

Periodic Review of the Institution-Wide Language Programme

Introduction

- 1 An internal review of the Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP) was held on 17 March 2016. The members of the Panel were:
 - Dr Matthew Nicholls, Department of Classics (*Chair*);
 - Dr John Morley, University of Manchester (*external member, subject specialist*);
 - Professor Vicky Wright, University of Southampton (*external member, subject specialist*);
 - Ms Caroline Crolla, Student and Applicant Services (*internal member*);
 - Dr Martin Bicknell, Henley Business School (*internal member*);
 - Ms Cindy Bei, Part 2 BSc Nutrition and Food Science, University of Reading (*student panel member*);
 - Ms Jennie Chetcuti, Centre for Quality Support and Development (*Secretary*).
- 2 The Panel met the following members of staff:
 - Professor Ros Richards, Director, International Study & Language Institute (ISLI);
 - Dr Elisabeth Wilding, Deputy Director, ISLI;
 - Mrs Alison Nader, School Director of Teaching and Learning, ISLI;
 - Dr Chiara Cirillo, IWLP Programme Director;
 - Ms Alison Fenner, German and English Coordinator;
 - Mrs Pilar Gray-Carlos, Learning Technology Coordinator;
 - Mrs Alison Nicholson, French Coordinator;
 - Mrs Daniela Standen, Examinations Officer and Disability Representative;
 - Mrs Kazumi Hiramatsu-Kidd, Japanese Coordinator;
 - Mrs Rachel Wood, IWLP Administrator;
 - Mrs Congxia Li, Chinese Coordinator;
 - Mrs Marie-Chantal Brault, French Tutor (Sessional);
 - Ms Karin Herbst, German Tutor;
 - Mr Ugo Marsili, Spanish and Italian Tutor;
 - Miss Wendy Smith, English and German Tutor;
 - Dr Younis Ali Lahwej, Arabic Tutor.
- 3 The Panel met current students who represented the following IWLP courses:
 - English for Erasmus students;

- Arabic Level 1 with Script Support;
- French Level 1;
- German Level 1;
- Italian Level 1;
- Japanese Level 1;
- French Level 4;
- German Level 4;
- Spanish Level 1.

General observations

- 4 The Review Panel met with a range of teaching and learning and support staff, including fractional and sessional tutors, during the Review process. The staff welcomed the Panel, provided a useful tour of the IWLP's facilities and engaged in discussions in an open and constructive manner. The Panel wishes to thank all those who participated in the process.
- 5 The Panel also met with a relatively large and varied sample of current students (including undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research students from a variety of Schools, and visiting students), who gave a very positive endorsement of the modules under review. The Panel wishes to express its thanks to them for their valuable input.
- 6 The Panel commends the Programme for the excellent standard of documentation provided, both for the purposes of the Review and for operational purposes, including the clear and comprehensive staff and student handbooks and assessment guidelines.
- 7 The Panel concluded from its investigations that the IWLP at Reading is a well-developed and professionally managed operation. This maturity is partly reflected in the wide range of language modules (11 languages) and levels of study available to students. The modules attract students from disciplines across the University and are entirely relevant to the realisation of the University's internationalisation and employability agendas.
- 8 The Panel was particularly impressed by the level of commitment and enthusiasm evidenced by staff and students alike. It was clear to the Panel that a real effort is made to foster a culture of collegiality within an unusually large and fragmented teaching staff. This sense of community also extends to the increasingly diverse student population [**Good practice (a)**].

Academic standards of the programmes

Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

- 9 The Panel was provided with evidence in the form of module descriptions, student and staff handbooks, External Examiners' reports, annual programme reports and samples of students' work. These, along with discussions with staff and students and the Panel's own deliberations, enabled the Panel to confirm that the academic standards of the modules under review were appropriate, and were being met.
- 10 The Panel confirmed that the aims and intended learning outcomes of IWLP modules were set at the appropriate level within the Framework for Higher Education

Qualifications and also confirmed the benchmarking of language levels with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It considered that the educational aims of IWLP modules were underpinned by sound pedagogical principles. Aims and learning outcomes were communicated to students in the module descriptions and Student Handbook, and External Examiners' reports verified that the aims and learning outcomes were attained by students.

- 11 Whilst the Panel expressed some initial concerns regarding Finalists being permitted to take beginner-level language modules alongside Part 1 and 2 students, discussions with staff and students confirmed that the lower-level modules were challenging to students at all stages of their studies and that they went beyond the “tourist approach” to language learning. The Panel noted the perception that prospective IWLP students often underestimated the difficulty of the modules and the workload involved, particularly in the case of lower-level modules. The Panel **recommends** that IWLP staff consider whether current module descriptions properly reflect the highly engaging and challenging range of content covered in the modules, the excellent teaching practice and the transferable skills that students are acquiring [**Advisable recommendation (a)**].

Curricula and assessment

Curricula

- 12 The Panel considered that the curriculum was designed to be engaging, coherent and relevant. Modules were carefully structured to develop students' skills across the four areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The students who met with the Panel were very enthusiastic about their experience of the modules on offer. This high level of satisfaction with the provision was also reflected in the largely positive student module evaluations.
- 13 The Panel noted from discussions with students and staff that students were not always clear about the differences between the modules offered to non-specialist language learners by the IWLP and by the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies (MLES). The issue of overlapping provision between IWLP and MLES was also highlighted in the Self-Evaluation Document (SED), p.28-29: “with regards to Italian and Spanish, any further development can only go ahead only if the issue of an overlapping of provision between IWLP and Department of Modern Languages ... is resolved”. The Panel encourages the Programme to more clearly distinguish the characteristics of IWLP modules in terms of teaching and assessment (communicative teaching approaches, development of the four skills, and pragmatic application of learning) from the characteristics of the MLES modules available to non-specialist students, and to articulate these differences via the IWLP website and other promotional materials (please see also **Advisable recommendation to the University (a)** below).
- 14 The Panel was pleased to note the expansion of IWLP provision in terms of both languages and levels since the previous Periodic Review in 2010, in response to student demand, feedback from External Examiners and an increasingly diverse student body, including increased numbers of international students with a multilingual background. This expansion included the introduction in 2014 of three ‘fast-track’ modules (Mandarin Chinese Fast Track, Arabic 1 with Script Support and Russian 2 Bridge). The Panel **recommends** that the IWLP continue to review regularly the range and levels of languages on offer, taking into account student demand, the resources required to expand provision, and possible synergies with MLES provision [**Advisable recommendation (b)**].

- 15 The Panel noted that giving further consideration to the range of upper levels on offer might help to address the potential issue identified in the SED of ‘level 1 returners’, who opted to take two or more beginner-level modules in different languages in consecutive years rather than progressing up the levels in one language. Discussions with current students highlighted that a number of them had been unable to continue to a higher level in their chosen language and so had opted for a beginner-level module in another language instead. The Panel **recommends** that, in order to assess demand amongst current students for higher level language modules, a question should be added to module evaluations asking whether students would wish to continue learning their chosen language at a higher level during a subsequent year of their studies, if it were available [**Desirable recommendation (a)**].
- 16 The Panel noted that a number of IWLP modules, particularly at the higher levels, included an employability focus and incorporated tasks such as reading job adverts, applying for jobs and going for job interviews in the target language. It **recommends** that consideration be given to creating more opportunities for students to explore areas of their target language with direct relevance to their post-University aspirations and experiences [**Desirable recommendation (b)**]. This would be particularly important for students in their final year and might be especially beneficial where modules comprised large groups of homogeneous students from one School/Department. The Panel suggests that this might be achieved through the incorporation of an independent language learning project for final year students.

Assessment and feedback

- 17 The Panel found strong evidence of a well-designed and delivered assessment regime. It commends the IWLP for its assessment practices, which reflect the curricula and educational aims of the modules and offer a robust and rigorous approach, adhering to the expected quality assurance standards for this kind of provision in Higher Education. The Panel was pleased to note the high degree of standardisation in the assessment structure across languages, and across levels to a large extent, which promotes cohesion and consistency whilst leaving some flexibility for tutors in their choice of assessment tasks. The Panel commends as a particular feature of good practice the Assessment Handbooks for staff, which provide an excellent example of how to ensure that all staff, including part-time and sessional staff, develop consistent assessment tasks [**Good practice (b)**].
- 18 The Panel was pleased to note the diverse range of assessment methods in use which took account of student diversity, were employed to good effect and often integrated different skills and competencies. These included listening comprehensions, individual and group oral presentations, short written texts following a brief (including letters and book reviews) and posters. The higher-level modules allowed students to produce a written project of their choice. Feedback from External Examiners was supportive, and in many cases highly complimentary, of the various methods of assessment in use, and confirmed that the standards achieved by students were appropriate and aligned to external reference points.
- 19 The students who met with the Panel commented positively on the various forms of assessment as an aid to effective learning and stated that many students would like to have more formative assessment. The Programme might wish to consider whether additional formative assessment tasks might be introduced, perhaps making use of peer assessment or online multiple choice questionnaires.
- 20 The Panel noted that different assessment criteria were available for different levels, and for some skills, languages and specific tasks. It considered that the assessment criteria were clear and used consistently for marking and feedback. The Panel supports

plans to further review the marking criteria to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The Panel welcomed improvements in communication with students since the last Periodic Review: an assessment and feedback plan, including dates and overall arrangements, is communicated to students at the beginning of each module and a detailed assessment brief is then provided at least two weeks before each assessment takes place.

- 21 The Panel was also pleased to note the considerable progress which had been made since the previous Periodic Review in respect of feedback to students. Feedback is now provided in a range of formats, including: via a standard written feedback form for summative coursework, oral feedback, peer feedback and audio feedback for formative assessments in some modules. The Panel wishes to highlight as a feature of good practice the use of guided self-reflection in a number of modules, whereby students are asked to reflect on their overall performance, their approach to learning the target language and their strengths/areas for improvement, and to formulate an action plan [**Good practice (c)**]. Module evaluations and the Panel's discussions with students confirmed that students were satisfied with the timeliness, level and quality of feedback they received.

Use of student management information

- 22 The Panel commends the Programme's efforts in collecting and analysing complex data relating to their courses, including admissions and progression data. It recognises the vital importance of this data to the IWLP's strategic planning, and the considerable effort invested in the process by IWLP staff [**Good practice (d)**]. The Panel **recommends** that the University provide the IWLP with access to admissions and progression/attainment data similar to that provided to other academic Schools/Departments to assist with planning [**Desirable recommendation to the University (a)**].
- 23 The Panel was pleased to note that the IWLP made appropriate use of data from a range of other sources, including External Examiners' Reports and student module evaluations, in reviewing and enhancing its provision. The Panel confirmed that the Board of Studies and Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) gave appropriate consideration to the relevant datasets and that key issues were addressed in Annual Programme Reports.
- 24 It was clear to the Panel that comments made by the External Examiners had been carefully considered and had informed a number of recent changes, which had then been reported back to the relevant External Examiner. For example, in response to an observation made by the External Examiner for Arabic in his Report for 2012-13 (and feedback received from students), varied provision for Arabic beginners was introduced from 2014-15. In his Report for 2014-15, the External Examiner responded that, "It is also very clear how splitting the cohort into two discreet levels has helped showcase the range of abilities of the students and provided the necessary challenge for the most able ones".
- 25 The Panel confirmed that the IWLP had appropriate mechanisms in place for student representation, including a well-attended and effective SSLC, which is co-Chaired by a member of staff and a student representative, and provision for student representatives on the Board of Studies, in accordance with University policy. The Panel saw clear evidence that issues raised at SSLC meetings were acted upon and the outcomes reported back at subsequent meetings.

- 26 The Panel considered that the Programme had developed a robust system for gathering, and reflecting on, student module evaluation and making appropriate changes; modules are formally evaluated on a bi-annual cycle, and the results and action points are summarised and discussed by the Board of Studies, with actions followed through. Summaries with action points were made available to the students via Blackboard. The Panel commends the introduction from 2013-14 of informal mid-term evaluations, which enable tutors to identify and address any issues at an early stage and to assess the effectiveness of any enhancement actions taken in response to the previous year's module evaluations [**Good practice (e)**].

Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

Teaching and learning

- 27 The Panel was impressed with the approach to, and quality of, teaching and learning on the IWLP. It noted that current students and External Examiners were very satisfied with the provision. The students who met with the Panel praised staff for their passion about the subject area and for the highly interactive and engaging style of teaching.
- 28 The Panel supports the Programme's commitment to small group teaching, which is intended to maximise participation. It saw evidence of appropriate engagement with, and active participation by, students in their learning. Students learned through a wide variety of activities, exercises and study, including individual, pair and group work. The majority of activities were task-oriented and wherever possible involved the use of authentic material in the target language, including newspaper clips, videos, websites and songs.
- 29 The Panel noted that the IWLP made use of a large number of fractional staff. It was pleased to note the considerable improvements which had been made in respect of staffing since the last Periodic Review, including: the increase in the fractional contract of language Coordinators; the increase in the number of language Coordinators, and the move towards permanent, fractional contracts for the vast majority of teachers, with only a small number of sessional staff remaining. These changes had provided greater continuity and had facilitated enhancements in a number of areas including student support and assessment and feedback.
- 30 The Panel noted that staff appeared to be well-integrated and highly engaged with the Programme. The teaching staff who met with the Panel demonstrated a high level of commitment to the IWLP and clearly worked hard. They confirmed that they felt supported in their roles and that they felt part of a wider team. However, the SED highlighted that, despite recent improvements, "*staffing levels are still proving to be a challenge*" and that current staffing levels in the context of the growth in student numbers and provision did not allow "*scope for enhancement of development beyond what is required by the Programme*".
- 31 The Panel noted that staff appeared to have a relatively high teaching load relative to national norms and highlighted the need to ensure that staff do not become overloaded and that there is an equitable allocation of work. The Panel **recommends** that, in the context of the School-wide review of the workload model which has recently been announced, the IWLP should monitor staff workloads and make adjustments as appropriate to the workload model. Efforts should focus in particular on the harmonisation of contact hours of teaching staff, taking account of sector norms [**Advisable recommendation (c)**].

- 32 The Panel was pleased to note that a peer review system had been implemented since the previous Periodic Review which included direct observations of face-to-face-teaching and the evaluation of a range of other learning and teaching practices, in line with University policy. The staff who met with the Panel considered that the new peer review system had helped them to consider and evaluate alternative approaches to teaching and to reflect on their assessment and feedback practices.

Student admission and progression

- 33 The Panel was satisfied that effective and purposeful arrangements for admission were in place, with measures put in place to ascertain students' linguistic competency, including a linguistic background questionnaire linked to the on-line application form, a written placement test and oral interviews when necessary. The Panel noted a drive towards a more consistent induction for students with calendared check-lists for all tutors to ensure that students receive the same information and access to information and resources.
- 34 The Panel considered that the IWLP website was clear and well-structured, and a number of students who met with the Panel commented that this was where they began their application process. The Panel considered that the Programme might benefit from a marketing perspective from changing its title and the related acronym IWLP. It advises the IWLP to give consideration to changing its title to reflect more clearly what the Programme offers its students. The Panel suggests that an alternative title might relate the Programme more explicitly to the University's key priorities.
- 35 The Panel noted that the Programme continued to demonstrate a strong recruitment record; the IWLP's enrolment figures had increased every year except one since the last Periodic Review. However, IWLP staff recognised that the rapidly changing landscape both within the University and across the sector more widely posed a number of threats with regard to the enrolment of credit-bearing students. They were mindful of the need to actively engage with Schools and Senior Management in order to secure and increase IWLP recruitment figures in a sustainable way and to ensure that the Programme was able to honour the University pledge to offer "language opportunities for all".
- 36 The Panel was pleased to note the high levels of student attainment: 96% of credit-bearing students passed IWLP modules on average in 2014-15 and 35% achieved a distinction. The Panel saw evidence of analysis of, and reflection on, differences in attainment levels between languages, skill elements, levels and individual classes. It was noted in the SED (p. 9) that progression figures had been recorded but that there were some gaps. Anecdotal evidence from discussions with staff and students suggested that those students who withdrew from IWLP modules did so due to having unrealistic prior expectations relating to the challenges of language learning.
- 37 The Panel gave careful consideration to the potential issue identified in the SED of 'level 1 returners', who opted to take serial beginner-level language courses rather than progressing up the levels in a single language (please see also paragraph 15 above). This phenomenon was noted in particular for Part 3 students, and might relate among other factors to the perceived value of a foreign language for employability. Following discussions with staff and students, the Panel concluded that this trend was not problematical in itself, but insofar as it might reflect a lack of higher-level language classes, it advises IWLP staff to continue to monitor the situation.
- 38 The Panel highlights as a particular feature of good practice the Programme's recognition and positive framing of diversity within the student body [**Good practice**

(f)]. As noted earlier in the Report (paragraph 14), this includes the recent introduction of a number of new modules, including Mandarin Chinese Fast Track, to meet demand from an increasingly diverse study body. In addition, language tutors and coordinators are actively seeking to meet the needs of a more diverse body of students, some with specific learning needs, by drawing on the expertise of the Disability Advisory Service and exploring language specific strategies. Individual adjustments have been made for students with disabilities, including provision for extra time or rest breaks in examinations and individualised support provided to hearing impaired learners, although allowances could not be made for specific learning difficulties in the marking of work, since grammar and spelling were some of the elements being assessed.

- 39 Whilst the Panel commends the willingness of the IWLP collectively and of individual members of staff to support a diverse range of students, it is concerned that the current wording of module descriptions does not accurately reflect this positive approach. The Panel **recommends** that the standard statement included in all IWLP module descriptions that, “*Students should be aware that IWLP language modules are usually not covered by the University’s requirement to take specific learning difficulties into account when assessing work. For queries, contact iwlp@reading.ac.uk*” be reformulated in order to better reflect existing good practice in this area [**Advisable recommendation (d)**].
- 40 The Panel concluded that appropriate academic support was in place for students and was particularly impressed with the clear and comprehensive Student Handbook. It **commends** as a feature of good practice the Language Learning Advisors scheme, a peer-to-peer scheme whereby trained undergraduate language students or IWLP high-level students provide advice to other IWLP students in relation to language-learning skills and study techniques [**Good practice (g)**]. The Panel endorses the Programme’s plans to explore the development of a buddying system to support tandem learning (Action point 11 in the SED). It **recommends** that the IWLP explore funding opportunities, including TLDF funding or a UROP project, to pursue the development of such a system, and suggests that it might take the form of an email matching system [**Desirable recommendation (c)**]. The Panel’s meeting with current students confirmed that such an initiative would be welcomed by students.

Learning resources

- 41 The Panel was impressed by the overall culture of resource provision within the IWLP as a whole. It **commends** as a particular feature of good practice the Self-Access Language Learning Centre (SACLL), which constitutes a valuable, well-organised and popular resource to help IWLP students improve different aspects of their language learning [**Good practice (h)**]. The SACLL complements the language learning resources available in the University Library. The Panel noted that, since the last Periodic Review, the IWLP had introduced a mandatory induction of SACLL for all students during the first few weeks of the Autumn Term. Some areas had also produced additional guidance on how to use the available resources. However, the Panel considered that there remained scope for better integration of the SACLL within modules to increase student familiarity with, and therefore engagement with, the available resources.
- 42 Evidence in the form of student module evaluations and SSLC minutes indicated that the provision of learning resources in SACLL and the Library remained an area of concern. The Panel endorses the IWLP’s commitment to making further improvements in this area, as documented in action point 14 in the SED: “*to continue to order resources, particularly for new languages, and to seek ways of managing students’*

expectations and of involving them in deciding what is needed". The Panel considered that by funding the SACLL from its own resources and making it universally available, the Programme was effectively subsidising the wider University. It advises the IWLP to give further consideration to the resourcing of SACLL and any overlap with MLES resources (please see also **Advisable recommendation to the University (a)** below).

- 43 The Panel was pleased to note that since the time of the last Periodic Review, staff engagement with Blackboard had improved considerably. Responsibilities of tutors in respect of Blackboard were clearly set out along with good practice guidelines in the Tutor Handbook. Student evaluation in this area had improved over recent years, although IWLP staff recognised that further improvements were needed in this area.
- 44 The Panel noted some excellent instances of the effective use of technology in teaching, including the use of screencasts and social media and a number of modules which engaged students with content production with videos and presentation tools such as Prezi and PowToon. The Panel endorses the following action points identified in the SED in respect of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL), which build on existing good practice:
- a) *"to ensure that the levels of staff engagement with Blackboard are consistent across the programme"*;
 - b) *"to establish, encourage and develop areas of good practice in the area of TEL and to address needs in terms of digital literacy for staff"*.
- 45 The Panel considered that a clear strategy in respect of TEL could have considerable benefits. It **recommends** that the Programme reflect on its long-term ambitions in respect of the harmonisation of e-learning and blended learning to facilitate independent learning in the light of ongoing developments in TEL within the University [**Desirable recommendation (d)**].
- 46 It was clear to the Panel that constraints imposed by the variable nature and location of teaching spaces made it hard for staff to deliver teaching as consistently as they would like. Staff were required to teach in different classrooms with uneven levels of technology, some of which were unsuitable in terms of layout for communicative learning. The location and suitability of teaching space had also been flagged as an issue in the last Periodic Review Report. The Panel also noted that timetabling continued to be a concern for the IWLP. The Panel **recommends** that IWLP staff continue to liaise closely with the Central Room Booking and Timetabling Office in relation to the timetabling of classes and allocation of suitable teaching spaces [**Advisable recommendation (e)**].
- 47 The Panel noted that the IWLP was exempt from the current Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) Review underway across the University, and considered that this might be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it would be beneficial to retain administrative staff *in situ* who had developed a deep subject-specific knowledge base and an effective relationship with academic staff. However, as student-facing support services around the University continued to evolve, the IWLP could find itself falling out of step with developing practices and points of contact in respect of, for example, module choice and enrolment. The Panel **recommends** that the IWLP monitor this situation carefully [**Desirable recommendation (e)**].

Employer engagement

- 48 The Panel noted that, given the nature of the Programme, the IWLP did not have specific arrangements for career learning within the curriculum. However, the Panel

recognised that the Programme enabled students to build highly desirable skills for employment, including communication, group work and intercultural awareness. The Student Handbook and IWLP website clearly set out in the “Why Learn a Language” section the advantages to be gained from an IWLP module in terms of global opportunities, intercultural competence, academic and transferable skills. The Panel was also pleased to note that the students who it met were confident that they would be able to apply the language competency they had acquired in a work environment. The Panel therefore concluded that the IWLP was effective in terms of both fostering the development of employability skills and in publicising to students the benefits of learning new languages for their employability.

- 49 The Panel noted that students were issued with an IWLP Certificate upon completion of a module. This included a list of “Can Do” statements which could be easily understood by employers, in addition to module results. The Panel considered that this would be beneficial to students and potential employers alike.
- 50 The Panel also noted a variety of extracurricular activities which focused on language learning strategies as well as introducing students to the social and cultural dimensions of languages. While feedback from students who had participated in the Skills Surgeries and other activities offered during Enhancement Week had been positive, attendance was disappointing in many cases.

Enhancement of quality and academic provision

- 51 The Panel concluded that there was clear evidence that the IWLP has a strong commitment to the continual enhancement of the quality of its provision. The IWLP is engaged in regularly reviewing its offering in response to changing demands and to feedback from current students and External Examiners, as highlighted elsewhere in this Report.
- 52 The Panel was impressed by the development and dissemination of good practice amongst teaching staff as a whole. It was pleased to note that, despite the limited resources available, considerable efforts had been made since the previous Periodic Review to enhance CPD provision for IWLP staff, with an increasing emphasis on active engagement with CPD activities which were often peer-led. The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to ways of enhancing CPD provision still further, perhaps by making the annual ‘showcase’ event biannual and seeking ‘cross-fertilisation’ from best practice in cognate units both within the University and at other universities [**Desirable recommendation (f)**].
- 53 The Panel was particularly impressed with the collegiate efforts made by senior IWLP staff to support and develop the wide range of fractional and sessional staff and to ensure they are all able to engage in CPD activities [**Good practice (i)**]. This was evident from the SED and from the Panel’s discussions with staff at all levels, although teaching staff on smaller fractional contracts confirmed that they would welcome further opportunities for training and development. The Panel **recommends** that the IWLP investigate whether funding for staff development could be allocated on a per-person rather than a per-fraction basis to facilitate attendance at conferences and participation in other training opportunities for part-time staff, although it recognises that this would carry significant cost implications [**Desirable recommendation (g)**]. The Panel also **recommends** that the IWLP keep under review the accessibility of teaching credentials to all staff, for example via the FLAIR scheme [**Desirable recommendation (h)**].

- 54 The Panel noted that the Programme had an appropriate forward-looking plan in place for developing its academic provision in the short to medium-term. As noted in a number of sections of this Report, the IWLP has undergone considerable change since its last Periodic Review: moving into ISLI; developing new programmes, and seeing continued growth in student numbers. The Panel considered that these changes had been well-managed, but notes that current and planned changes in the structure and direction of the University may pose additional challenges, including:
- a) the disappearance of the Faculty structure from 1 August 2016 and the dissolution of existing connections within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science could leave the IWLP somewhat isolated at academic and administrative levels. The Panel considers that the recent dissolution of the IWLP Advisory Board, due to lack of attendance, could further jeopardise the IWLP's links to other parts of the University;
 - b) the reshaping of the University's student-facing administrative services and the disappearance of the Joint Faculties Office could erode important routes via which students are signposted to IWLP;
 - c) the increasing operation of an internal market as Schools become financially autonomous may lead to students being discouraged from taking credit-bearing modules outside of their home School, which would be inimical to the University's advertised 'USPs' of flexibility and universal access to language learning. Anecdotally, this appears to be happening already to some extent;
 - d) the changing nature of students' experience and priorities may (or may not) mean that the IWLP has to work harder to 'sell' the value of its courses;
 - e) changes in the intake and provision of MLES could make it more difficult for students, academic and support staff to understand the distinctiveness of the IWLP and MLES offers, and to choose accordingly.
- 55 The Panel recognised the crucial role that the Programme plays, and should continue to play, in delivering key strategic University priorities in respect of range, internationalisation, student choice and employability. It noted the recommendation made by the Periodic Review of MLES which took place on 15 and 16 March 2016 that MLES, "*Consider how best to ensure that MLES and IWLP complement the provision offered by each Department and utilise all opportunities for efficiencies and collaboration*". In this context, the Panel **recommends** that a working group be convened, to be chaired by a Teaching and Learning Dean or suitable alternative, and to include representation from IWLP and MLES. The working group would consider, *inter alia*:
- i. the distinction between the MLES and IWLP modules offered to non-specialist language learners, and when students should be advised to take one or the other;
 - ii. how to communicate this distinction to key stakeholders involved in module selection, including students, Personal Tutors, and the new Student Support Centres;
 - iii. areas of synergy with MLES where there is potential for collaborative working; for example, the provision of higher-level language modules to maximise the choice available to students;
 - iv. the suitability of the current funding model of IWLP, taking into account the impact of non-credit-bearing students paying a lower (subsidised) fee and the service to the wider University that the IWLP effectively subsidises through the SACLL;

- v. the partly implemented policy of free entitlement for postgraduate research students to IWLP modules, subsidised by the students' home Schools;
 - vi. the potential for rationalisation of resources and aims that overlap with MLES and possibly the Library; for example, SACLL resources;
 - vii. the further development and implementation of a University-wide strategy on foreign languages [**Advisable recommendation to the University (a)**].
- 56 The Panel considers that this recommendation would help to address the concerns raised in action points 1-4 and 6 in the SED.

Main characteristics of the programmes under review

- 57 The Panel considers that the modules under review offer students a highly engaging, diverse and challenging curriculum. The modules are carefully structured to develop students' skills across the four areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing and enable students to acquire highly desirable skills for employment. The Programme's teaching is characterised by a communicative approach and by the pragmatic application of learning. It is underpinned by a strong culture of collegiality amongst staff and students, a positive approach to diversity and a strong commitment to enhancement and staff development.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

- 58 The Panel commends the following as areas where the Programme has particular strengths:
- (a) the considerable efforts made to foster a culture of collegiality within an unusually large and fragmented teaching staff and an increasingly diverse student population;
 - (b) the Assessment Handbooks for staff, which provide an excellent example of how to ensure that all staff, including part-time and sessional staff, develop consistent assessment tasks;
 - (c) the use of guided self-reflection in a number of modules, whereby students are asked to reflect on their overall performance, their approach to learning the target language and their strengths/areas for improvement, and to formulate an action plan;
 - (d) the considerable efforts of staff in collecting and analysing complex data relating to IWLP courses which are important for strategic planning;
 - (e) the introduction of informal mid-term evaluations, which enable tutors to identify and address any issues at an early stage and to assess the effectiveness of any enhancement actions taken in response to the previous year's module evaluations;
 - (f) the recognition and positive framing of diversity within the student body;
 - (g) the Language Learning Advisors scheme, a peer-to-peer scheme whereby trained undergraduate language students or IWLP high-level students provide advice to other IWLP students in relation to language-learning skills and study techniques;
 - (h) the Self-Access Language Learning Centre (SACLL), which constitutes a valuable, well-organised and popular resource to help IWLP students improve different aspects of their language learning;

- (i) the collegiate efforts made by senior IWLP staff to support and develop the wide range of fractional and sessional staff and to ensure they are able to engage in CPD activities.

Conclusions on quality and standards

- 59 The Panel is assured of the quality and standards of the modules that have been reviewed, that the intended learning outcomes of the modules are being achieved by students and that the module descriptions are appropriate.

Recommendations

- 60 The Panel **recommends** to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science that the following IWLP modules be re-approved to run for a further six years:

- Arabic, Levels 1, 1 with Script Support, 2, 3
- Mandarin Chinese, Levels 1, 1 Fast Track, 2, 3
- English for Erasmus students
- French, Levels 1-5
- German, Levels 1-4
- Modern Greek, Level 1
- Italian, Levels 1-3
- Japanese, Levels 1-2
- Portuguese, Level 1
- Russian, Levels 1, 2, 2 Bridge
- Spanish, Levels 1-6.

- 61 The Panel does not consider that any recommendations must be addressed as a condition of re-approval.

- 62 The Panel has identified the following actions which it **recommends** the University addresses:

Advisable action [University]:

- (a) to convene a working group, to be chaired by a Teaching and Learning Dean or suitable alternative and to include representation from IWLP and MLES, to consider, *inter alia*:
- i. the distinction between the MLES and IWLP modules offered to non-specialist language learners, and when students should be advised to take one or the other;
 - ii. how to communicate this distinction to key stakeholders involved in module selection, including students, Personal Tutors, and the new Student Support Centres;
 - iii. areas of synergy with MLES where there is potential for collaborative working; for example, the provision of higher-level language modules to maximise the choice available to students;

- iv. the suitability of the current funding model of IWLP, taking into account the impact of non-credit-bearing students paying a lower (subsidised) fee and the service to the wider University that the IWLP effectively subsidises through the SACLL;
- v. the partly implemented policy of free entitlement for postgraduate research students to IWLP modules, subsidised by the students' home Schools;
- vi. the potential for rationalisation of resources and aims that overlap with MLES and possibly the Library; for example, SACLL resources;
- vii. the further development and implementation of a University-wide strategy on foreign languages.

Desirable action [University]:

- (a) to provide the IWLP with access to admissions and progression/attainment data similar to that provided to other academic Schools/Departments to assist with planning.

63 The Panel has identified the following actions which it **recommends** the IWLP addresses:

Advisable actions:

- (a) to consider whether current module descriptions properly reflect the highly engaging and challenging range of content covered in the modules, the excellent teaching practice and the transferable skills that students are acquiring;
- (b) to continue to review regularly the range and levels of languages on offer, taking into account student demand, the resources required to expand provision, and possible synergies with MLES provision;
- (c) to monitor staff workloads and make adjustments as appropriate to the workload model, in the context of the School-wide review of the workload model. Efforts should focus in particular on the harmonisation of contact hours of teaching staff, taking account of sector norms;
- (d) to reformulate the standard statement included in all IWLP module descriptions that, "*Students should be aware that IWLP language modules are usually not covered by the University's requirement to take specific learning difficulties into account when assessing work. For queries, contact iwlp@reading.ac.uk*" in order to better reflect existing good practice in this area;
- (e) to continue to liaise closely with the Central Room Booking and Timetabling Office in relation to the timetabling of classes and allocation of suitable teaching spaces.

Desirable actions:

- (a) to add a question to module evaluations asking whether students would wish to continue learning their chosen language at a higher level during a subsequent year of their studies, if it were available;
- (b) to consider creating more opportunities for students to explore areas of their target language with direct relevance to their post-University aspirations and experiences;
- (c) to explore funding opportunities, including TLDF funding or a UROP project, to pursue the development of a buddying system to support tandem learning. The Panel suggests that this might take the form of an email matching system;

- (d) to reflect on the IWLP's long-term ambitions in respect of the harmonisation of e-learning and blended learning to facilitate independent learning in the light of ongoing developments in TEL within the University;
- (e) to monitor carefully the impact of the Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) Review and developments in respect of student-facing support services and associated practices around the University;
- (f) to consider ways of enhancing CPD provision still further, perhaps by making the annual 'showcase' event biannual and seeking 'cross-fertilisation' from best practice in cognate units both within the University and at other universities;
- (g) to investigate whether funding for staff development could be allocated on a per-person rather than a per-fraction basis to facilitate attendance at conferences and participation in other training opportunities for part-time staff;
- (h) to keep under review the accessibility of teaching credentials to all staff, for example via the FLAIR scheme.