

Sharing Words: Language tuition and cultural connections

Basic information for students

Secondary education in Britain (except Scotland)

Compulsory secondary education lasts until the academic year in which a student reaches the age of 16. This is normally referred to as 'Year 11' (i.e. a young person's 11th year of full-time education). Accordingly, 'Year 10' is the year in which a student reaches the age of 15.

At the end of Year 11, students take examinations in various subjects; some compulsory, some optional. In each subject, the examination, plus some coursework results, leads to a qualification known as **GCSE** (General Certificate of Secondary Education). The studies for GCSE cover Years 10 and 11. The result for each subject is graded; the highest grade is A*, the next highest is A, the lowest is G.

Suitably qualified students may then continue to further study. A wide range of qualifications can be taken, at various types of school or college. The normal academic qualification – in contrast to vocational qualifications – is the A-level, which is the usual qualification pupils take if they want to go on to study at university. It is therefore roughly equivalent to the Baccalauréat/ Bachillerato/ Diploma di Esame di Stato/ Abitur/ Matura/ Maturität/ Maturité. A-levels are studied in two stages, in a course which extends over two years; this two-year period is usually known as 'sixth form'. Most students in Manchester study their A-levels in sixth form colleges, i.e. institutions which specialise in post-GCSE study. Some Manchester secondary schools have a sixth form, but the majority only teach students in the 11-16 age range, i.e. up to GCSE.

In the first year of sixth form (known either as 'Year 12' or 'Lower 6th'), students study a number of AS-levels; normally four. Examinations and coursework produce grades in each subject at the end of Lower 6th, ranging from A (highest) to E (lowest; there are also various types of 'fail' grades).

In the second year of sixth form ('Year 13', or 'Upper 6th'), students continue to study some of their AS-level subjects; they normally take three subjects, sometimes more or fewer. These studies are known as A2-level. Again, they are graded from A to E on the basis of examinations and coursework. A2-levels cannot be studied without an AS-level in the subject, but it is possible to study an AS-level and obtain a qualification without continuing to A2-level. Together, an AS-level and an A2-level make up an A-level.

Foreign languages in schools

The main languages taught in schools are French and Spanish. German is still taught quite widely but is becoming increasingly less common and some schools also offer other languages (most commonly Arabic, Urdu or Chinese). Some schools employ native speakers to help students develop their speaking and listening skills; others do not. Native speakers are always in heavy demand, and in short supply. So you are very highly valued by the schools!

Foreign languages are not very popular overall and it is no longer compulsory to study them to GCSE level. It is still compulsory at some schools, but only 18% of schools in the North West have compulsory languages. One aim of the Sharing Words programme is to encourage students to continue studying languages, and developing the important skills (not only communication, but also intercultural awareness) which this study promotes.

Your likely duties

Type of work

You will probably be asked to support regular teachers, by working with small groups of around 5 or 6 students. Some schools may also ask you to work one-on-one with their students. Most of the time you will be working for half-hour periods during regular language classes. You will either support students preparing for their GCSEs (age 15/16) or A-levels (age 17/18). Most schools/colleges will ask you to

concentrate on teaching language skills, especially conversation practice for oral exams. Alternatively, you may be asked to tell the students something about modern life and culture in your country.

Some great ideas for lesson plans and materials can be found on the British Council website for Foreign Language Assistants: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/flasonline>

Of further interest to Spanish volunteers might be this website:

<http://www.educacion.gob.es/reinounido/publicaciones-materiales/material-didactico.html>

Duration of the programme

We would expect you to go to your school once a week during term time for a period of 1-3 hours per week, though this is flexible. It will depend on your own availability and how many schools and students are interested in the programme – we fit the Sharing Words timetable around your lectures and other commitments. In general, Sharing Words starts at the end of October/early November and continues till Easter. If you can commit to further lessons after Easter, this can be arranged with your school.

Volunteering

The involvement in Sharing Words is voluntary, i.e. unpaid, but we will reimburse any travel expenses. At the end of the project we will give you a certificate which proves that you participated and which you can use for future job applications etc.

We do understand that your university work is important and has to come first. However, please be aware that schools rely on your work and it creates considerable inconvenience to them if volunteers drop out of the programme early. It also damages the reputation of the University if our volunteers are seen to be unreliable. If you decide to participate in Sharing Words, please take this commitment seriously.

What to expect from your school/college

Each school/college will have at least one 'link teacher', a language teacher who will advise you on what to do in the classes. The link teacher will give you guidance on both educational and practical matters: not only what topics should be discussed in classes, but also where the nearest toilets are! Please let us know immediately if there are any problems or if you are not getting enough support from your school/college.

Practical matters

Please make sure you save all the travel receipts to claim back your travel expenses. We cannot reimburse you unless you keep those. Please hand them in to Sonja (in room A19) who will give you the cash.

Safeguarding children

Security and safety are very important when working with young people and because of this it will be necessary before you start teaching to provide us with a letter of good conduct (= police check) from your country. You will also have to fill in a DBS check (Disclosure and Barring Service) – this is a UK police record check. This is a legal requirement for anyone working with children and young people in the UK.

Please read and sign the code of conduct form and keep the following points in mind especially:

- NEVER share your mobile phone number or email address with pupils or befriend them on Social Media. This is as much to protect you from false allegations as it is to protect the young people from possibly inappropriate relationships with someone older.
- If a child tells you about abuse they are experiencing (domestic abuse, bullying at school etc), you must tell the link teacher (even if the child asked you to keep this confidential).
- If possible, avoid being left alone in a room with a single child.

Contact

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