

Report – Teacher Exchange Programme, Nicaragua, July-August 2022

The second NEU delegation of language teachers, a group of eleven primary and secondary trained teachers, accompanied by Louise Richards from Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG), set off for Nicaragua on 27th July 2022. They were greeted the following day at the Augusto César Sandino International Airport in Managua by Bernarda López and Indiana López from ANDEN, the National Association of Teachers in Nicaragua, who had both accompanied the first delegation in 2017.

On Friday 29th July, the delegation was welcomed at the headquarters of the Nicaraguan Ministry for Education (MINED) by the Minister of Education, Lilliam Esperanza Herrera Moreno, and the Secretary General of ANDEN, José Antonio Zepeda. Also present were the Director General for Primary and Secondary Education and the Presidential Advisory Minister for Educational Affairs. During this meeting, MINED outlined the current structure of English language teaching in schools which, in 2018, was also rolled out to primary schools with the aim of making English the official second language of Nicaragua. Their focus has been on training already practising, but unqualified, teachers across the country, as well as pedagogical support for graduates of English, who are now providing English lessons at primary level. There was also recognition of the challenges ahead, in terms of upskilling teachers, as the first cohort of children to learn English since Grade 1 will enter secondary schools at the start of 2024.



Over the remainder of Friday and Saturday, ANDEN representatives toured the delegation around Managua, discussing and sharing some of Nicaragua's key historical events. Sights visited included the giant statue of Sandino at the Loma de Tiscapa Historic National Park, the Plaza de la Revolución and Lake Managua. The delegation sampled their first Nicaraguan food, including gallo pinto (rice and beans) and Baho (meat, plantain and yucca steamed in a banana leaf), and enjoyed a sunset visit to the Masaya Volcano National Park, just before the heavens opened!

On Sunday 31st July, the delegation was divided into groups of two or three delegates, who departed to different regions of Nicaragua: Managua, León, Masaya, Granada and Carazo. The delegates stayed with local families and, over the duration of the week, were taken by representatives of ANDEN and MINED to visit a variety of primary and secondary schools. In total, approximately 30 schools were visited, including multi-grade schools, rural schools and one special school. At every school, the delegates received a warm welcome: they were greeted by children waving British and Nicaraguan flags, treated to dance performances and enjoyed recitals of Rubén Darío's famous verses.

Experiences over the course of the week were varied. Most delegates were able to observe at least one primary and one secondary English lesson, either in whole or in part. In total, 4 primary lessons

were observed and 9 secondary. In order to have been able to provide more informed feedback to MINED the following week, most felt that they would have benefitted from more lesson observations. Lesson observations early in the week also would have helped delegates to carefully tailor the training sessions that they provided. Most delegates spent one or two days with a group of primary English teachers and one or two days with a group of secondary, with up to 60 teachers in a group. Delegates provided up to 24 hours of teacher training sessions over the course of the week, on topics including Phonics, using texts and songs in the classroom, vocabulary and sentence building, games to improve grammar and participation, adaptive teaching strategies, paired and group work and British culture. In some instances, the Nicaraguan teachers also presented, on topics such as advancements in the use of technology and the assessment of English levels according to the Common European Framework. Between school visits and training sessions, the delegates enjoyed some regional sightseeing, including museum visits, trips to artisanal workshops and excursions to nature reserves. Everywhere, they were warmly welcomed and often introduced to local mayors and other politicians.

On Saturday 6th August, the delegates bid farewell to their Nicaraguan families and returned to Managua to be reunited as a group. That afternoon, they gathered with representatives of ANDEN in the local headquarters to be addressed and thanked for their work by José Antonio Zepeda. The delegates were each gifted a Nicaraguan t-shirt with a picture of the national bird, the Guardabarranco (Motmot).



The following Monday, the delegation convened again at the MINED headquarters with the Director Generals for Primary and Secondary Education, Cristian Danilo Cerda and Melba López Montenegro. In this meeting, the UK teachers summarised their experiences in each of the regions and outlined some of the educational achievements that had been observed. They commented on the enthusiasm and energy of the Nicaraguan teachers, their generally good level of English and the clear enjoyment of learning amongst students. The delegation had also been impressed by the development of technology across the curriculum. The UK teachers proposed some follow-up recommendations, which they refined and organised into short-, medium- and long-term goals to present to the Minister of Education, Lilliam Herrera, the following day. The short-term recommendations included: supporting communication between primary and secondary teachers to ensure the smooth transition from Grade 6 to Grade 7 English in 2024, online training opportunities for Nicaraguan teachers and the integration of English more widely across the school. In the medium-term, they suggested: more focus on the use of stories in the teaching of primary English, emphasis on speaking and writing at length, and the development of adaptive teaching strategies and assessment for learning in the classroom. In the long-term, they proposed bilingual learning programmes and the introduction of the English iGCSE.



Over the final few days of the programme, the delegation visited the Mombacho Volcano, the colonial city of Granada and Huehueté beach in Carazo. When the programme concluded on Wednesday 10th August, some delegates travelled onwards to other parts of Central America and others flew back to the UK the following day. All were thankful for this unique opportunity to participate in the Teacher Exchange Programme and departed Nicaragua rich in memories, humbled by the hospitality received and laden with colourful, handcrafted Nicaraguan gifts. Many thanks to the NEU, NSCAG and ANDEN for coordinating and supporting such a special experience for all involved.