

Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the Development of Lifelong Learning

26 June 2006



Modern Foreign Languages – Up-date

Report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1. To explain the attached report from the Modern Foreign Languages specialist inspector which provides an up-date about modern foreign languages teaching in County Durham.

Background

2. The Sub-Committee has drawn attention to the dramatic reduction in the take-up of modern foreign languages at GCSE level in County Durham schools as a result of a change in the National Curriculum.
3. Last year, Cabinet agreed that a new strategy should be adopted to encourage a more vocational approach to modern foreign languages study with the aim of providing skills fit for purpose for the business sector. Another aim was to try to demonstrate the relevance of language study for pupils and others.
4. The attached report from Margaret Bell, the Specialist Inspector for modern foreign languages provides an up-date about progress. It is disappointing to see that the number of pupils studying languages at GCSE is still continuing to fall although not as steeply as in the past. Nevertheless, in response to the approach from Scrutiny, a number of initiatives are being pursued to seek to redress this trend. The main aim is to work closely with the business sector to provide appropriate skills, hopefully to assist the County's economy longer term and to encourage younger people to pursue business careers in County Durham with the assistance of language skills.

Recommendation

5. You are asked to note the position.

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MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES ACTION PLAN – YEAR ONE – SEPTEMBER 2005-6

PROGRESS REPORT: JUNE 2006

CONTEXT

The annual audit of Modern Foreign Languages provision in County Durham indicates that the number of pupils following languages in Key Stage 4 is continuing to fall (from 70% in 2001/2, to 48% in 2004/5, to 46% in 2005/6).

Most Durham Secondary Schools now offer languages as an option in Key Stage 4. In many of these schools, GCSE groups run with small numbers of pupils. There is one school where there is almost no language taught at Key Stage 4, but some pupils are entered for a GCSE at the end of Year 9. Durham's three Language Colleges (Durham Johnston Comprehensive School, Lanchester St Bede's and Park View Community College) have the largest cohorts of pupils learning languages (10.1%).

PROGRESS WITH THE PLAN

1. IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Education Development Service has put in place a two year rolling programme of specialist MFL inspector monitoring, operational from January 2006. This means that, teachers are given bespoke advice about how best to improve the performance of their pupils. Where necessary, teachers have been further supported by an MFL consultant, commissioned by the BETT team, to give intensive support over an extended period of time. By July 06, twelve Secondary Schools will have been visited by the Inspector and the consultant continues to work in nine.

2. County Durham's Economic Partnership are currently considering a bid (£30,000) for funding to support additional consultancy.

3. INTRODUCING THE NEW ACCREDITATION SYSTEM – *THE LANGUAGES LADDER*

Awareness raising and Co-ordinator Training have both taken place for the first cohort of schools (funding from CILT, the National Centre for Languages). Nine Durham Secondary Schools are now registered as centres for Languages Ladder accreditation and are planning how best to put in place the Languages Ladder within their own contexts. Schools in this first cohort will cascade their experiences in the Autumn Term with a second cohort. Pupils will begin to be accredited during the next academic year.

4. **NEW MODELS OF DELIVERY**

The Headteacher of Teesdale School has developed an innovative method of delivering A Level French via a combination of distance learning and video-conferencing, in order to encourage schools to allow small numbers of pupils to access language learning post-16. Teesdale School and Wolsingham School and Community College are piloting this project from September 06. This project is now part of CILT's (The National Centre for Languages) MFL 14-19 Learning Networks programme and plans are in place to disseminate the impact of the project nationally (CILT funding £5,000). This initiative is also a key development for County Durham in terms of new collaborative provision post-16 and its progress is being monitored by the LA/LSC 14-19 Strategic Group.

5. **BUSINESS LANGUAGE CHAMPION**

Durham has also been successful in securing for Durham Johnston, the only regional place on the CILT Business Languages Ambassadors Project. The school has recently been linked with the North East Life Regional Portal, based at Team Valley. The firm is offering work experience for Year 12 and 13 languages students which includes the opportunity to develop languages skills, the hosting of distance collaboration with Durham Johnston's partners schools in France, Germany and China, and training for teachers and students on the development of websites through the medium of languages taught in the school.

6. **MANDARIN CHINESE**

Bids for funding to support the implementation of the teaching of Mandarin Chinese is currently being drafted for submission to the British Council and Durham's Economic Partnership.

7. **INTEGRATION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING INTO THE VISION, PLANNING AND ACTION OF KEY SKILLS STAKEHOLDERS**

The LA and LSC Durham 14-19 Entitlement document explicitly states that it is highly desirable that all pupils should have the opportunity to study at least one MFL. This document has been agreed by the LA, LSC, schools, sixth form and FE colleges, and work-based learning providers

Durham LA has convened a regional group of MFL teachers, University and business colleagues to support the development of vocational language provision in the North East. Initial work is being sponsored by the Education Business Partnership, CILT and the Learning and Skills Network (£10k). Expected outcomes are business links for language teachers, classroom materials, and a regional progression guide which will give advice to teachers, pupils and parents about where which languages can be studied in the North East and in which institutions.

CONCLUSION

A number of activities have been initiated to redress the falling trend in the takeup of Modern Languages at 14. The impact of this, at this stage, is that there is an increased awareness of opportunities available to motivate pupils to continue language learning post-14 in some providers in County Durham. Whilst these activities will not immediately result in a substantial increase in the number of language learners in Durham, support for schools is robust, the models of good practice replicable, and further developments can be expected from the implementation of key plans. The annual survey needs to be refined to be able to identify the impact of the above initiatives

Margaret Bell
Specialist Inspector for 14-19
and Modern Foreign Languages

20/06/2006