

Summary of Participants' Feedback

Future of learning Modern Foreign Languages

Although languages as primary level are unlikely to become statutory in the short term, participants suggested that supporting primary schools in promoting the love of learning foreign languages would provide good preparation for post-primary schools. Raising the awareness of career opportunities and the global perspectives that come from languages learning.

Many participants agreed that it is best to learn languages from an early age and therefore introduce them well before pupils move to post-primary schools. However, they also recognised that making languages compulsory does not necessarily lead to enthusiasm or appreciation of the subject unless appropriate support and investment can be made available.

A STE(A)M¹ style strategy and associated investment should be applied to promote languages, or STEM and languages could go forward promoting each other.

Industry/ business strategies should support links to business and engagement with schools and could include providing careers' education for languages teachers. Participants also mentioned modular Add-ons, Initial Teacher Education language training add-ons as ongoing support options.

Current challenges

Attendees highlighted a number of challenges. These included funding, the lack of awareness of benefits of having languages for career opportunities and cognitive development even at School Leadership Team level, the lack of continuation of language learning with the recent closure of languages departments in the local universities, the perceived high difficulty of achieving good grades in languages qualifications compared to other subjects, and dissuasion based on perceptions of languages as being difficult to learn or languages courses being no fun and mostly entailing rote learning.

The perception of lack of accessible and available technology in/for modern languages learning was considered another challenge, with CCEA's OLA currently available in paper format only being cited as an example. However, non-specialist courses, including non-specialist university courses, were suggested as a way forward.

The impact of the impending Brexit negotiations on many aspects of languages learning, teaching and potential funding, for example for Comenius and Erasmus programmes, was considered. Participants mentioned programmes by the British Council.

Languages Progression Pathway Development

Clear mapping of relevant information across the key stages and/or the mapping of key competences and, where appropriate the associated languages skills, to potential career choices and/or life situations would be welcomed. It was suggested that a clear pathway from Primary school onwards could aid connections and progression between sectors. Signposting of resources, links/connections between primary and post-primary provisions, languages options for all abilities, and alignment with the CEFR framework were suggested as useful additions to the progression

¹ A (Arts and Humanities) include languages

pathway. Thus the pathway could support raising awareness of the key role that languages play in schools, universities, and society and help with engaging pupils' interest in learning languages and continuing after Key Stage 3.

Action across all Key Stages

Languages learning would be more popular if languages teaching was perceived as more up-to-date, future orientated and fun. Literature, business application, specialist speaking, and translations can be more contemporary and relevant and resources and support materials that offered an up-to-date approach and methodology would be welcomed by the sectors.

A cross-curricular, inter-cultural approach at all Key Stages was suggested to increase learners' exposure to modern foreign languages and cultures.

Facilitation of collaboration between primary and post-primary schools through Shared Education courses referring to languages skills or peer tutoring can promote/encourage interest in languages and connect using suitable technology, for example showing how Maths and Physics could be studied alongside French, and how this can benefit the learners. CCEA should run its online OLA courses again.

Parents would need to be educated about the benefits of speaking foreign languages for themselves and their children.

Teacher training would be required at primary and a robust languages curriculum at KS 3 to build confidence. Teachmeets for languages teachers can help, as languages enthusiasm being built in our classrooms was considered of utmost importance.

Re: Are there any gaps in the qualification provisions for languages in NI?

Attendees asked about possibilities to develop and support more practical qualifications, for example, for students who see languages for business as a career path. Suggestions included options to combine qualifications such as Travel and Tourism or Hospitality with (a) language(s), for example with the development of a business module instead of the standard literature module in a GCSE (or equivalent) of Tourism with languages.

Beside a review of grading and difficulty levels at GCSE and A-level languages examinations, which was a recurring proposal, current GCSE/A-Level content and examinations were seen by many attendees as dated in terms of the examining approaches and the specification content that require updating and modernising. Instead there could be opportunities to infuse the Listening and Speaking with business elements to give them a new focus and wider relevance. MFL should be emphasised as a 'stepping stone' incorporated as transferrable skills and an asset, with a modular approach, as opposed to a 'single destination GCSE'. It was suggested that CCEA consider more of a baccalaureate than a traditional A-Level approach. To pupils who do not continue their languages learning into KS4, a certificate, alternative Level 2 qualification, or some form of utilisable credit could be given at the end of KS3.

Languages learning does not have to be a very academic exercise. Any learner should be able to take forward their KS3 languages learning via subject specific or business specific language modules at KS4. Languages learning opportunities for all abilities (including Short Courses at Key Stage 3 and GCSE), ideally with a form of certification, was another suggestion for direction that CCEA and policy makers should be looking into.

Re: How can the benefits of learning and teaching languages best be conveyed?

Attendees suggested that parent/guardian education plays a big role in this and perhaps Invest NI and Institute of Directors could run an advertising campaign around the importance of languages for learners of all ages. Changing perceptions by promoting modern languages learning as a need rather than an option was also suggested. The importance of DE, schools, educational support bodies, industry and the business community together contributing to parent/guardian education was acknowledged.

Suggestions included videos of people like the Terex guest speaker talking about their own experience to school assemblies via C2k video conferencing facilities, NICILT resources could be on or linked to from CCEA website (videos, lesson plans, resources) to avoid duplication of work and resources, work Experience (Exchange), trips and study visits, Language weeks, After School Language Clubs, meetings with international students for example for GCSE courses, prizes from and constant engagement with business to get and update information from business on what language skill/intercultural knowledge they want; language ambassador programmes with young people/entrepreneurs; social engagement events, webinars/use of technologies to permit classes to run (ALCs); visiting speakers and calls on university students to talk to schools.

Re: What actions, if any, can be taken as a result of this event's discussion on return to schools or organisation?

“Great to hear what other schools are doing – will use some of the ideas shared today.”

Many participants intended to report back to their teacher colleagues and School Management Team about ways of promoting or even prioritising languages in schools and discuss implications for curriculum planning. Some anticipated looking further into promoting careers with languages and new level 2 courses and trying to make links with businesses/industry and languages graduates. Some teachers thought of researching possibilities for suitable speakers from business and universities to come to their schools.

Industry considered to reaching out to linguists to explore useful connections with schools and pushing the importance of being able to apply modern languages in the workplace. Universities will continue to promote languages.

Re: What action should be taken as a result of this event's discussion by CCEA?

Participants suggested that CCEA should collate and make accessible presentations and discussion outcomes. CCEA also could forward discussion outcomes of this event to all school principals, and to consult with primary schools that are currently and consistently delivering modern languages learning if/when further work is undertaken, for example on lines of development or schemes of work.

Other suggestions included that CCEA should actively promote languages, as well as provide a strategic overview and alignment with the Levels of Progression to ensure improved pupil attainment, confidence and commitment, as well as develop/supply a clear scheme of work for languages in Primary schools, which goes beyond the 'vague' lines of development that transitions appropriately into Post-Primary teaching, and provide a form of accreditation, e.g. a Certificate of Primary Languages Learning. Also, CCEA should get OLA back online and provide a form of certification at Key Stage 3. Review the grading levels for French in comparison to other languages.

CCEA should work with DE and ETI on the languages agenda, and on more support for languages teachers to develop ICT skills so they can embrace technology to deliver their subjects. In addition,

suggestions included for CCEA to act as a conduit by facilitating more links with teachers, universities, industry and business, and regularly updating the subsequent information that is shared with schools.

Re: Key messages

Many participants were encouraged to see that peers and organisations want to work on improving and preserving the need for languages learning.

- “We need to inspire our learners on the joy and challenges of learning another language”.
- “Languages are struggling. We need to take action - children will lose out otherwise. Steps need to be taken to raise positive image of languages as a worthwhile, valued GCSE subject.”
- “Languages need strong promotion in schools and society, to be given a strong policy focus across the UK, and significant resources to grow.”
- “There is evidently a huge energy and passion for promoting languages amongst teachers in NI. This needs to be harnessed and listened to by CCEA/Ofqual.”
- “The importance of developing certification for Primary Languages.”
- “Need for strategic decisions from DE and other bodies to promote languages uptake.”
- “Importance of collaborative working, making languages relevant.”

Attendees:

1. Representatives - schools and stakeholders:

Primary Schools
Post-primary Schools
DE
Foras Na Gaeilge
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
Gael Linn
NICILT
St Mary's University College
Ulster University
Queen's University Belfast
Invest NI
Powerscreen/Terex
British Council

2. Representatives – CCEA:

Council
Education Committee
Executive Team
Speakers and Facilitators
Staff