

A day in the life...



Language skills helped Liam Innis to get a summer job as an au pair in Vienna

Spreading the word

As an Ambassador for Routes into Languages, undergraduate **Liam Innis** shows younger students the exciting directions life can take when you learn another language

Words: Marianne Smedley

Biography

Liam Innis is 19 years old and is in the second year of a Modern Languages degree course at Newcastle University. He is studying French, Spanish, German and Dutch and is a Senior Student Languages Ambassador with the North East consortium for Routes into Languages, promoting the importance of language learning to younger students throughout the region.

Liam Innis, Senior Student Languages Ambassador

Continuing language learning beyond GCSE-level has given Newcastle University student Liam Innis the opportunity to travel and work abroad, make friends with people from across the globe, and broaden his career options. Now he's urging younger students to continue learning languages through his work as a Senior Student Languages Ambassador for the Routes into Languages project.

"For me, this is really important," says Liam. "Often children drop languages and then end up regretting it later."

Through his work, Liam visits schools throughout the North East of England, to promote the value of languages and talk about the doors that they open. He says his background and down-to-earth approach means younger students can relate to him.

"I'm from a fairly low-income household in Darlington and I think the students respond well to that. They see that I'm just like them. A lot of children – especially in schools in the more deprived areas that we go into – just aren't aware of the opportunities that are available

"A lot of children just aren't aware of the opportunities that are available to them"

to them. They may be learning languages, but they don't know the places this can take them, because at the moment they're in the classroom just learning the basics. But I can speak to them and tell them where languages have taken me."

Impressive and inspiring

Liam says that, apart from their language teachers, a lot of the students he talks to haven't met anyone who can speak other languages fluently.

"So they find it impressive and inspiring to meet someone who has a level of fluency. It's fine to tell students that languages are important and that they will help them to get a better job. But these children really take notice when they see someone actually speaking fluent Spanish or French, for example. They think, 'Wow, I'd love to get to that level. I'd love to be able to speak to people when I go on holiday and make new friends.'"

Liam's love of languages has brought him many experiences he wouldn't have had if he was monolingual.

"At the end of my first year of university, I realised I didn't want to go home and work in a supermarket in my holidays, so I moved to Vienna and found a job as an au pair."

He has also been InterRailing around Europe and his languages helped him to make friends in Spain and Germany along the way.

"When I got to Germany, because I spoke the language, the friends



Liam gives presentations to students in schools to encourage them to carry on language learning



Above With younger students at a Routes into Languages workshop

Below, right Liam on his travels, at Lake Bled, Slovenia

I made invited me on nights out, and to gigs and festivals. A girl I'd made really good friends with even invited me to *Abifeier* – Germany's version of the graduation prom.

"Rather than just going to the Costa Brava to chill out on the beach for a few weeks a year, I can go to a country and immediately start living like a local. When you don't speak the language, that's not really possible because you'll never cross the border between being a tourist and a local without having that awareness of the culture and the language."

International ambitions

As might be expected of someone who has travelled so much already, Liam has big plans for the year abroad he will undertake as part of his course,

which starts in June. First, he's going to Luxembourg for a month to work in the EU's Publications Office. Then it's on to Berlin to study, then back to Vienna for a few months to see the children he looked after as an au pair. After that, he's teaching English in Peru for five months, then it's back to either Vienna or Nuremberg to work.

"It's important to not just accept whatever's easiest," he says. "I want to show the children I meet through Routes that it's not unrealistic to say, 'I'm going to live in France one day.'"

Ultimately, Liam wants to live abroad more permanently and make a difference in countries where children don't have the same access to education as in the UK.

"I'm interested in education as a career, and I'm especially interested

About Routes into Languages

The Routes into Languages project is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and seeks to promote language study and student mobility at HE level to pupils in schools. One of the ways that Routes does this is through Student Ambassadors, like Liam. The Ambassadors are students who are already doing language study of some kind, who go into schools to speak to younger pupils about what they are doing and why it is so important. Find out more about Student Ambassadors in your area at: www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk

in equality and education. I've had a lot of opportunities in my life to be educated, and to travel and see the world. If I could make that happen for other people, then that would be a real achievement. On a certain level, I'm doing that now, but when I'm more qualified I'd like to travel to countries where education isn't a given like it is in the UK and help to change that."

Using his Spanish language skills, Liam wants to work in South America. "I don't know which organisation I'd like to work for yet, or what specific job I'd like to do – that's something I'll have to figure out."

For now, Liam will continue to inspire students closer to home. "As a young person in the UK, you have so many opportunities open to you. I want to open students' eyes to the chances that are presented to them every day but that they don't really see."

My typical day...

"If we're visiting a school, I'll normally meet the other Ambassador I'm doing the presentation with at around 8am," says Liam. Before the visit, the pair prepare a presentation based on the criteria provided by the languages teacher at the school. The presentation could take the form of an assembly or a language masterclass and could be in front of between 10 to 150 students.

"We'll talk about ourselves and our fellow students' experiences of studying languages. I'm only 19 years old, so I was in the same place as these kids five years ago. I really try to hammer home how important it is to

keep studying French, Spanish, German or Chinese, for example, while they've still got the opportunities open to them."

Liam has to fit the school visits around his university timetable. As well as the visits, Liam's role as Senior Student Languages Ambassador means he also works out of the Routes into Languages office, based at Newcastle University's School of Modern Languages.

"This entails responding to emails, calling up schools to try to organise visits and filling out feedback forms. These tasks all feed back into the main programme to make sure it runs smoothly."

