

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES STRATEGY 2003–2011

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The Government's decision to withdraw almost all of the funding targeted at languages in schools, and to remove most public support for languages has effectively ended the 8 year National Languages Strategy for England. A proportion of the funding previously allocated to the primary languages initiative is now included in schools' general budgets, as is the dedicated funding for language colleges, but these amounts are no longer earmarked or identified.



FUNDING FOR LANGUAGES 2005–2011

In 2005 the 'Boost for Languages' increased funding for The National Languages Strategy from around £10million per year to nearly £45million. Most of this additional funding was to support primary workforce development. Additional funding was also made available for Language Colleges. Following the Languages Review of 2007 the budget was increased to £55 million per year, including –

- £35 million for primary languages (ITE, work force development, national and regional support)
- £5 million for CILT (in addition to primary languages support)
- £6 million for secondary support including regional support networks (eventually 'Links into Languages')
- £2 million for the Open School for Languages
- £2 million for a promotion campaign.

- £1 million for promoting links between schools and University (Routes into Languages)

There was also funding for national coordination of the strategy, for research, for the Languages Ladder, for Community Languages, for languages and sport projects and to support international links and exchanges. Language College funding (including the extra £30000 per year for each school) was not included in these totals.

In April 2011 this funding was cut. Two thirds of the primary funding was reallocated to the general schools' budget. A small amount of short term funding was provided for the CFBT/CILT¹. From the autumn a tendering process which is currently in train will release £3.5 million over 18 months to support primary and secondary languages.

In place of a national strategy the Government has initiated a review of the school curriculum, which could strengthen the statutory position of languages (in 2014) and has established the English 'bacc'² which should encourage some increased take-up of languages post 14.

We will consider later how best to take forward the argument for languages in this new situation. First, however, I would like to reflect on what has been done in the last 8 years, both to help learn the lessons that do need to be learned and to facilitate future progress.

¹Following the removal of most of CILT's DfE funding, the organisation was partly merged with the CFBT

²A new recording measure of the number pupils achieving good grades (A*-C) at GCSE in English, Maths, Science, A language and A humanities subject (actually History or Geography)

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES STRATEGY 2003–2011

UPDATE MAY 2011

Where were we then?

The turn of the century was an exciting and challenging time for languages in the UK. Exciting because there was a national debate on languages, stimulated by the Nuffield Inquiry of 1999 and carried through into the European Year of Languages (2001). Challenging because despite this increased interest, despite the advent of The National Curriculum and the introduction of languages for all in secondary schools, some major fault lines remained in languages provision.

Primary languages for very few

In 1999 there was virtually no language provision in the primary state sector – some committed LEAs (LAs) and schools had maintained non statutory provision after the abandonment of an earlier Government primary languages initiative (French from 8). There were also a few pilots, and clubs. According to a QCA survey 24% of schools offered some kind of languages provision to some pupils but mainly outside the curriculum and often on a voluntary basis. Even the successful Government-funded 'Early Languages Learning Initiative' of 1999 run by CILT was limited in its scope.

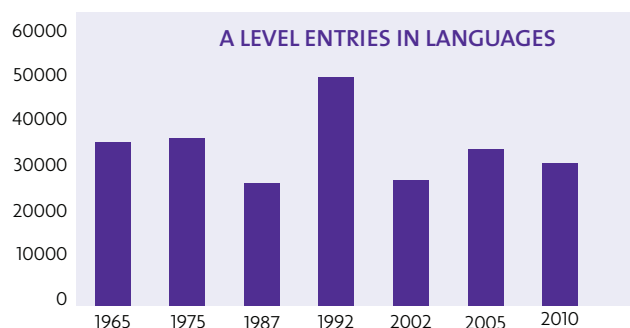
Pupil disaffection post 14

Although Languages were compulsory 11-16 (The National Curriculum had been fully implemented in Year 11 by 1997), there were issues of motivation and performance post 14. GCSE entries were less than 80%.

Large numbers of pupils were 'disapplied' from languages, and many Head Teachers were concerned about teacher recruitment.

Decline post 16

There was a high rate of drop out from languages post 16. Numbers entering for Languages 'A level' were lower than in the 1960s (after significant expansion between 1988 and 1992 there had been a steady decline).



Languages were not well integrated in vocational courses and take-up in FE was patchy

Limited provision in Higher and Adult Education

Numbers taking traditional University honours degrees in languages were declining, but there was significant growth of combined courses including a language.

There remained great enthusiasm and high take up among adults, but mainly at elementary level.



What has been done since?

From these rather unpromising beginnings, a great deal has been achieved in the last 8 years. There has been a national commitment to increased language capability (backed up by significant financial investment), and we have developed a collaborative model of implementation at local and regional level which has been a model for deep rooted curricular change. This is not to ignore the remaining major fissures in the system to which we will return.

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES STRATEGY 2003–2011

UPDATE MAY 2011

A transformation in primary schools

The introduction of languages into KS2 has been an outstanding success. By 2008 92% of schools were offering a language in curriculum time, 69% to all pupils in KS2. Those percentages have certainly increased since then. This programme has been implemented enthusiastically by teachers and received with great enjoyment by pupils. Key factors in this success story have been the development of a shared national vision about languages in primary schools, organised around the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages, combined with local coordination and creativity in implementing the vision. Primary schools have responded enthusiastically to this initiative, as to the opportunities offered for the internationalisation of the primary curriculum. There has also been significant investment in imaginative training programmes in initial teacher training, notably the collaborative courses with French, German, Spanish and Italian institutions.

New Possibilities for Secondary Languages

The Languages Review of 2007 ('Dearing Review') was able to build on a number of existing initiatives (The Languages Ladder, CLIL, HE/School partnerships for example) to develop a more relevant and coherent model for the languages curriculum in schools and beyond. This involved key strands such as functional competence for all pupils, knowledge about language

(grammar), the ability to learn a language and intercultural understanding. These objectives were supported by the new secondary curriculum and the revised Key Stage 3 Framework and by major national and local initiatives on CLIL, transition, pupil talk and ICT (among others). GCSE was reformed to meet the requirements of this more relevant curriculum (although problems still remain). The Languages Ladder was developed to recognize success in language learning in a range of skills, and a related graded assessment system – Asset Languages – was created. The Languages Diploma was developed as an innovative, challenging and broadly welcomed new qualification.

Support and Promotion

High quality national, regional and local support for language teaching was put in place and was having impact on the ground. Key players included ALL, British Council, CILT, Links into Languages, SSAT, Specialist Language Colleges as well as every local authority (primary initiative) and HEIs throughout England. Through initiatives such as 'Linked Up' and the CILT networks teachers were working collaboratively to take forward their understanding and develop better pedagogy.

A major effort at promoting languages was under way ('Try life in another language' 'Je suis un rock star', Languages work) and was meeting with measurable success.

What challenges remained (and still remain)?

The general direction established by the Languages Strategy was therefore a good one, and much was achieved. It would, however, be wrong to claim that all was well. One abiding weakness stemmed from the decision to make languages optional in Key Stage 4 – a decision taken outside the Languages Strategy. There were some understandable reasons for this – difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff, the lack of achievement and engagement of

many pupils during the 1990s, the subsequent effect of performance measures – Ofsted and the School League Tables – and the desire to personalise the post 14 curriculum by offering a wider choice of subjects and assessment pathways. However the decision was too simplistic and too brutal and it sent out the wrong message at a time when we were seeking to promote and strengthen languages. It also had an impact on the coherence of languages education and on learner capability, in particularly in secondary schools.

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES STRATEGY 2003–2011

UPDATE MAY 2011

Post 14 decline

Since 2003, and especially following the Languages Review, much effort has been expended on the secondary sector to counter-balance the effects both of falling take-up and of indifferent pupil progress³. A lack of continuity in language learning through from primary to the end of schooling was exacerbated by the stress on examinations and performance tables and, it has to be said, by some of the constrictions of the original Key Stage 3 Framework, both of which had an effect on the creativity of teachers and the engagement of learners.

Progress has certainly been made, notably in relation to the curriculum and to assessment systems. But this is far from complete, nor is it firmly embedded in practice. As a result engagement post 14 remains problematic, with only 44% of pupils entered for a GCSE or equivalent in 2009 (a fall from 78% in 2000). Even this low figure conceals large disparities (from 8% to 67% of pupils completing Key Stage 4 in one typical low performing authority for example). Performance is also very uneven, particularly in relation to pupil's speaking abilities.

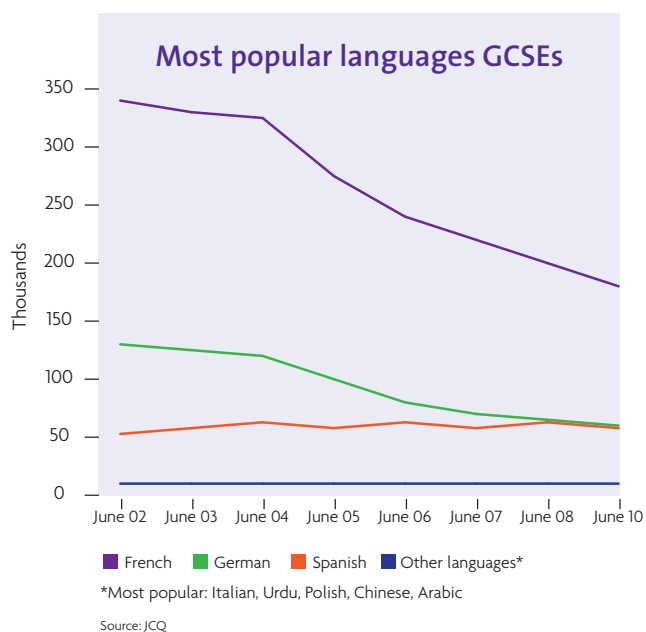
Post 16 take-up has not deteriorated further as many anticipated (A level entries actually recovered between 2002 and 2005 and have remained relatively stable since then), but nor has it significantly improved. Overall numbers are still lower than in 1965.

Primary Fragility

The success at primary is unquestionable but it remains fragile. Despite considerable progress in training and retraining the workforce and professional support from LAs, Universities and secondary schools, the language skills of teachers and assistants in KS2 are not secure. This has an effect on the two main developmental challenges for primary languages which are to ensure sound progression through the Key Stage and solid transition into secondary. According to both OFSTED and research carried out by Cambridge University, too few Secondary schools are yet taking account of and so building on the experience of primary languages. So long as primary languages remain a desirable but non statutory option, this is likely to remain the case.

Uncertainty beyond school

Although we have developed a vision of coherent languages education from the beginning of schooling to adulthood, this has not been translated into actual provision. In Further Education, languages are under threat, in particular from funding systems and financial cuts. Many graduates are not competent in another language at a time when the labour market is increasingly internationalised. Language competence seems to be regarded as important by business but this is not reflected in national training and skills priorities or in most vocational course offers. It is difficult to include a language in the 'vocational' diplomas.



³Ofsted – Modern Languages Achievement and Challenge 2007-2010
Cambridge University – Language Learning at Key Stage 3 2009

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES STRATEGY 2003–2011

UPDATE MAY 2011

Future Contexts – What can be done?

I have no doubt that the Strategy has been a success, but also that it is seriously unfinished business. The withdrawal of Government support for languages as a specific priority is clearly therefore a setback. It should not be forgotten that if languages are to thrive – even survive – in a climate which is often still too hostile, then we need not only a vision of their importance, but the means to support and nurture some still tender shoots.

In the absence of a Strategy we therefore have to support positive policy initiatives and to find possibilities for future engagement, learning lessons from both the successes and the failures of the past. In that respect funding is certainly important, but it is not the only condition for success. Other things, over which we have greater control are equally important. Firstly we need a clear articulation of our vision for languages, a vision which can be understood and supported by many people, in policy, in schools and in society. This means both understanding and demonstrating how our languages agenda relates to broader educational, social and economic goals. Secondly we need a real desire and commitment to work together in order to realise that vision. In practice this will mean:

● Speaking up for Languages

There have been many positive statements on languages from the present Government, for example Michel Gove's speech at Westminster Academy where he expressed his deep concern that "fewer and fewer students are studying languages; it not only breeds insularity, it means an integral part of the brain's learning capacity rusts unused."

We must promote and disseminate these messages. We must also work together to articulate a clearer rationale for the importance of language in education, training and social life, linking this rationale to some of the major challenges of our times – globalization, economic progress, skills development, social cohesion. These arguments are still not won.

● Strengthening the languages curriculum

The curriculum review provides the opportunity for completing the task of providing statutory languages for all pupils in Key Stage 2 and for reinstating languages as core in Key Stage 4. Perhaps even more importantly, phase 2 of the review will provide space for debate on the nature of the languages curriculum, enabling us to take forward what we have learned in the past decade and also to rectify some of the fault lines in the current system.

Already the 'e-bacc' is having an effect on Head Teacher thinking, and there are signs that provision and take up in Key Stage 4 are increasing. We must welcome this initiative and also seek to strengthen it: for example by extending the range of eligible qualifications, which could make it a more inclusive recognition of success.

● Supporting pedagogy

Improved pedagogy is as always the main way to improve both take up and pupil competence. This is recognised in the Education White Paper – The Importance of Teaching. So we should build on positive developments – the teacher networks, Linked Up, CLIL discussions for example – and promote further collaborative work on key issues. As educational policy evolves there will be new possibilities for doing this, through new national initiatives and through school based and regional activity.

● Working together

In the absence of a centrally funded strategy, the way forward is through joint work, collaboration both locally and nationally, making the best of available resources. We will do everything in our power to help this process, by sharing information and facilitating discussion and debate. We urge teachers and other practitioners to join their subject associations and other local and regional networks both for support and professional development and to make their voices heard. We urge organisations and individuals to work more closely together so that we can develop a clear and united voice about languages.

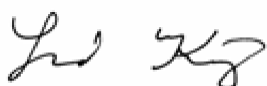
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UPDATE MAY 2011

The long term future of our country is bound up in the way that we educate the young. Language and multiculturalism are at the heart of that education, especially in this 21st century global society. To do nothing is not therefore an option. We need to learn from the past and in these more inauspicious times to do everything possible to create the conditions needed for coherence, creativity and success in languages education.

CONTACT

For further information about any aspect of this update, or to add your views to the discussion about the National Languages Strategy and the future of languages please contact enquiries@languagescompany.com



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The
Languages
Company

Promoting and supporting a National Languages Strategy

 Languages for all
Languages for life