



# Report on the 2016 Summer Residential for teachers of English, History, Latin and Modern Languages

Held at Homerton College, Cambridge

20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016



## Executive summary

This course was attended by 90 subject leaders in English, History, Latin and Modern Languages. They raised issues across four areas which were then responded to by a panel of educationalists. Below is a summary of the conclusions from the conference:

### 1. Out-of-school CPD inspires teachers to make learning challenging and creative

Delegates felt that this residential conference had boosted the morale, ambition and confidence of those who attended by allowing them to share best practice, hear from world-class lecturers and reaffirm the value of teaching their subjects.

### 2. Challenge, within and beyond the curriculum, prepares pupils for life

Pupils said they want to be challenged, and that they rely on teachers to guide them through risk taking and prepare them for further study. Delegates concluded that the bar cannot be set too high for pupils, or indeed for their own teaching practice.

### 3. Changes to the curriculum can be seen as opportunities to introduce more creative and challenging teaching

Delegates felt that while the new curriculum presents challenges, it also provides the chance to teach with more freedom and creativity. They recognised, however, that greater collaboration between schools and with other institutions would be needed to keep workloads manageable.

### 4. Raising the profile of a subject can help ensure high student uptake

A range of factors attract pupils to study particular subjects. To promote high student take-up, delegates therefore recognised the need to ensure that students are aware of the opportunities that a subject provides beyond school and exams, including for self-development and further study, as well as the breadth and range of the subject itself. A number of ideas for doing so are provided in this report.

The report concludes with a selection of quotes from delegates who attended the Residential.

## Course report

This report summarises points made during discussions in three elements of the residential: the pupil panel that began the course, reports made by subject leaders following teachers' discussions and panel sessions that concluded the course:

- **The pupil panel.** The programme began with a panel of pupils who had particular passions in English, History, Latin or Modern Languages and were studying for their GCSEs or A Levels in one or more of these subjects. They spoke about their subjects, their teachers and their lessons. The students were drawn from one comprehensive and one selective school in the surrounding area.
- **Reports by subject leaders.** Throughout the course, participating heads of department discussed their subjects, the importance of teaching them and the issues they felt were currently affecting them professionally. On the final day, teachers got the chance to hear what their colleagues in other subjects had concluded.
- **Concluding panels.** The course concluded with panels of educationalists from organisations including university faculties, exam boards and Ofsted, who responded to the issues raised by teachers.

The panel members were:

- **Dr Ruth Abbott** – English Faculty Access Officer and Lecturer in the Long Nineteenth Century, University of Cambridge
- **Ian Brinton** – Author and former secondary school Head of English
- **Paul Brooker** – Senior HMI, Ofsted
- **Bernadette Holmes MBE** – Campaign Director, Speak to the Future and Past President of the Association for Language Learning
- **Stephen Hunt** – PGCE Course Leader for Classics, University of Cambridge
- **Dr Sean Lang** – Senior Lecturer in History, Anglia Ruskin University
- **Silke Mentschen** – Senior Language Teaching Officer, Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, University of Cambridge
- **Grant Robertson** – Subject Specialist in History, OCR

The report is presented according to the following themes that emerged during the residential:

1. Out-of-school CPD inspires teachers to make learning challenging and creative
2. Challenge, within and beyond the curriculum, prepares pupils for life
3. Changes to the curriculum can be seen as opportunities to introduce more creative and challenging teaching
4. Raising the profile of a subject can help ensure high student uptake

## 1. Out-of-school CPD inspires teachers to make learning challenging and creative

Pupils have high expectations of their teachers, and emphasised how much their teachers influenced them:

- A great teacher makes learning fun, offers support and challenge to students of all abilities, goes beyond exam specifications and is passionate about their subject.
- Subject knowledge and passion go hand-in-hand: a teacher with passion will continue to study their subject and bring this to students.
- A bad teacher was seen as one who sticks too rigidly to the lesson plan, doesn't allow the lesson to go off-topic and relies too heavily on PowerPoint presentations.
- Students value the time and advice given by their teachers, and engaging teachers are the ones who dictate what they go on to do in life.

Panellists put forward four crucial ingredients that are needed for great subject teaching:

- Challenge
- Relevance to the real world
- Connections and networks between teachers and institutions
- Enthusiastic teaching

Teachers highlighted the importance of out-of-school CPD to help them fulfil these expectations:

- To better motivate the most able students, while at the same time supporting those less able, teachers need to continue to learn, to deepen their subject knowledge and to be inspirational in their teaching and leadership.
- Getting out of school allows important connections to be built between schools and teachers, and best practice to be shared.
- Teachers must feel empowered and trusted in order to think creatively, and CPD that encourages creativity should be prioritised.
- Recruiting specialist Latin teachers can be difficult, but inspiring and passionate non-specialists can be supported both through internal CPD and additional courses, many of which are run by charities.

This Residential conference has boosted the ambition and confidence of the teachers who attended through:

- World-class lecturers who delivered challenging and informative sessions that can be easily transferred to their departments and classrooms.
- An atmosphere of mutual respect and creative collaboration that has raised morale and given time and breathing space for teachers to remember why they chose to teach and what they love about their subjects.
- Exploring solutions and ideas for taking learning beyond the classroom, teaching beyond exams and broadening the horizons of students – including endorsement of the ten-minute tangent!
- Reaffirmation of the importance of delegates' subjects, and their invaluable contributions to students' educational experience.

## 2. Challenge, within and beyond the curriculum, prepares pupils for life

Pupils stressed that they value challenging material and learning that goes beyond the classroom:

- Being challenged, whether by introducing A Level material to a GCSE class or being forced to speak a different language, pushes students' learning further.
- Trips, exchanges and visits bring subjects to life in ways that classroom study cannot achieve, and pupils' lives are enriched when they see links between real life and what they are learning at school. This could be experiencing another culture, visiting the theatre, or discussing the relevance of the past to a current political situation.
- More challenging work, especially when it involves independent research, better prepares students for university.

Teachers echoed the desire to set the academic bar high:

- Creating a dynamic and broad curriculum will arm students with the skills and knowledge that will take them far in life. In English, this could mean bringing in a broader understanding of context and examining the use of dramatic techniques when studying a play.
- You cannot set the bar too high. Careful and precise selection of academic material can build students' confidence and skills to be able to tackle more demanding publications, and this can begin in Key Stage 3.

Teachers had a number of ideas for how they could provide more enriching and challenging opportunities for their pupils:

- Resources for extracurricular engagement lie within the school, for example staff can give talks about their area of expertise.
- Cross-curricular links and joint projects with other departments can offer enrichment beyond the constraints of the curriculum, and beyond the time offered in the school's curriculum.
- Close inter-school collaboration can make extracurricular opportunities more accessible, for example developing partnership projects and sharing speakers.
- Academics want to engage with schools, so teachers should be confident to start a dialogue with them through email and social media.

The panel gave advice for preparing students for university admissions:

- Be provocative in lessons – conflict is interesting and encourages the development of enquiring minds.
- University admissions tutors are looking for students who have read beyond the prescribed texts and have the ability to think and question independently. Students should think of themselves as researchers or literary critics. The Extended Project Qualification is good preparation for this.

- Evidence such as museum visits and having watched factual television programmes are more compelling on UCAS forms than claims to be ‘passionate’ about the subject.
- Ofsted rates school curriculums highly when they are vibrant and offer enriching experiences like trips.

Pupils said that they rely on teachers and the classroom environment to enable them to take risks:

- Languages are more exposing than other subjects, particularly the oral element, so extra encouragement from teachers is needed.
- Teachers need to demonstrate that there is no shame in being wrong, and allow students to make mistakes. However, they must also correct mistakes.
- Whether students will risk participating in a lesson, even if they might be wrong, also depends on the attitude of the class. Setting helps to ensure that high achievers do not feel that they are always answering questions and lower achievers do not feel afraid to.

Teachers acknowledged the need to demonstrate the value of risk-taking:

*“To encourage students to risk their own voice in debate, or in learning a language, we need to take risks ourselves and set the bar high.”*

Pupils also reflected on what forms of feedback and assessment they found most effective:

- The pupil panel were unanimous in their desire for feedback to be detailed and specific, but differed in their preference for it to be written or verbal.
- Spending a whole lesson picking apart a question is seen as worthwhile, despite the time pressures in the curriculum.
- Peer-assessment is not seen as useful, as it is difficult to criticise the work of classmates.
- Self-assessment is seen as useful only insofar as it gives teachers an idea of how much encouragement students need, but students are not confident in their ability to assess their own work.
- Homework is seen as useful only when students are confident that it will be marked in a timely fashion.
- Targets set by the teachers are not viewed as particularly accurate when they are set at the beginning of the year. Pupils suggested that setting targets part-way into the year, when teachers know them better, might be more beneficial.

### **3. Changes to the curriculum can be seen as opportunities to introduce more creative and challenging teaching**

Teachers said that although changes such as those to coursework, AS Levels and tiered entry at GCSE present challenges, they also provide opportunities:

- The changes allow for more freedom, and the chance to be more creative.

- Rather than re-inventing the wheel, teachers should develop and join subject hubs and networks. These could be used to exploit the resources that have already been generated by colleagues and are available, for example, on the PTI website.
- There is a need to work more intelligently, by collaborating, forming partnerships, sharing resources and sharing best practice. There is a wealth of support available for those who want to provide enrichment and challenge.

Panellists also identified both challenges and opportunities that were presented by curricular changes:

- The two-year A Level course provides more opportunity for Year 12 students to read widely and develop their passion for their subjects. Now defunct AS Levels were often reduced to 'testing, not education', as rather than fulfilling their original purpose of allowing students to broaden their education by studying another subject, they had become just a step towards A Level.
- The meaning of the new 9-1 grades is not yet certain, even for exam boards.
- Around a third of schools offer a three-year KS4, but this means a reduced experience of KS3. The intention for GCSEs is that they are a two-year course.

#### **4. Raising the profile of a subject can help ensure high student uptake**

Pupils were asked what had attracted them study their subjects:

- Career opportunities.
- Exploring other cultures.
- Opportunities to study and work abroad.
- Breadth – Classics covers so many disciplines: Linguistics, Philosophy, Art and History.

Teachers had a variety of ideas for promoting high student uptake:

- Raising the profile of a subject is key to recruiting more students and gaining more funding.
- Better celebrating the place of Modern Languages in the school community could help challenge perceptions that languages are difficult or boring. Cross-curricular and extracurricular links, department websites, social media and magazines can be used to publish successes, however small, to demonstrate the value of the subject to senior leaders and to pupils.
- Latin teachers must recruit enough students to make classes viable. This can be helped by in-school publicity, higher education links, lectures and, above all, students' enjoyment of the challenge and rigour of this diverse subject.

The panel built on this by offering a wealth of ideas for convincing students, parents and senior leaders about the importance of learning both Modern and Ancient Languages:

- Large companies and SMEs stress the importance of languages – there is a universal desire for intercultural agility and flexibility in the global world.

- Languages develop the brain and provide students with a competitive advantage. Neurolinguistic studies show cognitive benefits of learning Modern and Ancient Languages that impact on mathematical ability and literacy.
- Studying Languages makes pupils aware of how much we share with others across the world, giving a broad view of humanity itself. Similarly, studying Latin or History makes pupils 'global citizens across time'.
- Teaching Languages means that the range of topics that can be brought into the classroom are limitless. Students can step into a different skin in another language.

Panellists also emphasised the importance of interconnectivity, of demonstrating the normality of speaking other languages and showing their real-world relevance:

- Languages can invade the curriculum in other departments – cross-curricular activities do not have to be wholesale partnerships, but can be short-term links. For example, students can look at French internet sources in Geography lessons.
- Digital links can be made with other schools, and twin projects can show pupils how their languages can create real-life interactions that culminate in something tangible.
- Inviting 'significant outsiders' into school can show the importance of languages beyond exams. Academics and postgraduates are desperate to come into schools to fulfil their impact agendas, and former students are often willing speakers who can raise aspirations with stories of how studying languages has opened up opportunities, for example for travel.
- A Level students can be useful ambassadors for languages, and can make the subject 'cool' for younger students.
- Improving links with primary schools could help to motivate pupils who have already begun to learn a language in Year 6 by avoiding taking them back to the beginning in Year 7. It could also benefit primary teachers to visit secondary schools to observe lessons taught by a specialist.



## Selection of delegate quotes

*"I feel the time has allowed me to reconnect with what we have had as our ethos but has somehow got misplaced. **Love of learning.**"*

*"I feel **'plugged in' to academia** - latest insights, star names giving lectures, etc."*

*"It has been encouraging to feel **valued as professionals** - something that can be lacking at times."*

*"It's easy to fall into the habit of 'teaching to the test' without taking the time to explain the rationale and importance, and the **value of the subject**, not just in their brief years in formal education but lifelong as well."*

*"The opportunity to **network** with other heads of department and **exchange resources** has reinvigorated my passion for both my subject and teaching. I've found myself waking up in the middle of the night to jot down ideas! I haven't done that since my second year of teaching."*

*"The lectures have reminded me about **teaching literature for the enjoyment of the subject**, not to the exam! I realise that English offers so much opportunity to broaden pupils' horizons. The course has inspired me to reevaluate the way we teach for 'Enriching' and 'Challenging' both pupils and teachers for the **enjoyment of learning.**"*

*"It is easy to forget why we do this job and **why our subject is of great value**. The course has reminded and **refreshed** me. It has helped me consolidate my convictions on why history matters."*

*"This has given me motivation to **drive change** in my own department."*