

ALL response to the DfE
August 2013 consultation on revisions to the
national curriculum draft programmes of study

Whether or not to prescribe languages to be taught at KS2 was always a difficult choice and whatever the decision there was bound to be some opposition or concern.

ALL's position regarding this was (and remains) that the main aim in any strategy for the teaching of new languages from age 7 to ages 14, 16 or 18, has to be to ensure that there is good progression throughout the period of learning, equal access to high quality teaching and a positive and enjoyable experience of learning. This is more likely to happen in a situation where there is a continuum for one or more languages from primary to secondary. We therefore supported the restriction of languages to the major modern European languages most commonly taught in the UK, plus Mandarin Chinese, Latin and Ancient Greek, although we did propose that the list should be extended to include some other strategically and culturally important languages. We were aware that there was always a contingent among our members who would have preferred an open choice.

In our earlier submissions, we also recognised the need for children whose first language is not English, or from families where English is not the main language of communication, to continue to be supported in their mother (or other) tongue, (commonly described as 'support for community languages'). Our view, based on research into second language acquisition, was that this should be done **in addition to** the teaching of a new language to ensure good progress in English and general literacy. Unfortunately there was no provision of this kind in the earlier proposals, leaving some teachers and schools who teach only a community language in the primary phase frustrated by the prescribed list.

The decision to lift the restriction at primary level:

- means that primary and secondary schools now have the same open choice
- allows schools who already have sustainable provision in a less widely taught language to continue
- allows schools to respond to local circumstances and have more control over their own curriculum

However, we are now concerned about progression. The potential for more diversity of languages at primary level will require:

- robust systems in place for transition from primary to secondary
- clear guidance on assessment at primary level
- training to help primary teachers build language awareness skills into the FL programme
- training to help secondary teachers understand how to build on prior knowledge in a different language, where this is the case.

A further concern is that all children should have equal access to learning a new language, should they choose to do so and that this should not be incompatible with support for their first or other tongue i.e. their community language. In practice, we are aware that the majority of schools are still likely to teach French, Spanish or German and that this change to the Programme of Study is unlikely to have huge impact. Still far more important is the need for:

- adequate initial and in-service training for primary teachers, both specialist linguists and non-specialists
- good guidance for primary schools embarking upon language learning for the first time or building their provision
- access to resources and support