



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

# **Primary modern foreign languages in initial teacher training**

**A survey**

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## Introduction

1. In February 2002, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published *Language Learning*<sup>1</sup> which stated the government's ambition that all primary school pupils should be entitled to study a modern foreign language (MFL) by 2012. Later that year, the DfES published a strategy document, *Languages for All: Languages for Life*,<sup>2</sup> which built on the proposals of the earlier paper and affirmed, as part of one of the strategy's objectives, an intention to provide an entitlement to language learning for pupils at Key Stage 2. One of the ways in which the government plans to have sufficient teachers with the necessary language skills to make this entitlement a reality is through initial teacher training (ITT). Other initiatives include a small number of primary MFL Pathfinder projects, developed around local partnerships which include teacher training providers, and a strengthened role for specialist language colleges in supporting teaching in neighbouring primary schools.

2. In September 2001, five higher education institutions (HEIs) received funding from the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) to introduce a specialist unit in French into their primary ITT courses. Four of these were one-year postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) courses and the fifth was a four-year bachelor of education (BEd) course. In this first year, there were places for 61 trainees. At the same time, five training providers in France, or *instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFM), which were teaching a primary course with a specialism in English, were partnered with the English providers. An essential component of the specialist unit was a four-week exchange visit of the English trainees with their peers in the partner IUFM, which involved English trainees in a period of teaching experience in French primary schools.

3. In the following year, the TTA funded a further eight providers to introduce French as a specialism into their primary courses. This amounted to a total of ten PGCE and three BEd courses. The total number of places rose to 186. Since September 2003, more providers have been involved, the number of places for French has increased still further, and additional places have been funded for trainees wishing to specialise in German or Spanish.

4. Between September 2002 and June 2003 Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out an inspection of the MFL specialism in the primary courses of the five providers who had introduced their training in 2001/02. The purpose of the inspection was to identify at an early stage in the development of this initiative the strengths and weaknesses in the training and in the standards achieved by the trainees, and to provide information to the TTA and to training providers about what works well in the specialist units and what does not. To assist providers with their course development, interim findings were shared with their representatives at a TTA conference in June 2003.

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<sup>1</sup> *Language Learning*, DfES/0186/2002

<sup>2</sup> *Languages for All: Languages for Life. A Strategy for England*, DfES/0749/2002

5. Inspectors visited each institution at least twice during the year; interviewed MFL subject leaders, other trainers and trainees, including some trainees from France during their placement in England; observed central and school-based training; studied relevant documentation; and observed trainees teaching a French lesson towards the end of their final placement. Inspectors also interviewed headteachers about their involvement in the initiative and in particular about their experience of having a French national trainee on placement in their school.

## Main findings

- ❑ The first five providers offering specialist training units in primary MFL planned their programmes to a very tight timescale in readiness for the first year of training. These units have been developed rapidly and effectively in their second year. Although there are areas that still need to be improved, on the whole the specialist units are working well.
- ❑ The trainees recruited to the specialism are of a high calibre. The great majority are well-qualified in French.
- ❑ All trainees completing the courses can teach MFL at least satisfactorily and most do so well or very well. They use a good variety of suitable activities to make their lessons interesting. However, although the standard of their French is perfectly adequate for teaching primary-age pupils, many lack a range of strategies to use the language consistently in the classroom and to foster its use by pupils. Most trainees do not have sufficient opportunities to assess and record pupils' progress in French.
- ❑ The effectiveness of the specialist MFL course units is affected by the overall structure of the general primary training course in which they sit. Where the specialism is well-integrated, there are clear benefits for both training in the specialism and for the generic training. Where the specialism is more isolated, trainees' progress as MFL teachers is less good.
- ❑ There is some variation in the content of the specialist units across the five providers. Although all providers agree there is insufficient time to cover everything a good MFL teacher needs to know, particularly in the one-year courses, they have not agreed on the most important elements that should be given priority in initial training.
- ❑ Although trainees are usually placed in schools which provide good general primary training, there is wide variation in the level of specialist support they receive, from schools where MFL is well-established in the curriculum to schools which have no experience or expertise in the subject.
- ❑ The French exchange programme works well, on the whole, and there are clear benefits for the trainees, particularly in terms of increased fluency and confidence in the language. Although the reciprocal visits are well organised, more could be done to take full advantage of the opportunities they offer to trainees. Furthermore, in most providers the time required to manage the exchange has been seriously underestimated, and too much of the subject tutors' time and energy has been consumed by low-level administrative tasks.
- ❑ Tutors' final assessments of trainees as primary MFL teachers are accurate, and providers are developing a means to give recognition to trainees' achievement in the specialism. However, because there is limited time for MFL subject leaders to teach and manage their specialism, and because so many

placement schools have little or no specialist MFL expertise, formative assessment of trainees as MFL teachers is unsatisfactory.

## **Trainees' effectiveness as teachers of primary MFL**

### **Use of French**

6. Trainees recruited to the MFL specialism were competent in French to a level sufficient to teach the subject in primary schools. All made progress with their knowledge and skills in the language during the course; in particular, they made very good use of the opportunities to improve the quality of their French during the exchange visit. A minority of trainees, however, made occasional errors in the classroom. When this occurred, it tended to be in their pronunciation of some commonly used words and in their application of basic grammatical knowledge, particularly of gender, and of adjectival and subject-verb agreements. In most cases, trainees had a good awareness of their weaknesses and were already taking action to address these.

7. Although trainees' spoken French was usually of a good standard, they did not use it sufficiently during lessons. They often used English unnecessarily, and lacked strategies for giving instructions and explanations in French. In some cases, trainees had not had time to teach their pupils common classroom phrases; this inevitably hampered their ability to manage their classes in the medium of the foreign language.

### **Planning**

8. Trainees' lesson plans were carefully prepared, in considerable detail, and set out clearly identified linguistic learning objectives. Most were based on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA's) scheme of work for Key Stage 2, and some included appropriate references to the National Curriculum levels and the programme of study in the QCA's non-statutory guidelines. Activities were well-selected and sequenced, with estimates of the time required, to ensure trainees' lessons had good variety and pace. In many cases, work was planned to meet the differing abilities of the pupils, though plans did not specify the roles of teaching assistants in relation to particular pupils or groups of pupils. The best trainees planned effective plenary sessions to reinforce learning and give pupils a good sense of the progress they were making.

9. Although they planned well for pupils' progress over a short sequence of lessons, most placement schools gave trainees only limited opportunities for medium-term and long-term planning in MFL; their knowledge of these aspects of planning was, therefore, based largely on central training. Most of the trainees' teaching was at beginners' level, and usually restricted to listening and speaking. As a result, trainees had little experience of planning for a range of attainment levels and of planning to teach some fundamental elements from the non-statutory guidelines, such as simple aspects of grammar and how to apply them, and the interrelationship of sounds and writing.



10. Trainees had a good knowledge of available resources for teaching MFL and most were able to assess their value for their own situation. When placed in a school which already had suitable MFL resources, trainees' planning took good account of these. Trainees also produced their own high quality materials, such as flash cards and games, often using information and communications technology (ICT) for graphics and text, and occasionally exploiting specialist primary MFL websites. They adapted generic primary resources creatively, stimulating pupils' interest by presenting a familiar resource in a new context; for example, materials used in mathematics lessons were successfully used for teaching numbers in a French class. Some trainees used materials which they had acquired during their stay in France to very good effect, including photographs and audio cassettes.

## **Teaching and class management**

11. Most trainees used a wide range of strategies for presenting and practising the lesson's content. They engaged pupils' interest well and usually maintained it throughout the lesson. They managed their classes effectively; they taught with a quiet authority, related well to pupils, and managed transitions between activities smoothly. The techniques, activities and resources of the primary classroom were blended well with established best practice in MFL teaching to ensure that pupils' learning was well-supported, although trainees made little use of ICT.

12. Trainees generally secured a high level of pupil involvement in question and answer work. In many cases, however, their lessons tended to focus on learning nouns or single words, and pupils sometimes lost concentration when they were expected to spend too long memorising vocabulary and not using the language actively. This was not always the case. For example, in one very good lesson a trainee drew on elements of the National Literacy Strategy to encourage pupils to speak at greater length by teaching them connectives. Although the trainees' teaching was usually lively, lessons consisted largely of whole-class teaching and learning, so pupils had few opportunities to undertake independent work in pairs and groups.

13. Trainees had a good knowledge of individual pupils in the class to which they were attached. This enabled the better trainees to plan work and use well-chosen materials in ways that ensured all pupils were appropriately challenged. Trainees usually targeted their questions carefully at the start of the lesson so that all pupils experienced early success. Pupils with special educational needs were well-supported, particularly when trainees worked in partnership with class teachers and teaching assistants. In one lesson, a statemented pupil with speech difficulties successfully demonstrated his understanding of different colours by modelling shapes in play-dough for the class, which accurately reflected their oral work. Many trainees, however, were unable to develop their ability to meet a wide range of pupils' needs because they taught only beginners' classes and, consequently, the span of attainment and attitudes to language learning was not as wide as that found in groups where French was more established.

## Assessment and recording

14. Most trainees assessed pupils' progress during the lesson by listening carefully to their responses and monitoring their work during each activity. For example, pupils' understanding in part of one lesson was assessed very effectively as they all had to write and display their answers to questions on mini-whiteboards. However, assessment was generally one of the main weaknesses in trainees' teaching. In particular, their skills in formative assessment were not well-developed. Few trainees corrected pupils' mistakes, especially pronunciation errors, in an effective and systematic way. Several trainees erroneously believed that it was not possible for them to carry out assessment of the pupils' progress in French because they were not teaching reading and writing. There was often little opportunity to carry out formal assessments of pupils' progress, particularly where trainees were introducing French as a new subject to the pupils. Although some trainees had been shown how to assess pupils by using National Curriculum level descriptions, they did not have opportunities to do so in practice.

15. Few trainees used school systems for recording pupils' progress in French to support their planning or to prepare reports. The lack of experience in many of the partnership schools in dealing with Key Stage 2-3 transition in MFL meant that most trainees were unable to envisage how useful records might be prepared, which summarised the pupils' attainment in MFL, before the pupils progressed to secondary school. There were exceptions. The best trainees transferred effective ways of monitoring and assessing pupils' work from their general training to their MFL teaching. One trainee, for example, used a simple but clear recording system at the end of lessons to show each pupil's gains in learning. Where pupils were experiencing difficulties, she noted a point for action to pursue in the next lesson.

## Potential for subject leadership

16. The great majority of trainees showed clear potential for subject leadership; they taught well, had good subject knowledge, and were developing a good understanding of primary MFL issues. They knew of different ways to organise the subject in the primary curriculum, understood its benefits for pupils and had good ideas for resourcing it. They were keen to promote the subject in their schools and communicated their enthusiasm well to pupils and other staff, although this enthusiasm had led some to underestimate the challenges ahead in successfully introducing MFL teaching in primary schools.

17. Trainees showed a high level of commitment to developing their skills as primary French teachers. Many intended to continue to improve their own linguistic knowledge and skills after completing the course. They showed a keen interest in developing their knowledge of how to teach primary MFL and used short, practical publications, such as the *Young Pathfinders* series, to research their assignments. The intensive nature of their courses, however, often prevented them from reading as widely as they would have wished. Trainees evaluated their French lessons well and, in the best cases, this led to well-defined and suitable targets for improvement in their teaching.

## Contributory factors

### Recruitment

18. The calibre of trainees recruited to the specialist French course units was generally good. In the four PGCE courses, the great majority of trainees had a good A-level or equivalent, and a third or more had French as at least part of their degree. A small number had had a period of residence in a Francophone country. The small minority of trainees who were accepted without an A-level displayed other experience and qualities that made them suitable for the training: for example, a lengthy period of residence in a Francophone country or a commitment to live with a French family and study for A-level before and during the PGCE course. The original intake of trainees to the undergraduate course all had an A-level, but later recruits were accepted with only a GCSE as the provider had increased the time available for French training and had undertaken to bring all the trainees up to A-level standard by the end of the course.

19. General course publicity contained little information about the MFL units. Providers recruited trainees to the specialism from those who had already applied for the general primary course. In two providers, some trainees knew about the MFL specialism before applying but most were unaware of the option until invited to consider it when interviewed for the primary course. Subject leaders for MFL were seldom involved in interviewing the trainees or in assessing their competence in French before the course began. Where they were involved, they carried out a test of trainees' oral skills, but this part of the process was rarely used to reject an inappropriate trainee or to prepare an individual pre-course training plan.

20. Despite some shortcomings, recruitment procedures in most providers resulted in the selection of suitable trainees, most of whom successfully completed the primary course, including the specialist unit. Eight out of the 83 trainees withdrew from the French specialism or from the course as a whole; most were from a single provider. Five of the eight decided that teaching was not for them and left the primary course for reasons not associated with the French training. Only three of the trainees felt their lack of confidence in French was an impediment to their progress both as MFL teachers and as general primary teachers, and withdrew from the specialist element of their course.

21. Only three of the 83 trainees (3.6%) were male, a far smaller proportion of men than are recruited to primary courses in general or to secondary PGCE courses in MFL. The reasons for this are unclear and may need to be investigated further if groups recruited to the specialism in future continue to have a similar imbalance.

### Course structure

22. Although the time available for central training in MFL was similar in each of the one-year courses, the design of the specialist units varied considerably across the five providers. By way of illustration, in one provider the unit was taught in weekly three-hour sessions in the autumn term, followed by the exchange visits; and it

continued with further three-hour sessions in the spring term. In another provider, there were short, optional French enhancement twilight sessions in the autumn term, but most of the methodology training took place in a concentrated block of time in the middle of the spring term, just before the visit to France. In another, the sessions were more evenly spread over the year, leading up first to the visit to France and then to the final block teaching experience in England. The pattern of training in French was often constrained by other considerations, such as the design of the rest of the primary course and the dates that had been agreed with the partner IUFM for the reciprocal visits.

23. The best features of the course structures were achieved more easily in some providers than in others, largely because of these constraining factors. Training was most effective when the following features were in place.

- ❑ The specialist course unit in French was thoroughly planned before the course began. There was a carefully constructed programme that aimed to develop trainees' understanding and skills progressively over the full course. Topics were covered in a rational order and each session built on previous learning. The various components of the unit, including the central training, preparatory school visits, tasks and assignments were successfully blended to prepare trainees for each of their placements in France and in England.
- ❑ The explicit and well-managed linking of the specialist unit with other parts of the primary course made it possible for the time allocated to MFL to be used efficiently and to add coherence to the whole course. In one course, for example, links between MFL and literacy were clearly drawn and the English tutor was present at some of the training in MFL in order to strengthen trainees' understanding of these links. The trainees were adept at making connections between their general training and the work they were doing in French, to the benefit of both areas. They were also less anxious than trainees in other providers about the possible impact of missing out on some of the general training as a result of the demands made by the MFL training.
- ❑ Where the provider had retained a subject specialism as part of the primary PGCE course for all trainees, this created fewer difficulties of continuity for the MFL specialists than in those providers where they had to miss some of their core tuition. Where there was no subject specialism in the PGCE course, MFL training sessions were not always conveniently timetabled and were sometimes viewed as additional work by trainees. They remained anxious about work they were missing and needed to be convinced that their progress towards meeting the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) would not be stalled.
- ❑ Where the MFL trainees were placed together in a seminar or tutorial group, this not only enabled them to form a cohesive group, but also facilitated communications and created opportunities for them to catch up on work they might have missed because of their specialism.

## Course content

24. The specialist course units all had very clear and appropriate aims. In the best cases, these were comprehensive and specific to the subject. In one provider, for example, they included developing trainees' understanding of the rationale for primary MFL, improving their linguistic competence and cultural understanding, and building up their knowledge of resources for teaching French.

25. The content of the specialist units was relevant and practical in all five providers, but there was too little time, particularly in the one-year courses, for central training to cover everything of importance. Some key topics in the development of good primary MFL teachers had either been omitted or given insufficient emphasis on a number of courses. Time constraints and the absence of a statutory curriculum for MFL in primary schools led subject tutors to make their own decisions about course content. Topics that were sometimes omitted or given insufficient emphasis included: writing schemes of work; teaching grammar; the place of reading and writing; using the target language; exploiting ICT effectively; assessment and recording; and continuity and progression at the end of Key Stage 2. Despite productive collaboration on the development of this primary MFL initiative, providers had not agreed on the most important elements that should be prioritised for the ITT course and which elements might be better addressed in further professional development once the trainees had taken up their first teaching posts.

## The exchange visits

26. The reciprocal placements organised with the partner IUFM worked well on the whole, although there were several weaknesses, largely due to over-ambitious or unclear objectives for the exchange visits. Most trainees completed the full four-week experience in France and were satisfied with the arrangements. They were well-supported throughout their placement, both by local staff and by their own tutors, who maintained regular contact with them and visited them at least once during the stay. All reported gains in their fluency and in the breadth of their vocabulary, particularly words and phrases related to work in schools. They returned to England with greater confidence, not just in their use of French, but more broadly in their ability to face the challenges of their future career. As one trainee expressed it, 'I felt if I could teach a class of French primary school pupils in their own language, I could do anything!'

27. All trainees, directed by well-constructed task books, increased their cultural knowledge, especially in respect of the French education system, although opportunities to develop a greater breadth of cultural knowledge were sometimes missed. Some but by no means all trainees established productive and potentially durable links in France which they could use during and after the course.

28. Trainees' programmes in France varied greatly, within and between providers. Some trainees in one provider, for example, taught English but no other subjects; others taught a range of subjects but little or no English. In another provider, trainees were placed in schools in a region which did not teach English as its first foreign language and this restricted their opportunities to develop skills in teaching a MFL. At

another, some trainees benefited from useful coaching sessions in French but others did not have this opportunity. These varying experiences tended to be based on chance rather than identified need.

29. The French nationals had similar experiences when placed in English primary schools. Although some school staff were unsure of the aims and objectives of the placement and did not fully understand their role in mentoring and monitoring the trainee, they were able to provide them with a suitable and varied timetable. In those schools which already taught French, the trainee provided an authentic language model while working alongside the class teacher, and also did some teaching in small groups. Where French was not taught, the trainee introduced pupils to some basic vocabulary. Well-written directed tasks developed the French trainees' understanding of English education. There were clear benefits to the schools. Most trainees were highly competent and confident teachers who had good English. Their contribution extended the horizons of the pupils in the schools, and gave them an authentic experience of French culture. It was particularly useful when trainees were able to provide a lasting legacy for the school; for example, by teaching songs, dances and recipes to the staff; or by correcting the accuracy of the language in the school's scheme of work and the teachers' French.

30. For English trainees, the placement in France replaced a teaching experience in an English school. This proved a valuable opportunity for many trainees, who learned much from their observations of lessons about differences in pedagogy between the two countries. Trainees and some trainers, however, were anxious about the work they were missing in England and the effect this could have on their general progress as primary teachers. In the one-year courses, providers were concerned that trainees would not have sufficient time in England teaching the National Curriculum in consecutive key stages in order to be able to meet the QTS Standards. They took care to ensure that trainees' time in English schools was organised to give them that opportunity. Whilst several trainers and mentors felt that the placement in France meant that some, usually weaker, trainees were not as well-prepared for their subsequent English placement as their non-specialist peers, this was usually overcome by the end of the course and trainees who completed the specialist unit successfully met the QTS Standards.

31. For much of the year, the exchange visits dominated the PGCE trainees' and trainers' thinking. Many trainees became unduly anxious about their visit and, in some providers, too much training time was devoted to preparing them for it. Furthermore, the time needed by subject leaders to organise the visits had generally been seriously underestimated by course managers. Tutors had to undertake much of the preparation for this, some of it low-level clerical work, much of it in their own time and often in time that might have been used more fruitfully in planning and developing the specialist MFL training. Only one provider had had the foresight to allocate some time to an administrative assistant with some knowledge of French to help organise the exchange.

## **Training**

32. Subject leaders and tutors were well-qualified and had good experience of teaching in primary and secondary schools as well as in ITT. Some had significant



and recent experience of primary MFL teaching or had been involved in projects that promoted early language learning. In some providers, very effective training was provided by a team of tutors who could draw on complementary strengths. In others, most of the training was undertaken by a single tutor with contributions from external speakers. This second approach usually worked well, but resulted in occasional duplication when guest speakers had not been adequately briefed. The central training sessions observed by inspectors were all at least satisfactory and most were good or very good. Trainers demonstrated a high level of linguistic competence and teaching expertise, and elicited a good response from trainees.

33. Although there was a heavy emphasis in central training on practical approaches to teaching specific vocabulary from the QCA scheme of work for Key Stage 2, this was balanced effectively with a strong theoretical strand. Trainers regularly drew trainees' attention to underpinning issues such as class management, or the need to involve all the pupils in the class. In the best sessions, the tutor modelled a lively, interactive classroom, made sure all trainees were fully involved, and challenged their thinking throughout. Some sessions were, appropriately, conducted in French, although these did not always demonstrate successfully how teaching through the foreign language could be effective with new learners as distinct from a class with considerable prior knowledge.

34. Tutors introduced trainees to a variety of up-to-date teaching resources and considered how to use them in the classroom. Trainees had access to a good range of books on MFL teaching and relevant teaching materials, particularly where the provider had established links with other organisations, such as the local education authority, that made a wider range of appropriate resources available to trainees. Trainees were introduced to relevant websites and were also encouraged to use providers' own intranet systems and the TTA's dedicated primary MFL website to share teaching materials. There was, however, little evidence that trainees made much use of these additional on-line sources.

35. Trainees generally received little training on assessment in MFL. In two courses, trainees were shown how to assess against National Curriculum levels and, in one of these, trainees were expected, as one of their directed tasks, to provide evidence of formative assessment in French. In this course, there was a strong link between assessment training in the general course and in the specialist French unit. In most providers, however, this important aspect of teaching received too little attention.

36. The contribution made by assessment tasks and assignments to trainees' development as primary MFL teachers varied across the providers from excellent to unsatisfactory. Overall, the assignments were potentially very useful. One, for example, required trainees to compare and contrast different teaching methodologies in MFL and to produce materials for teaching a unit of work. Another was designed to develop trainees' understanding of the role of subject leader. In two providers, trainees prepared a rationale for introducing primary MFL into the curriculum. Trainees did not always give as much time to the written assignments as the tasks deserved; in one provider, for example, trainees' work was brief, tended to be superficial and was not well-supported by relevant evidence from the research literature or from the trainees' own school-based work. This was a consequence of

the shortage of time available, the perceived low status of the specialism in relation to the whole course, and the timing and quality of the school experience.

37. Although trainees received suitable reading lists which directed them to an extensive range of both practical and more theoretical books on the subject, only the most assiduous made time to undertake much independent reading. One provider overcame this quite effectively by requiring trainees to read selected pages of core texts on specific topics before and after training sessions.

## Subject knowledge

38. All providers required trainees to complete a subject knowledge audit, in most cases based on the descriptors in the common reference levels of the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.<sup>3</sup> This was seldom completed well enough or early enough for trainees to prepare an individual training plan. Where tutors interviewed trainees in the foreign language at selection, the outcomes were not used to identify individual training needs. Subject leaders usually expected trainees to produce written and oral French at various points during the course which, in some providers, was marked and used to set targets for improvement. On the whole, however, tutors had very little time to monitor trainees' linguistic progress. Although tutors commented on subject knowledge in their lesson evaluations – indeed, one tutor made precise and pertinent linguistic observations such as on a trainee's indiscriminate use of *tu* and *vous* forms – these were rare and school-based staff seldom had the linguistic knowledge to follow up these assessments.

39. In view of the relative lack of time available, language enhancement in the specialist units was good. The most significant element was the four-week visit to France; this led to increases in trainees' fluency and confidence, though subject leaders did not systematically assess the progress trainees had made. In England, approaches to training in subject knowledge varied greatly. In one provider, although there was no taught programme, trainees were encouraged to take advantage of the institution's self-study facilities, and to record any relevant activities in their portfolio. While some trainees made a considerable effort to improve their reading and listening skills, others recorded very little activity and the subject leader had no time to monitor this. In other providers, there were as many as ten taught sessions but, except for the one undergraduate course where lessons with a foreign language assistant were held in groups organised by ability, the programmes were not usually differentiated; this meant that the work was pitched at too low a level for some trainees. The best training provided a good blend of language enhancement and primary MFL methodology. It covered a broader range of subject knowledge than simply vocabulary, and included elements such as the interrelationship of sounds and writing, the place of grammar, and also links to citizenship.

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<sup>3</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.



40. Training in generic ICT skills formed part of the overall primary course. In the undergraduate course, trainees had structured opportunities to transfer these skills to MFL contexts. For example, one trainee drew on the generic training in PowerPoint to teach a MFL lesson. In most providers, however, there was little emphasis on developing trainees' ICT knowledge and skills specifically for teaching MFL.

## **School placements**

41. All trainees had the opportunity to teach French to at least one class on at least one of their placements. The extent and quality of their experience of teaching the subject varied considerably, however, within and between providers. In one course, for example, trainees taught French only in the final placement, whereas in another they taught French in both. One trainee taught four classes of forty minutes per week covering different age groups in Key Stage 2, while her colleague in a neighbouring school taught only one lesson per week to a Year 1 class.

42. While providers ensured that trainees were placed in schools that could provide a relevant and varied experience for the general primary course, they struggled to ensure that schools could give adequate support for the trainees' French specialism. In the best cases, trainees were placed in schools that enabled them to teach French to a range of attainment levels and age groups, and provided them with specialist support throughout the experience. One provider, in a region with a long tradition of primary school MFL, was able to place trainees in schools where French was long-established and where mentors were experienced MFL teachers.

43. Others were not so fortunate. Many trainees were placed in schools with no French in the curriculum but which allowed them to introduce the subject to their class. Although this was a useful experience, and certainly better than nothing, it did not allow trainees to teach much more than a few introductory phrases and gave them no insight into how pupils make progress over a year or a key stage. Trainees whose specialist teaching was limited to an extra-curricular club fared even worse, as the circumstances were too far removed from a conventional teaching context. Although these schools provided good general primary training, they did not have a MFL teacher whom trainees could observe teaching and who could advise and monitor them in the specialism. Some schools were unable to provide appropriate equipment for teaching MFL, such as an overhead projector or a cassette player. Many trainees were not observed teaching French by anyone other than their tutor. On those rare occasions when the trainee was observed teaching French by a mentor, their subsequent discussion was generally well-focused and practical, and occasionally covered relevant subject-specific points for development.

44. Even in regions where primary schools taught MFL, the school-based specialist training was not always satisfactory. Providers decided not to use some schools that taught French in curriculum time because their priority was to ensure trainees were placed with able general mentors. In two providers, the MFL subject leader played no part in deciding on the placement schools and this meant that opportunities were sometimes missed to provide a suitable specialist placement. Often, when trainees were placed in schools where French had been established in the curriculum, the MFL teachers, lacking in experience and expertise, felt unable to act as role models

for the trainees to observe, and the subject coordinator played little or no part in mentoring.

45. Some school-based staff were unsure what support and monitoring the provider expected them to provide for its MFL trainees, as they had received little information about the specialist training. In an extreme case, a mentor only discovered the trainee was a MFL specialist at the very start of the placement. Even when the provider's requirements or recommendations were clearly documented, some schools failed to act upon these. In one provider, for instance, schools were asked to give trainees a timetable with between 10% and 20% of French teaching throughout the placement, but several did not achieve this.

46. Subject leaders have worked hard to overcome these problems with school-based training. In the short term, they have done this by visiting schools to observe and support each trainee at least once and by briefing school staff with better documentation and at meetings. Despite this, there was insufficient support for those trainees placed in schools that were unable to provide specialist training. In the longer term, subject leaders were aiming to increase the number of partnership schools which teach MFL in curriculum time. They had made a start by developing links with local education authorities and neighbouring specialist language colleges, and, where relevant, by becoming a partner in one of the new primary Pathfinder projects.

## **Assessing the trainees**

47. Most providers used a wide range of well-documented assessment items for the specialist unit in French. These usually included a written assignment, the final reports from the placement schools, and completion of MFL-specific school-based tasks, including those from the placement in France. All providers also intended to assess trainees' subject knowledge, but the means and the criteria for doing this were not always clear. In some cases, evidence was not available to show that the planned assessment had taken place.

48. Assessment of the trainees' ability to teach their specialism proved problematic for subject course leaders. One particular challenge was how to assess trainees during their placement in France. Subject tutors and other staff from England visited each trainee and made their assessments against those QTS Standards for which there was evidence, but, because of the unpredictable variety of experiences encountered, it was difficult to ensure that there was a common core to these assessments. The end-of-placement reports made by French school staff were of limited value; many were unrelated to the QTS Standards and they appeared to have little effect on trainees' development towards these. However, subject tutors observed trainees teaching French on their final placement in England and made accurate judgements about their competence as French specialists. These assessments were supplemented by the mentor's view of their ability as general primary school teachers.

49. Although there were instances of very good practice, formative assessment of trainees was mostly unsatisfactory. On their school visits, subject tutors made satisfactory and, in most cases, very good written critiques of trainees' French

lessons. The best of these gave precise, subject-specific advice; for example, to teach pupils to ask as well as answer questions before beginning work in pairs. These evaluations were all too rare, however, and school-based staff seldom made observations of such quality. Course work was marked during the year, but the quality of the comments varied considerably amongst providers. In one course, for example, trainees received little feedback on a presentation they gave on their French exchange visits.

50. Career entry profiles from the first year's cohort of trainees mostly made no reference to their French specialism or to their experience of teaching in France. Those that did refer to the specialism did so without any analysis of the trainee's strengths and areas for development. The career entry and development profiles of the second year's cohort were more likely to include information about MFL. In one provider, for example, trainees included in their profile a final assessment from the subject tutor which set out clearly and succinctly their strengths and areas for development as French teachers. During the year, subject leaders considered the purpose and value of the final assessment in the specialist unit; some produced certificates to show that trainees had completed the unit, but not how well they had done so.

## Recommendations

### 51. Providers should:

- improve the quality of the school-based experience by giving better support to trainees in schools that are unable to give specialist MFL advice, and by ensuring all relevant school-based staff fully understand their responsibilities with regard to the trainees' specialism
- continue to increase the number of partner schools with MFL in the curriculum in which they can place trainees. Subject leaders should be fully involved in decisions about the schools in which trainees are placed
- structure their specialist training units so that trainees' skills and understanding are developed progressively throughout the course, and so that the specialist units are fully integrated with the general primary course. The various elements of the unit should combine so that trainees learn better how to: use the foreign language more effectively as the language of the classroom; use ICT for teaching MFL; assess and record pupils' progress in the subject, particularly in speaking and listening; and plan for progression over a year or a key stage
- improve the quality of formative assessment of trainees in all elements of the specialist unit
- improve arrangements for the visit to France by tailoring it better to meet trainees' individual needs, and making sure trainees exploit more fully the opportunities for cultural development it offers
- adopt a more rigorous approach to auditing and monitoring trainees' competence in the foreign language, focusing particularly on errors they commonly make in the primary classroom
- ensure that subject leaders have adequate time and administrative support to organise the exchange visits.

### 52. The TTA should:

- consider the impact of the MFL specialism on the general primary course and advise providers on how best they can structure their programmes to ensure trainees meet all of the Standards; in particular, that trainees are well prepared to teach the full primary curriculum in consecutive key stages

- consider how best to support school-based staff and subject tutors during the placement abroad in assessing the trainees accurately against a common core of relevant Standards
- support providers who wish to collaborate on the design of a core curriculum for their specialist units, and providers who wish to agree a way of formally recognising trainees' achievement in the specialism.