

Making of a champion

Sally Fagan won the 2016 Threlford Cup for her inspiring work as Director of Business Language Champions. She discusses her work to motivate young people to study languages

Thirty students are waiting expectantly (and a little nervously) to find out which company they will be teamed up with for the day. The event, a new one for 2016, is 'Marketing in the Making', organised by Business Language Champions. Six local companies have come to work with six teams of language students, ranging from Years 10 to 12, from different schools in the area. During the day, the students must find out as much as they can about their assigned company and create a short marketing video on an iPad in their target language about the company's product. At the end there will be a prize for the best video. This is what we call "making languages real" for the students.

Ask most young people what careers they can do with a language and they will say translating or teaching. What they don't see is the world beyond. At Business Language Champions (BLC), a social enterprise promoting language learning,¹ we tell them that, although there is a wealth of jobs you can do without a language, adding a language to the mix will open up many opportunities that you hadn't imagined; that languages will set you apart.

To do this, we recreate business scenarios showing how languages are used in different careers, bringing in business people who use languages in their work. Languages go with anything and everything. Our previous events have included languages in journalism, the RAF, event management, science and GCHQ. Coming up, we have Spanish with fair trade and languages with fashion.

Additionally, we like to encourage gifted linguists to consider taking on a more exotic language ab initio at university. To that end, we've run events on Russian,



Arabic, Chinese and Japanese. Students find this approach fun (and challenging!), and at the same time start to see that their language learning isn't just another school subject with no relevance to their later careers.

BLC events also offer additional benefits to the students and schools involved. Putting young people in teams and setting them a business challenge encourages employability skills such as leadership, self-confidence and team work. According to the Good Career Guidance report,² if a student has five or more 'contacts' with business people during their time at school, they are much less likely to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Our events can help push the

ON CEREMONY
Sally Fagan (left), accepts the Threlford Memorial Cup at the IoLET awards event in November, with CIOL Chief Executive Ann Carlisle (right)



contact number up. The new GCSE lays emphasis on spontaneous speaking, and at all our events, students are put on the spot to produce something oral in their target language, usually with business people asking questions.

It is important to note that we are not language evangelists, hell-bent on forcing all students to carry on with their language studies. But the sad truth is that many of the students we encounter don't feel that they are part of a global society. They are UK/English-centric and therefore, in some respects, disadvantaging themselves economically and missing out on life-changing experiences. At a recent event, a fourth year language undergraduate spoke to an audience of 80 Year 9 students about his year abroad. The talk focused much more on the transformative cultural experiences than the fact that he is now pretty much trilingual.

Becoming a social enterprise

So how did we get to this point? The history of Business Language Champions goes back to 2004, when the government made languages optional at GCSE level. BLC was born as a nationwide project managed by CILT, the National Centre for Languages, and rolled out through the Regional Language Networks (RLN). BLC Director Suzannah Hutton was co-managing the RLN and brought me in through a volunteering scheme in 2009. As a self-employed dual-language management trainer, I was well-placed to devote myself part-time to promoting languages in schools.

After various iterations of both funding and targets, the government money finally came to an end in March 2011. During the previous two academic years, we had reached 8,000 students in the East Midlands region. We were now faced with a difficult decision: should we sink with the funding or find some way of building on all the successful work we had done? We decided to set up BLC as a social enterprise so that we could continue.

The biggest challenge that we faced was having to start charging schools for our services. For a while we

did manage to find small pockets of funding, particularly by teaming up with Routes into Languages, which meant that we were still able to target schools in disadvantaged areas. One of the joys of being independent was that we were now able to work with all schools, from independent to state-maintained. It has been uplifting to have students from very different backgrounds working together.

We apply for funding where we can, with occasional success for smaller projects. It is no surprise that most funding expects applicants to target disadvantaged areas of the country. While this is understandable, the language deficit runs across all social strata. Middle-class areas suffer equally from falling numbers in their language departments. In our region, the East Midlands, we have grammar schools with joint sixth forms struggling to muster half a dozen A-level language students between them. It is becoming increasingly difficult even for independent schools to put together teams from Years 12 and 13 for our events.

The battle for budgets

So what is going on in our schools? Like any subject, languages have their share both of excellent teachers and of those that sadly fail to inspire. What they have in common is that they feel beleaguered by all sides: a generation of students and parents who, for the most part, don't see the point in learning a language, and Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) with an eye on the league tables, who often don't make optional and perceived 'hard' subjects, such as languages, a priority.

We know budgets are tight and things are not getting easier, but we need to ensure that SLTs see the value in promoting languages and assign a sufficient budget and credence to allowing students to find out more about global opportunities. Increasingly, over the past year, schools have been cancelling their places on BLC events. Conversely, one of our most popular events (described by one teacher as "the best cross-curricular event I have ever seen") is the 'International Space Challenge', supported

KEEPING IT REAL
Students make a video about Long Clawson Dairy cheese at a Business Language Champions event (above left); learn to dance at 'Chile, Chocolate and Cha Cha Cha'; and work creatively at the same event in January 2017



by the National Space Academy and initially funded by the Institute of Engineering Technology. It seems that the battle to increase the numbers studying STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) is being supported by SLTs in a way that languages teachers can only long for.

Creating opportunities

My own personal journey started at school with an inspiring German teacher. She infected us all with her love of the language and the country. When I left university, part of the General Electric Company (GEC) was looking for an Export Sales Engineer and I persuaded them to take me on instead; it proved easier to employ a linguist and train her in engineering than to take on an engineer and train him(!) in French and German.

Could I have done that export job without languages? Yes, but they proved invaluable in so many ways. Assigned to Latin America, I learned some Spanish. With a family move to Singapore, I learned some Mandarin. From there I moved into management training, where I have been ever since. Being able to offer soft skills training in both English and German has given me a unique selling point in an increasingly tough market.

My languages have allowed me to be interviewed in French on live Tahitian television news, train tribal leaders on a remote Pacific island, and visit most of Latin America. They have helped me gain interesting German assignments while my monolingual management training colleagues struggled to get work. It makes me feel proud to be able to stand up in front of young people and say that I am living proof that languages open opportunities that they have probably never dreamed of.

Sally Fagan was awarded the IoLET Threlford Memorial Cup for significant contribution to fostering the study of languages in 2016.

Notes

1 BLC in its original format still runs with Scottish Government funding in Scotland via SCILT. This is a separate organisation to Business Language Champions in England.

2 Holman, J (2014) 'Good Career Guidance', Gatsby, 24; www.gatsby.org.uk/education/programmes/good-career-guidance



HRH Prince Michael joins the award winners as they pose with their trophies

IoLET AWARD WINNERS 2016

Qualification	Award	Winner
Certificate in Languages for Business	Middleton Cup for best candidate	Charlotte Traynor (French, University of Huddersfield)
	Pilley Cup for best group entry	Shrewsbury High School
Certificate in Bilingual Skills: Police	McNally Trophy for best candidate	Bruno Rebeschini (French/English)
	Susan Tolman CPD Prize for best candidate	Agnieszka Charzyńska (Polish/English)
Diploma in Public Service Interpreting	Susan Tolman Award for best Law candidate	Agnieszka Charzyńska
	Corsellis Cup for best Health candidate	Dominique Marie de la Cruz (Spanish/English)
	Nuffield Trophy for best group entry	Peterborough Interpreting Academy
	NRPSI Award for best candidate	Véronique Cubilié-Ratio (French/English)
Diploma in Police Interpreting	Richard Lewis Trophy for best candidate	Julien Charles Georges Ivers (English/French)
Diploma in Translation	Fred Brandeis Trophy for best English/German candidate	Stefanie Ochel
	Peter Newmark Award for best Literature candidate	Sophie Leonie Renee Verschuur (Dutch/English)
	Schlapps Oliver Shield for best group entry	Akademie für Fremdsprachen
Special Awards	David Crystal Trophy for outstanding contribution to the field of languages	Dr Lid King
	Threlford Memorial Cup for significant contribution to fostering the study of languages	Sally Fagan Business Language Champions



Top of the class

Rachel Smith explains how her sixth-form students outperformed undergraduates to gain top marks in Languages for Business

With the introduction, in September 2015, of the reformed A-level specifications and the advent of standalone AS levels, Shrewsbury High School revised its A-level offer. The IoL Educational Trust Certificate in Languages for Business (CLB) was chosen as one of the options for sixth-form students, allowing those not studying a modern foreign language (MFL) to A level to continue doing so post-GCSE, and those taking an A level to gain an additional qualification using a different register.

In response to student demand, French and Spanish were offered in 2015-2016 – the first year the school ran the course. This year, we have extended this to include German as well. One hour per week is allocated to teaching the course. As all the students last year had already taken a GCSE in the language, it proved possible to study the course in less than the recommended time. The students had approximately 27 hours of study before the final exams in May. Most of the end-of-module assessments fitted into this, but some additional time was needed at the end of the course for the final comprehension, speaking and writing tests.

The CLB certificate is made up of six modules: Companies and Organisations, Correspondence and Communications, Rules and Regulations, Travel and Announcements,

Sales and Marketing, and Customer Service. At the end of each module students take an assessment, which is marked by the class teacher and moderated externally. Teachers are responsible for entering student details and marks for each of the assessments on a database. The marks for these internal assessments constitute 35% of the final mark (Pass, Merit or Distinction); the remaining 65% comes from exams taken in school at the end of the course and marked externally.

There is no doubt that the business orientation of this course appealed greatly to the students last year. Studying aspects of the language which are clearly applicable to real-life situations gave them a sense of achievement and the feeling that they were studying something with a genuine purpose in future life. Though the course does not currently attract UCAS points (something that is being discussed for the future), students included it in their university applications, demonstrating an additional qualification and continuing interest in MFL study.

In class, students took part in listening, reading, speaking and writing activities. They particularly enjoyed learning how to make phone calls in a foreign language and acquiring the language needed for social interaction. Most of the course was covered in the timetabled lessons but, on occasion, and

HARD WORK REWARDED

(Left to right) Prince Michael presents Rachel with the Pilley Cup; the young winners; and Institute staff at the awards ceremony

especially in preparation for the assessments, students were assigned homework and revision tasks. Modest group sizes (nine students in the French group and three in Spanish) meant that they received plenty of individual attention and feedback, and had a great deal of opportunity to practise.

The course is fully supported by a bank of online resources. PowerPoint presentations, recordings and transcripts, printable worksheets, vocabulary lists, games and grammar explanations are provided for the teaching of each module, and the site is easy to navigate. Resources to support the course have been produced by the Language Alliance, and the students appreciated and responded well to the variety of activity types.

There was plenty of time for speaking practice in addition to comprehension and writing exercises, and our students both revisited and extended their knowledge of GCSE vocabulary and structures. They particularly enjoyed developing their range of vocabulary to encompass words not encountered at GCSE and built up a bank of extremely useful words and phrases.

We were very pleased with the grades achieved for the course, which were the result of a lot of hard work. The CLB is a welcome addition to the MFL qualifications available to post-16 students, and one through which students learn valuable language and business skills.

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