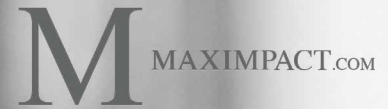




Specialist Language Courses



CASE STUDY:

MAXIMPACT & SLC'S ONLINE LANGUAGE TRAINING HELPS SYRIAN REFUGEES BUILD NEW LIVES IN THE UK

Language learning makes a difference. Language learning breaks down barriers, builds communities and offers opportunity to people around the world.

We see this in much of the training we do with healthcare professionals around the world, enabling doctors and nurses to acquire the professional English they need to work in other countries and support healthcare systems and patients coping with massive staff shortages.

However, perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in the work we have been doing with Maximpact to support Syrian refugees in Northern Ireland since May 2018.

Teaching Syrian refugees in Northern Ireland

We were contacted in early 2018 by Maximpact, an organisation working in Northern Ireland to support the resettlement of refugees. Maximpact had identified a clear need for the Syrian refugees they were in contact with to improve their English language skills so they could find work and integrate better into local communities. This need was, in many cases, not being catered for by local Further Education colleges as many refugees were unable to attend regular classes. Some had healthcare problems or disabilities which kept them at home. Others had young children to look after, or lived in places where there were few public transport facilities or adequate college classes.

Maximpact saw that the online classes given by SLC would be able to overcome these difficulties. Refugees could attend lessons at home; schedules could revolve around their availability; materials could be shared online and coursebooks sent to learners' addresses. Maximpact also saw that courses could be linked to employment opportunities, and SLC's experience of creating bespoke training programmes for specific purposes allowed us to suggest a number of different sectors that courses could prepare learners for, including care, hospitality, retail and logistics.

Pilot programme

Together, Maximpact and SLC worked on creating a pilot programme for a group of five refugees specifically designed to help them enter the hospitality industry. The course focused on developing the students' general English abilities, especially communicative, while also preparing them for jobs in hotels and restaurants by incorporating the specialist vocabulary and functional language of the hospitality industry.

“We were delighted to be approached by Maximpact. We believe that language training can make a real difference to learners' lives and working with Syrian refugees is such a powerful example of what this can look like in practice.”

Chris Moore, Managing Director, SLC

The course was delivered via Zoom, the award-winning videoconferencing software used by SLC for all its online courses. Students were able to communicate by video, voice and text, and interactive whiteboards and screen sharing were used to maximise their involvement, together with a combination of coursebook and digital materials.

The 60-hour course took place over five weeks and covered topics such as reservations, hotel amenities, food preparation and job interviews alongside the grammar and skills work necessary to bring the learners' general English to the required level. The small size of the group lent flexibility to the course, and students were involved in the selection of topics and language, ensuring that they worked on material that was relevant to their lives and careers.

All five of the students who took part in the course were subsequently offered work in hospitality through Maximpact, so proving the course to be a significant success.

The programme expands

Following the success of the pilot, Maximpact secured additional funding to teach further groups at the end of 2018 and into 2019. Some groups were specifically taught the English they needed to work in care, a programme which included SLC's online English for Care course, while others focused

“Many thanks for your big effort which you give to us. Annelie is an expert teacher and the results will appear soon.”

Farouk, course participant

on the more general language skills required to enter the workplace irrespective of sector.

Groups were all level-tested prior to course commencement and streamed accordingly, allowing SLC's tutor to target the needs of individual participants effectively. This was reflected in the course inputs, the choice of materials and in the classroom language used by the teacher. Maximpact provided the technical support to ensure attendance and use of online materials. This included integrating WhatsApp into the courses to support their organisation and also as a peer-led learning and advice forum. Lessons were recorded for students to review ongoingly and to support any absentees. Attendance and progress reporting was systematised and allowed Maximpact to provide hands on project management that was able to respond quickly to any issues as they arose.

Maximpact also secured iPads for participants and set up local community-based language support. They made sure that the refugees got all the support they needed throughout their learning, which included having translation and interpreting for lower level students available at all times and the services of a local reader to visit students' homes. This enabled Maximpact and SLC to further tailor the course and provide access to targeted English language support that was able to both consolidate and extend the learning they did in online classrooms.

“Many thanks Caroline (from Maximpact) and Ms Annelie (SLC tutor) for your effort and many thanks for everyone who works in the shadows and made this course come true.”

Ali, course participant

The results achieved were again excellent. End of course tests showed marked improvements in language ability. A number of students were able to enter the workplace through Maximpact's job placement assistance, while others continued their English studies on continuation courses. The feedback from all participants was excellent.

The programme today

At the time of writing, January 2020, Maximpact's English for Refugees programme has grown to consist of six groups studying on 80-hour courses at multiple levels, from complete beginner through to upper-intermediate. SLC has three teachers working with the refugees who are either bilingual or who have spent time working in Arabic-speaking countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This illustrates the advantage of online tuition being able to bring the right teachers to students wherever they may be. While the students are scattered across Northern Ireland, their teachers are in Brighton, Malvern and the Peak district.

These courses are a direct continuation and expansion of previous courses. This has allowed the SLC academic team and Maximpact to plan the delivery of longer-term curricula at the different levels more strategically and to start leveraging the peer support afforded by networks of local communities and learners' extended families as word of mouth has built demand for the courses.

Maximpact and SLC continue to work together to improve the programme wherever possible. Areas covered include the development of both bespoke assessments and feedback and review systems; the development of peer-led 'buddy groups' organised and managed by Maximpact and led by the refugees

“I have found it more useful than any course I've done before, because in this course the teacher focuses on me more. Also, at any time I can ask about anything I don't understand, and my teacher explains to me until I understand the full meaning of anything I ask about.”

Mourad, course participant



themselves; the integration of WhatsApp in both testing and ongoing support; the selection and use of coursebook and literacy materials; the provision of local logistical and project management support; and weekly attendance and progress reporting.



The way of learning is perfect and gives us confidence. I love online course because I can't attend college. I have a new-born baby and I should take care of him.

Asmaa, course participant



In conclusion

This case study highlights the impact language learning can have on the lives of those who perhaps need it most. Our courses' tailored approach is helping refugees who have come from the most challenging of circumstances settle into new communities, enter the workplace and rebuild their lives.

At SLC, we are delighted to have had the opportunity to apply our online model to the difficult problem of teaching a wide range of students located in many different places; and to have seen it succeed and grow. We are very much looking forward to continuing our work on these programmes with Maximpact.

About SLC

Based at the University of Sussex, SLC is one of the UK's leading providers of online English language services. SLC trains thousands of students in online classrooms and through the online English language courses it publishes.

www.specialistlanguagecourses.com

About Maximpact

Maximpact is a global organisation solving community challenges for its partners through world-class consultancy, training and capacity building. Maximpact's Fast Track to Employment and Social Integration Programme is designed to assist refugees in learning English and any additional vocational skills needed in order to become employed in their host countries.

www.maximpact.com/fast-track-to-employment/



"We have been very satisfied with the exceptional service provided by SLC, the flexibility of the tutors to deal with the unpredictable, whilst maintaining the high standards which SLC has built an outstanding reputation on delivering. Maximpact looks forward to further ongoing collaborations with SLC."


Caroline Kennedy, Senior Consultant, Maximpact



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