

Testimonies from CRGS Languages Alumni

Why take Languages at A-level?

***Read about the lives of those who did, and
how A-level Languages have enriched their
paths...***

Tom Byham
International Commercial Lawyer

The quality of A-level French teaching at CRGS is outstanding. Not only did the course put me at an advantage to fellow students when I started my languages degree at Oxford, it also laid the foundations for my career. I now work in the City at one of the world's largest international commercial law firms; *my languages experience was invaluable in helping me get the job*, and frequently presents exciting opportunities at work.

Recently we advised a client on its response to a high-profile environmental disaster - our advice was so time-critical that our client could not afford to wait for an official translation of the French incident report, and so I was tasked with analysing the report. This analysis fed directly into the advice that we gave our client. Next year, I will have the opportunity to go on an international secondment for 6 months, with possible destinations including Hong Kong, New York and Tokyo.

I recommend studying A-level Languages at CRGS to anyone who is career-minded. I also stress how rewarding it can be to balance a languages A-level alongside other subjects - even if you are a science student through and through, never underestimate the value of potentially discovering a lifelong interest that can complement whatever you choose to do.

Elliot Read
Assistant Head Pastoral, Dulwich College.

I started at CRGS in 1994 and sat my A levels in 2001. I was fortunate to be taught by some truly outstanding teachers throughout my time at the School for French and German, who, whilst fostering different approaches, held as a common belief the importance of a strong grammatical foundation to facilitate communication. I went on to study French and German at university, and my other A levels in History and English also helped to prepare me for my course.

Having been genuinely inspired by the commitment and professionalism of the Modern Languages Department as a pupil, I was lucky to be able to return to CRGS for a year in 2005, following a very brief stint in an investment bank, to complete my teacher training. Since 2006, I have worked at a boys' independent school in London, starting as a French and German teacher, then serving successively as Head of German, Head of Year and Deputy Head of Sixth Form. In 2017, I was appointed Assistant Head Pastoral; I still teach a couple of

classes in both languages, which is of course a highlight of the week.

Beyond this, I feel that my training as a linguist has helped me in other aspects of my job, especially in terms of communication and in developing an ability, I hope, to empathise with and understand others. In many respects, these additional competences acquired through studying languages - with the focus of degree courses on foreign culture, history, literature and so on - are as, if not more, important than mastering the languages themselves. They can also be applied to any career, as friends I graduated with (none of whom are teachers!) have also found.

Major Alistair Beard:

Army Officer in the Royal Engineers.

Current role: Officer Commanding, 52 Armoured Engineer Squadron.

Having commissioned from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 2005, I have been stationed across the UK and Germany and served in Afghanistan, Kenya, Oman, Jordan and the Falkland Islands to name a few. Language plays an important role in the day-to-day functions of the military. ***The British Army is increasingly being asked to operate as part of a multinational coalition, predominantly under NATO, meaning language skills and cultural understanding are vital qualities.*** If you can communicate in a local tongue, you are far more respected by your counterparts and working practices can be quickly established.

I have worked intimately with the French, German and Canadian Armies where I have used my language qualifications to good effect. Of particular note has been the use of language skills whilst deployed to Africa as part of a Short Term Training Team (STTT). These teams deploy overseas to teach foreign forces specialist practices ranging in anything from medical training to de-mining. The language skills I learnt at CRGS allowed me to quickly build a rapport with the indigenous troops particularly in ex-French colonies of Africa where the French language remains prevalent.

Finally, the transferable skills associated with languages have utility in day-to-day team building. The Squadron has a diverse make-up of personnel including a number of foreign and commonwealth soldiers and Nepalese. The skills I developed whilst studying French and German have allowed me to learn small phrases of the less common languages – it's amazing what a brief word or two in Fijian can do for teamwork on a rugby pitch!

Championed by the Vice Chief of Defence, the military has recognised the importance of languages. Following the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan,

the Army sought to implement language skills training as a core competence. Many of my soldiers conducted short and long language courses in dialects such as Urdu and Arabic, breaking down a potentially dangerous barrier between us and the Afghanistan National Security Forces and assisting in intelligence gathering with the local population. Soldiers with language competencies are encouraged to take examinations to register their language skills, whether they are language learners or speakers of heritage or community languages.

There are also financial incentives for linguistic skills, ranging from £360 for a lower-level western European language, to £11,700 for a high level, operationally vital linguist. ***In this age of interconnectivity and mutual support between nations, the significance of language skills and qualifications remains as important as ever.***

Dr Sam Elliot:
Electronic Engineer

I was a student at CRGS from 1994 to 2001, and having completed my GCSEs, I decided to take A-levels in Maths, Further Maths, Economics and French.

I knew I wanted to pursue maths at university, but I was looking for a more rounded selection of subjects to broaden my way of thinking. ***French was much more open and discursive than maths, and let me exercise my brain in different ways.*** I'm really pleased to have chosen such a varied selection of subjects. Learning to speak a language was a very different kind of challenge from my more technical A-levels, it forced me to go outside my comfort zone and feel confident making mistakes and learning from them. I carried on my French with a short course during my degree, and I had the opportunity to collaborate with French academics during my PhD: an opportunity which was made possible by my knowledge of the language.

More generally speaking French, I've helped a Congolese passenger negotiate her dinner choices with English speaking airline staff, surprised Erasmus students who didn't think I could understand them, ***and even given a bi-lingual talk at a French university (definitely a challenge, but enormous fun!).***

Although I don't use French directly now in my role as an Electronic Engineer, the varied education I chose has meant I've been confident enough to take on challenges outside of the purely technical arena. ***It's allowed me to progress quickly, take on responsibility, and feel at ease talking with people both inside my own company and elsewhere.*** I now lead a team of innovate research-

focused engineers, producing mathematical components for world leading electronics devices, like [the latest Amazon fire TV stick](#). The open education I have gave me the self-assurance to manage, lead, negotiate and work collaboratively with people all around the world.

Anna Guglielmi

Head of Consumer & Shopper Understanding, Ferrero Canada

Learning languages is one of the most empowering skills you can have and I am a passionate believer in learning at least one language during your education. I did A level French at CRGS but have since used my competency in French to learn Spanish and Italian (I lived in Peru one summer to learn Spanish and I took Italian language classes at University). Once you have mastered one language it becomes a lot easier to learn others since you understand how to apply the grammar rules, learn the necessary vocab and you have the confidence of speaking and practising a different language. ***I went on to study French at university and spent a year abroad in Paris during my third year at university, which was one of the best years of my life;*** this year improved my fluency in French no end. I went on to get a job in Market Research at Procter and Gamble where I spent the first 3 years of my career in London. It was a great help to know different languages in a multilingual organization such as P&G even though I was based in London.

Following my time at P&G I went on to relocate to Luxembourg to work for the Italian chocolate company, Ferrero, to pursue a global role in Consumer and Market research. I spoke French and Italian in this role every day – it was absolutely critical with no English native speakers in the Luxembourg office at that time. After two years in this role I was relocated to Toronto, Canada to lead Research for Ferrero Canada. Since Canada has Quebec I have continued to use my French in this role (even though the accent differs to the Parisian one!) and I continue to speak Italian and Spanish with colleagues in the company and friends outside of work. I will probably end up moving back to Luxembourg at some point as my goal is to become the global head of research for the International Area in Ferrero one day.

Learning languages is a precious skill that I highly recommend!

Yu Ching Tang

Investment Bank Analyst

I chose to study German for A-Level at CRGS because I was simply fascinated by the complexity of German grammar. It also provided a good contrast to my other subjects: Mathematics, Physics and Economics. The interactive German classes helped to broaden my worldview because we often discussed contemporary topics in Germany and other German speaking countries.

Studying abroad at the Vienna University of Economics and Business was one of the highlights of my time at university. My knowledge of German allowed me to fully immerse myself in the rich Austrian culture and the city of Vienna.

Strong language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures are highly sought after by employers. I am currently working as an analyst at a Japanese investment bank in London and we have recently set up a new entity in Frankfurt as part of our Brexit preparations. A ‘German Club’ was launched to give colleagues an insight into the German language and culture. I am grateful to have studied German since it has become an invaluable asset to my career development.

The benefits of learning German at CRGS will undoubtedly extend beyond the A-Level curriculum and learning objectives.

Kloe Lee:

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Studying languages at A-level is not just useful for people who wish to pursue a university degree/career in languages – it has so many broader benefits too!

Coming from a multi-cultural family really motivated my decision to take on French for A-level due to my desire to bridge the communication gaps between individuals from different backgrounds. In my early months of sixth form, I quickly gained a deeper understanding of not only the French language, but also the French culture too.

After moving to London for university (UCL), I found this particularly beneficial as I had the privilege of being in a multi-cultural city with people

from all walks of life. This made it a lot easier to make friends with people from a range of backgrounds. I even ended up taking French as my elective module! I am now training to be a Clinical Psychologist in the NHS and I am frequently working with team members and seeing patients who may not necessarily have English as a first language.

The great advantage of understanding multiple languages is the ability to quickly build rapport with patients, and the increased cultural awareness can improve understanding of our patients' behaviours. This ultimately puts me in a better position to provide appropriate treatment for each individual. ***For me, the best thing about studying languages is the way in which it has massively developed my confidence to face new challenges.*** I am currently considering a 6-month job transfer to collaborate with aspiring Clinical Psychologists in Paris! I really cannot thank my French teachers at CRGS enough for supporting and developing these great transferable skills within me.

Leah Holroyd: Freelance Learning Designer

As a freelance learning designer, I've designed and built online courses for a number of clients, including Guy's & St Thomas's NHS Trust, Imperial College London, and Médecins Sans Frontières. Although I don't use my languages in my day-to-day work, I can honestly say that I wouldn't have got to where I am now without them.

After studying French and German at A-level at CRGS, I went on to study Modern & Medieval Languages (French & German) at Queens' College, Cambridge. As part of my course, I spent 12 months living in Berlin and working for the publishing company Cornelsen. The experience I gained at Cornelsen helped me to get a job in London with the online publisher Epigeum, where I worked as an Editor and then as a Learning Consultant. Although it wasn't a requirement of the job, my languages were really useful – firstly because the Consultant job involved a great deal of travel, and secondly because the company decided to branch out into translations of its products and I was able to advise on that process.

After 4 years at Epigeum, I was offered a job at the University of Canberra in Australia – and because I'd already experienced living in a different country/culture, I felt confident enough to take the plunge and accept. The 18 months I spent there were fantastic and gave me the confidence I needed to go it alone as a freelancer when I returned to the UK. Freelancing has its challenges

but it's brilliant in terms of things like flexibility, autonomy, and variety of work.

I think studying languages really boosted my confidence when it came to travelling and working overseas and that has been invaluable in my career so far. Also, a detailed understanding of language and linguistics has definitely contributed to my work in terms of writing and editing text for online courses.

Bryony Glover:
Writer and charity worker

Even though I studied English at University, French was probably the most important A Level I took. It's more than just handy on a few holidays (though of course it is!): it teaches you that you can communicate with anybody, and it gives you the confidence to do just that. Along the way you learn about politics, philosophy, literature, music...whatever you're interested in, French offers you the avenue to pursue it.

I've just spent a year working for a charity, and now I'm looking forward to giving presentations to teenagers to encourage them to broaden their aspirations. Without French, I'm not sure I would have had the confidence.

Lucy Tallentire

Marketing and Communications

When I arrived at CRGS, I was fairly sure I wanted to apply for Medicine, but I changed my mind over the course of Year 12. ***I enjoyed the freedom and flexibility of the German A-Level, which incorporated language lessons with German culture, politics, literature and current affairs.*** I read German Literature at the University of Sheffield, with a year abroad in Berlin, and then did a Masters in European Literature and Culture at the University of Cambridge.

I'm now working in Marketing and Communications for Ipsos MORI, but while my role does not involve German everyday, it's incredibly useful to be able to rely on in meeting situations with German clients, or to scan the German newspaper headlines. I made incredible friends in Berlin, who I visit often, and I've found it much easier to navigate difficult cultural situations, since my time abroad.

Bradley Price:

Policy and Public Affairs Officer at Anthony Nolan, the UK's stem cell transplant charity

BA (Hons) Politics with French - Warwick

Certificate d'Etudes Politiques - Sciences Po

MSc European Studies: Ideas, Ideologies, Identities - London School of Economics and Political Science

There is no doubt in my mind that without French, I would not be where I am now. A-Level French sparked my interest in French culture and literature, ultimately leading me to write my Bachelors dissertation on the same topic as my A-Level French oral: la laïcité. It also allowed me to study at Sciences Po. ***Being able to speak French is a skill that helps you to stand out in the job market, and I was headhunted for my previous role for this exact reason.***

Olivia Daw:

Student of Architecture

I studied French and German at secondary school and chose to continue French A level at CRGS alongside Maths, English literature and Technology. Although it was very challenging when I first arrived at CRGS, I was committed to working hard as the subject became more and more rewarding the better I got. During the 2 year course I was able to take part in a French exchange to Geneva and also spend a week working in Lille. ***These international experiences were a highlight and to me, represent the benefit of studying a foreign language.***

When leaving sixth form I applied for French at several universities around the UK. I was interviewed at Oxford and offered a place at UCL which I accepted. In the time between leaving CRGS and starting university my plans changed and I am now in my 4th year of studying Architecture at the university of Queensland in Australia. Although I didn't continue studying French, my interest in languages has remained beneficial. I completed a 6 month exchange to Milan as part of my bachelor of architecture and learning Italian was definitely easier with a foundation in French. My housemate and best friends on exchange were also French and they always encouraged me to speak in their language around them, often surprised that an English person could speak their language so well!

Choosing to study a language is less about becoming fluent or having perfect

grammar (although that would be ideal) but instead being open to another culture and way of thinking and learning. The A level course at CRGS offered a wide range of assessment relating to history, literature, and current affairs. Learning to debate passionately in French about topics rather than simply learning pleasantries puts you ahead as you begin to think in French as you would in English. There were also extra curricular opportunities to study philosophical literature which I still try and read when I get the time.

It remains relevant to me that I studied French in school even though I am pursuing an architectural career. I am about to complete my second exchange in Germany next year and hope to spend some time in France combining my passions of languages and architecture by visiting some exciting places.

Anthony Else:

Masters Student at LSE

I studied both French and German at A Level, and went on to achieve A*s in both. This was down to the quality of the teaching, from what I always believed to be the strongest department in the school.

These grades helped me to secure a place at Cambridge to study Geography. Not only did the grades themselves aid me, but I was also later (in my second year) made aware by my director of studies who had selected me after interview (she was a geographer but also a Germanist) that she was hugely keen on my languages and viewed them as a real strength to my application. ***3 out of 5 of the successful applicants in my year at Jesus College had studied at least 1 language at A Level or IB level.***

My languages also helped me to secure an internship with UNEP-WCMC (a subsidiary of the United Nations Environment Programme) in Cambridge after my degree, in early 2018. I was able to use my skills in an extremely international office to translate various documents for them, which saved them valuable time.

While I do not always actively use my languages (and my standard has certainly slipped since I have not been using them regularly), I firmly believe they always look good to employers, not only because of the linguistic skills that you possess, but it demonstrates that you have the ability and desire to understand other cultures as an open-minded individual. This was certainly an attractive part of my application to UNEP-WCMC.

I fully intend to pick up my languages again, as the basis is always there to be built upon again. It opens doors for me to be able to work abroad, or at least to communicate internationally. I am currently studying towards a Masters in Environmental Policy and Regulation at LSE, and I am confident that my linguistic ability is a skill that is certainly sought after in an increasingly globalised world. It is something that I feel has, so far in my post-school life, set me apart from other applicants.

Lastly, I've always found it hugely enjoyable and rewarding to be able to understand another language. Without wanting to sound too clichéd, it does enrich you as a person. That's reason enough to study one; though the employability side is also beneficial!

Rob Parry:

Linguistics Masters Student

Taking French and German at A-Level was always certain for me as I always knew that I would carry on learning languages for as long as I could. The languages department was already a dynamic environment in CRGS and the A-Level classes made this even truer. ***The debate and presentation elements went a long way to improving my confidence and public speaking skills, meaning that so many more opportunities abroad were available*** – the Swiss exchange made me friends I'm still in touch with today! I always looked forward to the language classes, the atmosphere was always enjoyable and the social aspect brought me closer to my classmates. Since A-Level, I've gone on to study French and Portuguese at university and I'm now planning a Linguistics master's degree in France next year. Learning a language at the depth of A-Level gives you new skills to learn many other languages, but also to analyse, present and discuss various topics, even in English. It truly elevates the language learning skills from GCSE and becomes less to do with individual experiences (holidays, pets, family) and more an exercise in examining society as a whole. As I plan on spending my career in Europe, taking modern languages at A-Level has been invaluable and I look forward to seeing what opportunities present themselves in the future.