Review of Modern and Community Languages

November 2003

Birmingham City Council
Education Service

Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Learning+Skills Council
Birmingham and Solihull

Review of Modern and Community Languages

Final Report

November 2003

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FOREWORD

This final report of the Review of Modern and Community Languages in Birmingham and Solihull represents over a year of hard work by the steering committee under the able leadership of the chair Alan Dobson, the author of this report. The review was conducted against a background of falling numbers in modern languages provision, which is now affecting higher education institutions. All stakeholders have been involved in the process, and they have left no stone unturned in their analysis of language provision in the local area, which is considered in the regional and national context.
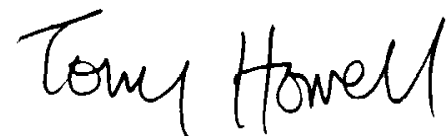
Particularly reassuring is the extent of good practice locally which features prominently in the national review of good practice commissioned by the review. More worrying are some of the views from the student perceptions survey, which give some indication of the reasons why numbers are falling not only locally, but nationally. The detailed recommendations contained in this report address all of the issues, but perhaps the key one is the appointment of a cross phase language co-ordinator as a joint appointment between the LSC and the two LEAs. The work of the postholder along with the implementation of the other recommendations and the commitment of our schools and colleges, which was evident throughout the Review, will help to build the provision from primary level through to higher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Review of Modern and Community Languages was initiated in 2002 by the Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC) following the Area-Wide Inspection of Education 16-19 in schools and colleges by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). It was carried out against the background of declining provision in languages post-16 in Birmingham and Solihull, resulting in many small teaching groups in modern and community languages. It also took place in the context of the debate about the emerging government strategy for languages in England from primary schools to adult education and concerns about national capability in languages.

The Steering Group for the Review was chaired by Dr Alan Dobson. Membership of the Steering Group consisted of senior staff or their representatives from schools and colleges with significant involvement in education and training in modern and/or community languages, the Brasshouse Language Centre, the University of Aston, and the Languages National Training Organisation (LNTO) in the West Midlands (Regional Languages Network – West Midlands (RLN-WM)). The members of the Steering Group are listed at Annex 3.

2. PURPOSES OF THE REVIEW

The purposes of the Review were to:

- inform the future strategy and planning processes of both the Birmingham and Solihull LSC and the providers of education and training in languages for the 16-19 age group;

- identify any duplication or gaps in the provision of languages in education and training;

- support the development of a network of excellence in languages amongst schools and colleges.

3. CONDUCT OF THE REVIEW

A broad definition of languages was taken to embrace modern languages, sometimes referred to as modern foreign languages (MFL), and community/heritage languages, of which the students usually have some prior knowledge through their family or community. A complex range of languages and qualifications is offered in the LSC area.

Although competence in languages has a key role in business, this competence is not usually linked to a particular sector: there is no languages "industry" as such. With some exceptions (interpreting, translating, teaching), it is usually more accurate to speak of careers *with* languages rather than careers *in* languages. The Review therefore modified the approach followed by previous LSC reviews which had focused on vocational areas linked to specific industries such as construction or engineering. Unlike such reviews, this Review covers schools as well as colleges.

The Steering Group delegated much of the detailed work to three sub-groups dealing with Curriculum Collaboration (Chair: David Peck), Curriculum Development (Henriette Harnisch), and Student Perceptions (Annie Bannerman).

The conduct of the Review drew on a range of sources.

(a) An Analysis of Languages Provision and Take-Up

An analysis of provision of languages programmes post-16 was carried out by the LSC. Available LEA sources on languages in schools were also consulted.

(b)   A Survey of Good Practice in Languages Post 16

A survey of good practice in languages in post-16 education and training in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on England, was commissioned from the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) in order to place the situation in Birmingham and Solihull in the national context.

A summary of the CILT survey is at Annex 1.

(c)   Analysis of Labour Market Needs for Employees with Language Skills

For information in this area, the Review drew upon the Language Skills and Capacity Audit carried out by the LNTO for Advantage West Midlands.

(d)   A Survey of Student Perceptions of Languages

A survey of student perceptions of the study of languages and of career prospects involving languages was commissioned from the University of Aston. This was led by Dr Peter Quaife.

(e)   Discussions with Providers

The Chair of the Steering Group had discussions with a sample of providers to assist in the identification of issues and good practice.

4.   LANGUAGES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM - THE NEED FOR CHANGE

For too long we have failed to value language skills or recognise the contribution they make to society, to the economy and to raising standards in schools. This has led to a cycle of national underperformance in languages, a shortage of teachers, low take-up of languages beyond schooling and a workforce unable to meet the demands of a globalised economy. We need to challenge these attitudes and inspire people of all ages to learn languages throughout life. (DfES)

The LSC Review, beginning in 2002, was conducted while national policy was also developing, as the situation of languages in the United Kingdom (England) had been the subject of considerable debate since the publication of the Nuffield Report two years earlier. The DfES, on behalf of the Government, published 'Languages for All: Languages for Life. A Strategy for England' in December 2002. It published the 14-19 next steps document "14-19: opportunity and excellence" in January 2003.

The foreword to the 'Strategy for England' is very explicit about the importance of languages and about the urgent need to transform the country's capacity in languages:

The ability to understand and communicate in other languages is increasingly important in our society and in the global economy. Languages contribute to the cultural and linguistic richness of our society, to personal fulfilment, mutual understanding, commercial success and international trade and global citizenship.

Our vision is clear - we must provide an opportunity for language learning to harness children's learning potential and enthusiasm; we must provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities in the world of travel and work; we must provide opportunities for lifelong language learning; we must recognise language skills are essential to breaking down barriers both within this country and between our nation and others.

Changing the country's attitude to teaching and learning languages will demand a huge cultural change. It will rely on action from government, schools, LEAs, colleges, universities, employers, parents and learners. Partnership is the key to making this strategy a reality. It is only if we work together on the implementation of this strategy that we will achieve real and lasting change for the future for our young people, for adults, for business and for our society.

The Government states three overarching objectives in the Strategy document:

- to improve teaching and learning of languages;

- to introduce a recognition system to complement existing qualifications frameworks;

- to increase the number of people studying languages in further and higher education and in work-based training by stimulating demand for language learning.

The need for change nationally is reflected within the LSC area: the Review shares the concerns of the 'Strategy for England' and has a strong stake in both the first and third objectives. The outcome of the work on the second objective, the recognition system, will clearly have important implications for Birmingham and Solihull, as for other areas.

Given its central position in the national economy and the linguistic and cultural diversity of its communities, the LSC area has much to gain from the 'Strategy for England'. The composition of the Steering Group for the Review indicates the commitment of the LSC to partnerships to bring about change.

5. LANGUAGES IN BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL

(a) Characteristics of Provision and Take-Up

Post-16 education is organized differently in the two LEAs. Apart from two schools in the north of the borough, Solihull has a system of 11-16 schools from which students proceed predominantly to a large sixth form college or a large general college of further education (FE) in the borough. In Birmingham, there is a complex mix of 11-16, 11-18 schools and sixth form colleges as well as a range of general FE colleges. In school sixth forms and sixth form colleges virtually all students are aged 16 – 19, whereas in some general FE colleges only a minority of students are aged 16-19 and, particularly in the case of students of community languages, there are considerable numbers of older students, many of whom study at "off-site" centres. The collection of data for 16 - 19 is complicated by these factors.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of characteristics. The broad picture, as indicated in the Area-Wide Inspection Report, is one of fragmented provision with many courses operating with low numbers. As is the case nationally, a high proportion of students of modern languages is female.

Although a wider range of languages is taught in the LSC area (notably at the Brasshouse Centre - see below), there are about 10 languages which have a significant presence post-16 at Levels 2 and 3. These fall broadly into two groups:

European: French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish

Non-European: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Punjabi, Urdu

With exceptions in some centres, the European languages are taught as modern (foreign) languages with few students having any family background in these languages. The non-European languages are almost invariably taught as community or heritage languages: in other words virtually all students will have some prior connection with that language and culture through their family, community or religion.

In school sixth forms (and sixth form colleges) GCSE is the predominant qualification at Level 2 and GCE AS/A level at Level 3. In the colleges generally a wider range of qualifications is in use. Across the schools and colleges, qualifications in a range of languages at Levels 2 and 3 include, as well as GCSE and AS/A2, GNVQ/NVQ Language Units, Foreign Languages at Work (FLAW), Foreign Languages for Industry and Commerce (FLIC), and the Certificate in Business Language Competence (CBLC).

In the case of some languages post-16, there are few centres in the whole LSC area which offer courses to Level 3. For example, Solihull Sixth Form College is unusual in that it runs AS/A2 courses in Russian and Italian. Some schools have used their specialist status to expand the range of languages and students in recent years, so that, for example, Arden School, Solihull (an 11-16 specialist Language College) offers Chinese as a foreign language to students without a previous connection with this language. It also provides Chinese as part of its Language College outreach commitment for students at Solihull Sixth Form College.

In adult education, the Brasshouse Language Centre stands out in the scale of its provision, although only a small proportion of its students falls into the 16 - 19 age group. Some 27 languages are offered representing Europe, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent and the Far East. In about one-third of the languages it is possible for learners to progress through the levels from beginners to post A-level standard. The Centre follows a policy of adding a language a year to its range.

Data on MFL in schools is collected in different ways by the Birmingham and Solihull LEAs. It is therefore difficult to generalize about patterns and trends across the LSC area, although broadly they seem to reflect the national scene. In Key Stage 4, French, German and Spanish predominate among modern foreign languages and Urdu and Bengali among the community languages. The take-up of languages appears to be declining as schools anticipate the change in national policy to languages as a non-compulsory "entitlement" subject after the age of 14. The numbers of pupils taking French and German tend to be falling but this tendency is partly offset by the increasing popularity of Spanish. As is the case nationally, boys perform less well than girls at GCSE and fewer of them take languages, although there are exceptions, for example in Solihull in 2002 more boys than girls were entered for German. The proportion of pupils taking two languages other than English is under five per cent of the cohort.

Recommendations: see 1-4.

(b) Curriculum Collaboration

The Curriculum Collaboration sub-group carried out a survey of collaborative arrangements in order to provide a 'snap-shot' of the situation in the Autumn Term 2002. A survey of group sizes and collaboration arrangements was carried out by questionnaire. Schools with sixth forms and colleges in Birmingham and Solihull were invited to take part. Forty-one schools and six colleges responded. In the responding institutions there were 596 A level students in schools (408 AS; 188 A2) and 488 in colleges (307 AS; 181 A2).

Institutions were asked to detail which post-16 language courses were running and how many students were in each group. Other information requested concerned the nature of any collaboration and the fate of any students who had signed up for courses which proved unviable.

A number of forms of collaboration was found to be operating. A *shared group* is taken to mean any group which includes students from more than one institution, whether they are co-taught or taught entirely by staff from one of the partner institutions. Birmingham's Catholic Partnership brings students from different schools together for occasional conferences as well as collaborating with other institutions such as universities and the Brasshouse Language Centre. A large number of institutions are involved. This collaboration does not, for the most part, include shared groups.

The main findings of the survey are summarised below;

(i)   Schools

- About half of the schools have group sizes of over 10.

- About half of the schools collaborate with other institutions for post-16 language teaching. In the majority of cases, this collaboration involves shared groups. Such collaboration happens much more frequently between schools which have fewer than 10 languages students each.

- Numbers of students roughly halve from AS to A2, although group sizes in schools with collaboration arrangements appear to drop off slightly less than in those without.

- French is the language with the greatest number of groups running, followed in descending order by German, Spanish, Urdu, Punjabi, and Italian. Group sizes follow a similar descending pattern.

- The number of non-AS/A2 language courses running is very small (about 5% of the total courses in the survey).

- The vast majority of students who opt for a language which turns out to be unviable in their school switch to another other subject within the school rather than go elsewhere to take up that language.

(ii)   Colleges

- Few examples of classes with groups of fewer than 10 students appear at A2 level.

- None of the six colleges in this particular survey reported any collaboration with other institutions.

- The drop-off from AS to A2 is well under half of the students enrolled on AS.

- Although numbers taking 'minority' languages are small, there is a wider range of such languages available across the colleges than in schools.

- The number of non-AS/A2 language courses running is much greater than in schools (about 45% of the total courses in the survey).

- There was no evidence about students opting for unviable groups in this sample of colleges.

This survey reinforces a number of points made in Chapter 5a above, although there are considerable variations across the schools and colleges. While there are many small teaching groups, there is a substantial commitment to, and experience of, various modes of collaboration to offset the advantages of fragmentation.

The Curriculum Development sub-group (see 5c below) also noted a strong commitment in schools and colleges in various parts of the LSC area to come together in meaningful partnerships in order to meet local needs in language teaching and learning.

There are various examples of successful collaboration between FE and the secondary sector (such as Kings Norton High School for Girls, a specialist Language College, and Bournville College), between AE/FE and the secondary sector (Brasshouse Language Centre and Birmingham's Catholic Partnership), and between primary and secondary sectors (Moseley School, a specialist Language College, and its partner primary schools). These partnerships are seeking to provide relevant and tailored solutions for the language needs of specific local target groups. However, insufficient knowledge is being cascaded at present about such successful partnerships.

Recommendations: see 5, 10, 15-20.

Cameo 1

Birmingham's Catholic Partnership

Birmingham's Catholic Partnership has used a range of collaboration to avoid the fragmentation of provision and to enhance teaching and learning. This has included some distance learning on-line in French and German. The schools have used flexible assignments devised by the Brasshouse tutors to respond to their particular situations (such as group size and the amount of time for the subject): some use them as supplementary materials whereas others see them as sources of enrichment. CD-ROMs with these materials have been produced. The materials are also available on the schools' respective Intranets and some are to be placed on the Partnership's website. In the second year of operation the materials were reviewed and consolidated. Students have also used tutorial packages on commercially produced CD-ROMs for private study.

One-day conferences are organised once a term which bring together MFL students from across the Partnership and students from higher education. Each conference has a specific focus: for example, on the practice of oral skills with foreign language assistants leading up to oral presentations to a panel. The presentations are recorded and taken back by students to their schools with feedback.

The partnership also adopts a collaborative approach to international work experience with shared organisation and funding to avoid the deterrent of high overheads for schools with low numbers of students.

(c)   Curriculum Development

The Curriculum Development sub-group identified a number of strengths.

Various examples of good practice in terms of emerging or developing expertise among providers were identified. These include the teacher training initiatives for primary teachers at Kings Norton High School for Girls in collaboration with the Birmingham Comenius Centre and CILT, the development of on-line support for AS and A2 delivery in modern languages by the Brasshouse Language Centre and Birmingham's Catholic Partnership (now joined by the Technology and Innovation Centre, University of Central England (UCE)), collaborative planning and development of schemes of work for community languages at Moseley School.

The Curriculum Development sub-group also identified several areas of concern.

Although the primary focus of the Review was on the 16-19 target group, the Curriculum Development sub-group felt strongly that a holistic view needed to be taken at both a strategic and a practical level for the planning of provision and progression routes 14-19. The sub-group further concluded that only if languages are considered from the primary sector upwards can a coherent structure of language learning and teaching be developed for the area.

Great emphasis was placed by the sub-group on the scope for coordination and more effective information sharing. It found that even providers in relatively close geographical proximity were often unaware of curriculum developments by other providers.

In the context of the national review of the 14-19 curriculum and the corresponding qualifications framework, there is a need for an analysis of the qualifications on both vocational and non-vocational courses offered for modern and community languages, their distribution in the area and their relevance

for today's language learners in the target age group. As noted above, there is limited provision of non-AS/A2 courses in schools.

Clearly there is considerable experience and expertise in curriculum development for languages in the LSC area, but also scope for more effective sharing of information and ideas and evaluation of developments.

Cameo 2

Primary Languages at the Birmingham Comenius Centre

As part of a national initiative coordinated by the National Advisory Centre for Early Language Learning (NACELL) at CILT, the Birmingham Comenius Centre has established a Regional Support Group for Early Language Learning. The network group currently has over 50 members. The twilight meetings, which are free of charge, are open to all colleagues, primary and secondary, who are currently teaching a language other than English, or who may wish to do so in future.

In addition to opportunities to review a wide range of resources and explore both the NACELL and CILT websites, each meeting has a main theme with a key presenter. Topics have so far included 'activities that work', resources from Channel 4 Television, curricular models for Key Stage 2, and examples of good practice, both locally and in Frankfurt.

Recommendations: see 3, 5-15.

(d)   Student Perceptions

On the recommendation of this sub-group, a survey of student perceptions of the study of languages and career prospects in languages was commissioned from the University of Aston. This was led by Dr Peter Quaife and involved structured interviews with a sample of 75 students (drawn from two schools and two colleges) who had chosen not to continue the study of languages beyond the age of 16.

It was felt that understanding the complexity of the issues was more important than being able to make generalisations. This was achieved by conducting a relatively small number of interviews but interviewing in depth, with fruitful lines of enquiry being pursued when appropriate. For this reason, some of the conclusions of the Student Perceptions Report are somewhat tentative. A larger scale quantitative study would be required for firmer conclusions to be drawn.

The interviews uncovered a complex of factors which affect students' decisions to stop studying languages. These factors were often interrelated.

The key themes in student perceptions are summarised below. It should be noted that references to the experience of studying languages pre-16 apply to a far wider range of schools than the two from which the interviewees were drawn.

Many students showed a low level of understanding of the relevance of languages to their career aspirations. Many claimed that, had they had better information at an earlier stage, they would have been more likely to continue with language study.

The perceived status of languages was related to this. Many students believed that universities and employers would not look favourably on language qualifications, while others believed the attitude of the school or college itself to languages showed it was a low status subject.

Students commonly had a very clearly defined career path in mind which dictated subject choices. In some cases, this left no room for languages, but in others the students had an element of choice in one or two of their subjects, and could have chosen a language.

Many students considered languages to be a tough option, and that they could get better grades for less effort by studying other subjects. Students who used this argument nevertheless often claimed to have enjoyed studying languages.

Timetabling was sometimes perceived as a constraint with students being unable to combine languages with certain other subjects.

Most interviewees were positive about the language teaching they had received pre-16, even though they had chosen not to continue with the subject, but some perceived their teachers as uninterested. Many had experienced frequent changes of language teacher, seven in three years in one case, and this had disrupted their learning. Some students indicated that they would have responded positively to more culturally based syllabi including, for example, films and music, and to visits and exchanges abroad.

The impact of community languages was complex. Many students said they were fluent in two or three languages. Some of them used this asset as a way of getting "easy" qualifications, while others felt that they had sufficient language skills and should devote their energies to other subjects. Surprisingly, some students felt that gaining qualifications in their community language(s) would be too difficult. This was variously related to their level of fluency, their use of unusual dialects, or the need to write in the target language. In some cases, teaching in the appropriate community language(s) was simply not available.

Attitudes towards the community languages themselves varied. Some saw them as a way of asserting their cultural identity, while others wished to leave them behind.

Some students welcomed the idea of greater choice of languages. Italian and Spanish were often mentioned. There was interest in other languages with career potential, such as Japanese or Russian, but these were perceived to be extremely difficult to study. Among students who had attended Qu'ranic school there was considerable interest in learning modern standard Arabic as well as classical Arabic.

Students indicated a wide variety of influences on subject choice. Teachers, parents, friends, career advisers, and the media were all mentioned, often with a complex inter-relationship between them which varied dramatically from student to student.

Such student perceptions convey important messages about revising practice in language teaching and learning and in promoting the subject. Several of the perceptions noted in Birmingham correspond to those about language learning and graduate career prospects which have been identified and analysed in studies at the University of Bangor[1], such as:

- *Languages are too difficult - you'll get better A-level grades in other subjects.*

- *You have a greater chance of getting into university if you do an easier subject.*

- *It's more difficult to get a job with a languages degree.*

- *You have a better chance of a job if you do a vocational subject.*

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[1] The Bangor studies demonstrate through the analysis of academic results and employment data how ill-founded these perceptions or 'myths' can be.

The survey tends to confirm findings elsewhere about student attitudes and provides additional insights into some of these. Some of the perceptions are linked to the issue of coherence in curriculum development noted in Chapter 5c and need to be taken into account when considering the match of courses and qualifications to students' needs. Above all, it is evident that more comprehensive and finely tuned advice is needed about the study of languages and careers with languages.

Recommendations: see 5, 10, 13-14, 27-30, 32-34.

(e)   **Use of Language by the Workforce**

The most comprehensive recent survey of the use of languages by the workforce is the Language Skills Capacity Audit carried out by the LNTO for the Regional Development Agency (RDA), Advantage West Midlands (AWM) in 2001. This was one of a series of language skills audits undertaken by the RDAs in England. The AWM report covers all aspects of skill provision in languages and maps that provision, both against today's demand for language skills in the Region and also against changes in employer attitudes to language skills over time against national trends. The audit involved sending a questionnaire to more than 4000 companies and contacts with all the Region's post-16 state sector providers and commercial providers.

The audit found that over 21 per cent of exporting companies knew they were losing business because of lack of language skills, 50 per cent were aware of barriers to effective business caused by language problems, and 16 per cent were aware of similar barriers resulting from cultural misunderstanding. In view of this, the report states 'the inescapable conclusion is that reducing these percentages would have a marked and positive impact on the "bottom line" of the Region's exporting business'.

Although many of the issues were common to other regions of England, the report also noted:

It is a matter of concern as that, despite shining examples of good practice, the percentage of companies with a strategy for languages is lower than in other regions audited so far. This coupled with a high incidence of companies insisting that 'English is enough' suggests that the task of reducing the percentages noted above will involve a significant element of awareness raising.

However, the AWM report further noted that the Region's resource base to achieve this change was encouraging, given the presence of nationally respected FE and HE institutions, an active commercial provider sector and pockets of consistently high involvement and achievement in languages through to A level in the schools sector.

The report made a number of recommendations. These include: a coordinated programme of initiatives to raise awareness of the importance of language and cultural skills in business competitiveness and employment; and the development of networks between sectors of education and training and between providers and users of language services.

Following the publication of the 2001 Audit, AWM, in collaboration with Trade Partners UK (TPUK) and the LNTO, have continued their programme of consultations embracing many regional employers and a host of support organisations. This consultation has confirmed some of the initial audit findings. Amongst smaller companies, cost and lack of awareness are significant barriers to the development of language skills whilst larger companies choose to develop their own internal solutions without exploring collaborative arrangements.

Nevertheless, this generally negative picture is punctuated with numerous examples within the West Midlands of good practice that have been documented.

Although there is much work to be done in business itself to change attitudes and improve skills capacity, the LSC and its partner schools and colleges can make a considerable contribution to raising awareness of the value of languages and to networking to increase the effectiveness of language education and training.

Recommendations: see 1-4, 7, 10, 14, 28-34.

6. CHANGING PROVISION AND PRACTICE: THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

(a) CILT Survey

Although, as noted above, there is a variety of good practice in languages within the LSC area, the Steering Group considered it most important to identify good practice in other parts of England in order to inform future developments in Birmingham and Solihull. Consequently, a survey was commissioned from CILT to provide a distillation of good practice in languages provision for the 16 - 19 year-old age group in England.

An important part of the remit was to look particularly for examples of good practice in other large conurbations and industrial areas. The survey considered various towns and cities including Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. No other major city outside London has the ethnic diversity of Birmingham. However, a range of examples of good practice was found in urban areas with significant minority ethnic communities and/or with similar industries.

(b) The Wider West Midlands

It is encouraging to note that a number of the examples of good practice in modern and community languages identified by CILT were in fact from Birmingham and Solihull, such as Joseph Chamberlain College, Moseley School, South Birmingham College and the 'Take 10 to learn' project, which was an important part of Birmingham's successful contribution to the European Year of Languages 2001. However, awareness across the LSC area itself of aspects of good practice such as these appears to be low.

At the same time, important individual examples of good practice were found in other parts of the West Midlands, such as Coventry, Sandwell, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton. It is worth considering the extent to which these are transferable to Birmingham and Solihull or may complement or enhance the good practice already present. Awareness in the LSC area of developments just over its borders appears to be limited.

The CILT report highlighted the work done by the neighbouring Black Country LSC to tackle the decline in MFL provision in schools, colleges and the wider community through the DfES-funded Black Country-wide 14 - 19 Pathfinder programme. This programme is a valuable source for Birmingham and Solihull of insights into issues and initiatives in another key area of the West Midlands which shares many of the same concerns. The objectives of the programme are: to enhance and develop language learning and to inject language learning into vocational learning across the 14 - 19 range; and to develop, through collaboration, high quality innovative networks that share and extend specialist learning in languages across all learning providers. Among its initiatives are to:

- develop a network of links and experiences to take languages and cultural awareness into the primary school sector investing resources and experience to develop language learning within Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2;

- exploit innovative ICT solutions, including video-conferencing, that will enable language learning and cultural awareness to reach out to the widest audience across the 14 -19 range and beyond;

- develop shared learning time, including out-of-school-hours learning operating on-line or through video-conferencing, in order to help address resource/teacher/lecturer shortage issues and encourage new teachers;

- ensure young people recognise the importance of functional language skills and the breadth of opportunities these skills can provide.

(c)   Community Languages

In the field of community languages, the CILT report points to examples of good practice, some in the West Midlands, some further a field, for example in Sheffield with its 'multi-lingual city' initiative. This is a city-wide initiative including all sectors from primary schools to universities and adult education. It seeks to promote and strengthen existing bilingualism as well as developing a policy for language learning in the monolingual community. The project supports over 50 community language schools, but promotes European languages as well. 27 languages are provided including less commonly taught languages such as Bohassa Malay, Farsi, (modern) Greek, Polish, Portuguese, and Somali. A feature of the scheme is that it aims to bring into language learning people with little or no prior experience of it, for example through a "Learn as they learn" scheme for adults and children.

Cameo 3

Community Languages at Joseph Chamberlain College

Joseph Chamberlain College offers Arabic, Bengali, Chinese and Urdu on a large scale from GCSE to GCE A Level. Arabic, Bengali and Urdu are also offered at community venues, with provision for discrete single sex groups. The college also caters for adult native speakers who wish to enhance their literacy skills in these languages.

The department has a team of highly qualified native speakers. Teaching is authentic and increasingly is incorporating new learning materials and the use of ICT. The department is well resourced and supported by a well stocked library. These features enable a very supportive learning environment to be provided for students of community languages.

The department has also developed a CD-ROM, 'Welcome to English', for ESOL students from the Arabic, Bengali and Urdu speaking communities. Each of these languages is used to provide bilingual support.

(d)   Effective Teaching and Learning

On the national scene, the CILT report usefully distils key features of effective teaching and learning in languages from post-16 inspections based on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework used for college inspections. These features are grouped in the report under seven key questions and supported by concrete examples:

* How well do learners achieve?

* How effective are teaching and learning?

* How are achievement and learning affected by resources?

* How effective are the assessment and monitoring of learners' progress?

* How well do programmes and courses meet the needs and interests of learners?

* How well are learners guided and supported?

* How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting learners?

Many of the features of effective teaching and learning are to be found in Birmingham and Solihull, but not consistently so. The national perspective on good practice provides a vehicle for dissemination and a filter for schools and colleges to use in evaluating their own practice. There are also specific examples of good practice in the CILT report in vocational language provision.

(e)   ICT

There are insights into the effective use of ICT in the CILT report, not least in the field of distance learning. There is considerable scope to develop the use of ICT within the LSC area; new technologies have a key role to play in strengthening collaboration and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Cameo 4

Solihull Sixth Form College

Solihull Sixth Form College (SSFC) has a multimedia language laboratory (16 stations) with Internet access so that all AS/A2 students can be taught there for at least one class in five. Year 13 have access during one lunchtime per week to undertake private study focused on the news in their chosen foreign languages. The languages team is fortunate in being supported by a non-teaching assistant who is a linguist and is able to assist in the considerable task of downloading and editing of material from the Internet across the range of languages. The college has a fast developing Intranet on which the MFL team is building up a series of materials and exercises for independent study. The development of learning materials on the SSFC Intranet has already led to some sharing of materials with schools. Foreign languages assistants are available both to support MFL lessons and to take small groups of students for conversation for half an hour a week per group (in addition to the usual five hours tuition per language).

(f)   Specialist Language Colleges

The Birmingham and Solihull area has four language colleges of which one, Bishop Vesey, was designated in September 2002. Developments at the three more established ones - Arden School, Solihull, Moseley School, and Kings Norton High School for Girls - are mentioned elsewhere in this report. There are Language Colleges which have experience going back to the mid-1990s; some of these are in neighbouring boroughs.

The Language Colleges have enhanced funding as specialist schools to encourage innovation in language teaching and learning, boost the take-up of languages, diversify the range of languages offered, and promote language study for their students beyond the age of 16. A significant part of their role involves work with partner schools and other community partners. The pool of experience of the Language Colleges in Birmingham and Solihull, though valuable, is only a small part of that available nationally, pre- and post-16. It is worth considering (a) the extent to which good practice in the area's Language Colleges is readily transferable to other schools, and (b) ways in which the national pool of experience and expertise from the network of Language Colleges can be drawn upon to inform practice in Birmingham and Solihull generally. There are some aspects of good practice which, once developed, are not dependent on special funding.

(g)   Challenges

The Birmingham and Solihull area can draw upon the successes around the country to inform its practice, but the area shares the same challenges as others. It is evident that the origins of many of the problems facing languages post-16 are to be found in the years of compulsory secondary education. Findings in Ofsted annual reports indicate that modern foreign languages is one of the weaker subjects in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in terms of both learner achievement and the quality of teaching. The national Key

Stage 3 Strategy is seeking to counter this; Solihull is one of 16 LEAs nationally which have been involved in developing the MFL Pilot through which good practice is emerging.

The take-up of MFL in Key Stage 4 is falling nationally, as schools anticipate the change from MFL as a compulsory subject to an "entitlement" subject from 2004. For example, a CILT survey in October 2002 showed the proportion of schools following a policy of 'languages for all' in Key Stage 4 fell from 73 per cent to 50 percent between September 2000 and September 2002. The signs are that this broad trend is reflected, but unevenly, across Birmingham and Solihull. Some of the initiatives noted within the LSC area recognise that schools need specific support in languages to boost motivation through improved teaching and learning, but much remains to be done.

(h)   Languages in the Primary School

The centrepiece of the 'Strategy for England' is the Government's intention to establish an "entitlement" for all pupils to study a language at primary school. For the implementation of this entitlement, it envisages LEAs and other bodies working in partnership, the increased use of ICT, the greater involvement of foreign language assistants and other native speakers, and greater use of teaching assistants. Some of the local initiatives mentioned in this report referred to partnerships between primary, secondary and further education to support the earlier learning of languages. The LSC will need to consider further how it can contribute most effectively to strengthening such initiatives in support of the 'Strategy for England'.

Cameo 5

The Brasshouse Language Centre

The Brasshouse Language Centre is involved in curriculum or materials development with a range of partners, including Birmingham's Catholic Partnership. For example, it is working with two schools on 'Accelerated GCSE' for pupils in Key Stage 3; it is involved in an initiative with the University of Central England to apply ICT to the teaching of a range of modern and community languages; it is piloting with the BBC the use of on-line support with adult learners of Spanish and German which could have some spin off for distance learning in schools. It is also well placed to contribute to staff development, for example in using ICT to enhance language learning or providing linguistic refreshment for teachers teaching their second or third foreign language.

(i)   Staff Development and Support for Teachers

The needs identified in this report will not be met without effective and focused staff development, whether it is for retraining people to teach languages in primary schools, providing support for secondary teachers who are teaching their second foreign language, training in the effective use of foreign language assistants, or developing greater expertise to apply ICT to language teaching and learning. The Birmingham Comenius Centre[2] is well placed to play a significant part in staff development. It is also important to develop a culture of ongoing reflection on practice. For example, in Solihull the analysis of data and observation of practice is used as a basis for dialogue with schools about teaching and learning in Key Stage 4 so that a new range of strategies can be developed.

At the same time, there is a complementary need to support materials development, for example in community languages or in the less commonly taught European languages for which there are few

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[2] The Birmingham Comenius Centre is part of the network of 14 Comenius Centres in England organized by CILT to disseminate information and promote good practice in modern and community languages.

publishers. There have been successful ventures in materials development in the LSC area, such as the production of CD-ROM material in French and German by the Brasshouse Language Centre and Birmingham's Catholic Partnership and in community languages by Joseph Chamberlain and South Birmingham colleges. Such experience can inform similar developments involving other languages and institutions.

Recommendations: see 1-4, 12-13, 14-15, 21-26, 35-37.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The situation of modern and community languages 16-19 in Birmingham and Solihull shares many of the major issues facing languages in education, training and business in the United Kingdom set out in the recent government "Strategy for England". The origins of many of the post-16 issues lie in Key Stages 3 and 4.

There are examples of good practice in curriculum, teaching and learning post-16 in both modern and community languages in Birmingham and Solihull, but there is limited dissemination and sharing of this practice.

There is a need to increase the take-up of a range of languages by students aged 16 - 19 and to counter the fragmentation of provision post -16. In order to meet this need, the quality of planning, provision and delivery in the LSC area has to be improved.

The profile of languages needs to be raised with students, teachers, parents and business. Many students have mistaken perceptions about the nature and value of the study of languages. More effective advice is needed for young people about careers prospects with languages.

More collaboration among schools and colleges is essential. Collaboration may take many forms. For example, it may involve sharing students to create viable teaching groups, or teachers to make the best use of specialist expertise, or staff and materials development, or a combination of all of these.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The LSC and its partner schools and colleges should develop an area languages strategy to build on the outcomes of the Review: the following recommendations should be considered in implementing this, looking particularly at the transferability of good practice both within Birmingham and Solihull and from further a field.

(a)   Audits and Information Sharing

(1)   Draw upon and develop further the audits of languages in Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16 in schools undertaken by the LEA advisory services in Birmingham and Solihull in order to inform strategic planning for modern and community languages in the area.

(2)   Develop further the LSC's own data collection on languages to complement such audits.

(3)   Create (in consultation with CILT) and maintain a website for languages in order to share resources, planning materials, examples of good practice, innovative developments; include a termly newsletter.

(4)   Share relevant experience in the region, particularly with the Black Country LSC.

(b)   Curriculum

(5)   Liaise and coordinate between secondary and post-16 sectors to link progression routes for ages 14-19.

(6)   Consider ways of building on the valuable developments in community languages.

(7)   Incorporate language units into other (vocational) courses/make a language option possible.

(8)   Increase the contribution of language teaching to the drive to raise literacy levels in secondary and primary schools.

(9)   Investigate other curriculum models, such as the International Baccalaureate, which include languages as an integral element.

(c)   Teaching and Learning

(10)   Organise a conference for schools, colleges and providers of adult education to celebrate good practice in modern and community languages and identify the potential for development and sharing through networks across Birmingham and Solihull.

(11)   Build on the experience of the Key Stage 3 Strategy to strengthen good practice in Key Stages 3 and 4.

(12)   Identify examples of good practice from the wider West Midlands and nationally which are transferable to Birmingham and Solihull.

(13)   In the field of community languages, consider examples of good practice from areas of similar linguistic diversity in the West Midlands or further a field, such as 'multi-lingual city' initiatives.

(d)   ICT

(14)   Draw on regional and national practice in ICT to enhance its use in MFL teaching and learning.

(15)   Provide teachers from Language Colleges to support groups with courses delivered via video-conferencing; use curriculum on-line resources and a virtual languages classroom to increase the viability of small teaching groups.

(e)   Organisation and Collaboration

(16)   Increase collaboration between schools and between secondary schools and colleges through new local partnerships; build on the experience of Birmingham's Catholic Partnership and the Brasshouse Language Centre in developing collaboration.

(17)   Use imaginative timetabling so that the teacher moves rather than the learners when shared groups operate; make use of reduced time to increase the viability of groups with low numbers.

(18)   Liaise with secondary Headteachers/Heads of Modern Languages regarding the pattern of provision in partner primary schools in order to plan more effectively modern languages provision after transfer to secondary schools.

(f)   Teachers

(19)   Appoint language teachers to groups of schools (Collegiates, Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) partners).

(20)   Establish a network of post-16 language teachers and draw on the expertise of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) in a peripatetic role.

(21)   Implement measures to address motivation and self-esteem of language teachers, particularly where languages are under threat owing to low numbers.

(g)   Staff Development and Support for Teachers

(22)   Support specific activities to promote more effective teaching and learning, such as retraining people to teach languages in primary schools, providing reinforcement for secondary teachers teaching their second foreign language, guidance on using FLAs and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) effectively, or developing greater expertise to apply ICT to language teaching and learning.

(23)   Organise through networks regular CPD events for both modern and community languages across the sectors with input from representatives of all sectors and drawing upon regional and national expertise.

(24)   Support networking for materials development, for example in community languages or in the less commonly taught European languages.

(25)   Draw upon the Brasshouse Language Centre and the Comenius network in these developments.

(h)   Promotion of Languages in the Local LSC Area

(26)   Develop the involvement of CILT, the Birmingham Comenius Centre and the Association for Language Learning (ALL) in networking and support.

(27)   Work with Key Stage 3 and 4 students to raise the profile of languages and counter mistaken perceptions about courses and careers.

(28)   Complement the LNTO's activity to boost the presence and status of languages in the schools and colleges in the area.

(29)   Seek LEA, LSC and Connexions commitment to, and support for, post-16 languages; work with Connexions, CILT and the LNTO to improve careers advice for languages.

(30)   Exploit the 'International City' label and collaborate with employers to stress the need for languages in business and industry.

(31)   Establish a team of volunteer 'language champions' as suitable role models prepared to address assemblies and groups of students on the value of learning a language; use video and the website also in this process.

(32)   Develop and extend opportunities for work experience abroad.

(33)   Introduce 'Birmingham Languages Graduation' events to celebrate achievement in languages.

(34)   Use the annual 'European Day of Languages' to publicise the importance of languages.

(i)   Government Initiatives

(35)   Consider (a) the extent to which good practice in the area's Language Colleges is readily transferable to other schools, and (b) ways in which the national pool of experience and expertise from the Language Colleges can be drawn upon to inform practice.

(36)   Draw upon available good practice in the MFL Pilot and other aspects of the Key Stage 3 Strategy.

(37)   Consider how the LSC can contribute most effectively to strengthening such initiatives as the primary 'entitlement' and a range of routes with languages for ages 14-19 in support of the 'Strategy for England'.

9.   **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is proposed to appoint a coordinator for modern and community languages as a joint appointment between the LSC and the two LEAs.

The coordinator will work to a management board comprising no more than six members of the Review steering group to be determined by the LSC and the two LEAs. In addition, the overarching stakeholder group which monitors the implementation of findings from the Birmingham and Solihull strategic area review process will oversee the implementation of the findings of the Review of Modern and Community Languages.

ANNEX 1

CILT Report (Summary)

The LSC commissioned a survey, *Good practice in post-16 modern languages provision* (October 2002), from CILT in order to place the situation in Birmingham and Solihull in the national context. The report covers provision in both community and modern foreign languages. The contents are outlined below.

1   Introduction

2   Key Messages

3   The Context for Language Learning

- Global and national contexts

  - The International scene
  - The British scene
  - The English National Strategy
  - The Welsh Languages Strategy
  - The work of the Languages National Training Organisation

- The West Midlands regional context

- The school or college context

  - The overall context
  - The academic context
  - The organisational context
  - Post-16 organisational arrangements
  - Viability of classes

4   Comparison with Other Areas

- The situation in Birmingham
- The situation in Liverpool
- The situation in Manchester
- The situation in Sheffield
- The situation in Wolverhampton and the Black Country

5   Good Practice in Encouraging Continuity

- Continuity between KS4 and post-16 education

  - Salient points
  - Case studies

- Continuity between AS and A2 levels

  - Salient points
  - Evidence from Language Colleges

- Combating the negativity

- Employability

6 Good Practice in Modern Languages Teaching Post-16

- College language provision

  - Salient points
  - Detailed examples drawn from OFSTED post-16 inspection reports

7 Good Practice in Vocational Languages Provision

- College-based vocational languages provision

  - Salient points
  - Case studies

- The work-based route

  - Examples of languages in Modern Apprenticeships

8 Good Practice in Community and Less-Widely Taught Languages Provision

- Excellence in ethnic minority languages

  - Salient points
  - Case studies
  - Examples taken from OFSTED College Inspection Reports

9 Features of Enrichment and International Programmes

- Some common enrichment activities in modern languages

  - Salient points
  - Examples from Language Colleges
  - Examples from OFSTED College inspections
  - Example from a school website

10 The Impact of Language Colleges

- The success of Language Colleges
- Range of languages
- Length of course
- Accreditation
- British Airways Flag project
- Case studies

11 The Impact of ICT

- Salient points
- Case studies

A copy of the full text of the CILT survey is available from Claire Mutchell, Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council, Chaplin Court, 80 Hurst Street, Birmingham B5 4TG.

ANNEX 2

Bibliography

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Birmingham and Solihull Learning & Skills Council will at all times endeavour to meet the needs of minority ethnic groups and other linguistic minorities by either translating all key communications or making translations available on request to Customer Services.

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