

Pressures on schools and pupils limit prospects of recovery for languages

The results of the latest Language Trends survey show that the number of students choosing to take a language at 14 is still in decline.

The findings, based on a survey sent to 2000 schools in England, revealed that the proportion of schools where more than 50 per cent of pupils study a language in year 10 has dropped from 45% in 2008-9 to 40% in the current school year. Interestingly, the survey shows that it is not due to disaffection from students but from the structure of post-14 education and its link to performance tables.

Schools are taking part in a wide range of new initiatives to improve take up, and they are already starting to show an impact on pupils' attitudes. However, their effectiveness in increasing numbers is limited by the wide choice of subjects available; pressure on schools and pupils to achieve higher grades and narrowly focused advice from parents, tutors and others. Responses also show that it is school policies which are the biggest determinant of an increase in take up, highlighting the crucial role of school leadership.

The survey shows that the national benchmark of 50-90% of pupils expected to continue with a language - which has been government policy since 2006 - is being abandoned as unrealistic in a context of ever-widening choices for pupils.

Kathryn Board, Chief Executive of CILT, said: "As we go into a new decade it is time to consider new objectives for the National Languages Strategy. The need for our young people to learn languages has never been greater, with language skills becoming increasingly important when competing for jobs in the global marketplace. We have to work with the government, school leaders and local authorities to tackle the challenges outlined in this report. It shows that young people are enthusiastic about learning languages but the system can be an obstacle".

French, Spanish and German are still the most commonly taught languages and the number of schools offering Spanish has overtaken German for the first time in state schools. French saw an overall decrease at Key Stage 4 but 30% of schools have increased the numbers for French post-16 and 10% of schools have introduced Spanish as a new subject in the 6th form. At Key stage 3 a third of schools have introduced a new language in the last 3 years.

Lesser taught languages are continuing to grow in state schools although not so noticeably in the maintained sector as in the independent sector where there has been a sharp rise in the offer of Mandarin. Overall there is a conspicuous gap in access to language teaching between the state and independent sector.

Linda Parker, Director of Association for Language Learning, said: “This year’s survey highlights once again the enormous efforts being made by teachers of languages to encourage and support language learning in our schools, at times in the face of policies and practices in state schools which create barriers to take-up and success”.

Mike Kelly, Director of the Routes into Languages programme, at the University of Southampton, said: “The information in Language Trends is enormously useful. It is disappointing that state schools seem to be slipping further behind the independent schools in this area. But it is very encouraging that schools are working so hard to attract students to languages, and getting such a lot of effective support from national initiatives, including the Routes programme”.

Other initiatives include CILT’s Languages Work website which is being re-launched today; the Business Language Champions programme linking schools and businesses, and MYLO, an innovative new online language learning resource funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which is being launched in the spring.

To read the report: www.cilt.org.uk/research_and_statistics.aspx

ENDS

For further information contact:

Alice Moran
Press and Marketing Coordinator
CILT, the National Centre for Languages
alice.moran@cilt.org.uk
020 7633 3319

Notes to Editors

1. Languages Trends report

The Language Trends survey was carried out in autumn 2009 by CILT, the National Centre for Languages with support from the Association for Language Learning and the Independent Schools’ Modern Language Association. It is based on responses to a questionnaire sent to a representative sample of 2,000 secondary schools in England (1,500 maintained schools and 500 independent schools). The survey has been carried out annually since 2002 to track developments in language provision and take-up in secondary schools. Findings are based on responses from 668 schools – a response rate of 38% from maintained schools and 19% from the independent sector.

http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/research_and_statistics/language_trends_surveys.aspx

2. CILT, the National Centre for Languages

CILT works to convince people of all ages, at all stages of learning and in all walks of life, of the benefits of learning and using more than one language. We do this by using our expertise as the National Centre for Languages to influence policy and

practice and to support the development of language professionals. In everything we do, we aim to inspire people to develop a life-long appreciation of languages and cultures.

CILT, the National Centre for Languages is a registered company no. 5375352 and an independent charity number 1108543. We support the Department for Children, Schools & Families in implementing the National Strategy for Languages and provide independent advice on all aspects of language teaching, learning and use. We are the UK Sector Skills Body for languages and intercultural working and provide products and services for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills'

www.cilt.org.uk

3. **Routes into Languages**

Routes into Languages is a programme funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) with the purpose of increasing and widening participation in language study in higher education. The programme has been developed by the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML), the HE Academy Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) and CILT, the National Centre for Languages.

The Routes into Languages programme includes National Networks for Interpreting and Translation which aim to address a national shortage in native English speaking translators and interpreters through organising events, creating promotional materials, developing curricula, and increasing synergy between universities and employers.

www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk

4. **Language initiatives**

A huge range of initiatives have been introduced in schools across the UK to engage young people with language learning.

These include the CILT'S Business Language Champions programme (www.cilt.org.uk/blc), Languages Work (www.languageswork.org.uk), the 14-19 website (<http://www.cilt.org.uk/secondary/14-19.aspx>), MYLO (www.mylo.dcsf.gov.uk) and Routes into Languages (www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk).