

Report from the Language Centre library proposals Open Forum meeting 7 May 2019

Chair: Dr Steve Rayner, Senior Tutor, Somerville College

Panel: Academic Registrar (Dr Saira Shaikh), Director of the Language Centre (Dr Jane Sherwood)

Also available to answer questions:

Head of Bodleian Humanities Libraries, Sackler Librarian, Taylor Librarian (James Legg)

Head of Academic English at the Language Centre (Sam McIlroy)

Head of Modern Language Programmes at the Language Centre (Marion Sadoux)

HR Business Partner, Personnel Services (Jen Wright)

Attendees: 31 (excluding chair, panel members, and Language Centre administrative staff and central AAD team)

Presentation

The Open Forum began with a presentation given by the Academic Registrar and the Director of the Language Centre. The slides are available on the Language Centre website.

Q&A session

There were a large number of questions and comments from the floor. The questions focused on the following themes:

- **The consultation process:** When the process had started, and who had been consulted. Why the proposals were being brought forward at this time, and the reasons behind them
- **Resources for learners of languages not taught at the Language Centre:** Concerns that those wishing to learn non-taught languages would not have access to the same level of resources as they do at present
- **Location of Language Centre resources in the Bodleian Libraries:** Which Language Centre resources would go where in the Bodleian, how they would be accessed, and how they would be categorised
- **The value of libraries, beyond the lending of print books:** Concerns that not having a library would diminish the value of the Language Centre, in terms of providing advice and guidance; and the opportunity to discover additional language resources
- **Fundraising:** Whether fundraising had been sought to support the Language Centre and maintain library provision
- **Further statistics about library usage:** Whether further statistics about library usage should be taken into account such as social media statistics, and readers utilising resources within the library but not borrowing them
- **Language learning strategy at Oxford:** How the library proposals fitted within any wider strategy about language learning at Oxford, and whether the University remains committed to language learning
- **Current services and online resources in the library:** How resources are being maintained at the Language Centre library at the present time – both within the physical building and online
- **Student representation:** How the student voice can be taken into account within the Language Centre
- **Disabled access:** Whether disabled access could be provided to the library space

Many of the questions and points raised are referred to in the presentation, and the following additional information was provided:

- **Languages not taught at the Language Centre:** Language learning advice will continue to be available via the Language Centre's VLEs. The Language Exchange will continue to run, as well as initiatives such as the group currently teaching Swahili in the Centre. Tutors will be able to provide advice, as will Bodleian library subject specialists.
- **Location of resources in the Bodleian Libraries:** Discussions are taking place about whether the collection would best be allocated to libraries along subject lines or kept in one library. There is a degree of overlap between resources held in the Language Centre library and those in the Bodleian. The Language Centre resources can be tagged on the SOLO catalogue, to be searchable as a collection.
- **Budgetary situation.** Given the current and continuing financial constraints in the University all central services had been asked to set 'cash flat' budgets for 2019-20, absorbing the costs of salary increments, inflation etc. All parts of the University are having to think about making efficiencies and cost savings. The consolidation of the Language Centre library within the Bodleian libraries ensures the collection is maintained, enables some savings, and brings benefits such as improved access
- **Fundraising:** This could be looked into further, however the case for support developed with the Development Office a few years ago had not led to any donations being received. Donors rarely contribute towards operational costs preferring to fund new activity and resources.
- **Student representation:** Class surveys are conducted regularly, and the Language Centre will be able to use the newly re-formed AAD Student Advisory Group, set up in conjunction with the Student Union
- **Disabled access:** Two bids have been put forward by the Language Centre, one of which covered the redevelopment of the whole Centre including full disabled access. However, these have not been prioritised for funding (along with other projects, given the competition for support). As far as possible, activities and facilities are relocated to the ground floor for individual students and staff members who cannot use the stairs.
- **Consultation process:** This began in February, and focussed first on the affected staff, following the University's HR procedures
- **Current services in the library:** The library's physical and online resources remained available for use as they were when the consultation began. Language Centre staff were re-shelving returned resources and keeping the space tidy.
- **Language learning strategy at Oxford:** The University's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan newly contained a statement about the value of languages. Education Committee was due to hold a strategic discussion on this topic in Michaelmas term 2019, with the aim of enabling articulation of the University's language learning strategy.

Next steps

The questions and views raised will be considered as part of the consultation process. A paper on the proposals and consultation will be considered by the General Purposes Committee of Council on 1 July. This committee will then make a recommendation to Council on 15 July 2019.

The consultation remains open until 12 noon on Friday 31 May 2019 (week 5) and respondents may either fill in the online survey available on the Language Centre website or email comms@lang.ox.ac.uk.