

BUSINESS MEETING

Item 4b: Report of the VC Languages & Intercultural Education

I need to start this report with thanks to Elena Polisca who was previously in the vice-chair role for all the work she has done to date and for her enthusiasm and willingness to continue with some of the projects she has helped to initiate.

This report has three sections and concentrates on priorities for languages going forward.

1. The Languages landscape

Statistics

Data which gives us an accurate picture of the take up of Languages in all sectors is vital, as is collaboration at key times of the year with other organisations such as the Association for Language Learning and the British Council so that efforts are not duplicated. Some of the interesting data which has emerged in the course of the current academic year is summarised below.

- **A-level and GCSE results 2019**

In summary, the English and Welsh A-level results and the Scottish Highers for 2019 seem to reveal quite similar pictures. Overall numbers in the ‘big three’ languages were mainly down in French and German (although German showed a small increase of 0.2% in England) but up in Spanish, following a similar trend over the last few years. A DfE graph (see appendices, Graph 1) showing language A-level numbers in England since 1996 demonstrates how drastically these numbers have changed. In 1996, 22,718 students took French compared to 7,607 this year, whilst 9,306 took German in 1996 compared to 2,864 in 2019. In Spanish there were 4,095 students in 1996 compared to 7,932 in 2019. However, it seems that Languages are not the only Arts subject which is seeing a decline in A-level numbers (see appendices, Table 2). A recent BBC report (15th August 2019), suggests that this move away from the Arts and Humanities in England is partly linked to School Performance measures where the focus is on the EBacc and the Progress 8 school attainment measures.

The numbers gaining ‘A’ grades was up in all 3 languages in Scotland and Wales and slightly down in England except for German. There is an interesting difference in the percentage of students gaining these ‘A’ grades between languages and between countries (see below) which brings up the continuing question of severe grading even though efforts are being made by the English exam boards to address it. The almost complete disappearance of AS levels and the introduction of new A-level curricula are also complicating the picture. However, the news around GCSE numbers is slightly more optimistic in some languages.

Percentage of students gaining A or A at A-Levels and Highers in 2019*

	French	German	Spanish
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England	36.4%	40.4%	34.9%
Wales	39.2%	51.9%	34.8%
Scotland	49%	53%	47%

Source: OFQUAL 15th August / QualificationsWales.org (with thanks to Joe Carson for the Scottish data).

At GCSE, overall numbers taking a language in England in 2019 increased by 3.2 % over the previous year¹ as opposed to a 0.4 increase in 2018 which had been the first increase in 5 years (Schoolsweek, November, 2018). Languages according to the BBC report had been the only EBacc subject not seeing an increase in numbers at GCSE; we can hope that this trend has now been reversed. It is only by increasing GCSE numbers that we can widen the pool for A-level and university.

- **UCAS data**

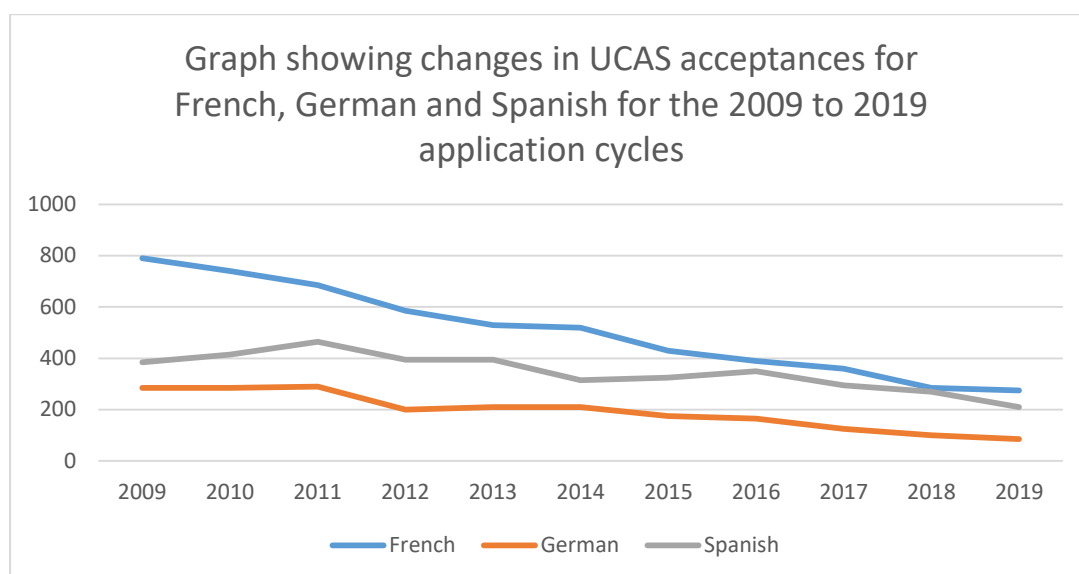
UCML with the support of the British Academy have now purchased datasets showing language/non-language Joint Honours combinations which are not otherwise available. Interrogation of this data should reveal interesting information about recent trends in language take-up and of students taking languages as part of their degree but who are otherwise invisible in freely available data. I hope that data analysis and a first report of the findings can be carried out fairly soon.

The first part of the UCAS end of 2018/2019 cycle report (applicants and acceptances) was published on 28th November, 2019 with detailed analysis following on 17th December and 30th January.

The report² shows that there was a 1.1% year-on year increase in overall university acceptances in the UK in the current academic year (2019/20). This is despite there being 1.9% fewer 18 year olds (the largest single demographic group) this year. The report makes interesting reading although analysis shows that the data around languages is somewhat depressing in terms of a year on year decline in university acceptances to study languages. The graph below shows the steady decline in numbers between 2009 and the current academic year for French, German and Spanish.

¹ French entries were up by 3.2 per cent to 130,931 while Spanish entries were up by 7.5 per cent, passing the 100,000 mark for the first time ever at 102,242. However, German entries were down 3.9 per cent to 42,791 and all other MFL subjects had collectively fallen by 1.9 per cent to 32,183. Source: the Joint Council for Qualifications.

² <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2019-end-cycle-report>



A table showing changes in numbers of acceptances between 2009 and 2019 for all relevant JACS codes is shown in the appendices (Table 4). It is quite hard to interpret the numbers within each code since it is a little unclear what they cover. For the sake of consistency, some codes have been omitted (e.g. R0: European Languages, Literature and Related, and R5: Portuguese Studies) from the table where there were no students in any one year. Moving forward, a new ‘broad brush’ subject classification system is being introduced, HECOS or the Higher education Classification of Subjects. This coding is being used for the first time in 2019 and shows that numbers accepted for Language and Areas Studies (CAH19) is 21135. It may be easier to track changes for languages quickly going forward with this new system.

Elsewhere in the report, it is interesting to note the increase in ‘conditional unconditional’ offers in 2019 with over a quarter of 18-year-old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales receiving a conditional offer which is made conditional if the applicants puts a university as their first choice. The numbers of these offers in Languages and Area Studies seem quite high (see appendices, Table 4) and it is interesting to wonder to what extent this distorts the normal pattern of acceptances.

- **UCML survey 2019**

The survey of language provision in UK ML Departments was carried out earlier this year with the Language Acts OWRI project and makes interesting reading. The section on institutional language strategies shows that more work needs to be done in this area – very few institutions have an agreed policy on languages in place and perhaps more sector wide discussion as to what a strategy might entail would be useful.

- **Other sources of data / information**

As key reports are published we need to signpost them. The recent House of Commons Briefing Paper (Number 07388, 16 October 2019), *Language Teaching in Schools (England)* gives a good overview of recent initiatives and trends in languages at school level and could be useful to pass onto senior managers so that they are more aware of the reasons for the ‘supply’ problems in our institutions.

2. Promoting Languages

- **Routes into Languages**

I will be chairing the Routes sub-committee now that the transfer of ownership to UCML is almost complete. Once the sub-committee is in place, there will need to be an urgent discussion of the shape of Routes going forward. Routes as a brand is still fairly active as can be seen on the current Routes

into languages website at <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/events>. It will be important to build on the good practice and experience that already exists.

The OWRI projects are currently supporting a joint Routes project which sees University language ambassadors in England working with year 11 pupils to see if positive engagement influences 'waverers' in their decisions about A-level subjects. Data is being collected from each of the participating schools and it is hoped that the results will help to support the argument for the need for further Government funding of these sorts of activities.

- **A national Languages strategy**

We need to work with others, especially the British Academy to push for a joined up national language strategy and play a role in keeping the case for languages in the public eye. There is an ever increasing need to do this in the current difficult political climate.

3. Developing the UCML Website

- In the re-design of the UCML website we need to ensure that it can become a one-stop shop for the languages community (HE/ FE and school sectors). One priority, is to highlight (provide space for) the many professional development opportunities available including conferences and workshops being held by member institutions. Other priorities include ensuring access to appropriate data, promotion of opportunities for funding and projects, making the case for languages and intercultural education and so on.

Finally, I was very pleased to represent UCML at the launch of the new Department of Languages and Cultures at the University of Reading on the 21st October

VW January, 2020

APPENDICES

Table 1: A-Level entries in Languages between 1996 and 2017

A-LEVEL ENTRIES IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES						
England, 16-18 year olds						
	French	German	Spanish	Other	All	as a % of all entries
1996	22,718	9,306	4,095	3,435	39,554	6.4%
1997	21,364	8,984	4,328	3,473	38,149	5.8%
1998	19,629	8,903	4,499	3,457	36,488	5.4%
1999	17,774	8,527	4,640	3,499	34,440	5.1%
2000	15,240	7,581	4,516	3,660	30,997	4.6%
2001	15,393	7,607	4,501	3,409	30,910	4.5%
2002	13,599	6,367	4,430	3,860	28,256	4.4%
2003	12,904	6,068	4,504	3,999	27,475	4.1%
2004	12,480	5,643	4,650	4,279	27,052	4.0%
2005	11,963	5,238	4,930	4,534	26,665	3.9%
2006	12,190	5,534	5,202	5,084	28,010	3.9%
2007	12,152	5,615	5,491	5,119	28,377	3.9%
2008	12,605	5,560	5,728	5,530	29,423	4.0%
2009	12,231	5,119	6,089	6,090	29,529	3.9%
2010	12,324	5,055	6,564	5,912	29,855	3.8%
2011	11,490	4,554	6,398	6,799	29,241	3.7%
2012	10,871	4,208	6,198	7,099	28,376	3.6%
2013	9,878	3,774	6,516	7,084	27,252	3.5%
2014	9,078	3,716	6,617	7,066	26,477	3.6%
2015	8,991	3,624	7,607	7,510	27,732	3.7%
2016	8,459	3,446	7,455	7,436	26,796	3.6%
2017	8,306	3,281	7,566	7,359	26,512	3.6%

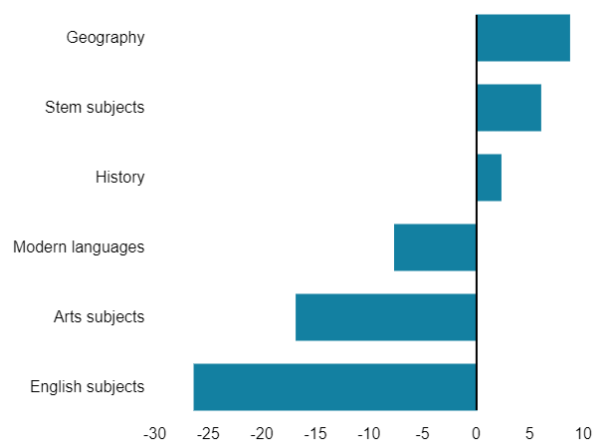
Source

[A-Level Results: various years, DfE](#)

Source: The Times, August 23rd 2019

Table 2: Percentage changes for A-level subjects between 2014 and 2019

% change in entries for A-Level subjects between 2014 and 2019



Source: Ofqual, provisional data for England



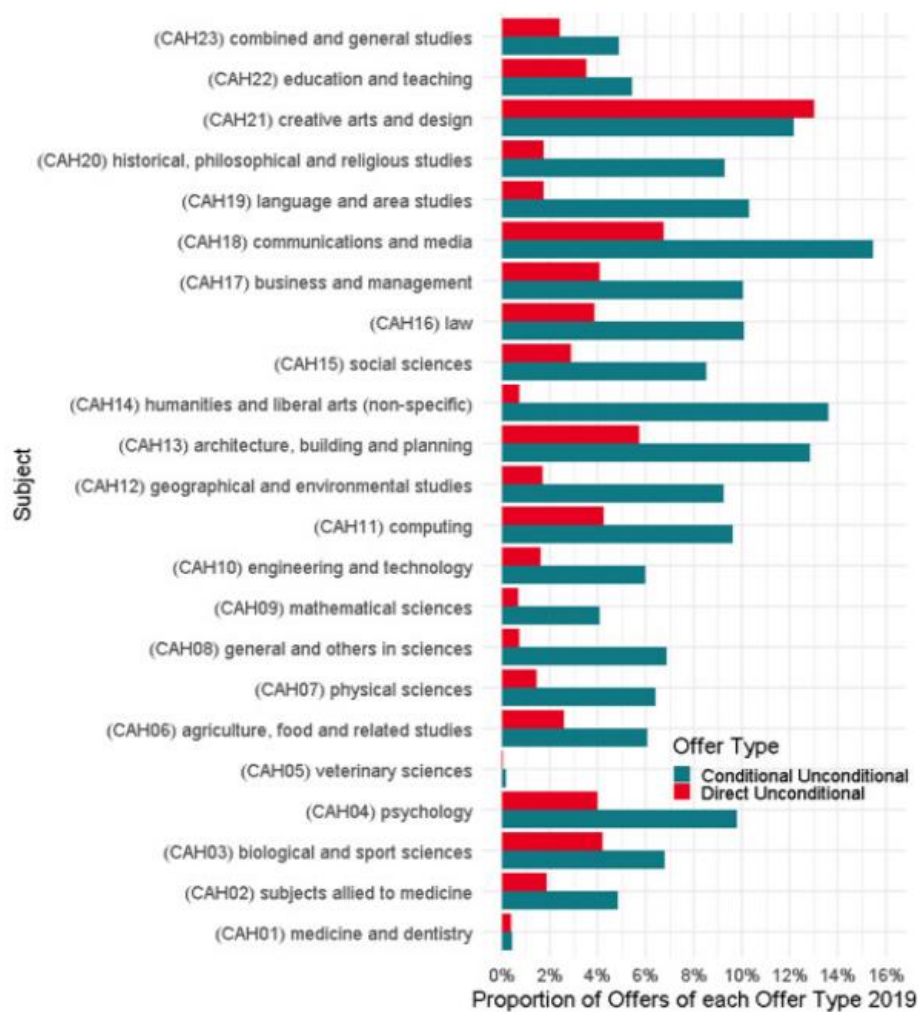
Source: BBC report, 15th August 2019

Table 3: Changes in numbers of university acceptances between 2009 and 2019 for all relevant JACS codes

	200	201	20	201	20	201	201	201	20	201	201	
R1 - French studies	790	740	68	5	585	0	520	430	390	0	285	275
R2 - German studies	285	285	29	0	200	0	210	175	165	5	100	85
R3 - Italian studies	80	60	46	65	45	25	40	25	20	30	25	15
R4 - Spanish studies	385	415	46	5	395	5	315	325	350	5	270	210
R6 - Scandinavian studies	15	15	15	10	10	10	10	10	15	10	10	10
R7 - Russian and East European studies	110	100	11	90	65	55	55	50	40	55	35	35
R8 - European studies	250	95	5	85	0	105	105	80	40	40	30	45
R9 - Others in European Langs, Lit and related	800	850	10	101	10	104	129	116	12	119	118	5
RR - Combinations within European Langs, Lit & related	181	199	17	166	16	148	141	128	12	112	107	5
T1 - Chinese studies	0	0	30	0	25	5	0	0	50	0	5	5
T2 - Japanese studies	155	175	20	5	170	0	145	170	140	0	95	130
T3 - South Asian studies	220	225	19	0	145	5	155	235	215	5	215	230
T4 - Other Asian studies	45	35	60	40	40	70	25	20	25	35	35	35
T6 - Modern Middle Eastern studies	10	15	20	30	40	30	95	120	0	155	160	160
T9 - Others in non-European Langs, Lit & related	125	135	10	0	115	5	115	90	100	95	100	90
TT - Combinations within non-European Langs & related	315	260	26	5	175	5	75	95	80	0	25	25
Y Combs of languages	95	70	65	90	75	90	65	60	60	60	85	85
	157	165	15	143	14	140	138	127	12	113	111	111
	0	0	95	0	15	5	0	0	50	5	0	0

Source: UCAS End of Cycle Report, 2019

Table 4: Conditional / Unconditional offers for all subjects in the UCAS 2019 application cycle



Source: UCAS End of Cycle Report, 2019