



LANGUAGES PROVISION IN UK FURTHER EDUCATION



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

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Authorship

This project report was co-written by five colleagues at Queen's University Belfast: Ian Collen, Leanne Henderson, Minchen Liu, Aisling O'Boyle and Jennifer Roberts. Each contributed equally to the final publication.

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Introduction from the British Academy

The British Academy is the United Kingdom's national body for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future.

The Academy's language programme aims to monitor trends in languages education provision and utilise expertise to inform debate about languages in education and society. Previous work has focussed on the place of languages in broader skills development, their use by small and large businesses, and their role in global relations. Since 2016, the programme has specialised on the strategic importance of languages across UK education, economy and society, and the policy opportunities to deliver this.

In 2019 the Academy published 'Languages in the UK: A call for action'¹. This was supported by the other National Academies – The Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering and The Royal Society - and demonstrated the value of languages, not just as a discipline, but as relevant to all dimensions of society. This was followed in 2020 by 'The Importance of Languages in Global Context'² – a joint statement with American Association for the Advancement of Science, Royal Society of Canada and academies of humanities and social sciences in Australia – and then, most substantially of all, by 'Towards a National Languages Strategy'³, in collaboration with four partners: Arts and Humanities Research Council, Association of School and College Leaders, British Council and Universities UK, but based on widespread stakeholder consultation. It was in Towards a National Languages Strategy that we uncovered the dearth of accessible data and evidence on the provision of language learning in UK further education, and made recommendations to rectify this.

Therefore, as part of this wider programme of work that The Academy continues to take forward, we contracted a team of researchers from Queen's University Belfast to provide an initial assessment of the evidence base on the question of: what is the extent of language provision and uptake in the FE sector and what have been the trends over the past 20 years? This evidence will be used to bolster our understanding of the health of languages across all parts of the sector, and support our work in demonstrating the value of language learning to economy and society.

¹ See: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/languages-uk-academies-statement/>

² See: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/the-importance-of-languages-in-global-context-an-international-call-to-action/>

³ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills/>

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1 Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

Languages Provision in Further Education (FE) has sought to understand the extent of the provision and uptake of languages (other than English and Welsh) in the FE sector in the United Kingdom, and to ascertain the trends in that provision over the past 20 years.

Using multiple primary and secondary sources, the evidence we assess includes a systematic style review of existing literature, a secondary data analysis of existing National Statistics on languages uptake, a survey of FE staff, a survey of FE students and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders.

The systematic style review of literature provides, for the first time, replicable evidence that there is a dearth of research in relation to languages provision in FE in the UK over the past twenty years. This branch of language learning has been neglected from research agendas and the voice of language learners and teachers in FE has rarely been heard. Narratives on the decline of languages in the UK have focused almost exclusively on declining entries in secondary and Higher Education, particularly in post-1992 universities.

The secondary data analysis shows that low levels of participation in languages in FE reflect years of underinvestment and an absence of clear progression pathways through appropriate vocational qualifications. The number of FE colleges with no provision at all in languages is substantial. There are 'cold spots' for languages in Higher Education in the north, east and southwest of England, particularly in universities with lower-than-average entry tariffs (Muradás-Taylor, 2022). It is of no surprise that there is next to no provision in FE in these areas too. Given that almost all students of FE live permanently within commutable distance of their FE college, most FE students in the UK do not have the option to learn a language as part of or alongside their studies or training.

The staff and student surveys were largely completed by those with a positive disposition to languages. Nevertheless, they reveal a frustration that languages are undervalued by leadership teams and there is a lack of strategic direction about the future place of languages in FE settings. French and Spanish are the main languages taught, demonstrating a similar picture to that found in the compulsory school system. Opportunities to engage in other languages, including ancient languages such as Latin, are very rare.

In-depth interviews with key stakeholders provide insight that economic arguments about the value of languages for the UK are not being heard. There is little evidence of the integration of language learning into core programmes and vocational qualifications, or that this is considered at senior management level. There is a sense in our data that arguments for languages as enablers of social cohesion have been lost.

Our recommendations, based on our research and discussed further in Chapter 7, are:

- Develop a unifying voice for languages in FE, drawing on the expertise of staff in organisations including Association of Colleges (AoC), Colleges Scotland, Colegau Cymru, and NI Colleges. This unifying voice would strategically execute the following linked recommendations;
- Improve communication and sharing of languages teaching and resourcing between secondary, further and higher education, including regional oversight of languages education chiming with the overarching strategic unifying voice;
- Review qualifications in languages post Level 2 (including in relation to T Levels in the case of England);

- Conceive a programme of funded research to better understand the teaching and learning of languages in FE settings (outwith sixth-form colleges in England), the needs of industry in relation to languages and the possibility of operationalising much more languages teaching and learning in FE.

2 Introduction

2.1 Languages in the education system in the United Kingdom

FE in the United Kingdom (UK) includes any study after secondary education (compulsory until age 16) that is not part of Higher Education (i.e., not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree awarded by a Higher Education Institute) and not part of a secondary school which offers courses beyond school age, for example a school with in-house sixth-form provision. Courses range from basic English and mathematics to Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) with some undergraduate teaching also possible.

FE is not limited to 16 to 19-year-olds; indeed, many students are older than 19 and students attend on a full-time or part-time basis. Primary and secondary education both precede FE and therefore have an important role to play in shaping the FE curricula. The following section will review language learning in the four jurisdictions of the UK prior to FE i.e., in primary and secondary education.

England

In England, languages are compulsory from ages 7-14 and the National Curriculum must be implemented in all local authority-maintained schools. However, most state secondary schools in England are academies, which are exempt from following the National Curriculum, though in practice most do (Cirin, 2014).

Key Stage	Year Groups	Age of pupils	National Curriculum England Requirement to Study a Language
1	1 – 2	5 – 7	None
2	3 – 6	7 – 11	Study an ancient language or a modern foreign language
3	7 – 9	11 – 14	Study a modern foreign language
4	10 – 11	14 – 16	None (but encouraged as part of EBacc, see below)

Table 2.1: National Curriculum England Requirements to study a language

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is an accountability measure for schools in England and was introduced in 2010. The EBacc encourages all pupils to study a GCSE⁴ in English language, English literature, mathematics, the sciences, a language (ancient or modern) and geography or history. The government is currently on track to meet its EBacc ambition of 90% of pupils studying a EBacc subject combination at GCSE level by 2025, except for languages (Collen, 2022).

Results from the Teaching Schools Council (2016) regarding teaching and effective pedagogy of foreign languages at secondary school in Key Stages 3 and 4 indicated that fewer than half of pupils at the time of the study were taking a GCSE in a language other than English. Following this review, a £4.8 million National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) was set up in December 2018, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and co-directed by the University of York and the Cam Academy Trust. A significant mission of NCELP is to improve language curriculum design and pedagogy, with the hope of generating higher uptake of languages and greater success at GCSE level. In addition,

⁴ GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education, the main qualification taken by pupils in England, Northern Ireland and Wales at age 16.

the DfE in November 2019 announced that it would be convening an independent expert panel to test and develop potential changes to the subject content for French, German and Spanish GCSE. Meanwhile, Ofsted⁵ (2021) published its Curriculum Research Review (OCRR) for Languages, with a focus on the three ‘pillars’ of phonics, vocabulary and grammar.

From September 2024 for awarding in Summer 2026, the linguistic content of GCSEs in French, German and Spanish will focus on the most commonly occurring vocabulary of each language, with 1,700 words at Higher Tier and 1,200 words at Foundation Tier. Pupils will be expected to know and use the specified linguistic content (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) receptively and productively in the oral and written modalities. Any words on examination papers outside of the prescribed list will be glossed. However, implementing this new approach, which uses vocabulary frequency to determine word lists, has been criticised from many subject associations, practising teachers, and academics such as Milton (2022) and Woore et al. (2022). There are currently no plans to adopt this approach in languages or levels other than GCSE French, German and Spanish.

The DfE has invested £16.4 million into the existing Mandarin Excellence Programme, which now has over 6,500 pupils from 75 schools in England. A similar £4 million programme is running for Latin, delivered by Future Academies. At the time of writing, the Department for Education's intention is to undertake a procurement exercise to source a potential supplier to establish a renewed national centre for languages, to support a collaborative network of Languages Hubs, as part of the wider development of school-led system leadership, in England. The aim of the Languages Hubs is to support schools and colleges to increase interest, uptake and attainment in languages, helping to reach the 90% EBacc entry ambition.

The most recent British Council Language Trends England report (Collen, 2022) found that the amount of time devoted to languages in different primary schools across the country varies, with some pupils receiving less than 30 minutes per week. It also ascertained that an increasing number of schools have no international contacts and there is much work to be done in rebuilding an international dimension. Ayres-Bennett et al. (2022) found that investing in languages education in the UK will most likely return more than the investment cost, which means the benefit-to-cost ratios are estimated to be at least 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin and Spanish in education. Thus, the economic benefit of learning languages cannot be underrated.

Northern Ireland

In contrast to the education system in most developed western countries, compulsory education in Northern Ireland (NI) starts from a relatively young age (age four), the continuation of a selective system of post-primary education with grammar and non-grammar/ secondary schools, and the significant role of the churches in education governance (Gallagher, 2019). Within the current NI curriculum, introduced in 2007, compulsory language learning in NI starts at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14), and this is the shortest time for compulsory language learning in any country in Europe. Like for all areas of learning at Key Stage 3, there is no guidance from the NI government on how much time should be spent on language learning, leading to the individual discretion of school principals becoming the deciding factor for how much time is allocated across the curriculum. In 2012, the Department of Education (DoE) published the Northern Ireland Languages Strategy, which proposed 18 main recommendations. However, to date none has been implemented at a system-wide level. Additionally, most school principals and teachers involved in the review of primary languages in NI

⁵ Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills.

suggested that additional language learning should be included in the statutory curriculum (Jones et al., 2017).

From January 2020, a New Decade New Approach (NDNA) agreement was eventually endorsed by all the main political parties in NI. This provided a commitment to introduce legislation to create a commissioner to recognise, support, protect and enhance the development of the Irish language, and to provide official recognition of the status of the Irish language in NI. On top of that, there is a commitment to provide official recognition of the status (such as the language, arts and literature) of the Ulster Scots variety in NI.

Additionally, at Queen's University Belfast, Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded research as part of the Priority Area Leadership Fellowship for Modern Languages has highlighted the importance of supporting home languages in the NI primary system (Carruthers & Nandi, 2020).

Scotland

The Scottish government appears to have embraced the most far reaching and ambitious approach of all UK jurisdictions to primary language provision. In 2012, the Scottish Government introduced the 1+2 Language Strategy, which has refocused attention on: language policy in education and the provision for language learning in Scottish schools; the further development of links and rapport with 'language communities'; and the ambition to 'derive maximum benefit from foreign language communities in Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2012: 24). The aim of every Scottish school is to offer children the opportunity to learn a first additional language from Primary 1 (ages 4-5) and a second additional language by Primary 5 (ages 8-9). This 1+2 provision continues until pupils reach the end of Secondary 3 (ages 13-14). However, McKelvey (2017) indicated that many schools continue to prioritise European languages, such as French and German, with a small number of Mandarin and British Sign Language classes (BSL) taking precedence in some locations (Christie et al. 2016). McKelvey stressed that Polish, Urdu and Arabic are rarely included in the mainstream education system, even though they are significantly spoken languages in some communities in Scotland. Data from the 2011 Scottish Census indicated that Polish was reported as a spoken language more often than any other European or non-European language.

The total number of entries for languages at National 5 (equivalent to GCSE) in 2021 fell to 14,547 from 16,027 in 2020 and French remained the most learned language. Unlike for other UK jurisdictions, the British Council does not run a Language Trends exercise in Scotland.

Wales

The Welsh government is in the process of implementing Curriculum for Wales 2022 which became statutory on 01 September 2022. This new curriculum has four purposes which should be the starting point and aspiration for schools' curriculum design. Ultimately, the aim of a school's curriculum is to support its learners to become (i) ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; (ii) enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; (iii) ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and (iv) healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Gov Wales, 2022).

The Welsh government plans to expand the teaching of international languages in schools, as well as increase Welsh across all stages of education, in order to push towards one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Curriculum for Wales 2022 reconceptualises and integrates 'traditional' subjects into six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). 'Modern Foreign Languages' is relabelled as 'international

languages’, as well as integrating Welsh and English as part of the AoLE ‘languages, literacy and communication’. Under this reform, schools are now required to ensure that pupils make progress in at least one other international language from primary school. The uptake of Welsh as a second language at GCSE has rapidly increased in recent years due to the government’s statutory status on Welsh across the entire of compulsory education (ages 3 – 16), but there is some evidence of teachers feeling that Welsh now fulfils the ‘languages slot’ at GCSE (Collen et al., 2021).

To support the new Curriculum for Wales, the proposed “made-for-Wales” qualifications, for new generation GCSEs and other qualifications, were launched by Qualifications Wales in January 2021, and will first be awarded in 2027 and be offered in both English and Welsh.

2.2 Overview of Further Education in the UK

Introduction to Further Education

Further Education (FE) plays a key role in skills and qualifications training outside of university and other Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) for all age groups from age 16. Education in the UK is devolved, with each of the four jurisdictions responsible for their FE offering. FE colleges are thus funded by government and offer Level 2 and Level 3 courses, access courses, Higher Education-level diplomas and in some cases full Bachelor’s degrees (albeit awarded by a HEI with degree awarding powers). College qualifications are designed to equip students with job-specific skills that they can provide a path into education, transfer into the workplace, boosting their employability. Where appropriate, they are designed in close partnership with employers, thereby ensuring a competitive edge and exposure to the latest industry thinking.

In the academic year 2020/21, i.e., from August 2020 to July 2021, there were 1,640,300 FE students in England, 50,808 students in Northern Ireland (22,304 full-time and 25,804 part-time), while in Scotland, there were 41,989 full-time and 87,902 part-time students. As for Wales, 90,395 students enrolled in FE colleges, with 47,590 full-time and 42,805 part-time. In total, there were approximately 1.9 million FE students in the UK during the academic year 2020/21.

Further Education in England

In February 2018, the then-Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced a wide-ranging review of post-18 education and funding. The review aimed to create a joined-up post-18 education system, which would facilitate lifelong learning and improve the integration of the Further and Higher Education systems. The review was informed by independent advice from a panel led by Sir Philip Augar.

The report by Augar et al. (2019) acknowledged that post-18 education in England to be a story of both care and neglect. It proposed a rebalancing of priorities and funding between the Higher Education sector and rest of the post-18 education system which had experienced ‘a loss of status and prestige amongst learners, employers and the public at large’. On 24 February 2022, the House of Commons published the government conclusion to the post-18 education and funding review, but it focused almost entirely on the financing of Higher Education, particularly student loans. Based on Augar’s review, the House of Commons indicates that in England, the lifelong loan entitlement (LLE), a flagship element of the Skills and Post 16 Education Act 2022, which received royal assent on 28 April 2022, will be introduced from 2025 and comprise the equivalent of four years of post-18 education. It is intended to be used flexibly, for full-time or part-time study of modules or full qualifications at levels 4 to 6 in colleges or universities. The Government’s ambition in England is for

the LLE to replace the two existing systems of Government-backed student finance loans and advanced learner loans, often used in Further Education for those over 19. According to Augar's review, the Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, David Hughes, said he hoped the lifelong loan entitlement would be delivered as soon as possible, but warned of the impact recently proposed minimum entry requirements might have on accessing higher education delivered by FE colleges.

According to the Association of Colleges (AoC), there were 232 colleges in England in 2021 providing FE courses, made up of 160 FE colleges and 72 stand-alone sixth-form colleges (i.e. not part of an 11-18 or similar school). National Statistics report there to be 6 percent fewer students in 2020/21 from the previous academic year of 2019/20.

In 2020/21, participation at the higher levels (level 4 or above) climbed by 24.9 percent, to 217,500 from 174,100 in 2019/20. Adult education and training participation fell by 0.6 percent to 869,600, down from 875,100 in the previous year. Community learning⁶ participation fell by 32.0 percent to 243,700, down from 358,500 in the previous year.

Female learners accounted for 60.8 percent (997,330). Learners aged 25-49 accounted for more than half of all participants, with 57.2 percent (938,800), while 19–24-year-olds accounted for 28.0 percent (459,600), and those aged 50 and over accounted for 14.7 percent (241,600) respectively. Learner groups also exhibited diversity, in that the percentage of students who identified themselves as BAME (Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic groups) accounted for 24.2 percent (385,800). Additionally, 16.3 percent of students claimed to have a learning difficulty and/or disability, with a total number of 259,200.

As for the geographic distribution, 289,800 learners are in the London area, which was the region with the highest involvement in "FE and skills" from Gov.UK, with 65,600 learners at or below Level 2 (excluding Basic Skills), 94,100 learners at "Basic Skills", and 82,800 learners at Level 2. The North West had the most students engaged in Level 3 courses. The South East had the most learners (33,100) at Level 4 or higher, followed by the North West (31,600).

FE in England has recently introduced T Levels which are new 2-year courses taken after GCSEs and are broadly equivalent in size to 3 A Levels. T levels have been developed in collaboration with employers and education providers so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or related technical study through Further or Higher Education. T Levels offer students practical and knowledge-based learning at a school or college and on-the-job experience through an industry placement of at least 315 hours – approximately 45 days. T levels have been developed in a range of subject areas including building services, health, catering and finance, but to date there is no indication that T levels will be developed in languages or that T levels will include a language element.

Further Education in Northern Ireland

There are six colleges across NI with 29 campuses or community outreach centres that provide FE courses. According to data reported by the Department for Economy in 2022, there were 50,808

⁶ According to the definition of Community learning from Gov. UK, it includes 'a range of community based and outreach learning opportunities, primarily managed and delivered by local authorities and general further education colleges designed to bring together adults (often of different ages and backgrounds).'

students (22,304 full-time and 25,804 part-time) and 97,532 enrolments (one student may enrol in multiple courses) in the academic year 2020/21.

Total FE college enrolments have fallen by 36.3 percent, from 153,088 in 2016/17 to 97,532 in 2020/21, with a 26.3 percent drop in 2019/20. COVID-19-related factors, such as more generous GCSE and GCE grades (leading to school pupils being more likely to progress to sixth form or Higher Education), and practical difficulties with organising community-based courses, have exacerbated recent trends, such as decreasing part-time enrolments and the number of 16–19-year-olds dipping to its lowest level since the 1950s (impacting mainly on adult provision).

As for student population demographics, age profile has shifted slightly as well. For instance, since 2016/17, the proportion of enrolments aged 20–24 has climbed from 12.8 percent to 14.8 percent, while the student population aged 25 and over has declined from 26.3 percent to 25.0 percent.

The popularity of some learning areas varies according to gender. Female students accounted for most enrolments in 'Health, Public Services and Care' (83.7 percent of enrolments) and 'Education and Training' (71.8 percent) in 2020/21. 'Construction, Planning, and the Built Environment' (96.8 percent) and 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies' (93.2 percent) were two of the most male-dominated topic areas. Additionally, males are more likely than females to be full-time students; in 2020/21, male students accounted for three-fifths of full-time enrolments (60.6 percent), while part-time provision was evenly split by gender.

Further Education in Scotland

There are 26 colleges in Scotland providing FE courses. As in other UK jurisdictions, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted greatly on FE in Scotland, especially on teaching and learning activities and student support services on campuses according to our interview data with key stakeholders; this resulted in a decrease in overall enrolments and in the academic year 2020/21.

According to the College Performance Indicators 2020–21 published by the Scottish Funding Council on April 26 2022, 61.3% of the 41,989 full-time FE students enrolled on recognised qualifications finished their studies successfully; 11.0 percent completed their courses but did not receive certification, although some of the students may receive their certification later. Additionally, 27.7% of students dropped out of their course.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 17,898 students were unable to complete their studies in 2019–20. By 2021–22, however, 90.6 percent (16,218) of those students had returned as a result of FE colleges' efforts to re-engage them. 13,074 students decided to postpone their studies in 2020–21, with 7,447 of these students (57.0 percent) returning by January 2022.

Further Education in Wales

There are 13 FE colleges in Wales, with 90,395 unique learners (a learner may enrol at two or more FE institutions) who enrolled in 2020/21, with 47,590 full-time students and 42,805 part-time students, according to the data reported by StatsWales on February 24, 2022.

Among the learners, gender is relatively evenly distributed, as 54.25% (49,040) of the whole student population being female. Students aged 16 accounted for the largest percentage at 33.43%, which was more than any other age or age group for full-time students, but those aged 25–39 occupied the largest percentage among part-time students, at 42.8% (18,320).

Students are highly concentrated across four of the thirteen colleges that take almost half of the enrolments, with each of these colleges contributing to more than 10,000 enrolments, i.e., Coleg Gwent (11,100), Grwp Llandrillo Menai (10,380), Cardiff and Vale College (11,990), and Coleg Cambria (10,830).

In response to the Covid 19 pandemic, Colleges Wales collaborated with colleges and the Welsh government to reduce the impact of the pandemic including a 5 percent increase in funding-per-student, £5m to support vocational students to return to colleges, £3.2m to provide digital equipment, and an additional £466,000 to support students undertaking Independent Living Skills programmes, to enable them to complete their transition from college into employment and independence.

Summary of Further Education in the UK

FE has witnessed a fall in recent years across the UK due to historic underfunding. In response to this, official interventions such as college and government funding are in place to support efforts to improve the situation in Scotland and Wales.

The situation in the four jurisdictions is not always similar. Part-time courses offer a more flexible schedule and attract more students than full-time ones. However, the full-time mode is more popular in NI and Wales, and the situation is reversed in Scotland. As for England, learners are highly distributed geographically, as one would expect. London attracts the most learners to FE, with learners' backgrounds also being some of the most diverse found in any region.

2.3 Research Methods

The research question guiding the study is: 'what are the trends in language provision in FE over the past twenty years?' Before selecting exact methods, the Principal Investigator met with key stakeholders from FE to scope out various avenues which the project could potentially take. The project team then constituted an Advisory Panel drawn from middle leaders in the sector in the four jurisdictions of the UK. The Advisory Panel was instrumental in commenting on draft research instruments and in helping to steer the overall direction of the project. The project started in February and concluded in August 2022. Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All research participants gave their informed and voluntary consent to participate in the research.

The chosen research methods were: (1) systematic style review of literature; (2) secondary data analysis; (3) online questionnaires of FE staff and students; and (4) qualitative interviews. The following outlines some of the broad reasons as to why these methods were chosen:

Systematic style review of literature

The research team wanted to ascertain what academic literature has been written on language in FE in the UK. Systematic reviews can be regarded as an evidence-based method for research investigations, synthesizing different research studies to provide substantiated evidence to inform policy or decision makers. Their strength is that they have greater potential than other research designs to be replicable. However, rigorous and noteworthy systematic reviews can often be time-consuming research methods, which can take between 0.5 to 2 years to conduct (Khangura et al., 2012). Given the tight timescale of this project, the research team concluded that a systematic style review of literature (similar to a rapid review of literature) could be used as an alternative.

Regarding the general concept of rapid reviews, Tricco et al. (2015: 2) stress that ‘rapid reviews are a form of evidence synthesis that may provide more timely information for decision making, compared with standard systematic reviews.’ Tricco et al. also emphasise that rapid reviews are ‘a type of knowledge synthesis in which components of the systematic review process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a short period of time (ibid: 3).’ Rapid reviews can thus be regarded as ‘a streamlined approach to synthesising evidence in a timely manner’ (Adedoyin, 2016: 362).

Secondary data analysis

Researchers commonly use secondary data (i.e. pre-existing data) to answer new or additional research questions, emphasise new or additional research purposes, or explore a research interest which is distinct from that of the original research (Heaton, 1998). In addition to publicly available data published as national statistics (e.g. DfE or StatsWales), this research makes use of a number of datasets which were compiled by our team or by researchers in government departments and official bodies. These data enabled us to respond to a number of research questions which would not have been possible with original data collection, particularly in relation to national trends. Our research team followed Cohen et al.’s (2018) nine secondary data usage suggestions which are accepted as a standard approach for work in this area.

Online survey methods (questionnaire for staff and students)

Advantages of conducting online questionnaires include reliability and validity, not to mention being relatively quick and easy to complete for respondents on a range of internet enabled devices. The use of an anonymous questionnaire to collect data could potentially decrease the level of concern some respondents may have with regards to their privacy, which in turn may help to increase the “fidelity” of the responses. Dillman (2000) stresses that an online survey method can not only provide a potential medium for overcoming geographical boundaries, but it also reduces costs when compared to the use of paper-based surveys. Unlike postal questionnaire survey methods, online survey methods potentially decrease error rates, as researchers do not need to manually key in all information from paper to computer. Additionally, using online survey methods is timely and convenient for researchers.

The research team used online survey methods and designed two surveys (i.e., one for staff and the other for students) to collect data. In order to increase the response rate, the following steps were taken. First, the research team created a detailed list of potential respondent groups from General FE Colleges using publicly available data. The second step was to circulate both online surveys across the social media platforms and internal school email lists that were deemed appropriate for targeting suitable groups of both staff and students. In order to circulate both online surveys effectively, the research team contacted all identified key contacts within FE educational organisations. The third step involved the research team monitoring the response rate through the online questionnaire survey system. If it showed some regions having relatively low response rates, the research team sent an email reminder to those organisations that had not shown interest in participating in the surveys.

Qualitative interviews

The research team chose a qualitative strand in order to get a thicker description of the findings of the rapid review, secondary data analysis and online questionnaires. Regarding the root word “interview”, it combines the meanings “interact between each other” and “see”. In this sense, Kvale (1996: 14) identifies an interview as not simply ‘an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest,’ it is also a social and interpersonal encounter. Laing (1967: 66) perceives an interview as intersubjective, where interviewers and interviewees co-construct an interview and discuss ‘their interpretations of the world in which they live and express how they regard situations

from their own points of view'. In addition, the main advantage of conducting interviews, according to Hochschild (2009), is that an interview can uncover and explore in-depth, hidden aspects that relate to statistical figures, in a way that questionnaires cannot. Additionally, an interview could uncover how and why people 'frame their ideas in the ways they do, as well as reveal how and why people make connections between ideas, values, events, opinions and behaviours (Cohen et al., 2018: 506)'. In fact, an interview should not only be perceived as an ordinary conversation; instead, it is often directed by an interviewer's (or a research team's) pre-designed questions, to serve the research objectives, gain insight of evidence, and follow up survey results.

Regarding types of interview, the semi-structured interview was adopted in this research project. The advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews is to collect data in an effective way, as the interviewer is aware of what the research objectives are, and therefore is in a position to construct questions and probe for answers in such a way that will satisfy the required research objectives required. Another advantage of using the semi-structured interview is that all interviewees answer the same questions with similar follow-up questions, thus increasing comparability of each response as well as reducing interviewer bias. Additionally, even though interviewees respond to the same topic and interview questions, the sequence of questions may be tailored to each individual interviewee to allow for greater flexibility and freedom during the interview.

The main interviewees in this research project are stakeholders who have worked or are working in or with FE in different parts of the UK, as well as students of languages in FE. During the initial recruitment stage, these stakeholders received email invitations from the research team inquiring into their willingness to participate. Those who indicated a willingness to participate were then invited to take part in an interview designed to share their experiences and perspectives on trends in language provision in the UK FE sector. Interviewees had the choice to participate in their interviews via phone, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other platforms during May and June 2022. Regarding the length of interview, each interviewee needed to take part in one 45-minute audio recorded interview. Additionally, in order to meet the high standard of an academic research project, the research team followed Kvale's seven stages (1996) in the planning of interview investigation: which are thematizing; designing; interviewing; transcribing; analysing; verifying; and reporting. Data are analysed using content analysis.

3. Systematic Style Review of Literature

As part of the wider project, the team carried out a systematic style review on language education in FE. This is sometimes referred to as a rapid review.

The research team anticipated a small research base and so decided to keep the searches broad. Initial searches on Google Scholar and the university library catalogue identify two studies which would be eligible for inclusion. This helped develop and formulate the inclusion and exclusion criteria below.



		
Where?	Research conducted on FE Institutions in the UK	Research conducted on universities, sixth form colleges or schools. Research conducted outside the UK.
Who?	Research involving students, lecturers, teachers and leadership from Further Education.	Research involving those with no connection to FE
When?	Research conducted in the last 20 years.	Research conducted before 2002.
Type of Research	Both quantitative and qualitative data Opinion pieces Case studies etc.	
Topic Area	Language trends Student experience Teacher experience FE Provision Interventions	Papers that discuss: Teaching English/ TESOL Teaching approaches/ pedagogical focus

Table 3.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for systematic style review

3.1 Steps

1: Searching

Three databases searched

British Education Index

ERIC

Education abstracts

1103 records identified

Completed on 24/3/22

2: Title and abstract screening

121 duplicates removed

982 records screened

883 records excluded

201 records (20%) double screened

Completed on 1/4/22

3: Whole text screening

99 reports sent for retrieval

95 reports retrieved

86 reports excluded

95 reports (100%) double screened

Completed on 12/4/22

4: Data extraction

9 studies included

Summary of studies table created

Completed on 19/5/22

5: Data analysis

Codes created

Analysis themed

Draft analysis completed on 1/6/22

3.2 PRISMA Flow Diagram

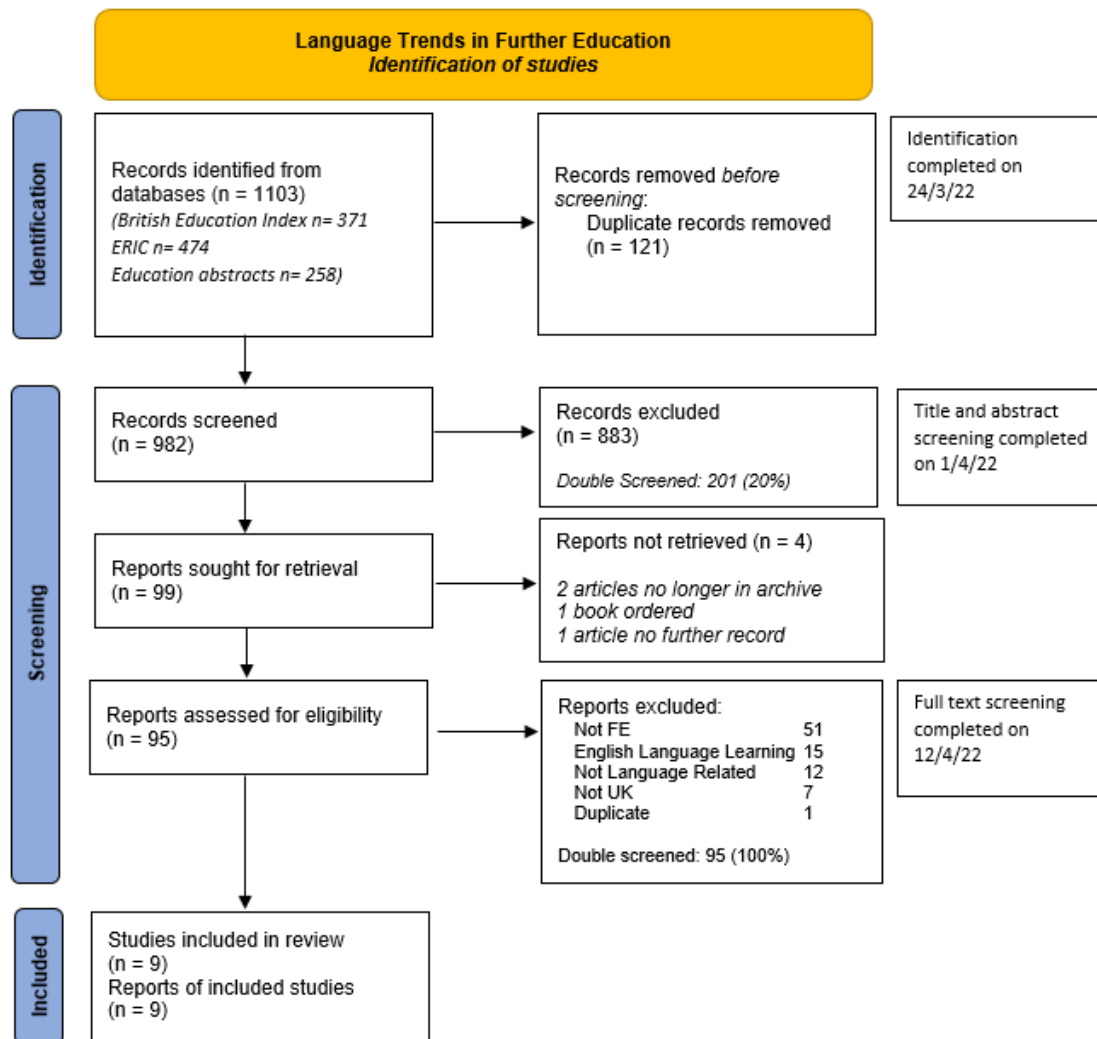


Figure 3.1: Prisma flow diagram of systematic style review

3.3 Summary of Included Studies

Each of the included articles are summarised below. The comments and conclusions presented in this section are of the papers presented. Much of the content has been copied verbatim.

Reference	Summary of Article	What does it say about languages in FE
Zhang, G. X., & Li, L. M. (2010). Chinese language teaching in the UK: Present and future. <i>Language Learning Journal</i> , 38(1), 87-97.	This article begins with a brief introduction to the current provision of Chinese language teaching in the UK, its background and characteristics, followed by some preliminary analysis of the issues and a forecast of possible trends in the development of Chinese language teaching in the UK in the coming years.	Chinese learning and teaching (CLT) in lifelong education is very unevenly distributed across the country but seems to reflect the economic relationship that education establishments in those areas have with China (for instance, CLT is very active in the southeast of England). Generally speaking, FE is the sector in which CLT is most diversified in form, and unbalanced in geographic coverage, with FE CLT provision falling far behind other education sectors.
Atherton, M., & Barnes, L. (2012). Deaf people as British Sign Language teachers: Experiences and aspirations. <i>Deafness & Education International</i> , 14(4), 184-198.	This article presents two research projects that investigated the teaching qualifications held by British Sign Language teachers (BSL), their career and professional development aspirations, and their perceptions of the training opportunities currently offered to deaf sign language users. The study highlights the need to improve access to relevant information, establish and strengthen peer support networks, and create a designated career path for British Sign Language teachers. The article also discusses the potential impact of the government's recent proposals for teacher qualifications in the FE sector and the	<p>This paper focused on BSL teachers and their experiences in FE. The research highlighted that there is a need to improve access to relevant information, establish and strengthen peer support networks as well as to establish a designated career path for BSL teachers.</p> <p>The paper discussed some issues in the sector and in particular the following points are relevant here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Little research has been undertaken into the profession of British Sign Language (BSL) teaching, despite a huge increase in the number of such courses offered in FE colleges and elsewhere over the past twenty years.• With professional Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills standards (QTLS) published in 2007 and fully implemented in 2010, BSL teachers working in FE colleges were required for the first time to hold formal teaching qualifications. The regulations allowed all those working in FE for a period of five years to gain these qualifications• There is a need to regulate and professionalise FE teaching.• Of those participants with teaching qualifications, City & Guild 7307 (part 1) qualification was the most commonly held at just under 50 per cent, followed by the City & Guild 7307 (part 2). This two-part award was intended to equip teachers working in FE with the basic teaching skills required at that level but not all those

possible implications for those wishing to train as BSL teachers.

who gained part 1 went on to complete the full award.

- All the respondents were or had recently been active teachers of BSL (46 per cent for more than 10 years), but more than half did not have the standard qualification for teaching in FE. Although only just over half of the respondents (53 per cent) were teaching in FE at the time of the studies, it might be anticipated that the standard of teaching should be the same no matter what the educational setting as all their students work towards the same national awards.
- Data collected from respondents indicate that FE colleges were not necessarily requiring higher levels of qualifications from BSL teachers compared with those working outside FE.
- It has been suggested that BSL teachers have been frequently employed by colleges simply by recommendation or word of mouth as someone who is a 'good BSL teacher', rather than having to meet the usual professional standards required in FE.
- The introduction of higher professional standards and qualifications for teachers working in the FE sector since 2007 should, in theory, have helped to improve BSL teaching in the UK in the long term.
- For anyone wanting to teach in FE, both PTLLS and CTLLS (or a prescribed equivalent qualification) are required as an absolute minimum; anyone wishing to take on a full teaching role also needs the DTLLS award.
- While many students continue to espouse the educational value of foreign languages, displaying an appreciation of cultural differences and an ability to look outward by enrolling on language programmes. Nevertheless, while theorists claim that life skills, including foreign languages, increase cognitive ability through mental flexibility, higher order thinking skills and problem solving, students are withdrawing from language classes at worrying rates.
- This study explores possible reasons for students' withdrawal from foreign languages and looks at intervention strategies that might help prevent this withdrawal in the future. They identify the motivation for the students' decision to take language classes and test the hypothesis of a positive correlation between motivation and perseverance. They refer to the views of language practitioners as to why students withdraw from courses. Finally, they discuss their findings and make recommendations for assuring the future vitality of modern foreign language teaching.
- Four qualified (Modern Foreign Languages) MFL teachers, each with 10+ years' experience in FE, responded to a survey asking them to share their views on students' reasons for withdrawal by email.
- Two out of four teachers surveyed believed that students primarily withdraw from courses because of the

Diamantatou, C., & Hawes, T. (2016). Foreign Language Learning, Motivation and the Market Economy. *Journal of education and learning*, 5(1), 95-103.

This article explores UK students' motivation to learn a foreign language, linking past unrewarding learning experiences to attrition rates and raising questions about the impact of official policies and social structural conditions. Thirty-one FE college students were surveyed. The study suggests that not only do foreign language students face significant challenges but that variables that relate to past emotional contexts surrounding learning may, unfortunately, overwhelm positive motivation to learn. They may create negative

expectations and ultimately extinguish this motivation itself.

difficulty of the subject matter, coupled with the pressure of other commitments such as family and work. One teacher cited lack of interest and lack of study time among students, while a final respondent suggested withdrawal might be due to illness, being away on holiday, or moving house. The initial hypothesis of a correlation between motivation and perseverance was thus not supported by the findings, despite its being widely acknowledged in the literature (Stern, 1983, p. 309).

- Respondents in the survey cited personal factors such as family or work as affecting students' decision to (dis)continue their studies. Work-related issues also cause students to drop out. Such as changes to employment status or shifts. The respondents' consensus was that lack of perseverance was due to lack of interest and study time on the part of students, as well as their illness, holidays and moving house. Teachers' personal beliefs may affect their decisions about classroom pedagogy and if these beliefs include the notion that learners' factors, rather than the quality of their teaching, are responsible for students' dropping out, this might be a more comfortable explanation to live with as teachers.
- 31 adult learners from affluent areas in Merseyside, with English L1, filled out questionnaires. 21 of these learners were enrolled in a first-year Italian evening course and 10 were on a first-year Italian morning course.
- 31 students were also surveyed, and findings suggest that all respondents were in fact false beginners, had already studied a foreign language at school, and now described the experience as unrewarding. This not only suggests that foreign language students face major challenges, but also that those variables related to the past emotional context around their studies may unfortunately trump positive motivation to learn. They may create negative expectations that finally extinguish this motivation itself.

Ó Ciaráin, R. (2019).
Irish: *The Irish Language in Education in Northern Ireland*, 3rd Edition.
Regional Dossiers Series

The aim of the Regional dossiers series is to provide a concise description of European minority languages in education. Aspects that are addressed include features of the education system, recent educational policies, main actors, legal arrangements and support structures, as well as quantitative aspects such as the number of schools, teachers, pupils, and financial investments.

Hagan, L. (2020) *Ulster-Scots- The Ulster-Scots Language in Education in Northern Ireland*.
Regional Dossiers Series

The Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (now Belfast Metropolitan College) offers GCSE and A-Level Programmes as well as beginner level courses.

A two-part guide for teachers of adult night classes is available.

Adult classes are currently being offered in over 50 venues across Northern Ireland. Based on surveys carried out by Líofo in the DfC, Northern Ireland, it is estimated that there are between 3000 and 3500 adults taking Irish language night classes in Northern Ireland.

An Ulster-Scots language course was run by South Eastern Regional College some years ago but ended when the lecturer was no longer available. There are no statistics available for the teaching of Ulster Scots in adult education.

McArdle, F. and Teare, R. (2016) *The Manx Gaelic Language in Education in the Isle of Man*. Regional Dossiers Series

Adult education courses in Manx Gaelic (evening classes) are available through the Isle of Man College. In recent years this was usually one class. No classes are currently available at Isle of Man College due to the small class sizes.

Fabian, K., & MacLean, D. (2014). Keep taking the tablets? Assessing the use of the tablet. devices in learning and teaching activities in the FE sector. *Research in Learning Technology*, 22.

This article summarises the methods and findings of an interventionist/action research project to assess the benefits and potential pitfalls of using mobile devices for learning and teaching activities in a FE setting. The authors collected feedback from staff and students during and after the project, and the project authors were present during classroom activities to observe and record. The overall feedback was very positive, but there were some issues with the use and management of the tablets. One of the main issues was the cumbersome nature of security settings and application management.

This project involved 3 sites. In terms of the Language school the following was found:

- Amongst the attributed benefits of mobile learning in FE were the improvement of communication channels, updating students about course materials via SMS and other forms of alerts and updates through mobile devices.
- Students did not always have 1:1 access to devices. Students in SVS had a 1:1 ratio during use, but hairdressing and Language School students had to share devices. Three was the maximum number of student groups.
- Students reported in the survey that they liked the Grammar App and the discussion board best. Whilst the discussion board activity is not mentioned, this was actually the end process for most of the activities in the language area.

Gibson, H., & Shutt, J. (2002). Tuning in, turning on and dropping out: an investigation into the reasons for non-completion of adult foreign language courses in colleges of

This article focuses on students who have dropped out of foreign language courses in FE colleges. The authors interviewed students who dropped out of foreign language courses in FE to determine why they chose to leave prematurely. Most cited a variety of reasons for not completing the course, ranging from initial course information,

This paper is concerned with those who drop out of foreign language courses in colleges of FE. Its aims were to investigate why part-time students withdrew from adult French and German classes, both evening and daytime as well as business courses, and to make recommendations for further study and courses of action.

1. Many of the issues that students mentioned could be attributed to college procedures before their enrolment. Under this broad heading we include items such as the availability and reliability of pre-course information, the prior assessment of students' learning needs, students' realism regarding the degree of commitment - such as homework and the effects of certification on motivation.
2. A second group of issues pointed clearly to the tutors' management strategies and teaching skills. Under

FE. *Language Learning Journal*, 25(1), 59-64.

teaching methods and tutor management skills, their confidence and prior knowledge of the target language and grammar, to seemingly mundane issues such as homework and break times. The article concludes with ten recommendations.

this heading we include tutors' ability to manage group dynamics and to nurture learners' confidence, to generate a climate conducive to learning, their use of the target language for instructional purposes and the use of teaching resources.

3. A third group of factors was clearly implied by our respondents. These included issues relating to the wider national and cultural context of FLL (foreign language learning), such as the international status of English, the age at which our interviewees were exposed to FLL in compulsory education, as well as their apparent lack of knowledge of relevant grammatical terminology.
 4. A fourth group includes things such as their view of themselves as learners, their confidence in conversing in the target language, as well as their prior experience of the culture of the target language.
- Interviewee J enjoyed conversation in the target language but found the pace too slow. It transpired that he had already covered the same textbook units on an earlier course even though he had sought guidance from a member of the college's modern languages department before enrolling. He had wondered whether it was a mistake to stay on Level 2, but it was clear that he had no information regarding other available courses as he did not know whether Level 3 ran that year.
 - Interviewee I said that he was put off by a person who already had an obvious knowledge of the language but who professed to be a complete beginner.
 - A lack of realism about the rigours of learning a language was another issue that came out strongly from the interviews and that led to students dropping out.
 - Connell has wryly commented that it "put into perspective all those courses with names like Bulgarian Made Easy...that make people think there is little effort and no real challenge in becoming fluent in someone else's language...People thinking of doing a language in three months...may reflect on the fact that section one is divided into six whole chapters. Connell's review of a book on foreign language study captures the unrealistic expectations with which some students seem to embark on foreign language courses. Interviewee D made the following comment on French speaking skills: 'As the tutor says, it's just a question of practice. But you think, oh God...how much practice?'. Other participants seemed partially aware of the length of the process. Interviewees A and H wanted to have a good grounding before progressing to another level. Interviewee G commented that continuity was needed in language learning, while Interviewee N felt that it was something 'you have to keep going'. Having withdrawn from his French class he considered that what he had needed was 'another good six month's solid work to really get it to a usable state'. Interviewee K believed that it took three or four years to achieve a good working knowledge of a language. Colleges need to be aware that not all students are mindful of the ongoing commitment needed to succeed in foreign language courses.

- If students are aware from the outset of the need for a long-term commitment to the learning of the language - through course brochures and clear information - there would be less frustration and less disillusionment at slow rates of progress.
- The clear expectation that homework was a college requirement, took a certain amount of time each week and was a course expectation, would have helped clarify what was involved in learning a language.
- It would seem that the tutor's skill in using the target language as well as audio and video resources was important in accustoming the student to the patterns and vocabulary of the language. The tutor's speed of delivery could, however, have a negative effect upon confidence. The students who had purchased video or audiocassettes reported using these at home successfully and felt more in control of the pace of delivery. While audio and videotapes often represented the language at natural speed, interviewees commented that they liked it when their tutor repeated sections and built understanding slowly.
- Many interviewees originally attended their classes with little confidence, as the products of the relatively low status of FEL within compulsory schooling in the UK. Also, while the majority of the students we interviewed initially attended with modest reasons for learning a language, i.e., primarily for holiday or for business purposes, they did so in the knowledge that competence in another language was not essential. One encouraging factor regarding confidence was the unanimous view that no matter how low it was in classroom contexts it was universally higher when attempting to use the target language abroad. Interviewee H, for example, thought that he and others felt less intimidated trying out the language abroad. This was partly because 'the native speakers were leading and asking the questions' and partly because students' limited vocabulary meant that it often seemed to be more difficult to keep the momentum of conversations going in class. Interviewee I also suggested that the issue of students comparing themselves negatively with one another in the classroom evaporated when talking with native speakers abroad. Tutors need to sharpen their awareness of both the positive effects of using the target language for instructional purposes as well as the negative consequences for those with little confidence.

Baker, C., Andrews, H., Gruffydd, I., & Lewis, G. (2011). Adult language learning: a survey of Welsh for Adults in the context of language planning. *Evaluation &*

This article discusses the importance of adult language learning when minority languages are under threat. The research context is Wales and uses primarily a longitudinal design and a multi-method approach to understand learners' expectations, experiences, outcomes and curriculum issues. The

- The research is the initial stage in a longitudinal design that follows adults in language-learning classes for three or more years using a multi-method research methodology. It is the first piece of research in Wales that follows adult learners of Welsh as a second language from Entry-level beginners' courses to more advanced courses that develop fluency in Welsh. The importance of adult language learners for languages is also highlighted.
- Given the importance of adult learners in the context of language revitalisation, it is essential that large-scale, longitudinal research is carried out in order to effectively inform the further development of Welsh for Adults

article reports preliminary results obtained from a sample of 1061 adults who started learning Welsh using a questionnaire approach. The results suggest a match between adult language learners' motivations and aspirations and language acquisition planning theory. Integrative motivation is stronger than instrumental motivation in starting to learn Welsh, although both are present and can be seen as conceptual, but not necessarily psychological. Managing the expectations of course members to improve retention is considered important. Language acquisition programmes depend on these learners being fluent in the language and thus achieving everyday language use.

and the field of adult language learning as a whole.

- In the six districts/counties of North Wales, (Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbigh-shire, Flintshire and Wrexham) there are 11 providers of courses for learning Welsh as an adult (e.g., FE Colleges).
- Of those (1061) who returned the questionnaire, 69.3% are female and 30.7% male. When asked about their previous experience, 28.2% of learners replied that they had attended a previous course and 13.6% that they had started but not completed a course. The majority of learners (58.7%) were born in England, while close to a third (32.3%) were born in Wales. It is important to note that only 13.2% had not studied Welsh before. Partly due to the Welsh language being compulsory in the National Curriculum of Wales (age 5~16), many in the sample had previous experience of Welsh language learning. For example, 31.3% of respondents had learnt Welsh in primary school, either before the National Curriculum was implemented or after.
- Adult language learners may wish to acquire a second language for employment, promotion or status. The results suggest that adult language learners are strongly motivated by language reproduction in the family, thus supporting language planning theory. It is noticeable that adult language learning is weakly connected with expressed needs to access mass media in Welsh.
- Around a fifth of respondents found the language difficult to learn, or the pace of the course too fast, experiencing slow progress and a lack of self-confidence. Such self-perceptions relate to expectations about the course and send a clear signal to course providers that such expectations need to be educated and managed for retention and completion.
- Adult language learning can be valuable for a kaleidoscope of excellent reasons (e.g., accessing the culture of that language, mental stimulation, social networking, travel and vacations, employment and promotion, religious participation, identity and community networking). Each of these reasons makes adult language learning purposeful, worthwhile and beneficial. On an individual basis, each reason provides justification for the supply of adult language learning, plentiful provision, high-quality teaching and learning and successful outcomes in terms of fluency and usage.
- The results of the research indicate that a particularly positive match occurred between the motivations, personal contexts and aspirations of adult language learners questioned in this survey.
- The review of literature noted that retention on such adult language-learning courses is problematic. Course members start with the best of intentions, the highest of motivations and the most enthusiastic of expectations. Yet language learning takes years rather than days, continuous practice rather than short lessons and commitment across time rather than quick wins. The dropout rate therefore can be high even when a good teaching style, environment, classroom ethos and high-quality materials and excellent staff are present.

The analysis of reasons for not completing a previous course indicated that expectations may have been too high, variously in terms of expected time commitments, speed of learning and the need to practise. For language planning purposes, this result suggests that increased clarity is needed at the commencement of a course regarding the amount of progress likely to be made, specific waypoint targets, pragmatic rather than idealistic expectations of fluency, and the need and opportunity to practise between lessons. If expectations are not managed, retention rates may be low, and hence language planning targets to increase the minority language population may become compromised. A third result indicated that most were realistic in terms of restricted outcomes from a beginners' course, and that result gives some optimism for language planners who need retention to be as high as possible.

- The results suggest that non-retention is partly due to personal circumstances such as other commitments and lack of time. Self-perceptions regarding non-retention also relate to the course itself. Around a fifth of respondents found the language difficult to learn, or the pace of the course too fast, experiencing slow progress and a lack of self-confidence.
- Lack of funding and lack of progression is also an issue

Table 0.2: Summary of Included Studies

3.4 Results

Summary of Issues

Upon completion of the coding, seven of the nine studies mentioned some problems in the FE sector. In these seven studies there were 43 individual codes for the issues in the sector. By combining, classifying and summarising these issues, four key themes emerged:

MANAGEMENT AND STRUCTURE

In the studies the management of FE, funding, teaching resources, organisation, standards, and professional development have been the main focus of discussion.

First, wider institutional issues such as staffing are considered to be a major factor affecting language learning and provision. In this regard, Baker et al. (2011) argue that the lack of sufficient funding limits the development of teaching staff and growth of the sector, which results in a low number of successful adult Welsh language learners. Similarly, Gibson and Shutt (2002) found that whilst management factors had a significant impact on student non-completion, a range of teacher-factors also had a large part to play, including the management of group dynamics, the development of confidence, the ability to generate a positive spirit of learning, including the seemingly trivial issue of coffee breaks, the use of the target language for instructional purposes, the use of instructional resources and the continuous monitoring of student progress.

Second, there is a lack of coordination and cooperation among FE organisations and institutions. In this regard, Zhang and Li (2010) argue that the lack of coordination and cooperation among different organisations and institutions not only slows down the development of Chinese language learning and teaching, but also makes it difficult to gain the understanding, support and trust of colleagues who teach other languages and scripts. Notable examples of this include inaccurate definitions of programme levels and the lack of clear and detailed objectives, resulting in significant differences in programme levels and objectives between different Chinese language teaching institutions.

Additionally, Atherton and Barnes (2013) also highlight two major issues regarding the qualifications of BSL teachers. These are: (i) the lack of teaching qualifications as a prerequisite for BSL teaching, and (ii) the lack of any standard qualifications for BSL teachers. It is of concern that almost all respondents were or had been active BSL teachers in the past (46% for more than 10 years) and more than half did not have a standard qualification for FE teaching. A serious consequence of such a situation is that it results in many teachers teaching in the sector lacking both a professional qualification and the pedagogical expertise to teach the language. A major reason for this situation is the lack of an active and effective regulatory process in some UK jurisdictions, which ultimately leads to uneven standards of teaching in the profession.

Furthermore, Atherton and Barnes (2013) argue that professional and career development for those teaching in FE has been unclear so far due to apparent management deficiencies and problems. On this point, the research data and findings indicate a general lack of understanding of what it takes to be a qualified BSL teacher and how to follow a structured career path. And, almost all of the current information on national qualifications and professional standards related to teaching FE (where most BSL courses take place) is published and in the form of academic research, which makes it difficult for the general population to access or keep up to date (Atherton & Barnes, 2013).

TEACHING AND TRAINING

Existing studies that address the topic of education and training for FE focus mainly on these five issues:

- 1) Lack of an appropriate syllabus and examination system. For example, in the case of Chinese language learning, Zhang and Li (2010) argue that a major problem in Chinese language learning

is the lack of appropriate syllabi to meet the needs and goals of the overall curriculum requirements and to guide native English speakers on how to learn Chinese, which makes training difficult.

- 2) Lack of adequate training materials. For Chinese language teaching, Zhang and Li (2010) point out that the three main reasons for the lack of Chinese language training materials are: (i) the lack of Chinese language textbooks that can meet the needs of the British curriculum design and the British education system; (ii) the existing textbooks are designed almost from the linguistic perspective of the Chinese language itself, not from the perspective of learners' needs, so that learners, especially beginners, may find Chinese is too difficult to learn and master; (iii) the content of Chinese textbooks seems to give little consideration to how language learners use Chinese and understand Chinese culture with very limited exposure to the Chinese language and culture. Existing instructional materials are rarely designed to address how native English speakers learn Chinese, and only a few are marketed to guide such Chinese learners to recognised British qualifications.
- 3) There is a lack of research and debate relating to teaching and training. Zhang and Li (2010) argue that a significant number of teachers are unsure of what research they can conduct based on classroom teaching and learning, or what knowledge and skills training would be useful. Furthermore, there are limited activities and opportunities for teachers to exchange information and learn from the best practice of others, which fall far short of meeting the real needs of a rapidly growing number of teachers.
- 4) Use of language of instruction. Broderick (2011) argues that there are currently no courses for 16-19-year-olds or adults in the UK that can qualify for teaching in Manx Gaelic, so all languages of instruction on the course are English. This highlights the wider issue of teacher availability.

MOTIVATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Diamantatou and Hawes (2015) explore UK students' motivation to learn languages, linking past unrewarding learning experiences to attrition rates and raising questions about the impact of official policies and social structural conditions. In this study, 31 FE college students were administered a questionnaire from the Attitude/Motivation Testing System, which examined the high rate of voluntary dropout even among motivated students. Diamantatou and Hawes (2015) administered a questionnaire to all students who had prematurely terminated their courses and found that all respondents were false beginners who had studied a language in the past, now describing the experience as unrewarding. Not only does this suggest significant challenges for language students, but unfortunately, variables related to the emotional context of past learning may overwhelm positive motivation to learn. That is, such language learners may develop negative expectations and eventually extinguish this motivation itself. Thus, the lack of a sense of reality when learning a language has become an issue of intense concern (Gibson & Shutt, 2002).

In terms of internal causes, the main reasons for students dropping out are the difficulty of the subject and other pressures such as family and work. For example, in the survey, one teacher mentioned students' lack of interest and lack of time to study, while the last respondent thought that dropping out could be due to illness, going on vacation or moving. In this regard, Diamantatou and Hawes (2015) also delved into the specifics of whether personal factors such as family and work influence students' decision to (not) continue their studies. On the one hand, although the study does not specify whether these family issues relate to factors such as family illness or dependency, the importance of personal circumstances is evident. Among other things, the role of family members in supporting each other seems to play a crucial influence in the stress of family relationships. Thus, helping students set their own goals and develop independence can go some way toward alleviating language learning problems that arise from a lack of support from family members. Also, the role of the teacher in establishing a supportive, non-threatening teaching

environment is very important. On the other hand, Diamantatou and Hawes (2015) point out that work-related issues may also lead to students dropping out of school. For example, extended working hours in conflict with classroom learning may affect students' commitment to learning a language, unless it is an activity that enhances their professional work. Similarly, the current status of the low number of adult language learners in post-compulsory education, which contrasts greatly with the situation of language learners in compulsory education, is more likely to account for the difficulty of these adult language learners in meeting their commitment to learning.

In addition, Baker et al. (2011) summarise four other intrinsic reasons why adult language learners drop out.

1. Personal circumstances, such as the existence of other commitments or lack of study time. About one-fifth of the respondents felt that the language was difficult to learn or that the pace of the course was too fast, slowing the learning process and lacking confidence.
2. Although language learners usually have a strong initial intention, motivation, enthusiasm and expectation to learn, continued practice and long-term commitment to learning are extremely challenging over the course of several years of language study.
3. Currently, dropout rates can be high even with good teaching styles, environments, classroom climates, high-quality materials, and excellent teachers.
4. In an analysis of learners who have not completed language courses, research has shown that expectations may be too high in terms of expected time commitment, speed of learning and practice needs.

COURSE LEVEL FACTORS

In addition to individual factors discussed above, Gibson and Shutt's (2002) study suggests that (i) most people believe that the various reasons for non-completion may be related to factors such as the curriculum, the tutor's teaching methods and management skills, the target language learning confidence and prior knowledge and that (ii) seemingly mundane influences, such as homework and break time, serve as very important pre-course information for language learners and can affect learners' motivation and sense of achievement. There is some research evidence that failure to do homework is a sign of a lack of perseverance, which may contribute to falling behind in the classroom and eventually dropping out. For example, Gibson and Shutt (2002) found in their investigation that a student received a postcard from his tutor during the holidays and was asked informally if he needed to have homework forwarded to him, and as a result of this contact, the student was ready to return to the course (Gibson & Shutt, 2002).

The following course level factors were found to be important:

a) The availability and reliability of pre-course information for language learners, pre-assessment of learners' learning needs, and the learners' commitment to learning.

b) Teacher management strategies and teaching skills. This issue refers to the teacher's ability to teach in a way that increases language learners' confidence, creates an atmosphere conducive to learners' learning, and uses teaching resources for teaching the target language. Many students believe that their instructor assumes beforehand that he/she is already familiar with language learning students, and the resulting pace of instruction by the teacher may hurt their confidence in learning. Also, the instructor's skills in using the target language and audio and video resources are important for students to become accustomed to the language patterns and vocabulary (Gibson & Shutt, 2002).

c) Issues of national and linguistic-cultural contexts related to FLL (foreign language learning). For example, the international status of English, the age of FLL learners and the level of grammatical terminology and basic knowledge base of the target language are among the possible influencing factors for language learners.

d) Issues of interpersonal relationships among students and motivation for language learning. For example, elements such as the language learners' perceptions of themselves as learners, their confidence in learning the target language and their prior experience with the target language and culture may be influential factors for language learners.

Diamantatou and Hawes (2015) point to a lack of perseverance as a reason for students' lack of interest and time spent studying. Gibson and Shutt (2002) argue, the decision to drop out of a language course is a possible outcome of a gradual process and that process is influenced by several factors. Their perception of themselves as learners, their confidence in talking in the target language and their previous experience with the target language culture. This is because language learners bring to the classroom not only their workday experience but also their experience with the language, which is one of the reasons why they drop out.

In addition to this, there are many learning requirements that language learners must meet. Diamantatou and Hawes (2015) argue that language learning difficulties encountered in the structure, content or overall context of a course (i.e., including the "hidden curriculum") are often related to students' characteristics. Individual differences in these personal characteristics are likely to stem from students' language learning orientations, maturity and cognitive styles, as well as psychological factors such as level of commitment to learning or ability to cope with learning stress.

Notably, Gibson and Shutt (2002) found that students tended to blame themselves rather than the learning process because they lacked adequate and appropriate curriculum guidance in selecting language courses. In this regard, it has been shown that this is exactly why some more experienced foreign language learners are frustrated with the language learning rate of others (Gibson & Shutt, 2002). According to Baker et al. (2011), the "main cause for concern" in adult language learning is the lack of progression from beginning to more advanced levels and the lack of effectiveness of training.

TEACHER RETENTION

Regarding the retention of FE teachers, the issues of teacher teaching experience, qualifications and teaching quality have received the most attention.

For example, Zhang and Li (2010) describe the lack of qualified and experienced Chinese language teachers as a concern. The demand for Chinese language teaching in schools has been low for a long time, and only recently have a few universities introduced nationally recognised training programmes for Chinese language teachers, namely the Chinese PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education). However, these programs have enrolled only a small number of students and have failed to meet the demand for teachers for the rapid growth in Chinese language teaching in schools over the past five years or so. As a result, less than one in ten of the more than 200 Chinese language teachers in the school are qualified to teach, and less than half of them have received formal training in teaching or linguistics. Few hold Chinese language teaching qualifications issued by the Chinese government. In addition to the lack of formal training, about 80% of these teachers work part-time. Regarding the quality of language teachers, the unpromising picture is that FE institutions usually hire teachers only through recommendations or word of mouth. For this reason, it has been argued that such BSL teachers are "good BSL teachers" by word of mouth and not BSL teachers who meet the professional standards of FE (Barnes & Padden, 2009; Barnes & Eichmann, 2010; Eichmann, 2010).

Furthermore, in Barnes and Eichmann's (2010) study, only one instructor out of 29 respondents applied for a formal position, suggesting that other teachers may have been hired because they had some language skills and did not have the standard recognised qualifications to teach BSL. Furthermore, the vast majority of BSL instruction took place in the evenings, and many BSL teachers worked only part-time. Full-time BSL teaching opportunities are rare, so teaching sign language is only one job in addition to other full-time or part-time work. This creates all sorts of difficulties in actively seeking training and professional development opportunities. The most obvious conflict is that such part-time language training crosses over with other jobs, and while part-time language training brings additional income, teaching weekend classes can conflict with family childcare. In addition, the lack of support from the student's primary employer may impact funding for staff development activities that are not directly related to their business. Conversely, BSL teachers who work part-time in FE are less likely to be eligible for staff development funds. At the same time, BSL teachers may also need to weigh the high cost of professional development (perhaps £600 for PTLLS courses and £1,000 for CTLLS courses) against the potential long-term benefits, since this is, after all, only a part-time source of income. And, typically, mentoring opportunities for part-time BSL instructors are limited.

In conclusion, a systematic analysis of the literature suggests that these language learning issues within the FE sector urgently need to be addressed to encourage more adult language learners to earn FE languages.

Other Themes

A number of other, smaller themes were identified. Some of these themes related to specific languages in FE and some were about the sector more generally.

WHY ARE LANGUAGES IMPORTANT?

Atherton and Barnes, L. (2012) argue that the educational value of language learning and its importance for personal development and understanding of other cultures (often associated with a greater appreciation of one's own culture) has attracted increasing attention and has become an important component of EU educational policy. Indeed, the EU's Lisbon Council of March 2000 listed Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) as a priority among basic skills, endorsed the learning of at least two languages from an early age, and called for a strong commitment to language learning.

Baker et al. (2011) concluded that the importance of learning a language has the following points:

- Adult language learning is a key component of saving the 'linguistic treasure trove';
- Adult language learning is an essential component of language resurgence, language planning, and language revitalisation;
- More research is necessary to effectively inform the further development of adult Welsh and the field of adult language learning as a whole;
- Adult language learners may wish to acquire a second language for employment, promotion or status and are strongly motivated by language reproduction in the home;
- Course members want to be active users and transmitters of the language and to use it in their families and other social settings;
- Adult language learning is valued for a kaleidoscope of excellent reasons (e.g., exposure to the culture of the language, mental stimulation, social networks, travel and vacation, employment and promotion, religious involvement, identity and community networks). Each of these reasons makes adult language learning purposeful, valuable, and beneficial;

- While ethnic identity, community and cultural language use, spiritual stimulation and preservation of heritage may be good reasons for minority language education, the link between language learning in schools and employment, affluence, and career prospects make minority language learning attractive to children and their parents;

LANGUAGE SPECIFIC POINTS

Many of the studies included in this systematic style literature review focused on one language in particular. They often had specific recommendations or insights into the language they had chosen to look at. This section outlines the points made in relation to specific languages.

British Sign Language (BSL)

According to Atherton and Barnes (2012), BSL teachers working in FE colleges in England were first required to have formal teaching qualifications following the introduction of the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills Standards (QTLS) in 2007. However, the generic training required to gain these qualifications failed to meet the teaching needs of deaf learners and, moreover, failed to adequately support those who wished to become BSL teachers.

This is due to the unregulated and fragmented nature of BSL teaching in the UK; the simple fact that no one knows exactly how many people are teaching how many sign language classes at any given time. Key findings suggest that the profession has been largely neglected, with many practical consequences and barriers for deaf learners wishing to gain QTLS qualifications (Atherton & Barnes, 2012).

This also illustrates two major issues regarding the qualifications of BSL teachers, namely the lack of teaching qualifications as a prerequisite for BSL instruction and the lack of any standard qualifications among BSL teachers. Moreover, the vast majority of BSL teaching takes place in the evenings and many BSL teachers work only part-time, limiting career and professional development (Atherton & Barnes, 2012). Despite the huge increase in the number of BSL courses offered in FE colleges and elsewhere over the last two decades, there has been little professional research into the teaching of BSL.

Chinese

Zhang and Li (2010) argue that Chinese learning and teaching (CLT) is very unevenly distributed across the country. The main points are as follows:

- Lack of adequate Chinese language syllabus and examination system;
- Lack of adequate Chinese language teaching materials;
- Lack of relevant research and debate on Chinese learning and teaching;
- Lack of coordination and cooperation among various organisations and institutions.

Ulster Scots

Ulster-Scots is not taught as a subject in any FE college. There is no official policy on the use of Ulster-Scots in FE, there are no teaching materials, and there are no current statistics on the teaching of Ulster-Scots in FE colleges (Visser & Hagan, 2020).

Welsh

In the six districts/counties of North Wales (Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham) there are 11 providers of adult learning Welsh courses (e.g., FE colleges) (Baker et al., 2011) And with regard to learning Welsh, Baker et al. (2011) recommend some suggestions:

1. Weekly courses should be provided by colleges of further education.
2. Given the importance of adult learners in language revitalisation, a large-scale longitudinal study must be conducted in order to effectively guide the further development of adult Welsh and the field of adult language learning as a whole.

Welsh is a compulsory subject in the Welsh National Curriculum (ages 5 to 16) and many of those in the sample had previous experience of learning Welsh. For example, 31.3% of respondents had studied Welsh in elementary school, either before or after the implementation of the National Curriculum (Baker, 2011). This suggests that curriculum members are motivated to learn Welsh, particularly when they can support their children, who are often also learning Welsh. In terms of language planning, this is one of the most positive and promising outcomes. A less positive outcome is that in contexts where grandparents rather than children are the targets of Welsh, language use is with the previous generation rather than the new generation (Baker, 2011).

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN REVIEWED STUDIES

Included studies made a range of recommendations. This theme looks at the recommendations made by the included studies.

To provide students with clearer information about their preparation, Gibson and Shutt (2002) suggest these points:

- In-depth pre-course information should be an essential prerequisite. Course information should be clear and comprehensive before the student enrolls.
- If students are aware from the outset of the need for long-term commitment to language learning - through course manuals and clear information - there will be less frustration and less disappointment with the slow pace of progress.
- Awareness of the need for homework increases student motivation and achievement. Clear expectations that homework is a university requirement, requires a certain amount of time each week, is an expectation of the course, and will help clarify what is involved in learning the language.
- Tutors should use a range of audio and video resources and need to be skilled in the dynamic management of mixed ability groups and understand that their behaviour may affect the confidence of individual learners. Tutors need to minimise the negative impact of dominant students and plan for the creative use of their skills through pairing and collaboration and appropriate task adaptation. Tutors should work to make the learning personalised and make students feel valued
- Policymakers at the national level need to strengthen provisions for language learning at the compulsory level so as to improve students' prior achievement. Colleges need to make these issues part of their strategic policy and provide appropriate resources.

Additionally, Fabian and MacLean (2014) found that students valued the higher level of engagement encouraged by the use of tablets in language courses, but also valued activities that improved their English speaking skills, whether from peer or tutor feedback. Students were happy to share their videos, which provided an effective peer learning experience. It also provided a new way to critique their language skills and develop softer skills such as awareness of their own presence, speaking style, posture and personal interactions, as well as learning to be tactful and sensitive to peer feedback. The use of tablets in this subject area, therefore, highlights the variety of activities that can be carried out using mobile devices.

3.5 Conclusions on our systematic style review of literature

Whilst this systematic style review found some included studies, the evidence considered here is sparse. Three of the studies are dossiers which outline the state of minority languages and only mention FE in passing. One of the studies (Zhang et al, 2010) focuses on Chinese language learning more generally and only has a short section focused on the language in the FE sector. Very few of the included studies include any empirical data collection and of the three studies which have collected relevant data, one has included data from other subjects within the FE College which are not relevant here.

Due to the fragmented and narrative nature of the included studies, thematic analysis was difficult and often a theme is focused on one study. However, the systematic style literature review has brought some key themes and areas into focus. It is clear that there is a dearth of research on language learning in the UK FE sector. This, coupled with the lack of legislation and lack of knowledge on what is happening makes it difficult to plan a cohesive and progressive programme for students. Similarly, the fragmented and unstable nature of language learning in FE makes it difficult for language teachers to develop professionally.

In order to address some of these shortcomings an initial review of what is currently happening would allow researchers, policy makers and educators to map current provision and feed into future planning.

4. Secondary Data Analysis

The proportion of adults (aged 25-64) in the UK who report knowing 'No foreign language' increased from 35.1% in 2007 to 65.4% in 2016 (Eurostat, 2021). These figures are a likely outworking of the declining uptake of language learning in UK schools over the past two decades. For example, in 2005 there were 272,140 entries for GCSE French, 105,288 for GCSE German and 62,456 for GCSE Spanish in the UK; by 2022 these figures are 129,419, 36,327 and 112,845 respectively. The growth in Spanish in no way compensates for the declines in French and German. We know from published research that high proportions of young people in the UK leave compulsory schooling with no modern language qualifications (See Henderson and Carruthers 2021 & Scott, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that language learning opportunities are made available to the population beyond their school lives. Provision in the FE sector has a great deal of potential to offer such opportunities. However, it is unclear to what extent the sector has the capacity and support to create and sustain language learning pathways for students across the lifespan.

The secondary data analysis strand of this study sets out to document the situation of language learning opportunities in the FE sector in four areas:

- 4.1 FE Enrolments and Achievements
- 4.2 Languages Qualifications available
- 4.3 FE GCSE and A-Level Examination Entries
- 4.4 Snapshot of FE Language Provision in UK jurisdictions

All figures reported should be interpreted with reference to the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of course participation, reported completion rates and uptake of formal qualifications. It is not possible to interpret 'declines' in any of these areas to be indicative of a longer-term decline for the period from March 2020. Therefore, such patterns should be interpreted with caution and, notwithstanding the potential for longer-term detrimental effects on the sector resulting from the pandemic, trends shown for the period up to the end of the 2018/19 academic year are likely to be a much better indication of the general trends.

4.1 FE Enrolments and Achievements

A key indicator of the extent of language learning within the FE sector is provided annually through statistics of enrolments and achievements published by the relevant authorities. This section provides an analysis of this data for the four jurisdictions. The data presented here are indicative of the overall picture of decline discussed elsewhere (The British Academy et al., 2020).

Enrolments may be for courses of more than one year, and the total achievements should not be interpreted as indicative of total progression because enrolment may be for courses which run across multiple years and some registrations may be for non-examination courses. Achievements are taken as reported by the relevant authority. The DfE (2022a) defines Qualification Achievement Rates (QARs) as showing 'how many learners that started a qualification or programme went on to successfully complete it'. Data are aggregated into standardised categories for reporting purposes, Tier 1 Sector Subject Areas (e.g. 12 – Languages, Literature and Culture) comprise several Tier 2 Subject Areas (e.g. 12.1 – Languages, literature and culture of the British isles, and 12.2 - Other languages, literature and

culture) (DfE, 2022b). These categories are also used in Northern Ireland and Wales. Where possible, we present data from the Tier 2 categories because this provides marginally more detail but often only Tier 1 data is published in the public domain. A limitation of aggregated data is that we are unable to distinguish between enrolments for different groupings of languages: English, whether as a first or second language; popular curriculum languages, such as French or Italian; indigenous languages, such as Irish or Welsh; and the broad spectrum of heritage / community languages, such as Polish or Urdu. Of course, many languages do not fit neatly into such categories and Mandarin is both an increasingly popular curricular language and a long-standing common heritage language. In effect, SSA Tier 1 figures report English Literature, French, Welsh Second Language and Urdu language learning as a single category. When we have data split by Tier 2 then we can distinguish only between the two categories described above (i.e., 12.1 and 12.2). All data reported here refer to FE Provision (i.e., apprenticeships, workplace learning, community learning, and education and training provision) and includes a range of FE institutions (i.e., General FE Colleges (including Tertiary), Sixth Form Colleges, Special Colleges (Agricultural and Horticultural Colleges, and Art and Design Colleges), Specialist Colleges and External Institutions) (DfE, 2022a).

England

Enrolments and achievements for ‘Languages, Literature and Culture’, 2014/15-2019/20

Using a subset of the Department for Education (England) ‘FE and Skills 2019/20’ dataset (DfE, 2020), we present an overview of participation in languages education in two formats.

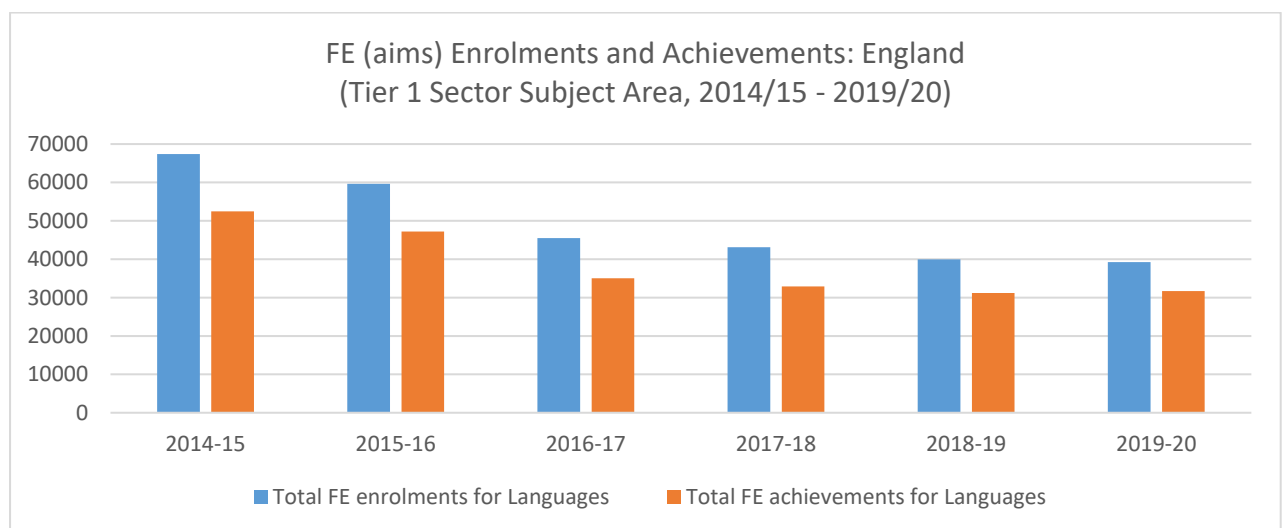


Figure 4.1: FE (aims) Enrolments and Achievements: England

As figure 4.1 shows, the number of enrolments and achievements in FE Courses (i.e., full courses and excluding ‘components’) within the Tier 1 Sector Subject Area 12 ‘Languages, Literature and Culture’ has declined over the past 6 years but much less dramatically since 2016-17. Although the achievements have declined overall, these have remained a relatively consistent proportion of enrolments (ranging from 77.9% in 2014/15 to 80.8% in 2019/20).

Enrolments for ‘Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles’ and ‘Other languages, literature and culture’, 2014/15-2019/20

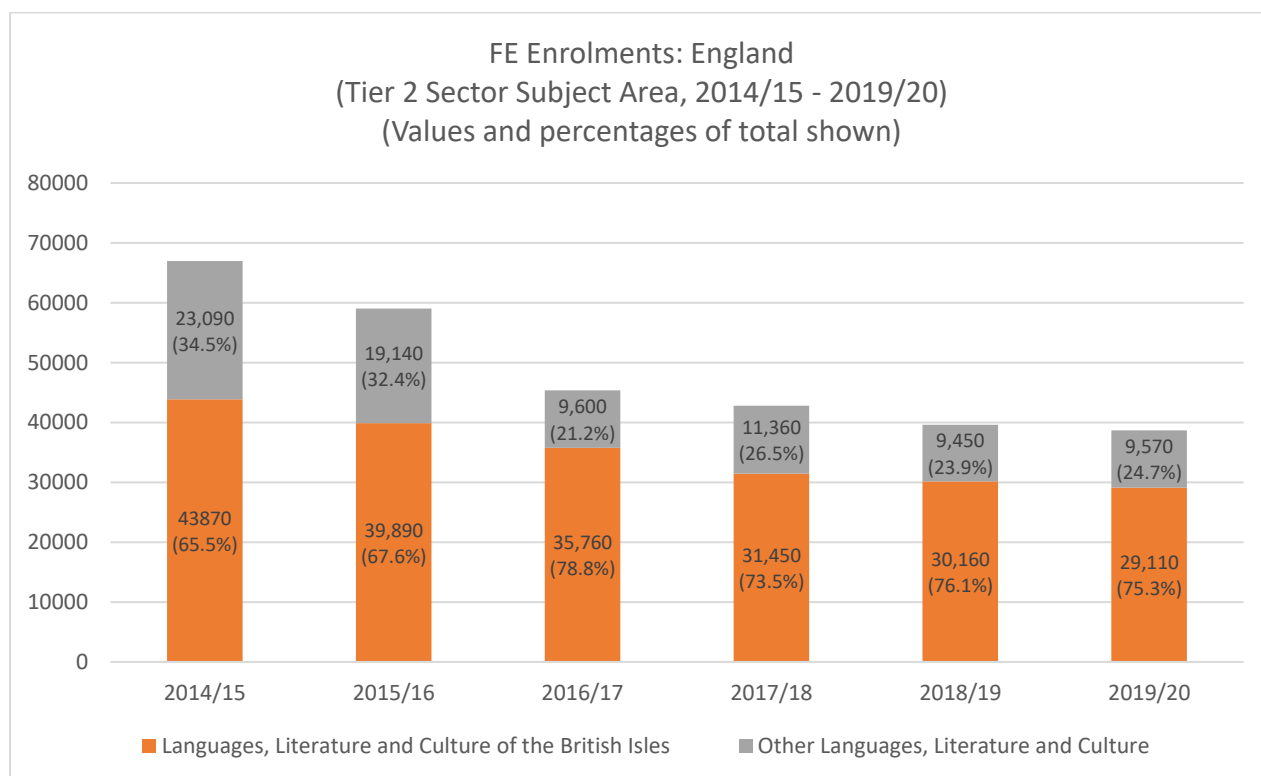


Figure 4.2: FE Enrolments: England

As figure 4.2 shows, the majority of participation in languages education is accounted for by courses in Tier 2 Sector Subject Area 12.1 ‘Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles’. Enrolments within the grouping 12.2 ‘Other languages, literature and culture’ – which includes subjects such as the main curricular languages taught in schools, other curricular languages with relatively smaller uptake, and the broad spectrum of heritage/community languages – account for a minority of enrolments, and a decreasing proportion within the Tier 1 category reported in the previous figure 3.1. For example, 12.2 subjects accounted for 34.5% of SSA 12 enrolments in 2014/15 and 24.7% in 2019/20, which constitutes a decrease of 9.8%. The size of these changes over a short period of time points to a need for the changing profile of FE sector provision to be closely monitored.

Northern Ireland

Enrolments and achievements for 'Languages, Literature and Culture', 2013/14-2019/20

Using a dataset compiled from the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland) 'FE Sector Activity in Northern Ireland' (DE, 2021: 2022) annual statistical bulletins, we present an analysis of enrolments and uptake for Northern Ireland.

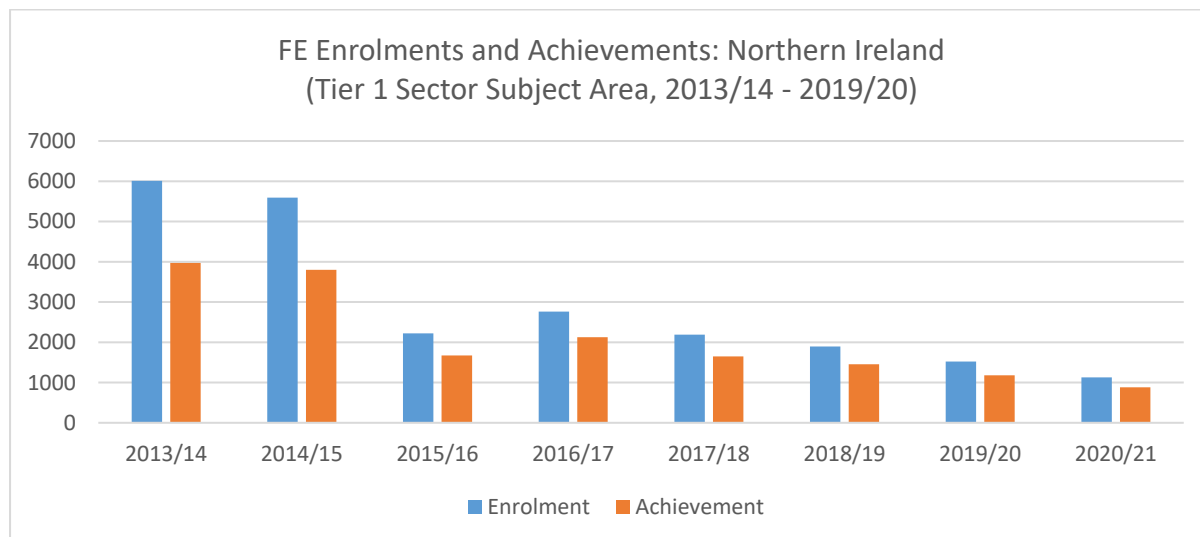


Figure 4.3: FE Enrolments and Achievements: Northern Ireland

Enrolments and performance illustrated in figure 4.3, show some variation across the years 2015/16 – 2020/21. The data show a dramatic drop between the participation rates in 2013/14 and 2014/15 when compared to subsequent years. Again, this represents a stark decline which should be further investigated.

Enrolments at Level 3 for 'Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles' and 'Other languages, literature and culture', 2015/16-2019/20

Using a dataset which reports level 3 Enrolments by Tier 2 SSA for Northern Ireland, we report the breakdown as raw numbers and percentage of overall enrolments in the Tier 1 category.

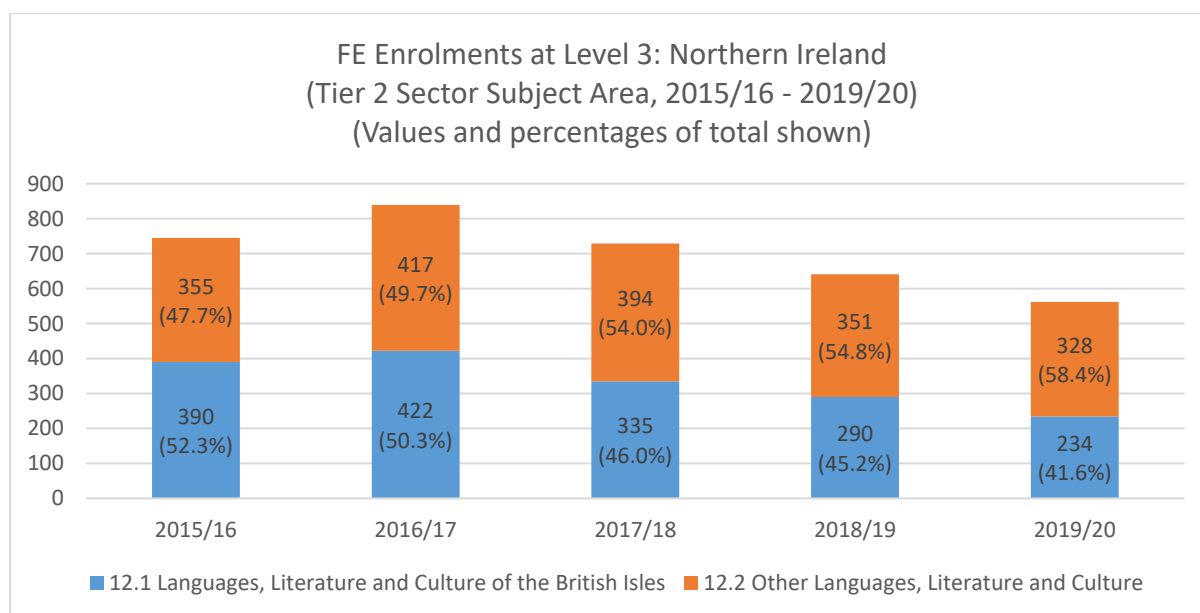


Figure 4.4: FE Enrolments at Level 3: Northern Ireland

The breakdown of Level 3 enrolments by Tier 2 subject area (figure 4.4) shows that course participation for 12.2 'Other Languages, Literature and Culture' in Northern Ireland represents an increasing proportion, and since 2017/18 a majority, of enrolments in languages at this level. Nonetheless, there is a decline in participation over the period considered and the already small numbers suggest that additional support is likely to be required in order for provision to be sustained in the longer term. It should also be noted that a large number of enrolments in the 12.2 subject category relate to courses providing Access to HE, for each year the relevant percentage is between 43.4% and 57.3%. For comparison, the percentage of enrolments accounted for by A-Level participation ranges from 3.7% to 8.7%. This suggests that the landscape of provision in the FE sector has a good deal of potential for further development and innovative proposals must be considered. For instance, the possibility for improved cooperation between FE institutions and University IWLP programmes may make a positive contribution to the opportunities afforded to students.

Scotland

Enrolments and achievements for 'Languages and ESOL, 2013/14-2020/21

This section presents an analysis of a dataset compiled from the Scottish Funding Council 'College Performance Indicators' (SFC, 2022) technical annexes (and relevant archived versions) for each relevant year.

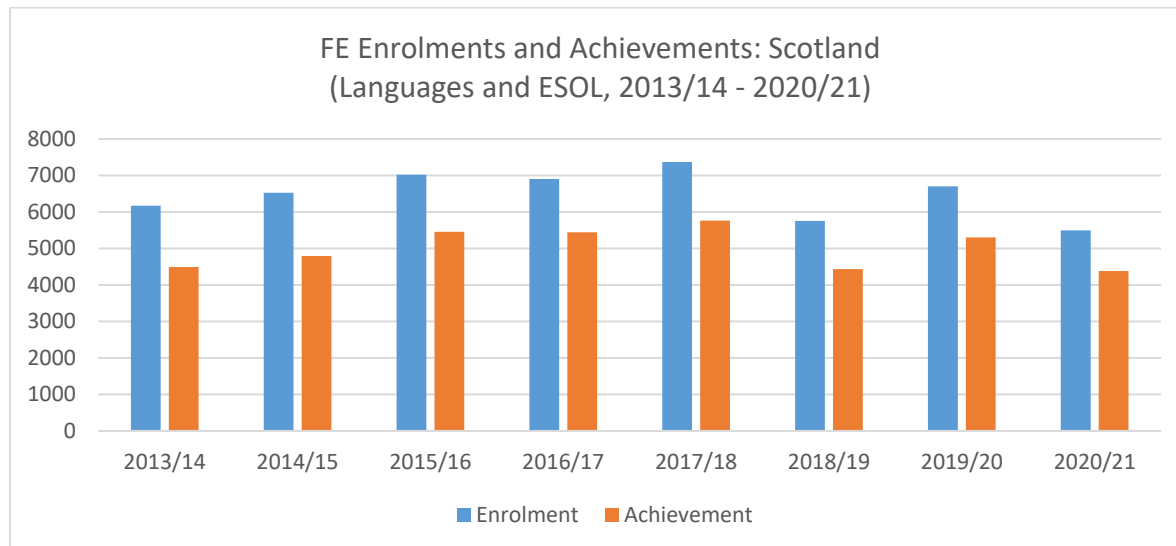


Figure 4.5: FE Enrolments and Achievements: Scotland

Similarly for the other regions, Language Education FE participation shows some variation over the period of our analysis (figure 4.5). However, rather than the fall in the mid part of the decade which we see in England and Northern Ireland, Scotland shows a small increase in enrolments between 2014/15 and 2015/16. The variations shown do suggest significant year on year changes in what is a relatively small sector. As with reporting for the other jurisdictions it is difficult to understand these figures in the context of changes in the total population of students and additional work in this area would be valuable in understanding the trends more broadly.

Wales

Enrolments and achievements for 'Languages, Literature and Culture', 2013/14-2019/20

Using a custom table drawn from the Stats Wales (2022) website we are able to show enrolments and achievements for Tier 1 Sector Subject area 12 'Languages, Literature and Culture' across a period of 9 years.

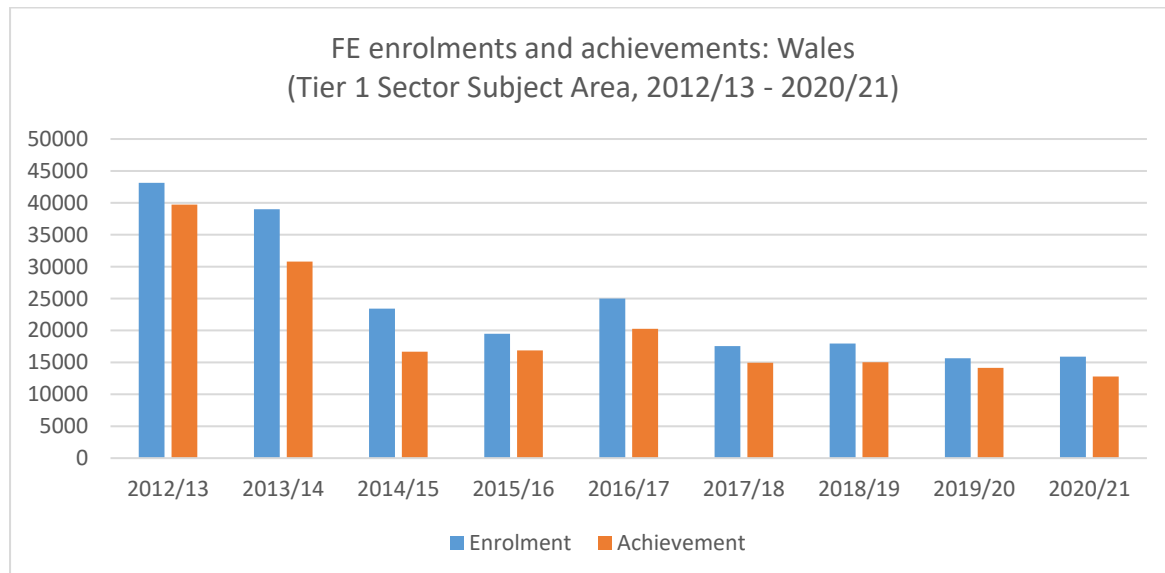


Figure 4.6: FE enrolments and achievements: Wales

The pattern for enrolments and achievements in FE Languages Education for Wales (figure 4.6) shows a significant drop in participation between 2013/14 and 2014/15, and a good deal of variation across the subsequent years. Nonetheless, the most recent participation levels remain the lowest across the period of the analysis.

Enrolments for 'Other languages, literature and culture', 2014/15-2019/20

Data drawn from Stats Wales (2022) is used to show enrolments for Tier 2 SSA 'Other Languages, Literature and Culture' as a proportion of total enrolments for Tier 1 'Languages, Literature and Culture'. This is a minor variation on how the data are reported for England and Northern Ireland.

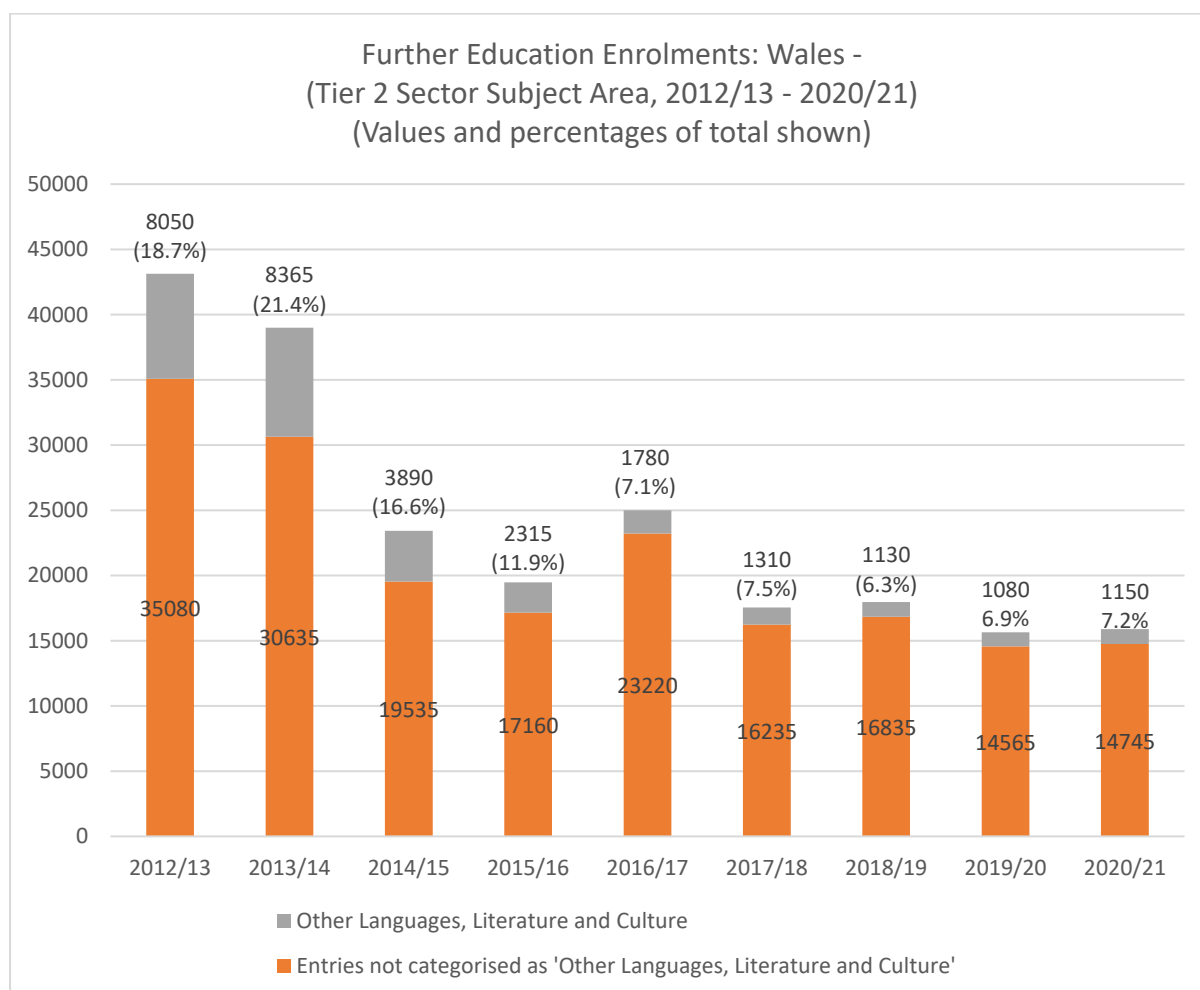


Figure 4.7: Further Education Enrolments: Wales

Figure 4.7 shows that for the first two years of our analysis, enrolments for 'Other Languages, Literature and Culture' accounted for close to 20% of enrolments for the general category 'Languages, Literature and Culture'. However, against a backdrop of overall decline, described in relation to figure 3-6, enrolment figures in more recent years show a declining raw number of students studying 'Other Languages, Literature and Culture' subjects, and the percentage share accounted for by these enrolments has dropped to something in the region of 7%. This suggests that the picture of FE languages participation in Wales is relatively precarious.

Summary

In each jurisdiction, other than Scotland, we see large declines in overall participation in FE languages provision. This reflects what we know anecdotally, from existing research, and from the findings of the other strands of this present study. While the data presented here offers some good insight into the context of language education in the FE sector, there are several limitations. First, the dominant format in the publicly available statistics for reporting FE enrolments in using the broader 'Tier 1' category which makes it impossible to identify whether the students are studying modern languages, ancient languages or culture, or courses in English language or literature. This makes it

difficult to understand achievements within categories and limits our understanding of the extent to which the sector can fulfill expectations of supporting regrowth. A particular issue is that no breakdowns are available by individual subject or qualification. Where data is available for the 'Tier 2' categories, we gain additional insights into participation patterns and these findings are important from a policy perspective.

It is therefore necessary to engage with the relevant authorities to ensure that this type of headline data can be collected and reported in a comparable format to enable jurisdictional variations to be understood more fully. Second, the absence of complete data for individual subjects means that it is very difficult to understand participation patterns in any degree of detail. For example, the finding that a majority of enrolments for the 12.2 'Other Languages, Literature and Culture' at Level 3 in Northern Ireland related to HE Access courses is potentially significant and raises multiple policy questions. However, it is unclear to which subjects these courses relate and an absence of such information is difficult for decision-makers to navigate. This issue will be revisited in the analysis presented in section 3.3. Third, the use of raw data means that fluctuations in the population of learners cannot be accounted for. It may be useful for future research to consider how the trends shown here can be better contextualised through analysis which takes account of sociodemographic factors and of key policy trends, across the UK and within the different jurisdictions and regions.

Recommendations:

- In order to facilitate effective analysis of trends in languages provision in FE it would be useful for relevant government departments to ensure that, at a minimum, metrics show enrolments and achievements at the Tier 2 level as a matter of course.
- Similarly, data collection and reporting should facilitate effective cross-jurisdictional and longitudinal comparisons where these have potential importance for policy development, evaluation and learning. For example, longitudinal comparisons would be improved if figures could take account of student population changes.
- Conduct a full assessment of the range, level and patterns of participation and achievement for courses within the 12.2 subject category.

4.2 Languages Qualifications Available

In order to understand the extent to which provision for languages within the FE sector has the potential to provide learning and certification opportunities for students, this analysis shows coverage of different languages and qualification types over time for each jurisdiction. It should be noted that the analysis relates to ‘regulated’ qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 of the Qualifications Framework (UK Government, 2022) and is therefore not exhaustive. We show an analysis of qualification coverage across the different subject areas using datasets produced from the relevant regulated qualifications databases.

England and Northern Ireland

This section covers the analysis of the ‘Register of Regulated Qualifications’ (Ofqual, 2021), which details qualifications regulated by Ofqual (England) and CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland) for the period from 1st September 2005 to present. These analyses are presented together because provision, at least at the headline level, is largely consistent across the two jurisdictions.

Main Curricular, Indigenous and Classical Languages

Here we show a detailed analysis of the availability of both general and vocational qualifications at Levels 2 and 3.

	Sep 2005 - Aug 2010				Sep 2010 - Aug 2015				Sep 2015 - Aug 2020				Sep 2020 - present			
	Level 2		Level 3		Level 2		Level 3		Level 2		Level 3		Level 2		Level 3	
	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc	Gen	Voc
Main curricular languages																
French	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
German	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Italian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous languages																
Cornish														✓*		
Welsh (L1)	✓		✓		✓		✓				✓					
Welsh (L2)	✓*		✓*		✓											
Welsh (not specified)	✓*	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓				
Irish (Gaeilge - L1 option)	✓				✓				✓				✓			
Irish	✓	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓*	✓	✓*	✓*	✓*		✓*	✓*	✓*	
Classical languages																
Greek (Classical)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
Hebrew (Biblical)	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
Latin	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
Classics /Classical Civilisation	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	

* A single ✓ denotes coverage for both England and Northern Ireland. Where only one jurisdiction has a regulated qualification in a particular cell, an ✗ denotes this (e.g. ✓✗ indicates that the qualification is used in England but not Northern Ireland).

Table 4.1: Availability of qualifications for England and Northern Ireland: Main Curricular, Indigenous and Classical Languages

Table 4.1 demonstrates excellent consistency of provision of general and vocational qualifications for the main curricular languages. Although, there have been numerous reforms to these qualifications over the period of our analysis, variations in the number of qualifications available within a particular slot, and other qualitative changes which our analysis cannot capture.

Some positives are evidenced in provision for indigenous languages with the emergence of a qualification in Cornish and consistent provision for Irish in Northern Ireland over the full period of our analysis. Our analysis suggests that the number and range of qualifications in Irish and Welsh which are approved for use in England has diminished over time. It is possible that this is a response to market demand but if these qualifications are already approved by one of the UK regulators, it is unclear why the qualifications are not available as a matter of course under existing arrangements.

Provision of Classical language and civilization courses is also consistent over time. However, it is notable that all qualifications in this area are general and no vocational provision has been developed.

Community and other Curricular, Sign Languages and General categories

This analysis does not show a split for General and Vocational and concentrates instead on an overview of languages covered. However, it should be noted that there have been significant changes over time in terms of the different options available to learners. Where our table denotes coverage it is still possible that a specific language has changed from having several general and vocational qualifications at a particular time point to having a single qualification in either the general or vocational category.

	Sep 2005 - Aug 2010		Sep 2010 - Aug 2015		Sep 2015 - Aug 2020		Sep 2020 - present	
	Level 2	Level 3	Level 2	Level 3	Level 2	Level 3	Level 2	Level 3
Community languages and other curricular languages								
Arabic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bengali	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dutch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Greek (Modern)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gujarati	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hebrew (Modern)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hindi	✓		✓		✓			
Japanese	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Panjabi	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Persian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Polish	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portuguese	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Russian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Somali	✓		✓					
Swedish	✓		✓					
Tamil	✓		✓					
Turkish	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Urdu	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yoruba	✓		✓					

Sign languages								
British Sign Language	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Irish Sign Language	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓
General categories								
Foreign Languages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Languages for professional purposes (e.g. Business, Travel and Tourism etc)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.2: Availability of qualifications for England and Northern Ireland: Community and other Curricular, Sign Languages and General categories

Table 4.2 shows consistent provision across an absolute majority of languages which could be considered minor curricular and community. However, there are significant gaps and some evidence of a reduction in provision over time. For example, languages such as Hindi and Somali previously had provision at Level 2 and this is no longer available. If decisions to remove qualifications are a market response to changing demographics, in relation to populations of speakers or learners of different languages, then we would expect new qualifications in different languages to be introduced. This is particularly the case given the relatively small number of heritage languages which we see represented here.

Provision for BSL shows good consistency over time. However, there may be qualitative differences, such as those we find for other languages described above. During our analysis there were a notable number of providers and variations in whether qualifications were categorised as general or vocational. Although approval for Irish Sign Language qualifications was evidenced during the first period of our analysis (2005-2005) there was a long period where no Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications were approved (with the exception of a short period from 2010-2013 when the NVQ Certificate at Level 3 was operational).

Under the 'general categories' we found a good number of qualifications available in a range of languages / language skills. These are a long-standing feature of the qualifications landscape in the UK and because many of these qualifications lend themselves to use with multiple languages, including combined 'double award' type qualifications, they are a viable format for addressing gaps in provision discussed above. However, a more complete analysis of how such qualifications are used, both in the more formal FE sector and through broader community-based provision, would be necessary to draw any firm conclusions about their potential in this regard. In addition, any limitations on which languages are permitted for inclusion in these broader qualifications is essential.

Scotland

A dataset compiled from the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* ‘Register of Qualifications’ (SCQF, 2022), allowed us to undertake a summary analysis based on former (previously available / archived) and current provision of qualifications in Scotland. The priority for this present report was to document qualification provision at Levels 2 and 3 on the Qualifications Framework shared across England, Northern Ireland and Wales (UK Government, 2022). However, due to the significant overlaps in relation to how qualifications, such as GCSE and A-Level, compare to qualifications under the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF, 2019) we report here the full range of levels from 4-7.

	Previously available / archived				Currently available			
	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
Main curricular languages								
<i>French</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>German</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Italian</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Spanish</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous languages								
<i>Gaelic (Learners)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Gaighlig</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Scots Language Award</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Classical languages								
<i>Greek (Classical)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
<i>Latin</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community languages and other curricular languages								
<i>Arabic</i>							✓	
<i>Cantonese</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Mandarin (Simplified)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
<i>Mandarin (Traditional)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<i>Russian</i>	✓	✓	✓				
<i>Urdu</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Sign languages							
<i>British Sign Language</i>	✓				✓	✓	
General categories							
<i>Modern Languages for Life and Work Abroad</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓
<i>Scottish Baccalaureate Languages</i>				✓			✓

Table 4.3: Availability of qualifications for Scotland

Table 4.3 shows a high degree of consistency in terms of provision across languages and levels, as well as good consistency in how current provision matches to previous provision. However, the present analysis does not show the timeframe of qualification availability because only two categories are available. Some emerging gaps are evidenced when comparing provision within the two categories, namely that Mandarin (simplified), Russian and Greek (Classical) were previously, but are not currently, available. Similarly, some improvements are noted, such as the introduction of an approved qualification in Arabic at Level 6 and an expansion of the levels covered by qualifications in British Sign Language and Modern Languages for Life and Work Abroad.

Wales

Here we show our analysis of the qualification provision in Wales drawn from the Qualifications in Wales 'Database of Regulated Qualifications' (QiW, 2022) from 1st September 2010 to present.

	Previously available / archived				Currently available			
	Level 2		Level 3		Level 2		Level 3	
	General	Vocational	General	Vocational	General	Vocational	General	Vocational
Main curricular languages								
French	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
German	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Italian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spanish	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous languages								
Welsh (L1)	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Welsh (L2)	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Welsh (not specified)		✓		✓		✓		✓
Irish (Gaeilge - L1 option)	✓							
Irish	✓		✓					
Community languages and other curricular languages								
Arabic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Bengali	✓		✓		✓		✓	

Chinese (Cantonese)	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Chinese (Mandarin)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greek (Modern)	✓				✓		✓	
Gujarati	✓				✓		✓	
Hebrew (Modern)	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Japanese	✓	✓			✓		✓	
Panjabi	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Persian	✓				✓			
Polish	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Portuguese	✓				✓		✓	
Russian	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Somali					✓			
Turkish	✓				✓		✓	
Urdu	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Classical languages								
Greek (Classical)	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Hebrew (Biblical)			✓		✓		✓	
Latin	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Classical Civilisation	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Sign languages								
British Sign Language	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.4: Availability of qualifications for Wales

Like the picture elsewhere in the UK, Table 4.4 shows consistent provision for the main curricular languages across qualification types and levels in Wales. Again, our analysis process showed multiple qualitative differences which are not discussed here.

Provision for Welsh is long-standing and coverage is maintained for general Level 2 and 3 qualifications in Welsh as a first and second language. There is sustained provision for vocational Welsh. Again, we see that although Irish language qualifications were previously regulated for use in Wales that this is no longer the case.

Across the range of minor curricular and community languages we see broad and consistent provision with only a small number of changes, almost always with a removal of provision, with the notable exception of Somali which has been introduced. Particular gaps, with previous and current provision, are evidenced for vocational qualifications for a good number of languages. The removal of a vocational option for Level 3 Arabic is of note, given the potential economic benefits of improved uptake in this language (Ayres-Bennett et al., 2022).

Again, provision for classic languages is consistently in the general rather than vocational category and it is interesting to note the introduction of Biblical Hebrew as an addition to the Level 2 qualifications portfolio.

Given the deficit in language skills within the UK, there is likely to be a considerable market for integrated vocational qualifications with a languages element. Therefore, although not currently featured in the suite of qualifications available in Wales, the 'Global Business Communication (with French, German or Spanish)' coming available in the near future is a positive feature of the qualifications landscape in Wales.

Summary

Overall, our analyses across the jurisdictions show good consistency of provision across a range of languages. However, what we do not show are qualitative differences between qualifications which fill the various slots. For example, 'Asset Languages' were categorised as 'general' qualifications share a slot with qualifications such as GCSE or A-Level which do not offer the flexibility which was available within the Asset programme. Therefore, although our analysis gives a good overview of provision it does not offer a fine-grained account of variations between qualifications, particularly in terms of how these are adaptable to the needs of a full range of learners. This is an important consideration in relation to how qualification provision addresses the specific needs of FE learners. For example, variations in assessment modes used within different qualifications would evidence a qualitative difference between comparable qualifications, regardless of whether these are categorised as general or vocational. Furthermore, a good deal more work is required to understand variations in the availability of and range of languages covered in qualifications for specific professional purposes, such as Business, Finance, Medical professions, and community interpreting.

Further analyses focused on specific groupings of languages are likely to offer additional insights. Our analysis for sign languages focused on languages for the Deaf but a range of other languages are certified within the UK system (e.g., deafblind communication). Furthermore, a good number of changes to the format and naming of qualifications in this category have occurred over the period of the analysis and these are difficult for a non-specialist to interpret. Similarly, analysis related to Classical Languages and Civilisations grouped several similar courses into a single category, and a more fine-grained analysis which considers the specification coverage of current and historic qualifications would offer insights into the position of these languages in the system. These points equally apply to the full body of languages covered here, including main curricular and community languages. Such an analysis is outside the coverage of this report, but periodic qualification reforms mean that provision in a particular category is not a complete depiction of the opportunities available to learners.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a fine-grained analysis of the changes in qualification provision across qualification levels and within the general and vocational categories. Importantly, such an analysis should include any qualifications within 'general' or 'double-award' categories, and qualification components which may be adapted for language certification.
- Identify pockets of good practice in relation to qualification development and delivery in the FE sector. Liaise with HE providers to understand how qualifications are considered in terms of HE access and further accreditation.
- Undertake a needs analysis of language skills which are in deficit within the UK across sectors and work to identify potential avenues for learners and speakers of these languages to be accredited within the system.

4.3 FE GCSE and A-Level Examination Entries

This section presents data on qualification participation in the FE Sector for GCSE and A-Level in England and Northern Ireland. It should be noted that these examination entries provide a snapshot of participation in the most widely used qualifications and that a broader range of qualifications are

available, as shown in section 3.2 above. Nonetheless, the analyses shown here offer some insight into the broader context of languages education.

England

The following section presents the number of languages qualification entries in England (for FE establishments, Sixth Form Colleges and Tertiary Colleges). This data was kindly provided by Ofqual, the English examinations regulator, from 2016-2021 for GCSE and 2015-2022 for A-Level.

Our analysis splits the languages into ‘main curricular languages’ and ‘all languages excluding main curricular languages’. For each analysis, reporting is to the nearest 5 and where reported entries were ‘fewer than 10’ we report the figure as ‘5’ for the purposes of visual representation.

Main Curricular Languages at GCSE

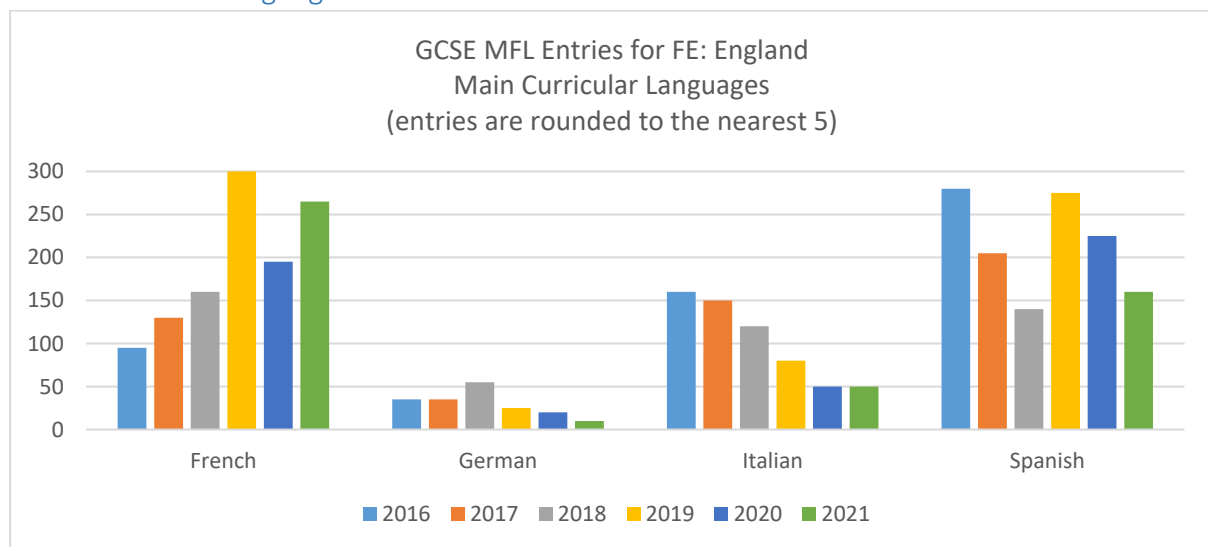


Figure 4.8: GCSE MFL Entries for FE: England - Main Curricular Languages

Entries for GCSE qualifications in the main curricular languages are small across England’s FE Sector (Figure 4.8). French and Spanish are generally the more popular options amongst the main curricular languages with year-on-year variation in which is the most popular. Italian enjoyed popularity greater than French for the two years 2016 and 2017 but more recently entries remain small.

All Languages excluding main curricular at GCSE

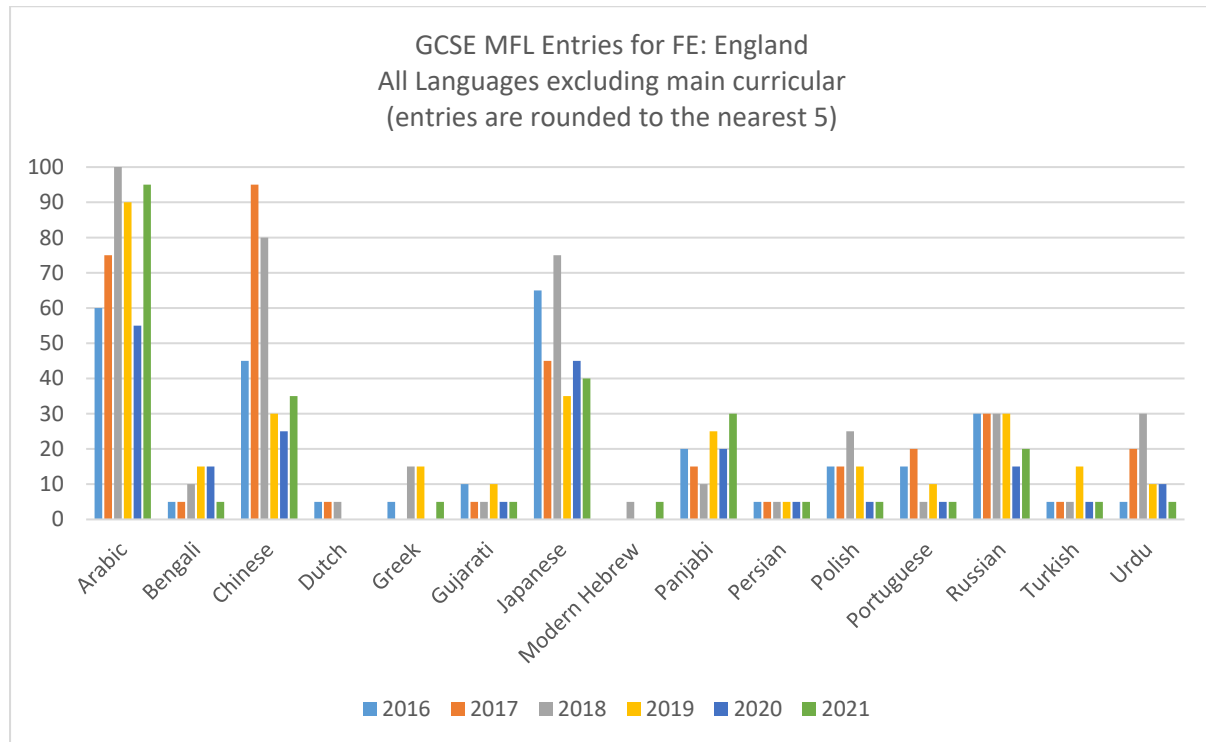


Figure 4.9: GCSE MFL Entries for FE: England - All Languages excluding main curricular

GCSE qualifications for languages outside of the main curricular language offering (figure 4.9) show a good range of participation with 15 further languages represented, albeit in very small numbers. Arabic, Chinese and Japanese generally have larger uptake and uptake in Russian, in general, is particularly consistent over time. The quite large drop in Russian entries, and some other languages, in 2020 may suggest particular negative effects for community language provision associated with the pandemic which have been reported across a range of sectors (see Hancock et al., 2021). However, due to the generally small numbers, any trends are difficult to discern because fluctuations can appear to be large due to the visual representation of the data.

Main Curricular Languages at A-Level

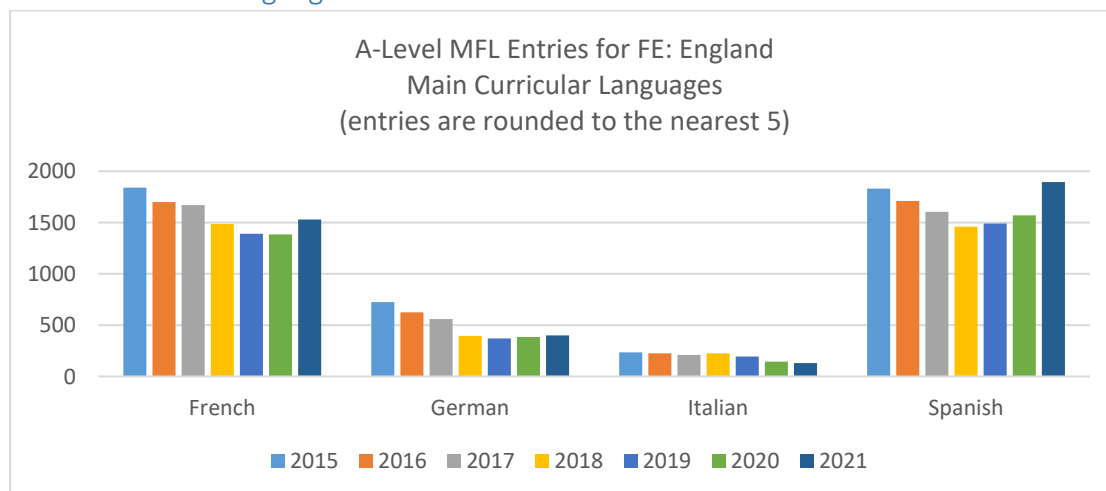


Figure 4.10: A-Level MFL Entries for FE: England - Main Curricular Languages

Although the numbers of entries for the main curricular languages in England’s FE sector remain small at A-Level (figure 4.10), this category is stronger when compared to the other 3 categories presented here (i.e., GCSE for both categorisations and A-Level for the languages grouping excluding the main curricular languages). Again, French and Spanish are the more popular options, with Spanish holding the primary position over the 3 most recent years. Interestingly, at A-Level German entries significantly outnumber those for Italian, the opposite of the pattern shown above for GCSE entries.

All Languages excluding main curricular at GCSE

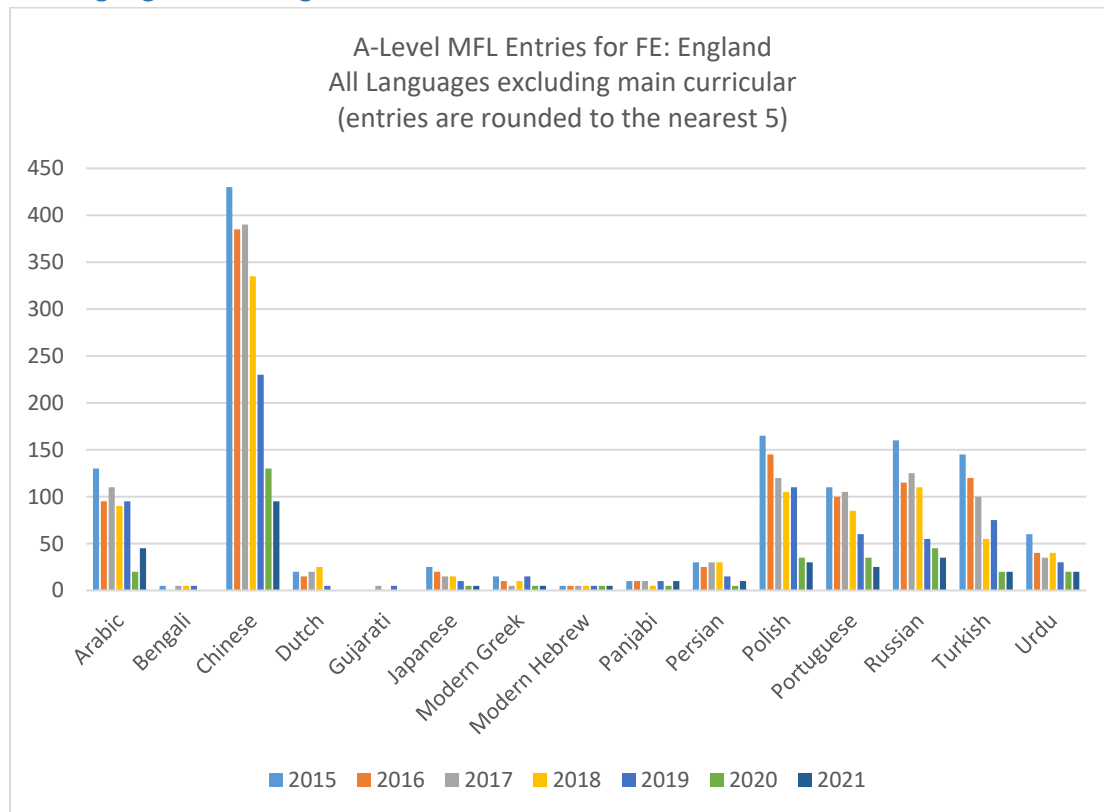


Figure 4.11: A-Level MFL Entries for FE: England - All Languages excluding main curricular

Similarly to the pattern for GCSE entries (shown in figure 4.9), entry numbers for A-Level (figure 4.11), for ‘all languages excluding main curricular’ languages, are small. Chinese is generally the most popular language, at least for the period 2015/19. Entry levels are generally small across the full range of languages, with Arabic, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish and Urdu enjoying some popularity.

Some community languages do appear to have much lower participation rates in recent years. It is unclear why this might be the case, perhaps the impact of the pandemic described above or wider implications such as Brexit may also have a role to play.

Northern Ireland

The examinations and awarding body for Northern Ireland, *The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CEA)*, in its annual publication of examination statistics provides data detailing the entries for GCSE and A-Level qualifications within the FE Sector for the main curricular languages. This data is shown here.

Modern Languages at GCSE

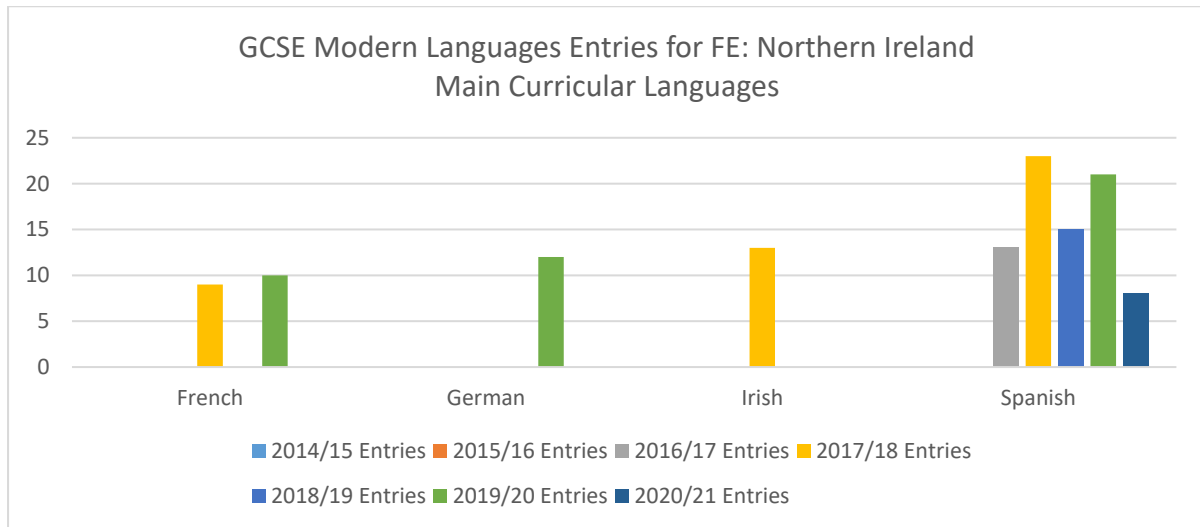


Figure 4.12: GCSE Modern Languages Entries for FE: Northern Ireland - Main Curricular Languages

Modern Languages at A-Level

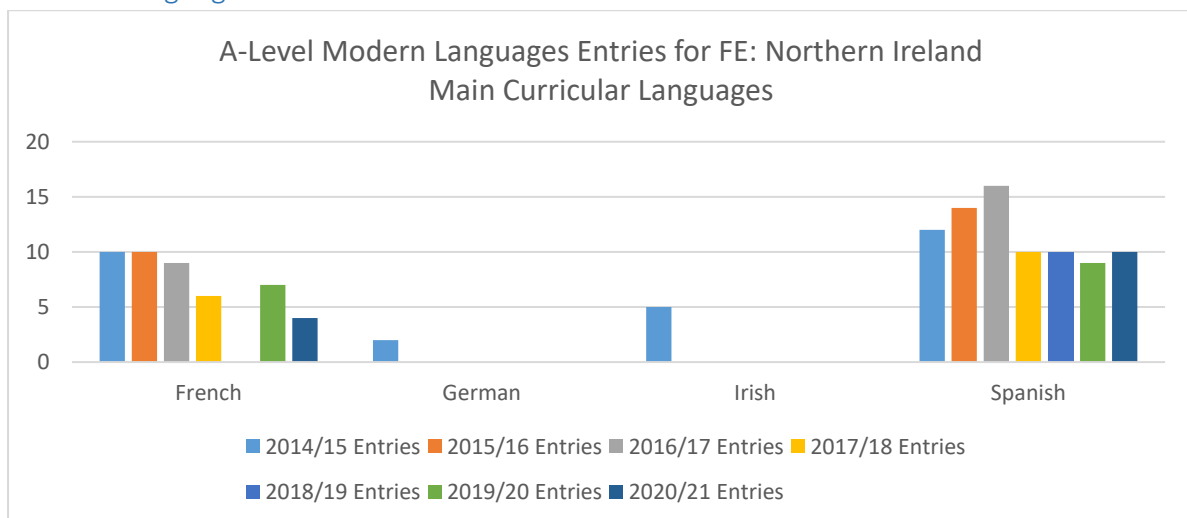


Figure 4.13: A-Level Modern Languages Entries for FE: Northern Ireland - Main Curricular Languages

As can be seen from figure 4.12 and figure 4.13, FE entries in Northern Ireland for GCSE and A-Level in the main curricular languages are very low. Nonetheless, the small number of entries shown suggests that the FE Sector retains the agility to respond to student demand for GCSE and A-Level courses. Such provision has the potential to be maintained and grown.

Scotland and Wales

At the time of writing, no data specific to the FE sector was available.

Summary

Our analyses show some evidence of participation in GCSE and A-Level examinations within the FE sector, where we have relevant data to consider this issue. There is a very substantial gap between the number of students enrolled in FE courses for 'Languages, Literature and Culture' (SSA 12), even when we can isolate the enrolments specifically for 'Other Languages, Literature and Culture' (SSA 12.2), and the number of entries for GCSE and A-Level in languages subjects. Additional work is required to understand the extent to which other qualifications are used within the system, including the full range of regulated courses such as those described in section 3.2, and for other bespoke models which are evidenced elsewhere in our data.

Recommendations:

- Undertake similar analyses for Scotland and Wales to understand uptake patterns for the main qualifications in those jurisdictions.
- Undertake additional research to document and evaluate the uptake of a broader range of languages qualifications.

4.4 Snapshot of FE Language Provision in UK jurisdictions

This analysis adopted a small-scale case-study approach to document the availability of languages education courses at a small sample of FE Providers across the UK jurisdictions. The online prospectus for each college selected in our random sampling was examined to identify the languages courses offered. The intention was to show a snapshot of the potential offering which might be available to a learner depending on the colleges accessible to them. The intention is not to suggest that these examples are representative of the broader picture across each jurisdiction, rather we represent here what a potential student may encounter should they investigate taking up a language through their local FE provider.

A range of course types and levels are used across our sample and we report the descriptors used by the institutions in their course materials without attempting to adjust these to create a comparative dataset. The abbreviations PT (part-time), FT (full-time) and OL (online) are used to indicate the mode of delivery of courses documented here.

Snapshot of FE Language Provision in UK nations



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England

CEFR	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1
Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
French	PT	PT		Online	PT
Italian	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
Spanish	PT	PT	PT		

Table 4.5: Example 1 England

Type	Leisure / Hobby
Chinese	PT
Italian	PT
Polish	PT

Table 4.6: Example 2 England

Type	Beginners	Beginners +	Improvers 1	Improvers 2	Improvers 3	Improvers 4
Japanese	PT		PT	PT	PT	PT
Korean	PT	PT				

Table 4.7: Example 3 England

Northern Ireland

Type	Beginner	Beginner +	Improver	Improver +	Intermediate -	Intermediate	Intermediate +	Advanced	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9
Qualification							GCSE	AS-Level	A2-Level
Arabic	PT								
French	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
German	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT			
Irish	PT								
Italian	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT		PT	
Japanese	PT	PT							
Polish	PT								
Portuguese	PT	PT							
Russian	PT								
Spanish	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT

Table 4.8: Example 1 Northern Ireland

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
French	PT	PT	
Spanish	PT	PT	PT

Table 4.9: Example 2 Northern Ireland

Scotland

	SCQF 1	SCQF 2	SCQF 3	SCQF 4	SCQF 5	SCQF 6	SCQF 7
French					OL	OL	PT / OL
Gaelic					PT / OL	PT / OL	PT
German		PT			OL	OL	OL
Italian						OL	OL
Spanish		PT	OL		OL	PT / OL	OL

Table 4.10: Example 1 Scotland

	Beginner	Improvers	Intermediate	Advanced
French	PT	PT	PT	PT
German	PT	PT	PT	
Italian	PT	PT	PT	
Polish	PT	PT	PT	
Spanish	PT	PT	PT	PT

Table 4.11: Example 2 Scotland

Wales

	Entry Level 3	Level 1	Level 2 GCSE	Level 3 AS-Level	Level 3 A2-Level
French		PT	PT	FT	FT
German		PT	PT		
Italian		PT	PT		PT
Spanish		PT	PT	PT/FT	PT
Welsh	PT		PT	FT	

Table 4.12: Example 1 Wales

	Introduction	GCSE	AS-Level	A2-Level
French	PT	PT	FT	FT
German	PT	PT		
Italian	PT	PT		PT
Spanish	PT	PT	PT/FT	PT
Welsh	PT	PT	FT	

Table 4.13: Example 2 Wales

Summary

There are significant variations in the offering a potential student may encounter at their local FE College. Some colleges provide comprehensive coverage of a range of languages which can be studied at different levels while other colleges offer relatively fewer languages and with limited opportunities for progression. Some examples show an excellent range of levels which a student may progress through, allowing for incremental language development for students who will almost exclusively be studying these courses on a part-time or online basis. Such a model ensures that learners can experience language learning in a manageable way which addresses their individual needs.

A further significant finding from this analysis is the range of different ways that course levels are reported across and within the jurisdictions. This is potentially problematic in terms of the portability of certifications and qualifications.

Recommendations:

- A thorough review of current provision and an evaluation of barriers to provision should be undertaken through further commissioned research by FE stakeholders to better understand why such variation is evidenced.
- FE providers should be encouraged to adopt course descriptions which communicate as much information as possible. Ideally, these could be reported in multiple formats which are easily interpreted by students themselves, as well as other education providers and employers.

4.5 Conclusions

The data presented here shows a picture of general decline in participation and achievement in languages education within the FE sector over the relatively short period covered by our analyses. This is of concern, given that participation in languages courses accounts for a small proportion of participation within the sector. For example, in 2014/15 enrolments on language courses in England's FE sector accounted for 2.6% of total enrolments (67,380 of 2,613,700) but by 2018/19 languages enrolments represented only 1.9% of the total (39,950 of 2,068,200).

Policy decisions must be informed by clear and transparent data on languages education in the FE sector. This includes collecting data in a format which ensures that the current situation is clearly understood. Such data will be required to facilitate the setting and monitoring of targets relating to policy interventions. We therefore recommend that participation is consistently reported using the split by Tier 2 Sector Subject Area for all jurisdictions. In addition, steps should be taken to improve and monitor participation in individual subject areas. One barrier in this area is the identifiability of individuals pursuing courses or qualifications which attract smaller numbers. However, where these smaller numbers are suppressed, it is still possible to see, for example, that the number is below 10 which provides a 'good enough' indication of participation. It is however likely that a more complex analysis can provide additional information with policy relevance.

We show relatively consistent provision of qualifications at Level 2 and 3 over time, even when we consider the declines in provision for some languages and at some levels. However, our analyses do not show the broader certification landscape within the Further Education Sector, specifically in relation to non-award bearing courses, such as conversation classes, or specialised courses, such as university access courses. A further area for development relates to how these courses are mapped to international benchmarks such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)⁷ which is important in terms of lifelong language learning.

A key issue identified in this section, and elsewhere in our data, is the variability of the offering for individual students. This relates both to students who are beginning or returning learners, as well as existing speakers of heritage, community and indigenous languages. If FE provision is to be well positioned to support the regrowth of language provision in the UK, these issues must be seriously considered and policy-based solutions proposed, implemented and evaluated.

⁷ See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference%20languages/level-descriptions>

5. Survey Results

Prior to disseminating the surveys, the research team conducted desk analysis of all 204 General FE Colleges in the UK to ascertain if any languages other than English, or English and Welsh in Wales, were taught using the following process:

1. Look up each college's website
2. Search 'Language' 'Languages' 'French' and 'Spanish'
3. Record Yes or No if offered.

The search strings chosen reflect the most taught languages in the four jurisdictions of the UK (Collen, 2021a, 2021b, 2022).

	ENGLAND	NI	SCOTLAND	WALES	UK
Yes	70	6	18	11	105
No	90	0	9	0	99
Total	160	6	27	11	204

Table 5.1: Results of desk research into colleges offering languages

It can be seen that just over half of General FE Colleges in the UK offer some form of language teaching on their curriculum; often, this is at Entry Level or 'Languages for Holidays'.

The UK-wide staff survey and student survey were designed by the research team and amended following consultation with the project's Advisory Team. A particular challenge was the devolved nature of FE, with intricacies across the four jurisdictions, as well as the need to develop a student survey to cover the 16 – 100+ age range. The surveys also included sixth-form colleges in England due to the fact these are classed as publicly funded FE settings. In the absence of publicly available email addresses for sixth-form colleges in England, the Sixth Form Colleges Association agreed to distribute the surveys to its members.

5.1 Findings from the staff survey

The staff survey was sent to the publicly available email address of 204 General FE Colleges in the four jurisdictions of the UK, as well as 78 sixth-form colleges and 16-19 academies in England who are members of the Sixth Form Colleges Association. After data sets had been cleaned, there were 53 usable responses. The overall UK response rate is therefore 18.8% which compares favourably with similar surveys of modern languages provision in secondary education (e.g., Collen, 2022). The response rates to the staff survey by jurisdiction:

	Sample	Achieved	Response rate
England – General Colleges	160	26	16.3%
England – Sixth form colleges and 16-19 academies	78	15	19.2%
Northern Ireland	6	5	83.3%
Scotland	27	3	11.1%

Wales	11	4	36.4%
UK Total	282	53	18.8%

Table 5.2: Response rates to staff survey

Of the 53 valid responses, just 4 reported that they are not teaching any languages in the academic year 2021/22. Referring to table 5.1, we can deduce that almost all of the 99 General FE Colleges in the UK which do not offer any language teaching based on our desk research chose not to respond to our survey, a regrettably absent voice in our data.

One General FE College which no longer offers languages commented:

“[Our college] used to offer a lot of languages but changes to post 16 policy meant increase in competition locally and school sixth forms took this 'market'. Become unviable. Now offered via adult recreational but limited success due to changing behaviours (affordability, less likely to travel currently)”

Those colleges which do offer languages have chosen to respond and it must be borne in mind that what follows may paint a rosier picture than the reality. The inclusion of sixth form colleges in England alongside all General Further Education Colleges across the UK also has the potential to distort the following data. There is thus strong argument for more robust monitoring of language provision in FE through more formal data capture mechanisms in the sector.

Languages Taught

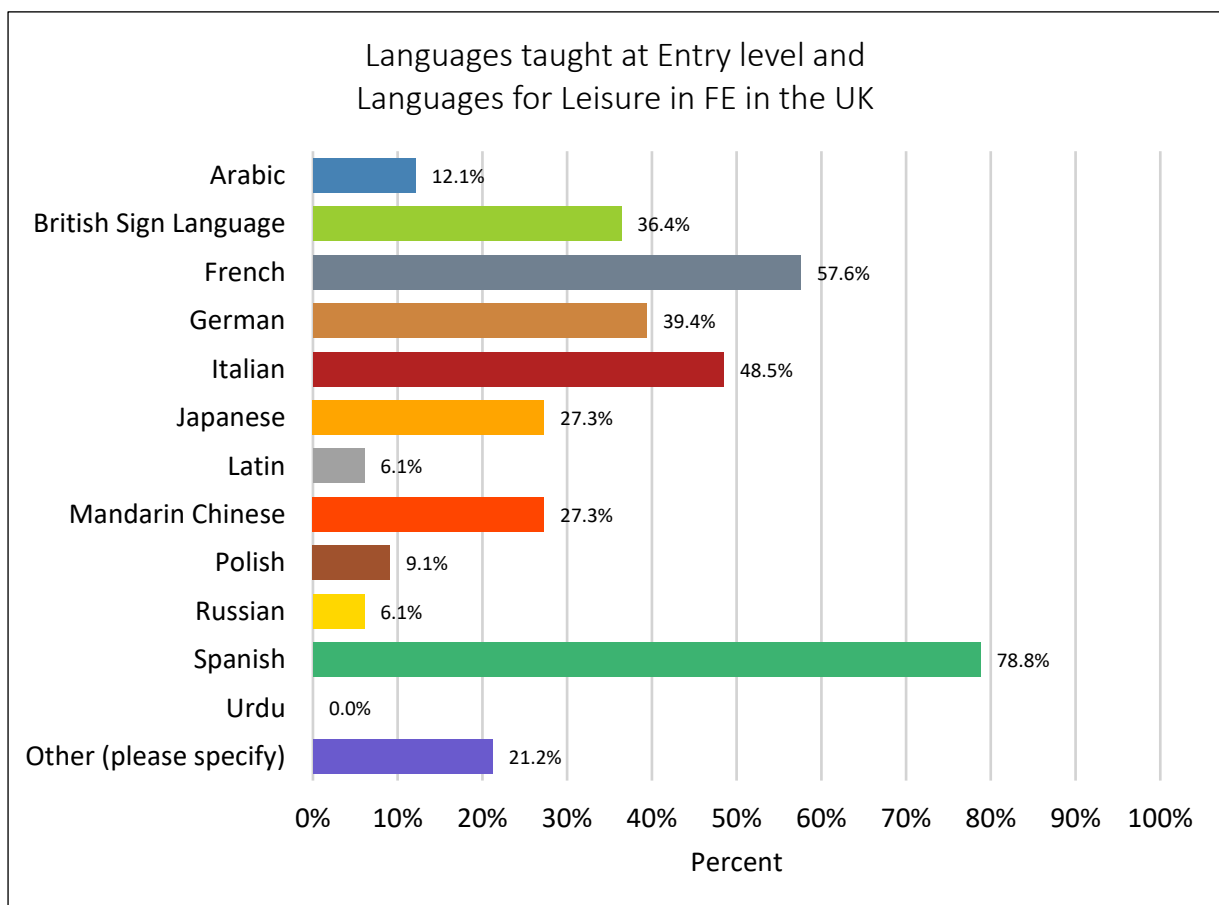


Figure 5.1: Languages taught at Entry level/ Languages for Leisure in FE in the UK

Figure 5.1 shows that Spanish is the most popular language at Entry Level/ Languages for Leisure, closely followed by French, Italian, German and British Sign Language. In the 'other' category, accounting for over 1 in 5 responses, languages included Dutch, Irish, Portuguese, Swahili, Turkish and Yoruba.

Just 11 UK colleges reported teaching GCSE, National 5 or alternative level 2 qualifications. This corroborates with our finding that just 1 in 5 colleges allows students to resit GCSE, National 5 or alternative level 2 qualifications in languages which they may have failed at secondary school. Two of the 3 colleges in Scotland reported teaching SQA Language Units; Modern Languages for Work Purposes is a suite of Units available at Access 3, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher levels in Scotland. The Units are built on a single generic specification, which covers 10 languages.

At A-level, (Advanced) Higher or equivalent, 36 colleges reported offering provision. Similar to secondary level and national trends, results are dominated by the 'big three' of French, Spanish and German.

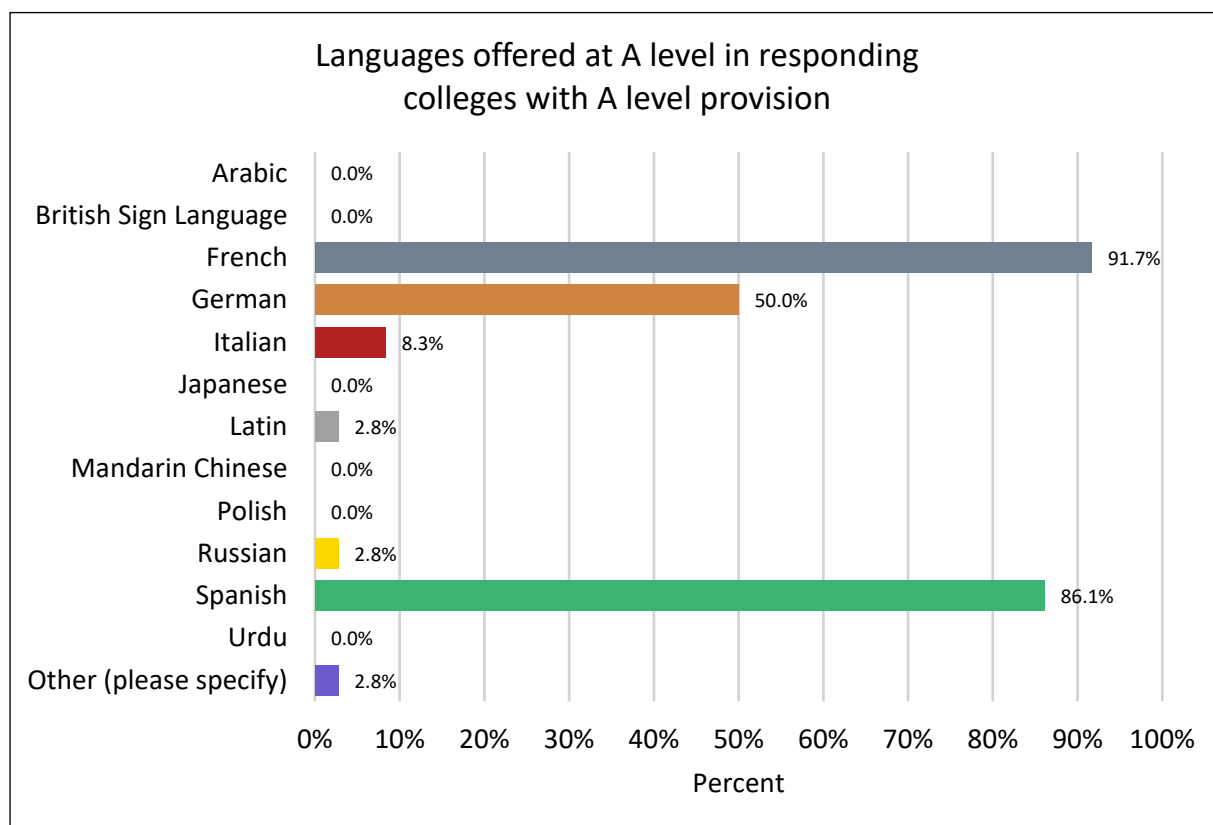


Figure 5.2: Languages offered at A level in responding colleges with A level provision

It is pleasing to see Italian, Latin and Russian featuring, but there is some concern that there is a lack of language diversification.

Just one in eleven colleges told us that they offer vocational qualifications in languages and these colleges were all in Northern Ireland or Scotland. The qualifications offered were the OCN Level 2 in languages and HNC and HND in Travel and Tourism, with the possibility to take a language (either French or Spanish) for 1 credit out of 18 each year. The responding college in this case used to offer

German and Italian as part of these travel and tourism qualifications but no longer. The college told us in the past, languages represented 6 credits across the 2 years of an HND, now they represent only 2 credits, 1 per year.

Challenges facing languages

We asked respondents to identify, if any, from the following list the top five challenges to providing high quality language learning experiences for students:

- The nature and content of external exams
- Insufficient curriculum time
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
- Lack of access to Professional Learning (PL) for lecturing staff
- The way external exams are marked and graded
- Timetabling of languages at Key Stage 3
- Timetabling of languages at Key Stage 4
- Lack of opportunities for learners to practise their language outside the classroom
- Global English (i.e., the importance of English as a world language)
- The implications of the UK's decision to leave the EU (Brexit)
- Languages not promoted at college-wide level as a careers option
- Languages a low priority for senior management

The main challenge was joint between languages not being promoted at college-wide level as a careers option and language being a low priority for senior management. This was followed by Global English, lack of opportunities for learners to practise their language outside the classroom and the way external exams are marked and graded. This is a different profile to what was found from the secondary sector through Language Trends England 2020 by British Council where the nature and content of external exams was seen as the biggest challenge.

We provided respondents with space to tell us about other opportunities or barriers to providing a high-quality teaching and learning experience in languages in college. Some comments included:

“There is a decreasing number of language students, especially in the sixth form; many of our feeder secondary schools limiting their language teaching provision, e.g., dropping German”.
(Sixth-form college)

“Little choice of appropriate qualifications and resources for adults and vocational learners.”

“Languages could be included in the curriculum where relevant-e.g., Travel & Tourism courses.”

“In our college languages are only taught as a ‘Leisure’ subject as evening classes. There are no exam or full-time language courses.”

“We are totally dependent on and have little control over our feeder schools: languages they teach, how they teach and, crucially, attitudes towards language learning and the importance of languages post Brexit. The lockdowns have impacted marketing.”

Our findings evince that there is much scope for a programme of advocacy for languages with college leaders across the UK.

Numbers of students studying languages

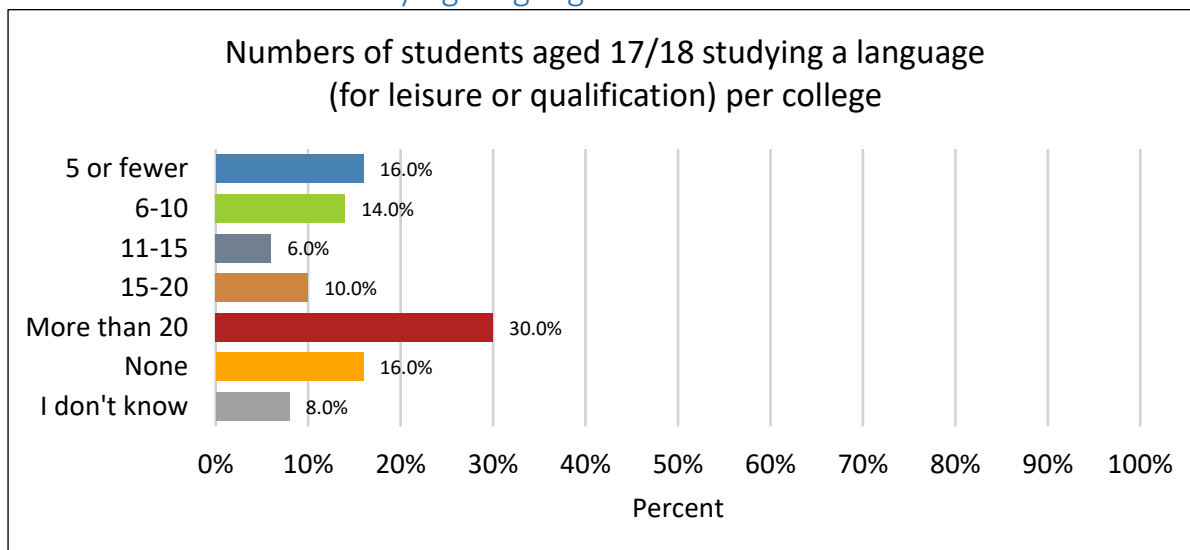


Figure 5.3: Numbers of students aged 17/18 studying a language (for leisure or qualification) per college

Sixteen percent of respondents told us that they have no students aged 17/18 currently studying a language; some of these respondents did have students aged 19 or older studying a language. Thirty percent of respondents have 10 or fewer students in this age range, whilst 30% pleasingly have more than 20. Respondents told us that classes of less than 10 are often financially unviable and it is a battle to keep language classes with low numbers running.

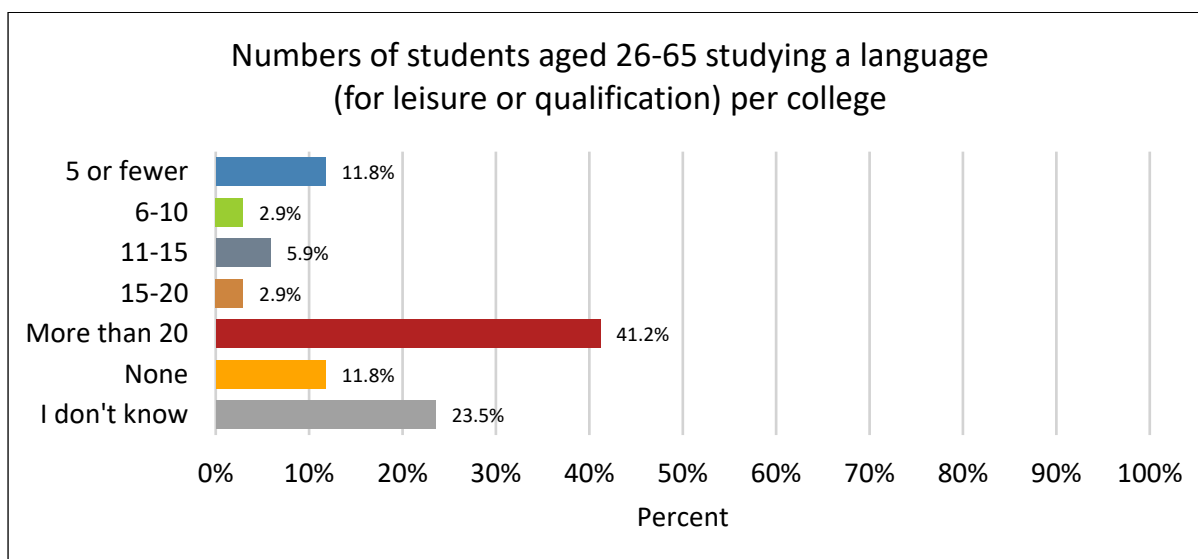


Figure 5.4: Numbers of students aged 26-65 studying a language (for leisure or qualification) per college

Thirty-four of the 53 responding colleges told us that they could have or do have adult learners in the 26-65 age range. Forty-one percent of respondents note they have more than 20 adult learners of languages; this reflects a healthy appetite for short courses across the lifespan.

Low numbers looking to do languages

There is great variation across colleges in what constitutes low numbers. A significant majority said that anything less than 10 was deemed to be low; in some institutions, however, as many as 20 students are needed for classes to run.

AS and A2 classes or (Higher and Advanced Higher) are taught together	16.3%
Classes do not run	53.1%
Class run at a reduced timetable	14.3%
Shared arrangements with another institution	0.0%
Hybrid face-to-face and online delivery	10.2%
Online only delivery	2.0%
Other	26.5%

Table 5.3: Arrangements when only low number want to study a language post-16.

Table 5.3 shows that in over half in institutions classes do not run where there are low numbers. There is no evidence of sharing classes between institutions.

For those colleges which teach A level languages, we asked respondents about their perception of trends in take-up over the past three years:

	Take-up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Not taught in my college	Other / Miscellaneous data
French	10.0%	20.0%	40.0%	16.0%	14%
German	13.0%	6.5%	37.0%	30.5%	13%
Italian	8%	8%	21%	47%	16%
Latin	0.0%	3%	3%	85%	9%
Mandarin Chinese	3%	9%	6%	62.5%	19.5%
Spanish	10%	27%	42%	10%	11%
Other language	17%	9%	17%	44%	13%

Table 5.4: Respondents' perceptions of take-up of A level languages over the past three years

A significant majority of respondents report take-up has decreased in French, German, Italian and Spanish, but it is good to see the minority of colleges citing growth in these languages, as well as the fact that Latin and Mandarin Chinese are noted in our data.

In commenting about changes in take-up, respondents told us:

"Fewer feeder schools offer German at Key Stage 4. Fewer students doing a GCSE in a language and far more emphasis given to STEM subjects results in less students studying a language in FE."

"Drastic drop of language students in all 3 languages (French, German, Spanish) in the last 5-10 years - in some languages only a third of previous class sizes. German being hardest hit by

this development. Secondary schools - state and private - making language learning optional has led to only a small number of students continuing language studies after GCSE. Misconception that languages are hard and not needed in a global context where English is widely used and after Brexit.”

“Spanish has always been the most popular language for evening classes. In past years French and Italian were also offered. I think Covid had a negative effect on take up of Spanish recently. Many did not want to do ‘online classes’ and I was not interested in teaching them. My students are mostly older adults who prefer ‘face to face’ classes and the chance to interact in person with others to learn and practise Spanish. As well as actually learning a language, the social aspect of attending an evening class is important to many of them. The increased use of English as an important international language, especially on the Internet and as a main language of Business and Commerce, may also be a reason for the fall in foreign language learning, especially in the teenage and young adult age groups.”

“We have not run languages at A level (or GCSE) for a number of years mainly due to a lack of interest resulting in a low cohort size which was not financially viable. We have recently started languages as a part-time adult offer and the take-up is good with around 50 students across three languages.”

“Welsh bac rendered compulsory in our college. This has meant that when in the past a language could be the 4th subject at AS (particularly for learners with a more scientific interest), the 4th subject is now the Welsh baccalaureate.”⁸

Teacher/Lecturer recruitment

Just under half of colleges told us that teacher recruitment in languages is not an issue. Just over half of colleges do, however, have an issue and mainly cite: (i) the part-time and often temporary nature of FE contracts in languages with little job security; (ii) the high percentage of classes in the evening; and (iii) the outworking of the UK’s decision to leave the European Union resulting in fewer ‘native speakers’ to assure classes.

The situation does vary across the four jurisdictions. Comments such as the following were typical in each jurisdiction.

England:

“Yes, recruitment is an issue. We need skilled sixth form teachers and we don’t accept Early Career Teachers (ECTs).” (Sixth-form college)

“Yes, EU nationals now hard to recruit. Retention difficult owing to cost-of-living rise and pay not keeping up with cost-of-living increase.” (General FE College)

Northern Ireland:

⁸ The Welsh Bacc can be achieved at three levels, Foundation (Level 1), National (Level 2) or Advanced (Level 3). At all levels, it comprises multiple elements and is achieved on the successful completion of the Skills Challenge Certificate and the required level of attainment in supporting qualifications.

“Yes, teacher recruitment is an issue. Part-time lecturer fee is very low and they are only paid for student contact time, not for preparation. We cannot offer a full-time job and there is shortage of qualified staff in languages such as Mandarin, Arabic and Portuguese.”

Scotland:

“There is presently a freeze in recruitment in Scotland due to cuts by the Scottish Funding Council. Retention is not an issue as far as lecturers are concerned, although many of them are part-time and also need to work for other institutions (e.g., at universities).”

Wales:

“Yes. We no longer recruit French Foreign Language Assistants and, although we have no vacant posts at present, I am aware the SLT view MFL as a difficult area to recruit teaching staff.”

Foreign Language Assistants

A Foreign Language Assistant (FLA) is a native speaker of a language other than English, or English and Welsh in Wales, who can help students in the UK build their cultural capital by developing their linguistic and cross-cultural skills. Seventy-six percent of responding institutions do not employ a language assistant; of those that do, a majority are sixth-form colleges in England and they invariably employ a French and/or Spanish assistant.

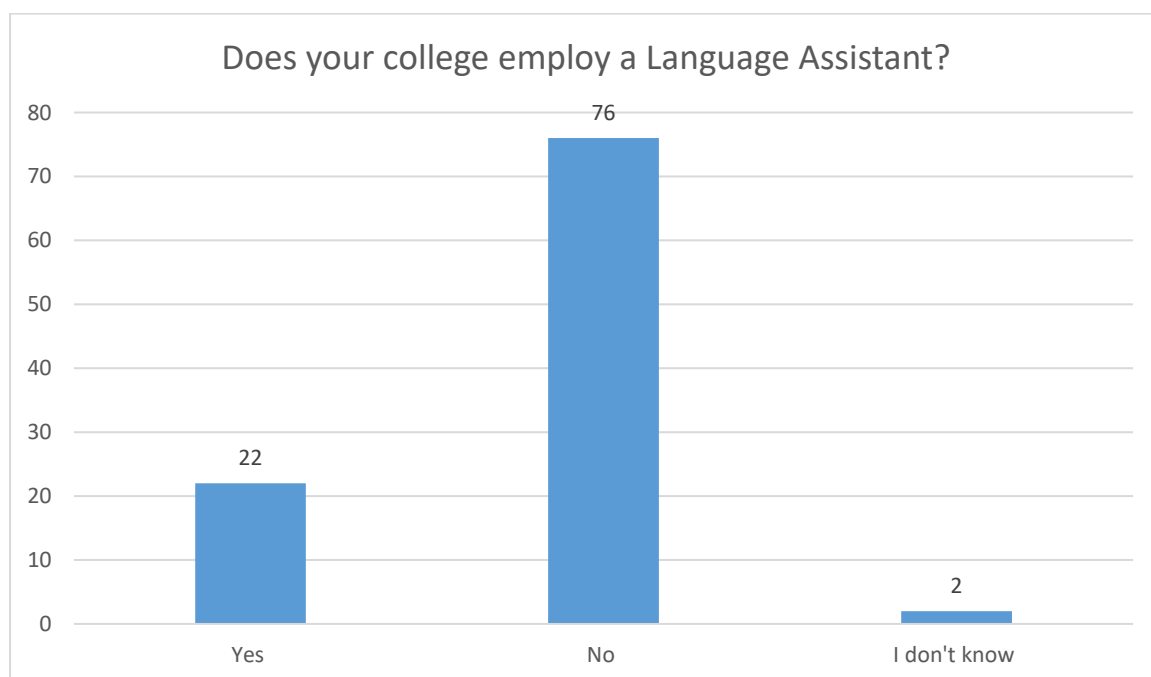


Figure 5.5: The employment of language assistants in FE colleges

The most frequent reason for not employing language assistants was funding, followed by (but inextricably linked to) low student numbers. One respondent commented:

“Lack of money. Until five years ago the college employed language assistants. Now language teachers - most of them native speakers - are expected to include speaking practice into their lessons which means that overall teaching time has been reduced.”

There is thus scope to consider the benefits which FLAs could bring to FE settings.

International Engagement

The institution has one or more partner institutions abroad	35.1%
British Council international opportunities e.g., British Council Skills Programme	14.0%
We employ Language Assistants	21.6%
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g., Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación)	24.6%
Turing Scheme for outward mobility	22.8%
Erasmus+ projects	17.5%
None	28.1%
Other (please specify)	14.0%

Figure 5.6: international engagement (multiple answers per college permitted)

Twenty-eight percent of responding colleges report no international engagement opportunities for staff and/or students. It is, however, pleasing to see that thirty-five percent have at least one partner institution abroad and that the Turing Scheme is beginning to show an impact in over one in five colleges; this compares favourably with findings from state secondary schools (Collen, 2022) in England, where understanding of and access to Turing funding is underdeveloped.

Other interesting data...

COURSES RELATED TO LANGUAGES

We asked respondents if their college offered courses related to languages, for example community interpreting and/or translation; less than 1 in ten colleges answered in the affirmative. Courses offered include:

- Diploma in Public Service Interpreting qualification for Spanish and Polish;
- Level 1 and Level 2 Community Interpreting;
- Unaccredited courses in translation and/or interpreting.

COMMUNITY/HERITAGE/HOME LANGUAGES

The terms 'community/home/heritage languages' are unhelpful, but we wanted to find out if colleges offer speakers of languages other than the traditional modern languages the opportunity to take qualifications in their language. For example, can a student recently arrived from Poland undertake a GCSE or A-level in college?

Our data show that one in three colleges facilitates this. When asked why this is not an option, colleges told us:

"We have not allowed this in the past. We could consider if the person already had a GCSE (grade 9) in that language and if they had a private tutor. The A Level exams are too specific and include movie/books study. A native speaker may not necessarily be able to be successful in the exams."

"In Scotland, Higher and Advanced Higher are not available for Polish. Higher and Advanced Higher is available for Urdu, but we don't offer it at our college. "

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, there is no provision for GCSE or A level Polish from the local awarding body, CCEA.

COLLABORATION WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

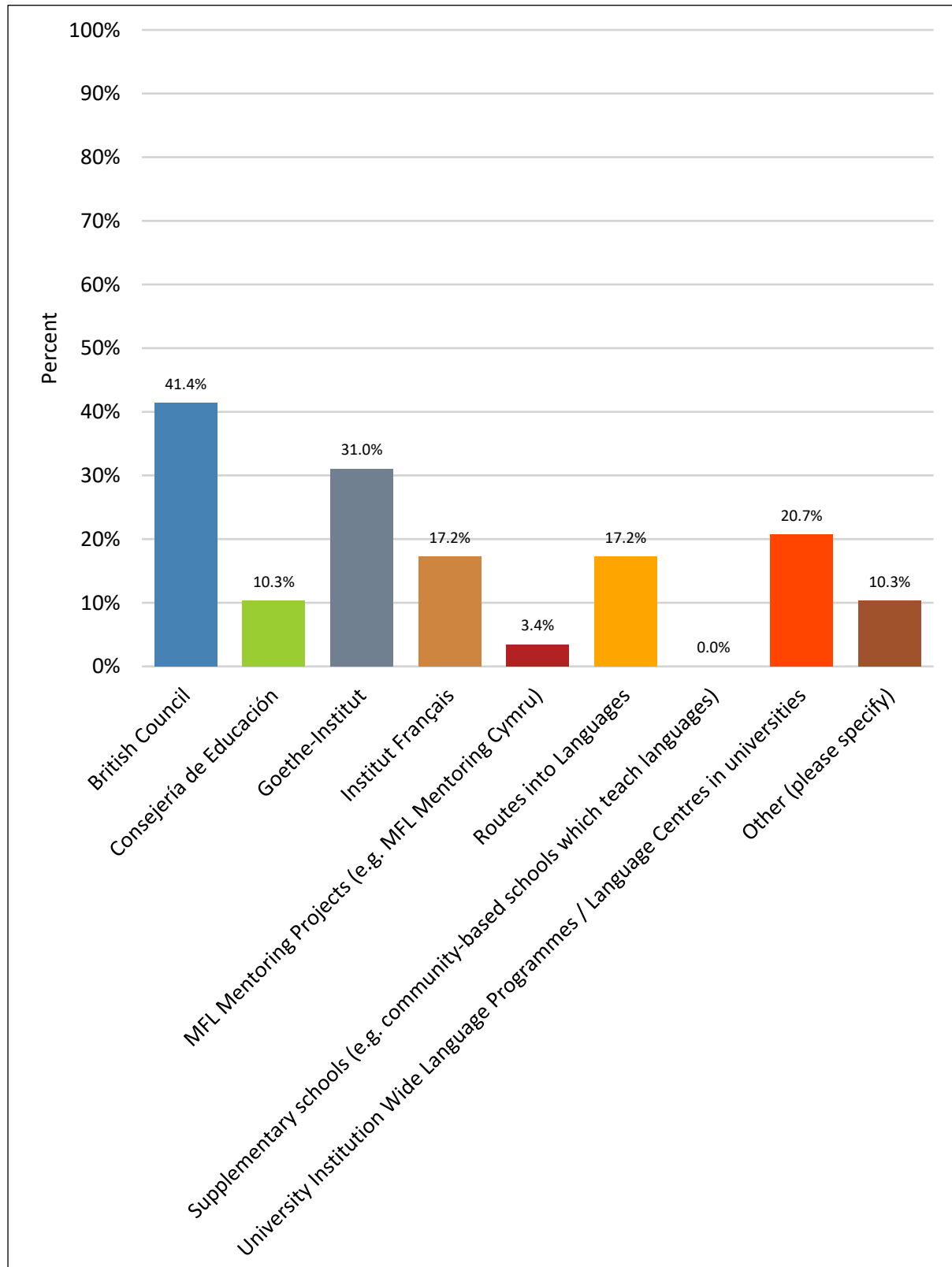


Figure 5.7: External collaboration with key partners allied to languages (multiple answers allowed)

We can see there is healthy levels of collaboration with the British Council and, interestingly given the decline of German at A level, the Goethe-Institut. One in five respondents currently work with University Institution Wide Language Programmes (IWLP), but there is no evidence of engagement with supplementary/Saturday schools.

5.2 Findings of the Student Survey

Overview

The student survey was sent to the same recipients as the staff survey, and we were thus reliant on FE staff sharing with their students. We stressed in all communication that we wanted to hear from all students, irrespective of whether they were studying a language. We also sought to raise awareness through various social media channels, but it was difficult to secure student engagement.

A total of 205 FE students in the UK chose to complete the survey, consisting of 54.6% of responses from Northern Ireland (112), 23.4 % from Scotland (48), 21.4% from England (21) and Wales (23), and 0.5% from Isle of Man or Channel Islands (1). Almost all respondents were studying a language(n=202), so it must be borne in mind that the following data relates to those who generally have a positive disposition towards languages. Given the small return rate compared to number of FE students nationally, the findings, whilst worthwhile in themselves, are not generalizable to the entire population.

Name	Percent
England	10.2%
Northern Ireland	54.6%
Scotland	23.4%
Wales	11.2%
Isle of Man or Channel Islands	0.5%
N	205

Table 5.5: Percentage of respondents from across the UK

RESPONDENTS' AGE RANGE IN THE UK

A total of 200 of the 205 FE students in the UK responding to the survey shared their age. 22.5% of these respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 16-19, with 19% between 20-29, 18% between 60-69, another 16% between 30-39, 11% between 40-49, 10.5% between 50-59, and 3% between 70-79.

Name	Percent
16-19	22.5%
20-29	19.0%
30-39	16.0%
40-49	11.0%
50-59	10.5%
60-69	18.0%
70-79	3.0%
80-89	0.0%
90-99	0.0%
100+	0.0%
N	200

Table 5.6: Age profile of respondents in the UK

ENGLAND AND WALES

Of 43 student responses in England and Wales, 70% these respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 16-19, with 12% between 60-69, 11% between 30-39, another 5% between 20-29, and 2% between 50-59. There were not any FE student respondents between the ages of 40-49 in England and Wales.

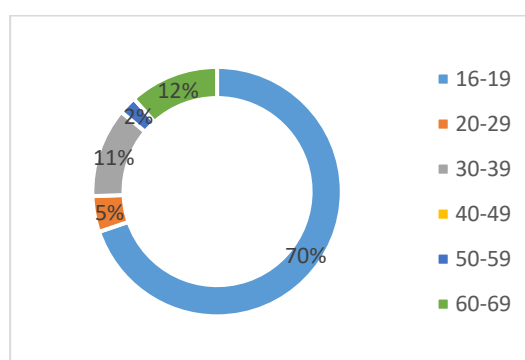


Figure 5.8: Respondents' age range in England & Wales

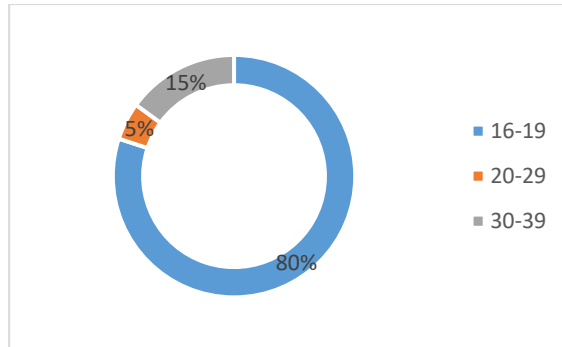


Figure 5.9: Respondents' age range in England

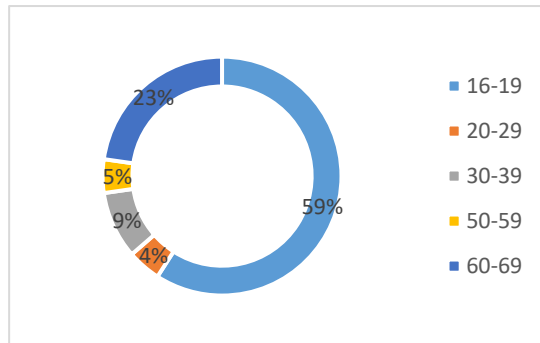


Figure 5.10: Respondents' age range in Wales

SCOTLAND

Of 48 student responses in Scotland, 37% these respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 20-29, with 23% between 30-39, 17% between 40-49, another 15% between 16-19, and 8% between 50-59. It will be interesting to explore why there were not any FE student respondents between the ages of 60-69 in Scotland.

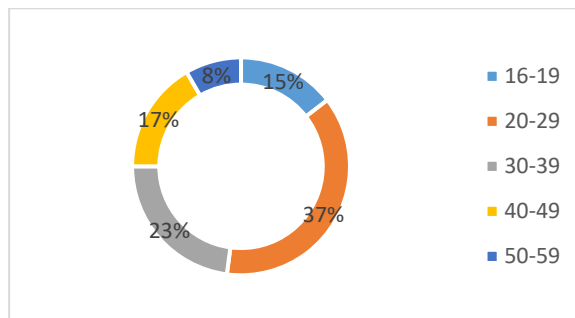


Figure 5.11: Respondents' age range in Scotland

NORTHERN IRELAND

A total of 112 FE students in Northern Ireland responded to the survey. 28% of these respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 60-69, with 16% between 20-29, 14% between 30-39, another 14% between 50-59, 13% between 40-49, 8% between 70-79, and 7% between 16-19.

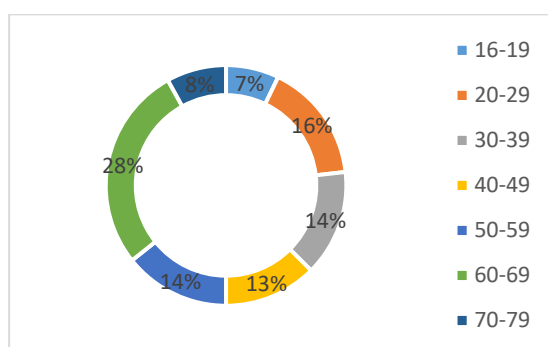


Figure 5.12: Respondents' age range in NI

Student attendee status at college in the UK

Student status

Part-time evening students account for 42.4%, followed by full-time student at 41.5%, then followed by part-time day student at 13.2%.

Name	Percent
Full-time student	41.5%
Part-time day student	13.2%
Part-time evening student	42.4%
Other (please specify)	2.9%
N	205

Table 5.7: Student status in the UK

- England and Wales

A total of 45 students attended FE colleges in England and Wales. Full-time student account for with 78%, followed by part-time evening student at 20%, then followed by others at 2%. It is surprising from the data that there were not any part-time day student respondents in England or Wales.

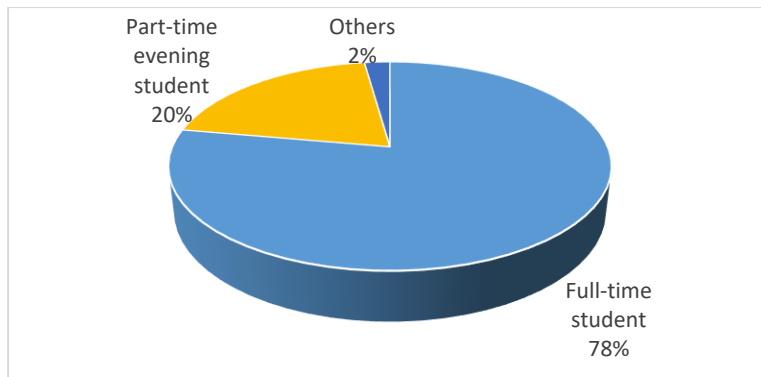


Figure 5.13: Student status at college in England & Wales

- Scotland

A total of 48 students attended FE colleges in Scotland. Full-time students accounted for 71%, followed by part-time evening student at 19%, then followed by part-time day student at 6%. It is interesting to indicate that others (2 student respondents) accounted for 4 % with one student from 'school college partnership' and the other from 'school student doing course through college'.

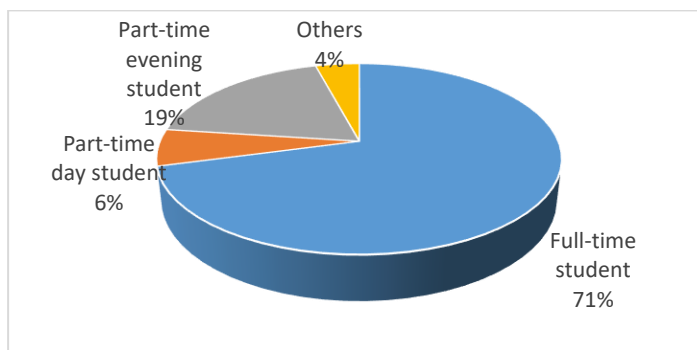


Figure 5.14: Student status at college in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

A total of 112 students attended FE colleges in Northern Ireland, part-time evening student stood top with 62%, followed by part-time day student at 21%, then followed by full-time student at 15%. However, 'mixture of part-time and full-time student' and 'others' (e.g., 2-hour course) both only accounted for 1%.

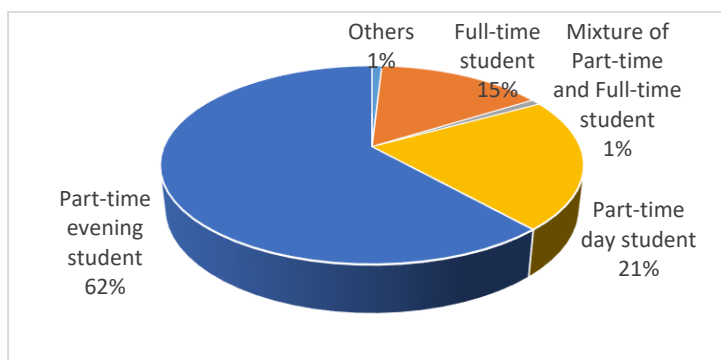


Figure 5.15: Student attendee status at college in NI

How students' classes currently are delivered in the UK

- Overview

Of 205 student respondents in the UK, it is clear from the data that 'Face-to-face/ in-person' is the predominant method of delivering classes (response rate 56.6%), compared to the other two methods: 'Mixture of face-to-face and online' (29.8%) and 'Online only' (13.7%).

Name	Percent
Face-to-face, in-person	56.6%
Mixture of face-to-face and online	29.8%
Online only	13.7%
N	205

Table 5.8: How students' classes currently are delivered in UK

- England and Wales

Of 45 student respondents in England and Wales, it is clear from the data that 'Face-to-face/ in-person' is the predominant method of delivering classes (response rate 71%), compared to the other two methods: 'Mixture of face-to-face and online' (27%) and 'Online only' (2%). It is interesting to note that there are not any respondents attending online only class in Wales.

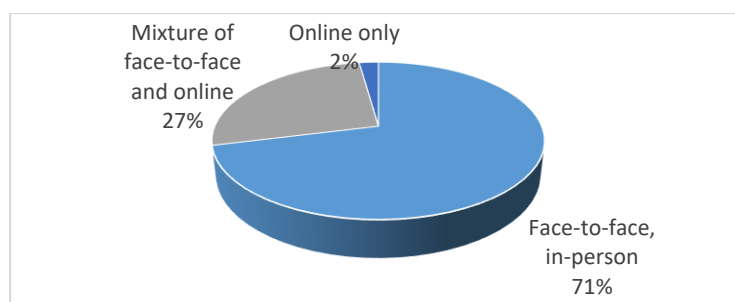


Figure 5.16: How students' classes currently are delivered in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 48 student respondents in Scotland, it is surprising from the data that 'Online only' is the major method of delivering classes (response rate 48%), compared to the other two methods: 'Mixture of face-to-face and online' (42%) and 'Face-to-face/in-person' (10%).

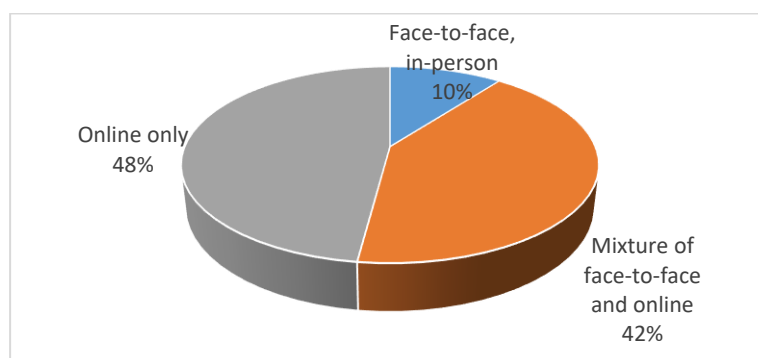


Figure 5.17: How students' classes currently are delivered in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 112 student respondents in Northern Ireland, it is clear from the data that ‘Face-to-face/ in-person’ is the predominant method of delivering classes (response rate 70%), compared to the other two methods: ‘Mixture of face-to-face and online’ (26%) and ‘Online only’ (4%).

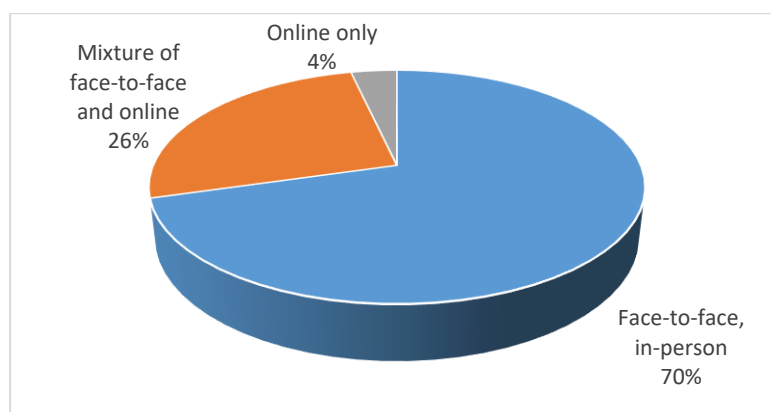


Figure 5.18: How students' classes currently are delivered in NI

Languages that students can speak in the UK

- Overview

The 205 FE students in the UK responding to the survey and subjectively perceived their own language repertoires. It is not surprising from the data that all responding FE students can speak English. Spanish (59 responses), French (44 responses) and Italian (32 responses) were the top three languages for these respondents, although we have no indication of to what level they might be able to communicate through in these languages.

It is clear from the data that Welsh language (9 responses) and Irish language (12 responses) appeared to be learned and spoken in Wales and Northern Ireland respectively.

Language	Response numbers
English	205
Spanish	59
French	44
Italian	32
German	15
Irish	12
Welsh	9
Polish	7
Russian	4
Norwegian	3
Portuguese	3
Romanian	3
Catalan	2
Arabic	2
Kurdish	2

Others (British Sign Language, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Hindi, Somali, Persian, Sinhala, Punjabi, Hieroglyphics)	12
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Table 5.9: Languages which students self-assess they can speak (multiple responses possible)

Of these FE student respondents, 79 students perceived themselves as monolingual speakers, while 126 students perceived themselves as either bilingual or multilingual speakers (learners).

Bilingual/Multilingual	126
Monolingual	79
Total	205

Table 5.10: FE students' language repertoire/ linguistic capital in the UK

- England and Wales

Of 45 FE student respondents, French (20 responses), Spanish (10 responses), Welsh (10 responses) and Italian (7 responses) are the top four languages in England and Wales.

Language	Response numbers
English	45
French	20
Spanish	10
Welsh	10
Italian	7
German	4
Norwegian	3
Others (Chinese, Korean, Russian, Romanian, Arabic, Somali, Punjabi and Hieroglyphics)	8

Table 5.11: Languages that students can speak in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 48 FE student respondents, Spanish (20 responses), Italian (9 responses) and French (9 responses) are the top three languages in Scotland.

Language	Response numbers
English	48
Spanish	20
Italian	9
French	9
Polish	6
German	4
Others (Hindi, Kurdish, Catalan, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, Hungarian, Portuguese)	8

Table 5.12: Languages that students can speak in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

A total of 112 FE students in Northern Ireland responded to the survey and subjectively perceived their own language repertoires. It is not surprising from the data that 112 FE students can speak English. Additionally, Spanish (12 responses), Italian (16 responses), Irish (12 responses) and German

(7 responses) were the top four languages for these respondents, although we have no indication of what level they might be able to communicate through these languages.

Language	Response numbers
English	112
Spanish	29
Italian	16
French	15
Irish	12
German	7
Portuguese	2
Russian	2
Romanian	2
Others (British Sign Language, Catalán, Ukrainian, Polish, Persian, Kurdish, Sinhala)	7

Table 5.13: Languages that responding FE students can speak in NI

Students who studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in the UK

- Overview

Of the 205 respondents across the UK, 76.6% of students studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) when they were a pupil at secondary school.

Name	Percent
Yes	76.6%
No	23.4%
N	205

Table 5.14: Students who studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent)

- England and Wales

Of 45 FE student respondents in England and Wales, it is clear from the data that most students participating in our survey studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) when they were a pupil at secondary school (response rate 89%).

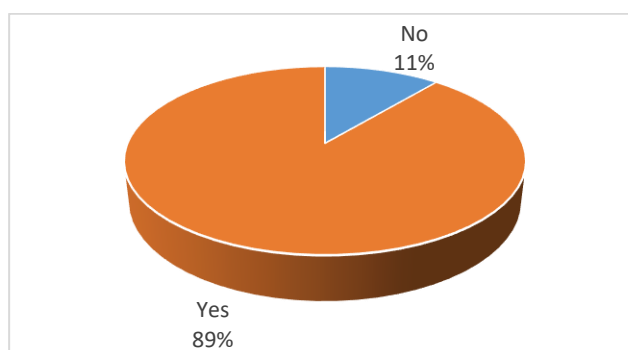


Figure 5.19: Students studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in England and Wales

It is interesting that all students (22 respondents) studied a language other than English for GCSE in England. This may suggest that learners of languages in FE have had a positive prior experience of language learning in secondary education.

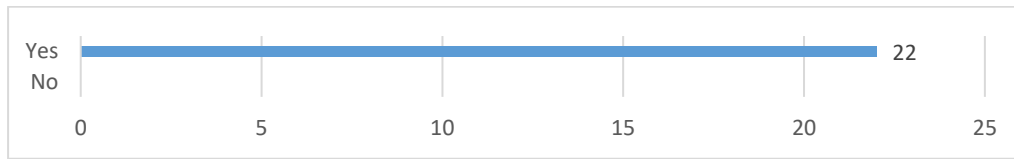


Figure 5.20: Students studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in England

- Scotland

Of 48 FE student respondents in Scotland, 69% of students (33 respondents) studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) when they were a pupil at secondary school, while 31% of students (15 respondents) did not.

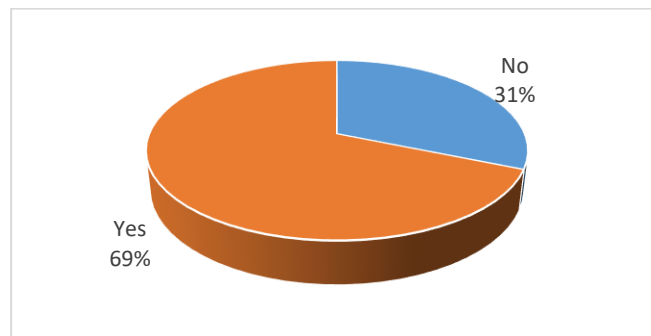


Figure 5.21: Students studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 112 FE student respondents in Northern Ireland, 75% of students (84 respondents) studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) when they were a pupil at secondary school, while 25% of students (28 respondents) did not.

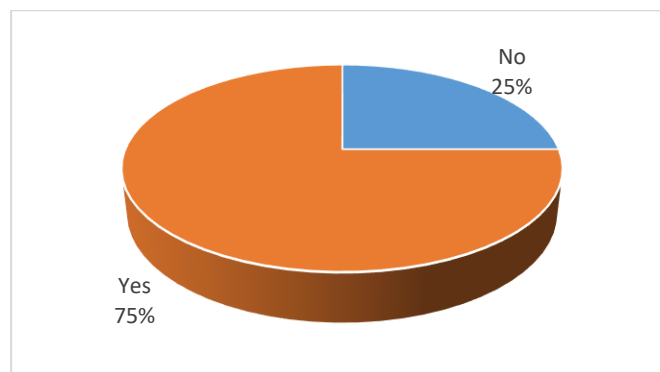


Figure 5.22: Students studied a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in NI

Students' explanations for not studying a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in the UK

- Overview

Of 48 FE students explaining for not studying a language other than English for GCSE, or English and Welsh in Wales, in the UK, '**Languages were not offered at my secondary school**' (35.4%) was the decisive factor impacting on students choosing not to study languages when they were a pupil at secondary school. This is firm evidence that learner pathways can be closed through curriculum limitations at secondary level. Further, '**I did not enjoy languages**' (18.8%) stood second place, while '**Other subjects were "easier"**' (14.6%) stood third place in the UK.

Name	Percent
Languages were not offered at my secondary school	35.4%
Other subjects were 'easier'	14.6%
I did not enjoy languages	18.8%
Other (please specify)	37.5%
N	48

Table 5.15: Students' explanations for not studying a language other than English for GCSE

- Scotland

Of 15 FE students explaining for not studying a language other than English for Standard Grade/National 5 in Scotland, '**Languages were not offered at my secondary school**' (43%) was the decisive factor impacting on students choosing not to study other languages when they were a pupil at secondary school. In addition, '**I did not enjoy languages**' and '**Other subjects were "easier"**' accounted for 19% each.

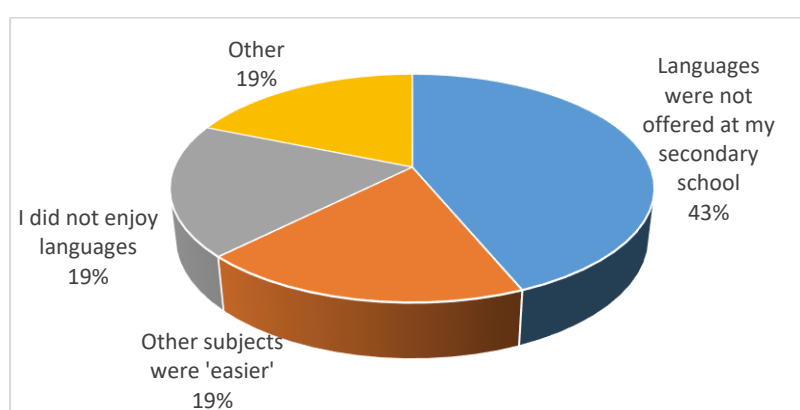


Figure 5.23: Students' explanations for not studying a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 28 FE students responding 'No' (28 respondents), '**Languages were not offered at my secondary school**' (36%--10 responses) was the decisive factor impacting on students chose not to study other languages when they were a pupil at secondary school. Regarding the 'other' option (29%--8 responses), 'unfamiliarity to the language' (e.g., 'I got behind in year 8 and was lost') and 'no suitable courses' were the two main factors to influence students not to carry on studying a language.

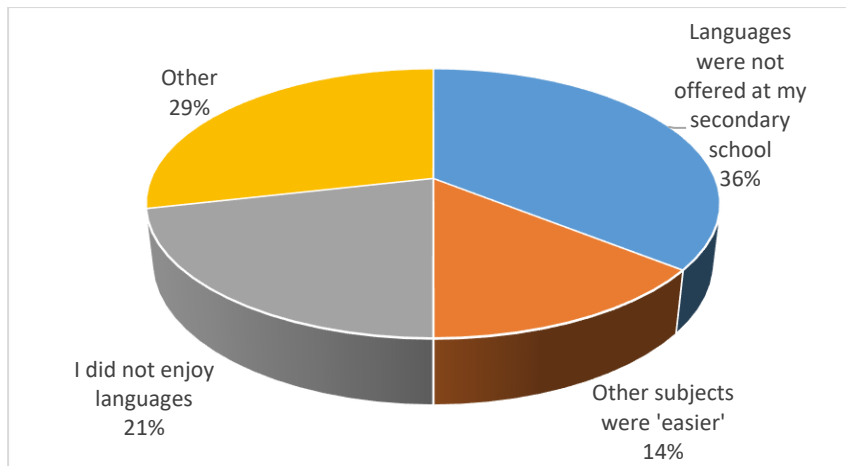


Figure 5.24: Students' explanations for not studying a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in NI

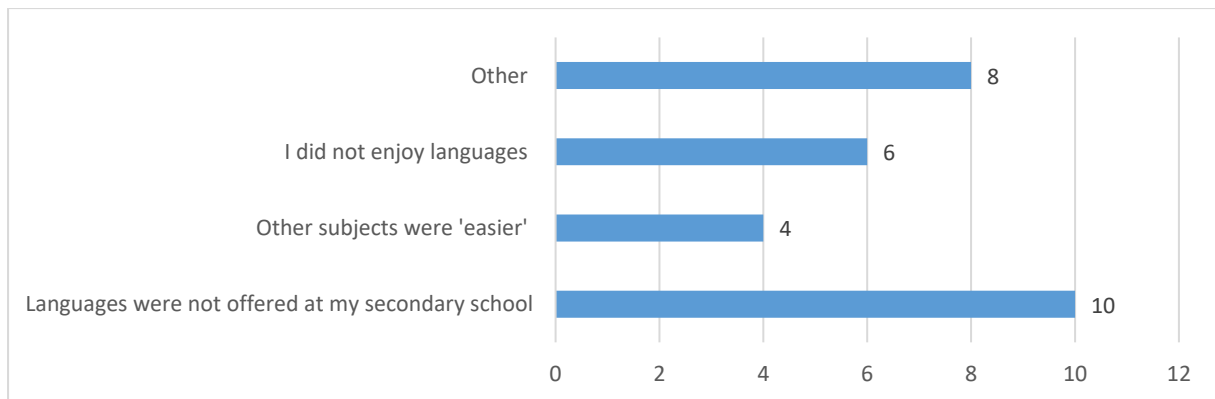


Figure 5.25: Students' explanations for not studying a language other than English for GCSE (or equivalent) in NI

At College, do students have the opportunity to continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level in the UK

- Overview

Of 157 FE student respondents in the UK, nearly 3/4 of students (68.8%) could continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level, compared with 14% of who indicated they had no opportunities. However, it shows that 17.2% of students appeared unaware whether they could continue with the language they learned at GCSE to a higher level.

Name	Percent
Yes	68.8%
No	14.0%
I don't know	17.2%
N	157

Table 5.16: students reporting whether they could continue with languages learned at secondary level into FE

- England and Wales

Of 45 FE student respondents in England and Wales, over 3/4 of students could continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level, compared with only 2% of who indicated they had no opportunities. If we combine the total percentages of respondents that selected 'No answer' (11%) and 'I don't know' (7%), it shows that 18% of students appeared unaware whether they could continue with the language they learned at GCSE to a higher level.

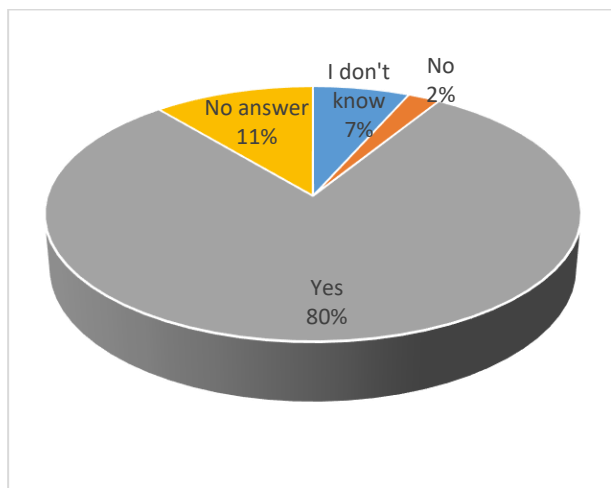


Figure 5.26: At College, do students have the opportunity to continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level in England & Wales?

- Scotland

Of 48 FE student respondents in Scotland, 42% of students could continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level, compared with 21% of who indicated they had 'No' opportunities. Surprisingly, if we combined the total percentages of respondents that selected 'No answer' (31%) and 'I don't know' (6%), it shows that 37% of students appeared unaware whether they could continue with the language they learned at GCSE to a higher level.

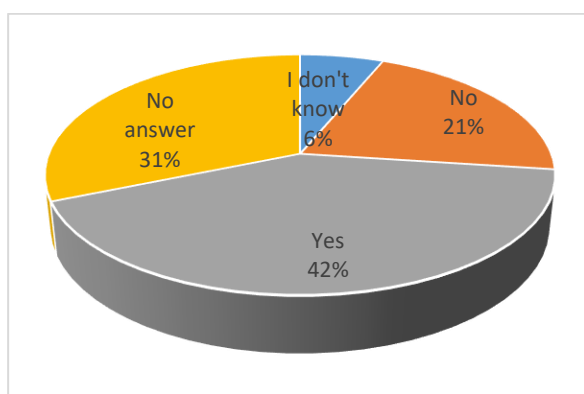


Figure 5.27: At College, do students have the opportunity to continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level in Scotland?

- Northern Ireland

Of 112 FE student respondents in Northern Ireland, nearly half of students (46%) could continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level, compared with 10% of who

indicated they had ‘No’ opportunities. Surprisingly, if we combined the total percentages of respondents that selected ‘No answer’ (25%) and ‘I don’t know’ (19%), it shows that 44% of students appeared unaware whether they could continue with the language they learned at GCSE to a higher level.

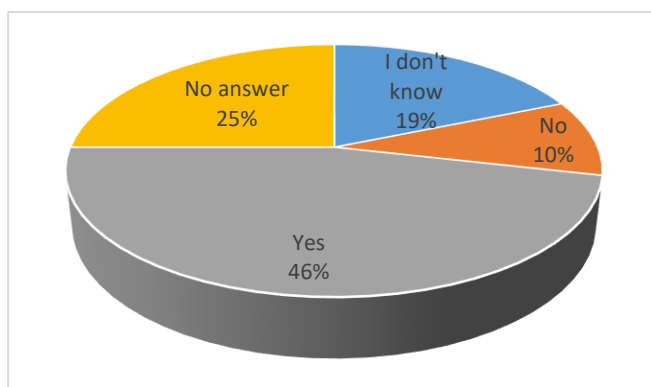


Figure 5.28: At College, do students have the opportunity to continue with the language they learned at GCSE (or equivalent) to a higher level in NI?

Students studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course

- Overview

Regarding courses that 202 FE students are currently studying in the UK, 70.8% of students are studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course, compared to 29.2% of students who are not studying a language other than English as part of their course.

Name	Percent
Yes	70.8%
No	29.2%
N	202

Table 5.17: Students answer to question whether they are studying a language as part of their course

- England and Wales

Regarding courses that 45 FE students are currently studying in England and Wales, 76% of students are studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course, compared to 20% of students who are not studying a language other than English as part of their course.

In terms of studying a language as part of course, Spanish (e.g., A Level Spanish/ GCSE Spanish), Italian, French (e.g., French A level) and International Baccalaureate are the top four language courses for these respondents to study.

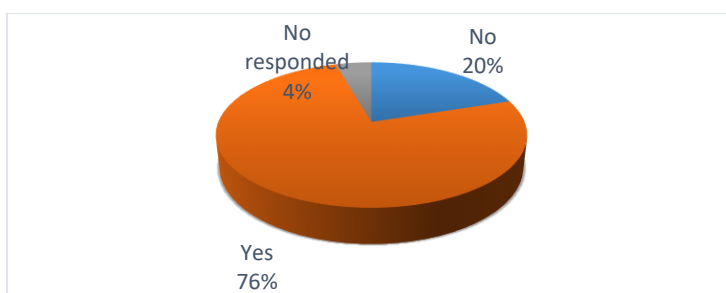


Figure 5.29: Students studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course in England & Wales

Students studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course?	
No	9
Yes	34
No responded	2
Total responses	45

Table 5.18: Students studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course in England & Wales

- Scotland

Regarding courses that 48 FE students are currently studying in Scotland, 71% of students are studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course, compared to 29% of students who are not studying a language other than English as part of their course. It will also be interesting to track why 2 students responded 'No' when there is evidence they are studying languages (such as 'SWAP Access to Languages with Business' and 'Advanced Higher French').

In terms of studying a language as part of course, 'HND Travel and Tourism', 'Swap Access to Languages with Business', 'Swap Access to Languages, Arts and Social Sciences', 'Advanced Higher French' and 'Beginner German' are top five language courses for these Scottish respondents to study.

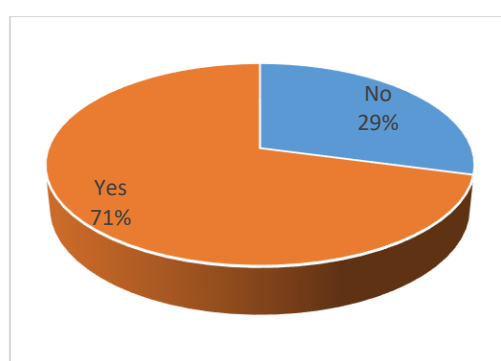


Figure 5.30: Students studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Regarding courses that 112 FE students are currently studying in Northern Ireland, 67% of students are studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course, compared to 32% of students who are not studying a language other than English as part of their

course. It will also be interesting to track why 10 students responded ‘No’ when there is evidence they are studying languages (such as ‘Conversational Spanish’, ‘German OCN level 2’, and ‘Italian OCN Level 3’).

On top of that, Spanish (e.g., Holiday Spanish/ Conversational Spanish/ Spanish OCN Level 2/ GCSE Spanish), Italian (e.g., Advanced Italian/ Italian OCN Level 3), Irish (e.g., Diploma in Irish/ Irish beginner), French (e.g., French A Level/ GCSE French) are the top four language courses for these respondents to study. Additionally, it will be interesting to explore why students (6 responses) have more interest in studying Japanese among all East-Asian and Southeast Asian languages.

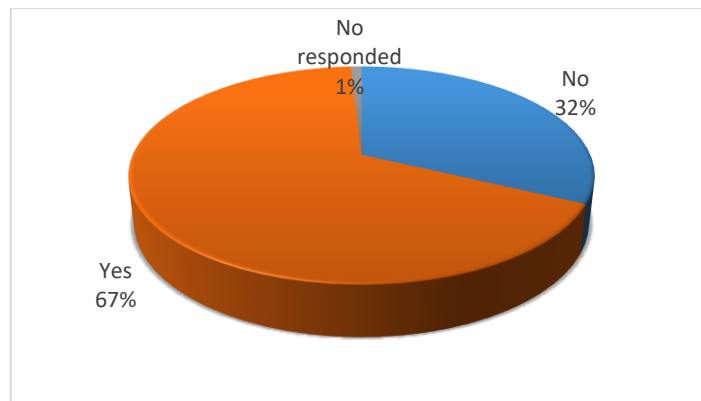


Figure 5.31: Students studying a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) as part of their course in NI

Language(s) that students are studying in the UK

- Overview

Of 143 FE student respondents in the UK, Spanish (62 responses), French (42 responses), Italian (24 responses) and German (7 responses) are top four language courses which these FE student respondents study.

- England and Wales

Of 34 FE student respondents in England and Wales, French (18 responses) and Spanish (16 responses) are top two language courses for these respondents to study.

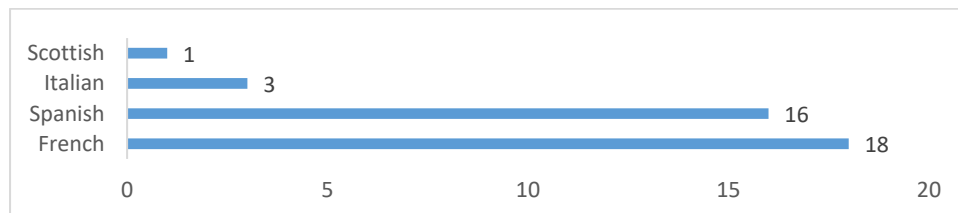


Figure 5.32: Language(s) that students are studying in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 34 FE student respondents in Scotland, French (18 responses), Spanish (14 responses) and German (5 responses) are top three language courses for these respondents to study.

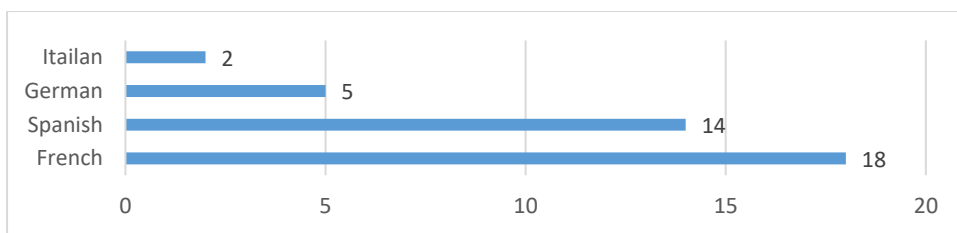


Figure 5.33: Language(s) that students are studying in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 75 FE student respondents in Northern Ireland, Spanish is the most popular language to study (32 responses), followed by Italian (19 responses), Irish (13 responses), French (6 responses), Japanese (5 responses) and German (2 responses).

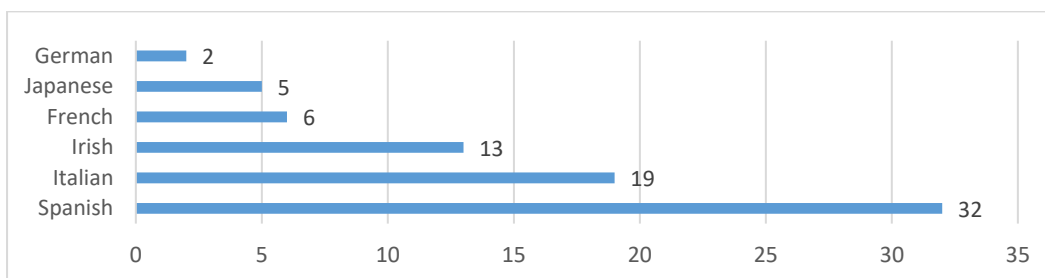


Figure 5.34: Language(s) that students are studying in NI

Students working towards a qualification in a language(s) in the UK

- Overview

Of 142 FE student respondents in the UK, over half of students (52.1%) are working towards a qualification in a language(s). However, 33.8% of respondents selected 'No' and 14.1% of respondents expressed 'I don't know', when expressing whether they were working towards a qualification in a language(s).

Name	Percent
Yes	52.1%
No	33.8%
I don't know	14.1%
N	142

Table 5.19: students working towards a language qualification in the UK

- England and Wales

Of 34 FE student respondents in England and Wales, 65% of students are working towards a qualification in a language(s), while 15% of respondents selected 'No' and 20% of respondents expressed 'I don't know'.

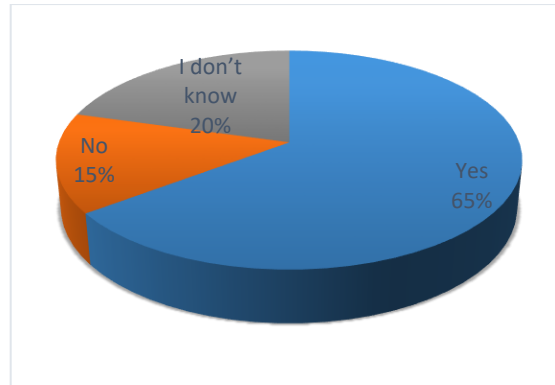


Figure 5.35: Students are working towards a qualification in a language(s) in England & Wales

Of 22 FE student respondents, in terms of language qualification that these respondents are studying in England and Wales, 'A-level Spanish' and 'A-level French' appeared to be predominant language qualifications to study. Furthermore, over half of students (12 responses) expressed they either plan to or would love to continue studying the language they are currently studying beyond college, compared to six students who responded to no intention or uncertainty. Additionally, it is interesting to note from the data that three students hoped to study a language from scratch such as Russian or an Asian language, and two students would consider doing a joint degree with French.

- Scotland

Of 34 FE student respondents in Scotland, nearly half of students (49%) are working towards a qualification in a language or languages, while 33% of respondents selected 'No' and 18% of respondents responded, 'I don't know', when expressing whether they were working towards a qualification in a language or languages. Of 16 responses, Advanced Higher (Spanish and French), National 4 and National 5 (French) are the most popular language qualifications that students are not only studying but are also planning to continue studying beyond college.

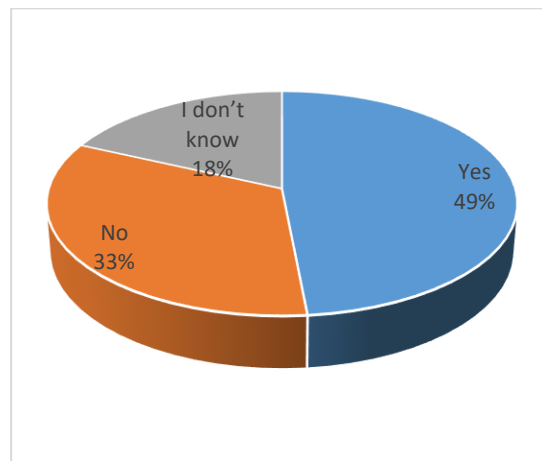


Figure 5.36: Students are working towards a qualification in a language(s) in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 75 FE student respondents in NI, nearly half of students (48%) are working towards a qualification in at least one language. However, 43% of respondents selected 'No', when expressing whether they were working towards a qualification in a language(s). Of 35 respondents, OCN NI (e.g., Spanish and Italian) and Irish (e.g., Diploma in Irish) are not only the top two language qualifications that students are currently studying but are also planning to continue studying beyond college.

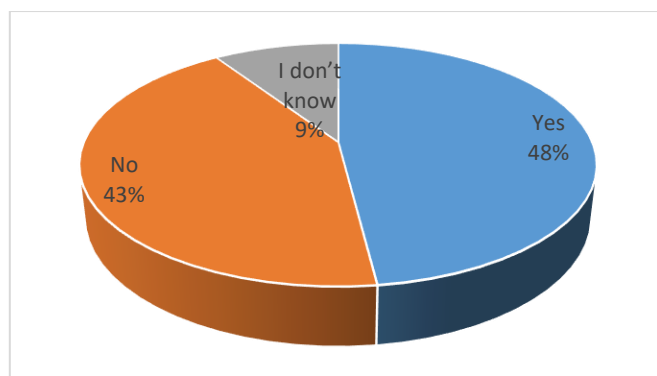


Figure 5.37: Students are working towards a qualification in a language(s) in NI

The level of importance that students think languages have towards the future of the United Kingdom

- Overview

Of 205 respondents, 89.7% of FE students in the UK think that languages are either 'very important' (66.3%) or 'quite important' (23.4%) for the future of the United Kingdom. On the contrary, the student respondents who perceived languages 'neither important nor unimportant' (5.4%), 'quite unimportant' (2%), 'very unimportant' (2%) and 'I don't know' accounted for 10.4% of those respondents.

Name	Percent
Very important	66.3%
Quite important	23.4%
Neither important nor unimportant	5.4%
Quite unimportant	2.0%
Very unimportant	2.0%
I don't know	1.0%
N	205

Table 5.20: Students' perceptions of the importance of languages for the future of the UK

- England and Wales

Of 45 respondents, 87% of FE students in England and Wales think that languages are either 'very important' (62%) or 'quite important' (25%) for the future of the United Kingdom. On the contrary, the student respondents who perceived languages 'neither important nor unimportant' (11%) and 'very unimportant' (2%) accounted for 13% of those respondents.

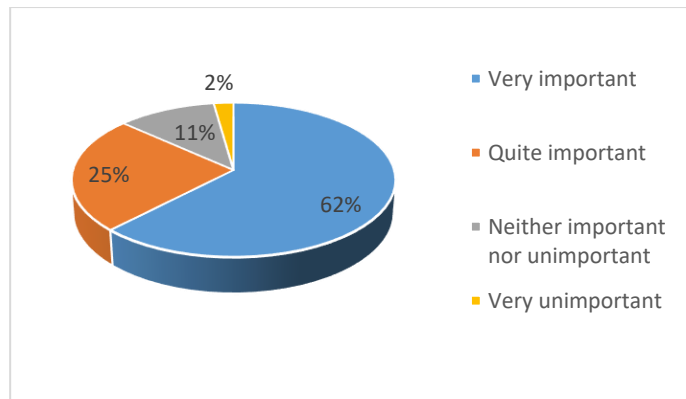


Figure 5.38: The level of importance that students think languages have towards the future of the United Kingdom in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 48 respondents, 88% of FE students in Scotland think that languages are either ‘very important’ (75%) or ‘quite important’ (13%) for the future of the United Kingdom. On the contrary, the student respondents who perceived languages ‘neither important nor unimportant’ (4%), ‘quite unimportant’ (4%), and ‘very unimportant’ (4%) accounted for 12% of those respondents.

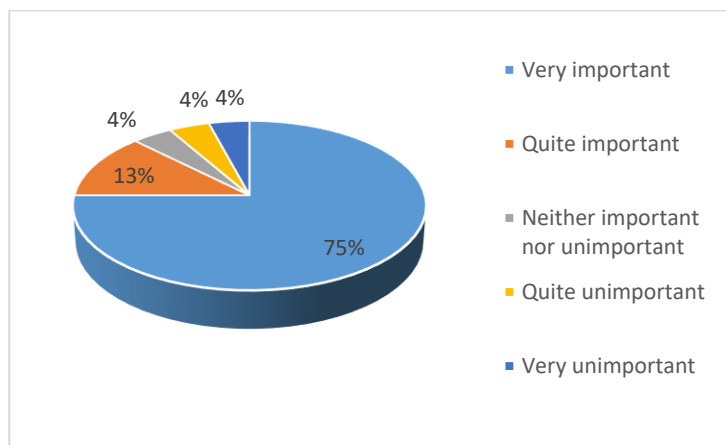


Figure 5.39: The level of importance that students think languages have towards the future of the United Kingdom in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 112 respondents, 92% of FE students in Northern Ireland think that languages are either ‘very important’ (64%) or ‘quite important’ (28%) for the future of the United Kingdom. On the contrary, the student respondents who perceived languages ‘neither important nor unimportant’ (3%), ‘quite unimportant’ (2%) and ‘very unimportant’ (1%) only accounted for 6% of those respondents.

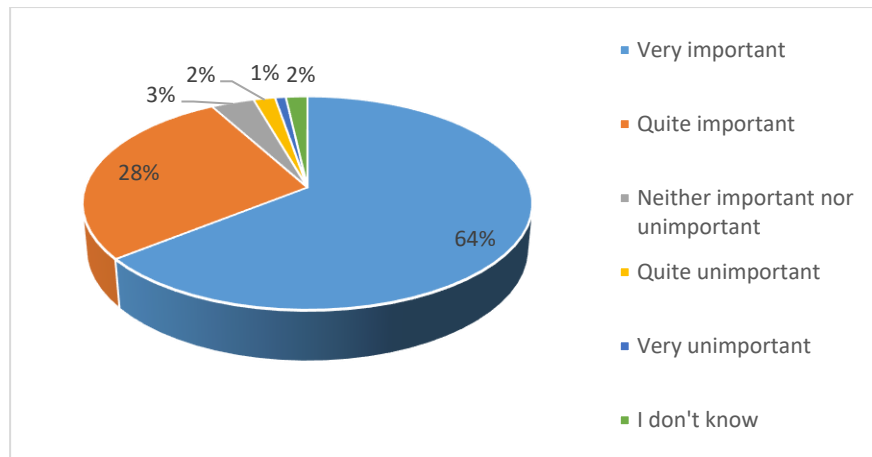


Figure 5.40: The level of importance that students think languages have towards the future of the United Kingdom in NI

- England and Wales

Of 45 FE students perceiving the importance of language for the future of the United Kingdom, several top reasons have been revealed.

1. **Diversity and integration:** In this case, several students specifically emphasised that UK is a multicultural country. We have a wide range of cultures and nationalities living in the UK, so we need to learn to engage for the population with different languages and cultural backgrounds. For example, one student mentioned that *'We cannot continue to assume that shouting at foreigners will make them understand what we need'*.
2. **Communicate with speakers of other languages:** It can benefit multilingual interaction. For example, some students stated communicating with speakers of other languages could break down barriers between countries.
3. **Cultural awareness:** In this case, we could learn how to appreciate and perceive things differently. For example, as one student indicated that *'We need to understand each other and respect different cultures and language'* in becoming a global citizen.
4. **Globalisation**, including travel, tourism, business, trade, international employment: For example: UK exports to non-English speaking countries.
5. **Market demand** (e.g., language interpreters)
6. **Challenge the concept of "English is enough":** For example, one student stated that *'It would be a shame if we lost languages due to the spread of English'*, another student emphasised that *'We can't rely on English alone when we travel the world'*, and the other noted that *'It's a mistake not to learn about different languages and cultures - one could become too insular'*.

On the contrary, some students indicated the significant reasons why they perceived other languages are unimportant for the future of the UK are due to *'other languages are not always essential in the UK'* and *'Brexit'*.

- Scotland

Of 48 FE students perceiving the importance of language for the future of the United Kingdom, several top reasons have been revealed.

1. **Globalisation, including travel, tourism, business, trade, international employment:** (e.g., expand markets and economic growth)

2. **Personal development** such as being bilingual or multilingual, enrich life experience and mental agility
3. **Communicate with speakers of other languages**
4. **Better understand other countries**
5. **Market demand** such as translators
6. **Challenge the concept of "English is enough"**: For example, one student stated that 'British don't usually speak a second language they should pay attention to this as is the future.'

On the contrary, one student indicated the reason for perceiving other languages are unimportant for the future of the UK are due to the concept of '*English is a universal language*'.

- Northern Ireland

Of 103 FE students perceiving the importance of language for the future of the United Kingdom, several top reasons have been revealed.

1. **Diversity and integration**: For example: One student indicated that '*With more people immigrating, and especially refugees, it would help with communication. It would also help in health and care settings to be able to communicate efficiently*'.
2. **Communicate with speakers of other languages**: In this case, several students specifically emphasised a need to learn European languages, especially after Brexit.
3. **Cultural awareness**: For example: One student mentioned that learning a language '*fosters empathy towards people of different nationalities and ethnicities*'.
4. **Globalisation, including travel, tourism, business, trade, international employment**: For example: One student stated that '*Whilst an island nation we should be outward looking and embrace the culture and languages of other countries to benefit from international trade and travel*'.
5. **Better understand other countries** (e.g., culture)
6. **Personal development** such as confidence, enriching life and mental agility
7. **Identity to one's native language, history and culture**: In this context, students more implied to learn Irish language.
8. **Challenge the concept of "English is enough"**: For example: One student stressed that '*We are very ignorant and lazy as a nation in learning another language compared to other countries. We should educate ourselves like the majority of other countries, where learning another language is compulsory*'. Another student stated that '*UK think the English language is the be all and end all and fail to even learn the basics of other languages. I personally believe this outlook is pompous and obnoxious*'.

Students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be important for their future career

- Overview

Of 203 student respondents in the UK, students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be very important for their future career at 36% and quite important at 20.2%. Contrary to this, nearly half of students (43.8%) did not have positive responses to speaking other languages when it came to their future career.

Name	Percent
Yes, very important	36.0%
Yes, quite important	20.2%
Neither important nor unimportant	17.7%
No, quite unimportant	6.4%
No, very unimportant	1.5%
Not applicable to my situation	16.7%
I don't know	1.5%
N	203

Table 5.21: Students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be important for their future career

- England and Wales

Of 45 student respondents in England and Wales, over 75% of students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for their future career could be very important at 47% and quite important at 29%. Of these 34 responses, international employment and global mobility are the main reasons why students think speaking an additional language could benefit their future career.

Contrary to this, nearly 1/4 of students (24%) did not have positive responses to speaking other languages when it came to their future career. For example, 16% of students responded 'Neither important nor unimportant'. Reasons given were: 'In today's modern society knowing more language is not essential for careers, particularly with technology that can be used for translation' and 'It depends on what you are going to do'. Furthermore, 'No, quite unimportant', 'No, very unimportant', 'Not applicable to my situation' and 'I don't know' accounted for 2% each in England and Wales. 'Retirement' and 'Uncertainty to their future career path' were top two factors for students not having positive responses to speaking other languages when it came to their future career.

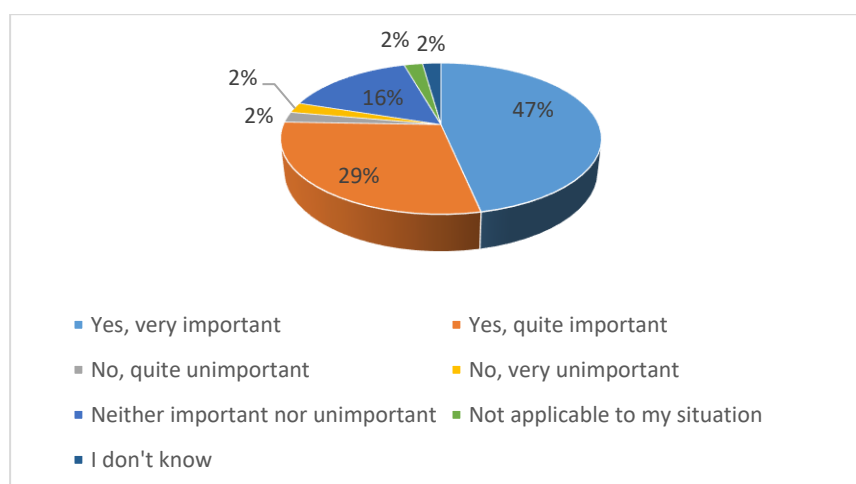


Figure 5.41: Students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be important for their future career in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 47 student respondents in Scotland, over 3/4 of students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for their future career could be very important at 58% and quite important at 19%. Of these 36 responses, international employment and global mobility (e.g., communication with other jurisdictions) are the main reasons why students think speaking a foreign/second/target language could benefit their future career.

Contrary to this, nearly 1/4 of students (23%) did not have positive responses to speaking other languages when it came to their future career. For example, 11% of students responded, 'Neither important nor unimportant'. Reasons give were: 'I do not intend to work abroad but I believe that learning a language helps with other skills and competencies too' and 'I have no idea what my future career might be'. 6% of students responded, 'Not applicable to my situation' with the reason 'English Language is enough for me' and 'nearing retirement'. 4% of students responded 'No, very unimportant' without specifying details. 2% of students responded 'I don't know' with providing any reasons. Our data suggest there is a need for better public understanding of the benefits of language learning.

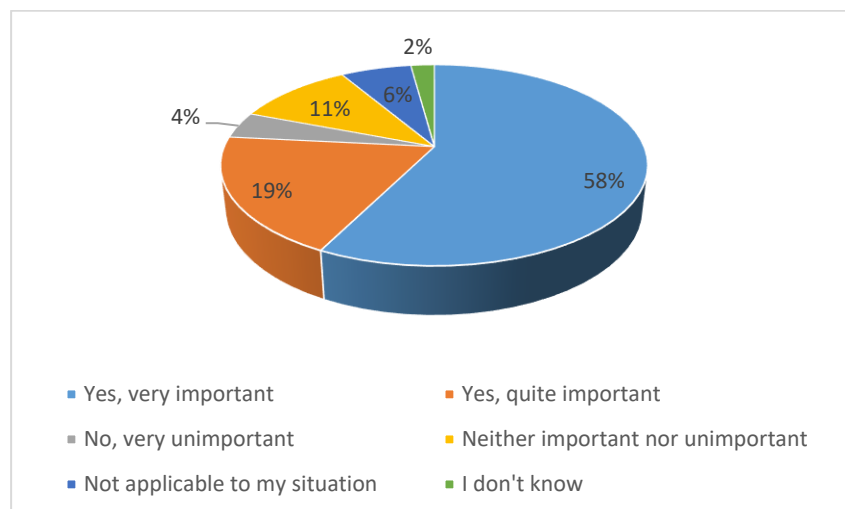


Figure 5.42: Students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be important for their future career in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 111 student respondents in Northern Ireland (1 missing data), 40% of students (44 responses) think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be important for their future career. Of these 44 responses, international employment and global mobility are the main reasons why students think speaking a foreign/second/target language could benefit their future career. Contrary to this, nearly 60% of students did not have positive responses to speaking other languages when it came to their future career. For example, 11% of students responded 'No, quite unimportant'. Reasons give were: 'the ability to speak another language is not directly linked to my career'. 22% of students answered, 'Neither important nor unimportant' and 27% of students responded, 'Not applicable to my situation' with the reason 'no longer working' or 'retirement'.

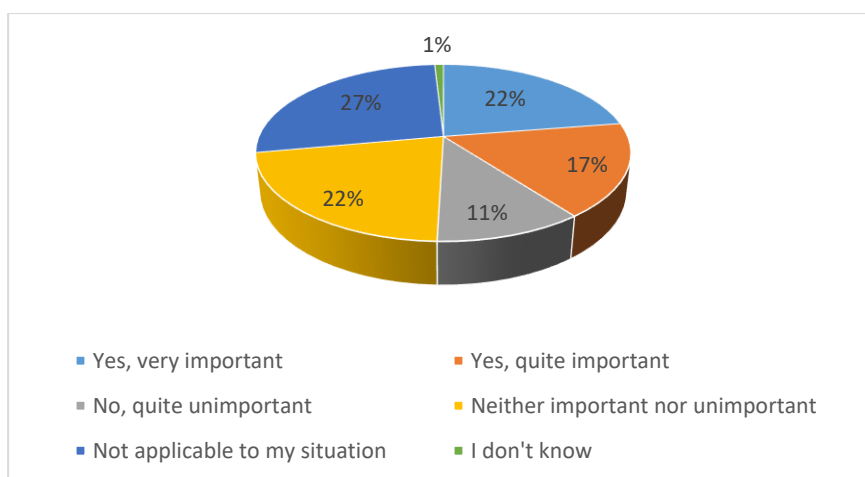


Figure 5.43: Students think that speaking a language other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) could be important for their future career in NI

Industry or field of work that students think languages would be important for career progression

- England and Wales

Of 41 student respondents in England and Wales, seven students think languages would benefit in all areas with different level of impact when it comes to career progression. In particular, 26 respondents emphasised that those fields related to global mobility, transnational business, diplomacy and politics, tourism, medical-orientated industries or technology would have more impact on career progression. Also 10 respondents think language repertoires would be important for career progression in education-related fields, particularly in language teaching.

Industry or field of work students think languages would be important for career progression	Response numbers	
All	4	7
Any job that you do abroad	3	
Academic/Education/Language teaching/Translator/Interpreter	10	
Business / Politics / Global trading / Tourism/Hospitality/IT/International journalism	22	26
Any Medical field	4	
Others (e.g., Engineering)	3	

Table 5.22: Industry or field of work that students think languages would be important for career progression in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 41 student respondents in Scotland, 10 students think languages would benefit in all areas with different level of impact when it comes to career progression. In particular, 26 respondents emphasised that those fields related to global mobility, transnational business, diplomacy and politics, tourism, medical-orientated industries or technology would have more impact on career progression. Also, seven respondents think language repertoires would be important for career progression in education-related fields, particularly in language teaching and translator or interpreting.

Industry or field of work students think languages would be important for career progression	Response numbers	
All	10	
Academic/Education/Language teaching/Translator/Interpreter	7	
Business / Politics / Global trading / Tourism/Hospitality/IT/International journalism	24	26
Any Medical field	2	
Others (e.g., Vegan Chef and plastic artist)	1	
I don't know	1	

Table 5.23: Industry or field of work that students think languages would be important for career progression in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 97 student respondents in NI, the majority of students (88 responses) think languages would benefit in all areas with different level of impact when it comes to career progression. In particular, 57 respondents emphasised that those fields related to global mobility, transnational business, diplomacy and politics or medical-orientated industries would have more impact on career progression. Also 13 respondents think language repertoires would be important for career progression in education-related fields, particularly in language teaching.

Industry or field of work students think languages would be important for career progression	Response numbers	
All	13	88
Academic/Education/Language teaching/Schools	13	
Most/A lot so professions/industry	5	
All areas of work or industry (e.g., travel & tourism, international sales and exports, international policy making, diplomacy& politics, hospitality industry, politics, catering, law, sales, marketing, IT, telecommunication, journalism, archaeology, anthropology, banking services, HR, Social work, medicine)	57	
Others (e.g., cooking area, Construction)	2	
No need: e.g., retirement	2	
I don't know/Not applicable	5	
	97	

Table 5.24: Industry or field of work that students think languages would be important for career progression in NI

Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit

- Overview

Of 201 student respondents in the UK, 42.8% of students think people are more likely to need languages after Brexit, while 32.8% think the situation is 'No change' when it comes to learning a language, followed by 14.4% responded 'I don't know' and 10% think people are less likely to need languages.

Name	Percent
More likely to need languages	42.8%
No change	32.8%
Less likely to need languages	10.0%
I don't know	14.4%
N	201

Table 5.25: Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit

- England and Wales

Of 44 student respondents in England and Wales, 34% of students (15 responses) think people are more likely to need languages after Brexit, while 21% of students (9 responses) consider the situation to be 'No change' when it comes to learning a language. Additionally, 25% of students (11 responses) consider the situation is 'I don't know' and 21% of students (9 responses) think people are less likely to need languages.

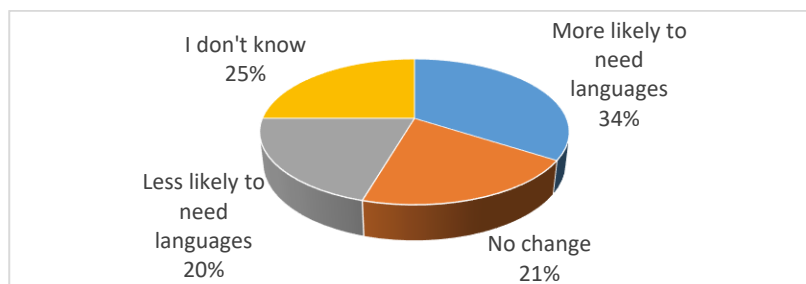


Figure 5.44: Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit in England & Wales

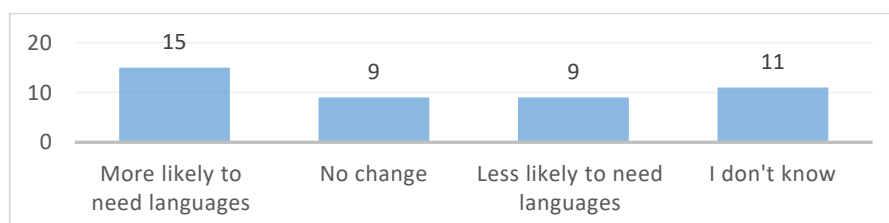


Figure 5.45: Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 48 student respondents in Scotland, 44% of students (21 responses) believe people are more likely to need languages after Brexit, while 23% of students (11 responses) think the situation is 'No change' when it comes to learning a language. Additionally, 23% of students (11 responses) consider the situation to be 'I don't know' and 10% of students (5 responses) think people are less likely to need languages.

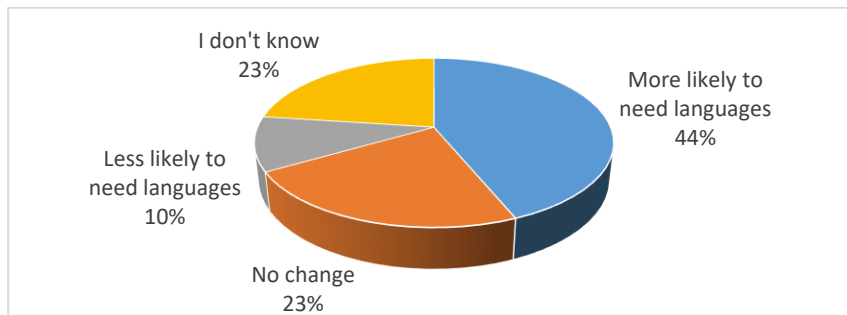


Figure 5.46: Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit in Scotland

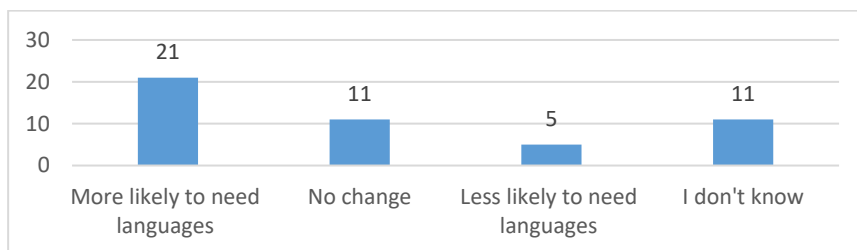


Figure 5.47: Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 112 student respondents in Northern Ireland, nearly half of students (50 responses) think people are more likely to need languages after Brexit, while nearly equal responses (46 responses) think the situation is 'No change' when it comes to learning a language. Only 6 responses think people are less likely to need languages.

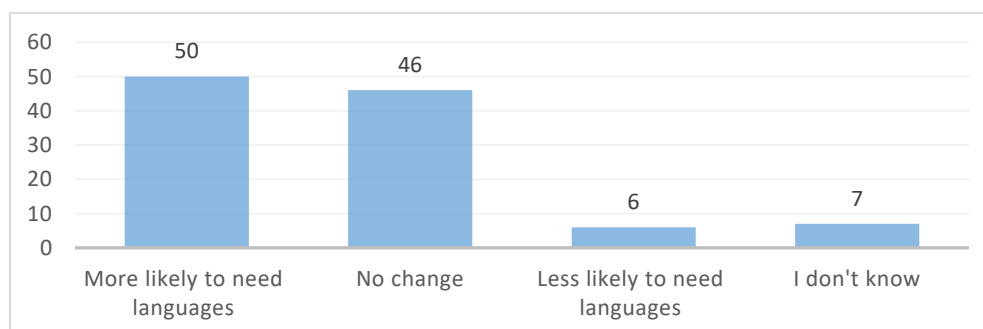


Figure 5.48: Likelihood of needing languages other than English (or Welsh and English in Wales) for working life after Brexit in NI

Students would be interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in the UK

- Overview

Of 204 responses in the UK, 73% of students would be interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies, while 27% of students would choose not to learn a language online.

Name	Percent
Yes	73.0%
No	27.0%
N	204

Table 5.26: Students would be interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in the UK

- England and Wales

Of 45 responses in England and Wales, 69% of students (31 responses) would be interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies, while 31% of students (14 responses) would choose not to learn a language online.

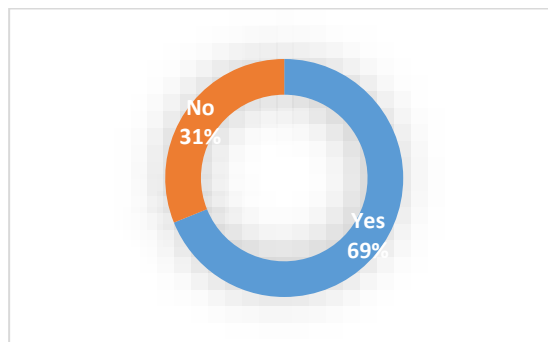


Figure 5.49: Interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in England & Wales

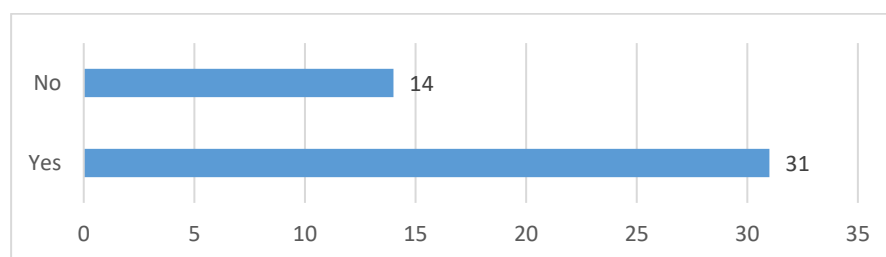


Figure 5.50: Interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 48 responses in Scotland, 79% of students (38 responses) would be interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies, while 21% of students (10 responses) would choose not to learn a language online.

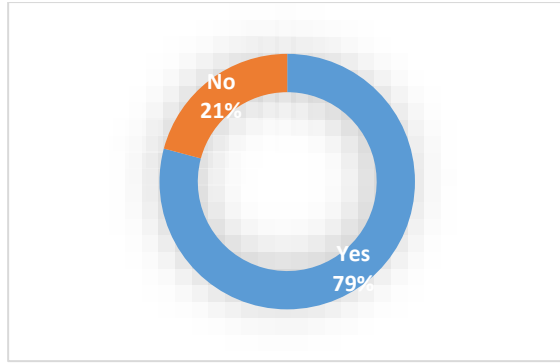


Figure 5.51: Interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in Scotland

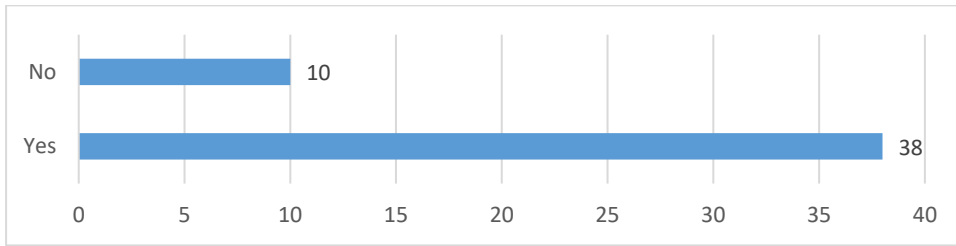


Figure 5.52: Interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of 112 responses, 71% of students (80 responses) would be interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies, while 28% of students (31 responses) would choose not to learn a language online.

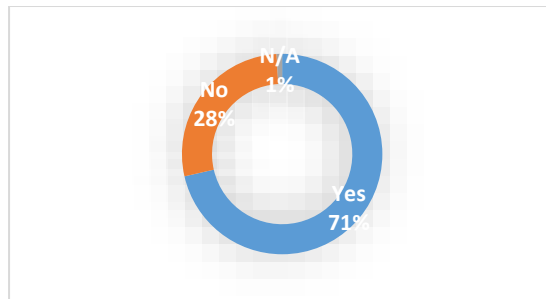


Figure 5.53: Interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in NI

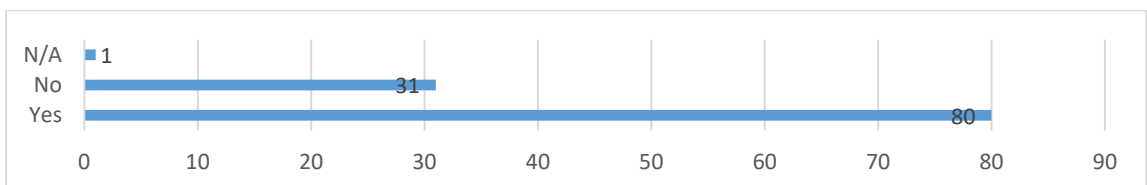


Figure 5.54: Interested in learning a language online, alongside their current studies in NI

Opportunities in students' colleges to gain international experience in the UK

- Overview

Of 199 student respondents in the UK, 21.1% think 'Trips and exchange abroad' would help them gain international experience while in college. 'Project with colleges in other countries' were ranked as the second highest means (7.5%), 'Work with cultural institutes' (6%) came in third, 'We engage with Routes into Languages' (3.5%) came in fourth and 'We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme' (2.5%) came in fifth. However, nearly half of respondents (46.7%) answered 'I don't know' and 28.6% of respondents selected 'No opportunities that I am aware of' when it came to gaining international experience while in college.

Name	Percent
Trips and exchanges abroad	21.1%
Projects with colleges in other countries	7.5%
Work with cultural institutes (e.g., Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación)	6.0%
We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme	2.5%
We engage with Routes into Languages	3.5%
No opportunities that I am aware of	28.6%
I don't know	46.7%
Other (please specify)	4.5%
N	199

Table 5.27: Opportunities in students' colleges to gain international experience in the UK

- England and Wales

Of 45 student respondents in England and Wales, 18% think 'Trips and exchange abroad' would help them gain international experience while in college. 'Project with colleges in other countries' were ranked as the second highest means (8%), 'Work with cultural institutes' (6%) came in third, 'We engage with Routes into Languages' (4%) and 'We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme' (4%) came in fourth each. However, 33% of respondents answered, 'I don't know' and 27% of respondents selected 'No opportunities that I am aware of' when it came to gaining international experience while in college.

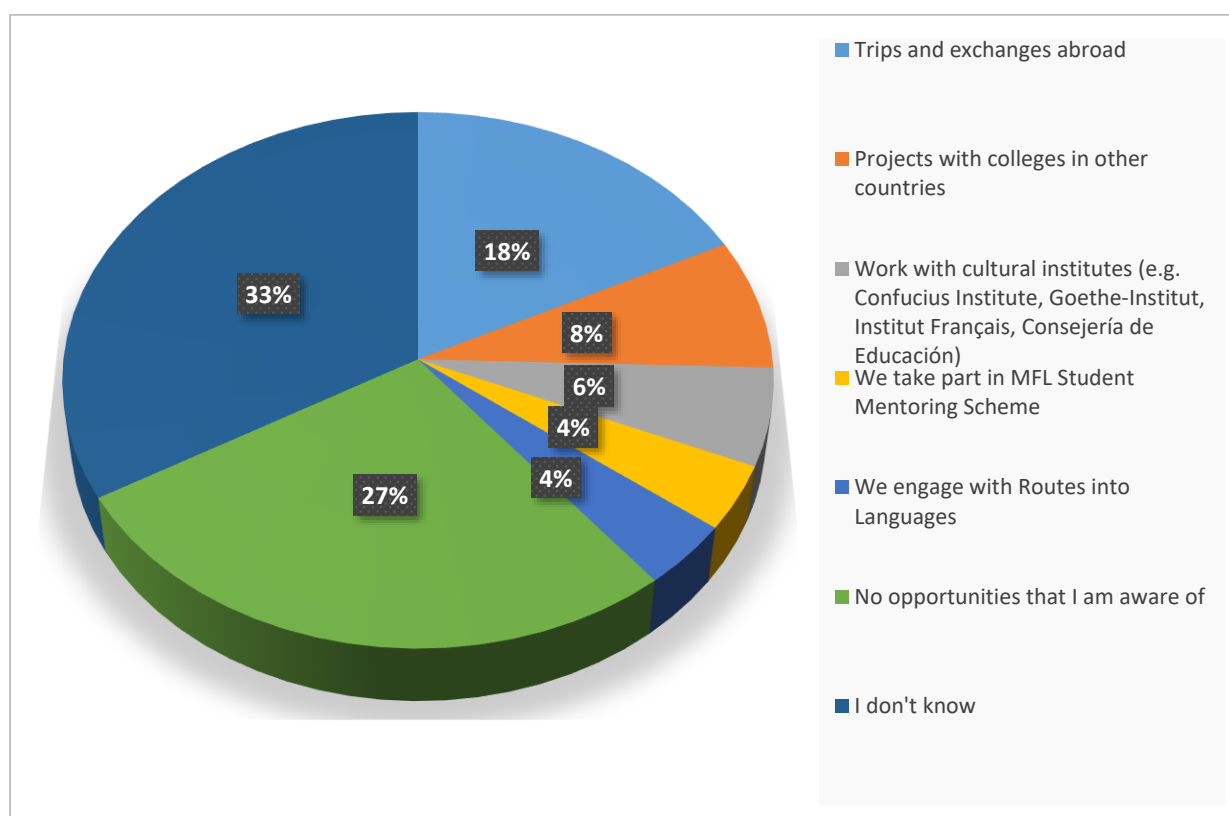


Figure 5.55: Opportunities in students' colleges to gain international experience in England & Wales

- Scotland

Of 48 student respondents in Scotland, 12% think 'Trips and exchange abroad' would help them gain international experience while in college. 'We engage with Routes into Languages' were ranked as the second highest means (5%), 'Projects with colleges in other countries' and 'Work with cultural institutes' came in third with 4% each. 'We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme' (2%) came in fourth. However, 41% of respondents answered, 'I don't know' and 32% of respondents selected 'No opportunities that I am aware of' when it came to gaining international experience while in college.

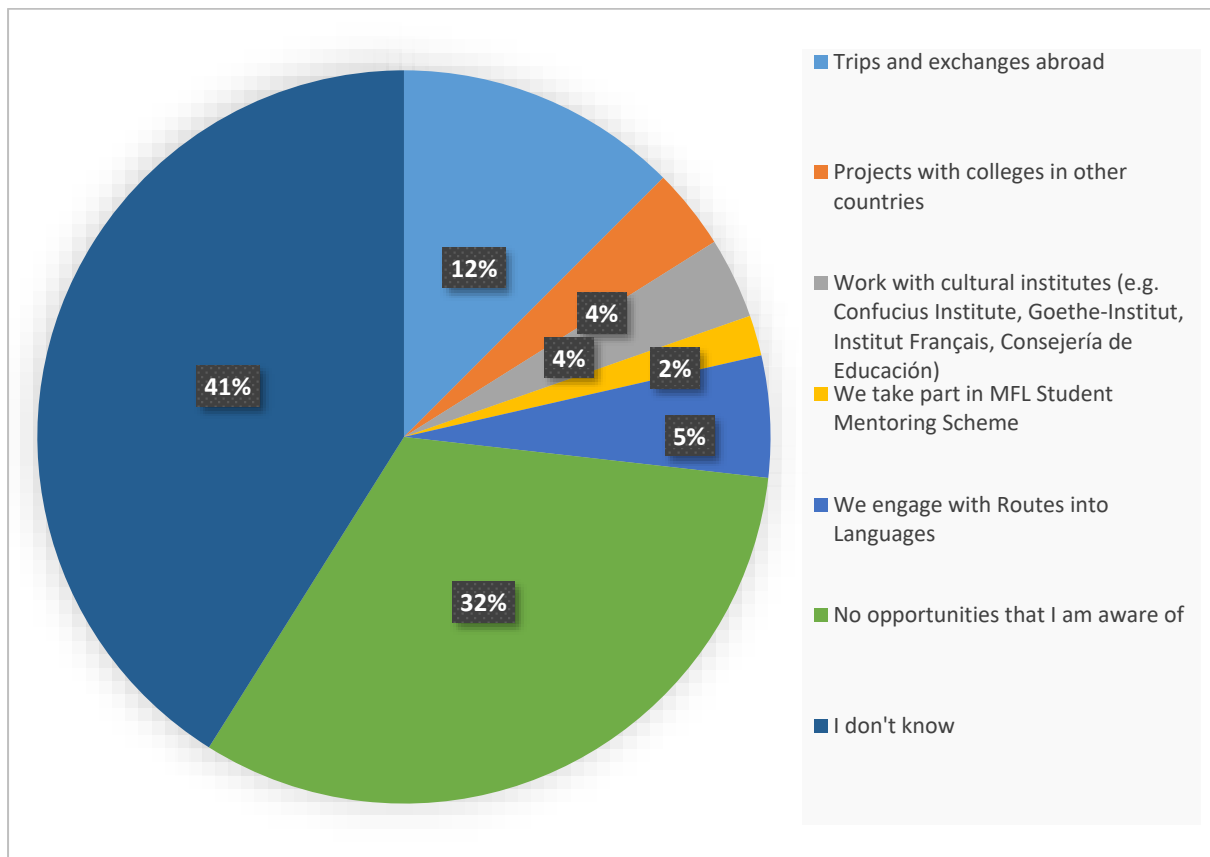


Figure 5.56: Opportunities in students' colleges to gain international experience in Scotland

- Northern Ireland

Of those student respondents in NI, 21% think 'Trips and exchange abroad' would help them gain international experience while in college. 'Project with colleges in other countries' were ranked as the second highest means (7%), 'Work with cultural institutes' (6%) came in third, 'We engage with Routes into Languages' (2%) came in fourth and 'We take part in MFL Student Mentoring Scheme' (1%) came in fifth. However, nearly half of respondents (43%) answered 'I don't know' and 20% of respondents selected 'No opportunities that I am aware of' when it came to gaining international experience while in college.

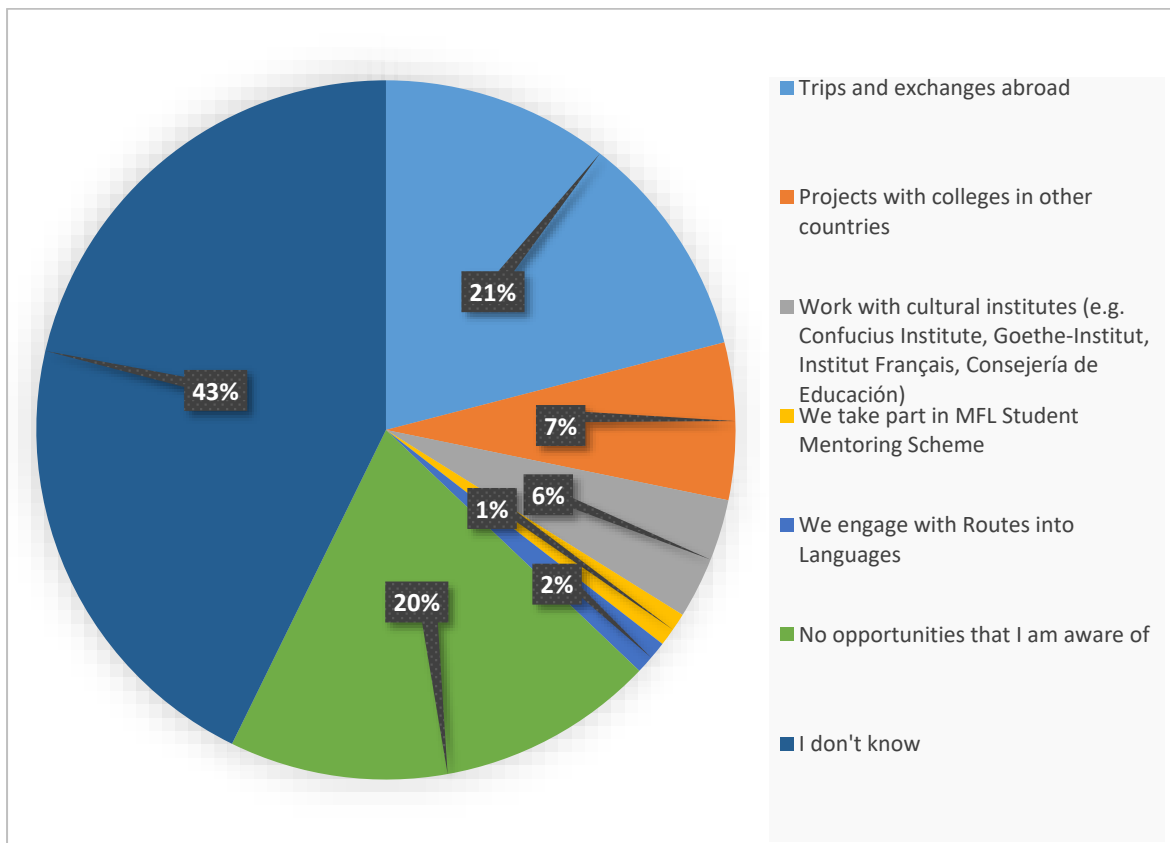


Figure 5.57: Opportunities in students' colleges to gain international experience in NI

6. Interview Findings

“In the beginning there were no facilities at all. I was in this hut. I used to have to bring everything with me. I used to be like one of those people that sell things on the beach. So, I had a kettle with me. I had a tape recorder and all my books, my milk and everything, because we like to give them a coffee break. But there were absolutely no facilities, parking was a problem, and so you were trudging along with all your equipment. But obviously the experience must have been good for the students because they kept coming back.

Eventually they built. They extended the college, and they added purpose-built rooms for languages, which was amazing. And then we installed equipment, specifically for languages. It was a huge difference, a significant development. Then it stopped. That would have been about 20 years ago. The changes were made, and there hasn't been anything significant since” (*FE/College subject leader*)

In this section of the report, we examine the perceptions and experiences of learners, lecturers, and stakeholders over the last twenty years, in order to better understand the narratives and trends of languages provision in the UK

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve stakeholders across the four jurisdictions. Interviewees included i) FE/College learners, ii) FE/College lecturers, iii) FE/College subject leaders and iv) Leaders of membership bodies and/or related external stakeholders. Six male participants and six female participants representing different age groups (from 25-60+) took part in the interviews. Participants had been between 7 years and 30+ years of engagement and experience related to language education at FE. A further breakdown of interviewee characteristics is restricted to ensure participant anonymity.

The interview questions were designed by the research team and drew from the literature relating to Language Education and FE, in addition to the limited research on the integrated topic of Language Education in FE as identified in the systematic style review (see Section 2). In consultation with the project's Advisory Team, the interview questions were amended to include specific questions on contemporary issues such as online learning and partnerships. All interviews were conducted via MS Teams and were between 45-90mins in length. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview data were analysed using content analysis methods and driven by the aim of the research to collate evidence on trends and current perceptions of languages provision in FE. The findings from the interviews are discussed under key themes, illustrated with extracts from the transcribed interviews. Extracts have been edited for readability, anonymised and pseudonyms provided where required.

It is important to note that given the extended periods of time in which participants have been engaged in the area of language education and FE, all interviewees expressed a clear alignment with one another regarding the importance of sustaining language education in the UK across all sectors. All participants view language learning and using multiple languages as positive, necessary, and normal. They collectively recognise, and have experienced over decades, the everyday, institutional, and systemic challenges to enabling and supporting people to learn languages in the UK.

The findings from the qualitative analysis of the twelve interviews with the stakeholders are presented and discussed under the following themes. First, reflecting on languages provision in FE since the turn of the millennium, different participants from across the four regions and stakeholder

groups all echoed their concern about the decline in language learning and language provision. The connected notions of economic viability and precarity featured strongly in this narrative of decline. Interviewees discussed the funding challenges and the obstacles that they work to overcome, in order to stop this trend becoming self-fulfilling. Second, what appears consistent across regions and stakeholders is the responsiveness with which language education can operate in FE. This relates to swift and bespoke programming for local contexts and to a responsiveness in language pedagogy which enables a more learner-centred (rather than teacher or qualification-focused) approach to language teaching and learning. Third, perspectives on what constitutes learning a language appear to be shifting over this period and participants are eager to engage with shifting attitudes to language learning. Fourth, in contrast to some other narratives in the arena of language education in the UK, participants are very cognizant of the unequal values attributed to (some) languages (and not others). Fifth, participants related a dissonance between what they wanted to learn and teach and some of the formal qualifications on offer. Finally, a key trend over this period and most certainly in the latter period is the impact of digital resources and online communication on language education. It is perceived as a means through which language education can survive and thrive in further education. Each of these trends are discussed in more detail below, illustrated by extracts from the interviews.

6.1 Decline in language learning and language provision

Reflecting on languages provision in FE since the turn of the millennium, different participants from across the four regions and stakeholder groups expressed their acute awareness and concern about the decline in language learning and language provision.

“Have things got better or worse? I think you have got to say they've got worse across the board. I don't think anyone can say that they've got better” (*External stakeholder*)

“I'm still worried that despite all the involvement, despite all the bridges, we are trying to build, I'm not sure how convincing we will be to some other areas of the college or society, which do not see languages as relevant” (*FE/College lecturer*)

“Just going to sound pessimistic here but for the future I'd like to see us actually still delivering what we're currently delivering” (*FE/College subject leader*)

“If I'm perfectly honest, I don't know if my department will still be functioning in five years...the demand for languages is so fragile. You just don't really know. It's difficult to project yourself in the future. (*FE/College leader*)

“I don't know how strong we will be to change people's opinion that languages are not just like a nice option for people who can afford it” (*FE/College leader*) “we're very involved in international projects and people haven't failed to notice as I do, everyone speaks English and you're in a room where you're the only the only UK representative and yet all the Spaniards and the Austrians and the Portuguese and the Italians and the French and the Finnish and the Estonians or whatever. They're all speaking English. And it does kind of remind you that, you know, we're in a very privileged position and language teaching is in a parlous state” (*FE/College stakeholder*)

These concerns were not underpinned by a general narrative about the state of arts, humanities and languages in the UK in the 21st century or a language skills deficit. Participants were specific about the consequences in terms of increased social and cultural inequalities and the loss of diversity of opportunity to learn.

“I'm just a bit scared that one day languages in university departments will only be either for pupils in England or people coming from private schools. Because, you know, they're the number of state schools where there are healthy languages departments are declining” (*FE/College leader*)

Participants concern was strongly focused on notions of economic viability and precarity. Course leaders and tutors discussed at length their effort to recruit students to ensure that their language

courses could be offered. The precise number of students to make a course viable varied across region, context of learning, and learner group:

“For the part-time courses, my colleague decides. But for the 16 to 19 cohort, it's my decision.

And I run it, even where it's two learners. I'll still run it. Occasionally if it's just the one learner, I'll reduce the hours. But fewer learners doesn't mean they need less teaching” (FE/College subject leader)

In the face of doubts on viability of courses due to low numbers, there can be support from senior leaders:

“When you have a large college which has budgets of millions of pounds, one small course or one financially unviable course is bearable. Small numbers are bearable if they're part of a strategy that says we want a good languages offer, we want to have a languages department and the teachers” (FE/College leader)

However, the sustainability of this approach seems to participants to be precarious given their knowledge and experience of funding for Further Education in the UK.

“The funding has always been an issue. The funding for language courses is less than for other subjects. So the funding that we received means that that we need more students to, you know, profitable, the course to run to be profitable, we need more students.” (FE/College lecturer)

“The funding problem also leads to the fact that making it harder for colleges to run small groups. You can run a few small subjects, but you get to a point where the numbers are consistently unviable, and it's just impossible to justify carrying them on or employing a teacher.” (FE/College leader)

Participants' experiences of declining numbers and questions on the viability of courses over time make them acutely aware of the impact of reduced language provision:

“The decline leads to viability issues, and you get into the spiral where there's less demand, colleges are offering less and therefore the choice isn't there. This results in a lack of opportunity, the teachers aren't there, the students aren't progressing to HE and they're not becoming HE teachers or schoolteachers or college teachers, and you get into this downward spiral.” (FE/College stakeholder)

“I still have a slight anxiety about the fact that at some point we're going to be told- your numbers are too low. It wasn't said the Languages Department will close, but I think I've been in a few meetings that I find difficult to erase from my memory, thinking, will I be teaching languages all my life or will I have to do something else” (FE/College leader)

This sentiment is experienced across different regions and different stakeholders. The consequence of this focus on viability impacts available levels of progression for students

“So I completed the GCSE and then found I was stuck again. There was no path to continue on. Unfortunately, there was no A level, the college refused to do it because there weren't enough people signed up or wanting to do it at the time” (FE/College learner)

Viability, cost, and funding available at FE for language courses and qualifications are also pertinent issues from FE learners' perspectives:

“Cost is a real factor. You know I'm fortunate I work full time. I don't have any dependents, so I'm able to afford to study” (FE/College learner)

“Some of the reason that we did the further education course was because it was government subsidised, which kept the price of the course down. At one stage they were talking about the course being £400-500. Most people in the class are not in work and that would just not have been possible. If the prices had changed, it would be a case of no, we can't do it.” (FE/College learner)

“I think the question is who's going to pay for the qualification? And if it's an individual, unless it unlocks something for them. It's going to be hard for them to justify hundreds of pounds.” (FE/College stakeholder)

“So my peers, some of them have paid different amounts, some of them have been asked to pay the two years up front, and some have paid just the year. I think it was something like £750 for the two years, which is a real chunk” (FE/College learner)

Lecturers, subject leaders, and external stakeholders discussed how they had or could work to overcome some of the challenges related to course viability and the consequences of part-time, often temporary nature of teaching contracts in language education. Partnerships, possible collaborations, and resource sharing within local regions were some of the initiatives considered to offset or rebut these challenges. (The use of online connectivity to facilitate these developments is discussed in section 6.6).

“You've got a situation in FE but also it could happen anywhere where programs shrink to a size where they're deemed to be no longer financially viable. Therefore, the teachers have no work, so they go off and do something else. If you've got three or four organizations in the same region who have all got the same problem, if you actually chipped in together and shared one teacher between you, you can actually increase the sustainability and viability for everybody *(FE/College stakeholder)*”

“When push comes to shove and resources are tight, institutions tend to withdraw internally and don't necessarily expand externally, but I think there's a change in the air. Working with our own local regions is the easiest way of doing that” *(FE/College stakeholder)*

But these responses emerging from ground-level efforts are not necessarily without their difficulties either. Support for the promotion of languages at college-level and a lack of prioritization in senior management appear to be additional barriers to overcome.

“I think a lot of college leaders just see it as being on its last legs and almost they've almost given up already and they have other things to worry about than promoting languages. And it's, you know, teaching English and Math, for example, which are big, big priorities. And kind of addressing deficits in in those areas. *(FE/College stakeholder)*”

“the big push towards STEM, the sense that the policy is pushing learners towards subjects that have an economic value. Languages are perceived as not having that, except in very kind of specific business context, you know there's always that sense that you have to justify your interest in languages” *(FE/College lecturer)*

“for funding reasons or a lack of interest, they might decide that the languages are not necessary in a program like this.” *(FE/College lecturer)*

However, some participants indicated that at a micro-level, more finely tuned than the soundbites in public discourse about education, there is support, albeit, not guaranteed.

“So it's not high on the agenda but I think there's a lot of underlying, you know, there's a lot of kind of submerged support for the idea of languages” *(FE/College stakeholder)*

“At the time head of the department decided to sort of push for some recognition in the languages department and whoever was in charge then decided to take it seriously. We still have these two language teaching rooms. I keep thinking any day now they're going to take them away from me for something that's in their eyes bigger. Perhaps, but so far, so good, I've managed to hold on to them.” *(FE/College subject leader)*

There was some frustration expressed by participants with regard to what they considered lost opportunities to maintain and further the provision and integration of languages in college programmes.

“I'm not pleased with the fact that there isn't more involvement of languages within other departments. We have a lot of students who are studying to be chefs and work in the catering, hospitality, and food industry. The college has a partnership with one catering school in France. When this happened we didn't even know! We could have had students and an introduction class, but nothing was done” *(FE/College subject leader)*

“For the tourism courses, sadly, I've just heard last week that we're not going to be offering a language option for them, which makes me very sad. That's not unique. I know that is the case in many colleges. The tourism courses have been suffering an application crisis. I think with the pandemic, but certainly since Brexit as well, the courses where we had a lot of European students have decreased” *(FE/College teacher)*

6.2 Responsiveness in Further Education contexts

What appears consistent across regions and stakeholders in their discussions of language education over the last two decades is the responsiveness with which language education can operate in further education. This relates to swift and bespoke programming for local contexts and to a responsiveness in language pedagogy which enables a more learner-centred (rather than teacher or qualification) approach to language teaching and learning.

Witnessing 'waves' of popularity of different languages and language needs over time, enables some college lecturers and leader to predict some (but not all) related to social/cultural developments and migration.

"I mean we've been teaching Arabic on and off, but you've had years where there's been no interest and then all of a sudden you get a surge of interest, which I'm very happy about and I try to run them as much as I can. We have languages that have died. We did Polish, we did Mandarin Chinese. But once the interest goes, it's very hard to bring it back" (*FE/College subject leader*)

"When you're a college, you've got facilities, you've got rooms, you've got some budget you can invest in sort of risk taking if you like. So from one year to the next, you can turn these things around very quickly" (*FE/College stakeholder*)

"Previously nobody would have been interested in Arabic. But now that we have hundreds and hundreds of Syrian refugees and people working with them. So that sort of guides me when thinking offering a language" (*FE/College subject leader*)

What seems to remain constant in responding to these dynamic environments is a steady focus on the needs of adult learners and the nurturing and enabling relationships between lecturers and students.

"She believed we were good enough to do it and she brought us, helped us, through the process with the continual learning" (*FE/College learner*)

"You really feel like you see the significance of what you do. You see the social impact, you do really get message from learners to say, you know, if you hadn't been there for us then I wouldn't have been able to do this" (*FE/College lecturer*)

According to the learner interviewees, their lecturers supported them to seek out opportunities to practice languages outside the classroom, either through organizing trips overseas or connecting with local communities who spoke the language they were learning. Lecturers also consider how it is crucial to keep in balance a focus on students' interests and motivations for learning and guiding them in equal measure to the formal and cultural aspects of language learning.

"What I particularly enjoy about teaching languages at FE for adult learners is just the instant camaraderie that you get in a foreign language class. Because they know they're going to have to talk to each other and communicate with each other. So, you've already broken down that barrier. And you feel like you're a tour guide, basically showing them a way through the language, you see all the sites as you go" (*FE/College lecturer*)

"I think what's good in language teaching is striking the correct balance between that conversational enjoyment aspect and genuinely understanding the grammar-you know everything else behind the language. Too much of one, you lose. You're not actually learning the

language and too much of the other grammar side of things you bore them to death" (FE/College lecturer)

6.3 Shifting perspectives on the notions of language learning

Third, perspectives on what constitutes learning a language appear to be shifting over this period and participants are eager to engage with shifting attitudes to language learning.

"I do think there is an element of snobbery when it comes to languages, if only people realised, the fun, the value of learning a language- that is lacking" (FE/College leader)

"My motto has always been- don't tell me you can't speak a foreign language, if you can speak one you can speak any. And people need to understand that" (FE/College leader)

"We always have the experience with speaking other languages of not being very good at it. We should cut ourselves a bit of slack on this one. We should be a bit kinder to ourselves" (FE/College stakeholder)

The absence of discussion on the economic advantages of learning languages was notable. Instead, participants with extended periods in FE prioritised communication with speakers of other languages and better understanding other countries and cultures.

"You get emails from people who are looking for a particular language because of changes in communities. We taught a lot of Chinese classes because at one point there were a lot of Chinese people working here, and then there were a lot of Polish people. There was a very big Polish community. So obviously demand for Polish was big at one point. There were a lot of Italians working nearby, so demand grew. That's also why I put Arabic on, because previously nobody would have been interested in Arabic. But now there are Syrian refugees and people working with them" (FE/College leader)

Over the period of their experiences, interviewees challenged some of the long-held notions and indeed fallacies about language learning, including, the time allotted to languages in compulsory education as sufficient for learning; 'native speaker' teachers as essential to language learning; 'the earlier language learning starts, the better' and understandings on what language proficiency entails.

"using somebody who is a native speaker doesn't necessarily make them a teacher, and that's a real problem. The students know that they can sense that. And because they're paying money for the courses, they're very discerning and you know that they'll come in and experience isn't good, and they won't come back. It's as simple as that. Just being a native speaker is not enough" (FE/College leader)
"She is a language expert. However, she's not a teacher. She understood everything she was trying to explain to us. She clearly understood. But she couldn't teach" (FE/College learner)

"We have raised our standards, we do require as a minimum a background in languages and some sort of qualification because otherwise if you don't respect the professional status of language teachers, nobody's going to want to become a language teacher, and it just drives the problem even further" (FE/College stakeholder)

"I think one real difference I've seen between native speaking teachers and British teachers is that they don't understand that people my age weren't taught grammar in school. The British teachers understand that. I don't know what a transitive verb is. So, the teacher was able to comprehend that and break it down into a format that me and the other students could actually understand. And I think that was a really great way to get over those initial barriers because those were the sort of issues that I was having in other lessons" (FE/College learner)

“A certain type of person is drawn toward hourly paid contracts and with the best will in the world, they are often unqualified or poorly qualified or untrained. Often it's just, a native speaker who happens to be able to speak the language is brought in to teach it *(FE/College stakeholder)*”

While interviewees fully support early language learning initiatives where they operate, some raised concerns about not offering (or making compulsory) languages throughout the primary phase and into post-primary education.

“I think the emphasis put on early learning and has had benefits initially, but I'm not sure that there is enough emphasis on the senior phase. I think for me that's what's missing there is still this gap at a more senior phase, those early benefits are lost because what is the point if after that you can just drop your language” *(FE/College leader)*

Interviewees also pointed to changes in the ways in which language proficiency can be viewed. Reference was made to a greater awareness of differences in productive and receptive language skills, register variation, previous language learning experiences and understanding of jagged profiles in language pedagogy.

“How good are you at your languages? The answer is either not very or fluent. You can say, well I'm this (level) at speaking, I can listen and understand you, but I may not be able to respond immediately. So if I had to do something in Spanish, I could absolutely understand everything they were saying, but I wouldn't necessarily be able to respond in kind” *(FE/College stakeholder)*

“We had a French class, in fact, we actually had to have sort of subsets within the class who had different experiences. You had the students who have done French at school, UK students, UK born students who had no family history of French speaking, but enjoyed French at school, and chose A level French They were in the same group as students who had grown up speaking French, but as a second language, and weren't necessarily that literate. Their needs were just very different, so they would come together for some things, but the teacher just had to do different things with them, and that was fine” *(FE/College leader)*

“I think making the jump from reasonably fluent use of language in the family context or in the community context and being literate enough to pass an A level with a good grade requires quite a lot of work” *(FE/College leader)*

6.4 Shifting perspectives on values attributed to (some) languages (and not others)

Fourth, participants are very cognizant of and report their experiences of the unequal values attributed to (some) languages (and not others).

“the indigenous population either revels in not speaking any foreign languages or is chronically shy about it. And then the population that has got multiple languages doesn't want to talk about it because they think it's sort of almost a marker of deprivation or something to own up to having a community and heritage language. That's the landscape that we see” *(FE/College stakeholder)*

“We were always very surprised with so many Urdu and Bengali speakers in our college at the low numbers that chose to take them [qualifications in these languages] and I think that's probably to

do with all the messages that the students were getting about their value in the kind of qualifications market” (FE/College leader)

Despite languages departments in Higher Education institutions being seen as the potential champions of languages, some interviewees reported their negative experiences of admissions processes which seemed to attribute less value to A-level qualifications in some home or heritage languages than others:

“I was always very frustrated at HE admissions processes. Many of them seemed to distinguish very sharply between languages that students brought with them to education, a mother tongue or home languages or whatever, and languages that were being learned...it did often feel like if you had Polish or Arabic or Bengali or Urdu there was always this sense that you had an advantage and that that A level didn't really count. It wasn't really one of you A levels” (FE/College leader)

“There's that kind of a bias against mother tongue or community languages, which tends to polarise around certain languages and not others” (FE/College leader)

“I fought quite a few battles with admissions people to say look it doesn't matter that the student comes from Democratic Republic of Congo or Ivory Coast or whatever, and spoke French at home, or that the student spoke English at home and has learned French what actually should matter is the qualification that they've acquired and its currency and its value, if that's what you care about anyway” (FE/College leader)

6.5 Shifting perspectives on assessment and recording progression

Fifth, participants related a dissonance between what they wanted to learn and teach and some of the formal qualifications on offer.

“We had to do an exam for the GCSE but we were very well prepared for it. And I felt, to be honest with you, in some ways we were too prepared for it. We didn't learn a lot about the language that year. We just learned how to pass an exam” (FE/College Learner)

“Some of them don't want to do a qualification, they come to learn a language and the last thing they want is a qualification. But it is to do with funding. The college needs to survive, and so funded courses are more lucrative. So, we push the credited courses more and some find it challenging. Some find it fulfilling, some find it a waste of time. (FE/College leader)

“We don't, as a matter of routine, offer a qualification. We used to offer an end of course exam that would issue a certificate that we gave to the learner with level of proficiency benchmarked to the CEFR. But we were getting less than one in 10 to actually do the assessment. So, we scrapped it” (FE/College stakeholder)

Some of the learner interviewees acknowledged the value in recognising their learning achievements through assessment and qualifications, but they consider some means better for them than others. This gives some insight into developing assessments which are aligned to learner needs and expectations.

“I think it would be easier if different programmes all had a similar assessment of language proficiency levels. I understand what a GCSE does, what an A level does and beyond. But then when you switch to something like a university or private language school, they have their own system of levels so it's hard to understand what each of those means” (FE/College learner)

“The continual assessment made a huge, huge difference to me none of us were doing it to gain academic qualifications we were doing it because we enjoyed doing it” *(FE/College learner)*

Changes in assessments over time and the comparisons between school and college/FE approaches to assessment were also discussed by the FE/College lecturers:

“We realised that students would perform better through portfolio work. So that's now spreading into schools and that's helping because it's making languages a bit more attractive. Because I mean there's nothing worse than a school having to say we've got 30 pupils, the majority of them have failed. And I've had teachers teaching at the college who taught in a secondary school and they said to me, you know, you do the recording for their speaking exam GCSE and you did not get one word out of them. They just can't do it. They just freeze. So obviously the schools have picked up that using continuous assessment is far better” *(FE/College Lecturer)*

“Exams perhaps I think make it too difficult, the language, the learning of the language should not be that difficult because you learn a language with time, just create your foundations, but you need time to consolidate that learning to practice those sentences, to see it in context. It's harder than it needs to be. Translations for example, I just think the translations are to degree level, not to A level. I feel that we can still do translations without having to make it so challenging” *(FE/College Lecturer)*

“In FE, they are learning and studying with a bit more depth than in school just preparing for an exam with a set structure, sentences. Because as soon as you go away from those, you get lost. A better language education allows them to progress to the next level rather than to go to the next exam” *(FE/College Lecturer)*

With the extended period of time that the learner interviewees have been engaged in language education at FE over the last 20 years, there is some contrast with the literature discussion on dropout (e.g. Gibson and Shutt, 2002). This may have been an issue in the years preceding the new millennium, however as the secondary data analysis illustrates in the years that follow achievements remain at a consistent proportion of enrolments. For the learners that we interviewed, there was long-term engagement with language learning at FE in one way or another. For lecturers, signalling progression and finding progression routes aligned to their learners needs and intentions in some way is considered important.

“We have students being coming to us for years and years and years and that's something that I'm very proud of actually. I like the progression. I like people to start a language and keep going” *(FE/College Lecturer)*

“We always offered up to level 3 and then the students had nowhere else to go. So I went to another awarding body. They did another level 3. And then again, they had nowhere to go. So I went to another awarding body and we actually wrote up a level 4. And so we offer it in Italian, Spanish and French, and we have over 80 students doing this. And as far as progression is concerned, it's great what we offer because we teach in different regions and so we'll try to keep the courses very similar” *(FE/College Lecturer)*

6.6 Developments in online learning

Finally, a key trend over this period and most certainly in the latter period is the impact of digital resources and online communication on language education. It is perceived as a means through which language education can survive and thrive in further education.

In relation to staying connected with one another, new media platforms are increasingly employed. Learners connected with their tutors and each other via apps which for some enhanced group cohesion and facilitated peer support. Other learners were able to develop digital skills:

“The Whatsapp group was like watching the news if anything was happening, there would be a mention of it there. And it was brilliant because it may have jogged your memory, it was always a help, it was a good sounding box for everyone. So social media in that respect was excellent”.
(FE/College learner)

“using the technology so I could learn from the house was a totally new thing as well. I would be speaking so we would discuss things and I would course submit homework and get comments via Word or whatever” (FE/College learner)

In relation to course accessibility, strategic decisions were made by subject leaders to use and maintain possibilities for computer-mediated communication

“Since COVID, I've made it so that all courses are available online as well as face to face. And next year, I will insist that all tutors send out a meeting invitation to all students so that this will help. So for that, the college was very supportive even before we started using Teams. We installed something in our language labs to enable us to do this. So, that's been positive”
(FE/College subject leader)

“We were point bold enough to say, OK, we're just going to go fully online. It has been a great change because, there is a national demand, and we know this from the feedback. If we were not here, a lot of pupils in school would not be able to study a language. So, in terms of the how meaningful that is, I think it is very important. I think the fact that management team trusted us to be able to do that, went beyond this, kind of class-based vision and the fact that we could deliver digital classrooms. I think that's been a great change” (FE/College subject leader)

In addition to integrating online learning for course flexibility and survival, teacher recruitment issues were considered in this light:

“These days you can do a lot of things online and that's very efficient. You know, the teacher can be in Birmingham and the student can be in Manchester and London or something, you know, that's all possible” (FE/College stakeholder)

“We are one of the departments in the college that have larger online provision of courses and that's one of the positives that because we saw possibilities to increase numbers and to survive as a department and to keep offering languages” (FE/College subject leader)

Examples of how online learning emerged and how language provisions were responsive to changes were discussed by lecturers, together with the impact thereof, as this extract illustrates:

“I liked the idea of accessibility and making a language available to pupils who would not be or able to study it if it wasn't for us. So not just the adult returners, but the part we play in terms of providing language teaching to school pupils. We started working more and more online. And this has allowed us to not only reach initially the school partnership, which was conceived locally, and the schools in the catchment area, but then because we were also offering these courses online things started to spread. We did just a bit of networking, not really through the college, more from our language team. We started reaching out to a lot of schools and now we work with schools, all over the country. And when I say *all*, I do mean it, it's really across the land including remote schools. You know, we do teach languages everywhere” (FE/College leader)

From the findings of the interview data, which are reflected in the student survey responses in section five of the report, there is evidence of positive interest from leaders, lecturers, and learners in using digital and online language provision. This is in addition to participants focus on online learning as a means of increasing accessibility, flexibility and contributing to course viability. Although some interviewees discussed the effectiveness and authenticity of translation software and the use of bilingual online dictionaries, engagement with the wider range of online resources for language learning, including the use of multimedia and additional online language learning tools was less prominent in interview discussions. Given the positive perceptions and contemporary practices of online language learning discussed by the interviewees and previous research of Fabian and MacLead (2014) indicating positive feedback to use CALL, it seems highly likely that the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) will indeed be a clear feature of future language education in FE. A further issue to explore in this regard, is the extent to which digital inequalities will impact online learning in FE contexts, as evidenced in other sectors of education (e.g. Coleman, 2021).

6.7 Conclusions

The interviews with participants who have been engaged in language education and FE for extended periods of time and across the four jurisdictions offer a narrative of language provision in the UK over the last two decades. All interviewees regard language learning and using multiple languages as positive, necessary and normal. However, they collectively recognise and have experienced over decades the everyday, institutional, and systematic challenges to enabling and supporting people to learn languages, across the lifespan, in the UK. From their perspectives, the languages provision in the FE sector has been much neglected. So much so, that the future appears precarious and fragile. Yet, according to those interviewed, there is much potential to be developed. FE, above all sectors, is regarded as responsive to community contexts, to learners needs, and is able to accommodate change swiftly and to be creative in both what is offered and how it is offered. Perspectives on what constitutes language learning are changing and participants are eager to engage with shifting attitudes to language learning. The absence of discussion on the economic advantages of learning languages was notable. Instead, participants with extended periods in FE prioritised communication with speakers of other languages and better understanding other countries and cultures. Participants did voice their concerns regarding the values attributed to some languages and not to others, giving

examples from their experiences. Such concerns certainly require further examination. Making meaningful connections across different departments and integrating more language teaching into core programmes in FE were some of the suggestions which participants discussed, together with dedicated regional hubs and significant development in online language learning and teaching opportunities.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on our research, we can make four overarching recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Develop a unifying voice for languages in FE

The absence of a unifying voice for language education in FE, as well as a lack of national and regional strategy and oversight, or long-term planning, means that it is currently exceedingly difficult for middle leaders in FE to effect meaningful change. We recommend the creation of a Strategic Committee for Languages in FE, as recommended by TNLS⁹, led by Association of Colleges, Colleges Scotland, Colegau Cymru, and NI Colleges, and informed by the languages education and skills community. This unifying voice would take forward Recommendations 2-4 below, in collaboration with stakeholders and government departments.

Recommendation 2: Cooperation between colleges and sectors

We found little evidence of extensive and systematic cooperation in relation to language learning between FE colleges, and fewer examples still across sectors. However, there appears to be considerable potential for schools and colleges to work together in School College Partnerships or as Area Learning Communities: mechanisms within which institutions come together to plan the curriculum they offer on an area basis, share resources and the teaching of languages, both in person and digitally. After years of declining enrolments in languages in FE, colleges may need to explore ways of working together to offer a broad and balanced, economically-relevant curriculum to meet the needs and aspirations of all students.

On a local level, FE colleges may need to collaborate more with feeder secondary schools to ensure there is a clear language learning progression route for all learners. Opportunities should be offered in FE to allow students to resit language qualifications from secondary school or continue on to Level 3 and beyond.

At a regional level, barriers which exist between FE and Higher Education need to be recognised and overcome. It is over simplistic to consider FE simply as a pipeline to HE. Institution Wide Language Programmes delivered through Language Centres in HE evidence strong numbers of enrolments. The Covid-19 pandemic has also demonstrated the power of digital language learning in facilitating growing numbers of language learners. One short-term solution to promote language provision in FE would be to collaborate more with existing IWLPs to offer all students the opportunity to continue with previously learned languages or start a new language.

There is, as yet, an untapped potential for languages education to forge a link between schools, FE and HEIs, and to enable a more diverse community of learners to engage with post-compulsory education.

Recommendation 3: An urgent review of qualifications in FE

Our research evidences three key issues with qualifications for languages in FE: (i) there is an unrelenting focus on A levels in England, NI and Wales as well as Highers / Advanced Highers in Scotland, and an overemphasis on French and Spanish; (ii) there is a patchwork of vocational qualifications in languages offered by awarding bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but a complete absence of appropriate progression pathways in England; and (iii) there are numerous vocational qualifications, at Level 2 and above, which ought to have or have the potential to have a

⁹ See: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills/>

language element and which do not, i.e. qualifications allied to travel, hospitality and communication. Despite the opportunity to embed global language skills in the new T-levels in England, they too do not have any compulsory language learning component.

Further, the way in which qualifications are reported, particularly in England, means that policy makers are not getting the full picture. Data are reported to elucidate the situation in compulsory education, but fine-grained data for languages in FE is not readily available. Behind the headline data for FE, it has not been possible to ascertain achievement in courses which are perceived to be casual in nature. We recommend that government reports fine-grained data on language enrolments and achievements so that a clearer understanding and fuller picture of language qualifications and languages provision in FE can be presented.

The economic argument for languages in education in the UK is well documented (Ayres-Bennett et al., 2022). Our research shows that FE has been underfunded for the past twenty years; lecturers in those colleges which still have languages told us candidly that there is no investment in the subject area. Given the fact that languages are of strategic importance for UK trade and investment on the world stage, strategic investment in language provision in FE would seem very overdue. We recommend that there is a programme of investment in language education in FE running alongside qualifications review and reform. Without this investment, it is difficult to see how the crisis point at which languages in FE is currently at will ever be reversed.

We also note an absence of qualifications in translating and interpreting in FE. We know the UK is potentially a linguistic powerhouse, with many languages spoken in our communities. Together with a review of qualifications, there is room for strategic investment in languages other than French and Spanish to provide employment for people in the UK who can work across linguistic boundaries within and beyond the UK.

Recommendation 4: Research into Languages Provision in FE

This project has been the first UK-wide research project on the topic of languages provision in FE, in a lifetime. The results of the systematic literature review evidence the dearth of research which focuses on language provision and language learning in FE contexts. On the basis of our research we can and are able to provide insight into language provision in FE across four jurisdictions and make some recommendations. However, more in-depth and longer-term research projects would allow for more detailed evidence and enable further recommendations.

We recommend that further research is conducted into what constitutes effective second language acquisition across the lifespan in FE settings – not only in award bearing courses, but also in courses which are perceived to be for pleasure. We also recommend further research into the identity of the language teaching professional in FE settings; what are their needs and how does their professional self, their continuing professional development and career opportunities differ from their peers in other sectors.

Our research showed that the UK's decision to leave the UK has had an impact on languages provision in FE, but more work is needed to understand and quantify the decline as a direct result of Brexit.

Finally, there is a dearth of systematic, reliable data about language learning in complementary schools, Saturday schools and in community centres not attached to a FE college. Whilst the economy is clearly a driver for research into the benefits of languages education, we recommend more work on the social and cultural dimensions of language learning which have not been measured or impact assessed.

In conclusion, lecturers of languages in those FE colleges in the UK, and sixth form colleges in England, which still offer language provision are frustrated by two decades of next to no investment in languages in their sector. The economic arguments in favour of learning languages are well rehearsed, but languages in FE will never be buoyant unless there is government intervention at system level. FE is a large sector of education in the UK and the opportunities for language learning are boundless, if only the strategic direction can be set.

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What qualification levels mean in England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

[All data cited from the Gov.UK](#)

There are 9 qualification levels.

Entry level
Each entry level qualification is available at three sub-levels - 1, 2 and 3. Entry level 3 is the most difficult.
Level 1
e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE - grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G • Level 1 national vocational qualification (NVQ)
Level 2
e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE - grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C • Level 2 NVQ
Level 3
e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A level • AS level • Access to higher education diploma • International Baccalaureate diploma • Level 3 NVQ • T Level
Level 4
e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher national certificate (HNC) • Level 4 NVQ
Level 5
e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diploma of higher education (DipHE) • Higher national diploma (HND) • Level 5 NVQ
Level 6
e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree with honours - for example bachelor of the arts (BA) honours, bachelor of science (BSc) honours • Ordinary degree without honours • Level 6 NVQ
Level 7

e.g.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 7 NVQ • Master's degree, for example master of arts (MA), master of science (MSc) • Postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE)
Level 8	
e.g.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctorate, for example doctor of philosophy (PhD or DPhil)

What qualification levels mean in Scotland?

[All data cited from the SCQF \(Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework\)](#)

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications	SVQs	Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions
1	National 1, Awards		
2	National 2, Awards		
3	National 3, Awards, Skills for Work National 3		
4	National 4, Awards, Skills for Work National 4	SVQs	
5	National 5, Awards, Skills for Work National 5		
6	Higher, Awards, Skills for Work Higher		
7	Advanced Higher, Awards, Scottish Baccalaureates		Certificate of Higher Education
8	Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), Advanced Diploma		Diploma of Higher Education
9			Bachelors Degree/Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate
10			Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate,
11			Masters degrees, Integrated Masters degrees, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate
12			Doctoral degrees

