



City of Languages Partners Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Karen Thomas (EMAS), Liz Lord, Tanya Riordan, Debbie Anderson, Gemma Cake, Mark Woolvern, Andrew Starr, Helen Castle, Gemma Bamber, Lynn Jordan

Date: 13 June 2025 1300 – 1400 (online)

1. MP Engagement and National Advocacy

Liz Lord and Tanya Riordan met with MP Stephen Morgan in April to present the Portsmouth City of Languages initiative and to express concerns relating to aspects of languages education nationally and locally. Stephen will chair a roundtable meeting to discuss languages issues in Portsmouth. At his request, Tanya and Liz wrote to him outlining what had been discussed. Stephen then forwarded this letter to colleagues in the Education department and Catherine McKinnell, Minister for Standards in Education has since responded positively. A meeting with Amanda Martin, MP for Portsmouth North has been scheduled for the end of July.

Tanya expressed her continuing concerns about the visa situation for non-UK PGCE students who want to remain and work in the UK. Her thoughts and experiences of this have been sought by the ALL Party Parliamentary Group for Languages (APPG). Tanya will attend the Primary Headteachers' Conference in June to encourage schools to offer placements for trainee teachers and also to consider becoming involved in the E-Live virtual exchange programme.

2. Language Conference at ALNS (2 July)

Planning is well underway with over 40 attendees expected. Speakers will offer sessions for both primary and secondary education. The next evolution of the Solent Language Hub, the Solent Languages Network will focus on civic engagement and is keen to collaborate with Portsmouth City of Languages.

3. Website Updates

The City of Languages section on the PEP website is actively growing. Contributions are welcome; updates can be sent to Karen Thomas, Liz Lord, or directly to Justine Streeton. (Following the meeting, Andrew Starr has forwarded information which can be added to the Portsmouth and Beyond page.)

4. BSL (British Sign Language) Inclusion

Gemma Cake and Mark Woolvern shared comprehensive updates on BSL initiatives:

- BSL is now legally recognised (since 2022).
- BSL learning resources and conversation clubs are being promoted.
- BSL GCSE is in development; updates pending from Ofqual.
- Interest is growing in schools, with potential for after-school clubs and future GCSE offerings.
- Portsmouth libraries have BSL books for children; adult resources are being considered for the website.

Both Gemma and Mark are keen to increase their involvement in next year's Week of Celebrating Languages in Portsmouth. We should all consider how we can make events more accessible to all.

They will contact Liz or Karen or go direct to Justine for additions to the Portsmouth, City of Languages website.

5. Twinning Initiatives

Andrew Starr highlighted partnerships with Caen (France) and Duisburg (Germany). The twinning with Duisburg is 75 years old this year.

Opportunities include pen pal exchanges and cultural visits. Tanya Riordan is promoting virtual exchanges (e.g. E-Live) to reduce barriers for schools. Contacts with Valencia University may support Spanish-language twinning.

Schools in Caen are very keen to have exchanges with Portsmouth schools – Tanya will continue to promote the relative simplicity of setting up virtual exchanges, which may, in turn, lead to live exchanges or visits.

In the autumn, Liz and Tanya will revisit the register of exchanges currently in place in Portsmouth schools.

6. Celebrating Languages Week 2026

Tentative date: Week of 16–20 March 2026 (to align with University of Portsmouth's Global Week). Consideration needed to avoid overlap with Eid. BSL Week coincided with this year's event—future alignment would be ideal.

Plans include:

- Festival of Cultures
- BSL team participation
- Competition across schools – theme to be decided
- PowerPoint resources on top 5 languages in Portsmouth

Schools could also be encouraged to take part in the British Council's Celebrate Speaking competition.

7. Careers and Employment in Languages (First two weeks in October 2025)

The 'new' Solent Languages Network hopes to organise a fortnight of activities across schools focused on careers and employment in languages, and would hope to co-badge this with Portsmouth, City of Languages.

Liz hopes to have a meeting with Amanda Percy and Chloe Bolton in the next few weeks to discuss joint ventures. She has also reached out to the Portsmouth Port Authority and to the Chamber of Commerce.

Attendees should consider what potential there is to include BSL-related careers, as well as careers where languages other than French, German and Spanish are in demand.

8. Future Planning

Steering group to consider:

- Number of annual meetings (2 vs. 3)
- Expanding participation
- Finalising dates for 2026 events

Action Items

- Confirm date for Celebrating Languages Week 2026 (align with Global Week and avoid Eid).
- Contact Joe Hall to confirm University Global Week dates.
- Explore BSL participation in Festival of Cultures.
- Promote BSL clubs in primary and secondary schools.
- Update website with BSL book resources for children and adults.
- Reconnect with Valencia Council in the new year.
- Follow up with Portsmouth schools on existing or new twinning links in autumn.
- Include BSL and HHCL in October careers and employment focus.