



Languages Link

Issue 4 Winter/Spring 2010

“Igniting an interest in languages” – the challenge at The Sheffield College

An interview with Andrew Cropley, the new Director at Norton College

In September 2009, The Sheffield College appointed a new Director for its Norton centre, Andrew Cropley. Andrew’s previous post had been Commanding Officer, for 2½ years, at the Defence School of Languages at Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, where about 40 languages were taught to over 400 uniformed personnel a year.

I spent over an hour with Andrew in his office at Norton College, and our conversation ranged over the work he had done at the Defence School and how this had shaped his awareness of the importance of language learning in intercultural understanding, his vision of how language learning could develop at The Sheffield College and the contribution that the College could make to the revised City Languages Strategy (see article on back page).

At Beaconsfield Andrew learnt very clearly that language and cultural understanding are, in his words, “part of a continuum”. They progress together. *“It’s very clear that without the language you can only go so far in understanding the culture”*. This awareness runs through his vision of how languages should be presented at the Sheffield College.

Languages at The Sheffield College

Languages provision at the College is centred on Norton and Hillsborough Colleges, with adult part-time outreach centres at Bannerdale and Tupton School. Provision at the College has had to be restricted over the last few years through the way that further education funding is controlled. This pains Andrew, who recognises that all the College’s courses are very much demand-led, “with a limited ability to create demand”, he stated. Central Government funding control severely curtails the College’s ability to run courses at a loss. It cannot compete with schools like Meadowhead or organisations like the WEA in providing ‘recreational’ languages courses. Provision is now centred on the European ‘big four’ of French, German, Italian and Spanish – though A-level German is no longer on offer through the lack of takers.

The revised City Languages Strategy

Andrew sees a two-fold role for the College’s role in the revised City Languages Strategy. The first, “straightforward” one is to maintain an offering for those full-time students who want to be linguists. “We need to do all we can to protect and if possible, grow that”.

“Igniting interest”

The second role is, he says, “a bigger challenge” and that is to *“play a real part in igniting an interest in languages for those that dropped it at the first possible opportunity at school”*



Andrew hopes to meet this challenge in three ways. The first is through the use of “immersive” technology, “an immensely powerful tool” available today. He would like to see, for instance, Norton College and the Peaks Centre in the South East of the city linked, so that students in both centres could be studying the same lesson with the one teacher at the same time. This kind of linkage can be extended, “up to ten different places” at once in Andrew’s vision. Technology can make provision “much more economically viable so that everyone has access to it”, he claimed. A clever use of the technology available would cover its capital cost by being available for a variety of subjects, in addition to languages.

Technology would also contribute greatly to the second important development at the College - partnerships with local schools. Technology would take the learning to the learners where *they* are rather than, as at present, the students having to be bussed to the College.

Partnerships

Partnerships with local schools are going ahead. One is developing between Norton and Meadowhead School, one of the city’s Specialist Language Colleges, which will help the school to put on A-level Russian. Collaboration is at an exploratory stage with Meadowhead on the offer of vocational language learning. The Peaks Centre is developing a partnership with the four South East secondaries, Birley, City, Handsworth Grange and Westfield.

The College’s partnerships extend to commerce and Sheffield’s inward investment company, Creativesheffield, too. *“I would hope that through that we can start to ignite an interest in and an awareness of culture and being able to communicate better with colleagues, with potential customers, with whoever it might be that people are working with”.*

The third means of igniting interest is through the introduction of project work involving languages and cultural understanding in existing courses at the College, such as the traditional National Diploma courses, for instance in Creative Media, IT and Engineering.

Andrew is enthusiastic and at the same time pragmatic. He believes in starting small. Language projects would involve small numbers at first, and just “one or two units in a bigger qualification”. There could be scope for the new Diplomas, too (see article on back page on the Languages & Intercultural Communication Diploma).

BME and community languages

Andrew’s pragmatic enthusiasm shows in his keenness to forge links with the city’s BME communities. This would give opportunities for community languages. “I would love to bring people from the community into the College to work with us” Andrew said, “I think it’d be really exciting”.

Andrew’s final suggestion for incentivising language learning was intriguing. He considered a competition in which one of the prizes would be a visit to “somewhere exciting” as a reward for students showing not just linguistic skill but also linguistic and cultural commitment. “Wouldn’t that be wonderful!” he said.

It would, indeed – and we wish Andrew well in realising his hopes for languages at the College. It certainly has a vital role to play in the delivery of language learning, post-16, in the city.

Mike Reynolds
'Languages Link' Editor



Andrew Cropley

The Diploma in Languages and International Communication is a new qualification for students aged 14 to 19, due to be taught in schools and colleges from 2011. One of seventeen Diplomas that have been designed with the help of employers and universities so that practical learning is at the heart of the student experience, it provides both a genuine alternative to GCSEs and A-Levels and a recognised route into further and higher education and into direct employment.

This Diploma offers schools and colleges an exciting new way to teach languages in partnership with local businesses and universities, and to give teenagers of all abilities and aspirations the context in which to apply their language learning. Students will learn which jobs use languages and about global organisations and challenges such as climate change and sustainability

As well as learning new languages and the skills to be autonomous language learners, students will become better communicators in English and learn about language use through topics such as sport, music and film. They will also gain an introduction to interpreting and translation, and find out about the structure of language and linguistics, giving them an excellent grounding for further study in higher education.

- Students learn one main language, can pick up another from scratch – and have the option to take another language in their Additional and Specialist Learning.
- Students will be assessed on content – including international organisations, the world of work and global society – as well as their language learning.

Giving young people a reason to continue their language learning

For many language teachers concerned about the decline in take-up at GCSE and A-Level, the Diploma in Languages and International Communication cannot come too soon: delegates at consultation events held this year have welcomed the arrival of a motivating qualification which gives young people a reason to continue their language learning, allows them to study what interests them most, and prepares them for their future career. Available at three levels – Foundation (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades D-G), Higher (7 GCSEs at A* to C) and Advanced (3.5 A-Levels) – this Diploma also enables students to develop the team working and creative skills they will need in the workplace, as well as functional skills in Maths, English and ICT.



The Diploma Development Partnership, led by Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Sheffield, Dr Terry Lamb, will now be working closely with awarding bodies through the remainder of 2009 and into early 2010 to get the qualification ready for the classroom. In September, the government asked consortia to form and bid to pilot Diploma delivery in 2011 – applications becoming due by the end of November 2009.

Diploma Chair Dr Terry Lamb commented, “We’re delighted with progress to this point and immensely grateful to all those who have contributed to the development of our qualification. When practitioners tell us that this is what their students need (and that they’d study it themselves given the opportunity!) – that’s all the motivation we need. It’s extremely encouraging to think that Advanced Diploma students will be applying to university in just over three years.”

To find out more, visit the Diploma in Languages and International Communication website at www.diploma-in-languages.co.uk.



Sheffield Complementary Schools Achieve Quality Framework Awards

Sheffield complementary schools celebrated their Quality Framework achievements at a ceremony on 5th February 2010 at The Circle, Rockingham Lane. We were delighted that Nick Clegg M.P., the famously multi-lingual leader of the Liberal Democrats, was able to come and present the awards. Certificates were given to the four Sheffield complementary schools who have successfully achieved the Bronze Award, namely Sheffield and District Chinese School, Sheffield Star Mandarin School, Club OK, and Polish Saturday School.

The National Quality Framework Awards for Supplementary Schools is a voluntary quality recognition scheme. It aims to recognise, celebrate, record and improve the achievements of supplementary schools across the country. The award is available at four levels, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Special Distinction. The Award has similarities to the Quality in Study Support Award (QiSS) that many mainstream schools work to achieve, the difference being that the Quality Framework was designed specifically with supplementary schools in mind.

The celebration event provided an opportunity for all supplementary schools in Sheffield, not only to celebrate the achievements, but also to find out more about the process, to meet with those familiar with the Quality Framework ethos and practice, and to find out about the support available from Languages Sheffield, the City Council and The National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education.

The award ceremony also provided a chance to thank all those who to date have worked so hard to institute the National Quality Framework Award Programme: Anita de Brouwer, Sheffield's Study Support Coordinator, who has tirelessly secured funding for the project; and the two Quality Framework mentors, Jane O'Brien, the recently retired Languages Sheffield Supplementary Schools Manager, and Ranjit Chakravorty, CYPD Supplementary Study Support/Volunteers Co-ordinator.

Julia Podziewska

Complementary Schools Officer,
Languages Sheffield

"Extracted and expanded from Extended Services e-news, a free email newsletter from ContinYou, National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education. See the ContinYou website at www.continyou.org.uk."

The LEPP is signed off. It's now official!

On Friday December 11th, the Council of Europe LEPP – see article on back page – was signed off by Sheffield City Council Leader, Cllr. Paul Scriven, and the Council's Chief Executive, John Mothersole. The ceremony took place at a successful breakfast with a number of Sheffield's Business Languages Champions held at the Town Hall. This event brought together business people and some leading council officers and city politicians. It was a good chance to bring home to policymakers the importance of languages for the city's economic life.



The Business Languages Champions at the Town Hall breakfast

Paul Scriven (centre) in the act of signing the LEPP, flanked by John Mothersole (left) and Mike Reynolds (right).

Schools / Higher Education Languages Link Group

Schools and Higher Education Working together to promote language teaching in local schools

The Schools/Higher Education Languages Link Group (**SHELL**) has been in existence for several years. The aim of the group is to support local schools in their efforts to promote languages, particularly at Key Stage 4 and Post-16.

What started out as a group of people concerned about the decline of languages in local schools sharing what they do to promote languages has now become a very active group which is engaged in a number of practical projects to encourage more young people to continue with their language learning beyond the age of 14.

SHELL Activities – Well-established, tried and tested

- “**Languages Live**” **Roadshow**, for Key Stage 3 learners, half-day promotional events organised by the **University of Sheffield**. Students and staff from the university visit local schools with activities designed to encourage pupils to continue with their language learning.
- **Languages and Careers Days** for Y9 students organised by the Faculty of Organisation and Management at **Sheffield Hallam University**
- “**Your Future in Europe**”, a day-conference organised by the Language College at **King Edward VII School**: for Key Stage 4 and 5 students across South Yorkshire to raise awareness of the vocational relevance of language learning and study and employment opportunities in the UK and Europe.
- **Sixth Form Days** in **French, German, Spanish** and **Urdu**, organised by the local branch of the **Association for Language Learning (ALL)** in partnership with the Language College at **King Edward VII School** and the **Showroom Cinema**.

SHELL Activities – New ventures in 2009

The SHELL group now acts as a consultative group for **Routes into Languages Project**, a government-funded initiative which aims at promoting languages in schools on a regional basis. Routes into Languages consortia are working in all the nine regions of England, following on from the recommendations of the Dearing Review of languages. In South Yorkshire it is the **SHELL** group that plans and organises the events funded through Routes into Languages.

The following two projects were new in 2009 and involved all **SHELL** group members in intensive planning work:

SHELL “Adopt a Student/Adopt a Class” Project

This project involves 2nd Year university language students working with classes of Year 8 pupils, before they leave to go on year abroad placements. The university students spend several lessons with their “adopted” class and their teacher, getting to know each other and engaging in activities designed to encourage the children to think about the relevance and enjoyment of language learning. The university students then stayed in touch with the class via the internet and a regularly updated blog - reporting back on their experiences, the activities they have been involved with, the places they have visited and the people they have met. The idea behind this project is to ‘make language learning real’ and to provide Key Stage 3 pupils with a real example as to where learning a foreign language can lead, both in terms of career development and personal enjoyment and fulfilment. The children got to know someone close to their own age group for whom language learning matters and has made a real change to their lives. The project commenced in May 2009 and involved about 20 university students and 500 Y8 pupils from 7 different schools.

SHELL Film/ MFL Transition Summer School

This project was aimed at Year 11 students who have just completed their GCSEs. The Summer School will help them prepare for their post-16 language courses by letting them practice and develop their language skills before starting A-Level. The programme of this 3-day intensive transition course has been designed in partnership with the Showroom Cinema, using the medium of film as the starting point for language work as well as for the project outcome.

At the end of the three days each participating student had produced a short, one-minute spoof film describing what it means to be British, in their chosen language. The short films, entitled "UK, one minute, innit!" were screened during the annual 'Showcomotion' festival at the Showroom Cinema in the week after the Summer School. The films could then be used back in school for joint projects with their partner schools abroad or in preparation for exchange visits.

The idea behind the project was to bridge the gap between GCSE and A-level in a creative and innovative way, thus giving students the confidence and motivation to continue post-16. Students not only improved their language skills in preparation for their A-level course in a fun way, but also got to know more about the medium of film.

Members of the SHELL group during 2008/09 were teachers and lecturers from both Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam Universities and the following South Yorkshire Secondary Schools: All Saints Catholic High School, Aston and Brinsworth Comprehensive Schools and Swinton Community School in Rotherham; Wisewood, Handsworth Grange, King Edward VII and Meadowhead Schools in Sheffield.

The **SHELL** group is convened by King Edward VII School and Language College and meets about once a term at the School's Upper School site. The group can be contacted via King Edward VII School's Language College Director, Eva Lamb.

Council of Europe prepare way for revised City Languages Strategy

The city of Sheffield is the first city in Europe to be profiled by the Council of Europe on its Language Education Policies. The profiling took two years overall, from June 2007 to July 2009. In January 2008 the Council of Europe's four delegates, led by Professor David Little, of Trinity College, Dublin, wrote an interim report based on their six day visit to Sheffield.

On 24 February 2009 the same delegates returned to Sheffield to present their report. Fifty people attended the Council of Europe Round Table event representing the Language Colleges, the Association for Language Learning, CILT, Languages Sheffield, Sheffield University, the Sheffield College, Primary schools, 14 – 19 Team and the Learning and Achievement Service. The day was structured so that the Council of Europe delegates could expound upon what they had written. The four main areas included:

- Sheffield's languages: Diversity and Equality
- Languages in education, society and the world of work
- Language teaching and teacher training
- A City Languages Strategy: the challenges of cooperation and coordination

Following the Round Table the Council of Europe delegates went away to produce their final report.

The final report – the Language Education Policy Profile (LEPP) – was presented in July 2009, and this has been the starting point for the process of producing a revised City Languages Strategy.

Consequently on 23rd September a Council of Europe Consultation Briefing was held to focus on the recommendations put forward in the LEPP to help us work towards developing a 21st Century Languages Strategy for the city of Sheffield. Colleagues divided into three focus groups to include a Primary Focus Group, a Secondary Focus Group and a FE/HE Focus Group.

At the end of that briefing, a Steering Group was set up with a representative from each of the three groups to work on the revision of the City Languages Strategy. Two meetings have taken place so far, in November last year and in January this, and five more are scheduled throughout 2010. The revised City Languages Strategy will be launched in February 2011.

The Steering Group comprises representatives from all sectors of education, including vocational language learning, and from business (Jenx Limited) and Business Education - South Yorkshire.

If you are interested in becoming involved in this initiative please contact Tania Sanders: Tania.sanders@sheffield.gov.uk, or Languages Sheffield, via info@languages-sheffield.org.uk.

Languages Sheffield –the MultiLingual City Forum and Complementary Schools Alliance

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