FAVOR PROJECT REPORT

Andrea Wilczynski & Franck Michel

School of Modern Languages

Newcastle University

The Newcastle team

The FAVOR project at the School of Modern Languages was led by two project leaders who worked with a team of eight tutors. Languages represented were Chinese (x3), Japanese (x1) and Spanish (x2).

Incentives & worries

Some of the tutors had been approached because they were relatively new to the School, others have been working at Newcastle University for many years. The fact that our participants came from different teaching backgrounds and different languages made the meetings very interesting. Newer colleagues felt perhaps more integrated into the School (one tutor said that it gave her a sense of community) and everybody cherished the chance to develop themselves further.

Initially there was concern among some teachers that their materials might not be of a good enough standard to be published in Language Box. A workshop with the project managers from Southampton early on in the project did reassure participants and also motivated them to explore the use of the LOC tool and other technologies.

A further incentive to join FAVOR was the opportunity to get together with other language teaching colleagues to exchange ideas and look at each other’s materials. One teacher also mentioned that it was nice to have all your work in one place.

Support from the institution

The Head of School initiated our participation in the project and personally invited staff to take part. A brief interim report was delivered to colleagues at a School meeting to make everybody aware of FAVOR and its aims. The payment of tutors was overseen by the School Administrator which meant that project participants were paid as soon as they had put a claim in. Overall, we did not experience any problems with the admin side and felt that everything was going smoothly.

It was also fantastic that the Head agreed to fund all colleagues involved in the FAVOR project to attend the Languages in Higher Education conference in Edinburgh in July. As a result, all tutors, along with the project leaders, took part in the event.

Materials produced by Newcastle staff

A great variety of materials suitable for different levels were created by the Newcastle team, involving songs, business language and etiquette, language skills for medical students, reading literature, grammar and translation exercises,etc.

Challenges

Creating and uploading materials proved time-consuming; most tutors had to acquire the technological knowledge to do this. Regular meetings with the project leaders at Newcastle resolved many questions that arose in the initial stages and the project team in Southampton was always at hand to offer support.

There were also time constraints: We lost two (of the original 8) tutors, as they found it difficult to work on the project in addition to other commitments (in this case completing an MA and looking after children).

Future impact of the project on participants and beyond

Tutors have said that they will continue to use Language Box – upload their own materials and look at other people’s ideas. It has definitely given them the confidence that they can produce materials of a publishable standard which can be shared with the world. Some have also mentioned that they are very motivated now to continue to develop themselves professionally and that they would like to design more materials using the LOC tool in the future.

Colleagues in the School of Modern Languages are aware of the FAVOR project, but we will try to involve even more staff and get them to join the ‘Newcastle group’ within Language Box in the future. It is planned to talk about the project outcome and to show examples from Language Box at the next meeting of the School’s Language Teaching Steering Group in October.

Overall, the project seems to have had a significant impact on the participants who have all been extremely positive about it. It remains to be seen in what way it will influence the School’s attitude to open resources in the future.