

## University of Glasgow

## Academic Standards Committee – Friday 14 November 2014

**Periodic Subject Review: Updated Response to  
Recommendation 3 arising from the Review of School of  
Modern Languages and Cultures held on 18 and 19 February  
2013**

Mrs C Omand, Senior Academic Policy Manager

**Recommendation 3**

The Team recommended that the School work towards delivery of weekly oral classes, or to providing equivalent provision, to achieve the desired aims of confident and independent graduates. If the School opts to develop 'equivalent provision' the School should engage with the student body to ensure that students consider that it is of equal value to weekly oral classes. [Paragraph 4.8.4]

**For Action: Head of School****For information: Dean (Learning and Teaching)****Response:**

This is the most challenging of the Review's recommendations because of continued constraints on resources that make it difficult simply to opt to provide weekly oral classes. In the light of this, a working group has been created to review the available options, including different forms of equivalent provision. This task needs to be placed in the context of more general discussions about the way speaking activities are balanced and integrated with teaching of the other core skills (writing, listening and reading). The working group will report its findings to the School in Semester 1 2014 for discussion and agreement, followed by implementation of the chosen solution in 2015-16.

**ASC Comment**

It was noted that the involvement of students in the working group was "not felt to be appropriate". ASC suggested that as an alternative, the School could consider the use of student focus groups to engage with the student body

**SMLC Response**

A student focus group has been held as part of the SMLC Working Group on Language Teaching and Oral Classes (**Appendix 1**). Similar groups will be used again in the future to engage students in School business.

**Updated response – November 2014**

Attached are the notes from the first student focus group (**Appendix 1**) and also the report relating to Phase 1 of the Oral Working Group (**Appendix 2**) which should provide an update. The NLT / GTA induction session was held on 16 September as planned. The working group has already met this semester and aims to report to the School by the end of November.

### Problems / issues

- Contact hours
- Exam technique – ie no purpose to class [no constructive alignment]
- Seen as an hour a week and 'that's it' – integrate language across all classes (eg give culture classes in French)
- Lowest level seems to be aim of classes
- Need more structure (nothing to prepare in advance, minimal material, not always clear from programme what we're doing)

### What is an 'oral' class?

- class with focus on speaking [very narrow / fixed ideas]
- They did accept that it could add vocab and grammar but not about that – that's what written classes are for [very black & white]
- Integration into other classes – thought it could work with right teachers

### What are the best things you've done in oral classes?

- Very positive about teachers (particularly Katrin and Emily – even talked about how they 'facilitated' classes)
- Ground rules (lots of talk about 'forcing' people to speak)
- Identify important mistakes (either at end of task and put on board or upload on Moodle afterwards, avoid over-correction)
- Feedback (both in class and after exams - not given at levels 1 and 2 but they found it really helpful in Senior Hons). Want to know if this can somehow be integrated into classes so everyone gets some feedback before exam.
- Peer discussion / small groups and report back or have teacher walk round – noted a tendency to sometimes only channel via teacher
- Material – has to be varied eg role plays, games etc
- Topics – ok but do something with them and if there are topics, these should be aligned with written classes

### How do you prepare? Use of material on Moodle?

- Varies by language
- Over and under use of Moodle

### Possible alternatives:

- Native speaker? Teacher / peer learning?
  - Native speaker [important to hear about growing up and issues in country etc, introducing vocab etc through personal stories]
  - Very astute – talked about training. How to facilitate a class (dealing with talkative or shy students), 'forcing' people to speak, need to be stricter.
  - Any peer learning has to be monitored for attendance – otherwise people won't come
  - Language 'cafes' – might already exist (union possibly and definitely in societies).
- Hours per week? Class size?
  - Ideally weekly but more about 'forcing' people to talk and participate. Class size 10-12 if everyone comes but big focus was on participation.

- Guided tasks? Or 'free' conversation?
  - Best classes mixed material – ice breakers, quick questions, very informal. Need to work on small talk / nothing topic based – just the basics. Give tasks and don't just read article (eg give students roles in a debate to discuss issues)

After my more structured questions, they just chatted and I took notes.

General free conversation at end:

- Level upon entry and variable policies on moving between levels 1 and 2
- Disparity of level (plays to lowest common denominator)
- Grade (10%) for participation – not attendance but you must speak at least once in every class
- Write culture essays in language [Came from a student in Gaelic – apparently they also do exams in language but everyone was very emphatic that they don't want this part of the deal!]
- Summary / notes of what happened in classes posted on Moodle after class (talk of no guidance, no clear focus)

Overall, when asked about 'oral classes', students have a very fixed idea of a small group where you talk but when talking about other models, the idea of small groups that also include other skills or 'oral classes' that cover some other skills were given as examples of their 'best experiences' of classes.

My suggested areas for discussion:

- Training for teachers (esp around motivating students, managing classes)
- Variety of level and advancing to level 2 (and using level 3)
- Variety of activities
- Coherence of curriculum
- Feedback (both in class and on exams in lower levels)

**SMLC Working Group on Language Teaching and Oral Classes**  
**Report on Discussions in Phase 1: May-June 2014**

Membership

The core working group had the following members in the first phase:

- Kathryn Crameri (Chair)
- Eanna O'Ceallachain (L&T Convenor – will be replaced by Jackie Clarke in phase 2)
- Pilar Delgado Chaves (MFL Unit – will be replaced by Emanuela Ponti in phase 2)
- Dougal Campbell (French)
- Donatella Fischer (Italian)
- Shamil Khairov (Russian)
- Eamon McCarthy (Spanish)
- Katrin Uhlig (German)

In addition, a broader group of colleagues who had expressed an interest in the process were invited to two of the meetings, including representatives from the EFL Unit.

Meetings

Three meetings were held with staff, and one with students:

- 15 May: focus group with students run by Eamon McCarthy.
- 20 May: meeting of the core group to identify the main issues.
- 2 June: meeting of the extended group to discuss these issues.
- 16 June: meeting of the extended group to share good practice regarding the type of tasks we use for speaking practice.

Notes from the student focus group and the meeting on 2 June can be found in the SMLC Communal folder on J:\SchoolOfModernLanguagesAndCultures\Communal\Oral classes working group.

Issues Discussed

- What are the minimum contact hours students need/should expect in language, and how should these be utilised for practice in each of the four skills?
- Student expectations: they often have a narrow idea of what 'oral practice' entails and don't recognise other activities that have an oral component as being just as valuable.
- How to encourage (force?) participation by all students.
- How to create a culture in which language practice is seen as part of the entire programme, not just the language courses within it.
- How best to support speaking practice through advance preparation/support materials on Moodle etc.
- The need to ensure a clear relationship between written and oral work (e.g. building on the same topics/vocabulary).
- The use of presentations as a part of oral practice and assessment.
- The pros and cons of pair/group work for both practice and assessment.
- The types of tasks that can be used and the need to ensure variety, but also the need to make sure that tasks build on one another.
- Good practice in designing and conducting oral classes.

## Outcomes of Phase 1

A session on conducting oral classes has been arranged for the new NLT/GTA induction session on 16 September 2014, to be led by Katrin Uhlig.

## Points to Take Forward in Phase 2

- Possible recommendation that all students should get 3 hours per week of language tuition at all levels. Discussion of ways of achieving this.
- Possible recommendation that in levels 1 & 2, classes should not be divided according to 'purpose' but all four skills should be integrated into each class.
- Possible recommendations on use of the target language in classes/assessments outside the core language classes.
- Recommendations on better aligning speaking practice in class with oral assessment.
- Discussion of more explicit assessment criteria for pre-Honours orals (following on from the work already done at Honours level).
- Suggestions for more flexible, efficient and innovative forms of oral assessment.
- Suggestions for fostering extra-curricular activities that provide opportunities for speaking practice.
- Suggestions for tutor-led activities that might get students out of the classroom to engage with the language.
- Suggestions for shared materials to be made available to tutors and students.

The core group will meet to discuss these issues, and any others that might arise, and will seek input from students and other staff members as appropriate. The aim is to have a set of recommendations ready to put to the School by the end of November.

Kathryn Crameri

September 2014