

“Making the most of Community Language skills”

11th June 2007

Summary report



An event hosted at the Royal Society of Arts by
Regional Language Network London

Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Summary of the event	3
3 Guest speakers	4
4 Facilitated discussions	6
a. Challenges	8
b. Settings	9
c. Tips and Solutions	10
d. Scenarios and presentations	11
5 Next steps	12
Appendix 1 – Feedback from delegates	14
Appendix 2 – List of organisations represented at the event	16

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Introduction

When Londoners are conservatively estimated to speak 300 languages, it begs the question - how can we harness this linguistic diversity for new business, employment and training opportunities? Regional Language Network (RLN) London, with support from the London Development Agency, held this event in order to encourage debate and sharing of views – and most importantly to agree collectively a way forward for Community Languages in the capital.

Documents and presentations from the event are available to download from the RLN London website at www.rln-london.com/events. Following the publication of this report, a new strand of the Regional Language Network London website for Community Languages will be developed, to which we will encourage the continued contribution of those attending the event and other stakeholders.

1. Summary of the event

Over forty people from a wide range of organisations with an interest in Community Languages in London attended, especially:

- further, adult and higher education curriculum leaders with responsibility for languages, ESOL and/or vocational programmes;
- representatives from training and other organisations in the community and voluntary sector;
- representatives of employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors.;
- funding bodies;
- examination boards.

A full list of organisations represented is included in Appendix 2

With a balance between thought-provoking sharing of knowledge by guest keynote speakers and interactive discussions, delegates were very positive in their feedback after the event. Their comments are supplied as Appendix 1 at the end of this report. Input from the workshops in particular has helped to form the 'next steps' in section 5 as we work towards a plan for supporting Community Languages in London.

2. Guest speakers

There follow synopses of the two speakers' presentations – their slideshows in full are available to download in the Events area of the RLN London website www.rln-london.com/Events.

a. *Professor Itesh Sachdev, Head of the School of Languages, SOAS 'Higher Education and Community Languages'*



Professor Itesh Sachdev

Professor Sachdev presented on the background and history of Community Languages in the UK, taking us through the different ideologies that have prevailed – from assimilation in the 1970s to civic ideology from the 1980s where languages were valued and supported – and in the post September 11 era, a mooted shift back to assimilation.

He made arguments in favour of Community Languages on three levels:

- **Instrumental benefits** in the globalised world, for example in business relations and international travel;
- **Social and cultural benefits**, for identity and inter-community cohesion;
- **Cognitive benefits of being bilingual or multilingual** which are supported by research.

He further described the activities of the School of Oriental and African Studies and the SOAS-UCL Centre of Excellence in the Teaching and Learning of Languages of the Wider World, funded by HEFCE. Delegates were made aware of a range of other initiatives connecting back to SOAS and higher education.

b. Diana Muallem, Consultant

'Making the most of Community Language skills: opportunities and challenges'



Diana Muallem, Consultant

Diana presented on the opportunities and challenges presented by Community Languages. They can become a national asset, and it cannot be denied that awareness is growing for a number of reasons including:

- **Focus on intercultural understanding in society and education;**
- **2012 Games as an international event;**
- **LSC priorities.**

Other possibilities lie in embedding languages in programmes such as the Foundation Learning Tier and the 14-19 Diplomas and in allying case making for Community Languages to general promotional activity for all languages.

Challenges lie in raising awareness of the importance and value of language skills, and encouraging take-up post-16 – as well as in finding resources, and developing staff to deliver language learning. A way forward should include partnerships, sharing of best practice and different modes of delivery for languages.

3. Facilitated discussions¹

During the facilitated discussions, participants were asked to think about the benefits and importance of harnessing Community Language skills. The specific objective was to draw out the priorities for a strategy to support Community Languages in London. This was achieved by considering the challenges of using Community Languages as a route to employment, training and community participation, the settings in which community languages are particularly valuable and tips and solutions to overcoming any barriers

It was acknowledged that the term 'Community Language' means different things to different people. However, for the purposes of the workshop, Community Languages were defined as those spoken by members of minority groups or communities within a majority language context. This could include languages that are also considered to be 'world' languages.



Jane Collis, RLN London Manager Heather Barker, Facilitator

¹ The workshop was led by consultant Heather Barker, and groups were facilitated by RLN consultants Dominic Luddy and Pinky Sidhu, presenter Diana Muallem and Comenius London manager Caroline Conlon.

The benefits

Benefits of using Community Languages relate to the individual, the business and to the wider community.

For the individual there are:

- cultural and social benefits in maintaining and developing languages and the social network;
- educational benefits in providing a wide range of ability;
- employment-related benefits in terms of access to jobs.

For employers there are business benefits in:

- having a multilingual workforce able to communicate with a multilingual customer base;
- employing individuals who not only are able to speak the language but may also have an insight into the culture of different communities.

For the wider social community there are benefits in:

- improved understanding;
- social and cultural integration.



Group 1

The key points arising from the group discussions were as follows:

a. Challenges

What are the key challenges and / or barriers to using Community Languages as a route to employment, training and community participation?

1. *English is enough*: the preconceived view of how British people are, and are allowed to be – think Brits abroad – suggests that English is enough. This culture of monolingualism can be hard to overcome.
2. *Training needs*: for staff delivering Community Language learning to offer all levels of study, and for effective interpreting services.
3. *Fragmented initiatives*: funding is available for various phases of education, for businesses, for employer organisations and for voluntary bodies to support speakers of Community Languages (often with an ESOL / EAL focus rather than on Community Languages per se). However, there is little attempt to co-ordinate research and initiatives and little opportunity to learn from good practice of small-scale initiatives.
4. *Lack of understanding of the value of Community Languages*: in society, education and workplace, their importance is hard to quantify – and they suffer by comparison with mainstream European and ‘world’ languages. Speakers of Community Languages may fail to recognise that these skills can have value and an application beyond the home.
5. *Lack of resources*: there are limited resources to support Community Languages in education and scarcer resources than for many other themes in social inclusion.

b. Settings

In which settings are community languages particularly valuable?

1. *Events*: there are many high profile events (and many on a smaller scale) which can be connected with the Community Languages agenda. Notable examples are the 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games and World Skills 2011.
2. *Workplace*: Community Languages become most relevant in frontline roles especially in the public services (for example in the police) and in interpreting roles, and there may be scope for harnessing them in commercial settings such as tourism and hospitality.
3. *Community setting*: Community Languages have tremendous value as a target subject or indeed the medium language in family learning and other community initiatives; their use can advance social cohesion.
4. *Media*: high profile speakers of Community Languages can influence interest and take-up; foreign language programming would encourage immersion in and exposure to other languages.



Group 4

c. Tips and solutions

How can these challenges be overcome? What resources, information and support are necessary?

These headline solutions are developed more fully in the 'Next steps' section 5.

1. *Mapping of initiatives and provision:* for better access to labour market information and a more joined-up approach.
2. *Sharing of best practice and promotion:* through websites, newsletters, events and networking.
3. *Embedding in other schemes:* for example kitemarks such as IIP, the LDA's 'Diversity Works' programme and initiatives like the LSC's 'Train to Gain'.
4. *Intercultural understanding and culture:* build on the growing interest in this for example in the school curriculum.
5. *Improving employer guidance:* for example on how they recruit for language skills, and how to identify existing skills in the workforce.



Group 2

d. Scenarios and presentations

Groups developed project ideas to be presented in a two-minute pitch based on scenarios in which they were bidding for funding to a business group or a panel of community organisations.

Innovative ideas and presentations emerged from the discussions, highlighting key themes:

- the potential for sponsorship from the private sector and the support of high-profile champions
- an emphasis on projects in Hospitality and Tourism and for the public services and interpreting in the health sector
- allying projects with other topical themes such as healthy eating
- considering income generation as part of the project through the development of 'products', such as bags with multilingual logos
- building in business benefits such as improved retention and communication for companies and organisations
- opportunities to use the 'buzz' and 'feel good' factor of the 2012 Games for projects with international and community links
- community-based projects involving family learning and new partnerships across London's communities and organisations
- work with schools as a focal point for involving the wider community of parents and adult population
- developing community ambassadors and volunteers



Group 3

4. Next steps

The following recommendations are based on input from delegates at the event and our understanding of the use of community languages in a wider context. With support and new resources, these can help to advance the Community Languages agenda for London and feed into an action plan. RLN London will discuss these recommendations with partners and funding bodies and use them as the basis for developing an implementation plan.

I. **Mapping existing provision and initiatives**

Carry out a survey of provision for Community Languages in the post-16 sector (FE, HE and voluntary / commercial sector), interpreting and teacher training - leading to case-making for joined-up approaches and action. This could be allied to labour market information on languages spoken in the population and provide a powerful gap analysis.

II. **Creation of an information, networking and focal point**

Set up a one-stop-shop led by Regional Language Network London, that provides on-line access to information on news, events and networking opportunities focused on Community Languages. It will also serve as a platform to share best practice.

III. **Gathering, disseminating and embedding best practice**

Disseminate good practice for languages and diversity and use to influence IIP, LDA's 'Diversity Works', LSC's 'Train to Gain', other programmes and kitemarks. Use the same information to improve employer guidance.

IV. **Capacity-building and resources**

Investigate ways of sharing existing resources and create new resources where gaps are identified. A need for vocational Community Language learning and teaching resources has been identified in addition to training for lecturers, teachers and specialists such as interpreters. Pilot programmes could include building provision for Community Languages into Specialist Diplomas for those with existing skills (or *ab initio*).

V. **Promotion of positive messages**

Develop a collaborative campaign to tackle the undervaluing of Community Language skills and intercultural understanding. This could involve employers, those in the education sector and in London's communities. Employers and community leaders could champion languages through case studies illustrating workplace and academic success, community initiatives and the cognitive benefits of bilingualism.

VI. Events and the media

Use events such as the 2012 Games and World Skills 2011 as a natural stage to raise awareness of the value of Community Language skills and to show the tangible difference they can make. Ensure the media are fully engaged.



Nadine Collins, Senior Olympic Skills and Employment Manager, London Development Agency, delivering her closing remarks.

Appendix 1

Feedback from delegates

A selection of comments made by delegates on their feedback sheets – with reference to specific areas for development.

Thinking to the future, please add any further information, ideas and best practice that we can feed into our final report, 'Making the most of Community Language skills'.

- > CPD for interpreters – how do we make it happen?
- > What can we learn from BSL and signing systems for other languages?
- > Need to develop an assessor's qualification for Community Languages.
- > I work on a project to further community interpreting training throughout the regions of England ...it is valued by several local authority interpreting and translation services.
- > Interest in proposed mapping of activity, possible duplication/gaps.
- > Interested in plans to co-ordinate existing partnerships/networks in the area of Community Languages.
- > Would like contact details of people and organisations represented.
- > Look forward to an action plan based on recommendations – including funding bodies.
- > Better cohesion between local education authorities and local communities very important. Example – Panjabi event at King's College London.
- > Consider the role of a high profile Community Languages speaker and how they might promote the benefits of being bilingual / multilingual.

General comments on the event

- > Very useful – I gained knowledge of the different initiatives concerning Community Languages.
- > Well organised – all useful!
- > Very useful to network and see where my organisation can fit in with Community Languages.
- > Very good, collaborative atmosphere. Very inspirational.

- > Very good – only area I'd try to improve is making sure everyone was aware of the different scenarios at the end.
- > It was all very interesting. Thank you.
- > I was hoping for a better idea what policies and measures are already in place.
- > The practical task-based approach to the event was very stimulating.
- > It was very uplifting to hear such positive attitudes concerning Community Languages.
- > Small group sessions were well chaired.
- > Well organised and educational.

Appendix 2

List of organisations represented at the event.

Agroni Research
Asset Languages
Chartered Institute of Linguists
CILT, the National Centre for Languages
City of Westminster College
City Lit
College of North East London
Comenius London
GoSkills
Greenwich Community College
GRIP NHS Language Services
Institute of Education
King's College
Learning and Skills Council
Leyton Sixth Form College
London Development Agency
Making Training Work
Merton Adult College
NATECLA
Praxis
Refugees Into Jobs
RLN London
SOAS
Social Action for Health
Stanmore College
Tower Hamlets College
University of Westminster
West Thames College