

# BORN GLOBAL

## Summary of interim findings

Prepared for the Born Global Symposium  
Friday 17 October 2014



BRITISH  
ACADEMY

*for the humanities and social sciences*

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“ There are two disadvantages in global language arrangements: one of them is not knowing English; and the other one of them is knowing only English. ”

PROFESSOR JO LO BIANCO, Chair of Language and Literacy Education, University of Melbourne, Australia



# Summary of Interim Findings

Part 1: Context: a critical review	8
Part 2: Languages in employment	20
Part 3: Every graduate a linguist	27
Part 4: Reflections: Time for a new national conversation	32

# Questions for the Born Global Symposium

## Food for debate

### PANEL 1: Why language skills count – languages for the economy

- 1 The vast majority of businesses (94%) do not require a high level foreign language fluency as an essential core competence of their operation  
CBI/Pearson: 2014  
  
Has the demand for language skills been overstated? Is English really enough?
- 2 In the global race for business, as we try to push forward an export-led growth agenda, what are the hard economic benefits of learning foreign languages?
- 3 Our major trading partners are France, Germany and the US. We are also trying to break into newer emerging markets: the BRIC, CIVET and MINT economies.  
  
How does a business go about planning for its strategic development?
- 4 How much proficiency do you need in another language for it to be useful in a professional context? How much is enough to exercise soft power?
- 5 There is very little evidence to show any labour market advantage for UK-born employees with language skills, whereas there is for employees with STEM subjects.  
  
How can we incentivise English speakers to learn languages?
- 6 Is there a multilingual dividend? Are young people who only speak English at a disadvantage in the labour market?
- 7 Mobility and multilingual societies go hand-in-hand, bringing opportunities and challenges.  
  
How do we manage all of the different language needs that are now required in the workplace, for business and in wider society?
- 8 We have rich linguistic reserves in our communities.  
  
How can we utilise our multilingual capital to best effect?
- 9 There is a major focus on export to rebalance our economy. Another element in economic recovery is inward-investment.  
  
Are we making enough of our cultural diversity in attracting inward investment?
- 10 Language skills can smooth the path to business. Yet, we know that year-on-year employers express concern about the quantity and quality of foreign language skills and the low levels of international cultural awareness. The supply chain from schools and universities appears not to be producing the right product or service to meet the employers' requirements.  
  
What should we be doing better?

# Questions for the Born Global Symposium

## Food for debate

### PANEL 2: Fixing the supply chain – languages for employability

- 1 One of the longer-term problems, raised in the Worton report (2009) that has inhibited our national effort to build capacity in language skills has been a question of subject identity, and a confusion over what constitutes specialising in a language.  
  
So, where to with languages, academic discipline or skill?
- 2 Given the national and international priority to prepare young people for employment, is it time to rethink the identity of languages and locate language learning within a broader matrix of transferable skills for employability?
- 3 How can we redefine our understanding of communication skills to include English and other languages?
- 4 Demonstrating an ‘international outlook’ and ‘a global mind-set’ are high on the list of criteria for selection at recruitment. What do these mean and how can language learning in schools and universities ensure that these attributes are developed?
- 5 How can we provide international work experience for school, college and university level students, and as part of the new apprenticeship schemes?
- 6 How can we harness the power of new technologies?
- 7 What do we need to change in the curriculum for schools and universities that will normalise multilingual communication and create a step-change in attitudes towards language learning?
- 8 How do we fix the supply chain and ensure that there are sufficient numbers of specialist linguists with the necessary levels of proficiency to become our interpreters, translators, researchers, diplomats and teachers?
- 9 Can universities become part of the supply chain for language skills training and provision within their local or regional areas?
- 10 How can the private sector contribute to fixing the supply chain? Can language skills training become a regular part of professional development and employee engagement?

## About this research

**Born Global** is a major policy research project in the British Academy's language programme. The project forms an integral part of the Academy's Languages and Quantitative Skills Programme and will build on previous research into the demand and supply of language skills in the UK.

Following public concern over declining capability in language competence in all sectors of education and in the face of recurrent calls from employers for stronger language skills to support economic growth, this research will elicit new knowledge about the extent and nature of language needs for employment to inform government language policy development and implementation. The project aims to provide a new paradigm for evidence-based policy development, engaging key stakeholders from education and employment in a radical rethinking of languages education for the 21st Century.

The research aims to develop a deeper understanding of how language is used in the workplace for different purposes, by employees of different levels of skill and accountability. It will explore employers' attitudes towards language skills and their expectations of language competence and use.

Working with the Education and Employers Task Force, the study will also draw on an analysis of longitudinal data made available through the British Cohort Study. It will investigate the relationship between the language competence of young people and their employment prospects. While there has been some research into the potential benefits of language capability to economic recovery, to date there has been no reliable information to inform public discourse about the economic and social benefits of language study to individuals.

The findings and recommendations from this study will be published in the form of an independent report in spring 2015.



# About this report

The summary of initial findings draws on analysis of evidence from the first phase of the research project from October 2013 to July 2014. The data gathering and analysis are in still in process, therefore these findings should be taken as provisional and may be subject to change.

## Sources

The study is based on a number of sources of information

1. A comprehensive review of available literature into the relationship of language skills to the economy and to employment (A selection of key texts has been included here)
2. The main source of evidence is an analysis of in-depth interviews conducted by the principal researcher with senior executives and other relevant staff from a number of major global companies and other organisations. Over 45 hours of primary source interview data have been recorded and analysed through a process of selective transcription and thematic induction.
3. Findings from the analysis of the British Cohort Study data commissioned as part of the Born Global research project and carried out by the Education and Employers Taskforce (Morris, Kashefpakdel and Mann, 2014)
4. Feedback from the first wave of returns to the Born Global Executive Survey of Employers (April/May 2014)
5. Analysis of the survey of 1,300 members of the Inspiring the Future Network a collaborative exercise with the Education and Employers Taskforce (Holmes with Morris and Kashefpakdel, 2014)
6. Insights from the independent analysis of the current Institution-Wide language Provision (IWLP) Student Survey data made available online by The University of Manchester (Holmes, 2014)

# PART 1

## Context: a critical review

Public concern over the health of languages education in schools and universities in England has been long-term and remains acute.<sup>1</sup> The declining numbers of students with language skills affect a wide range of different stakeholders in different ways and there are inward-facing and outward-facing arguments which are equally valid in stating the pressing need to reverse the downturn. Concerns relate to quantity, quality and identity of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

The following summary of some key facts and figures will help to clarify the extent of the challenge that must be taken up by policy makers and employers, and schools and universities, in a concerted action to prepare our young people for employability in an international labour market, so that they may take full advantage of being 'born global'.

### QUANTITY – What do the figures tell us?

In 2010, at the time of the change of government, language education in England was in a critical state.

- The proportion of students entering for GCSE in modern foreign languages steadily decreased from 2002, when around three-quarters (76%) of students were entered for a modern foreign language,

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1 Language Trends 2013/14 *The State of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council and CfBT Education Trust

2 Review of Modern Foreign Languages provision in higher education in England: By Professor Michael Worton, Vice-Provost, University College London. October 2009 | ref: 2009/41

dropping to just over 43% in 2010.<sup>3</sup> The languages most affected by the decline were German and French.

- Between 2004, when languages ceased to be a statutory requirement for fourteen-year olds, and 2010, the percentage of state maintained schools retaining compulsory languages dropped from 30% to 20%. Meanwhile the Independent Sector appeared to be prioritising languages, with figures for compulsory language learning rising from 75% in 2004 to 89% by 2010.<sup>4</sup>
- Evidence presented to the Education Select Committee<sup>5</sup> reveals that the situation disproportionately affected pupils from the poorest backgrounds or attending schools in disadvantaged areas.
- Research by the Sutton Trust in 2009<sup>6</sup> finds that highly able pupils attending the most disadvantaged schools were ten times more likely to take a vocational qualification than highly able pupils in the most advantaged schools, even though they might have been expected to opt for more academically focused courses to fulfil their ability potential. Similarly, financially disadvantaged pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) were far less likely to take individual academic subjects. Figures for 2009 show that only 4% of FSM pupils took chemistry or physics. Fewer than one in five did history and fewer than 15% took geography or French.
- Closer analysis of the available data confirm that maintained schools with an above average number of FSM pupils were significantly less likely to offer students an opportunity to learn a language post 14 than schools in more affluent areas, and this was particularly the case for boys. In 2010, 24% of FSM pupils entered an MFL subject compared with 43% of non-FSM pupils doing likewise.

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3 Written evidence submitted by the Department for Education to the Education Select Committee © Parliamentary copyright 2011 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/851/851we07.htm>

4 Language Trends 2011 *Language learning in secondary schools in England*, CfBT Education Trust

5 Op. cit.

6 Sutton Trust, (2009). Attainment Gaps between the most deprived and advantaged Schools. A summary and discussion of research by the Education Research Group at the London School of Economics.

- Languages education in English schools was stratified according to gender, school type, ability and socio-economic background. By default, language capability, or lack of it, seemed to be operating as an indicator of educational inequality.<sup>7</sup>
- To secure wider opportunity for all learners to study beyond the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the EBacc performance measure<sup>8</sup> was introduced into the 2010 performance tables. Its impact on increasing the number of pupils entering modern foreign languages at GCSE was immediate and very positive. The latest DfE examination entry figures show a 7% increase in the proportion of Key Stage 4 pupils entering a languages GCSE in summer 2013 in comparison with 2012 (48% rising from 41%)<sup>9</sup>
- Initial readings of the latest Language Trends 2013/14 present cautious room for optimism, since the number of schools with more than 50% of their pupils studying a language has continued to rise and perhaps of greater significance, given the relative fragility of provision for the teaching and learning of community languages, 31% of schools have used the EBacc as an opportunity to encourage learners to take a qualification in their home languages.
- In the evaluation of the impact of the EBacc, a further control variable can be introduced into the mix and that is geographical area. Analysis of the statistics<sup>10</sup> made available from the Department for Education for the year 2012/13 identifies the percentage of students entered for the languages component of the EBacc within each local authority. Overall, there is improvement in the number of pupils

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7 Holmes, B. (2012) *21st Britain needs more than English*. The Linguist CIOL

8 In its first iteration in 2010, the measure recognised where pupils had secured a C grade or better across a core of academic subjects—English, mathematics, the sciences, a language and either history or geography. To qualify for the science element pupils needed to take and gain an A\*-C grade in both core and additional science or take all three single sciences and gain an A\*-C grade in two. The language element included all modern foreign languages and Latin, Ancient Hebrew and Classical Greek. In 2013, the EBacc was extended and now includes computer science as one of four science options. The change was made because of the importance of computer science to education and the economy.

9 Language Trends 2013/14 *The state of language learning in primary and secondary schools in England*. British Council and CfBT

10 DfE GCSE and Equivalent Results 2012-13 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2012-to-2013-revised>

entering languages GCSE across the country, although there remain significant differences between north and south and between different local authorities in the proportion of students studying languages. A pupil was far more likely to study a language and enter and EBacc in Kingston upon Thames, (67.4%) in Outer London, than in Middlesbrough, (23%) in the North East.

- There is disparity between one local authority and another within each region, and disparity between regions in the north and in the south. London significantly outperforms the rest of the country. The following figures show the proportion of pupils entering languages as part of the EBacc by region: North East (41.8%); North West (47.6%); Yorkshire and the Humber (42.1%); East Midlands (46.8%) West Midlands (43.6%); East (46.9%); London (57.7%); Inner London (56.8%) and Outer London (58.1%); South-East (48.2%) and South West (47.6%). This becomes of relevance to employers, since there will be a generational language skills deficit, which will be unevenly distributed from one area to the next and some areas where the shortage in language skills will take some time to reverse.
- The situation for students of languages at Advanced Level remains fragile.<sup>11</sup> Entrants for A level have become fewer and fewer over the last twenty years and numbers have dropped in French and German by well over 50% during that period, although Spanish and other languages have shown a steady increase from a relatively low baseline. In 1996, 22,718 students entered A-level French. Ten years later the number had fallen to 12,190. The entry has continued to drop and in 2013 just 9,878 A-level students were entered for the subject.
- Similar to GCSE distribution, there are differences in entry patterns across the regions of England: Inner London has the highest percentage of total A-level MFL entries (3.18%) and the West Midlands has the lowest (1.76%).<sup>12</sup>
- The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) report into the decline of A Level Modern Foreign Languages (July 2014) reveals that the progression rates for all three MFLs are the lowest of all of the

11 DfE (2014). A Level and other Level 3 results, England: Subject Time Series, SFR02/2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/A-level-and-other-level-3-results-england-2012-to-2013-revised>

12 July 2014, Chapter 1, The Decline in Uptake of A-level Modern Foreign Languages: Literature Review by Dr Debra Malpass Published by the Joint Council for QualificationsCIC

EBacc subjects for both AS and A-level despite higher percentages of GCSE MFL students gaining grade A\*-C than in English, maths, geography and history. It is unsurprising, then, that numbers of students feeding through into higher education are in short supply.

- The speed of decline in higher education is a cause of concern. An analysis of the figures shows a particularly acute crisis for German with the number of universities offering German degrees falling by 50% over the past 16 years, while there are 40% fewer universities offering French. Spanish figures had been increasing during the period between 1998 and 2007, but since then the number of universities offering degree courses in Spanish has fallen by over one third.
- The downward trend in university applications for languages<sup>13</sup> over the last decade exacerbates the skills shortage of specialist linguists, affecting the future supply of teachers, translators and interpreters; reducing the UK capacity to influence in the field of international diplomacy; threatening our security;<sup>14</sup> and minimising our capability<sup>15</sup> to engage with international research, requiring advanced knowledge of languages other than English, which would call into question our pre-eminence as a global research hub for the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences.
- Despite the value employers place on international experience, very few UK graduates are undertaking work and study abroad, and while the numbers of students taking part in the EU Erasmus programme are expanding over Europe as a whole to offer students unprecedented opportunities to study and work in other member states, numbers of applicants in the UK continue to decline.<sup>16</sup> This reluctance to participate is linked to a lack of language skills, affecting the confidence and motivation of students to engage in international exchanges. Where this is the case, it typifies a mono-cultural and monolingual attitude that tends to fossilise in the mind and inhibit a person's willingness to develop international connections and readiness to communicate with colleagues from other cultures in

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13 UCAS accepted applicants to UK institutions 2013

14 *Lost for Words The Need for Languages in UK Diplomacy and Security* The British Academy 2013

15 *Language matters* (2009) and *Language matters more and more* Position statements British Academy (2011)

16 UCML Written evidence to parliament re. higher education reform 2011 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmbis/885/885vw30.htm>

the workplace. Missed opportunities to take up international places leaves young people less equipped with the attributes they need to work in a global labour market. Such attitudes may also affect the propensity to export of many small- to medium-sized companies.

## QUALITY – How do our pupils' languages skills compare with their international peers?

- In 2012, the European Commission carried out the first European Survey on Language Competences (ESCL) with fourteen member states taking part. The survey collected information about the foreign language proficiency of a representative sample of 54,000 European pupils at age.<sup>17</sup> England was bottom of the table with only 9% of pupils achieving the level of an Independent User, defined as the ability to deal with straight forward, familiar matters (B1 or above). Of greater concern, was the fact that 30% of pupils failed to reach the level of a Basic User (A1), defined as a basic user who can use very simple language with support. Top of the table was Sweden with a score of 82%. The average across the fourteen participants was 42%.

## And what about other skills?

- In the OECD Triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA),<sup>18</sup> the UK achieved average in maths and reading and a little above in science. Taken together with the low national performance in languages, this presents a sobering picture of relative underachievement to students in other competitor economies.
- The UK spends 18% more than the OECD average on each school child between 6 – 15 years old. This result seems to be a rather low return on investment.

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17 Changing the Pace: CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2014

18 The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. To date, students representing more than 70 economies have participated in the assessment.

- Better performing economies are all in Asia, in particular, Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Korea, Macao, Japan.
- Certain Western economies perform better: Canada, Switzerland, Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands. A common characteristic of these higher performing countries and economies is that they are all multilingual communities<sup>19</sup> with established bilingual learning programmes and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning).
- **The impact of bilingualism onto cognitive gains in other subjects requires further investigation, as this could help in repositioning the value of language learning within an employment context and more broadly as part of a new national conversation about the kind of curriculum and the kind of learning that we now need to develop to foster language skills and a broader range of transferable and employability skills.**

## What do employers think?

- In the annual CBI/Pearson education and skills surveys over the last five years (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013<sup>14</sup>, 2014), there has been a consistent pattern of low levels of satisfaction with the foreign language skills of school and college leavers and those of graduates.
- Low levels of satisfaction with foreign language skills are usually parallel with another area of concern, low levels of satisfaction with international cultural awareness.

## What is the level of demand for language skills?

- The CBI found that seven out of ten (70%) businesses said that they valued foreign language skills in their employees (CBI 2013) and specified that language skills were particularly useful in building relationships with clients, customers and suppliers (38%) and assisting staff mobility within the organisation (23%).

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19 Special Eurobarometer 386 Europeans and their languages [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf)



- The **British Chambers of Commerce** commissioned a major trade business survey in 2012: *Exporting is Good for Britain*,<sup>20</sup> and achieved a sample return of 8,073 responses. Their findings highlighted a major skills deficit which led to a call to action and a number of policy recommendations, which were aspirational in their vision and scope.
- The survey reported that first time exporters cited language as a barrier, influencing whether and when and where to enter international markets. 61% of non-exporters 'likely to consider' exporting in the future saw language as a barrier to doing so.
- 99% of business owners surveyed claimed not to speak Russian and Chinese well enough to conduct business deals in the buyers' language.
- 57% of business owners surveyed spoke no German; 64% spoke no Spanish; and, 76% spoke no Italian. French was the most commonly spoken language, but only 4% of business owners surveyed claimed that they are able to converse fluently enough to conduct business deals
- Up to 96% of respondents had no foreign language ability for the markets they served, and the largest language deficits are for the fastest-developing markets.
- For example, only 0.4% of business owners surveyed reported that they were able to speak Russian or Chinese well enough to conduct business deals in their buyers' language.
- This strong evidence of employer-led demand and the positioning of languages within the framework of commercial exporting skills gave clear messages about the contribution that language skills could make to supporting the growth of Britain's export sector.
- The British Chambers of Commerce gave high priority for language learning, calling for languages to be part of the statutory curriculum until the age of seventeen in a proactive effort to bring about change and strengthen national language capability.

*"A shortage of language skills undermines UK Export Performance"*  
British Chambers of Commerce 2013

- Evidence available from the 2013 UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Employer Skills Survey data, based on interviews with 91,279 establishments in the UK with at least two staff, demonstrated that employer demand for language skills was not restricted to the higher occupational categories. The UKCES survey demonstrated that there was a perceived shortage of foreign language skills across the full range of occupational categories amongst both existing staff and job applicants. **These findings appear to strengthen the case for a languages for all policy, since opportunities for employment using language skills are so widely distributed.**

## Macroeconomics benefits

Several theories have been put forward to argue the macroeconomics case for languages.

- Professor Stephen Hagan in the ELAN report (2006) argues that, assuming a model where small- to medium- companies (SMEs) account for a mean average of 45% of European output, if SMES work smarter and adopt a Language Management Strategy, which involves strengthening language skills, they could improve their output, meaning that exports could rise by 10% of GDP – equivalent to more than one trillion euro for EU economy.
- In 2009, Professor James Foreman Peck, former Treasury adviser put forward the position that a lack of language skills makes exporting difficult, particularly for SMEs. Cross-European studies have revealed that the UK invests less in language training than other countries and as a result they export less, losing out on reaching lucrative international markets. His numerical estimate for the 'tax on trade' estimates that a minimum of £7.3 billion could be at stake.
- In his research for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, he proposes that deficient language skills and the assumption that "everyone speaks English" are costing the UK economy around £48bn a year, or 3.5% of GDP.
- **Poor language skills act like a "tax on growth", hampering small to medium-size exporters, who are unable to employ the language specialists brought in by global companies. It also deters non-exporters from trading internationally.**

## Current concerns of employers from the CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey (2014)

In the latest employer survey from the CBI/Pearson: Gateway to Growth,<sup>21</sup> it is clear that there is strong advocacy for languages: *Language skills can smooth the path to business*. Yet, the focus on foreign language skills is not seen by many employers as a top priority area for action in education. There are other more pressing concerns.

- Employers express ongoing concern over general standards in schools and awareness that *what happens at school is crucially important for individuals in their lives, for the businesses that employ them and for the wider economy*. There is a real sense of cause and effect: if standards are not met then individuals and their employers are disadvantaged. The impact of low standards is made more acute because we are operating within a highly competitive international environment, where research evidence shows that many competitor nations are outperforming the UK.
- Businesses are concerned about the divergence between different regions of the country. Greater autonomy for schools is a good thing, but there needs to be some underpinning to enable comparability of learning and assessment structures. Businesses are concerned that the qualification system, including the new vocational qualification is, as yet, not fully understood.
- For the 14-19 age group, employers believe that the top priority for schools and colleges should be developing awareness of working life with support from businesses (52%)
- Employers interviewed for Born Global were also convinced of the importance of commercial awareness and work experience, favouring, in particular, opportunities for students to apply their languages skills in 'real world' contexts, including work placements or work shadowing abroad.

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21 Gateway to growth: CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2014 <http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2807987/gateway-to-growth.pdf>

- According to the survey, **two in five businesses already (41%) see foreign language skills among their employees as beneficial**, particularly in helping build relations with clients, customers and suppliers (28%) **As yet, they do not prioritise them at recruitment.**
- The challenge for the languages community is to articulate the case for languages with fresh energy and a renewed understanding of what languages can offer to persuade the other **three in five** of their importance and to persuade all businesses to be alert to the **multi-lingual dividend**, which many may be unaware they have.
- The same languages are leading the demand by businesses with French seen as useful by 50% and German by 49%. Firms intending to develop business in China are increasingly looking for some level of fluency in Mandarin Chinese, demand for which has risen from 25% in 2012 to 31% in 2014.
- Employer satisfaction was generally low for foreign language skills, intercultural awareness and business and customer awareness. In the case of school and college leavers, 62% of employers said that they were not satisfied with foreign language skills; 63% said that they were not satisfied with international cultural awareness; and 72% said that business and customer awareness was unsatisfactory.
- There are marginal changes in responses relating to graduates, but there is still a high proportion of employers who are not satisfied with foreign language skills (51%) and business and customer awareness (53%), while employers' views on graduates' international cultural awareness appear a little more positive, with 58% saying that they were satisfied and 5% very satisfied. It is of interest that these skills are classified as *employability skills* for graduates and this connection between languages and employability is fertile ground for further development.
- Among the positive signs of employer support for language skills, we read that 51% of manufacturing firms and a third (33%) of professional services businesses say that foreign language skills among staff are helpful in building relations with overseas contacts.

- The support for foreign language skills sits alongside recognition of the significant value of what the British Council calls, the 'English Effect'.<sup>22</sup> We read: **English is the international language of business** – in itself a real benefit for the UK. But there can be great advantages for British businesses, if employees can communicate with at least reasonable proficiency in the language of the clients, customers of suppliers (Exhibit 7.11)
- We read further in the CBI report: **The vast majority of businesses (94%) do not require a high level of foreign language fluency as an essential core competence of their operations.**
- These views are perplexing, expressed at a time when there is strong evidence that the UK is suffering from a growing skills deficit in foreign language skills and when globally, the demand for language skills appears to be expanding.<sup>23</sup>
- **This is where the central challenge defines itself. How do we make a cogent case for other languages in a world where English is the language of personal adoption for close to two billion people and rising?**

## Young people are working it out for themselves

The most recent research from Pearson and Teach First, cited by the CBI, shows that young people want to learn more about getting a job, managing money, **different cultures and languages**, and generic work skills. These views would appear to match some of the areas where businesses report lower levels of satisfaction. 94% of the young people surveyed thought that **communication skills** were important to learn at school.<sup>24</sup>

## There is potential for the development of a new approach.

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22 The English Effect. British Council 2013

23 State of the Nation. British Academy 2013

24 *My Education*, Pearson and Teach First, November 2013. The Pearson and Teach First *My Education* report published in November 2013 examines the views of young people on their own experiences of the education system – bringing together the opinions of over 8,000 young people aged 14-21 across the UK. CBI 2014

## PART TWO

# Languages in employment What do the employers say? Preliminary insights

### Key points

- Unique selling points of language skills and cultural intelligence
- English as the lingua franca
- Multilingualism and mobility
- Globalisation and localisation
- Monolingual inertia in the system
- Mixed messages from employers
- Analysis of British Cohort Study (BCS) data

### Unique selling points of language skills and cultural intelligence

A key finding from our study is that employers recognise that language skills are an advantage, particularly if they have been developed through international experience, as well as through academic study or training.

**Employers are seeking employees with an international outlook, a global mind-set and cultural intelligence.** Employers perceive that people who have studied languages tend to have a refined cognitive framework in which to resolve problems and make decisions, which reflect multiple perspectives and are sensitive to the diversity agenda. International experience can develop a heightened awareness of the ethical issues of working in a global environment. Employers believe that it is not the fact that a person may be fluent in three different languages that makes them employable. There is a more subtle value,

and that is the ability to recognise, understand and interpret cultural difference. This is increasingly relevant, particularly in management and leadership positions. The ability to understand and adapt to different cultural codes of practice is becoming an essential skill, as the world works through multinational teams with locations in many different countries, involving many different languages and cultures. Young people who can connect with others through their languages and through a shared understanding of diverse cultures are at an advantage in the global labour market over their monolingual peers.

*“For an international career, you need an international language and a global mind-set.”* Executive Director and Human Resources Expert

## English as the lingua franca

Ethnographic evidence from this study confirms that **English is the established language of global business and enjoys a very high rate of currency**. This is certainly the case at executive and managerial levels, although there appears to be a greater need for a wider range of languages at operational level.

An initial review of how languages are used, particularly within the financial and consultancy sectors, could lead us to assume that speakers of English as a first language would have a distinct advantage in terms of general employability and recruitment to executive fast streams. This would be a false assumption. The further that we deepen our understanding of how the sector operates the clearer it becomes that high levels of fluency in English are expected of all employees and are a distinct advantage for multilingual employees, who offer sector specific skills, fluent English and one or more different languages, and one or more different cultural theories of how the international world works.

*“I work for a multinational organisation which employs talented people globally. The global market is filled with candidates who speak English AND another language and as monolinguals, most British candidates begin at a disadvantage. Global companies with global customers and clients will always prefer those who speak more than one language.”* Executive Director, Financial Services

## Multilingualism and mobility

International mobility within the globalised economy is driving the need for language skills. Significant numbers of the most ambitious international students are becoming more motivated to learn at least one language other than their first language and in many cases, more than one. New international recruits would expect to be fluent in English in addition to other languages and for many they would perceive this to be a requirement and an indicator of educational achievement and employability.

Our study finds that **the concept of being 'born global' is characterised by proficiency in at least two and often several other languages, including English**, in addition to high level qualifications in other disciplines. Fluency in English is developed through school and higher education programmes but is normally enhanced by 'lived' experience in another country. These opportunities are often provided through undergraduate study in international universities through the medium of another language and post-graduate professional study very often in the UK or the USA.

The profile of high achieving, highly employable graduates is typified by a willingness to study and work internationally. Mobility is regarded as a desirable norm. The most ambitious graduates will normally complete their studies in several different countries and in several different languages.

*"For the monolingual English speaker, fluency in English alone is no longer a unique selling point. There is a distinct advantage in being born with English as the first language, but the asset value of English only decreases commensurate to the number of international speakers of English, entering the labour market." Language Policy Adviser*

## Globalisation and localisation

Increased globalisation involves localisation where English changes its status. In major companies operating in 140+ countries, **English is used for cross border communication and international connection across organisations**. Localisation within global organisations means that **day-to-day business is conducted local-to-local**. The language of the country is used for all operations with local clients and for all internal



communication between colleagues. The ability to connect in the language of the client is an essential attribute for building relationships and sustaining business, making a company memorable, trustworthy and competitive.

Successful global businesses recruit high performing multilingual graduates with a range of qualifications and skills, including the ability to speak and write in English and other languages. English is usually but not exclusively, the common language in multilingual teams within organisations. Multilingual offices operate concurrently in an increasing range of languages, as colleagues group in cultural and linguistic clusters. The ability for an English monolingual to acquire other languages to be able to trans-language with ease like their counterparts would increase their credibility, self-worth and utility value. **To be internationally mobile and able to take on leadership and management roles in international companies, the ability to speak other languages and relate to other clients, customers and suppliers and to be attuned harmoniously with different cultures is a significant advantage.**

*“Diversity means that we must represent the people we serve. Knowledge of the local language for those working internationally, adds value, because it unlocks the key to cultural understanding and oils the wheels of efficiency.”* Head of Global Talent in a multinational fast-moving consumer goods company

## Monolingual inertia in the system

Spoken and written fluency in English seems to be a prerequisite for graduate employability and mobility for all speakers of other languages. international education systems recognise the ubiquity and central importance of English as a lingua franca and invest in early language learning, CLIL and immersion programmes in schools and universities. This incentivises international students to learn English.

Influenced by the public perception that ‘English is enough’, there is a degree of inertia in the UK among employers and parents, which affects attitudes and behaviours, and perpetuates the fracture in the system created by a market failure to prioritise language skills. The demise of language learning in schools and universities is widely known, and has been recognised by government. Current policy reform, particularly the introduction of the EBacc performance measure, and the changes to

the content of the national curriculum the GCSE and the AS/Advanced Levels are measures that have been taken to reverse the downturn and re-engage learners with languages.

### **Public attitudes still remain unconvinced of the central importance of multilingualism.**

#### **Mixed messages from employers**

National employer surveys have regularly reported dissatisfaction with the foreign language skills of school and college leavers and graduates. And **while there is advocacy for the value of languages, it is clear that languages are not the top priority for employers.**

Available research evidence from published reports reinforces the apparent demand for language skills at all levels of employment, not merely at executive level. Findings from the 2013 UKCES Employer Skills Survey revealed a perceived skills shortage in languages across the full range of occupational categories. This included a lack of proficiency in existing staff and also in the skill sets of job applicants.

However, there is little evidence that employer behaviours actively privilege language skills in English first language employees in terms of recruitment, promotion or wage premiums. Despite the expression of dissatisfaction and the heightened awareness of language skills deficits, the 2013 UKCES Employer Skills Survey showed relatively low levels of planned investment in employee language skills. This low level investment has also been identified in other leading research (Foreman Peck, J. 2009 and 2013; Hagan, S. 2006, 2011)

Evidence from the Born Global interviews would substantiate the view that, although employers value language skills in the abstract, there is scant evidence that language skills take priority at recruitment or that there is a particular explicit reward for the language skills of employees. Very few companies conduct a language skills audit and very few have a language management strategy. There are notable exceptions in high profile, highly successful global organisations, where languages are recognised and required at recruitment, but even in these companies, language capability alone will not of itself give a competitive advantage over another applicant.

*“If a candidate speaks five languages but does not have the necessary sector skills or aptitudes required, s/he will not have an advantage at recruitment. If two candidates present with equal aptitudes and one is offering proficiency in other languages in addition to other skills, languages, and often international experience, can be the tie breakers.”* Recruitment Executive, Financial Services

Those businesses which are taking advantage of UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) ‘support for export programmes’ are developing language management strategies, which are transforming their practice to rebalance their operations into export-led business planning. This means that such businesses proactively recruit multilingual employees, often native speakers or work with interpreters and translators, as required. These businesses also invest in their own staff’s professional development, valuing even low levels of conversational competence, because the ice breaker in a client’s own language can often ‘seal the deal’.

**There is still a communications exercise to be done to engage employers and convince them to take full advantage of the added value of language skills. More businesses should take full advantage of the English effect and the potential of the multilingual dividend, that additional language skills can provide.**

### Analysis of British Cohort Study (BCS) data

The analysis of BCS data found no clear evidence of a link between language qualifications and higher than average subsequent earning power. There was also little evidence of a direct association between language qualifications and relative labour market advantage in terms of employment outcomes and job satisfaction in the UK labour market.

While initial evidence suggests that linguists do secure marginally superior labour market outcomes, these effects disappear when statistical controls for social background and academic ability are introduced. **Any association of linguists to higher labour market outcomes is likely to be related to other factors such as socio-economic class, type of schooling, gender and general academic ability rather than to language skills.**

(These findings, although noteworthy, must be evaluated within the context of changes to the world economy. The dataset used for this analysis of labour market outcomes was collected in 2000. A further data collection process is underway and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) will be published in 2015. A similar research exercise on these new data should provide a very informative point of comparison to the current findings and could shed light on the potential benefits of multilingualism for English first language speakers within the current global labour market.)

## PART THREE

# Every graduate a linguist

In a climate where the market for specialist language degrees appears to be declining, the relevance of take-up of Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLP) within higher education assumes greater significance. The extent to which IWLP can contribute to fixing the supply chain of language skills feeding into the labour market is a matter which requires serious further consideration.

The year-on-year increase in the numbers of students learning languages through IWLP, generally offered by university language centres, shows that undergraduates and post-graduates from a wide range of disciplines are choosing to learn a new language or are enrolling to improve their existing language skills.<sup>25</sup> In the academic year 2013-2014, the number of students reported as 'enrolled' increased from 49,637 (2012-2013) to 53,971 (2013 – 2014). IWLP typically comprises both elective language course units taken for academic credit and language courses studied in addition to a student's degree programme, which are not-for-credit. Analysis of the data shows that for the majority of institutions, the proportion of students studying for credit was within five points of a mean average figure of 60%.

Our study was interested in uncovering the motivations for students opting to learn a language alongside their specialism. For this purpose, a bespoke analysis of response patterns from the data made available

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25 UCML/AULC HEA Annual Survey 2013/2014

through the IWLP Student Survey Response<sup>26</sup> was carried out and included both credit-bearing and non-credit bearing returns. The sample included students from a wide range of other disciplines spread over arts, humanities, social sciences, health (medicine, dentistry, nursing and pharmacy) and STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The proportion of students responding to the attitudinal survey from STEM + Health made up 40%; students from social sciences and business and management constituted 26%; and, students from humanities (English, history, philosophy) and Modern Languages/Linguistics constituted 23%.

The breakdown of student numbers according to their first language profile is of particular relevance. 57% of the students said that they had English as their first language, compared to 43% who were already multilingual international students. This approximates to the overall ratio of English first language speaking students to international students represented in IWLP within the reported national figures.<sup>27</sup> The mix of home-grown and international students brings significant benefits, since international students are highly motivated and create a very constructive learning environment. The large proportion of international students in IWLP also indicates the high value international students, who are already bilingual or multilingual, place on extending their language capability.

Taking the sample as a whole, making no distinction between international or home-grown students, our analysis points to a number of key motivational factors which account for students choosing to study a language in addition to their specialist discipline. Students attribute particular value to the importance of languages to employability and global engagement, to cultural interest and the broadening the mind, and above all, the importance of languages for personal pleasure. Students were invited to indicate their attitudes towards the relative importance of languages to a variety of fields, ranking their importance on a 4-point Likert scale (not important; important; very important;

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26 The IWLP Student Survey is a live data collection process gathering daily returns on the number and profile of students following language courses in addition to a degree subject within an Institution-Wide Language Programme. Data for the purposes of the Born Global analysis were extracted on 31 March 2014 and included 1005 entries drawn from eight universities: Birmingham, Cambridge, Coventry, Leeds, London School of Economics, Manchester, Sheffield and Warwick

27 The national data for the percentage of international students reported in the UCML/AULC survey 2013-2014, showed a mean average proportion of international students of 38%, in a range of between 10% and 80%, where two-fifths of respondents reported figures of over 50%.

extremely important). In response to fields relating to employability, students strongly believe that languages were *important to extremely important* in enhancing their employment prospects (87%) and would be useful in their prospective careers (84%), helping them to engage globally more effectively (87%). 87% of students believe that language learning is *important to extremely important* for cultural interest and a resounding 94% of students believe that language learning is *important to extremely important* for broadening the mind. The top ranking, achieving 97%, is the importance of languages for enjoyment.

In a commercial sense (and it is recognised that this may be controversial), the IWLP Student Survey Response could be seen as form of market research, providing rich attitudinal data to inform policy, strategic planning and the development of appropriate curricula. One of the key motivational factors for students learning languages is that they believe that they will become more employable and better equipped in the global race because of it. At the same juncture, employers are encouraging universities (and schools) to place a stronger focus on developing employability skills. The question that must be addressed, is to what extent current provision is meeting students' expectations and employers' requirements?

In addition to developing language skills *per se*, participation in IWLP has the potential to nurture a number of other attributes, which are much sought after by employers. The diverse range of first languages and different cultures which may be represented in a class of IWLP students, provides a representative microcosm of the multilingual global environment that awaits students upon graduation. Learning a language and developing cross-cultural competence should prepare them for the prospect of working in multilingual, transnational teams in their future professional lives.

The UCML/AULC report recognises that the presence of international students learning alongside English first language students is a real bonus, providing opportunities for cross-cultural learning. This may happen implicitly, but to take full advantage of the potential to enhance the employability skills of individual students, language skills need to be developed within a much wider framework of transferable, transversal skills, and such development should be planned as part of the curriculum.

There is a sub-set of attributes and skills which can be fostered in this fertile, multilingual, flexi-cultural environment, which can equip a student for employability and mobility. Taking into account the feedback from interviews with executives responsible for global talent development and recruitment, who are participating in our study, it becomes more possible to develop a common understanding of what employers mean by recruitment criteria such as 'an international outlook' or 'a global mind-set'. Students should be encouraged to mediate between cultures and develop multiple perspectives, demonstrating a more evolved understanding of diversity in relation to beliefs, behaviours and values.

**It can be argued that language competence and cultural intelligence enable students to understand and accommodate difference, enabling them to reconcile cultural ambiguity and seek fresh areas of common ground, making students more able to manage any form of relational activity that they may face in future employment, from holding a first conversation with a prospective new client to transacting a business deal or negotiating an international contract.**

With regard to the range of languages studied by students, the demand for the traditional 'big three' languages of French, German and Spanish currently outweighs demand for other languages, spoken in the newer market flows, represented by BRIC, CIVET and MINT economies. This pattern mirrors the national figures, although the national report shows that numbers for some of these languages are growing, in particular, numbers for Mandarin Chinese and Arabic, while Japanese, Italian and Russian also appear to be attracting significant numbers of students.

The extent to which IWLP can and should contribute to reducing the language skills deficit at local, regional and national levels is a subject for debate. The subject expertise (in some cases, underused specialist expertise) that is available in a wide range of languages in higher education may provide the opportunity for strengthening the existing strategic development for IWLP as a skills provider within the community at a time when there is evidence of local need for specific languages. There is significant potential to explore closer links between universities and their communities, including strategic learning partnerships between local businesses and small- to medium-sized companies and their local HEI provider. Students learning a language alongside businesses, or students with higher level language expertise becoming a language



support mentor to start-up companies or groups of employees with particular language requirements, are all possible areas for development in higher education IWLP and are worthy of further investigation and a feasibility study.

Both in the CBI/Pearson Survey (2014) and in our study, employers confessed to confusion over assessment and national qualifications frameworks. Few employers felt confident that they understood what a graduate presenting with languages skills as a specialist subject, or as a graduate of IWLP would be able to do and what levels of operational competence could be expected. The majority of students (86%) confirmed the extreme importance of ensuring that language skills acquired through IWLP were recognised outside of the university.

The national survey found that the learning outcomes of most IWLP courses are calibrated to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which is the most widely recognised and used international reference for proficiency levels. Yet, employers report that they are unfamiliar with the CEFR and have no clear sense from a CV of a prospective applicant's level of language proficiency in operational terms.

To resolve the disconnect between graduate achievement in languages and the communication of their achievement to prospective employers, there would seem to be two priorities for action, which interrelate: first, universities and their students must ensure that there is a common understanding of the CEFR proficiency levels and that these are consistently interpreted and applied both across and within institutions; second, there is merit in developing a universal mechanism for describing, recording and referencing language skills, using the CEFR, which is accessible and comprehensible to employers and to the wider society. This could mean encouragement to use the existing Europass<sup>28</sup> but could also provide an opportunity to develop a new mechanism for communicating language proficiency alongside a wider range of international experience and transversal employability skills.

## PART FOUR

# Reflections: Time for a new national conversation

The research process to date has revealed some thought-provoking findings from both quantitative and qualitative data.

To apply the classic economic theory of supply and demand to the current weak supply of language skills to meet the theoretical high demand from employers, would lead to a logical assumption that language skills would be highly valued and would attract some level of labour market advantage.

There is little evidence from the current research to show a direct binary equation linking the learning of a languages, other than English for speakers of other languages, to the assurance of better labour market outcomes and wage premiums.

This is the time for **a new national conversation about languages**, which takes account of the English effect, the potential for a multilingual dividend, and the broader benefits to individuals of developing language capability.

Within the context of educational reform, in addressing the future of language education policy and its implementation, it is helpful to avoid narrowing the debate and allowing it to become too inward-looking. There is benefit in exploring how language learning could fit into a broader matrix of employability skills, while still retaining its academic rigour.

Taking account of the voice of employers, as enacted by the CBI, it is of interest that foreign language skills are classified as *employability skills* for graduates, appearing to build on the recommendations put forward in *Changing the Pace* (CBI/Pearson, 2013), which proposes that subjects like languages are *enabling subjects*, *strengthening other areas*, and supporting the development of *compelling individuals*, producing the kind of future employees that society and the economy need. A rationale, therefore, emerges to support the argument that language skills are of value to every learner, and should be developed across the continuum of education, training and employment: languages enable other skills and aptitudes.

We know that employers are not satisfied with foreign language skills, international cultural awareness and business and customer awareness skills, in general. Taking up the challenge of strengthening those skills, which employers currently feel are in deficit, can be turned into a creative opportunity for curriculum development within the context of the current curriculum reform. These skill areas can combine rather effectively to create a new fusion for learning, with languages, intercultural flexibility and business and customer awareness, developing into an integrated and dynamic programme of learning, which can apply across the continuum of education from primary through to secondary, and on into further and higher education, in age-appropriate ways.

Clear possibilities lie in the closer alignment between communication skills and *foreign* language skills. There is no logical reason why communication skills should be monolingual in an international world. In fact, there is every logical reason that they should connect.

Rethinking the employability skills categories used in the CBI/Pearson Survey, and applying them to a school and university context, can offer a powerful vehicle for innovation in the way English, *foreign* languages and community languages can become part of an integrated approach to the development of **multilingual communication skills, international cultural awareness and business and customer awareness for global employability**. Within this fresh and broader conceptualisation of communication skills, English is an enabler, not a competitor to the development of other languages. **English becomes the stepping stone to international communication and multilingualism**. The benefit of this approach is that *foreign* languages, English and community languages become part of the same story, inhabiting the same space in the cognitive framework of the learner, and becoming powerful

foundations for the development of employability skills. We begin to normalise multilingualism.

***“Businesses want young people who are rigorous, rounded and grounded...”*** *What employers expect from schools is that they produce confident, motivated young people with the attitudes, core knowledge and behaviours that will prepare them for success in the life outside the school gates.* CBI/Pearson 2014

Languages, then, should position themselves as an essential part of **core knowledge and behaviours**, and show how learning a language is transformative, changing attitudes and behaviours, shaping and refining them, to enable young people to develop an international outlook, intercultural understanding and strong multilingual communication skills. These are the attributes of the global mind-set, which young people should develop, if they are to be competitive and successful in the global labour market, and happy and fulfilled individuals within society.

## New languages eco-system

The world has changed. There are new realities for young people in what is known as Generation Y,<sup>29</sup> and the world in which they make friends, study and work, is multilingual. This is becoming as much a reality in rural areas as in the cities. The soundscape is different, and it is normal to hear ambient communication in other languages. Friendship groups from early childhood<sup>30</sup> through to adult life are more likely to include people from different language and cultural groups. Neighbourhoods are culturally diverse and, more significantly, so is the workplace. Our study has shown that it is increasingly normal to work for employers whose first language is not English, and to work in teams, where co-workers can operate in a number of languages other than English, and with clients, who often speak two or three languages in addition to English.

29 The Generation born between 1982 and 2004. Strauss, W. and Howe, N. (2000). *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Cartoons by R.J. Matson. New York, NY: Vintage Original. p. 370. ISBN 0-375-70719-0.

30 Department for Education, School Census data January 2012 (including information on the number of schools and pupils, as well as tables showing the number of pupils by age, gender, free school meal eligibility, ethnicity, and first language.)<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2012>

Within this context, **monolingualism becomes a problem and multilingualism becomes an asset.**

Overall, in making the case for multilingual skills, the argument which has the most traction is the one that focuses on employability. English-speaking monolinguals will be more employable, more competitive and better equipped with a wider range of transferable skills, if they have learned one or more languages in addition to English. They can then take full advantage of the asset of English by adding the multilingual dividend, acquired through the learning of other languages. This advantage can be increased further by engaging in Erasmus + or other international programmes, and actively pursuing the opportunity to participate in international work experience.<sup>31</sup> The evaluation of the Erasmus programme demonstrates the benefits to employability of living, studying and working abroad. Without such experience, the monolingual CV can seem a little insipid.

We may be reaching a tipping point for monolinguals, who offer English only as they enter professional life. For too long, English speakers have relied on the status of English as the lingua franca to enable them to communicate anywhere in the world without the need to learn other languages. English is, indeed, an asset, but for those who only have English, the asset value is diminishing.

### Taking advantage of the English effect by becoming multilingual

High levels of youth unemployment worldwide present us with serious challenges for education, for social cohesion and for the economy. Graduates and other young job seekers face a highly competitive and constricted labour market. This is characterised by 'hourglass'<sup>32</sup> employment opportunities, where we encounter growing numbers of executive level jobs aimed at A grade global graduates; a squeezed middle for public sector and middle-tier white collar, administrative positions; and large numbers of semi- to unskilled jobs. Increasingly jobs at all of these levels are recruited internationally, often enabled by recruitment through

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31 Evaluating the impact of the Erasmus Programme: skills and European Identity. Taylor & Francis online 28 April 2014 Routledge

32 Sissons, P. (2011) The Hourglass and the Escalator. Labour market chance and mobility. The Work Foundation

social media, as employers seek out the brightest and the most skilled for the job in hand.

For English monolinguals the key message must be, that to take full advantage of starting out with the global language, English speakers should add to their language skills, just as their international peers are already doing. There is value in language learning for students of all disciplines and for individuals of all ages, throughout life.

It can be argued that monolingualism comes at a cost to individuals, to society and to the economy. We should seek to engage all stakeholders, including young people in education and training, politicians, employers, educationalists and the wider public, in order to bring about multi-dimensional societal change in attitudes and behaviours towards the value of multilingualism and the development of language skills.



The British Academy, established by Royal Charter in 1902, champions and supports the humanities and social sciences across the UK and internationally. It aims to inspire, recognise and support excellence and high achievement across the UK and internationally. As a Fellowship of over 900 UK humanities scholars and social scientists, elected for their distinction in research, the Academy is an independent and self-governing organisation, in receipt of public funding. Views expressed in this report are not necessarily shared by each individual Fellow.

In 2011, the British Academy launched a programme, with funding from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, to address the deficit in languages and quantitative skills in UK education and research. Recognising that these deficits are rooted in the way in which these disciplines and skills are taught at every level – from school to undergraduate degrees and beyond – the Academy is supplying leadership to help strengthen skills in these vital areas. We engage in both high level activity, working with key stakeholders with the aim of facilitating greater change and deepening awareness within relevant communities; and through identifying and promoting best practice, and supporting research and scholarship.

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