



Press release

17 February 2011

New campaign calls for urgent action on languages

A new campaign, branded ***Speak to the Future***, has been launched with the support of over 30 organisations to address the UK's flagging achievement in language learning. The campaign calls for urgent action on policy to safeguard and revitalise language learning across all phases of education in order to boost educational and career opportunities for young people and our ability to compete in the global economy. Campaigners have united to send a powerful public message highlighting the vital national importance of foreign language capacity in today's global world.

The campaign will target policy-makers in government and leaders in education and business. It will focus on the importance of languages for the UK's international influence, economic success and rich cultural life. It will make the case for long-term positive action to transform the UK's capacity in languages and to achieve a step change in language learning.

Baroness Jean Coussins, who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on modern languages, welcomed the campaign and said: 'A national languages recovery programme is needed to improve the quality of our children's education, their future employment prospects and the influence of the UK on the international stage. England is currently joint bottom of a table of 39 countries in the developed world for the amount of time spent on languages by 12-14 year olds in schools. Government must take a lead and reverse this decline'.

The campaign has five key aims, designed to create a coherent approach to language learning across all phases of education:



1. Every language valued as an asset
2. A coherent experience of languages for all children in primary school
3. A basic working knowledge of at least two languages including English for every child leaving secondary school
4. Every graduate qualified in a second language
5. An increase in the number of highly qualified linguists

The five-year campaign will reach out to people and organisations from all walks of life to gain wider public support for language learning.

Richard Hardie, Chair of UBS Ltd, said: 'Learning other languages and exploring other worlds of culture is invaluable. Yet language skills seem to be becoming increasingly the preserve of the independent education sector. This can't be right, for so many reasons; for UBS it does not reflect the cultural and economic backgrounds of an increasing number of our clients'.

Lid King, National Director for Languages, said: 'Our campaign looks to a future in which monolingualism is a thing of the past and where we celebrate and utilise the UK's multilingual resources. There have been some major challenges for languages in recent years, especially in secondary schools, and we clearly have a long way to go to achieve our aims. The great challenge now is to build on the momentum of successes such as the primary languages initiative'.

Professor Mike Kelly, University of Southampton, said: 'This campaign could not come at a better moment. Languages are vital for the UK's future and the future of young people. It is beginning to dawn on people that we need to learn other languages if we are to punch our weight in the world. If we are tongue-tied, we will lose out against more articulate competitors'.

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Notes to editors

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Key supporters of the campaign include:

Association for Language Learning
British Council
Chartered Institute of Linguists
CILT, the National Centre for Languages
Independent Schools' Modern Languages Association
Institute of Translation and Interpreting
National Association of Language Advisers
Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
The Languages Company
University Council of Modern Languages

- Only 6% of the global population are native English speakers and 75% speak no English at all.
- It is estimated that in less than 20 years, most Internet material will be in Chinese, not English.
- There are already more blogs in Japanese than English.
- French dropped out of the top ten GCSE subjects last year, for the first time ever.
- Only 38% of pupils in state schools continue with a language to GCSE level, down from 76% in 2000.
- 45% of secondary schools offer alternative languages qualifications to GCSE and A Level.
- 92% of primary schools teach a language in Key Stage 2 as a result of the primary languages initiative.
- A third of university language departments closed between 2002 and 2009.



The campaign has five key objectives:

1. Every language valued as an asset

This will encourage policy makers and citizens to recognise that the many languages used in the homes of UK citizens are a valuable resource for social cohesion and economic success.

2. A coherent experience of languages for all children in primary school

This will introduce the learning of other languages and cultures as well as develop a better understanding of how the child's own languages work.

3. A basic working knowledge of at least two languages including English for every child leaving secondary school

This will equip every school leaver to live and work in a global society where confidence in learning and using other languages is a major advantage.

4. Every graduate qualified in a second language

This will prepare future leaders in business, the professions, voluntary organisations, education and research to thrive and communicate confidently in complex global societies.

5. An increase in the number of highly qualified linguists

This will fulfil the growing need for language professionals, especially English speaking interpreters and translators, and for teachers and researchers specialising in languages and cultures.

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