

Case study

John Laing and languages: picking up new skills for work and play

John Laing
making infrastructure happen

John Laing plc, like many UK businesses, is becoming more international. A leading owner and manager of public sector infrastructure in the UK and overseas, they have just opened offices in Canada, Prague, Singapore and New York. This global dimension is important for the business, although language skills are not employed in everyone's day to day work.

However, languages are valuable for socialising as well as in the workplace, and can help to develop a whole range of other business skills. Katherine Malins, a commercial analyst at John Laing who studied French, Spanish and Portuguese at university, saw that language-themed get-togethers could help colleagues to network across the business, develop communication skills and even coaching skills.

Nearly 50 people signed up for the Language Club



The 'Language Club' was started in early 2008, following a communication in the internal company newsletter asking employees to register their interest and awareness-raising lunchtime seminars by Regional Language Network London in January. Nearly 50 people put their name down for either French, German or Spanish groups. Some staff even offered to help with the co-ordination of the Club, and were assigned to lead each language group.

The 'Language Club' was started in early 2008, following a communication in the internal company newsletter asking employees to register their interest and awareness-raising lunchtime seminars by Regional Language Network London in

rln london
regional language network

Events and activities have been coming thick and fast, hosted both at John Laing's offices and outside. The French group held a meal at a French restaurant in February 2008, attended by staff with all levels of French language ability – encouraging each other to try out their language skills. This was followed by a French film night at John Laing's on-site café showing 'Le Dîner des Cons'. Meanwhile the Spanish and German groups have held a film night (Almadóvar's 'Hable con Ella') and enjoyed a meal at the Bavarian Beerhouse in Old Street.

Plans for language learning classes

Plans are in place for language learning classes at CityLit in Holborn (an operation for which John Laing actually provides facility management services) during May and June, and with a regular slot now in the internal newsletter plus a zone on the company intranet, interest remains strong for all three languages.



Katherine is pleased to have given colleagues the stimulus they needed to pick up new languages – or perhaps refresh skills they haven't used for a while. "I was surprised by the take-up, especially considering people have to give up their own time at lunch or in the evening. It goes to show the enthusiasm people have for language skills – whether for work or pleasure. Outside the Language Club, I'm now learning Czech which should help me when I'm in contact with our new Prague office. It's great to see others go that extra mile with their language learning."

Find out more

A language club or similar activity could help your business. For more information about John Laing and its Language Club, visit www.laing.com or contact Katherine Malins on katherine.malins@laing.com.

For information and advice on languages and culture, go to www.rln-london.com.

