

## Language Trends 2006

# Languages in Key Stage 4

This year's survey, carried out by CILT, the National Centre for Languages with support from the Association for Language Learning and the Independent Schools' Modern Languages Association, is based on responses to a questionnaire sent to a representative sample of 2,000 secondary schools in England (1,576 maintained and 424 independent schools). The survey has been carried out annually since 2002 to explore languages provision and take-up in schools in Key Stage 4. Findings noted below are based on a 54% response rate from 1,086 schools.

### Key findings

- There is a continued decline in the number of pupils studying a language in Key Stage 4: a minority of maintained schools now have more than half their Year 11 and Year 10 pupils enrolled on language courses.
- Although 73% of maintained schools which responded to the survey are aware of the Government's requirement to set a benchmark of between 50% and 90% of pupils taking a language qualification at Key Stage 4, only 17% have done so. In schools where less than a quarter of students study a language in Key Stage 4, only 5% have set a benchmark.
- Provision and take-up for languages is better on almost all counts in the independent sector than in the maintained sector. However, there is evidence that some independent schools are starting to let a small number of pupils drop languages.
- The promotion of languages as an option is largely left to the Languages department with very little involvement of those in a position to influence teenagers positively, such as governors, local business, universities or parents. In the maintained sector, only 38% of Senior Leadership Teams help support take-up, and only 10% of careers staff. In independent schools, there is more support from careers staff and parents.
- The number of schools offering alternative qualifications to GCSE is still very low (22% of state schools, 9% of independent schools) and this proportion has not increased since last year. This would indicate that schools are allowing pupils for whom GCSE is not suitable to drop languages, rather than develop alternative courses suited to their needs.
- There is some evidence of innovation in terms of new languages offered, and some interest in Content and Language Integrated Learning (approaches which teach languages simultaneously with other subject areas, such as Geography or ICT).
- Provision and take-up for languages in sixth forms is relatively stable with evidence that the declines seen over the last decade have bottomed out.

### Further details and commentary

#### Decline in pupil numbers

Only 18% of maintained schools, of which about half are Specialist Language Colleges, have 'languages for all' in Key Stage 4. Nearly a third of maintained schools (29%) have fewer than 25% of their pupils studying a language beyond the age of 14. Declines are also being identified in the independent sector. This year, only 56% of independent schools have all Key Stage 4 students studying a language in Year 11, compared to 78% in 2005.

According to DfES schools data released in October 2006, 51% of the cohort took a language at GCSE in 2006. This survey, undertaken since the start of the new academic year, would indicate that this figure is likely to fall still further in 2007 and 2008.

The survey confirms trends identified in previous years regarding the types of school least likely to have substantial numbers of pupils studying languages. Schools which have fewer than half their pupils studying a language to GCSE (or similar) include:

- 58% of comprehensive schools, as opposed to 10% of grammar schools.
- 85% of the lowest-performing schools (in the lowest quintile), but also 22% of the highest-performing schools.
- 74% of schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals.
- 74% of Specialist Business and Enterprise Colleges.
- 71% of Specialist Maths and Computing Colleges.
- 70% of schools in the North East (the region where there is lowest take-up of languages).
- 45% of schools in the East of England (the regional with the best take-up of languages).

The trend towards languages becoming an elitist subject has been identified in previous years. Students are less likely to be studying a language in Key Stage 4 if they live in economically disadvantaged areas of the country or attend schools which have lower than average educational achievement. However, the dropout affects all types of school and all types of student. As the following quotes show, it is not simply a question of the less academic students dropping languages:

*'At present there are no students in Key Stage 4 studying a foreign language as the take-up at options has been deemed too low to be viable. At the moment the Head of Department is teaching three Year 10 pupils GCSE French after school.'*

Maintained school, East Midlands

*'High flyers are usually dissuaded from continuing with languages.'*  
Maintained school, East Midlands with less than 25% languages take-up

### Introduction of benchmarks

In January 2006, the then Minister for Schools, Jacqui Smith, wrote to all headteachers in maintained schools asking them to set a benchmark of between 50% and 90%, for the numbers of students studying languages leading to a recognised qualification at Key Stage 4. 73% of schools responding to this survey said they were aware of this requirement, but only 17% (of those where not all pupils are studying languages) said they had complied. Schools tended to be more likely to have set a benchmark where they already had more than 50% of pupils studying a language (44% of those with more than 75% take-up and 28% of those with take-up of between 50% and 75% of pupils). However, the majority of schools with less than 50% take-up have yet to set a benchmark. There is some bitterness about this expressed by a large number of respondents to the survey, e.g:

*'Benchmarking does not seem to have any effect on the Senior Leadership Team despite reminders by the Languages department.'*  
Maintained school, North West, which has experienced a severe drop this year in Year 10

*'When I pointed out the much-trumpeted KS4 benchmark, the reply was that this was the same government that had made languages optional at 14 so, no, they (the SLT) weren't going to take it seriously. Quote: "If Ofsted comes and queries the SEF, we'll just nod our heads and when they've gone, we'll forget about".'*  
Maintained School, East of England

### Languages offered at Key Stage 4

99% of all maintained schools offer French at Key Stage 4; 71% German; and 57% Spanish. French and German have seen mainly decreases in pupil numbers over the past three years. However, while 21% of schools report decreases in Spanish, 30% have seen increases and 17% of all schools now offering Spanish have introduced it in the last three years.

There has been growth, albeit from a low base, in provision for some lesser-taught languages in both the state and independent sectors. Italian is offered by 9% of maintained schools and 18% of independent schools. 4% of state secondary schools now offer Chinese, Russian or Japanese, but this compares with 18%, 12% and 7% respectively for the independent sector. The introduction of Chinese has been popular in both the maintained and independent sectors. The offer of Urdu remains stronger in the state sector. Other languages offered by small numbers of schools include Arabic, Bengali, Panjabi, Latin, Gujarati, and Polish.

There is strong evidence of the continued decline in German. Many schools report that German has been phased out. Reasons for this are mixed, but include the difficulty of finding teachers; the idea among learners that German is difficult; a negative image; the growth of Spanish; and the general pressure on the second language. This is happening in both the state and independent sectors.

In the words of our respondents German is 'decreasing rapidly', 'being squeezed out', 'sidelined': 'The decline of German seems inevitable and sad.'

### Independent schools

Between 2005 and 2006, the proportion of independent schools with all pupils studying a language in KS4 has decreased. However, the majority of independent schools still have more than 75% of pupils studying a language. This indicates that, although some independent schools may be taking advantage of the national situation to let a small

number of pupils drop a language, they are still maintaining the basic position that a language is a curriculum expectation.

The overall language trend in the independent sector, as noted in previous years, is a move from German to Spanish, together with an increase in 'new' languages. There are significant increases in the provision of Spanish and Italian, as well as a fair proportion of schools offering Chinese in the independent sector.

*'We require all pupils to study a language to GCSE, and a second European language is an option (taken up by 50% of the year group), started in Year 9, our first year. The growth of 'oriental languages' – Arabic and Chinese – is gathering as it moves from individual lessons to timetabled classes, mostly early takers of French GCSE in Years 9 and 10, who can accelerate to AS French or take up one of these languages ab initio.'*

Independent school, South West where all pupils study a language to GCSE

### Who promotes take-up for languages?

Respondents were asked for the first time to say who is involved in promoting languages in their school. The responses show that in the majority of schools, there has been little attempt to support the languages department in maintaining numbers once languages has become an optional subject. Previous surveys have highlighted the need for proactive support given that the benefits of studying another language are not self-evident to young teenagers, particularly those with little experience of foreign travel.

Senior Leadership Teams are active in 38% of schools; however careers staff are involved in only 10% of maintained schools. In the independent sector, careers staff take a more proactive role in promoting languages, but business and the community are less likely to be involved. There is scant involvement of some key influencers who could help pupils to become more aware of the benefits of language learning: figures given below refer to the percentage of maintained schools saying these groups are involved (independent sector figures in brackets).

Senior Leadership Team	38	(37)
Other pupils	13	(16)
Careers staff	10	(23)
Year staff	10	(12)
Members of the local community, e.g. business, universities	7	(4)
Governors	6	(3)
Parents	4	(9)

Where the wider school and community are involved in providing positive messages about languages (and it is encouraging to see that all the groups mentioned have some involvement), there is a clear correlation with better take-up. For example, careers staff are actively involved in promoting languages in 18% of schools which have all pupils taking languages, but only in 7–8% of schools where take-up is less than 50%. Similarly, Year staff, members of the local community, governors, and parents, as well as Senior Management, all appear to be contributing to higher levels of take up where they are involved. Two contrasting experiences are reported below:

*'We are very lucky because the Principal is a languages teacher and the Senior Leadership Team and governors are very supportive.'*  
Maintained, Specialist Technology College, East of England with more than 75% languages take-up

*'As a department, we try hard to promote languages but we get no support from SMT. The school has an "open" option system and basically one either sinks or swims: it's the survival of the fittest.'*  
Maintained school, East of England with less than 25% languages take-up

There is much more potential for all these groups to be involved in discussing the benefits of language learning with pupils and creating a positive climate for languages. Indeed, if numbers are to rise their involvement may well be a necessity. Given the existence of Aimhigher and initiatives to widen participation in university education, there is a surprising lack of involvement with higher education institutions. The Routes into Languages project recently announced by HEFCE will help promote regional collaboration between universities and schools. University Schools of Education were not mentioned specifically, although CLT is aware of good practice in that sector, which could be developed further.

### Evidence of innovation

Only a small proportion of responding schools offered any alternative accreditation to GCSE – 22% of maintained schools and 9% of independent schools. This proportion is very similar to previous years, indicating that there is little momentum yet behind providing alternative courses which might be better suited to the needs of particular groups of pupils. It may be that schools are happy to see pupils take another subject in place of a language and see no need to provide alternative courses, or they may still be considering possibilities. A fair proportion of schools mentioned that they were currently looking into alternative accreditation and they may need incentives or support in taking this further. The lack of take-up for alternative qualifications makes the outcome of the review of GCSE for languages all the more important.

The proportion of schools offering fast-tracking for some pupils to take GCSE in Year 10 or earlier has not increased since last year (27%). Once again, this tends to affect small numbers of pupils, often students who speak the language at home, according to teachers' comments. Over half of the schools with fast-tracking had 10% or fewer pupils doing this. There is little information available about progression pathways for students who take their GCSE a year early, and this needs further investigation.

In the Specialist Language Colleges particularly, but not exclusively, there are some very encouraging examples of innovation:

*'We have recently been very encouraged by after-school classes where parents, staff and pupils have all learnt together. Fifteen took Spanish GCSE in a year and gained an A–C pass. We now have German in a year; Chinese beginners; Spanish for Tourists; Russian club. There is a positive take-up.'*

Specialist Language College, East of England

Maintained schools are more innovative than the independent sector when it comes to offering other curriculum subjects through the medium of a foreign language. 4% of state schools offer this (i.e. 32 of the survey respondents), fewer than half of which are Specialist Language Colleges and a further 9% (84 responding schools) are considering doing so, as opposed to 2% of independent schools already implementing this approach and a further 4% interested. This is a particularly interesting finding which indicates scope for developing the interest expressed through appropriate support.

### The options system

The Language Trends 2005 Key Stage 4 survey stressed the importance of balanced and managed options system if languages in Key Stage 4 are to thrive. Evidence from this year's survey underlines this still further. Many schools report that there is still a 'free for all'

when it comes to choosing optional subjects in Year 9, with pressure on languages coming from more vocational and practical subjects. As in 2005, many of the most able students also choose to take subjects they see as being easier options.

Linked to this – and much more widely reported this year than in previous years – is a tendency in many schools, especially those specialist colleges which are not Language Colleges, for a very directed Key Stage 4 curriculum with little room left for optional subjects. A significant number of respondents cited the BTEC examination as having an impact:

*'One BTEC subject has been introduced as compulsory at KS4, counting as four GCSEs and, therefore, pupils can only choose one optional GCSE. Many pupils express a wish to continue with a language, but limited choices means we compete with all the humanities, graphics, art, textiles, design, and technology and drama and, also introduced this year, additional science.'*

Maintained school, West Midlands, Specialist Maths and Computing College with under 50% languages take-up

Able pupils being directed to three sciences was also having an adverse effect on languages take-up. A number of schools, however, spoke positively of how there were policies in operation in their schools which meant that pupils were encouraged to select a balanced and appropriate range of subjects at Key Stage 4 and in these situations the number of students continuing to study languages was usually high.

*'An option system at KS4 was introduced last year to provide choice in languages and humanities subjects. Theoretically, students can opt for two languages or two humanities, but practically the vast majority do one language plus one humanities subject. We agreed this between departments to avoid competition between us for the most able students, and because we believe a balanced curriculum is more appropriate for the vast majority of students.'*

Maintained school, North West with more than 75% languages take-up

### Key Stage 3

Nearly all schools reported that all pupils were studying a language in Years 7, 8 and 9. Some teachers told us of specific policy changes to languages at Key Stage 3 in their schools. The most-frequently reported change was that curriculum time for language learning was being cut:

*'Language lessons have been cut in KS3 from three per week to one – it's going to be even more difficult to attract students into languages.'*

Maintained school, West Midlands, Specialist Arts College with less than 25% languages take-up

Another development reported by a very small number of schools was that Key Stage 3 itself is being shortened:

*'Along with other subjects, Languages has been affected by a shortened KS3, with pupils make option choices at end of Year 8.'*

Maintained school, West Midlands with less than 25% languages take-up

### Dual linguists

The opportunity to study more than one language is important for our next generation of professional linguists – those who we need to specialise in languages at university rather than studying a language in combination with another subject. There are already very serious shortages of English mother-tongue interpreters, translators and other specialists. The majority of schools (69%) do provide opportunities for pupils to take more than one language and this proportion is not significantly changed from previous years.

However, take-up tends to be very low and the decline in the number

of dual linguists was widely reported. The pressure on the second language begins in Key Stage 3 and is particularly marked at Key Stage 4. The Specialist Language Colleges are maintaining second and even third languages, but many other schools appear to be struggling. Some schools are responding to this by teaching outside the normal timetable but many who did so also said that this was unsatisfactory.

*'From September 2006, only French is taught in Year 7 instead of a 50% French/Spanish option in the past.'*

Maintained school, South East, Sports College with 25–49% languages take-up

*'We have moved from a 100% GCSE take-up to a figure approximating 60%. Dual linguists at GCSE discontinued – now taught after school.'*

Maintained school, North East, Arts College with 50–75% languages take-up

Some schools are looking for ways to maintain their numbers of dual linguists:

*'We have trouble with dual language uptake at KS4 despite 50% of the year having studied two languages at Key Stage 3 in the past. From next year, Year 8 will go to Year 9 with only one language, plus they will have a choice of French or German (the one they are currently not studying) or Spanish as second language. Also, we are fast-tracking one group French, one group German from Year 8 to do GCSE in the end of Year 10. The reason for these changes is to boost the uptake of GCSE entries, particularly double linguists and also to engage gifted pupils early into AS during Year 11 to encourage them to continue to full AS and onto A2.'*

Maintained, West Midlands Science College with over 75% take-up

## Languages post-16

The situation for languages in sixth forms remains relatively stable, albeit at a low level. 90% of maintained schools offer French; 69% German; and 42% Spanish. Of those offering Spanish, one in five has recently introduced the language, and for both Spanish and French, more schools reported increases than decreases in numbers. About a third of schools reported decreases for German, although there were also some increases. Higher proportions of independent schools offer languages in the sixth form: 97% offer French; 82% German; and 77% Spanish. Italian, Chinese and Russian are also offered by about one in five independent schools.

## Conclusions

This year's survey underlines the difficulties behind achieving the order of change aspired to in the National Languages Strategy, in a context where there are many other competing demands for schools in reshaping 14–19 education. The strengthening of guidance in the form of benchmarks appears to have had little effect in the schools where it is most needed. A revival of languages 14–19 is likely to encompass a diversification of courses and of languages, but there is little evidence yet of this happening. As the Dearing Review recognises, both schools and pupils will need greater incentives for languages to flourish once again in the 14–19 phase. Given the demands on curriculum time, teacher expertise, and the move towards specialised Diplomas, it is likely that the solutions will be found through collaboration and in tandem with other developments across the whole 14–19 phase, not simply in schools in Key Stage 4.

We can see clearly for the first time this year how involvement of the whole school and wider community contributes to high take-up of languages. There is scope for much more collaborative work at school, local, regional and national level to involve groups such as careers advisers, governors, parents, universities and business – and there are already models of how this can work (e.g. Languages Work, Business Language Champions, initiatives around the European Day of Languages).

Although the overall picture is of seriously decreasing numbers, there are signs of success too. We know our Specialist Language Colleges are flourishing as test-beds for new and innovative practice. CILT's new 14–19 learning networks are helping this and other good practice to be replicated and developed. Spanish is a success story which is bucking current trends and there has been little work so far to understand the reasons behind its appeal to teenagers, or what attraction other languages might have. In the independent sector, there is no 'market failure' of languages and no questioning of the place of languages in the curriculum. Yet, a system which prides itself on the transformative power of education is not delivering the same benefits to state pupils that parents who pay for private education expect as standard.

The three organisations responsible for this survey are very grateful to all respondents for the wealth of information they have provided. The statistical data, together with the commentary respondents provided ensure we have a highly up-to-date, representative picture of languages in Key Stage 4 to present to Lord Dearing, to inform his important review.

### Further information

The full statistical report can be downloaded from the CILT website at [www.cilt.org.uk/key/language Trends/2006/ks4.htm](http://www.cilt.org.uk/key/language Trends/2006/ks4.htm).

### Links

#### Business Language Champions

[www.cilt.org.uk/employment/employers/blc.htm](http://www.cilt.org.uk/employment/employers/blc.htm)

#### European Day of Languages

[www.cilt.org.uk/edl](http://www.cilt.org.uk/edl)

#### Languages 14–19

[www.cilt.org.uk/14-19](http://www.cilt.org.uk/14-19)

#### Languages Work

[www.languageswork.org.uk](http://www.languageswork.org.uk)

#### Specialist Language Colleges

[www.cilt.org.uk/specialistcolleges](http://www.cilt.org.uk/specialistcolleges)

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