

Building a partnership: Bouygues and the Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College



Construction company Bouygues UK is part of a worldwide group comprising 132,000 in 80 countries. Their London-based operation, which specialises in designing and building hospitals, schools and social housing, employs people of 30 different nationalities. With French alongside English as the corporate language, the Business Language Champions programme proved a perfect fit for an international business with a direct interest in supporting those in education.

Working with Dr Luisa Bonelli, assistant headteacher at the Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College, Danielle Jackson at Bouygues UK, herself a languages graduate, organised a visit during February 2009 to the school in order to bring home to students the value of languages at work. 28 year 11 students in the top set for French were involved. Having taken their GCSE French a year early, the event gave them an opportunity to learn why they might continue with their study through to A Level.

Video showed the company's activities around the world

Danielle and HR colleague Anne-Laure Michon, a native French speaker, both introduced the day and talked in French about their own experience of using languages. An icebreaker memory game followed where students had to name objects in French which were first revealed and then hidden, with the winners getting chocolate as a reward.

Students really enjoyed the presentation which followed, including a video of Bouygues' activities across the world – showing clearly how different languages are used in the building industry in countries like Cyprus, Hong Kong, Russia and Singapore. Students asked about whether they too could work abroad, what languages they might need – and what level of French they'd need to work for Bouygues. They were surprised to learn that a business would pay for them to have training to improve their language skills.

A range of materials were used on the day to bring the presentation to life – diversity posters published by Bouygues depicting hard hats with



flowers on or made out of denim, showing an inclusive side to the industry students might not have been aware of. Giveaways such as keyrings and pens went down well.

The school and business partners were already looking ahead to the next event, and asked students during the presentation and video to take notes about Bouygues so that some of them could be selected to present in French during a visit to the building company's offices on 25 March. 14 students made the half-day trip to Waterloo, where they were also given a tour of the building. A prize was given to the student who delivered the best presentation, with Business Language Champions certificates going to every student who participated.

A new insight into how languages are used in business

The impact on students was already clear after this initial event, as they saw how languages are used in life and in business, and learned why for example a company might train its staff in languages because of their importance in international communications. The team at Bouygues enjoyed the opportunity to communicate with young people who benefit from many of their projects – indeed students will see the company logo on the site of a new social housing project in Brent.



Danielle, who works on undergraduate programmes and work placements at Bouygues, felt that the events were extremely successful from the business and student perspective: "Both days gave the girls an opportunity to understand the importance of languages in the wider world and in a business context. We also hopefully gave them an insight into construction as a exciting international career opportunity – it certainly isn't one I was aware of at their age!"

Year 11 student Carla Fonseca described the new insight she gained from the Bouygues visit: "It showed us that languages are very useful and that we should always aim to know more than one language as people appreciate it and it is good for business."

Find out more



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