

# Language learning

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department for

**education and skills**

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

The Green Paper 14–19: *extending opportunities, raising standards* says:

“The teaching of modern foreign languages needs to reflect the reality of the world in which we live. Our position at the heart of Europe places a particular emphasis on a number of European languages, but our global and cultural links extend much wider. Over 300 languages are in use in London alone, making it one of the most linguistically diverse cities in the world. The ability to understand and communicate in other languages contributes to community cohesion and educational inclusion, two of our key goals.”

# Introduction

This Government is committed to raising standards in education and that mission extends to the teaching and learning of languages. In this paper we set out the strategy for improving Britain's performance at languages over the next decade and beyond. In particular, we will deliver a dynamic new approach to widening opportunities for language learning in the primary sector. The fundamental premise is that unless our children learn languages earlier we will fail them.

For too long in this country there has been an assumption that because English is spoken in many parts of the world, there is no need for English speakers to learn other languages. It has led to a cycle of national underperformance. Too few people study languages to A Level and Degree Level, and in turn, we have too few language teachers in our schools. We need to arrest this

decline, and recognise the contribution of languages – not just European languages, but all our community languages as well – to the cultural and linguistic richness of our society, to personal fulfilment, commercial success, international trade and mutual understanding.

Our determination to offer languages earlier also reflects our commitment as a Government to achieve genuine equality of opportunity in this country. In the independent sector almost all preparatory schools offer a second language to their 5–11 year olds. The maintained sector must do the same. This is part of what it means to modernise the education service, a central objective of this Government's second term agenda, and it will give every child, not just the privileged few, the chance to make the most of their unique potential in the modern world.

This paper sets out our aspirations for language learning and teaching and the areas in which we are developing proposals, and asks all the key stakeholders to contribute their views.

Our ambitions are that:

- all primary school children will be entitled to study languages by 2012;
- there will be at least 200 Specialist Language Colleges by 2005;
- all young people and adults will have the opportunity to learn languages and be motivated to do so;
- the number of people studying languages in further and higher education and in work-based training will increase;
- languages will be properly recognised and valued by society and competence will be recognised;
- local and regional networks will support primary schools and harness available resources to provide high quality language learning;
- our national capability in languages will be transformed;
- we will increase the number of people teaching languages, and be innovative about using expertise wherever we find it.

# The Challenge

We will need fundamental change to deliver this revolution in language teaching and learning. In setting out our ambitions, we must be realistic about our starting point and therefore the pace at which we can move forward. We must have a vision that stretches forward over the next 10 years.

We face two key challenges. First, as we have set out, as a country we do not value languages, or recognise the contribution they make to the economy and to society. We need to challenge this attitude and inspire people of all ages to learn a language. Our record in teaching modern foreign languages has historically not been good enough. Traditionally, we have not taught modern foreign languages in primary schools, although QCA has developed curriculum material to support those primary schools that do so. We have not capitalised on the facility for language learning that young children often have. This has fed through into weaknesses in

the system, and has been compounded by our indifferent attitude to language learning. It will take time to reverse these weaknesses.

Second, there is a shortage of modern foreign language teachers at secondary level, and relatively few primary teachers have been trained to teach modern foreign languages, although there are many primary teachers who have an interest in languages and may have linguistic expertise. The pace of change will depend critically on increasing the supply of trained teachers and others with language expertise, including teacher assistants. This, too, will require commitment on the part of all our partners to finding innovative ways of encouraging people with language expertise to support learning and teaching in school.

This is an exciting and challenging agenda. There is a battle to be won, and we need to convince this generation and the next that competence in English alone is not enough.

# Our proposals

We are determined to reverse the cycle of national underperformance, starting at primary school level, but encompassing good quality provision for a new wave of language learners of all ages. Our proposals focus on revitalising provision for children and young people, but we propose a national accreditation strategy which will inspire and motivate everyone to develop and improve their language skills.

We see language learning as enriching the primary curriculum and supporting the emphasis on literacy which has produced a sustained rise in standards at Key Stage 2, as well as developing wider skills outside the formal curriculum. Whilst not making it a compulsory part of the national curriculum, we will give each child an **entitlement to learn a language at primary level by 2012**. And the Key Stage 3 strategy, with its dedicated strand of work on improving standards in

modern foreign languages, will support the drive to motivate young people to continue to acquire language skills. The move to an entitlement at Key Stage 4, discussed below, should also help us to focus on languages at Key Stage 3 and, in the longer term, at primary school. In particular, it will free up scarce teaching resources.

This entitlement means we will need to draw on expertise and resources both inside and outside school. Given the current shortages of modern foreign language teachers, we need to both increase numbers and call on expertise from elsewhere. We want to raise the number of **primary teachers trained to teach languages** in order to build capacity into our primary schools, and we welcome the TTA's decision to offer 170 places for French in the primary teacher training allocation for 2002/03. We will

increase the number of primary training places that include modern foreign languages year-on-year, with the rate of increase subject to both recruitment capacity and the outcome of the current spending review.

We will **extend and revitalise the language assistant programme**, recognising the value of more than 2000 language assistants from over 30 countries who work in this country, and the professional development opportunities for those who choose to work abroad. With key partners, we want to support language assistants in primary as well as in secondary schools. We will need to look at how we can best support language assistants, and at how their skills can most effectively be used, and we should look for other sources of language assistants – for example, among overseas students in our universities, as well as among our students of modern foreign languages.

We will build on the success of our 126 **Specialist Language Colleges** and encourage more schools to apply for Specialist Language College status. We will build up the number of colleges year-on-year, and work towards an even spread of colleges across the country and an overall target of at least 200 colleges by 2005. Partnerships that currently exist between

Specialist Language Colleges and clusters of primary schools enable language teaching to be delivered by a visiting specialist teacher in primary schools, often supported by a language assistant, and for joint planning to take place between the partners. This allows for an easier progression from primary to secondary for those pupils learning a modern foreign language.

We will also need to encourage other education institutions, including those in further and higher education, to support schools and learners. Teachers should have **access to support networks** similar to those that exist between Specialist Language Colleges and primary schools. Specialist teachers are able to act as mentors to primary teachers and Specialist Language Colleges can provide access to their facilities and in-service training. We welcome the development of regional support networks, which have an important role to play in offering professional development opportunities, information and in-service training support. We want to find ways of identifying and encouraging other centres of expertise – Beacon primary schools, secondary schools and further and higher education institutions with language strengths – to share specialist facilities and resources and offer support to

other schools particularly primary schools in their wider community.

We want to identify, promote and **disseminate good practice** in teaching languages at all key stages. We would also welcome comments on how language teaching can be organised – particularly in primary schools. We could, for example, teach it in intensive blocks of time, or at Summer Schools. Alongside enhanced vocational opportunities we will explore the benefits of teaching elements of vocational subjects in a language other than English, as they do in Holland.

We want to use **ICT** more effectively to give learners and teachers access to high quality electronic learning materials and to enable children and young people to communicate with their peers in non-English speaking countries and to develop their linguistic skills as well as their knowledge of other cultures. Curriculum Online will have an important part to play here. We want to encourage the development of electronic links and of arrangements for 'e pals', with pupils communicating with other children and young people in other countries. ICT could play a part in any modern system developed to recognise achievement.

**Our proposals for Key Stage 4** published in the Green Paper *14–19: extending opportunities, raising standards* recognise the reality of large-scale disapplication of young people (around 36,000 pupils last year) from modern foreign languages by schools and colleges. All young people will continue to be entitled to learn a modern foreign language, but those who find it very difficult to do so (and who often disrupt the learning of others) will not be forced to take up the entitlement. And by reducing the compulsory element of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 from 80% to 50% of teaching time we will also make it easier for those who wish to study more than one language to do so.

More people studying more languages more intensively in the sixth form will, in turn, help to **increase the numbers of people going on to study languages in further and higher education**. A Level entries and passes in both French and German have declined steadily since 1991/92. We must reverse this trend. The introduction of new AS Levels has had a positive effect on the numbers going on to study languages post-16. We will make sure that we build on this by inspiring those learning languages in primary schools and at Key Stage 3 to continue to study languages, and by working with employers to influence career choices.



We will also encourage the integration of language learning within Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks.

There is a great deal of high-quality **language provision in our colleges and universities**, but take-up needs to be improved. Building languages back into the education system and the national consciousness from the early years will drive an expansion in participation in language in further and higher education. We expect to see an increase in the numbers studying modern foreign languages, including through the increasing numbers of joint honours courses and modular programmes involving languages, which allow students to study a language at Degree Level alongside another subject.

We want to **meet the language needs of employers** by raising the awareness of linguistic skills for employees. Employers can play a critical role in influencing career choices by signalling the economic and social value they attach to language competency. Employers in every sector of the economy need to encourage language learning and invest in work-based training. We can build on the experience of those who already offer language training to prepare trainees and employees for placements abroad.

If we are to motivate the majority to make progress in learning a language, there must be an incentive to do so. We want to introduce a new **national system of recognising achievement in languages**, which is easily understood and applies to all age groups. It would increase motivation, provide a ladder of progression and engage people with linguistic expertise. We are working with key partners to develop a scheme similar to that which accredits musical performance, with perhaps an 8 grade scale to recognise achievement. The experience of developing the oral and written tests to underpin the 'Teaching English as a Foreign Language' programme will be useful in this respect, as well as the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which has been developed jointly with other European countries, and which provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, and helps educational and occupational mobility.

## Next steps

The Languages National Steering Group, chaired by Catherine Ashton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for School Standards, which brings together all those with an interest in this area, is already developing a national strategy for languages, to be published in the autumn. Its work will be informed by the responses to this paper and the debate prompted by it.

Changing the nation's attitude to teaching and learning languages will demand a huge cultural change, and action from Government, schools, colleges, universities, employers, parents and learners. But in a world where language competence is increasingly becoming a requisite for economic success and when young people will have more opportunities to travel than ever before, it really is a challenge we need to take on.

This publication is available online through the DfES website at [www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19greenpaper](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19greenpaper)

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