

Learning from the best – questioning a renowned entrepreneur about the real use of languages in business

Paget High School in Burton working with Angela Maxwell, MD of Acuwomen.



Paget High is an 11 -18 school based in Burton on Trent, Staffordshire. The school teaches French and German and is committed to improving attainment within all subject areas, which is why in February 2008, they began working with local entrepreneur, Angela Maxwell, to encourage more students to continue with their language studies.

Angela, who is currently MD of Acuwomen, the UK's first company to bring a group of all-female entrepreneurs under one roof, shot to fame when she turned Fracino, the UK's only manufacturer of espresso and cappuccino coffee machines, into a world-class leading brand. She was also formerly an advisor to UK Trade and Investment and has recently become regional ambassador for the Women's Enterprise Network.

With her vast range of experience and enthusiasm, Angela was well placed to offer local students a perspective on languages beyond the classroom and so the RLN arranged for her to visit Paget High School, on 5 February 2008, to talk with students about the importance of language skills in business.

At an initial meeting between Angela, the school and the RLN, it was decided to hold specially extended assemblies for Year 9 pupils in order to allow plenty of time for questions after Angela's talks.

During the assemblies, Angela recalled her experience of using languages, including being honoured by the Queen at Buckingham Palace for outstanding contribution to UK Trade and Industry. Pupils were then split into groups to question Angela about why they need languages and how businesses make use of such skills.

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.

The talks were well received and students seemed to gain a lot from the session through the various questions they had prepared beforehand. As Janet Nash, head of languages, said:

“Angela’s talk made students realise the importance of learning a language and that speaking another language is a vitally important business asset in a competitive world. Rapid expansion and globalisation means that students with a language will have a competitive edge in the market place and we hope that this realisation will increase the take up of languages at Key Stage 4.

“We intend to introduce business-based language courses and challenges in the future and look forward to working with Angela again.” She added.

Angela was delighted to be involved in the programme:

“I thoroughly enjoyed my visit, as it became clear that by exploring the variety of options open to those that study languages offered the students a new perspective on the world of work.”

To publicise the event and create more awareness of the programme, the RLN organised for a press release to be sent to local papers and articles subsequently appeared in the Burton Mail and Burton Trader.

Angela’s and the department’s hard work paid off when the school confirmed that the number of language students had more than doubled from the previous year! From just 20 students last year, the school now has 41 students due to start language GCSEs in September 2008 – 18 will take French and 23 opted to take German in its first year of delivery.

Renewed interest in languages had spread throughout the department as French and German, were confirmed as Year 9 subjects. In fact, the languages bug seems to have spread throughout the school as Janet Nash confirmed:

“I think that pupils now realise that MFL is a serious subject and we are doing our best to raise the profile of MFL within the school. I am running a trip to Berlin and when I invited the Humanities Department to input, they seem delighted and happy to support us!”

The school is also planning to hold MFL Business Challenge Days later in 2008, for Year 8 students as well as Y5 students from local primary schools. Angela has been invited to return for these days to further inspire the next generation of linguists and entrepreneurs.

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Case study published by Regional Language Network West Midlands, for more information please contact the RLN on 0121 329 3297 or visit www.rln-westmidlands.com