

# Promoting foreign languages in a time of reform: a UK perspective

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# Context- my background

- Deputy Director of the Language Centre, University of Leeds
- Chair of the *Association of University Language Centres, UK and Ireland (AULC)*
- Executive committee member of the *Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS)*
- Past-EAP teacher
- Past-Researcher in academic English, phraseology (in non-academic post)
- Current full-time management

# Context- Leeds Language Centre

- LCs very diverse in the UK in structure, size and location
- In Leeds within the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, largest in the country
  - 11 subject areas covering:
    - major European languages
    - Arabic and East Asian studies
    - Linguistics and Phonetics
    - Translation and Interpreting
    - World Cinemas

- Hybrid operation: part teaching; part service
- Structure typical of the larger LCs in the UK:
  - EAP (fee-paying international students)
  - Foreign language elective modules (% of FTEs)
  - Language learning facilities for independent study (central grant)

# AULC ([www.aulc.org](http://www.aulc.org))

Around 80 members:

- England- 61
- Scotland- 4
- Wales- 2
- Northern Ireland- 2
- Ireland- 8
- West Indies- 1

# AULC- functions

- Active members from management, teaching, technical and resources staff
- Non-competitive so very collegial
- Advice for members, especially smaller or newer
  - Staff contracts, technology, assessment, external examiners, resources etc.
- Lobbying in support of members under threat
- Annual conferences and workshops

# CercleS ([www.cercles.org](http://www.cercles.org))

*Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education*

- 12 national associations + associate centres in 14 other countries, 300 member institutions
- Conferences, workshops, seminars
- Focus groups: e.g. translation, event management
- ELP
- Journal: *Language Learning in Higher Education*
- ‘Wulkow’ memoranda on quality assurance

# National leadership for languages

## 1. UCML-

*University Council of Modern Languages (UK)*

- Umbrella body for all academic subject associations including AULC
- Lobbying for languages
- Managing projects

## 2. LLAS-

*Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies*

- Subject centre, training workshops, projects, resources, lobbying, conferences

# Threats

- Funding/tuition fees (up to £9,000 p.a.)
  - Effect on recruitment
  - More serious effect on planning
  - Residence abroad
- Languages at primary and secondary level
- International student recruitment
  - UKBA (now wound up)
  - Privatisation of EAP
- Relative lobbying power / insularity

# Responses

- Worton Review- reported October 2009
- (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2009/200941/>)
- Need for coherent identity for the discipline
- Followed by:
  - Worton Forum
  - Meetings at BIS, British Academy
  - Hefce funding for projects (£52k 2010-11)

# Relationship between academic departments and language centres

- *“the relationship between Language Centres/IWLPs and the Modern Language Departments is often an uneasy one, with the Language Centres often being perceived by the MFL Departments as mere service providers of ‘everyday’ language learning.”*
- *“there was some anxiety amongst a group of respondents about the profile of Language Centres and the extent to which they represented a threat to the status of the academic Departments.”*
- *“A recurring theme was the need to challenge the ‘false dichotomy’ which exists between Language Centres (perceived as merely teaching language skills) and academic Departments (who define themselves as teaching language through content and culture).”*

# 1. “Shaping the future of languages in HE”

(<http://www.ucml.ac.uk/shapingthefuture>)

## **Identity**

“Towards a shared sense of purpose within a diverse and changing field”

## **Internationalisation**

“Ideas and examples of ways in which languages can actively engage with the institution’s internationalisation agenda”

## **Employability**

“Research data and practical tools for supporting the development of employability skills for language graduates”

# Example 1: Identity

- The Algerian demonstrations of 1961 and their repression
- The History of the French Language in Russia
- The G8 and G20's position in global governance and the role of Japan
- Cultural Literacy in Contemporary Europe: A European-wide project
- Maintaining a regional language in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the example of Low German
- Learning French from ages 5, 7 and 11: An investigation into starting ages, rates and routes of learning amongst early foreign language learners
- Dante and Theology
- Documenting varieties of the Romani language
- German Autobiographical Writing in the Twentieth Century
- Russian Media, Culture, and Conceptual Blending
- Queer Cinema from Spain and France: the translation of desire and the formation of transnational queer identities

## Example 2: Employability

“Working collaboratively with non-language departments” - case studies of work with:

- Engineering (French for the Aerospace Industry)
- Medicine (French, Italian, German, Spanish, Punjabi for medical students).
- Highlights the large amount of collaborative activity between languages and STEMM subjects.

## 2. “Speak to the Future”

(<http://www.speaktothefuture.org/>)

Five-year campaign with objectives for five levels of UK language use:

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*

# Other reports

## British Academy

- Language Matters (2009)
- Language Matters More and More (2011)
- Languages: The State of the Nation (2013)
- Multilingual Britain (2013)

## British Council

- Language Rich Europe (2013)

# UCML/AULC survey of IWLPs (2012)

Essential but difficult to monitor LCs' numbers

- 62 institutions responded
- 50,000 students on IWLPs
- 2001: Arabic 2 institutions; Chinese 9 (Fr = 49)
- 2012: 43 and 48 respectively (Fr= 55)
- 2001: French 34% of all students
- 2012: 25% = Spanish

# Positive prospects for IWLP provision

- ‘The provision of languages is seen as an important part of the institution’s employability agenda and internationalisation agendas’
- ‘There are strong institutional initiatives to develop employability, and language skills feature prominently in this context and enjoy institutional support’
- ‘On a number of occasions senior officers of the University (VC and others) stressed the importance of such provision for the institution’
- ‘Many students see language learning as an important part of their professional development, a trend that seems to be growing. There has definitely been growing awareness regarding the necessity of foreign languages over the last years’



# Opportunities and trends

## 1. Responding to demand

- Turkish, Farsi, Polish? (according to British Academy)
- How to manage these responses in language departments?
- Collaboration with STEMM subjects
- Short-term interest (e.g. Brazilian Portuguese) rather than long-term trends?

# Opportunities and trends

## 2. Fee-paying

- More or less?
- ‘Free’ languages for all?
- More complex student behaviour?

# Opportunities and trends

## 3. International students

- Can they continue to be seen as a source of replacement funding?
- Can they be given the ‘gold-plated’ student experience claimed for Home students?
- Will they increasingly be interested in foreign language learning while in the UK?

# Curriculum Enhancement (UG)

- Making the curriculum more coherent
- Re-defining 'graduateness' for employment
- 3 Core Threads (programme level)
  - 'Ethics and Responsibility'
  - 'Global and Cultural Insight'
  - 'Employability'
- 10 Broadening Strands (elective modules)
  - e.g. 'Languages and Cross-Cultural Understanding'
- Promotion of Study Abroad opportunities
- Hope that this will improve visibility of languages

# Joint Honours degrees

- 1300+ JH students in SMLC (800+ SH)
- 300+ degree combinations with a language:  
e.g. 'BA in Arabic/Chinese etc and International Development/Relations etc'
- Reduced to 17 programmes:  
e.g. 'BA in Modern Languages and World Cinemas'

# 'Cornerstone' modules

- 7 compulsory modules, depending on programme:
  - Introduction to Audio-Visual Cultures
  - Language, Structure and Sound
  - World Histories
  - Discourse, Culture and Identity
  - Intercultural Competence: Theory and Application
  - Politics, Culture and Society
  - World Literatures

# Language Policy

Need for a different motivation at different educational levels, not just languages are useful for everyone:

- Primary- natural part of the syllabus, fun, taster sessions, speak to your friends in their own language
- Secondary- languages open doors, European citizen, get into university
- Tertiary- gradueness, employment: engineering (Stuttgart), medicine (MSF), business (anywhere)

# Language Policy

Universities must take the lead in language requirement for graduation/employment, as schools can't; e.g. UCL:

*“UCL encourages intercultural awareness in all its students, and considers experience of learning a foreign language a vital element of a broad and balanced education. UCL wishes to ensure that all of our graduates have had some experience of exploring another culture through language ....*

*UK students who do not have a GCSE grade C or equivalent in a foreign language (other than Ancient Greek, Biblical Hebrew or Latin) on admission to UCL will be required to acquire an equivalent level of language proficiency once they are enrolled with us. This will either be through participation in a UCL summer school, study for a specially designed certificate at the [UCL Centre for Languages & International Education](#), or by taking a 0.5 CU (course-unit) course in a language as part of their degree programme.”*

# Internationalisation

- Linked to language policy:
  - incorporate language learning and use into campus life
  - recognize explicitly the multi-cultural, international environment
  - encourage cross-cultural communication
  - develop innovative curricula
  - facilitate combinations of STEMM subjects with languages