

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject: MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS**  
**Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL**  
**Date: 29 January 2013**  
**Author: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update elected members of the historical role and costs associated with the engagement of Foreign Language Assistants in secondary schools.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In the past, Foreign Language Assistants have played a role in supporting language learning in Falkirk Schools. Budgetary considerations led to the suspension of this support in the early 1990s. Foreign language assistants were gradually re-instated in the late 1990's until the programme ended in 2010 as part of a budget review for that year.
- 2.2 Foreign Language Assistants worked mainly but not exclusively in secondary schools to specifically support the languages taught. These Foreign Language Assistants were recruited through the British Council FLA scheme. (Appendix 1)
- 2.3 The British Council (Scotland) promotes Foreign Language Assistants in supporting language learning. The popularity of the programme however has significantly reduced across Scotland over the past five years and at this point in time very few authorities across Scotland use FLAs in their schools. The reason for the removal is associated with cost and perhaps in recognition that there is no evidence of a causal link between the use of modern foreign language assistants, attainment and uptake of a modern foreign language in schools.

**3. ERASMUS and COMENIUS**

- 3.1 The ERASMUS programme provides students with grants through the European Commission which contribute towards the extra costs arising from studying abroad. The COMENIUS programme provides funding to support partnerships, in-service training and teaching assistantships.
- 3.2 In session 2012-2013 two secondary schools (Larbert and Braes High Schools) shared a student for 3 months under the ERASMUS training programme (Appendix 1) scheme.
- 3.3 Bo'ness Academy has engaged Foreign Language Assistants through the COMENIUS project (Appendix 1). These Foreign Language Assistants are 'cultural ambassadors' and do not directly support the languages taught in the school.

**4. SUCCESS OF MODERN LANGUAGES IN FALKIRK**

- 4.1 The uptake of a modern foreign language remains positive in all secondary schools across Falkirk Council.

- 4.2 Language departments are investing in information and communication technology (ICT) devices which personalise learning for young people and increase their confidence in speaking the language. These include specialised microphones and hand held video devices. Schools and the authority are increasingly funding these pieces of equipment, which are popular with young people and appear to improve confidence and performance in speaking the language.

## **5. FINANCIAL COSTS OF EMPLOYING MODERN LANGUAGES ASSISTANTS**

- 5.1 The cost of a modern language assistant is circa £8,000 per school. The total cost of re-instating a MLA programme for all secondary schools would therefore be in the region of £64,000 per annum.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The use of Modern Foreign Language Assistants in normal financial circumstances may be a desirable asset for a language department in a secondary school to enhance cultural links. There is however no evidence which indicates that the use of this resource improves attainment or uptake of a modern language and very few authorities around the country employ Foreign Language Assistants at this time. Schools are increasingly using ICT devices to support young people develop confidence around the speaking of a modern language and the view of teachers and pupils using this technology is that it is of value in improving attainment and confidence in the spoken language. Investment is therefore being targeted to supply such technology across departments as financial opportunities arise. This investment supports the Scottish Government's drive to promote the 1+2 language uptake in schools.
- 6.2 The opportunities from the ERASMUS and COMENIUS programmes will continue to be developed by the authority to support secondary schools.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Committee are recommended to:**

- (i) endorse the increasing use of ICT in modern foreign language departments to promote confidence in speaking and using the language; and
- (ii) seek annual updates on the outcomes in secondary schools from participation in the ERASMUS and COMENIUS programmes.

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**Director of Education**

**Date:** 21 January 2013

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## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL

### **British Council Foreign Language Assistants Scheme**

The British Council has reciprocal arrangements with a number of countries around the world which allow young people to be engaged as Foreign Language Assistants.

Foreign Language Assistants are native speakers of French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese who are usually between 20 and 30 years old. They range from advanced students, intending teachers or experienced teachers with a strong command of English and are looking to gain valuable work experience as well as improving their English and learning more about UK culture. Their key task is to support language learning.

Young people from the UK have the opportunity to undertake similar positions in a number of countries.

Foreign Language Assistants engaged under this scheme work for 12 hours per week and receive an allowance of £7,911 (2012 figures) from the authority. They work in schools from early September till late May.

### **ERASMUS Training Programme**

Students from European Union countries have the opportunity to seek out placements under the ERASMUS Life Long Learning Programme. Students on this programme are on placement for 3-6 months and work for 22.5 hours per week. They are funded by the ERASMUS programme (300 Euros per month) and are given financial support or a contribution in kind from the placement provider.

### **COMENIUS Foreign Language Assistants Scheme**

Young people participating in the COMENIUS scheme act as 'cultural ambassadors' supporting international education. They work in schools for 12 hours per week and teach 2 hours per week of their native language (normally a language not usually taught in the school). Their work is normally undertaken within the context of school partnerships and collaborative projects and their placements vary in length depending on the individual project (12-40 weeks). These placements are fully funded by the European Union.