

During the week of 23- 27th July, Kelley Proctor (Academic Manger, Foyle International) and Therese Lafferty (Academic Administrator, Foyle International) logged on to the OLS for Erasmus students, and here are a summary of the main points notes noted vis-à-vis face-to-face language training which would take place in the destination country. We also asked for feedback from an English language student who had not seen the programme before. This report applies to the English language programmes on the OLS, but may also apply to others.

Listening and comprehension tasks

- It appears to follow the CEFR and includes many topics and items typically found in an English language coursebook however
- the content in the listening activities often lack context and tend to be out-dated
- listening texts are presented using a very narrow range of accents
- listening comprehension questions tend to follow the same (predictable) format, which is not useful in terms of language acquisition and would have the tendency to become monotonous.
- while topics are relevant/useful for *some* vocation / work situations, for other students, much would be irrelevant and not prepare them linguistically for work in their specific area. It may also lead to student dis-engagement.
- the topics which would match a student's vocational / work area, are still presented in a way which does not allow for realistic context to be established, and does not allow for any personalised engagement with the material.

Pronunciation

It is noteworthy to have included a pronunciation section with a recording playback feature, however it is extremely limited and parts of it flawed:

- Only tests single word pronunciation, throughout the levels. While this is needed to a degree, studies have found that students actually struggle with understanding words within natural flow of speech as the pronunciation of a word by itself and within a sentence is often very different.
- After mis-pronouncing words, they were still marked as correct. This would contribute to communication problems in real life and student confidence and confusion.
- When words were mis-pronounced and detected as so, there was no feedback on why or how it could be correctly pronounced. (i.e. why the sounds they are producing are wrong and how they can physically produce them correctly).

Speaking

While there are opportunities to attend live sessions hosted by a language teacher, these are proportionally low compared to opportunities for grammar and listening practice. In the two sessions observed, attendance was low (two students) or negative (no students) and both sessions had connectivity issues which meant the teachers left. In the first, the two students remained and talked to each other but no opportunity was available for them to receive feedback.

Testing section

Answers are marked right or wrong while students are competing the test but there is no explanation given as to why answers are wrong when they are – so there is no feedback to point the student in the direction of the right answer.

There is no summary at the end of the test to remind students which answers were incorrect, meaning that students would need to take a note of the result of each question as they progress through the test in order to be able to go back to the relevant section to re-study, without learning from their mistakes.

Other

No reading practice other than reading that takes place when presenting other language (grammar, vocabulary)

No writing activities, classes or practice is provided for on the OLS.

Language presentations are not

Summary and Advantages of Face-to-Face Classes.

1. For the majority of students going abroad, one of the main linguistic objectives cited is to improve language from the point of view of listening, pronunciation and speaking. While the OLS does provide some practice, for the reasons outlined above it is highly recommended that students attend live, face-to-face classes, ideally during an orientation week (before placements and within the destination country) so as to gain proper practice in listening, speaking and pronunciation, essential for their engagement and success on their Erasmus programmes.

2. Face-to-face tuition includes an individual needs analysis which is designed to elicit the relevant language (vocabulary, functions) and skills needed to perform within the work placement. These are then taught *using relevant contexts* which help prepare students to participate more and benefit more fully from their placement.
3. Face-to-face tuition provides practice in each skill and sub-skill (speaking, listening, reading and writing, proportionally relevant to the placement needs of each student. The OLS does not provide for learning / practice in each skill.
4. Courses held in the destination county have the added advantage of preparing students culturally for the specifics of local life and work.
5. (Linguistic) Preparation for work and orientation to local life takes place by using more relevant language acquisition methodologies (including adaptive, CLIL and project/task-based learning) than those used on the OLS. Bring flexible, these provide relevant language practice, correct context and promote learner autonomy, which is vitally important for students to continue learning and using the language when on work placement.
6. The face-to-face course, delivered by local tutors with local knowledge, prepares the students not only linguistically, but also vocationally and culturally to work in the destination country and within their chosen sector and organisation.
7. Face-to-face tuition provides the students with a chance to meet, learn and gel as a group, under the guidance of a language tutor to whom individual students can have recourse to for any language questions/problems they may have over the course of their placement.
8. During a face-to-face course, students can be advised about formal certifications of language levels provided by examining bodies such as Language Cert and about which they often have questions. Many students, having spent time improving their language, then wish to take an official test to certify it.