



# Languages recruitment, transition & motivation: where are we now?

Angela Gallagher-Brett  
Routes into Languages  
LLAS Centre, University of Southampton  
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# Recruitment in languages: where are we now?

## GCSE - decline since early 2000s

- 2001 - 78% of cohort sat GCSE
  - 2011 - 40%
  - 2012 - 41%
  - 2013 - 48%
- Recent uptake linked to EBacc
  - Significant gender divide (especially in French & Spanish)
    - 2013 - 56% girls; 44% boys
  - Higher participation rates in independent schools than in state schools
  - Very low progression rate from GCSE to A-level:
    - French - 13%
    - German - 12%
    - Spanish - 19%

Sources: Board & Tinsley (2014) *Language Trends 2013-14* [http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/language\\_trends\\_survey-2014.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/language_trends_survey-2014.pdf)

Department for Education (2012) *Subject progression from GCSE to AS level and continuation to A level.*



# Recruitment in languages: where are we now?

## A-level

- Overall decline of 31% between 1996 & 2013
- Increases in Spanish and ‘other languages’ not enough to mask huge drop in French & German
- Gender divide greater than at GCSE
  - 2013 - 64% female; 36% male
- Relatively high proportion of entries come from independent schools
- Disproportionately high number of entries come from London
- Overall decline at A-level against backdrop of increasing A-level entries (decline in market share)

Sources: Board & Tinsley (2014) *Language Trends 2013-14* <http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/language-trends-survey-2014.pdf>



# Recruitment in languages: where are we?

## University

- Since late 1990s - 40% drop in in universities offering language degrees
- Student numbers - 1992-2004 - decline
- 2004-2011 small increases each year
- 2012 - 14% fall - introduction of £9K tuition fees
- 2013 - 1% fall

# Recruitment in languages: where are we?

## University

2013 UCAS end of cycle report	% of independent school students
All subjects	9.58%
Eastern, Asiatic, African, American & Australian languages, literatures & related studies	22.19%
European languages, literatures & related studies	28.34%

- Healthy growth in non-specialist language study -
- 2013-14 - 53,971 approx. - Spanish most popular

Sources: UCAS 2013 Application Cycle: End of Cycle Report <http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf>  
UCML-AULC survey of institution-wide language provision in universities in the UK 2013-14 <http://www.ucml.ac.uk/languages/education/he-languages>



# A 'climate of negativity'\*

- Low levels of linguistic competence -
  - EC 2012 survey - 9% of English 15 year olds competent in FL beyond basic compared with 42% of Europeans
- Perception that MFLs are not valued in society
- Hostile social / political context
- Severe marking at GCSE and A-level
- Languages seen as difficult
- English is enough
- Need to 'promote a clear and compelling identity'\*\*

## Sources:

\*McPake et al, 1999: xi - *Foreign languages in the upper secondary school: A study of the causes of decline*

Board & Tinsley (2014) *Language Trends 2013-14* <http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/language-trends-survey-2014.pdf>

\*\* Worton 2009: 36 *Review of Modern Foreign Languages provision in Higher Education in England*

Coleman 2009 Why the British do not learn languages: myths & motivation in the UK. *Language Learning Journal*, 37(1).



# Challenges in the transition to university in languages

- Lots of concern in universities about transition over a long period - not just in MFLs
- What academics complain about:
  - Grammar
  - Reading
  - Independent learning
- What students say
  - Independent learning =biggest change
  - Quantity of reading is challenging

Sources: Gallagher-Brett & Canning 2011 Disciplinary disjunctures in the transition from secondary school to higher education studies of modern languages: A case study from the UK. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 10 (2).



# Challenges in the transition to university in languages

- Need to keep a sense of perspective - our students are good & have good completion rates
- Lack of understanding /awareness of curricula on both sides - in universities & in schools
- University staff and incoming students have different expectations of the discipline
- Students motivated by fluency - will be interested in language acquisition and not necessarily in 'content' courses - culture, history, literature
- Effects of rise of mixed A-levels - not well understood

Sources: Gallagher-Brett & Canning 2011 Disciplinary disjunctures in the transition from secondary school to higher education study of modern languages: A case study from the UK. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 10 (2).





# On the positive side...

- Languages designated as ‘strategically important and vulnerable subjects’ in English HE by HEFCE in 2005
  - Funding attached, e.g. Routes into Languages
- Reports/research in recent years showing the value of language skills:
  - British Academy 2014 *Lost for words: the need for languages in UK diplomacy and security.*
  - British Academy - Tinsley - 2013 *Languages: the state of the nation. Demand and supply of language skills in the UK.*
  - Confederation of British Industry & Pearson Education 2013 *Changing the pace: education and skills survey 2013.*
  - British Chambers of Commerce 2012 *Exporting is good for Britain - Skills.*



# Why students do not choose languages: what we know

Research points to the following reasons for not doing languages:

- Lack of enjoyment
- Lack of perceived usefulness of languages
- Difficulty - negative perceptions of competence
- Anxiety - lack of confidence in speaking - even among high achievers
- Preferences for other subjects

Sources: Watts 2003 *Decline in the take-up of Modern Foreign Languages at degree level*

Graham 2002 Experiences of learning French: a snapshot at years 11,12 & 13, *Language Learning Journal*, 25.

Fisher 2001 MFL Recruitment post-16: the pupils' perspective, *Language Learning Journal* 23.

Lord & Jones 2006 *Pupils' Experiences and Perspectives of the National Curriculum & Assessment*



# Why students do not choose languages: What learners say:

*“I do not like French. It is mind-numbingly boring and I’m English. I don’t get them. You get me” (year 9 boy)*

*“It causes me too much stress and I don’t enjoy it” (year 11 girl)*

*“It’s boring and won’t help me in future” (year 8 girl)*

*“I don’t like learning languages. I don’t understand it” (year 9 girl)*

*“I get quite scared if I know I’m going to get something wrong but if someone else can do it, I kind of just feel like I can’t do the same sort of things as what they can do. It’s just really nerving” (year 8 girl)*

Sources: *Routes into Languages Event Evaluations 2011-12*

[https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/default/files/routes\\_event\\_evaluations\\_2011-2012\\_england\\_0.pdf](https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/default/files/routes_event_evaluations_2011-2012_england_0.pdf)

Gallagher-Brett 2010 ‘Cool’ but ‘nerve-wracking’? An exploration of language learners’ motivational perspectives on speaking in an English secondary school. PhD thesis, University of Southampton



# Why students choose languages: what we know

Research indicates that choosing to study languages is associated with:

- Enjoyment
- Perceived usefulness e.g. for employability
- Perceptions of competence / ability
- Desire for fluency
- Interest in culture (advanced learners)

Sources: Graham 2002 Experiences of learning French: a snapshot at years 11,12 & 13, *Language Learning Journal*, 25.

Fisher 2001 MFL Recruitment post-16: the pupils' perspective, *Language Learning Journal* 23.

*Routes into Languages first-year undergraduate survey in England and Wales: students' prior engagement with languages outreach and enrichment activities 2012*

[https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/default/files/1st\\_year\\_ug\\_survey\\_2011\\_report\\_england\\_and\\_wales\\_final.pdf](https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/default/files/1st_year_ug_survey_2011_report_england_and_wales_final.pdf) &

Gallagher-Brett 2004 *700 reasons for studying languages* [https://www.llas.ac.uk//resourcedownloads/6063/700\\_reasons.pdf](https://www.llas.ac.uk//resourcedownloads/6063/700_reasons.pdf)



# Why students choose languages: what learners say

*“Learning languages is really fun” (year 9 boy)*

*“I enjoy it and will continue throughout my life” (year 9 girl)*

*“I love German - it is legendary” (year 9 boy)*

*“Es ist sehr gut” (year 11 girl)*

*“I have a passion for the Spanish language” (East Midlands undergraduate)*

*“Always wanted to, love French (NE undergraduate)*

*“It will help my employability when I graduate” (SW undergraduate)*

*“I love French culture, film, food, country” (YH undergraduate)*

*“Because I’ve been told I have a language talent” (YH undergraduate)*

Sources: *Routes into Languages Event Evaluations 2011-12*

*Routes into Languages first-year undergraduate survey in England and Wales: students’ prior engagement with languages outreach and enrichment activities 2012*

[https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/default/files/1st\\_year\\_ug\\_survey\\_2011\\_report\\_england\\_and\\_wales\\_final.pdf](https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/default/files/1st_year_ug_survey_2011_report_england_and_wales_final.pdf)

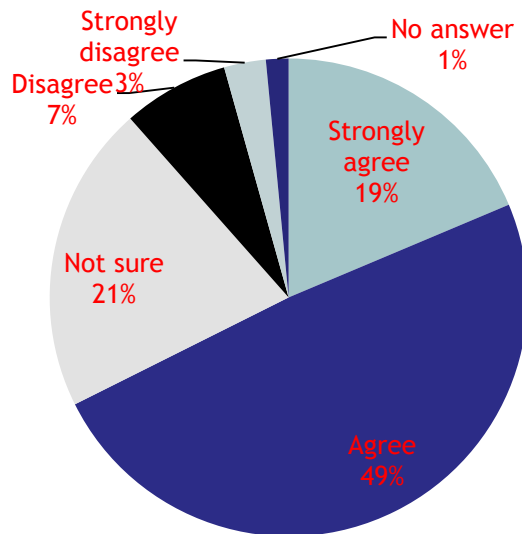


# Motivation: what Routes pre- & post-activity evaluations are telling us

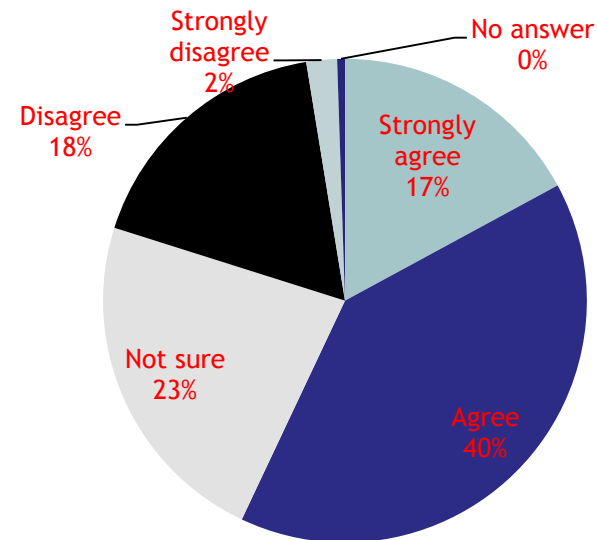
- Variety of activities involving learners from years 7-11
- Attitudes to languages and interest in continuing to study surveyed pre- and post-activities
- 2011-12 - more than 3000 learners surveyed pre- and post-activity
- 2012-13 - more than 3000 learners surveyed pre and post-activity
- Predominantly positive attitudes expressed pre-activity

# Routes into Languages: pre-activity attitudes

I enjoy learning languages



I would like to carry on learning languages



Source: *Routes into Languages Event Evaluations 2011-12*

# Routes into Languages: pre-activity attitudes

- Year 9s expressed more negative attitudes than those in other year groups
- Years 9 & 11 were least likely to express interest in continuing with languages

I would like to carry on	2011-12 survey (pre)	2012-13 survey (pre)
Year 9	47.6%	60.7%
Year 11	43.1%	52.3%

- Year 11 - big gap between enjoyment and wanting to carry on:
  - 2011-12 - 75% agreed that they enjoyed languages
  - 2012-13 - 82.5% agreed they enjoyed languages



# Example activities

## Language learning -

- A-level study days
- GCSE revision days
- Talking to student ambassadors

## Information (e.g. about careers, about studying languages, about university etc.)

- School visits
- Careers talks
- Sixth form conferences

## Culture

- Festivals of culture - Chinese and Japanese days
- Film and languages activities
- Song competitions
- Foreign language Spelling Bee
- Sport and languages days, Double Club activities
- Japanese and Martial Arts
- Italian Job



# Routes into Languages: post-activity attitudes

- Post-activity surveys in 2011-12 and 2012-13 indicated positive attitudinal change in all areas (sometimes small but very consistent)
- Both years biggest positive change was in perceived usefulness of languages for jobs

Wanting to carry on with languages	2011-12	2012-13
Year 11	+2.1%	+2.7%
Year 9	+5.2%	+7%

Sources: *Routes into Languages Event Evaluations 2011-12 & 2012-13*



# Routes into Languages: what learners say post-activity

- Not everyone is positive - small hard core of disaffection remains - 105 negative comments
- **Some participants find activities boring**

*“I didn't really enjoy the event. I don't care about different languages. Don't want to learn any. I think it was a waste of time” (year 8 girl)*

*“Bit boring” (year 10 girl)*

- **Some complain about the food**

*“Not enough pain au chocolat” (year 9 boy)*

- **Some indicate that activities have clarified their thinking**

*“It was good and a language would be useful in life but I have other subjects I would like to take for GCSE” (year 9 girl)*

Sources: *Routes into Languages Event Evaluations 2011-12 & 2012-13*



# Routes into Languages: what learners say post-activity

- Mainly very positive - 657 positive comments

- **Strong enjoyment of activities:**

*“I LOVE IT! Thank you. Better than the Space Centre” (year 7 boy)*

*“Invite us more, it was great. Italian man was fab!” (year 10 girl)*

*“I loved it. It was so fun and I would want to come again” (year 8 boy)*

- **Useful information**

*“I thought that it was really interesting about how useful even a GCSE in a language can be later in life” (year 9 girl)*

*“I thought it was a real eye opener about university. The information I received was really helpful” (year 9 boy)*

- **Support for language learning**

*“I improved on my pronunciation and learned new ways about talking in past tense (year 11 girl)*

- **Enjoyment of cultural aspects**

African dance, Bollywood, Chinese calligraphy, Tai Chi etc.



# Routes into Languages: what learners say post-activity

- Some learners suggested that activities would make them think about studying languages

*“This has made me think more about choosing a language for GCSE”  
(year 9 boy)*

*“It helped me decide I do want to take French” (year 9 girl)*

*“Now considering to take A-level French” (year 11 boy)*

All this concerns immediate impact - the buzz after activities  
What about longer-term impact?



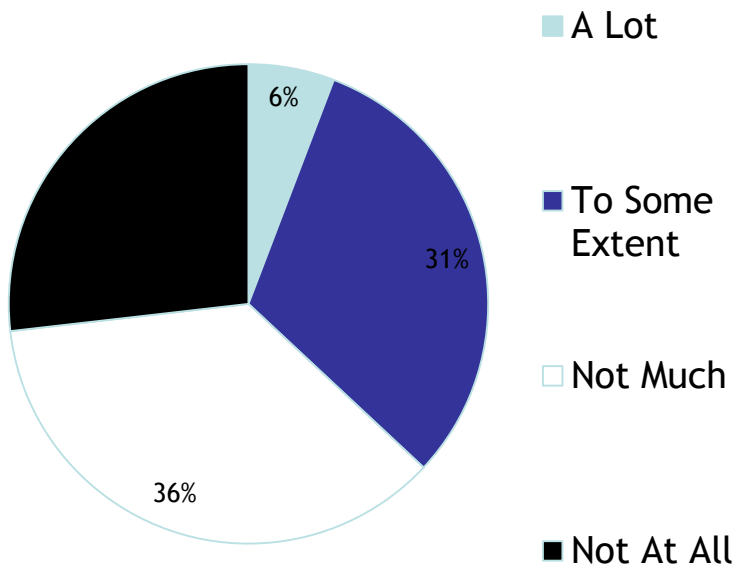
# Longer-term motivation???

- Surveys of first year undergraduates who are studying languages (approx. 1000 students surveyed each year)
- Their experiences of languages outreach and enrichment while at school or college
- Impact on attitudes and decision to study languages
- 2011-12 & 2012-13 approx. 2/3 reported they had been involved in activity

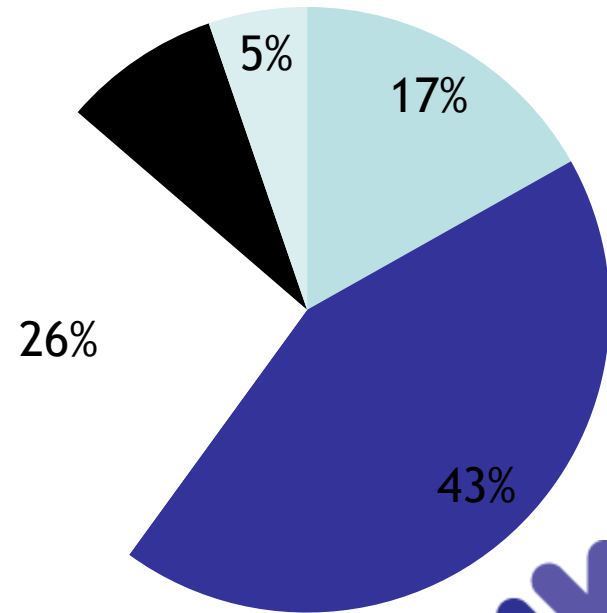
	% agreement 2011-12	% agreement 2012-13
Activities improved attitudes to languages	75.6%	73.8%
Activities influenced decision to study languages	48.1%	50.8%

# Longer-term motivation???

1 activity attended - impact on decision



More than 3 activities attended - impact on decision



# What did students say was useful about activities?

- **Useful information on careers & employability:**

*“We were able to see how we could use our languages in a job environment. They were interesting and inspirational - also challenging” (WM UG)*

- **Information about languages at uni:**

*“It was interesting to see what learning modern languages at university would be like (Wales UG)*

- **Support for language learning**

*“Revision and going over things I struggled with” (EM UG)*

- **Support from student ambassadors**

*“Having students come into my school made me think that I could also do it - before, I hadn’t really considered it” (East UG)*



# Where does this leave us & what next?

- Outreach & enrichment activities DO make a difference
- Taking languages out of the classroom helps
- Providing cultural input can enthuse learners
- Finding opportunities to help support confidence in learning is important
- Working together
  - Pooling resources
  - Supporting transition
  - Lobbying with a common identity (Like STEM)
- We need more information from refusers
- We need to talk to year 11s who enjoy languages about why they don't want to continue



# Questions

- Contact: [A.Gallagher-Brett@soton.ac.uk](mailto:A.Gallagher-Brett@soton.ac.uk)