

Meeting Minutes

Teaching Sustainability Languages Subgroup meeting

11th June 2026

1. Welcome and apologies

Attendees: Fiona Devine (Chair), Fiona Smyth, Emma Rose, Gemma Gaffney, Emma Wilson, Julia Dobson, Tom Woerner Powell, Huw Twiston-Davies, Thomas Schmidt, Elizabeth McCullough, Jodie Read (3pm-3:20pm) and Hannah Jordan (Secretary)

Apologies: Christina Collier, Jayne Hindle, Lexy Cummins, Isobel Morgan

2. Minutes from the last meeting: for confirmation

The [minutes](#) of the previous meeting held on 26 February 2026 were presented for confirmation. No amendments were raised, and the minutes were approved as an accurate record.

3. Outstanding actions

- The subgroup noted that the majority of actions had been completed.
- It was confirmed that outstanding actions primarily relate to communications regarding programme withdrawals and require completion following final approvals.
- The group discussed the sequencing of communications, agreeing that formal signoff of withdrawals must take place before communications are issued to staff and students.
- It was confirmed that communications will include clarification of the programmes retained and withdrawn, alongside information for students currently enrolled.
- An update was provided on LEAP, noting that enrolment is imminent and that interim arrangements are in place to manage delivery despite staffing challenges.
- The subgroup noted that the LEAP administrative post had been approved but is currently vacant following the departure of the postholder, presenting an operational risk at the point of enrolment. It was noted the post is being discussed at VMG and once approved, will be progressing to advertisement and recruitment so it is in hand.

[Action Log - Taskforce.xlsx](#)

4. Chair's update

- The Chair provided an overview of recent activities relating to programme amendments and withdrawals across the school, noting that a number of changes have progressed through appropriate approval routes.
- It was confirmed that these included a combination of programme withdrawals and amendments, alongside wider changes being considered across the school portfolio.
- The Chair noted that, at present, there are no significant additional issues arising from this activity that directly impact the remit of the subgroup.

N8 activity

- The Chair noted that a recent N8 meeting was held, chaired by Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle), with Duncan acting as sponsor.
- It was reported that there is an increasing media interest in languages and N8 discussed this.
- Members discussed the opportunity to develop proactive communications ahead of A level results, with a view to presenting a more positive and nuanced narrative about languages.
- The Chair noted links to the British Academy report and the wider context of declining applications and provision.
- The Chair noted the N8 group considered a range of international and national collaborative models and noted that replication in the North presents challenges due to geography and institutional diversity, although exploration of collaborative opportunities will continue.

5. Course Unit Framework

- It was noted that the Course Unit Framework is intended as an enabling framework to support more coherent and sustainable programme portfolios, rather than a prescriptive or standardised template.
- It was emphasised that cross-disciplinary teaching remains a core principle and will continue to be supported.
- It was confirmed that consultation is ongoing and that implementation will take place on a phased basis, beginning with PGT provision and drawing on learning from other Schools.
- Members noted that safeguards, including Equality Impact Assessments and ongoing monitoring of application and conversion data, are being built into the process.
- Members emphasised the importance of joint honours provision, particularly given the high proportion of students enrolled on joint programmes, and the need for alignment with partner Schools.
- It was agreed that joint programmes should be developed as integrated offers, rather than as a combination of separate disciplinary 'halves'.
- Concerns were raised that programme changes could be implemented unevenly across Schools, potentially creating unintended imbalances in student choice and experience.
- The group stressed the importance of involving Programme Directors and School representatives from Languages at an early stage of discussions in other schools where a joint programme is offered, rather than introducing changes retrospectively. Emma Wilson said she would pick this up with Programme Directors.

Action EW.

- The subgroup discussed proposed changes to free choice within programmes, noting that:
- Programme teams will retain discretion over whether to include free choice.
- Free choice will operate within timetabling constraints, representing a shift from the current model.
- Free choice will continue to promote LEAP units,
- It was acknowledged that, while the intention is to simplify and make choices more transparent, there is a risk that changes may be perceived as reducing choice.
- Members noted that the current system can be overly complex, particularly in relation to prerequisites, and that this can lead to confusion for students at the point of enrolment.
- The subgroup agreed that improved clarity, more coherent programme design, and better communication of options would enhance the student experience, even where the number of options is reduced.

6. British Academy Report

- The subgroup received an overview of SHAPE sector data, noting sustained long-term decline in language study, a reduction in providers, and increasing geographical concentration of provision.
- Caveats noted about the data: SHAPE data is UG, home students; is full person equivalent, not headcount; CAH coding does not always map neatly to our subjects and programmes.
- It was noted that UoM reflects similar trends, although the rate of decline is less pronounced.
- It was highlighted that the data reflects both issues of access and structural factors, not solely declining demand.
- It was also noted that the data must be interpreted carefully, particularly given volatility in smaller subject areas and differences in categorisation.
- The importance of understanding the pipeline from GCSE and A-level study was emphasised and a perceived decline does not equal a decline in interest in languages but more linked to access opportunities.
- It was noted that access to language education in schools remains a significant constraint, particularly in the state sector.
- Members also discussed potential institutional responses, including targeted interventions and strengthened messaging around accessibility routes into language study.
- The group discussed whether the sector may reach a point of stabilisation or a "floor" following continued decline and whether it was possible to forecast data to try and predict that point.

- It was agreed it would be useful for Jodie to consider if and how this data, in combination with other data sources, can provide a forecast of language supply and demand.

Action: JR

7. **Umbrella Model**

- The subgroup noted that communications regarding the umbrella model have been issued to students and staff, and that implementation activity is progressing effectively.
- It was reported that marketing, web content and open day preparations are well advanced, with a focus on presenting programme options clearly and consistently.
- Members agreed that the umbrella model significantly improves the clarity of programme presentation, enabling prospective students to more easily understand the range of available options.
- It was noted that this approach allows greater emphasis on the student experience and academic offering, rather than on complex programme structures.
- Some operational considerations were raised, including the need to confirm student language choices where these are not specified in applications, and the likelihood that this may require follow-up communication and manual processes in some cases.

8. **Admissions Update** **Undergraduate**

- The group noted that applications and offers have increased overall.
- It was acknowledged that interpretation of percentage changes can be misleading at this stage of the cycle, particularly where numbers are small.
- Members discussed variation across subject combinations, with some areas showing growth and others experiencing decline.
- It was noted that programme withdrawals may have had some impact on patterns of application, although these effects are difficult to isolate.
- Overall, trends were not considered unexpected given the wider sector context.

Postgraduate (PGT)

- The group noted that recruitment remains challenging in several PGT programmes, with some programmes recording very low acceptance numbers.
- Members identified a number of contributing factors, including:
 - Increased international competition.
 - Changes to visa policy and associated costs.
 - Shifts in application behaviour, including later decision-making by applicants.
- It was noted that reliance on specific international markets presents additional risk.
- The subgroup agreed that these programmes require ongoing monitoring and consideration of potential mitigating actions.

Action: HTD

Clearing update

- The group received an update on clearing activity, noting early campaign launch, increased lead generation activity, and a segmented approach to audiences.
- Current demand is concentrated in high-volume subjects, with diversification expected later in the cycle.
- The group noted competitor activity, including the introduction of early “strategic clearing” models by other institutions.
- It was agreed that this approach should be explored further on a limited basis within SALC. FS and EM will look into this separately.

Action: FS/EM

Commented [ER1]: I know it was suggested in the meeting that there could be a correlation between withdrawals and patterns of application but it cannot be evidenced. I would be reluctant to include this bullet but also want to ensure our minutes are transparent. Fiona's view would be appreciated.

9. **Communications**

- The subgroup reviewed recent communications to students regarding programme changes.
- It was noted that messaging was clear and factual, although there is potential for misinterpretation by some students. Members emphasised the importance of monitoring for any concern raised by the students and maintaining a measured approach.
- It was agreed that if a response is required to a student concern, it should be coordinated, consistent, and reassuring.
- BC along with input again from JD, FS and others involved in the original messaging would draft a potential response to go back to students only if any come back with concern.

• **Action BC**

10. **RAID**

- The subgroup reviewed the RAID log and discussed the status of several amber risks.
- It was suggested that some risks may be reclassified in light of the newly introduced normative criteria. JD to review and forward any updates to LC.

Action JD/LC

- Members noted that risks relating to LEAP and IT issues could be more clearly reflected. It was agreed that risks should be articulated alongside appropriate mitigation measures. JD noted she would provide some wording for these risks to be added on.

Action: JD/LC

Summary of actions and decisions

ACTION/DECISION	DESCRIPTION	OWNER	DEADLINE
Action 110626-124	EW to liaise with Programme Directors to ensure Programme Directors and School representatives from Languages are involved at an early stage in discussions with other Schools where joint programmes are offered, and that changes are not introduced retrospectively.	EW	Next meeting
Action 110626-125	JR to consider whether the available sector data, in combination with other relevant data sources, can be used to forecast language supply and demand, including whether trends indicate a potential point of stabilisation following continued decline.	JR	Next meeting
Action 110626-126	HTD to monitor recruitment trends across the relevant PGT programmes and consider any potential mitigating actions in response to areas of concern.	HTD	Next meeting
Action 110626-126	FS/EM to investigate possibility and potential to pilot a strategic clearing initiative on a limited basis within SALC.	FS/EM	Next meeting
Action 110626-127	BC along with input again from JD, FS and others involved in the original messaging would draft a potential response to go back to students on, only if they came back with concern.	BC	Next meeting
Action 110626-128	JD to review the RAID log in light of the newly introduced normative criteria and identify any risks that may require reclassification. JD to forward any	LC/JD	Next meeting

	proposed updates to LC, and LC to update the RAID log accordingly.		
Action 110626-129	JD to provide proposed wording for the RAID log to ensure risks relating to LEAP and IT issues are clearly articulated, including appropriate mitigation measures. LC to update the RAID log accordingly.	JD/LC	Next meeting