



Languages Review

Consultation Report:
Short Text

December 2006



Right Hon Alan Johnson, MP
Secretary of State for Education & Skills
5 December 06

You appointed us on 5th October to advise you on what action should be taken about the severe fall in the numbers continuing with the study of modern foreign languages (referred to in the enclosed report on languages) at Key Stage 4 in secondary schools.

You asked us to make an interim report in December and a final report in February 2007. In undertaking this task you asked us to look into the following issues:

- With secondary schools to support them in making available a wider range of more flexible language courses, with accreditation, so that more young people keep up language learning even if they are not doing a full GCSE course;
- Further ways of strengthening the incentives for schools and young people themselves to continue with languages after 14;
- With representatives of FE and HE, to look at what more might be done to widen access to and increase interest in language learning among the student population;
- With employer organisations, to consider what more they can do to promote the value of language skills for business and to give stronger market signals to young people about language skills and employability; and
- What broader communication effort is needed to get across the importance of language skills to all sections of the population.

Although we are only at the half way stage of our work, in order to stimulate comment and so inform our recommendations to you in February, we make provisional proposals for action for both the short term and long term in this interim report.

We did however make two recommendations to you for immediate action in November. We refer to these in the Report, and we proceeded with them as agreed with you.

At this stage we have not costed our provisional proposals. This will be done before our report in February, which will provide an assessment of how best to achieve value for money and the timetable for implementation of any recommendations.

Subject to any further guidance from you and the responses to this interim report, we will make our final report in February, as you requested.

Ron Dearing

Lid King

To the Reader,

Our consultations will continue in January and we invite comment on this interim report and its provisional proposals. We are due to make our full report in February. Comments should be sent to The Language Review, the Department for Education and Skills, Room 4.86 Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT or by email to KS4language.review@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

You can respond on-line at www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/.

Ron Dearing

Lid King

Executive Summary & Main Proposals

The National Languages Strategy: Languages for Life

- 1 The National Languages Strategy, 'Languages for All: Languages for Life, a Strategy for England', (2002) is proceeding well in primary schools. It is also making headway at Key Stage 3 (KS3), and through the introduction of the National Recognition Scheme, the Languages Ladder (and its associated qualifications, Asset Languages), it has the potential to impact on language learning at all stages and all ages. But at Key Stage 4, where languages have become a statutory entitlement instead of a mandatory requirement, in the last two years of statutory schooling, the proportion continuing to learn a language has fallen from eighty percent to fifty percent in state schools, and it is still falling.
- 2 The Government's decision to remove languages from the mandatory curriculum for all pupils at Key Stage 4, to provide space for other forms of learning that would motivate more young people to succeed, and stay in learning after age 16, was taken for good reasons. Overall performance at age 16 is rising year on year and attainment at 16 is one of the best predictors of the likelihood of staying on in learning. Within the overall GCSE performance, the proportion of pupils getting good GCSEs in languages has risen from 50% five years ago to 64% in 2006. The decision on languages at Key Stage 4 was also taken as part of a package which included the introduction of languages into primary

schools. But with the benefit of hindsight, more should have been done to safeguard against the unwanted scale of the movement out of languages before the change came into effect, and the full benefits of the National Language Strategy came into play. Action is needed to recover the situation and we make proposals to halt the decline in language learning.

The Fundamental Issues

- 3 Because English is so widely used in many parts of the world the common, but mistaken view, that English is enough, needs to be challenged at every level, based on a clear understanding and statement of the benefits of a facility in a second (or third) language. Especially within the European Community it is an enfranchisement for the individual; for companies engaged in overseas trade, it helps in opening and sustaining trading relationships, and for society it helps to create a people who are both confident in themselves and able and willing to engage with others on their own terms, and whose cultural understanding goes beyond these shores. These realities need to be complemented by an equal understanding that, especially after some basic grounding in a language has been achieved, the needs and aspirations of students in Key Stage 4 will differ, and the opportunities we offer for learning, and the means of recognition of achievement, must respond to that.
- 4 But if we are to succeed in changing the current attitudes to learning a language, as have been demonstrated by what has happened since it became a statutory entitlement in Key Stage 4, there is much to be done by those who determine the curriculum for schools. The teaching of a language to secondary pupils is particularly challenging. Many of the answers to this challenge already exist in the innovative practices developed in schools across the country, and in universities. The issue is to build

on what is there, so that it is incorporated into general practice. But the teachers also need a curriculum, especially in Key Stage 4, that better supports their need to engage pupils in learning, and this prompts the proposals we make for changes to the GCSE, which effectively drives the curriculum in the later years of secondary schooling.

- 5 A successful strategy cannot however be based simply on addressing the problems in these later years. A coherent approach is needed across the primary and secondary years, if the benefits of introducing languages into the primary schools are to be realised. A piecemeal approach would not work.



Making the case for languages

- 6 Our terms of reference asked us to look into the scope for working with employer organisations to promote the value of language skills and into action by Higher & Further Education to promote access.
- 7 The employers' organisations have offered to use their good offices to encourage appropriate members to make the case for languages in schools. We **propose** in addition action by the Department working with overseas embassies to seek the engagement of multinational companies, and draw attention to events, like the Olympics, where, working with the media,

the Department and its partners could promote interest amongst young people in languages.

- 8 In advance of this interim report we invited universities, working with specialist language schools and colleges to seek opportunities with the agreement of head teachers, to speak to pupils about the value of studying languages in Key Stage 4. We see much advantage in a continuing structured support to such interaction.

Languages at Primary Level

- 9 The National Languages Strategy is well on course to deliver its objective of enabling all primary schools to offer a language by 2010. We **propose** that the provision for teacher support in primary schools should be continued and where necessary extended to 2010. In view of the widely accepted opinion that languages are best learnt when young, subject to further consultations, we **propose** making language learning a standard part of the National Curriculum for primary schools in the next review of the primary curriculum, based on a well founded understanding of what content and approach to language learning is most suitable for children in primary schools, and how best to build on that at Key Stage 3. In saying this we recognise that there will have to be some compensating adjustments to the primary curriculum elsewhere. We also **propose** that over time primary schools should be enabled, with the help of specialist language schools and local secondary schools, to offer some choice in the language learnt.
- 10 We note the widespread practice in primary schools of teaching through cross-curricular themes. This seems a particularly appropriate vehicle for teaching part of a language curriculum because of the interest and context it gives to the learning. We note that this is supported by the Key Stage 2 Framework for languages.

- 11 It is important that the teaching should respond to the enthusiasm, and ability to learn through games and play, at primary level.

Languages at Key Stage 3 in Secondary Schools

- 12 The framework for languages at Key Stage 3 appears to be working well and it is important that it is embedded in the teaching practice of all schools in this Key Stage.
- 13 It is however, in this Key Stage, and particularly in year nine, that many pupils are finding that the study of a language is either difficult, or boring, or both, and this points to the need to look at the cognitive level of the content to ensure that it engages with the interests of young teenagers. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is well advanced in a complete review of the Key Stage 3 Curriculum and this is much needed, so that it responds to the distinctive interests of young people of this age. There is also a need, in order to provide motivation, to do more to recognise achievement. We make recommendations to that end below.

The GCSE and the Languages Curriculum at Key Stage 4

- 14 It was said at one of our conferences that at Key Stage 3 the pupil is given the knowledge of the basic structure of a language to enable him, "to fly, but instead he is put in a cage". This reflects

what many teachers regard as the stultifying effect of the repetition of Key Stage 3 topics. The present requirements of the GCSE examinations were criticised for their dulling effect.

- 15 To facilitate teaching in contexts that are motivating to pupils, we **propose** for consideration that a range of options from which the pupil would be required to select a specified number, should become the basis of a curriculum, alongside the requirements relating to linguistic context and competencies. Our purpose is to maintain the level of challenge in a more engaging context.
- 16 We understand that work is soon to begin on the revision of the specifications for the GCSE. That is very much and urgently needed.

Pedagogy and Professional Development

- 17 There is no consensus about a uniquely appropriate approach to teaching. But any long term policy for languages must include a concerted effort to enable teachers to share their thinking on practice; to learn about innovations in teaching; to have opportunities to develop their skills in using innovations and to exploit to the full the opportunities offered by the developments in information technology in all its manifestations. We accordingly **propose** that sufficient provision should be made for the continuing professional development of language teachers in secondary schools.

Retaining Teachers

- 18 If languages are to recover, we **propose** that action should be taken to arrest the continuing loss of qualified teachers. Teachers retained beyond immediate requirements could be employed:
- to support the development of languages in primary schools

- to provide cover for teachers released for professional development

The Issue of Assessment and Grading in the GCSE

- 19 We **propose** that the assessment of speaking and listening in the GCSE is changed to make it less personally stressful and hence a more reliable test of a candidate's capability. Moderated teacher assessment over a short period would be a better way.
- 20 There has been long, sustained argument that the standards for the awards of grades are more demanding than for other subjects, and that this has contributed to the flight from languages, both because of the concern of students to get good grades and the concern of schools to do well in the 5 A* to C achievement and attainment tables. This is a continuing sore point: it is important and we **propose** that it is resolved. We also **propose** that the reformulation of the GCSE should take account of the issues of cognitive level and study of culture.

Other means of Recognising Achievement

- 21 Our terms of reference require us to look into the scope for a wider range of more flexible language courses with more flexible accreditation.
- 22 The use of the Languages Ladder (Asset Languages) for recognising achievement in the four elements of language skills, speaking, listening, reading and writing provides an important opportunity to recognise progress for learners of all ages from the earliest primary years through to A Levels and beyond, and we **propose** that its use is now promoted for general use by schools.
- 23 We **propose** that there should be non-statutory formative classroom assessment at the end of

Key Stage 2, using the Languages Ladder (Asset Languages) to facilitate continuous progression in learning from primary to secondary school, and thus avoid the frustration and regression that can occur when the move takes place. We have no wish for this to form the basis of any league table: the purpose is formative. We also commend close and continuing contact between teachers of languages in the last year of primary and the first year of secondary school. We further invite consideration to an entitlement to an assessment of pupils' language skills at the end of Key Stage 3 so that they have a certificated achievement that counts towards the school point scores in the Achievement and Attainment Tables. We understand that at least one of the GCSE Boards has a foundation certificate with that in mind.

The Organisation of Language Learning

- 24 Already some schools are adopting flexible approaches to language learning. These include taking the GCSE at the end of Key Stage 3, and moving on to AS, or a second language. The planned specialised diplomas will require changes in provision and approach. In pedagogy too the value of short immersion to rapid learning and raising enjoyment of learning is well established. This might, for example, be a means through special summer courses of re entry to languages by pupils who decided against them, but who wish to return simply for a refresher and enhancement of their language skills as a preliminary to having them assessed and certificated through the Languages Ladder (Asset Languages).
- 25 We **invite** the Department, in consultation with other key stakeholders, to promote and support such flexible ways of organising learning.

Which Language?

- 26 We **propose** that current regulations on eligible languages are withdrawn and that schools

should be able to offer one or more languages based on clear non-statutory guidance from the Department. This would allow schools considerable autonomy within a national framework and provide flexibility in response to changing national and regional needs. It would also inform forward planning for example in future ITT provision. We **propose** that schools should be encouraged where possible to make provision for some learning of the languages of their local communities.

Information Technology and an “Open Languages School”

27 It is very much in the interests of teachers to enter into the world of young people when teaching languages, both in the choice of topics through which a skill in the languages is developed, and also through full exploitation of the various learning packages now available. Developments over recent years in software and hardware have greatly facilitated ICT use as an interactive, immensely patient and at the same time powerfully instructive form of learning. Teachers should not hesitate to use packages which draw upon the culture of young people. ICT should be used as an opportunity to build up class to class relationships with schools abroad, within which pupils build up friendships with pupils in other countries and which may well lead to exchange visits. We **propose** that the Department fosters and supports various nascent initiatives and proposals that have come to attention during the Review, for ‘open school learning’ providing excellent learning materials for use by pupils and to support the work of teachers in the classroom.

Making a Reality of the World of Languages

28 Languages need to come to life as realities for young people. They need to experience their use with real people from other countries. Much is already taking place, but we invite the

Department, in consultation with the British Council and the Embassies of overseas countries, to take action to increase the level of such visits and exchanges, and that modest additional funding is provided to enable visits to include looked after children, perhaps through the British Council.

29 At Key Stage 4, the Government’s policies for work experience and enterprise education outside the school should be seen as an opportunity for pupils to see languages at work in businesses and other organisations to which they go. Particular note should be made of this on their records of placements. Some providers of work experience can give opportunities for pupils to go overseas, and these should be followed up in the contacts with multinational companies proposed in paragraph 7.

Specialist Language Colleges

30 We **propose** that continued resources are made available to specialist language colleges to support the National Languages Strategy and that concerted efforts are made to increase the numbers of second specialism and combined specialism in languages, including further opportunities for specialist schools to take up languages as a second specialism “out of cycle.” Where Local Authorities have run down their language advisory service, the local leadership role of the specialist language colleges will be particularly important.

Support Networks

31 For change to be effective and lasting there is a need for coordination and support at local as well as regional and national levels. We therefore **propose** maintaining support for existing national and local bodies supporting language teaching and learning. We **propose** that consideration is given to a 3 year programme for supporting local and regional consortia of LAs, SLCs, and Comenius Centres

for example – who take on the role of coordinating and promoting lasting change in schools.

School Achievement and Attainment Tables

32 In view of the influence of the achievement and attainment tables on decisions by schools we welcome the current consideration being given by the Department to some additions to them and **propose** that the Department ensures that head teachers are aware of the contribution of awards under the Languages Ladder (Asset Languages) to points scores in the achievement and attainment tables.

Other Options

- 33 We now turn to two ways in which further support could be given to the take up of languages.
- 34 The first is a qualified return to a mandatory requirement. In our consultations there were very divided views on this.
- 35 Such a return would have to be weighed against the reasons that led to the decision in 2004 to remove them: the need for a curriculum that motivates many more of our people to stay in education and training to eighteen. The present curriculum for languages works against that and any return would have to be preceded by a new curriculum.

36 We are not at this stage recommending a return to languages as part of the required/compulsory curriculum, but if we did we would need to ensure:

- a) The Curriculum should enable the language to be studied in different contexts.
- b) There would be an option to continue the study to one of two levels.
- c) For pupils who are at a low level of achievement in Mathematics or English (or both) at the end of Key Stage 3 there should be an automatic disapplication, although the pupil would have the entitlement to continue with the study of a language.
- d) The pupil would be required to be working for a prescribed qualification, of whatever kind.

37 We would consider such changes essential because it would be wrong to make students return to a curriculum which for many is inappropriate or, as they see it, not relevant.

38 In any consideration of use of a mandatory power, account would have to be taken of the availability of language teachers. It might therefore have to be set for an appropriate date in the future. There is also a need for further consultation with employer interests and the requirements of the specialised diplomas.

39 There is an alternative, which we would call a middle way. It builds upon the approach made to schools in January this year by the Minister of State asking them, on a voluntary basis, to set targets for between 50 and 90 per cent of pupils taking languages at Key Stage 4. The reported number of schools responding to this has been disappointingly low.

40 Although there is no statutory basis for the target in these terms, the Secretary of State has powers of direction to require schools to set performance targets and we **propose** that the Department should make a study of this

approach and of the guidance that might be given to governing bodies on what it would expect them to have in mind in setting targets. The Languages Ladder (Asset Languages) could be one of the relevant qualifications. Ofsted, HM Chief Inspector, and School Improvement Partners could support a positive response from schools.

Conclusion

41 The measures we have proposed for changes to the languages curriculum, the content and assessment of the GCSE, with our key proposals on pedagogy, motivation, and on promoting languages, as well as a long term proposal for incorporating languages into the primary curriculum, will all be very material to the take up of languages. Subject to further work on the detail of the two supportive measures, we think the middle way, if it delivers, would be the better one. We shall want to go into it more fully in our further work. We will also examine more closely the option of a suitably qualified return to a substantially qualified mandatory requirement which, subject to all the reservations we have set out, should be used if it proves needed. But it is not our preferred course. Indeed we urge that where they have not already done so, all Heads and Governing bodies should, over the next three months, take the action requested by the Minister of State in January 2006, to set targets for continuing with languages of between 50 and 90 percent, reflecting the aptitude and aspiration of their pupils, and mindful of what we say about alternative forms of award, at appropriate levels, and their contribution to achievement and attainment tables.

04138-2006DOM-EN

PPOAK/D16-6870/1206/351

© Crown copyright 2006

Produced by the Department for Education and Skills
Extracts from this publication may be reproduced for
non commercial education or training purposes
on the condition that the source is acknowledged.

For any other use please contact

HMSO licensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

75% recycled
This leaflet is printed
on 75% recycled paper

 **recycle**
When you have finished with
this leaflet please recycle it