

INTERNATIONAL

Eaquals

CONFERENCE



**21—23 OCTOBER 2021
BELFAST, UK**

HYBRID EVENT



Eaqual Conference Discussion Groups | Summary Report

The discussion groups were led by members of the Eaquals Board. The emphasis was on providing an opportunity for attendees to come together to reflect on the impact of the pandemic on both medium and long term in their own context. Attendees were encouraged to share experiences and insights on how they worked through the challenges and the innovations and solutions they found. Attendees were also encouraged to bring up additional topics for discussion within the group.

Three discussion groups took place during this session and the following provides an overview of the discussion content from each group.

Group 1 | Led by Eaquals Trustee, Julie Wallis



Group 1 participants, Eaquals Annual Conference 2021

How will we handle the next 14 months?

The group responded in different ways to this question. Answers ranged as follows:

- Extremely concerned and felt that the next 14 months would be the telling time.
- Very positive and felt that the school was on track.
- Expecting the school to 'go back to normal'.
- Expecting to continue with online, F2F and hybrid lessons for the next two years at least.

Leadership

- Good communication has been essential. Important to always let people know what is happening and support change.
- Retraining for students and staff and 'how to' videos have been important.
- Comment on use of zoom: more opportunities for individual voices to be heard than there would have been in F2F meetings.

How can we restore faith?

- People had been stuck in a routine prior to the pandemic. Eaquals had to make some decisions and this helped members to pull everything back into focus.
- Eaquals cannot complain about people not having 'faith', we need to implement good employment standards.
- One person noted that online DELTA numbers had suddenly increased at start of pandemic, yet have now plummeted.
- Teachers had had a lot of training in how to teach online and other relevant online courses.
- It was noted that bringing in Hybrid has brought new challenges.
- It was felt that the next big challenge would be bringing people back to the office or classroom, though not everyone felt that this was important.
- One of the biggest challenges currently faced is not being allowed to ask questions due to 'privacy' laws.
- Another challenge is how the community perceives our schools and putting ourselves under a positive spotlight.

Group 2 | Led by Eaquals Trustee, Chris Moore



Group 2 participants, Eaquals Annual Conference 2021

Current situation and context:

- Schools which survived all shrunk.
- Local schools have proved more successful and resilient than language travel schools.
- European schools able to survive better than most non-European thanks to furlough / salary support schemes.
- Students in HE in US want hybrid/blended - whereas teachers don't want to deliver it - not comfortable and it can be lots of extra work.
- There has been growth in demand for remote testing, but teachers and schools don't want it or trust it. There is a concern from some schools that they will lose test centre business.
- There has been growth in awareness of environmental concerns in language education. However, this may be market-specific, with less interest from countries such as Russia, China and those in the Middle East.
- Some schools also finding it difficult to recruit host families. Spare rooms being used for Work From Home.
- Business landscape more varied than before - school-based, hybrid, online, sending teachers to other countries e.g. to teach at overseas camps organised as joint ventures with local organisations. While there is an urge to return to Business As Usual, the reality is quite different.
- Kids in public/state schools on EAL (English as an Additional Language) support all went backwards during lockdown.

Online delivery experience:

- Lots of schools went online but found it difficult to sell into a global marketplace. Online was a more popular among adults than kids, largely because of convenience. However, now things are easing on travel, etc, there is a definite push to get students back into the classroom.

Teacher training, development & recruitment:

- Teacher development has gone online, and this could be a permanent move.
- CELTA business went significantly down and there is now a shortage of teachers - fewer newly-qualified and lots of existing teachers have left the sector.
- Teacher recruitment a common problem with some schools, eg in Ireland, facing higher numbers of students booking in, but not enough teachers to serve them.

Group 3 | Led by Eaqals Trustee, Susanna Dammann



Group 3 participants, Eaqals Annual Conference 2021

- The USP of Eaqals is the cross-language collaboration across the LECs. We need a marketing plan to bring other languages to the forefront. Cross-lingual research could help establish connections across languages.
- Another feeling was that "Eaqals is an association of teachers for teachers" - Inspections help teachers to see the LEC as a whole,
- "Research is what makes Eaqals special" and different from other accreditation schemes - we offer so much more than the Inspection Scheme.
- Eaqals particularly valuable in Ireland since there is no central Irish based scheme (? still?). It offers a collaborative approach which is particularly helpful.
- It was felt (especially Mark) that on-line aspect of inspections and other collaborations should continue. It had worked very well in Luxembourg.
- Collecting evidence for Inspections was felt to be a challenge - Giorgio and others. (This is true but a valuable part of the exercise as he acknowledged.
- EPG - general feeling was that it is not user-friendly. An on-line platform would help? It would be easier to have something personalised to suit local cultures, or the multi-cultural classroom.

Thank you to all who took part in the discussion groups at conference.

If you have any further queries, please contact Eaqals Executive Director, Lou McLaughlin, directly director@eaquals.org.