

SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE FOR
MODERN LANGUAGES

Alternatives to French as a first foreign language in Secondary Schools

*Third Report of the National Steering Committee
for Modern Languages*

EDINBURGH

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

2s 0d [10p] NET

1. Introduction

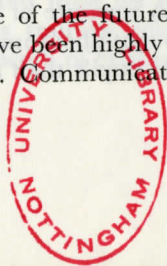
At present French is the first modern foreign language offered in the vast majority of secondary schools in Scotland. In session 1968-69 in education authority and grant-aided schools there were 166,871 pupils studying French of whom 58,519 were in the first year of their secondary course. In the same year, the corresponding figures for German were 17,692 and 1,917, for Spanish 4,191 and 800, for Russian 1,381 and 74 for Italian 866 and 174; 117 of the 174 pupils studying Italian in the first year were in one school.

While it is true that these figures show the position of the less commonly taught languages in the least favourable light and that numbers of pupils studying these languages, especially German, rise considerably in later years of the course, the fact remains that French is clearly predominant. Furthermore, since a first foreign language is studied for a longer period (5 or 6 years or even longer in areas where French is taught in the primary school compared with 3 or 4 for most second languages), it is more thoroughly mastered and therefore tends to be the one chosen for advanced study at university level. Thus the position of French as the first foreign language in the schools is still further reinforced.

In drawing attention to the imbalance in the numbers of pupils studying the major European languages there is no question of trying to impose an order of precedence for the various languages according to some hypothetical scale of values, but rather of attempting to gain practical recognition of the fact that, from a cultural and utilitarian point of view, there is a real need to increase the teaching of languages other than French. For a variety of reasons—the traditional pattern of language teaching in Scotland, cultural ties, geographical proximity, trade relations—French will probably remain the major foreign language in our schools for a long time to come. But if a greater percentage of the pupils in the first year were encouraged to choose a language other than French the position of French itself would remain secure while the situation with regard to the other European languages would be significantly improved.

2. New Times—New Needs: The case for diversification

However well our traditional pattern of language learning and teaching may have met the requirements of the past, it will be inadequate for those of the future. Since the end of the Second World War there have been highly significant social, economic and educational changes. Communications throughout the world are



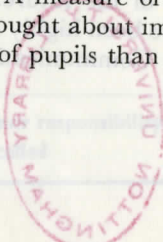
swifter and more highly developed than ever before. Increasing numbers of people travel abroad on business and on holiday. Recent investigations carried out by the Confederation of British Industry have shown that Britain's trade with English speaking countries is declining and that commercial and industrial relations with Europe are becoming closer. As a result, interest in all aspects of European life is growing and more and more people appreciate the value of learning a variety of foreign languages. Whether or not Britain enters the Common Market, her comparative isolation from the countries of the European mainland is a thing of the past and her involvement with the peoples of Europe will continue to grow.

3. A new view of the nature of language. New methods of language learning and teaching

Just at a time when the new needs outlined in the previous section are making imperative a reconsideration of the aims and methods of traditional language teaching, and at a time when, through the introduction of comprehensive education, study of a modern foreign language is being offered to a much wider segment of the ability range than ever before, there have been developments which have done much to bring about a fundamental reassessment of the methods of language teaching and language learning. These developments place emphasis on stages in learning a foreign language corresponding to those which a child goes through in acquiring mastery of the mother tongue. Hence the emphasis is placed first on listening, then on speaking, and later on reading and writing. It is now desirable to approach language learning on an immediately practical, direct basis. Given the flexibility of approach which has resulted, it is possible to tailor a language learning programme to suit the requirements of virtually any situation and to offer pupils of widely varying linguistic ability the opportunity to acquire some knowledge of a language. Furthermore, by the use of aural—oral methods a degree of success will be achieved whatever the language chosen.

4. Alternatives to French

It has always been possible for schools to teach German to some pupils in the first year since many language teachers are qualified in both French and German. A measure of diversity in language teaching could therefore be brought about immediately by offering German to a greater number of pupils than at present in the first



year of their secondary course. Opinion varies as to the relative difficulty of German in the early stages, but the difficulties may appear greater to teachers who adopt a more traditional, analytical approach than to those who pursue a policy aimed at giving the pupils experience of the living language by aural-oral methods.

It is generally accepted that Spanish and Italian can be studied with profit by a wide range of pupils. At present, however, the comparative scarcity of teachers with appropriate qualifications will not permit a rapid increase in the number of pupils studying these languages. (*See Appendix 1 and 2.*)

As regards Russian there is a tendency to overstress the difficulties of the language, and as a result the study of Russian has largely been confined to selected pupils. Provided reasonable objectives are laid down and the pace is suitably adjusted, many more pupils should be able to derive profit from a study of Russian even in mixed ability classes in the first year.

5. Staffing

Even though it may be thought desirable to encourage the study of major European languages other than French in the first year of the secondary course, Scottish schools are at present not equipped to do so on a large scale. As indicated above, the supply of teachers of German is probably adequate to enable immediate progress to be made with that language. But given the growing popularity of single-subject Honours degrees in a modern language (with or without a second modern language as a subsidiary subject) the position might not continue to be so favourable. In Italian, Spanish and Russian exceptional measures will have to be taken if sufficient additional teachers are to be forthcoming to permit diversification.

Whilst it might be desirable to retrain some members of language staffs in schools, to offer teachers of French or Latin a conversion course to enable them to learn Italian, Spanish or Russian, it is evident that, in the present staffing situation, it is not feasible to second teachers from the schools for this purpose for long periods in term time. Experience with the Russian course at Strathclyde suggests very strongly that several regional centres, rather than one national centre, might have a stronger appeal for more people and that a longer course fitted into evenings and weekends, allowing the teacher to travel to and from his home, might produce a better response. Part of this training might be carried out in school time within the framework of existing in-service training provision.

For teachers already in service a programme of the type envisaged would be feasible only in the cities and in the industrial belt of Scotland, generally. For teachers in less populous centres recourse might be had to FE courses, to broadcast courses offered by the Open University, or to correspondence courses supplemented by special arrangements to ensure that oral proficiency is adequately developed.

Another approach would be through students who have already decided to make a career in teaching. In this connection University departments of Italian, Spanish and Russian which do not already offer beginners' courses in these languages might consider introducing them. This would enable students who had not studied these languages at school to obtain a qualification.

A third possibility which might be investigated would be to offer a one year's intensive course in Italian, Spanish or Russian to students who have just completed a degree in modern or classical languages followed by an appropriate course of professional training, before they take up their first teaching post in the schools. The need, obviously, is not for any one policy, but for a number of policies all harnessed to the achievement of one aim, namely, the creation of a corps of language teachers with qualifications in the less commonly encountered major European languages.

6. Conclusion

It would seem to be desirable on many grounds to extend the teaching of languages other than French in our secondary schools and to institute practical measures to enable a supply of trained, qualified teachers to be made available to promote the study of alternative first languages in secondary schools. In present circumstances few schools will be in a position to offer more than 2 foreign languages in the first year. Since, however, a large number of teachers of French are also qualified in German, the possibility of offering German as an alternative to French already exists in many schools. It is not suggested that the only alternative which can be considered at present is German; wherever there are suitably qualified teachers Spanish, Italian or Russian might be offered. The provision of courses in all these languages should be extended as staff becomes available.

The administrative problems involved in implementing the recommendations of this report are discussed in *Appendix 3*. They are considerable but far from insuperable. The benefits to be gained in terms of a more balanced pattern of language teaching both

within a school and on a national scale far outweigh the difficulties which have to be faced. Some schools have already become conscious of these benefits and have begun to diversify the provision of language teaching in the first year. Others should now examine how this might be done in their own particular circumstances.

Given the fact that the majority of schools are still offering only one language in the first year, it is not surprising that the majority of schools are still offering only one language in the first year. This will be particularly true of schools which are still offering only one language in the first year. The numbers of schools offering two languages in the first year are still small, but they are increasing. This is particularly true of schools which are still offering only one language in the first year. The numbers of schools offering two languages in the first year are still small, but they are increasing. This is particularly true of schools which are still offering only one language in the first year.

APPENDIX 2

Ordinary Graduate Certificate Training at Colleges of Education—Sessions 1964-65 to 1969-70

| Year | Number of Candidates | Number of Successful Candidates |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1964-65 | 112 | 58 |
| 1965-66 | 118 | 62 |
| 1966-67 | 122 | 65 |
| 1967-68 | 128 | 68 |
| 1968-69 | 134 | 72 |
| 1969-70 | 140 | 75 |

The numbers given above refer to language-provided and not to individual subjects. This means that the same candidate may hold qualifications in two languages (French and German or French and Spanish) in the first year and a second language in the second year.

With the qualification in Modern Languages still permit a school to offer three modern languages, French, German and Italian, an arrangement which involves it in offering two of them, say French and German, and the third, say Italian, in the second language. As compared with the traditional arrangement where a school offers three modern languages, i.e. French as a

APPENDIX 1

**Honours Graduates Completing Training at Colleges of
Education—Sessions 1964-65 to 1969-70**

| | FRENCH | GERMAN | ITALIAN | SPANISH | RUSSIAN |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1964-65 | 45 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1965-66 | 32 | 20 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 1966-67 | 52 | 29 | 0 | 10 | 5 |
| 1967-68 | 45 | 32 | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| 1968-69 | 72 | 45 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| 1969-70 | 72 | 56 | 1 | 8 | 3 |

NOTE

The numbers given above refer to languages professed and not to individual graduates. This means that the same graduate may hold qualifications in two languages, *eg* French and German or French and Spanish.

APPENDIX 2

**Ordinary Graduates Completing Training at Colleges of
Education—Sessions 1964-65 to 1969-70**

| | FRENCH | GERMAN | ITALIAN | SPANISH | RUSSIAN |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1964-65 | 108 | 75 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| 1965-66 | 114 | 74 | 5 | 7 | 7 |
| 1966-67 | 112 | 79 | 7 | 12 | 4 |
| 1967-68 | 126 | 74 | 8 | 9 | 3 |
| 1968-69 | 144 | 94 | 6 | 10 | 4 |
| 1969-70 | 185 | 100 | 9 | 18 | 8 |

NOTE

The numbers given above refer to languages professed and not to individual graduates. This means that the same graduate may hold qualifications in two languages *eg* French and German or French and Spanish.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

1. Staffing Requirements

Given flexibility in the qualifications of the staff of the Modern Languages Department and the possibility of arranging pupils in viable teaching-groups, the provision of one or more alternatives to French in SI does not immediately create a need for additional staff. It must be appreciated, however, that a commitment has been entered into which will continue to SVI. If the alternative language is made available to one First Year class only, by the time SIV and SV are reached, there may be un-economic use of staff. This will be particularly so where the first year class is a mixed-ability group, a considerable proportion of which may give up the study of the language after one, two, or three years. Of a class of 35 in SI, fewer than 10 pupils may be left in SV and of these some will be preparing for the Higher grade and some for the Ordinary grade of the Scottish Certificate of Education. This problem will not arise, or will be minimal, if two, or preferably three classes in the same year can be given the alternative language.

A problem can also be created if a language is introduced in SI of the course where only one teacher of this language is available. If this teacher leaves the school for any reason then pupils may be committed to the study of a language for which no tuition is available. In these circumstances it may be preferable to introduce the new language as an option in SV or SVI where pupils are less likely to be left in an impossible position because of staff changes. When Education Authorities are considering how to allocate staff within their area they might examine the case for ensuring as far as possible that at least two teachers of less commonly taught languages are present in one school rather than allocating them singly as a matter of principle to different schools.

The arrangements for the provision of a second modern language in SII or SIII, must also be carefully considered. Are those pupils who start with a language other than French to be offered French as a second modern language? If so, an additional and continuing commitment is created for the remaining four or five years of the secondary course—almost equivalent of a full teacher. If not, then pupils choosing a language other than French as their first modern foreign language must be informed at the outset either that it will not be possible for them to take up the study of a second modern language or that they will be restricted to a language other than French.

When the qualifications of the Modern Languages staff permit a school to offer three modern languages, *eg* French, German and Italian, an arrangement worth considering is to offer two of these, say French and German, as alternative first languages, and the third, say Italian, as the sole second language. As compared with the traditional arrangement where a school offers three modern languages, *viz* French as a first

modern language and German and Italian as alternative second languages, this arrangement may actually result in an economy in the use of staff. Its disadvantage is that it may rule out a popular combination of languages, *eg* French/German.

Where it is proposed to introduce an alternative first modern language, the first step should be to calculate carefully the additional staffing commitment involved. This commitment should then be considered in the light of the staffing position and of rival claims for the use of any staffing margin—teaching of a modern language to a wider ability range in SI and SII, reduction in the size of teaching-groups, etc. It is unlikely that the extra commitment will preclude the introduction of an alternative language in the large secondary school; in the smaller secondary school this development may be possible only where the staffing position is relatively favourable.

2. Consultation with Parents

It is generally accepted in modern education that weight should be attached to parents' wishes; it is also desirable that parental choice should be exercised in an informed way. This is particularly important in the choice of a first modern language; for parents who have learned French at school may well prefer the same language for their children, either because they feel they can help them with their homework or because they consider it is the accepted thing. The choice must be made before the pupils enter the secondary school, as first year classes must be made up before the start of the new session. It is therefore desirable to invite parents to a meeting in the secondary school in June at which the options can be stated and the reasons for offering a choice explained.

A problem which must be faced is the possibility that a pupil taking a language other than French may move to a new school where this language is not available. Difficulties will be created both for the pupil and his new school. While the position will gradually improve as alternative languages are introduced more generally, at the present time it is probably advisable that any pupil who is at all likely to move in the near future should make the safe choice of French. Parents should be well warned in advance of this problem. A suitable occasion would be the meeting envisaged above for the explanation of options.

It is unreasonable that considerations affecting one subject should lead to an imbalance in the size of first year classes. Normally viable teaching-groups of approximately equal size are essential. (An exception may be made where pupils can be set for the modern language in a number of teaching-groups greater than the number of first year classes, *eg* where 5 classes each of 38 pupils can be set for their modern languages, the 190 pupils may be divided into 4 teaching-groups each of 35 pupils for French and 2 teaching-groups each of 25 pupils for the alternative language.) To give a measure of flexibility parents who have no strong views should be invited to leave the allocation to the school.

After the meeting, the parents' wishes should be indicated on a form (perhaps a tear-off slip to the letter of invitation to the meeting) and returned to the secondary school through the headmasters of the primary school.

3. School Organisation

In the Memorandum on Modern Languages in SI and SII of the Comprehensive School, issued by the National Steering Committee for Modern Languages, it was suggested that machinery should exist from the beginning of SI for setting, either full or partial. Where there is full setting, it is immaterial whether or not pupils are allocated to first year classes according to their choice of modern language, as they can be regrouped for their instruction in that subject. Where there is partial setting, there are strong arguments for timetabling all the pupils studying an alternative modern language at the one time. Take the case where two classes out of seven are studying German and the remaining five classes studying French. If classes IABC and classes IDEFG are set together and the two classes studying German are classes IFG, then the pupils can be regrouped according to their proficiency in German after a period, in the manner recommended in the National Steering Committee's memorandum. If, on the other hand, IC and IG are the two classes studying German, then the pupils cannot be regrouped and the two classes must remain as mixed ability groups—an arrangement which after a time has disadvantages. There is one case where it may have to be tolerated—where staffing considerations make it necessary to use the same teacher for both the German classes.

Another situation which was quite common in the past, but which is gradually disappearing as the notion of a two-year period of orientation and assessment gains ground, is the streaming of pupils in SII in accordance with their performance in SI. Clearly some modification of this practice would be necessary if there were a first year class studying an alternative language. The problem can be resolved in one of two ways. Either the pupils studying the alternative language can be dealt with separately and kept as a mixed-ability group; or setting, full or partial, can be introduced for modern languages.

4. Conclusion

The administrative problems of providing alternatives to French as a first modern language are considerable, but not, in most cases, insuperable. They should be carefully considered beforehand in the light of the conditions obtaining in the individual school.



© Crown copyright 1971

Published by
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

To be purchased from
13a Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2 3AR
49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6HB
109 St Mary Street Cardiff CF1 1JW
Brazenose Street, Manchester M60 8AS
50 Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3DE
258 Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2HE
80 Chichester Street, Belfast BT1 4JY
or through booksellers

SBN 11 490504 5

