



## BRIEFING PAPER

Number 07388, 16 November 2015

# Language teaching in schools (England)

By Robert Long and Paul Bolton

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

### Inside:

1. What must be taught
2. Quality of provision, levels of achievement
3. A strengthened English Baccalaureate: impact on languages
4. Other issues
5. Statistics: student and teacher numbers

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. What must be taught</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 The National Curriculum: maintained schools	4
Requirements for languages	4
Programmes of study	5
1.2 Academies and Free Schools	6
1.3 GCSE, AS and A level subject content	7
<b>2. Quality of provision, levels of achievement</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Ofsted reports	8
2.2 Language teaching: support and quality	9
Language trainee teacher support	9
Quality of language teaching	10
2.3 European survey on language competences	11
2.4 British Council: Languages for the Future report	12
2.5 CfBT Education Trust and British Council report: Language Trends 2014/15	13
2.6 CBI survey on employers' views	14
2.7 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages	14
<b>3. A strengthened English Baccalaureate: impact on languages</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 Introduction: performance measure	16
3.2 A strengthened EBacc: September 2015	16
Supply of language teachers: concerns and consultation	17
<b>4. Other issues</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 Teaching community and less-commonly spoken languages	19
4.2 Chancellor's announcement on Mandarin teaching	20
<b>5. Statistics: student and teacher numbers</b>	<b>21</b>
5.1 Student numbers	21
GCSE	21
A level	22
5.2 Language teachers	23

Contributing authors

Robert Long, Social Policy, sections 1-4  
Paul Bolton, Social and General Statistics,  
section 5

## Summary

Languages are a part of the National Curriculum in England from ages 7-14, with the requirements at Key Stage 3 specifying that a modern language is taught. Revised content for GCSE, AS and A level languages has been published for teaching from September 2016.

Most pupils beginning secondary school from September 2015 will be required to take a GCSE in a modern language under Government proposals for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) to be taken by at least 90% of pupils.

Ofsted reports have found important strengths in language teaching in English schools, alongside significant weaknesses. A recent report on Key Stage 3 identified modern languages classes as requiring significant improvement, particularly in light of the introduction of the strengthened EBacc.

The majority of schools teach one or more of French, German and Spanish, but the Government does not promote the teaching of particular languages. Recently, concerns have been raised about the potential withdrawal of qualifications in lesser-taught languages such as Arabic, Japanese and Polish. The Government and Ofqual, alongside others, are in discussions on how to maintain the broadest possible range of languages at GCSE and A level.

Language learning in England is consistently poor when compared with foreign language learning in other countries, and there have been regular calls from industry and educational bodies for the levels of attainment to be raised.

This briefing relates to England only. It discusses the teaching of ancient and foreign languages, and does not include information on the teaching of English for students with another first language.

# 1. What must be taught

## 1.1 The National Curriculum: maintained schools

### Requirements for languages

The National Curriculum must be taught in all local authority maintained schools in England.

The National Curriculum [Framework](#) sets out that languages are required to be taught at Key Stages 2 and 3; that is, from ages 7-14. At Key Stage 2, the requirement is for a foreign language to be taught; at Key Stage 3 the requirement is specifically for a modern foreign language.

After the age of 14, all pupils in maintained schools have a statutory entitlement to provision in four 'entitlement areas', one of which is the study of a modern foreign language:

[The other entitlement areas] and [a] modern foreign language are not compulsory national curriculum subjects after the age of 14, but all pupils in maintained schools have a statutory entitlement to be able to study a subject in each of those four areas.

- schools must provide access to a minimum of one course in each of the four entitlement areas
- schools must provide the opportunity for pupils to take a course in all four areas, should they wish to do so
- a course that meets the entitlement requirements must give pupils the opportunity to obtain an approved qualification.<sup>1</sup>

At Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11), the Framework states:

Teaching may be of any modern or ancient foreign language and should focus on enabling pupils to make substantial progress in one language. The teaching should provide an appropriate balance of spoken and written language and should lay the foundations for further foreign language teaching at key stage 3.<sup>2</sup>

At Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14):

Teaching may be of any modern foreign language and should build on the foundations of language learning laid at key stage 2, whether pupils continue with the same language or take up a new one.<sup>3</sup>

The inclusion of languages at Key Stage 2 is fairly new, having been in place since September 2014. It was introduced as one of the changes made following the Coalition Government's National Curriculum review. The Library briefing on the [National Curriculum Review](#), SN06798, provides background.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, [The national curriculum in England: framework document](#), p7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p213

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p215

## Programmes of study

[Programmes of study](#) have been published for languages study at Key Stages 2 and 3.

The programme of study for Key Stage 2 states that:

Pupils should be taught to:

- listen attentively to spoken language and show understanding by joining in and responding
- explore the patterns and sounds of language through songs and rhymes and link the spelling, sound and meaning of words
- engage in conversations; ask and answer questions; express opinions and respond to those of others; seek clarification and help\*
- speak in sentences, using familiar vocabulary, phrases and basic language structures
- develop accurate pronunciation and intonation so that others understand when they are reading aloud or using familiar words and phrases\*
- present ideas and information orally to a range of audiences\*
- read carefully and show understanding of words, phrases and simple writing
- appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes in the language
- broaden their vocabulary and develop their ability to understand new words that are introduced into familiar written material, including through using a dictionary
- write phrases from memory, and adapt these to create new sentences, to express ideas clearly
- describe people, places, things and actions orally\* and in writing
- understand basic grammar appropriate to the language being studied, including (where relevant): feminine, masculine and neuter forms and the conjugation of high-frequency verbs; key features and patterns of the language; how to apply these, for instance, to build sentences; and how these differ from or are similar to English

The starred (\*) content above will not be applicable to ancient languages.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: languages programmes of study](#), 11 September 2013

The programme of study for a modern foreign language at Key Stage 3 states that:

Pupils should be taught to:

**Grammar and vocabulary**

- identify and use tenses or other structures which convey the present, past, and future as appropriate to the language being studied
- use and manipulate a variety of key grammatical structures and patterns, including voices and moods, as appropriate
- develop and use a wide-ranging and deepening vocabulary that goes beyond their immediate needs and interests, allowing them to give and justify opinions and take part in discussion about wider issues
- use accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation

**Linguistic competence**

- listen to a variety of forms of spoken language to obtain information and respond appropriately
- transcribe words and short sentences that they hear with increasing accuracy
- initiate and develop conversations, coping with unfamiliar language and unexpected responses, making use of important social conventions such as formal modes of address
- express and develop ideas clearly and with increasing accuracy, both orally and in writing
- speak coherently and confidently, with increasingly accurate pronunciation and intonation
- read and show comprehension of original and adapted materials from a range of different sources, understanding the purpose, important ideas and details, and provide an accurate English translation of short, suitable material
- read literary texts in the language [such as stories, songs, poems and letters] to stimulate ideas, develop creative expression and expand understanding of the language and culture
- write prose using an increasingly wide range of grammar and vocabulary, write creatively to express their own ideas and opinions, and translate short written text accurately into the foreign language<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Academies and Free Schools

Academies and free schools, which make up a majority of the secondary schools in England, do not have to teach the National Curriculum, although in practice many follow it at least in part. They are, however, required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.

---

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: languages programmes of study](#), 11 September 2013

### 1.3 GCSE, AS and A level subject content

The Coalition Government undertook significant reforms to GCSEs and A levels, which are continuing under the Conservative Government. Full background is available in the Library briefing [GCSE, AS and A Level reform](#), SN06962.

The reforms have included consultations on revised GCSE subject content and assessment objectives in both ancient and modern foreign languages, which will be taught from September 2016:

- [GCSE ancient languages](#)
- [GCSE modern foreign languages](#)

Similar consultations have taken place to produce reformed subject content for AS and A level ancient and modern foreign languages, also to be taught from September 2016:

- [GCE AS and A level ancient languages](#)
- [GCE AS and A level modern foreign languages](#)

## 2. Quality of provision, levels of achievement

### 2.1 Ofsted reports

In January 2011, Ofsted published a report on modern languages provision from 2007-2010, [Modern languages: achievement and challenge](#).

The report's key findings included that:

At primary level:

- Achievement was good or outstanding in just under six out of ten of the primary schools visited;
- Teaching was good in two thirds of the lessons observed. Despite some occasional shortcomings in pronunciation and intonation, primary teachers' subject knowledge and their teaching methods were predominantly good;
- Senior leaders were very committed to introducing modern languages into primary schools. Weaknesses lay in assessment, and the monitoring and evaluation of provision, often because leaders did not feel competent enough to judge language provision.

At secondary level and post-16:

- The overall progress made by students at Key Stages 3 and 4 was good or outstanding in over half of the lessons observed. However, there were weaknesses in "too many" lessons, particularly in speaking, listening and reading in modern languages.
- In many of the secondary schools visited, opportunities for students to listen to and communicate in the target language were often limited by many teachers' unpreparedness to use it.
- Despite declining numbers choosing foreign languages generally, in the specialist language colleges visited, numbers remained high. In half of the 28 specialist language colleges visited, the curriculum was judged to be outstanding.
- Most secondary students had positive attitudes to learning languages despite low take-up in Key Stage 4. Their intercultural understanding, however, was weak in the majority of the schools visited because they did not have good opportunities to develop it.
- Teaching in Key Stage 4 was focused on achieving good examination results, but this did not always prepare students sufficiently for study at a more advanced level, post-16.
- Most of the secondary schools visited had not yet modified their Year 7 curriculum or adapted their teaching of



## 9 Language teaching in schools (England)

languages to build on the increasing amount of work being undertaken in primary schools.

- Teaching and learning were good in most of the post-16 providers visited, and the relatively small numbers of students on modern language courses achieved well.<sup>6</sup>

In September 2015, Ofsted published a report on [Key Stage 3: the wasted years?](#), which was critical of several aspects of education at KS3, including modern foreign languages (emphasis in original):

Inspectors observed MFL, history and geography lessons at Key Stage 3 in 51 routine inspections carried out during June and July 2015. Inspectors reported significant weaknesses in all three subjects. Too often, inspectors found teaching that failed to challenge and engage pupils. Additionally, low-level disruption in some of these lessons, particularly in MFL, had a detrimental impact on the pupils' learning. **Achievement was not good enough in just under half of the MFL classes observed, two-fifths of the history classes and one third of the geography classes.**

It is no surprise, therefore, that there is low take-up in these subjects at GCSE. Some pupils told inspectors that they were not taking these [English Baccalaureate] EBacc subjects at Key Stage 4 because they did not enjoy them or had found them difficult at Key Stage 3, particularly MFL. A small number made an explicit link between their choices and the quality of teaching that they had received at Key Stage 3. **This is a serious concern given the government's ambition for all pupils starting Year 7 in September 2015 to take the EBacc subjects when they reach their GCSEs in 2020.** Improving the Key Stage 3 provision in these subjects will be crucial to raising the EBacc success rate in the coming years.<sup>7</sup>

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is discussed in more detail in section 3 of this briefing.

## 2.2 Language teaching: support and quality

### Language trainee teacher support

Eligible non-salaried trainee teachers on postgraduate programmes may qualify for a training bursary – an incentive payment designed to attract highly-qualified trainees in shortage subject areas, such as languages.

The Department for Education's '[Get Into Teaching](#)' website provides information on teaching languages and the support available. [Subject knowledge enhancement](#) (SKE) courses provide support for students to build up their subject knowledge. SKE courses are fully funded and students may be eligible for a training bursary of up to £7,200 to support them during the course.

[Bursaries](#) are also available for trainee language teachers. Languages are amongst the highest priority subjects (only maths and physics attract

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p6-7

<sup>7</sup> Ofsted, [Key Stage 3: the wasted years?](#), September 2015, p5. Summary of findings available at Ofsted, [Too many students let down in early stages of secondary school](#), 10 September 2015

higher bursary levels), with bursaries of up to £25,000 potentially available in 2016/17 depending on the qualifications of the applicant.<sup>8</sup>

Bursaries are available to train to teach modern foreign languages, community languages and ancient languages including Latin and Ancient Greek. Classics courses where the majority of the course is in an ancient language are also eligible, while other classics courses are eligible for the history bursary. Trainees do not need to apply for a bursary – if they meet the eligibility criteria, payments will start when they begin their course. Broader background on support for trainee teachers is available in the Library briefing Initial teacher training in England, [SN06710](#).

During a House of Lords [debate](#) on language teaching in January 2015, the schools Minister Lord Nash addressed the issue of support for trainee teachers:

**Baroness Perry of Southwark (Con):** Will my noble friend tell me what the Government are doing to ensure a supply of well qualified and competent teachers of modern languages, both at primary and secondary level?

**Lord Nash:** I am delighted to answer my noble friend's question. We have increased the bursary available to people with a first class degree in, for instance, languages, to £25,000. We are providing £2 million to fund nine projects across the country that will help primary and secondary teachers teach the new modern language curriculum at key stages 2 and 3. The National College for Teaching and Leadership facilitates an expert group for languages and also has a pilot scheme for subject enhancement in primary schools.<sup>9</sup>

A [TES article](#) in October 2015 suggested that language teachers, alongside those in other shortage subjects, are becoming more highly paid due to their scarcity.<sup>10</sup>

## Quality of language teaching

As noted in section 2.1, the [2011 Ofsted report](#) identified good teaching in two thirds of the lessons observed in primary school, with primary teachers' subject knowledge and their teaching methods described as predominantly good. Some weaknesses lay in the assessment, and the monitoring and evaluation of provision, often because school leaders did not feel competent enough to judge language provision. In secondary schools, the [2011 report](#) stated that in many of the secondary schools visited, opportunities for students to listen to and communicate in the target language were often limited by many teachers' unpreparedness to use it, and that teaching in Key Stage 4 was focused on achieving good examination results, but this did not always prepare students sufficiently for study at a more advanced level, post-16. However, teaching and learning were good in most of the

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education Get Into Teaching, [Bursaries and funding](#) [accessed 13 October 2015]; see also Department for Education, [Top graduates to get up to £30k to train to teach core subjects](#), 1 October 2015

<sup>9</sup> [HL Deb 26 Jan 2015 c9](#)

<sup>10</sup> Times Educational Supplement, [Staff in shortage subjects offered up to £10,000 more a year as recruitment crisis bites](#), 9 October 2015

post-16 providers visited, and the relatively small numbers of students on modern language courses achieved well.<sup>11</sup>

The September 2015, Ofsted report on [Key Stage 3: the wasted years?](#) identified language teaching that failed to challenge and engage pupils at KS3 as a particular concern.<sup>12</sup>

In the House of Lords [debate](#) on progress in teaching foreign languages in schools in January 2015, Baroness Coussins raised concerns about the assessment of language teaching in schools:

**Baroness Coussins (CB):** My Lords, the Question is about progress. The problem is that we have no real idea about that, because there is no benchmark either to help schools to interpret the national curriculum guidelines consistently, or for pupils to know what level of competence they should achieve at the end of each key stage. Will the Minister agree to consider introducing a light-touch measure for progress linked to the Common European Framework and apply it to all key stages?

**Lord Nash:** In April last year, we published a set of key principles for assessment, produced as a result of consultation on accountability. We also announced last May a new package of pupil assessment methods developed by teachers for their fellow teachers. Schools are able to develop whatever methodology of assessment they like. However, I will take note of what the noble Baroness says and look at that further.

[...]

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, the Minister will be aware that I have expressed concern in the past about the changes in teacher education and the increasing difficulty of national planning. In view of the shortage of language teachers, does he envisage a situation where there will be a complete shortage of language teachers in certain parts of the country, and how does he plan to rebalance this particular problem? Will he speak to the university colleges of education and the church colleges about the importance of teacher education?

**Lord Nash:** I agree entirely with the noble Baroness about the importance of the matter. More than 1,800 places for modern language teacher trainees are allocated for 2015-16, which is an increase of 4%. As I say, we have substantially increased the bursaries, which were brought in for language teachers by this Government.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3 European survey on language competences

In February 2013, the final report of the European Commission's European Survey on Language Competences, undertaken in England by the National Foundation for Educational Research on behalf of the Department for Education, was published. The [report](#) stated that "across skills and languages, England's performance did not compare

---

<sup>11</sup> Ofsted, [Modern languages: achievement and challenge 2007-10](#), January 2011

<sup>12</sup> Ofsted, [Key Stage 3: the wasted years?](#), September 2015, p5

<sup>13</sup> [HL Deb 26 Jan 2015 c9-10](#)

well with the global average.”<sup>14</sup> A previous BBC [report](#) on the survey drew attention to some key findings:

[The report] said England was bottom in reading, writing and listening in the main foreign language taught - French for English pupils - while pupils started learning a language later than average and were taught for fewer hours a week than average.

It also found only 1% of foreign language students in England were able to follow complex speech. This compared with a Europe average of 30%.<sup>15</sup>

Referring to the survey in a House of Lords [debate](#) on foreign languages in January 2015, the Schools Minister Lord Nash stated that:

We do feel that we need to redress the situation in languages. The European Survey on Language Competences in 2012 showed us that our 2011 GCSE students were the worst at languages across all the countries surveyed.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.4 British Council: Languages for the Future report

In November 2013 the British Council published its [Languages for the Future](#) report, which identified what it considered to be the ten most important languages for Britain’s future, considering the impact on trade, security and influence:

1 Spanish; 2 Arabic; 3 French; 4 Mandarin Chinese; 5 German; 6 Portuguese; 7 Italian; 8= Russian; 8= Turkish; 10 Japanese

The Council’s report stated that “the need for the UK to improve its capability in languages is incontestable,”<sup>17</sup> and that the low level of proficiency in foreign languages in the UK posed a variety of problems:

This report argues that, while millions of people around the world are learning English, the UK has fallen behind by not devoting sufficient time, resources and effort to language learning.

The resulting language deficit, if not tackled, is a threat to our competitiveness, influence and standing in the world, as well as to our citizens’ ability to play a meaningful role in the global economy and an increasingly networked and interconnected world.<sup>18</sup>

An [article](#) on the British Council website subsequently argued that:

That’s not to say that [the most vital languages] are the only languages worth learning – but, when you consider our research’s finding that the percentage of UK adults who can speak each of these is in single figures for everything apart from French (15%), it pays to have some focus.

The move to make a foreign language compulsory at Key Stage 2 in England from September is undoubtedly a step in the right

<sup>14</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, [European Survey on Language Competencies: Language Proficiency in England](#), February 2013, p18

<sup>15</sup> BBC News, [Pupils in England worst for using languages independently](#), 21 June 2012

<sup>16</sup> [HL Deb 26 Jan 2015 c9](#)

<sup>17</sup> British Council, [Languages for the Future: Which languages the UK needs most and why](#), November 2013, p6

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p19

direction, but there are unresolved issues about resourcing, continuing professional development, continuity and progression from primary to secondary, as well as time for languages within the curriculum.

[...]

Good intentions alone will not help us to introduce languages such as Chinese or Arabic into the curriculum, because we have a real lack of people qualified to teach them. Indeed, the supply of newly qualified teachers in even the most traditionally popular languages such as French is dwindling, as a result of fewer and fewer young people studying them to degree level. So we need to look at ways to encourage more native speakers in these and other languages to teach.

And perhaps there is an even bigger hurdle that we need to tackle: the alarmingly prevalent notion that foreign languages are just a 'nice to have', because everyone speaks English anyway. Quite simply, they don't. Only a quarter of the world's population speaks English and, while that's clearly still a lot of people, it still leaves three quarters with whom we're – quite literally – lost for words.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.5 CfBT Education Trust and British Council report: Language Trends 2014/15

In March 2015, the CfBT Education Trust and the British Council published a [report](#) based on their annual language trends survey. The report focused on the impact of increased language provision at Key Stage 2. Its key findings were:

- The introduction of compulsory language teaching in Key Stage 2 has had an immediate impact on the number of primary schools teaching a language. Almost all schools responding to the survey (99 per cent) now do so and 12 per cent say they have just started in the current (2014/15) academic year.
- Secondary school teachers are concerned about the wide variation in the quality of provision of language teaching at Key Stage 2 and sceptical of many primary schools' ability to deliver what they regard as a worthwhile level of language knowledge that pupils can apply to their studies in secondary school.
- There is a growing trend in both the state and independent sectors, but particularly in state secondary schools, to exclude or excuse pupils from the study of a language for a variety of reasons. The practice of disapplication of pupils in Key Stage 3, and of restricting access to language study in Key Stage 4, is associated with socio-economic disadvantage. In the most economically deprived category of schools, 17 per cent exclude groups of pupils from language study in Key Stage 3 and 44 per cent exclude some pupils from language study at Key Stage 4.
- There are a number of factors threatening the future of language study at A level. These include the impact of performance measures, grading and assessment systems, arrangements for languages lower down the school,

---

<sup>19</sup> British Council, [Why UK schools need foreign languages now](#), 17 April 2014

increasingly tight budgets for post-16 courses and student perceptions of the relative value of languages in relation to the risk of not obtaining a high grade.

- Schools with high levels of take-up for languages, where pupils with a range of different abilities take the subject to GCSE, are unfairly represented as underperforming in government accountability measures, which are based on achievement, not on participation. This is leading to cuts in language provision.
- French is overwhelmingly the language most frequently taught in primary schools and is offered by well over 90 per cent of secondary schools. However, in secondary schools there is a trend towards fewer pupils studying both French and German, and there are difficulties establishing and sustaining provision for lesser-taught languages. Of the main languages taught, only Spanish is expanding, but more slowly than the rate of decline for French and German. French is declining more rapidly in the independent sector than in state schools.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.6 CBI survey on employers' views

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has consistently raised concerns about levels of competence in foreign languages in the workforce. Its 2015 [education and skills survey](#), published with Pearson, stated that 60% of businesses were concerned about the preparation of school leavers in foreign languages, and that:

The proportion of businesses saying they have no need at all for foreign language skills among their employees has dropped sharply (to 23%). While a focus on foreign language skills is not seen by many businesses as a top priority area for action in education, their practical value is increasingly recognised.<sup>21</sup>

The survey found that despite the usefulness of languages, employers rated ability in this area relatively lowly compared to other skills. For example, when asked to identify priority areas for 14-18 education, 4% identified foreign language skills, compared with 50% for "more engagement with business."<sup>22</sup> When asked which subjects gave graduates an advantage in competing for graduate career openings, only 1% of employers cited languages, compared to 40% for STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).<sup>23</sup>

## 2.7 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages

The APPG on Modern Languages published its [manifesto for languages](#) in July 2014. The manifesto argued that knowledge of other languages and cultures is important for education and skills, the economy,

---

<sup>20</sup> CfBT Education Trust and British Council, [Language Trends 2014/15: The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England: Executive Summary](#), March 2015, p3-4

<sup>21</sup> CBI and Pearson, [Inspiring Growth: CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2015](#), June 2015, p41

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p56-57

## 15 Language teaching in schools (England)

international engagement, defence and security and community relations; it stated that “in the 21st century, speaking only English is as much of a disadvantage as speaking no English.”<sup>24</sup> It called for political parties to support a Framework for National Recovery in Language Learning in their 2015 General Election manifestos, advocating:

- A long term commitment to transforming the reputation of UK citizens as poor linguists, reluctant to value languages other than English. Languages are as important for our future as STEM subjects. Leadership is needed to ensure they are given similar recognition.
- High quality language learning for all children throughout the UK from age 7. Support for teachers and trainers to develop their linguistic and professional skills and lead the recovery.
- A goal for every child to have a high quality language qualification by the end of secondary education. The reform of GCSEs and A-levels must encourage and reward progression to higher levels.
- Active encouragement for business and employers to get involved in tackling the crisis. Support for schools and employers to work together. Tax breaks and other incentives for business to train and recruit home-grown linguists.
- A commitment to maintaining and developing UK expertise in modern languages and cultures in university language departments. Maintain the status of languages as ‘strategically important and vulnerable’ subjects and continued support for the Year Abroad.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, [Manifesto for Languages](#), July 2014

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



## 3. A strengthened English Baccalaureate: impact on languages

### 3.1 Introduction: performance measure

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a performance measure for schools in England, first applied in the 2010 school performance tables. It measures the achievement of pupils who have gained Key Stage 4 (GCSE level) qualifications in the following subjects:

- English
- mathematics
- history or geography
- the sciences; and
- a language

The Coalition Government stated that the principal purpose of the new measure was to increase the take-up of 'core' academic qualifications that best equipped a pupil for progression to further study and work.

During a [debate](#) on foreign languages held in the House of Lords in January 2015, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Nash, stated that "the inclusion of a foreign language in the English baccalaureate measure has raised entries from pupils in England by 20% since 2012."<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2 A strengthened EBacc: September 2015

The [Conservative Party manifesto](#) for the 2015 General Election stated that:

We will require secondary school pupils to take GCSEs in English, maths, science, a language and history or geography, with Ofsted unable to award its highest ratings to schools that refuse to teach these core subjects.<sup>27</sup>

On 16 June 2015, the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan made a [speech](#) outlining the new Government's plans.<sup>28</sup> The accompanying DfE [press notice](#) stated that the Government intended for pupils beginning Year 7 in September 2015 to study the EBacc at GCSE level, meaning they would take their GCSEs in those subjects in 2020. The announcement indicated that a consultation on the proposals would follow, and that it did expect that the EBacc would not be appropriate for a small number of pupils.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> [HL Deb 26 Jan 2015 c8](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Conservative Party Manifesto 2015](#), p34

<sup>28</sup> Department for Education, [Preparing children for a successful future through the Ebacc](#), 16 June 2015

<sup>29</sup> Department for Education, [New reforms to raise standards and improve behaviour](#), 16 June 2015



On 3 November 2015 Nicky Morgan made a [speech](#)<sup>30</sup> to the think-tank Policy Exchange announcing the consultation on the EBacc. The DfE [announcement](#) of the speech stated:

Today the Education Secretary will announce a consultation on achieving the government's goal for 90% of pupils to be studying the vital Ebacc subjects of maths, English, science, a foreign language and either history or geography. She will also announce plans for the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc to become a headline measure used to hold schools to account through Ofsted.<sup>31</sup>

The published [consultation](#) on implementing the policy makes clear that the Government intends that "in time, at least 90% of pupils in mainstream secondary schools should be entered for the EBacc."<sup>32</sup>

Currently 49.3% of students are entered for a language GCSE; this figure, drawn from provisional data published by the Department for Education in October 2015, represented a drop from 50.5% in 2014.<sup>33</sup> More detail on pupil numbers is available in section 5 of this briefing.

## Supply of language teachers: concerns and consultation

Several concerns have been raised about the potential impact of the move to a strengthened EBacc, including the supply of language teachers if uptake of these subjects is expanded.<sup>34</sup>

The issue was raised with the Government in the House of Lords in September 2015:

**Baroness Coussins:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of how many additional Modern Languages teachers, if any, will be needed fully to implement the English Baccalaureate.

**Lord Nash:** The Department for Education considers the resulting change to teacher demand carefully each time a teaching or curriculum-related policy change is announced.

The department does this by adding policy assumptions into the Teacher Supply Model (TSM), which informs the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) targets each year.

Further details as to how the policy assumption process is managed within the TSM itself can be found in both the 2015/16 TSM and the accompanying user guide, which have been published online

at:<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-supply-model>

We will factor the Ebacc commitment into future TSMs as required, and publish online in keeping with our usual approach to forecasting teacher supply requirements. This will be informed

---

<sup>30</sup> Text at Department for Education, [Nicky Morgan: one nation education](#), 3 November 2015

<sup>31</sup> Department for Education, [Nicky Morgan: no tolerance of areas where majority of pupils fail](#), 3 November 2015

<sup>32</sup> Department for Education, [Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), November 2015, p19

<sup>33</sup> Department for Education, [Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England, 2014 to 2015](#), October 2015, p6

<sup>34</sup> Guardian, [There's nothing sadder than EBacc without teachers](#), 16 June 2015; Schools Week, [2,000 more MFL teachers needed for EBacc](#), 19 June 2015

by the Ebacc consultation that we are planning to run later on in the Autumn.<sup>35</sup>

The Government's [Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#) accepts that the EBacc reforms would require a particular increase in the number of language teachers. It asks for views on the training, recruitment and retention of teachers for EBacc subjects.<sup>36</sup> The consultation is open until 29 January 2016.

### **Further information on the EBacc**

A Library briefing on the English Baccalaureate, [SN06045](#), provides broader information.

---

<sup>35</sup> [HL2320 \[Languages: Teachers\]](#), 28 September 2015

<sup>36</sup> Department for Education, [Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate](#), November 2015, p28-29

## 4. Other issues

### 4.1 Teaching community and less-commonly spoken languages

Concerns have been raised about the teaching of less widely spoken languages and the availability of qualifications for those who wish to learn them. An [adjournment debate](#) on lesser-taught languages, and the decision of several exam boards to withdraw GCSE and A level courses in languages such as Arabic, Japanese and Polish, was held in March 2015.<sup>37</sup>

The issue was again raised, with specific reference to Turkish and modern Greek, in a [Written Question](#) in July 2015. The schools Minister, Nick Gibb, responded:

The Department for Education does not promote the teaching of one foreign language over another and has not made an assessment of the benefits of pupils learning Turkish, modern Greek or other community languages.

The department is currently working with awarding organisations and Ofqual to consider how best to enable as wide a range of languages as possible to be maintained at GCSE and A level. The government has been clear that it wants to see all pupils provided with the opportunity to take a core set of academic subjects, including modern foreign languages.

The Secretary of State wrote to exam boards in April 2015 to express her concern about awarding organisations' decision to stop awarding qualifications in some languages, and to ask those organisations to work with Ofqual on the future of these qualifications. We are actively exploring the best approach, in close discussion with those organisations, and in consultation with community representatives.<sup>38</sup>

In July 2015 the schools Minister [announced](#) that the Department for Education was working with exam boards and Ofqual to "make sure as wide a range of language subjects as possible continue to be taught in the classroom" and would, "where necessary, extend the timetable for awarding organisations to continue with existing qualifications until September 2018." The announcement stated that further information about the proposed approach would be provided later in the year.<sup>39</sup>

A further statement was provided in response to a [Written Question](#) in September 2015:

**Nick Gibb:** The Department for Education is currently in discussion with awarding organisations, Ofqual and others, including foreign embassies, to consider how best to maintain as wide a range of languages as possible at GCSE and A level. We are continuing to develop proposals to achieve this and will hold a more formal, public consultation in due course. I announced on 22 July 2015 that to avoid any gap in provision in certain

---

<sup>37</sup> [HC Deb 24 March 2015 c1398-1412](#)

<sup>38</sup> [PQ 7419 \[Languages: education\], 23 July 2015](#)

<sup>39</sup> Department for Education, [Future of community language qualifications secured](#), 22 July 2015

languages we will, where necessary, extend the timetable for awarding organisations to continue with existing qualifications until September 2018.<sup>40</sup>

## 4.2 Chancellor's announcement on Mandarin teaching

In September 2015, the Chancellor announced during a visit to China that the teaching of Mandarin in English schools would receive £10m of additional funding, and that 5,000 more pupils will learn it by 2020.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> [PO 8740 \[Languages\], 9 September 2015](#)

<sup>41</sup> BBC News, [Mandarin lessons to get £10m boost, says Chancellor](#), 22 September 2015

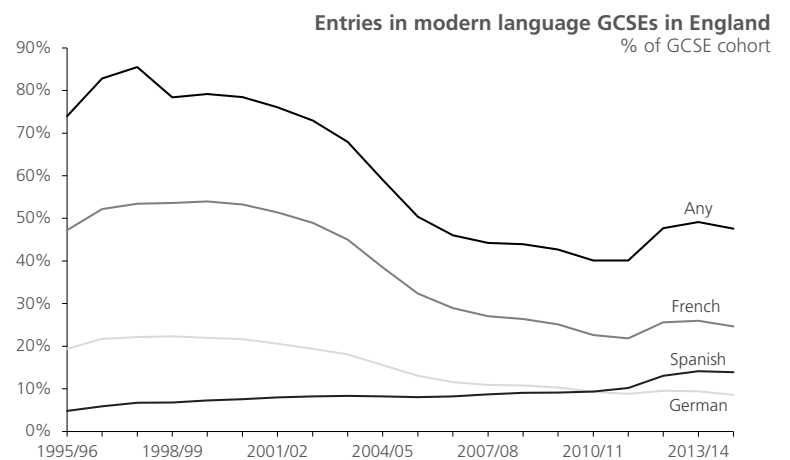
## 5. Statistics: student and teacher numbers

### 5.1 Student numbers

#### GCSE

In 2015 290,000 pupils in England entered one or more modern foreign language GCSE. This was just under half of all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 across all types of schools. French is still the most popular language with just over 150,000 entries followed by Spanish (85,000) and German (53,000).

Entry patterns over the past two decades are shown in the table opposite and the first table at the end of this section. In the mid-1990s more than 80% of GCSE pupils took one or more modern language, more than half took French and more than 20% German. Since the turn of the century entries have fallen with particularly rapid decline between 2002 and 2007. This was driven by similar (proportionate) drops in entries for both French and German. The pace of decline slowed after 2007. There was a clear jump in the entry rate in 2012/13. This was the first cohort which had a sufficient time to choose subjects that met the English Baccalaureate criteria<sup>42</sup> which was introduced in late 2010 and included languages. However, the 48% who entered one or more modern language in 2014/15 was still well below rates seen a decade earlier.



The exception to the overall trend among the main languages was Spanish which has grown consistently from 5% of pupils in the mid-1990s to 14% in 2014/15. It overtook German as the second largest language at GCSE in 2010/11. Among the other modern languages there were more than 3,000 entries in GCSE Urdu, Italian, Polish, Arabic and Chinese.<sup>43</sup>

Published data by pupil characteristics looks at GCSE achievement rather than subject entries. In 2014 34.7% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in state-funded schools achieved a grade C or better in one or more modern foreign language. The rate among disadvantaged pupils<sup>44</sup> was 20%, half the figure for all other pupils. There were generally above average rates of modern language achievement among minority ethnic

<sup>42</sup> Passes at C or better in English, mathematics, sciences, a language (including Latin, classical Greek or ancient Hebrew) and a humanities subject (history or geography).

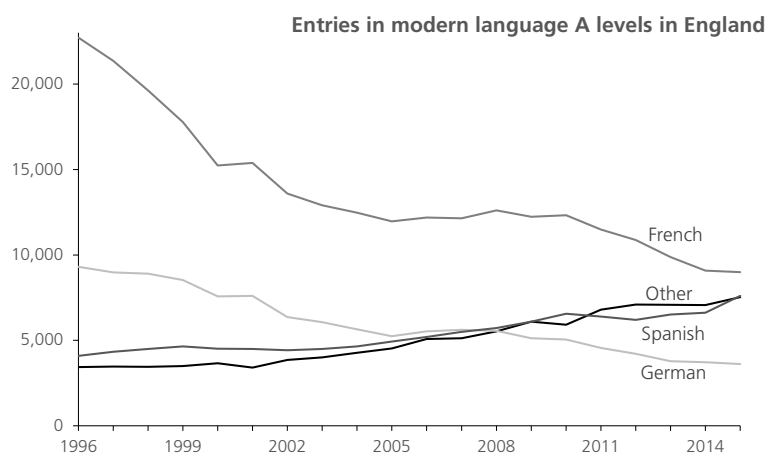
<sup>43</sup> [Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2014 to 2015](#), DfE

<sup>44</sup> Those eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous six years and all looked after children.

pupils (especially Indian) and those whose first language was not English.<sup>45</sup>

## A level

Patterns in modern language entry at A level are shown opposite and in the second table at the end of this section. The broad direction of trends are similar to GCSE – a long term drop in French and German entries and an increase in Spanish and ‘others’. The main period of decline in French shown here was the late 1990s where entries fell from almost 23,000 to just over 15,000. Spanish overtook German as the second most common modern language at A level in 2008 and was only 1,400 below French in 2015.



These figures cover a period where the total number of A level entries generally increased. The rate given in the table is the proportion of all *subject* entries, not all A level *entrants*, so is not directly comparable to the GCSE figures. If modern language entries are summed then they made up 6.4% total entries in 1996, 4.6% in 2000 and less than 4.0% from 2009 onwards.

### GCSE entries in modern foreign languages, all schools in England

	Thousands				% of pupils in GCSE cohort			
	French	German	Spanish	Any	French	German	Spanish	Any
1995/96	281	115	29	<b>439</b>	47.2%	19.4%	4.8%	74.0%
1996/97	306	128	34	<b>466</b>	52.2%	21.7%	5.9%	82.8%
1997/98	307	127	39	<b>492</b>	53.4%	22.1%	6.7%	85.5%
1998/99	311	130	40	<b>455</b>	53.6%	22.3%	6.8%	78.4%
1999/00	313	127	42	<b>459</b>	54.0%	22.0%	7.3%	79.1%
2000/01	321	131	46	<b>473</b>	53.2%	21.6%	7.6%	78.5%
2001/02	312	125	48	<b>462</b>	51.4%	20.6%	8.0%	76.1%
2002/03	305	121	51	<b>454</b>	48.9%	19.4%	8.2%	73.0%
2003/04	290	116	54	<b>437</b>	45.0%	18.1%	8.3%	67.9%
2004/05	245	99	52	<b>375</b>	38.5%	15.6%	8.2%	59.0%
2005/06	210	85	52	<b>327</b>	32.3%	13.1%	8.0%	50.4%
2006/07	190	76	54	<b>302</b>	29.0%	11.6%	8.2%	46.0%
2007/08	176	71	57	<b>289</b>	27.0%	10.9%	8.7%	44.2%
2008/09	167	68	57	<b>279</b>	26.4%	10.8%	9.0%	43.9%
2009/10	161	66	58	<b>273</b>	25.1%	10.3%	9.1%	42.7%
2010/11	142	58	59	<b>251</b>	22.6%	9.3%	9.4%	40.1%
2011/12	136	55	63	<b>249</b>	21.8%	8.8%	10.2%	40.1%
2012/13	162	60	83	<b>302</b>	25.6%	9.5%	13.1%	47.7%
2013/14	161	58	87	<b>304</b>	26.0%	9.4%	14.1%	49.1%
2014/15	151	53	85	<b>291</b>	24.6%	8.6%	13.9%	47.6%

Source: Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2014 to 2015, and earlier, DfE

<sup>45</sup> [GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics: 2014](#), DfE

**A level entries of 16-18 year olds in modern foreign languages in all schools and colleges in England**

	French	German	Spanish	Other	<b>All</b>	<i>as a % of all entries</i>
1996	22,718	9,306	4,095	3,435	<b>39,554</b>	6.4%
1997	21,364	8,984	4,328	3,473	<b>38,149</b>	5.8%
1998	19,629	8,903	4,499	3,457	<b>36,488</b>	5.4%
1999	17,774	8,527	4,640	3,499	<b>34,440</b>	5.1%
2000	15,240	7,581	4,516	3,660	<b>30,997</b>	4.6%
2001	15,393	7,607	4,501	3,409	<b>30,910</b>	4.5%
2002	13,599	6,367	4,430	3,860	<b>28,256</b>	4.4%
2003	12,904	6,068	4,504	3,999	<b>27,475</b>	4.1%
2004	12,480	5,643	4,650	4,279	<b>27,052</b>	4.0%
2005	11,963	5,238	4,930	4,534	<b>26,665</b>	3.9%
2006	12,190	5,534	5,202	5,084	<b>28,010</b>	3.9%
2007	12,152	5,615	5,491	5,119	<b>28,377</b>	3.9%
2008	12,605	5,560	5,728	5,530	<b>29,423</b>	4.0%
2009	12,231	5,119	6,089	6,090	<b>29,529</b>	3.9%
2010	12,324	5,055	6,564	5,912	<b>29,855</b>	3.8%
2011	11,490	4,554	6,398	6,799	<b>29,241</b>	3.7%
2012	10,871	4,208	6,198	7,099	<b>28,376</b>	3.6%
2013	9,878	3,774	6,516	7,084	<b>27,252</b>	3.5%
2014	9,078	3,716	6,617	7,066	<b>26,477</b>	3.6%
2015	9,000	3,623	7,608	7,524	<b>27,755</b>	3.7%

Source: GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2014/15 (Provisional), and earlier, DfE

## 5.2 Language teachers

In November 2014 there were 13,600 teachers in state funded secondary schools in England who taught some French lessons, 7,400 Spanish, 4,800 German and 2,600 other modern languages.<sup>46</sup> Teacher numbers have followed exam entry trends with a fall in French and German teachers (and the hours they teach) and an increase in Spanish teachers since 2010. The number of teachers/hours in other modern languages also fell despite the increase in exam entries.

Language teachers were overall less likely to have a 'relevant' post-A Level qualification in their subject. Rates varied considerably within the different languages. Around one quarter of French teachers did not have a relevant post-A level qualification in the subject compared to one third German, a half of Spanish and almost two-thirds of other modern language teachers. These high rates are in very large part due to teachers who are native speakers in their subjects but do not hold a formal 'relevant' qualification in it.

In November 2014 there were 80 full-time vacancies or temporarily filled posts for secondary language teachers in state schools in England. This was a rate of 0.7%; below the rate for all secondary classroom teachers (1.1%) and well below some other subjects such as maths and science (both 1.4%).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> These are headcounts and some teachers will be counted under more than one language category

<sup>47</sup> [School workforce in England: November 2014](#), DfE

### About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email [hcinfo@parliament.uk](mailto:hcinfo@parliament.uk).

### Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).