



THE CAMPAIGN
FOR LANGUAGES

Briefing for Objective 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.

▪ Why working knowledge of another language matters

Knowledge of at least two languages including English is vital for the future of young people from all backgrounds as they leave school and make their way in our global world. Using and understanding another language enables them to establish meaningful social and professional relationships with people from other countries and cultures. Mobility and access to jobs and study opportunities overseas are limited by inadequate knowledge of other languages and cultures.

Language learning achievement and the amount of curriculum time devoted to language learning in UK secondary schools compare unfavourably with many other developed countries. UK employers are dissatisfied with school leavers' and graduates' language skills. For personal and intellectual development, language learning, including cultural knowledge, should form part of a rounded and rigorous education that brings transferable cognitive and intellectual skills and intercultural understanding. Success in achieving a basic knowledge and understanding of another language gives the confidence to approach and enjoy future learning of languages – a vital attribute for the future of all young people.

▪ Where we are now

Languages are in decline in secondary schools, with falling numbers of students studying languages in Key Stage 4, a reduction in curriculum time for languages, especially in Key Stage 3, and fragile recruitment to language courses post-16.

Too many pupils are giving up languages before reaching a basic level of competence.

Too few pupils are continuing to study one or more languages to higher levels.

Only 38% of pupils in state schools continue with a language to GCSE level, down from 76% in 2000. This compares poorly with other developed countries.

A declining proportion of 16–18-year-olds take an A level in a foreign language. In 1996 one in 10 A level candidates took French; by 2008 the proportion was less than one in 20.

Take up and achievement in languages is much **higher in grammar schools** and in the **independent sector** where a language is compulsory in Key Stage 4 in nine out of ten schools.

Low participation in Key Stage 4 is associated with schools with **high levels of disadvantage**.

The complex range of barriers and issues of current concern include:

Unsatisfactory planning to build on prior learning in Key Stage 3 caused by the lack of clarity on the status of languages in primary schools.

The focus on league tables as a measure of success discourages schools from ‘taking a risk’ on subjects such as languages, which are perceived to be difficult.

The inclusion of a language in the GCSEs that make up the **new English Baccalaureate** introduces a number of risks to success, which include **teacher supply**, the need to improve the quality of teaching and the need for more head teachers and school management teams to champion language learning.

The future **viability of alternative accreditation** to GCSE and A level, which is offered by 45% of schools.

Availability, accessibility and affordability of **high-quality training for teachers**.

▪ **Priorities for the future**

Our **priorities for debate** to be addressed to policy-makers and leaders in government and education are to:

- Promote the need for **every secondary school** to develop a **languages policy** to include links between English and other languages including community languages
- Ensure that every student will have **access to a minimum number of hours of high-quality language learning** during their school career and have rich experiences of other languages and cultures
- Develop **provision and qualifications that meet the needs of learners** and that allow **teachers** to express their passion for their subject and interpret the syllabus with creativity and imagination.