

Introduction

Authority:	Glasgow
Case Study focus:	Language uptake from the BGE to senior phase
Establishments:	St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School
Learners' stage/s:	S1-S6

About the educational establishment and the learners

St Thomas Aquinas is based in Scotstoun in Glasgow and has seven associated primaries. The school role is approximately 900 and 71% of the young people who attend the school live in SIMD 1-3. All learners in the St Thomas Aquinas learning community study Spanish throughout the broad general education until the end of S3.

Learners have subject choice points at the end of S1 and S2, which ensures a broad range of experiences across the curriculum. At the end of S3, young people can choose to study up to seven national qualifications in S4, leading to further options in S5 and S6.

Background

In January 2012, a new Principal Teacher was appointed to the languages department. At that time, Standard Grade exams were still in place nationally and all learners studied Spanish from S1-S4 with French as an option. Uptake of French was low, with only four young people choosing to study it as a second language. The perception of staff, learners and parents at this time was that it was a Spanish department. Change became vital as new curriculum structures, to be implemented in session 2013-14, would give young people an entitlement to Spanish (L2) until the end of S3 and it would become an option in the senior phase. National changes to the curriculum, the introduction of the 1+2 Approach and a change in leadership provided the department and the school with the opportunity to reinvigorate the delivery of languages and increase uptake in the senior phase.

Implementation

Planning

In order to plan effectively for change, the department went through a process of rigorous self-evaluation, at that time referring to 'How good is our school? (third edition)' to identify potential factors that might impact on language uptake in the senior phase. All staff in the department were involved in these evaluation processes, which took the form of classroom observations, course audits, pupil surveys and feedback from parents.

Learners' experiences – while most young people reported positive experiences in the languages department, from the information gathered it became clear that these experiences were not consistent and that a review of courses would also require a review of pedagogy. There were no whole-school language and cultural events or excursions abroad to enhance the experiences of language learning in the department.

Curriculum – the curriculum structure did not provide young people with the opportunity to study both sciences and languages. At the point of choosing subjects for the senior phase, many learners elected to study two sciences which impacted on the number of young people who then chose to study two languages.

Implementation

Learners' experiences

Discussions at departmental meetings gave staff the opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts on the content and structure of the new courses, thereby giving them ownership in the implementation of change. When designing these courses, the department consulted all relevant documentation, which included 'Building the curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching' and 'Curriculum for Excellence: Modern Languages principles and practice'. Development work to create lessons, resources and assessments for the broad general education was built into the departmental improvement plan and progress was regularly discussed and tracked at meetings using a visual display to record the success of the team. To ensure that learners and parents could engage in this process of change, the department created pupil course plans, which allowed learners to track their own progress and for parents to support them in their learning.

To enhance the pedagogy of the department, sharing good practice became a standing item on the departmental agenda. All staff actively engaged in this process. Staff researched and developed new ideas and activities to motivate learners, put it into their classroom practice and then shared the most successful techniques at team meetings. This type of practice ensured more consistent experiences for learners in the department and created a more

positive language learning environment. This was highlighted in the school's observation procedures in October 2012, where the overall quality of the learning experience in the Modern Languages department was identified as being very good.

"The overall quality of the learning experience in the Modern Languages department is very good. The departmental team is to be complimented on the consistency of learning experience that was witnessed by the Senior Management Team."

The department has provided greater opportunities for young people to develop their cultural awareness and to use their languages in relevant contexts. It was evident in feedback from learners that they wanted more opportunities to use their language outwith the classroom. Consequently, in 2012, the department launched the first trip to Barcelona. This has been a successful venture and has been cited in S6 yearbooks as the most memorable experience by many young people who participated. It is now an annual school trip, enjoyed by both pupils and staff, and has become a feature of the life of the school. The department also runs annual tapas night at local restaurants for S3-S6. These are very popular as learners enjoy the social aspect of these evenings where they can chat with their teachers and friends, experience Spanish food and use the language they have been learning in an informal setting. More recently, the department organised an expedition to Nicaragua in Central America. This was a learner-led initiative. After positive experiences in the department of languages senior pupils wanted to take the skills they had been learning and use them in a community where Spanish was spoken. In order to promote L3, the French breakfast has become a successful annual event which involves all pupils in S2. The format for the breakfast has changed every year and has included a French photo booth, French dress theme for the day and French films.

[Listen to pupils talk about their experiences of language learning at the school](#)

Partnership Working

To further enhance learners' experiences, the department took part in the 'Our Europe' competition, which is organised by Scottish European Educational Trust (SEET) and has now evolved into 'Our World'. A representative from SEET visited the school and delivered a workshop to S3 learners to introduce the competition. This event was successful in that it helped to reinforce the message delivered by the department that language learning is important and that, as young people, they have an important role to play in both the European and global community. Four pupils from St Thomas Aquinas were selected to take part in the final stage of the competition and received the 'Peer Choice Award' at the Scottish Parliament for their video entry.

Curriculum Map

Changes to the curriculum structure in session 2013-14 led to a consultation process between the Senior Leadership Team and the department to discuss pathways which would allow for optimum uptake of languages. It was highlighted by the department that options should be in place for learners to choose two languages and two sciences. This was reflected in new curriculum maps designed by the Senior Leadership Team.

The Senior Leadership Team in the school continue to support the delivery of Scottish Government 1+2 Approach through meticulous planning of curriculum maps. Their support for dual linguists is evident in their planning as they provide a clear progression pathway for learners to continue with both languages into the senior phase. The school regularly consult with learners, parents and staff on curriculum maps to support young people in their aspirations beyond school.

[Listen to the Head Teacher talk about language learning in the school](#)

Impact

From S1-S3, all young people are entitled to three periods (50 minutes) of Spanish and are given an option at the end of S3 to continue their language study. In S2 there is an increased language allocation of 2 periods through the school's elective model. This ensures that all learners experience an L3 (French) as part of BGE in the secondary without taking time away from their L2. In S3, learners can opt to study French in addition to Spanish. This is a popular choice and the department has maintained a high uptake in French as L3.

Uptake of languages in the senior phase is testament to the positive learning experiences and language opportunities received by pupils and the success of the courses developed. Every year the department secure two thirds of the S3 cohort as they move into S4. For session 2017/18 they have successfully secured 8 senior classes: two Higher Spanish classes, four National 4/5 Spanish classes, one Higher French and one National 5 French class. Arrangements for the provision of Advanced Higher are in place at an authority level.

Next Steps

Challenges

While the L3 is now firmly embedded in the curriculum, the challenge still remains for the department to increase uptake of L3 in the senior phase. The Senior Leadership Team are aware that the numbers for the L3 will never match those for the L2 but believe that opportunities must exist for dual linguists.

Next Steps

Building on the success of the school's participation in the 'Our Europe' competition (now 'Our World'), the department will work with more external agencies, inviting them into the school to promote language learning.

The department will further develop links with associated primaries:

- organise programme of senior pupils to visit associate primaries as Language Ambassadors
- liaise with primary link teachers to develop a range of opportunities for moderation and assessment across the broad general education for Spanish (L2) to ensure there is a shared progression pathway from primary into secondary languages
- work with associate primaries to support delivery of French as an L3 as part of the continuum model outlined in the 1+2 Approach.