

## **Case study title: Improving the student experience and developing skills**

**– creating a new curriculum**

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### **Summary**

I was appointed through the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Staffing Plan to co-ordinate the Second Language (L2) route on the degree scheme at the School Of Welsh. The provision needed changing in order to improve the student experience and to create better opportunities for students to develop their skills in the language. I was given the opportunity to transform the L2 provision - at level 4 (year 1) and level 5 (year 2). This included restructuring the modules on offer, adapting the content and teaching methods and providing extracurricular and non-contact opportunities that would reinforce the learning.

Creating a new provision has provided an opportunity to work closely with students to ensure that we create a flexible curriculum which meets the needs of students as well as allowing them to develop their language skills and confidence in all contexts.

### **Background**

The second language provision needed transforming in order to close the gap between second language provision at A Level and at degree level. There was a need to facilitate the transition to a Higher Education context and to equip students with the ability to develop their linguistic skills as well as fostering confidence to use the Welsh language in different situations and contexts. The new provision is based on a spiral curriculum which provides opportunities for students to review and reinforce knowledge in order to develop and learn anew.

### **Approach**

The following aspects were initially considered:

- **Communication with students:** student input was used during the restructuring process by means of focus groups and informal conversations. Regular feedback was also requested during the transition to ensure that the provision responded to student needs.

**Adapting the timetable:** this was the biggest change as we wanted to create 'transition' modules at the beginning of year 1. The timetable was adapted to create a spiral curriculum where modules weave into each other.

The old provision was based on learning 80 credits - 4 modules, 20 credits taught over the whole year.

The new provision is based on a completely different structure and includes 2 intensive (20 credit) modules over a period of 5 weeks each during the Autumn Semester. These are the

bridging/transition modules which reinforce patterns and skills developed during the A Level course and further develop them in order to learn anew.

In 2015/16 120 credits were offered in Welsh to students for the first time. This change has been extremely important as it allows for more contact hours with the target language.

- **Contact hours:** Contact hours for each module were increased from 2 contact hours on each module to at least 4 hours. Students studying 120 credits in Welsh on the second language pathway will now have at least 16 contact hours and additional contact hours through personal tutoring and informal learning opportunities.
- **Learning Content:** In the two transition modules there are opportunities to respond to student needs by ensuring flexibility in the learning sessions. Contact and non-contact learning methods are used, as well as regular use of formative assessment and feedback which form the basis for the learning sessions.
- **Informal learning:** Based on student response, regular informal activities are arranged to reinforce the learning and to provide opportunities to use the Welsh language outside the classroom. These activities include informal language sessions and a weekly conversation club. These are informal and
- voluntary activities but as is seen from the response below and informal feedback (and attendance), the effect is very positive.
- **Challenges:** Increasing contact hours and providing more formative assessments means that there is more demand on staff time but the response is very positive and an increase was seen in student attainment levels last year.

## Results

The first cohort to follow the new provision graduated this year. The response has been very positive and attainment levels were certainly higher with a greater number of students attaining a 2:1 degree.

There were also positive responses from external examiners during recent years.

## Student feedback

Here is a selection of the feedback used for nominations during the Student Life Enrichment Awards.

1. [Angharad] uses her own time to provide extra activities for second language Welsh students from Years 1-3. Although she does not teach us in the third year, she is always willing to help anyone of us by reading through our work, correcting grammar or providing work sheets to encourage improvement. She utilises social media in which she posts helpful links, updates and information on any extra sessions we can attend.

Without her relentlessly hard work in the first year and extra support in the third year of my course, I highly doubt that any one of the second language students currently in the third year, including myself, would be able to reach any level of proficiency in the language.

2. 'As a second language Welsh student, [Angharad] has supported me and other pupils throughout our degree at the School of Welsh and has arranged informal sessions outside lectures for us to have an opportunity to converse in Welsh. She is supportive, creative and does her very best to ensure that we improve our language skills without even realising it!

### **Learning points and insights**

- **Developments for the future** - I shall be involved with a project to integrate L1 and L2 students during 2016/17 in order to provide opportunities for students from various cohorts and at all levels to collaborate and interact with each other. This will build on the current second language and first language provision and will strengthen that provision.
- I am keen to continue to develop the provision by responding to student needs and feedback. This project has shown the importance of student input to the process. I would like to continue to work with students to develop ideas and changes in future and provide opportunities for students to guide their own learning. Working as partners is certainly useful important to enhance the student experience.
- The dedication and input of staff and individuals - beyond the classroom in particular - has been central to the success of the new provision. Unfortunately there is no room to note these work hours in the workload model which can be challenging when considering staffing etc.

As a member of staff, providing and undertaking informal activities is time consuming but the results and the impact on students experience are great...which makes it a worthwhile experience!