

Curriculum Ambassadors

Case Study: Jess Brandham

Jess went to Franklin College, Grimsby and is studying French and Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh and will graduate in 2020.



What attracted you to studying languages at the University of Edinburgh?

From my first ever visit to Scotland for the University of Edinburgh open day in 2015, I got a great feeling about the university and city. Filled with Hogwarts-like buildings, homely bagpipes and a warm Scottish atmosphere, I knew straight away Edinburgh was the place my heart was. Even more so, the prospect of continuing languages for a further four years in such an international city was something that truly excited me!

Languages and Linguistics at Edinburgh are a really strong point of the university academically and this is reflected in the incredible range of courses available in almost everything you could think of language-related! The lecturers are world-class experts who are so enthusiastic about their subject and determined for you to do well! Having the opportunity to be part of the research of our lecturers is also something that I love about Edinburgh – they really encourage us to be in the driver's seat and inspire us to become positive, inquisitive and independent thinkers!

I wouldn't want to be studying anything else for my undergraduate degree at any other university – Edinburgh is the perfect match for me.

How do you feel you benefited through your work as a Curriculum Ambassador? What did you enjoy most about this role?

Without doubt, working as a Curriculum Ambassador for French has been one of the most rewarding and worthwhile experiences I have taken up since joining university. I teach French to a class of Primary 6 pupils every week at Prestonfield Primary School in South Edinburgh, with the mission of widening participation into higher education.

Each week, I plan lessons in line with the Scottish curriculum for modern languages, with the aim of giving each child the opportunity to see the world beyond the classroom. Having attended a low-achieving school myself, educational inequality is something that I feel determined to help combat and I feel like Edinburgh have given me the opportunity give something back!

Having no fully-qualified French teacher in the school itself meant that when I first arrived, the children had a lack of motivation and knowledge of French – so we started from square one.

However, after around three months in my role as a curriculum ambassador, I've found it so rewarding to see the children find a new interest in learning a new language and exploring other cultures.

After lots of lessons, many of the children in the class can introduce themselves, tell others about what they like and don't like along with talking about their family and friends in French. They also love singing along to songs in French and we're progressively working towards counting to 100 by the time I finish my placement at the school. I'm so proud of them

I have loved every minute and I believe that the entire experience has benefited my future. Thrown in at the deep end, I have designed every lesson and worked around the Scottish curriculum with my own ideas. This has made me more creative and has pushed me to allocate enough time to plan fulfilling lessons. Also, through leading the class, my self-confidence has come on in leaps and bounds as well as my ability to be assertive with behaviour management.



I have gained great interpersonal skills through working with the children from a range of backgrounds and locations, as well as the teachers. The experience has allowed me to become more professional and gain valuable experience for my goal to participate in the Teach First programme after I graduate. In all, an incredible insight to life as a teacher, a great skills-booster and one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had!

What have been the best and worst things about studying French and Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh?

One of the things I love most about being a student at Edinburgh is the flexibility within the academic programmes – with the opportunity to try new things and stretch out of my comfort zone!

For example, in first year, I decided to take beginners German as an outside subject, along with my main subjects of French and Linguistics. Therefore, in one lecture I could be learning about the structure of the oral cavity and how it works to produce sounds, the next I could be learning how to pronounce some of the insanely long words in German, to another where I could be translating and analyzing a French film. Edinburgh really brings languages to life in every aspect; the lecturers are so enthusiastic and down-to-earth!

Some of our assignments are often quite mind-boggling – but this is more of a challenging aspect, rather than a negative one. The lecturers are really supportive and are always willing to answer your questions clearly when you get stuck.

We also have Familing, a group of 2nd, 3rd and 4th years who help us voluntarily and put on sessions each week. Having a great support network around you really makes the schools feel like a family – the collaborative thinking makes the challenges more enjoyable.

How have you found managing a good work/life balance, either while studying or working?

Time-management is something that I really struggled with during A-Levels and when starting at university. However, with my desire to do the best I can academically, while grasping so many of the amazing opportunities Edinburgh has to offer – I have had to force myself to become effective in managing my time by structuring my time around my lectures, tutorials and assignments.

Overcoming my poor time management is something I am really proud of since I can fulfil my time with things I love and enjoy – rather than leaving everything till last minute and feeling super stressed. Both my position on the committee of EGP and as a curriculum ambassador are big commitments, yet challenges that I thrive in, because I am so enthusiastic about them. As well as this, in second year I have even found the time to join the Edinburgh University Female Voice Choir – a new commitment in something totally unique from the rest of my university life that allows me to destress and relax!

What are you currently doing and what are your plans for your future career?

Alongside my second year studies in French and Linguistics, I am currently grasping every opportunity I can. After applying and successfully gaining the role as Curriculum Ambassador for French, I teach French to a class of Primary 6 pupils every week at Prestonfield Primary School in South Edinburgh, with the mission of widening participation into higher education. Each week, I plan lessons in line with the Scottish curriculum for modern languages, with the aim of giving each child the opportunity to see the world beyond the classroom.

Having attended a low-achieving school myself, educational inequality is something that I feel determined to help combat. Furthermore, I am also elected as one of twelve committee members for the UK's oldest student-run charity, Edinburgh Global Partnerships (EGP) with a team mission to make sustainable change happen across the globe. Over the 2016/2017 academic year, I successfully coordinated a team of five volunteers fundraising £9,900 for a community-initiated and sustainable project in Zambia; the construction of a community vocational centre for orphans and vulnerable children in partnership with a local community-based organisation over two months.



My drive to give others a similar opportunity to mine led to my position as Publicity and Fundraising Officer for EGP. Equally, after undertaking volunteering experience in Zambia over summer 2017, I am also Project Parent for our EGP team heading out to Kenya in summer 2018; for this role, I have had the opportunity to become an effective leader.

In my remaining free time, I am also part of the Edinburgh University Female Voice Choir, which allows me to unwind, meet like-minded people and express myself through music – one of my greatest passions. Equally, I often attend Tandem Café sessions on Saturdays to practice my French with other French natives/learners – which is hugely beneficial for my degree.

After graduating, I aim to apply for the Teach First Leadership Development Programme – which involves teaching over two years in a disadvantaged school, with the aim of giving children from the poorest backgrounds a great education.

Over the next few months, I have a few more plans that I hope will stand me in good stead for making me a good candidate for this programme – including a place on a Taster Programme with Teach First in London, along with my position as Camp Counselor this summer at Lake Delaware Boys Camp in New York. I will also be heading on my year abroad next year to Aix-Marseille University in France.

Since my first day at the University of Edinburgh, I have been in awe of the amount of opportunities available and I really feel that grasping these is allowing me to achieve my potential.

Beyond it all though, I strongly believe that I would not have had the belief to get into a university as great as Edinburgh or university in general, had it have not been for my teacher in secondary school who was a Teach First participant at the time. Now grasping every opportunity and having the best time at university, I want to give something back to Teach First and make a difference like my teacher did to me.

What advice would you give to prospective students?

Edinburgh is bursting with so much opportunity which gives you the chance to become the best possible version of yourself - get yourself out there, go beyond your comfort zone and make the most of every second! Doing the things that scared me most have turned out to be the best decisions I have ever made and allowed me to achieve things I never believed I would or even could. Edinburgh gives you a world of opportunity, no matter where you've come from. Keep your feet on the ground and your head in the clouds.

