

BORN GLOBAL: IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



Born Global is a British Academy project on language skills for employability, trade and business.

The British Academy set out to develop a deeper understanding of the language needs for employment, employer attitudes to languages and how languages are used in the workplace for different purposes, by employees of different levels of skill and accountability. Alongside analysis of existing British Cohort Study data, the British Academy commissioned a range of new research, both quantitative and qualitative, including a nationally representative survey of SMEs, and a survey of the Education and Employers Taskforce's *Inspiring the Future Network* members.

We are making the survey data publicly available in the hope that it will be used by a range of stakeholders and inform, inter alia, government language policy development and future developments in Higher Education language curricula and assessment.

Report produced by

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INTRODUCTION

Language study to degree level is of great value to individuals, to the economy and to the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. Yet these benefits are under-appreciated.

Many young people, even those emerging from university with single or joint honours language qualifications, may undervalue the range of skills they have developed through that study.¹

Investigations carried out for Born Global, the British Academy's project on demand for linguistic and intercultural communication skills among employers, show that many businesses have a need for the qualities that language graduates can bring to their workforces, a need which is not currently being met. Furthermore, the project has identified a belief among many employers that economic opportunities are being lost where such recruits are in short supply.

Other studies have shown an unmet demand for specific language skills in the diplomatic and armed forces fields, while the growth of English as the global lingua franca has, paradoxically perhaps, created a need for interpreters and translators into English from many languages which is not currently being satisfied.² Language degrees, however, equip students with much more than technical linguistic competence, requiring individuals to demonstrate qualities of rigorous thinking, problem-solving and resilience – among others – which are useful to employers. As technological change and travel make the world more inter-connected, the need for people to understand diverse cultures is growing and becoming more urgent, rather than shrinking.

Yet language study is facing a struggle to be seen as relevant by young people growing up in a world in which English is seen as globally dominant. The number of

students enrolling for language degrees has shown a sharp decline, while until recently the proportion of young people taking the subjects even to the age of 16 or 18 in school has also been falling. And, though our evidence suggests employers value the qualities that language graduates possess, would-be employees are clearly not receiving that message strongly enough.

What can be done to change this situation? This report considers the current state of language learning in England and discusses how findings from Born Global could help to bring about both a reversal of some of the more alarming trends facing these subjects in higher education and a realisation of the potential of language learning to enhance careers, intellects, the economy and the cultural life of the nation.

OPPORTUNITY ALONGSIDE CHALLENGE: THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ENGLAND

The word “crisis” has featured in recent media reports of the state of the subject in schools and universities, and there is no doubt that the rise of English to the status of global lingua franca presents a challenge to advocates for linguistic study as they seek to demonstrate why languages remain important.³

Yet there are positive developments to report. Government reforms of school education, in particular the decision to require all English primary schools to teach a language to their pupils from the age of seven and, in secondary schools, to advocate and push for the learning of languages to age 16 for the vast majority of young people, represent an important commitment to languages while holding out the long-term hope of increasing the number of young people engaged with, and committed to, the study of languages and their associated literatures and cultures.

In higher education, Institution-Wide Language Provision (IWLP) courses, which offer students the chance to study languages alongside, or as a minor part of, their degree courses, have also proved successful. Routes into Languages, a programme established in 2006 to promote the value of language study in schools and universities, has reached hundreds of thousands of young people.

However, there is no doubt that the overall context for language learning is extremely challenging. Professor Michael Worton’s 2009 review of modern language provision in higher education described the academic community as feeling “vulnerable – and, indeed, beleaguered” and there is little sense that this has changed substantively in the intervening years.

The next section of this report considers opportunities alongside the challenges of the coming years for languages.

Potential

Employers recognising potential value of languages

New evidence that employers value the qualities which languages graduates can bring to their workforces is provided by Born Global. This information should have the potential to increase the numbers opting for languages degrees, if young people can be convinced by the evidence that dedicated linguistic study opens doors to a wide range of future careers.

Born Global found new evidence that young people with the linguistic, analytical, inter-cultural communication skills and global mindset provided by the study of language are in demand.

A survey conducted for the project, based on questionnaires completed by a representative sample of 410 small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), found half of them reporting that school leavers who speak only English are at a disadvantage in the jobs market. Seven out of 10 firms believe that future executives will need (foreign) language skills and international experience. And more than half of the companies said that increasing the number of employees having facility with languages would help create new business opportunities.

Further survey work completed for Born Global, which reported on the views of 146 mainly senior figures within business in the UK who have skills in more than one language, found 71 per cent saying that their language skills have given them a competitive edge in applying for jobs. Some 67 per cent said that language skills enabled them to apply for a wider range of jobs than would have been open to them otherwise, Born Global’s *Languages at Work* survey found.

Nearly a quarter – 22 per cent – of companies whose employees took part in the survey were said to have insufficient languages capacity to meet their needs. Among those without sufficient capacity, two thirds said that misunderstandings generated by a lack of language skills on the part of their employees create

operational problems, including client dissatisfaction, supply chain difficulties and problems of communication with co-workers. This suggests that a greater supply of employees with linguistic skills might improve these businesses.

Translators, interpreters and teachers of modern foreign languages in schools are also in demand, as will be discussed below.

This evidence of demand indicates both that there is a need for more young people with linguistic capability than are currently emerging from schools, further education colleges and higher education, and that individuals can benefit from this demand at various points in their careers. This, in turn, argues for higher education institutions to seek to increase the number of student linguists.

Schools policy emphasising languages

Meanwhile, a succession of changes to schools policy in England have raised the possibility of a reinvigoration of language learning, against the context of a long-term trend of declining numbers of young people continuing with the subjects to GCSE and A-level.

The landscape of provision in primary schools has been transformed in the past 10 to 15 years, as the proportion of schools teaching a language to children from the age of seven within the school day has risen from 22 per cent in 2002–3⁴ to an estimated 99 per cent in 2014–15.⁵

The proportion of schools offering a language at Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) rose to 92 per cent by 2008,⁶ following the implementation in 2002 of a national languages strategy which introduced an entitlement to linguistic study for pupils.

The Coalition Government's announcement in 2012 that languages were to become a statutory part of the national curriculum at KS2 then provided a final boost to numbers, with the Language Trends 2014–15 survey reporting that “many schools have formalised or strengthened provision by teaching a language more regularly or more rigorously”.⁷ The initiative has been widely welcomed in the primary sector, with 38 per cent of schools reporting that they have increased the resources available for languages.⁸ Some 49 per cent of schools also now offer languages at Key Stage 1 (five- to seven-year-olds). The schools inspectorate Ofsted's 2011 evaluation of language learning in primary schools found that pupils' enjoyment of it was “very clear”, with children said to look forward to lessons and teachers' subject knowledge and teaching generally being good.⁹

In secondary schools, where the number of pupils taking languages GCSEs fell dramatically following the Labour Government's decision in 2004 to make language study optional at Key Stage 4, language study entries then rallied in 2013, following the Coalition Government's announcement in November 2010 of a new league table measure for schools in England: the English Baccalaureate or EBacc.^{10,11} This would rank all schools on the proportion of pupils achieving at least GCSE C grades in each of English; mathematics; science subjects; history or geography; and a modern or ancient language. Entry numbers for French, for German and for Spanish GCSE all increased sharply that year.

The impact of the EBacc policy, as announced in 2010 on GCSE language entries appears to have proved short-lived. GCSE entry numbers fell back in



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2015, to the extent that German entries were below those before the EBacc effect was experienced in 2013, and those of French were only three per cent higher. By contrast in Spanish, numbers are still 25 per cent up on their 2012 level. However, moves in 2015 by the new Conservative Government to strengthen the EBacc by requiring 90 per cent of GCSE students to take it would seem to imply another large increase in entry numbers at GCSE in the coming years.¹² The Association for Language Learning, in its official response to the Department's consultation on the move, said that the new policy would provoke schools to "express publicly the value which [they] attribute to language learning" as the numbers taking the subjects grew.¹³

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However, the ALL's response also suggests there may be difficulties related to the implementation of the 90 per cent EBacc policy. It reports that among the challenges, in relation to a curriculum with which many pupils will now be compelled to continue, will be "countering the feeling of some pupils that they are not successful," and "disaffection and behaviour management issues where challenging pupils are required to pursue any of the subjects in which they are no longer engaged or in which they know they are underachieving". Despite these challenges, the policy of languages for (nearly) all pupils up to the age of 16 is to be welcomed.¹⁴

Higher education developments

At the same time, there have been positive developments in relation to higher education study of languages.

Institution-Wide Language Provision (IWLP) courses – that is to say university-based language modules which are taken as a small part of or alongside an individual's degree, also known as Languages for All – are proving successful in attracting students and gaining support from higher education management.

A survey published in February 2015 found 54,975 enrolments for the 2014–2015 academic year, which was an increase of more than 5,000 on the figure of 49,637 reported for 2012–13.¹⁵ Some 33 of the 58 institutions surveyed in 2014–15 reported an increase in student numbers, with only 10 reporting a decrease. "These figures suggest that, unlike the languages sector in HE as a whole, recruitment onto IWLP courses generally appears to be relatively buoyant," the survey report concluded. One unnamed institution reported having "long waiting lists for courses". The total number of nearly 55,000 IWLP enrolments in the 2014–15 academic year represents a figure markedly higher than the 39,000 full-time undergraduates and postgraduates enrolled in language degrees for the 2013–14 academic year.¹⁶

Typically, universities offer between 6 and 11 languages to students, around 60 per cent of whom are learning them as credit towards their degree courses, with the remainder taking them independently of their degree study. The number of universities offering Chinese has increased dramatically since 2001: the language was on offer in nine higher education institutions 15 years ago, compared to 54 in 2014–15; while Korean was not offered at all in 2001, it now features

at nine institutions. Mandarin Chinese was the language most likely to be chosen as the leading language for business growth in the coming years by participants in Born Global's *Languages at Work* survey; its growth within IWLP programmes may reflect its perceived importance for global business.

A study of IWLP provision at one university (the London School of Economics and Political Science) for Born Global found that students there were most likely to say they were taking an IWLP course because of interest in the relevant country and culture, with the language's usefulness to an individual's career being seen as more important the more advanced a course became.¹⁷ This confirms that future employment needs are not the only consideration taken into account by students opting for language studies, but neither should they be discounted as unimportant.

However, student enrolment numbers on IWLP courses should not be taken only to signify a demand for linguistic study from British undergraduates. Some 39 per cent of those enrolments are international students, many of them learning at least a third language in addition to English and their native tongue.

When asked about the prospects for IWLP in their institution, some 80 per cent of respondents to the latest University Council of Modern Languages/ Association of University Language Centres annual IWLP survey said they were "encouraging".¹⁸ The survey report concluded: "The overall picture of student recruitment onto IWLP courses is broadly positive across the HE sector ... the survey found that there was broad support for IWLP activity within institutions, even though this could be merely aspirational, and there is strong take-up by students."

Routes into Languages is a programme bringing together universities across England and Wales to promote the study of the subject. It encourages young people to carry on with language study at school and university, seeks to raise aspiration and academic attainment in schools, and also seeks to address the shortage of translators and interpreters whose first language is English.

The programme runs careers events highlighting employment opportunities for those with language skills, works to understand the language-related needs of businesses and promotes study abroad for students of all disciplines. It also works with specific schools, focusing particularly on those with disadvantaged pupil intakes, to promote and enhance language study. It co-ordinates student ambassadors and student competitions such as a foreign language spelling bee.

Routes into Languages has been funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England since its inception in 2006. However, that support is due to finish on July 31st, 2016. The future for its work will be discussed towards the end of this paper.

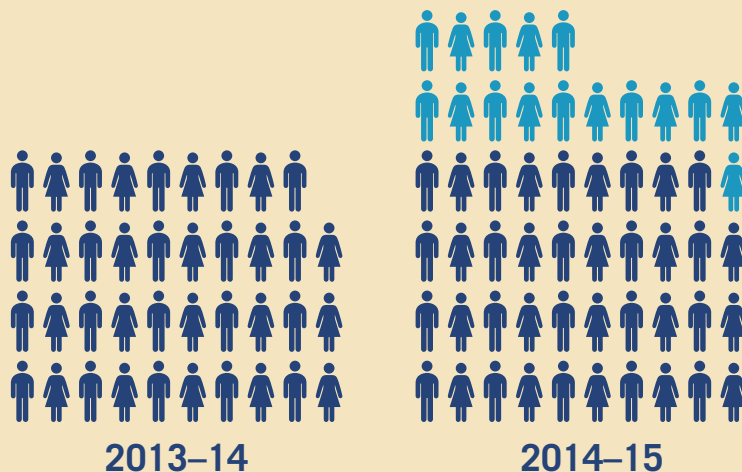
Challenges

Higher Education student numbers

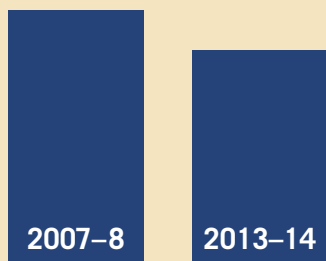
These positive developments have to be seen against the undoubtedly challenging overall picture facing language provision in higher education, including a worrying shift away from the kinds of degree programmes which engender rich critical and cultural awareness as in addition to command of the spoken and written language.

The number of students enrolling for languages as a first degree fell by 16 per cent between 2007–8 and 2013–14, from 9,550 to 8,030. By comparison, most other major subject areas saw their student numbers rise over the period, with enrolments increasing by 13 per cent on average and most other subject categories registering an enlargement, rather than a reduction, in incoming numbers. Of the three most popular European languages, German enrolments contracted by 34 per cent and those in French by 25 per cent, while incoming student numbers in Spanish only fell by one per cent.¹⁹ Over the period 2002–3 to 2013–14, the overall fall in the number of entrants to modern foreign language degree courses is even larger, at 57 per cent.²⁰

Over the period 1998 to 2014–15, there was a 40 per cent drop in the number of universities offering specialist degrees in languages: from 93 universities to 56. The fall has been particularly severe in the case of German, which has seen the number of universities offering the subject falling by half, while 40 per cent fewer universities now offer French.²¹ The institutions most affected by falling numbers of student applications for modern foreign languages are middle-ranking and post-1992 universities, leaving provision increasingly concentrated in Russell Group universities. This gives rise to concerns about limited options for students seeking more applied, vocational language degrees and a fear that languages are becoming a subject for a highly academic elite, a high proportion of whom (25 per cent of undergraduates studying languages) will



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have been educated in the independent sector. However, even Russell Group institutions are not immune from the pressure to reduce the size of their language departments.²²

Schools reform

The government's school education reforms also present challenges as well as opportunities for languages. There is a question as to whether the recent increase in GCSE entry numbers, seemingly produced by the EBacc, will be sustained through to A-level and beyond.

The gain in GCSE numbers over the period 2012-14 needs to be set in context: between 2001 and 2015, GCSE French entries fell from 347,007 to 157,699 (a decline of 55 per cent) while in German, the fall over the same period was even steeper, from 135,133 entries in 2001 to 54,037 in 2015, meaning the 2015 entry was only just over a third of what it was 14 years earlier.²³ Entry numbers for Spanish have grown substantially over the period, from 57,983 to 90,782 – a rise of 56 per cent – but the increase in that subject does not come close to making up for the combined reduction in French and German.²⁴

A-level entries in French and German in 2015 – the first year in which the larger cohort of language students who took GCSEs in 2013 had fed through to complete A-levels – were actually down on those of the previous year.²⁵ In Spanish, the gain in A-level entries was 14 per cent, compared to a 26 per cent rise in 2013 in GCSE Spanish entries.

Longer-term trends for A-level French and German entries demonstrate the difficulties which have faced these subjects in the past

15 years, with numbers fewer than half what they were in 2000. In 1996, 22,718 students entered A-level French. In 2010, the figure was 12,324. In 2015, it was 10,328. In 1996, there were 9,306 entries for German; in 2015, the total was 4,009.²⁶ The decline of entries for German and the corresponding relative popularity of Latin, Greek and classics means it is now almost twice as likely that students in England will enter A-levels in classical subjects than will enter in German, the language of the strongest economy of the European Union.

If numbers taking the subjects at GCSE in particular are to rise again following the government's stipulation that 90 per cent of students must take the EBacc, this will create a further challenge in terms of the recruitment of language teachers. In 2015, the Association for Language Learning asked ministers "where will the language teachers come from?" to support the EBacc move, given that 16 per cent of places for initial teacher education in languages were not filled in 2014-15.²⁷ In 2016, the association reported that attempting to recruit dual linguists, i.e. teachers able to offer more than one language, was "challenging" and that the reduction in language graduates was reducing the supply of potential language teachers.²⁸ In summer 2015, the think tank Education Datalab reportedly estimated that 2,000 extra language teachers, and 7,000 language classes, would be needed to meet the EBacc pledge. This was described as an almost "impossible ask".²⁹

Questions have also been raised as to whether the now universal or near-universal offering of language teaching in primary school will feed through into improved quality understanding and enthusiasm of pupils for languages in secondary, given that links between the two phases are often patchy.³⁰

Employer attitudes to languages

The Academy's Born Global project presents new evidence of the demand for the skills offered by languages graduates among employers. However, other findings show that many companies are not providing language training for their employees.

Born Global's survey of 420 small and medium enterprises found that, even among those which were described as "language-active" – using additional languages as well as English to operate their businesses – fewer than one in six said they invested in language training.

Its *Languages at Work* survey of 146 individuals with language skills also found that only one third of the businesses for which they worked facilitated language skills training for staff.

Born Global also found that representatives of UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and the British Chambers of Commerce agree that demand for language training among companies was low, with the view offered that it was because of a perception that overseas companies were investing in their workforces learning English.

There may, then, be a conflict between the aspiration of companies for employees with better language skills and the ability or willingness of those companies to tackle any deficits through investment in training. This in turn presents both a challenge and an opportunity, as discussed towards the end of this paper.

Prevalence of the English language

These detailed concerns in relation to languages provision at school and university, and employers' attitudes to languages, need to be set against the backdrop of a looming question: why should languages be studied at all when English predominates globally?

English is the global language of business.³¹ Fluency in English is a characteristic of the global executive, with the language being widely spoken at managerial levels and above. Aspiring international students of many different disciplines regard English as a core requirement of a global education. They often complete their studies through the medium of English in universities in the UK or the US, graduating with professional, scientific or technical competencies and the ability to speak two or more languages. Moreover, many universities outside the Anglophone world now offer their graduate courses in English. The status of English as the lingua franca and the current levels of international mobility create the conditions for a highly qualified and highly competitive global talent pool and labour market.

“There is a strong sense that the importance and value of languages are not properly understood and recognised either by Government or by potential students.”

This might lead a UK student to ask: why bother studying a language when employers will have a ready supply of other would-be employees from around the world, with fluency in both English and their one or more native languages?

With English believed to be ubiquitous, the Born Global project found advisers for UKTI testifying that “generally speaking,

the majority of companies that they support hope to get by with just English.”

This pervasive perception that languages are no longer necessary has had an impact. For example, the Worton review, published in 2009, reported that: “There is a strong sense that the importance and value of languages are not properly understood and recognised either by Government or by potential students.”³²

More recently, in 2015, the annual Language Trends report, which assesses the state of language learning in the school sector, concluded: “A lack of awareness of the value of languages is commonplace. Influencers such as careers advisers, the media and parents have an important role to play and should help to explain how knowledge of a language can contribute to success with university studies and careers.”³³

Such perceptions can be misleading and need to be challenged. A large part of the world still does not use English. Other languages, such as Spanish and Mandarin to name but two are important at a global level. Furthermore, even if many international business people speak English, the fact that they are bi- or multi-lingual leaves them at an advantage against mono-lingual native English speakers.³⁴

Far from accepting that the global position of English makes language study less important, the detailed findings of Born Global show that students who leave higher education with the qualities they have developed during a languages degree are of great potential value to employers. This, coupled with ongoing labour market shortages for linguists in some sectors, opens up opportunities to galvanise efforts designed to communicate the benefits of language study to young people and to businesses and employers.

THE ROUTE AHEAD: EVIDENCE-BASED STATEMENTS ON THE VALUE OF LANGUAGE DEGREES

LANGUAGES DEGREES
PROVIDE THEIR
STUDENTS WITH:

THE TECHNICAL ABILITY
TO SPEAK, UNDERSTAND
AND WRITE IN
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

INTERCULTURAL
UNDERSTANDING: SPECIFIC
KNOWLEDGE OF AT LEAST
ONE OTHER CULTURE, ALLIED
TO THE ABILITY TO NAVIGATE
AND MEDIATE BETWEEN
MORE THAN ONE CULTURE.

OTHER SKILLS: ANALYTICAL
RIGOUR; RESILIENCE;
GENERAL COMMUNICATION
SKILLS; MATURITY
AND INDEPENDENCE
(INCLUDING AS DEVELOPED
IN TIME SPENT
STUDYING OR ON WORK
PLACEMENTS OVERSEAS).

Defining the qualities developed in a language degree

Before discussing the implications of the Born Global research for the future of language study, it will be valuable to attempt to define the qualities that a language degree promotes in its students.

For the purposes of this report we offer a simple three-stage categorisation.³⁵

Languages degrees provide their students with:

- The technical ability to speak, understand and write in a foreign language
- Intercultural understanding: specific knowledge of at least one other culture, allied to the ability to navigate and mediate between more than one culture
- Other skills: analytical rigour; resilience; general communication skills; maturity and independence (including as developed in time spent studying or on work placements overseas)

This report argues that the qualities contained within the final bullet point of the above definition – and, to a lesser extent, those contained within the second bullet point – are under-appreciated by students as assets that are to be gained through language study to degree level.

Building on this insight will be key to transforming the ways in which language study is perceived by students and the ability of languages graduates to take advantage of the opportunities which are available to them.

Statement A

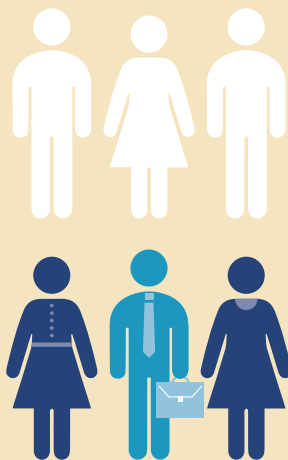
There is a demand for the technical linguistic skills and intercultural understanding provided by language degrees which is not currently being met.

There are two categories of demand for languages graduates which are worth considering. First, there is evidence of a shortage of entrants to **specific language-based careers** in which a language degree is followed by professional training. This applies to the careers of translation and interpreting, as well as to school teaching.

Translators and interpreters

As English becomes the global language, paradoxically there is a need for more people who can translate and interpret from languages used around the world into English.

There is now a severe shortage of English first-language interpreters and translators working in the institutions of the European Union, as the current generation of interpreters in five key languages heads towards retirement.³⁶



**50 PER CENT OF ENGLISH
FIRST LANGUAGE
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RETIRING FROM THE
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According to official estimates, 50 per cent of English first language interpreters will be retiring from the service over the next five to ten years. Meanwhile, the demand for interpreting into English is showing an exponential increase and is now required in 96 per cent of the meetings held in the European Commission. So great is the demand that it is becoming increasingly common that international speakers of English are obliged to take on the role of interpreting into English, as there are too few interpreters of the relevant profile with English as a first language.

The global spread of English is creating a worldwide need for translation and interpretation into English by English native speakers.

English first-language speakers are required to be able to speak two additional languages of the European Union in order to work within European Union institutions. This means that the talent pool for future interpreters and translators and civil servants capable of working in the European Union is drying up. UK officials are also under-represented in the United Nations.³⁷

This may be a problem for the EU and for the UK's position within the UN, but it does create employment opportunities for UK language graduates looking for work, and space for further efforts in communicating this skills demand to young people. Moreover, demand is not confined to the EU and UN, with English's global spread creating a worldwide need for translation and interpreting into English by English native speakers.

School teaching

There is also evidence of under-recruitment of teachers of modern foreign languages in secondary schools, which has been reported as 16 per cent in 2014–15.³⁸ Although this clearly creates challenges for language teaching in schools, it is also evidence of another potential career avenue for language graduates. With the EBacc now to become a requirement for teaching to 90 per cent of 14- to 16-year-olds at GCSE level, future demand for language teachers looks strong.

Therefore, it is important that young people considering their future employment prospects before choosing a university degree should bear in mind potential opportunities which will be likely to open up for them in the above careers (translating, interpreting and teaching), should they opt for languages.

Statement B

Language degrees also provide skills well beyond technical proficiency with languages which are important to employers and which can be under-appreciated both by students and by employers.

The potential career paths open to languages graduates do not stop at translating, interpreting and teaching. Born Global presents evidence of untapped demand for both technical linguistic skills and intercultural understanding **in the wider economy.**

The wider economy

Evidence documented by Born Global, through both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, suggests there is strong demand for the skills provided by graduate linguists. Such demand is greater than is widely appreciated: many young people, their teachers and wider society are unaware of the extent to which language graduates have skills which are likely to be of value to employers.

Half of small and medium enterprises say that having additional foreign languages within their organisation would help to extend business opportunities in the future.

When asked whether school leavers who speak only English would be at a disadvantage in the jobs market,

half of the firms said “yes”, with a similar proportion saying that this was the case in relation to graduates who speak only English. Some 7 out of 10 firms said that future executives would need foreign language skills and international experience.

There was also some evidence of growing possible future demand for languages. One in six small and medium enterprises use additional languages as well as English to operate their businesses. Yet, even among the remainder of companies which use only English, more than one in five disagreed with the statement that English alone was enough to operate in international markets. Some 27 per cent of those operating only in English said they had dealings with non-English-speaking clients, potentially opening up added value for new employees with appropriate linguistic knowledge and inter-cultural awareness.

Born Global's *Languages at Work* survey results also suggest a demand for language abilities which extends far beyond the traditional language-specific careers of translating, interpreting and teaching. The survey included responses from across the economy, ranging from legal and political services to marketing, education and administration, with finance and insurance the largest sector represented. It found 71 per cent of respondents overall, all of whom had skills in more than one language, saying that those skills had given them a competitive edge in applying for jobs. Some 67 per cent said that language skills enabled them to apply for a wider range of jobs than would have been open to them otherwise. Nearly a quarter (22 per cent) of companies whose employees took part in the survey were said to have insufficient languages capacity to meet their needs.

Statement C

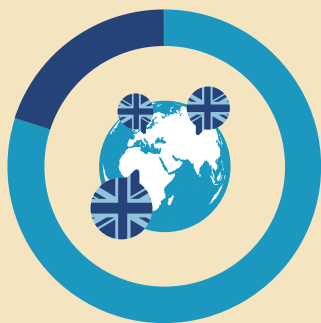
Language study is about more than simply satisfying a need among employers. But there need be no conflict between rigorous scholarship to degree level and the demands of the employment market, because the underlying qualities and abilities of language graduates are of value to employers.

As discussed in the definition above, the attributes of languages graduates go beyond technical linguistic skills, important though those undoubtedly are, and even beyond intercultural understanding, embracing analytical rigour, resilience, the ability to communicate sensitively and subtly and the maturity and independence which come from studying or working abroad.

This third category of wider skills, which may not be specific to language degree study but which are certainly strong features of it, may be under-appreciated as among the benefits of language degrees even by languages students and graduates (and by their teachers).

Evidence shows that language graduates tend to earn less than graduates from other disciplines, while slightly fewer language graduates (75 per cent) were likely to be in managerial, professional and associate professional occupations compared to graduates of all subjects (79 per cent).

Given the high-level skills provided by language degree study, it is probable that languages graduates are under-selling



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themselves. Human resource management professionals consulted during the Born Global project observed that the English native speaker graduate of languages can fare less well at interview in comparison to their peers from other disciplines and to their international peers.

“I think employees should...regard languages as a useful indicator of flexibility and adaptability for employees, as it shows intelligence, curiosity, mathematical ability, and probably makes the individual more adaptable to new work environments, which is a useful asset in the private sector at least.”

It was felt that they could lack commercial awareness, and were often less capable of articulating the knowledge, skills and attributes that they have acquired through their degree courses, and how these may be relevant to future employers. Unless there was a direct request for language competence, language graduates tended to convey the perception that they did not have the confidence or possess the generic skills to apply for general graduate posts.

The demand for the wider skills developed by language degrees also came through in some of the responses to Born Global's *Languages at Work* survey.

An associate director of a consultancy firm said: “I think employees should...regard languages as a useful indicator of flexibility and adaptability for employees, as it shows intelligence, curiosity, mathematical ability, and probably makes the individual more adaptable to new work environments, which is a useful asset in the private sector at least.”

A vice-president risk manager with Bank of America Merrill Lynch said: “[The ability to communicate in more than one language] always brings a competitive edge, helps with idea association and analytical thinking and overall allows for a greater level of culture.”

Languages need not be seen as of only commercial value, though. Having made the case for the value of languages to their career, a freelance writer and journalist then told the *Languages at Work* survey: “I believe that the learning of a foreign language is the ultimate sign of civilisation, regardless of the career advantages that it confers!”

It seems likely that the underlying, non-technical qualities which come with language study to degree level have value to companies, and to the economy as a whole. There should be much greater awareness – by students, by university departments and by employers – that these important attributes are developed during the course of a language degree.

Statement D

Employers are keen on graduates having combined their linguistic study with another discipline. It is important that the number of students pursuing languages as at least a half of a joint honours degree increases.

Born Global's *Languages at Work* study provides some evidence that joint honours language degrees – languages studied with a non-language subject – may be seen to

be more useful in the workplace than single honours study.

More than one in three respondents to Born Global's *Languages at Work* survey recommended studying a joint honours degree that involves a language (or languages) and other subject disciplines.

One survey respondent, who works for a local authority in London, said: “Unless you plan to be a translator or interpreter you should focus mainly on another skill but appreciate that languages are highly important and greatly beneficial when combined with other subject areas, e.g. politics, business or history.”

Another respondent, a former human resources director, said: “The optimum is to have e.g. commercial skills and languages or engineering and languages.”

It may be that there is a case, based on a view expressed within Born Global's surveys, for universities to include more employability-orientated modules within languages degrees.

Born Global's *Languages at work* survey found warning signals from employers that there is a pressing need to rethink languages in higher education.³⁹ Employers value language proficiency and cultural competence. They strongly support international experience and immersion. Many recommend joint degrees which allow students to develop expertise in two disciplines. Others recognise that language competence is valuable for all graduates, a view which endorses and promotes the importance of Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLP).

Employers' voices are not the only important ones in the languages debate. Many of them are unlikely fully to appreciate the

extent to which language study in higher education has evolved in recent decades, with many universities having developed new joint honours courses with major/minor combinations in a range of subjects and new options in which languages are taught *ab initio* and with degrees generally placing a greater emphasis on fluency in spoken language than they used to. Language study is a mode of intellectual enquiry which has value in its own right. However, the employer perspective, which will be important to students as they seek employment, needs to be considered.

There need be no conflict between the two potential study routes: single honours language study, or joint honours combining a language with another discipline: Students should continue to be given the choice of single or joint honours. Single honours language study will continue to be a valuable route for many students, as some employers – GCHQ is a well-known case in point – put a premium on the dedicated study of one language.⁴⁰

As discussed above, Institution-Wide Language Provision (IWLP) courses are proving successful. The report of the 2014–15 annual IWLP survey said: “The internationalisation and employability agendas adopted by many HEIs are of relevance to IWLP activity. There is evidence that, in many institutions, the provision of optional language courses is recognised as playing a vital part in supporting these agendas.”⁴¹

This would appear to be a sign that the messages of Born Global about the value of young people with linguistic and inter-cultural skills alongside more general attributes likely to appeal to future employers are being taken seriously by HE administrators and leading to support for IWLP programmes.

However, the success of IWLP may be double-edged for those committed to developing the attributes in young people which are best fostered through the in-depth study of a language as a large part of a degree programme. The growth in IWLP numbers has come at the same time as language degree enrolments have been decreasing. It may be that IWLP has been seen by some prospective undergraduates as a substitute or alternative to a single or joint honours language degree.

While IWLP programmes should be supported, the case for language degrees in their own right, i.e. in single or joint honours programmes, needs to be made vigorously. Language degrees offer individuals the chance to build linguistic, intercultural,

analytical, general communicative and other abilities to a much deeper level than is generally provided in IWLP courses. These skills carry intrinsic lifelong value as well as being sought after by employers.

Statement E

While companies can often fulfil their core business requirements using only English in international transactions, speaking other languages adds value, both to the company and to the individual. Languages therefore must be seen and promoted as inherently useful to UK companies working internationally.

Born Global found strong agreement from employers that speaking other languages and developing greater cultural fluency added value and that this was the approach that English speakers should adopt.

Perhaps the most direct evidence of this effect comes in individual responses to the *Languages at Work* survey from company employees, all of whom have language skills and many of whom are senior within their organisations.

One human resources professional said: “A lot of our business is done through building and leveraging great relationships – where people come from different countries, if they can speak a common language, this adds to the relationship and credibility.”



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A regional executive with the tea company Twinings said: “I work in sales so it is important for me to understand the language and culture of those I communicate with. Even if we communicate in English, it is really important that I can speak their language as it creates a basis for a relationship.”

“Language skills and cultural understanding really make it so much easier to relate to an international workforce...”

Stephanie Frackowiak, regional services director for social media company Sprinklr, said: “Even though I work for a USA company and the ‘company language’ is English, being able to speak [the] local language opens doors, since it makes locals more at ease in dealing with you... this smooths the way for customers.”

Katie Morrison, a human resources business partner with the consumer electronics firm Canon Europe said: “Language skills and cultural understanding really make it so much easier to relate to an international workforce, and break the stereotype of parochial Brits!”

An executive director with the investment bank Goldman Sachs said: “The global market is filled with people who speak English AND another language and as monolinguals most British candidates begin at a disadvantage. Global companies with global customers and clients will always prefer those who speak more than one language.”

Others saw the case of language study in terms of opportunities which could be missed without the command of one or more languages other than English.

A senior BBC broadcast journalist said: “Every day I work with people who are as intelligent, skilled and hard-working as me but most of them are also fluent in at least one other language...I have lost opportunities to people who are fluent in a language I could not speak.”

An executive director with the investment bank Goldman Sachs said: “The global market is filled with people who speak English AND another language and as monolinguals most British candidates begin at a disadvantage. Global companies with global customers and clients will always prefer those who speak more than one language.”

Statement F

Employers have often been reluctant to offer language training for employees. This may underline the value of individuals having language capability before entering employment.

The finding, from Born Global’s surveys and from UKTI and British Chamber of Commerce sources, that UK companies may often be reluctant to organise language training for employees may be a problem for a UK economy given that linguistic skills would seem to be important in the UK workplace.

However, it may also underline the case for ensuring that prospective future employees have those linguistic skills *before* they enter the workplace, with students needing to receive the message that it is better not to rely on improving language skills after entering the workforce. A participant in Born Global’s *Languages at Work* survey, who is a professional support lawyer with a major law firm, seemed to support this view, saying: “A foreign language degree... could open up opportunities within the law that are not available to somebody who does not speak a language.”

The fact that developing command of a language to a good level of proficiency may take years may also mean that employers will find it advantageous to take on an employee with the relevant linguistic ability and then develop their specific professional skills, rather than vice versa.

Statement G

Whatever happens to the Routes into Languages programme, efforts to communicate the values of learning languages to degree level need to be sustained and enhanced.

The ending of HEFCE funding for this initiative in July 2016 means that the work done by “Routes” will need to be delivered in a different way, with the lead universities in each of nine English regions now encouraging individual higher education institutions to support through their own budgets the events and activities currently offered by the “Routes” scheme. Greater business sponsorship is also being sought.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

The clear value of language learning to the individual, to the economy and to the intellectual and cultural life of the nation needs much greater appreciation. The evidence that language graduates are of value to companies, as demonstrated by the Born Global project, should be understood by universities, by teachers and by students themselves, as young people prepare to build careers and live fulfilling lives in today's multi-national and multi-lingual, connected world.

University language departments and Institution-Wide Language Programmes should review their courses in terms of content, assessment and modes of delivery in order to ensure that they develop the skills particularly appreciated by employers, such as global mindset and resilience, as well as analytical, linguistic and intercultural skills. Language departments and careers services should encourage and facilitate study or work abroad during undergraduate programmes. Universities should explore further increasing the range of joint honours and interdisciplinary programmes. This will ensure that the range of language options available to students, while developing understanding for its own sake, also takes full advantage of the demand for language skills in the economy.

Endnotes

1. See Worton, M. (2009). *Review of Modern Foreign Languages in England*. Higher Education Funding Council for England and Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT.
2. British Academy (2013) *Lost for Words: The Need for Languages in UK Diplomacy and Security*. British Academy and BBC website, 27th February 2015 *UK diplomats have 'alarming shortfall' in language skills*.
3. Guardian, 11th September, 2013 *Why is UK language teaching in crisis?* and Observer, 17th August 2013 *Language teaching crisis as 40% of university departments face closure*.
4. Driscoll, P., Jones, J. & Macrory, G. (2004). *The Provision of Foreign Language Learning for Pupils at Key Stage 2 (DfES Research Report 572)*. Department for Education and Skills.
5. Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT. The survey is based on schools which respond, so there is a possibility it may slightly over-state the actual take-up, as the small number of schools thought to be offering no language provision might be less likely to respond.
6. Wade, P., Marshall, H. & O' Donnell, S. (2009). *Longitudinal Survey of Implementation of National Entitlement to Language Learning at Key Stage 2: Final Report (DCSF Research Report 127)*. National Foundation for Educational Research/Department for Children, Schools and Families.
7. Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT.
8. The "Language Trends 2014/15" report says 87 per cent of respondents welcomed the introduction of compulsory languages in primary schools. Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT.
9. Ofsted (2011). *Modern languages: Achievement and Challenge 2007–2010*.
10. See detailed figures discussed in this paper under "Challenges".
11. Key Stage 4 usually covers years 10 and 11, when pupils are aged 14 to 16, although some schools now start it in year nine, when pupils are aged 13 to 14.
12. Department for Education 3rd November, 2015 *Nicky Morgan: one nation education*. Speech to Policy Exchange. This announced a consultation *Implementing the English Baccalaureate* which stated that the EBacc would become the "default option" for all pupils, becoming a headline measure in school performance tables and being given a more prominent place in the Ofsted inspection framework.
13. Association for Language Learning (2016) *Response to Department for Education Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate*.
14. Ibid.
15. University Council of Modern Languages/ Association of University Language Centres in the UK (2015) *UCML-AULC survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2014–15)*.
16. LSE Language Centre (2015) *Every graduate a linguist – Building strategic language capability through IWLP – Research report on a case study carried out at the LSE Language Centre*. Report for Born Global.
17. LSE Language Centre (2015) *Every graduate a linguist – Building strategic language capability through IWLP – Research report on a case study carried out at the LSE Language Centre*. Report for Born Global.
18. University Council of Modern Languages/ Association of University Language Centres in the UK (2015) *UCML-AULC survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2014–15)*.
19. Higher Education Statistics Agency press release, 12th February, 2015 *Demand grows for biology, business and maths degrees*. See www.hesa.ac.uk/pr/3456-press-release-211 [accessed 15th February, 2016].
20. Based on figures from Higher Education Funding Council for England *Time series of undergraduates in higher education subjects*. See www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/supplydemand/ug [accessed 15th February, 2016].
21. Although the number offering Spanish had increased during the period 1998 to 2007, since then the number has contracted by a third, Born Global reports.
22. Born Global.
23. See mention of redundancies at University of Birmingham here: <http://birmingham.ac.uk/2016/02/11/can-you-feel-the-love> [Accessed 14th March, 2016].
24. Annual Joint Council for Qualifications GCSE entry statistics. Figures quoted are for England, Wales and Northern Ireland combined.
25. Other languages are not featured here as French, Spanish and German continue to dominate modern language entries overall.
26. Annual Joint Council for Qualifications A-level entry statistics.
27. Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT and Joint Council for Qualifications, Provisional GCE A Level Results – June 2015.
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29. Association for Language Learning (2016) Response to Department for Education *Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate*.
30. Schools Week, 19th June, 2015 *2,000 more MFL teachers needed for EBacc* See <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/2000-more-mfl-teachers-needed-for-ebacc> [accessed 15th February, 2016].
31. Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT.
32. Neeley, T. (2012) Global Business Speaks English. *Harvard Business Review*, [online]. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2012/05/global-business-speaks-english> [Accessed 14th March, 2016].
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34. Board, K. & Tinsley, T. (2015). *Language Trends 2014/15 The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council/CfBT.
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36. More detailed codifications are available. See Wyburd, J. (2011) *The Languages Graduate* University Council of Modern Languages, on which the definition above draws.
37. For an example of the employment packages on offer to linguists who are selected to work for the institutions of the European Union, see http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/become-an-interpreter/interpret-for-dg-interpretation/index_en.htm [Accessed 14th March, 2016].
38. House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence (2014) *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*. P81. Available at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldselect/ldsoftpower/150/150.pdf [Accessed 14th March, 2016].
39. Koglbauer, R. (2015) *Open letter to Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools, about the government's plans to reinforce the importance of a core academic curriculum*. See <http://bit.ly/1LqaAFS> [accessed 15th February, 2015].
40. This constitutes text responses in the *Languages at Work* questionnaire filled in by 75 respondents and case studies with 13 language-active individuals.
41. See www.gchq-careers.co.uk/departments/language-analysts.html
42. University Council of Modern Languages/ Association of University Language Centres in the UK (2015) *UCML-AULC survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2014–15)*.




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