UCFL
The University Council For Languages

UCFL Executive

Friday, 5th July, 2024

Report from the Scotland Representative

1. Scotland's Languages Explorers Programme (SLEP)

The second phase of our online language mentoring programme for S2 and S3 secondary students, developed in partnership with SCILT, has been successfully concluded. Following last year's pilot in North East Scotland, colleagues at SCILT coordinated the national rollout of the programme, including recruitment and training of student mentors and enrolment of participating schools.

Of the 24 schools from 15 local authorities which applied for the scheme, 14 (from 10 LAs) completed the programme, a completion rate of 58%. Reasons for non-completion included scheduling difficulties, a change in school circumstances and issues with the allocated mentor (e.g. withdrawal without the possibility of replacement or poor communication). Of the 28 mentors who applied (representing 6 HEIs), 11 completed the programme, a completion rate of 39%. The attrition rate amongst mentors was higher than for the pilot scheme, which was c. 50%.

Feedback from participating schools, mentees and mentors was overwhelmingly positive. All 11 mentors said they would recommend becoming a mentor to other students. All 10 teacher respondents to the survey indicated they would recommend the mentoring programme to other schools. Of the 17 mentees who responded, 16 students said they would definitely (7) or possibly (9) recommend the mentoring scheme, with one not sure. Meanwhile 8 said they would definitely choose a language on entering S4, 4 probably would and 5 weren't sure. SCILT plans to follow up with participating schools once subject choices have been made to establish how final choices align with the intentions expressed here. An increase in uptake of languages into S4 amongst mentees is the main KPI of the programme.

Mentees commented that the scheme 'helped me decide and know the benefits of a language', that 'you learn good skills from it' and that 'it has made me think about taking languages'. All of these comments align with the intentions of the scheme as it was designed. Mentors found the programme rewarding in terms of developing presenting, speaking and leadership skills, self-confidence, and an understanding of career possibilities with languages.

Various refinements are planned for the AY 24/25 iteration, including a longer lead-in time (promotion after the Easter vacation, applications open in September for schools and students) and adaptations to the application process for schools and students, aiming in particular to address and mitigate a mentor attrition rate of 50% minimum. We are also considering asking participating HEIs to make a small contribution (c. £200-£300/institution) to a central operating budget for the scheme to support mentor travel and participation (e.g. to attend training sessions or visit partner schools at the beginning or end of the programme).

More details on SLEP, including videos featuring some of the mentors, can be found on the SCILT website:

https://scilt.org.uk/S1-S3/Supportingtransition/SLEP/tabid/8594/Default.aspx

As ever, we are very grateful to colleagues at SCILT for their support and work on the programme, which they are taking forward as one of their key initiatives for the coming years.

2. Senior Phase Modern Languages Workshops

Planning is under way for the AY 24/25 round of online workshops for Senior Phase students (Higher/Advanced Higher) run by SCILT with input from six HEIs (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Strathclyde). The aim for AY 24/25 is to increase the number of sessions to two per institution, running over the autumn and spring terms, foregrounding the different skills associated with the study of languages (translation, cultural and critical analysis, grammar and language), and giving tips and guidance to support students with their current studies. Interest in the programme remains strong, with students joining from across Scotland.

3. UCFL Scotland Representative and Convenor

This is my final report as the UCFL Scotland Representative and Convenor after three very enjoyable years in the role. Scotland is very fortunate to have a vibrant and collegial languages community, sustained in particular by the work of SCILT and LANGS (Languages Network Group Scotland). It has been a privilege to represent UCFLS within that community over the past three years and facilitate our contribution to its work. I was delighted to be invited to give the keynote talk at the June meeting of LANGS and reflect on the spirit of partnership in languages education across Scotland that LANGS fosters and sustains. I look forward to welcoming my successor as UCFLS convenor and working with them on a handover when the results of the election are announced in July.

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UCFL Scotland representative
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