

# UCML Executive Committee

Friday 12 November 2021 10am-12pm

Via MS Teams



## Item 4: Report of Vice Chair Languages & Intercultural Education

This report reviews activities since the last meeting and starts with a summary of the trends that we were able to share with the sector during the 2020/21 summer school examinations results period. Thanks to all that contributed to this summary. Key points are highlighted in yellow.

### 1. The UK Languages landscape

Overall, the number of exam entries for languages is relatively encouraging across all nations and across all age groups although it is clear that for individual languages there are both gains and losses. Numbers receiving top grades remain high with the use of teacher assessment and it is of particular concern to Languages that OFQUAL<sup>1</sup> has said that with the expected return to exam-based assessment that the grade profile will drop in 2023 to 2019 levels with an interim position in Autumn 2021 and summer 2022. Some adaptation to assessment is being made for certain subjects (English literature, history, ancient history and geography science, art and design) given the likely disruption to learning caused by COVID, but not for MFL.

- MFL GCSE<sup>2</sup> / National 5 results 2021

Numbers taking French at GCSE in England in 2021 were up slightly at **124,739 compared to 124,404** in 2020 with **32.9% gaining grade 7** and above compared to **29.9%** in 2020. German numbers were down with **36,933 students taking GCSE in 2021** compared to **40,748** in 2020. The percentage gaining grade 7 and above is **38%, up from 34.1%** in 2020. Numbers taking Spanish GCSE in 2021 have risen to **108,982 from 104,280** in 2020 with **34.4% gaining grade 7** and above compared to **32.5%** in 2020. Numbers taking languages other than French, German and Spanish in 2021, were up slightly to **24,103 compared to 22,344** in 2020 and **72.7%** gained grade 7 and above compared to **68.6%** in 2020.

In England, despite the drop in numbers of young people taking German at GCSE in 2021, overall numbers taking a language rose by nearly 3,000 to **294,757 compared to 291,776** in 2020.

There were **3838** young people taking Spanish GCSE in Northern Ireland in 2021, an increase on the **3583 in 2020**, with **45.8% gaining A or A\*** in 2021 compared to **43.4%** in 2020. Numbers taking French GCSE in Northern Ireland in 2021 were down slightly at **3567 compared to 3681** in 2020 with **46.0% gaining A or A\*** compared to **42.2%** in 2020. Numbers taking German GCSE were **692 in 2021** down from **835 in 2020** and **47.8% gained A or A\*** compared to **41.4%** in 2020. Numbers taking Irish GCSE were **1757 in 2021** compared to **1764** in 2020 with **59.4% gaining A or A\*** compared to **53.5%** in 2020. **121** students in Northern Ireland took GCSEs in other Modern Languages in 2021, down from **233 in 2020**. **80.2% gained A or A\*** in 2021, against **76%** in 2020.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/ofquals-approach-to-grading-exams-and-assessments-in-summer-2022-and-autumn-2021>

<sup>2</sup> The Welsh/ English / NI results are published by JCQ – Joint Council for Qualifications

In Northern Ireland, slightly fewer young people took a language GCSE in 2021 with **9,975** entries in 2021 compared to **10,096** in 2020.

The numbers taking Chinese in 2021 at National 5 in Scotland were **245** compared to **258** in 2020. **74.7%** of these received an A grade as opposed to **76%** in 2020. Numbers taking French in 2021 were **down slightly to 7,115** compared to **7,752** in 2020 and **60.1%** received an A compared to **59.9%** in 2020. German numbers were down slightly at **1,422** in 2021 compared to **1,712** in 2020 with **58.4%** gaining an A grade compared to **57.9%** in 2020. **161** students took Gaelic in 2021 up from **125** in 2020, and **54.7%** received an A grade compared to **50.4%** in 2020 Italian numbers **dropped to 114** in 2021 from **280** in 2020 and **60.5%** gained an A grade compared to **57.9%** in 2020. Spanish numbers at GCSE were slightly down at **5,424** compared to **5813** in 2020 with **59%** gaining an A grade compared to **56.4%** in 2020. **66** students took Urdu at GCSE in 2021 as compared to **87** in 2020 and **78.8%** gained an A grade compared to **89.7%** in 2020

In Scotland, the total number of entries for languages at National 5 in 2021 fell to **14,547** from **16,027** in 2020 and French remained the most commonly chosen language at this level.

Numbers taking French GCSE in Wales in 2021 dropped slightly to **2711** from **3040** in 2020 and **54.6%** gained A or A\* compared to **46.1%** in 2020. Numbers taking German were **485** in 2021, down from **556** in 2020 and **59.2%** of these students gained A or A\* compared to **52.0%** in 2020. Numbers taking Spanish rose in 2021 to **1,553** up from **1,120** in 2020 and **50.9%** gained an A or A\* compared to **46%** in 2020. Numbers taking Welsh as a second language increased slightly in 2021 to **21,798** from **21,351** in 2020 with those gaining A or A\* dropping to **26.5%** compared to **28.2%** in 2020. The number of students taking other Modern Languages decreased in 2021 to **175** from **264** in 2020 with those gaining A or A\* dropping slightly to **80%** compared to **80.7%** in 2020.

In Wales, there was a slight increase of just under 400 Modern Languages entries to **26,722** in 2021 compared to **26,331** in 2020.

- **A level results/ Scottish Advanced Highers**

These are the 2021 A-Level combined results for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and separate information for the Scottish Advanced Highers.

In French, overall numbers taking A-level in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are up very slightly from 8,263 in 2020 to 8,383 this year. The numbers getting A or A\* are up from 54.4% to 60.3%. In German, overall numbers are down slightly in England, Northern Ireland and Wales from 2849 in 2020 to 2708 in 2021. The numbers getting A or A\* are up from 58.7% to 67.7%. In Spanish, overall numbers are up in England, Northern Ireland and Wales from 8,707 in 2020 to 9,139 in 2021. The numbers getting A or A\* are up from 54.3% to 63.2%. There was a slight increase in students taking languages other than French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh from 4,928 in 2020 to 5,256 in 2021. The numbers gaining A or A\* rose from 73.8% in 2020 to 82.1 in 2021. **In the three languages for which A-level figures are readily available, Spanish remains the most popular language with French numbers going up slightly and German numbers going down slightly compared to last year. Numbers taking other languages have risen slightly and it is particularly rewarding to see the numbers of male linguists increasing slightly over last year in all languages except German.**

In the Scottish Advanced Highers, numbers taking French in the Scottish Advanced Highers went up slightly from **574** in 2020 to **591** in 2021 and the percentage gaining A went up from **59.4%** to **60.1%**. In German, numbers also rose, from **106** in 2020 to **143** in 2021 with **67.1 %** gaining A as opposed to **only 49.1%** in 2020. Numbers taking Spanish remained almost the same at **463** in 2021 as opposed to **464** in 2021 with **60.9** gaining A as opposed to 53.9 in 2020. In the other languages where statistics were available, numbers taking Chinese language went down slightly from **61** in 2020 to **59** in 2021 with **86.4%**

gaining an A in 2021 as opposed to **90.2 %** in 2020 and in Italian numbers went up from **27 to 33** in 2021 with **90.9%** gaining an A in 2021 compared to **70.4%** in 2020. Overall, numbers taking Languages in the Advanced Highers were steady with slight rises in French, German and Italian with a slight fall in Chinese.

## 2. UCAS data

The end of Cycle reports for 20/21 will be available on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021<sup>3</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022, but the 2021 June applications data<sup>4</sup> was made available in July and shows data for both JACS and HECOS codes. Data for CAH19 which covers Language and Area Studies is rather broad (since it also includes English Studies) but it is useful to show comparisons with previous years and data for the home nations are given for 2020 and 2021 below – it does not include non-UK applications although this is available. These figures give some idea of the acceptance numbers and another overall slight decline, but they are difficult to interpret until we see the rate of acceptances in the final figures. There are evidently many factors at play here.

### 2020

England	71710
NI	2580
Scotland	6820
Wales	3150
<b>Total</b>	<b>84260</b>

### 2021

England	70090
NI	2310
Scotland	7090
Wales	3030
<b>Total</b>	<b>82520</b>

Using JACS codes (JACS 3), key trends data for the last 10 years is given for European and non-European languages. The table below shows core numbers for the 2021 June application deadline compared to other years. Again, it is difficult to interpret the data given the changes in subject combinations over time and the fact that the figures show applications to single subject degrees. It will be interesting to see if a move to more generic degree titles (e.g. BA Modern Languages) will have any impact on these numbers.

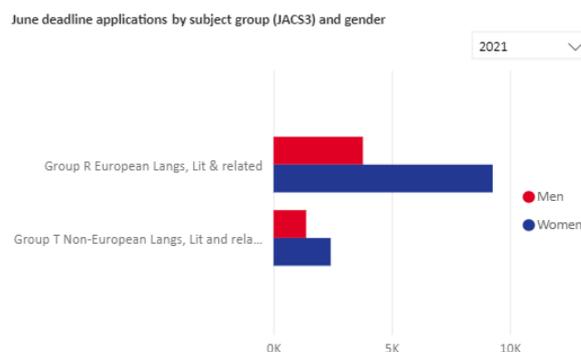
Subject group (JACS)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Group R European Langs, Lit & related	22,490	21,250	20,090	19,900	18,630	17,320	15,410	15,700	14,810	13,050
Group T Non-European Langs, Lit and related	6,680	6,240	5,910	6,130	5,760	5,470	5,010	5,120	4,420	3,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,160</b>	<b>27,490</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>26,030</b>	<b>24,390</b>	<b>22,790</b>	<b>20,430</b>	<b>20,820</b>	<b>19,230</b>	<b>16,850</b>

Data on gender in applications are given in the table below. Less than a quarter of the applicants to European languages are male (3780 men compared to 9720 women) and constitute nearly a third of the applicants to non-European languages (1380 men compared to 2420 women). The higher rate of males applying to study non-European languages is unsurprising but overall numbers are relatively small. The British Council report '*Boys studying MFL*<sup>5</sup>' (January 2020) makes interesting reading in this area.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-timetable-data-and-analysis>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2021/2021-cycle-applicant-figures-30-june-deadline>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/boys-language-gcse>



### 3. Promoting Languages

- **Routes into Languages**

Building on a question in the 2019 UCML / AULC survey, we asked in the 2020/21 survey whether HEIs were contemplating expanding their activities in the area. We have now made initial contact with those that indicated an interest in Routes to see if they would like to discuss potential further involvement. We have been very encouraged by the speedy and positive email responses. I have had a conversation with each of the HEIs who have shown an interest and I am delighted to report that there is a real hope that there will be much more visibility for Routes in the English regions going forward.

- **For note**, two useful recent short reports to be found in the House of Lords Library:
  - Foreign Languages: primary and secondary schools (July 2021) – this includes a useful overview of the recent debate over proposed curriculum changes<sup>6</sup>.
  - Foreign Languages: skills in the workforce (July 2021) – this includes a mention of the language deficit in the UK and also of moves to include language skills in the UK export strategy and other bills going through parliament
- **National Centre for CLIL: Learning through Languages UK**  
I attend the regular meetings of this group on behalf of UCML.
- **Gender Action** (<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/>)  
I am on the steering group for GA and attend their regular meetings. Originally set up with external funding by the Institute of Physics, DECSY (Development Education South Yorkshire) has now taken over the management of the GA initiative. There is ongoing active discussion around future funding sources to take the GA programme forward although a lottery funding bid was unsuccessful. There is discussion around potential financial support from Academy trusts and there is a general feeling that school-based gender action has particular relevance in the light of the recent Sarah Everard case.
- **Coventry City of Languages** (<https://coventry2021.co.uk/what-s-on/coventry-city-of-languages-the-launch-event/>).

I have attended several planning meetings for this event which is aligned with the events taking place as part of Coventry City of Culture. Initiated by two school teachers this event had amazing support from local universities, the British Council and many others and would be a good model for others to follow.

VW, November 2021

<sup>6</sup> <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/foreign-languages-primary-and-secondary-schools/>