

Item 3b: Vice Chair Education (Languages and Intercultural Studies)

This report reflects some of the ongoing interests in the Languages area and given the interest we all have in the health of languages, starts with a review of this summer's examination results.

1. The Languages landscape

- **A-level and GCSE results summer 2020**

Given the extraordinary circumstances around last year's exams in all parts of the UK, it was difficult to identify any trends with certainty. On the 13th August before grades were revised to reflect centre assessments, the TES¹ was announcing an **increase in A* grades across French (15.2% compared with 10% in 2019), German (20.7 % of students compared with 13 %) and Spanish (15.7 % compared with 10.1%)**. The percentage gaining A or A* had also increased in French (45.9% of candidates compared with 36.8 % in 2019), German (53.8 % compared with 41.2 % in 2019) and Spanish (43.8% compared with 35.2%). On the 20th August, OFQUAL published revised results tables² for England and on the 10th September, GCE results tables were republished by JCQ³. The statistics for all UK entries are given in the JCQ tables plus separate statistics for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (percentages for England are given in blue here) and in all cases the numbers gaining top grades had increased in French, German and Spanish at A-level compared to the earlier grades given. **In French UK wide, a fifth (20.4%, 20.1%) of candidates eventually achieved A* with over half (54.4%, 53.6%) gaining A or A***. In German, **over a quarter (23.4% 22.9) gained A* and over half (58.7%, 58.3%) gained A or A***. In Spanish, the numbers were **over a fifth (21.7% 22.1%) and over a half (54.3%, 54.5%) respectively**. In other modern languages, **nearly a third achieved A* (31.3%, 31.5%) and nearly three quarters (73.8%, 73.8%) achieved A* or A, however entry numbers were low (4928, 4606) compared to the previous year (8289, 7762)**.

In terms of numbers at A-level, there was a 0.9 per cent rise in Spanish entries compared to last year (to 8,705 candidate), whereas French entries fell (by 1.1%), as did German entries (by 6.2%). It is suggested that some of the decline in numbers could be attributed to the fact that private candidates aged over 19 as well as younger native speakers taking A levels early would not have been able to secure a teacher-assessed grade or rank order to gain an A-level this year. The 18 year old cohort also declined by 3% according to OFQUAL with overall A-level entries declining by 2%. **AS level entries continued to decline in French (722 candidates in 2020 compared to 1217 in 2019) German (338 compared to 512) and Spanish (785 compared to 1211)**.

¹ <https://www.tes.com/news/A-levels-2020-big-leap-top-languages-grades>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-tables-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-results-in-england-2020>

³ <https://www.icq.org.uk/examination-results/?post-year=2020&post-location=>

Data from OFQUAL⁴ shows that at GCSE there was slightly better news in that **overall MFL entries increased by 2% (from 268,955 to 275,00) compared to 2019. Both German and Spanish numbers increased (by around 3% and 5% respectively) and French entries remained stable. Other MFL numbers declined slightly whilst Ancient Languages remained stable. Overall GCSE entries in EBacc subjects increased by 2% while the 16 year old cohort increased by 3%. Top grades also increased in 2020 with severe grading for this year at least not being an issue given the percentages gaining grade 9 or 8 in GCSE in French (17.4% of candidates compared to 12.8% in 2019), German (19.8% compared to 13.1%) and Spanish (19.2% compared to 15.5%).**

Change in GCSE entries 2019 - 2020

	2019 entries	2020 entries	
French	125,700	125,770	0%
Spanish	101,080	105,840	5%
German	42,175	43,390	3%
Other modern languages	32,035	30,685	-4%
Ancient languages	12,170	12,215	0%

- #### UCAS statistics

It was to be hoped that we would have a clearer picture of the impact of last year's A-level and equivalent exam results on from the UCAS end of 2020 cycle report (applicants and acceptances) which was published on the 16th December 2020⁵ - with further reports due on the 28th January. First analysis of the different JACS code data in the Languages area (see below) reveals an uncertain picture with a slight downward trend over the last three years, almost across the board. Much closer analysis is needed to try and fully understand what is happening.

The report itself focusses on widening access and participation and the 'covid cohort' and on what lessons can be drawn for levelling up in 2021 and beyond. Languages and related areas are only mentioned within the report in relation to mental health declarations from students. These are generally on the rise except for Medicine and Dentistry - although as the report states it should not be assumed that these students are less likely to face mental health challenges. In contrast, students in arts and languages (including European and Non-European Languages and Literature, Creative Arts and Design, and Linguistics) are between three to six times more likely to declare a mental health condition. Although gender is not necessarily the determining factor leading to these differences, the report suggests that it is worth considering when addressing the disparity at subject level. These high levels of mental health declarations in our subject areas are perhaps something that we should discuss more widely.

JACS Codes	2020	2019	2018
Q1 Linguistics	515	500	540
R1 French Studies	230	275	270

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2020-exam-series/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2020-exam-series>

⁵ <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2020-end-cycle-report>

R2 German Studies	70	85	95
R3 Italian Studies	15	10	15
R4 Spanish Studies	190	210	270
R7 - Russian and East European studies	30	35	30
R8 - European studies	40	45	25
R9 - Others in European Langs,Lit and related	1280	1185	1180
RR - Combinations within European Langs,Lit and related	1045	1070	1115
T1 - Chinese studies	105	120	80
T2 - Japanese studies	260	230	200
Y Combs of languages	1055	1110	1125
Y Combs of languages with arts/humanities	4685	4980	5415
Y Combs of phys/math science with arts/humanities/languages	1020	985	910
Y Combs of science/engineering with arts/humanities/languages	2800	2535	2750
Y Combs of social studies/bus/law with languages	2085	2030	2145

- **UCML survey 2020/ 21**

UCML is combining with AULC to run a joint survey which intends to capture a picture of the Languages landscape and build on data captures over the last two surveys. It is now available and with a deadline of the 12th February for completion. The ensuing report will not just report on the Languages landscape in our universities but also on the impact of COVID and Brexit on our activities. Please click on the [link](#) to access the survey.

2. Promoting Languages

- **Routes into Languages**

Now that the transfer of ownership to UCML is almost complete, the Routes into Languages sub-committee has met three times formally and presented its activities at the summer plenary – we were pleased to see that so many colleagues are interested in participating in RiL type activities. The Routes web site still sees several thousands of visits every month and a RiL working group is bringing the site up to date and deleting any resources which are likely to be problematic in terms of data protection and IPR. There is now a RiL presence on the UCML website. There is also a question about RiL in the annual survey.

VW January, 2021