

Language Ambassadors

Profile



LINDSEY DODD

Field of employment: Academic (French history)

Company: University of Reading

Degree/University: BA History with French and European Studies, Sussex; MA Life History Research: Oral History and Mass-Observation, Sussex; PhD: 'Children under the Allied bombs, France 1940-1945', Reading

Languages spoken (native and learned): English, French

“Learning a language is difficult. Yet so many people speak more than one – why not you?! Persevere, and it is one of the most rewarding things you can do. It is a skill with applications in numerous contexts, personal and professional. Learning a language forces you to engage with your own culture and others – sometimes making you realise that you have a culture which is different from others. It causes you to consider means of communication beyond words. And, like riding a bike, it is a skill that will never leave you, or lose relevance.”

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“I studied French at university because I was good at it. Simple as that. I never questioned whether or not it would be ‘useful’. Use – often shorthand for ‘how much will I earn?’ – is overrated as a reason to study a subject. Study it because you enjoy it and because you are good at it; give yourself the chance to excel. Universities are places of learning, not apprenticeships. The time to figure out ‘use’ is later in your life, and languages will never damage your cause – indeed, they will open doors that would otherwise remain shut.

“Studying French at university has been extremely significant as it was only at university, and specifically during my year abroad, that I felt that my French was at a level good enough to enable easy communication. Languages are difficult, and they are acquired over time; confidence can take even longer. But since I graduated, speaking French has come into many different job contexts, and given me opportunities to do remarkable things.

“I could not do my current work without speaking French; I am a historian investigating themes in French history never before examined. I am an oral historian, meaning that I interview elderly people about the past. These people are French – and believe it or not, not everyone in Europe, let alone the world, does speak English! Being a linguist and a historian gives me two avenues to pursue in my professional career, in French studies and in history.”