

Think German Conference
25 June 2010
Whitgift School, South Croydon



Event

In the context of the growing awareness of the importance of foreign language learning in the UK over 150 participants from British industry (e.g. Siemens), the UK government (Department for Education), UK Higher Education (AHRC, UCML, LLAS, and universities), the UK schools sector (CILT, ALL, QCDA, ISMLA), the British Council and the European Commission came together for a conference. The Think German Conference was coordinated as part of the Think German campaign by the German Embassy, the Goethe-Institut London, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and UK-German Connection to

- assess the state of language learning in the UK and discuss positive and innovative ways forward
- showcase and celebrate examples of good practice, providing a platform for networking
- focus on German language skills and the economic, academic and cultural benefits of learning German in a globalised world.

Key outcomes:

- Competence in a modern foreign language (MFL) greatly enhances the employability of UK school-leavers and graduates. 36% of employers recruit specifically for language skills; not only for linguistic competence, but for the concomitant intercultural skills and communicative abilities needed to succeed in a global market.
- With Germany being one of the UK's most important trading partners, German is currently the most highly sought-after foreign language by UK employers. Not only in the arts and humanities but also in STEM subjects such as engineering, researchers and graduates with competence in German have a substantial advantage over monolingual competitors.
- In view of the greater independence and competition in the educational sector, schools and universities need to respond more strategically to the employability factor of German in particular and MFL in general with regard to curriculum development, degree structures and course options.
- Raising standards is not only about higher grades. When pupils are motivated by their subject and see its relevance, this results in higher achievement contributing to raising standards.
- When learning German is combined with other curricular areas (e.g. science or art), and has relevance to young people's lives, then motivation for and achievement across the curriculum is increased.
- Institution Wide Language Learning provision across the Higher Education curriculum strengthens alliances between the humanities and sciences and simultaneously helps to secure modern languages financially.
- The value of internationalism in education cannot be underestimated, as it allows young people to broaden their horizons and engage in dialogue with peers abroad. Not only is this a motivating factor for language learning, but it equips them with the skills to flourish in a competitive global world.
- If UK research is to maintain world class status, it must show awareness of the international context. This can only be achieved if universities continue to provide multilingual education and specialist degrees in the languages.
- The value of German in education and in business in the UK is currently underestimated – it is crucial that we address this. Recognition and support for German from Government, the media, senior managers, governors and parents, whether in school or higher education, help guard against the marginalisation of German.

Resolution

This conference was remarkable in bringing together for the first time all sectors with an interest in the value of German in UK education. The messages that emerged from the conference commanded unanimous support and were followed by a strong commitment both to the strengthening of the teaching and learning of German and to enhanced engagement with Germany and other German speaking countries. All representatives expressed their determination to make a compelling case for German to stakeholders, to Government, to business and to the media.