



Newcastle City of Languages

How Newcastle City of Languages evolved and is developing

Chief Executive Officer, International Newcastle

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Our Newcastle Our World – a framework for collaboration

Newcastle City of Languages is part of a wider, strategic approach to internationalism for children and young people in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It is a multi-agency partnership approach that links language teaching and learning, international links and experiences and intercultural awareness.

- 2018-2019: International Newcastle led the development of a city-wide approach. The first step was to engage a broad range of people from different organisations and sector across the city (public, private and voluntary and community sector) to develop thinking around city-wide international priorities, which became [Our Newcastle Our World](#), which set out the vision, principles and partnership approach. This acts as a framework for collaboration
- From that – the key priority was agreed in April 2019: ***Newcastle as an international city for children and young people (0-30) as confident, global citizens***
- Rounds of follow-up consultations in 2019 with young people and those who work with them, as well as city stakeholders and national organisations helped to develop our three interconnected workstrands for action:
 - [Connecting Internationally](#): We broker international links and connections to increase access to experience, engagement and opportunities, especially for children and young people, including disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.
 - [Newcastle City of Languages](#): We support language teaching, learning and take up in Newcastle schools and the wider community, to develop the current and future workforce. We also facilitate and promote activities celebrating languages, diverse cultures and our connections to the world.
 - [Internationalism in the City](#): We support activities to increase intercultural awareness and engagement, promote social cohesion, inclusion and the celebration of cultural diversity in the city. We also share opportunities and support for underrepresented groups.

Benefits of internationalism

We support Newcastle schools with international connections, intercultural awareness and language skills, because these are essential for children and young people to thrive in a globally connected world. Engagement supports personal development, builds skills, broadens future education and careers choices and opens doors to a wide range of new experiences and opportunities.



Global Competence

Helps young people navigate a world where interactions, both personal and professional, often span international boundaries and provides a framework for understanding diverse perspectives and cultures.



Enhanced Communication Skills

Proficiency in multiple languages improves overall communication abilities, both verbally and non-verbally and enables them to engage effectively with a wide range of people, regardless of language or cultural differences.



Competitive Advantage

Language skills and intercultural awareness are assets in the jobs market, equipping young people to work effectively in diverse teams and increasing employability and future career opportunities.



Cultural Understanding

Cultivates empathy and fosters an appreciation for the similarities and differences among people, to value and respect diversity in a multicultural society, fostering social cohesion, enriched by cultural awareness.



Education

Engaging with diverse perspectives and experiencing this through virtual working and international visits stimulates creativity and innovation, preparing young people for complex problem-solving, as well as boosting aspirations and ambitions for the future.



Personal Growth

Encounters with different cultures leads to personal development, builds lasting friendships, broadens their worldview and nurtures adaptability, an essential skill in a rapidly changing world.



Peace and Harmony

Cross-cultural understanding helps prevent misunderstandings and conflicts rooted in cultural differences and fosters a sense of global citizenship and shared responsibility for the well being of the planet.



Environmental and Social Challenges

Facilitates international cooperation in addressing pressing issues like climate change, poverty, and health crises and empowers them to contribute meaningfully to local and global solutions.



International Newcastle's role

[International Newcastle](#) is a not-for-profit social enterprise established in 2012. We have a strong [Board](#) of key stakeholders and a broad partnership which delivers huge impact in the city and region.

Our role is as broker, facilitator, catalyst and sometimes manager for activities and initiatives, as well as engaging partners. We lever in resources, expertise and support from our partners to deliver opportunities for children and young people in the city.

International Newcastle works very closely with Newcastle City Council's School Effectiveness Team on languages, international links, intercultural awareness and also supports Schools of Sanctuary. We work at different geographies, in order to maximise the investment of partners in our work for Newcastle as a city, the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority area (7 local authorities), the wider region (which includes Tees Valley local authorities) and nationally, as well as working with key international partners.

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Newcastle City of Languages

Following the establishment of the vision, priorities and approach for the city, [Our Newcastle Our World](#), International Newcastle led further consultation at the end of 2019 with a broad range of stakeholders in the city to agree key areas of focus and action. From that came the priorities for [Newcastle City of Languages](#) (NCoL). This included:

- promoting positive messages about the benefits of language learning
- boosting take up of languages and progression
- sharing CPD opportunities and teaching resources with language teachers
- including culture and creativity as part of making languages fun and accessible
- linking in with businesses and employers around careers
- supporting links between schools and universities
- providing opportunities to celebrate and support our diverse language and cultural communities and supporting Home Heritage and Community Languages
- developing sustainable international links through virtual working

A Working Group of local, regional and national colleagues was established to support the development and implementation of the Newcastle City of Languages work programme (listed on the [NCoL webpage](#)), which ran in person and online. We launched Newcastle City of Languages in January 2020, just before the pandemic.

NCoL now has an Association for Language Learning supported Primary Hub for language teachers in Newcastle and a North East wide Secondary Network for language teachers – from these meetings we identify priorities, gaps, opportunities, CPD needs and share learning ([see article online here](#)). We engage with national and international organisations (Institut français, Goethe Institut, Spanish Embassy Education Department, GCHQ, Association of Language Learning, National Consortium for Language Education and others) to develop opportunities to promote language learning and teaching in the city and also the North East region.

We work closely with the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority skills, careers and school improvement leads to promote languages as a key skill for children and young people. We developed a KS2-5 languages and careers toolkit for NE schools, which launched in 2026.

Express Yourself: North East Festival of Languages has become a key part of NCoL's work, leveraging resources, opportunities and activities for schools in the city and region, establishing new partnerships to support language learning and teaching and promoting the celebration of diverse languages and cultures and our connections to the world – helping us deliver on our priority of Internationalism in the City, with a focus on intercultural awareness and social inclusion.

Connecting Internationally

Our work around the development of international links for schools is complemented by the engagement of schools around languages, intercultural awareness and the work around Schools of Sanctuary. We provide briefings to schools on making the most of international partnerships across the school, curriculum and school community.

We have established strategic partnerships with six different countries to support international links for schools: three with twin/sister cities in France, Germany and the USA and others in priority regions – Spain, and India and via a partner organisations with China and The Netherlands. We also help schools establish links in other countries, such as Italy or other areas they want to connect with.

We now have 80 international school partnerships in place and more developing (from a handful of state schools in 2019). Many of these partnerships support language teaching and learning, but others connect around other curriculum subjects or cross-curriculum.

We supported Turing applications across six rounds from 2021-2026 providing briefings, application support and 1-2-1 help on visits abroad. We also facilitate sharing learning and expertise around school partnerships and visits. We are continuing to support schools under Erasmus+.

We work with British Council on the International School Award. The majority of Newcastle schools have achieved the ISA Foundation Certificate (most as a result of participating in the Festival through an agreement with British Council). We work with the national ISA team and Newcastle schools to help them progress through the ISA levels and embed internationalism across their schools.

Internationalism in the City

We support and promote activities to increase intercultural awareness and engagement, promote social cohesion and inclusion in Newcastle. We promote the celebration of cultural diversity in the city and share information about opportunities to be involved in activities and events that support this.

We support Schools of Sanctuary and City of Sanctuary work in Newcastle and share opportunities and support for underrepresented groups and diaspora communities

We facilitate and promote activities celebrating languages, diverse cultures and our connections to the world by working with a wide range of partners, including through Express Yourself: North East Festival of Languages.



Express Yourself: North East Festival of Languages (2021+)

In response to the pandemic and languages dropping off the taught curriculum, the Newcastle City of Languages working group suggested we develop and online Festival to deliver free languages activities to schools in the region, [Express Yourself: North East Festival of Languages](#).

This has become an incredibly successful annual event which engages hundreds of schools and thousands of children and young people in the North East, as well as offering opportunities to UK and international schools.

In 2020, International Newcastle agreed to co-ordinate the Festival, with a steering group of local, regional and national experts to support this. They engaged a growing number of local, regional, national and international partners to develop a programme delivering free language and culture activities, events and resources for schools.

The Express Yourself: North East Festival of Languages was entirely online for the first time in March 2021 and then again in 2022. It grew into a 3-month event running from January-March every year from 2023, with ever increasing numbers of children and young people and schools involved. The Festival has grown from 11,955 children and young people taking part in 2021 to 115,449 in 2026.

Between January and March annually, the Festival:

- provides a comprehensive programme of free language and cultural activities designed to enrich educational experiences and inspire children and young people aged 3–18
- delivers a flexible programme of in-person events, online events and classroom activities, creative multilingual projects and competitions - all with teaching resources
- focusses on having fun, but is also aligned with curriculum and inclusion objectives
- inspires engagement with languages, promotes cultural awareness, raises aspirations, promotes inclusion and widens perspectives of future education and career opportunities

We encourage our schools to engage with their international partners, using some of the free activities to build relationships and participate in joint projects and help them progress with the International School Award.

Many of the activities in the festival support the celebration of Home Heritage and Community Languages, as well as supporting work around Schools of Sanctuary.

Express Yourself: North East Festival of Languages: [Website](#) | [X \(twitter\)](#) | [facebook](#) | [instagram](#)
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