



BORN GLOBAL

Rethinking Language Policy for 21st Century Britain

An introduction

September 2013

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Rethinking Language Policy for 21st Century Britain

A new policy research project into the nature and extent of language needs in the labour market and the implications for language education from school to higher education.

The British Academy

The British Academy is the UK's national body which champions and supports the humanities and social sciences. It is an independent, self-governing fellowship of scholars, elected for their distinction in research and publication. Its purpose is to inspire, recognise and support excellence in the humanities and social sciences, throughout the UK and internationally, and to champion their role and value.

The Academy has been at the forefront of promoting excellence in the study of languages for over a century, and received additional funding from the Department of Business, Innovations and Skills in 2011 to launch a new, targeted programme to address the skills deficit in language learning in UK education and research. Through its language programme, the Academy is funding research and relevant initiatives, and seeking to influence policy in these areas.

Born Global: Rethinking Language Policy for 21st Century Britain

As a key project in the British Academy's language programme, *Born Global* has been established to develop a deeper understanding of how language is used in the workplace for different purposes, by employees of different levels of skill and accountability. Following years of declining capability in language competence in education and recurrent reports of high levels of employer demand for language skills, *Born Global* will elicit new knowledge about the language needs for employment to inform government language policy development, the current national curriculum review for England and future developments in Higher Education language curricula and assessment.

The Context

Language teaching and learning has been a long-term battle ground for policy-makers, educationalists, employers, academics, schools and universities. Despite a number of policy initiatives over the last 25 years made by successive governments, languages capability remains in crisis. Although surveys produced by the CBI have indicated that 70% of employers value foreign language skills, particularly for their use in building relationships with clients, customers and suppliers, they also report recurrent dissatisfaction with graduate language skills and an increasing demand for non-traditional languages such as Mandarin and Cantonese.

The evidence of weakness in language teaching and curricula at every level – from school to undergraduate degrees, and in life-long learning programmes – indicated the urgent need to refine our understanding of employers’ needs and requirements in order to fix the supply chain of language learning and improve economic performance.

Born Global thus aims to provide new knowledge, fresh analysis and thoughtful leadership to inform the curriculum and assessment debate in modern languages, particularly during this crucial period of policy development and implementation. It will seek evidence to prove that language capability improves adult employment prospects, thus convincing young people to pursue languages at school and university and address the dramatic and continuing trend away from specialist language study in Higher Education. It will also explore employers’ expectations of language competence and investigate the reasons for their dissatisfaction with the current language capabilities of school and college leavers and university graduates.

GOVERNANCE

The project will draw on the expertise of a high-level Steering Group convened by the British Academy and an Advisory Board, including representation from the Confederation of British Industry, British Chambers of Commerce and the Employer and Education Task Force. The Steering Group will be chaired by Richard Hardie and the research undertaken by Bernardette Holmes.

Richard Hardie, Chair, Born Global

Richard Hardie is the non-executive Chair of UBS Ltd. and Chair of the Born Global project. Having read History and French at Lincoln College, Oxford, Richard joined SG Warburg & Co. which became part of UBS. His last executive role was as the Investment Bank's overall COO in EMEA.

He has a number of educational and pro bono interests. He is: an Honorary Vice-President of the Chartered Institute of Linguists; the London lead on education for Business in the Community; Deputy Chair of Heart of the City; and a Governor of the Bridge Academy, Hackney, which he co-founded and is sponsored by UBS. From 2007-12 he was Chair of The Learning Trust, Hackney's not-for-profit, independent education authority.

Bernardette Holmes, Principal Researcher, Born Global

Bernardette Holmes is the Principal Researcher of Born Global. She is also the Campaign Director of Speak to the Future, Bye-Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge and the Past President of the Association for Language Learning.

Bernardette is recognised as an innovative and inspiring teacher who has made a major contribution to modern language education in England as a policy and curriculum adviser, inspector, teacher trainer and researcher. As Director of Languages First at the University of Cambridge Language Centre, she led research-informed networks focusing on languages for employability and entrepreneurship, communicative grammar and CLIL and was highly active in the university's widening participation programme. She is currently advising the Department for Education on curriculum reform for modern languages and is the lead drafter of the new GCSE criteria for both modern and ancient languages.

RESEARCH METHODS

Born Global will provide a new paradigm for evidence-based policy development by engaging with key stakeholders from education and employment in a radical rethinking of languages education for the 21st Century.

The research for this study will use mixed-mode methodology and will include quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Furthermore, it will involve direct engagement with a range of research partners and stakeholders such as employers, schools and universities, government and policy-makers in a longitudinal study of language use and policy development in education and employment.

Stages of the project:

Employer engagement in needs analysis

Working with the British Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Education and Employers Taskforce, the research will have access to a wide and representative sample of employers, led by Richard Hardie, over a two-year period. Direct observation of language in the workplace, interviews, focus groups and surveys will also be conducted.

Understanding language needs and the implication for policy reform

The research methodology will combine the innovative use of ethnographic data with discourse analysis of recorded samples of languages in use in a variety of employment contexts. It will elaborate a conceptual framework to map language competence, identifying the range of knowledge, skills and understanding required to function effectively from administrative to executive levels, calibrating authentic examples of language use to the Common European Framework of Reference. This will create a new and accessible graded level of assessment for schools, universities and in the workplace.

Analysis of longitudinal data investigating the relationship between the language competence of young people and their adult employment prospects

Working with the Education and Employers Task Force, the study will also include a closer analysis of longitudinal data from the British Cohort Study using SPSS V.17. This analysis will allow us to identify young people with language qualifications at GCSE level, A-level and university and follow them through into adulthood, comparing their employment outcomes in areas such as earnings and length of employment periods with those of groups of people from similar social backgrounds and attainment levels but who lack language qualifications.

This will allow for in-depth data extraction and interrogation by identifying value and use of languages based on a number of variables such as economic sector, age, gender, ethnicity, qualification level and region.

School policy research partnerships

Schools from a representative sample of unitary authorities and academies will be involved in regular focus groups and survey activity. This will be supported by direct observation of language learning, in addition to interviews conducted with head teachers, teachers and students that focus on the impact of government legislation and policy reform.

University perspectives

Through a British Academy seminar programme, universities will be invited to reflect on research findings from Born Global and contribute to the development of further research questions to employers and school leaders in subsequent phases of the longitudinal study.

TIMETABLE

The research will be structured in three phases and will take place between September 2013 to July 2015.

Part 1: September 2013 – June 2014

Phase 1: Literature Review

Phase 2: Employer focus groups and case studies; School research partners; BCS analysis; first phase of linguistic data gathering

Interim Report May 2014

Part 2: July 2014 – July 2015

Phase 3: Analysis of linguistic data and policy implications, employer perspectives, school-based policy development and case studies and policy recommendations

Final Report July 2015

The final report will be published by the British Academy and will be relevant to the Department for Education, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Higher Education Academy, as well as to a range of other stakeholder groups from education, public services and employer networks.

Contact information

For further information on Born Global, please visit the webpage:

<http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Languages.cfm>

To get involved, please email Bernardette Holmes (Principal Researcher, Born Global) and Anandini Yoganathan (Senior Policy Adviser, British Academy) at bornglobal@britac.ac.uk