

## Over two-thirds of LFA students miss their exams

By Jack Davies, Deputy Editor (2017)

Tuesday 3 October 2017



Image: Lars Curfs

Just 32.7 per cent of students who signed up to LFA language courses across the 2016/17 academic year were present at end of year assessments, a *Nouse* investigation has revealed.

LFAs are year-long, university-wide courses available to all undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as staff members and the general public. The programs include an extensive number of languages, ranging from more conventional options, such as French and Spanish, to specialist and extinct languages, such as Medieval Latin. The courses in each language are split into seven difficulty levels, in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for language learning.

Previously, an initial, one-year LFA course was accessible for free to all students of the University. However, as reported by *Nouse* earlier this year, the University has scrapped the complimentary course for the upcoming academic year, instead charging students a slightly decreased price of £159, in comparison to the £237 paid by members of the general public. This came just a few months before only 601 of 1 834 students signed up to LFAs turned up to the end of year exams necessary to fully obtain the qualification.

Dwindling numbers at LFA classes have not gone unnoticed by students. Jade Anderson, a third year Psychology in Education student who took an LFA in Mandarin Chinese last year, noted that “in the first class there were 30 or 40 pupils, but this just decreased throughout the year, to the point where there

were actually only two of us at the final exam”.

A number of questions have been raised as to why there is such a large discrepancy between students enrolled on courses and those actually turning up to exams. Some have suggested that teaching standards on certain courses are low, causing students of these modules to feel unsure as to whether turning up to the exam is of any use as they feel they have not been given the correct tuition to pass the assessment.

A third year English student who took a French LFA last year, who wishes not to be named, stated “I found that my early classes jumped straight in to very conversational French. It felt like basics about grammar and common vocab were completely skipped”. The student goes on to say that “in the middle of my second term of classes, my attendance became really sporadic. It became apparent that things were not going to change, and I didn’t even consider turning up to the exam; I knew I would fail, even if I tried”.

YUSU’s Academic Officer Julian Porch has advised students to let tutors know if they feel teaching methods can be improved or better tailored to the levels of the class as a whole. “As with any course, we encourage students to give feedback to tutors regarding particular strengths of the course as well as areas which could be improved” said Porch.

The University, when asked for comment, were keen to emphasise that exams in LFAs are “not compulsory” and that, while attendance may appear low, “exam attendance figures against enrolment are above the national average for IWLP (Institution Wide Language Programmes) in the UK”. They go on to point to the fact that “in addition [to LFAs], there is now a free Languages For International Mobility (LFIM) course available” in a variety of languages, not only teaching students basic grammar skills but going more in depth into the cultures from which the languages themselves originate.

However, these courses are available for free only to students taking up or registering interest in an “international opportunity” during their studies, such as a placement abroad, and is not available at no charge to the wider student body. It remains to be seen whether the University’s decision to start charging for LFA courses across the board will catalyse a reduction in the number of no-shows at examinations, but they will hope to improve on the figures from 2016/17.



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