

Supporting and managing language teachers: challenges & insights



Scenario A

Chantal is the Director of Studies at a university language centre where there are no other people in course management roles. She planned to spend the day observing lessons, which she has been meaning to do for the last month, but a number of problems have occurred. Her day began with a meeting with her boss, who urgently needs the course programmes that same day for intensive summer courses so that they can be advertised on the university website. Strong enrolments for these courses are crucial for the centre's finances. Then a teacher, Alain, came to see her, upset about some students in his groups who have complained that his teaching is not motivating enough. He is emotional and has asked to have the afternoon off. Finally, three students from a different class came to ask to be moved to a higher class, claiming that the differences in language levels of students in that group are holding them back.

In your opinion, what order of priority should Chantal give to these four issues, and what action should she take?

Scenario B

David is a new Director of Studies in a small language school with 12 teachers. Some of them have been with the school a long time while others have joined relatively recently. David is very keen to find out about the professional competences and attitudes of the teaching team so that he can think about how to organise professional development at individual and group level, but he also wants to get to know them as individuals, build a positive relationship, and involve them in decisions about professional development.

In your opinion, which of the following tools/procedures are likely to be most useful when David is collecting the information he needs while building a positive relation with the teachers?

- 1) lesson observation of different kinds
- 2) self-assessment and 'profiling' using a teacher competence framework
- 3) individual discussions with each teacher
- 4) group discussion following completion of a questionnaire?



Scenario C

Maria is the Director of Studies of a large language school with 30 teachers. The school specializes in teaching ESP to companies and has recently started working with a local branch of a multinational software development company that uses English as the main language of communication between its branches. The company management has selected 15 key members of staff for an English course lasting six months. The aim is to improve their level of job-related English so that they are able to communicate with customers better and liaise more effectively with staff in other countries. If the course is successful, the company intends to roll out similar courses on a larger scale, so it is important for Maria and her team to identify the students' language needs as clearly as possible. From the options listed below, which **three** techniques do you think would be most effective in this context?

- 1) Have all students fill in a detailed questionnaire about their job, and how they need to use English.
- 2) Hold a 15 minute interview with each of the 15 students to assess their oral level and find out about their English language needs.
- 3) Have all students carry out a series of communicative tasks related to their job roles whilst being observed and assessed.
- 4) Have the students do self-assessment using descriptor scales. For each descriptor scale (e.g. presenting sales reports in English) the student is asked to assess firstly their current level (present situation) and secondly where they think they need to be to do their job well (target situation).
- 5) Have all students take a placement test to assess their level in general English.
- 6) Find out about the students' job-related language needs in a meeting with the HR manager.
- 7) Find the ESP coursebook that seems to reflect the students' needs most closely and adapt it to the group's general needs – this will reduce unnecessary planning time, and increase valuable teaching time.