

A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Ireland

Institution: University College Dublin

Type of context: Programme/school level;

Educational sector: Tertiary

Main focus of your project: Curriculum, Teaching practices

SUMMARY

Name: CEFR-based curriculum modules

Abstract:

The CEFR was used to specify levels and goals for the Global Language Modules at the Applied Language Centre in University College Dublin starting in the academic year 2012/3. The module descriptors, outcomes and assessment components were developed over the past 5 years and the process has been improved and evaluated since its initiation

Stage: Planning

Theme: Curriculum

CEFR aspects used: Levels, descriptors

Main features of this example:

- Level descriptors used for third level elective language modules (A1 to B2)
- Aims and outcomes couched in 'can do' statements
- Curriculum and syllabus aligned to CEFR guidelines
- Assessment components moving towards CEFR objectives (but not fully aligned)

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Relevance, Transparency, Coherence



2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background: Before 2013 the Applied Language Centre at University College Dublin offered language electives to students of multiple disciplines but without clear entry and exit levels (beginners, intermediate, advanced). Students who travelled to European destinations often emailed the Centre requesting CEFR equivalences for modules taken. The adoption of CEFR levels for language modules helped clarify this situation and helped students learn how to describe their language learning in a framework. Modules were developed more closely with the CEFR 'can do' statements in line with CEFR level descriptors.

Global language modules are aimed at university students across academic disciplines who are interested in improving their language skills in a range of international languages. Language modules are offered at beginner through advanced levels and follow CEFR guidelines (level descriptors from A1 to C2). The focus is on communication and on developing speaking, listening, reading and writing competence as well as cultural knowledge. Native and near native-speaker teachers aim to engage students in cultural and language learning tasks. Small group teaching helps improve student confidence in speaking and ensures a meaningful learning environment. Research findings on effective approaches to language learning are employed in an effort to improve second language learning in English speaking contexts. Emphasis is placed on the balanced and transparent assessment of language learning and includes the testing of four language skills.

Languages offered: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili

2300 language learners annually take accredited (5 ECTS) modules as elective choices, 30 part-time language teachers teach 10-12 languages at varying levels and subject to demand

Stated aims: To help clarify levels of language learning in HE and use 'can do' statements to help students understand their learning.

Steps/stages:

In 2013 the modules were initially aligned to CEFR levels.

In 2014 and 2015 the syllabi and outcomes for less commonly taught languages adapted.

In 2016 and 2017 the modules are being reviewed and steps taken to consider aligning the assessment more closely with CEFR guidelines.

Timeline

Staff in the Applied Language Centre had engaged with CEFR descriptors and research since approx. 2006.

In 2013 teacher meetings and discussions were held on descriptors and intended learning outcomes of Language Centre modules. Meetings with teachers of similar levels on appropriate syllabus inclusions were held and work started on the development of appropriate syllabi.

In 2014 and 2015 conferences on developments on the CEFR were attended (TCD) and speakers on related themes were hosted.

In November 2016 the Global Language Modules Programme underwent UCD's Curriculum review and enhancement process.

In May 2017 a workshop on the application of the CEFR to assessment in the Centre (by Carol Spöttl (University of Innsbruck) started work on this long term project.

People/roles: This programme involves a Module Coordinator, approx. 30 language teachers and programme administrators. An external consultant has been involved for aligning assessment procedures.

Other resources needed: Costs: Payment was set aside for teachers under module enhancement and programme development systems to pay for on-going changes to modules.

Quality Assurance procedures employed: This programme is subject to an External examiner who visits each year (she is at present the Director of a similar programme in a UK university). Student evaluate these modules on an online evaluation system, a paper feedback form and a class rep meeting.

3 RESULTS

What was achieved: An improvement to language offerings to non-specialist university language learners was achieved as described above.

Impact: The result has been a strengthening of UCD language elective modules and a clarity around levels and language learning for the institution, the teachers and students.

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

- Do discuss the levels, descriptors, outcomes and approaches at length with teachers and students
- Do invite speakers to train and inspire teachers
- Don't assume all aspects of the programme can be quickly aligned (beware of assessment issues)