

Language Provision in UK Modern Foreign Languages Departments 2019 Survey

December 2019



Ruskin Library, Lancaster University

The survey and this report have been designed and written on behalf of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) by Elena Polisca and Vicky Wright together with Inma Álvarez and Carlos Montoro (*Language Acts and Worldmaking* project).

How to cite this report:

Polisca, E., Wright, V., Álvarez, I. and Montoro, C. (2019). *Language Provision in UK MFL Departments 2019 Survey*. Report no. 2, December. University Council of Modern Languages (UCML), United Kingdom.

We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to the respondents from each institution for their participation. We are also grateful to Claire Gorrara and Caroline Campbell for their useful comments on the survey questions and draft of this report.

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List of acronyms

APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BSL	British Sign Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IWLP	Institution-Wide Language Provision
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NICILT	Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching & Research
OfS	Office for Students
OWRI	Open World Research Initiative
SCILT	Scotland's National Centre for Languages
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCML	University Council of Modern Languages
UUK	Universities UK

Executive summary

This is an executive summary of the report on the results of the Language Provision in UK Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Departments 2019 Survey conducted by the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) in partnership with the AHRC-funded *Language Acts and Worldmaking* project.

This report follows on from its first iteration in 2018 (Álvarez et al., 2018), with the objective of providing a longitudinal study on under-researched areas relating both to the provision of language modules¹ in MFL departments and models of collaboration between MFL departments and Institution-Wide Language Provision (IWLP) units in UK universities. The report should be read in conjunction with the annual AULC-UCML national IWLP survey in order to gain a fuller picture of the sector and to compare findings.

Of the 62 universities offering MFL degrees in the UK during 2019, 30 responded to the survey. The data collected shows that the systematic decline in number of MFL departments regrettably continues to be an identifying feature of the sector at large, as the number of such institutions seems to drop from 69 to 62 in the course of one year. As was the case in 2018, 52 languages are still currently being taught as part of MFL programmes in the UK even though the number of institutions has declined. A similar distribution in the variety of languages offered can be observed after two years: the five most widely-available languages (20%) still monopolise the current MFL presence at UK universities, while the remaining 42 lesser-taught languages (80%) represent only 20% of the current offerings.

The survey reports that collaboration between IWLP and MFL units keeps increasing as we witness a change in the latter's configuration within the wider university structures. In particular, there is a tendency for MFL units to merge with cognate disciplines and lose their independent status as units in their own right, effectively being downscaled within institutional hierarchies. The question arises then about whether deeper collaboration between language-related units increases or reduces the strong presence of languages in the sector.

When considering the current political climate, the survey reveals institutional attitudes towards language policies and internationalization strategies, and institutional stances in

¹ In this report, 'language modules' are those whose object of study is language.

relation to Brexit. Whilst the presence of institutional language strategies remains patchy, the institutions surveyed seem to have taken steps to offset the potentially adverse consequences of the UK exiting the European Union. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are particularly keen to safeguard the existence of the Erasmus scheme and are actively seeking to reinstate bilateral agreements and individual arrangements with their European counterparts.

Cross-sector collaborations also continue to exist under the Routes into Languages umbrella albeit on reduced funding and scale. In this respect, the formal suspension of funding in 2016 has not had a completely adverse and detrimental effect on the work the brand conducted; a number of HEIs and primary and secondary schools continue in fact to work jointly and nurture collaborations successfully established in the past.

In an increasingly uncertain landscape, the survey responses invite us to collaborate further between the different providers in the sector, both nationally and internationally, in a bid to strengthen the languages agenda and presence. It is hoped that this report is of use to the languages communities in their efforts to prevail and flourish.

1. Introduction

The *Language Provision in UK MFL Departments 2019 Survey* has reached its second year of publication after the sector was surveyed for the first time in 2018.²

The purpose of the 2019 survey is to continue gathering relevant data for the Higher Education (HE) languages sector and community with a particular focus on language provision in MFL degrees. With the present iteration, the survey continues to investigate the degree of collaboration between IWLP and MFL units whilst presenting new information on current areas of interest. The core data collected through the survey forms the basis of a longitudinal study on the collaboration within language-related units in universities in order to monitor changes in response to external factors, such as the current political climate in the UK. Additionally, with each publication, a second area of the survey collects data that is deemed to be currently relevant to the sector by the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) community through discussion and feedback from the UCML Executive Committee.

In 2019, the survey opens its focus to language policies and internationalization strategies, institutional attitudes in response to the current uncertainty of the political climate in relation to Brexit, and the configuration of MFL units within the wider University institution. Lastly, the third section of the study investigates collaborations between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Routes into Languages.³

The 2019 survey has been designed, distributed and analysed by the UCML in collaboration with the *Language Acts and Worldmaking* project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) Open World Research Initiative (OWRI).

² The survey from 2018 can be accessed here: <https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/5a467-languageprovisioninukmfldepartmentssurvey2018finalversionforpublication.pdf>

³ Routes into Languages is the "initiative funded between 2006 and 2016 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to promote the take-up of languages through cooperation between universities, schools and colleges in England". To access more information on the project, see:

<https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/>

2. Method

2.1 Surveying the sector

Following on from the 2018 survey, 62 university departments were identified in 2019 as providers of MFL degrees compared to 69 in 2018. The number was updated through online searches of publicly-available information from university websites, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the 2019 University League Table by *The Guardian*.⁴

The lists from these sources were triangulated and compared against the list of institutions used for the same purposes in the 2018 survey report (Álvarez et al., 2018). Languages that appear on degree titles were used as the defining criteria to produce the 2019 final count. It is important to highlight that the number of HEIs on the different lists varies for different reasons and fluctuates in time due to managerial decisions taken by individual institutions in relation to the very existence of Modern Foreign Languages units. The final number of 62 HEIs produced by this survey was correct as of June 2019.

Regrettably, a decline in the number of institutions offering languages as degree programmes continues to be recorded nationally with a dramatic drop of seven HEIs no longer offering MFL programmes over the course of one year. This may partly account for the lower number of responses received for the 2019 survey; however, data confirms the systematic closure of languages departments "as more than 50 universities in the UK have cut courses, or scrapped departments entirely since 2000" (Kelly, 2019) prompting the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modern Languages to issue a document addressing a framework proposal for a national recovery programme for languages in March 2019.⁵

As was the case in 2018, languages offered as an add-on to programmes through IWLP courses (e.g. at Language Centres) were not counted; conversely, language minors attached to specialist modules within dedicated MFL departments were.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2019/jun/07/university-guide-2020-league-table-for-modern-languages-linguistics>

⁵ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/cj6kdqgl4uaz685/LanguagesRecoveryProgrammeAPPGMFL-Embargo4March.pdf?dl=0>

2.2 Questionnaire

An online survey was created using Qualtrics online surveys available through the Lancaster University's server. An email with a link to the questionnaire was sent in May 2019 to individual contacts at the 62 HEIs offering language degree programmes. The survey closed on 31 July 2019.

Data in the following key areas was obtained: the range of languages offered at undergraduate MFL degree programmes; the level of collaboration, where relevant, between teaching staff in Language Centres or IWLP units and teaching staff in MFL departments; the perceived value of this collaboration; the existence of university language policies at the institutions surveyed; the response of HEIs to the political situation created by Brexit and the potential degree of collaboration between HEIs and the nation-wide initiative Routes into Languages after funding ended in July 2016 within England.

2.3 Participation

Of the 62 HEIs providing programmes of study in MFL in the UK in 2019, valid responses were received from 30 institutions (48%). The range and distribution of languages on offer are commented on below (see 2.5 Languages).

2.4 Respondents

Results from this survey show that, in line with findings from the 2018 study, all respondents hold senior (management) positions in the HEIs to which they belong.

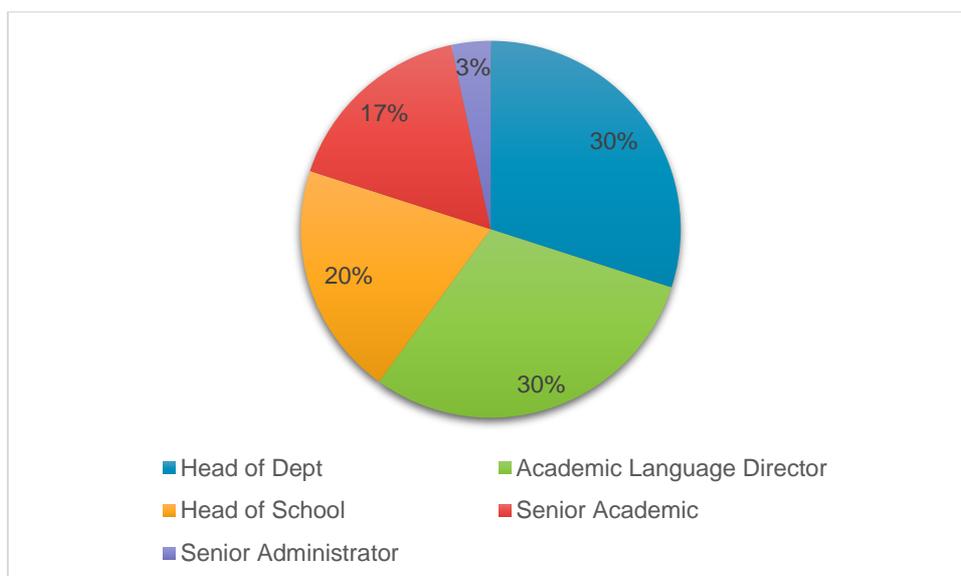


Figure 1: Role of survey respondents (n=30)

From the 30 respondents, most were Heads of Modern Languages Departments (9) or Language Executives or Directors of Language Studies or similar (9), followed by Heads of School (6), Senior Academics (5) and a Senior Administrator (1).

2.5 Languages

When looking at the spread of languages offered as degree subjects by the various HEIs, a similar picture emerges when comparing the 2019 survey with the one carried out in 2018 (Álvarez et al., 2018, p. 23). The variety and number of languages entered is consistent with previous findings also when the lower number of respondents for 2019 is taken into account. The presence of British Sign Language (BSL) continues to be significant: of the 8 entries listed under 'other' for the languages provided in the survey, 4 of them were entries for BSL by 4 different institutions, one more than in 2018.

2.6 Limitations

In order to keep the survey brief and to encourage participation, the number of questions and the amount of information requested was very focused. Therefore, the survey did not collect information on issues such as the range of language levels offered by each institution, that is, whether the languages were available from *ab initio* or not. In future, it might be worth collecting specific data on language provision at postgraduate level too.

3. Findings

The results of the survey reveal that there continues to be diversity in terms of the range of languages offered as part of MFL undergraduate degree programmes despite the significant drop in number of HEIs offering them; however, no changes emerge in terms of which languages remain more or less widely taught in universities compared to the findings from last year's survey. The second part of the survey reveals data on institutional attitudes towards both internationalisation strategies and Brexit. The extent of the integration and collaboration between MFL departments and IWLP units also varies within each HEI. Interestingly, the 2019 results reveal a higher degree of collaboration between the two units which suggests a joint and renewed sense of purpose in the face of a challenging national climate, already reported by Oxford University in 2016.⁶

⁶ Katrin Kohl, *Modern Languages in the UK – all change after the EU Referendum?* Available at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/oxford-and-brexit/brexit-analysis/modern-languages-uk#>

3.1 Languages offered

The survey did not reveal big surprises in terms of which languages are more widely offered across the 30 participating institutions compared to 2018 results (Álvarez et al., 2018, p. 12).

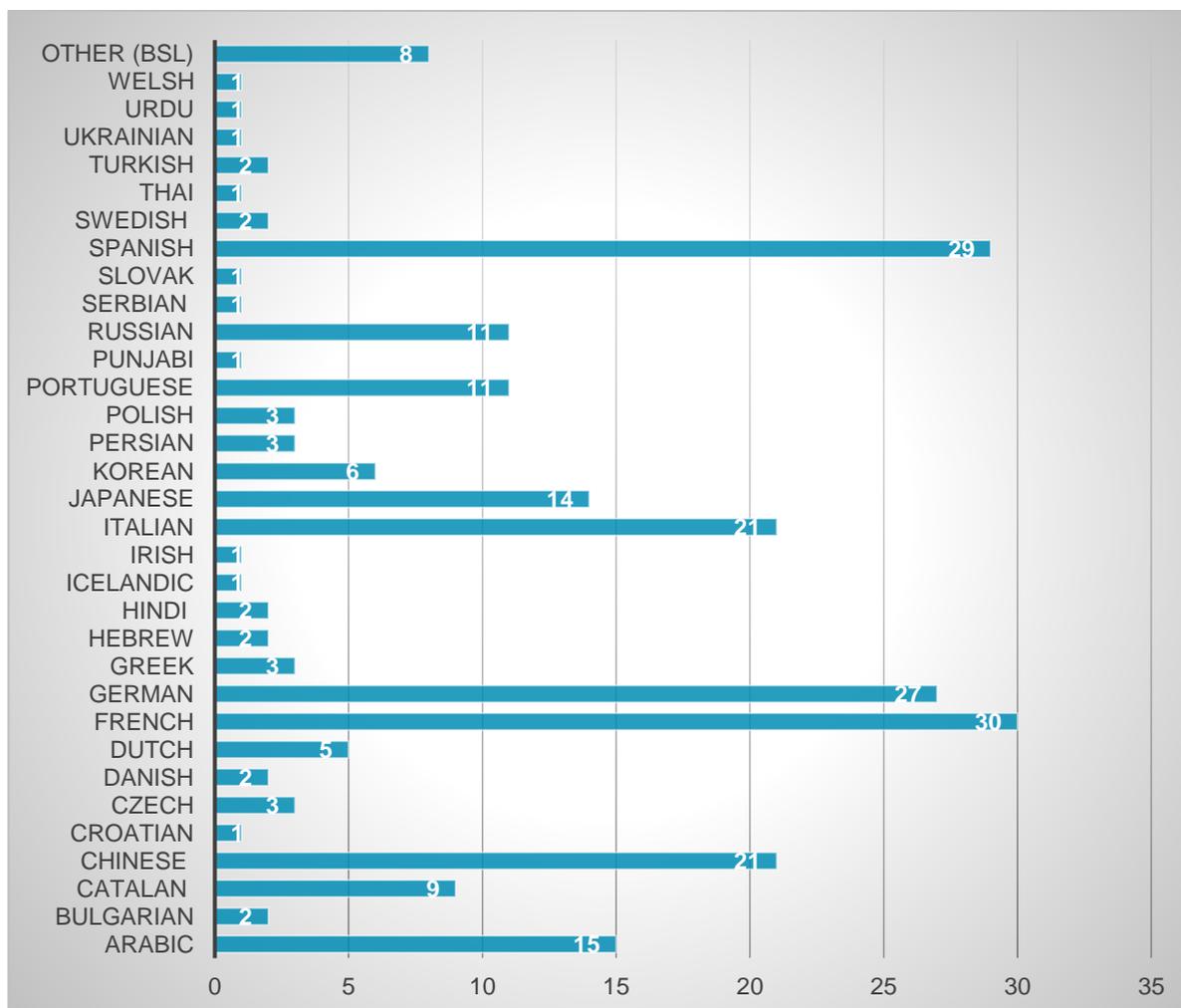


Figure 2: Languages offered in UK MFL departments in 2019 (n=30)

Chinese, French, German, Italian and Spanish are taught in the majority of HEIs, with French being the most widely taught (30 HEIs), followed by Spanish (29 HEIs), German (27 HEIs), Italian (21 HEIs) and Chinese (21). This data indeed corroborates the findings that show an increase in Chinese takers nationally (more A-level students took Chinese in 2019 than German)⁷; however, the results must be read with caution regarding numbers for

⁷ Katharine Carruthers, "More British children are learning Mandarin Chinese – but an increase in qualified teachers is urgently needed", *The Conversation*, 8 February 2019. Available at:

<http://theconversation.com/more-british-children-are-learning-mandarin-chinese-but-an-increase-in-qualified-teachers-is-urgently-needed-103883>; see also Amy Walker, "A-level results: foreign languages

both French and German since the UK-wide picture reveals a continued dip in learners of these subjects. Other commonly-taught languages include Catalan (9), Portuguese (11), Russian (11), Japanese (14) and Arabic (15). The remaining less-widely taught languages are offered in a smaller number of institutions (between 1 and 5). This year, no entries were recorded for Finnish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Norwegian and Romanian. Interestingly, of the institutions surveyed, 8 indicated that a number of other languages are being offered with British Sign Language as the most popular of them (4).

3.2 Modern Foreign Languages in institutional structures

Other than programme and department closures, a strong tendency in UK HEIs has been the amalgamation of MFL communities and activities into larger units, often merging with other disciplines. Data from this year's survey shows a continuation of this trend, with further programmes closing and departments being restructured, but for the first time there is data that speaks to the hierarchical space occupied by MFLs within university structures. More precise data needs to be gathered in future surveys, but for the time being the survey suggests that the structural 'downgrading' of MFL units is continuing.

As Figure 3 below shows, a variety of responses were recorded in the survey.

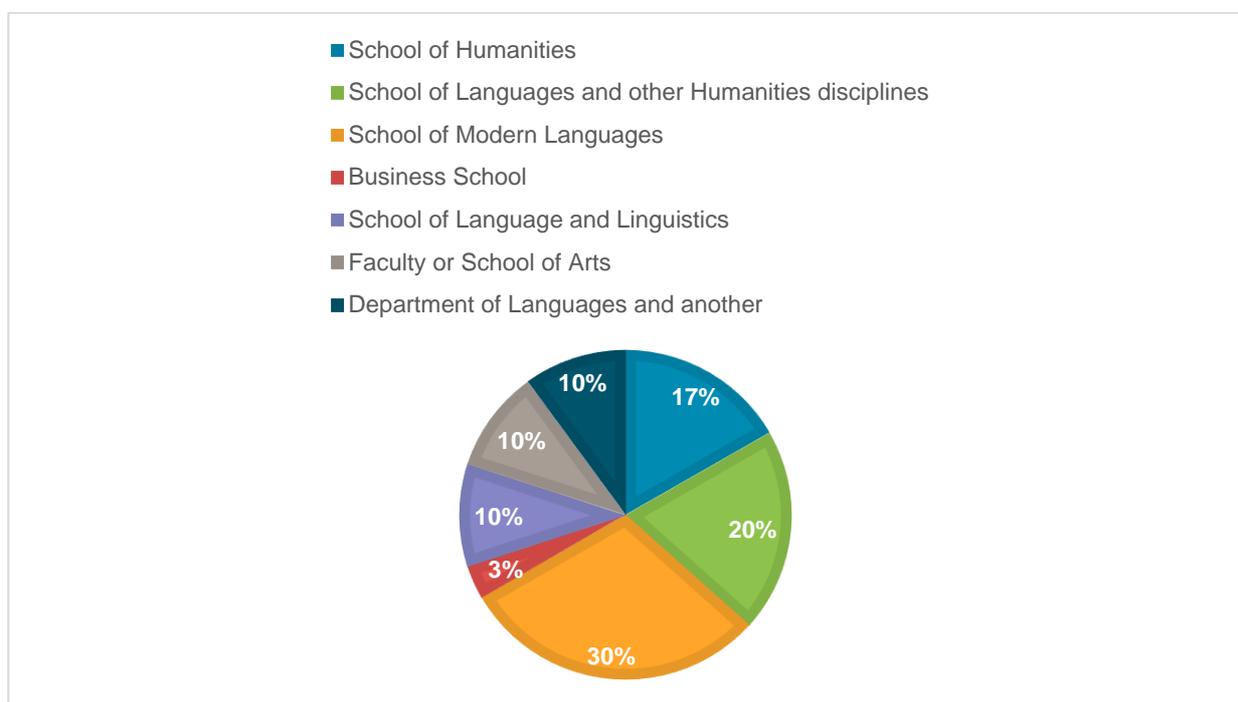


Figure 3: Modern Foreign Languages units in institutional structures (n=29)

suffer further slump", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/aug/16/a-level-results-foreign-languages-suffer-further-slump>

The majority of respondents stated that MFL is located in the School of Modern Languages or as independent units (30%). In other HEIs, it located within the School of Humanities (17%) or within a School of Languages and another Humanities disciplines (20%). In the latter case, complementary subjects included: Art, Art History, Communications, English Language, Global Studies, History, Music, Philosophy, and Politics. 10% of the respondents are within the School of Languages and Linguistics and another 10% within the Faculty/School of Arts and Social Sciences. Only one respondent stated that Languages are part of the Business school, whereas three others identified themselves as 'Departments' either in their own right or with cognate disciplines (Linguistics Science, Information and Communication).

The next iterations of the survey will help to provide a longitudinal view of how the structure of MFL departments/schools continues to change and be shaped by ongoing reorganisations and restructures.

3.2.1 Modern Foreign Languages departments

From the 30 responses gathered, 50% of MFL units (15) declared School status, 10 of them as stand-alone Schools and five combined with other disciplines. Eleven units (37%) declared Department, Section or Centre status, 7 of which as stand-alone entities and 4 merged with other disciplines. The complementary disciplines with which MFL is associated have been identified as: Art, Art History, Communications, English Language, Global Studies, Music, History, Philosophy, and Politics.

None of the units declared Faculty status (which they may have had in the past) and 4 (13%) did not provide sufficient information to indicate their status. Signalling a possible trend in recent times, one of the participating MFL units had just been merged with the IWLP unit and another one had just lost School status to become a stand-alone department.

The details are sketchy but a hypothesis could be that MFL as a discipline has been and continues to be losing status within institutional structures as a result of financial restrictions and perceived insufficient recruitment of students. Anecdotal data from other questions seems to suggest that institutions are changing structures to push for greater collaboration between IWLP and MFL units for cost-saving reasons.

3.3 Models of collaboration between MFL departments and IWLP

As in the 2018 edition of the survey, in 2019 a section focused on enquiring about models of collaboration between MFL departments and IWLP as this is increasingly important in

the sector. This set of responses builds on the data collected on the 2018 survey and seeks to map any changes in the way in which both sections are seen to interact. As in previous results, most of the institutions surveyed have a Language Centre (80%).

3.3.1 Presence of Institution Wide Language Provision

This section of the survey queried whether those institutions that do not presently have a Language Centre did so in the past. Of 6 respondents, 2 institutions claimed that a Language Centre had existed: in one instance, this was the case when learning a language was compulsory before 2002 for students doing certain degrees (e.g. European studies); in the other case, at some point in the past students could join in credit-bearing language modules as electives through the Language Centre.

When questioned about any potential plans to open a Language Centre in the future, one of these institutions answered positively whereas five claimed that no such plans exist; one further respondent remained unsure.

3.3.2 Types of collaboration

In particular, the focus was on the extent of the collaboration between IWLP and MFL units according to 5 parameters: Tutors teaching for both Departments and IWLP, Joint internal moderation/second marking, Collaboration in speaking exams, Shared personal tutoring duties and Other activities. As was the case in the previous report, the type and extent of collaboration between the units is varied and widespread (Figure 4).

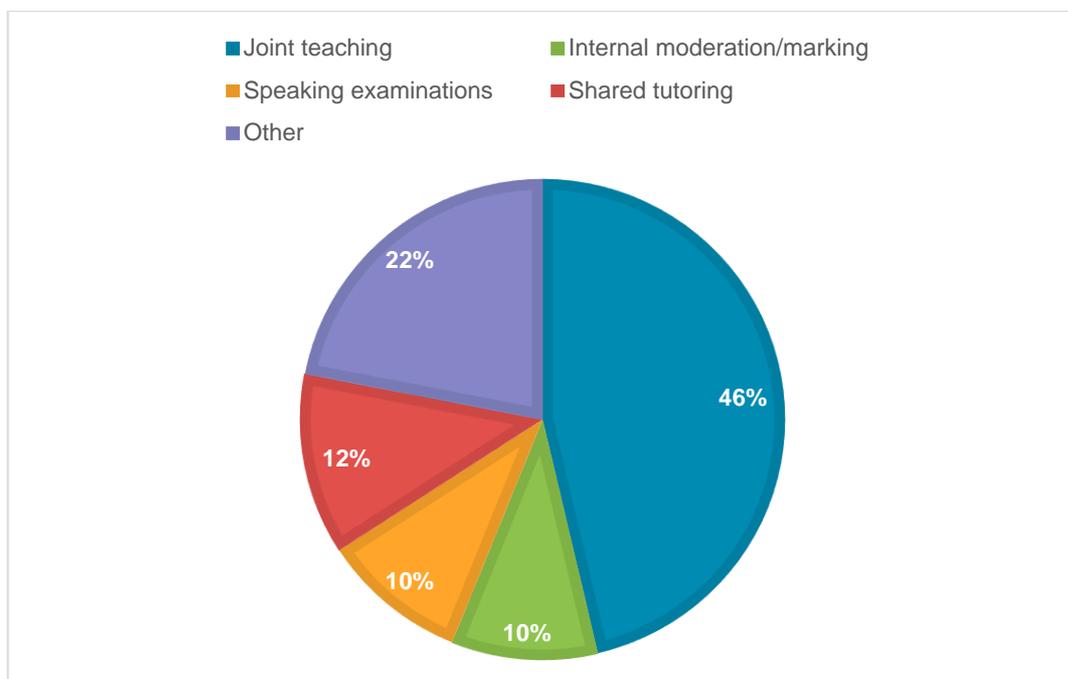


Figure 4: Collaboration between MFL departments and IWLP (n=23)

Of the respondents who provided data, the main area of collaboration between the two units was joint teaching whereby staff divide their time between degree-level teaching and university-wide teaching (46%). Shared assessment also formed part of the shared duties albeit to a smaller extent.

3.3.3 Length and value of collaboration

Data collected in this area of the survey continues to show that IWLP-MFL collaboration is well established, with the majority of partnerships having existed for 4-6 years, 7-10 years and over 10 years (19 institutions of the 22 who responded), as Figure 5 below shows.

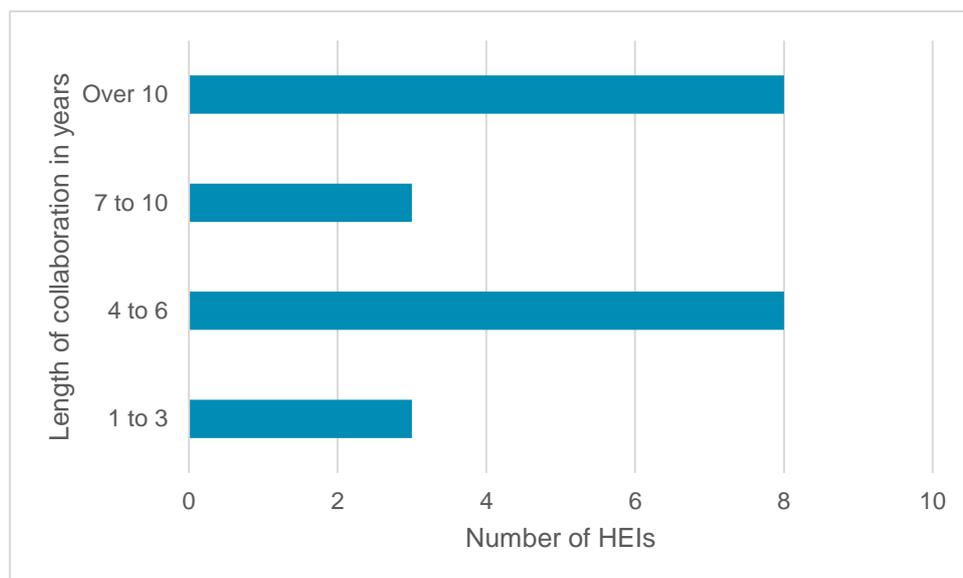


Figure 5: Length of IWLP-MFL collaboration in years (n=22)

The well-established length of partnerships seems to be corroborated by the value the departments attach to these according to the comments collected in Question 7.1.5. Overall, a strong sense of cooperation emerges with departments acknowledging the importance of a two-way collaboration. In one particular case, the very existence of IWLP was deemed 'mission-critical'. Other widespread comments can be summarized in four broad areas:

1. Importance of Language Centres coordinating the university-wide language teaching and promoting languages provision to local, regional, national and international partners and third parties. In this respect, the very existence of IWLP is deemed 'invaluable'.
2. Importance of proactive collaboration between departments and language centres: one respondent suggests that, given the perceived vulnerability of languages on a national scale, it is essential that both units work together and in complementary ways rather than in competition (another respondent commented on how IWLPs

represent an additional selling point at Open Days, thus emphasising the link between the two providers). Additionally, such collaboration allows for the building of a 'critical mass' of students and opens up to the sharing of common practices in pedagogy and the creation of additional synergies between the 2 units. By joining forces, one respondent claimed, "IWLP provides adaptability and flexibility to the language curriculum, whereas departments provide stability and academic credibility (although the two are not mutually exclusive as a growing number of Language Centres are integrated within departments)".

3. In some instances, Language Centres are part of the School of Modern Languages and this enables HEIs to deliver a larger number of languages overall. Such cooperation extends to language pedagogy and innovations. In some cases, the same integrated unit delivers degree level, minors, and extracurricular modules. The shared identity is seen by one respondent as "important and enabling".
4. One perceived obstacle to the productive collaboration of the two units is "the need to ensure that [senior management] does not come to the view that all language work could be delivered in the IWLP without distinction between degree level provision across the four skills, and the communicative proficiency approach developed through the IWLP". This point highlights the historical tension between the two providers which, in the past, contributed to the widespread view of IWLP as "a service provider". One respondent suggested that by being attached to established departments, IWLP may stop being considered in a diminishing manner and, by the same token, "departmental collaboration with IWLP can help languages become more resilient as a subject when considering the current climate".

3.3.4 Improving collaboration

14 participants provided suggestions for improving collaboration between IWLP and MFL units. 29% of them (4) replied that both units should be or should stay fully merged as a single entity. The reasons range from financial sustainability to achieving parity academically and administratively, and as a way of offering new degree pathways and programmes. 57% argued that close collaboration levels should be kept to innovate in teaching, share staff, resources, methodology and assessment, and to break down the historical language-content divide. Finally, 2 participants proposed greater investment in languages to enable an expansion of the language provision across their institutions to include less-widely taught languages.

3.4 Language strategy

One section of the survey enquired whether the represented institutions have a university-wide 'Language strategy' in place, with "explicit focus on fostering multilingualism and

promoting language learning among students and staff to ensure an international dimension in [the HEIs'] academic mission".

Out of the 30 responding universities, only 11 (36%) confirmed that they had a university language strategy (in one institution, it was classed as a 'Language Statement') whilst 5 more (17%) said that they had 'other' arrangements in place. Interestingly, 47% of the respondents answered negatively to this question as Figure 6 below shows.

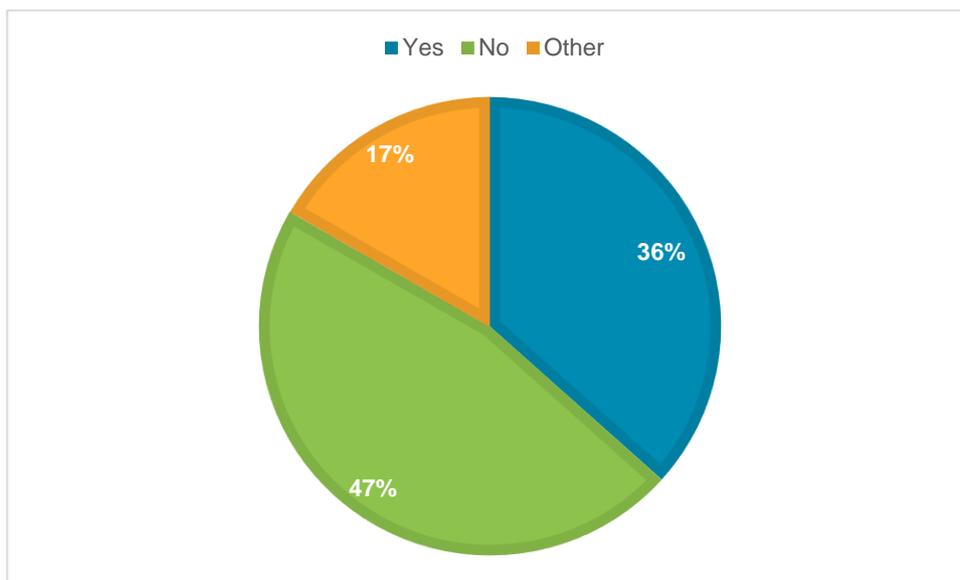


Figure 6: UK HEIs with a Language Strategy (n=30)

Nevertheless, almost all respondents underlined the need for institutional commitment to language provision and gave some indication of the priorities they had identified.

3.4.1 Description and evidence of strategy

The answers given indicate a relatively broad interpretation of the concept of institutional language strategy, with many institutions seeing it as support for institution wide schemes which offer a wide range of languages and the right for all students (and staff) to have access to language learning opportunities. In terms of what a language strategy should include, a number of respondents argued that all students should have access to 'degree level provision' or credit-bearing electives and should receive transcripts recording their achievements. Two other institutions mentioned the need to support student outward mobility and staff visits while several others highlighted the importance of a commitment to bilingualism (particularly for one Welsh HEI) and linguistic diversity amongst staff and students. This would incorporate support for 'regional minoritized languages' such as Irish and Welsh, support for the first language of international students (and staff) as well as English language and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) support for these students. Many respondents highlighted the associated need for a focus on 'culture' in its broadest

sense and for provision for all students to develop intercultural competence, cultural agility and awareness as well as empathy, pragmatic skills and intellectual confidence. These are seen as key employability skills for graduates.

Several respondents who indicated they had an institutional strategy in place gave an indication of its strategic aim, and two supplied web links to their publicly available strategies. Institutions articulated their strategies as:

- relating to the "coverage and capacity for languages, and also the vision for how languages will sit within the wider curriculum in the university";
- maintaining the "commitment to in-depth study of the world's societies and cultures";
- "putting languages at the centre of our strategy as an internationally focused institution, which seeks to develop students as global citizens of the future".

A significant number of respondents, whether they had a language strategy in place or not, argued that the concept of support for languages in a general sense has to include access to appropriate funding.

3.4.2 Responsibility for strategy

As for where support for a language strategy comes from within an institution, for several universities, language learning is at the heart of the internationalisation strategy whilst two other institutions mentioned that languages are embedded within their education strategies and are part of the wider curriculum. In another institution, the "Equality and Diversity unit is consulting on a policy which incorporates a linguistic diversity element". Another respondent reported that they were "lobbying for an explicit commitment to language learning" to be included in their new institutional strategic plan.

The need to gain support for languages from stakeholders, both internal and external to the university, was mentioned by several respondents and the importance of dialogue (and targeted messages) is seen as key. Internal audiences may include university senior management, students, and staff in other subject areas who might be suspicious of "special pleading" for a particular subject area. It was said to be important to show how language provision maps onto the university's overall strategic aims. Externally, there is seen to be a need for dialogue with local schools, including parents, and employers as well as government. One respondent felt that in order "to put pressure on government decisions regarding language study at school level [we should be] setting a clear example at university level".

3.4.3 Priorities in strategy

Comments from respondents have given considerable insight into what can be categorised as the 'drivers' for implementation of an institutional language strategy and the 'priorities' that need to be considered in its formulation. Many of these are given above and other examples include:

- the point that a language strategy will facilitate any university's international strategy;
- the argument that languages are needed to support the local and global economy and are thus part of graduate employability;
- the argument that 'graduateness' should include a "vision of the global graduate with internationalist skills" and multilingualism;
- in Scotland, the "need to get in step with the 1 + 2 languages policy in Primary education".

Others may find the points raised here useful in helping to state the case for their own institutional language policy. Many of them are summarised in the message to stakeholders from one respondent:

"Learning a new language develops your cultural awareness, opens up new career fields and helps you stand out in a competitive global economy. Today's society is increasingly globalised, which means that managing relationships across cultures is often essential for organisations to thrive. Graduates who speak another language are, therefore, in high demand with business and industry, in roles that extend well beyond interpreting and translation to encompass all elements of business transaction, international cooperation and politics."

3.5 Impact of Brexit

Since June 2016, lack of clarity on how and when the UK would withdraw from the European Union (EU) has been a source of great concern for universities and for both staff and students. The sixth area of the questionnaire focused on how HEIs are dealing with the protracted uncertainty of this situation.

3.5.1 Steps to address the Brexit transition

The questions sought to investigate, in particular, whether institutions had adopted steps to mitigate the impact of Brexit.⁸

⁸ See also findings from Universities UK (UUK) survey. Summary in "Majority of universities well-prepared for no-deal Brexit; but continue to fear negative impact", 16 September 2019. Available at:

Most institutions provided an answer to these questions and some clear measures have emerged.

1. The majority of the HEIs surveyed have set up specific web pages directly dealing with the issue of Brexit. Such websites greatly vary in terms of quantity and quality of information provided: some offer a general explanation of the current political situation, others focus on giving advice to different constituencies, some have detailed FAQs, regular updates, and one institution has set up a Brexit helpdesk.
2. Groups internal to individual institutions have been set up in order to review the situation and make recommendations. In some HEIs, regular briefings are also being held providing support for staff and non-UK EU citizens (in some cases institutions have paid the governmental 'settled status' fee for its non-UK EU staff), while in others regular updates on Brexit are sent from central administrative offices.
3. Three of the respondents stated that their institutions have pledged to underwrite the Erasmus agreement for two or further years or are considering how to deal with (lack of) funding related to Brexit.
4. Some institutions are reviewing communications with European partners focusing particularly on recruitment strategies and willingness to continue existing partnerships in case of an adverse impact.
5. Other measures include the setting up of a Brexit Risk register and the opening of a university branch in mainland Europe. In a minority of cases, staff remain unsure about the measures that have been implemented by their HEI.

3.5.2 Arrangements with European partners

The survey focused on exchange programmes and enquired about specific arrangements or agreements made by HEIs with European partners to minimise the impact of a possible exit from the Erasmus scheme. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that communications with European partners have started and are currently ongoing to ensure that bilateral agreements remain in place following the UK's exit from the EU. Most of the institutions have contacted their European counterparts individually and some have agreed to underwrite the current arrangements for the immediate post-Brexit period until further details emerge. Such flurry of activity across the board seems to suggest that HEIs

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Majority-of-universities-well-prepared-for-no-deal-Brexit;-but-continue-to-fear-negative-impact.aspx>

are aware of the importance of the Erasmus scheme and see it as an integral part of the degree programmes they offer.⁹

3.6 Collaborations with Routes into Languages

One question of the survey sought to find information on any existing or expired collaborations between the surveyed HEIs and the Routes into Languages umbrella. Encouragingly, 64% of the respondents answered positively while just one institution (3%) claimed that they had not collaborated with Routes. The remaining responses (33%) were returned blank (see Figure 7 below). This question is of particular relevance at this point in time as the future of Routes into Languages is currently under review after the cessation of funding in 2016.

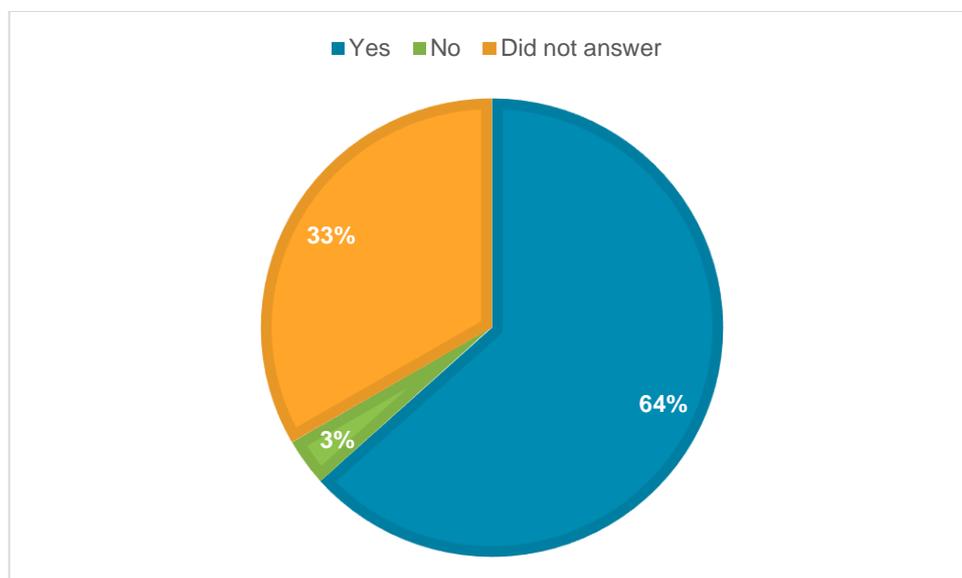


Figure 7: Involvement with Routes into Languages activities (n=30)

There were 20 responses to the request for information on collaborations, if any, individual institutions have, or have had, with Routes-branded activities and the picture given is rather incomplete since there is little or no information from many universities who were active participants in the original Routes into Languages programmes.

In England, there remains some institutionally-funded activity and in the case of at least one regional consortium, the Routes regional lead is working with other partner universities. 'Removal of funding' in another case means that the former consortium is

⁹ UUK has been guiding universities on issues around transnational education and other consequences of Brexit. See their resources and guidance on "Brexit and UK universities", <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/brexit/Pages/brexit-and-universities.aspx>

now 'dormant'. The activities reported include language activities, film events, summer schools and recruiting undergraduates as Student Language ambassadors. In one institution, up to 50 ambassadors are recruited each year to help with school outreach activities. Six other universities (including one university in Northern Ireland) are participating in a Routes mentoring initiative funded by the four OWRI projects and the AHRC Leadership Fellowship for Modern Languages. The aim is to bid for further Routes funding for this type of activity and, if successful, for Northern Ireland which did not participate in the original Routes programme to come under the Routes banner in future. The respondent from Northern Ireland reports that the university currently works with the Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching & Research (NICILT).

In Scotland, which like Northern Ireland has not participated in Routes activities, four of the Scottish universities who responded to the survey indicate the extent to which they work together with other organisations such as Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT), the Scottish Association for Language Teaching, Education Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Linguists, UCML Scotland, local authorities and other cross-sector collaborative initiatives in order to run outreach activities. One of the universities reports that they are aiming to develop a Modern Languages mentoring programme to start in the next academic year.

There was little detail given of Routes activities by universities in Wales, but funding has been ongoing since 2016 and the network is funded on a consortium model by five Welsh universities, the British Council Wales and the four education consortia who support schools work in Wales. Routes Cymru (Wales) is based at Cardiff University with a further centre at Bangor University. It delivers Pupil Language Ambassador training, A level Master classes, careers talks and trains Student Language Ambassadors who support language taster days, sometimes in collaboration with English partners.

It is gratifying to see that the importance of universities working together with schools and other bodies is recognised in the activities that are reported and that the Routes brand is still current. However, those activities that take place in England are likely to be patchy and indicate a need for further collaboration and for more joined-up thinking nationally. UCML will hope to take on this role when it assumes responsibility for Routes from the Office for Students (OfS) in the New Year.

4. Conclusions

This study sought to gather data on the current MFL landscape following on from the first iteration of the survey carried out in 2018 (Álvarez et al., 2018). The overall objective of the study is to provide a set of longitudinal data that can help map provision and changes in the languages landscape on a national level. In particular, the survey asked questions relating to languages taught in British universities, the extent of the collaboration between MFL and IWLP units, the existence of 'language strategies' within HEIs, steps that universities have taken in order to address the Brexit transition (with particular regard to Erasmus agreements), and information on collaborations HEIs carried out in partnership with the Routes into Languages project.

When compared to 2018, results from 2019 show a decrease in the number of HEIs offering languages as a degree subject (from 69 down to 62), which confirms the lamentable trend in departmental closures and downsizing that has been characteristic of the sector since 2008, with the accumulated loss of some 50 higher education language providers overall. The spread of languages offered, however, has not changed in the course of one year (52 languages offered). Of these, the most commonly-taught languages remain Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Chinese. It is worth mentioning that Chinese is emerging as one of the most commonly-taught languages in the UK in line with its perceived increased usefulness, nationally, as a language associated with business purposes. Indeed, in 2019 more A-Level students were entered for Chinese than German for the first time since records began.

The survey also investigated the distribution and configuration of MFL departments within universities. Findings in this area reveal the strong tendency towards an amalgamation of MFL communities and activities into larger units, often merging with other disciplines confirming the continuation of what was observed in 2018. One particular area of concern in this regard is the perceived structural 'downgrading' of languages across the sector on a national level and an attendant loss of status and leverage institutionally which is becoming more severe through the systematic loss in number of HE providers.

One other aspect of the study offered an insight into the mode of collaboration between IWLPs and MFL departments focussing, as in the previous survey, on the type and length of collaboration and the perception of such collaboration amongst respondents. The results from 2019 suggest that, where such collaboration was in place, it continued to be perceived as worthwhile by the respondents. Replicating findings from 2018, the level of IWLP-MFL collaboration encompasses administrative duties, teaching and marking. The

value of such collaboration has emerged with additional strength in 2019 despite a lower number of respondents. Such findings continue to suggest that collaboration within the sector may represent a successful way of moving forward in uncertain times.

The survey also investigated the approach the responding institutions have taken with regard to the uncertainty generated by the Brexit climate. All HEIs have provided some form of support around this issue, ranging from the creation of web pages with information and advice for staff and students to the setting up of groups or committees internal to individual institutions to address Brexit and its challenges. The managerial staff surveyed seemed overall to be aware of the direction taken by their institution in this area and the resources the latter had made available. Additionally, the survey enquired about potential measures HEIs had put in place to ensure the continuation of the Erasmus scheme, when the UK exits the EU. Results from this section are encouraging. The individuals who provided a response here claimed that their institution had already started to approach, or had already stipulated agreements with, their European counterparts. Such a positive response may be directly attributable to the great importance universities place on the Residence Abroad period, thus acknowledging it as a non-negotiable part of an MFL degree.

Other encouraging data emerges with regards to the Routes into Languages programme: despite the cessation of funding in 2016, collaborations between HEIs and primary and secondary schools continue to take place under the brand's banner as joint ventures both on a local and national scale.

Overall, this study continues to show the diversity of the higher education languages landscape. From the results, it seems clear that many of the various challenges faced by the sector can be addressed by collaborations both internal and external to the institutions. In particular, links and collaborations with Language Centres seem to be on the rise perhaps as a response to the continuing threat of departmental closure. British HEIs are also reaching out to international institutions in order to safeguard their involvement in the Erasmus scheme (or future equivalent) through agreements and collaborations initiated or pursued with the relevant interested international parties. Projects run under the Routes umbrella also testify to the need of cross-sector collaborations within a financially challenging climate.

It is hoped that this study, through the provision of collected data, is of use to the community and to language practitioners. It is recommended that such survey continues to be carried out annually in response to, and focussing on, the needs of the wider sector.

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Appendix: List of participating HEIs in the 2019 survey

1. Aberdeen
2. Aberystwyth
3. Birmingham
4. Bristol
5. Buckingham
6. Cardiff
7. Central Lancashire
8. Chester
9. Dundee
10. East Anglia
11. Edinburgh Napier
12. Imperial College
13. Lancaster
14. Leicester
15. Liverpool
16. Manchester
17. Manchester Metropolitan
18. Newcastle
19. Open University
20. Oxford
21. Queen's Belfast
22. Reading
23. Royal Holloway
24. SOAS
25. St Andrews
26. Sussex
27. Warwick
28. Westminster
29. York
30. York St John