	RG available for private individual meetings with staff
17.00- 17.30	Meeting of Review Group to identify any remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day
17.30	RG Depart

Day 3:Thursday 14 November 2019
Venue: Daedalus Building, Room 15, First Floor, ALC

09.00-09.30	Private meeting of RG
10.00-11.00	RG meet with Director
11.00-11.15	RG tea/coffee break
11.15-12.00	RG continue preparing draft RG Report
12.00-13.00	RG meet with VP Global Engagement to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations
13.00-13.30	RG continue preparing draft RG Report
13.30-14.00	RG meet with ALC Director to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations
14.00-14.30	Lunch
14.30-15.00	Exit presentation to all available staff of the unit
15:00	Review Group depart