

ELT



Ireland bulletin

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Treasuring ELT Ireland by Liliana O'Reilly

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In his article about burnout in ELT, Lindsay Clandfield (2016) suggests using this tool and if you find that you are getting a high score and are therefore running the risk of burning out, he suggests a number of strategies for addressing it. The first is to reduce the workload when possible. Next you should try new approaches. This could mean changing the book or material you use, or changing the group, level, or type of students you work with. This can lead to a more extensive development of your personal pedagogy giving a renewed interest to what you do every day. The final point he makes is to take better care of yourself outside the school, things like improved diet and exercise can have a better effect than any medication.

This is a complicated issue which this short article has only briefly examined. The role of burnout in ELT is something that needs more research. By raising awareness of the signs of burnout caused by excess stress we hope to have contributed to making a start on tackling this problem.

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Getting EAQUALS: A brief "How to"

by Nadine Early (ATC)

In December 2014, our school began the application process for membership of EAQUALS (Evaluation & Accreditation of Quality in Language Services) in earnest. EAQUALS is an international association of institutions and organisations involved in language education. It exists to promote and guarantee excellence in language teaching and learning. Currently, EAQUALS has accredited-member schools offering courses in a variety of languages in 31 countries (EAQUALS 2016). Our decision to join was made in April 2014 when I attended the EAQUALS annual conference, along with the school's Managing Director. The conference was thought-provoking and inspirational and was the catalyst for change in our organisation.

In August 2015 we underwent a successful first inspection, becoming accredited members a few weeks later.

This article will outline the process we went through to become an accredited member of EAQUALS. It will look at the application procedure and some of the accreditation services offered by EAQUALS to facilitate applicants prior to inspection. It will conclude by looking at the benefits we feel we have gained from going through inspection and becoming an accredited member.

To achieve its aim of guaranteeing excellence in its member schools, EAQUALS has published a demanding set of criteria known as the Quality Standards (EAQUALS 2016). Becoming a member involves undergoing a rigorous inspection to verify if your school meets these standards. EAQUALS' holistic approach and its commitment to quality across the whole of the organisation are evidenced in the twelve categories into which the thirty-nine Quality Standards fall.



A plaque on the wall that equals quality

Pic by the author

EAQUALS Quality Categories:

Management and Administration
 Teaching and Learning
 Course Design and Supporting Systems
 Assessment and Certification
 Academic Resources
 Learning Environment
 Client Services (which includes social programmes, accommodation and pastoral care)
 Quality Assurance
 Staff Profile and Development
 Staff Employment Terms
 Internal Communications
 External Communications

The first thing we did in our school was to put together a team of quality-focussed individuals who would work together to push this through to completion. The team comprised the Academic Director and the Director of Studies of each of our two schools in Ireland. The Academic Director was responsible for drawing other departments into the process, from Managing Directors, to Accommodation, Student Welfare, Social Programme, Bookings, and Reception. This involved informing them of what was required of their departments, and ensuring that all department policies and procedures were up-to-date and relevant, and that all actions taken by these departments could be easily evidenced.

We then sat down to study the Standards. To facilitate this, we purchased from EAQUALS the Self-Assessment Handbook (EAQUALS 2016). Within this handbook each criterion in the inspection scheme is covered in a series of checklists, offering you a clear and accessible way of familiarising yourself with the Standards and carrying out a quality audit. As a starting point we asked ourselves two questions for each standard related to the Academic Department:

Do we meet this Quality Standard or not?

If we do, how can we demonstrate that?

OR

If we don't, what is it we have to do to ensure it is met?

We then passed the checklists on to other staff members and asked them to do the same for their departments. The Assessment Handbook also contains a number of workshop activities to help the person(s) responsible for managing the application to involve other staff members in the process, including teachers and learners.

From an academic perspective, what the self-assessment checklists showed us was that we needed to further develop our syllabus guidelines and work on bringing our assessment programme further in line with our course objectives. We were greatly helped in this by the Self-help Guides, another resource available for purchase from the EAQUALS website. These guides offer support in areas such as curriculum and syllabus design, assessment, standardisation and so on. Many of these self-help guides contain case studies from other member schools, which we found particularly helpful.

A further support service which we decided to purchase prior to inspection was the Advisory Visit. This involves an EAQUALS Inspector visiting the school in the capacity of a consultant, to carry out a review and make recommendations. We put in an application for an Advisory Visit in December, and our consultant came to see us in early February. Within a couple of weeks we were sent a comprehensive written report that reiterated the feedback we had been given during the visit.

Over the next few months we set about making the changes we deemed necessary and implementing the recommendations of our consultant. Using his feedback and the Quality Standards to guide us, we looked at every aspect of what it is we provide. We held meetings and focus groups with all stakeholders, including every member of staff (academic and administrative), and, in the weeks prior to inspection, with the learners and their host families too. We worked to ensure that our programmes, services, and resources met or exceeded standards and, importantly, that we could evidence it all. We tried to make sure that quality was something tangible – something happening all around and not just something outlined in our policies and procedures.

EAQUALS like to carry out their inspections when a school is at its busiest, and ask that you give a couple of months' notice at least, so that they can find suitable inspectors for your organisation. With this in mind, we sent in our application

form in April 2015 and agreed an inspection date for the following August. We were sent two inspectors and the inspection of our two schools was carried out over two days. The inspectors were both very experienced in the field of English language education, as both teachers and school directors, and as such their feedback was invaluable. Indeed, the whole inspection process was remarkably constructive and a very positive experience.

Passing our inspection and becoming an accredited member of EAQUALS was very rewarding and has benefits far beyond the obvious promotional advantages of having its logo on our website and being listed on theirs. To date it has encouraged us to reflect and to develop. It has shown us how to keep quality at the core of what we do. It has helped us to set appropriate goals for further, ongoing development. Being a member has given us accesses to a wealth of resources and an international community of practitioners with a shared understanding of quality and best practice.

I would recommend membership to those who are looking to develop their organisations within a framework that clearly promotes quality and excellence. I would encourage those who are considering an application for inspection to firstly consider carrying out a self-assessment and to follow it up with an advisory visit. They are costly (fees can be requested online from the EAQUALS Secretariat) but we certainly found them worthwhile. A good starting point, and an overview of the process, is the free handbook: An Introduction to EAQUALS Accreditation, which can be downloaded from the website.

Finally, I would stress the importance of not underestimating the time and resources necessary to undertake such an extensive appraisal of your organisation. A dedicated person or team is crucial and support from the top is paramount.

References

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When going through Delta...keep going

by **Damian Cunniffe** (Atlantic Language)

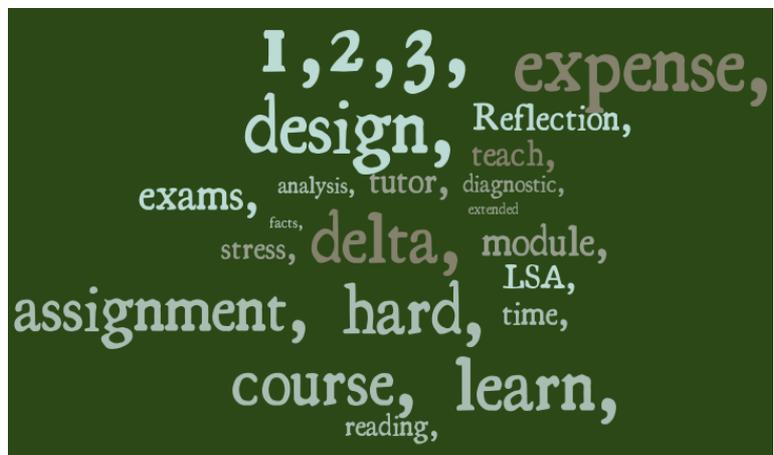
The Delta comes with a formidable reputation. Having taken the course in 2015 I can confirm that it is indeed a daunting prospect but intimidating as it can be, the rewards are significant even though it may take some time to realise these, often after the course is completed. There is no getting away from it though, as having a diploma like the Cambridge Delta has become the essential requirement for anyone who want to develop a career in English language teaching.

In this article I have some advice for those who may be considering doing Delta gleaned my own experience of doing the course itself and from the experience of other Delta survivors whom I contacted to get their opinions of the Delta, from its construction and its support structure to the actual course content itself.

Many referred to how isolated they felt while doing the course with some stating that they were often overwhelmed and felt the workload was excessive. However, when asked whether they were glad they did the Delta the majority answered in the affirmative. True, the Delta can be hellish. There are seemingly interminable lows tempered with only occasional highs. The key is to keep going, to organise before and during the course and to always keep your goals and objectives to the forefront.

The Delta modular course is run over the 9 months from March to December and September to June. The course consists of three modules which all run concurrently. There is an option to do each module separately which I initially considered and then rejected.

Module one deals with understanding language, methodology and resources for Teaching and is examined through a formal written exam at the end of the course. Module two consists of developing professional practice and focuses on



Word associations

Pic by the author