

Undergraduate Participation in German-Language Outreach Activities

Report prepared by Dr Charlotte Ryland and the Oxford German Network, with funding from the German Embassy in London.



Introduction

For this project we consulted members of the Think German Networks across the UK, as well as a number of outreach/schools liaison coordinators for university German departments. We held two focus groups for teachers, one for undergraduates, and one for undergraduate mentors in Wales, and conducted follow-up discussions with teachers and undergraduates in the Oxford area and beyond. We met representatives from the MFL Mentoring Programme in Wales, the Goethe-Institut London, the OWRI programme Creative Multilingualism and the organisation Translators in Schools.

This report comprises sections on ‘undergraduate involvement in outreach’ and ‘literary outreach’. We have attempted to strike a balance between blue-sky thinking – what outreach would ideally constitute if the resources were available – and what is possible in the current funding environment. We close with some general conclusions about and recommendations for the Think German networks.

Part I: Undergraduate Participation

Part II: Literary Outreach

Part III: Think German Networks

I. Undergraduate Participation

Undergraduates are currently involved in outreach in ad hoc ways (giving tours on an Open Day, for example) and structured ways (such as the MFL Mentoring scheme in Wales). Where the participation is structured, the impact tends to be high, and attempts to formalise ad hoc participation have also been effective. This section of the report begins with some general reflections on the benefits of undergraduate participation and good practice in the field, before presenting five examples of structured approaches.

Introduction

Teachers and outreach practitioners generally give very positive feedback about undergraduate participation. The students' enthusiasm and proximity in age to school pupils are major advantages. Being able to talk about their Year Abroad makes the experience of studying languages very tangible and its door-opening, life-enhancing aspects obvious. Outreach practitioners (e.g. university Widening Participation officers) are very positive about undergraduates visiting schools, with the general sense being: what the students do when they are there is less important than their being there and being inspirational, friendly, encouraging and well prepared.

The following features represent good practice in undergraduate outreach:

- A training programme, however simple. This need not be in person, it can be a guidelines/FAQs document and a point-of-contact for any questions that arise.
- Peer support. Students should be put in contact with those who've already been involved in outreach work, developing a sense of community and providing opportunities for discussion and support.
- A structured scheme, whereby interested undergraduates are inducted in their first year and then involved in appropriate ways throughout their university career. A student who has just returned from their YA, for example, has a different set of skills and needs from an incoming first year.
- Well-prepared students. They need to be prepared to answer the standard questions, to deal with any awkward questions that arise, and to modulate their plans for different levels of ability and group sizes.
- Resources. If the students are expected to give a content-based workshop (on translation, for example), then it is desirable to provide resources that can be adapted.
- DBS checks. If the student is going to spend time in a school setting, it is helpful (though not essential) for this to be in place.

The focus of this consultation has been on *undergraduate* involvement, but there is clearly scope for involving postgraduates in similar forms of engagement. In some universities there is an interest in training PGs to develop outreach materials and resources, and to deliver workshops in schools.

Types of outreach

Undergraduates are currently involved in outreach in a variety of ways, often on an ad hoc basis. The most common format is of a ‘Student Ambassador’ programme, whereby students are invited to take part in on-campus activities and events (Open Days, schools conferences, film screenings etc.). Five additional formalised schemes for undergraduates to visit schools are detailed below: the MFL Mentoring scheme in Wales; ‘Languages XP’ at the University of Manchester; an Undergraduate teaching module at the University of Leeds; programmes for visiting Erasmus students; and the ‘Adopt-a-Class’ scheme. Particular attention is paid to the ‘Adopt-a-Class’ scheme, since it has the advantages of being admin-light, cost-effective and scalable.

(a) Student Ambassadors

Student ambassadors (SAs) are the most common form of undergraduate outreach participant. This section highlights elements of good practice.

SAs are recruited from the student body (including postgraduates), from any year group. Recruitment ideally takes place at the beginning of the academic year: students apply to take part in a training session in the first term. This session (lasting 3-4 hours) prepares students for the kinds of questions they are likely be asked at any given event, and provides them with resources. The training should also give the ambassadors a sense of the importance of their mission, by giving details of the languages crisis at school level and highlighting what a difference their contribution can make. Experienced ambassadors are present, to share their experiences so far, to offer advice and provide a point-of-contact for the trainees. This sense of community is enhanced by providing branded t-shirts to all ambassadors and through regular communication throughout the year, either by email or social media (e.g. setting up a Facebook group). This correspondence can take the form of a newsletter, which informs the ambassadors of upcoming opportunities as well as giving them information that is relevant to their mission – on a national or local level.

Routes into Languages used to run a cascading training structure for ambassadors – two students per university would attend a training session in London and would then feed back to their local cohort. A national coordinator could replicate this system for German (cf. part III of this report).

Student Abassadors: Forms of engagement

At events where pupils visit the university campus, ambassadors often take part in a Q&A panel where pupils can ask questions about studying languages at university. How effective this is depends on (a) the age of the pupils and (b) how well prepared and suited to the task the students are:

- (a) For Years 8/9 the reality of university seems a long way off. At this age it is more effective for undergraduates to join in activities with the pupils (an accessible and fun translation activity, for example). If working together in small groups, the pupils will develop a rapport with the undergraduate which can break down boundaries and facilitate informal discussion about languages and university.
- (b) Students should be given some form of information and training about how to deal with this sort of engagement (either Q&A panels or group activities). A training session where they talk together about the sorts of questions that might be asked, and the sorts of questions that they might ask pupils, is effective.

Student Ambassadors: Payment

Under Routes into Languages, ambassadors were paid an hourly rate. Funding for this now needs to be sourced from individual university budgets. It is possible to have a varied payment structure, whereby ambassadors are not paid for short sessions (e.g. helping at a lunchtime workshop) but are paid for significant involvement, such as a whole Open Day.

Student Ambassadors: Testimonials

A Widening Participation programme at the University of Cambridge recorded video testimonials with their student ambassadors, which gives some good examples of the kinds of activities they can be involved in and their motivation for doing so:

<http://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/lc/outreach/testimonials.html>

(b) MFL Mentoring

A scheme funded by the Welsh government and run by a consortium of universities in Wales. Undergraduates attend a weekend of mentoring training and subsequently run six weekly mentoring sessions with small groups (c. 6) of Year 8/9 pupils in schools. The mentoring course ends with an ‘Reward and Recognition’ ceremony at one of the universities, throughout which the mentees are accompanied by their mentor. Undergraduate mentors are paid a bursary (£200 per six-week session; 2 sessions per academic year).

The pilot scheme ran for two years, after which take-up of languages at GCSE doubled in the majority of schools involved (from c. 20% to 40-50%). A “digi-languages” scheme is currently being piloted, whereby undergraduate mentors visit the school in weeks 1 and 6, and conduct virtual mentoring in the interim weeks via an on-line platform supported by Welsh Government.

The benefits for pupils and undergraduates are significant: undergraduates report that the mentoring experience is highly rewarding and teaches them professional and interpersonal skills that increase their confidence and employability. They take pride in the opportunity to support younger learners and to represent their university in a school setting. The experience caused them to reflect more intensely on their own identity as a multilingual person, and their relationship to other languages and cultures. The bursary increases the status of the role in the mentors’ eyes, and makes it more inclusive.

<http://mflmentoring.co.uk/>

(c) Taster sessions delivered in schools

The University of Manchester runs a ‘Languages XP’ scheme, whereby final year students run a course of four language taster sessions in a local school, to small groups of pupils. In each case the pupils have no prior knowledge of the language. UGs are trained by university tutors to deliver these sessions. Feedback on a pilot course was very positive.

(d) Undergraduate teaching modules

The University of Leeds offers a teaching module to UGs: following preparatory sessions, they teach two hours per week in a local school during the course. It is assessed by a portfolio of teaching materials, a reflective account of their experiences, and a presentation.

(e) Conversation classes by Erasmus students

Funding for language assistants has been cut hugely in recent years, and schools are increasingly doing without or relying on volunteers (e.g. parents). Some universities run schemes whereby Erasmus students give conversation classes at schools.

(f) Adopt-a-Class / Back-to-School

Routes into Languages introduced an ‘Adopt-a-Class’ scheme, whereby a 2nd-year undergraduate would visit a secondary MFL class at the end of the academic year, correspond with them (email/blog/postcards) during their Year Abroad, and return to the school in their final year to give a talk about their experiences. This format is being replicated in various ways in university German departments across the UK and receives extremely positive feedback from teachers. General points:

- It need not be just one class – if a student is travelling to a school, it is generally thought more worthwhile for them to talk to a number of classes.
- It is not essential for the student to visit the school before their YA. Some schemes just involve correspondence during the YA and one visit afterwards.
- It works best when there is some guidance for the student (either from the teacher or the university). This could also be given by undergraduates who have already participated in the scheme. They are advised, for example, to focus their correspondence on seasonal events, such as some info about painted Easter eggs in the run up to Easter.
- The student gives a presentation for about 5 minutes at the school. On a pre-YA visit they talk about their languages journey so far, why they decided to study it, what being a languages student is like, their experience of the country so far, and their plans for the YA. A post-YA visit can cover some of this plus detail (with lots of photos) of the YA.
- There is scope for tying the student’s visit in with European Day of Languages – late September.
- There is generally no payment for these informal visits, but the school covers the student’s travel expenses.
- Increasing numbers of students are now teaching German to refugees during their YA in Germany. Their experiences and their enthusiasm for teaching can be harnessed on their return for schemes like this.

At some universities a similar format is used, sometimes called ‘Back to School’, whereby undergraduates are encouraged to return to their own secondary school during the vacation and to give a talk about their experiences. This may or may not focus on the YA. Some universities provide a template presentation for students to adapt.

A great advantage of this format is that it is **scalable**: it can function with as little as one school visit by the student, or the entire scheme can be conducted virtually. If there is only one visit, this will ideally take place after the student’s YA, so that they can present their experience with photos.

Advantages for teachers

- The pupils respond very well to this sort of engagement: it makes learning a language seem relevant and exciting. It makes the argument that teachers are always trying to

make in the classroom – that learning a language is an enriching experience that will increase opportunities throughout life. Teachers say: this message is more powerful when it comes from somebody who is *not* a languages teacher.

- Offers sustained engagement, if the student corresponds regularly throughout their YA (once every half-term is ideal).
- Provides material for display in MFL departments and for follow-on work by pupils (e.g. they might write a postcard/email back to the student in German).
- Provides the teacher with contact to languages graduates – if they stay in touch after completing their degree, the teacher can create a display about where a languages degree can take you.
- Establishes a concrete link between the school and the local university.
- Brings pupils into contact with an undergraduate, which has aspirational value beyond the specific languages focus. This is particularly valuable in rural and deprived areas.
- Requires relatively little logistical organisation.

Advantages for undergraduates

- **Employability:** multiple skills – giving presentations to a group, modulating a message for different audiences.
- A civic mission – students report that they appreciate the opportunity to give something back, to share the benefits that a languages education has brought them.
- Experience of and contacts at a school setting, for those interested in a career in education.
- The organising teacher can offer to write employment references for the student.

Recommendation: The Year Abroad should be exploited to the maximum for this sort of engagement. Whether students are returning to their own schools or visiting a setting close to the university, this is a low-impact, high-return activity. Training and resources (such as a guideline template for a presentation) could be delivered nationally, but the focus here must be on the student’s personal experience and enthusiasm. In this way it relates closely to the **mentoring** scheme.

Conclusion

Undergraduate participation in outreach is a growing area with a great deal of potential. In general, those running schemes in which undergraduates visit schools report highly positive feedback from teachers, pupils and students. It would be helpful to collate this feedback/evaluation, as a basis for funding applications for this sort of engagement in the future.

We recommend that undergraduate participation is formalised where possible. The MFL Mentoring programme has been particularly successful in increasing uptake of languages at GCSE level, and there is significant interest amongst colleagues in setting up a similar scheme in England.

Teachers consulted were very positive about university initiatives to support language teaching at schools, but expressed concerns about timing. Equally, university colleagues are often frustrated at perceived low take-up of activities by schools. We recommend that a timetable of the school year is published, in consultation with teachers, which highlights

which periods are ideal for outreach and engagement activities, how much lead-time is needed, and how the activities can best be promoted to teachers.

Other ideas for student participation that were suggested during this consultation but have not yet been trialled include:

- ❖ *Undergraduate/A Level speed-dating-style evening, where UG would meet an A Level student and mentor them on their IRP – independent research project. This scheme would also benefit undergraduates by giving them the opportunity to develop tutoring/mentoring skills.*
- ❖ *Postgraduate/teacher exchanges: Postgrads (or postdocs) would be paired up with local teachers for a skills-sharing partnership. Teachers would support the PG in pedagogy, and PGs would share their subject expertise with the teacher.*

It would be useful to collate further ideas in this area.

II. Literary Outreach

‘Literary outreach’ is to be understood in the broadest sense – not just supporting the teaching of literature at schools (A Level set texts, etc.) but using literary, translation and creative-writing activities to enliven language teaching and raise aspirations from primary level upwards.

This report details existing activities and makes recommendations for how they might be developed. Opportunities for undergraduate participation in these activities are highlighted.

1. Writer-in-Residence / Visiting Author schemes

There is scope for the DAAD writer-in-residence scheme to include more outreach elements. This depends to a degree on the writer and their capacity / willingness to visit schools, but when it works it can be a very powerful outreach mechanism. Information could usefully be shared between colleagues already running these events, regarding the sorts of outreach activities that work well.

There is also scope for more to be made of visits to the UK by other German-language authors.

Recommendation: A writer-in-residence database with a two-fold aim –

- (a) collating information on previous residencies – activities with universities and schools, materials used, digital resources available for sharing; and
- (b) sharing information about upcoming residencies and visits by German-language writers. This could take the form of an interactive map, so that universities and schools can easily see when a writer will be visiting the area.

2. Reading Groups

Some teachers run reading groups at their schools, for example reading a German book in English translation for younger years, or in the original for A Level. Resources to support this are desirable:

- a list of suitable books for each key stage
- stimulus questions for selected books

This format would also benefit from undergraduate involvement – simply taking part in the reading group, or running the discussion if the student feels confident to do so.

Teacher-run reading groups can also be supported by **virtual reading groups** and **podcasts** provided by a university. This is currently being trialled at the University of Oxford: a literary passage is circulated to teachers at the beginning of the month, and a video-tutorial on the passage is then uploaded: <http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/schools/digital-resources>

Case Study: Oxford German Network Reading Groups

OGN has trialled various formats for reading groups for Years 9 – 13:

- six weekly after-school sessions held at the university and run by one lecturer
- six weekly after-school sessions held at the university and run by a different lecturer each week
- one-off “masterclass-style” reading groups

The conclusions of these trials are:

- short literary passages with vocabulary and stimulus questions work well. The most recent reading groups looked at a selection of *Berliner Mauergedichte*, with much pictorial and textual material. Feedback from teachers and pupils was very positive.
- pupils will attend weekly sessions if they are strongly encouraged to do so, via regular reminders from organisers and teachers. The material (a short passage) should be circulated in advance to give pupils the opportunity to read and digest, so reducing intimidation. This can be uploaded to the network website so that it’s accessible to all.
- undergraduates can very effectively participate in the groups. If the numbers are big enough, small groups of 4-5 pupils can work with one undergraduate each. This breaks down barriers and provides the opportunity for informal chat about studying languages and life at university.
- the opportunity for pupils to visit the university and take part in a seminar-like event is very positively received by teachers.
- teachers prefer one-off masterclasses to shorter weekly meetings: it is logistically easier to get the pupils to the university for a longer one-off session.

3. Supporting literature teaching at secondary level

(a) GCSE / A Level

At our focus groups, teachers reported that there are some good resources for teaching literature available, but that teachers are not always aware of them / of which ones are particularly useful. Literary passages for use in the classroom are thin on the ground, and teachers would welcome a booklet of short passages that work well. Ideally, these passages would be connected to topics on the curriculum, so that they can be readily incorporated into lessons.

(b) Literature with Key Stage 3

Teachers reported that the GCSE curriculum is now very crowded, and that the stage with the most capacity for additional enrichment activities is KS3.

(c) Teaching translation

Our teacher focus groups revealed mixed feelings about the new focus on translation at GCSE and A Level, but there was agreement that pupils are excited by translation when they have the opportunity to be creative with it.

Recommendation: A small selection of good resources for teaching literature throughout all key stages, and for involving translation as a creative activity, is needed. These can be selected from existing resources, with links and materials gathered together on one online platform. For example, a list of recommended resources (‘top 10’ per year group) could be

listed, and updated once per year, via consultation with a local teachers' network. In addition, a booklet of literary passages for use at GCSE and A Level could be developed and published via an open-access network (e.g. Open Book Publishers).

4. Multilingual Drama

Following a pilot project in Oxford, the Creative Multilingualism programme is now running a 'Multilingual Performance Project' programme with hubs in Birmingham (already established), Oxford, Wales, the North East and potentially other centres. It has the dual aim of building confidence amongst teachers for conducting creative work with drama and performance to enhance language teaching, and building confidence among students in learning and using languages. It is designed to encourage the inclusion of performance in the MFL classroom while also offering an opportunity to integrate and showcase other languages represented among pupils in schools. A festival involving participating schools is planned for spring 2020:

<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/projects/multilingual-performance-project>

In addition, there is potential for building further outreach mechanisms into 'German plays' that are already happening at several universities. Pupils would be able to follow the whole trajectory of the play, from inception to production. A 'starter pack' of resources relating to the play could be developed for teachers to use in the classroom, and podcasts/short videos of rehearsals and cast members talking about the play released during the rehearsal weeks. Pupils would then attend workshops/talks before the performance (this already happens at KCL, for example) and finally there would be a follow-up competition for all schools involved – a creative task inspired by the play. The majority of this engagement could be carried out by the students producing the play: a further form of undergraduate participation.

Conclusion

The teachers consulted at our focus groups and elsewhere were very keen to develop their use of literature in the classroom, but short of suitable texts and resources for doing so. A platform for universities to share information about successful literary outreach activities would enrich the existing activities and open up possibilities for more. We recommend four initiatives:

- ❖ A writers-in-residence database (archive, resources and information about future visits, as detailed above)
- ❖ A list of suitable books for different Key Stages
- ❖ A booklet of literary passages, indexed by topic
- ❖ An online platform to collate recommended online resources

III. Think German Networks

Discussions with representatives of the Think German networks were particularly fruitful, highlighting examples of successful outreach as well as the challenges of sustaining the network format. We therefore conclude this report with some reflections and recommendations that result from those discussions.

1. Administration and coordination

The overwhelming message is that good outreach requires good administrative support. At present an enormous amount of time and energy is going into university outreach programmes across the country, with the majority of the administrative and logistical work conducted by academics. Time constraints mean that there is little capacity for communication between university departments and between the various Think German Networks. The most active networks are those with the capacity for paid coordination, which can take numerous forms – for example, the Oxford German Network has a partnership with an independent school, which makes the services of an ‘intern’ available, and the Wales Think German Network employs one intern per year via the universities’ employability schemes. One difficulty with this internship structure is that turnover tends to be high, requiring regular training of new interns and increased time spent on their supervision.

Recommendation: The Think German networks would benefit greatly from national coordination, whereby a single individual would have an overview of the networks’ activities and be able to support as necessary. This form of coordination would help with the following aspects:

- training interns / new network coordinators
- training student ambassadors (via a similar cascade scheme to that previously used by Routes into Languages)
- sharing examples of best practice, advice on running particular types of events, etc.
- resource-sharing
- facilitating contact with businesses

A national platform would also enable colleagues to show that their local outreach work is part of a national exercise, which has an impact on recruitment of students applying for German throughout the country. At present, feedback from pupils taking part in university outreach activities tends to show that their interest in studying languages is increased, but not necessarily their desire to study at the university delivering the outreach. Evidence of joined-up recruitment efforts happening across the country will assist colleagues in applying for further outreach funding at their respective universities.

2. Core network activities

This section highlights activities that might be considered fundamental to each Think German network: where impact is high and input plausible within the time and funding available.

A. A website that acts as a first-port-of-call for teachers and members of the local community

To achieve this the website should contain clear links to the desired final contact: the network coordinator where one exists, the relevant academic contact (the Admissions Tutor, for example) at the partner universities, or the outreach officers at that university. In other words, the website can act as a gathering-point for all those

interested in German, who can then be efficiently directed to the appropriate contact person.

B. A website that collates and advertises information about relevant local events, competitions etc.

There is currently no standard format for this across the networks. It would be helpful to discuss further how this function of the website can be carried out most efficiently, and/or whether such activity should be limited solely to social media.

C. A teachers' network

Teachers respond very positively to networking opportunities.

University networks can effectively create and support groups of local German teachers, giving them the opportunity to share ideas, discuss problems, and to cooperate in events for their pupils or CPD opportunities.

One model is termly teacher meetings hosted by the Think German network: the venue and logistics are provided by a university but the agenda is set by the teachers themselves. There are also two very well established teachers' networks run directly by teachers: these can act as models for best practice.

Four examples of teacher networks:

- a) East of England German Network, run by a teacher with funding for events from the Goethe-Institut. Bi-annual CPD workshops, annual pupil conference, visits by Year 9 pupils to primary schools
- b) South Wales German Teacher Network, run by a teacher in association with the Wales Think German Network
- c) Oxford German Network: termly teacher meetings hosted by OGN.
- d) Goethe-Institut-funded 'Digital German Networks': bringing together one secondary school and 4-5 primary schools to provide CPD for primary schools. Also bringing together secondary schools to build viable A Level cohorts. There are currently 32 networks comprising c. 150 schools, and the current funding phase runs until 2020.

These networks can help teachers to work together on CPD events and pupil events, sharing the logistical and administrative burden. For example, the coordinator of the East of England Network provides templates of safeguarding letters-to-parents for the pupil events – this sort of hands-on support can make a real difference to the success of such activities.

D. A termly e-newsletter

With information about local and national opportunities for teachers and pupils of German. Teachers are very positive about this form of engagement, which serves to break down (perceived) boundaries between universities and schools.

E. Competitions

The experience of the Oxford German Network has been that competitions are an effective way of engaging pupils and teachers. They can provide enrichment material

and activities for teachers to use in the classroom. This form of activity is also scalable and offers opportunities for collaboration across networks. Competitions can usefully be set up as a follow-up activity to events: a creative writing competition inspired by a film screening, for example.

Next steps

Discussion between the networks and all those involved in German outreach and schools liaison is ongoing, in particular in the context of the Association of German Studies. During this project we gathered information about specific Think German Network events and activities, and will be happy to share these with colleagues in due course.

Thanks

We are grateful to all those who contributed to this consultation, and apologise to those we have not yet been able to involve. We hope that this report will spark further discussions and provide a basis for new developments, funding applications, partnerships and collaborations.

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