

Modern languages closures and restructurings

These findings are the results of a survey conducted with 77 HEIs, of which replies were received from 68 (88.3% response rate). The focus here is on closures and restructurings over the past 10 years since 2014, although occasional mention is made of earlier changes. The results are divided into three groups: pre-1992 Universities in the Russell Group (requests sent to all 24 of which 22 replied); other pre-1992 Universities (requests sent to 27 institutions of which 23 replied); post-1992 Universities (sent to 26 institutions of which 23 replied). The survey only focuses on undergraduate provision. Specialist medical and other institutions, conservatoires and private universities were excluded. The survey also excludes degrees in translation and interpreting.

1. Russell Group

- Overall language degrees are holding up well in the Russell Group universities
- Since 2014, Czech has been lost in one institution, Dutch in one institution, German in one institution, Slovak in one institution, and there has been the temporary closure of Finnish and Icelandic in one institution (with the loss of external funding)
- Conversely, some institutions mention additions to the languages on offer: Polish in one institution, Italian and Korean as 'minor' languages in one institution, the reintroduction of Japanese and Chinese Studies in one institution, the reopening of provision of Dutch and Basque in one institution; another institution reports introducing two new BSc joint degree programmes with a language
- In a number of universities languages (or formerly individual language departments) have been brought into larger units (e.g. School of Modern Languages); in two institutions the current restructurings are being viewed with some concern for the future of languages
- A number of universities are undergoing curriculum reviews, sometimes as part of wider university projects, sometimes just affecting the Humanities. The motivation is to streamline degrees, reduce optionality and cut the number of programmes. This potentially has a bigger impact on smaller and joint programmes, but also the viability of single Honours degrees, for programming and accounting reasons; for these reasons languages may be particularly adversely affected.

2. Other pre-1992 Universities

- It should be noted that, before 2014, four pre-1992 institutions lost all their modern languages degree programmes, although they have all kept Institution Wide Languages Programmes (IWLP)
- The picture is much less positive for this sector overall. Since 2014, three institutions have lost all their degree level provision, one has lost all its modern languages with the exception of Irish (and some Mandarin through its Confucius Institute), and one other didn't offer languages degrees in the period under consideration
- Of the eighteen remaining institutions that replied, only four report no changes in either the range of languages on offer and/or their staffing. One institution reported compulsory redundancies, another is currently under threat of compulsory redundancies, whilst there had been voluntary redundancies, early retirement schemes and redeployment of staff at seven institutions. Two of these noted the consequential rise in teaching load for the remaining staff and resulting stress; this had been exacerbated at one institution by the additional loss of lecturer posts.

- Eleven universities reported a change in the languages offered: since 2014, Italian has been lost in three universities, but has replaced Portuguese in another; German has disappeared in four institutions; Russian has gone from one institution and is reported as struggling in another.
- Conversely, Mandarin has been added in three institutions at degree level and at beginners level at another, BSL has been added in one institution, and Korean at a lower level in another.

3. Post-92 universities

- This is where the most attrition has occurred. To get as full a picture as possible for this sector, results from the survey have been supplemented at times by information from UCAS, etc. Pre-2014, seventeen institutions had already lost their modern languages degrees, and since 2014 another eleven have been added to this list, making a total of twenty-eight closures. This has been achieved through a mixture of compulsory redundancies, voluntary redundancies and redeployment of staff
- This leaves ML degrees of some sort surviving in just ten institutions, although often with a (sometimes very) reduced or changed list of languages offered. According to the survey, Italian and German have been particularly affected. One institution is now only left with Mandarin, another with just BSL. One institution has replaced degrees in French, German and Spanish with degrees in BSL, Japanese and Korean
- In five other universities, where the BAs in languages have been lost, a language is taught as a minor subject with international business
- Since post-1992 universities are typically lower-tariff institutions that have often been favoured by those from socioeconomically less privileged and non-traditional backgrounds and from under-represented groups, there are now fewer possibilities to study modern languages available for these groups, who may, in addition, be unable to move away from their home area.

4. Some other general points

- Brexit was cited as a problem for student travel abroad and the recruitment of language assistant posts
- Some universities report pressure on the Year Abroad, with an increase in requests for exemptions
- As Becky Muradas-Taylor has noted,¹ there are cold spots emerging, for instance, there is no degree level provision of Russian or Italian in NI, and German can only be taken as a Minor in 'International Business with German'.

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¹ Muradás-Taylor, B. & P. Taylor (2023). "Cold spots" in language degree provision in England, *The Language Learning Journal*, 52(1), 92-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2023.2257705>; Muradás-Taylor, B. 'Undergraduate language programmes in England: A widening participation crisis'. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 22(3), 322-342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222231156812>.