

LANGUAGE TRENDS 2018
LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PRIMARY
AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND
SURVEY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Language Trends is an annual survey of primary and secondary schools in England, designed to gather information about the current situation for language teaching and learning. Its aims are to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to languages and to analyse strengths and weaknesses based both on quantitative evidence and on the views of teachers. This year's survey was carried out from January to March 2018 and gathered evidence from 692 primary schools and 785 secondary schools (651 state-funded and 134 independent).

The achieved samples for both primary and secondary tend to represent schools with lower levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility (i.e. in more favourable economic circumstances) and with higher levels of overall educational attainment. The findings may therefore paint a rosier picture for languages than the situation nationally.¹

¹ Also, for both primary and secondary schools, there is under-representation from schools in the West Midlands and, for secondary schools, over-representation of converter academies, and under-representation of sponsor-led academies, studio schools and community schools.

² DfE Policy Paper. English Baccalaureate. Updated 18 December 2017: www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc

³ British Council, Language Trends Survey 2017: www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/thought-leadership/research-report/language-trends-2016-17

⁴ DfE, Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England, 2016/17, table SFR01.2018.S2b: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2016-to-2017

⁵ DfE, National Curriculum in England: languages programmes of study: www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study

POLICY BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The 2018 Language Trends survey responds once again to ongoing concern about the level of participation in language learning since the subject was removed from the compulsory curriculum at Key Stage 4 in 2004. The proportion of the cohort taking a language GCSE dropped from 76% in 2002 to 40% in 2011. This rose to 49% in 2014 as a result of the English Baccalaureate which was introduced as an accountability measure for schools in 2011.

However, since then, numbers have not continued to increase, although the Government's ambition is for 90% of pupils to obtain the English Baccalaureate, which requires a good GCSE in a language, by 2025². In the 2016/17 Language Trends survey, schools expressed concern that the introduction of new GCSEs would depress numbers further³. This year's report looks particularly at the socio-economic and educational variables associated with the situation in which only half the pupil population take a language to GCSE, and only a third (33%) obtain a grade C or above⁴.

Declining participation in language learning post-16 has also been a concern in recent years, affecting both the independent and state-funded sector. In conjunction with financial stringencies, it has called the viability of post-16 language courses into question in some schools. This year's survey gathers information about how schools and pupils are responding to the new A level syllabuses and the separation ('decoupling') of AS from A level.

Language teaching became compulsory in primary schools in England in 2014 and high expectations of what can be achieved at Key Stage 2 underpin the whole National Curriculum Programmes of Study for languages⁵. Previous Language Trends surveys identified significant disparities in provision between primary schools and barriers to achieving smooth transition to secondary school which would allow pupils to build successfully on their prior learning. The 2018 survey again explores these issues.

With the UK's relationship with the countries whose languages are most commonly taught in schools about to undergo a significant realignment, the survey also sought to gather information on the impact of the Brexit process on school policies, teacher supply, international links and the attitudes of parents and pupils.

KEY FINDINGS

The principal finding this year concerns inequity in access to language learning at school. Schools in more disadvantaged circumstances tend to dedicate a shorter time to languages in Key Stage 3, allow pupils to drop languages after only two years and have lower participation at GCSE. Independent schools have higher take up and more languages on offer, and provide more opportunities than state schools for international experience. However, both state and independent schools report an increasing concentration of high and middle-attaining pupils in GCSE languages, to the exclusion of those of lower ability or with special educational needs. Teachers report that the introduction of new, more rigorous GCSEs and A levels is depressing take up and the increase in GCSE numbers delivered by the English Baccalaureate policy is now in reverse. There is a widening gap between schools which are moving towards the Government’s ambition of 90% of pupils taking a language, and those where languages are not a priority. The Brexit vote has impacted on pupil and parental attitudes in some schools and this is exacerbating the divide. Boys are under-represented in language study at GCSE and significantly so at A level.

In primary schools, the national picture is one of stasis, with little development since last year. Languages remain a marginal subject which many primary schools find challenging to deliver alongside many other competing demands. The lack of consistency between primary schools, in a context where secondary schools take pupils from many different feeders, is one of the barriers to smooth transition and hinders coherent progression in learning. However, respondents recount many examples of success, enthusiasm and determination both in delivering primary languages and in overcoming the difficulties of transition to secondary.

Post-16 language study remains a concern and the vast majority of schools have now withdrawn from offering AS courses, meaning that, increasingly,

pupils are studying three rather than four subjects post 16. In a context where sciences and mathematics are promoted heavily and demanding new A Level specifications, this is affecting languages disproportionately. Despite declines in numbers studying French and German for A level, Spanish is continuing to attract greater numbers and new provision in the state sector.

EXAM FIGURES

GCSE entries for language subjects

The proportion of pupils taking a GCSE in a modern language subject at the end of Key Stage 4 fell by two percentage points to 47% between summer 2016 and summer 2017⁶ (Figure 1). This proportion varied by school type and region. In selective schools, 76% of the cohort took a language and there was also higher than average take up in free schools (60%) and converter academies (51%). In sponsored academies, only 38% of pupils took a modern language, 27% in university technical colleges and 15% in studio schools. Take up was higher than average in faith schools, whether Church of England, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh. Girls accounted for 56% of candidates and 44% were boys. Entries were above average in London (62%) and the South East (49%) and below average in all other regions. The North East had the lowest participation rate at 40%. The local authority with the highest proportion of entrants was Newham at 74.5%, a proportion over two and a half times that of the lowest – Middlesborough, with 29%.

⁶ Data in this section from DfE SFR01.2018 tables S2a and b, S7b, S8b, S9b and LA6.

Figure 1: Proportion of pupils sitting a modern language at GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4, 2002-2017

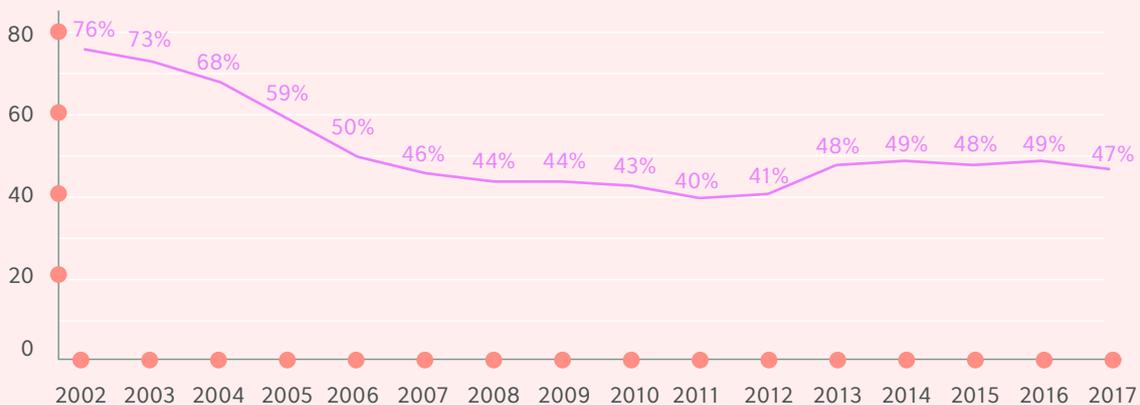
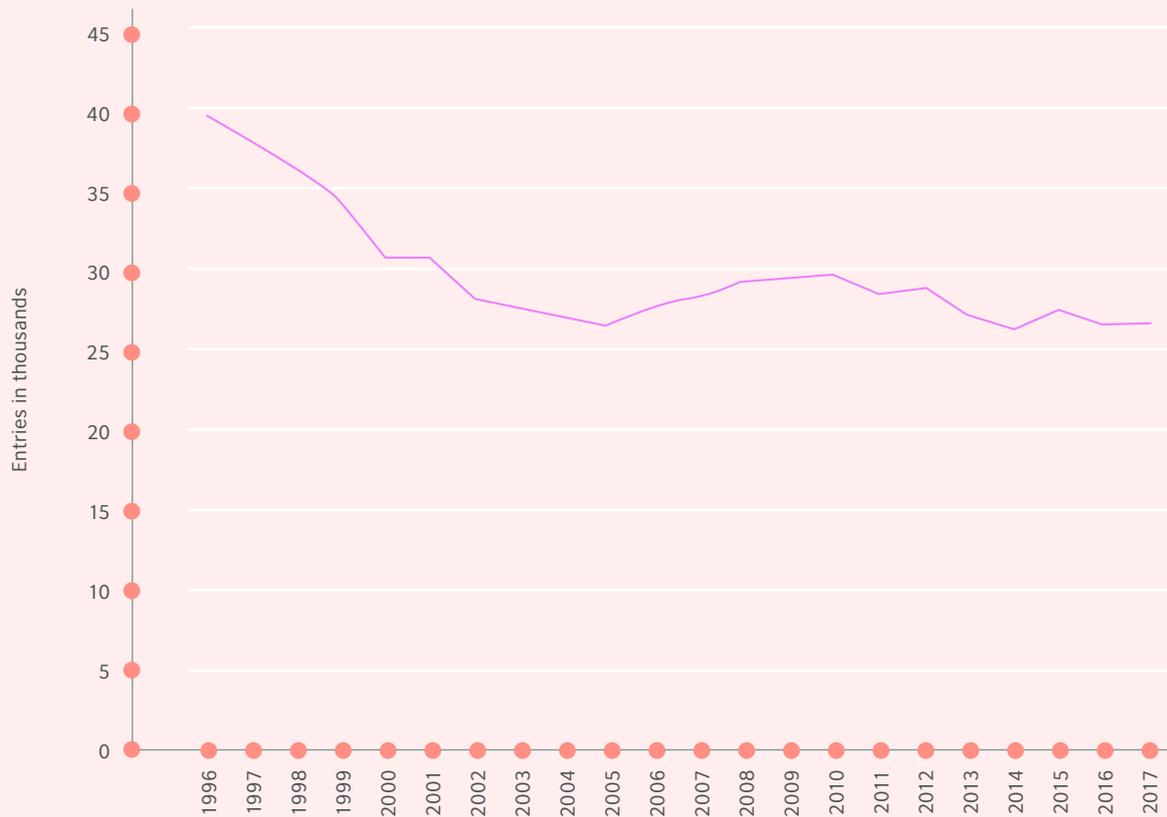


Figure 2: A level entries in modern languages subjects, 1996-2017



A level entries for language subjects

A level entries for modern languages underwent sharp declines in the late 1990s and early 2000s but have since tended to flatten out⁷ (Figure 2). However, the appearance of stability masks underlying turbulence in patterns of language study post 16. Since 2005, when overall numbers appeared to stabilise, French has lost nearly a third of its numbers and German is down by 37%. In contrast, Spanish and other languages have seen substantial increases (Figure 6, page 10). Participation in A level languages, particularly French and Spanish, is highly gendered, where more than two thirds of candidates being female. Overall, 63% of candidates for A level language subjects are female, and 37% male.

“SINCE 2005, WHEN OVERALL NUMBERS APPEARED TO STABILISE, FRENCH HAS LOST NEARLY A THIRD OF ITS NUMBERS AND GERMAN IS DOWN BY 37%. IN CONTRAST, SPANISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES HAVE SEEN SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES.”

⁷ Data in this section from DfE SFR03-2018 table 2a.

UNEVEN ACCESS TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

The responses to the survey highlighted a number of ways in which some schools are reducing access to language learning. We analysed these further in order to identify which schools and which pupils are being most affected.

“WE AIMED TO USE THE DATA GATHERED TO HIGHLIGHT INEQUALITIES IN PROVISION FOR LANGUAGES BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOL AND SCHOOLS WORKING IN DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES.”

REDUCTION OF KEY STAGE 3 TO TWO YEARS

There is an increasing trend towards reducing language teaching to two years in Key Stage 3. More than one third of state schools (34.5%) say that entire groups of students are not taught languages in Year 9, compared to 29% in 2017 and 26% in 2016. Schools which are reducing access to languages in this way are more likely to have the following characteristics:

- » A higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.
- » Lower educational achievement overall, based on average Attainment 8 scores
- » Academies rather than local authority-maintained schools
- » Located in urban areas
- » Located in the North of England rather than the Midlands or the South
- » More likely to be judged as requiring improvement by Ofsted.

The nature and direction of these relationships are not clear, but the findings could suggest that schools under pressure to improve performance indicators are more likely to be reducing Key Stage 3 in order to provide a longer period of preparation for GCSE subjects. Where pupils do not opt to take a language this means that their language education is prematurely curtailed. In addition, around 7.5% of schools also reported entire groups of pupils not studying a language in Years 7 and/or Year 8.

UNEVEN ACCESS TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

More schools are allocating a shorter amount of time for languages. In the current survey, 58% of state schools set aside less than two and a half hours per week for languages at Key Stage 3, compared to 52% in 2017. Schools with fewer teaching hours for languages at Key Stage 3 are more likely to have higher proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and lower overall educational attainment. Schools are over twice as likely to offer two and a half hours or more of languages per week at Key Stage 3 if they are in the lowest quintile for free school meal eligibility, as opposed to in the highest quintile. At Key Stage 3, fewer teaching hours are also significantly related to establishment type, with Academies more likely to be allocating less than 2 hours for languages compared to local authority-maintained schools.

At Key Stage 4 more time is generally allocated to languages than in Key Stage 3. However here too, more schools are allocating a shorter time to

languages compared to previous years: 27% report less than two and a half hours per week, compared to 24% in the previous survey. However, at Key Stage 4, it is schools with lower levels of free school meal eligibility and higher attainment that are more likely to allocate a shorter time for languages.

PARTICIPATION IN LANGUAGES IN YEAR 10

Figures for participation in Year 10 show that there is a widening gap between the best and the worst-performing state schools, judged on the criterion of take up for languages at GCSE. The proportion in the highest band for take up (75% or more pupils) has increased. However, the proportion in the lowest band (25% or fewer) has also increased. This suggests that government policy (the aspiration for 90% of pupils to gain the EBacc) is having an impact on schools which are already performing well in languages, but not on those which are struggling.

Proportions of pupils studying at least one language subject in Year 10	% of state schools	
	2018	2017
75% or more	29%	24%
Half or more of the cohort, but less than 75%	21%	26%
Less than half of the cohort, but more than 25%	27%	31%
25% or fewer, but more than 10%	16%	13%
10% or fewer	6%	7%
None	1%	n/a

Thirty-one per cent of schools said that they were expecting numbers taking languages to increase over the next few years in accordance with Government policy. However, this is down on last year's figure of 38%. Of the 142 schools with very small numbers taking languages to GCSE (up to one in four pupils) less than half (58) are expecting numbers to increase. There are 56 schools reporting that 25% or fewer of their current Year 10 students are studying a language and stating that take-up for languages over the next 3 years is likely to stay constant or decline. These schools are statistically over-represented by schools with higher levels of free school meals and lower levels of attainment at Key Stage 4. Schools in the highest quintile for free school meal eligibility are over three times more likely to have low participation rates in languages in Year 10 (and with no plans to increase this) when compared with schools in the lowest quintile. The 56 schools are also statistically more likely to be sponsor-led Academies or Voluntary Aided schools, and situated in the North of England (specifically in Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West). Schools rated as 'Outstanding' in their last Ofsted report were the least likely to be in this group of schools.

IMPACT OF THE NEW GCSEs ON THE PROFILE OF PUPILS TAKING LANGUAGES

Schools were asked which groups of pupils are now more likely to be taking a language to GCSE than previously, and which groups are less likely to be doing so. The responses show a very marked trend, over the last year since the introduction of the new GCSE, towards high and middle ability pupils and away from lower ability pupils and those with Special Educational Needs. These trends are evident in both state and independent sectors.

Groups more or less likely to be taking a languages GCSE	State schools		Independent schools	
	2018	2017	2018	2017
Higher ability more likely	66%	26%	59%	8%
Middle ability more likely	44%	30%	35%	10%
Lower ability less likely	68%	29%	49%	25%
SEN less likely	57%	13%	62%	26%

Comments provided by respondents indicate that the new GCSE is seen as more rigorous and demanding for pupils. However, teachers indicate that this makes the subject excessively challenging for lower-attaining learners and expressed concern about the negative impact on uptake:

'The level of difficulty and the amount of language the students have to learn for GCSE puts our students off and SLT are less keen to push for languages options as it is harder for our students to get the top grades.' (State school respondent)

'The reformed GCSE was supposed to help MFL recruitment but I think it has done the opposite. This is unfortunate as I believe the theory was correct and that students do need to be assessed in end of course exams and not through controlled assessment. The reading and listening exams have been made much too hard.' (State school respondent)

'The new GCSE will make "better linguists" but this is only true for the few higher attaining pupils' (Independent school respondent)

'The new GCSEs are a much better preparation for A Levels... unfortunately, they are also very much more difficult, which deters many potential candidates.' (Independent school respondent)

There was also concern about the new grading structure and the difficulty of languages GCSEs compared to other subjects. A substantial number of comments from state sector respondents relate to the pressure on teachers caused by the pace of this and other curriculum changes.

Independent schools gave the new GCSEs a generally cool reception, when asked to specify the ways in which they were addressing identified challenges.

8 This question was not included in the state school survey.

Do you think the new GCSEs for languages are having a beneficial effect on any of the following challenges regarding language learning?	Independent schools only ^B Multiple responses permitted
Pupils' interest and motivation	11%
Pupils' actual linguistic competences	48%
Progression to A level	42%
Perceived level of difficulty compared to other subjects	9%
Pupils' cultural learning	26%
Issues relating to severe grading	9%
None of these	36.5%

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The survey found that opportunities for international experience are much more widespread in the independent sector. Although the majority of schools in both sectors organise school trips abroad for at least some pupils, it is notable that far fewer organise pupil exchanges - once the mainstay of language departments as a way of demonstrating the purpose of language learning to pupils. Teachers comment that exchanges are expensive for both families and schools and that safeguarding and risk assessment present a disproportionate administrative burden – particularly in the light of recent terrorist attacks and pressures on teacher time.

Types of international experience offered	State	Independent
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	31%	41%
Pupil exchanges	29%	53%
Teacher exchanges	4%	2%
School trips abroad	81%	90%
Teacher CPD abroad	2%	8%
We host Language Assistants	23%	50%
Work experience abroad	15%	33%
Joint curriculum projects	10%	17%
None of the above	11%	3%

There are also differences between state schools. State schools which offer international experience are statistically over-represented by schools with high attainment and low levels of FSM eligibility. Schools which are judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted are the most likely to offer international experience, and 'Inadequate' schools the least likely. One school which does not offer international experience and is in the highest quintile for FSM commented: *'There is no funding! Overseas projects are too costly and the students/families can't contribute much as we are in a very deprived area.'* The fall in the value of the pound was mentioned as an additional new barrier to organising trips and exchanges overseas.

New ways of providing international experience for pupils

Respondents referred to the many and varied ways in which they are able to provide international experiences for their pupils without going abroad. These included visits by partner schools and other visitors from abroad, collaboration with local universities or community centres, offering internships to foreign university students, visits to local cultural centres, cinemas or restaurants, e-twinning partnerships and the use of Skype.

'Our Year 7 students go to our nearby Japanese neighbours, Teikyo School to experience a day of Japanese culture'

'We use [university student] ambassadors who come and do extra speaking with our students when they are at university'

IMPACT OF BREXIT ON ATTITUDES

Just over a third (34%) of state secondary schools report that leaving the European Union is having a negative impact on language learning, either through student motivation and/or parental attitudes towards the subject. One typical comment was:

'We regularly have questions from pupils or parents about the value of learning a language, as "we don't need it" and "everyone should speak English" [...] Brexit is often touted as a reason not to do a language'

Schools reporting a negative shift in attitudes are statistically more likely to have lower attainment, have medium to high levels of pupils eligible for FSM, and be Community Schools or sponsored-led Academies. Negative shifts in attitudes were also very strongly associated with schools with low levels of pupils recorded as having English as an Additional Language.

In contrast, 10% of respondents reported that senior management in their school had become more positive towards language study as a result of Brexit. These schools are very mixed in their characteristics.

'We are determined to maintain both language teaching and our foreign exchange, after Brexit. It is more important than ever, for intercultural understanding and also for employment prospects for our pupils.'

These contrasts emphasise the challenge of overcoming the social and cultural divide which the Brexit vote revealed.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS

Language departments depend heavily on teachers who are citizens of other EU countries: 67% of state secondaries and 78% of independent schools report having one or more language teachers who are citizens of other EU countries without UK citizenship. The majority of state schools are already finding it difficult to recruit teachers for some languages or combinations of languages and finding language teachers of sufficient quality is a concern for 60% of state schools and more than half of independent schools.

Recruitment and retention in secondary schools	State	Independent
Our language department is currently fully staffed	83%	91%
We are finding it difficult to recruit teachers for some languages/ combinations of languages	53%	45%
We are finding it difficult to recruit language teachers of sufficient quality	60%	53%
We have experienced difficulties retaining high quality language staff	39%	25%

About one in five state schools and a slightly higher proportion of independent schools expressed concern about the impact of Brexit on teacher recruitment and retention, and a number had already seen staff leave as a result. One respondent commented:

'We are two EU nationals in my department and none of us know if we will stay on once the Brexit has happened. Given the economic situation, one of us may have retired early and the other one may have chosen to work in a different country.'



“67% OF STATE SECONDARIES AND 78% OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS REPORT HAVING ONE OR MORE LANGUAGE TEACHERS WHO ARE CITIZENS OF OTHER EU COUNTRIES WITHOUT UK CITIZENSHIP.”

TRENDS IN PROVISION AND TAKE UP FOR DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

EVIDENCE FROM EXAM FIGURES

There has been a decline in numbers taking French and/or German, but Spanish has increased rapidly over the past few years to become England's second modern language. On current trends, it looks set to overtake French at A level by 2020 and at GCSE in the early 2020s.

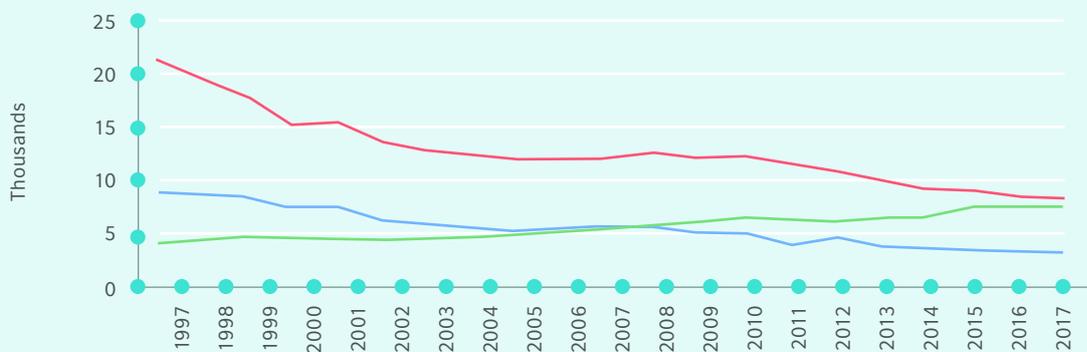
“OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN FRENCH AND/OR GERMAN AT A LEVEL ARE SHRINKING. 1/4 OF STATE SCHOOLS AND MORE THAN 1/10 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS THAT USED TO OFFER GERMAN POST 16 DURING THE LAST 3 YEARS NOW NO LONGER DO SO.”

Figure 3: GCSE entries in French, German and Spanish, 2010-2017



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
● French	160,598	141,749	135,547	161,821	160,955	151,095	136,862	130,790
● German	65,822	58,299	54,793	60,320	58,520	52,746	48,136	45,471
● Spanish	58,230	58,681	63,345	82,733	87,553	85,342	87,519	90,544

Figure 4: A level entries in French, German and Spanish, 1997-2017



	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
● French	21.3	17.8	15.4	12.9	12.0	12.2	12.2	11.5	9.9	9.0	8.3
● German	9.0	8.5	7.6	6.1	5.2	5.6	5.1	4.0	3.8	3.6	3.3
● Spanish	4.0	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.9	5.5	6.1	6.4	6.5	7.6	7.6

Figure 5: GCSE entries for smaller-entry languages, 2011-2017¹¹



	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Arabic	2,138	2,298	2,630	2,966	3,201	3,480	3,576
Chinese	2,480	2,307	2,341	2,830	3,286	3,575	3,654
Italian	3,436	3,851	4,080	4,068	4,004	4,081	4,507
Polish	2,505	2,748	2,944	3,948	4,075	4,726	4,749
Urdu	3,891	3,704	4,093	4,111	4,185	4,005	3,798

Other languages, with the exception of Urdu, have seen GCSE entries rise.⁹ As might be expected, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh faith schools have high levels of take up in these languages, but they also present some interesting characteristics as regards take up of the more commonly-taught languages. Sikh schools disproportionately favour French, whilst Jewish schools record much higher than average take up of Spanish. In contrast, Church of England schools have higher than average take up of German¹⁰.

⁹ UK-wide figures for other languages show that Portuguese, Russian, Turkish, Panjabi, Modern Hebrew, Modern Greek and Persian have all increased numbers at GCSE since 2011, while Japanese, Bengali, Gujarati and Dutch have all decreased. The DfE does not provide a breakdown for these languages, which each account for between 400 and 2,500 entries nationally. Data from www.jcq.org.uk

¹⁰ DfE.SFR01-2018.S9b.

¹¹ DfE.SFR01-2018.subject time series.

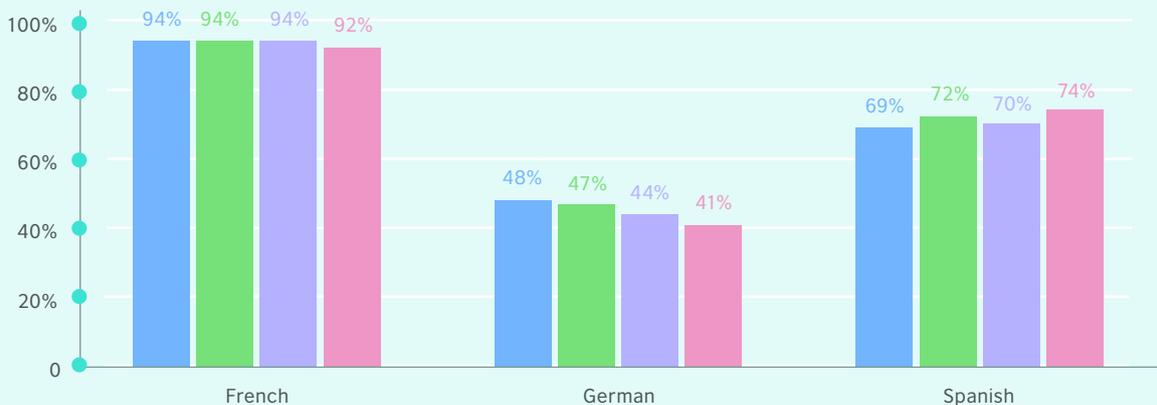
PROVISION IN SCHOOLS

This year's survey findings shows a decrease in the proportion of state secondary schools offering French and/or German at Key Stage 3, and a corresponding increase in those providing Spanish, suggesting that the trend indicated by the exam figures is likely to continue.

In the independent sector, this tendency is less marked because more independent schools were already offering Spanish four years ago and more are retaining provision for German. However, the proportion of independent schools offering Key Stage 3 German has dropped from 70% to 63%, while 85% offer Spanish (84% in 2014).

Opportunities to learn French and/or German at A level are shrinking. A quarter of state schools and more than one in ten independent schools that used

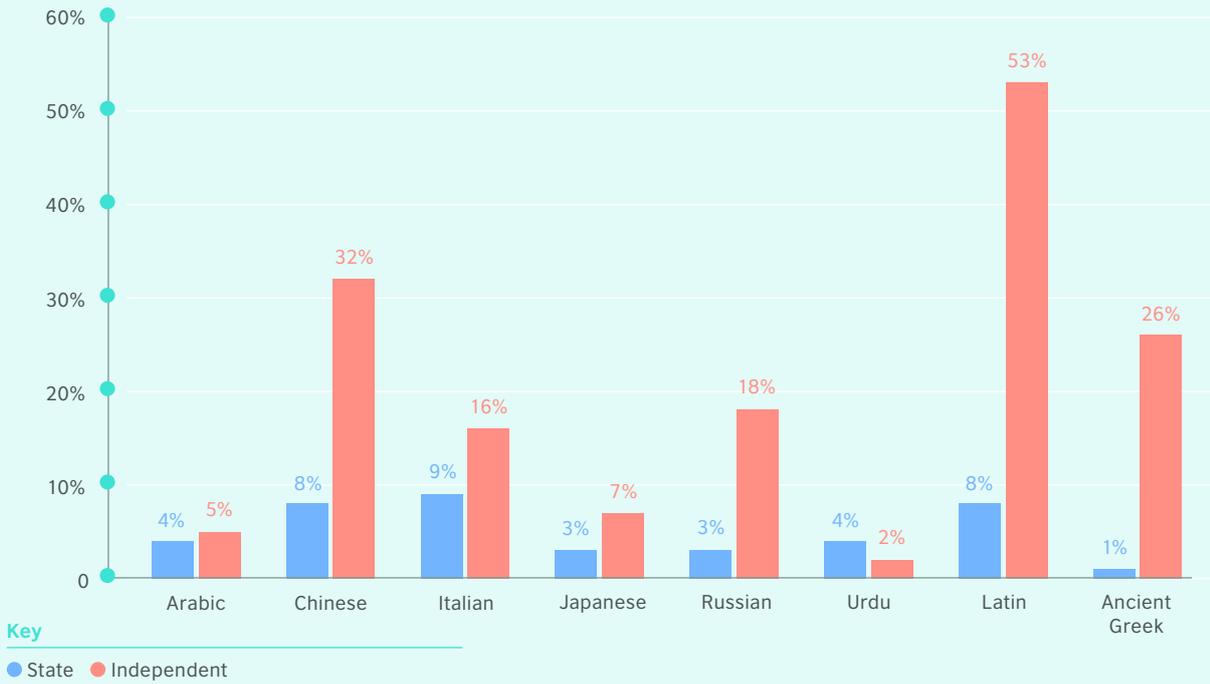
Figure 6: Provision for French, German and Spanish at Key Stage 3, state schools, 2014-2018



Key

● 2014/15 ● 2015/16 ● 2016/17 ● 2018

Figure 7: Schools offering other languages as a GCSE option



to offer German post 16 during the last 3 years now no longer do so. In this year's sample, twenty-five state secondary schools and two independent schools have discontinued French post 16.

Provision for other languages is patchy and often aimed at small groups. Pupils in the independent sector have opportunities to learn a wider range of modern and ancient languages.

Comments show that schools offering a more diverse range of languages are catering for a mix of new and heritage learners and native speakers:

'Boys have the option to choose Chinese from Year 8 to GCSE, the GCSE groups tend to be about 15 pupils and include some heritage Chinese pupils' (State school)

'We have 20-25 students in all classes in Urdu and Arabic and most of these students are pupils' heritage languages for the Urdu and mother tongue for the Arabic students' (State school)

'Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Persian A Level is only available if it is a pupil's heritage language' (Independent school)

'Chinese is principally native speakers for examination classes; non-native for enrichment classes' (Independent school)

“SCHOOLS OFFERING A MORE DIVERSE RANGE OF LANGUAGES ARE CATERING FOR A MIX OF NEW AND HERITAGE LEARNERS AND NATIVE SPEAKERS”



LANGUAGES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

PROVISION

Around four out of five responding schools reported offering continuous provision for languages, with built-in progression as required by the national curriculum, for all pupils in Years 3 to 6. Another 14.5% say that they are working towards this. Nearly half also provide some teaching in Key Stage 1. Further comments show that, in practice, Key Stage 2 provision is often interrupted, particularly in Year 6 when the focus is on SATs. Three quarters of primary schools teach French, around 23% Spanish, and 3% German, with some overlap. Around 80% of schools allocate on average between 30 minutes and up to one hour per week for language learning, although comments indicate that this is often irregular or eroded by other priorities:

‘As a school we “block” subjects across the year. For example, we may teach a whole French unit over the course of a week or two and then not cover the subject for another half term.’

‘French is also often the first subject dropped (unfortunately) due to other things going on in the school’

These findings are very similar to those of previous years, indicating little movement in developing languages as a new subject in the primary curriculum.

STAFFING

In 42% of schools, language teaching is provided by class teachers alone – this is slightly up from last year’s figures of 40% in Years 3-4 and 38% in Years 5-6. There has been a slight reduction in the use of specialist teachers (whether internal or external) from 49% to 46%, though where they are used, they are more likely to be members of staff than external. In 13% of schools, class teachers and specialists work together to deliver language teaching – this can be a way of carving out more time to consolidate formal learning:

‘The class teacher will revisit the learning from the Spanish lesson throughout the week ideally 5 mins each day so that children are getting an hour a week’.

However, in 58% of schools where class teachers are involved in delivering languages, there has been no CPD for languages in the past year. This is of concern given the relatively new status of the subject in the Key Stage 2 curriculum and the evident need for further training and development identified in previous years’ surveys.

ASSESSMENT

There has been a small increase in the proportion of schools assessing individual pupils’ progress in language learning, and a decline in those not carrying out any form of assessment in languages.

Forms of assessment for languages	2018	2017
Formal assessment of each child	16%	13%
Informal assessment of each child	52%	48%
Individual pupils are not assessed but group records are kept of progress in language learning	14%	17%
We don't assess or record pupils' progress in languages	15%	18%
Other	3%	4%

CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOLS

The main challenge for schools, as previously, is finding sufficient curriculum time, while 62% of respondents say that staff training – either boosting their linguistic proficiency and/or their confidence and pedagogical expertise – is a challenge. Schools were least likely to identify either (or both) of these issues as challenges if they were based in London, and if they had higher numbers of students recorded as having EAL.

What are the main challenges, if any, for your school in meeting the National Curriculum requirements for modern/ancient languages?	2018	2017
Finding sufficient curriculum time	71%	69%
Finding enough suitably qualified teachers	19%	19%
Improving staff languages proficiency and/or boosting staff expertise and confidence	62% (39% / 46%)	35% / 48% ¹²
Funding and resources	25%	24%
Accessing training	15%	12%
Achieving buy-in from parents and/or governors	1%	1%
We do not experience any particular challenges	8%	10%
Not applicable	2%	2%

Respondents refer to ways they have found to provide extra time for language learning without impacting on other subjects through themed assemblies, performances or singing, and project activities. One school provided the following example of how formal language lessons are integrated into the school’s literacy and international work:

‘We all have the obligation to deliver a French session up to an hour weekly. However, alongside that, we have Year 3, for example, who do a whole topic on

12 In 2017 we did not calculate a composite figure.

French [...] Year 4 are involved in an international project linked to their topic of Around the World in 80 days from January - March [...] in Year 6 we have an international project through e-twinning. [...] Also, in Year 6 we push French in to guided reading sessions by showing the children that by identifying key words they can decipher the meaning in a sentence.'

CONTACTS BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

There has been a slight decrease in most forms of contact between primary and secondary schools. Just under half (47%) of primary schools have some form of contact with at least one secondary school (last year's figure was 50%) and 65% of secondary schools have some contact with at least one primary school. Many secondary schools face barriers in the extent to which they can engage with local primaries, since 41% have more than ten feeder schools.

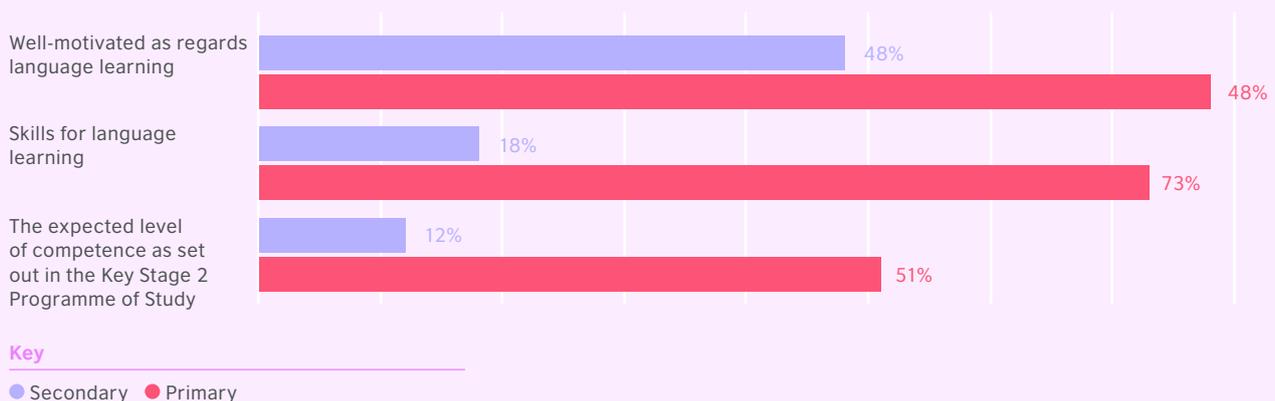
Types of contact primary schools have with secondaries (percentages out of all schools)	2018	2016/17
A local secondary school provides language teaching in my school	6%	8%
A local secondary school provides our Scheme of Work	2%	2%
A local secondary school provides training for teachers of languages in my school	5%	2.5%
We exchange information on language teaching informally	18%	23%
We collaborate in planning units of work in languages	2%	n/a
We plan language lessons together	1%	2%
We plan CPD sessions together	1%	2%
We take part in cross-phase observations	1%	4%
We take part in network/cluster meetings	16%	17%
We provide data on pupil progress in language learning at the point of transfer	9%	9%

TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Previous surveys detected a mismatch between what primary schools consider they are achieving in language teaching and the perceptions of secondary schools who receive their pupils. This year's survey sought to investigate this further by asking primary schools what proportion of their 2016/17 Year 6 cohort had gained various competences through their language learning and, in parallel, asking secondary schools what proportion of their current Year 7 cohort had arrived with those competences. The responses, shown below, indicate a disparity of perception between what primary schools believe they are achieving and what secondary schools judge their feeders have achieved. It is due in part to secondary schools receiving pupils from a wide variety of feeders and the inconsistency of provision between them. The efforts of those with well-developed language provision are therefore perhaps lost in an overall perception of minimal prior learning. Further, the disparity may not be unique to languages as 'summer learning loss' is well documented in other subjects. It should also be noted that, in 2017, 20% of secondary schools reported that pupils had been learning a different language in their primary school.

"65% OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS HAVE SOME CONTACT WITH AT LEAST ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL."

Figure 8: Proportions of schools reporting outcomes of Key Stage 2 languages for 'all or most pupils' at end of Year 6/start of Year 7



Comments from primary and secondary schools below highlight this disparity of perceptions:

Comments from primary schools	Comments from secondary schools
Pupils have a good background knowledge of the language when they get to secondary school, which makes them more confident as well as more effective language learners.	No students arriving in Year 7 are able to demonstrate the expected level of competence as set out in Key Stage 2 Programme of Study. Most are however capable to recognise familiar words as taught at KS2 but sentences are out of reach
MFL has been a consistent platform for the children to shine, independently of how they perform in other areas of the curriculum.	Primary school language provision is sketchy, inconsistent, and done mostly to hit national obligations.
We spend quite a lot of time developing their Language Detective skills: looking for cognates, building phonic skills, strategies for remembering new vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation etc.	It seems that languages are treated as a part of enrichment in primary schools (e.g. language of the month) rather than taught formally.

Another explanation for the disparity of perceptions between primary and secondary schools is the impact of SATs interrupting Year 6 provision for languages. This was commented on by both primary and secondary school respondents:

‘Last year’s Year 6 cohort would have experienced MFL teaching in years 3 & 4, some had provision in Year 5 however timetable constraints and SATs pressures meant that they did not have any MFL teaching in their final year at the school’ (Primary school respondent).

‘Provision at primary is still either poorly taught or not taught at all in year 6 as teachers focus on preparing students for their SATs [...] It is clear primary teachers have not been given sufficient support in introducing languages and leaders do not see it as a priority’ (Secondary school respondent).

Despite these challenges, some secondary schools report positively on the impact of primary languages in their area:

“THERE IS A DISPARITY OF PERCEPTION BETWEEN WHAT PRIMARY SCHOOLS BELIEVE THEY ARE ACHIEVING AND WHAT SECONDARY SCHOOLS JUDGE THEIR FEEDERS HAVE ACHIEVED.”



‘The fact that they know all the meta language now and don’t freak out if you start talking about verbs/ adjectives etc is AMAZING’

‘Despite disparities in languages many students have acquired transferable skills by the time they reach year 7, more so than 10 years ago’.

Secondary schools report efforts to improve transition arrangements, and some are beginning to see the results of liaison with their primary schools, as these examples show:

‘We have been using language leaders (current year 7 & 8 pupils) to lead MFL days, we bring groups of primary school children in and they do a carousel of activities in both French and Spanish which are all delivered by pupils’.

‘Trying to get a common Scheme of Work between the 3 schools at the moment’

‘We over-staff the MFL faculty to provide MFL teaching in three of our feeders. We also provide training and materials for two other main feeders at present and are looking to expand this.’

LANGUAGES POST-16

DECLINE IN NUMBERS AND PROVISION

The general trend towards a decline in language study post 16 is continuing: for most languages, there are more schools reporting decreases in numbers and withdrawal of provision than schools reporting new provision or increased numbers. The exceptions to this are, in the independent sector, Arabic and Chinese and, in the state sector, Spanish¹³. Twenty-eight per cent of state schools which offer Spanish post 16 have seen numbers increase over the last three years.

The reasons for the decline in numbers are the difficulty of languages compared with other subjects, combined with a perception that they are not as useful or important as STEM subjects:

'Fewer students at GCSE means fewer potential linguists at A-Level. Students who are our brightest linguists tend to take STEM subjects, choosing Further Maths over a language' (State school respondent)

'There is [...] a perception that languages are hard to get top grades in and they can get grades with less work in other subjects.' (Independent school respondent)

'The Government and school SLTs are not stating clearly enough how important languages are for the future. German, for instance, is the most required language in recruitment for London and internationally in Europe, yet we don't see parents or pupils being aware of this.' (Independent school respondent)

In schools in the state sector where the English Baccalaureate policy has had a positive effect on numbers in Key Stage 4, this has provided an increased pool of pupils able to continue with a language post 16. However, only 6% of these schools report that increases at Key Stage 4 have improved take up post 16 (last year's figure was 7%). The reasons given for this are the same as noted above:

'Many year 11s are saying they are not inclined to take a language as it is the "most difficult GCSE" they are studying'.

Comments such as this are of concern given that part of the rationale for introducing greater rigour at GCSE was to create a better bridge to A level.

IMPACT OF 'DECOUPLING' OF AS FROM A LEVEL

There is a very significant move away from AS courses in both state and independent sectors: 70% of state schools (74% independent) no longer offer AS and another 9% (5% independent) are phasing them out. This has caused numbers to fall as students often chose a language as their fourth option at AS:

'The move from four AS levels to three A Levels has impacted on our French numbers. 2017/18 is the first year for a long time we do not have a Year 12 French class.'

'If we did offer AS, we might be able to attract STEM students to take languages as an "extra".'

The problem is being compounded by tight budgets which require minimum numbers for a course to run:

'Uptake at A Level is a constant worry as schools are imposing minimum numbers in order for A Level classes to run due to tight budgets. With less than 8-9 per class it may run but on reduced time which makes it very difficult to cover the course.'

IMPACT OF THE NEW A LEVELS

Independent schools, which account for 32% of A level language entries, do not see the new exams as addressing their concerns about the difficulty and severe grading of the subject¹⁴:

Do you think the new A level syllabuses for languages are having a beneficial effect on any of the following challenges for language learning?	Independent schools ¹⁵ . Multiple responses permitted
Pupils' interest and motivation	30%
Pupils' acquisition of linguistic competences	35%
Progression to study languages at university	27%
Perceived level of difficulty compared to other subjects	8%
Issues relating to severe grading	5%
Pupils' cultural learning	54%
None of these	32%

¹³ We have noted before that such provision in the independent sector often caters for very small numbers or is directed at native speaker pupils.

¹⁴ SFR05.2017 Table 10.

¹⁵ This question was not included in the state school survey.

WAYS FORWARD

As in previous years, this year's findings reveal significant challenges for the good health and development of language teaching in English schools. However, they also contain some positive messages and evidence of strengths to build on.



A LANGUAGE-RICH ENVIRONMENT

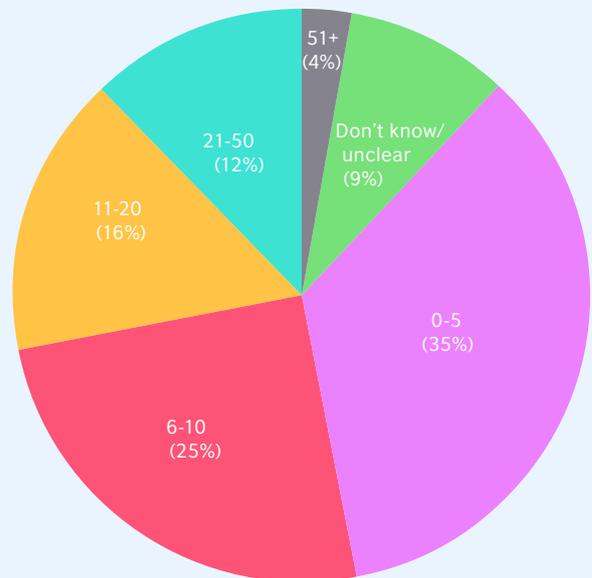
Although the presence of children who do not speak English as their first language is often seen as a challenge for schools, for language learning it seems to be a benefit rather than an obstacle.

The survey found that language learning is valued more in schools where there is already a relatively high degree of multilingualism. In both Key Stage 3 and 4, schools which allocate more hours to the teaching of languages are more likely to have higher proportions of pupils with English as an Additional Language. These schools are less likely to report negative attitudes towards language learning as a result of the Brexit vote:

'As a very diverse school in East London, our students are very culturally aware and internationalist in outlook' (State secondary school respondent)

The survey responses show that many schools are now very rich language environments as illustrated on the chart in relation to state secondary schools. Primary schools and independent schools present similarly diverse linguistic profiles.

Figure 9: Number of languages in addition to English spoken by pupils, state secondary schools



Schools provided evidence that they were building on these multilingual resources to benefit all pupils:

'We have an international boarding community with lots of students from Germany/Spain (usually short term) as well as Chinese. This means our students have a lot of interaction on a daily basis' (Independent school respondent)

'Parents come in and read in home language, every class has a language scrapbook with common phrases that children use at home' (Primary school respondent)

THE RISE OF SPANISH

The growth of interest and demand for Spanish negates the proposition that language teaching in English schools is in fatal decline. It is a phenomenon which has been observed throughout the UK over several decades and reflects long-term changes in the social and cultural context at home and abroad. One respondent commented:

'First Spanish GCSE cohort was 3 years ago and still seeing impact of enthusiastic first students'

COMMITTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS LEADING THE WAY IN LANGUAGE PROVISION

Although our findings show that there remains much work to be done in improving consistency and standards across all primary schools, there are many examples of schools which have already successfully integrated languages into a crowded Key Stage 2 curriculum. Almost all respondents from primary schools (91%) highlighted the cultural importance of language learning for pupils and the benefits for improving understanding of the world. In the words of one respondent:

'Primary school is the perfect place to start learning a language. The children love it, their horizons are broadened greatly and it dovetails into our whole approach to loving our neighbour.'

Respondents put forward many examples of good practice in transition to secondary school. Through systematisation of schemes of work, the teaching of joint modules, the use of secondary pupils as 'ambassadors', taster days, festivals and project work, disparities in perceptions can be overcome and secondary schools can better appreciate the work which is being carried out in primary schools. Increased opportunities for CPD for primary staff teaching languages could ease the pressure on curriculum time by highlighting links with literacy and other curriculum subjects and by providing suitable resources.

RISING STANDARDS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In secondary schools, the simultaneous introduction of new GCSEs and A levels has put pressure on teachers and the sudden increase in the expected level of competence has been daunting but there seems to be little disagreement that the new exams have the potential to create 'better linguists'. It will take time and effort to ensure that this is spread beyond a small élite. The greatest challenge will be to bridge the divides that exist in language learning in order to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to benefit from the cultural, educational and economic benefits of speaking another language.

“PRIMARY SCHOOL IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO START LEARNING A LANGUAGE. THE CHILDREN LOVE IT, THEIR HORIZONS ARE BROADENED GREATLY AND IT DOVETAILS INTO OUR WHOLE APPROACH TO LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR.”

