Cátia Verguete:
Director of Camões, I.P. – Portuguese Embassy Education



MEET THE PROFESSIONALS



Cátia Verguete

What is the Camões Institute?
Camões is the Portuguese international organisation for cooperation with, and promotion of, Portuguese language and culture. We are a public institute, indirectly managed by the government, operating from Portuguese embassies, consulates, and cultural centres across the world. We provide resources and funding through multilateral partnerships, dialogue and interaction with other governmental and educational institutions worldwide.

In the UK, our network has more than 5,000 pupils and 45 teachers and lecturers, and collaborates with around 70 educational institutions – primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Channel Islands

What does your work involve?
Each director of Camões focuses on educational cooperation, language, and culture. Our goal is to foster excellent learning and teaching, and to improve academic success and social outcomes for all pupils. We plan and implement high-quality training and professional development for teachers, qualifying and certifying learning, and establishing and sustaining professional relationships.

What is a typical week like for you?
My typical week starts with a team meeting to discuss what everybody is doing. We spend time supporting our teachers, pupils and their families, with various educational and administrative aspects, as they interact with our partner institutions and schools and universities in our network. One part of the team is more dedicated to logistics and operational functions (organising enrolments, hiring of premises, contracts and protocols), the other to academic aspects (curriculum, cultural visits and activities, event planning).

General welfare and governance is down to me. I plan and prepare materials and resources to offer to schools and universities. Most weeks, we run competitions and other activities to raise awareness of the value of language-learning and promote Portuguese in

schools. We offer prizes and invite pupils to engage through programmes and initiatives.

What programmes and initiatives do you offer?

We offer a variety, including education cooperation and advocacy for multilingualism, support to schools and universities, support to Portuguese and Lusophone families, and Portuguese language and culture courses.

A core element is support to schools and universities. Over 5,000 students per year get involved in our programmes, from primary through to higher education. More than 50 schools benefit from the professional experience of our 27 fully-qualified teachers, teaching within the mainstream curriculum and in wraparound care. We support around 400 pupils each year to prepare for Portuguese GCSEs and A-Levels. Our support extends beyond exams. Around 300 pupils get to meet Portuguese authors and illustrators as part of our commitment to promote good reading habits and literacy. We also have a programme of awards for pupils and students, to celebrate excellence in Portuguese language learning.

We are also dedicated to supporting children and young people of Portuguese or Lusophone origin. We offer afterschool and Saturday classes to pupils studying in the British school system. We also support various charities who promote Portuguese language, culture and research in London, Edinburgh, Belfast and Bermuda. We also support the creation of bilingual schools and/or the transition of schools to a bilingual curriculum.

I meet regularly with educational stakeholders, with schools and universities, to discuss the importance of learning languages and to promote Portuguese. One example of our commitment to multilingual advocacy is our support and partnership with the recently founded Cátedra for Multilingualism and Diversity at the University of Lancaster.

How do schools get involved with Camões UK?

It generally starts with a discussion between me and the senior leadership about the profile of the school and the pupils, and how the current curriculum and school structures can accommodate the teaching of Portuguese. Often, these are schools where there is a Portuguese-speaking community, and the school is looking to improve pupil performance and relations with families.

We then draft a memorandum of understanding (MoU). This is tailored to address each specific educational context. For example, at Wyvil Primary School there are more than one hundred Portuguese-speaking pupils, and our first MoU was for after-school classes. The senior leadership realised it would be beneficial to involve the whole school in the project of learning Portuguese. Our teacher became the MFL lead at the school and is responsible for all language activities and curriculum.

Wyvil has one of the most interesting methods of teaching Portugese of all the primary schools we work with. Pupils from a Portuguese-speaking background have classes together, during the school day, while the rest of the pupils have Portuguese as an MFL at other times. This allows all to progress at the right pace and to work at their level. The school has had fabulous results. We hold a similar offer at St John Bosco College, where a full-time Camões teacher teaches Portuguese to all pupils, alongside other MFL colleagues. In each case, we communicate closely with schools, monitoring and assessing key performance indicators and adapting the teaching so it remains relevant.

What opportunities do you offer to someone wanting to teach Portuguese?

Our teachers are employed by the Portuguese government under fulltime contracts, with a final salary pension scheme. We provide them with a wide range of pedagogical resources, free access to textbooks, literature, and audiovisual and digital resources, such as tablets and educational software. We also offer a sense of safety to teachers through our close connection with the Portuguese consulates and the Embassy, who are vital supporters of this network.

What are your plans for the future of Camões UK?

The overall plan is to increase the number of pupils learning Portuguese, and the number of teachers and schools that offer it. To achieve this, I would like to work closely with the Department for Education in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to increase education cooperation in terms of Portuguese language teaching and learning, teacher training and recruitment, language assistants, and PGCE students in Portuguese. ¶