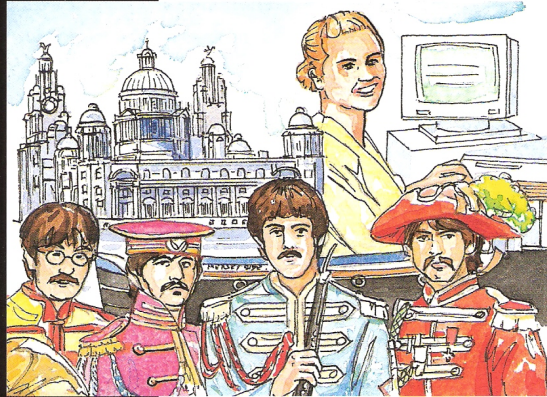


OPEN LEARNING

Training for the Tourist Industry

WILKOMMEN IN MERSEYSIDE!



Tourism is vital to Merseyside and to Liverpool, a city which boasts the River Mersey, the new Albert Dock development and the Beatles as major tourist attractions (not to mention two football teams and two cathedrals).

The Merseyside Tourist Board is actively involved in promoting the city, both within the UK and abroad, and now welcomes some

1.2 million visitors to the area every year, including many of the 220,000 overseas guests who visit the North West region as a whole.

In 1988 the Tourist Board recognised that although British visitors were well catered for, opportunities to attract overseas guests were not being fully exploited, as few staff in the tourism industry were proficient in a foreign language. Research indicated that competence in French, German, Spanish and Japanese should be the priority, with languages such as Dutch, Russian and Italian required to a lesser extent.

The First Step

The Tourist Board approached the Merseyside Language Export Centre, an organisation which specialises in producing tailor-made Open Learning material. As an autonomous part of Liverpool University, the Centre has broad experience of language training for industry and has worked extensively in areas such as exports and Customs and Excise.

The Centre's language training adviser aimed to create a body of materials which would provide basic foreign language skills and give students a general understanding of the culture of each of the countries concerned. The materials would concentrate on the spoken rather than the written word and would be targeted at staff in hotels, restaurants



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LEARNING METHODS CASE STUDY

and sports clubs as well as the Mersey Guides who daily take parties of foreign tourists round Liverpool.

Participating Companies

The Beatles Experience is typical of the organisations that took part in the initiative, with five of its seven full-time staff participating in the scheme. After only two years, the Experience was attracting 150,000 visitors a year of which 20 per cent were foreign language speakers. The manager's aim was to increase this percentage further.

Liverpool YMCA in the city centre was another participant, accommodating over 300 Japanese students each year, following its listing in the Diamond Student Travel Guide.

The Training Solution

The objective of the course was simple:

- to provide a means whereby course participants can understand, and be understood by, foreign tourists in the city in order to give them better service.

To fit in with participants' work patterns, the Open Learning project involved a weekly tutorial for small groups as well as a range of self-study materials such as worksheets and audio tapes. Materials were regularly updated with 'live' maps, memos and timetables. The course was designed to facilitate co-operation between participants who were encouraged to practice in groups as well as working solo.

The role of the tutor was vital, encompassing correcting pronunciation and monitoring each

participant's progress. The climax of the course was a trip around Liverpool when trainees conducted a native speaker around the city and delivered a foreign language commentary on sites and attractions.

No previous language experience was necessary, although trainees were grouped according to their existing skill level.

Funding the Project

The Merseyside Language Export Centre secured funding for the initiative from the European Social Fund.

Project Feedback

The training programme led to an immediate improvement in the rapport between tourism staff and visitors to Liverpool, many of whom were clearly delighted to be greeted and welcomed in their own language.

Employers, too, have responded favourably to the flexibility of the Open Learning approach. The manager of the Beatles Experience was positive:

"With such a busy operation, I could not have allowed staff to go on a formal language course. Open Learning, supported by regular two-hour tutorials, is an ideal solution for an operation such as ours."

The YMCA was equally enthusiastic:

"Flexible learning provided plenty of time to practise and ensured that participants were sufficiently involved with their own learning to feel committed to its success."

Future Developments

The Language Export Centre is continuing to work on the confidence-building aspects of the programme and is also investigating how to tailor material more closely to the needs of individual companies. This would ensure that students do not learn vocabulary or phrases that are not directly relevant to their everyday business.

The programmes have been extremely well received and have gained a Certificate of Commendation for Effective Training under the National Training Award scheme.

Project Results

The Tourist Board is eager to recruit staff who are proficient in more than one language and is planning to continue the programme and encourage other tourism companies to do the same. The head of the Tourist Board's

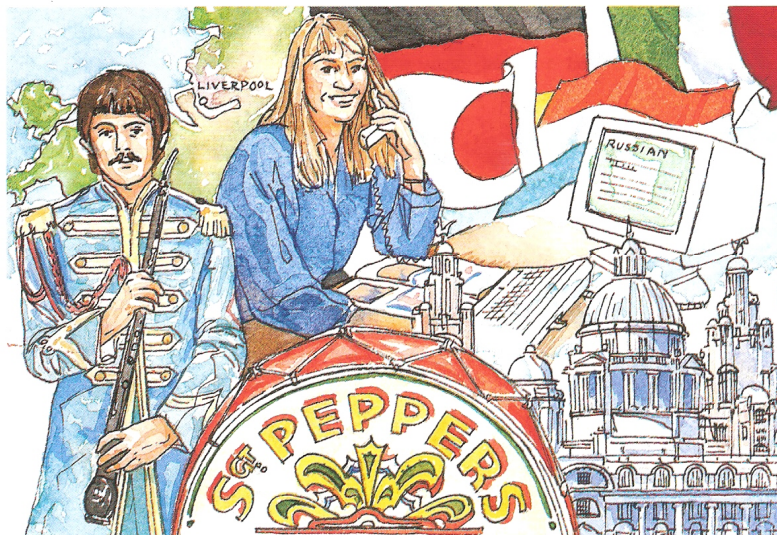
Marketing and Promotions Department expresses the benefits simply:

"It makes sound business sense to make as much use of foreign languages as possible in an industry such as tourism. The response from overseas visitors has been overwhelmingly positive."

Many of the participating tourist venues are reporting an increase in foreign visitors as well as in staff motivation and confidence. Many feel they are now equipped to take positive action to build up their overseas business.

Future Developments

The Language Export Centre has established links with both Paris and Valencia and is planning to take the project one stage further through the creation of a three-way language link. Staff exchanges and visits are a further possibility.



O P E N L E A R N I N G

Plans are also being made to capitalise on the increasing numbers of tourists coming to Merseyside from Eastern Europe. The addition of more languages, coupled with the expansion of the activities included in the existing programme, will ensure that Liverpool's flexible

language training programme will see more successes in the future.

This Case Study is one of a series of eight covering Open Learning and foreign languages in the hospitality and leisure sector.