

Case study

Languages and culture at work



West End's Red Caps offer a multilingual welcome to visiting shoppers

New West End Company is an organisation dedicated to promoting London's West End as a shopping destination to visitors from all over the world. Their multilingual team of Red Cap Street Wardens, with their excellent customer service skills and recent training in simple phrases and understanding of different cultures, is making overseas visitors feel at home in London's Bond Street, Oxford Street and Regent Street.



With the West End thriving as a shopping district and tourist numbers growing in advance of the 2012 Games, languages and cultural knowledge are more important than ever. The team of 15 Red Caps are around half from the UK and half from overseas – including a Hungarian, an Italian and a Polish warden. They've also taken time to learn other languages that are new to them including Spanish, French and Portuguese.

Learning how to 'Welcome the World'

Building on their already impressive skills and knowledge, a number of Red Caps undertook training as part of Regional Language Network London's one-day 'Welcoming the World' programme, giving them a huge confidence boost in dealing with overseas visitors from a wide range of countries. Focusing on Arabic and Polish, but gaining an understanding of cultural differences across the world, they also took away a handy, pocket-sized phrasebook from their day's training.

Even months after the course, they're using their newly acquired knowledge and phrases on a daily basis, whether in orientating lost shoppers or helping to resolve difficult situations in store. Their Jamaican team member has been encouraged to learn Mandarin recently, and the team is looking to add an Indian language such as Hindi to their collective knowledge, as well as German.

Speaking to London's visitors in their language always gets a smile

Red Cap Abdul Miloudi, a native Algerian who speaks Arabic, French and Spanish and attended the training, described the difference that languages and cultural awareness can make in their work. "I get such a buzz out of just saying 'Good morning' in Polish for example. Visitors find it surprising and it always gets a smile – you're recognising where they come from. The other day my supervisor called me to Optical Express on Oxford Street, where a French-speaking student was lost and clearly distressed. I used my French to help calm him down and got the contact details for the school teacher in charge. I phoned him and the student was reunited with his group in less than ten minutes."



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New West End Company www.newwestend.com

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