Plenary Title: English, globalisation and the cultural dimension

Presenter: Simon Sweeney

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English language is one of the twin media of contemporary globalisation, the other being the Internet. Simon argues that whereas English once represented a narrow British culture, as displayed in the posters that used to adorn British Council offices worldwide, it has now become almost detached from geography. Instead the hinterland of English is ‘communication itself’. During this transition towards becoming a global lingua franca, English has come to represent the language of multinational corporations and of globalisation, an uncomfortable development for those who see globalisation and the work of large corporations in a negative light. How should ELT and English language teachers respond? Simon suggests that a global issues agenda that highlights diversity and respect for other cultures, as well as economic sustainability, is vital. Global issues should be a central aspect of the responsible promulgation of English as an International Language (EIL).

Simon Sweeney is Head of Programme for MA International Studies at York St John University, York, UK. In 2006 he was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy. He also lectures in Education and Development at the University of York. He has published widely in ELT, mainly for Cambridge University Press, in particular English for Business Communication and Communicating in Business. He is co-author with Bob Dignen and Steve Flinders of the course book English365. He also wrote Europe, the State and Globalisation (Longman, 2005).