

Learning the true worth of languages in the workplace

Oakland International Ltd working with St Augustine's Catholic High School



St Augustine's Catholic High School, in Redditch, Worcestershire provides a Christ-centred learning community for thirteen to eighteen-year-olds. Incorporated in their commitment to learning is considerable emphasis on the importance of languages, which is why, in February 2007, the school started working with local company Oakland International Ltd.

Oakland International Ltd, also based in Redditch, is a fast-growing multi-temperature storage, contract packing picking and logistics company. Established in 1998, Oakland works with a range of manufacturers and retailers worldwide, giving them valuable experience of languages in the workplace, which they were keen to pass on to the next generation of business people.

This project is part of the Business Language Champions programme, co-ordinated by the Regional Language Network (RLN) West Midlands. It is designed to bridge the gap between school and the workplace and to reverse the decline in the take up of modern foreign languages.

After an initial meeting between school, company and RLN, Oakland Managing Director Dean Attwell returned to St Augustine's with colleague Peter Vaughan to talk to all of the Year 9 options groups.

Through interactive presentations, which included a company overview, a practical exercise in dealing with overseas customers and a breakdown of how much more people with language skills were likely to earn within the company, Dean and Peter communicated the importance of languages within their business. Both agreed that the students seemed genuinely pleased to have someone from 'the outside world' talking to them about the increasing need for languages in the workplace.

Delighted with the response from students, Dean returned to the school on 13 March 2007 to talk to a combined Year 11 French and German group, focusing more heavily on the kind of tasks multilingual staff could expect to take on at Oakland.

Following the presentations, Year 9 pupils prepared phrases in several languages for Dean to make use of at work as well as helping him to design posters to display around

the workplace. To create more awareness a press release and photograph were circulated to the press, with articles appearing in four local papers.

The collaboration between these two organisations has had an extremely positive impact, with the number of students opting to study French at GCSE level doubling from 33 to 67! Chris Marples, Head of Modern Foreign Languages at St Augustine's was delighted with this increase:

“We have been extremely lucky to have worked with someone as enthusiastic and productive as Dean, not only because the number of pupils opting to take languages has increased dramatically but also because all students seem more enthusiastic about languages. We hope that we can build on this inspiration and continue working with Dean in the future.”

As Dean is keen to point out, this has also been a valuable exercise for the company:

“We were asked some very interesting questions during these sessions which has enabled us to bring a few lessons back to our business in terms of tailoring our recruitment methods slightly differently and offering more comprehensive personal development plans to support young people in our business.”

“I would recommend other businesses to give up some of their time to talk to local schools about how language skills can give you an advantage in the world of work. It's a lot of fun and I guarantee that you will feel good about having gone back to school to lend a hand to your future team members.”

(566 words)

Below: Broadening career horizons: Dean Attwell (centre) with Chris Everall (second row, far-right) and Year 9 students at St Augustine's Catholic High School.



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