

June 2025

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REVIEW – LANGUAGES

Premise

In the interim report of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the subject “languages” was classified as requiring category 1 intervention, i.e., a subject currently deemed to be furthest away from the curriculum principles and for which the problem diagnosis is still unclear. A task and finish group is to be established in the next phase of the review. Here a collective of key stakeholders of the language community address some of the identified issues.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGES

- At a time when it is recognised that Britain’s relationship with the rest of the world is more important than ever, it is difficult to overestimate the role that language education serves.
- If the UK is to ensure its future security and economic prosperity, while affirming its identity as a multilingual country that thrives on the possibilities of exchange, the number of school leavers who are proficient in more than one language needs to increase. The government’s sustained commitment to the [Mandarin Excellence programme](#) in schools makes this clear.
- As the ‘[Purpose of study](#)’ for languages in the National Curriculum in England outlines: ‘Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils’ curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.’
- Knowledge of languages facilitates intercultural cooperation and exchange, promotes opportunities in all spheres of life, and enhances creativity (Graham et al. 2020). It means not only being able to express ourselves and understand others across national borders, but doing so with critical insight into how we perceive ourselves and are perceived by others.
- One of the government’s five missions is removing barriers to opportunity and promoting social justice. Linguistic and cultural diversity are a daily reality in the UK, where one in five school-aged children have a [first language other than English](#). Acknowledging and building on these linguistic repertoires is essential to achieving this mission.
- How the education system draws on this resource is a crucial question for curriculum reform. Language teaching in schools not only provides students with a range of skills: linguistic, oral (supporting oracy across the curriculum, Mercier and Mannion 2017), and written (helping literacy, Forbes 2018); it is also fundamentally concerned with the multilingual and multicultural environment in which students live and learn.

2. THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR LANGUAGES

International trade enhancement

- Not sharing a common language acts as a trade barrier: eradication of language barriers with Arabic-, Chinese-, French- and Spanish-speaking countries could increase UK exports annually by c. £19bn (Ayres-Bennett et al. 2022).
- Investment in languages education would return £2 for every £1 spent: just a 10% increase in the UK KS3/KS4 population undertaking an intensive Mandarin

programme could improve the UK's GDP over 30 years by between £11.5bn and £12.3bn (≈0.5% of the UK's GDP in 2019) (Ayres-Bennett et al. 2022).

Supporting growth of UK business

- SMEs are 30% more successful when they use language capabilities (LO-C 30 report 2021).

Driving tourism and hospitality

- There is a growing language skills gap in the UK tourism industry (UKinbound 2018), exacerbated by EU exit and the decline in UK language training. Intermediate language skills are valuable in this sector, including those of Home, Heritage and Community languages speakers.

3. LANGUAGES AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- The school curriculum should position language study as a key driver of equality, diversity, and inclusion, providing invaluable skills and social capital for all. Language learning inherently engages pupils with diverse ways of thinking, communicating, and understanding the world (Van Avermart 2024).
- A reformed curriculum must include meaningful and inclusive language education that challenges narrow perceptions of what is considered 'foreign' or 'other', and exposes students to the richness of different cultures, identities, and worldviews. This approach should not only promote empathy and intercultural understanding but also tackle underlying assumptions and biases – such as racial stereotypes, fear of difference, and notions of cultural superiority (Panford 2021, 2024). With this goal in mind, language education must go beyond traditional topics and instead include contemporary global issues, marginalised voices, and diverse linguistic heritages (Ardizzone & Holmes 2020, Wassell & Koch 2023).
- Language learning must be reframed not just as a technical skill, but as a critical and transformative educational practice, essential to preparing young people for life in a multilingual and multicultural world. (See also Vienna Theses on Language Policy, 11+1 demands for strengthening social participation, IDT 2022.)
- Crucially, as a longer-term aim, the curriculum must recognise, integrate and build upon the capacity in Home, Heritage and Community languages. This will affirm students' identities, support engagement, and foster a greater sense of belonging and academic legitimacy (Teravainen-Goff, Clark & Little 2021).

4. CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT REVIEW: RESPONSE TO PROBLEM DIAGNOSIS

Languages are a vital ingredient in a broad curriculum. Language learning supports wider aspirations, including the enhancement of communication skills (including oracy), cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness, preparing learners to become global citizens. Languages in the school curriculum also open career opportunities, boost personal development, and lay the foundation for lifelong learning. We endorse the strategic commitment of a multilingual languages policy approach that includes Home, Heritage and Community languages.

Primary Languages

- Removing the statutory requirement for languages at KS2, especially alongside any softening / removal of EBacc, would accelerate long-term decline in language learning (Richmond 2019), widening inequality and reducing university access to language degrees and combined degrees with a language component for all but the most privileged.
- Meaningful progress in one language at KS2, complemented by the development of language awareness (Tellier & Roehr-Brackin 2017) and intercultural knowledge, is essential for creating a languages pipeline across formal education and expanding language GCSE uptake. It forms the foundation for a coherent, 9-year curriculum (KS2 to KS4) that connects primary to secondary education.

- Achieving this progress is not only possible but is already happening – admittedly inconsistently ([Wardle 2021](#)) – across the nation. Research and practice show that primary teachers, including non-specialists, can deliver strong results with a well-sequenced curriculum (Kasprowicz 2025). Widely used, audio-supported free resources are further enhancing the language learning experience for pupils across hundreds of schools. The initiation of a nation-wide professional development programme, by utilising existing resources and networks (e.g., the NCLE CPD platform; the Association for Language Learning primary hubs; the DELTEA project) would contribute towards achieving this goal (Holmes & Myles 2019).
- While Language Awareness (LA) or Knowledge about Language (KAL) are valuable, and can enhance language acquisition, they do not build the knowledge base needed for GCSE success. A replacement LA or KAL model would require funding, structure, and training, but with less clear outcomes. Therefore, LA or KAL – drawing where possible on pupils' curiosity about the languages already present in the classroom – should be seen as a component of Primary Languages (PL), not a substitute.
- The infrastructure for progress over time is already in place; what is needed now is strategic action, including policy backing, the formulation of non-statutory guidance (relating notably to the number of contact hours for languages at KS2), subject leadership, and incentives to embed what already works more consistently (Holmes & Myles 2019). With appropriate support and clear expectations (e.g., benchmarked in relation to the CEFR) of what a learner should have achieved by the end of KS2 in languages, substantial national progress is realistic within five years (see also Language Trends England 2024).

Key Stage 2 to 3 transition

- Clear expectations articulated through non-statutory guidance (ALL 2024; Language Trends England 2024) – coupled with the aforementioned strategic action, decisive school leadership and adequate in-school and trust-wide/local authority support – will positively impact on transition from primary to secondary settings ([Graham et al. 2014](#), Holmes & Myles 2019).
- Complementing progress in a single language at KS2 with the development of a broader multilingual awareness builds confidence and prepares pupils well for learning a new language at KS3. Initiatives such as the introduction of a languages passport might provide further support for this transition.
- Curriculum alignment initiatives that ensure that the KS3 curriculum builds on such language knowledge, as well as skills developed alongside language acquisition at KS2, will contribute to progression, even if learners transition to a new language as part of their secondary school experience (Wardle 2021; [Courtney 2017](#)).

GCSE uptake and EBacc

- Languages are an integral feature of a broad, inclusive and ambitious curriculum: all students should be entitled to continue studying a language at KS4, with the longer-term aim of restoring the statutory requirement (removed in 2004, with clear negative impact on uptake) to study a language after the age of 14.
- It is widely understood that EBacc contributed to halting the decline in GCSE language uptake (Language Trends England 2024). As such, the unintended consequences of its removal need to be considered very carefully. Whether EBacc is retained or not, languages must be included in the Department for Education's and its inspectorate's definition of a broad, inclusive, and ambitious curriculum (see also Ofsted Research Review Languages 2021).
- The systemwide commitment to such a longer-term universal and inclusive languages education should be seen as the key driver of this curriculum reform.

Alternative qualifications spanning Primary through to 6th Form

- Across many [submissions to the CAR consultation](#), a greater variety, diversity and flexibility in assessment methods and/or qualifications has been called for, alongside the recently reformed GCSE Languages (French, German, Spanish).
- Judging from previous alternative assessment schemes, innovative, criteria-and-competency-referenced assessment formats will contribute to an increase in learners' engagement, motivation, and sense of achievement. They will be able to assess quickly their areas of strength and development.
- An in-depth exploration of additional alternative assessment formats for languages as part of the CAR Languages Task and Finish Group – or as part of a broader review of post-16 education (including FE) – would be welcomed.
- If conceptualised appropriately, assessment schemes like the Language Ladder offer a clear, step-by-step progression that helps learners track their progress and stay motivated. They also provide flexibility and inclusivity, recognising different levels of language competence and allowing for certification of individual skills.
- Such alternative assessments would offer new opportunities for Home, Heritage and Community languages, permitting further collaboration between mainstream and complementary sectors, and would allow for progression from primary through to 6th form for all learners (Kenny 2025).

Teacher recruitment and retention

While teacher recruitment and retention sit outside of the curriculum and assessment review panel's remit, it must be noted that adequate resourcing will be required to implement the panel's forthcoming recommendations. For languages, a long-standing issue has been the supply of language teachers and increasingly so the retention of high-quality language educators in schools across England (Koglbauer 2018, Education Committee, 2024, Parrish 2024). The Education Select Committee inquiry [report on teacher recruitment, training and retention](#) highlights the complexity and severity of the issue across a wide range of subjects, including languages. The [Government's response](#) (2025) outlines a commitment to 're-establish teaching as an attractive profession'. Financial incentives, including a pay award for all teachers, continued bursaries and scholarships for language trainees, etc. have been steps towards this commitment. However, school leaders and subject leaders of languages frequently report of difficulties in recruiting to vacant language positions in their schools or Multi Academy Trusts. In addition, with the overall number of GCSE and A-level entries continue to decline (Ofqual 2025), fewer students enrol on language degree courses and the pool of potential trainee teachers shrinks further – the vicious cycle of language teacher recruitment (Koglbauer 2018) continues. As subject associations and learned societies, we understand the complexity of the issue and offer to proactively engage with the government and other stakeholders in exploring innovative and sustainable solutions.