

Fellowship Trinity College London Diploma in TESOL Education Studies (FTCL TESOL)

280 words

Sample abstract:

1. *Project aim and rationale*

Development of an accreditation scheme for English language providers (independent and state schools, colleges and universities in Country X in mainland Europe)

- ***What was the issue to be handled?***

The development of a scheme of benchmarking for English language tuition providers, in relation to practical and academic criteria, with an inspection scheme, in order to promote those of good quality and proven reliability, and encourage learners of English to select those accredited schools.

- ***How did the project benefit its participants?***

It helped protect the country's reputation for good quality English language teaching and related services (accommodation, social, pastoral) in a market where poor quality providers exceeded the number of quality providers by giving better providers a reliable kitemark of quality.

2. *Project environment and challenges*

- ***What was the teaching / learning / management context?***

The context was one of the smaller countries of Europe where English is a foreign language but quite widely spoken, and where there was a strong perceived need for good communicative oral and written English language skills among working adults for professional and social purposes, and - hence - among young learners from the age of ten.

- ***What problems arose and how were these handled?***

- The identification of quality benchmarks to be met by participating organisations (POs.) (Predicted.)* These were negotiated by POs in relation to other national or international sets of benchmarks, and the agreed, acceptable average standards of course design and delivery in the current English teaching market. There was inevitably a tension between high standards, and the costs and logistical difficulties needed to support these - and the possible requirement for students to pay higher fees.
- The current competition between POs for students in the market place. (Predicted.)* It was necessary to demonstrate the value of mutual cooperation **between** the better language training providers, and the need to compete with what would become the non-accredited sector.
- The hostility of the emerging non-accredited sector. (Predicted.)* POs needed to ensure that they made full use of the law in this respect, as well as providing "stepping stones" to help the better among the non-accredited organisations to work towards accreditation.
- The timing of the above stages. (Predicted.)* A number of the above stages had to be carried out simultaneously.

e. *Missing consultation. (Not predicted.)* The POs and others associated with the project did not consult learners or parents of young learners as to what **they** would value in an accreditation scheme of this kind. While the quality benchmarks were impressive and re-assuring to other professionals, they lacked some key features important to language learners as customers of POs - e.g. teachers who are not only well qualified and competent but "interesting" and engaging in their teaching style; flexibility of fee payment schedules.

f. *Volume of administrative work for FCM (Not predicted.):* The paperwork - reports, committee minutes, drafting and re-drafting, was time-consuming and initially unpaid.

- ***Who funded initial and recurring costs incurred through the project and related activities?***

a. *POs contributed initial ("founder member") fees and agreed a scale of charges for participation in the scheme.* It was necessary to convince POs that this financial investment would be reimbursed by improved future business taken from the non-accredited sector, and the ability of POs to charge higher than currently average fees for language courses.

b. *POs requested a start-up grant from the local department of culture and tourism to assist with the setting up of the scheme.* This was agreed by the department on the grounds that local adverse publicity about poor language schools was damaging the reputation of the city and the country as a whole among students wishing to find a good location for English language studies.

- ***What was the external or wider contextual justification for the work to be undertaken (e.g. government initiative, training requirement internal policy such as equal opportunities?)***

a. The local adverse publicity about the lower quality element of the language teaching sector as described above.

b. The recognition among language providers that there was benefit in mutual cooperation on practical and professional issues - e.g. exchange of professional advice, transfer of students, exchange of staff, joint approaches to the local council on regulations affecting student business.

c. The need to identify and promote key TESOL (teacher training) qualifications to be held by teachers seeking employment in the emerging accredited sector. These qualifications formed one of the sets of benchmarks for scheme membership.

d. The wish to enhance the perceived status of the better teachers working in the sector.

3. Project staging with rationale

- ***What were the different stages of the project?***

a. ***Establishment of Founding Management Committee (FMC)*** of 12 individuals, including Chair and Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, and sub-divisions into smaller subject-specific sub-committees - e.g. academic standards (teachers' qualifications and teaching standards; quality and integrity of marketing and promotion; overall management of the organisation (PO); plus myself as external consultant.

b. ***Consultation*** with the organisations below as to market value of such a scheme; means of promotion; appropriate quality benchmarks; methods of monitoring and inspection; local and national law and how this might hinder the special marketing of POs belonging to the scheme.

Official bodies : local department of culture and tourism; local British Council office (in respect of support and the British Council's own national accreditation scheme in the UK); a selection of local English language providers; a sample of local senior teachers; a local legal adviser.

This consultation took place over a period of 12 months as and when appropriate meetings could be set up. It was a moot point as to whether POs should approach local authorities with a near-complete draft scheme in terms of detail or whether we should take consultation with the authorities as our first step towards securing support for the project.

c. *Establishment of draft quality benchmarks:* This took place among Founding Management Committee members over a period of 6 months.

d. *Establishment of draft procedures for monitoring and inspection:* The objective was to hold 3-yearly inspections for all POs and occasional spot-check mini-inspections without notice.

e. *Appointment of six provisional inspectors:* These included initially two former inspectors of general education in the state sector; two school principals; and two senior teachers / trainers who had worked in private and university sectors.

f. *Trialling of draft inspection procedures and quality benchmarks:* Three organisations represented by three members of the FMC volunteered to be inspected under the draft procedures and benchmarks, and to give feedback.

- ***What methodology(ies) were used and why?***

These were:

- a. initial consultation and planning by immediate stakeholders
- b. consultation with wider stakeholders and influential individuals
- c. discussion and agreement on draft procedures and principles
- d. trialling of draft benchmarks and inspection procedures
- e. reviewing and revising
- f. piloting over twelve months for further review

The team took into account some of the issues raised by - for example - formal Prince project methodology (identification of stakeholders; critical path analysis of the project's development) - but we did not work to a formal, online-based project schedule.

- ***How were local resources, human and other, utilized in the project?***

The FMC drew on the suggestions and practical support of their own staff and on the support of their local authorities (endorsement and a small start-up grant rather than practical facilities.)

- ***How were stakeholders consulted?***

Through face-to-face interviews followed by written reports agreed by both sides. Contacts in other similar schemes were consulted through meetings, telephone and email correspondence.

4. Anticipated outcomes

- ***What were the anticipated outcomes of the project as far as you could predict, at this stage - both positive and negative?***

Positive outcomes initially anticipated:

- a. That following a period of possibly acrimonious discussion between potential POs and others, a skeleton scheme would emerge over some 12 months for trialling (some 6 months after initial discussions) and be implemented on a full (pilot) basis the following year.
- b. That by the pilot period (some 12 months after initial discussions), the publicity put out by scheme members would have already influenced potential learners of English who would be considering their choice of language provider.
- b. That the scheme would initially attract language providers in the area (i.e. in and around the capital) and in the longer term it would attract providers from a wider catchment area.

Negative outcomes initially anticipated:

- a. That even willing POs would resent an even moderately close form of inspection and that teachers especially would feel threatened by discussions with inspectors, let alone observation of their teaching.
- b. That for some currently well-regarded language schools, the possibility of failing an inspection in relation to several quality benchmarks would be difficult to impose and would draw more acrimony than sympathy towards the scheme.
- c. That a number of key individuals would have to put in considerable time over the first two years on a voluntary basis.

- ***What were the risks inherent in the project in terms of damage to ongoing activities in the organisation concerned?***

- a. That secondary management staff and teachers and trainers in POs would feel so threatened by the scheme that they would withhold their support and influence others against it.
- b. That the time-consuming preparation for inspection, including setting down on paper systems and codes of practice already in operation, and devising and implementing those that needed to be in place but which were not, would deter POs.
- c. That once the scheme was under way, the actual costs involved in paying committee members and inspectors even a modest remuneration plus expenses would be a deterrent to all but the richest POs.

- ***How did you monitor your own handling of the project and build mechanisms for ongoing evaluation?***

- a. My role was as external consultant given my experience of managing a comparable but larger scheme in the UK. My time was unpaid but offered *pro bono* by my employer who continued to pay me a full-time salary. My responsibilities were therefore to offer suggestions as to how a scheme might be designed and delivered, and to adjust my recommendations following local stakeholders' interests and wishes, without compromising key quality considerations (e.g. transparency of inspection criteria, opportunities for appeal against inspection visit outcomes etc.)

b. I was not formally assessed but measured my success by:

- the group's wish to involve me in the project over the first two years
- their request for me to continue my involvement after the scheme was established
- informal feedback from the group.

c. In retrospect and in a more formally structured environment, I would have invited more formal feedback on my contributions, so as to give clearer opportunities for criticism.

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