

Languages Curriculum Background and Evidence Paper

May 2026

Executive Summary

Overview

Working Together to Make Change Happen (Education Scotland, 2025) identifies the development of an Evidence and Background Paper for each Curriculum Area and Context for learning as an outcome of the analysing stage of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC), with publication on the CIC website. This paper provides an evidence base to inform the Curriculum Improvement Cycle in Languages. It draws on sources produced by government bodies, local, national and international stakeholders and the voices of children and young people. It includes national attainment and workforce data, national policy, and research evidence. The paper looks at the current landscape across all sectors of education and identifies key strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the next iteration of the technical framework.

Key messages

The language curriculum in Scotland is shaped by a range of policy and legislative frameworks. Policies such as *Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach* (2012) establish clear expectations at system level around entitlement to language learning and Scotland's ambition to develop confident communicators with the skills required for an outward-looking, internationally engaged society. The *Scottish Languages Act* (2025) also reinforces the status and value of Gaelic and Scots as national languages of Scotland.

This policy context sits within a wider rights-based framework shaped by the *UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act* (2024). While not determining curriculum content directly, the UNCRC provides an important lens through which language learning can be understood, emphasising children and young people's rights to participation, identity, inclusion, and voice. These frameworks position language learning as both a national entitlement and a key contributor to communication, cultural understanding and employability.

Evidence from the Scottish Government's 1+2 surveys across local authorities demonstrates that significant progress has been made in embedding the 1+2 Approach in primary schools. However, the provision and approach vary across schools and local authorities. According to the survey, this is particularly evident in secondary schools. Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, results showed that the number of secondary schools offering learners a continuous L2 experience until the end of S3 as per the 1+2 Approach has declined.

Attainment data indicates that languages continue to show strong performance, with learners who progress to the senior phase achieving consistently positive outcomes. Over time, entries in French and German have declined, while participation in Spanish and Mandarin has increased. These patterns reflect a combination of factors, including shifts in global language demand, changing learner interests and the availability of appropriately qualified teachers.

In 2024/25, 41% of local authorities have reported challenges in recruiting teachers of languages in secondary schools. Recent data from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) shows that

recruitment to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Modern Languages and in Gaelic (Learners) programmes has fallen below targets for the past three years.

A renewed national focus on languages pedagogy could support improved learning experiences for learners. For example, an increased focus on the use of the target language in classroom practice could support learners to develop fluency and confidence and become more spontaneous when talking in a language. Evidence from research shows that continuous exposure to the target language is essential to help learners develop linguistic competence.

Gaelic continues to hold a distinct position within the curriculum. Provision has expanded significantly through Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic (Learners) pathways. The National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-2028 sets out commitments to broaden access, increase subject choice in secondary schools, and strengthen teacher supply. The Scottish Languages Act reinforces status of Gaelic as a national language of Scotland and its integral role in education, culture, and public life.

Latin also represents an important element of Scotland's Classical Languages provision but continues to face considerable barriers. Importantly, there is currently no ITE route for new teachers in Scotland. This position suggests that access to the Latin curriculum is likely to remain concentrated in a small and reducing number of schools and specialist teachers. This reflects the absence of established routes into teacher education, curriculum development and learning pathways.

Reports from HMIE inspections show that there is good practice in languages classrooms across many schools and settings. However, learners' experiences are inconsistent due to variation in time allocation for languages, differences in curriculum structures and approaches to progression planning. Feedback from primary and secondary teachers in the initial pilot reviews highlights a need for clearer national guidance, exemplification of progression, and more consistent advice to support planning across CfE stages.

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle provides an opportunity to modernise and strengthen language learning within Curriculum for Excellence. Building on the achievements of the 1+2 policy, a revised technical framework can ensure that all learners in Scotland experience a progressive, inclusive, and future-oriented languages curriculum that prepares them to participate confidently in a multilingual world.

Implications

The evidence set out in this paper has clear implications for the focus and direction of work within the Curriculum Improvement Cycle for Languages:

- The evidence provides a clear mandate for the CIC to strengthen national coherence in languages through a shared articulation of purpose, progression and entitlement, ensuring greater consistency in learner experience across sectors and stages.
 - The findings support the importance of the CIC prioritising high-quality languages pedagogy within the evolving technical framework. This should be supported by clear
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guidance and exemplification that promotes communicative competence, fluency and confidence in language use.

- Workforce evidence underscores the need for the CIC to consider sustainability and subject breadth as part of curriculum design, including the distinct positions of Gaelic (Learners) and Latin, to support equitable access and viable learner pathways.

Next Steps

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle aims to develop a national technical framework for languages that:

- Supports teachers and practitioners with clear curriculum guidance with exemplification of progression at all levels.
- Supports learners to continue to choose to study and be successful in SQA Modern Languages National Qualifications and Awards.
- Promotes the place of Gaelic (Learners), Scots and Latin in the curriculum to ensure that learning experiences and attainment in these subjects remain positive.
- Supports career-long professional learning.
- Promotes best practice in languages pedagogy, with an increased focus on developing communicative competence.
- Includes the voice of learners to ensure that languages are seen as relevant and useful by children and young people.

Accordingly, it is vital that Education Scotland works in close partnership with stakeholders throughout the CIC process to develop solutions and secure improvements to teaching and learning experiences in the languages curriculum.

The findings in this paper will support the development of Scotland's Languages curriculum, as part of the wider CIC. The CIC process will continue to reflect on the evidence base, engage stakeholders, and iteratively refine the curriculum to ensure it meets the evolving needs of learners and society. This work will contribute to a strong Languages education for all learners, aligned with Scotland's broader educational ambitions for equity and excellence.

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1 Introduction

This section introduces the evidence paper for the Languages Curriculum Area. It states the purpose of the paper before clarifying the sources of evidence used in its compilation as well as defining the scope of the paper. The section ends by summarising national policies related to languages.

1.1 Purpose

This paper provides a snapshot of the current educational landscape, drawing on a wide range of evidence to highlight prevailing trends, challenges, and successes across different contexts. It offers a foundation for ongoing curriculum development by presenting insights into the policy environment, learner experience, and professional perspectives. By combining quantitative and qualitative data with contributions from practitioners, learners, and the wider education community, it creates a space for reflection and informed discussion. While not exhaustive, the evidence selected reflects the breadth of work currently shaping thinking in this area. The insights outlined here are intended to support CIC stakeholder groups as they consider key issues and determine the next steps in the evolution of Scotland's curriculum.

1.2 Sources of Evidence

A comprehensive body of research was identified through collaboration between Education Scotland's Curriculum team, the Data, Performance and Research (DPR) team, Scottish Government Analytical Services, and the Scottish Government Library Support Service. This partnership brought together a broad range of expertise to identify, evaluate, and organise relevant literature.

The evidence base includes peer-reviewed academic papers, publications from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), data and reports from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), government datasets, research produced by national agencies, and Scottish Government reports. It also draws on international publications from organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN). The perspectives of children and young people are represented through survey evidence, including the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) and Ipsos MORI's Young People in Scotland survey.

1.3 Scope of the Review

This paper considers the curriculum in its entirety across the full learner journey, examining breadth and depth of provision, progression, and learner outcomes from the early level through to the senior phase.

The languages curriculum in Scotland follows a distinct learner journey from first level to the senior phase (ages 5-18). Languages do not currently appear at early level or within Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings, although some ELC providers may choose to introduce them to their curriculum. In most instances, the journey begins in Primary 1, where learners are introduced to

their first additional language (L2), and continues through the Broad General Education (BGE) before progressing into the senior phase.

This paper highlights the role of Gaelic (Learners), modern and classical languages within Scotland's Curriculum focusing on the policies and practices that support the development of listening and talking, reading, and writing for all learners. It considers achievement across the BGE and draws on national indicators such as attainment in National 2-5, Higher, Advanced Higher, and a range of other awards.

1.4 Related National Policies

A range of national policies and strategies shape language learning in Scotland. These policies outline the Scottish Government's ambition for children and young people to develop the skills, knowledge and intercultural awareness needed to engage confidently in a multilingual world. This section summarises the key national policies and highlights their relevance for language education.

Language Learning In Scotland: A 1+2 Approach (2012)

In 2012, [*'Language learning in Scotland: A 1+2 approach'*](#) was introduced to give children and young people the opportunity to learn additional languages from an early age in line with the [*2002 Barcelona agreement*](#), and introduced as a 2011 manifesto commitment and reaffirmed in 2016.

The 1+2 policy is Scotland's national approach to language learning. It establishes the ambition and commitment that all children and young people have an entitlement to learn two languages as part of their BGE from P1 to S3 (typically age 5 to 15). Research shows the benefits of early access to languages supports confidence and competence in talking, listening, reading, and writing, while developing intercultural awareness. Local authorities and schools have responsibility for delivering this policy and aims to meet local needs and contexts. The policy establishes a learner entitlement to learn a first additional language (L2) continuously from P1 until the end of S3, and a second additional language (L3) from P5 at the latest. As part of the policy, the L2 must be a language which is available as a National Qualification: Cantonese, French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish and Urdu. The L3 can be any language, including British Sign Language (BSL), community languages (sometimes offered as GCSE qualifications), Scots language (available as an SQA Award) and Latin (available as a National Qualification).

Primary schools may choose either to provide a continuous L3 from Primary 5 to Primary 7, or to introduce different languages across these stages. In secondary schools, the L3 should be offered at some point during the BGE. Both models must include the teaching of all four language learning skills, as well as cultural aspects of the language(s) learned.

Education Scotland supports the implementation of the 1+2 Approach by producing support material which includes a progression framework for L2 and national guidance on L3 implementation. Further national guidance on L3 implementation can be found [here](#).

This policy has become the cornerstone of Scotland's approach to language learning in the BGE and remains central to the entitlement framework for all children and young people. In the senior phase, there is no entitlement to language learning, consistent with all other aspects of the curriculum.

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005

The [*Gaelic Language \(Scotland\) Act 2005*](#) established Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the national public body responsible for promoting Gaelic. The Act gave Gaelic official recognition in Scotland, with a statutory commitment that it should be treated with the same level of respect as English.

The legislation requires the production of a National Gaelic Language Plan every five years, setting out priorities for the promotion, learning, and use of Gaelic across Scotland. It also empowers Bòrd na Gàidhlig to advise on Gaelic education and to request public authorities to prepare Gaelic Language Plans tailored to their functions.

The Act has provided an important framework for strengthening Gaelic in public life, supporting its visibility, status, and use in education, communities, and public services.

This framework strengthens the status and visibility of Gaelic across education, communities, and public life.

National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28

The [*National Gaelic Language Plan 2023–2028*](#), developed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, sets out strategic priorities to strengthen Gaelic education and increase opportunities for Gaelic use across Scotland.

Key priorities include:

- Reviewing and updating the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education.
- Using the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund to establish new standalone Gaelic Medium Education (GME) schools.
- Developing a new strategic approach for GME, supported by coordinated provision for extra-curricular Gaelic activities as part of a Gaelic Youth Strategy.
- Expanding subject choice in GME at secondary level.
- Delivering a coordinated approach to support and retain GME teachers.

The plan provides a national framework for strengthening Gaelic Medium Education and widening access to Gaelic, both within schools and in the wider community.

Scottish Languages Act 2025 – Statutory Provisions (Scottish Government, 2025)

The [*Scottish Languages Act 2025*](#), which received Royal Assent in July 2025, gives official status in Scotland to both Gaelic and Scots. It places duties on Scottish Ministers, public authorities and education bodies to promote, protect and support the use of these languages in public life, education and communities.

The Act is supported by accompanying provisions and guidance which set out how public bodies and education systems should embed Gaelic and Scots within policy, practice, and service delivery. Key measures of direct relevance to the Languages curriculum include:

- Gaelic-medium education (GME) – Parents can request the establishment of Gaelic schools or nurseries in their area. Local authorities must assess demand, and Ministers may direct that provision be created where feasible.
- Scots language strategy – Ministers must prepare, consult on, and regularly review a national strategy for Scots, including guidance to education authorities on teaching and learning resources.
- Areas of linguistic significance – Gaelic-speaking regions may be formally designated to focus targeted cultural and educational support.

The Act also gives Ministers powers to set language standards for public bodies, fund initiatives, and commission research.

This legislation represents a major development in consolidating the role of Gaelic and Scots within Scottish education, culture, and public services.

United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

The [*UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024*](#), which received Royal Assent in January 2024, incorporates into Scots law the rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Bill was approved by the Scottish Parliament on 7 December 2023, marking a significant step in embedding children's rights across policy and practice. The Act places a legal duty on public authorities, including schools and local authorities, to act compatibly with children's rights and to give due regard to them in decision-making.

Statutory guidance published by the Scottish Government in 2024 provides further detail on implementation. It sets out how education systems should embed a rights-based approach across policy and practice. Several articles are particularly relevant to the languages curriculum:

- **Article 2 (Non-discrimination):** Every child is entitled to protection from discrimination, including on the basis of language, ethnicity, religion, ability, or family background.
- **Article 20 (Children unable to live with their family):** Children who cannot be cared for by their immediate family must receive alternative care that is continuous and respects their culture, language, and religion.
- **Article 30 (Children from minority or indigenous groups):** Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs, and religion of their family, if these differ from the majority population.

This combined framework of law and guidance ensures that children's linguistic and cultural identities are recognised, respected, and actively supported within Scotland's education system. It reinforces the responsibility of schools and local authorities to create inclusive environments where every child can participate fully in their learning.

Additional Support For Learning: Statutory Guidance (2017)

The [*Additional Support for Learning Act*](#) provides the legal framework for supporting children and young people in school education, and for working with their families. The framework is built on

the principle of additional support needs, a broad and inclusive term that applies to any child or young person who, for short or long periods, requires additional support to benefit fully from school education and to be included in their learning.

The 2017 statutory guidance sets out how local authorities, schools, and partners should meet these duties in practice. Within the languages curriculum, this framework is particularly important in ensuring that learners with additional support needs can access appropriate language learning opportunities, resources, and support. This enables full participation and progression in language learning for all children and young people.

This guidance reinforces the commitment to equity and inclusion, ensuring that the benefits of language learning are accessible to every learner.

British Sign Language Acts – UK And Scotland (UK Government, 2022; Scottish Government, 2015)

The [*British Sign Language \(Scotland\) Act 2015*](#), which received Royal Assent in October 2015, gave BSL official recognition as a language of Scotland. It requires Scottish Ministers to publish a National Plan every six years to promote and facilitate BSL use, and places duties on public bodies to prepare local BSL Plans aligned with national priorities. The first National Plan (2017-2023) focused on improving access, rights, and visibility for BSL users, with a second plan now in development.

The [*British Sign Language Act 2022*](#) extended statutory recognition of BSL to England, Wales, and Scotland. It places duties on UK Government departments to promote BSL, publish regular progress reports, and develop guidance for public service providers.

Together, these Acts represent major milestones in strengthening the status of BSL across Scotland and the wider UK. They require public bodies, including schools, to support BSL use, expand opportunities for BSL learning, and ensure more inclusive education for deaf children and young people.

Scotland's International Framework: China engagement strategy

The Scottish Government China Engagement Strategy (2012, updated [2018](#)) set out a coordinated approach to strengthening Scotland's economic, cultural, and educational links with China. The strategy identified education and people-to-people connections as key enablers of long-term engagement, including the development of linguistic and intercultural capability.

Within education, the strategy helped to shape nation investment in Chinese language provision, including support for teacher development and the teaching of Chinese languages and cultures. This is also supported through programmes run by Scotland's National Centre for Languages. This framework reflected a recognition of the role of languages in supporting international engagement, global citizenship, and future employability.

While the strategy does not place statutory requirements on the curriculum, it provides important context for understanding how language learning has been influenced by wider economic and international priorities, particularly in relation to diversification of language offer and global outlook.

Export And International Trade Policy

The UK Government, through the Department for Business and Trade, recognises the value of language skills in supporting economic growth and increasing exports. Research such as the British Council's [Languages for the Future](#) report highlights the importance of linguistic capacity in accessing non-English-speaking markets, ranking languages such as Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, French, Arabic, and German as priorities for the UK's global trade. These findings are directly relevant to Scotland. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) identifies meta-skills as central to future employability, including communication, adaptability, problem-solving, and working with others. Languages can make a clear contribution to the development of these meta-skills. Learning and using languages requires learners to communicate across contexts, adapt to unfamiliar situations, manage uncertainty, and engage with different perspectives, all of which align closely with the meta-skills SDS identifies as critical for the future workforce.

In Scotland, the Government's export growth plan and international strategy emphasise the need to build capacity in priority markets such as Germany, China, Spain, and the Middle East. Language learning therefore underpins both economic policy and education policy, ensuring that young people gain the skills needed to contribute to Scotland's workforce, support key industries, and strengthen global trade links. Business support initiatives, including subsidised language training for exporters, further reflect the strategic role of languages in Scotland's future prosperity.

OECD Review of Scottish Education (2020)

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future (OECD, [2021](#)) praised Curriculum for Excellence as an ambitious and widely supported framework that offers schools flexibility and promotes the development well-rounded learners. It highlighted Scotland's strengths in reading, science, equity and inclusion, while identifying system-level challenges. These included inconsistent assessment practices and a continued overreliance on traditional exams, which the OECD noted that this does not align with CfE's progressive and learner-centred principles. The report called for reforms to the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland, increased use of continuous and project-based assessment, and clearer system leadership to strengthen coherence and implementation.

The OECD highlights Scotland's approach to language education, including actions to preserve Gaelic and Scots, support British Sign Language, and develop language learning from Primary 1 onwards. It identifies the 1+2 languages policy as a key mechanism intended to enable learners to study three languages by their third year of education, noting that implementation has required additional support and funding since 2013 to guarantee a diverse offer at school level (OECD, 2021).

New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy

New Scots: Scotland's Refugee Integration Strategy ([2024](#)) sets out a cross-government approach to supporting refugees and people seeking asylum to rebuild their lives in Scotland. The strategy places strong emphasis on participation, inclusion, and access to education, employment, and public services.

Language learning and communication skills are identified as critical enablers of integration supporting social connections, cultural understanding, and access to opportunity. The strategy highlights the importance of developing linguistic confidence alongside cultural literacy to enable meaningful participation in Scottish society.

Although the strategy does not determine languages curriculum content, it provides an important policy backdrop for understanding the role of language learning in promotion inclusion, equity, and cohesion withing increasingly diverse communities.

2 National Data Sets

2.1 SQA Attainment and Presentation Data

SQA attainment and presentation data provide an additional source of evidence on the performance and uptake of languages within the senior phase. These statistics offer insight into both the scale of learner participation in National Qualifications and the outcomes achieved across different levels. A review of entries and attainment patterns helps to identify trends over time, strengths in learner performance, and areas where progression or sustainability may be at risk. In this evidence paper, data from the year of introduction of each National Course - National 5 (2014), Higher (2015), Advanced Higher (2016) - is included. The inclusion of this is particularly significant for the languages Curriculum Improvement Cycle, as it highlights the extent to which the entitlement to language learning in the BGE translates into continued study and achievement in the senior phase.

2.1.1 SQA National Qualifications Overview

The SQA offers National Courses in eight languages: Cantonese, French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish, and Urdu. These qualifications range from National 2 to Advanced Higher (SCQF Levels 2-7) for most languages. Urdu is currently available only to Higher level at National Qualifications but is offered up to SCQF level 7 through the Modern Languages for Life and Work (MLLW) Award. Russian and Polish are also available through the MLLW Award. At National 2 level, 5 languages are offered: French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian and Spanish.

At all levels, these qualifications cover all four literacy skills (reading, writing, listening and talking) through a wide range of contexts. Therefore, there is some alignment with the BGE up to fourth level, as the technical framework at present is divided into three sections: Listening and Talking, Reading, and Writing.

Latin is available as a NQ from National 3 through to Advanced Higher. The course comprises two main units: Literary Appreciation and Translating. It enables learners to develop translation skills, analyse and evaluate texts, and gain knowledge of literary techniques and Roman culture. In addition to supporting the study of an ancient language, the course contributes to wider literacy by developing skills in reading, writing, talking and listening in English, while engaging with Latin texts.

The MLLW Award is available from SCQF levels 3-7 and is available across ten languages: Cantonese, French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. This award provides flexible, skills-based pathways that reflect practical language use in real-world contexts.

The BSL Award is available from SCQF levels 3-6. At all levels, the course has two mandatory units: Understanding Language and Linguistics and Using Language in Context. At SCQF level 5 and 6, there is a third unit: History and the Deaf Community. The course recognises the linguistic and cultural heritage of BSL and provides learners with the opportunity to develop communication skills for a range of contexts.

The Scots Language Award (SLA) is available from SCQF levels 3-6. It promotes studying the history and development of the Scots language. It also helps learners develop their ability to understand and communicate in Scots. At all levels, there are two mandatory units: History and Development, and Understanding and Communicating.

2.1.2 SQA National Course Entries

This section reviews SQA data from the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence qualifications to 2025. It examines trends in presentation and attainment across NQs, highlighting patterns in languages. The inclusion of 2025 data provides a complete picture of recent developments, showing that almost all languages at all levels are beginning to show signs of stabilisation. The latest figures show a picture of improved stability following the COVID-19 pandemic, with pass rates for languages consistently above the national average and improved entries at National 5 and Higher over the past two years, and sustained growth at all levels for both Spanish and Mandarin. Attainment data for 2025 is presented using pre-appeal statistics and should be interpreted with due caution when considering final outcomes.

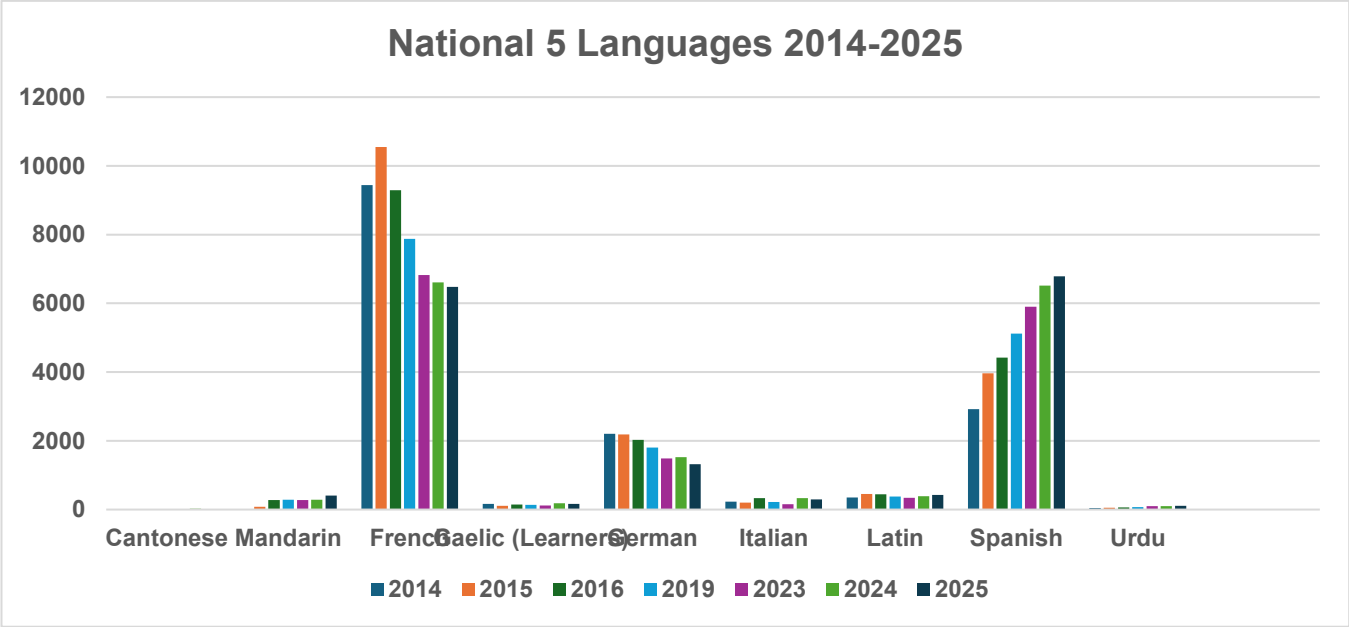
In 2025, entries at National 5 languages totalled 15,580, a slight decrease of 97 presentations (-0.6%) compared with 2024, but still above 2023 levels (+723, +4.9%). Higher entries rose to 6,907, an increase of 370 presentations (+5.7%) from last year and up 15.1% from 2023, although they remain below both 2019 (-898, -11.5%) and 2016 (-1,800, -20.7%). Advanced Higher entries were stable at 1,052, matching the 2024 total and 4 entries higher than in 2023, but 256 fewer than in 2019 (-19.6%).

French and Spanish now account for over 85% of all entries at National 5, just under 80% at Higher, and around 75% at Advanced Higher

SCQF Levels 3-7 entries to languages qualifications including Latin rose by 2.7% between 2024 and 2025, increasing from 35,676 to 36,633 presentations (+957). This figure includes Modern Languages for Life and Work.

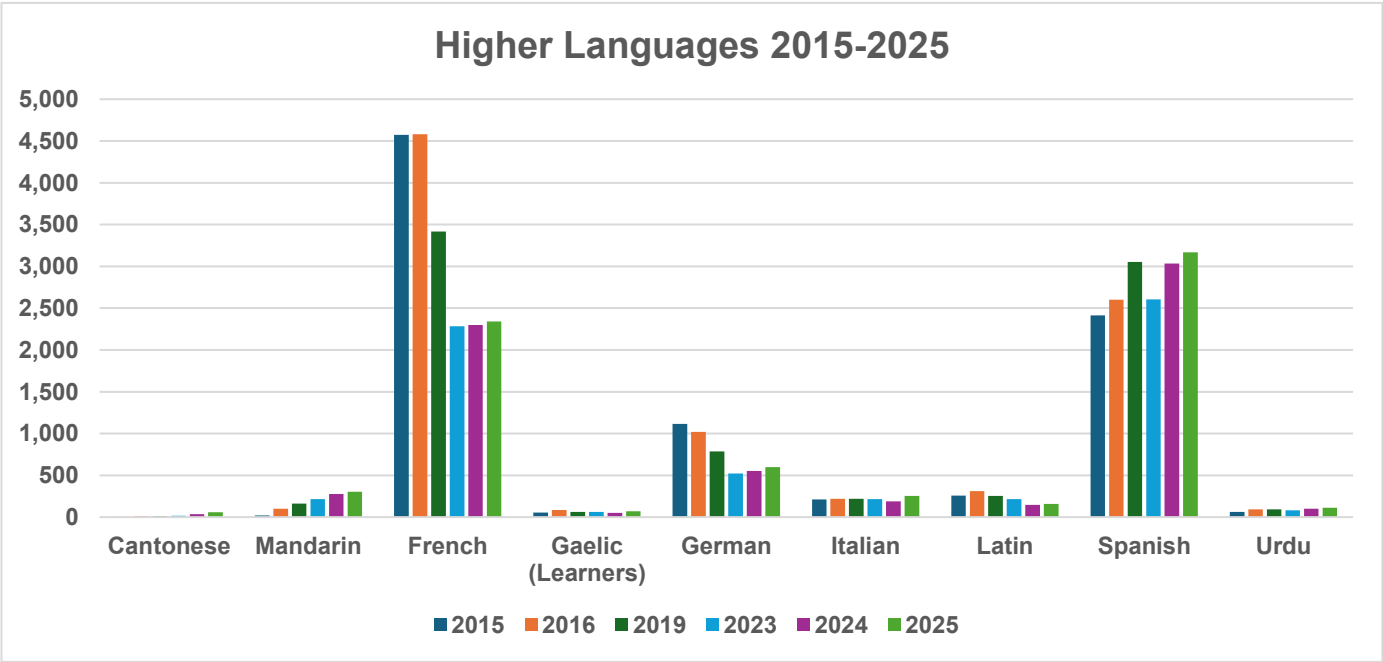
Summary of changes for National 5:

- **2024 to 2025:** -0.6% (15,580 vs 15,677)
- **2019 to 2025:** +0.5% (15,580 vs 15,510)
- **2014 to 2025:** +3.8% (15,580 vs 15,009)



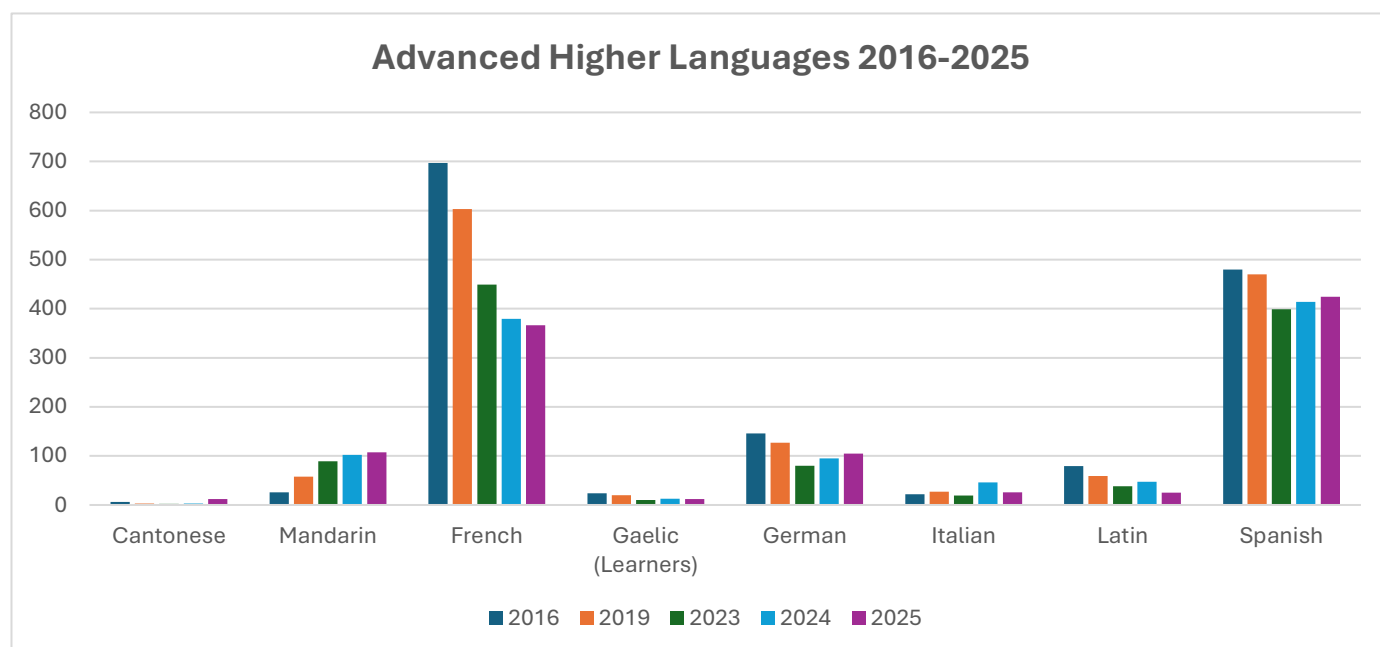
Summary of changes for Higher:

- **2024 to 2025:** -11.5% (6,907 vs 7,805)
- **2019 to 2025:** +5.7% (6,907 vs 6,537)
- **2015 to 2025:** -19.3% (6,907 vs 8,556)



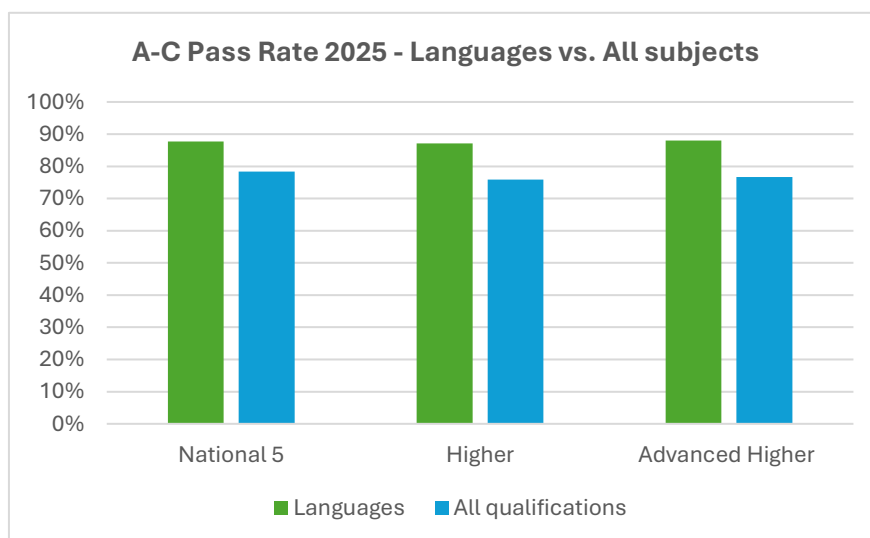
Summary of changes for Advanced Higher:

- **2024 to 2025:** 0% change (1,052 vs 1,052)
- **2019 to 2025:** -19.6% (1,052 vs 1,308)
- **2016 to 2025:** -24.9% (1,052 vs 1,401)



2.1.3 SQA National Qualifications Attainment

Learners who choose to study languages in the senior phase continue to perform very strongly.



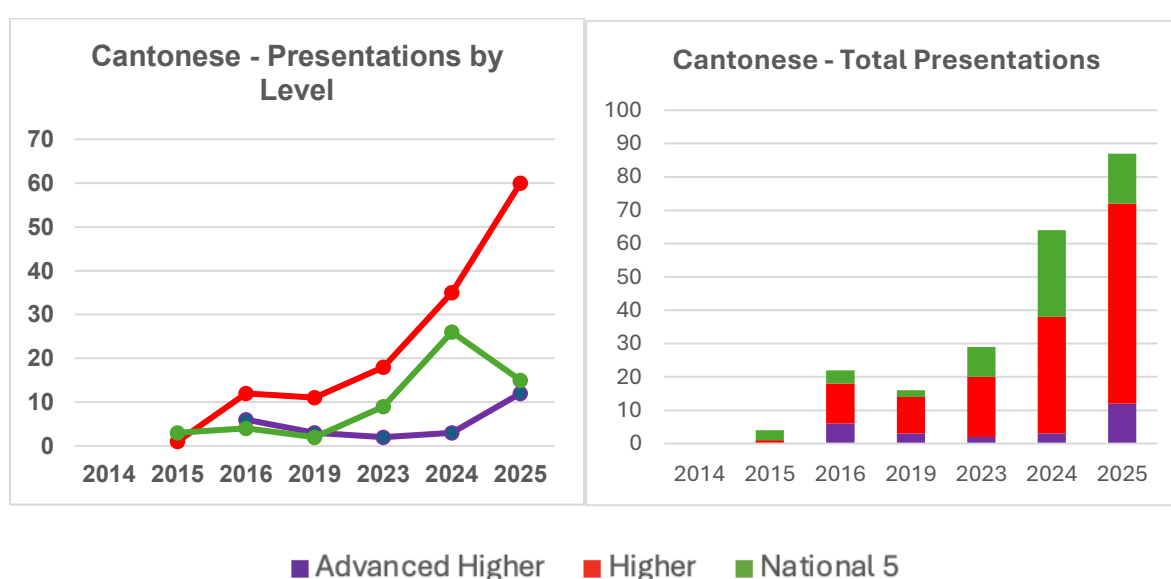
- **National 5:** 87.7% (languages) vs 78.4% (all subjects)
- **Higher:** 87.1% (languages) vs 75.9% (all subjects)
- **Advanced Higher:** 88.02% (languages) vs 76.7% (all subjects)

2.1.4 Languages Entries and Passes

In 2025, Spanish and Mandarin increased at each qualification level compared with recent years. The number of entries for French and German remain below that of both 2019 and below the year each qualification was introduced (2014 for National 5, 2015 for Higher, and 2016 for Advanced Higher), though there has been some recent improvement at Higher. Latin shows stronger uptake at National 5 but low numbers at Advanced Higher. Gaelic (Learners), Urdu and Cantonese have small cohorts though recent movements in the senior phase are mostly positive. Across all languages, A-C pass rates remain generally high at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

Cantonese

Entries for Cantonese remain small but have grown strongly at Higher and Advanced Higher year-on-year. There are no entries for National 3 or 4, and the language is not offered at National 2¹.

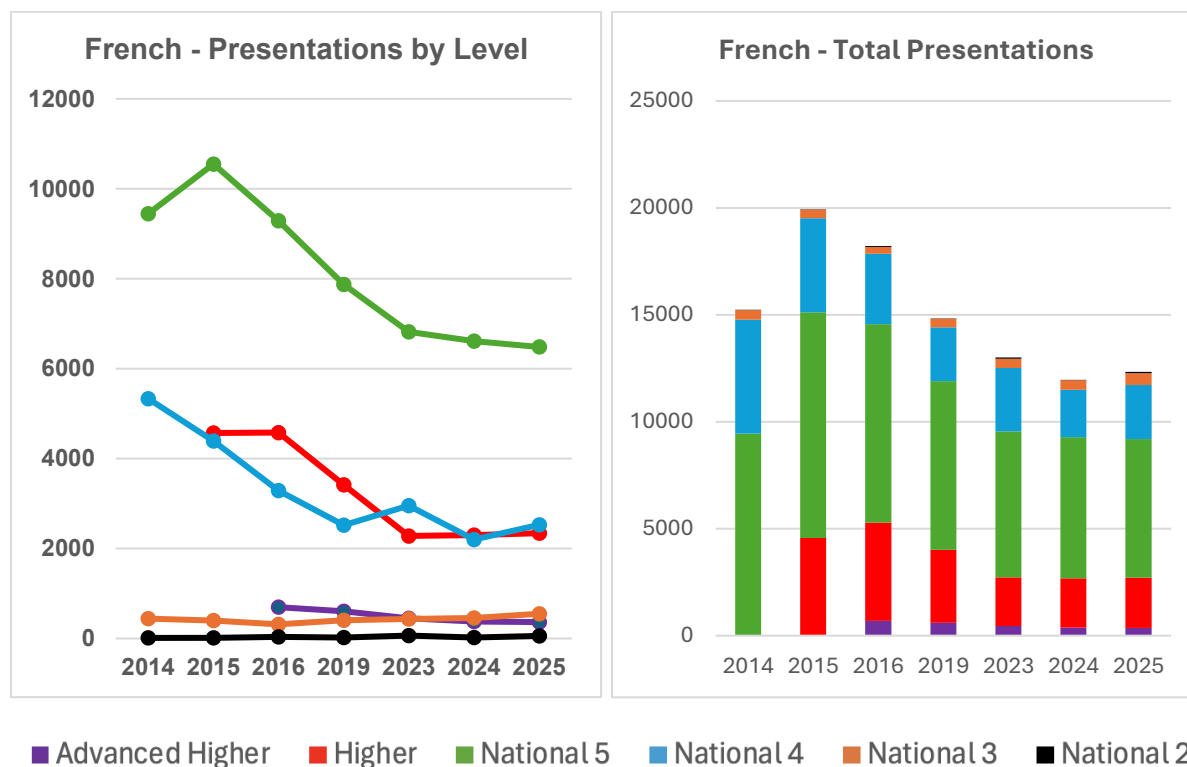


- **National 5:** 15 entries (A-C pass rate 100%) a decrease of 11 candidates (-42.3% compared with 2025) but an increase of 13 in 2019, when only two candidates were presented.
- **Higher:** There were 60 entries in 2025 (A-C pass rate 100%), up 25 candidates from last year (+71.4%) and up 49 compared with 2019 (+445.5%).
- **Advanced Higher:** There were 12 entries in 2025 (A-C pass rate 91.7%), an increase of 9 entries compared with last year (+300%), and an increase of 6 compared with 2016 (100%).

¹ Note: The graphs for each language include only Curriculum for Excellence National Qualifications. Earlier qualifications awarded prior to CfE are excluded. Higher was first awarded in 2015 and Advanced Higher in 2016.

French

National 5 and Advanced Higher entries decreased compared with last year, while Higher entries saw a slight uptick. Over the longer term, entries remain lower than 2019 and the introduction of the National Qualifications.

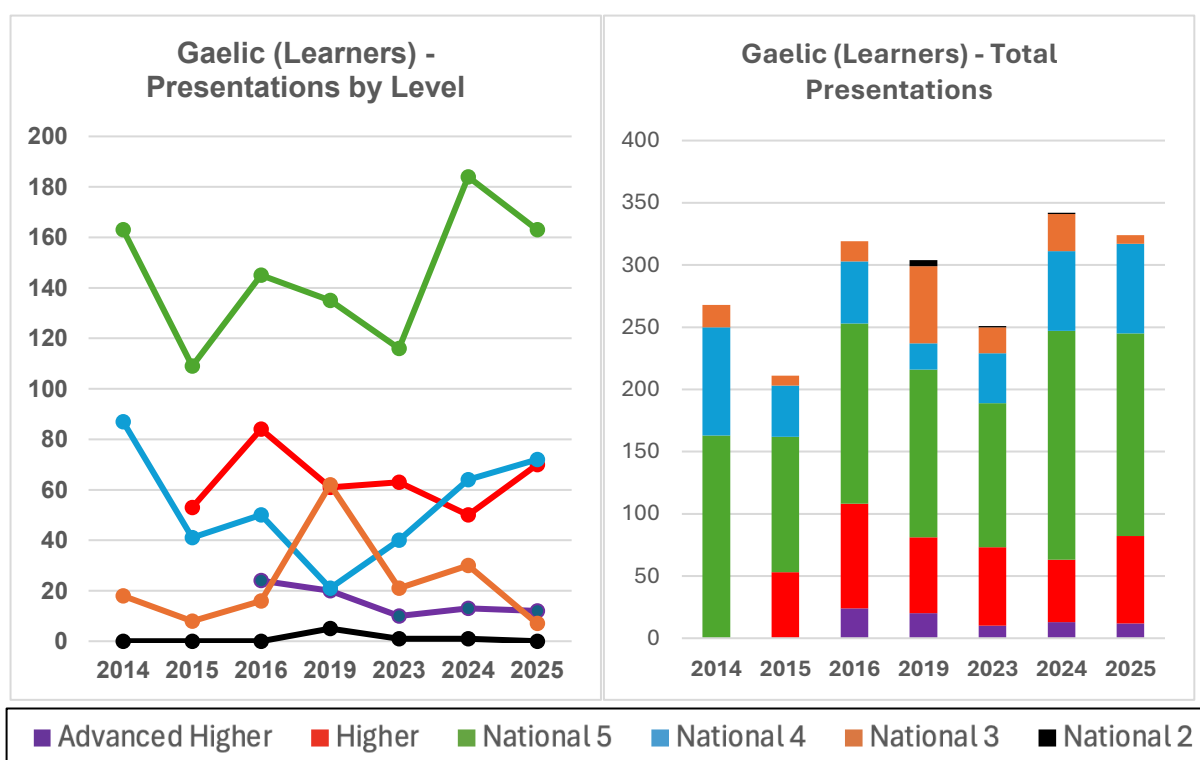


- **National 2:** Entries rose to 61 in 2025, up from 20 in 2024 and similar to 2023 (66). This is a significant increase from 2019 (21) and 204 (14). The 2025 pass rate was 70.5%, broadly in line with last year.
- **National 3:** Entries increased to 551 in 2025, an increase of 94 (+20.5% compared with 2014). National 3 French entries are broadly stable and have risen steadily since 2019 (408) with this year representing an increase of 105 entries (+23.5%) compared with 2014. The pass rate remains broadly stable at 90% (compared with 89.1% in 2024, 91.2% in 2019) but is lower than in 2014 (93.3%).
- **National 4:** There were 2,527 entries in 2025, up 326 (+16% compared with 2024), but down 431 (-14.6%) compared with 2019 and a fall of 2,807 entries (52.6%) compared with 2014. The pass rate this year was 87.3%, a decrease of 3.8 percentage points from 91.1 last year, 6.1 points from 93.4% in 2023 and 10.1 points from 97.4% in 2014.
- **National 5:** Entries fell from 6,611 in 2024 to 6,483 in 2025 (-128 entries, -1.94%), representing a wider downward trend at this level. There were 336 fewer entries (-4.9%) compared with 2023, 1,390 fewer (-17.7%) than in 2019 and 2,961 fewer (-31.4%) since the introduction of the qualification in 2014. The A-C pass rate for 2025 was 84.5%, down 0.6 points compared with last year, broadly similar to 2019 (84.8%) and 2.3 points lower than 2014 (86.8%).
- **Higher:** Entries rose slightly by 44 from 2,298 in 2024 to 2,342 in 2025 (+1.91%). This is 1,075 fewer (-31.5%) than in 2019, and 2,230 fewer (-48.7%) than in 2015, when the qualification was introduced. The A-C pass rate was 85.7%, broadly in line with last year (85.8%), 1.6 points lower than 2019 and 2 points lower than 2015.

- **Advanced Higher:** Entries fell slight from 379 in 2024 to 366 in 2025 (-13, -3.43%). This is down 15.6% compared with 2023 (449) and down 47.5% compared with 2016 (697) when the National Qualification was introduced. The A-C pass rate was 84.2% in 2025, up 1.4 points from 2024 (82.8%), a notable increase from 77.4% in 2019 (+6.8 points) but slightly below 2016 (85.1%, -0.9 points).

Gaelic (Learners)

Entries for Gaelic (Learners) remain small across all levels, with notable year-on-year variation at National 3 and a longer-term decline at Advanced Higher. National 4 shows steady growth since 2019, while National 5 and Higher have seen mixed patterns but generally positive movements in recent years. Pass rates are variable at lower levels but remain high and stable at Higher and Advanced Higher.



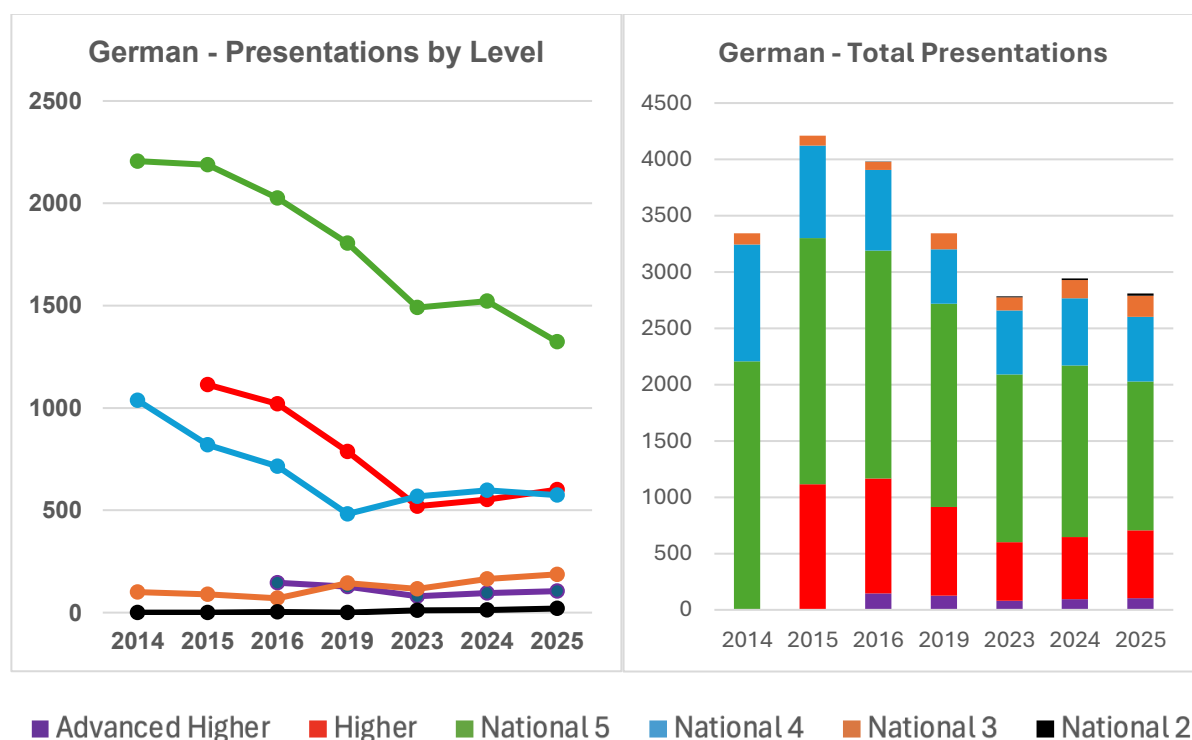
- **National 2:** No entries in 2025. Presentation at this level is rare, with only one entry in both 2024 and 2023, and five in 2019.
- **National 3:** Entries are inconsistent and vary year to year. In 2025, there were 7 entries and with a pass rate of 14.3%, compared with 30 (-76.7%) in 2024, 21 (-66.7%) in 2023 and 62 (-88.7%) in 2019. This is also 9 fewer (-56.2%) than in 2014 (16). Pass rates fluctuate considerable: 100% in 2015 (8 candidates), 82.3% in 2019, rising to 90.5% in 2023 and 96.7% in 2024.
- **National 4:** There were 72 entries in 2025, an increase of 8 (+12.5%) compared with last year. Entries have risen steadily (+242.9%) since 2019 (21 candidates) but still remain 15 lower (-17.24%) than 2014 (87). The pass rate was 84.7%, up 1.9 points from last year (82.8%) but well below 2019 (95.2%, -10.5 points) and 2014 (100%, -15.3 points).
- **National 5:** There were 163 entries in 2025, down 21 (-11.4%) from 184 last year. The 2024 figure had marked a large rise of 68 (+58.6%) from 2023 (116). This year's entries

were 28 higher (+20.7%) than in 2019 (135) and match the total from 2014. The A-C pass rate was 87.1%, up 5 points from last year and 14.2 points from 2019, but below 2014's 90.8%.

- **Higher:** 70 entries in 2025, up 20 (+40%) from last year. Entries were lower in 2024 compared with both 2023 (63) and 2019 (61). The highest number recorded was for in 2015 (97), making 2025's total 27.8% lower. The A-C pass rate was 88.6%, up 0.6 points from 2024, but 1.4 points lower than 2019 and 2.5 points lower than 2015.
- **Advanced Higher:** Entries have been relatively stable over the past three years (12 in 2025, 13 in 2024 and 10 in 2023) but are down 40% from 2019 (20) and 50% lower than in 2016 (24). The A-C pass rate was 91.7% in 2025, down 0.6 points from 2024 but 1.7 points higher from 2023 and significantly higher than in 2019 (+6.7 points) and 2016 (+2.3 point).

German

German entries show a mixed picture in 2025. National 2 and 3 have grown, while National 4 and 5 have declined compared with last year. Higher and Advanced Higher have both increased year-on-year but remain below 2019 and the results from the year each qualification was introduced. Pass rates are generally high, with notable improvement at National 2 and stability at Advanced Higher.

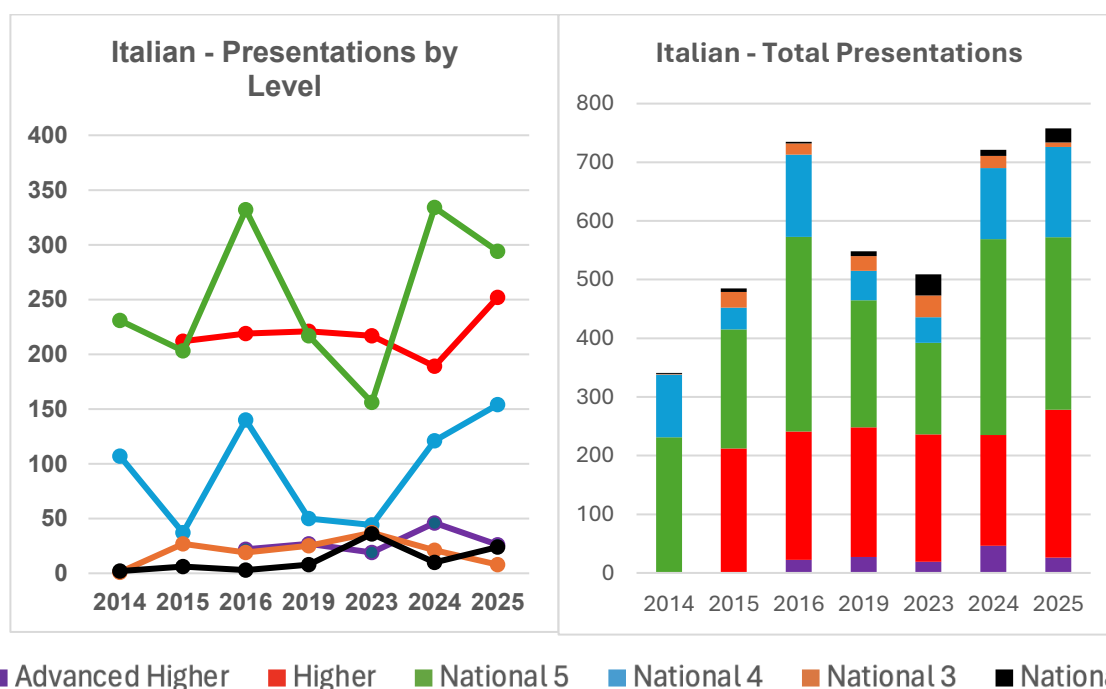


- **National 2:** 20 entries in 2025, up 7 (+185%) from last year. This is highest number recorded and an increase of 17 from 2016 (3). The pass rate was 65% which up from 46.2% in 2024 and 25.5% in 2023.
- **National 3:** 187 entries in 2025, up 23 (+14%) from last year (164). This is 33 higher (+22.9%) than in 2019 and 86 higher (+85.1%) in 2014. The pass rate was 94.1%, down 1 point from last year but 2.4 points higher than 2019 and 1 point higher than 2014.

- **National 4:** 574 entries in 2025, down 25 (-4.2%) from last year but up 92 (+19.1%) from 2019. Compared to 2014, entries are down 463 (-44.6%). The pass rate was 85.4%, the lowest since the qualification began, down 0.9 points from last year, down 10.9 points from 2019 and 11.9 points from 2014.
- **National 5:** 1,323 entries in 2025, down 199 (-15%) from last year. In 2024, entries had risen slightly (+32, +2.15%) compared with 2023. Entries remain much lower than in 2019 (-482, -26.7%) and 2014 (-883, -40%). The A-C pass rate was 88.9%, up 3.8 points from last year, 2.6 points higher than 2019 and broadly similar to 2015 (88.4%).
- **Higher:** 600 entries in 2025, up 48 (+8.7%) from last year and 80 (+15.4%) from 2023. Still lower than 2019 (787), down 186 (-23.8%) and 2015 (1,114), down 513 (-46.1%). The A-C pass rate was 87.5%, down 1.6 points from 2024 and down 2.6 points from 2019, but higher than the 80.9% recorded in 2015 (+6.6 points).
- **Advanced Higher:** 105 entries in 2025, up 10 (+10.5%) from last year and 25 higher (+31.3%) than in 2023. Down 22 (-17.3%) from 2019 and 41 (-28%) since the introduction of the qualification in 2016. The A-C pass rate was 95.2%, up 4.7 points from last year and 8.9 points from 2016. The highest A-C pass rate recorded was 98.8% in 2023.

Italian

Italian entries show a varied picture in 2025. National 2, 3, and 4 have grown compared with last year, while National 5 and Advanced Higher have declined. Higher has increased year-on-year and is showing signs of recovery, although it remains below 2019 and the year the qualification was introduced. Pass rates are generally high, with strong performances at Higher and stability at Advanced Higher.

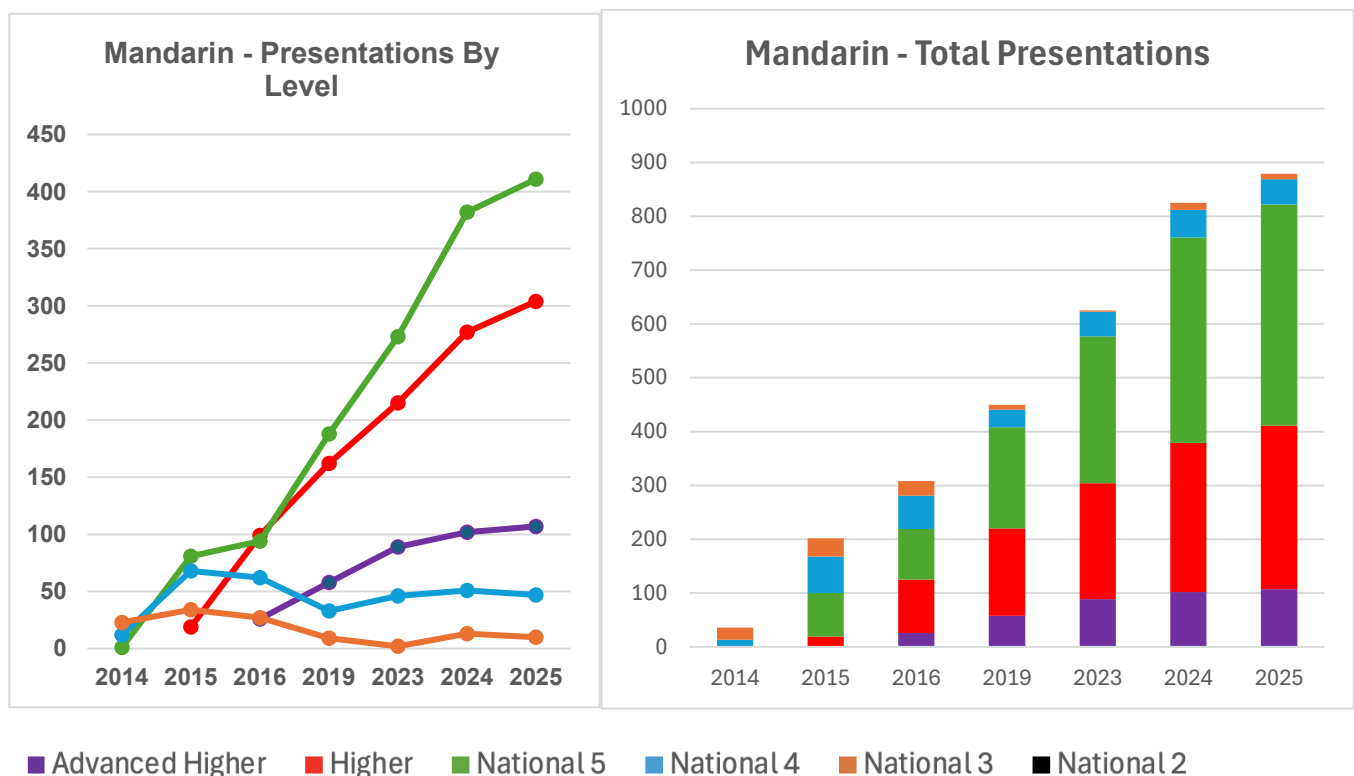


- **National 2:** 24 entries in 2025, up 14 (+140%) from last year and the highest since the qualification began. This is 18 more than in 2016 (6). The pass rate was 91.7%, down 8.3 points from 2024 but up from 83.3% in 2016.

- **National 3:** 8 entries in 2025, down 13 (-61.9%) from last year. This is 19 fewer than in 2019 and 19 fewer than in 2016. The pass rate was 87.5%, up 11.3 points from 2024 but down 8.5 points from 2019.
- **National 4:** 154 entries in 2025, up 33 (+27.3%) from last year and the highest since 2019. Compared with 2014, entries are down 46 (-23%). The pass rate was 82.5%, down 10.9 points from 2024 and 16.4 points from 2014.
- **National 5:** 294 entries in 2025, down 40 (-12%) from last year. This is 43 lower (-12.8%) than in 2019 and 77 lower (-20.8%) than in 2014. The A-C pass rate was 77.9%, down 1.1 points from 2024 and 8.1 points from 2019.
- **Higher:** 252 entries in 2025, up 63 (+33.3%) from last year and 31 higher (+14%) than in 2019. This is still 148 entries fewer (-37%) than in 2015. The A-C pass rate was 91.7%, down 2.4 points from 2024 but up 1.7 points from 2019.
- **Advanced Higher:** 26 entries in 2025, down 20 (-43.5%) from last year and 1 fewer than in 2019. This is 4 more (+18.2%) than in 2016. The A-C pass rate was 96.2%, up 6.7 points from 2024 and 5 points from 2016.

Mandarin (Simplified and Traditional)

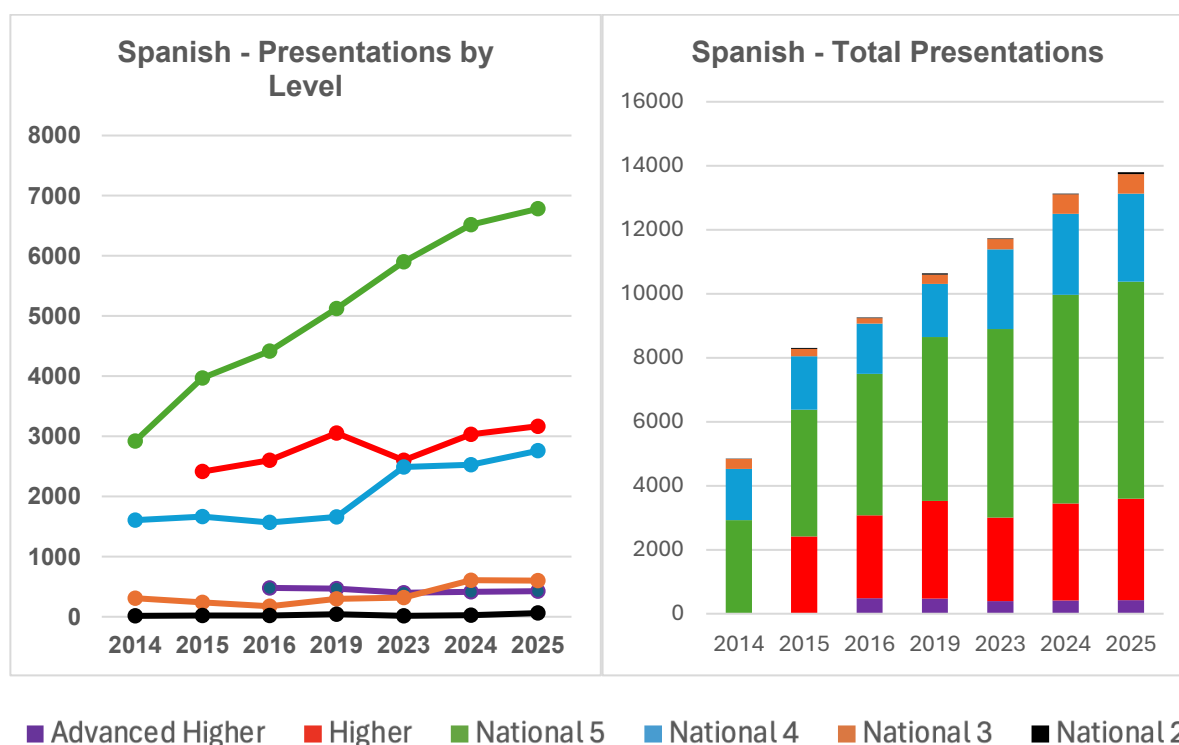
Mandarin entries have shown strong growth over the past decade, particularly at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, though trends at National 3 and 4 are more variable. Pass rates are generally high, with candidates taking the Mandarin (Traditional) National Course maintaining a 100% pass rate over the years.



- **National 3:** 10 entries in 2025, down 3 from last year and is broadly similar to 2019 (9 entries). This is 56.5% fewer than in 2014. The pass rate was 100%, up 7.7 points from last year and matching 2019.
- **National 4:** 47 entries in 2025, down 4 from last year. This is 14 more (+42%) than in 2019 and 25 more (+291%) than in 2014. In 2015 and 2016, there were 68 and 62 entries respectively. The pass rate was 85.1%, down 1.2 points from last year and 5.8 points from 2019. In 2014, the pass rate was 100%.
- **National 5:** 411 entries in 2025 for Mandarin (Simplified and Traditional), up 29 (+7.6%) from last year. Compared with 2019 (141 entries), this is an increase of 270 (191.4%). Since 2015, entries have risen from 81 to 411 (+407.4%). The A-C pass rate for Mandarin (Traditional) has been 100% for the past three years. For Mandarin (Simplified), the 2025 pass rate was 91.7%, down 2.8 points from last year and 4.6 points lower than in 2019.
- **Higher:** 304 entries in 2025 for both Simplified and Traditional exams, up 27 (+9.8%) from last year and 142 (+87.7%) from 2019. In 2015, there were only 19 entries. The A-C pass rate for the Traditional exam has been 100% since 2015. For Mandarin (Simplified), the 2025 pass rate was 95.1%, broadly similar to last year (+0.1 points), but 1.1 points lower than 2019.
- **Advanced Higher:** 107 entries in 2025, up 5 (+4.9%) from last year and 49 (+84.5%) from 2019. In 2016, there were only 26 entries.

Spanish

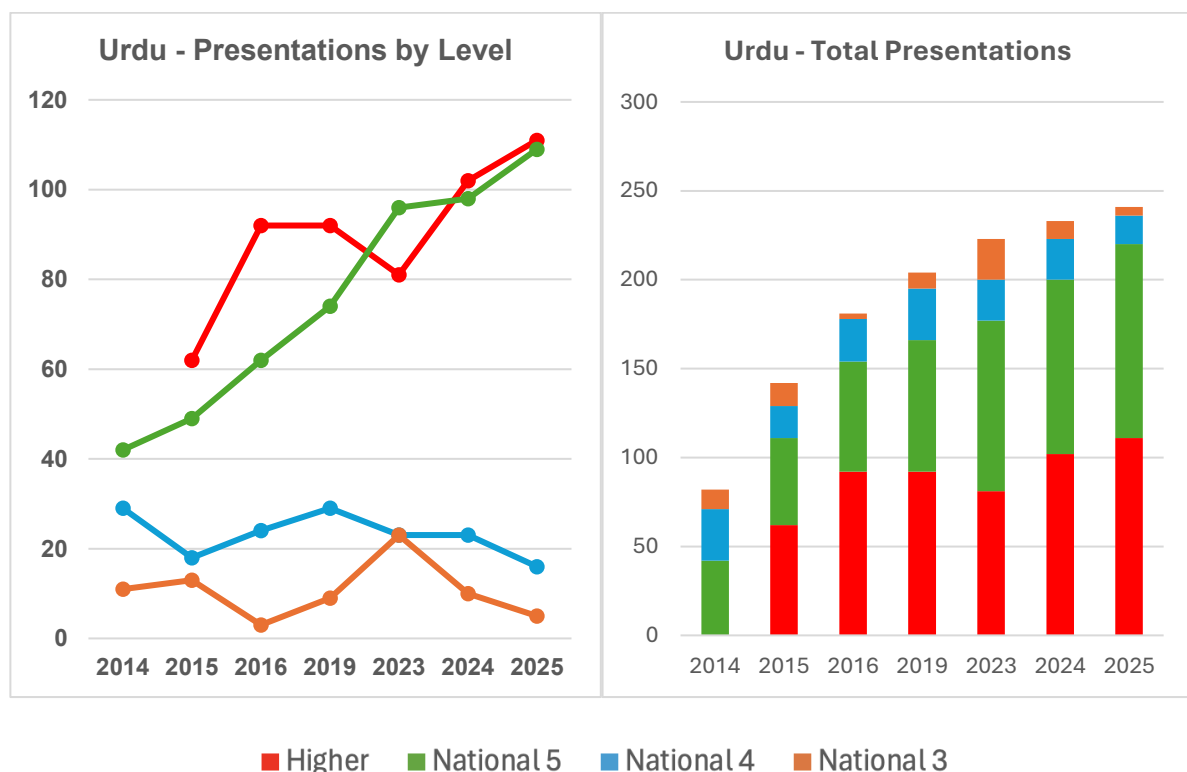
Entries in Spanish have increased year-on-year across the senior phase, with particularly strong growth since the introduction of the National Qualifications in the language. Long-term trends show sustained growth at Higher level and below. Advanced Higher has risen over the past two years but remains below 2019 and 2016 levels. Pass rates remain high overall, though several levels have seen declines compares with earlier years.



- **National 2:** 61 entries in 2025, up 35 (+134.6%) from last year and 18 (+41.9%) from 2019. This is a significant increase compared with 2014 (+306.6%, from 15 entries) and represents the highest number of presentations to date. The pass rate was 45.9%, the lowest since the introduction of the qualification, down 19.5 points from last year and 14.1 points from 2014.
- **National 3:** 603 entries in 2025, down slightly by 5 (-0.8%) from last year. This is more than double the 295 entries in 2019 (+104.4%) and 294 more than in 2014 (+95.1%). The pass rate was 90.5%, up 1.8 points from last year and 4.7 points from 2019, but down 5.9 points from 2014.
- **National 4:** 2,759 entries in 2025, up 230 (+9.1%) from last year. This is 900 more than in 2019 (+54.2%) and 1,155 more (+72%) than in 2014. The pass rate was 85.6%, down 3.2 points from last year and 7.6 points from 2019. In 2014, the pass rate was 98.2%, 12.6% points higher than in 2025.
- **National 5:** 6,782 entries in 2025, up 262 (+4.0%) from last year. This is 1,660 more than in 2019 (2,923, +32.4%) 3,859 more than in 2014 (5,122 entries, +132%). The A-C pass rate was 84.7% which was 1.3% points lower than last year, 3 points lower than in 2019 and 5.8 points lower than in 2014.
- **Higher:** 3,168 entries in 2025, up 134 (+4.4%) from last year and 114 (+3.7%) from 2019. Compared with 2015 (2,413 entries), this is a 31.2% increase. The A-C pass rate was 83.3%, broadly in line with last year and 2019, but 2.73 points lower than in 2015 (86.03%).
- **Advanced Higher:** 424 entries in 2025, up 10 (+2.4%) from last year, but down 46 (-9.8%) from 2019 and 56 (-11.7%) from 2016. The A-C pass rate was 81.4%, up 3.9 points from last year, 3.2 points from 2019 and 0.8 points from 2016.

Urdu

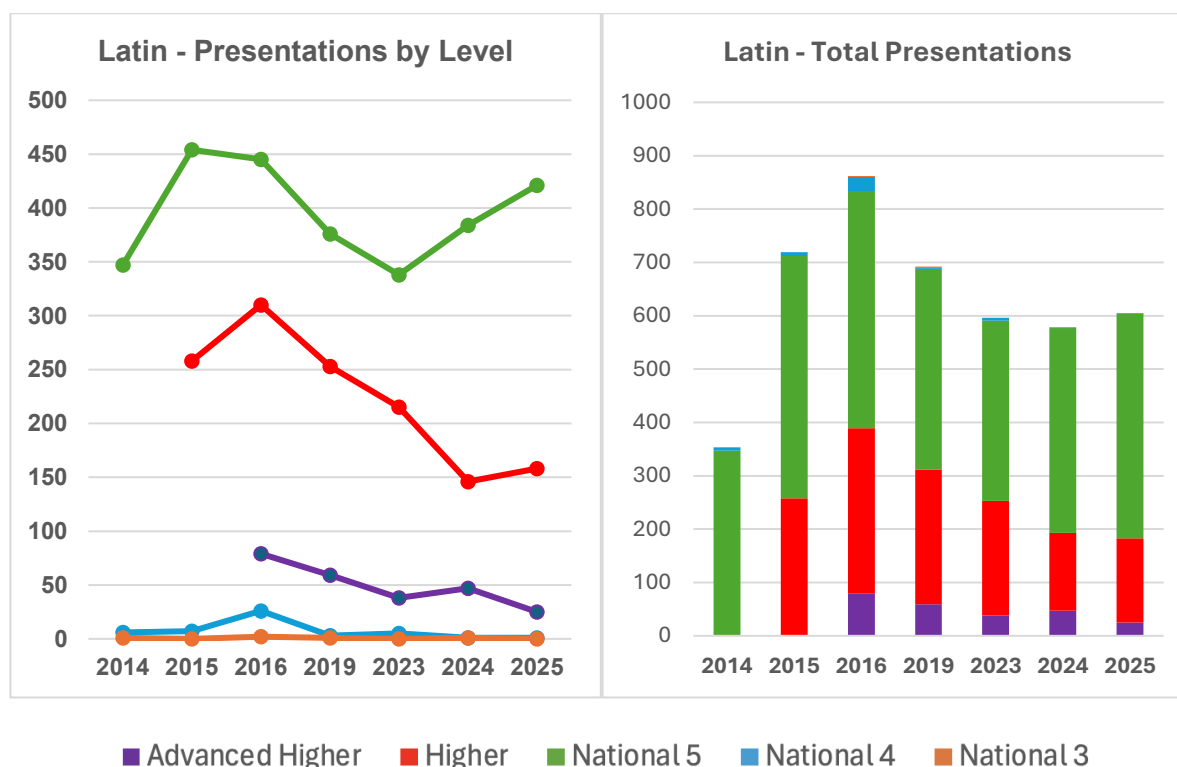
Urdu is not presented at National 2 or Advanced Higher level. The number of entries is small across all levels and fluctuates year-on-year, with generally high pass rates at National 5 and Higher. National 3 and 4 entries and pass rates have declined in recent years.



- **National 3:** Entries at National 3 vary year on year. There were 5 entries in 2025, half the number from last year (10). In 2019 and 2014, there were 9 and 11 entries respectively. The pass rate was 80%, down 10 points from last year. In 2019, all candidates passed, while in 2014 the pass rate was 90.9%.
- **National 4:** 16 entries in 2025, down 7 (-30.4%) from last year, and 14 fewer (-48.2%) than in both 2019 and 2014. The pass rate was 75%, 25 points lower than in all other recorded years.
- **National 5:** 109 entries in 2025, up 11 (+11.2%) from last year, 35 (+47.3%) from 2019, 67 (+159.5%) from 2014. The A-C pass rate was 97.2%, up 5.4 points from last year, 1.4 points lower than 2019, and slightly lower than 2014 (100%).
- **Higher:** 111 candidates in 2025, up 9 (+8.8%) from last year, 20.7% higher than 2019, and 27.6 higher than 2015. The A-C pass rate was 98.2%, broadly in line with previous years (99% in 2024; 98.6% in 2019 and 93.1% in 2015).

Classical Languages: Latin

Latin presentations remain concentrated at National 5 and Higher, with very small candidate numbers at National 3 and 4. National 5 entries have grown steadily over the past decade, while entries at Higher and Advanced Higher have declined significantly compared with 2015 and 2019. Pass rates are consistently high across all levels with entries.

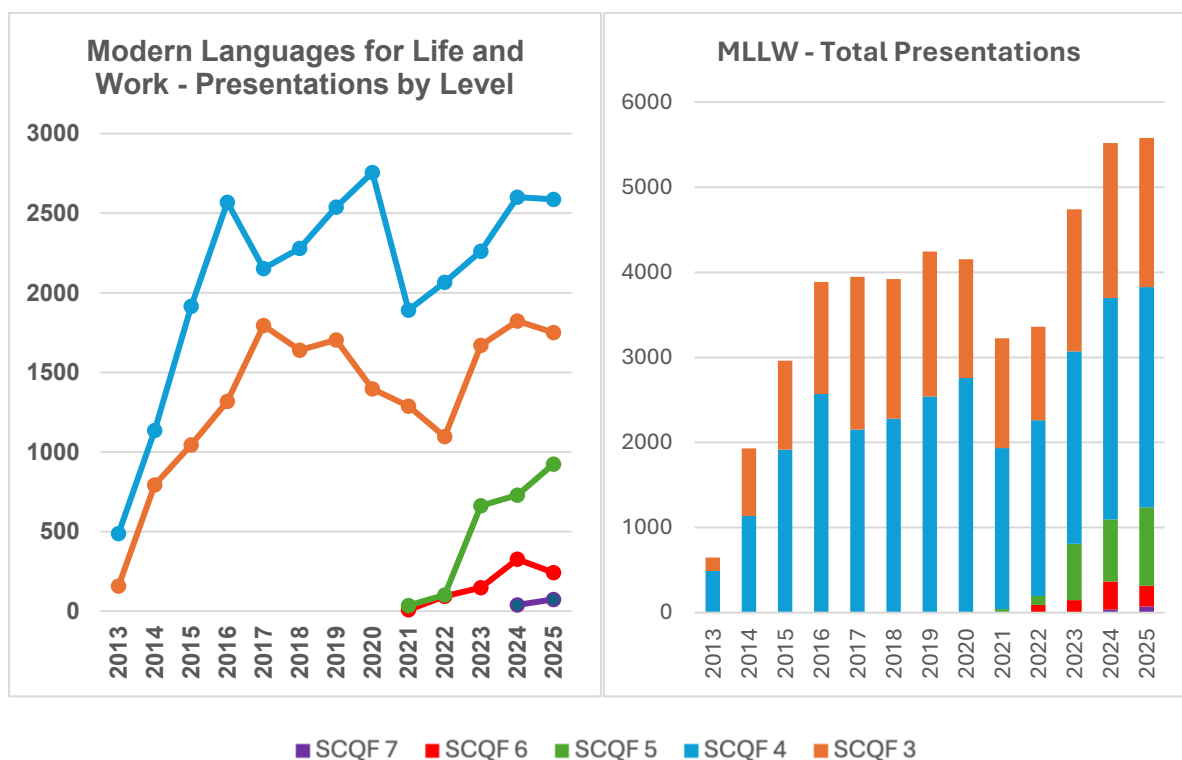


- **National 3:** No candidates were presented in 2025. Presentations at this level are rare, with 1 entry in 2024, 1 entry in 2019, 2 in 2016 and 1 in 2014.
- **National 4:** 1 candidate in 2025, the same as in 2024. There were 3 entries in 2019, 6 in 2014, and the largest cohort in 2016 with 26 candidates.

- **National 5:** 421 entries in 2025, up 37 (+9.6%) from 2024, 45 (+12%) from 2019 and 74 (21.3%) from 2014. The A-C pass rate in 2025 was 97.6%, down 2.1 points from 2024, up 1.3 points from 2019, and slightly lower than in 2014 (99.1%).
- **Higher:** 158 in 2025, up 12 (+8.2%) from 2024, but down 95 (-37.5%) from 2019 and 100 (-38.7%) from 2015. The A-C pass was 97.5%, up 7.1 points from last year, and broadly similar to 2015 (97.9%).
- **Advanced Higher:** 25 entries in 2024, down 22 (-46.8%) from last year. This is 34 fewer (-57.6%) than in 2019 and 54 (-68.4%) fewer than 2016 (79). The A-C pass rate was 88.0%, down 7.7 points from 2024, slightly down 1.5 points in 2016, but 13.4 points higher than 2019.

Modern Languages for Life and Work (MLLW) Awards

Entries for MLLW have generally increased across most levels in 2025, with particularly strong long-term growth at SCQF levels 3, 4, and 5. Introduced in 2024, SCQF level 7 at MLLW has seen the largest proportional rise year-on-year. Level 6 entries fell back from a 2024 peak but remain well above earlier years.

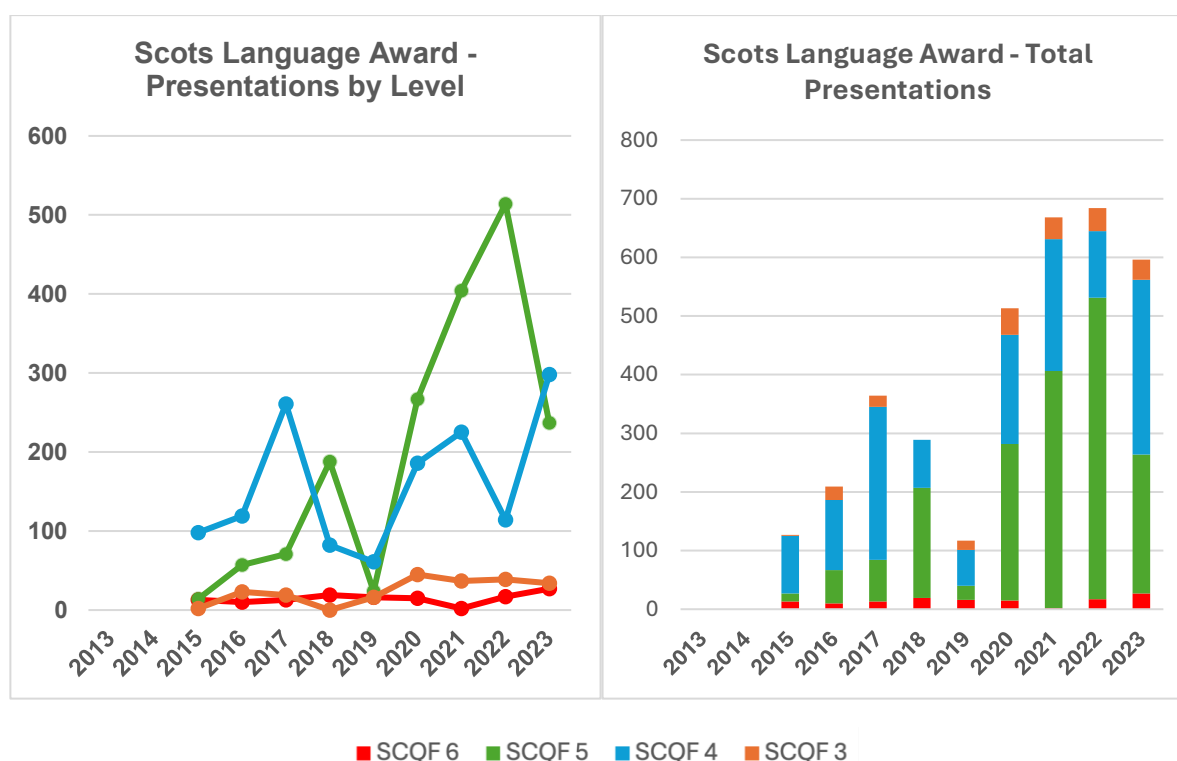


- **SCQF Level 3:** 1,751 entries in 2025, down 72 (-3.9%) from 2024 but 80 (+4.8%) higher than in 2023. Over the long term, entries have more than doubled compared with 2014 (+957, +120.5%).
- **SCQF Level 4:** 2,587 entries in 2025, down 15 (-0.6%) from 2024 but up 326 (+14.4%) compared with 2023. Entries remain well above pre-2020 levels, showing an overall upward trajectory since the introduction of the award in 2013.
- **SCQF Level 5:** 924 entries in 2025, up 195 (+26.7%) from 2024 and 262 (+39.6%) from 2023. This marks the highest number of entries recorded at this level.

- **SCQF Level 6:** 242 entries in 2025, down 84 (-25.8%) from last year's peak (326) but still significantly higher than in 2023 (+95, +64.6%). Entries have grown sharply since 2021 (8).
- **SCQF Level 7:** 74 entries in 2025, up 35 (+89.7%) from 2024. This is only the second year the award has been offered and indicates strong early uptake.

Scots Language Award

Entries for the Scots Language Award increased significantly between 2019 and 2024 but fell by 15% in 2025. While totals remain much higher than in the early years of the award, the decline in 2025 was most marked at SCQF level 5. Numbers at SCQF level 4 rose slightly, and level 3 entries remain well above their 2019 total.



- **SCQF Level 6:** 22 entries in 2025, unchanged from 2024 but 5 fewer (-19.5%) than in 2023 (27 entries). Numbers remain broadly consistent with the past four years and higher than in the early years of the award.
- **SCQF Level 5:** 376 entries in 2025, down 180 (-32.4%) from 2024 (556 entries) after a substantial increase between 2023 and 2024. This is still higher than in 2022 (514) and far above the early years, when annual entries were below 100.
- **SCQF Level 4:** 312 entries in 2025, up 14 (+4.7%) from 2024 and more than double the 2022 figure (114 entries). Numbers have risen steadily since 2020, although they remain below the 2017 peak of 261.
- **SCQF Level 3:** 93 entries in 2025, up 24 (+34.8%) from 2024 and nearly six times higher than in 2019 (16 entries).

Across all SCQF levels, there were 803 entries in 2025, down 142 (-15%) from 2024 (945 entries) but still the third-highest total since the introduction of the award.

British Sign Language

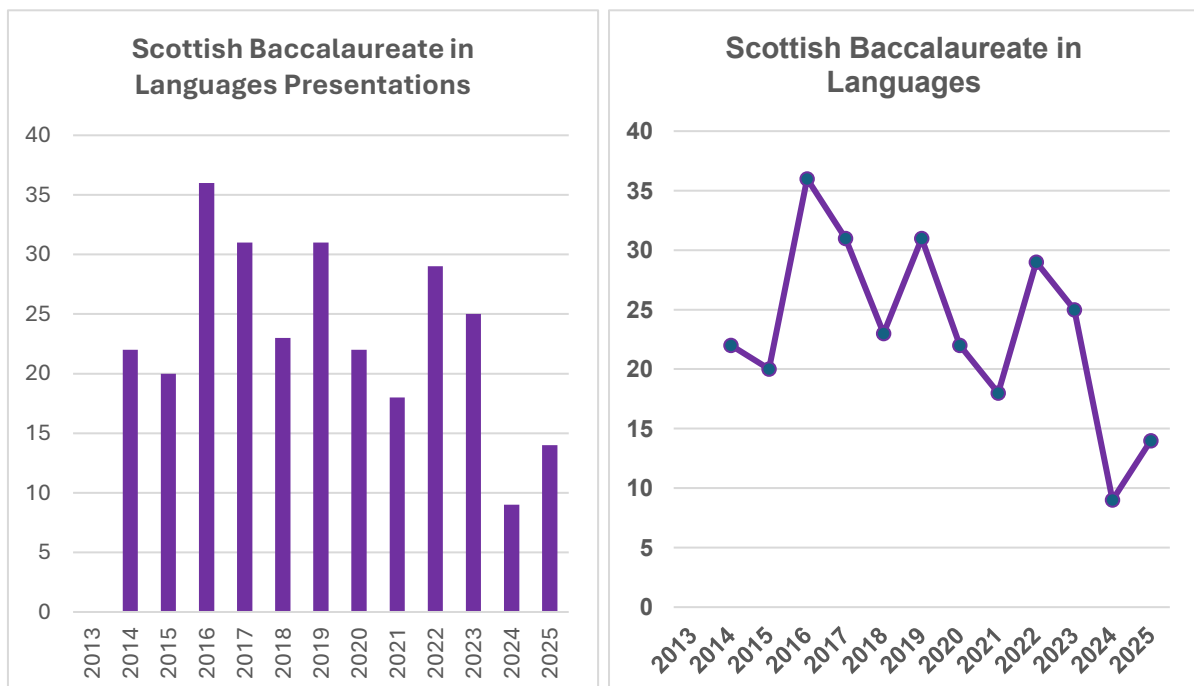
British Sign Language (BSL) entries remain relatively small but have shown long-term growth since 2020. After peaking in 2023, entries have declined in the past two years, with reductions across most SCQF levels in 2025, compared with 2024.

- **SCQF Level 6:** 6 entries in 2025, down 1 (-14.3%) from 2024 (7 entries).
- **SCQF Level 5:** 14 entries in 2025, up 6 (+75.0%) from 2024 (8 entries), but down 15 (-51.7) from the 2023 peak (29 entries). This is more than four times the number of entries in 2021 (3 entries).
- **SCQF Level 4:** 35 entries in 2025, down 7 (-16.7%) from 2024 (42 entries) and less than half the 2023 figure (77 entries). Numbers remain higher than in 2021 (8 entries) and 2020 (5 entries).
- **SCQF Level 3:** 40 entries in 2025, down 38 (-48.7%) from 2024 (78 entries) and half the number seen in 2022 (81 entries). This is still almost double the entries recorded in 2021 and 2020 (both 22 entries).

Across all SCQF levels, there were 95 BSL presentations, down 40 (-29.6%) from 2024 (135 entries) and 74 (-43.8%) from the 2023 peak.

Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages

The Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages is an award designed to recognise high-level achievement and interdisciplinary learning in the senior phase. It combines two Advanced Highers and one Higher in eligible languages, including English, ESOL or Gàidhlig, with an Interdisciplinary Project that develops research, analysis and presentation skills. The award is graded at Pass or Distinction and provides young people with challenge, breadth and opportunities to apply their language learning in wider contexts, supporting progression to higher education and future employment.



In 2025, there were 14 entries for the Scottish Baccalaureate in languages at SCQF Level 7, with 6 achieving Distinction and all 14 achieving a Pass. This represents an increase of 5 entries compared with 2024 (+55.6%) but a decrease of 11 entries compared with 2023 (-44.0%). Entries in 2025 are also lower than the 31 recorded in 2019 (-54.8%) and the 36 in 2016 (-61.1%). Pass rates have consistently been 100% in every year recorded, with variation only in the proportion achieving Distinction. In 2025, Distinctions accounted for 42.9% of passes, compared with 55.6% in 2024 and 36.0% in 2019.

2.2 Key messages from SQA course reports 2024

SQA course reports are published annually for each subject and level after the publication of exam results. These reports highlight recurring themes across the suite of language qualifications at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

Key messages in modern languages often refer to candidates' performances in talking assessments appearing over-rehearsed and lacking spontaneity. The reports emphasise the importance of increased listening practice through consistent use of target language in the classroom and planning specific listening tasks to build comprehension and confidence.

The SQA course reports for Modern Languages, Latin and Modern Languages for Life and Work can be found here:

- N5 [National 5 Modern Languages - Course overview and resources - SQA](#)
- N5 [National 5 Latin course report 2024](#)
- Higher [Higher Modern Languages - SQA](#)
- Higher [Higher Latin course report 2024](#)
- Advanced Higher [Advanced Higher Modern Languages - Course overview - SQA](#)
- Advanced Higher [Advanced Higher Latin course report 2024](#)
- Modern Languages for Life and Work [NQ Awards Modern Languages for Life and Work Qualification Verification Summary Report 2024](#)

The reports' comments on candidates' attainment and guidance for teachers to prepare candidates for course assessments are similar across the suite of languages and courses available. The following section highlights some selected key recurring messages from these reports:

At National 5 French, in relation to the performance–talking IACAA, pronunciation remains a significant challenge for many candidates. While some conversations "sounded more natural as candidates answered with a combination of longer and shorter answers," it was also evident that others felt "excessively rehearsed." To support progress, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to ensure candidates "regularly practise listening and use French as often as possible in the classroom to reinforce listening strategies," while also developing a "confident knowledge of numbers, seasons, months, common adjectives, nationalities, school subjects, weather expressions, days of the week and question words."

In Higher Spanish, candidates are advised to practise speaking skills regularly and avoid responses consisting of "mini monologues," as these can "appear overly rehearsed" and lose the natural flow of conversation. A blend of shorter and longer responses is recommended to maintain spontaneity.

In the performance–talking at Advanced Higher French, well-prepared candidates demonstrated the ability to discuss a broad range of topics using "complex and sophisticated language," often skilfully adapting learned material to maintain meaningful exchanges. Many also showed strengths in handling "unpredictable questions" by using "appropriate language structures and idiomatic language," successfully engaging with more complex discussions.

SQA course reports highlight recurring themes across all language qualifications at all levels. Candidates are often well prepared but sometimes lack spontaneity, particularly in talking assessments. Greater emphasis on authentic listening and talking, stronger vocabulary knowledge, and strategies for handling unpredictability are consistently identified as areas for improvement. Creating opportunities to further enhance learners' communicative skills in speaking, through more effective classroom practice and assessment, should be considered as part of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

For Higher German, in relation to the Listening component, emphasis is placed on helping candidates recognise language connections, particularly noting that those "with an awareness of the interconnected nature of language and the roots of the Scots language are likely to be more successful listeners and learners of German." Repetition and consistent vocabulary practice linked to monologue and dialogue tasks are recommended. Furthermore, candidates should develop "a range of strategies to cope with unpredictable elements of the task" and know how to ask for repetition or clarification when needed.

2.3 Key messages from SQA verification reports 2025

SQA verification reports for Modern Languages summarise the findings of quality assurance checks on the internally assessed components of Modern Languages National Qualifications at National 5 and Higher level. They are specific to individual languages, such as Cantonese, French, German, Gaelic (Learners), Italian, Mandarin, Spanish, and Urdu. These reports ensure consistency and fairness for candidates, provide feedback and guidance for practitioners, and support professional development.

In the verification summary reports (VSF) for 2024/25, across the languages with the most numbers of presentations ([French](#), [German](#), and [Spanish](#)), it is highlighted that centres are generally implementing the performance–talking component as intended, and that many candidates are well prepared for their assessments. Where assessors support candidates in selecting appropriate topics, performances often display a good range of vocabulary, structures, and tenses. Stronger presentations tend to be clearly organised, with a sense of introduction, development, and conclusion, and conversations are more successful when they flow naturally from the chosen presentation topic.

However, several recurring challenges are evident. In all three languages, some candidates attempted to cover too many themes in their presentation. This reduced coherence and depth, sometimes leading to repetitive content or reliance on language more typical of a lower level. A related issue was the overuse of lists of nouns or simple descriptive statements, which limited opportunities to demonstrate variety and complexity.

At Higher and in the conversation element at National 5, best practice was seen when assessors made smooth, natural links from the presentation into the wider discussion. Where this was not the case, abrupt topic shifts undermined coherence. Another widespread difficulty lay in questioning technique. Closed questions, or questions pitched at too low a level, restricted responses to "yes," "no," or similarly short answers. This was particularly problematic for stronger candidates, who need open, probing prompts to demonstrate more sophisticated language. In

contrast, assessors who tailored questions to the interests of their candidates tended to encourage spontaneity and richer, more personal responses.

At Higher level, a number of candidates also found it difficult to sustain discussion over time. The reports recommend a gradual approach: starting with accessible, general questions to help candidates settle, before moving into more challenging areas that require elaboration, opinion, and justification. Importantly, discussions should remain conversations rather than evolve into mini presentations, balancing short and longer answers to simulate authentic interaction.

The reports highlight that, across languages, more broadly, spontaneity and personalisation should be encouraged, avoiding overly rehearsed exchanges or the repeated use of identical questions for all candidates. Allowing candidates some ownership of their performance helps ensure more natural and genuine interaction.

In the reports, teachers are encouraged to guide National 5 candidates towards choosing a single, manageable presentation topic that allows for depth, detail, and use of varied tenses, rather than covering multiple themes superficially.

In the conversation phase, teachers should make smooth transitions from the presentation, use open and probing questions, and adapt their questioning to the interests and ability of each candidate to encourage spontaneity and richer language. At Higher level, questioning should stretch beyond National 5 expectations and allow candidates to sustain discussion with opinion, justification, and more complex structures, while avoiding over-rehearsed or mini-presentation style responses.

The VSFs highlight similar issues and recommendations as the Course Reports and can be considered as part of the evidence for the next iteration of the languages curriculum as part of the CIC. They highlight clear areas where teaching, assessment, and curriculum design, as part of the CIC, can be refined to enhance both learning experiences and candidate performance.

There should be an enhanced focus on curriculum planning that prioritises opportunities for pupils to explore topics meaningfully, rather than superficially covering multiple themes. This would support deeper linguistic development and help candidates demonstrate a full range of vocabulary, tenses, and structures. The challenges identified around questioning technique and conversation flow indicate that professional development and teacher training should include guidance on improving use of the target language in day-to-day teaching, developing young people's skills in coping with unpredictable elements and responding to open-ended or probing questions.

Planning for the inclusion of strategies such as these as part of the CIC would ensure that classroom practice aligns closely with assessment expectations, encouraging spontaneous and authentic communication.

2.4 Labour Market Information

Part of the original recommendations of the 1+2 Approach was to consider languages of the economies of the future when developing a language curriculum and that this is more important than ever.

Labour market [forecasts](#) from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) indicate that by 2034, healthcare, construction and social care will continue to be Scotland's largest employing industries, while tourism will have the highest total recruitment requirement.

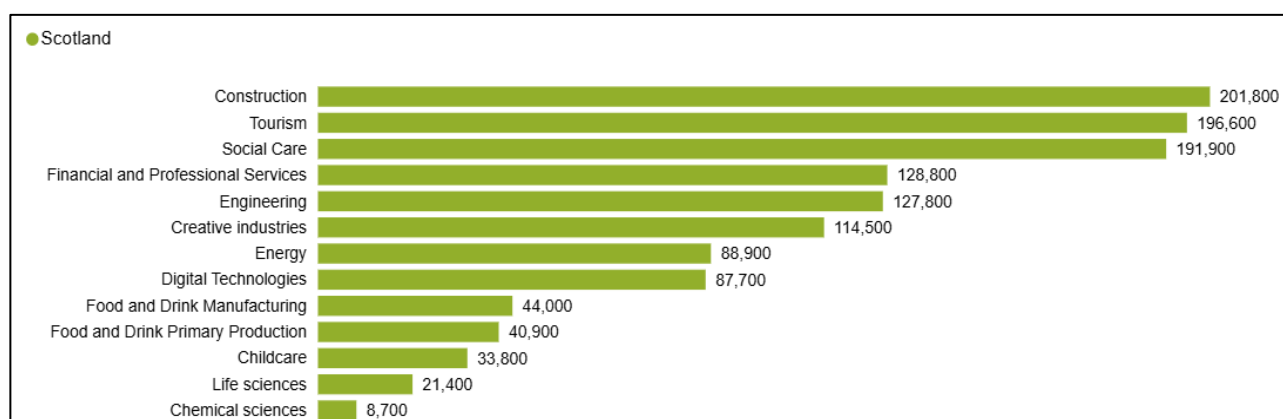


Figure 1 - Future employment forecast by industry for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2025a)

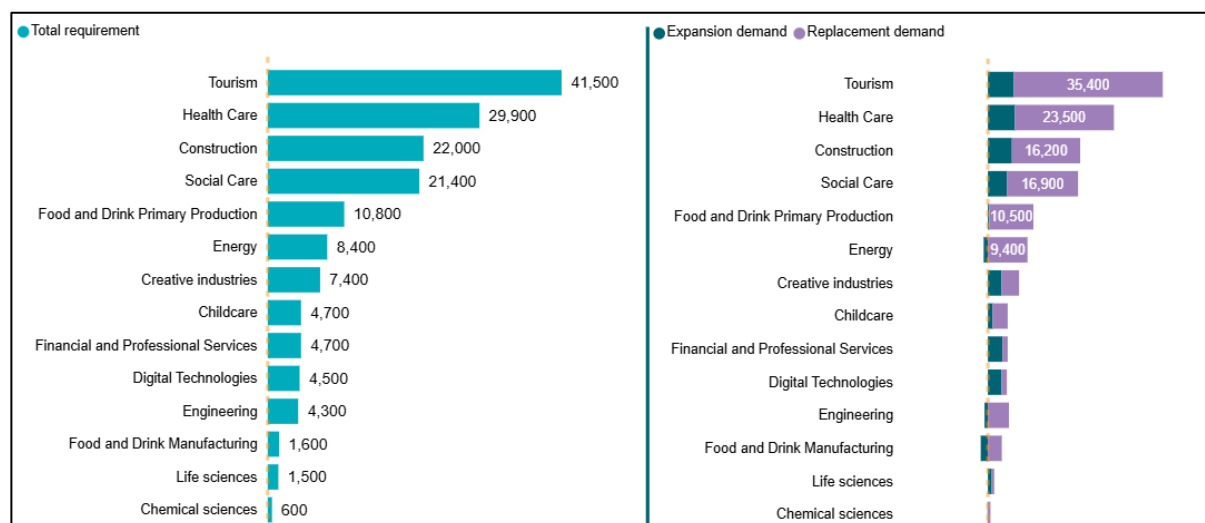


Figure 2 - Total requirement by industry for Scotland in 2027-2034 (SDS, 2025a)

This figure combines new jobs created with the replacement requirement, which is the need to fill vacancies left when people retire, change career or leave the workforce. In sectors such as tourism and hospitality, replacement demand often exceeds the number of new jobs created, meaning employers must continually attract and train new workers. In these circumstances, recruiting staff with the right technical, interpersonal and language skills becomes especially important.

Employers across Scotland, the wider UK and Ireland consistently report that multilingual and intercultural competent staff improve business performance, strengthen client relationships and open new markets. Evidence shows that organisations with access to multilingual staff are better able to build relationships with customers and suppliers, engage confidently in international markets and identify new commercial opportunities (Aston Business School, [2016](#); British Council, [2017a](#)). Research also highlights that strong intercultural competence improves workplace communication, collaboration and client engagement, contributing to more effective teams and stronger organisational outcomes (Marian, 2023). Irish enterprise research similarly emphasises that language capability enhances export potential and supports enterprise development in an increasingly globalised economy (Skills Ireland, [2017](#)).

The British Council (2023) notes that many employers in the UK face difficulties recruiting linguists with the combination of technical expertise, business understanding and cultural knowledge needed for their roles. Building a multilingual workforce is critical to Scotland's economic and strategic future. Scotland's trading partners span Europe, North America and Asia, and reliance on English alone limits full engagement and opportunity in these markets (Copeland and McPake, [2022](#)). As the British Council states, *"Both within and beyond Europe, we will need to reach out beyond English, not only to maintain and improve our economic position but to build trust, deepen international influence and cultural relationships, and to keep our country safe"* ([2017b:4](#)). However, English continues to be disproportionately viewed as the dominant business language, a perception that Holborow ([2021](#)) argues must change if Scotland is to realise the full benefits of multilingualism.



The economic cost of the language skills gap is significant. Foreman-Peck and Wang ([2006](#)) estimate that the UK loses up to £48 billion annually (3.5% of GDP) due to limited language skills, while recruitment data from the Language Matters Recruitment Trends 2024-25 [report](#) shows that of UK job advertisements specifying a language, require German (25.5%), French (23.9%), Spanish (15.6%), Turkish (13.3%) and Mandarin (3.6%). These results are mirrored in patterns identified by City Lit ([2024](#)) and the CBI ([2023](#)), both of which highlight the continued demand for European languages, with German consistently holding the highest share of demand. This is consistent with export data: Scotland's largest international markets include the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, France, China and Ireland, with Germany ranking as the largest European export destination (Scottish Government Export Statistics, [2024](#)). Similarly, the UK's top markets include the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, France and China (ONS, [2024](#)). German's prominence in both trade data and recruitment trends suggests its particular value in strengthening economic relationships.

Languages can support Scotland's economy and its priority export sectors by supporting firms to engage with global markets, partners and customers. The Scottish Government's export strategy identifies sectors such as food and drink, engineering and advanced manufacturing, life and chemical sciences, energy, and financial and business services as central to international trade growth (Scottish Government, [2019](#)). The chemical sciences sector is also listed among Scotland's priority export sectors. In food and drink, Scotch whisky remains Scotland's largest single export, with an export value of around £5.4 billion in 2024 and products reaching markets worldwide (Scotch Whisky Association, [2025](#)). Scottish companies in energy and engineering increasingly operate in global research, innovation and supply networks, while financial and business services also play a significant role in international trade. The global nature of these sectors means that language skills and intercultural competence contribute to engagement in diverse markets and support international relationship-building. Evidence from business and policy literature highlights the value of language skills in supporting international business engagement and their readiness to export.

Scotland's international ambitions depend on these capabilities. The Scottish Government's International Framework ([2017](#)) sets priorities for export growth, inward investment and global partnerships, all of which require cultural understanding and language skills. Language competence also strengthens Scotland's appeal for foreign direct investment. Scotland is regularly ranked as one of the UK's top destinations for investment outside London (EY Scotland Attractiveness Survey, [2025](#)). Investors consistently highlight the quality of Scotland's workforce and business environment as factors in location decisions, and broader workforce capabilities such as multilingual and intercultural competence are recognised in policy literature as supportive of international engagement, even where survey reports do not single them out directly.

Languages are also vital for Scotland's engagement with emerging growth markets. Demand for Turkish reflects Scotland's expanding trade links with Turkey's manufacturing and energy sectors, while the need for Mandarin mirrors Scotland's trade, tourism and education partnerships with China. In African countries, the growth of renewable energy and fintech provides opportunities for exporters who can build relationships in local languages and in French, which is widely used across West and Central Africa. Similarly, Latin America offers opportunities in renewable energy, food and drink and creative industries, where Spanish and Portuguese are key. By developing competence in these and other strategically important languages, Scotland can diversify its trade and investment portfolio and increase resilience against market fluctuations.

Employers recognise the business value of this capability. As Andrew Gillespie-McLean, Technical Sales Manager at ACE Aquatec in Dundee, stated: *"Understanding the challenges that our customers face in their industry, market and sector separates us from our competitors. Our customers appreciate our ability to hold a conversation with them in their mother tongue. We, as a team, have developed our knowledge of other cultures through language learning and, ultimately, how businesses operate in terms of conduct, styles, attitudes and values"* ([Scottish Enterprise](#)). This direct link between language ability and business success is echoed in research showing that multilingual companies export more, grow faster and innovate more effectively.

Multiple forces are reshaping Scotland's economy, including technological change, deeper global interconnectedness, demographic shifts, the transition to a net-zero climate-aligned economy and

evolving trade relationships following the UK's departure from the EU (Scottish Enterprise, [2023](#); Scottish Government, [2025](#); ClimateXChange, [2024](#)). SDS identifies meta-skills such as adaptability, critical thinking, creativity, empathy and collaboration as essential for navigating these changes. Language learning develops all these skills by building cognitive flexibility, resilience, intercultural competence, negotiation skills, clarity of expression and active listening. These capabilities are difficult to automate and will remain essential in the future workforce.

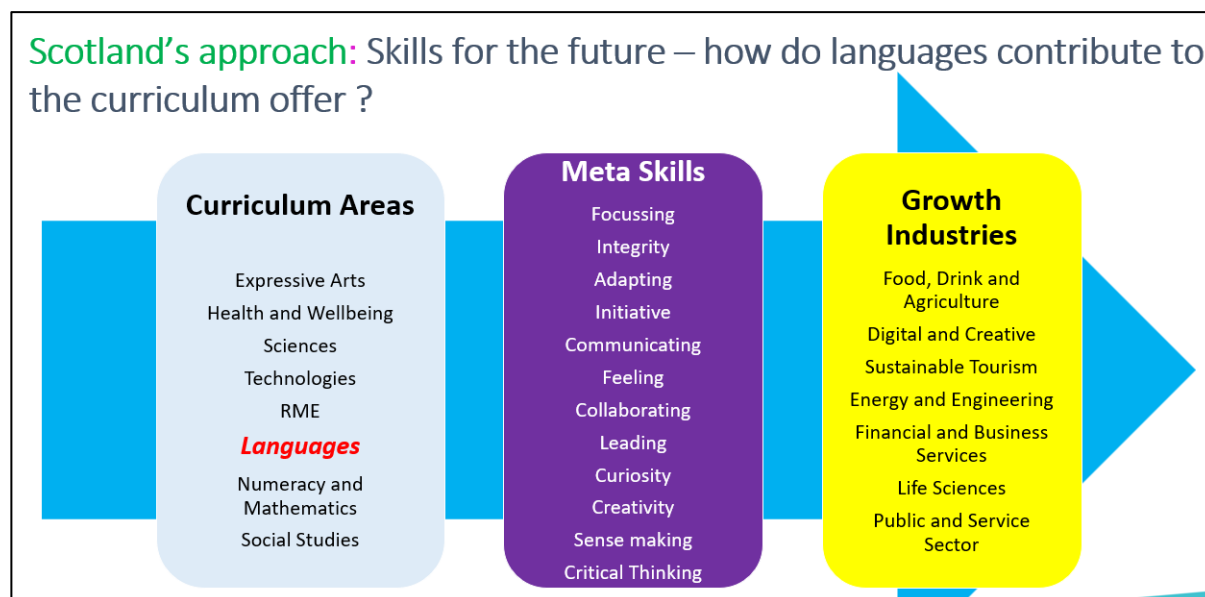


Figure 3

Since the UK's exit from the European Union, changes in regulatory and collaborative frameworks have created risks and uncertainties for language provision previously supported under EU multilingual policies, including interpreting and translation services (Abercrombie et al., [2017](#)). Brexit and wider language-skills research also highlight ongoing economic losses tied to poor language capability and the continued importance of skilled language professionals for international trade, diplomacy and cultural engagement in a globalised context (Global Voices, [2023](#); Wolfestone Group & Swansea University, [2025](#)). Parliamentary debate further highlights the continued domestic need for interpreters in diverse settings after Brexit (UK Parliament, [2019](#)). The global language services sector, according to the Chartered Institute of Linguists ([CIOL](#)), is worth over €20 billion across the EU and continues to expand. It includes translation, interpreting, localisation, subtitling, dubbing and language technology.

Evidence from Scotland, the wider UK and Ireland demonstrates that language skills are a strategic necessity for economic growth. Parliamentary and government analysis highlights the close relationship between trade performance, inward investment and workforce skills, including languages, in internationally engaged economies (Scottish Parliament Information Centre [SPICe], [2024](#); UK Government, [2024](#)). Within this context, German, French and Spanish continue to align most closely with Scotland's current trade profile, reflecting strong economic links with key European markets. German, in particular, offers a strong return on investment, given Germany's prominence as a trading partner and the consistently high employer demand for German language skills identified in both UK and Irish recruitment and skills data (SPICe, [2024](#); Skills Ireland, [2017](#)).

2.5 National statistics

This section draws on survey evidence on public attitudes towards language learning, trends in pupil participation, and data on the modern languages teaching workforce. The sources and statistics in this section help to show how national policy, public perceptions, and capacity within the workforce shape learners’ experiences of languages education across Scotland.

The data provide some background information and context to support the CIC and highlights strengths in early language learning, growing diversification in language provision, and public support for multilingualism. However, the data highlights a number of challenges. These include a decline in language uptake in the senior phase, inconsistency in provision, and continued difficulties in teacher recruitment and retention.

2.5.1 Attitudes Towards Language Learning in Schools in Scotland (2016)

Questions on language learning were added to the 2015 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA), funded by the Scottish Government, the University of Edinburgh, and Scotland’s National Centre for Languages (SCILT) at the University of Strathclyde. [The survey](#) was carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen) between July 2015 and January 2016, with responses from 1,288 adults aged 18 and over.

Findings showed that most people in Scotland (89%) believe it is important for children to begin learning a language other than English from the age of five. This view was consistent across all groups, regardless of age, educational qualifications, or socio-economic background. When asked which languages would be most appropriate for children in their area, respondents most frequently identified Western European languages.

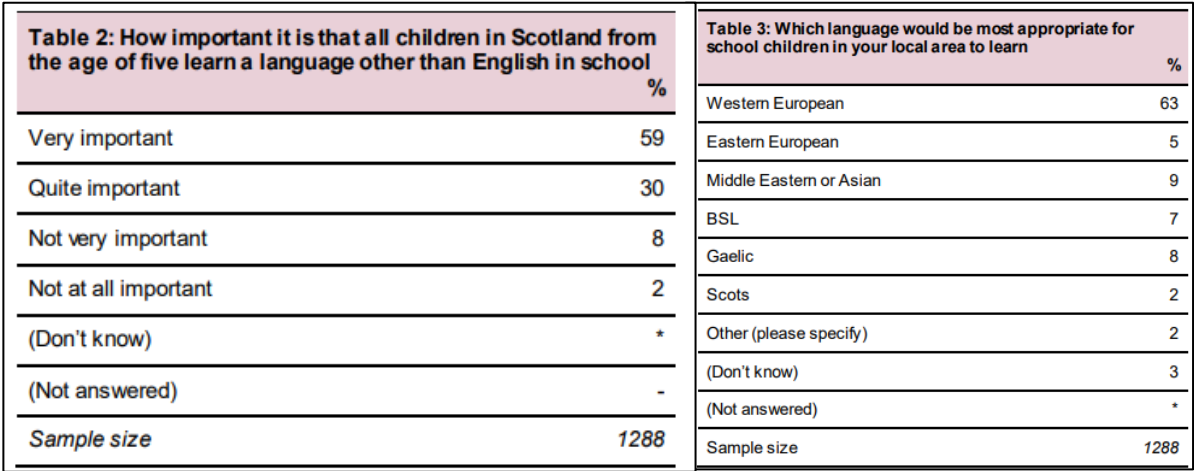


Figure 4

This survey highlighted the strong public support for early language learning and confirmed alignment between national policy and public attitudes.

2.5.2 STEM and language choices in school: Young People in Scotland Survey (2017)

The [2017 Young People in Scotland Survey](#), which involved 1,781 learners aged 11-18, explored young people's engagement with both STEM and languages. The findings showed that number of young people learning a language declined as pupils progressed through secondary school, but interest rose again in S6. Pupils most commonly identified enjoyment as a reason for learning a language. They also cited that languages were valuable for travel and their future career opportunities. Girls were more likely to study languages than boys, and uptake was also higher among pupils in rural areas than those in urban settings.

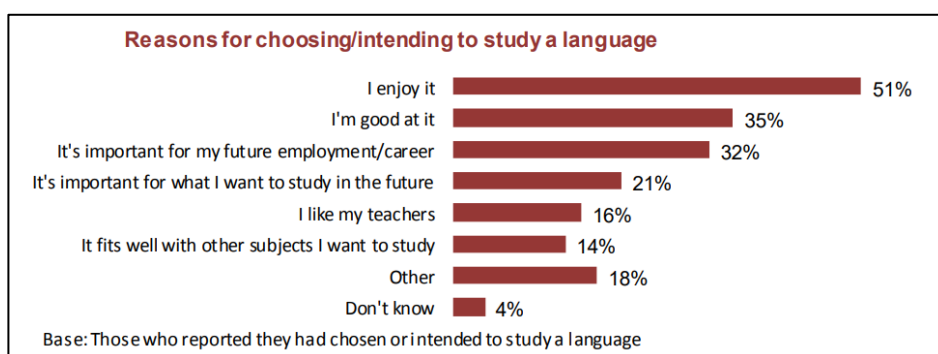


Figure 5

A large majority (89%) supported starting language learning at age five, which reflects the aims of '[Language learning in Scotland: a 1 + 2 approach](#)'. However, many pupils perceived languages as difficult and did not see the relevance of them in their future plans as reasons for not continuing to study a language.

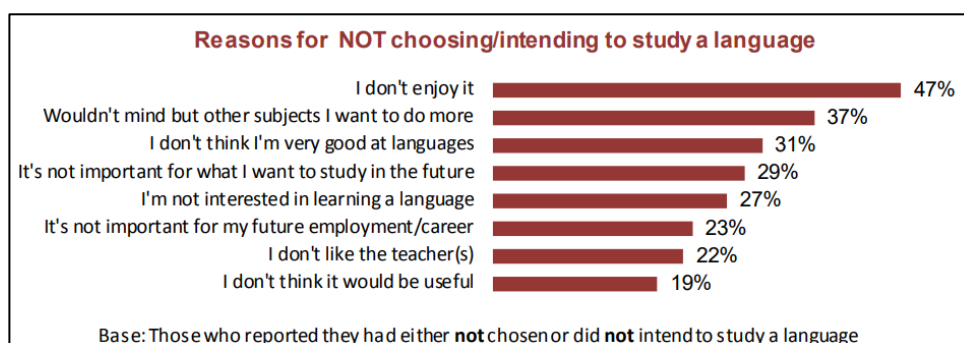


Figure 6

The survey highlighted the need to increase young people's awareness of the wider benefits of multilingualism and to support uptake beyond the early years of secondary school. The findings also suggest the importance of approaches that help learners see languages as relevant, accessible and valuable.

2.5.3 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) data for intake of Modern Languages student teachers (2018-2024)

Modern languages are taught by qualified subject specialists in secondary schools. As of early 2026, the General Teaching Council for Scotland has the following requirements for full registration to teach modern languages, in addition to a degree in the relevant subject area:

“For registration in languages such as French, German, Italian, Mandarin and Spanish, applicants must have lived abroad in a country where the language/s are spoken, during which they must have fully participated in the culture of the country and immersed themselves in the target language.

The residency requirement for candidates registering a first language is 6 months, normally in blocks of at least 3 months.

The residency requirement for candidates registering a second, or subsequent, language is 3 months, normally in blocks of at least 4 weeks.”

Language learning in primary schools is delivered by the class teacher; a languages qualification is not a requirement in order to be able to teach languages in primary schools.

Data on ITE in Scotland for secondary school modern languages teachers shows a sharp and sustained decline in recruitment against Scottish Funding Council (SFC) targets over the past seven years. As per the 1+2 policy, language learning in primary schools is delivered by the class teacher; a languages qualification is not a requirement in order to be able to teach languages in primary schools.

Between 2018 and 2020, recruitment was relatively strong, with annual intake consistently achieving more than four-fifths of the target. In 2020, the sector came close to full allocation, with 117 trainees recruited against a target of 119 (98.3%). Since then, however, numbers have fallen sharply. In 2021, only 85 out of 122 places were filled (69.7%). The gap widened further from 2022 onwards: 59 of 138 places were taken up in 2022 (42.8%), falling to 46 (33.3%) in 2023, and only slightly improving to 55 (39.9%) in 2024.

According to the [2024](#) British Council Scotland’s Language Trends Survey, 41% of local authorities report that recruitment of modern languages teachers is a major issue.

Table 1 - Modern Languages ITE recruitment against SFC targets (2018–2024)

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) figures 2018-2024			
Year	SFC target	Actual	Percentage of target achieved
2018	109	91	83.4%
2019	113	94	83.2%
2020	119	117	98.3%
2021	122	85	69.7%
2022	138	59	42.8%
2023	138	46	33.3%
2024	138	55	39.9%

The Scottish Government has identified teacher recruitment in modern languages as an area that requires targeted support. In response, modern languages have been included within the national Teaching Bursary in Scotland scheme. This provides a £20,000 incentive to support career changers undertaking one-year PGDE ITE programmes in hard-to-fill subjects. Modern languages are listed alongside chemistry, computing science, home economics, mathematics, physics and technological education, as well as subjects taught through the medium of Gaelic. The scheme aims to reduce the financial barriers of teacher training and to encourage more applicants into the profession to increase the future supply of qualified languages teachers.

2.5.4 GTCS Registration for Language Teachers

Data from the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) provides an overview of the registered modern languages workforce across Scotland.

French continues to have the largest number of teachers (1,773 fully registered and 290 provisionally registered), followed by Spanish (861 fully registered and 345 provisionally registered). The data shows that there are fewer German teachers (519 fully registered and 163 provisionally registered) which reflects long-term trends of declining uptake in the subject. Italian (90 fully registered, 82 provisionally registered) and Mandarin (61 fully registered, seven provisionally registered) represent smaller but strategically important parts of the workforce.

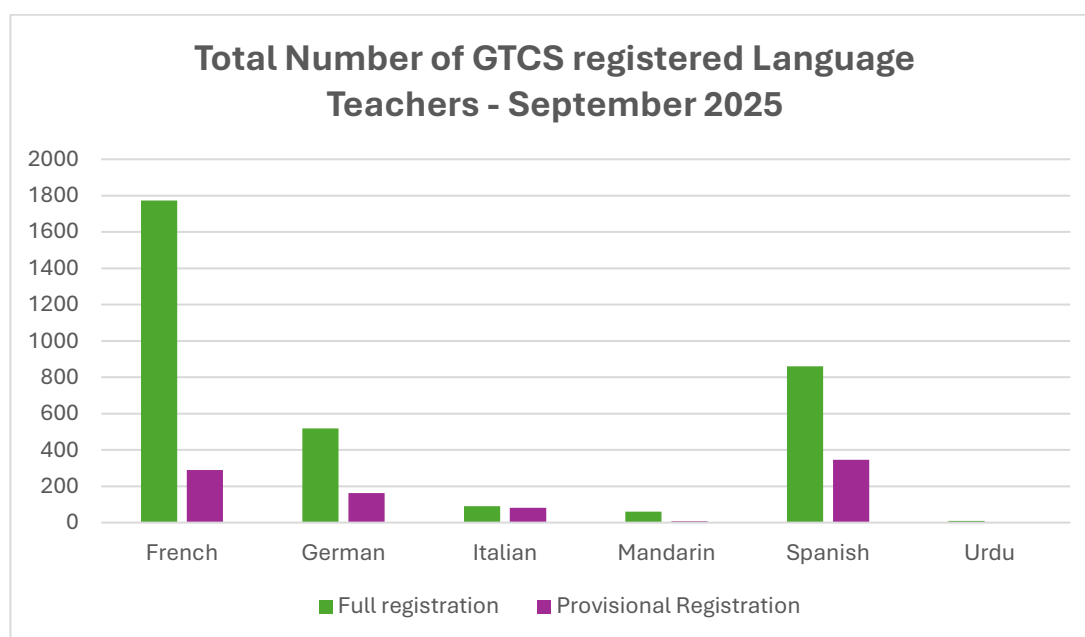


Figure 7

This distribution highlights clear differences in workforce across languages. While French and Spanish continue to have comparatively large teacher bases, provision for German, Italian and Mandarin depends on much smaller numbers of teachers.

The presence of high numbers of provisionally registered teachers in Spanish and Italian suggests growth and interest in these areas. One reason why some teachers remain provisionally registered is the GTCS residency requirement for certain languages. To be eligible for full registration in French, German, Italian, Mandarin and Spanish, teachers must complete a period of residence in a country where the language is spoken. This requires a minimum of six months

for a first language, normally in blocks of at least three months, or three months for any additional languages, normally in blocks of at least four weeks. Feedback from teachers indicates that, while the residency requirement is valued for its contribution to linguistic and cultural competence, it can be challenging to complete alongside employment, caring responsibilities or financial constraints, resulting in some teachers remaining provisionally registered.

According to the data, there are 2,574 teachers registered to teach modern languages in Scotland. The data also shows that 1,049 teachers are registered in only one language, while 1,390 hold registration in two languages, 130 are registered in three languages, and five teachers are qualified to teach four or more. While this multilingual registration provides some flexibility for schools and local authorities, it also highlights the limited depth of provision across less widely taught languages, which are dependent on very small groups of specialists.

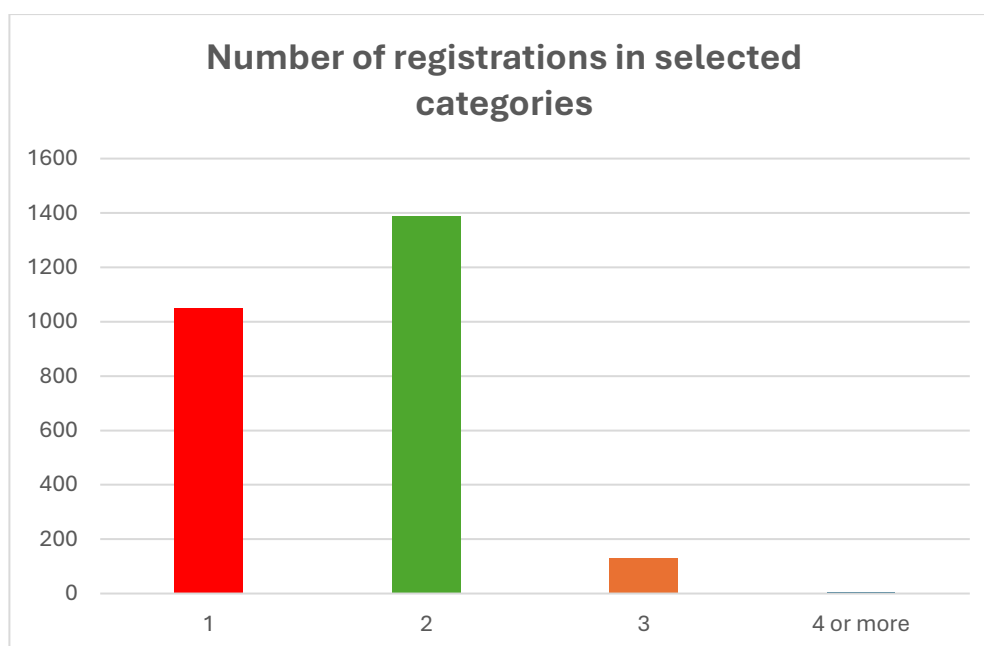


Figure 8

Ensuring that Scotland has sufficient trained teachers across a balanced range of languages is essential to maintaining the entitlement of learners within the 1+2 policy and in shaping a sustainable technical framework for the future.

A significant proportion of the modern languages workforce is registered in a single language. Although many local authorities advertise for teachers with two languages to maximise staffing flexibility, GTCS data shows that 1,049 teachers currently hold registration in only one language.

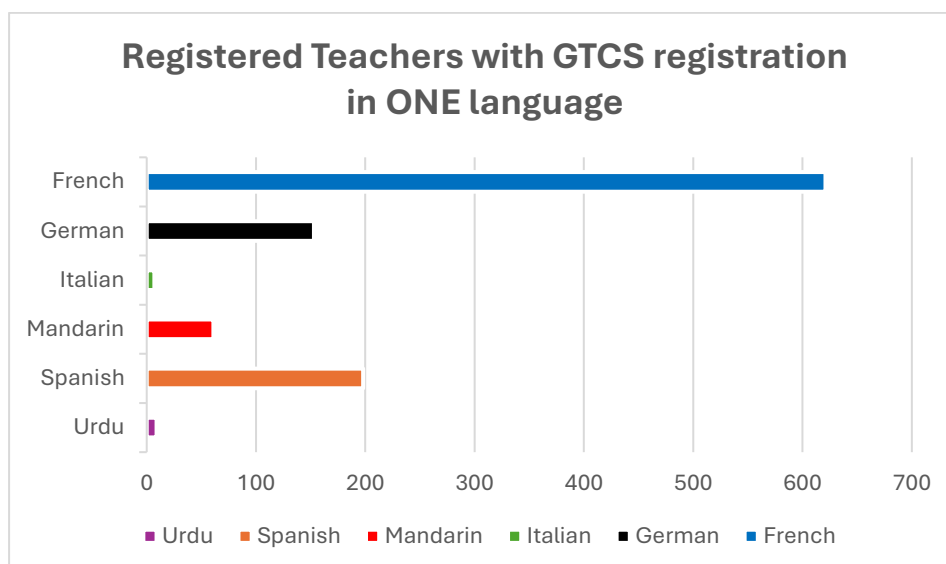


Figure 9

The largest groups are in French (621), followed by Spanish (198), German (153), Mandarin (61), Urdu (9) and Italian (7). While dual-language registration can provide greater flexibility within schools, the data suggests that many teachers are registered to teach one language at National Qualification level. This has implications for timetabling and for maintaining consistent access to two additional languages in line with the 1+2 policy.

In addition to initial registration, a number of modern languages teachers add further languages to their GTCS registration. Many meet the requirements for registration or have completed an Additional Teacher Qualification on offer at universities. Over the past five years, the annual number of teachers obtaining an additional registration has remained modest but steady, ranging from 22 in 2020 to a peak of 36 in 2024. In 2021 and 2022, 27 and 25 additional registrations were awarded respectively, while 33 were recorded in 2023. In 2025 (YTD), 14 teachers had already been awarded an additional language registration.

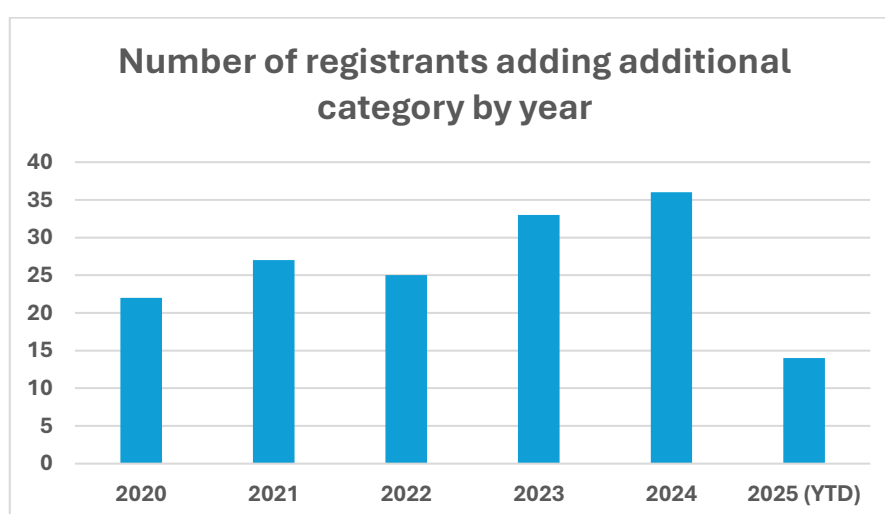


Figure 10

These figures suggest that some teachers continue to expand their qualifications to include additional languages. However, the scale remains limited in relation to the overall workforce of 2,574 registrants. This reinforces the need to consider how professional learning and initial teacher education can support dual-language qualifications to increase flexibility and sustainability across the system.

Trends in modern languages teacher registration over the past five years also show clear variation between languages. French and Spanish continue to account for the highest number of new registrations each year, although totals have fluctuated, ranging from 74 to 110 in French and from 64 to 86 in Spanish. Registrations in German has declined steadily, falling from 29 new registrations in 2020 to 7 in 2024, with a slight increase to 13 recorded so far in 2025. Italian registrations has remained very small but relatively stable, with between 4 and 9 registrations annually. Registrations in Mandarin remain consistently low, peaking at 10 in 2021 before falling to just 1 in both 2024 and 2025 to date. No new registrations have been recorded in Urdu during this period.

Table 2

Registration category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (YTD)
Secondary (French)	74	110	76	46	58	45
Secondary (German)	29	22	20	11	7	13
Secondary (Italian)	4	7	8	8	9	5
Secondary (Mandarin)	5	10	8	7	1	1
Secondary (Spanish)	76	86	64	69	65	44
Secondary (Urdu)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Overall, the figures suggest that French and Spanish continue to maintain comparatively strong pipelines. However, provision in other languages remains more fragile, with German, Italian and Mandarin dependent on very small numbers of new registrants each year.

Registered modern language teachers are represented across all 32 local authorities, as well as within the independent sector and universities. The independent sector employs 255 teachers, with a further 31 in universities and eight in national organisations. An additional 365 registrants are recorded in the “Other” category, which may include supply teachers and those working in a range of roles across the system.

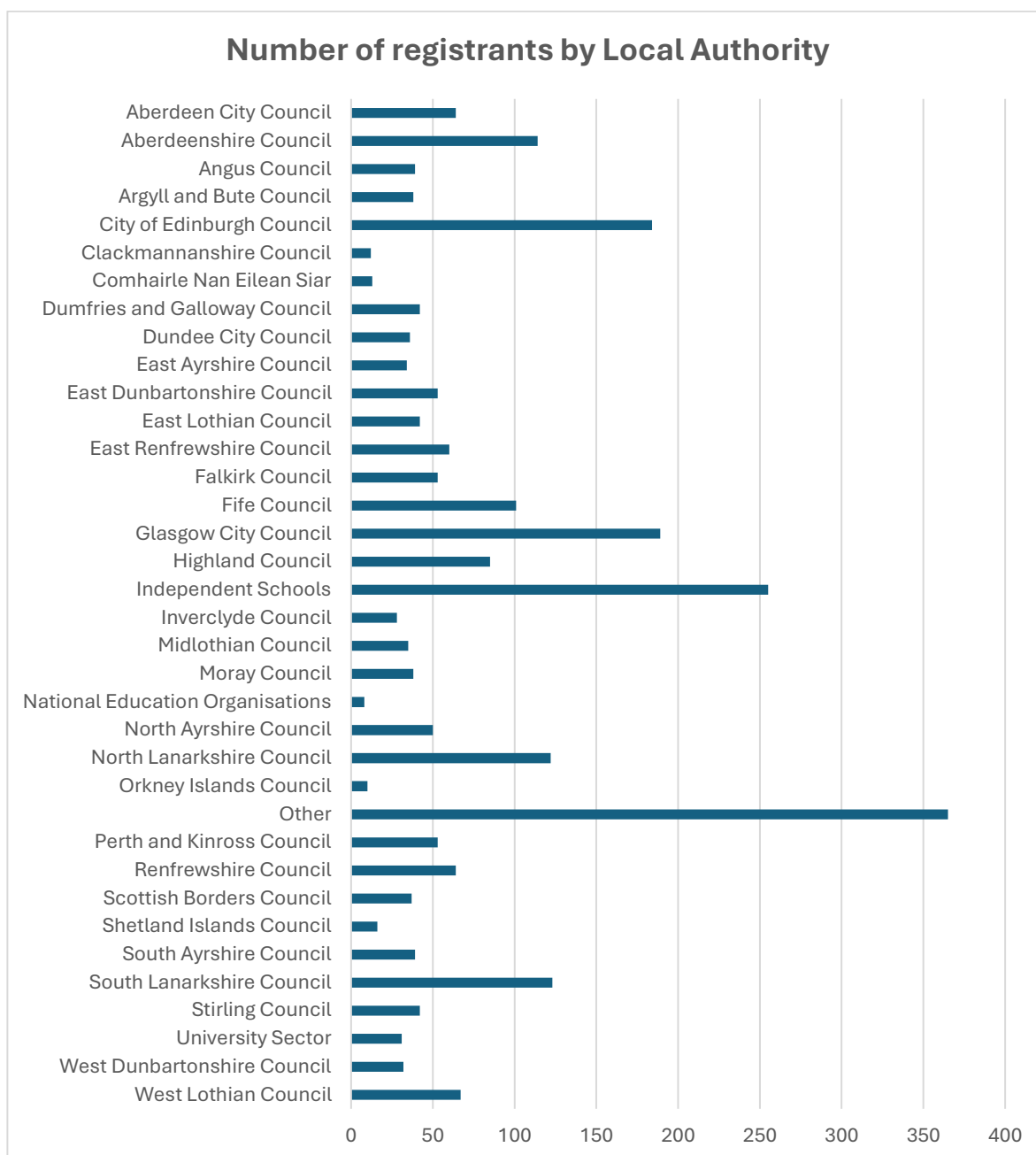


Figure 11

Other data sets and articles

This section summarises a range of recent reports, studies, and commentaries that provide additional insight into the national and international context for language learning. The evidence highlights the growing recognition of languages as a strategic asset for education, the economy, and global engagement.

The evidence provides important context for the CIC, illustrating the opportunities that a revised languages curriculum could unlock for Scotland's learners and its future economy.

2.5.5 The economic value to the UK of speaking other languages (RAND, 2022)

Ayres-Bennett et al. (2022) examine the potential economic returns of improving language skills in the UK. Their analysis draws on modelling undertaken by researchers from Cambridge and RAND Europe. The study places languages education within a wider economic context and notes a continued decline in uptake of languages at GCSE and A-level since 2004. This is despite the UK's increasing need for international trade, collaboration and engagement. The analysis shows that the lack of language skills acts as a non-tariff barrier to trade, while additional language skills unlock potential in the labour market and human capital.

The modelling focuses on four languages, Arabic, Mandarin, French and Spanish, and estimates the economic impact of increasing uptake of languages among pupils aged 11–16 at Key Stages 3 and 4. It projects that reducing the language barriers with countries where these languages are spoken could increase UK exports by approximately £19 billion per year. Over a 30-year period, the study estimates that increasing uptake by ten percentage points could raise UK GDP by around £11.8-12.6 billion for Arabic, £11.5-12.3 billion for Mandarin, £9.1-9.5 billion for French and £9.1-9.7 billion for Spanish, compared with a business-as-usual scenario. For some languages, these projected gains are equivalent to around 0.5 percent of 2019 UK GDP.

Across all four languages, the study reveals that there are benefit-to-cost ratios of at least 2:1 and estimates that every £1 invested in languages education could generate around £2 in economic returns. The authors look at evidence from existing programmes, which includes enhanced language learning models that compliment and do not replace other curricular requirements. The report also includes estimated costs per pupil to demonstrate the potential scale and the overall feasibility of the investment. The analysis also challenges the assumption that languages come at the expense of STEM subjects or the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc measures pupils' performance across a core group of academic subjects: English, mathematics, sciences, a humanity and a modern or classical language. The authors argue that investment in languages should be seen as complementary to other educational and economic priorities rather than in competition with them. They suggest that language learning can support wider economic goals by reducing trade barriers and increasing export capacity. This would also support long-term international engagement.

2.5.6 Languages in the UK: a call for action (The British Academy, 2019)

The British Academy along with the Royal Society, the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Royal Academy of Engineering, issued [a joint statement](#) to call for a national strategy to address the UK's language deficit. The academies argue that weak language skills undermine the UK's economic performance, cultural engagement, international relations, and research competitiveness. They estimate that the shortfall in language skills costs the UK approximately 3.5% of GDP through lost trade and investment opportunities.

The statement says that Brexit has increased these risks and suggest the need for more direct engagement with non-English speaking partners. The academies highlight that existing initiatives across Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England are fragmented and insufficient. They call

for a more coordinated UK-wide strategy that involves government, business, civil society, and the education sector.

In the report, the academies commit to collaborating with a broad coalition of organisations to support a strategy. They emphasise that reversing the decline in language learning is not only an educational challenge but a national priority. They argue that stronger language skills are key for bolstering the UK's global competitiveness and international influence..

2.5.7 Foreign languages: skills in the workforce (House of Lords Library, 2021)

[This 2021 briefing](#) examines the gap in foreign language skills across the UK workforce and the ways in which this can limit trade, employment, and international reach. It reports that around two thirds of British people are unable to hold a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue. Many organisations consider view this as a constraint on economic opportunity.

On trade, studies found that many UK businesses do not have sufficient foreign-language capacity for the markets they serve. A survey by the British Chambers of Commerce showed that up to 70% of businesses lacked language skills relevant to their export markets. Earlier reviews estimated the economic costs of a lack of language skills at about £48 billion (roughly 3.5% of national income) as far back as 2006.

Regarding employment, language skills are linked to improved job opportunities and social mobility. However, participation in language learning is uneven, with socio-economic and regional disparities across England. For example, there is higher uptake in London and the South East, while uptake is lower in the Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, and the North East. Lack of specialist teaching staff, limited teaching time, and challenges in retention exacerbate these inequalities.

The brief recommends include the creation of a national languages strategy; enhancing initial teacher training and retention for language specialists; integrating languages into vocational and technical qualifications; maintaining outward mobility programmes and access for disadvantaged students; and targeted government support such as bursaries and teacher shortage recognition.

3 International Reports and Comparative Studies

3.1 International reports

This section uses evidence from international organisations and academic bodies to consider how Scotland's education system, and languages within it, are viewed in a wider international context. These reports place Scotland's approach to languages education in an international context and identify both areas of strength and ongoing challenges.

The OECD and the British Academy found that Scotland's commitment to early and inclusive language learning through the 1+2 Approach is recognised internationally. They also identify ongoing issues around progression, consistency of guidance, and the transition between the Broad General Education (BGE) and the senior phase.

International research has linked language learning with a range of wider educational and social benefits. Some studies suggest that learners who speak more than one language may develop stronger literacy skills, approach problems in different ways, and gain a broader understanding of other people and cultures. Some research also links multilingualism with positive outcomes across other areas of learning. These findings provide useful context for the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) and support the place of languages within a modern education system that prepares young people to engage with the wider world.

3.1.1 OECD - Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence - Into the Future (2021)

The OECD's [*Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future \(2021\)*](#) highlights the ambition of Scotland's 1+2 language policy and its place within the Curriculum for Excellence. The report points to the strengths in early language learning and in the inclusive approach to modern, classical, Gaelic, Scots, and English literacy.

The report also highlights that progression in languages is not always consistent, particularly in the senior phase. In some cases, connections between learning, the curriculum and assessment are unclear. The report also highlights the need for clearer guidance, stronger support for teachers, and language pathways in the senior phase that reflect the wider principles of Curriculum for Excellence more closely.

3.1.2 The British Academy - Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning: Broadening our perspectives (2019)

The British Academy (2019) synthesised findings from 20 studies examining the relationship between language learning and academic attainment. The review found that around 90 percent of the studies showed that language learners perform better across a range of academic subjects than students who do not study a second language. Learning another language also boosts student literacy, which gives learners an advantage in core school subjects like mathematics and science.

3.2 International comparative assessments

International comparative assessments can provide useful insight into how Scotland's learners are prepared to engage with cultural diversity, global issues and multilingual societies. These assessments do not test language ability directly, but they do give an indication of young people's attitudes towards other cultures, global issues and intercultural understanding.

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) includes a global competence element which explores how well young people can understand different perspectives, communicate with people from different cultures, and engage with global issues. Scotland performs well in a number of these areas. Pupils report positive attitudes towards immigration, show respect for people from different backgrounds, and keen to engage with global issues. This reflects wider aims within Curriculum for Excellence, including global citizenship and Learning for Sustainability.

At the same time, PISA data highlights inequalities in access to language learning. Across OECD countries, young people from more advantaged backgrounds are more likely to study additional languages and spend more time learning them in school. The UK is now below the OECD average for language learning, with fewer than 40 percent of 15-year-olds studying a language. In Scotland, 64.5 percent of young people report that they do not learn a language at school. This suggests that access to language learning is uneven and raises wider questions about how language learning is sustained across the system.

The findings reflect some of the key aims behind Scotland's 1+2 language policy, including the idea that all learners should have access to language learning. They also draw attention to differences in progression, access and learners' experiences across the education system.

3.2.1 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

PISA is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment and measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2018)

The 2018 report [New OECD report shows Scottish pupils are embracing Global Citizenship — IDEAS](#) included an evaluation of school students' 'global competence', described as their ability to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development.

The results show that pupils in Scotland have very positive attitudes towards immigrants as well as an above average respect for people from other parts of the world, including respect for others' values and opinions.

Overall, Scotland's score in the assessment was 534; one of five countries out of twenty-seven to score at least 50 points above the average. These results are a positive indication of the impact of the Learning for Sustainability Action Plan within the Curriculum for Excellence, and of the importance of global citizenship education for young people in Scotland: the learning of other

languages and about other cultures is key to sustaining this positive and open attitude in Scotland's learners.

PISA in Focus: The socio-economic gap in foreign-language learning (2018)

In 2018, [PISA asked students](#) whether they studied foreign languages at school and how much class time they had on foreign languages per week. Results show that learning foreign languages is widely available to 15-year-olds in today's education systems. However, these opportunities are not evenly distributed among students of different socio-economic status: students in advantaged schools have more opportunities to learn foreign languages than students in disadvantaged schools.

The report highlights that the UK is among the few countries where under 40% of students study a foreign language at school - well below the European average of 97%.

The report also states that, of the PISA-participating countries and economies, Scotland is the country with the highest proportion of students who do not learn foreign languages at school (64.5%). This is ahead of Australia (63.6%) and New Zealand (62.3%). The figure is 11.8% in Ireland.

3.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages \(CEFR\)](#) is an international framework developed by the Council of Europe to describe language proficiency. It sets out six levels of language learning across three broad stages:

- **A1–A2 (Basic User):** simple communication and everyday needs.
- **B1–B2 (Independent User):** everyday interactions, opinions, and main ideas in texts.
- **C1–C2 (Proficient User):** fluent expression, complex understanding, and flexible use.

The CEFR is widely used to support curriculum design, assessment and progression in language learning. It also underpins a range of international qualifications, including IELTS and Cambridge English, and is commonly used to describe what learners can do at different stages of their language development.

3.3.1 CEFR Companion Volume (2020)

Published in 2020, the [CEFR Companion Volume \(CEFR/CV\)](#) updates and extends the original framework while keeping the six-level structure. The CEFR/CV reframes language use around four modes of communication:

- **Reception** – understanding input (listening, reading, viewing, sign perception).
- **Production** – creating output (spoken or written texts, presentations, essays).
- **Interaction** – two-way communication (conversation, debates, online chats, collaboration).
- **Mediation** – relaying or adapting information (summarising, interpreting, facilitating discussion).

This reflects a greater focus on communication in real-life situations and on using different language skills together across a range of contexts.

Reception focuses on understanding meaning from a range of sources, including speech, written texts, audiovisual content and sign language. This includes identifying ideas, following meaning and recognising purpose across different contexts.

Production relates to expressing ideas in speech or writing. Learners demonstrate this when they explain something, write a text, give a presentation, or share information with others. The Companion Volume gives more detailed descriptions of production at both the earliest and most advanced stages of language learning.

Interaction refers to communication between people. In practice, this could be a short conversation, a classroom discussion, group work, messaging online or speaking in a meeting. It involves understanding what someone else means and replying in a way that keeps the exchange going.

Mediation involves helping others access or understand meaning. This may include summarising information, paraphrasing, explaining ideas in simpler terms, facilitating discussion or interpreting across languages and cultures.

The Companion Volume reflects a shift towards seeing learners as active language users who interpret, create, discuss and adapt meaning in different social and cultural contexts.

These four modes present a fuller view of communication. They show that learning a language is not just about isolated skills but about using language as a social agent - interpreting, creating, interacting, and mediating in real-life contexts.

3.3.2 The Impact of Implementing the Common European Framework of Reference on Language Education: A Critical Review (Sahib and Stapa, 2021)

[Sahib and Stapa \(2021\)](#) provide a systematic review of the implementation of the CEFR in school contexts, synthesising evidence on its influence in language education. The study examines areas including teaching and learning approaches, teachers' understanding and use of the CEFR, learner outcomes, classroom assessment and professional learning. The findings suggest that teachers and learners generally respond positively to the framework, although difficulties remain in translating it into everyday classroom practice. The authors point in particular to the need for ongoing support and professional learning to help teachers use the framework effectively.

3.3.3 Linking Assessments to International Frameworks of Language Proficiency: The Common European Framework of Reference (Jones, 2011)

In this paper, [Jones \(2011\)](#) discusses the use of the CEFR in language assessment. He describes it as both a way of organising thinking around language learning and a series of levels used to describe learners' language ability. The paper argues that using the CEFR can make assessment more comparable across different education systems.

Jones also argues that the framework cannot simply be transferred from one context to another without adjustment. He argues that the CEFR needs to be used differently depending on the

context. What works for older learners, for example, may not work in the same way for younger children. The paper suggests that the framework can help create greater consistency in assessment, but that schools and systems still need flexibility in how they apply it.

3.3.4 Implications for the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Scotland has a technical framework for modern languages which is not aligned to the CEFR. This framework sets expectations for learning languages through each stage of the BGE (i.e. first to fourth levels). The “benchmarks” and “experiences and outcomes” do not specify, for example, that “students must reach A2 by end of S3”, as might the case in CEFR-aligned language learning frameworks. This provides more flexibility in Scotland’s schools and practitioners but prevents comparability with CEFR levels.

The CIC may wish to consider the extent to which the revised languages curriculum could be aligned to the CEFR to allow children and young people to have an internationally recognised means of demonstrating their proficiency in a language.

4 Education Scotland Evidence

This section looks at evidence from inspection findings, national surveys and practitioner engagement to provide an overview of language learning across Scotland. It focuses on the implementation of Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach and highlights strengths, areas of variability and priorities for improvement.

Since the introduction of the policy, language learning has become more established in primary schools, with most now offering at least some form of entitlement. The picture in secondary schools is less consistent. This is particularly evident in S1 to S3, where learners' experiences can vary considerably between schools and local authorities.

Inspection findings between 2023 and 2025 identified many examples of creative and effective practice in primary schools. In secondary schools, inspectors continued to identify difficulties in maintaining consistent language provision and progression. Evidence from the Scottish Government's 1+2 survey and Education Scotland engagement also highlights the commitment of practitioners to providing inclusive and high-quality language learning experiences.

Overall, the evidence indicates a stable foundation for language learning, with clear progress in primary education but persistent fragility in secondary schools. The Curriculum Improvement Cycle provides an opportunity to strengthen progression, ensure all learners are receiving their entitlement and refresh national guidance to support greater coherence across the system.

4.1 HMI Evidence and Reports

Schools' implementation of Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach is increasingly reflected in HMI reports. Summarised Inspection Findings (SIF) frequently comment on the extent to which learners receive their entitlement to continuous language learning in both primary (Primary 1 – Primary 7) and secondary schools (to the end of the BGE). A review undertaken by Education Scotland's languages team in February 2025 focused on inspection reports from 2023-2025.

This timeframe was chosen because the initial 2013-2023 implementation period for the 1+2 policy had concluded, with no new funding allocated beyond that point, and because pandemic disruption in earlier years meant fewer SIF reports were available.

4.1.1 Primary schools

Between January 2023 and February 2025, 223 inspection reports referred to languages provision. Of these, over 210 indicated that children were receiving a full or partial entitlement. This aligns with the Scottish Government's 2022/23 1+2 survey, which found that 99% of primary schools had implemented the policy fully or partially.

Positive comments noted effective progression and breadth of provision, for example:

- “Staff deliver the national 1+2 language policy effectively. Children in all classes learn French and older children learn Spanish in a planned progressive way.” (**HMIE report, November 2024**)

- “Children across all stages learn French. In P5–Primary 7 they also learn Mandarin from an external provider. There is clear progression with the associated secondary for both languages.” **(HMIE report, April 2024)**
- “Children are receiving their entitlement to 1+2 languages... Older children also learn Spanish, supported by older peers from the local secondary.” **(HMIE report, June 2023)**

Only a small number of primary reports highlighted lack of full implementation, e.g.:

- “All children are not yet receiving their entitlement... Teachers now need to ensure modern languages are taught more frequently.” **(HMIE report, November 2023)**
- “Teaching of modern languages should be reviewed to ensure the 1+2 requirement is met.” **(HMIE report, August 2023)**

4.1.2 Secondary schools

Of 45 inspection reports from 2023–2025, 28 confirmed that entitlement to language learning in the BGE was being met. Examples include:

- “They receive their entitlement to languages 1+2 in the BGE in line with national expectations.” **(HMIE report, June 2023)**
- “Young people experience French and Spanish as part of the school’s approach to meeting the 1+2 policy.” **(HMIE report, March 2025)**
- “As a result of course choice at the end of S3, the majority of young people learn modern languages in line with national expectations.” **(HMIE report, February 2024)**

However, 17 reports raised concerns that entitlement was not being met, particularly in S3:

- “Young people do not receive their entitlement to 1+2 modern languages in the BGE.” **(HMIE report, March 2024)**
- “Senior leaders should ensure all young people receive their full entitlement to learn two modern languages.” **(HMIE report, April 2023)**
- Some schools interpreted the policy as offering one period of an additional language without sufficient depth or progression, e.g.:
“Young people experience learning in either French or Spanish in their primary school. In the BGE, staff provide one period of an additional language for all learners. This is in line with policy but may not ensure appropriate pace and depth.” **(HMIE report, April 2023)**

4.1.3 Key findings

Inspection evidence from 2023-2025 broadly supports the findings of the Scottish Government’s 1+2 languages survey and feedback from practitioners. In almost all primary schools, the policy is either fully or partially embedded, and many examples of effective practice were highlighted in inspection reports. A small number of schools continue to require support to ensure that all children receive their entitlement to two additional languages by the end of Primary 7.

In secondary schools, most learners have access to language learning in the Broad General Education, with appropriate pathways into the Senior phase. However, variability remains most evident in S1-S3. While languages are a core element in almost all schools in S1-S2 and in most schools in S3, HMI reports confirm that in some cases the entitlement to study a language until the end of the BGE is not being met.

4.1.4 Care Inspectorate Reports

Care Inspectorate reports have not been included at this stage due to the ongoing development of a new joint inspection programme. This plan introduces a refreshed approach to multi-agency scrutiny and improvement support, which is still in progress. Once the updated framework and findings are fully implemented and published, they will provide a more comprehensive basis for inclusion in future curriculum evidence papers.

4.1.5 Implications for the Curriculum Improvement Cycle

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle provides an opportunity to address these issues. In particular, it can ensure consistent entitlement to language learning from P1 through to the end of S3, provide updated national guidance to support clearer planning for progression in S1-S3, and strengthen support for schools to sustain depth, continuity, and progression in language learning in line with national expectations.

4.2 Education Scotland Reports And Evidence

There are currently no Education Scotland reports that focus specifically on the languages curriculum. However, other evidence sources provide relevant insights. The Scottish Government's 1+2 survey provides information on how the policy is being delivered across schools. Practitioner and pupil surveys carried out by Education Scotland also provide insight into classroom practice, learners' experiences and the wider impact of language learning. These sources provide useful evidence about the progress made so far, as well as the strengths and ongoing challenges within the languages curriculum.

4.2.1 Scottish Government 1+2 Survey

The Scottish Government carries out a national survey of local authorities to monitor the implementation of Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach. This survey gives a clear picture of how the policy is being delivered across schools and captures the range of provision and the variety of languages offered. In the past, the survey was carried out on an annual basis, but this was changed to every two years in 2019. The most recent available data published are the results from the 2023 survey.

4.2.2 1+2 survey results 2022/23

The following section provides the national findings from the [2022/23 survey](#), which includes information on levels of entitlement and the range of languages offered in Scotland's schools.

Responses were received from 30 of Scotland's 32 local authorities, although some authorities submitted only partial data. Overall, the survey covers around 79% of mainstream primary schools, 86% of mainstream secondary schools and around half of special schools. The survey is a useful national overview of how the policy is currently being delivered in schools across Scotland.

The findings suggest that language learning is now part of the experience of most learners across Scotland, although delivery is not consistent in every school. In the primary schools included in the survey, 99% reported that children receive an L2 experience. Among these schools, 68% provide continuous delivery from Primary 1 to Primary 7, while 31% describe their provision as partial.

All secondary schools in the survey reported offering an L2 entitlement. However, only 61% stated that this continued consistently across S1 to S3. This is a drop from the 2021 survey, when around 70% of schools reported continuous delivery across the broad general education. Staffing pressures and timetable constraints are likely to be contributing factors.

The survey also gathered information on the range of languages taught. French continues to remain the most common L2 language, followed by Spanish, Gaelic (Learners), German and Italian. The most common L3 language is Spanish, followed by French, Scots, British Sign Language (BSL), German, Chinese languages and Gaelic (Learners). Italian and Urdu are also taught but at smaller scales. Sixty-two schools reported that they taught a wide range of other languages, including Arabic, Japanese, Makaton and Polish. This highlights range of languages available to primary pupils and highlights Scotland's linguistic diversity through Scots, Gaelic (Learners) and BSL.

The 2022/23 survey results show that the picture of L3 languages offered by primary schools is continuing to change over time. Although Spanish is still very much ahead, five languages are now offered by a more similar number of schools: French, Scots, BSL, German and Chinese languages. Around three quarters of primary schools now deliver L3 from Primary 5 to Primary 7, compared with 64% in 2021. All secondary schools report offering at least one L3 within the Broad General Education, although the way this is delivered varies between schools. In some schools, learners follow continuous language courses, while in others the language is offered through shorter blocks of learning or project-based activities. As a result, learners' experiences of L3 are not consistent across the system. Languages offered as L3s in secondary schools remain mostly focused on languages that can be taken at National Qualification level.

The findings also show differences between local authorities. Some report continuous L2 provision across all stages, while others provide more limited delivery. Secondary schools are less likely than primary schools to provide continuous language learning, particularly during the move from Primary 7 into S1. This means that learners' experiences can vary depending on the school or local authority they attend.

The data also shows a gradual increase in L3 activity in primary schools over time. By contrast, there has been little change in the overall picture for continuous L2 delivery. Secondary provision appears to have weakened in some areas, which may make it harder for learners to build confidence and progress in a language over several years.

Strengths in Primary Education

Primary pupils begin learning a first additional language (L2) from Primary 1 and start a second additional language (L3) by Primary 5 at the latest. French, Spanish, German and Gaelic (Learners) are the languages most commonly taught. In many schools, languages form part of everyday classroom routines and are linked to learning in other curricular areas.

The 2022/23 survey found that 68 percent of primary schools provided full L2 entitlement and 31 percent offered provided partial entitlement. French continues to be the main L2 in most schools and is taught in around 80 percent of primary settings.

The picture is more mixed for L3. Spanish is the language most commonly offered, followed by French, Scots, BSL and German. A smaller number of schools offer Italian, Gaelic (Learners), Urdu, Mandarin and Cantonese. A number of schools have also introduced languages that are not currently linked to National Qualifications, including Arabic, Dutch, Greek, Japanese, Makaton, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian. In some cases, schools have introduced these languages because they are spoken within the local community or because pupils and staff have shown an interest in them. At present, however, learners cannot always continue studying these languages through National Qualifications.

The strong integration of L2 at primary level demonstrates the potential for sustainability and progression into the BGE and senior phase.

Strengths in Secondary Education

In secondary schools, subject specialists bring depth of expertise to language teaching. Provision extends beyond National Qualifications to include Open University courses, wider achievement awards, exchanges and independent study.

The 2022/23 survey found that all secondary schools offered some form of L2 provision, with high levels of attainment in National Qualifications. Languages remain among the subjects with the strongest A-C pass rates at both National 5 and Higher.

Language uptake has changed in recent years. Since 2015, entries for Spanish have increased by 26 percent, and in 2024 Spanish overtook French at both Higher and Advanced Higher level. The number of entries for Higher Mandarin have increased by around 50 percent.

Schools are also developing broader pathways for language learning through wider achievement awards, work placements and interdisciplinary learning linked to Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). Many schools are also working with international links, digital learning and cross-curricular projects to give languages a more visible place within school life and connect them more closely to learners' experiences.

Challenges in Primary Education

While many primary schools are delivering language learning from the early stages, a number of barriers continue to limit full implementation of the 1+2 policy.

The 2022/23 survey found that 76 percent of primary schools were providing an L3 entitlement, while 24 percent were not.

Some schools report difficulties around finding time within an already crowded curriculum, staff confidence in teaching languages, and access to staff with the relevant language knowledge or qualifications. In some schools, languages are also taught by specialist or visiting staff. Longterm planning can become challenging if there are changes in staffing or the support is no longer available.

In addition, L3 provision can be harder to maintain, particularly when it involves multiple short language experiences or relies on external partnerships that are difficult to scale. Embedding all four language skills within available time was Even with these challenges, many schools are still managing to include languages in everyday classroom routines and activities. Schools continue to identify the need for support with areas such as professional learning, planning time, staffing and access to suitable resources if language learning is to be delivered consistently across all settings.

Challenges in Secondary Education

Although 100% of secondary schools reported a full or partial delivery of the L2 entitlement, only 61% of secondaries fully sustain L2 through S1-S3. The 1+2 policy is designed to provide progression from Primary 1 until the end of S3. Many pupils discontinue their languages studies after S2 due to timing of course choice pathways in almost one third of secondary schools.

Curriculum narrowing in the senior phase continues to affect language uptake. In 2016, Professor Jim Scott from the University of Dundee argued that reducing the number of subjects studied in S4, with many schools moving from a traditional model of seven or eight subjects to six, had a significant impact on languages. His research found that around 54 percent of schools at that time offered only six subjects in S4. The reduction in subject choice affected a number of subjects, including languages.

Looking at the broader picture of uptake in languages at National Qualification levels N5-AH over the past 10 years, there has been a notable decline in the number of young people taking languages. For example, Higher French entries dropped by approximately 50% between 2015 and 2024. German entries are in decline too - from around 1,051 Higher entries in 2013 to 520 in 2024. Over the past decade, entries for Advanced Higher French and German have declined by 43% and 25% respectively.

The figures also raise questions about the future of languages in the senior phase. If this pattern continues, some learners may have fewer opportunities to continue with languages and develop their skills over time.

4.2.3 Education Scotland Languages Senior phase survey (2024)

In late 2024, Education Scotland's languages team surveyed a sample of Senior phase learners from across Scotland. The survey explored learners' motivations, experiences, and critiques of NQ language courses, as well as their experiences of language learning in the BGE. The findings reveal recurring themes in learners' reasons for choosing languages, their views on what makes an effective course, the skills they value most, and where they see scope for improvement.

Motivation for choosing to learn languages

Enjoyment was one of the main reasons learners gave for continuing with languages. Many learners referred to positive experiences in earlier years of school and spoke about an interest in particular languages or in the countries and cultures associated with them. Spanish, French and German were the languages that learners mentioned most frequently.

Learners also linked languages to future opportunities. Travel and communication were common themes, alongside the view that languages could be useful in careers such as business, law and education. Some learners wanted to communicate more easily with relatives or friends living abroad. Others saw languages as a useful qualification for university entry or future employment.

Some learners also said that their subject choices were influenced by school timetables, limited option columns or school expectations. In these cases, languages were sometimes taken because there were few alternatives available rather than through a strong personal interest.

What makes an ideal language learning experience

Across the survey, learners expressed a desire for language education to be more practical with a greater emphasis on communication. Talking and listening were consistently identified as the most important aspects of learning, and learners highlighted the value of conversational practice, role-play, and interaction with native speakers. Many wanted teachers to use the target language more frequently in class, with less reliance on English. Real-world scenarios, such as ordering food or asking for directions, were viewed as essential, alongside opportunities for cultural immersion through trips abroad, exposure to films and music, and engagement with festivals or traditions.

Learners also emphasised the importance of interactive and engaging pedagogy. They particularly enjoyed activities involving digital tools such as Kahoot and Quizlet, or role-play tasks that built confidence in communication. A supportive classroom environment, where mistakes were treated as learning opportunities and teaching was paced to reflect different learning needs, was seen as critical. Learners called for balanced development across all four language skills, but with a stronger emphasis on talking and listening than they currently experienced.

Key skills in language learning

Learners consistently identified talking and listening as the most important aspects of language learning, reflecting the importance they placed on communication in real-life situations. Confidence also emerged as a significant theme, with many learners indicating that concern about making mistakes affected their willingness to participate and use the language spontaneously.

Grammar and vocabulary continued to be viewed as important components of language learning. However, learners generally saw these as supporting effective communication rather than as ends in themselves. Regular exposure to authentic language use was often viewed as more valuable than an exclusive focus on grammatical accuracy.

What is missing from current courses

Some learners felt that language courses focused too much on writing tasks and memorising content, with fewer opportunities to practise talking in realistic situations. A number of learners said they lacked confidence in having a conversation and felt that some listening activities did not reflect how people speak in everyday life. Learners also expressed interest in more cultural experiences, including trips abroad, and wanted classroom learning to feel more relevant to real situations outside school.

Learners also identified areas where they wanted more support. These included grammar teaching, vocabulary building and access to a wider range of languages, including British Sign Language, Arabic and Mandarin.

Enjoyed aspects of language learning

Learners placed particular value on opportunities to build confidence in talking and frequently referred to positive experiences of being able to communicate clearly or improve their pronunciation. Many also responded positively to creative writing tasks, reading activities, and the use of music and film within language learning. Cultural learning was another area that learners consistently valued, particularly where they could apply their language skills beyond the classroom.

Interactive approaches were also viewed positively. Learners frequently identified games, collaborative activities and creative tasks as engaging and motivating, and many felt that these approaches supported retention and increased confidence in using the language.

The survey suggests that learners value languages for a range of personal, academic and future career reasons. At the same time, many want courses to include more opportunities for practical communication, cultural experiences and interactive learning. Their feedback points towards language learning that feels relevant, engaging and connected to real-life use.

4.2.4 Curriculum Improvement Cycle pilot reviews

As part of the early stages of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC), pilot reviews were carried out to explore how the process could be used to gather insights, test different approaches and inform future development work. These pilots did not involve all curriculum areas and instead focused on five of the eight areas within Curriculum for Excellence, including languages.

The reviews asked practitioners to review the current curriculum framework, identify strengths and challenges, and find where changes or improvements might be needed. In languages, the pilot activity included a national event involving secondary teachers, followed by meetings with secondary modern languages Principal Teachers and targeted engagement with primary practitioners. The following subsections summarise the main themes and findings that emerged from this work.

4.2.5 Languages Curriculum Improvement Cycle pilot review – Thursday 4th October 2023

Education Scotland carried out a series of pilot curriculum reviews between February 2023 and April 2024. These pilot reviews were designed to test and refine approaches to curriculum review and stakeholder engagement in advance of a full Curriculum Improvement Cycle, while also exploring perspectives on the role of knowledge and identifying key messages to inform the ongoing development of Curriculum for Excellence.

An initial full-day meeting for languages took place in October 2023. This event marked a significant step in gathering insights from practitioners across Scotland. Participants were self-selected, following an open call for volunteers communicated through social media platforms, GLOW, and national subject networks. Only secondary teachers were invited to take part at this stage of the pilot,

ensuring that the voices of those from settings where languages are facing the most significant challenges would be heard.

The event attracted approximately 70 attendees, representing a diverse range of educational sectors, including state and independent schools, and with a range of roles in their respective schools (including classroom teachers, principal teachers, curriculum leaders, faculty heads, and depute head teachers).

Tasks were designed to allow participants to explore the current languages curriculum framework freely, with no preconceived outcomes or expectations. This approach aimed to generate a wide range of ideas and reflections that will inform future developments in the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

Some of the key messages from the pilot event in October 2023 were as follows:

- Prescribed topics at each level/ideas/suggestions for topics
- Grammar grids per level across the BGE
- Exemplification of what each level looks like across the 4 skills
- Access to an assessment bank for BGE
- Clarity on the place of communicative competence vs accuracy
- Separation of Listening and Talking
- Pupil versions of Es and Os
- Digital skills integrated
- Transactional language given a more prominent place
- Clarity around the place of knowledge
- Articulation between BGE and senior phase
- Pupil voice in any new framework
- Add WHY pupils need to take ML into all curricular docs and link to Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
- Moderation models and national exemplification
- Reduce number of Es and Os, make them clearer and concise
- Call it phonics and sounds, call it grammar

There was consensus for greater structure in modern languages, with some colleagues wishing for prescribed topics, grammar grids, and clear progression exemplars across BGE. Some colleagues said that a national assessment bank would be useful, as well as clarity on communicative competence vs accuracy, and the separation of Talking and Listening as skills within the technical framework. Other priorities include pupil-friendly Es and Os, integrated digital skills, and a stronger focus on transactional language. The revised technical framework should clarify the role of language knowledge, improve BGE-Senior phase links, embed pupil voice, and explain the value of languages, connecting to DYW. Further suggestions include national moderation, exemplification, simpler Es and Os, and explicit use of terms like phonics, sounds, and grammar.

These initial findings were shared at a further event in March 2024 attended by secondary school principal teachers and lead teachers representing their local authorities.

4.2.6 Secondary Modern Languages Principal Teacher group meetings - March 2024 (Glasgow) and December 2024 (Dundee)

Discussions at the 2024 national meetings with Secondary Modern Languages Principal Teachers focused on gaps in the current curriculum framework, priorities for improvement, and the types of national support that could strengthen consistency, progression and learner engagement across secondary schools.

What is missing from the current curriculum framework for languages?

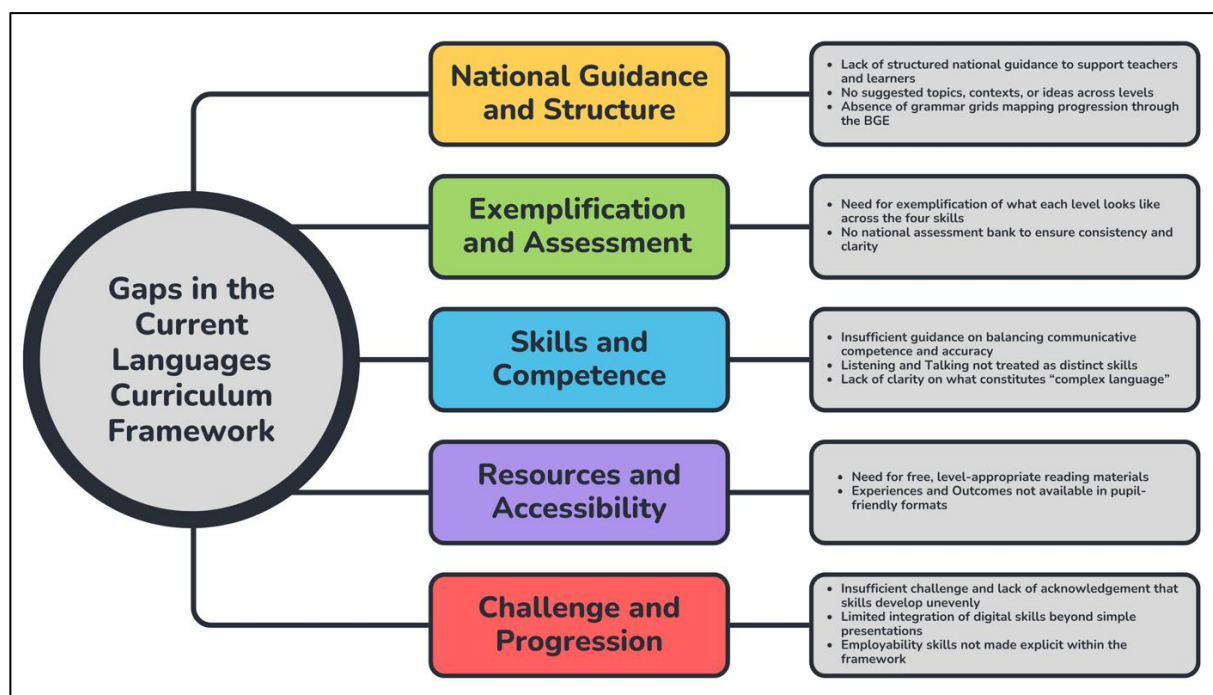


Figure 12 - Summary of feedback from PT groups (March/December 2024)

Feedback from the Secondary Modern Languages Principal Teacher meetings in 2024 highlighted a number of gaps within the current curriculum framework. Across both meetings, participants called for clearer national guidance and a more structured set of supports for teachers and learners. Principal Teachers noted that there is currently no agreed framework for suggested topics, contexts for learning or progression across levels, and many highlighted the absence of grammar progression grids across the Broad General Education.

Principal Teachers repeatedly referred to the need for clearer exemplification across the four skills of talking, listening, reading and writing. Many felt that practical examples of progression at different stages would support planning and help create greater consistency between schools. Linked assessment materials were also seen as important in supporting clearer and more consistent professional judgement.

Participants also identified the balance between communication and accuracy as an area requiring clearer guidance. Many argued that listening and talking should be recognised more explicitly as separate skills within the framework to reflect the importance of oral communication in language learning. There were also calls for clearer guidance on what increasing language

complexity should look like across different stages, alongside more accessible reading materials and pupil-friendly versions of the Experiences and Outcomes.

Teachers also highlighted that progression in languages is not always linear and that learners often develop different skills at different rates. Many felt that the current framework did not sufficiently reflect this. Greater challenge across all stages was identified as another priority.

Digital skills were also discussed. Many participants felt that the use of digital technology in languages was often limited to presentations or simple classroom tasks, with less focus on wider forms of digital communication and digital literacy. Participants also noted that employability skills and links to national priorities such as Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) were not made explicit enough within the framework. Many felt that stronger connections in these areas would help reinforce the wider relevance and value of language learning.

It would be better if...

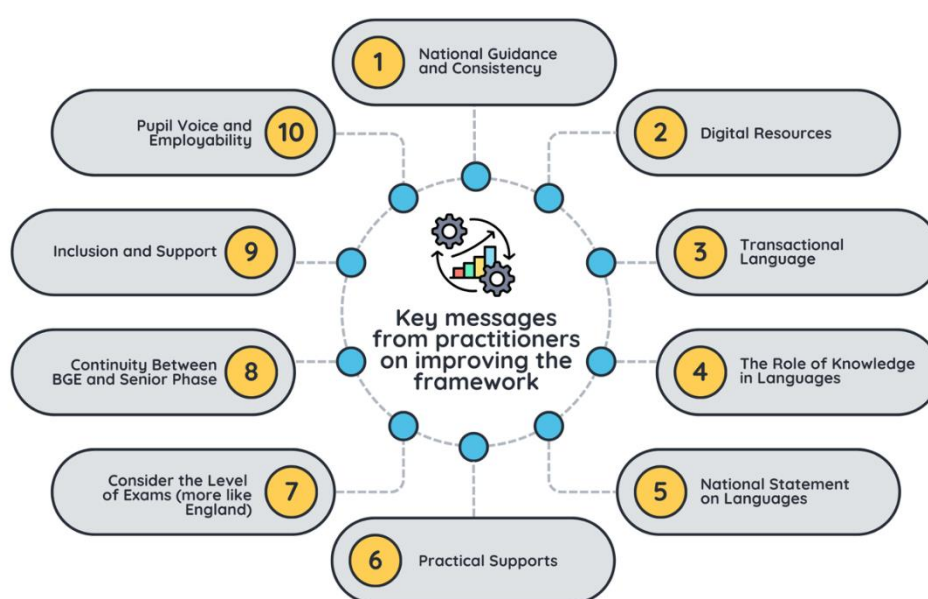


Figure 13 - Summary of feedback from PT groups (March/December 2024)

Principal Teachers felt the curriculum for languages would be stronger with clearer national guidance and greater consistency across Scotland. They also called for centrally provided digital resources, such as online dictionaries and shared banks of materials, to ensure more equitable access. Transactional language should be given greater prominence in both the BGE and the Senior phase, helping learners to gain confidence in everyday communication. A national statement affirming the importance of linguists to Scotland's cultural, social, and economic future was seen as essential to raise the profile of languages across schools and communities.

Principal Teachers also identified a number of practical measures that could support learning and teaching. These included the introduction of a national correction code for writing to support greater consistency in feedback, closer alignment between standards in Modern Languages and English qualifications, and stronger links between the Broad General Education and the Senior phase to support progression into national qualifications. Participants also highlighted the

importance of targeted resources for learners with additional support needs (ASN) and for those requiring additional support to catch up with learning.

Pupil voice was identified as an important part of any future framework development. Principal Teachers stressed that Experiences and Outcomes should be more accessible to learners and that curriculum guidance should explain more clearly why languages matter, including links to employability and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW).

Principal Teachers highlighted that clearer national guidance on time allocation for languages is required. At present, provision varies considerably between schools and local authorities, resulting in young people receiving very different learning experiences. In some schools, languages are allocated enough time to support progression across talking, listening, reading and writing. In others, more limited time allocations restrict opportunities for continuity and sustained development. Participants identified greater consistency in time allocation as an important factor in ensuring that learners across Scotland receive a more comparable experience of language learning.

Participants felt that addressing these issues through a revised national framework could help strengthen equity, relevance and coherence across the curriculum, while supporting Scotland's wider ambitions for language learning and international engagement.

4.2.7 Messages from pilot reviews (Primary):

The pilot review sessions with primary practitioners highlighted a number of priorities for the development of languages within Curriculum for Excellence. Practitioners repeatedly referred to the need for one clear source of national guidance in place of the current range of 1+2 documents and updates, which many felt had become difficult to navigate.

Primary practitioners also highlighted that it was important to recognise the languages that children already bring with them to school. Community languages, Scots and Gaelic were discussed frequently during the sessions. Participants felt that these linguistic experiences should be acknowledged more clearly within the curriculum and treated as part of learners' wider language development.

Practitioners also identified that there is a need for a national approach to sharing resources and professional learning. Many would like to have access to examples of effective practice, planning materials and assessment approaches linked to progression in languages from P1 to S3. They felt that access to this kind of support could help reduce inconsistency between schools and support greater continuity in learning.

Participants also reflected on the value of looking outward to learn from other UK jurisdictions. Reviewing approaches to languages policy in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was viewed as a useful way to inform Scotland's own direction, while adapting lessons learned to Scotland's specific context.

Finally, the reviews stressed the importance of normalising the interconnectedness of all languages and building a positive ethos around multilingualism in school communities. Practitioners felt this was key to challenging any perception of languages as elitist and instead presenting them as relevant to all learners. Participants felt that embedding this ethos more

clearly within the curriculum could help reinforce the place of languages within Scotland's wider commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.

5 Stakeholder Reports and Reviews

This section includes evidence from stakeholder reports, professional associations and national consultations related to language learning in Scotland. It includes findings from research, sector reviews and learner engagement and highlights current opportunities and challenges within the languages curriculum.

Many of the reports share a similar view of the role of languages in Scotland's cultural, economic and educational future. The British Council and the British Academy point to continuing issues around provision, uptake and equity. Professional associations also highlight concerns around teacher supply and workforce capacity. Evidence from learners show that many young people associate languages with global awareness, future employment and personal development.

The evidence also highlights the importance of clear national guidance and collaboration between schools, local authorities, national bodies, universities and professional organisations. There is a need for greater coherence across the learner journey, particularly in relation to progression, practitioner support and alignment between the Broad General Education and the Senior phase.

5.1 Key Stakeholder Reports

This subsection summarises findings from recent national and UK-wide reports that examine the state of language learning, teacher supply and higher education provision. These studies provide useful context for understanding current national trends, ongoing challenges within the system and areas for future development in language learning in Scotland.

5.1.1 [Language Trends Scotland: Research into the teaching and learning of modern languages](#) - British Council

The [Language Trends Scotland 2024](#) report, published by the British Council, provides an analysis of the current state of language education in Scottish primary and secondary schools. The survey (using questionnaires and hosted on the survey platform Questback) was conducted from late August to the end of September 2024. Using a database of publicly available email addresses for the attention of Headteachers or Faculty Head of Modern Languages, British Council Scotland invited schools to participate via email. Links to participate were also distributed via British Council social media channels and Education Newsletter, and the SCILT weekly bulletin.

After data sets had been cleaned and duplicates removed, a total of 129 local authority primary schools responded from 29 of the 32 local authorities; 113 local authority secondary schools responded from 30 local authorities. In the independent sector, six independent primary schools and 16 independent secondary schools responded.

Table 3

	Primary (local authority)	Primary (independent)	Local authority secondary	Independent secondary
Base figure (emails delivered)	1,524	79	329	68
Number of responses	129	6	113	16
Response rate	8%	8%	34%	24%

As the response rates indicate, the survey is only a small sample (particularly in primary schools) of the number of schools in Scotland and therefore can only give an impression of the languages landscape rather than being a comprehensive study.

Drawing on survey data and national qualification statistics, the report identifies key trends, challenges, and areas of opportunity within the current system.

Primary

Almost all primary schools now offer at least one additional language, with provision reported in 98% of schools. French remains the most widely taught language at 83%, followed by Spanish and British Sign Language (BSL). Most primary language teaching is delivered by generalist class teachers, who account for 94% of provision. Around 40% of these teachers do not hold formal language qualifications. The report also found that 67% of primary schools had no international links, limiting opportunities for pupils to engage with authentic language and cultural experiences.

Secondary

Languages remain a common part of the Broad General Education in secondary schools, particularly French and Spanish. The picture changes after S3, when continuation into the senior phase drops considerably. Almost 30 percent of schools reported that no pupils continue with more than one language beyond S3. Spanish now has more entries than French at Higher and Advanced Higher. Mandarin entries have also risen in recent years, although the numbers are still relatively small.

The report identifies several contributing factors:

- 64% of S4 and 49% of Higher/Advanced Higher classes are taught as multi-level groups.
- 41% of secondary schools report difficulties in recruiting qualified language teachers.
- Resource shortages and lack of specialist training continue to impede quality delivery.

Despite these challenges, modest increases in the totality of languages entries for national qualifications in 2024 and growing diversity in language offerings suggest positive momentum. The report recommends targeted investment in teacher recruitment, professional development, and international engagement to support long-term sustainability and equity in language education across Scotland.

5.1.2 British Academy - the future of languages in the UK (2021)

A [2021 report](#), from the British Academy, produced in partnership with ASCL and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, highlights concerns about language skills across

the UK. The report warns that language deficits could have significant economic consequences, with estimates suggesting costs of up to 3.5% of GDP each year. It presents language learning as important not only within education, but also for economic prosperity, international engagement and social cohesion. The report focuses on language provision in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The report proposes a number of targeted strategies designed to tackle declining uptake in languages. One recommendation is the introduction of an 'Advanced Modern Languages Premium' to provide financial support for A-level language provision in areas with low uptake. The report suggests that this could help increase participation. It also recommends the creation of a national mentoring scheme linking schools facing difficulties with departments where language uptake and engagement remain higher, allowing schools to share approaches and examples of effective practice.

German is highlighted in the report as a language where uptake has fallen sharply in recent years. One proposal is a dedicated 'German for All' programme, with additional resources and promotional activity targeted at schools in disadvantaged areas.

International experiences are also discussed as an important part of language learning. Increased investment in the Turing Scheme is recommended so that more young people can access exchanges and study visits linked to languages.

Concerns about shortages of modern languages teachers also feature prominently. Proposed actions include the return of teacher training scholarships and expansion of subject knowledge enhancement programmes to help increase the number of qualified teachers entering the profession.

The report links these proposals to the wider [Towards a National Languages Strategy](#), where languages are presented not as a specialist subject area, but as part of wider discussions about education, economic participation and public life.

5.1.3 British Academy's Cold Spots: Mapping Inequality in SHAPE Provision in UK Higher Education (2025)

[This paper](#) identifies Modern Languages as one of the most severely affected disciplines within the SHAPE subjects. Across the UK, provision in Languages and Area Studies has contracted by 47 percent since 2011/12. The decline has been particularly marked in French, German and Spanish, where the availability of single honours degrees has halved, leaving joint honours as the only option in many institutions.

The report highlights significant regional inequalities in access. Cold spots are most acute in rural, coastal and disadvantaged areas, where students are less likely to move away from home to study. This has a disproportionate impact on learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds, many of whom commute to university. Non-European languages, which had seen growth in the early 2010s, have also begun to retreat. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, six institutions withdrew programmes in Asian languages such as Mandarin, Japanese and Korean.

In Scotland, cold spots are already visible, particularly in provision for French at below-average tariff levels. Increasingly, provision is concentrated in a small number of urban universities,

narrowing opportunities for learners in other parts of the country. These patterns have implications for equitable access to languages study in higher education, the pipeline of future language teachers, and Scotland's wider cultural and economic capacity.

The British Academy warns that without targeted intervention, Modern Languages will continue to contract, further limiting opportunities for learners and weakening the UK's ability to meet language needs for trade, diplomacy, education and cultural life. It recommends stronger regional collaboration, an "at risk" subject register, and sustainable funding models to safeguard provision in strategically important disciplines such as Languages.

5.2 Subject Associations

Languages in Scotland are also supported by subject associations and practitioner networks such as LANGS (Local Authority Network Group Scotland) and SALT (Scottish Association for Language Teaching). These organisations do not usually publish formal reports. Their contribution is more visible through professional discussion, networking and the sharing of classroom practice between practitioners. Their main contribution lies in professional networking, sharing of effective practice, and teacher development. Cultural institutes also make an important contribution to language learning through resources, events, partnerships and exchange opportunities. They do not usually produce formal reports or evidence specifically intended to inform curriculum review.

5.2.1 Professional Associations

Professional associations and trade unions have raised sustained concerns about the future of modern languages in Scotland, both within schools and across the wider education system.

At the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) in April 2024, Motion 34 was brought in response to Aberdeen University's decision to cut teaching and research in modern languages, placing 30 members of staff at risk of redundancy. The motion stressed that reducing modern languages provision in higher education would have direct consequences for the teacher pipeline, with fewer graduates available to enter initial teacher education. It warned that this could further diminish the demand for languages in schools, ultimately harming Scotland's international reputation. The motion called on the STUC General Council to oppose cuts at Aberdeen, support staff and students, and lobby the Scottish Government for adequate university funding that ensures modern languages are properly resourced.

The Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) has consistently raised issues relating to the delivery and sustainability of modern languages in schools. At its Congress in May 2023, Motion I highlighted declining entries to National Qualifications in languages despite investment in the 1+2 policy. It argued that Scotland requires young people with the knowledge and skills to act as global citizens and called for a review of the 1+2 policy to address inequities in delivery. The motion also called for a revision of the Experiences and Outcomes and the development of clear pathways for progression beyond the senior phase. The motion was carried unanimously. At the May 2024 Congress, the SSTA reaffirmed its concerns, stating that modern languages had faced "an uphill struggle" since the introduction of CfE and criticising the piecemeal implementation of the 1+2 policy. The motion called for increased investment in language

provision in schools and for stronger recognition of the contribution of languages to Scotland's economy. After amendment, the motion was carried.

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) has also repeatedly raised issues about resourcing and training. At its AGM in 2025, the EIS instructed Council to investigate how much time is devoted in ITE programmes to BSL as a third language within the 1+2 framework. This reflected the recognition of BSL as an official language of Scotland and the need to ensure parity in teacher education. In 2019, the EIS called for a comprehensive government review of the 1+2 policy to evaluate progress and ensure that it enhanced language provision nationally. In the same year, it also campaigned for curricular specialist provision of art, music, physical education and modern languages in primary schools. Earlier, in 2017, the EIS pointed out the need for sustained funding, calling on the Scottish Government to release resources to complete 1+2 training for primary teachers beyond 2020.

Similar issues appear across the positions taken by these associations. Funding, equity of provision and teacher workforce sustainability are recurring concerns. Many also stress the wider cultural and economic importance of languages. Professional associations have called for stronger government commitment, improved training and resourcing, and greater coherence in implementation to ensure that language learning continues to be a key part of Scotland's education system.

5.3 Pupil Voice and the Languages Curriculum

Recent national reports provide insight into the priorities, concerns and aspirations of children and young people in Scotland. The evidence also highlights the importance of a languages curriculum that reflects learners' experiences and prepares them for future study, work and life.

The All Learners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education (Scottish Government, [2023](#)) found that climate change and global warming were among the most important issues for children and young people. Learners expressed passion for protecting the planet and upholding their rights, alongside anxieties about living in a world undergoing rapid change. or the languages curriculum, this points towards opportunities to connect learning more directly to global issues, including intercultural dialogue, international cooperation and the contribution multilingualism can make to sustainability.

The Young People and the Future of Scotland: A Participatory Horizon Scanning Engagement (Scottish Government, [2025](#)) identified five priority themes. In relation to climate and environment, young people urged Scotland to lead on nature protection and green job creation. Embedding these themes in languages learning can provide contexts for exploring how different cultures approach environmental sustainability. On the economy and jobs, they called for a fairer economy and wider access to roles in green industries and emerging technologies. This aligns with positioning language learning as a skill that broadens career This also supports the view of language learning as a skill that can widen career opportunities and support employment in international sectors. In discussions about politics and government, young people referred to the importance of inclusive decision-making and reliable public services, alongside concerns about misinformation and instability. Languages can contribute here through critical literacy and

intercultural awareness, helping learners engage with different perspectives and evaluate information more critically.

In relation to society and communities, many young people described a future built on fairness, respect and stronger collaboration between people and communities. Language learning contributes directly by developing communication, empathy and intercultural understanding. Finally, in relation to health and habits, young people highlighted the importance of wellbeing and mental health support. Language classrooms can contribute by creating inclusive and supportive spaces where learners build confidence, resilience and self-expression.

The report “This is our lives, it matters a lot”: Putting children’s rights at the heart of education (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, [2025](#)) emphasised the importance of designing curricula that fulfil children’s rights and personal potential. Learners identified the importance of gaining knowledge and skills relevant to the world they live in, as well as experiencing more active and outdoor learning. They expressed a desire for greater access to arts, drama and sports, opportunities for play, rest and reflection, and stronger awareness of their rights. They also asked for more choice in what they study, opportunities to follow their interests, and practical skills for life. The languages curriculum can respond by embedding learner voice in course design, providing practical and engaging contexts for communication, and offering varied and creative approaches to learning that reflect individual interests.

These insights suggest that the next iteration of the languages curriculum should place learner voice at its core. Curriculum design should connect language learning to global challenges such as sustainability and equity, highlight its relevance for future careers, and provide opportunities for learners to develop practical communication skills in meaningful contexts. Active, creative and culturally rich approaches, shaped by the interests of children and young people, can ensure that language learning feels purposeful and engaging. Embedding pupil perspectives within the Curriculum Improvement Cycle will help to secure a languages curriculum that is inclusive, future-focused and responsive to the realities of learners’ lives.

6 Academic Research

This section looks at key academic research relevant to language learning and pedagogy, including Latin. It provides key findings from peer-reviewed studies, reports and reviews to give an overview of the landscape in languages, including second language acquisition, employer insights, pedagogy and case studies. There is very little research on languages in a Scottish context, so the report draws on evidence from other parts of the UK. International evidence is also included where it has clear relevance for Scotland's policy context, particularly in relation to the cognitive, cultural, and employability benefits of multilingualism. A Rapid Research Review was completed, and a separate report will be published with the findings alongside this report.

The research is not an exhaustive list, but provides the evidence base to support the CIC and the development of the new technical framework. This evidence shows how policy, pedagogy and case studies could shape the experience and outcomes for learners.

6.1 Languages Pedagogy

This section provides an overview of key research in second language acquisition (SLA), target language use, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). It highlights a range of approaches that support children and young people to develop as successful language learners. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review. Instead, it focuses on findings that are particularly relevant to the Scottish context and to the aims of the CIC. The evidence summarised here is intended to inform discussion on effective pedagogy and guide the development of the revised technical framework for languages.

6.1.1 Second Language Acquisition

A body of research on SLA highlights the processes that support effective language learning. This research base may support the CIC to help develop the new technical framework to support classroom practice in Scotland.

Research consistently identifies talking and listening as central to language acquisition (Swain, [1995](#); Field, [2008](#)). Learners are more likely to develop language successfully when they use it in meaningful communication, respond to other people, and receive feedback that helps them clarify and extend their use of language (Ellis, 2003). These findings highlight the importance of creating classroom environments where pupils have frequent opportunities to use the target language for authentic purposes rather than simply to demonstrate memorised content.

Learning a language is a skill-based process that depends on practice, proceduralisation, and building fluency. Research by Nation ([2001](#)) and Gatbonton and Segalowitz ([2005](#)) suggests that fluency develops through repeated exposure to familiar language, allowing learners to move from recognition towards more spontaneous use. Lessons focused on consolidation, repeated practice and revisiting known language can sometimes be undervalued within curriculum planning. However, this type of learning plays an important role in helping learners internalise language patterns and use them more automatically. DeKeyser ([2007](#)) describes this process as “*proceduralisation*,” where declarative knowledge, such as understanding a grammar rule,

gradually becomes procedural knowledge that learners can apply more fluently and accurately in real-time communication.

Continuity and comprehensible input are both important within the language learning process. Lanvers and Coleman (2013) found that sustained exposure to language, coherent curriculum planning and clear progression have a greater impact on long-term success than short-term methodological trends. This evidence points to the importance of closer alignment between the Broad General Education and the Senior phase so that learners experience more consistent progression in their language development.

International research also suggests that many learners have not developed effective strategies for listening or independent study. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) found that explicit teaching of listening strategies, including prediction, monitoring and evaluation, can improve both listening comprehension and learner confidence. Research also points to the importance of helping learners develop self-regulated approaches to language learning, including organising vocabulary, using retrieval practice and reflecting on their own progress. These strategies can support both retention and motivation.

Another aspect of learning a language is developing intercultural awareness. Byram (1997) and Norton (2013) argue that culture is a core component of language learning, not an optional addition. Teachers should support learners to understanding how language connects to identity, values, and worldviews. This helps them to develop empathy, global awareness, and become motivated. If culture is only covered superficially or not included in lessons, learners are denied the opportunity to see language learning as a means of understanding and participating in the wider world.

This body of research highlights that learning a language should be based on real-life communication, regular practice and clear progression, as well as learning about other cultures.

6.1.2 Speaking spontaneously in the modern foreign languages classroom.

In this study, Christie (2013) looks at how teachers can create conditions to encourage pupils to speak more spontaneously in the target language classrooms when learning a modern language. The research draws on observations from case studies of French lessons with learners aged 11-16 and identifies management of target language and context as the two main tools used by teachers.

The first approach of target language management involves providing learners with chunks of language that can be recycled, modelling phrases that can be internalised, and giving learners the strategies to ask for help. Teachers also motivate learners to use the target language through praise, points, and by responding in the target language. These strategies are designed to help pupils build confidence and the procedural knowledge needed to communicate more spontaneously.

On the other hand, context management aims to create a classroom environment that encourages spontaneous communication through competitive activities, role-play, humour and opportunities for pupils to take on the role of the teacher. The study found that these activities

helped learners to express themselves freely, to take more risks and to interact with others, including the teacher.

The study claims that exams often reward pupils for rehearsed and planned answers, but that talking spontaneously is also important for motivation and to develop meaningful communication skills. Allowing learners to express themselves in another language gives teachers the opportunity to provide feedback and support pupils to achieve greater fluency and accuracy.

The study concludes that teachers can facilitate spontaneous talk. When teachers plan language carefully and create opportunities for unplanned interaction, pupils are more likely to treat the foreign language as the normal way to communicate in class. This builds fluency, confidence and enjoyment in learning languages.

The research underlines the importance of spontaneous talk in delivering the aims of Curriculum for Excellence. It shows that communicative competence develops when pupils are supported to use language for genuine purposes, take risks, and reflect on strategies for coping with gaps in knowledge. This has direct relevance to the 1+2 Approach, which emphasises active use of language, progression in fluency, and motivation through meaningful interaction.

6.1.3 'Value-added' modern languages teaching in the classroom

Crichton (2013) explores how the use of the target language by teachers can support pupils' communication skills in modern languages classrooms. The research observed five experienced French and German teachers in secondary schools in Scotland. All teachers involved in the case studies were recognised as having strong practice. The lessons were audio-recorded, and pupil interviews were carried out to capture the views of the learners.

The study found that pupils benefited from hearing the target language used regularly in class. Regular exposure helped develop vocabulary, pronunciation and familiarity with common patterns of language. Familiar classroom phrases became easier for pupils to recognise and use themselves, particularly when they were repeated consistently in everyday routines.

Classroom atmosphere also affected how willing pupils were to use the language. In classes where teachers combined regular target language use with encouragement and reassurance, pupils were more prepared to attempt answers and take part without worrying excessively about mistakes. Some pupils also felt that regular exposure to the language helped improve pronunciation and recall.

Teachers adapted their language in different ways to support understanding. This included repeating or rephrasing language, slowing down speech and providing scaffolding when needed. Feedback and clear expectations around target language use encouraged pupils to respond in the language they were learning. The study notes that limited timetable time and examination pressures can restrict opportunities for more natural communication. Even so, regular use of the target language in class was linked to greater confidence and more spontaneous interaction among pupils. The study concludes that regular use of the target language can make a significant contribution to listening and talking skills and can increase pupils' confidence in communicating.

6.1.4 Theoretical Bases of Communicative Language Teaching

This article sets out an influential framework for teaching and testing of communicative language. Canale and Swain (1980) argue that teaching a second language effectively should focus on grammatical accuracy as well as the ability to use language for real communication.

Communicative competence is defined as an integrated set of skills. To be able to communicate, learners need knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but also the ability to use language appropriate in different social and cultural settings. The authors also state that learners need strategies to overcome gaps in their knowledge or a breakdown in communication, including the use of verbal and non-verbal cues.

Communication is presented as a central aim of language learning, and the report challenges approaches that place too much emphasis on grammar drills or isolated language skills. It outlines a framework for teaching and assessment that focuses more closely on meaningful language use. The report argues that learners should be given opportunities to use language in practical interaction and that assessment should consider how effectively learners can communicate, rather than focusing only on performance in controlled exercises.

The article concludes that communicative approaches require teachers to integrate grammar, meaning and context into their practice, and that assessment should reflect this. This approach continues to shape classroom practice in communicative competence around the world.

Curriculum for Excellence places emphasis on talking, listening and using language in meaningful contexts. The Canale and Swain framework provides theoretical support for this approach and helps inform the design of tasks that combine fluency, accuracy and intercultural awareness. The findings suggest that language learning involves more than learning grammatical structures. Learners also need opportunities to use language purposefully when communicating with other people.

6.1.5 Support material for CCEA preschool curricular guidance: Irish-medium early years immersion education.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) produced support materials to support preschool curricular guidance and to address the needs of the Irish-medium settings. While the principles of early years education, such as play-based learning, child-centred pedagogy and parental engage, are common across all preschool provision, immersion settings require distinct approaches because most children enter without prior knowledge of Irish. This places responsibility on practitioners to introduce, model and consolidate language.

Language acquisition is a gradual and cumulative process. Many children experience a “silent period,” (2018:11) during which they listen and build understanding supported by visual aids, contextual cues and gestures. Productive spoken skills only develop later through repetition and modelling. This is supported by consistent exposure to communication in the target language.

The guidance recognises differences in language that can be acquired naturally through daily routines and language learning that needs to be planned for progression, for example the

development of vocabulary should be link to wider aims of the curriculum. The reports that there needs to be continuity across themes and contexts and language planning has to be embedded.

Irish is expected to be used regularly throughout the day in immersion settings rather than being limited to specific teaching activities. Children hear the language during routines, play and everyday interaction. Understanding is developed through repeated exposure to familiar language, rephrasing, visual prompts and encouragement to respond using words and phrases they recognise. Everyday communication is treated as an important part of early immersion practice.

Immersion preschools are an important starting point for developing Irish from an early age. The materials place considerable emphasis on practitioners' fluency and on creating environments where Irish forms a natural part of daily communication.

Many of the approaches described also have relevance beyond immersion settings. The emphasis on structured exposure, repetition and meaningful contexts connects closely to wider approaches to early language learning, including Scotland's 1+2 policy. The guidance also highlights the value of visual support, play-based learning and parental involvement. The staged approach to language acquisition provides useful insight into progression in immersion education and in additional language learning more broadly.

6.1.6 Teaching modern foreign languages in multilingual classrooms: an examination of Key Stage 2 teachers' experiences, Finch, Theakston and Serratrice (2018)

Research by Finch, Theakston and Serratrice (2018) examined how primary teachers in Greater Manchester responded to the 2014 requirement to teach Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in increasingly multilingual classrooms. The study explored some of the opportunities associated with language learning in linguistically diverse settings and offers insights that are relevant to Scotland's multilingual context.

The study found considerable variation in how MFL was delivered across schools. Teacher confidence, available support and local priorities all influenced implementation. In some schools, teachers integrated language learning successfully into classroom routines and everyday practice. In others, progression was more difficult to maintain because of limited time, lack of resources or reduced subject expertise. The findings point to the importance of professional learning in helping teachers develop confidence and a better understanding of language pedagogy.

Teachers viewed learners who spoke English as an Additional Language (EAL) as a valuable resource within the classroom. These pupils were often viewed as having an advantage in language learning because of their previous experience of using and acquiring more than one language. Teachers also felt that their presence contributed positively to the classroom environment by increasing exposure to different languages and cultures.

At the same time, the study found that many teachers were unsure how to draw on multilingualism effectively within classroom practice. Many teachers recognised that pupils' home languages and wider linguistic experiences could support modern language learning. The study also found that

many teachers were unsure how to make effective use of pupils' home languages and wider linguistic experiences within classroom practice.

The findings suggest that teachers need opportunities to develop their understanding of multilingual classrooms and to share approaches that can be adapted to different linguistic contexts. For Scotland, they show the potential of multilingual classrooms to serve as a strength rather than a challenge, provided that teachers are supported to make effective use of the linguistic resources their learners bring.

6.1.7 Teachers' and pupils' beliefs about using English and target language in the Scottish secondary modern language learning context, Mroczkowski (2023)

Mroczkowski investigated how teachers and pupils in Scottish secondary schools view the use of English (L1) compared with target languages (L2) in modern language classrooms, particularly within predominantly English-speaking contexts. A mixed-methods design was employed, drawing on data from eight schools through questionnaires (15 teachers, 174 pupils), metaphor prompts, interviews (15 teachers, 46 pupils) and cartoon storyboard tasks.

The study found notable mismatches between teacher and pupil perspectives. Both groups recognised the pedagogical value of English but diverged on when and how L1 and L2 should be used, particularly in relation to grammar teaching. Questionnaire and metaphor data indicated that pupils generally held more favourable attitudes toward the use of English than the target language.

Interviews, analysed across macro (societal), meso (school and community) and micro (classroom) levels, revealed the influence of wider sociocultural attitudes, peer dynamics and the extent to which languages were perceived as personally relevant. The storyboard tasks reinforced these findings: pupils often portrayed themselves as code-switching, while peers were more frequently depicted as relying primarily on English.

This research highlights the ongoing tension between the use of L1 and L2 in English-dominant classrooms. It contributes valuable insight into pupil voice in Scotland's 1+2 policy context and demonstrates the value of innovative methodologies, such as creative prompts, in capturing learner perspectives on language learning.

6.1.8 The integration of content and language in CLIL: a challenge for content-driven and language-driven teachers

This article looks at the challenge of achieving a balance between language and content in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) instruction. Villabona and Cenoz (2022) examine the implementation of CLIL to develop English skills and multilingualism in Spain's Basque Autonomous Community. The article compares the experience of a content specialist teaching anatomy through English with the experience of a language specialist teaching media studies through the medium of English.

The research finds that both teachers interpret CLIL and implement it in their classrooms differently. The content specialist delivered the lessons through the medium of English and did not focus on language development. On the other hand, English was used as both the language

of instruction and the output with a focus on language skill development and feedback embedded into classroom practice. The variability in approach was attributed to each teacher's professional background and training. The anatomy classes were teacher-led and content-driven, whereas the media studies classes task-orientated and collaborative.

The research highlights a systemic structural problem with CLIL. Teachers who are content-driven are usually not trained in language pedagogies and language specialists prioritise linguistic development. The two approaches may impact the effectiveness of CLIL goals. The authors suggest that targeted professional training should combine how content and language goals to maximise the impact of the intervention by raising teacher awareness.

This reiterates the importance of investing in high-quality teacher training as well as a collaborative approach in order to develop teacher confidence in linking subject knowledge and language learning.

6.1.9 CLIL and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Learning (CALL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) can enhance language learning in school systems (Scott and Beadle, [2014](#)). Drawn from 57 research pieces and peer learning activities involving experts, both CALL and CLIL approaches were shown to enhance learning outcomes when carefully planned and with teacher expertise.

CLIL had a positive impact on pupils' receptive ability (listening and reading), vocabulary, fluency, and confidence over more traditional language teaching. Large-scale studies in Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain showed that results of CLIL were significantly higher in English compared to the control groups.

A key finding was that CLIL does not negatively impact progress in a subject, but can enhance motivation, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness of pupils. Evidence from the study shows that younger learners benefit when exposed to CLIL early on, even though older learners tend to have quicker initial gains due to their cognitive maturity. The report also suggests that the outcomes can vary in terms of language development. The use of CLIL can improve technical vocabulary and comprehension but can have a lesser impact on syntax, informal usage, and pronunciation.

The CALL approach involves the use of technology, for example web-based multimedia materials, computer-assisted pronunciation training, intelligent tutor systems, and gamification of learning. The review determined that CALL accelerates progress in some skills such as pronunciation, learning vocabulary, and fluency in speaking, while reducing anxiety through environments which are pupil-centred and judgement-free. Online platforms provide children and young people greater access to authentic material and intercultural contacts, for example online exchanges. The research indicated that the evidence based for CALL was less extensive when compared to CLIL, as many of the studies small-scale or short-term.

Each approach places particular demands on teacher expertise. In CLIL settings, teachers require knowledge of language teaching alongside subject-specific pedagogy. The reports suggests that this can be developed through ITE, ongoing professional development and collaboration. For CALL to be successful, there needs to be enough ICT infrastructure, teacher training in digital

pedagogies and sharing of resources. Both approaches need to be supported by national guidance, curriculum frameworks and effective school leadership.

The report found that integrated language learning approaches can support attainment, learner motivation and intercultural understanding without weakening subject content. It also highlights the practical conditions needed to sustain this work, including professional learning for teachers, confidence in digital approaches and greater flexibility within curriculum planning.

6.1.10 Target language use in Modern Language classrooms: Perception and change among newly qualified teachers in Scotland (Lynch, 2015)

Lynch (2015) investigates how newly qualified modern foreign language teachers (NQTs) in Scotland perceive and use the target language (L2) in secondary classrooms, and how their use changes early in their careers. Drawing on questionnaires for MFL teachers, interviews with student teachers at their final training year and after their first year, plus classroom recordings, he finds that NQTs use significantly less L2 in their first year than during their training.

Certain aspects of classroom practice were identified as more difficult to manage fully through the target language, particularly behaviour management, grammar explanations, detailed instructions and informal social interaction. The study found that patterns of target language use often changed once teachers moved into full-time classroom practice. Teachers' use of the target language was influenced by a number of factors, including mentor influence, school culture and the day-to-day demands of managing lessons.

Lynch argues that ITE and professional learning should place greater emphasis on supporting teachers to use target language in everyday classroom settings. This includes support that helps teachers connect professional knowledge with the realities of day-to-day teaching. He also suggests collaboration between teacher educators, quality-improvement bodies and practising teachers to enable practical strategies.

6.1.11 Theory and practice reflected in interaction in the Scottish Modern Languages classroom: four early career Modern Languages teachers' ideal-selves stories (Valdera-Gil, 2020)

Valdera-Gil (2020) highlights the central role of target language use in communicative language teaching. He draws on interactionist second language acquisition theory to argue that learning happens through interaction, making target language use crucial for providing input, negotiating meaning, and enabling feedback and output.

He introduces the idea of “ping-pong interaction” to describe dynamic exchanges between teachers and learners, showing how the target language mediates real classroom communication. However, he also emphasises that its implementation is shaped by contextual factors. Institutional policies, assessment practices, and curriculum alignment can either support or constrain teachers' use of the target language.

Teachers' sense of professional agency also affects how much and how confidently they use the target language in the classroom. Valdera-Gil argues that target language use is most effective when it is combined with feedback, attention to language form and integrated skills work rather than treated as a fixed rule within classroom practice. He also suggests that target language

use should be linked more closely to assessment for learning approaches so that teaching and assessment remain aligned.

6.2 Benefits associated with language learning and bilingualism

This section summarises some of the key research around the additional benefits of language learning in terms of cognitive benefits and wider academic outcomes. It is intended to provide some context for the CIC as part of a review of the wider purpose and positive effects of language learning as part of the curriculum.

6.2.1 Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning

Recent research into the cognitive benefits of bilingualism has expanded beyond executive function to include literacy, health, creativity, social and affective cognition, and intercultural understanding. This broader perspective includes both spoken and signed languages and considers how multilingualism contributes to cognition and social development.

The project combined a systematic literature review and meta-analysis with an exploration of public attitudes and stakeholder interviews. This approach enabled an assessment not only of research evidence but also of its implications for practice and policy. Engagement with teachers, learners, employers, policy makers and the public highlighted the importance of translating research into practical action.

The evidence in the report includes peer-reviewed UK and international studies, as well as literature relevant to UK policy and practice. Research on bilingualism normally focusses on executive functions, but the report shows that findings in this area are inconsistent and complex. However, emerging evidence indicates that language learning supports creativity, empathy and social cognition, with growing recognition of the value of signed as well as spoken languages.

Key findings point to the need for a broader conceptualisation of cognitive benefits. The age at which language learning takes place interacts with multiple factors, making outcomes less predictable than initially assumed.

These findings reinforce the wider value of multilingualism across the curriculum. They confirm that languages are not only a means of communication but also a driver of cognitive development, creativity, and wellbeing.

6.2.2 Foreign language learning and its impact on wider academic outcomes, Education Endowment Foundation (2022)

The Education Endowment Foundation ([EEF](#)) conducted a rapid evidence assessment to look at the impact of MFL teaching on wider academic outcomes. The review aimed to inform educational policy and practice and identify areas for future research.

The EEF also funded a large-scale randomised controlled trial of a structured French curriculum in primary schools that was integrated with English literacy activities. The intervention was designed to enhance attainment in English through an approach linked to foreign languages. The findings showed that there was no measurable improvement in English compared with typical language teaching. There was some indication that pupils eligible for free school meals made slightly less progress in English, but confidence in this result was very low due to high attrition rates and variation in delivery.

The evidence provides limited support for claims that language learning leads directly to wider academic gains in other areas of learning. The findings suggest that further research is needed, particularly studies involving longer-term interventions, before firmer conclusions can be reached.

6.3 The place of languages in the curriculum

This section summarises some of the key research undertaken in Scotland looking at the impact of curriculum changes since the introduction of CfE and the subsequent effects of these on uptake for SQA national qualifications in modern languages. It is intended to provide some context for the CIC to review the place of languages in the curriculum, given the continuing decrease in pupils studying languages in the senior phase.

6.3.1 Exploring curriculum making in Scottish secondary schools: trends and effects (Shapira et al, 2023)

A [2023](#) article published in Scottish Affairs examines the experiences of young people and teachers in secondary schools under Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Drawing on research funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the study investigates the reduction in the number of National Qualification entries in S4, a trend commonly described as “curriculum narrowing.”

Although the study focuses broadly on CfE, Shapira et al. analyse patterns across a range of subject areas, including the senior phase, the BGE, and other outcomes for learners. The research finds that while subject entries have declined overall, the degree differs between subject areas. Mathematics, sciences, English, social subjects, and expressive arts experienced decreases of around 30%, whereas modern languages and technological subjects saw greater reductions of approximately 45% and 60% respectively. Entries to compulsory and STEM-related subjects have partially recovered in recent years, but uptake in modern languages, expressive arts, social subjects, and classical languages, such as Latin and Greek, continues to fall.

The authors conclude that curriculum narrowing and fragmentation within CfE are having a negative impact on progression and attainment. They note that reduced subject choice in S4 is associated with fewer opportunities for study and with less favourable outcomes for young people after leaving school, particularly in relation to participation in higher education.

6.3.2 Narrowing the Curriculum? Contemporary trends in provision and attainment in the Scottish Curriculum (Shapira and Priestley, 2018)

Shapira and Priestley ([2018](#)) investigate trends in subject uptake, presenting findings from a preliminary analysis of Scottish Qualifications and school leavers’ attainment data to investigate trends in subject uptake. It finds evidence that the curriculum is becoming narrower with fewer subjects being taken in school year S4 and that, in the case of arts and modern languages, the decline since 2014 may well have been due to curriculum narrowing, as students abandoned low status subjects in the face of reduced choice.

Shapira and Priestley also note that the narrowing of the curriculum did not appear to have a negative impact on attainment at National 5 level. They explain that the increase in level 6 qualifications was noticeable in more deprived local authorities, indicating that the issue of curriculum narrowing is more nuanced and complex than claimed.

It is also suggested that a broader education and inclusion of subjects such as modern languages, arts and social subjects is particularly important for young people from less advantageous socio-economic backgrounds, as they often miss out on chances to develop cultural and social capital, even if they do well academically.

6.3.3 Breaking the languages barrier (Reform Scotland, 2018)

The [2018 report](#) from Reform Scotland which explores ways to improve the teaching of foreign languages in schools in Scotland. It highlights the concerns over the reductions in young people studying modern languages and looks at approaches to teaching foreign languages across Europe, comparing with practice and trends in Scotland.

The report also presents background statistics including educational examination entries, the use of non-English languages at home and extent of plurilingualism. It considers Scotland's policy for children and young people having the opportunity to learn two additional languages and the practical difficulties in achieving this.

The report provides policy recommendations aimed at improving the teaching of foreign languages in schools, including ending the distinction between community and modern languages and piloting new approaches.

6.3.4 Choice, Attainment and Positive Destinations: Exploring the impact of curriculum policy change on young people (University of Stirling, Nuffield Foundation, 2023)

This [project](#), funded by the Nuffield Foundation, explores how curriculum narrowing in secondary schools in Scotland, under CfE, is linked to socio-economic characteristics, producing robust evidence on the factors influencing curriculum decisions made by pupils and their families, teachers/schools and Local Authorities.

The report states a number of findings, including: a steeper decline in enrolments in subjects such as social subjects, expressive arts and modern languages, compared to subjects seen as core curriculum (e.g. Mathematics and English) was found.

The report asserts that the evidence produced by this project will inform curriculum policies and practices, as well as deepen understanding of how curriculum-making relates to educational attainment, early transitions of young people and other outcomes.

6.3.5 National 4 and 5s: the accidental attainment gap (Reform Scotland, 2019)

[This report](#) by Reform Scotland investigates whether an attainment gap is emerging, in the provision of National 4 and 5 qualifications, between state and independent schools. It explains that since the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence in 2014 that the maximum number of qualifications that pupils have been allowed to take in S4 in state schools has fallen (from typically eight subjects to often only six now) whereas this has not been the case in independent schools.

The report considers that although the Curriculum for Excellence was supposed to broaden pupils' education it is in fact restricting it, especially in the senior phase. It also reports that there has been a large reduction in the take up of some subjects such as modern languages and social sciences. The authors consider that every child in Scotland should be able to study the

appropriate number of subjects for their ability. The report shares the results of a Freedom of Information request made to all Scottish local authorities showing the maximum number of subjects which can be studied at National 4 and 5 levels in their schools.

6.3.6 Beyond the 1+2 Approach in Scotland's language policy landscape: implications for policy and practice for Mandarin and other languages, Hao Zhang and Andy Hancock (2024)

[This report](#) examines the implementation and impact of Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach and reported that by 2022 only around 69% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools were delivering the full entitlement to an L2. Delivery of L3 was notably weaker, particularly in primary schools.

The study identified challenges to consistent implementation. Teacher shortages, limited training opportunities and competing curricular demands were commonly referenced as constraining factors. Provision for community and heritage languages, including Mandarin, often remained at the margins of the curriculum. In many schools, these languages appeared mainly through short-term projects or lunchtime and after-school clubs rather than through regular classroom teaching.

Research in Mandarin classrooms showed that schools interpreted and delivered the 1+2 policy in quite different ways in practice. The authors link this partly to the limited pedagogical guidance available and partly to differing teacher beliefs and cultural understandings of language learning. This resulted in highly variable classroom experiences across schools and local authorities.

The authors argue that progress towards a more inclusive and effective multilingual framework will require systemic changes. These include workforce planning that addresses teacher supply, curriculum design that ensures coherence and continuity, and the development of research-informed pedagogies to support the meaningful integration of a wider range of languages, including those spoken by Scotland's increasingly diverse communities.

6.3.7 The economic value of language learning

This section summarises key research on the economic value of language learning and the projected benefits of developing a workforce with proficient language skills. Evidence consistently shows that languages skills support trade, employability and contributes to national productivity and growth. The findings here provide important context for the CIC, highlighting why it is essential that children and young people to develop the skills confidence and motivation to be successful lifelong linguists.

6.3.8 Languages in the UK: A Call for Action

A [joint statement](#) issued by four UK-wide academies (British Academy, the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and the Royal Society) in 2019 calling for a co-ordinated approach from the four UK nations to implement a national strategy for languages and engage with the coalition of organisations who stand willing to explore the steps needed. It recommends that “a joined-up approach is needed, across social, economic, and international policy, with coordination across different government departments and liaison with the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales” (2019:6).

The report recognises the importance of languages to the UK, including indigenous languages to the UK. It warns that monolingualism is increasingly unsustainable in a globalised world, describing it as “the illiteracy of the 21st century” (2019: 3), and that it has major economic, social, cultural, and research costs, highlighting the estimated £48 billion a year in lost trade and investment.

The Academies stress that there needs to be a “attitudinal change... which shifts away from a model that sees a few people as good at languages and most people as bad, towards a model of a spectrum of linguistic competence” (2019: 6) and opening opportunities for all to learn a language.

The statement emphasises the wide-ranging benefits of speaking languages other than English, for example increased economic competitiveness, cultural agility, and employability; improved research capacity; greater social cohesion; and health and cognitive advantages, including delayed onset of dementia. Languages are also presented as “facilitating subjects” (2019:7) which strengthen literacy, science, and mathematics attainment through the development of cognitive flexibility and problem-solving skills.

The statement identifies severe decline in language study in schools and universities as a concern. In England, GCSE entries have fallen from 76 percent of pupils in 2002 to under 50 percent, with disproportionate effects on disadvantaged groups and regional divides. Similar trends are evident across Wales. The Academies highlight a disconnect between mainstream education and the learning that takes place in thousands of complementary and community schools, whose contribution to the UK’s linguistic capacity often goes unrecognised.

Key proposals from the statement include widening opportunities to learn languages across all life stages; building bridges between mainstream and complementary education; protecting provision from market pressures; and embedding language learning across wider policy domains, including trade, diplomacy, and public health.

The Academies’ conclusions reinforce the case for sustained action to build on existing strategies such as Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach. They underline the importance of aligning school provision, community language learning, and workplace training to develop national capacity.

6.3.9 The Economic Value to the UK of Speaking Other Languages (2020)

A major study by RAND Europe and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council assessed the economic benefits of strengthening language education in the UK (Ayres-Bennett, Hafner, Dufresne & Yerushalmi, [2022](#)). The report builds on earlier work by Foreman-Peck and Wang ([2014](#)), which estimated annual losses of 3.5% of GDP due to the UK’s language deficit, and uses updated modelling to quantify the potential returns from expanding language provision.

The study applies model using a computable general equilibrium, similar to those used by government to assess trade agreements. It finds that a 10-percentage point increase in uptake of a language at Key Stage 3 or 4 could generate cumulative GDP gains over 30 years of between £0.6 and £0.9 billion from trade effects alone, rising to around £9-12 billion when wider human capital effects are included. In the report, four languages were modelled in detail: Arabic,

Mandarin, French, and Spanish. In all cases, the benefit-to-cost ratio was greater than 1, with conservative estimates suggesting a £2 return for every £1 spent on language education.

The report also included the wider benefits beyond trade and productivity that could not be monetised but would further strengthen the case for investment. These include literacy and cognitive development, social cohesion, soft power, diplomacy, defence, and health benefits such as delaying the onset of dementia.

Although the RAND analysis only modelled 4 languages, other languages remain of clear economic and strategic importance. Evidence cited in the report shows that using German in non-German-speaking countries has a strong positive impact on employment outcomes, often greater than for French, Spanish or Italian. Studies also demonstrate that companies investing in German language capacity are able to expand into more export markets than those without. Given that Germany is the UK's second largest trading partner and a key source of inward investment, the economic case for supporting German in schools and universities is compelling.

The report concludes that investment in language education is not only economically important, but essential for the UK to compete internationally in a multilingual world.

6.3.10 Foreign Language Skills in the Workforce

A report from the House of Lords Library ([2021](#)) highlights the UK's longstanding "language deficit", which has been identified as a barrier to trade and employability. According to Shepard, two in three Britons are unable to hold a conversation in another language other than English.

Surveys of businesses show that language skills are among the most persistent gaps. The British Chambers of Commerce finds that up to 70% of UK companies had no foreign language capacity for the markets they served. Cardiff Business School estimates the economic cost of "language ignorance" at 3.5 percent of GDP, or £48 billion annually. Firms with greater language and cultural capability were better able to secure sales and expand into new markets.

The research also shows that language skills improve employability. A Confederation of British Industry survey concludes that languages and cultural understanding are "vital" for a global economy, while data from Erasmus demonstrates that unemployment rates are significantly lower for students with experience abroad. Employers across Europe report that a quarter of jobs require advanced proficiency in a foreign language, with German, French and Russian among the most sought after. A third of employers report that they experience recruitment difficulties as applicants have insufficient language skills.

Furthermore, the report highlights the importance of languages in supporting social mobility, for example in the participation in international exchange, which broadens horizons and builds confidence. However, access to language learning in schools remains unequal, as socio-economic and regional disparities persist, with disadvantaged pupils and those outside London and the South East least likely to benefit.

The report reiterates calls from the British Academy and partners for a national languages strategy. This would include action on teacher supply, post-16 provision, outward mobility schemes, and integration of languages across policy domains.

6.3.11 Building a new public idea about language': Multilingualism and language learning in the post-Brexit UK

Copland and McPake (2022) analyse the position of languages in the UK following the UK's exit from the European Union. They argue that the UK now faces a crisis as political discourse and public perception of multilingualism and learning languages have reduced their value to trade and diplomacy, without considering the broader cultural and social benefits.

The UK's exit from the European Union has also contributed to perceptions that English alone is sufficient for international communication, reducing the perceived importance of language learning in some contexts. The research points to other studies that show a reliance on English alone limits opportunities as other countries expect communication in their own languages, particularly in trade.

Language education across the four UK nations continues to decline. The study notes the falling entries for language qualifications, a reduction in provision in schools and sharp socio-economic inequalities in access to languages are beginning to emerge. The authors stress that the narrative that languages are an important skill for trade does not motivate learners to study a language or reflect the diversity of languages spoken across the UK.

The report argues for a change in how language learning is understood and promoted publicly. Alongside employability and economic value, it places emphasis on multilingualism in relation to identity, social cohesion and cognitive development. The report also suggests that languages should be viewed as an entitlement and an opportunity for all learners rather than as an optional or elitist area of study.

The analysis reinforces the importance of Scotland's national policy for languages which values intercultural awareness and inclusion. The report warns that the UK needs to adapt a more positive view of multilingualism to avoid the negative effect on our economic, social and cultural prosperity.

6.3.12 OECD: The demand for language skills in the European labour market

This OECD working paper (2023) provides a comprehensive analysis of the demand for language skills in the European labour market. The paper draws on information on over 160 million online job advertisements across 27 EU countries and the United Kingdom in 2021. The findings show that proficiency in a language proficiency is crucial for employability and has implications for government policy in education and skills.

English appeared in 22% of vacancies across the dataset, making it the sixth most requested skill overall. The report notes that demand for English was comparable to areas such as digital skills, adaptability and teamwork. References to English were most common in management and professional occupations, where almost half of vacancies required some level of competence. In manual occupations, English appeared much less frequently and was mentioned in around one in ten roles.

German, French, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese appeared far less often, usually in around 1% to 2% of vacancies. Demand varied considerably between regions and sectors. German featured

more prominently in central European countries, border regions and sectors linked to tourism, hospitality and management. French and Spanish appeared more frequently in vacancies connected to education, trade and customer service in countries where those languages are widely used. Mandarin Chinese was linked more closely to areas of international business and commerce.

National languages also remained important across European labour markets. In Austria, Germany and France, more than 90% of vacancies were advertised in the national language, suggesting that employers expected applicants to work confidently in the language used locally. Some vacancies also referred to regional and minority languages such as Basque, Finnish and Welsh, reflecting their continued relevance within local economies and communities.

The evidence points to a more complex picture than the idea that English alone is sufficient for mobility and employment. English functions as a shared language in many international and highly skilled sectors. National and regional languages, however, continue to shape access to work across Europe.

The findings of this study suggest that education systems should continue to support the teaching of English but also ensure that young people develop proficiency in European and world languages. This will enhance young people's employability skills, but also support regional development, international trade and help Europe to stay culturally and economically resilient.

6.3.13 Language skills, the labour market, and socioeconomic integration

This review by Gazzola, Templin and Wickström ([2019](#)) looks at how language skills affect employment, income, and integration into society. It reviews existing research and includes new studies on both immigrant and non-immigrant populations in Europe and beyond.

The evidence shows that proficiency in the national or official language of the host country is strongly linked to higher earnings and better chances of employment. For immigrants, these skills are vital for the labour market and social inclusion. However, proficiency in the language alone is not enough for full integration in society, as cultural and political factors, as well as equity issues such as gender and ethnicity, also have an impact.

Studies looking at knowledge of a foreign language reach similar conclusions. People who speak other languages, particularly English and other widely used languages, are associated with higher wages and a greater chance of employment. An important finding shows that the benefits are greater for people with advanced skills and proficiency in a language, compared to those with basic or intermediate skills.

Research in Spain shows that proficiency in Spanish raises the employment prospects of immigrants by 15 to 22%. This figure increases for women. In the Netherlands, native speakers who use dialects at work earn 8 to 10% less than those who use standard Dutch. In Turkey, English skills increase women's labour market participation and earnings. In Poland, advanced proficiency in Spanish, French and Italian brings higher wage returns than English or German. Other studies highlight how knowledge of foreign languages acquired before migration supports learning the host language, and how multilingualism influences knowledge sharing in organisations.

The paper emphasises that language skills should be viewed as a form of human capital, as they improve productivity, expand social networks and serve as a signal of talent to employers. However, their economic value depends on the interaction between education policies, individual learning choices, and changes in labour market demand. While the demand for English continues to dominate, focusing only on English in education risks neglects other languages that may have higher premiums in specific sectors.

The article concludes that public policy has a significant influence on the supply of language skills, patterns of demand and access to language learning. Education systems are identified as particularly important because they shape which languages are taught and the level of proficiency learners are expected to reach. The article also argues that more detailed data and further research are needed to understand longer-term patterns of language demand, particularly in relation to less widely taught languages.

6.3.14 Are people who speak foreign languages at an advantage in the labour market? An analysis of British Cohort Study data.

The UK continues to have some of the lowest levels of proficiency in foreign languages in Europe. [The report](#) highlights the global dominance of English, and many people and employers underestimate the value of other languages. Another point raised in the report is that access to learning a language is dependent on a range of factors, including gender, type of school and socio-economic factors

Employer surveys often highlight that the lack of proficiency in languages is an issue. In the CBI/Pearson 2013 survey, almost two thirds of employers were dissatisfied with the poor language skills of school and college leavers, and more than half expressed dissatisfaction with the language skills of university graduates. The UKCES Employer Skills Survey the same year highlighted shortages across all levels of jobs, not only in higher-status professions.

Evidence from the United States suggests that even modest proficiency in another language can have a positive impact on salary; however, the picture in the UK is more mixed.

Some European studies show that workers who speak a second language at work earn significantly more, but this data is weaker or absent in UK studies.

Research for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has found that language degrees often do not translate into higher wages compared to other degree programmes. The British Cohort study tracks over 17,000 people born in 1970. An analysis by Morris, Kashefpakdel and Mann (2014) of this study finds little evidence that better earnings, employment opportunities and job satisfaction are linked to having a formal qualification in languages at age 29, once other factors such as ability and social class are taken into account. The study shows that some linguists have better outcomes, but these are linked to wider advantages rather than the study of a language.

This contradicts employer surveys as many organisations say they need more people with proficiency in another language. Possible reasons for this could be a cycle of low demand and low supply of workers who speak other languages, employer reliance on recruiting workers with

language skills from abroad rather than training UK staff, the belief that English is enough for global trade and misperceptions of the value of language degrees.

The findings highlight the complex relationship between language learning and the labour market in the UK. Employer surveys continue to point towards demand for language skills, yet the benefits for individuals are often less visible or more difficult to measure. The study suggests that this may reflect wider issues within education and employment systems. It also argues that more recent data and further research are needed to understand more clearly how language skills influence career pathways and employment within the current economy.

6.4 Latin and classical studies

This section summarises some of the key research undertaken into Latin and classical studies. It is intended to provide some context for the CIC as part of a review of the importance of Latin's place in the curriculum.

6.4.1 Ancient languages in UK schools: current realities and future possibilities.

Holmes-Henderson, Hunt and Imrie (2024) provide an overview of the policy landscape for ancient languages across the UK. According to the report, Latin is now the fourth most commonly taught language primary schools in England. This position was strengthened by the 2013 National Curriculum, which gave classical languages parity of esteem with modern languages at Key Stage 2. The Latin Excellence Programme, launched in 2022 with £4m of government funding, aims to widen access to classical languages in more than 40 state schools.

However, some challenges persist despite the additional funding to support access to classical languages, for example access remains geographically uneven, with “cold spots” in the East Midlands and Northeast of England. The number of students taking Greek at GCSE and A Level continues to decline. Recruitment of teachers is also a contributing factor, with only around 70 teachers trained each year despite an increase in vacancies. The supply of teachers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is particularly fragile as there are no initial teacher education routes for Latin or Classical Studies currently available.

The report also highlights the precarious position of Latin in Scotland. Latin is currently only recognised within the 1+2 languages policy only as an L3, and although SQA still offers National 3 to Advanced Higher qualifications in Latin, most candidates come from independent schools. There is no longer provision for Ancient Greek. As there is currently no ITE provision for classical studies or languages, there is limited scope for expansion within the system. Nevertheless, Education Scotland has expressed continued support for Latin and its teachers, creating an opportunity for alignment with wider curriculum reform.

Holmes-Henderson, Hunt and Imrie recommend investment in ITE, professional development, and curriculum design to support provision in the Scottish education system. They call for the reinstatement of a Scottish route to full Classics teacher registration, stronger cross-sector collaboration, and closer integration of ancient languages into national language strategies.

6.4.2 Latin Challenges: Perceptions, Policy and Curriculum for Excellence. Barriers to Teaching Latin in Scottish Schools.

Since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence and the 1+2 languages policy Latin has faced challenges in Scottish schools. According to the report, there has been a steep fall in numbers of candidates sitting NQs in Latin, with entries at Higher falling by 43% between 2019 and 2024. This decline has been most evident in state schools, where the entries dropped by over two-thirds, while independent schools saw a smaller decline. On the other hand, entries for classical studies have grown significantly, with National 5 entries increasing by over 350% during the same period.

There are also several key challenges identified in the article. Many consider Latin to be elitist and a subject associate with private education and high academic demand. These perceptions discourage schools from offering the subject. There are also structural barriers, such as no ITE programmes for classics. This has an impact on the supply of teachers and there are few pathways for training teachers. O'Reilly (2004) also suggests that there is confusion in the current policy documentation: Scottish Government recognises Latin as an L3 option, but Education Scotland materials emphasise modern languages, leaving Latin's position unclear.

The narrowing of subject choice and an expanding curriculum in S3-S4 under Curriculum for Excellence further reduces opportunities for pupils to opt for Latin, which is often treated as marginal. Gaelic and Mandarin have benefitted from strong political and financial support as heritage and economic languages, while Latin has struggled to make the case for relevance.

However, the study also highlights some opportunities. Latin can support literacy across the curriculum, particularly for learners with ASN or those who have barriers in modern languages due to the focus on talking and listening. Resources such as Suburani and the Cambridge Latin Course provide more inclusive approaches and have expanded access to classical studies. There are also strong teacher support networks which are supported by organisations such as Classics for All. The Curriculum Improvement Cycle and reform of NQs offer an opportunity to refresh and redesign the curriculum for Latin to strengthen the wider cultural and educational value of the subject. Stronger clarity in policy could help Latin be regarded as a viable L3 in the BGE.

6.4.3 The Impact of Learning Latin on School Pupils

Bracke and Bradshaw (2017) reviewed a century of research, primarily from the United States, on the educational impact of Latin. The evidence draws on research involving more than 17,000 pupils and focuses on three main areas: literacy in English, learning in modern foreign languages and possible wider cognitive effects.

Most of the evidence in the review relates to literacy. Several studies published between the 1960s and 1980s reported improvements in vocabulary, reading and comprehension among pupils studying Latin. In a number of cases, attainment was higher than in comparable groups who had not studied the subject. In some cases this was equivalent to an additional year of progress. The benefits appeared especially significant in primary schools and in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. There is also some evidence that Latin supports learners with

additional needs, since its approach to grammar and vocabulary can help to build confidence in literacy in a structured way.

Evidence that Latin supports the learning of modern foreign languages is much weaker. Although Latin is historically linked to Romance and Germanic languages, studies do not demonstrate consistent advantages for Latin learners. In one European study, German pupils with prior knowledge of French were better prepared for Spanish than those with prior knowledge of Latin.

The review found limited evidence to support claims about cognitive benefits such as improved mathematical reasoning or problem solving. Some studies did report positive outcomes, although these were more commonly linked to innovative teaching approaches. More traditional grammar-translation methods were associated with weaker results.

The authors argue that Latin can support literacy development, particularly where teaching approaches are engaging and accessible to a wide range of learners. They also acknowledge limitations within the evidence base. Much of the available research is relatively old and several studies rely on methods that would now be considered limited. The article points to the need for more contemporary research into the place of Latin within modern classrooms.

In the Scottish context, the findings suggest that Latin may have value in supporting literacy, particularly in primary schools and in areas affected by deprivation. The article also cautions against promoting Latin through claims about cognitive transfer that remain difficult to substantiate. Greater emphasis is placed on literacy, classroom practice and ensuring that access to Latin is not limited to particular groups of learners.

6.4.4 Ancient Languages in Primary Schools in England: A Literature Review

A Department for Education literature review, conducted by Holmes-Henderson and Kelly (2022) examined the teaching of Latin and Ancient Greek at Key Stage 2. [The review](#) framed in the context of the changes to the National Curriculum in England, which gave ancient languages statutory parity with modern languages. Following the curriculum changes, the review analyses international and UK evidence on ancient languages, provision in schools, and the role of organisations in supporting this provision.

The research base on ancient languages is limited. Many of the international studies, which come from the United States, suggest that Latin can support literacy in English, including vocabulary growth and comprehension. However, much of the literature available is dated and raises the question if it is still applicable. In the UK, projects, such as Classics in Communities and The Latin Programme, provide more up-to-date findings. The projects suggested that Latin could be beneficial for pupils with SEN, EAL and those eligible for the Pupil Premium. Case studies linked participation in Latin programmes to improvements in literacy, confidence and cultural awareness. Some schools also reported wider benefits across areas such as history, science and citizenship.

Provision of ancient languages in schools remains uneven across England. National patterns are difficult to track accurately because reporting is inconsistent and comprehensive data is limited. Recent estimates suggest that Latin is taught in between 5% and 10% of primary schools, whereas Ancient Greek is available in only a small number of settings. Support for delivery often

comes from educational charities, particularly through training, classroom resources and assistance for non-specialist teachers.

The report also refers to several ongoing barriers to wider provision. Limited curriculum time and shortages of trained staff continue to affect delivery. Access also varies considerably between schools, and perceptions of the subject as elitist remain influential in some contexts.

Latin has statutory recognition within the curriculum, but uptake remains relatively low. The study points to several reasons for this, including limited resources and continuing perceptions that ancient languages are elitist or not intended for all learners.

The review recommends targeted investment in teacher training, more robust systems for monitoring provision and further research into impact, particularly in relation to Ancient Greek. It also demonstrates the need for positive messaging to shift perceptions of ancient languages as elitist and to emphasise their contribution to literacy and cultural education.

6.5 Generic international reports

6.5.1 Programme for International Student Assessment

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

6.5.2 Unlocking High-Quality Teaching | OECD

In an era of rapid change, it is important to not lose sight of the potential of high-quality teaching and the power of refining teaching practices that have demonstrated impact. This report aims to deepen understanding of the complexities of teaching and its multifaceted nature as a discipline grounded in scientific research, but so too an art requiring creativity and a craft necessitating constant collaborative reflection and improvement.

7 Future Trends

Consideration of future trends is an important element of the evidence paper, as the Curriculum Improvement Cycle is intended to co-create a curriculum that looks forward as well as reflecting current needs. While it is not possible to predict the future with certainty, there is a growing body of international and national evidence that highlights emerging patterns likely to shape education. These trends are reported in publications by the OECD, United Nations, think tanks, academics and government agencies, and they provide a useful indication of the challenges and opportunities that Scotland's education system may need to address.

7.1 Global challenges

A number of common challenges are highlighted across reports. Rising global conflict, climate change, biodiversity loss and food insecurity are identified as issues of increasing concern (Patton et al., 2016; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD, 2025a/b). Health and wellbeing pressures are becoming more significant, particularly the rise in mental health difficulties and obesity among young people (Patton et al., 2016; OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024). Demographic change, especially ageing populations, is expected to reshape labour markets and society more broadly (Scottish Government, 2025; PWC, 2024).

Technological disruption is advancing rapidly, particularly through artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. These developments bring opportunities but also the risk of increased polarisation (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; OECD, 2025a). Inequalities are widening, including the concentration of wealth, health inequalities and social instability (Patton et al., 2016; OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024). Rising costs of living add further pressures for households (World Economic Forum, 2025).

These challenges are likely to affect children and young people differently from older generations. They will live with the consequences for longer and are already increasingly exposed to conflict, displacement, environmental degradation and unregulated commercial activity in digital and food environments. Many will grow up under the continuing effects of climate change (Patton et al., 2016). At the same time, young people are often the earliest adopters of new technologies and are at the forefront of societal transformation. The impacts will also vary across equalities groups, with intersecting disadvantage reducing resilience and increasing the likelihood that inequalities will deepen further (Scottish Government, 2025).

7.2 Opportunities for a future-oriented curriculum

Despite the scale of these challenges, there are also opportunities for education systems to adapt. Future-oriented curricula are expected to be more flexible, personalised and responsive, supporting learners to meet sustainability goals and adapt to uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024).

Evidence highlights a number of opportunities for the development of a future-oriented curriculum. Strengthening learner agency and co-agency is central, enabling children and young people to take greater ownership of their learning and to develop the skills needed to navigate uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Patton et al., 2016). Education can also be positioned as a driver for sustainability

by equipping individuals and communities with the knowledge and confidence to understand environmental challenges and to act responsibly (OECD, 2025b).

Wellbeing and resilience are identified as priorities, with socio-emotional learning, digital wellbeing and health literacy seen as essential for all age groups (OECD, 2025a; Patton et al., 2016). Alongside this, the development of transformative competencies is emphasised, focusing on attitudes, values and problem-solving abilities that enable learners to create value, address dilemmas and take responsibility for their choices (OECD, 2020).

Future skills are also highlighted, particularly in relation to artificial intelligence, big data, analytical and creative thinking, technological literacy, resilience, adaptability and green skills (OECD, 2025b; WEF, 2025). These need to be balanced with human-centred skills such as leadership, social influence, curiosity, lifelong learning, systems thinking and self-awareness, which will remain vital as technological change accelerates (WEF, 2025).

Finally, opportunities lie in embedding equity and inclusion at the heart of curriculum design, ensuring that widening inequalities are addressed, intercultural understanding is promoted and all learners can access meaningful opportunities (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025a). A broader vision of educational goals is also identified, with education positioned not only as a route to attainment and economic productivity but also as a means of promoting wellbeing, sustainability and social cohesion (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024).

7.3 The contribution of the languages curriculum to future trends

The languages curriculum can make an important contribution to preparing young people for future life and work. Learning additional languages helps learners communicate in different situations, engage with people from different backgrounds and participate more confidently in an internationally connected world. It also supports collaboration and intercultural understanding through regular engagement with different perspectives, cultures and communities.

Language learning can also contribute to sustainability education. Engaging with different cultures and viewpoints helps learners develop a better understanding of international issues and the importance of working together. Through this, learners can develop empathy and a greater awareness of how local and global issues are connected.

Language learning can also support socio-emotional development. Regular opportunities to use another language in meaningful contexts can help learners build confidence and become more comfortable communicating in unfamiliar situations. Languages also create opportunities for learners to engage critically with digital media and technology, including content linked to health and wellbeing.

Languages can also support the development of wider competencies associated with future learning and work. Through engagement with different cultures and forms of communication, learners encounter new perspectives and consider issues from different viewpoints. Language learning also creates opportunities to develop skills such as creativity, analytical thinking, flexibility and digital literacy, particularly where digital tools and real-world contexts are integrated into learning.

Languages also continue to promote human-centred skills. Leadership, collaboration, empathy and curiosity are developed through interactive and cooperative learning activities. The study of languages can support lifelong learning by helping learners transfer skills and strategies, draw on prior knowledge and respond to new challenges.

The curriculum also supports inclusion and equity through engagement with different languages, cultures and experiences. It gives learners opportunities to encounter a variety of viewpoints and helps ensure that the languages and cultural backgrounds represented within schools are recognised and valued.

Within a wider educational focus on wellbeing, sustainability and social cohesion, language learning can help prepare young people for life after school and to be part of a diverse global society.

7.4 Implications for the CIC

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle provides the mechanism to align the Scottish curriculum with future demands and to co-create a curriculum that is both forward-looking and grounded in the principles of equity and inclusion.

The evidence points to a global shift towards education systems that are more adaptive, inclusive and future-focused. For languages, this means strengthening learner agency through practical communication skills, intercultural understanding and engagement with global challenges such as sustainability. These priorities align closely with the aims of Scotland's Curriculum Improvement Cycle, which seeks to co-create a curriculum that reflects learners' experiences and equips them to navigate an increasingly interconnected world.

8 Points To Consider

This paper provides an evidence-based approach to curriculum improvement, drawing on a range of sources produced by various stakeholders, including the opinions of children and young people. The paper supports the identification of areas of strengths and areas for improvement within the existing technical framework and will inform the work of the CIC for languages. The evidence in this paper identifies a number of key points that the CIC should take into account when developing the new technical framework.

Although there has been progress made in embedding language learning across schools in Scotland, there are still inconsistencies in children's and young people's learning experiences and provision in schools.

Evidence shows that the 1+2 Approach has established a framework for entitlement to learning languages in schools. However, evidence from HMI inspection reports, the Scottish Government 1+2 survey and surveys from teachers highlight variability in provision and learning experiences for children and young people across schools and local authorities. In many primary schools, almost all children get access to an L2. In secondary schools, continuity between Primary 7 and S1, and from the broad general education into the senior phase, continues to be inconsistent. A growing number of secondary schools allow young people to opt out of languages before S3, which is not in line with the 1+2 Approach. Addressing these transition points will be key to ensuring that language learning is continuous and consistent from Primary 1 until the end of the BGE. This will in turn improve progression and pathways into the senior phase.

Research in this paper shows that speaking a language is an important skill that can positively contribute to other parts of the curriculum. They are shown to help learners develop new ways of thinking, support literacy and help build intercultural awareness. This is reinforced by SDS's meta-skills framework. A strong rationale for languages should be created to challenge the perception of languages in the curriculum. This will help young people develop the skills for the future.

The Scottish Languages Act (2025) recognises both Gaelic and Scots as official languages of Scotland and places statutory obligations on public bodies, including schools, to promote and support their use. The Act represents a significant step in positioning Scotland's indigenous languages on an equal footing with other modern and classical languages. The CIC will consider how Gaelic and Scots are represented within the refreshed technical framework to ensure equity.

Gaelic (Learners) has a place within the languages curriculum. The provision of Gaelic (Learners) has expanded in recent years and is also supported by the National Gaelic Language Plan (2023-2028). The plan sets out ambitions of widening access to learners, increasing the supply of teachers, and increasing uptake in secondary schools. Gaelic (Learners) courses offer valuable opportunities for learners to engage with Scotland's linguistic and cultural heritage, promoting inclusivity and national identity. The 1+2 Approach currently supports a 5-18 curriculum and the CIC will reflect the context of Gaelic (Learners) as a 3-18 curriculum. This will ensure pathways for Gaelic across all stages of education.

Latin also contributes an important dimension to Scotland's curriculum by offering learners a unique insight into classical civilisation, etymology, and the historical foundations of European

languages. Research shows that Latin supports the development of literacy skills. However, Latin faces some challenges in terms of sustainability and access. At present, it typically exists as an L3 option and only from Third level onwards, despite qualifications being available from National 3 to Advanced Higher. The absence of ITE pathways for new Latin teachers in Scotland further limits provision and opportunities for expansion.

Community and heritage languages, as well as British Sign Language and Scots are also taught in schools as an L3. The CIC provides an opportunity for the technical framework to reflect Scotland's linguistic diversity.

Teachers would like a greater degree of consistency and support. Evidence from the Curriculum Improvement Cycle pilot reviews and PT engagement sessions highlights a need for clearer national guidance, exemplification, and a shared understanding of what progression looks like across the four skills in languages. This may include the development of grammar grids, exemplars, and assessment banks to ensure a greater consistency in learners' experiences by supporting teachers' understanding of national standards.

Data from the SFC show that the recruitment of students for ITE programmes for modern languages and Gaelic (Learners) has been at around 40% of the target for the 3 years leading up to the 2024/25 session. Modern languages and Gaelic are also included in the Teaching Bursary in Scotland scheme. Some local authorities report challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff in the subject and a significant proportion of the teacher workforce is only qualified in one language.

Engagement with children and young people has highlighted that they value practical communication and would like to develop the skills to use language in real-life contexts. There could also be an increased focus on communication, promoting regular use of the target language in classrooms to support the aspirations of children and young people. This would help learners to increase their confidence in communicating in a language other than their own and motivate them to continue studying and learning languages beyond the BGE.

There is limited research into languages in a Scottish context. This can limit the evaluation of the impact of policy with robust local evidence. The evidence base internationally is richer. Strengthening research would support tailoring the curriculum to the needs of the Scottish system and help to provide high-quality CLPL to support teachers in delivering engaging learning experiences for learners. Practitioners could also be encouraged to develop the research base through practitioner enquiry and could be supported by the new Centre for Teaching Excellence.

Languages play an important role in the workforce. Many employers report that there is a lack of proficient linguists to meet the demand, particularly after the UK's exit from the European Union. Multilingualism contributes to Scotland's and the UK's economy in a range of sectors, including export growth, tourism, diplomacy and innovation. The most sought-after languages are German, French, Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic in sectors such as energy, food and drink, finance, and engineering. Building a workforce with strong linguistic and intercultural skills is essential to Scotland's future prosperity and global competitiveness.

This evidence paper shows that the next iteration of the technical framework for languages should prioritise progression and sustainability through clear national guidance and national progression framework that supports coherence from P1 to pathways beyond school.

The CIC provides an opportunity to emphasise the strategic importance of languages to our children and young people, our society, and the economy. By creating a future-orientated curriculum, we can prepare learners with the skills they need to succeed in a multicultural and multilingual world.

9 Declaration

The content of this document was written by the author, exercising full professional judgement. Education Scotland approved AI tools were used to support review, clarity, and quality assurance. Education Scotland staff retain full responsibility and have reviewed and approved all content.

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Annex A Abbreviation List

The following list provides the full form of abbreviations used throughout this evidence paper. It is included for ease of reference.

ASN	Additional Support Needs
BGE	Broad General Education
BSL	British Sign Language
CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CCEA	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CIC	Curriculum Improvement Cycle
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLTA	Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
DPR	Data, Performance and Research
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EEF	Education Endowment Fund
EIS	Educational Institute of Scotland
ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
Es and Os	Experiences and Outcomes
GME	Gaelic Medium Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
HMIE	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KS2	Key Stage 2
L1	First Language/Mother tongue
L2	First Additional Language
L3	Second Additional Language
LANGS	Local Authority Network Group Scotland
MLLW	Modern Languages for Life and Work
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NQ	National Qualification
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PT	Principal Teacher
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers

QS	Qualifications Scotland
SALT	Scottish Association for Language Teaching
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SCILT	Scotland's National Centre for Languages
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SIF	Summarised Inspection Findings
SLA	Scots Language Award
SSAS	Scottish Social Attitudes Survey
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SSTA	Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
UCU	University and College Union
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VSF	Verification Summary Reports
WEF	World Economic Forum
WME	Welsh Medium Education

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