

A Day in the Life of Nola Marshall

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“Just because we’re English doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t speak another language. Language broadens the mind”

Nola Marshall, Curriculum Manager for Languages for Essex County Council’s Adult Community Learning, rarely has a typical day, and it’s no wonder, when you find out what she manages to cram in...

Nola Marshall works across two centres, one in Stansted and one in Brentwood and lives near Bishops Stortford, not far from Stansted. “Our service operates over a very large geographical curriculum area and I am one of seven Curriculum Managers for Languages,” says Nola, “– my area being west Essex”. “We have very busy days, but I love my job because it gives me the opportunity to work alongside others who enjoy languages as I do. I have such a great team, we work as a close-knit sector group – in fact, I’m not sure any of us could do it without the others! “We offer about 10 languages to our adult learners, including French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Greek, German and Mandarin Chinese – it does vary across curriculum areas, though – for example, my colleague in Colchester offers Arabic and we don’t.

“I don’t think I have a typical day, which is what I like – lots of variety and the unexpected. I can access my emails from home and often start checking them before I leave for work to see if there is anything urgent – I also check my texts (often from one of my British Sign Language tutors). I then have to decide whether to go to the Stansted centre which is close by or Brentwood which is a longer journey. Before I leave I will update my online diary so that others can find out where I am.

“I am Line Manager to 44 tutors, many of whom are native speakers. The majority of them teach on average one or two courses a week (two hours each); the maximum anyone teaches is four courses a week (eight hours) – they’ll also often have a ‘day job’ usually teaching in a school or at one of our other centres. All our tutors are very reliable and committed, and I meet with them whenever I can. Generally, they will contact me if they have problems, need certain resources, have contractual queries or just need support and advice in their career development. I also answer learner queries and check availability of teaching equipment and other resources, and liaise with locality and technical staff regarding premises, organisation of classes and digital equipment.

“Most of our adult learners are beginners and improvers, predominantly female and of an older age group – ie, 35+. We don’t have quite so many people coming to learn minority languages – Greek, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, etc, but there is still some interest. We have to attend a lot of meetings, sector group, team meetings, and so on. I am on the ILT/E-learning Ops Group because I really enjoy computers and I have become an E-guide through a programme championing e-learning run by NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education), and I help tutors to use digital technology in their teaching. Through the LSIS (Learning & Skills Improvement Service) teaching and learning programme, I have become a Subject Learning Coach - which means I’m trained to support tutors in their own teaching and learning. In both of the above roles I help tutors to create and develop resources. Additional projects include working with a team to



produce a distance/blended learning version of PTLLS (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) which includes an add-on for language tutors including Use of the Target Language which I consider to be an essential part of good language teaching when used appropriately.

Over the last year we have been busy preparing for our Ofsted inspection. I might eat something very quickly back at my computer checking my emails – or there's always something I need to do online. I use the internet to find suitable events and websites to visit for updating skills and for keeping up to date with language strategies, statistics and future projects.

The Adult Learning service is very pro-active in promoting its courses and we are very much involved in marketing. During Adult Learners' Week in May, for example, we set up activities and nominate our tutors for various awards. We often 'set up shop' somewhere like a shopping centre, school or library! We get involved in promotional projects, too, like the Essex-Jiangsu project, working with Zhong Wang, Jiangsu Centre Coordinator in Harlow, Essex to promote Mandarin Chinese courses for adults throughout the county. Its aim is to provide easy access to authentic Chinese language and culture.

Another initiative that has proved extremely popular across the whole county is our project offering French, German and Spanish language courses to teaching assistants in primary schools. Funded by the Schools Improvement and Advisory Service (SIAS) it addressed the fact that support staff also needed training after Lord Dearing's report made it compulsory for all primary schools to offer a modern foreign language by 2010.

Another part of my job is to observe around 80 per cent of my tutors. This involves meeting the learners and reporting back on what I see in the classroom. I'll do this twice a year for all new tutors and probably once every two years for the more experienced. It can actually make for a very long day because most of our classes are in the evenings. Most of my free time is spent studying for an MA in Digital Technology, Communication and Education at Manchester University. It's a distance learning course covering the use of digital technology in teaching and learning – it's quite often after all this that I'll not end up eating until 10pm! Fortunately my husband is very understanding.

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About Nola

Although born in England, I was brought up in Geneva, where I went to the local French village school at the age of six. Within six months I was bilingual. At 17, I trained as a bilingual secretary in England and returned to France to work for a scientific research centre in Grenoble in the French Alps. I loved it – not just the job, but the mountains and the French way of life, in which I became totally immersed.

I did my degree in European Studies back in London at Queen Mary College (University of London) and then got a job at the International Wrought Copper Council organising conferences, mostly abroad. I loved dealing with all the different cultures and travelling – and it was around this time I became very interested in computers.



When my two daughters were little (they are now both at university), I set up French clubs in primary schools and village halls with a friend who was similarly interested in Languages and we ended up teaching French (and some Spanish) to children in about 17 schools. Unfortunately, it outgrew us and then my friend moved away. That's when I joined Essex County Council's Adult Community Learning.

On the job**Q: What is your favourite part of the job?**

A: The tutors I oversee and the colleagues I work with are all committed to the teaching and learning of languages which, for me, is really what makes my job so worthwhile. I sometimes still teach French and cover for French tutors. I like doing that a great deal because I miss teaching very much. I'm very lucky in that I get a lot of training opportunities – in the last four months I've been to three training events and I find them all very helpful.

Q: What first attracted you to the world of language learning

A: I was brought up in Geneva and was devastated when we, as a family, had to return to England when I was 12. I think that's when I decided to make languages my vocation. Languages have always been a vehicle to make friends and find work, and I like sharing my knowledge of them.

Q: How did you come to be doing the job you do now?

A: I initially joined the Adult Community Learning service as a tutor – first, in word processing and then French. In time, I took on part time managerial positions until I arrived at where I am today – full time Curriculum Manager.

Q: Are languages on the rise?

A: Well, I don't think enough is done in England, and the English language does tend to dominate. Languages are decreasing in secondary schools, yet we have an increased need to offer them in primary schools. Just because we're English doesn't mean to say we shouldn't speak another language. Language broadens the mind.

Q: Is there anything of which you are particularly proud?

A: In 2005 I was Runner Up for the Star Awards in the E-learning Tutor of the Year category.

Q: What language would you like to learn next?

A: I would love to learn British Sign Language (BSL). Over the last couple of years demand has increased and BSL has only recently been given language status.

www.essex.gov.uk/adultlearning

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