

UCML Steering Group Meeting, October 2022

Report from the Vice Chair Education (Languages and Intercultural Studies)

This brief report reviews activities since the last meeting.

1. The UK Languages landscape

1.1 Summer 2022 GCSE / A-Level results

OfQUAL published a summary of the latest GCSE results for England in August, 2022¹ with an interesting set of infographics and ‘interactive visualisations’. In a year when the results for GCSE French and German reflect adjustments required by Ofqual to better align grade standards with Spanish, it is interesting to see that **50.1% (36.4%) of all students get A or above for French, 58.0% (40.4%) of all students get A or above for German and 50.6% (34.9%) for Spanish**. Pre-pandemic percentages for 2019 are given in brackets and the graphs from OFQUAL for French, German and Spanish are given in Appendix 1. The percentage getting A and above when taking **all subjects into account is 35.9% (25.2%)**. A full set of results for GCSE and A Level examinations in England, Northern Ireland and Wales is given by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)² on their website.

The following extracts from the media further exemplify key trends in this summer’s results and in the take-up of languages – one taking a rather less neutral stance.

- “It’s disappointing that that numbers taking GCSE languages have decreased this year. **Spanish has decreased 1.7%** after a period of rapid growth since 2018. **French remains the most popular language subject despite a 1.9% decrease** in entries. The continued decline in numbers taking **German (a decrease of 5.1%** this year) is a concern”.
(British Council)³
- “... the number of students studying A level languages remains a cause for concern. **French entries decreased by 5.4%** from 8,383 in 2021 to 7,929 in 2022, **Spanish entries decreased by 0.6%** from 9,139 to 9088. Indeed, entries for French represent the third biggest drop of any subject after English literature (down 9.4%) and English language and literature (down 5.8%). Whilst **German entries increased this year by 3.5% from 2,708** to 2,803 this is in a context where the number of A level candidates increased by 3.5% from last year.”
(Association for Language Learning⁴).
- “Ofqual adviser Professor Robert Coe told *Tes* that MFL subjects were in trouble as the figures for this year show that the numbers of students taking French, German and Spanish all dropped this year. ... **Professor Coe’s appeal for national intervention on MFL subjects** comes after warnings ahead of GCSE results day that the decline in MFL take-up had meant that government’s EBacc targets were ‘done for’.”
(TES)⁵
- “The trends in EBacc entries almost exactly track the trends in entries to languages. **While the proportion of pupils entering humanities subjects has been increasing over the last few years, this has had little effect on the overall proportion entering the EBacc**. It really does all come down to languages. And **the proportion of pupils entering the languages pillar of the EBacc is falling** ... the

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-gcse-results-for-england-summer-2022>

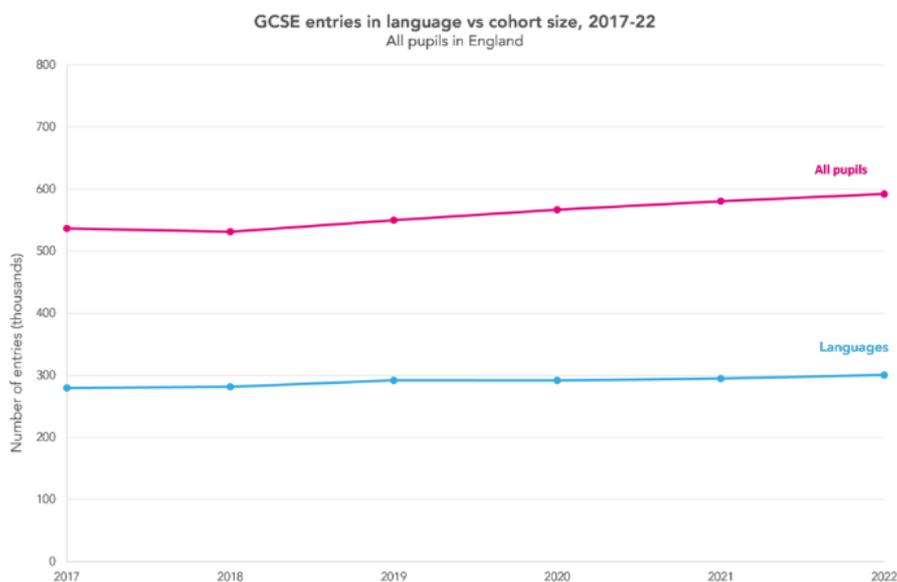
² <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/?post-year=2022&post-location=>

³ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/about/press/british-council-statement-modern-foreign-languages-gcse-results-1>

⁴ <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/news/all-statement-on-2022-a-level-and-as-results/>

⁵ <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/gcses-modern-foreign-languages-vicious-circle-decline>

population of KS4 pupils has increased over the last few years – so we would expect entries to languages to increase even if they haven’t become more popular. But – in short – they have not become more popular. The chart below shows how entries in modern foreign languages compare to the overall number of pupils. **Entries to modern foreign languages (in blue) have increased, from 279,709 in 2018 to 300,402 this year.** But the cohort size (in pink) has also increased, and rather more sharply”.



Entries to modern foreign languages have increased, from 279,709 in 2018 to 300,402 this year. But the cohort size has also increased, and rather more sharply.

Interestingly, the entries to other modern languages, which were flat until 2020, took a fall during the pandemic. This appears to be because **of a decrease in pupils studying community languages, such as Bengali, Polish and Turkish, which are often taught outside school.** The restrictions during the pandemic and the cancellation of exams meant that many pupils were unable to enter GCSEs in these subjects. Entry numbers this year are up on pre-pandemic levels”. **The data from JCO showing numbers taking GCSE in the ‘other languages’ category for the last three years is given in the appendix.**

(FFT Education Datalab)⁶”

1.2 Language Trends Survey, 2022⁷

Headlines from this year’s Trends survey published by the British Council show a mixed pattern across the country especially in primary schools:

- Four out of five responding primary schools have been teaching languages for more than five years.
- There is a great deal of variation in the amount of time devoted to languages in different primary schools across the country. Some pupils receive less than 30 minutes per week.
- The trend in all school types is that an increasing number of schools are reporting no international engagement.
- Data show that the government is not on target to meet its EBacc targets for numbers of pupils taking a GCSE in a language.
- Spanish is now firmly established as the most popular A level language in England.

1.3 UCAS data

⁶ <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2022/08/why-dont-more-pupils-study-modern-foreign-languages-at-gcse/>

⁷

UCAS data releases⁸ for this year include:

- 27th October, 2022: analysis of 22/23 AY undergraduate applicants at the October deadline.
- 8th December, 2022 : analysis of UCAS undergraduate applicants at the end of the 2021/22 AY application cycle.

Whilst the end of cycle reports give the good overview of current application trends in all subject areas, the October report gives some indication of the overall application rate (in terms of domicile, gender age and POLAR4 quintile) at the beginning of the cycle. **It shows a year on year increase since 2006 with an increase of nearly 40% in the last 10 years, rising from 55,670 applicants to 77,810** by the 15th October, 2022 deadline⁹. Of the latter number, nearly 30,000 are applying for courses in Medicine.

1.4 Purchasing additional UCAS data: Granular Trends report

We have worked closely with the British Academy over the last few months on the analysis of data purchased from UCAS (from 2019 to the 21/22 academic year) which updates the previous *Report on Granular Trends in Modern Languages*¹⁰. The new report which is being compiled in the first instance by the British Academy shows trends in degree combinations with languages over the last 10 years (2012-2022). We have purchased 200 data points (i.e. any one point made in a report is counted as 'one' whether it draws on one or more pieces of data) so we are able to give a more detailed presentation of patterns emerging than in the previous report. The report, a joint publication between the British Academy and UCML will be published before Christmas. Analysis confirms what we suspect already in that **most of the decline in numbers studying languages is amongst those who are studying specific language degrees** where one or more languages is studied. On the other hand, where languages are studied in combination with other subjects the picture is different. For example, **'the numbers of students studying languages with a social science or with arts/humanities subjects has stayed relatively stable over the period**, with a slight overall reduction in each case'.

1.5 AULC / UCML annual surveys.

The annual survey which was carried out in Spring 2022 had a very low return rate unfortunately with only 21 HEIS responding. Some initial headline data was reported at the summer plenary meeting but a detailed analysis is still underway and we hope to publish it shortly.

2. Promoting Languages

2.1 Routes into Languages

Every English region is now represented on the UCML Routes sub-committee meeting of the new year, 2022, alongside Routes Cymru, the national networks for Translation and Interpreting, Northern Ireland are represented through NICILT and Scotland through SCILT. We are still to set up a national (English) training scheme for UG ambassadors / mentors and last academic year set up a small working group to look at this. The current plan is to develop a web-based 'Toolkit' using existing and new resources which can be used by individual regions / universities to run short training courses. These could be run as in-person courses or online. Several regions have continued to run training courses which were originally coordinated at national level when Routes was a funded project. We will be having our first meeting this year in December – we have been slow to get started this academic year.

There is some interest too in a national ambassador / mentoring scheme from elsewhere and Emmanuelle Labeau has reported an interest from the AHRC following her report on the Future of

⁸ <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-timetable-data-and-analysis>

⁹ <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2022-cycle/2022-cycle-applicant-figures-15-october-deadline>

¹⁰ <https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UCML-BA-UCAS-Granularity-Report.pdf>

Languages. The British Academy is also in touch about exploring ways in which mentoring schemes for languages can be fostered across UK HEIs.

Other activities

I attend meetings of Gender Action on behalf of UCML and also the National Centre for CLIL: Learning through Languages UK.

I am a member of the Languages Cultures and Societies Subject Benchmark Advisory Group and also represented LCS on the Linguistics Advisory Group. These meetings have been very fruitful and very positive. The ensuing Statements have tried hard to reflect the current status of our subject areas. The consultation version of this fifth iteration of the LCS Statement is available online as is the Linguistics Statement ¹¹. The closing date for responses to the consultation was 2 November and the final Statements are planned to be published in spring 2023.

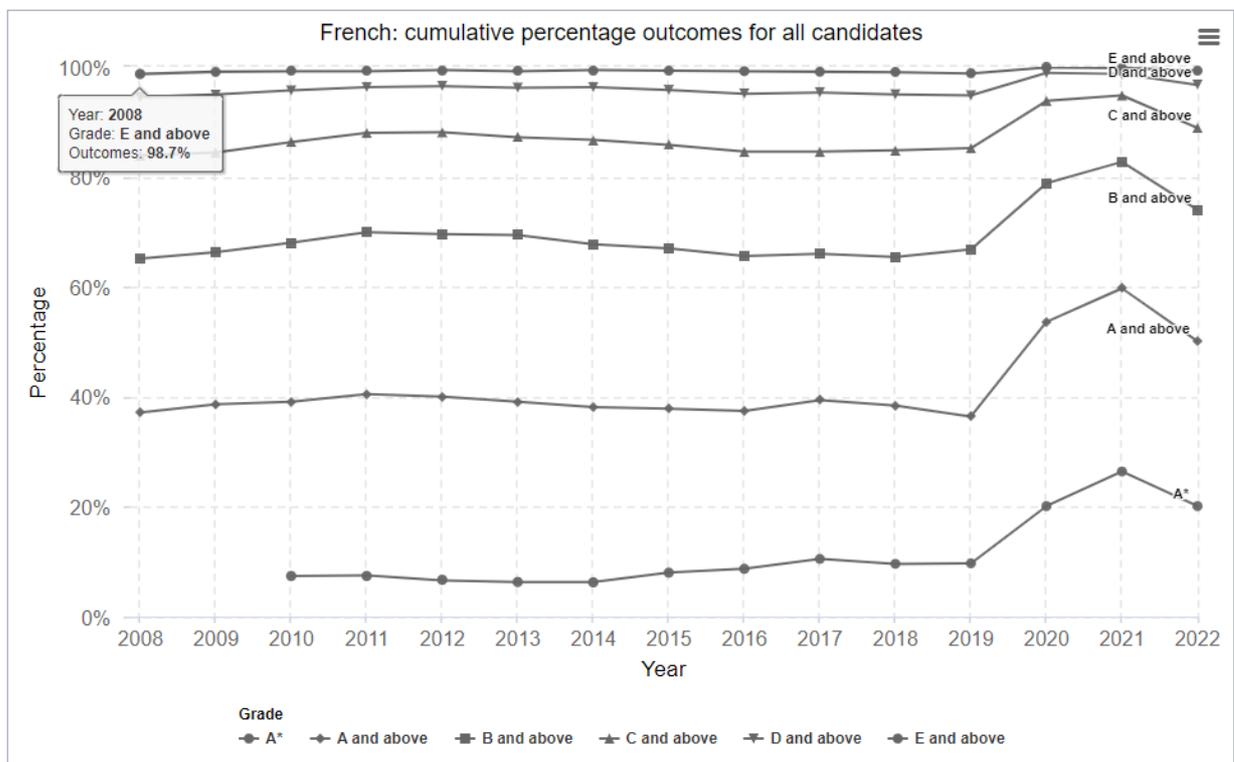
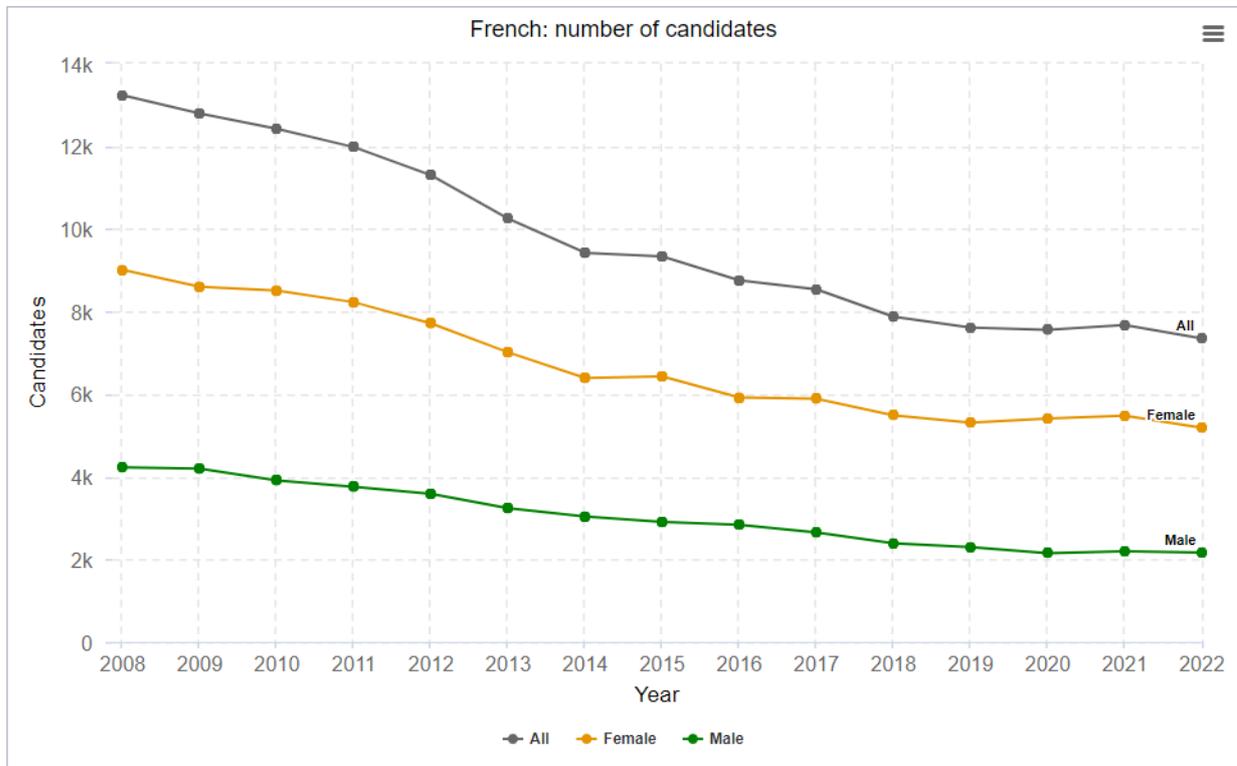
VW, November 2022

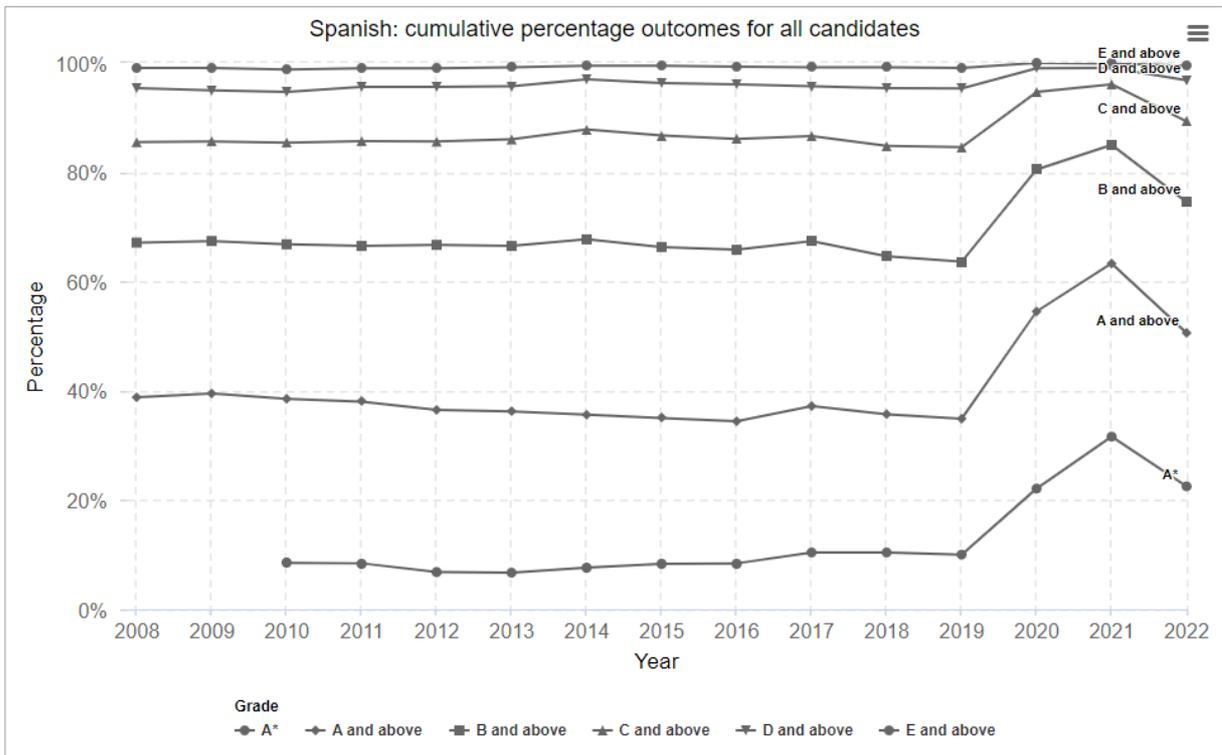
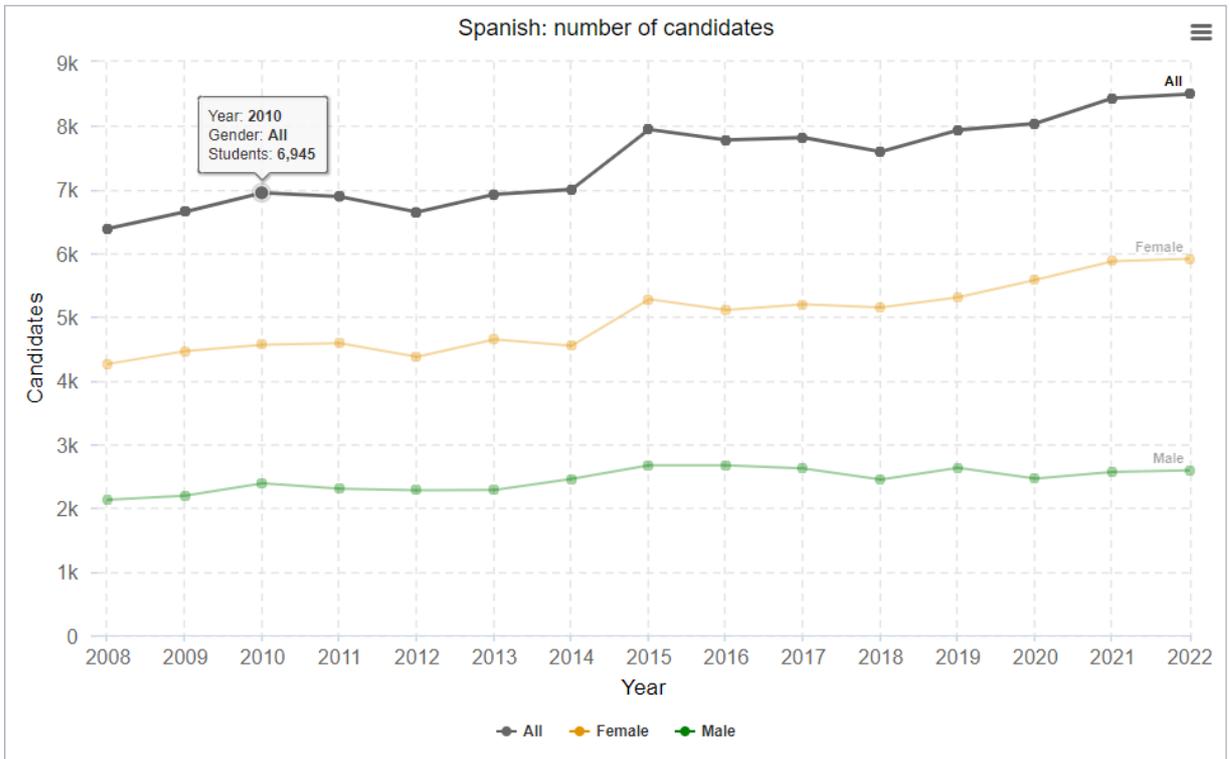
¹¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/consultation-on-revised-subject-benchmark-statements>

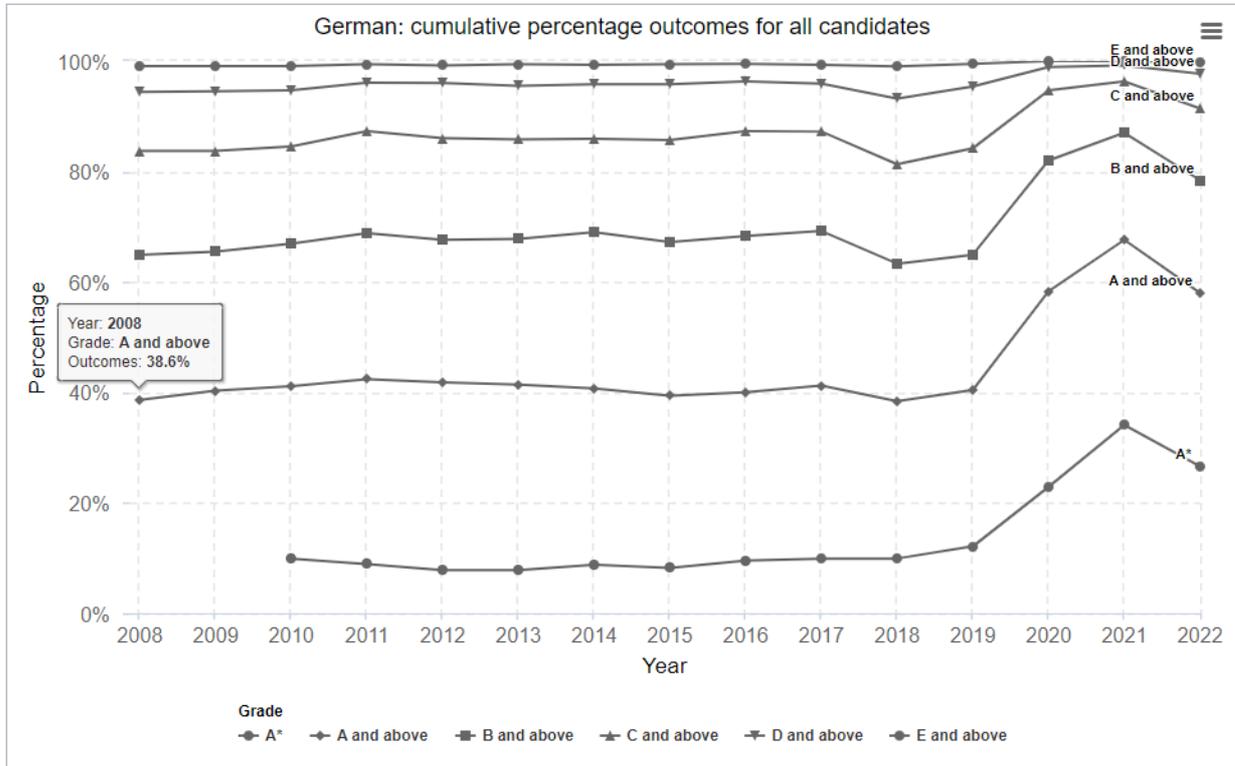
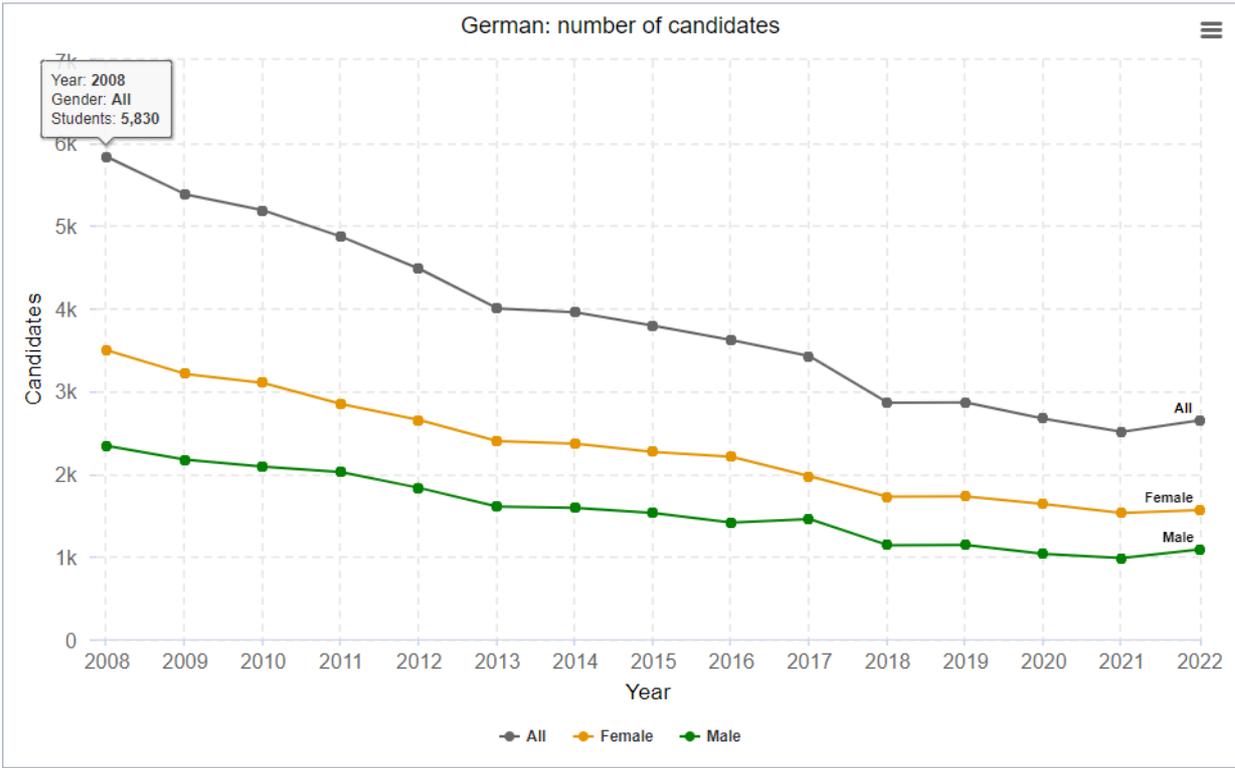
Appendices

Source: Ofqual, 2022 interactive graphs for each subject area, summer 2022

<https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/>









GCE A-Level Other Modern Language UK Entries June 2019, 2021, and 2022

Subject	2019	2021	2022
Arabic	835	615	570
Bengali ¹	28	0~	12
Chinese	2272	1312	1349
Dutch	35	0	0
Gujarati ¹	25	0~	0~
Italian	822	666	800
Japanese	216	108	155
Modern Greek	172	99	79
Modern Hebrew	56	28	28
Panjabi	202	133	112
Persian	172	111	128
Polish	1169	630	657
Portuguese	530	228	294
Russian	754	730	738
Turkish	591	264	366
Urdu	410	322	223
All Other MFL	8289	5256	5518

Notes:

1. Very low entry figures, fewer than 10 (-) not published but included in the All Other MFL figures.



GCSE Other Modern Foreign Languages Entries Summer 2019, 2021 and 2022

Subject	2019	2021	2022
Arabic	4203	3848	4931
Bengali	570	361	455
Chinese	3201	3648	5504
Dutch	0	0	0
Gujarati	508	248	270
Italian	5331	3600	4897
Japanese	698	668	928
Modern Greek	589	517	640
Modern Hebrew	378	599	522
Panjabi	865	643	820
Persian	388	247	507
Polish	5704	2878	6003
Portuguese	2280	1476	2710
Russian	2133	1495	2376
Turkish	1656	1283	2360
Urdu	3679	3203	3522
All Other MFL	32183	24714	36445

Source: JCQ - <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GCSE-Other-MFL-Entries-Summer-2021-2022.pdf>