



The economic case for language learning and the role of employer engagement

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Written by

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www.educationandemployers.org

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Brian Lightman
General Secretary
Association of School and College Leaders



School and College leaders have for many years been deeply concerned about the decline in Modern Foreign Languages which, in spite of the numerous reports and initiatives, has not been reversed. Yet, we know that language acquisition at school is a passport to real opportunities in later life. This fact has been recognised by teachers at all levels who are working hard to ensure that young people have a better understanding of why languages are valued across a wide range of careers within learning rooted in real life experiences.

This paper sets out a compelling case for young people to learn languages and describes convincingly the benefits to employers. Schools and colleges now need employers to bring their voices into the classroom to communicate this argument to young people and their parents.

The organisations responsible for this publication are to be congratulated on the proactive part they are playing in taking this agenda forward.

The combination of the Taskforce's work to link schools with employers and give young people first-hand information about why languages will open doors for them and CfBT's support in providing high-quality resources and professional development for language teachers is a powerful one. I am very pleased to lend ASCL's full support to this important work and urge employers to join in.



Roland Rudd
Chairman
Business for New Europe



The last twenty years have seen a rapid decline in language learning in the UK, and it's a problem. It is inhibiting our businesses, our national prosperity and even our international standing. Quite simply, British businesses will not remain competitive unless we can communicate effectively and interact with customers and partners around the world.

While language prowess can bring huge commercial benefits, as this report sets out, our national language deficit effectively acts as a tax on trade. And if the UK wishes to trade its way out of this downturn, it is a tax we can ill afford to pay.

The ability to speak a foreign language enriches us both as individuals and potential employees. Uniquely, language learning requires young people not only to develop linguistic ability, but to develop abilities to listen, understand and communicate effectively – skills that are highly valued in the modern workplace. Young people need to know that both the specific and transferable skills that result from learning languages are highly sought after by employers across a wide range of business sectors. But the message is not getting through.

And who is better placed to remedy this than employers themselves? By coming forward to work in partnership with teachers to close this information gap, employers can help both young people and the wider economy. As such, I fully endorse this timely report.

Executive Summary

EMPLOYER DEMAND

The decline in language learning is holding back both young people and UK plc as a whole. In the CBI's 2010 survey of employer satisfaction with the skills of both graduates and school-leavers, foreign language ability ranked last out of twelve skills areas. At the same time, foreign language skills are becoming an increasingly big issue in vacancies that employers find difficult to fill, across a wide range of sectors and professional levels.

It is not just fluency that is in demand; almost two-thirds of employers say that they are interested in basic 'conversational ability'. This suggests that the level of competence which can be gained in learning a language whilst at school can be a major advantage in the labour market. Evidence is underpinned by a number of US and UK studies suggesting that meaningful wage premiums are enjoyed by those with language abilities. Controlling for other factors, US studies have found that the effect of taking a language at school and/or university provides wage premiums of up to 4%. In the UK, studying languages at university has been shown to lead to good employment prospects. Three and a half years after graduation, more languages graduates are in work or study than their peers who studied Law, Architecture, Business or Computer Science, and earning high average wages.

DECLINE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

A comprehensive survey by the European Commission in 2006 confirmed that the UK has the worst language skills in Europe. Beginning in the 1990s, decline became more rapid after 2004 when language learning at Key Stage 4 (KS4) or GCSE level became an optional, rather than compulsory, subject of study. The decline in uptake at A level, which preceded this change, has yet to be reversed, and university enrolments are also notably low.

More concerning, perhaps, is that the opportunity to study languages is now heavily determined by the social characteristics of a pupil's school.

Less than 10% of schools with the highest proportion of Free School Meals (a key indicator of deprivation) make languages compulsory. This compares with 50% of schools with the lowest level of Free School Meals.

Furthermore, young people studying in independent schools have considerably greater opportunity to study a wider range of languages than students in the state sector.

THE EFFECT ON UK PLC

While language proficiency is in demand across the economy, it has a specific relevance to the UK's trade performance. The UK exports disproportionately to English speaking countries, and a lack of language ability is a major reason for this.

Former Treasury economic adviser, James Foreman-Peck, has calculated the effects of what he calls the 'tax on trade' represented by British relative under-investment in languages. In an updated estimate for this report, Prof. Foreman-Peck suggests that this currently equates to at least £7.3 billion, or 0.5% GDP.

Two specific studies illustrate how this 'tax' works in practice. A British Chambers of Commerce survey of 1,000 businesses in 2004 put enterprises into four groups, based on their approach to and proficiency in languages. Of those in the lowest proficiency group, only 33% had a turnover of £0.5m a year or more, as compared to 77% in the highest proficiency group.

A key area of competitive advantage for exporters lies in the quality of understanding, and responding to, market information. A study of 400 exporters found that export managers who are linguists are more likely to be discriminating about the intelligence collected, and more innovative in their decision-making.

TACKLING THE PROBLEM THROUGH EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Recent years have seen a number of initiatives designed to stem the decline in language learning, though it is yet to be reversed. In 2010, the Government announced that languages would form part of the English Baccalaureate. This may encourage some schools to place greater focus on languages, but there are broader issues with the Baccalaureate and it cannot be seen as a solution. The decline in language take-up at A level began, after all, while languages were compulsory for all young people at GCSE level.

One major barrier to uptake is the information gap that exists between young people's perceptions (often assuming that languages are irrelevant to their future) and the reality in the labour market. This is a key reason why employers can do so much good by working with teachers to bring learning to life and demonstrate its value in the workplace. Teacher demand for such involvement is high, not least because the primary message they use to encourage language learning is that it is relevant to future work.

A major recent programme of this kind involving languages was Business Language Champions now discontinued at national level. Initial evaluations suggested a significant effect on both student appreciation of languages and take-up at Key Stage 4.

There is strong wider evidence from other subjects to show that children and young people respond positively to the involvement of employers in their learning. One particularly important area is Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), where there is evidence of a strong correlation between confidence in careers choices and the number of times that a learner has interacted with employers (such as via work experience, careers talks, enterprise competitions or workplace visits).

More broadly, a systematic review by the National Foundation for Education Research of how young people learn found that real-life connections are especially important in creating relevance for pupils, and that the involvement of professionals from

outside the school is particularly welcome. It is an approach with growing international recognition: in 2010, the OECD concluded a major review by highlighting the importance of employers in education, especially when it comes to improving the transitions of young people into the labour market.

HOW EMPLOYERS BENEFIT

Employers also benefit from involvement with schools, as demonstrated in a 2010 City of London report. Volunteering in education can provide a cost effective means to develop staff, notably younger graduate recruits, and can often lead to demonstrable improvement in motivation levels. Introducing young people to an organisation can enhance awareness and reputation within the local community, and is also useful for recruitment, both in the short and long term.

In the case of languages – where young people often see languages as irrelevant to their future while at the same time as employers complain of strategic skill shortages – the role for employers is particularly clear. Employers have risen to the challenge in the past but there is demand in schools now for much more. This report has set out a business case for further involvement, and highlights the contribution employers are uniquely placed to make.

PART 01 THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Over the past decade, it is rare that a year has gone by without the publication of a major report lamenting the paucity of British linguistic ability and the crisis in language learning.

Reports such as “Languages: The Next Generation” and “A New Landscape for Languages”, (Nuffield Foundation 2000, 2003), “The National Languages Strategy in Higher Education” (DfES, 2005), Lord Dearing’s “Languages Review” (2007), the final report of the 2008 Advisory Group on Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects (HEFCE 2008), “Internationalisation of HE: A 10 Year View” (DIUS, 2008) and “Language matters more and more” (British Academy, 2011) have set out in bold terms the sharp decline of interest in modern foreign languages among young people.¹ Britain’s inadequacy in language learning is seen as a problem for many reasons: for the UK’s international position; its capacity in addressing global challenges through international partnerships; the development of sustainable community cohesion; the maintenance of the UK’s position as a global research hub and, crucially, in preparing young people as true global citizens.²

The focus of this publication, however, is more specific. It considers the economic significance of foreign language skills to the UK over a period of economic instability. Over recent years, economists have deepened their understanding of the consequences of language decline to the UK as an economic power. This work presents an overview of academic, economic and educational literature to set out in clear terms why languages matter for UK plc and how employers can work with teachers to help reverse the decline and gain benefits for themselves, as well as facilitating our nation’s economic recovery.

DEMAND FOR LANGUAGE GRADUATES

The operation of the labour market represents the truest test of employer demand for language skills. Two approaches quantify the extent of employer demand: regular surveys, using a range of methodologies, provide evidence of attitudes and immediate recruitment behaviour, while evidence from wage returns provides a firmer view of the outcomes of linguistic ability. Both approaches suggest high levels of demand for language skills in the UK as well as other English-speaking labour markets such as the United States. There is also evidence to suggest that employer demand underestimates actual need, because of complacency about the role of English.

The CBI’s annual employer surveys regularly find high levels of dissatisfaction with the language skills of graduate recruits. Given a list of twelve different skills, employer satisfaction with foreign language skills ranked bottom with 56% of respondents unsatisfied and just 3% very satisfied. Unhappiness at the level of international cultural awareness was also high – with 55% dissatisfied (Figure 1).

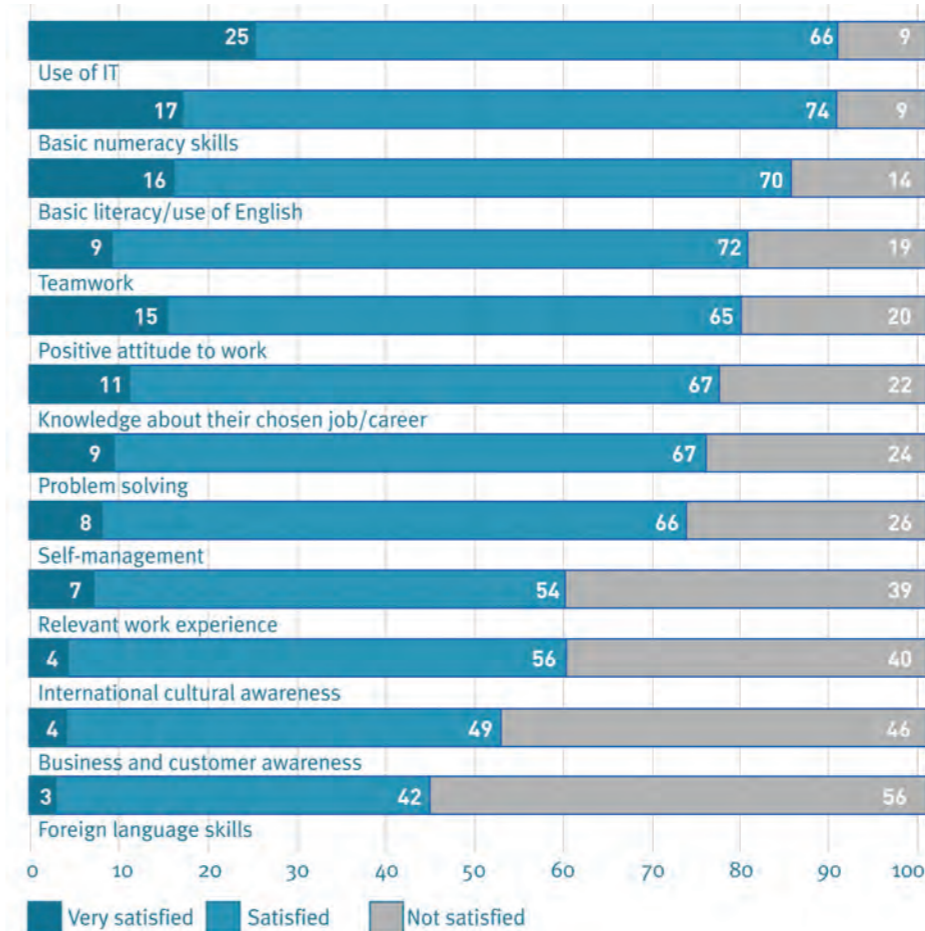
On four occasions over the last decade, the National Employers Skills Survey (NESS) has surveyed the opinions of tens of thousands of UK employers, providing data on skills levels, skills shortage vacancies (known as SSVs and defined as vacancies that are hard-to-fill due to applicants lacking the necessary skills).⁴

Considering the skills that directly contribute to current unfilled vacancies, rather than satisfaction levels with existing employees, the NESS found that of the 63,000 SSVs in England in 2009, in 18% of

cases (or 11,350), foreign language skills were among those lacking amongst applicants. This is a significant lack, even if it is not the most critical area of skill shortage cited. In many cases of course, these companies will be able to hire non-UK citizens to fulfil their language needs, suggesting that the number of jobs where a UK national with foreign language skills will have a concrete advantage is higher still.

Comparing NESS data over recent years, it is noticeable that the percentage of SSVs where foreign language skills are lacking has risen steadily since 2004, when it was just 7%. In particular, amongst the ‘professional’ category, the figure has risen from 10% in 2007 to 28% in 2009 and is witnessed across a wide range of industrial sectors. An interesting and perhaps unexpected result from the 2009 NESS survey was a high demand for language skills in elementary occupations, being a factor in 30% of such skill-shortage vacancies.

Figure 1: Employer satisfaction with graduates’ employability skills, 2010



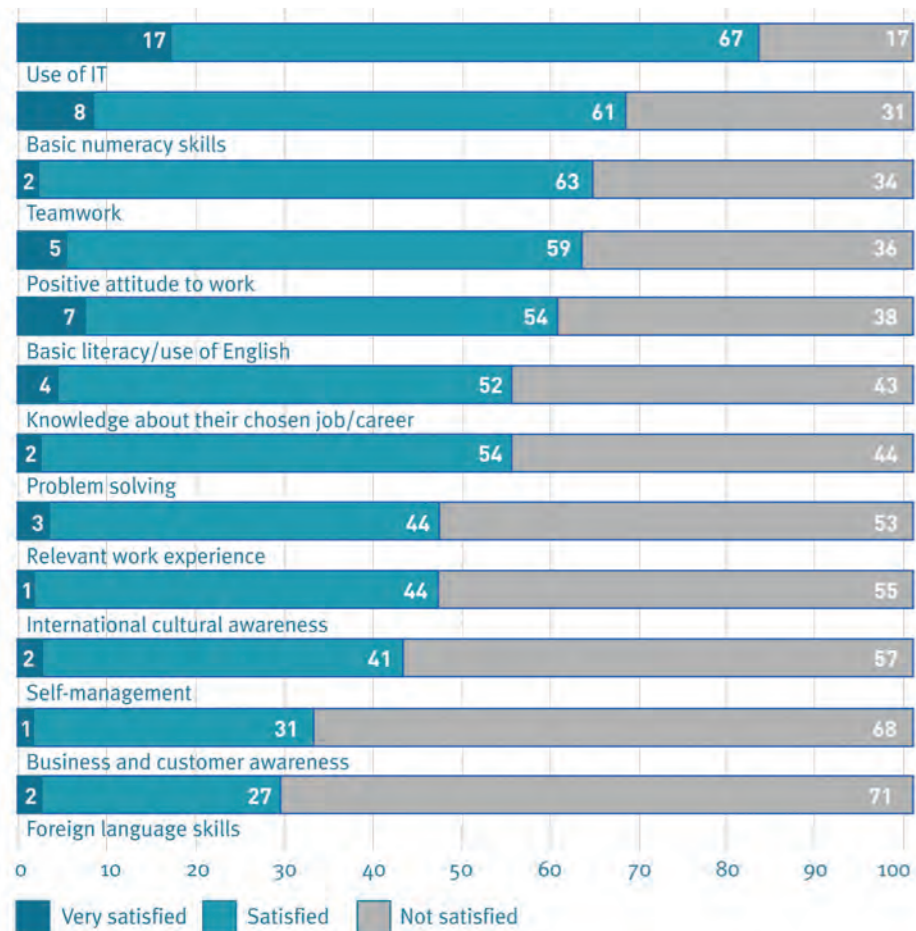
Source: CBI (2010), Education and Skills Survey. Based on responses from 694 employers. Results weighted using ONS data³

“Language skills are increasingly important in a globalised economy. Staff who can communicate at least conversationally in another language – particularly where this is coupled with an understanding of overseas business culture – can be a great asset. Linguistic proficiency helps firms to consolidate their relationships with existing overseas trading partners and develop contacts in new markets.”

– The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) 2010
Ready to grow: Education and skills survey 2010, p50

The NESS results suggest, therefore, that employer demand is not just for fluent speakers. The CBI’s 2010 survey agreed, highlighting high dissatisfaction with the linguistic abilities of school leavers as well as graduates, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Employer satisfaction with school- / college-leavers’ employability skills, 2010



Source: CBI (2010), Education and Skills Survey. Based on responses from 694 employers. Results weighted using ONS data ⁵

The same survey demonstrated that while many employers require fluent speakers, almost two-thirds – 65% – are interested in what is described as ‘conversational ability’.⁶ Such results suggest that the level of competence which can be gained in learning a language whilst at school can be a major advantage in the labour market and that linguistic ability forms an element of human capital valued within a broader assessment of an individual’s skills, knowledge and attitudes.

It might be expected, therefore, that language proficiency is connected to demonstrable employment outcomes, and there is some persuasive evidence to suggest that this is the case. A longitudinal survey by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, shows that languages graduates have good employability rates, above the average for graduates of non-vocational subjects. Indeed, they are more likely to be in work or further study 3.5 years after graduation than those who have studied law, architecture, business or computer science, subjects which are typically more closely linked to smooth career progression.⁷

Language graduates, therefore, tend to find work at a good rate; but how much do they earn? As the Higher Education Funding Council for England reported in 2008:

Modern Foreign Language graduates go into a wide variety of careers, where their many skills are recognised by employers. This is reflected in the fact that the mean salary of language graduates 3.5 years after graduation is £26,823, the highest mean salary of all of the SIV [Strategically Important and Vulnerable] subjects – ahead of that of graduates of Engineering, Mathematical Sciences, Physics and Astronomy and Chemistry.⁸

Unfortunately, in-depth research into wage premiums of those who have studied languages at lower levels is rare, especially in the UK context. The most relevant research comes from the US, though given the different educational and economic context, the findings should be treated with a degree of caution. Nonetheless, they are striking: two in-depth longitudinal analyses, exploring the connection

“college graduates with conversational knowledge of a second language earn, on average, wages that are 2%-3% higher than those without”

between subject choice and earning, both found statistically significant correlations between language study and wage premiums.

Considering school-level study, economist Joseph Altonji found the effect of studying a language at school on later earnings was “substantial”, at 4% providing a stronger premium than study of maths or science and with the greatest returns experienced by high-school leavers who did not go onto university. Controlling for general ability and other advantages, a comparable study of US college graduates by Saiz and Zoido found that ‘college graduates with conversational knowledge of a second language earn, on average, wages that are 2%-3% higher than those without’.¹⁰

Furthermore, these studies also suggest that language learning has broader benefits than simple fluency. Both papers find that many young people with language skills are recruited into job sectors which do not make direct and full use of these skills and yet they too enjoy a wage premium that still applies when controlling for other factors, such as university quality, cognitive ability and family background. This has led a number of academic commentators to ask whether there is something distinctive about the process of learning languages which develops broader skills of value to employers, such as effective and confident communication.¹¹ And recent focus group research does suggest that HR managers are increasingly recognising the wider value of language learning (See Box 1 overleaf).¹²

Box 1: Transferable skills identified by HR managers, after discussion, likely to be found among recruits with language skills:

- *Communication skills*
- *Listening skills*
- *Interpersonal skills*
- *Greater cultural understanding and awareness.*
- *Determination and discipline*
- *An ability to learn*
- *Understanding of how language works/the structure of language*

Focus group results. Seven HR managers from medium-sized enterprises (200-500 employees). Sectors: Maintenance, Music, IT, Medical, Recruitment, Architecture, Construction. Fieldwork, Spring 2010.¹³

A range of research, therefore, shows that linguistic ability is in high demand in the labour market and can provide young people with a competitive edge. Demand is, of course, intrinsically linked to supply and the flow of young people with the right skills in languages coming into the English-speaking labour market has, over recent years, been in marked decline.

THE DECLINE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

A comprehensive survey by the European Commission in 2006 confirmed that the UK has the worst language skills in Europe (see Figure 3); and there is little sign that they will improve significantly as young people come out of education and enter the labour market. The last generation has seen a decline in the number of young people studying languages at all levels, especially secondary schools and colleges.

“the overall effect of decline has been sharp”

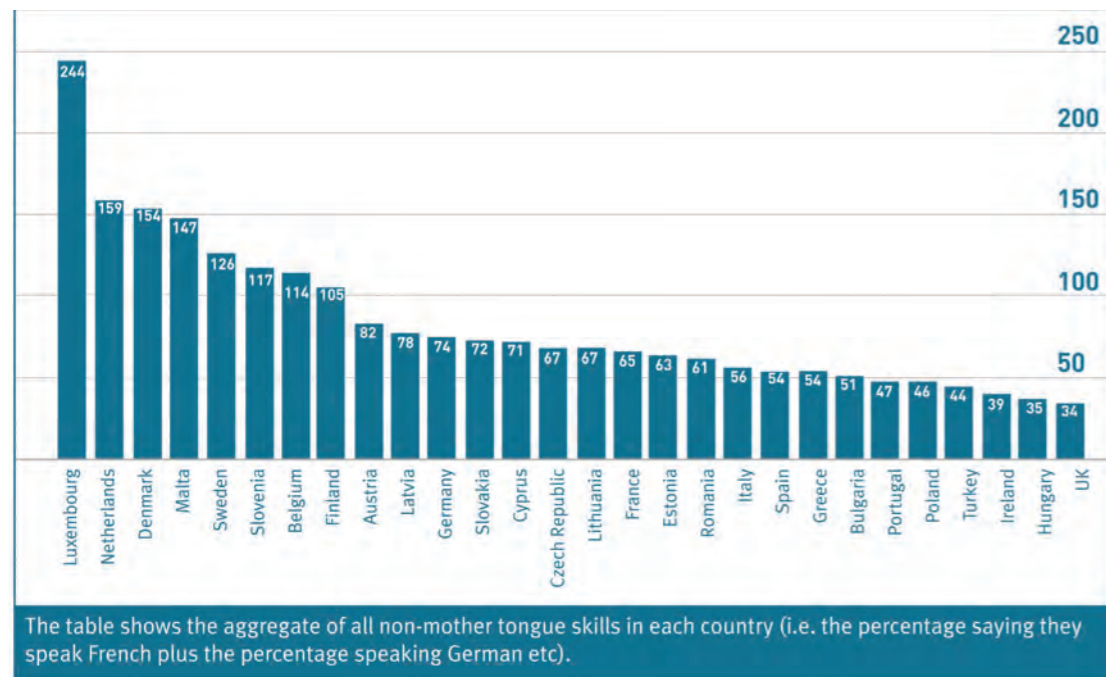
“The decline in modern language learning in England is a cause of real concern... If not arrested, it will lead to the UK becoming one of the most monolingual countries in the world.”

- Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009 Review of Modern Foreign Languages provision in higher education in England, p34

Beginning in the 1990s, decline became more rapid after 2004 when reform to the national curriculum made language learning at Key Stage 4 (KS4) or GCSE level an optional, rather than compulsory, subject of study.

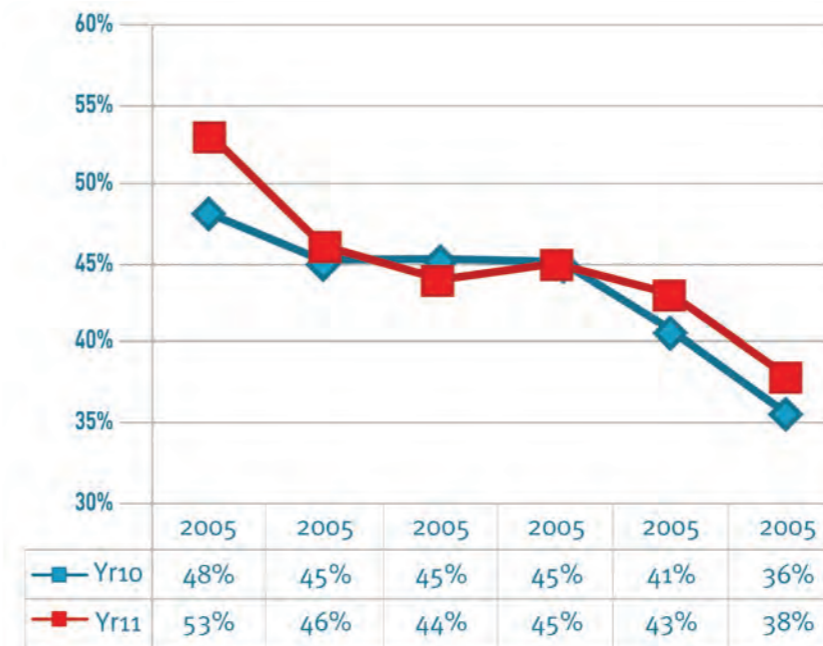
Research on school practice, conducted for the Department for Education, found that 69% of Languages Heads ‘reported that languages would be an optional subject at KS4 from 2009/10, 11% said that languages would be compulsory for some but not all, and 18% said that languages would be compulsory for all pupils at KS4’.¹⁵ As Figure 4 highlights, the five years following 2004 saw a sharp decline in the numbers of young people studying languages at ages 15 and 16.

Figure 3: Language skills in Europe



Source: Eurobarometer 2006, cited in CILT (2009a)¹⁴

Figure 4: Percentage of maintained schools with more than 50% participation in Key Stage 4 languages



Source: CILT, Language Trends 2010. Based on survey responses of 711 secondary schools¹⁶

The decline in languages GCSEs followed an earlier steep decline in the numbers taking languages at A level, which has yet to be reversed (Figure 5). And in the context of increasing numbers taking part in Higher Education, applications to study languages have been notably sluggish.¹⁷ While growth has been witnessed in less common languages – notably in Mandarin and in community languages such as Arabic, Polish and Urdu – the overall effect of decline has been sharp.

INEQUALITY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Arguably, the most important consequence of the removal of compulsion to study languages at age 14 has been a broadening of the social divide in access to languages. A series of studies have set out starkly that the opportunity to study languages is now heavily determined by the social characteristics of a pupil's school.

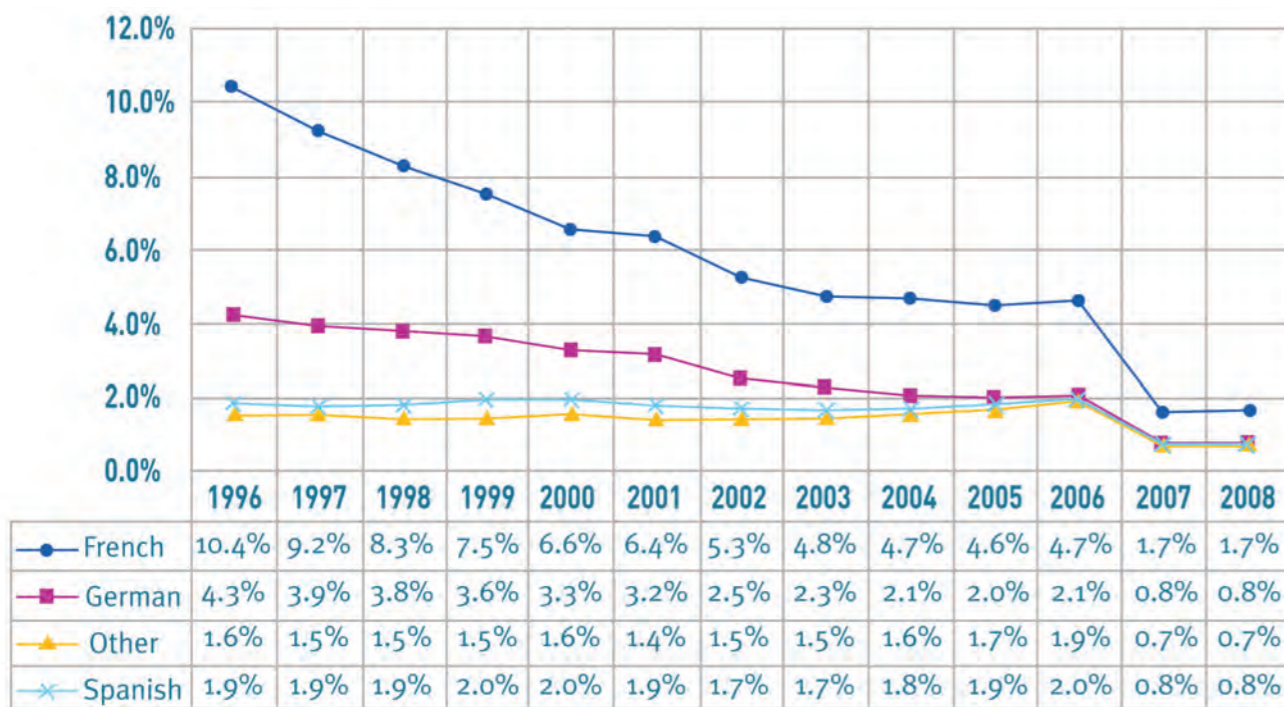
“opportunities to study languages are now heavily determined by the social characteristics of a pupil's school”

“A higher proportion of schools with the following characteristics offered a wider range of languages and accreditation pathways: higher achieving schools, schools with low proportions of FSM [Free School Meals] pupils and schools where languages have compulsory status.”

- Department for Education
Languages at Key Stage 4 2009, p iii

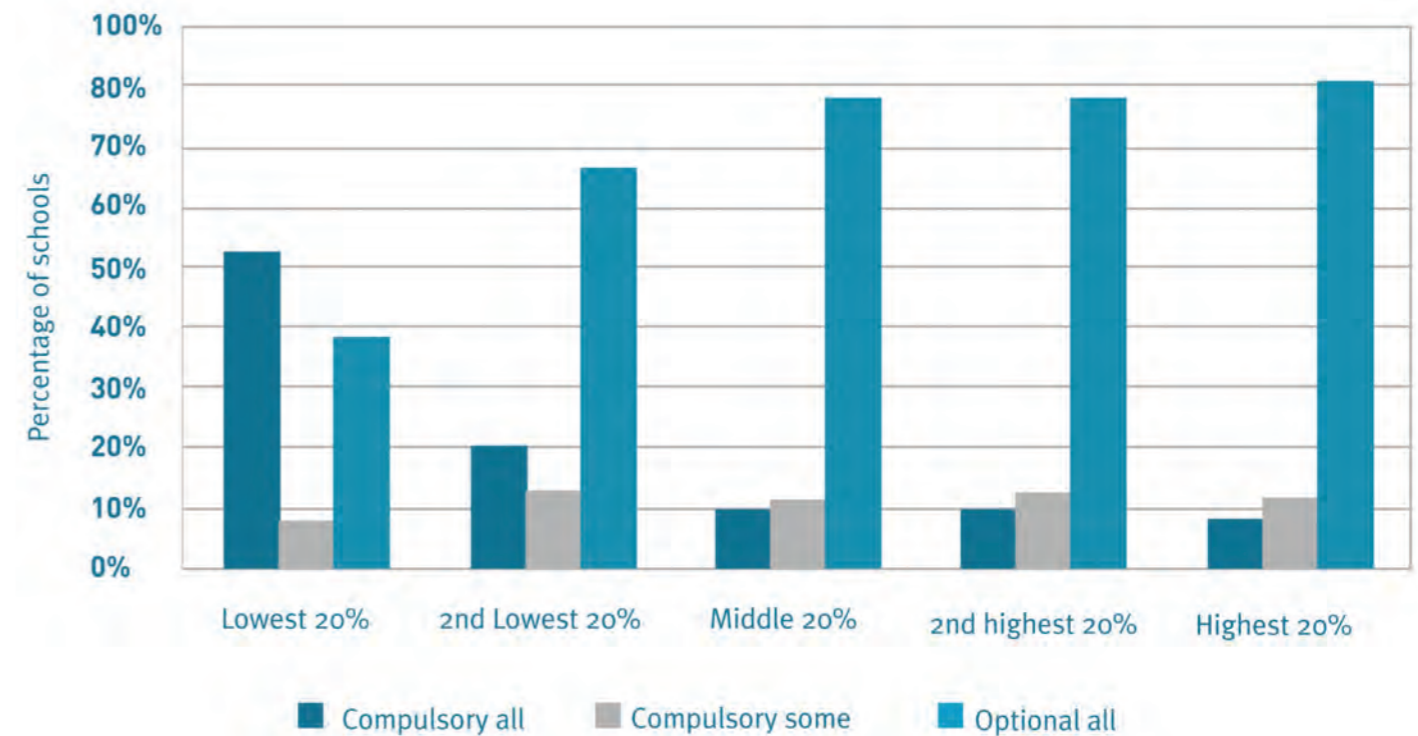
As Figure 6 sets out, school approaches to language learning correlate closely with the proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals – a primary indicator of social inequality. For example, among the 20% of schools with the lowest uptake of Free School Meals, just over 50% make languages compulsory to all students, compared to under 10% of schools with the highest proportion of Free School Meals.

Figure 5: Percentage of Languages A levels as a percentage of total enrolments, 2003–2009



Source: Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick, (2008), 'Market View for the Diploma in Languages'¹⁸

Figure 6: Status of languages in schools with different proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals



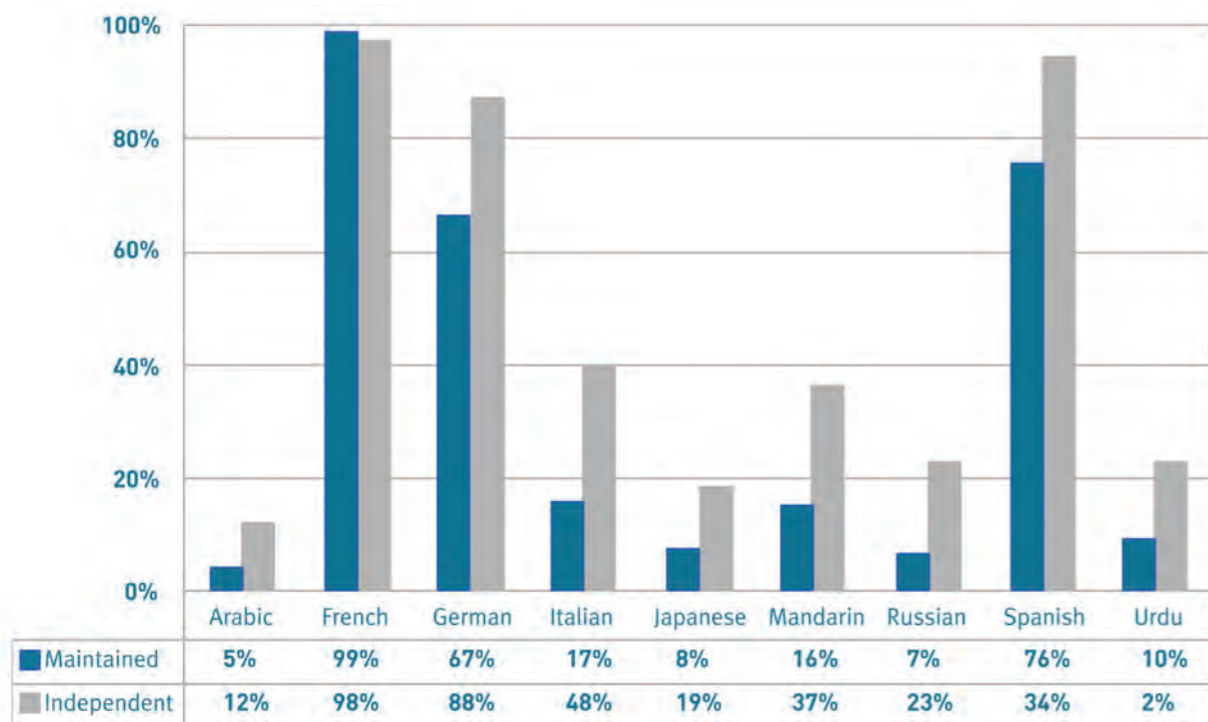
Source: Department for Education (2010), Languages at Key Stage 4 2009 - 2011. Evaluation of the Impact of Language Review Recommendations. Based on findings from survey of 1134 schools.¹⁹

“I am keen on the British economy developing in a way that is more export-driven, with more investment and a different model of growth to that pursued in the last decade or so.”

- George Osborne MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer ²¹

Furthermore, young people studying in independent schools have considerably greater opportunity to study a wider range of languages than students in the state sector, as shown in Figure 7. Given the economic advantages related to language ability outlined above, it is fair to ask whether such inequitable access to language learning is serving to reinforce social inequalities and undermine social mobility.

Figure 7: Languages offered at any level, inside or outside curriculum time



Source: CILT, Language Trends 2010. Based on survey responses of 711 secondary schools ²⁰

LANGUAGE ABILITY: PROVIDING THE EDGE IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Much of the academic literature on the economics of languages has focused primarily on the implications of linguistic ability for international trade. And it is clear: cultural awareness and language ability matter both to individual enterprises (by determining exporting success) and to the nation (because participation in international trade can underpin significant productivity growth).

On top of the costs of physical production, distribution and regulatory compliance (tariffs, currency exchange, contract enforcement), barriers presented by languages and cultural awareness form a part of the total cost of getting a good or service from a producer to a final user, and are meaningful in determining export success. Research commissioned by the EU in 2006 with 2000 exporting SMEs across 29 European countries showed that 11% had lost a contract as a result of lack of language skills.²² Economists have estimated the costs of lack of languages at 7% (see ‘tax on trade’ below) and lack of market information at 6% of total trade costs.²³

There is reason to believe that such language barriers are particularly high for the UK. As a country, the UK exports disproportionately to English speaking

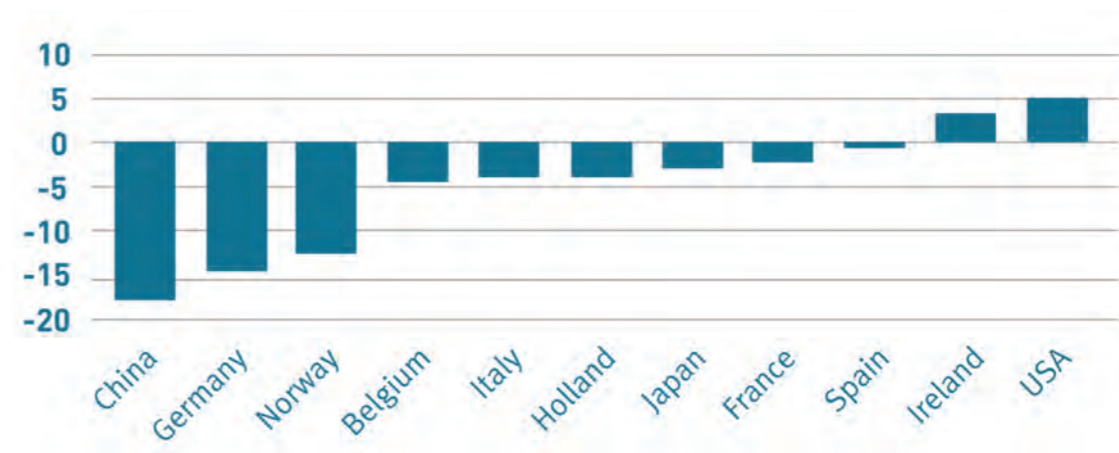
“If I’m selling to you, I speak your language. If I’m buying, dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen”

- Willy Brandt, former German Chancellor (1994)
Cited in CILT (2009). Why Languages Matter, p4

countries (Figure 8) and, as shown above (Figure 3), possesses language skills which are the lowest in Europe.

Two key studies illustrate clearly just how UK exporters are penalised by language deficiencies. In 2004, the British Chambers of Commerce surveyed 1000 UK exporting SMEs and found three-quarters of exporters believed they had missed or lost export sales or revenue over the previous two years.²⁵ Most frequently, these losses were due to their offer proving unsuitable for the market and needing adapting, sending the wrong goods abroad or having them returned for some reason, or simply not receiving payment. As set out in Box 2, the research found a significant correlation between linguistic ability and export success.

Figure 8: UK’s international trade balances, 2009



Source: HMRC, statistics cited in CILT (2009b)²⁴

Box 2: British Chambers of Commerce: Language survey 2004²⁶

Based on a telephone survey of 1000 UK business exporters exploring language ability and export behaviour, researchers segmented exporters into four groups:

- *Opportunists, who simply respond to approaches from overseas customers rather than instigate business development initiatives, most often failing to adapt and localise their offering to their markets and communicating only in English.*
- *Developers, who are more prepared to adapt their products and services to overseas markets but remain reactive towards export development and continue to communicate in English.*
- *Adaptors, who make an effort to adjust their offering to their overseas markets, have sales literature in foreign languages and have penetrated a wide range of markets.*
- *Enablers, who are proactive in their export approach, consciously choosing markets and adapting their products, services and literature to meet those market needs. They place a great deal of importance on staff within their business having foreign language skills.*

The survey found: There is a direct correlation between the value an exporter places on language skills within their business and their annual turnover. Only 33% of Opportunists have an annual export turnover above £1/2 million. This increases to 54% for Developers, 67% for Adaptors and 77% for Enablers, who place the most value on language skills within their business.

Furthermore, Opportunists' (the segment that least values language skills) export sales are declining by an average of £50,000 a year per exporter, while Enablers' (the segment placing the highest value on language skills) exports are increasing by an average of £290,000 a year per exporter.

A key area of competitive advantage for exporters lies in the quality of understanding, and responding to, market information. Drawing on data from 400 representative exporters combined with in-depth interviews, economists Williams and Chaston found important connections between the skills and experience of export managers and their professional behaviour:

linguists are more likely to be discriminating about the intelligence collected, and more innovative in their decision-making, but use information responsibly. Those with international experience are likely to be more active information gatherers and decision-makers, while length of exporting experience is indicative of a more confident, if rather more conservative approach.²⁷

A TAX ON TRADE?

In essence, lack of language skills makes exporting more difficult and it is a barrier particularly felt by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As former Treasury adviser, Professor James Foreman-Peck has argued in an influential study on the economics of language and trade, the UK's weakness in language ability effectively

means both that some British trade is diverted from non-English speaking economies and that some is completely prevented, because foreign language costs act like a tax on trade.²⁸

Cross-European studies have shown that UK firms invest less in developing language ability compared to continental rivals, thus paying a higher penalty in the battle to reach international markets.²⁹ As Foreman-Peck points out, "the proportions of enterprises claiming language skills, language plans and using translators in the rest of Europe are at least three times higher than in the UK."³⁰ And this is not simply a matter of lower need due to wider use of English as an international language of communication:

This lower UK demand for language services might simply reflect a lower need relative to the continent. But [...] UK SMEs export a lower proportion (37%) than the rest of Europe (45%) consistent with underinvestment in the language skills that are associated with exports. [...]

British SMEs' lower investment in language skills is not compensated by the advantages of being native English-speakers, as far as export intensity is concerned. Indeed the best estimate is that there is a substantial negative effect on exports that must be attributed to language complacency.³¹

Foreman-Peck also provides a numerical estimate of the costs to the UK economy:

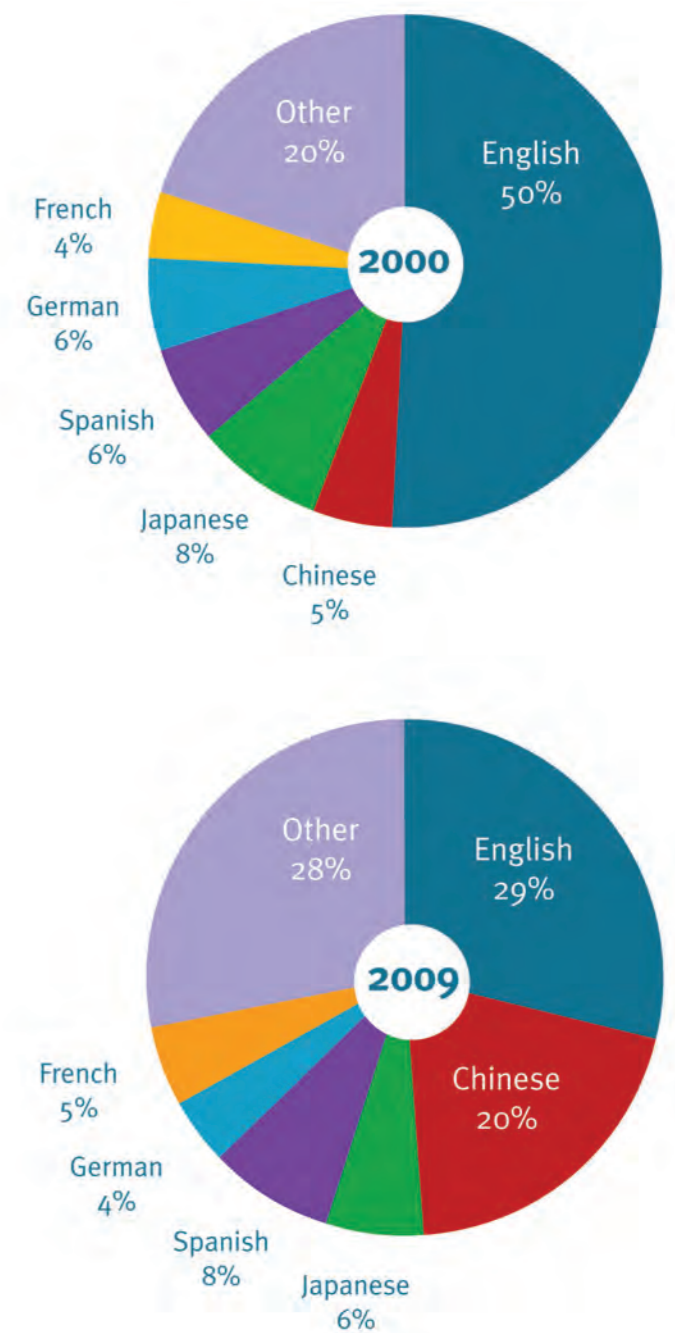
The trade results imply that the consequences of British relative under-investment in languages amount to the equivalent of between a three and a seven percent tax on British exports. Since exports are about one quarter of GDP, the effect is substantial, for it is equivalent to a similar cut in productivity. At stake in 2005 was at a minimum £9 billion. It would be worth spending almost up to this sum on improving language skills if the outlay brought British proficiency to the world average by reducing language-induced trade cost.³²

Using the same method of calculation for the most recent available figures (2009), Prof. Foreman-Peck has estimated that the £9 billion figure equates to a range of between £7.3 billion and £17 billion, or 0.5 to 1.2% of GDP.³³

Given wider trends in reducing costs in terms of physical and regulatory compliance, it is likely that this tax on trade driven by language ability and cultural awareness will increase as a proportion of total costs in coming years.³⁴ Nearly three-quarters of UK trade is with non-English speaking countries where increasing English proficiency enables higher respective access to UK markets. English, as witnessed in rapidly changing patterns of language use on the internet, is losing its dominance as the language of choice for international communication (Figure 9).

“At stake is an estimated minimum of £7.3 billion”

Figure 9: Language use online, 2000 and 2009



Source: CILT, (2009a), Talking World Class

EXPORTERS DRIVING INCREASED UK PRODUCTIVITY

Economists and policy makers have devoted much resource to understanding, and addressing, barriers to trade and interest goes beyond the balance of payments figures. It is widely accepted that there is a direct, and often significant, relationship between the productivity of an enterprise and its trading status. Research for UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) published in 2007 showed that firms new to exporting experienced a remarkable 34% long-run increase in total factor productivity in year of entry as costs were driven down to enable competitiveness with indigenous producers and rival exporters. Firms exiting overseas markets, moreover, experience negative productivity effects of some 7-8% in the year they stop exporting and subsequently.³⁵ For long-term exporters, increases in productivity experienced in the run up to exporting are often sustained in subsequent years – an effect known as ‘learning-by-exporting’ – by as much as 5% a year.³⁶

PART 02

TACKLING THE PROBLEM THROUGH EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

The fragile position of language learning has not gone unnoticed. Recent years have seen a number of initiatives, programmes and strategies implemented across a range of ages and levels to help reverse the trend. HEFCE’s decision to provide additional funding to university language departments, identifying modern foreign languages as a ‘strategically important and vulnerable’ subject, was for example, widely welcomed. The previous Government had intended to make language learning an entitlement at primary level, giving young people a longer introduction to languages. Further work has been devoted to making new resources available to support learning. Most recently, the Government announced that languages would form part of the English Baccalaureate, which is likely to prompt some schools to encourage more young people to study a language GCSE.

These are initiatives which have been welcomed by language teachers, but have yet to reverse the decline in young people entering the labour market with strong language skills (and there are concerns about the narrowness of the English Baccalaureate which, for example, doesn’t include applied languages).³⁷ While such incentives can make a large difference, more can still be done to increase motivation, enjoyment and attainment in languages, irrespective of the specific qualification.

as pupils’ school careers progress.³⁹ Among other factors, boys are more likely to see languages as having little future utility and thus perceive little point in studying them. Consequently, in considering how to increase motivation to learn languages, researchers have seen the value of engaging linguistic role models and improving students’ awareness of the potential utility of language skills for jobs in the UK as well as abroad.⁴⁰

Several studies have outlined barriers to students’ enjoyment of modern language study, and their perceptions of its relevance to personal and career-related goals. A study of Scottish secondary school students reports that students’ experiences of language learning were not “intrinsically rewarding” and found little evidence of motivation among students to make contact with foreign cultures and speakers or to identify the usefulness of foreign language skills in achieving future goals.³⁸ Furthermore, research shows that perceptions of language study are highly gendered: a 2006 survey of 210 Year 7 (age 12-13) pupils showed that while 89% of girls “looked forward to” starting foreign language study, the same was true of just 73% of boys: a gap that widens considerably

“boys are more likely to see languages as having little future utility”

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Indeed, over recent years a key plank of government policy has been to drive up interest in languages through efforts to engage employers directly in the learning experiences of young people. The idea is a simple one, that working with teachers, employee volunteers from occupational fields which use languages are able to help close the information gap and demonstrate the vocational relevance of linguistic ability. At the same time, involvement enriches the learning experience, bringing real-life language speakers and situations to the classroom. As set out below, this is an approach which has been widely used elsewhere in education as a means to enrich learning and improve career awareness and so student motivation.

A primary means of encouraging and enabling employer involvement in language learning was the Business Language Champions (BLC) programme then managed by CILT – the National Centre for Languages. Launched in 2004 regionally with funding from the Department for Education, the programme recruited employee volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and helped them to engage with schools. A national programme ran from 2009 to 2011 and continues in some areas.

Evaluations of the programme have been encouraging, with individual schools reporting some striking results: in one case, a 70% increase in take-up of languages following a BLC programme; in another, students achieved on average a full grade above their predicted levels in languages GCSEs.⁴¹ The most recent independent evaluation of the national programme indicates that teachers believe that employer engagement has been successful in raising awareness of the relevance and importance of learning a language amongst young people:

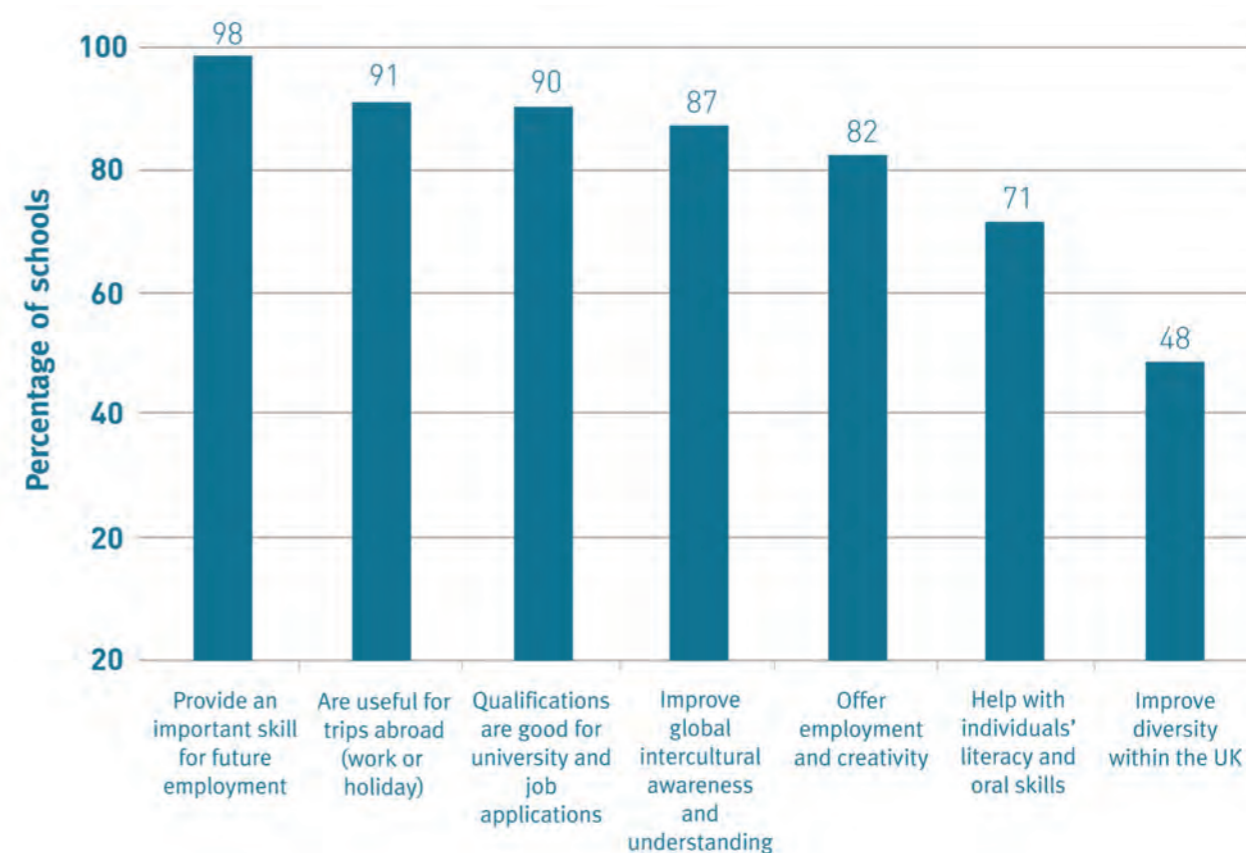
- 97% of teachers surveyed said that participating in the BLC scheme had increased student appreciation of languages
- 95% said it had raised students' interest in languages
- Over four-fifths of teachers believed that participating in BLC activities had raised intercultural awareness amongst students
- Two-thirds of teachers felt that participation in BLC had had a direct impact on raising take-up of languages at KS4.⁴²

A 2009 review of demand for employee volunteering to support language learning found high levels of interest. The review of 72 Education Business Partnership Organisations – local organisations which liaise between schools and employers – found no lack of will on the side of the schools. “Those currently involved” in such volunteering programmes, the review concluded “that they could do more if they had more resources, felt supported and/or more business volunteers.”⁴³

“employee volunteers can demonstrate the vocational relevance of linguistic ability”

Understanding of teacher demand deepens when considering the approaches used by Heads of Languages in secondary schools to excite interest in language learning. As Figure 10 shows, the primary fact which teachers want to get across to young people is that languages do have a vocational relevance. It is easy to understand how a real-life employer, providing real-life examples, could positively reinforce such messages.

Figure 10: Messages used by Heads of Languages departments to promote positive awareness of language



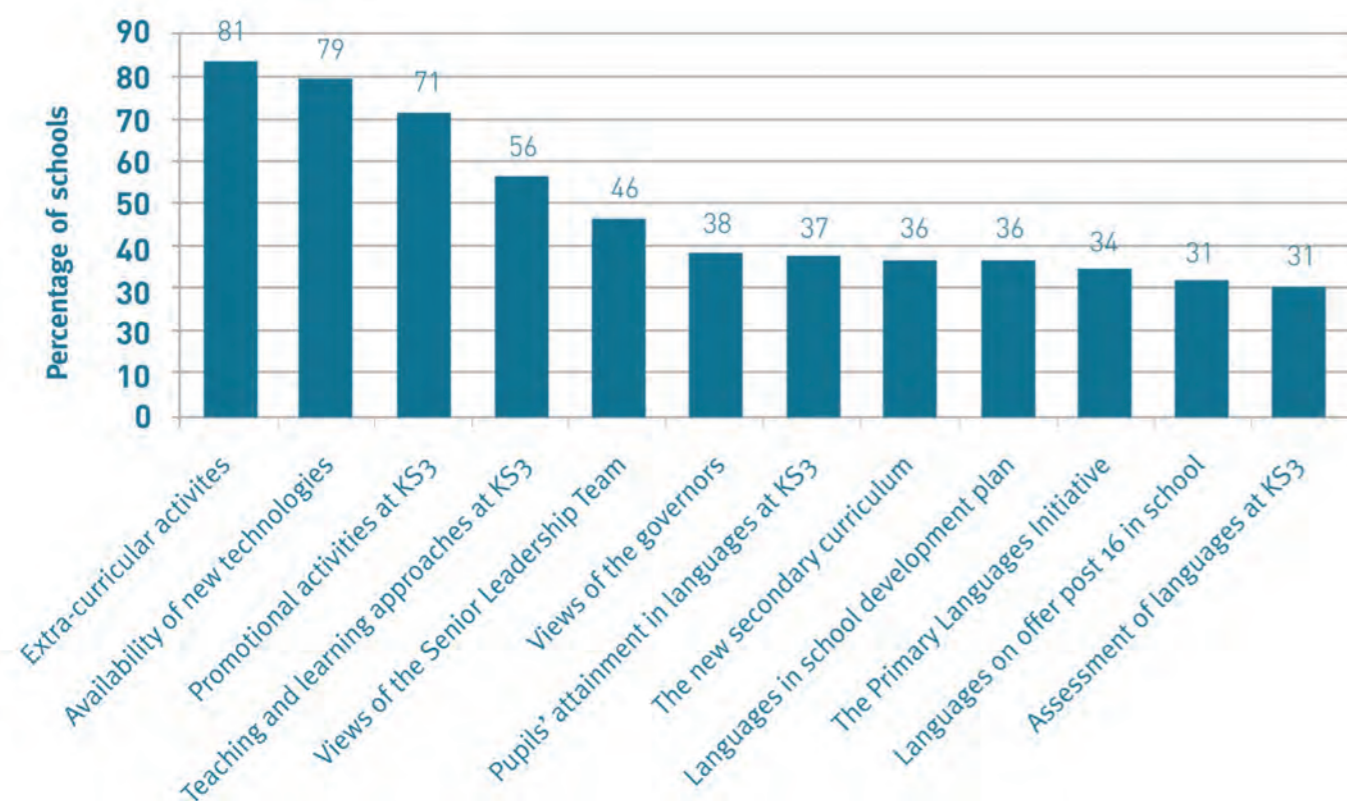
Source: Department for Education. Based on survey of 1134 heads of languages departments of UK maintained secondary schools⁴⁴

Asked explicitly about what most helps to encourage young people to choose languages as an option at 14, teachers highlighted a range of activities which would frequently include roles for employers (see Figure 11 below). Extra-curricular activities would include exchanges, theatre visits but also workplace visits, seeing languages at work. The most popular ICT resource used by languages teachers is the Languages Work website – www.languageswork.org.uk – found useful by nine out of ten users. It is a website that draws on real-life case studies to show the relevance of languages to careers.⁴⁵

Over recent years, attempts have been made to make it easier for teachers to connect with people who use languages at work. Alongside the Business Language Champions scheme,

Routes into Languages (supported by HEFCE and HEFCW) helps to make several hundred young role models available to schools. Demand from schools for language support, however, outstrips the current supply of employee volunteers, and lessons from other disciplines present a model of possible future practice.

Figure 11: Factors enabling languages uptake at KS4



Source: Department for Education, Languages at Key Stage 4 2009. Evaluation of the Impact of Language Review Recommendations ⁴⁶

LESSONS FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES

While evaluations such as that of Business Language Champions provide an insight into how such programmes have been received, they cannot conclusively demonstrate impact on student learning and progression, as so many other factors contribute to pupil choices and achievement. Ultimately, only longitudinal studies with randomised control groups will provide that data. Such studies are hugely expensive however and potentially unethical where decisions must be made to exclude pupils from an intervention which is perceived as having a positive impact on learning.

While the impact of employer volunteering in language learning is under-researched, there is strong wider evidence from other subjects of study to show that children and young people enjoy and respond well to the involvement of employers in their learning. A systematic review of more than 300 studies of preferred pupil learning styles by the National Foundation for Educational Research in 2006 found real-life connections to be especially important in creating relevance for pupils; that young people place high value on clarity of explanation and subject knowledge, and “welcome sessions with professionals from within the field (e.g. health professionals, visitors from colleges, the workplace and so on)”.⁴⁷

As a strategy to improve career awareness and enrich learning, the approach has been used extensively and successfully to drive up interest in the STEM subjects. Coinciding with significant investment to bring employers and their representatives into the classroom, over the last five years, science entries at GCSE level have stabilised and A level entries and achievement have increased notably. While it has been difficult for analysts to unpack the impact of related interventions, a wide ranging review by the National Audit Office concluded that two of the five critical success factors for improvements in participation and achievement relate to employer involvement: “careers information and guidance”, and “image and interest”.⁴⁸ An army of more than 25,000 employee volunteers now act as STEM ambassadors, working voluntarily with young

people in schools and colleges across the country to raise awareness of career pathways and allow young people to meet real life scientists, often for the first time.

In the policy arena, employer engagement with schools is a widely-accepted means of improving transitions from education into the workplace and enhancing the flow of enthusiastic and well-prepared young people into an area of key skills shortage. The approach has won considerable international interest and endorsement. The EU 2020 strategy calls on industry to work closer with schools to help encourage more young people to consider studying science and related subjects. During 2011, a European co-ordinating body to build momentum on this front across the continent launched with the strong backing of the European Roundtable of fifty multinational companies, including Shell, Microsoft, Siemens and Volvo.⁴⁹

The OECD has also identified employer engagement in education as a primary means to improving the transitions of young people into the labour market, improving information on career opportunities and providing young people with additional social networks offering valuable practical experience and advice. The OECD’s 2010 Learning for Jobs report argues:

schools should encourage an understanding of the world of work from the earliest years, backed by visits to workplaces and workplace experience. Partnerships between schools and local firms allow both teachers and students to spend time in workplaces. Research studies suggest that young people particularly value information on jobs and careers if obtained in a real workplace and through contacts with working people. Through such experience young people can be introduced to some of the choices they will face in their professional and learning pathways.⁵⁰

It is an approach which has won the endorsement of many academic commentators, notably in the US.⁵¹

Such approaches are seen as especially relevant to tackling issues of gender inequalities in education. In the STEM arena, girls have been successfully encouraged to consider further STEM study through effective use of female role models. This is an approach of relevance as language learning is itself highly gendered.⁵²

Wider assessments of the effectiveness of involvement of employers in education and improved career preparation for young people have shown how much can be achieved through these approaches. Work undertaken by Deloitte with schools, employers and young people has highlighted how confusing and dynamic the modern labour market has become and high levels of confusion over the range of careers available and the best routes into them. In a revealing study of 333 pupils in English schools, Deloitte found a strong correlation between confidence in careers choices and the numbers of times which they had experienced interventions from employers (such as work experience, business mentoring, enterprise activities, classroom presentations, workplace visits and careers advice (Figure 12)).

Box 3: Employer benefits from working with schools

Hundreds of thousands of employers of all sectors and sizes already work with schools to support the learning and progression of young people through such areas as careers advice, work experience and mentoring. Surveys of employer opinion highlight four primary employer benefits from working with education:

Recruitment. Employer motivation covers both immediate and long-term recruitment needs. Many employers struggle to attract high quality recruits and work with schools to raise awareness of potential career opportunities as well as building the employability skills of future recruits.

Staff development. Research sponsored by the City of London Corporation has concluded that volunteering with schools provides a cost effective means to develop staff, notably younger graduate recruits. Requiring them to be personally effective with diverse groups of young people develops communication, adaptability, influencing and negotiating skills highly valued in the workplace.

(contd)

Box 3 (continued):

Staff engagement. Growing numbers of employers seek to improve performance and output by increasing the motivation of staff. Research has shown that volunteering initiatives, such as working with schools, often leads to demonstrable improvement in engagement levels.

Corporate reputation. Many employers choose to work with schools as a means to establish and enhance awareness and reputation within their communities.

For more information, see:

CBI (2007) *Time well spent – embedding employability in work experience*

Corporate Citizenship (2010) *Volunteering: the business case*. City of London Corporation

Mann, A. et al (2010) *What is to be gained through partnership?* Education and Employers Taskforce

UKCES (2009) *The Employability Challenge*

As three studies have shown, work experience in particular is seen by young people as providing valuable information to inform their future career plans (Figure 13).

Employers can make a difference to young people. They can and are helping to close the information gap between the reality of labour market practice and the attitudes of young people. In doing so, they help young people to make more informed choices, increasing motivation to succeed and so improving the flow of talented new recruits into the workplace.

Figure 12: Responses to survey of 333 young people regarding careers choices and number of employer interventions

Statement	% Strongly agreeing with the statement with respondents grouped by the number of different employers respondent has received careers advice or information from			Improvement in numbers strongly agreeing with statement
	None	1 to 4	>4	
I feel confident to make a decision on my career, with the information I have	26%	23%	37%	+11%
I feel I know what I need to do to get the sort of jobs I want to do	21%	25%	36%	+15%
I have a good idea of the knowledge skills I need for the jobs I want to do	23%	23%	44%	+21%
I am confident that I am developing the right knowledge and skills to get the sort of jobs I want to do	23%	23%	41%	+18%
I am confident that I will be able to find a good job	18%	29%	45%	+27%
I feel excited about the jobs that I could do when I leave education	34%	36%	46%	+12%

Source: Deloitte (2010), *Helping young people succeed: How employers can support careers education* ⁵³

Figure 13: Results of three surveys investigating link between work experience and young people's confidence in career choices

Survey team (year survey): statement	Number (sample)	% agreeing strongly/finding very helpful	% total agreeing/finding helpful
IEBE (2008): "I am clearer about what I want to do in my future education and career (post 16)". Unweighted data. 50	15,025 (Age 15-16)	37%	75%
London Metropolitan University (2005): "encouraged/discouraged you from choosing work like this". Unweighted data. 50	566 (15-16)	N/A	60%
Loughborough University (2005): "work experience was helpful in making post year 11 decision". Weighted data. 51	18,989 (16-18)	N/A	60%

Source: IEBE (2008), Francis et al. (2005), Rennison et al. (2005) ⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS

UK plc cannot afford to let its languages deficit continue. This deficit – marked by major declines in language learning at all levels, especially secondary – hampers economic growth and is a tax on trade, with the cost to our economy estimated at between £7bn and £17bn.

Over the last decade, a range of initiatives have addressed the problem, and arguably have succeeded in stemming the decline, but not reversing it. The inclusion of languages in the English Baccalaureate may encourage schools to place greater focus on languages, but there are broader issues with the baccalaureate and it cannot be seen as the solution. The decline in language take-up at A level began, after all, while languages were compulsory for all young people at GCSE level.

A key conclusion of this report is that there exists an information gap: young people, especially boys, often see languages as irrelevant to their futures, while at the same time employers complain of strategic skill shortages. Teachers recognise the importance of closing this gap, and many have long understood that employers have a key role to play. By demonstrating the practical uses of language skills, employers are already improving motivation, enriching learning and allowing young people to make more informed choices about their future.

The urgency for these interventions is greatest in those schools that serve the most disadvantaged communities, where there are both fewer opportunities to learn languages – especially those whose economic relevance is growing most quickly, such as Mandarin – and other sources of advice are typically at their weakest.

Increasing numbers of employers are rising to the challenge, as illustrated in the case studies that follow, but there is demand in schools for much more. This report has set out a business case for further involvement, and highlights the contribution employers are uniquely placed to make. As globalisation drives on, the need for that involvement will only grow greater.

INSPIRING THE FUTURE

Inspiring the Future is a new free way for people who use languages at work to volunteer to share real life experiences with young people at state schools and colleges. Inspiring the Future allows teachers to connect with people locally who are well placed to talk to pupils about how choices made at school can affect their future lives. It's an opportunity for employee volunteers talk about how they use language in their job and encourage young people to see the wide range of jobs where languages are important.

It is run by charity the Education and Employers Taskforce. To register yourself or your organisation/employees to take part visit: www.inspiringthefuture.org

Other resources:

Resources for language learning:

www.cfbt.com

A guide for employers on how to work with schools:

www.employers-guide.org

A guide for schools on how to work with employers:

www.teachers-guide.org

Routes into languages

www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk

EMPLOYERS AND TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER: FOUR CASE STUDIES

1

THE PARTNERS

Aston Manor Foundation School is a mixed comprehensive in Aston, Birmingham.

Birmingham Airport employs over 500 people across a wide range of occupations.

WORKING TOGETHER

Aston Manor was visited by Birmingham Airport, a large local employer who set Year 9 students a challenge to design a poster in French to promote Birmingham to tourists. This gave the students a local context for the importance of learning languages which they could identify with and uptake has more than doubled since the partnership began.

"They were talking about [the presentation] for days because before they were not linking the fact that they were taking French with real life ... The greatest impact on the school was to increase the uptake of GCSEs. Our target as a school is to get 50% taking it for GCSE. We have hit that this year."

Head of Modern Foreign Languages, Aston Manor School

2

THE PARTNERS

Our Lady's Catholic College is a voluntary aided, mixed comprehensive secondary school in Lancaster which also includes a sixth form.

Tabula is an SME in Lancaster which designs, manufactures and supplies outdoor furniture.

WORKING TOGETHER

After finding out about Business Language Champions from his Portuguese teacher in 2008, Nick Barnicoat (Managing Director of Tabula) was keen to work with a local school to raise student awareness of the value of languages. Year 9 students from Our Lady's Catholic College visit Tabula before making their GCSE choices in order to research the business and report back to their peers. This research centres on the business itself and links well to enterprise; however Nick takes every opportunity to highlight how integral languages are to the operation and success of the business.

"It is about broadening their horizons, making them see the bigger picture. Real communication with people comes about by making that initial contact... it is a step towards valuing other people's cultures."
Head of Modern Foreign Languages, Our Lady's Catholic College

3

THE PARTNERS

St Bede's Catholic Grammar School is a voluntary aided secondary comprehensive in Bradford for boys aged 11 to 16.

Bradford City Football Club employs several hundred staff across a wide range of occupations.

WORKING TOGETHER

In 2008 David Baldwin (Director of Operations at Bradford City Football Club) visited the school and gave a talk to Year 11 students on the link between business and language. He explained that he was able to use his Spanish to negotiate with and sign Chilean footballer Billy Topp. Later that year, ten students from Year 9 visited the club and held a question and answer session with Billy, and presented their findings back to the class. Since then the Spanish language link has expanded to form an extensive portfolio of activities involving every year group. The effect on uptake has been dramatic, more than quadrupling uptake at GCSE level.

"It was the fact that there was someone out there saying – why not do this, we have businesses that are interested. I think as a teacher I wouldn't have had the confidence to go and approach somebody – that is why the Business Language Champions scheme has been so brilliant – it has actually been that intermediary."

Head of Modern Foreign Languages, St Bede's Catholic Grammar School

4

THE PARTNERS

The Grove School is a community comprehensive secondary school in New Balderton, near Newark in Nottinghamshire.

Optima Training (UK) is a small business in Newark providing tailored language training for businesses.

WORKING TOGETHER

Optima Training (UK) Ltd set up a competition for Year 9 students at The Grove School to prepare a presentation to promote language learning in primary schools, businesses or the local community. The winning group presented to a local business club. After the initial engagement, language take-up at GCSE increased significantly at the school.

"This work has had a huge impact on us as a business. We won the 2009 Newark Business Award for the 'Commitment to the Community' and it was largely because of our work with The Grove. It was a win, win on both sides."

Education Director, Optima Training (UK) Ltd

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