

# Career View

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## Asian and European Languages

The rewards from studying languages are many and last a lifetime. There is the *personal satisfaction* you get from taking on an intellectual challenge and achieving a definable outcome. Languages fall into that rare category of skills that give real-world feedback about whether you've got it right or not.

There is the *social confidence* that comes from being able to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. Not only will this widen your circle of friends, it will make travel in other countries a much richer experience. After all, most of the world's population do not speak English as their mother tongue.

There is the *practical payback* that Language graduates have in the job market. Whether or not your job demands a foreign language skill, possession of it can give you that 'something extra' that employers look for in a competitive market.

There is the ability to *actively participate* in the issues and events that shape the social, political and economic direction of the entire world. Climate change, terrorism, international debt and the balance of trade are issues which will not be limited to conversations in English.

### Languages are Where the World is Going

- Overseas surveys report that, on average, people who use languages in their job earn 8% more than their colleagues.
- It's increasingly recognised that languages are basic life skills. In NZ there is both political and educational support for students to learn at least a second language.

European countries are aiming for skills in three languages.

- Although English is currently the dominant language, it's predicted that Asian languages and Spanish will increasingly gain ground over coming years.
- More books are published in German than in any other language except English.
- Apart from English, the business languages most in demand in the European Union are; German, French, Spanish and Italian, followed by Dutch.
- In the world context there is an increasing demand for Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Japanese and Arabic.
- Currently it is estimated that the Internet is about 80% English but that percentage is predicted to drop over the next decade as other languages gain strength.
- German is the second most used language on the Internet after English.
- Website designers need linguists in order to reach global markets. 'Website localiser' has emerged as a job title.
- As cultural identity grows stronger, media groups need linguists for subtitles and dubbing.
- There is a steady demand for teachers of

*Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Career Development and Employment.*

*Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene.*

*Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.*

English, particularly in European and Asian countries and there are opportunities to live overseas and teach English while deepening one's knowledge of the local language.

- To take advantage of opportunities for teaching English in NZ it is most useful to know an international language.

### **Languages Add Value to Other Degrees**

Owing to globalisation, organisations increasingly need personnel with technical or professional skills, plus another language. Add a foreign language to a Tourism degree and the advantage is obvious; however a bilingual marketing manager will also enjoy enhanced job opportunities. Many large law and accounting firms are internationally networked and overseas secondments are a possibility quite early in a graduate's career. A second language adds considerably to the professional effectiveness of a young lawyer or accountant in an overseas environment.

A second language can be an extremely valuable research tool. It can broaden the field of study and make it possible to access material published in languages other than English. This is particularly important in the science and technology disciplines, and a big advantage in the study of music, art history, history and politics.

### **What Skills do Language Graduates Possess?**

#### **Communication skills**

Typically the top skill all employers want.

Language graduates:

- can speak and, more particularly, write in coherent and logical sentences with correct punctuation and grammar. Employers always seek staff who will represent their organisation in an educated and professional manner.
- are effective in communicating ideas and information accurately and precisely,

because they are trained to be sensitive to the nuances of meaning contained within the written and spoken word.

- possess a broad vocabulary and are discriminating in their choice of words. This allows them to adopt the appropriate tone for different types of communication.
- are skilled at drawing out the meaning and intention behind other people's ways of communicating. This makes them effective in group situations and can develop leadership potential.
- have well-developed listening skills which are important in all jobs, but critical in those which involve a lot of interaction with colleagues, clients or the public.
- have learned to speak confidently and fluently in a language which is not their own - the ultimate challenge of oral expression. This tends to develop fearless presentation skills, which are particularly useful in unfamiliar or intimidating situations.

#### **Analytical thinking skills**

Language graduates:

- are trained to process foreign and unfamiliar information in a logical and systematic way. This develops a 'can do' attitude to new challenges which makes for efficient problem solving.
- are trained to critically evaluate information for meaning and content. This is important for summarising complex information, report-writing and conducting effective discussions.
- are adept at switching from one mental framework (language) to another quickly and constantly. This develops flexible thinking and the ability to shift with the flow of ideas. Those who can 'think on their feet' tend to perform well in interviews and are valued by employers for their adaptability.
- are skilled at identifying hidden structures and links buried in abstract information because they are practised in the 'de-coding' process of translation and language con-

struction. Being able to 'see inside' ideas is the basis of innovative thinking.

### People skills

Language graduates:

- demonstrate cultural empathy which can be essential in certain jobs but also contributes to constructive working relationships in general. Relationship building and relationship management are emerging as core competencies for many, particularly management, positions.
- are, typically, tolerant of other people's differences and idiosyncrasies, tending to be interested in how other people live their lives. Work relationships can be as complex as personal ones and tolerance is an asset recognised by most employers.
- are likely to search for the intention and motivation behind what people say and do, realising that words and gestures can have many different meanings. They are less likely to engage in cultural or ethnic stereotyping. This is particularly important in the 'people professions' such as counselling, health care, education, media, and social or community work.

### Personal qualities

Completion of a language degree demands and develops certain personal strengths which include:

- diligence, application and discipline - learning a new language makes your brain work hard. Employers like people with hard-working brains.
- a good memory and the capacity for sustained concentration.
- attention to detail and high standards of accuracy.
- a logical, systematic and organised approach to work.
- a willingness to step outside what is comfortable and familiar.
- intellectual and personal curiosity.
- self-reliance, especially if lived and studied abroad.

## Where Can Language Graduates Work?

In general there are two options.

- Jobs in languages, where languages are central to the job
- Jobs with languages, where languages add value to other work skills

### Jobs Where Languages Are Central to the Job:

- Translator
- Interpreter
- Languages teacher

Translators work with the written word, usually converting a foreign language into their mother tongue. Translators may develop specialist skills in, for example, legal, engineering or medical translation. Knowledge of the institutions, culture, attitudes and practices in the countries where the foreign language is used is also necessary, as are computer skills. An Honours degree in the foreign language is sometimes required. A Diploma in Translation Studies is desirable. Affiliation with the New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI) provides professional and ethical credibility, as does accreditation from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, Australia (NAATI). It is possible to sit the NAATI examination in New Zealand. Most translators work in a freelance capacity. The larger translation services, for example the NZ Translation Centre Ltd and The Translation Service employ a small number of full time translators and additional translators, as required, on a part-time, freelance basis.

Interpreters work with the spoken word and their command of the foreign language must be near perfect. For this reason interpreters really need to have lived for several years in a country where the foreign language is spoken. Community or Liaison interpreting occurs when people who are not fluent in the dominant language, need it in order to have access to legal, health and other social services. Conference interpret-

ing occurs at international conferences and meetings. Interpreters must be culturally and linguistically accurate, impartial and able to maintain confidentiality as they may work with highly sensitive information. Maturity and life experience are important. Like translators, most interpreters work on a freelance basis so NZSTI affiliation and NAATI accreditation are professionally desirable.

Teachers of Languages are in demand all over the world. This demand is maintained by the trend towards teaching children a second language at a young age. A recent report on the New Zealand school curriculum recommends that schools offer classes in a second language at the intermediate and secondary level, and ideally at the primary level as well. This would significantly expand the need for language teachers in New Zealand. In addition to demonstrated linguistic competence, a teaching qualification is usually required. Tertiary level teachers and lecturers typically require advanced degrees and a record of academic publication. Specialised courses for teaching English as a foreign language (TOEFL) are available.

### **Jobs Where Languages Add Value to Other Work Skills**

Skills in more than one language can be valuable in many jobs across a range of organisations and industries, particularly those which are global in focus. Industries which tend to operate worldwide include:

- transport and distribution
- travel and tourism
- importing / exporting services or products
- education
- media, publishing and entertainment
- finance and banking
- professional and research based organisations

Organisations that have a client group which includes people whose first language is not

English are also possibilities. Such organisations include:

- Tourism New Zealand: Language skills are required for positions within NZ and overseas, where it is necessary to speak the local language. Staff arrange trade events and familiarisation tours, and host media from other countries.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Language graduates need a postgraduate qualification, (Honours or above) and start as policy officers. Entry is through the annual Graduate Recruitment Programme (see below). A foreign language is also useful in management support positions.
- NZ Trade and Enterprise: (Formerly TradeNZ and Enterprise NZ) Foreign languages are necessary both for NZ based roles, such as business analyst or policy work, and for the thirty-eight offshore offices.
- Department of Customs: Specifically recruit people with foreign language skills for operational roles, such as customs officer.
- Department of Immigration: Foreign languages are valuable for immigration officer and business specialist roles in New Zealand, and also for visa officer positions in offshore branches.
- Educational Institutions: Universities, Polytechnics and Secondary Schools market educational services internationally. A foreign language is useful for liaison and student services roles.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Quarantine Services: Skill in particularly Asian languages is useful. A science qualification is necessary.
- International Aid Agencies (e.g. World Vision, NZ Red Cross): Given considerable life experience and other skills a foreign language can be an advantage.
- Department of Courts; District Health Boards; New Zealand Police; Immigration Consultants: Use interpreters and transla-

tors, but generally have their own contacts or service contracts with providers of interpretation services. Cultural knowledge that accompanies languages is recognised as valuable.

- Regional Tourism Operators: includes adventure tourism, hotels, car hire etc.

### **Graduate Recruitment Programme**

A range of organisations participate in annual recruitment activities run by university careers services. Some employers are interested in graduates from all disciplines, including Languages. The quality of your degree, your interests and personal qualities are all important. Check with your Careers Service for details.

A very popular programme which many graduates apply to is the JET Programme - Teaching English in Japan run by the Japan Information and Cultural Centre. Although graduates from any discipline may apply, this two-year programme offers students of Japanese an excellent opportunity to use and improve their language skills.

### **Job Roles Where Knowledge of Languages Can be Useful**

A foreign language is a value-added skill that may set you apart from other applicants even if it's not specified as a requirement for the job. Examples include:

- Events Coordinator
- Hotel Manager
- Librarian
- Researcher
- Journalist - print, TV, radio
- Travel Consultant
- Information Officer
- Customer Support / Helpdesk personnel
- Recruitment Consultant
- Teacher (other than language)
- Conference Organiser
- Immigration Officer

- Lawyer
- Tour Guide
- Art Historian
- Actor
- Local Authority Official
- Mediator
- Human Resources Officer
- Counsellor
- Health Worker
- Hospital Administrator
- Police Officer
- Restaurant Manager
- Advertising and Marketing
- Market Researcher
- Social / Community Worker
- Public Relations Officer
- Career Practitioner
- Editor
- Accountant
- Museum / Art Gallery Curator
- Bank Officer

## **Graduate Profiles**

### **Rebecca McLean**

*Executive Assistant and Policy Support Officer*

*Permanent Mission of New Zealand, Geneva, Switzerland. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade*



I studied French throughout secondary school and, following my seventh form year, I spent a year in Geneva, Switzerland as an exchange student with the American Field Service. Upon returning to New Zealand to start my studies at

Victoria University, it seemed only natural to me to include French as one of the majors of my Bachelor of Arts degree. Then, having completed my BA but still not ready to give up studying French, I carried on to do an Honours year in French with the hope that it would one day enhance my chances of getting a great job using French somewhere in the world. Through studying French at Victoria University, I had the opportunity to work for seven months as a Language Assistant in New Caledonia, which again gave me the opportunity to practise and further develop my language skills while living once more in a French-speaking country.

Having fallen in love with Switzerland and more particularly Geneva several years earlier, I had always thought that it would be really fantastic to return and get a job with the United Nations or one of the many international organisations that are based here. I was extremely fortunate when the opportunity came up for me to work at one of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office in Geneva where being bi-lingual (English/French) was a prerequisite for the job. I am now in my second job at the New Zealand Permanent Mission to the UN where I work as an Executive Assistant and Policy Support Officer, and where it is essential for me to be able to speak, write and read French for many of my work-related duties. Furthermore, being familiar with the local language certainly facilitates day-to-day living.

I would recommend to any student considering studying languages to try and spend time living in a foreign speaking environment, for example doing a teaching assistantship through university. I know that the knowledge I gained through my undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Victoria University, on both a linguistic and cultural level, has been imperative to getting where I am today.

## Nicholas Lee

*Export Manager  
Kenwood Ltd.*



This may sound corny, but studying German changed my life.

In my last year of school I was an exchange student to Switzerland and picked up German. It opened my mind to a new world and made me want to study the language at Victoria University upon my return. I graduated with a Master of Arts in German and a Bachelor of Commerce and Administration in Marketing.

The courses were divided into two types: written and spoken language practice, and literature and culture. I enjoyed both. In the language tutorials you got hands-on practice at improving oral and written communication skills to a very good level, while the literature classes dissected German-speakers' understanding of the world.

Taking the language through to Honours level qualified me for a German Government scholarship. I had the semester of a lifetime at the University of Tübingen where I met my future Italian wife.

We now live in northeastern Italy, a strong manufacturing region, where my German language skills are very sought after. More Europeans speak German as their mother tongue than any other language. Yet fluent German-speakers are thin on the ground in Italy, a trend that is destined to continue. European governments are focusing ever more on English as a social prerequisite, meaning a greater scarcity of students for other European languages. In the future, those in Europe who command English alongside their mother tongue will be employable. Add a fluency in German to the equation and you create a highly marketable individual.

Knowledge of German has in no small part led me to my current position, Export Manager for Kenwood Ltd., an English company in the Italian industrial Gruppo De'Longhi. I look after sales and marketing in ten European countries, and help strengthen the link between Head Office and the local markets.

I recommend studying German. It enriched me as an individual, opened my eyes to a new world, enabled me to travel, brought me into contact with different cultures, and has been a substantial contributor towards my career and future.

## **Penelope Thompson**

*Committee Adviser*

*Democratic Services Team*

*Wellington City Council*

After studying languages throughout high school

and spending a year in French-speaking Switzerland, I decided to major in French and Italian, as well as Politics at Victoria University.

Languages at Victoria gave me the opportunity to not only learn how to write and speak other languages, but also to be involved in a wealth of other activities such as plays, language clubs and concerts.

I only ever decided to study languages because it was, and is, something that I am passionate about. However, having since completed my BA Honours degree in French I find that employers are very welcoming of the additional skills that language graduates can bring to a position, in that learning languages teaches you so much more about your own language, communications, relating to people, managing people and so forth. With this in mind I applied, and was accepted, for the position of Committee Advisor at Wellington City Council. The subtleties that



language learning teaches you about the intricacies of language and the best and most efficient and effective way to get your message across has been invaluable in this position. In addition to this, I am on the Wellington City Council language register and am required at certain times for translating and interpreting.

I strongly believe that the studying of languages is an extremely useful skill to have in the workplace, especially in the current world climate. And given that there are smaller numbers of students who choose to study language as opposed to other disciplines, language graduates have the added advantage that they can provide prospective employers with a skill base that often otherwise does not exist.

## **Dianne Shee**

*Settlements Information Coordinator*

*Service Excellence Group*

*NZ Immigration Service*



I have always admired people who are multilingual and, since I have always been fascinated with Japan and its people, I decided to take Japanese as my third language to learn.

What I enjoyed the most about studying Japanese at Victoria University was the different ways of learning. We studied in small classes rather than in big lecture rooms, so classes were much more interactive than my other courses. We also had audiovisual workshops and conversational tutorials each week with teachers from Japan who would correct our pronunciation.

Other than improving my language skills in Japanese, I have also learnt more about Japanese culture and traditions. Most of all, I have learnt to be more appreciative of other cultures and understand how hard it is to learn another language.

After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Japanese and a Bachelor of Commerce and Administration (E-Commerce, Commercial Law, Accounting) and a Diploma in Professional Accounting at Victoria University, I got my first full-time job working at the New Zealand Immigration Service as a Settlement Information Co-ordinator last year. My job involves producing and managing various publications to help migrants from all over the world to have a smoother settlement process in New Zealand. Having studied Japanese culture as well as my own experience with Chinese culture, I help identify aspects of New Zealand that can be foreign to migrants from non-European backgrounds, and highlight those areas in our publications.

Japanese is not the easiest language to learn but the learning experience was, without doubt, most interesting and worthwhile. If you are studying for a commerce degree, taking Japanese will most likely expand your employment prospects.

### **Asian and European Languages at Victoria**

In the School of Asian & European Languages & Cultures we teach a full range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses covering Asian and European languages, cultural studies and literatures. We offer courses in the following subjects: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Asian Studies, European Studies, Malay Studies and Comparative

Literature. Students can major in all the above (except Malay Studies and Comparative Literature), as well as in Asian Languages and Modern Languages. For students seeking to study at postgraduate level, the School offers a number of postgraduate programmes including Honours, Masters and PhD study.

Many students choose to study these courses in combination with courses or programmes offered by other parts of the University, for instance Commerce, Law, Music, Science, and Tourism. Languages can also be taken as part of the BA/BTeach. Classes are generally small with much of the teaching done in small groups of 15-20 students.

Languages have library/common rooms with foreign language books, newspapers, magazines, and each language has its own student club which organises student drama productions, video shows and many other social events. Students have full use of the Language Learning Centre, which has audio, video and computing facilities, and offers self-access through a comprehensive catalogue system.

Exchanges are available with a number of Universities and many students take up Teaching Assistantships offered in France, Germany, Spain and Japan.

For more information please consult the School of Asian & European Languages & Cultures prospectuses, or check out the website: <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/saelc>.

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