



'Broadening Horizons':

A proposal for a pilot project to promote Mandarin Chinese in Specialist Language Colleges in the South West through a Taiwanese Assistant Scheme

Presented by Graham Watson MEP

Member of the European Parliament for South West England and Gibraltar

Leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament

April 2007





Foreword by Graham Watson MEP

In our interdependent world, where actions on one side of the planet create reactions on the other, our ability to communicate with one another, to share ideas and to solve problems together is ever more important.

Yet in the UK this is not always reflected in the classroom. Put simply, our children are not being given the opportunity to learn Chinese: an opportunity which would serve them so well in future years. With the world's three major languages, Mandarin, Spanish and English, our children would be equipped to communicate with nearly a quarter of the world's population.

Traditionally, the provision of Chinese teaching in the UK has been a preserve for private schools, colleges or universities. Whilst the British Council now offers a Chinese language assistant scheme, uptake of this has been reserved to those schools which can commit up to £10,000 per annum.

I believe that we must open-up the provision for the teaching of Chinese language and culture in more of our schools: establishments which are passionate about language learning but which currently do not have a provision for Mandarin and which have been deterred from the British Council scheme due to its price tag.

That is why, further to a visit I made to Taiwan in 2006, I set about trying to establish the framework for a Taiwanese assistant scheme which would bring young and enthusiastic Taiwanese assistants to specialist language colleges in my constituency to sow the seeds for Chinese teaching. Through close liaison with the Taipei Representative Office in London, the British Council and the interested schools, all of which have a particularly forward-looking outlook, I believe that we have put together a viable proposal which would offer Taiwanese assistants a unique snapshot into life in rural England, and the schools a unique opportunity to welcome into their community a 'real-life' Mandarin speaker.

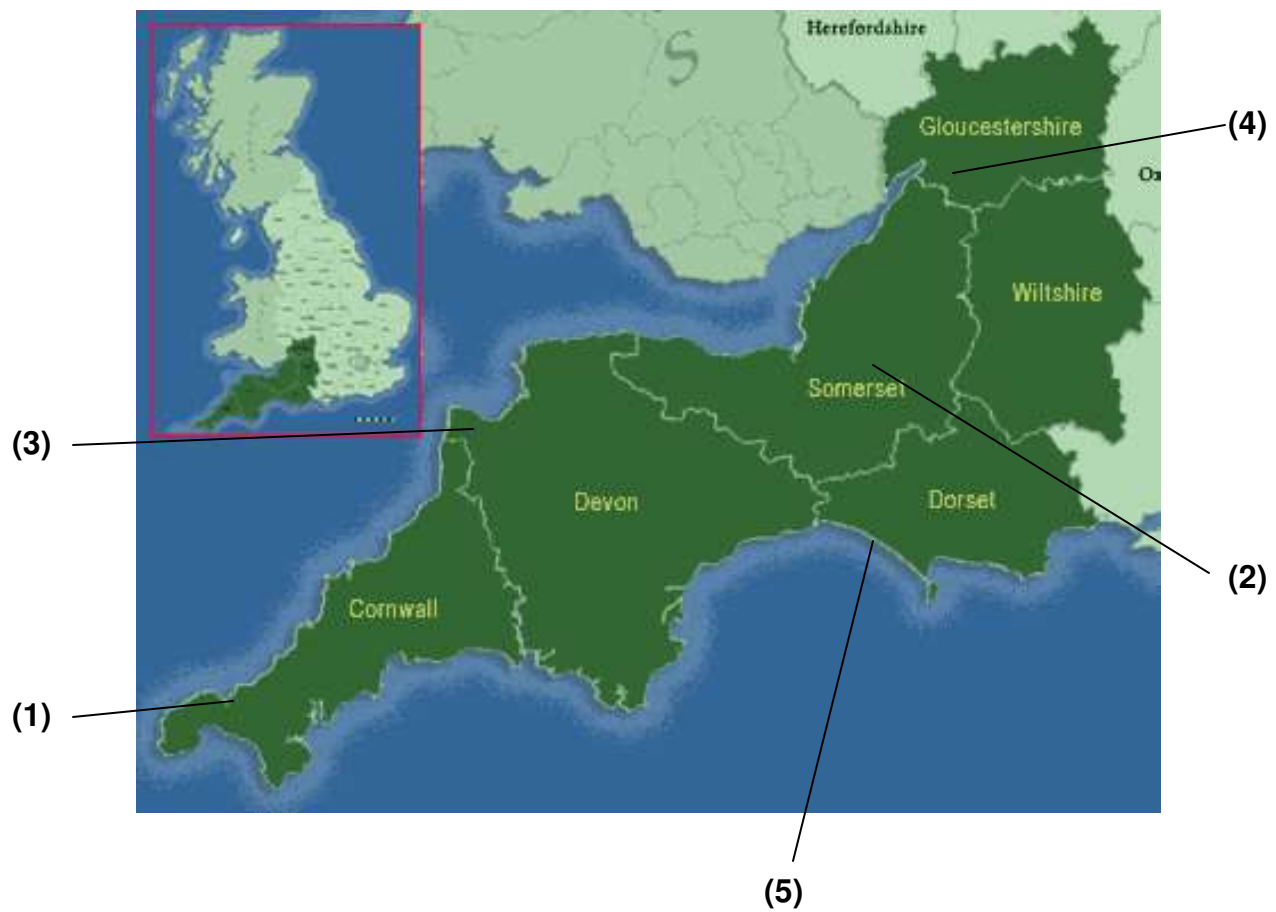


A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Watson".



The interested schools:

- 1) Hayle Community School, Hayle, Cornwall
- 2) Huish Episcopi School, Huish Episcopi, Somerset
- 3) Pilton Community College, Barnstaple, Devon
- 4) The Sir Bernard Lovell, nr. Bristol
- 5) Sir John Colfox, Bridport



Information on Specialist Languages Colleges:



From my experience, the five chosen languages colleges all have a particularly outward-looking focus with a drive for internationalism. As such, these schools want to use an assistant to introduce basic Mandarin but also to develop cultural understanding for their pupils of Taiwanese culture.

Below is an overview of the interested language colleges:

- 1) **Hayle Community School** is a mixed sex comprehensive school (ages 11-16) with 681 pupils, situated at the tip of Cornwall near St Ives and Penzance. The school currently employs French, Spanish and German assistants and therefore has experience in looking after and accommodating assistants. Hayle would provide both a coordinator for the work of an assistant and a mentor to look after an assistant's welfare needs.
- 2) **Huish Episcopi Science and Language College** is a high-achieving mixed sex comprehensive school (ages 11-16) with 1208 pupils located at the heart of rural Somerset. Huish Episcopi does not currently employ language assistants, nor has it for some time, but it has recently introduced Chinese teaching through its 'Gifted and Talented' scheme and thus is particularly keen to expand this area. Huish is interested in sharing an assistant with another college and are currently trying to establish links with nearby schools to enable this to work.
- 3) **Pilton Community College** is large mixed sex comprehensive school (ages 11-16) with 1414 pupils located in the North Devon town of Barnstaple. The College has a rich tradition of welcoming into its fold foreign language assistants and currently has a Japanese Language assistant working within the language department. Pilton Community College would like to use the opportunity to raise cultural awareness; as important for them as promoting structured Mandarin language skills.
- 4) **The Sir Bernard Lovell School** is a large mixed sex comprehensive school with a Sixth Form (ages 11-18), located near Bristol with 1319 pupils. The College has a real dynamic drive for internationalism, presenting to its students the vision that 'the world is not flat'. Whilst it has considered Chinese assistants in the past, funding through the current British Council system has been an issue and it has been unable to commit. The College has a particularly friendly feel and the necessary structures in place with an International coordinator and six International Advocates among staff to ensure that an assistant is well utilised and looked after.
- 5) **The Sir John Colfox School** is an 11-18 Comprehensive School with 1013 pupils located in the seaside town of Bridport in Dorset. The College currently employs three language assistants (French, German and Spanish with the aim of employing a further French assistant to support its work in local primary schools) and thus has experience in ensuring assistants are well looked after and well



An Assistant's life in the South West

The Aims and Role of an Assistant

This pilot project is based along similar lines to a successful and established British Council scheme for Mandarin assistants who come to the UK from mainland China. In particular, the pilot year would run from September to June and assistants would be contracted for 12 hours work in schools per week. This would take into account school holidays which fall within this period.

The primary aim of the project is to introduce Taiwanese Mandarin speakers into these selected schools to promote Mandarin as an essential global language. As a result, the main role of an assistant within their 12 hour working week would be to teach introductory Mandarin classes. Nonetheless, since our schools currently do not offer Mandarin, it is important to point out that assistants would not be 'assisting' Mandarin teachers, they would in fact be teaching it themselves. However, it is also important to note that teaching for this would be less formal than for a mainstream subject in the school curriculum. Schools will also be requested to provide an induction period for assistants, which would enable them to understand better teaching style and discipline within the school. In some instances a qualified teacher would be on-hand to help assistants in the classroom, but generally assistants would be by themselves with small groups.

Since Mandarin is not part of the school curriculum, there will be no pressure on Taiwanese assistants to obtain good grades for their students in exam results. Moreover, class size would much smaller than for other lessons. Foreign language assistants normally work with groups of between 5 and 15 pupils, which enables a greater level of student participation. Within these lessons, assistants would be given space to promote the Mandarin language and Taiwanese culture through a variety of different means.

Some of the schools have expressed an interest in drawing upon an assistant's experiences, skills and interests in other areas aside from introductory language teaching. This might be for example in teaching Taiwanese cooking, history, geography, art or dance, but it would be underpinned by the dual role of an assistant being to promote Taiwanese culture within the schools. I do not envisage prescribing what extra activities an assistant should bring to a school, but I would like to see assistants utilised to their maximum by sharing what they are passionate about and interesting the pupils. Additional hours accrued helping in other areas of the school would count towards an assistant's 12 hours per week.

Some schools have also expressed an interest in using an assistant for OUTREACH work in local primary schools and, where it is offered, in the delivery of adult education. Where appropriate and where an assistant was interested, this might also be included in an assistant's weekly timetable.

Timetabling for an assistant will be the responsibility of the host school and this would be organised in liaison with an assistant and on the basis of their skills, interests and the possibility of OUTREACH work or adult education. It may also be possible to ensure timetabling allows assistants sufficient opportunity to explore the local area and destinations further afield, for example by allowing for a three-day weekend.



Meeting an Assistant's Personal Needs

Within every host school there will be a coordinator and mentor for an assistant who would be a qualified teacher at the school. This would generally be the Head of Languages in the school, but this would ultimately be for the schools to decide. This person would organise a suitable timetable for an assistant and also be on-hand to provide practical advice on teaching methods, discipline issues or any other concerns an assistant may have. Many of the schools included in this proposal currently have a coordinator for assistants and therefore have experience in the kind of challenges assistants may face and approaches to meet these challenges.

Assistants will be accommodated by host families which I have asked the schools to help arrange. I believe that by staying with an English family an assistant will infinitely gain much more from their experience than would be the case were they to stay by themselves or with other language assistants. A host family would also provide another important contact point for an assistant. In instances where there is a cost involved in a staying with a family, this cost would be met through an assistant's salary (**see Salaries and Financing**).

Assistants in this scheme would take part in two induction-style courses: one in Taipei, which the British Council Representative in Taiwan has indicated that he would help organise and one in the UK, for which the British Council in London have offered help. The aim of these inductions would be to offer assistants a greater idea about what teaching in British schools would entail as well a selection of cultural 'dos and don'ts' for the UK. The induction in Taiwan will focus on cultural aspects whereas the induction in London, which will take place on arrival and before assistants travel to their host schools, would focus on teaching methods. I understand that the Taipei Representative Office in London might also be prepared to host a reception at this event. Such courses would afford assistants the opportunity to meet each other and discuss concerns. Whilst organised trips for assistants taking part in the scheme are not proposed, it is hoped that by meeting and spending time together both in Taipei and London, assistants would be able to organise amongst themselves to explore together the local area should they so desire.

During the induction in London, assistants would be offered the opportunity of opening bank accounts with an HSBC branch in the city. HSBC currently help to organise accounts for PRC Chinese assistants. To open such an account, assistants would require: a passport, valid visa, proof of home town address in Taiwan and a letter from their employer with details of the applicant's UK address and duration of employment.

Visas would be organised from Taipei and I have assurances that once a scheme is in place, obtaining working visas for assistants for a 10-month period would not pose a problem.



Salaries and Financing

My aim with this scheme was to create a subsidised programme that would offer a 'taster' of what Mandarin teaching might offer but which would be affordable for the interested schools.

I have based the project on the British Council scheme currently in operation. As such, an assistant's salary would be identical - £800 per month (subject to National Insurance contributions at 11% and tax on earnings exceeding £5229) which represents a 10-month salary of £8000. As previously stated, any costs for accommodation with a host family would have to be met through this salary. Accommodation costs may range from £50-£80 per week. All personal domestic travel (with exception of the initial train fare from London to the South West) would also be met through an assistant's salary.

On top of an assistant's salary are their travel costs from Taipei to London and from London to their host school. On the basis of a return flight from Taipei costing between £700-£900 and accounting for train travel in the UK costing between £40-70, travel costs are estimated at £1000 per assistant.

Thus, the overall cost of an assistant for 10 months would be £9000. To meet this, I propose that participating schools fund £3000 (one third) and that the Taiwanese Executive funds £6000 (two thirds) on the understanding that should the scheme become established the contribution from the schools would increase. To add a further incentive for the schools and to reduce their administrative burden, I propose that an assistant's salary is paid by the Taipei Representative Office in London rather than by the schools themselves. The schools would pay their contribution for the pilot project of £3000 to the Taipei Representative Office in London in either one payment or a split six-month payment. I propose that the administrative side of the scheme is organised from the Taipei Representative Office in London and I propose therefore that work contracts would be arranged between the Taipei Representative Office and the assistants.

The total cost for 5 assistants therefore would be £45,000. On the basis of my proposal, this represents a contribution from the Taiwanese Executive of £30,000.

Outstanding Financial Question

Concerning an induction day in London, for a two-day course plus accommodation for 5 assistants, I have been quoted up to £1000 to organise an event. This might include, for instance, the cost of paying a trained Mandarin teacher to come to speak about teaching techniques in the UK. I am confident that funding for this could be obtained privately from business sponsorship although seeking such funding has had to wait until any proposal is agreed upon.



Outstanding Issues



Recruitment

Schools would require Mandarin assistants with at least a basic level of English and also an understanding of how languages are taught. These might be language graduates or trained teachers. Schools have indicated that they would not require any formal prior interview with assistants, although they would expect a selection process in recruitment which would ensure candidates were competent and above all enthusiastic.

Learning Opportunities for Assistants

Whilst I have had indications from some schools that it might be possible to organise language courses or cultural tours for assistants, these elements are not factored into the proposal. Some schools may be in a position to offer this; others will not be. Nonetheless, an assistant will be able to liaise closely with their mentor in the school to ensure they get the most out of this experience and most schools will either offer, or be situated near centres which offer, English courses in which an assistant might enrol.

An appraisal for the project

I propose to host a meeting to evaluate the development of this scheme in March-April 2008 to which would be invited representatives from the Taipei Representative Office, the school Head teachers, assistants' mentors and the assistants themselves. This could be organised near my constituency office in Somerset, which would also be the most central to all schools. It would provide a useful forum to discuss the success of the scheme, any specific concerns about the running of the scheme and would also be a date to decide whether this pilot could become established.

Time Frame

To start this project from mid-September 2007 leaves 5 months to recruit and brief assistants, organise working visas, carrying out the necessary police checks, liaise with local schools to finalise home-stay accommodation and arrange the induction courses. Clearly if this proposal is to gain approval and be implemented by September, commitments must be made now.

This would therefore require close cooperation between the Taiwanese Executive and UK, in particular on matters such as Criminal Record Bureau Checks (which from September 2007 will be obligatory for all persons working with children in the UK). Assistants would need to be CRB-checked, which would require a complete police check by UK authorities who would request information from Taiwan on an assistant's background.

