GCSE languages by Key Stage 4 pupils – all schools in England, 1994-2010

(Revised data released on 12 January 2011)

Data notes:

The data summarised below is from the Department for Education (DFE) exam figures. The analysis covers all maintained and independent schools in England. Data from 1994 to 2004 is for all 15-year old pupils in maintained and independent schools in England. In 2005, the DCSF changed their reporting to all pupils at the end of KS4. Hence data from 2005 uses this population base. This refers to pupils who have reached the end of Key Stage 4 (i.e. when they have completed Year 11). The large majority of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4, however, are aged 15. Looking at all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 who achieved any qualification in 2005, 98.8% were aged 15, 0.3% were aged 14 and 0.9% were aged 16 at the start of the 2004/05 academic year.

The 2010 figures are based on revised data provided by DFE on 12 January 2011 at http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000985/index.shtml. The 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 exam data are all revised figures. All previous years' data up to 2005 relate to the final figures after the provisional data has been checked.

The summary includes:

- Pupils taking GCSE languages, in total
- Pupils taking GCSE languages, by language
- GCSE language achievements

- **Dramatic decreases in the number of KS4 pupils taking a language GCSE took place from 2004 to 2006. The decrease seemed to slow down from 2007. The proportion of KS4 pupils taking a language GCSE remained at 44% in 2008 and 2009, but further down to 43% in 2010.**

Figure 1: the proportion of KS4 pupils* taking languages at GCSE, England, 1997-2010

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
% of pupils entered for a language GCSE	**71%**	**75%**	**78%**	**76%**	**78%**	**76%**	**73%**	**68%**	**59%**	**50%**	**46%**	**44%**	**44%**	**43%**

** 15-year-old pupils in 1994-2004, see data notes on p.1. Only 1 entry is counted for each pupil - that which achieved the highest grade.*

The total number of KS4 pupils in school steadily increased after 1994 and reached a peak of 655,146 in 2007. The number slightly reduced to 653,083 in 2008 and then further down to 639,744 in 2010. Meanwhile, the number of KS4 pupils taking languages at GCSE and their proportion out of the total KS4 population decreased. 473,000 pupils were taking a language at GCSE (78%) in 2001 whereas only 327,000 KS4 pupils (50%) took a GCSE in languages in 2006. The decreasing trend continued into 2007 and 2008 although the drop rate seemed not as dramatic as those in previous years. In 2009, 278,800 pupils took at least one language GCSE and the proportion out of total KS4 population remained the same as that in 2008 (44%). In 2010, the number decreased to 272,800 (43%).

- **The number of pupils taking GCSE in French or German has been shrinking over the years and the 2010 examinations saw a further decrease of 4% in the number of KS4 pupils taking GCSE French or German. Meanwhile, other languages remained stable or showed slight increase.**

- **The number of pupils taking GCSE languages, by language (Figure 2, Appendix, p.5)**

Overall, **French** continued to attract the majority of students entered for GCSE modern languages. In 2010, 160,600 pupils entered for GCSE French. **German** remained in the second place although the gap between German and Spanish entries has been getting smaller over the years. In 2010, 65,800 KS4 pupils took German GCSE and 58,200 took Spanish.

The number of pupils taking GCSE in **French** or **German** decreased by 50% for both languages over the period from 2001-2010. 2005 and 2006 saw particularly severe decreases in the two languages, when French decreased annually by 14-16% and German by 15%. The annual decrease started to slow down in 2007, when French saw a decrease of 10% on 2006 and German 11%. In 2009, the annual decrease in French entries further slowed down to 5% and German 4% although in 2010, both languages had a further decrease of 4% on the previous year.

Meanwhile, the number of pupils taking GCSE in **Spanish** rose by 25% in 2008 compared to 2001 (despite a temporary decrease in 2005 and 2006). However, the increase of Spanish entries seemed to slow down in 2009 with a minor increase of 0.5% on last year. 2010 saw slightly better improvement, with an increase of 2% on the previous year. Total entries for **other languages** increased over the years with various annual rates (2-5%) despite a temporary decrease in 2005 and 2006. However, in 2010, students taking GCSE in other languages only increased by 0.4% on the year of 2009.

- **The proportion of pupils taking GCSE languages, by language (Figure 3)**

The changes of candidate numbers in GCSE languages should be considered together with the change of total KS4 pupil numbers. In 1994, 55% of all pupils were studying **French**, but the proportion fell to 53% by 2001. French kept falling after 2002 particularly in 2005 and 2006 (2005: 38% and 2006: 32%). The decrease continued into 2007 and 2008 although the rate seemed to slow down (with an annual drop of 3% and 2% respectively). The drop further slowed down in 2009 and 2010 with 26% and 25% of KS4 pupils entered for a French GCSE, although compared to 15 years ago, the shrink of French GCSE was still very remarkable (from 55% to 25%).

The proportion of pupils taking **German** kept around 21% from 1994 up to 2002. The decrease of German started in 2002, with the decreasing rate remaining at around 1% - 3%. The year of 2008 saw a decrease of 1% on 2007, with 11% out of the total KS4 pupils taking GCSE in German and the same proportion stayed in 2009. In 2010, this proportion was down by 1%.

The proportion of pupils taking GCSE in **Spanish** has seen a proportionate rise from 5% in 1994 to 8% in 2001 and has since stayed constant at 8-9%. **Other languages in total** remained constant at 3% up to 2008 and 2010 remained the same as 2009 (4%).

Figure 3: Proportion of pupils taking GCSE modern language, by language, England, 1994-2010

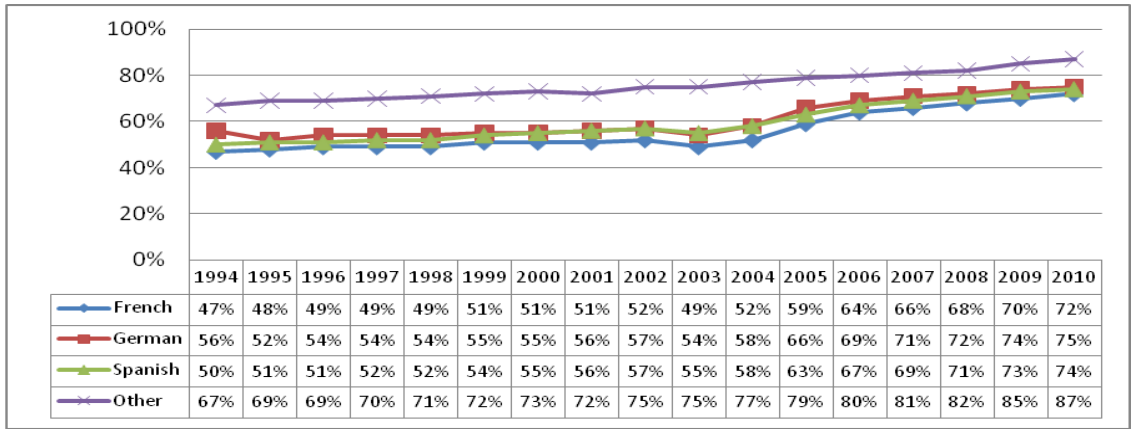
For each subject, only 1 entry is counted for each pupil - that which achieved the highest grade.

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
French	55%	51%	53%	52%	53%	54%	54%	53%	51%	49%	45%	38%	32%	29%	27%	26%	25%
German	21%	19%	21%	22%	22%	22%	22%	22%	21%	19%	18%	16%	13%	12%	11%	11%	10%
Spanish	5%	5%	6%	6%	7%	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	9%	9%	9%
Other languages	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%

- **The percentage of pupils gaining an A*-C grade continued to increasing (Figure 4).**

While the overall entries for GCSE languages have been declining over the years, the achievements of language GCSE have improved over the same period. Around three quarters of all pupils taking French (72%), German (75%), Spanish (74%) and 87% of pupils taking other languages achieved an A*-C grade in 2010. This compares with 70% for English and 65% for Maths.

Figure 4: Achievements A*-C by language, as a percentage of KS4 pupils attempting the subject, all schools in England, 1994-2010



	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
French	47%	48%	49%	49%	49%	51%	51%	51%	52%	49%	52%	59%	64%	66%	68%	70%	72%
German	56%	52%	54%	54%	54%	55%	55%	56%	57%	54%	58%	66%	69%	71%	72%	74%	75%
Spanish	50%	51%	51%	52%	52%	54%	55%	56%	57%	55%	58%	63%	67%	69%	71%	73%	74%
Other	67%	69%	69%	70%	71%	72%	73%	72%	75%	75%	77%	79%	80%	81%	82%	85%	87%

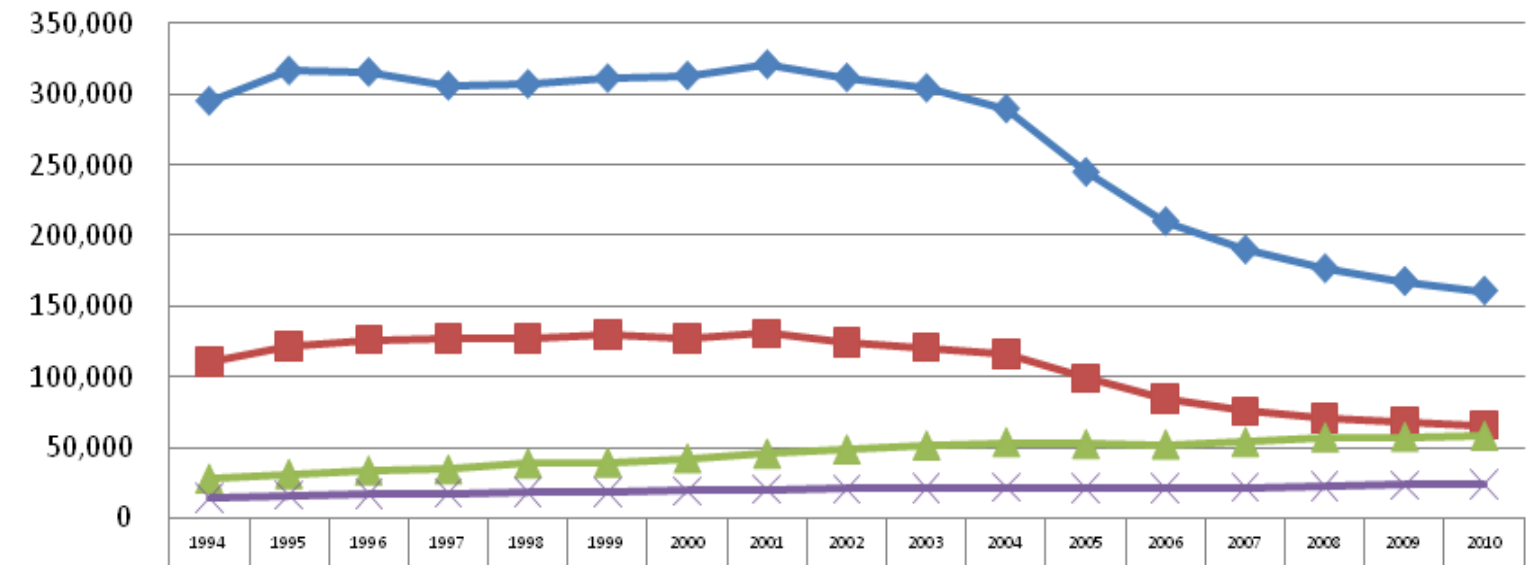
Individual grade in 2010 can be found at http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000985/index.shtml (see Table 11).

For future information, according to the DfE data, 32% of KS4 pupils achieved A*-C in a Modern Foreign Languages and 15.6% achieved the English Baccalaureate in 2009/10 (22.0% of pupils were entered for subjects that covered all the components parts of the English Baccalaureate).

Appendix

Figure 2: GCSE entries by language, England, 1994-2010

For each subject, only 1 entry is counted for each pupil - that which achieved the highest grade.



	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
French	295,211	316,847	315,746	306,055	307,293	311,384	313,146	321,207	311,847	304,472	289,756	244,800	209,800	189,700	176,400	167,300	160,600
German	110,446	121,259	126,233	127,510	127,374	129,765	127,437	130,627	124,717	120,659	116,347	99,200	84,800	75,800	71,100	68,300	65,800
Spanish	28,000	31,314	33,814	34,454	38,810	39,523	42,288	45,629	48,444	51,299	53,539	52,200	52,100	53,800	57,000	57,300	58,200
Other	14,686	16,258	17,423	17,791	18,207	18,779	19,423	20,317	20,641	21,508	21,879	21,400	21,300	21,700	22,600	23,500	23,600