

London's language skills: a vision for London 2012



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Contents

2.
London:
Multi-lingual
capital

3.
Languages in
London's
education
system

4.
London's
language
professionals

5.
Language
support for
London's
public services

6.
Innovative
language
technologies

Five virtuous circles

Five virtuous circles

This briefing highlights the five symbolic circles of London's language skills and knowledge and aims to show that our capital has the potential to harness this pool of talent to great effect for London Olympics and Paralympics in 2012. The vision to bring these five elements together into one virtuous circle embracing Londoners' language expertise will contribute a lasting legacy for a diverse global capital.

London: a truly multi-lingual capital

London, one of the most multi-lingual and multi-cultural capitals in the world, has an enviable second language and cultural resource. Its resident communities come from over 90 countries including 38 communities of over 10,000 people and a further 20 of over 5,000¹. One in four Londoners is from an ethnic minority group, and over three hundred languages² are used by Londoners.

Proposer

The Regional Language Network London (RLN) promotes a greater national capability in language and cultural skills for business and employment. It is supported by CILT, the National Centre for Languages, the government's recognised centre of expertise for languages, and plays a key role in England's unfolding National Languages Strategy. For this briefing RLN London has consulted a wide range of language service providers and organisations that support the London bid.

Why are languages important for the Games?

A successful London bid will require language skills and expertise for the **translation** of programmes, guides, visitor information and way-finding; voice-overs and **foreign language versioning** of video and audio material; **interpreters** for individuals, officials, teams and the press; **language and cultural training** for frontline and other roles; **multi-lingual support** in public and emergency services; **website globalisation and localisation** for businesses and organisations – all supported by innovative **language technologies**. A managed languages strategy for the Games will guarantee excellence in professional international communication and also create opportunities to harness, develop and use London's vast language talent.

¹ Think London website www.thinklondon.com

² Multilingual Capital: The languages of London's schoolchildren and their relevance to economic, social and educational policies, edited by Philip Baker and John Eversley, 2000, Battlebridge Publications

Languages in London's education system: a wealth of talent and expertise

London's Higher Education Institutes (HEI) and Further and Adult Education Colleges offer courses in **over seventy languages from Arabic to Zulu**. They serve not only the business community and international organisations, but also the communities in the capital, whose language skills are a cornerstone of personal and commercial links across the world – a key attribute of London's diversity.

There are around **11,000³ undergraduate and postgraduate foreign language students** in the twenty London HEIs that offer foreign language degrees. A recent survey⁴ identified even greater numbers studying other language programmes, with an additional **15,000 students following optional or degree credited language courses** in eleven London HEIs. Expertise in specialist and vocational language programmes and translation/interpreting courses for business, diplomatic and public services makes an important contribution, along with the language skills of bi-lingual UK students and the **65,000 international students** in London's HEIs. The capital's universities are a key source of current and future language professionals, expertise and technology.

Many of the **400,000 students** in London's **Further and Adult Education** colleges are **bi-lingual**, and thousands take up opportunities to improve their language skills in programmes at many levels. **One central London college⁵** enrolled over **7,000 students on part-time foreign language courses in 2003/4** – demonstrating Londoners' desire to communicate with other communities at home and abroad. Another college⁶ has 27 teenaged native speakers studying Turkish A Level and runs beginners' courses for the friends of the Turkish community. Similar developments are happening elsewhere in other heritage languages.

Nearly a quarter of London schoolchildren speak a language other than English at home and the vast majority of all pupils learn a second language in their school career. By 2012 today's schoolchildren will be young adults. Imagine the impact on the perceived value and prestige of languages used at home and learned at school, if languages were at the heart of pre-Games cultural, employment-related and volunteer programmes. Imagine also the impact on visitors in 2012 of a drive to use languages as a key customer service feature for a warm welcome and access to information and services.

³ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Records of individual enrolments at HE institutions (2002/3), The headcount covers students registered on a higher education programme that includes the study of a language as a single honours, major honours, one of a joint double, one of a triple or as a minor subject combination

⁴ Association of University Language Centres' (AULC) survey of degree credited and non-degree programmes 2003/4 (not included in the HESA statistics above)

⁵ Statistics provided by City Lit

⁶ Information provided by Westminster Kingsway College

London's language professionals

With historical links across the world and a large and growing multi-lingual population it is not surprising that the capital is home to professional associations of linguists and practitioners with international membership and standing. Their expert services in translation, interpreting, localisation, versioning, language training and cultural consultancy will be of paramount importance to a successful international communication strategy for the Games.

Regional Language Network London offers signposting to **BLIS Professionals**, a free on-line quality-assured database to search for translators, interpreters, language trainers and cultural consultants from the commercial and public sector. It contains over 1,380 UK and international registrants including around 350 providers in London alone. www.blis.org.uk/professionals

The Association of Translation Companies (ATC) is the world's longest established professional body representing the interests of translation companies, and serves the needs of translation purchasers. Its surveys reveal that a quarter of the UK's translation service providers are based in the capital. www.atc.org.uk

Conference Interpreters UK is a member of Visit London and the contact point for the 125 UK-based members of AICC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters. Free advice on interpreting needs is offered. All members are vetted and experienced professionals, who work at top-level international conferences and smaller meetings, and some have experience at the Athens Games or previous similar events. www.conferenceinterpreters.co.uk

The Institute of Linguists Group (IoL) includes an international membership organisation of language practitioners and an accredited exam board. Many of the IoL's six and half thousand members offer language services through its database. The IoL subsidiary, Language Services Ltd, provides customised language solutions to businesses, government departments and private sector organisations ranging from translating/interpreting to language dubbing and skills assessments. Also see page 5. www.iol.org.uk

The **Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI)** has over 2,500 members worldwide and around 760 Associates and Qualified Members living within 25 miles of London and is one of the UK's primary sources of information on language services. ITI promotes the highest standards in the profession and plays a key role in promoting cross-border trade in products and services. The ITI office refers enquirers, free of charge, to qualified, experienced freelance professionals or corporate members. www.iti.org.uk

Language support for London's public services

The capital's track record in embracing linguistic diversity for its public services is an important factor for the London 2012 bid. Language support services have become a fundamental part of the communications strategies of London's hospitals, doctors' surgeries, local authorities, police forces and criminal justice agencies. Telephone and face-to-face interpreting, translation and other technology-assisted and interactive solutions are already offered as public services seek to ensure equality of access for residents and visitors who speak little or no English or who have visual or hearing impairments. The seamless operation of such services for routine and emergency situations will be essential for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

There are many examples of good practice and of demonstrable goodwill on the part of public service providers to meet these communication challenges. The Metropolitan Police, for example, introduced a telephone interpreting service for '999' calls during 2004 and holds a central register of interpreters for to meet the needs of non-English speakers. For many public service organisations, the Institute of Linguists' subsidiary, the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), is the preferred means of locating quality assured and security cleared interpreters for the criminal justice sector, the health sector and local government.

There is still, however, much to be done to ensure consistency of quality, standards and access to appropriate language support services. In this connection the London Health Commission is working towards an ambitious plan to set standards and create guidelines for language support services across all public services in the capital. RLN London has been commissioned to conduct the first phase of research for the project.

The prospect of London hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games provides further impetus to the quest drive up standards, disseminate best practice and maximise the efficient use of resources in language support services. London's resident communities of second language users and those with visual or hearing impairment will benefit from such improvements and from the training and employment opportunities needed to deliver enhanced services.

Innovative language technologies

The scale of communication challenges presented by the Games will require innovative technological solutions. Translation tools and interactive solutions alongside specialist services such as versioning and digital sub-titling allow handling of enquiries and access to information for non-English speakers in settings where it is difficult to achieve direct access to a second language or assisted communication user. Examples of such solutions are cited below to illustrate the potential for such technology.

Video sub-titling and dubbing are increasingly used by businesses and public services to provide information to foreign language speaking clients and users and people with visual or hearing impairment. In public areas multi-lingual audible information, such as 'Talksign', accessible by touch sensitive activation helps meet Disability Discrimination Act requirements as well as the needs of non-English speakers.

The LTC-Communicator⁷ is a **multilingual eCommunication tool** allowing non-English speaking users to interact with different service providers. For Olympic and Paralympic Games held in London, LTC Communicator could be integrated with an existing website to provide a **helpdesk** for tourists, organisers and athletes, requiring information in a wide range of languages. The user and the helpdesk team **do not need** to share a **common language**, as user requests are routed through the LTC-Communicator translation components, displayed to the helpdesk in English, whose solution is then routed back through the translation environment to appear in the user's language.

Technology may also have a part to play in responding to the huge **language and cultural training** commitment for the Games. With broadband networks giving fast, reliable connectivity, **live, collaborative teaching networks**⁸ allow the tutor to create learning groups easily in a 'virtual classroom' bringing together students of a similar skill level, time availability and language need irrespective of their geographical location. The development of the e-learning domain will permit more flexible and spontaneous responses to training needs.

⁷ Information provided by The Language Technology Centre Limited

⁸ Information provided by Sanako UK Ltd

The last word

The 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games present an opportunity to tap Londoners' language skills and expertise to create a legacy of improved communication for the benefit of visitors and the capital's communities – but the last word goes to Paula Radcliffe:

"For me sport and languages go hand in hand; both have the power to bring people together and open doors. That's why, as the London 2012 team work on the Olympic bid, I am keen to encourage Londoners to use and develop their foreign language skills - for themselves, for businesses and organisations and for London as a great multi-lingual capital."

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