

Case study



Civil Service volunteers teach Beckenham students about languages and the European Union



Whether in European, national or local government, many civil servants can benefit from language skills and cultural knowledge in their day-to-day work. In February 2010, Simon Milward and Kathryn Mason – both Fast Streamers from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) – and Miles Perry, an economist at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) visited Cator Park School in Beckenham on an ‘enrichment day’ – to talk to 130 Year 9 languages students about the importance of languages in the European Union.

Four sessions of an hour each were run throughout the morning. Each session started with a quiz as an icebreaker, where students had to guess which language different words came from. Students were split into teams and gained points for guessing the correct language as each word was read out. Then one of the civil servants gave a talk – explaining which languages they speak, how they had learned them and what positive experiences they had enjoyed as a result of speaking different languages.

Students formed a mini European Council and debated how to tackle climate change

The four civil servants then organised a mini ‘European Council’. The students were split into groups – each group becoming a ‘Council of Ministers’, and each student representing a different country. The Council was then presented with a number of different projects for tackling climate change on a European level and had to agree which one to choose. This was a challenging task in English – just imagine if everybody around the table spoke different languages...

The students benefited hugely from the day, being able to meet English speakers (other than their teachers) who’d learned and used foreign languages. At the same time they found out more about the European Union and the role of government. “The ‘council of students’ resembles situations that civil servants have to deal with regularly, so it was really encouraging to see the different ways the students interacted, negotiated and came up with different solutions,” added Miles Perry of Defra. “I hope some of them are making policy in 20 years’ time.”

Find out more

www.civilservice.gov.uk
www.catorpark.bromley.sch.uk

For more on Business Language Champions in London, visit
www.rln-london.com/champions

