

Minutes of the AULC AGM, 8/9 February 2007, University of Portsmouth

After registration delegates were taken on a tour of the School of Languages, including the multimedia labs and Learning Resources Centre.

AULC Chair, Pam McIntyre, introduced the programme and Paul Edmondson, Technical Resources Manager, welcomed everyone to Portsmouth.

Professor John Craven, Vice Chancellor of the University of Portsmouth, added his welcome, urged delegates to visit the historic dockyard and provided a bit of history about the University, which has a prime position in the centre of Portsmouth, mostly occupying buildings which formerly belonged to the Ministry of Defence. Originally geared to training people for the Navy, Portsmouth gained university status in 1992 and the Languages Department, which was already well established, moved to the 99 year-old old Park Building in 1997.

Professor Craven went on to express concern about what was happening to languages in schools and said he was glad that Lord Dearing was coming to address the conference and was hopeful that his review might restore languages in schools. He said languages were very important to the University and that both Portsmouth's full degree programme in languages and its IWLP were still alive and well.

Bill Brierley, Head of the School of Languages and Area Studies 'Languages to 2010: The Challenges Ahead'

Bill Brierley has been Head of School for six years and is to retire in the summer, but languages have been his life and career. He spoke of his sadness at the current 'dismal picture' of languages nationally, with the 'catastrophic decline' of uptake at undergraduate level and referred to Dundee, the latest university to close its languages department. However he also pointed out that AULC statistics regarding IWLP languages painted a different picture and that Portsmouth has maintained numbers over the past five years. The School offers Spanish, French, German and Italian as well as EAP. There have been significant changes to the curriculum and the IWLP has been an area of growth, with an uptake of 1,900 students, representing 10% of the university population. Over recent years international recruitment, particularly from China, has become an important factor.

Looking to the future he said the School sought to:

1. maintain intake of approximately 150 undergraduates per year onto degree courses, including Languages and Journalism
2. maintain and expand the IWLP and increase retention
3. expand the English suite
4. build on links with China

Bill mentioned some important factors regarding the IWLP:

- a favourable institutional context (languages are seen to be one of Portsmouth's strengths)

- a favourable funding regime (in Portsmouth the IWLP is paid for through a 'top slice')
- recognition that language competence should be a graduate attribute
- good support from the vast majority of Heads of Department

He also mentioned specific problems with subject benchmark statements, due to be reviewed for Languages and Area Studies. Problems arise because these statements focus on degrees where a language forms at least 1/3 of the curriculum and he referred delegates to his extra paper on non-specialist language modules.

He insisted on the role of languages departments in internationalising the university and referred to the 2012 Olympics as perhaps our last/best chance to improve uptake of languages. He regretted the fact that the BA in International Business at Portsmouth has no compulsory languages element, but was pleased to note that within International Relations language study was available throughout. He said that the EAP was very important, since the entry requirement of IELTSs 6.0 was really too low and international students needed remedial English, academic skills and subject-specific courses. He mentioned that Portsmouth favours institutional partnerships and articulation agreements and is developing 2+2 and 3+1 programmes.

On the European front, he referred to Bologna and asked whether it can be made to work with all the differences that exist between member states. The Lisbon agenda is also far from being fulfilled in the UK.

Speaking of the National Languages Strategy he said that dropping languages at KS4 did not help, though the decline had already set in, and expressed the view that re-imposing compulsion would not solve the problem. He supported a review of the GCSE and its link to AS/A2 and saw the Languages Ladder as providing a tool to facilitate this. He also saw languages at KS2 as very important.

He spoke of the impact of new technologies and the phenomenal opportunities they provided. At Portsmouth there was high demand for audio-visual materials for all modules. Collaborative projects are also important and Portsmouth is part of a group along the south coast working on widening participation, as well as working with the OU on projects for German and strategic languages (Arabic and Chinese).

As for the local community, Portsmouth is offering free language tuition to primary school teachers, but Bill regretted the absence of any strategic linkage between sectors, such as exists in some parts of the country. He concluded by stressing the importance of retaining a good research programme and mentioned the Centre for European & International Studies Research and British Council funded projects.

Sue Wright, Professor of Languages and Politics
Virtual communities of communication: who is in contact on the Internet?

Professor Sue Wright moved from Aston to Portsmouth 8 years ago. She spoke in general terms about the value of pure research to policy makers and went on to describe the research she has undertaken. After a brief history of the development of language and technology she went on to explain the predominance of English in the early days of computer networks. She undertook analysis of internet users, internet penetration and internet usage growth 1995-2006 and explained how the data for this analysis was gathered. The full findings of her research can be found in the International Journal on Multicultural Societies, Volume 6, Number 1, 2004.

Mick Webb – BBC Languages Department
Innovations in online language learning

Mick started off by stating that the BBC was 'tasked to be innovative' and to serve all. He said that broadband and flash technology was a 'marriage made in heaven' for language learning, delivering decent quality interactive video and high quality sound. He reported that the BBC are currently shooting new video for the web.

He went on to talk in some detail about the new 'Ma France' post-beginners website. The TV series 'Excuse my French' was used as a 'hook' to get people to visit the website which is now attracting 50,000 people a month. He said that one of the advantages of online delivery was the capacity for ongoing change. He added later that it will soon be possible to download video podcasts of 'Ma France' to mobile phones.

He spoke briefly about new Flash videos, and directed us to Nokia 20 Lives (<http://www.nokia.com/20Lives/>) and <http://anyfilms.net/> for examples of interactive film.

He demonstrated features of a new Spanish beginners course currently under development. It takes the form of an interactive game designed to be immersive, motivating and repetitive (in a positive way). The game progressed from the user's perspective, feels like a real visit and has a twist. The user gets to interact with people, find out about Spain and learn Spanish using on-screen learning tools.

Plurilingual Portsmouth

Pauline Anderson, Community Learning Co-ordinator, Portsmouth Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, gave us an overview of the situation in Portsmouth. There are 62 languages spoken (below the national average), the most frequent of which are Bengali, Arabic, Cantonese and Punjabi. Specialist teaching is available, as is bilingual support in 22 languages. There are 1st language assessments. The longest established ethnic minority communities in Portsmouth are Bangladeshi and Chinese; in recent years the local NHS has recruited from Zimbabwe and the Philippines and a bus company have been recruiting from Poland. There are 11 community

language schools covering 8 languages and there are family learning opportunities, where parents can join primary KS2 learners.

Pauline's colleague, Rowshonara Reza, spoke of her own experiences as a child in Portsmouth. She remembered particularly the negative effect of language help outside the classroom and said that current best practice was to:

- teach children in the whole class environment with regular support from a bilingual assistant
- draw on and value language skills as an asset

Eric Baber, Associate Lecturer, Open University **Web 2.0 and language learning: An overview of contemporary technologies**

Eric started by giving a brief history of learning technologies, tracing the development from the earliest stone rubbings in China around 2,000 BC, via writing on papyrus in Egypt around 1,240 BC, through Greece to the development of the printing press. Books were quicker and dissemination of knowledge become easier. The invention of the computer and the internet and CD-ROMs brought more possibilities for interactivity, but in the early days it was reactive, rather than interactive.

Genuine interactivity can be achieved with modern technologies such as:

- Blogs – democratic, no technical knowledge required
- Wiki
- VLEs (eg Moodle)
- Ajax – user can set up websites with no technical knowledge

Web 2.0, a term coined in 2004, is the second generation of the WWW. Whereas Web 1.0 was a medium, Web 2.0 is a platform, a social phenomenon which connects people and leads to the development of communities, eg Webheads for language teachers and learners.

The tools used include:

Frappr <http://www.frappr.com/>

Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/>

Yahogroups <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

Content is no longer in the domain of individuals or organisations; groups can work on documents together and share resources. An example of sharing is del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us/>), which enables people to share internet bookmarks.

Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/start>) is one of many blog hosts. Teachers or students can set up weblogs. They can be used for dissemination of information, to encourage creative writing, reflective journals etc which can be commented on by readers.

Potential problems include abuse, lurkers, taking work out of the university environment. Access via a VLE, such as Moodle, can eliminate some problems.

RSS – really simple syndication – was recommended as a very useful tool. It informs registered users when sites have been updated. Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com/>), Sharpreader (<http://www.sharpreader.net/>) and FeedDemon (<http://www.newsgator.com/NGOLProduct.aspx?ProdID=FeedDemon>) all work in a similar way.

The use of Podcasts was recommended. Audio files can be downloaded via RSS and saved to PC, MP3 or CD. They are good for listening practice, especially when accompanied by exercises. 'Listen to English' and 'Business English pod' were given as examples. It was also suggested that students create their own podcasts. Skype (<http://www.skype.com/intl/en-gb/>), a free online telephony programme incorporating video and file-sharing similar to MSN, allows a maximum of 5 people to take part in audio/video conferences.

Management SIG report

The main topic discussed by the Management SIG was the issue of the privatisation of EAP and English Language Centres. The current situation was felt to be serious, with changes taking place in some institutions without the knowledge or agreement of the staff concerned. Where Centres have already been taken over existing staff have employment rights (under TUPE), but only for one year. BALEAP has held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the issue and UCU is now also taking an active interest in what is happening. There was also some discussion of rates of pay for part-time staff, and the change-over from hourly-paid to permanent part-time contracts in HE institutions and its effect on Language Centres.

Resources SIG report

1. Southampton is to host the next SIG meeting – date to be arranged.
2. Though there was no demonstration of Exterity, it was discussed. It was mentioned that another system (INUK) charges £5 per year per student for the service.
3. There was some discussion of suitable equipment to take the place of the older Tandberg cassette recorders. Coomber models were suggested.
4. There was discussion of problems with Samsung DVD recorders. (Note: This has continued on the mailing list since the meeting, with Rob Kennedy at SOAS apparently finding a solution.)
5. Several delegates commented on the unreliability of Freeview receivers.
6. Apparently the ERA licence does not cover rebroadcasts.

Teaching and Research SIG

There was no Teaching and Research SIG meeting this year as the majority of delegates were more interested in attending the other two SIG meetings.

Update and discussion on The Languages Review

Lord Dearing, Lid King and Kate Green

The auditorium filled up with staff from Portsmouth University and interested parties from the local area who joined AULC delegates to welcome Lord Dearing, Lid King and Kate Green to our meeting. They were all thanked for fitting this into their busy schedule.

Lord Dearing started by providing the background to the review, which started in September 2006 after the publication of GCSE results, and followed on from the National Languages Strategy. Measures implemented following on from recommendations made in this document were, he said, doing well in parts, but there were certainly problems in the post-14 sector and an urgent response was required because of the declining numbers of students taking a language at KS4 and at A Level, resulting in a smaller pool coming through to HE.

Under what he called the 'new paradigm' everyone should be doing a language at KS2, with an increased offering at KS3 and different routes and purposes post-14. He said that the idea that 'one menu suits all' is a disaster in schools where languages are concerned. He said that there is a close correlation between overall academic achievement and doing a GCSE in languages; nevertheless, languages should be an entitlement for all.

He reported on meetings he had had with Primary heads and was thrilled to hear of the success of languages for all at KS2. In Brighton, for example, it is embedded in the curriculum and 70% of Primary school children are learning a language there. He did, however, say that there are problems, for example regarding the quality of teaching and the need for a successful transition to the Secondary sector, a real area of risk. Funding to support KS2 languages will have to continue. The next version of the report will include this important transition and suggest a melding of approach from KS2 to KS3. The aim should be to make languages an enjoyable experience for 11-14 year-olds, to counter the feeling that they are difficult, boring and useless. He commented that teachers need to be equipped with new ideas and suggested that the Languages Ladder with its smaller steps would help. He looked to the introduction of new diplomas, the possibility of a 'short course' GCSE and 'facility in several languages, plus cultural understanding' as part of other courses, such as Leisure and Tourism. He also mentioned the feeling that the current GCSE does not stretch the most able and that those achieving A Level had not reached the desired standard. One possibility was for students to sit GCSE at 14, AS at 16 and A2 at 18.

He welcomed HEFCE funding for partnerships in HE and hoped that more money would be made available and successful pilots would be rolled out quickly. HE could contribute to making a success of language learning in schools in various ways. He said young students had a role to play in this; that

they might in fact be more influential than language specialists. HE could also help support new French teachers in Primary schools, who perhaps only ever did a GCSE some years ago and need their skills refreshing quickly, perhaps through intensive refresher courses, offered by University staff or international students.

Kate Green gave a brief update of Asset Languages. Last year 8 languages were offered up to higher GCSE level and this year more have been added. The new Advanced Level is now on stream in some languages, with more to follow and Higher Level statements are currently being prepared, with the help of HE, the IoL and the FCO. She also reported that KS3 Asset Languages certification was proving very motivating.

A number of delegates made comments and asked questions:

Bill Brierley (Portsmouth) informed Lord Dearing of the contribution Portsmouth University has made to support the introduction of languages to the Primary curriculum by offering free tuition to teachers. Lid King responded by speaking of the need to map such examples of good practice and promote them. Lord Dearing said that tremendous work was being done by enthusiasts, but that they are over-burdened.

Vicky Wright (Southampton) encouraged HE to get involved, especially in view of the fact that not all local authorities have language advisors.

The Deputy Head of a local school said that her staff were working with local primary schools.

Sarah Schlechter (Anglia Ruskin) said that her institution housed the local Comenius Centre and had put together a programme for upskilling language teachers but that it was not wanted by local primary schools.

There was some talk of the suggestion that languages be made a requirement for university entrance, though this comes up against criticism because of elitism. An alternative might be to make it compulsory in the first year at university, but an Irish delegate this was already the case in Ireland and it was a worry. It was mentioned that in France students have to achieve A2 in a language to matriculate.

Reports

CILT

David Newton highlighted 'Routes into Languages':

- Research bids are being processed
- Bids have been invited for 4 Regional consortia to be managed by the Subject Centre, deadline end March
- Call for bids for National Translation Networks managed by CILT

DfES 'Gateways to Languages'

Strand 1: producing materials for a) schools; b) mature recruits

Strand 2: model for structured work placements in translation companies for PG students of translation

Strand 3: CPD modules

Strand 4: languages for engineering and construction in HE

David said that new Spanish materials, vocational diplomas and a range of posters were available from 'Languages Work' at CILT. He also referred to last year's 'Crossing Frontiers' conference in Cardiff. Papers will appear on the web soon. He said that a successful workshop on 'Starting out in the HE department' had taken place in November last year, that more were at the planning stage and ideas for further workshops were invited. He said more information could be found in the CILT 'Higher' newsletter and suggested that delegates subscribe to new RSS feed to keep in touch.

BALEAP

BALEAP is working on supporting professional development for teachers and has a well established quality assurance scheme. Its next conference with the theme 'EAP in a globalising academic world' will be held in Durham, 15-17 April.

CercleS, the umbrella organisation for European Language Centres will hold its next conference in Seville in 2008. There is also to be a conference on the ELP and the CEF in Dublin 6-8 June this year. Delegates were encouraged to submit articles for publication in the CercleS bulletin.

Subject Centre

Vicky Wright picked out a number of items listed on the report drawn up for the meeting which was circulated to delegates. She encouraged anyone interested in bidding for funding to get in touch with her colleagues at the Subject Centre, who can put HE institutions in contact with one another. She highlighted a number of forthcoming events, noted the role the Subject Centre is to play in the review of benchmarking statements and distributed a questionnaire drawn up by a team at the Open University, conducting a survey of student uptake of Chinese (Mandarin) and Arabic in HE.

AULC AGM

1. Elections

Pam announced that two posts would soon become available on the Executive Committee, as current post-holders had retired from their respective institutions and would be stepping down. Both Roger Frisby (Vice Chair) and Colin Richardson (Treasurer) have agreed to continue to perform their current duties until new members have been elected. Pam pointed out that both Roger and Colin had been founder members of AULC in 1998. An email with details of forthcoming elections can be expected in due course.

2. Treasurer's report

Colin said that a summary had gone out. AULC currently has 76 paid up members. It has not yet proved necessary to increase subscriptions. Colin commented that he had enjoyed the job of Treasurer.

3. Mailing Lists

Matt encouraged everyone to sign up to mailing lists.

4. Next Year's Meeting

Four suggestions had been made regarding the venue for next year's meeting, all of which sounded excellent. Limerick had already been put forward for 2009. Delegates were asked to confirm their willingness to host the AGM on their return to their respective institutions.

5. Dfes – AULC Project

Nick Byrne reported that he would be circulating the results of last year's IWLP survey, together with an appeal for next year when he gets back to the office.

6. Melissi Prize

Pam announced that Melissi had offered a £100 prize for 'innovation of a practical or technical nature', to be judged by the Executive Committee. An email would be going out inviting entries soon.

7. AOB

Trevor Pull (Nottingham Trent) advertised a meeting of the VLE Languages Users Group to be held at his institution on Thursday 29 March.

Pam drew the event to an end by thanking Paul Edmondson and his team for a terrific meeting and for being such terrific hosts.