

## Establishing a Modern Foreign Languages Department in your School

### *Rationale in an Irish context*

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) recognises “the importance of professional development and collaboration between teachers for informing their understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and their practice in the classroom.”<sup>i</sup> Good practice in the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages is not confined to the realm of any one particular language.

Furthermore, the new curriculum specification for Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages presents itself as a framework to be used for teaching all the junior cycle languages including: French, German, Italian and Spanish.<sup>ii</sup> Considering this, establishing a Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Subject Department is vital for schools to fully embrace and implement the new MFL Specification in relation to teaching, learning and assessment.

### *Setting Up your MFL Department*

#### **Establishing Norms and Protocols – Operational and Relational**

The intention is to discuss how you intend to work together as a department and is similar to how we often make classroom contracts with our students. In the first meeting as a department, members could individually make a list of things that might **help and hinder** them working as a department. These thoughts can then be shared and discussed in an open, safe environment.

#### ***Relational***

It is worthwhile to **name behaviours** that may affect the department (e.g. it is helpful if there is equity of voice), to tease out **why this is important** (e.g. everyone’s experience is valued) and **what that might look like** (e.g. we take it in turns to speak).

Working as a team can sometimes be difficult, so take time to **revisit your norms and protocols on a regular basis**. That gives people the chance to notice if things are not working or if ways of working have been forgotten. It also allows people to express any concerns they might have.

#### ***Operational***

- Discuss logistics of meetings (where and when, how often to meet)
- Work out roles in the department and agree on how often they will be rotated - this will ensure equity of workload for everyone

- Set an agenda in advance, allowing people to adjust or add to it
- Keep minutes of meetings, agree how and where they will be stored and communicate decisions to school leaders
- Agree on how you will plan and where the unit of learning plans will be kept
- Consider how you will approach the student language portfolio aspect of MFL Assessment (hard copy/online/blended). There are video links below to assist you with this
- Discuss any policies that the school/department already have in place or may still need (e.g. on the storing of student videos). This will most likely require a whole-school approach so talk to school leaders or teachers about how other departments have managed this
- Discuss how you will communicate any decisions and information about Junior Cycle to parents of MFL students. It might be useful to make them aware of the MFL Information Leaflet from JCT:

<https://www.jct.ie/perch/resources/languages/mfl-information-leaflet.pdf>

### ***Create a Mission Statement***

This is your shared vision as a Modern Foreign Languages Department reflecting the school ethos, the vision of the MFL teachers and, in turn, the vision for the MFL classroom.

Something like this will probably already exist in your subject folder but you might want to revisit and revise it considering the Junior Cycle Framework and the MFL Specification. It may be useful to look at the aims outlined on page 6 in the Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages Specification.

<http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/bbb30195-a78a-4d66-9b80-04af66349905/JCMFLspec.pdf>

### ***Other tips for developing as a Modern Foreign Languages Department***

- Meet regularly and, in addition to talking about the day-to-day logistics such as deadlines, assessment etc., make time for CPD. Teachers may take it in turns to briefly present on some strategies which they have used successfully or to report back to colleagues on CPD attended
- Choose an area to research: key documents, an article, a video clip, a screencast, a webinar about teaching in the MFL classroom. Agree to cover it before meeting. Use an allocated amount of time during the meeting to discuss it. This will lead to rich discussion and learning. A list of sources is included below
- Share resources (online resource bank/YouTube channel) and consider sharing professional practice (e.g. Teach Meet), sharing of best ideas for language learning).

### ***What does research tell us about collaboration?***

In their paper on 'The Power of Professional Capital', Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan<sup>iii</sup> outline five highly effective ways to collaborate:

- create the curriculum together
- share ideas
- take part in continued professional development (CPD)
- study data
- take collective responsibility for student learning.

Further to this, in his recent webinar with the Teaching Council, Fullan suggests that two or more teachers work together in a purposeful, specific way to improve the learning of teachers and of students.<sup>iv</sup>

According to research, teacher success and improvement are greatly influenced by strong professional environments which can, in turn, have benefits for student progress. The positive cycle of meaningful peer collaboration and organisational culture can lead to improved practice for teachers.<sup>v</sup>

To further develop this idea, Senior Inspector with the Department of Education and Skills, Kate O'Carroll, whilst discussing the implications for implementing the Framework for Junior Cycle in relation to the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, recommends that subject departments would find it useful to consider their own practice. She suggests referring to statements of practice in the domain 'Teachers' Collective/Collaborative Practice' in the Looking at Our School document especially when considering the area of assessment arrangements,<sup>vi</sup> thus establishing links with effective subject departments within the context of school improvement through the SSE process.

### ***Tips for good administration***

- Take minutes of all meetings and revisit them regularly so that you can celebrate achievements and identify any unresolved issues.
- Set up a Shared Workspace (e.g. online or hard copy) where teachers can upload documents. Google Classroom, Edmodo and Schoology are popular, as is SharePoint on the Office 365 platform. These online spaces are also suitable for interaction with students.

### ***Useful Resources:***

#### **Books**

- Absolum, Michael, Clarity in the Classroom, Using Formative Assessment for Building Learning-Focused Relationships
- Smith, S. and Conti, G (2016). The Language Teacher Toolkit

## Documents

- Key MFL Documents for Junior Cycle MFL - [https://www.jct.ie/modern\\_foreign\\_languages/key\\_documents](https://www.jct.ie/modern_foreign_languages/key_documents)
- Dylan Wiliam - [http://www.dylanwiliam.org/Dylan\\_Wiliams\\_website/Presentations.html](http://www.dylanwiliam.org/Dylan_Wiliams_website/Presentations.html)
- Looking at Our School, 2016, A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools (2016). Department of Skills and Education <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf>
- The power of professional capital with an investment in collaboration, teachers become nation builders. Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan <http://www.michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/JSD-Power-of-Professional-Capital.pdf>

## Useful Videos/ Webinars/ Screencasts/ Documents

Research Webinars - <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Research/Research-Webinars-and-Ezines/Research-Webinars/Teaching-Council-Inquiry-based-Webinar-with-Professor-Kathy-Short/>

Classroom Strategies - [https://www.jct.ie/wholeschool/classroom\\_strategies](https://www.jct.ie/wholeschool/classroom_strategies)

PPLI Classroom Online Tutorials in MFL Teaching and Learning–  
<http://www.languagesinitiative.ie/resources/teachingandlearning/cpd-online>

Reflection in the MFL Classroom - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjI305IM0tE>

EU Folio Experience in Ireland  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fx2eQX1Tgbs&feature=youtu.be>

Guidance on how to create these units and examples which can be adapted can be accessed on [www.jct.ie](http://www.jct.ie)

For use of Professional Time, a guiding document can be accessed on  
<https://www.jct.ie/perch/resources/languages/professional-time-mfl-1.pdf>

Videos to support schools to use the SSE Process to prepare for and implement the Framework for Junior Cycle

<http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/post-primary/junior-cycle/>

<sup>i</sup> Department of Education and Skills (DES). (2015). *Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages*. p.5.

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Education and Skills (DES). (2015). *Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages*. p.5.

<sup>iii</sup> Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. (2013). *The Power of Professional Collaboration, with an investment in collaboration, teachers become nation builders*. Retrieved from [www.learningforward.org](http://www.learningforward.org)

<sup>iv</sup> Fullan, M. (Teaching Council of Ireland). (2017). *Building Cultures of Collaborative Professionalism* [Video webinar]. Retrieved from <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/News-Events/Latest-News/Teaching-Council-Webinar-with-Professor-Michael-Fullan-Building-Cultures-of-Collaborative-Professionalism.html>

<sup>v</sup> Kraft, M and Papay, J. (2014). Can Professional Environments in Schools Promote Teacher Development? Explaining Heterogeneity in Returns to Teaching Experience. [Electronic version] *Education Evaluation and Policy Analyse*, 36 (4) p.495.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/post-primary/junior-cycle/>