



RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON PRIMARY LANGUAGES

Q1 a) Do you agree with the Government's proposal that foreign languages should become compulsory at Key Stage 2 in maintained schools in England from September 2014?

Yes, the Association for Language Learning fully supports the inclusion of languages as a statutory part of the primary curriculum. We would strongly recommend, however, that due consideration is taken to the lessons learned from past initiatives, where attempts to introduce primary languages have been less successful. We need to address certain key priorities: (i) the amount of taught time dedicated to languages, (ii) access to high quality initial teacher training and continued professional development, (iii) time and support to plan coherent progression across key stages from 7 to 14.

Q1 b) Please explain the reasons for your answer:

The Association for Language Learning believes that learning other languages is an essential part of education for the 21st century, bringing personal, cultural and cognitive benefits for all ages. For young children, in addition to conceptual and cultural development, there is research evidence to show that learning another language supports literacy in the mother tongue, enriches communication skills and promotes deeper learning by providing cognitive challenge. An early introduction of language learning also takes advantage of younger learners' receptivity; they display less anxiety to risk-taking in the new language and can draw on instinctive language acquisition ability. Research highlights the linguistic advantages, particularly with regard to pronunciation, accent and intonation, and the ability to acquire the sound system of the new language, together with the potential for overall progress in processing language and willingness to experiment with the new language, transferring competences from literacy in the mother tongue. Recent findings from Survey Lang/The First European Survey on Language Competences show that an early start supports higher levels of proficiency in secondary schools, provided that a coherent and relevant curriculum is set in place.

In terms of continuity, four years of sustained learning with an adequate time allocation in the primary sector, linking coherently to a further three years of statutory learning in Key Stage 2 will give a much more realistic opportunity for learners at the end of KS3 to be able to speak and write independently using language at a level that better matches

their conceptual understanding and maturity. This can lead to further study and use in KS4 or provide a springboard to the learning of other languages.

Q2 a) If you are responding on behalf of a primary school, what language(s) would your school be likely to teach and why?

ALL believes that decisions about which language to teach are best made as close to the point of learning as possible. This will allow a degree of diversity of languages, where appropriate. However, diversity poses specific questions about coordination between sectors. ALL would advise that there is central advice available to encourage primary and secondary schools to collaborate more effectively to ensure that coherent programmes of learning are available to children to continue their study of a specific language across key stages. It is likely that most primary schools will teach one of the most commonly spoken hypercentral languages French, German and Spanish.

Q2 b) If you replied to the question above, would the language(s) your school teaches be likely to change over time and if so, why?

There is a general view from ALL members, that in an essentially Anglophone country, the choice of language(s) taught at KS2 is less important than the quality of the learning experience and the effectiveness of the plans for continuity and progression. There is also a view that there should be diversity in the languages offered. However, languages curricula for KS2, KS3 and KS4 should be viewed and designed holistically, as part of a unified whole. This is especially crucial across the KS2/3 transition. It may be helpful in formulating any national guidance on choice of language, to consider that the choice of second language of study for European countries includes German, French, Spanish as the dominant choices. There is also some teaching of Russian and Italian, where socio-cultural and geo-political circumstances make these choices more appropriate.

Q3) How might the proposals affect different groups of pupils?

General impact: Language learning addresses major issues such as raising self-esteem, improving literacy, and developing positive attitudes to others which are relevant to all learners.

Benefits to SEN learners: The interactive, kinaesthetic approaches often used with younger children are appropriate to learners with special or specific needs as much as to others. The learning of a new language offers a fresh start to learners with special educational needs, as the language of study is new for all learners.

Support for EAL: There is some evidence that learning a 'foreign' language benefits children with English as a second language, as it helps them to understand how language works by reflecting on their own language, English and the functioning of the new language..

Q4) How might the proposal affect different types of schools?

Primary classroom teachers are expert teachers of their children and can deliver very good lessons in languages, if they have sufficient confidence in their own language proficiency, are provided with appropriate training, and ongoing opportunities for professional support. The issue of confidence is crucial and ALL would recommend that ITET courses should include language instruction or refreshment at an appropriately high level within their training programmes.

There may also be a role for native speakers (appropriately trained or deployed) acting as teaching assistants to provide role models to children. Supplementary native speaker support could be coordinated across school clusters, wherever possible.

ALL is aware that the issues of teacher supply, curriculum planning and continuity at transfer within small rural schools are different from those in urban contexts. In some cases, in mixed-age classes, a multilingual approach with a significant component of language awareness has been effective in introducing language learning. It is recommended that a focus on how language works and links to literacy should be a part of language education in the primary school and that this development is as much a part of the English curriculum as it is that of the foreign language. ALL would like to emphasise that such an approach is not incompatible with the introduction of a sustained study of one language from seven to fourteen and is not a replacement for sustained language study. The recently published Eurostat report shows that early language learning of one European language is commonplace across Europe and the First European Survey on Language Competences shows evidence that an early start provides a strong foundation for higher language proficiency in the secondary curriculum.

Q5 a) If the proposals go ahead, what do you think the priorities will be for training and professional development of teachers?

Primary generalists will need language training in the language they are teaching as well as training in appropriate methodology. There are also implications for the entry level requirements for Initial Teacher Education, since it would be advisable to recommend that entrants to primary initial teacher training should be required to have a language to at least GCSE level A* - C and preferably AS level. Similarly, courses of continuing professional development will need to address linguistic, pedagogic and cultural dimensions.

Teachers in Primary and Secondary will need support and time to explore age-appropriate, child-centred pedagogy, suitable content, assessment, and planning for progression and coherence throughout and across the key stages.

Information on language competence at points of transfer needs to be reliable, so that secondary teachers can collaborate with primary colleagues to build on progress achieved. Age-appropriate assessment should be developed for the end of KS2, which could be linked to levels of performance described in the Common European Framework of Reference. This will not only support progress for pupils and enable teachers to co-plan more effectively but will also allow comparisons of national achievement between major jurisdictions.

Q5 b) Do you have any suggestions for how schools and other stakeholders could work together to meet these needs?

ALL believes in the power of local focus groups and networks working together on curriculum and lesson planning, raising awareness of new policies and new methods, sharing and developing resources and discussing professional issues. Research-informed networks can also play a major part in evaluating and strengthening practice. Networks can usefully bring together colleagues from different sectors of the profession (including colleagues from HE and ITET). This enables the language community as a whole to have a sense of the bigger picture and also to address priorities for development at local level. A priority to support the introduction of the new curriculum will be to ensure that primary and secondary school teachers have time together for professional reflection, sharing of best practice and joint planning.

Intending primary teachers in ITET as well as primary teachers in post, can benefit greatly from training programmes abroad, gaining valuable linguistic, cultural and pedagogical insights; the Actions of the European Commission in this regard should be closely investigated. Education and Training 2020 with its expanded Erasmus for ALL programme will offer funded courses for professional training for teachers from 2014. A more strategic approach to building on knowledge gained by participation in such programmes should be recommended at local level. Language Learning Networks have a role in supporting the dissemination of best and next practice.

Plainly new resources will be developed but existing resources will continue to be relevant to primary teachers new to language teaching, particularly those that are research-informed and those that have been developed by practising teachers.

ALL members expressed strong support for the Key Stage 2 Framework document which they have found of particular value in their planning and understanding of primary language methodology.

Q6) Please let us know if you have any further comments you would like to make about the proposals in this consultation document.

ALL Members observe that a competence-based approach is not only beneficial to the children in terms of developing them as language learners, but also offers a positive learning platform for making conceptual links with literacy.

We believe that decisions about the languages to be taught and approaches to teaching and learning should be made as close to the point of delivery as possible in relation to the local context.

To transfer policy into practice will require the provision of a high quality infrastructure of support for existing primary generalists and investment in specialist language training within Initial Teacher Education. There are implications for the secondary curriculum and the careers guidance offered to aspiring primary teachers in schools. If we are to succeed in introducing robust and valuable programmes of learning into the primary schools, we must ensure the quality of the input provided by teachers. This implies a revision of the entry requirements for ITE to include a level of language competence in at least one language to E Bacc level or preferably to AS/A2.

Inevitably there will be a time lag for the impact of the E Bacc to be visible in the profile of competences present in graduates entering the profession. There is also the issue of sustaining language competence, if future teachers have in effect abandoned language learning after the age of sixteen. Hence, the strong recommendation that future teachers continue to AS level in at least one language. There is also a clear implication for Higher Education and the institution-wide provision made available to students of all disciplines. A programme of intensive language enrichment/extension for those intending to enter teaching in either primary or secondary phases would be of great value, particularly offering those with one language competence to extend their capability by acquiring a second new language.

The reintroduction of language teaching post-14 by virtue of the E Bacc will result in fewer secondary teachers converting to the primary phase. In fact, the number of children in Key Stage 4 requiring language teachers is likely to result in a shortage of specialist teachers, particularly in the lesser taught languages, such as German and Russian. There is already a shortage of teachers for those schools wanting to introduce new world languages such as Mandarin. We have a history of encouraging native speaker teachers to join the profession. However, we also are aware that being a native speaker is not of itself a sufficient basis for becoming an effective language teacher. To build a successful delivery model supported by native speaker input will require programmes of induction, covering education policy for England, the requirements of the new curriculum, intercultural communication and understanding, language pedagogy particularly with regard to use of the target language, the teaching of grammar within communicative contexts and age-appropriate assessment.

The quality of teaching must be supported by clear and unequivocal national statements about expectations and outcomes. In the absence of any extensive government-led national support, a central policy endorsement of and support for knowledge transfer through regional networks and local focus groups is crucial to enable organisations like

the Association for Language Learning to mobilise and expand its membership as a means to access professional development and update subject knowledge.

There will also be a need for an effective communication strategy to present and explain policy changes to teachers in schools and in higher education, parents and employers. The ALL can assist in this exercise, reaching teachers in all sectors, advisers, teacher educators and researchers. The breadth of this membership also provides a strong and reliable base of front line experience and expertise which we will readily make available to support the implementation of the new curriculum, as required.

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