

# Is this the future of language learning?

As we learn to adapt to a shifting international landscape, a new approach to developing our young people as competent linguists could prove crucial, says **Clodagh Cooney**

*“Since the EU referendum outcome, there has been widespread recognition that the UK needs languages more than ever, but this will only become a reality if government and school leaders, including governors, lead the implementation of the EBacc and support EBacc departments, including language departments, in overcoming the various challenges that have been acknowledged in the DfE’s response to the consultation. This will require a culture change: a shift with regards to the general perception of and attitude towards languages and language learning across society is necessary to also explore the exciting opportunities that are hidden behind these challenges.”*

Statement by the Association for Language Learning on the publication of the DfE’s response to the EBacc consultation

As well as promoting the development of language policies which reflect the linguistic diversity and the language needs of the country and its population, the Association for Language Learning aims to advance public understanding of language learning, including the techniques, approaches and opportunities that are available to maximise the chance of it being successful.

Following the EBacc consultation, the government’s revised target is for 90% of pupils to take EBacc subjects by 2025, with the interim expectation that 75% of pupils will be studying this combination of subjects (including a language) by 2022. With the further decline in numbers of students studying languages at GCSE and A Level as announced by Ofqual in June, though, how can we inspire and motivate students to get on board with this change?

One way could be through Language Futures – an exciting, highly personalised and innovative approach to languages teaching and learning.



Led by the Association for Language Learning and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, it has been designed to foster deep learner engagement and enable students to take responsibility for their own learning, which they are encouraged to extend beyond the classroom. As part of the approach, students choose a language they wish to study, with several languages being learnt in any one classroom situation, and students being encouraged to learn both in and across language groups.

## Mentor support

Designed by Linton Village College in Cambridgeshire in 2009, Language Futures aims to broaden languages provision, promote linguistic diversity and create independent and lifelong language learners. The role of the teacher represents a fundamental difference in this approach. Whilst he or she must be an expert linguist with a deep understanding of how languages are learnt, and the strategies required to support this, in the Language Futures classroom he or she will not be the expert in all – or even any – of the specific languages chosen by the

students. Instead, students are supported in their language learning by mentors, volunteers from the local community who speak the languages that students have chosen to learn and can offer a more immersive experience.

## Immersive empowerment

“The Language Futures programme has been running at Linton Village College since 2009 and is taught during the school day as part of the curriculum,” explains Siobhan Judge, languages teacher at the school. “We currently have 34 Year 9 students who have chosen to study Arabic, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Norwegian, Russian and Turkish. Students immerse themselves in their chosen language and its culture with the support of volunteer community mentors who are either native speakers or have learnt the language themselves. This imaginative and enabling approach provides pupils with lifelong learning skills, enabling them to learn any language in the future.”

Pupils also speak very powerfully about the impact of the approach, how much they enjoy exercising choice in elements of how and what to learn, and how mentors bring both the language and the culture of the language alive. “Language Futures really suited me, because I could learn about what interested me, as well as what was required of me,” observes one participant in the programme, for example. “I loved being able to learn about the cultures of Spain and Latin America alongside the spoken and written language, because it felt like I was getting a more rounded, useful and adult Spanish language under my belt.”



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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