

PLENARY WORKSHOP

Surviving and Thriving: Developing a Tool Kit for Languages in Difficult Times.

The toolkit below was developed from a UCML AGM workshop held on 5 July 2019. All ideas and suggestions are those from colleagues who are part of the language community of the UK. The outcomes draw on group experience. They provide practical suggestions for support and resilience around six questions that were the starting point for group discussions. Please feel free to disseminate widely.

1. What can you do to help keep senior leaders on side to support languages in an institution?

- a. Build alliances with colleagues in other Schools, above all schools that are more 'powerful' institutionally, such as business schools.
- b. Be perceived to be open to positive change. Cultivate a 'solutions-based' approach to challenges. Engage with the changing nature of HE.
- c. Have senior linguists in senior university leadership roles. They can understand and 'interpret' the institutional agenda. Use them as language advocates who can 'talk the talk'.
- d. Keep languages together in one community and/or institutional unit – there is power in critical mass.
- e. Develop a languages strategy and push for it to be acted upon; articulate the value of languages in the global environment: intercultural competencies, functional language, 'global graduate'. Show how you add value to universities and other disciplines.
- f. Use your transnational/interdisciplinary expertise productively.
- g. Exploit the possibilities of flexibility in the curriculum. Look to different ways to co-teach across core modules (international/transnational). This approach makes it more difficult to 'pick off' smaller language units.
- h. Ensure that you understand and respond to the internationalisation agenda of your university. Lobby to have language skills/intercultural competency within the international/global strategy. Partner with your international office. Make language learning part of agreements/partnerships. Promote tandem or global cafés where students share language practice and intercultural communication to show how the multilingual is on your doorstep.
- i. Capitalise on innovation or new projects within the institution. Integrate languages into flagship projects valued by senior leaders and in which they invest.
- j. Be prepared to talk in the 'language' of senior leaders (including financial terms); be aware of the pressures and scrutiny that senior leaders are under and the key performance indicators they are working to.

- k. Make the most of alumni and honorary fellows with a languages background. They are often aware of the issues and prepared to speak out.
- l. Keep a strong research base – vital for the long-term sustainability of the unit. Languages research is often outstanding and impacts on the regional and global standing of the University.
- m. Link languages with widening participation agenda and social mobility.
- n. Profile the employability and future careers of language graduates, often above average of other subjects and demonstrate international mobility. Create case studies of employability.
- o. Make yourselves visible in positive ways to support internal positioning and external communications (esteem indicators). Be prepared to ‘blow your own trumpet’.

2. *What are the most successful strategies for responding to reviews of language programmes?*

- a. Ensure that you are at the table and in the conversation from the very beginning; be vocal, be visible.
- b. Make the most of the student voice; show student demand and valuing of your programmes.
- c. Celebrate successes; use newsletters to show how you support the institution on so many levels.
- d. Work together across departments and programmes (UG degrees and IWLP) if separate institutionally.
- e. Value all members of staff otherwise you diminish the value of the subject. Break out of the cycle (if in it) of a hierarchy of value between language teaching and culture/area studies teaching.
- f. Emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of your research and how languages can support ‘decolonising the curriculum’ for example.
- g. Show how linguistic competence supports PG students in other Schools and helps with the communication and co-creation of research.
- h. Highlight how languages and translation fit with/support/enhance STEM, AI, Computing etc.

3. *Who can you work with to support languages beyond your School/department and institution?*

- a. Professional sector partners, such as APTIS, ITI and CIOL.
- b. Employers: they value your graduates; speak to them and identify the skills they seek in your students.
- c. Alumni networks: to support your work and reach and speak for you and your value if needed. They can also potentially provide internships for your students.
- d. Colleagues in other University Schools: you can work with them on research, mobility projects, joint hours teaching – key allies.
- e. Students: as advocates and passionate supporters. Send them into schools as student teachers/ambassadors as part of outreach programmes.
- f. Student Union: work with committed student activists who support the value of languages.

- g. Teachers in schools (and teacher trainers): they and you are part of a pipeline of languages with common purposes and passion; support teachers and schools in more disadvantaged areas.
- h. Cultural institutes/associations who have local presence: DAAD, Institut français, Cervantes etc.
- i. Cultivate 'soft power': invite senior leaders/VC to open conferences, to meet international partners.
- j. Emphasise the diversity of experiences, careers and destinations of your graduates and communicate with senior leaders, local schools, wider public.
- k. Support peer-assisted learning across the university and faculty with language students spreading the message of languages.
- l. Key into digital developments (resource may be available institutionally).
- m. Get linguists onto university committees and professional association to create profile and glean insider knowledge.
- n. Devote time to widening participation and schools work. Create a cascade effect of near-peer learners (i.e. university students with A level students) working together between schools and universities.
- o. Make your value clear to local politicians, councillors, national and UK Government.
- p. Think about developing short courses to support mobility schemes and international partnerships.

4. *What can you do to mitigate the impact on languages of restructuring and reconfiguration?*

- a. Lead with colleagues who are prepared to invest positively in change.
- b. Be aware of different personal circumstances and how different people at different career points will respond differently to change.
- c. Look beyond traditional language programmes; explore blended/digital learning; build strength at PG level; look at English for Academic Purposes and English as an Additional Language and linguistics with potential shared interests and comparable 'language mission'; increase the positive effects of cross-language teaching and research.
- d. Identify areas for growth to balance shortfalls in some areas/languages.
- e. Weave your activities into broader university structures.
- f. Think through the challenges of centralisation/simplification of administrative processes.
- g. Be open to working with other Schools; reconfigure/recycle modules/programme offer; avoid homogenisation.
- h. Contact UCML for support and put your views/position in the public domain – have agency.
- i. Anticipate change and have a strategy/three-year plan and creative solutions for future challenges. Build in robustness for the long-term.

5. *What can be done to support colleagues during a period of change?*

- a. Make sure that you communicate regularly with colleagues across language units. Silence can be filled with negative messages.
- b. Make sure that messages are personalised and that people are given time to react.

- c. Involve Professional Services colleagues in dialogue and discussion as impacted too by change.
- d. Valorise and celebrate student feedback on staff teaching and ensure individual staff successes are recognised as external esteem.
- e. Reinforce sources of professional valorisation.
- f. Support and value all activities – teaching, research and public engagement. Create communities of practice and share good practice with departmental peers.
- g. Be aware that you are on a journey of change (it is never complete); address the importance of having common purpose and shared values, even if the end point is unclear.
- h. Make clear that you are all pulling together – ‘damage to one is damage to all’.
- i. Use external lobbying to support colleagues and demonstrate external recognition.
- j. Enlist External Examiners as supporters and advocates.
- k. Think carefully about the timing and location of important meetings (never late on a Friday or at times that are difficult for colleagues with caring responsibilities). Make sure as many people as possible can attend.

6. *What can be done to sustain the community of linguists after a period of change?*

- a. Ensure that we refer to ourselves as one community sharing common purpose; avoid silos.
- b. Work with other language communities of practice across the institution (e.g. Classics, Linguistics) and attempt to engage all colleagues involved in language learning.
- c. Create or build upon regional cross-institutional links – White Rose, GW4 – to launch languages fora or yearly symposia and create regional profiles across universities.
- d. Work hard to build a national profile for language learning/language professionals that values teaching and scholarship as well as teaching and research (AULC).
- e. Foster our students as passionate linguists.
- f. Work against ‘methodological nationalism’ and exploit the potential of transnational frames and developments.
- g. Work to foster understandings of language structures and connections that have purchase across all languages including English.
- h. Make use of funding that can build critical mass and support, such as AHRC OWRI scheme.