

Seven hundred reasons for studying languages

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www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons



reasons for studying languages ...go on, pick one

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Executive summary

New research by the UK Subject Centre for Languages has identified more than 700 reasons to study languages. It concludes that the strongest of these reasons are the personal benefits and enjoyment that people gain from learning a language. These findings are significant for the current campaign to encourage more people to learn languages in and out of school.

The research project has created a taxonomy of reasons for language learning which will enable languages to be more effectively marketed, and will also provide information that could be used for the purposes of curriculum and course development. The research included an extensive review of academic and policy documents and a series of fieldwork studies, during which information on reasons for studying languages was obtained from language learners across two educational sectors (16 to 19s and undergraduates).

More than 700 rationales for language learning were discovered as a result of the research. These cover themes such as citizenship; communication; economic, social and political dimensions; democracy; diversity; employability; environmental sustainability; equal opportunities; globalisation; identity; intercultural competence; international dimension; key skills; language awareness; mobility; multilingualism; personal and social development of the individual and values.

Learners who participated in the project were found to give high importance to the personal value of language study. Languages were associated with enjoyment; personal benefits such as employability, communication and mobility; an appreciation of culture and enhanced relationships (both personal and political). Learners were, however, less sure about how far languages might be strategically important for the UK and EU. The report suggests that these findings have implications for the way language learning is marketed.

The research was prompted by the findings of an earlier study of the new landscape for languages (Kelly and Jones, 2003: 35), which recommended that rationales for studying languages be collected and classified. The study has been produced by the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, based at the University of Southampton, between October 2003 and October 2004.


The 700 reasons for studying languages have been grouped into 70 different key areas in which languages make a difference, each area identified by a keyword. They are available in an online searchable database of reasons, which can be freely accessed on the Subject Centre website at www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons

Michael Kelly,
Director of the Subject Centre for Languages,
Linguistics and Area Studies



I think languages just set you free

If you look at a map and you notice how small Britain is in relation to the rest of the world and you look at the size of Latin America with, goodness knows, twenty countries, and you think, you know, you can go out there when perhaps the person next door to you ... is just going to be working here for the rest of their lives ... it's just like liberation.



(language undergraduate)

Why study languages?

This project has set out to compile a detailed list of possible reasons for language learning obtained from academic literature, policy documents and language learners themselves and in so doing to provide a tool which can be used:

**To promote language study
To inform the design of courses**

The principal outcome of the study has been the production of an online database consisting of more than 700 reasons, which can be updated as appropriate and is available on the Subject Centre website at: www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons. Details of this are available on a promotional postcard. A poster illustrating selected rationales has also been designed. It is hoped that the 700 reasons for studying languages will facilitate the marketing of languages and will support educators in encouraging secondary school students to continue with languages (and to consider doing language degrees) and in encouraging undergraduates to add a language unit to their degree programme. The rationales should also contribute to the design of course programmes and individual units and assist in the broadening of overall course aims and objectives.

The project has been guided by one key research question:

Why study languages?

The 700 reasons database is offered as a non-hierarchical taxonomy of quotations. It is not intended to suggest that any particular reasons for language study are more important than any others. Reasons for studying a wide variety of languages have been considered. Some reasons apply to the learning of all languages, while others can obviously only relate to one particular language or group of languages. However, the taxonomy itself consists of a set of general rationales for language learning. Efforts have been made, as far as possible, to avoid mentioning individual languages by name because it is hoped to advance the benefits of language study in general, rather than to promote one language at the expense of another (although in a few cases this has been unavoidable). Reasons for learning English as a second or additional language have not been specifically included in the research. This is because the position of English as global lingua franca means that a quite different set of rationales is in operation in comparison with all other languages. Additionally, English is quite simply not under threat in the way that many other languages are. Reasons for lan-

guage learning at different levels of education have also been taken into account. The taxonomy is not, however, an exhaustive list. There are clearly very particular reasons for studying certain languages in addition to those found during the course of the project. Also, the sample of learners who participated in the study provided some highly individual descriptions of why they were learning languages. A different group of learners may well have produced different rationales.

The scope of the study has not included a focus on the reasons why students do not want to learn languages. This has been the subject of exploration by others (e.g. McPake et al., 1999; Watts, 2003).

The research was undertaken by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies at the University of Southampton between October 2003 and October 2004. One of its sources of funding was a grant received from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to examine the meaning of employability for the relevant subject communities. This report sets out to describe the research process and findings.

Why reasons to study languages are needed

The main impetus behind the project was a report which investigated the changing patterns of language learning at 16-19 and in higher education, 'A new landscape for languages' (Kelly and Jones, 2003). The authors recommended that 'rationales for studying languages should be collected and classified' (p. 35) on the grounds that this would help to inform public opinion of the benefits of language learning and would also provide information which could be utilised for the purposes of curriculum development and innovation.

There have been other calls for consideration to be given to reasons for language study at all stages of education. A lack of clarity surrounding the purposes of language learning, from primary through to undergraduate level was highlighted by Grenfell (1999). Particular concern appears to exist about the utilitarian rationale that underpins much language learning in schools, for example Mitchell (2003: 120) has suggested that:

Classroom procedures generally focus on the development of practical language skills. Thus Modern Foreign Language (MFLs) education as currently implemented in schools seems to be driven by a quite narrowly instrumental rationale.

Starkey (2000) similarly drew attention to the apparent emphasis in both the National Curriculum and the GCSE examinations on the language learner as consumer; and Pachler (2000) argued for the aims of language teaching and learning in schools to be investigated. Finally, second language motivation researchers (e.g. Oxford and Shearin, 1994) have stressed the importance, for motivation purposes, of teachers understanding the reasons why learners are studying languages.

In addition to all this, language learning in the UK currently appears to be at something of a crisis point. The Nuffield Languages Inquiry (2000) pinpointed problems of motivation among many secondary school language learners and reported that nine out of ten students choose not to continue with language study post 16. University modern language departments are experiencing difficulties with student recruitment at a time when the higher education sector in general is undergoing expansion. Kelly and Jones (2003) found that applications for language degrees have been declining at a rate of about 4-5% annually over the last decade. It has more lately been reported under a series of dramatic headlines such as 'Language crisis mars A-level triumph', 'Language crisis looms' and 'Languages dying of ennui' (The Times Educational Supplement, August 27, 2004; August 20, 2004; June 11, 2004), that the numbers of students taking GCSE and A-level examinations in languages are falling and are likely to continue to decline now that language learning is optional post 14. Against this backdrop, the Chief Inspector of Schools, David Bell recently underlined the need for learners to be made aware of the benefits of language study (Education Guardian, October 5, 2004).

These factors point to a substantial need for reasons for language learning to be investigated and more clearly defined.

Overview of main findings

This section provides a brief summary of key issues that emerged during the research. The research methodology and the project findings are described in detail later on in this report.

The project consisted of two main phases: a literature review and a fieldwork phase. An initial survey of the literature resulted in a list of several hundred reasons for studying languages. These were arranged into a broad set of categories and included the following themes:

- a) Citizenship (UK and EU);
- b) Communication;
- c) Economic, Social and Political Dimension;
- d) Democracy;
- e) Diversity;
- f) Employability;
- g) Environmental Sustainability;
- h) Equal Opportunities;
- i) Globalisation;
- j) Identity;
- k) Intercultural Competence;
- l) International Dimension, Foreign Policy etc.;
- m) Key Skills;
- n) Language Awareness;
- o) Mobility/Travel;
- p) Multilingualism;
- q) Personal and Social Development of the Individual;
- r) Values.

Following on from this, information on reasons for studying languages was collected from language learners themselves by means of questionnaires and focus group interviews. It was decided to concentrate on obtaining data from 16 to 19 year olds and undergraduates because their views were most likely to be of interest to the Subject Centre's constituency in higher education (HE) modern language departments. This is, therefore, a study across two sectors. Learners' rationales were subsequently added to the existing list, which resulted in a total of more than 700. Participants' reasons for studying languages proved to be very varied and seemed to raise the following issues:

Language learners value the personal benefits of language learning

The data gathering process revealed a high level of learner identification with, and support for, the personal benefits associated with language learning, such as communication, travel and employability.

Language learning is enjoyable

The findings that will be presented here seem to indicate that the vast majority of learners who study languages in a post-compulsory setting find them enjoyable. Most learners claimed to be studying languages for reasons of personal satisfaction, such as enjoyment, fun, interest and challenge.

Language learners acknowledge the possibility of employability gains but this is not the main reason for studying languages

A huge 86% of participants in this research expressed an expectation that a language would be helpful to their future career goals. However, in terms of motivation to study languages, the prospect of gaining an employability advantage was less important for these learners than the personal satisfaction resulting from language learning.

Language learners believe that languages promote better relationships with others (individuals and countries)

There appeared to be strong endorsement among participants for the view that language proficiency facilitates better relationships with other countries. Reasons for studying languages which stress the importance of relationships with people, such as cultural understanding of others, wanting to communicate, meeting people and making friends also featured prominently.

Language learners are uncertain about the existence of strategic benefits of language learning for the UK and EU

In comparison with the recognised personal benefits of language learning, respondents appeared to be far less aware of any potential significance of languages for the economic well being of the UK, the national security of the UK and EU citizenship.

Language learners are interested in learning about culture

Clear interest was expressed in learning about, and gaining an appreciation of, other cultures as well as the study of related subjects such as history, geography and politics along with the language.

Some language learners are motivated because they experience success and find languages easy, while others seem attracted by the perceived difficulty of languages

Rationales relating to the previous experience of success, being good at languages and finding them easy were a clear factor for some of the learners surveyed. Conversely, the idea that languages are challenging and elitist appeared to underpin other reasons produced by participants.

These findings and their potential implications are considered in the discussion section of this paper.

Construction of taxonomy

As already stated, the data collection process produced a list of more than 700 reasons for language learning. At this stage a refining of the hitherto general categories was undertaken in an attempt to combine the literature review findings with the information from language learners in order to produce a workable taxonomy. The categories were allocated relevant keywords, most of which were already in use on the Subject Centre website. A total of 70 keywords have been used, which relate to a series of themes, aspects of language learning, educational sectors, specific types of language programme and broad social and political entities. The keywords can best be described as 70 important areas in which languages count.

The process of assigning keywords to rationales proved to be difficult and its outcome reflects, to a certain extent, the subjective judgments of members of the research team. However, every effort has been made to be as consistent as possible in interpreting the keywords and allocating reasons to them, although there are instances of overlap between keywords and not all categories are discrete (e.g. Key Skills and Communication). Most of the reasons for studying languages touch on more than one theme and have therefore been allocated more than one keyword in the online taxonomy as appropriate, e.g.

The assumption is that increased foreign trade, closer European links, the effects of globalisation and even the war on terrorism will increase the demand for skilled linguists in an increasing range of languages (Connell, 2002: 3).

In the searchable database, this example will appear with all these keywords: Business, Diversity, Employability, EU, Globalisation, International Relations, National Security.

There are wide variations in the number of reasons belonging to each keyword, ranging from Aesthetics with two reasons to much larger categories such as Key Skills with over 100. The student participants generated rationales which fitted into more than 50 of the 70 categories. It is perhaps noteworthy that the Personal Satisfaction category consists mostly of learners' reasons for studying. Certain keywords did not attract any learner rationales. These included Citizenship, Democracy, Identity and Sustainability.

“ I think it is a good contrast to my other AS subjects
(sixth former); ”

Clearly, all students who took part in the project have contributed reasons which reflect their personal opinions. In certain cases it may seem as if they have made hugely optimistic claims about the benefits of language learning. In other instances, the learners' opinions either can be or are endorsed by research evidence. For the purposes of this project, all reasons have been treated as equally valid and added to the taxonomy, except in a small number of cases where this was found not to be possible. These examples tended to concern particular personal experiences which cannot necessarily be given general relevance. Reasons for studying such as **I was born in Germany** or **It was one of my highest grades at GCSE** have therefore not been made part of the taxonomy. However, they are nonetheless important rationales for students and will be commented on as appropriate in the discussion which follows.

In order to provide a flavour of the online taxonomy, all keywords are listed in the table below, along with an example of a rationale obtained from the literature review and, where possible, from a learner. A brief definition of each keyword is provided in Appendix 2.

The reasons are presented as a list of quotations. For the most part, quotes have been used verbatim, although there are exceptions to this:

- Information not perceived to be relevant to the rationale has been edited out of the quotation. This occurred with more lengthy rationales.
- In some instances learners made reference to 'I' when mentioning their personal reasons. Where this occurs it has been altered to 'you' in order to generalise the reason and to give it wider applicability.
- The words 'languages' and 'language learning' have been inserted to replace the use of 'it' in some learner rationales for purposes of clarity.
- Some students made negative comments about other subjects. These have been omitted.



**A language enables you
to communicate**

with others without seeming arrogant
enough to expect them to speak English

(sixth former)





If you are travelling around the world, speaking the language is **better than shouting**

(undergraduate: IWLP)



1.	Academic Skills	Instruction in a foreign language can have a direct effect on the development of cognitive processes (Swarbrick, 2002: 14)
		A language expands your range of thinking (sixth former)
2.	Accessibility	In a multilingual world a modern language has enormous benefit to offer all students at primary or secondary school, regardless of their age or their aptitude, their starting or their finishing point, and including those with special needs. The benefit arises from their being able to access and interact with real people who speak and use other languages and to engage with relevant, interesting and up-to-date information presented by modern means (Scottish Executive, Ministerial Action Group on Languages, 2000: 7)
3.	Aesthetics	Language training has an aesthetic and artistic value (Leathes Report, 1918; cited in Byram, 1997: 52)
		Some languages are beautiful (sixth former)
4.	Autonomy	Residence abroad {as part of a languages degree programme} represents highly autonomous learning (Coleman, 2004)
		If you do a language degree, your year abroad will show you have many good qualities such as independence etc.(language undergraduate)
5.	Business	Some exporters give little consideration to the possibility that there might be language and cultural differences between themselves and customers in overseas markets and that their business is significantly affected by ignoring these differences (Stevick, 2003: 5)
		Languages are useful for trade (sixth former)
6.	Careers	Career opportunities in the leisure and tourist industries exist for well-qualified people with a blend of land-based and management skills to develop these amenities, and of course the addition of foreign language skills can only enhance European and international employment opportunities (King and Thomas, 1999: 123)
		A language could help you if you want to work in the fashion industry, you'll be able to travel to Paris etc. (sixth former)
7.	Citizenship	The pedagogy associated with language learning provides a further contribution of languages to citizenship. Communicative methodology is itself democratic. Skills developed in language classes are thus directly transferable to citizenship education, i.e. discussing in pairs, expressing opinion, working with others, taking part in public discourse (Starkey and Osler, 2003: 32)
8.	Communication	British nationals' interaction can only be responsive: they cannot initiate communication on equal terms with other EU member states. In other words, they are less powerful than those who have greater linguistic skills (Willis, 2003: 302)
		A language helps you to communicate adequately in that country and to help people from those countries when they come here (sixth former)
9.	Creativity	Plurilingualism enhances creativity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002: 14)
10.	Critical Thinking	International and foreign language education is a break with the focus on our own society in order to find new perspectives which allow us to be critical of our assumptions (Byram, 2002: 47)
		Learning a language means that you can read the foreign press which perhaps gives you a different stance/viewpoint on world events (language undergraduate)

11.	Culture	<p>Part of the reason for having second or foreign languages in the curriculum is the signal which this provision sends regarding the room which a school very visibly makes for the study of other cultures (Williams, 2001: 47)</p> <p>Speaking with people from different cultures is very enriching. Languages enable you to do this (language undergraduate)</p>
12.	Democracy	<p>Language learning is a key component of education for democratic citizenship; a participative process, which inter alia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equips men and women to play an active part in public life and to shape in a responsible way their own destiny and that of their society; • Aims to instil a culture of human rights; • Prepares people to live in a multicultural society and to deal with knowledge, sensibly, tolerantly and morally; • Strengthens social cohesion, mutual understanding and solidarity <p>(Council of Europe, 1999, cited in Starkey, 2002: 95-96)</p>
13.	Diversity	<p>The more languages we study, the fuller our picture of the human linguistic options will be. Languages which are off the beaten track are especially important, as their isolation means they may have developed features which are not found in other languages (Crystal, 2000: 55)</p>
14.	Economic, Social and Political Dimension	<p>For the English-speaking countries themselves, the emergence of English as an international lingua franca is not an unmixed blessing. For Britain especially, it masks the effects of the loss of imperial dominance, encourages complacency and perpetuates a sense of superiority as a result of a position in unequal international communication based simply on linguistic advantage but no longer corresponding to the realities of political and economic relations (Trim, 1999: 12)</p> <p>Learning another language gives you a wider understanding of world affairs (language undergraduate)</p>
15.	Education	<p>Learners' heightened awareness, not only of other languages, cultures and peoples but also of themselves as cultural beings is a major contribution of language teaching to their education (Byram, 1997: 57)</p>
16.	Employability	<p>Monolingual speakers of any variety of English - American or British - will experience increasing difficulty in employment and political life (Graddol, cited in Schmidt, 2004)</p> <p>It's very good for public relations to be able to speak to different parts of a multinational company or its suppliers in their own language regardless of whether they can speak English fluently. People are much more confident expressing themselves in their native tongue and open to persuasion, convincing, asking for things. It does work miracles (language undergraduate)</p>
17.	English Mother Tongue	<p>Learning a new language improves the use of English. Learning another language gives the learner valuable insights into the way the mother tongue works (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 31)</p> <p>Learning another language improves your English language skills (sixth former)</p>
18.	Equality	<p>There are socio-political arguments for language study which are concerned with helping students to understand issues of power, domination, and subordination related to language, language use, language status and language attitudes (Reagan, 2004: 233)</p> <p>Language learning promotes equal opportunities (language undergraduate)</p>
19.	EU	<p>The European Union is built around the free movement of its citizens, capital and services. The citizen with good language skills is better able to take advantage of the freedom to work or study in another member state (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 9)</p> <p>If you want to work for the EU, then a language is pretty important (sixth former)</p>

20.	Experiential Learning	In fieldwork {study visits to the target country} learners are surrounded by and immersed in a new environment and learn consciously and unconsciously through all the senses (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002: 20)
21.	Global English	One of the cultural shocks of September 11 is, overwhelmingly that English is simply not enough. We cannot understand the world in English, much less search out intelligence, build ever larger coalitions of friends, and heal some of the long-standing wounds of the past. We need to be aware as never before of foreign languages and of the ways in which languages identify and represent their cultures (Footitt, 2001)
		England and the UK in general tend to be very insular because we speak the world language which can isolate us from other European countries. Speaking a foreign language could improve international relations (sixth former)
22.	Globalisation	The assumption is that increased foreign trade, closer European links, the effects of globalisation and even the war on terrorism will increase the demand for skilled linguists in an increasing range of languages (Connell, 2002: 3)
		Languages keep you in contact with the rest of the world (sixth former)
23.	Health	Learning languages boosts brain power (BBC, 2004)
		Part of the reason that the National Health Service (NHS) has interpreters is to ensure that there are equal opportunities and that people are able to access services (language undergraduate)
24.	Higher Education	Higher education offers language training programmes that prepare students of all disciplines for their future professional contacts with people from other language/culture communities (Kelly, Elliott and Fant, 2001: 2)
		If you study a language, you will leave university with a degree showing that you are capable of learning something new and which will enable you to travel easily and possibly live/work abroad (language undergraduate)
25.	Historical Dimension	Different languages will provide bases for different kinds of experience. Some (and particularly the major languages of national and international communication, including English) will provide a basis for action in the world as well as for learning and conceptualising. Some (and particularly mother tongues in the early years) will be crucial at particular stages as the major means by which learning takes place. Some (particularly classical languages and those with strong literary, religious and scientific traditions) will have a major role in reinforcing understanding of heritage (Brumfit, 2002: 118)
26.	Identity	Ultimately , to make sense of a community's identity we need to look at its language (Crystal, 2000: 39)
27.	Inclusion	If languages are indeed inessential to the UK Government's main educational agenda, and are therefore to be left to choice, opportunity and clusters of local initiatives, we might do well to address this policy with a detailed mapping of the foreign language take-up by social class. We may find that the 'unlanguageed' are increasingly located within the postcodes of social deprivation, those socio-economic categories IV and V that the Government has identified as its main targets for raising educational aspirations and widening university participation (Footitt, 2003: 86)
28.	Information Acquisition	As Internet use increases, so does the use of languages other than English and opportunities for English speakers to access information in other languages (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 13)
		If you do a historical career, learning a language means you'll be able to study foreign sources (sixth former)

29.	Intercultural Competence	<p>The study of a foreign language enables students to participate in the society whose language they study and to operate within different linguistic and cultural contexts. This places them in a privileged position: they can be ambassadors for their own society within the foreign society and they can also learn to view their own society from new perspectives. They can compare and contrast diverse visions of the world, thus promoting intercultural understanding and bringing distinctive benefits both to their own society, for example in employment terms, and to the society or societies of the target language(s) (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, QAA, 2002: 3)</p> <p>People learning languages are not selfish and they acquire an extensive understanding of the 'other' (language undergraduate)</p>
30.	International Relations	<p>Competence in foreign languages is an essential tool of an effective foreign policy (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, cited in Davies, 2003: 43)</p> <p>Language learning opens up a range of opportunities that would be unavailable if you were monolingual and it is also important with regard to the relationship between European countries (language undergraduate)</p>
31.	IT Skills	<p>The rapid expansion of opportunities for e-business within a shrinking world is driving a need for languages ability. Customer expectations and the high stakes of winning or losing business require competence to deal in a customer's language (Scottish Executive, Ministerial Action Group on Languages, 2000: 7)</p> <p>Language students have above average IT skills in comparison with the rest of the population, they can work to deadlines and be flexible and adaptable in dynamic situations (language undergraduate)</p>
32.	Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLP)	<p>Each institution-wide language programme incorporates a number of subject-specific and personal transferable skills. These are the ability to communicate effectively, organise, gather information, use IT, act independently, work in teams (Ingrams, 2000: 54)</p>
33.	Key Skills	<p>Communication across cultures will remain a key skill - the ability to communicate across cultures will be essential to national well-being and it is in the UK's interests to wake up to the value of languages in cementing international relations (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 17)</p> <p>The act of learning a foreign language reflects keen determination, outstanding communication skills and good organisational skills (language undergraduate)</p>
34.	Knowledge	<p>In the knowledge society of the 21st century, language competence and intercultural understanding are not optional extras, they are an essential part of being a citizen. For too long we have lagged behind in our capability to contribute fully as multilingual and culturally aware citizens. Likewise in the global economy too few employees have the necessary language skills to be able to engage fully in international business and too few employers support their employees in gaining additional language skills as part of their job (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2002: 5)</p> <p>Languages give you knowledge of other countries (sixth former)</p>
35.	Language Awareness	<p>Foreign language learning can contribute to developing awareness of language through help in discriminating nuances of meaning in English by exploring alternatives in the foreign language which do not exactly match the English (Hawkins, 1981: 57)</p> <p>Learning a language gives you the ability to pick out information in many languages which you haven't actually studied (language undergraduate)</p>

36.	Languages for Specific Purposes	Vocationally-oriented language learning fosters key skills, such as communication, ICT, problem-solving and working with others (Sewell, 2004: 7)
37.	Law	The growth in the multilingual population in the UK indicates the need for a wider range of language provision related to the public services, namely Health, Law and Local Government (Connell, 2002: 10) You could use a language if you work in business or in a court (sixth former)
38.	Learning	Some of the most moving and relevant examples of language learning in practice have been the attempts of the very young, and the striving of those with learning difficulties, to communicate in foreign tongues. Through it they have learned - about themselves, about the world, about their own language (King, 1999: 23) Learning another language shows intelligence and good learning qualities (sixth former)
39.	Learning Strategies	Learning a modern language will help students develop strategies for learning and using language that will assist them not only with their current modern language but with others also that they may subsequently learn (Scottish Executive, Ministerial Action Group on Languages, 2000: 7) Learning another language improves your educated guesswork (undergraduate: IWLP)
40.	Lifelong Learning	Languages are a lifelong skill - to be used in business and for pleasure, to open up avenues of communication and exploration, and to promote, encourage and instil a broader cultural understanding (DfES, 2002: 5)
41.	Language Learning Skills	Language learners learn how to listen to public announcements, to media, as a member of a live audience, for gist, for specific information, for detailed understanding, for implications. They learn how to speak in an interaction which could be a transaction, a casual conversation, an informal discussion, a formal discussion, a debate, an interview, how to give information or instructions, make presentations speaking from notes, speaking spontaneously or giving a prepared speech (King and Honeybone, 2000: 27) Language learning develops effective writing skills in English and the foreign language (undergraduate: IWLP)
42.	Linguistics	Differences in the way languages use grammar are always illuminating, especially those which help to quash the myth of primitiveness in indigenous languages. There are many languages which provide ways of expressing an area of experience that actually offer more points of contrastivity than are available in languages like English or French (Crystal, 2000: 57) When you do a language degree, you develop a much more sophisticated knowledge of English grammar than other people (language undergraduate)
43.	Literature	Subject-related skills are developed through the study of both the language and the related thematic areas. These may relate to the study of the countries or regions in which the target language is used, including aspects of the literatures, cultures, linguistic contexts, history, politics, geography, social or economic structures. In certain programmes, these will relate to discipline-specific contexts such as the business, legal, creative, technological or scientific communities within these countries or regions. Study of these will lead to the development of analytical, critical and specialist skills drawn from the relevant discipline areas. The opportunity to study discipline-specific content in the target language represents a unique contribution to the students' learning experience (QAA, 2002: 6) A language gives you a wider knowledge of literature from other countries. This will help with any literary degree (sixth former)

44.	Less Widely Used Lesser Taught Languages	It is inevitable that, in a post-colonial era, there should be a strong reaction against continuing to use the language of the former colonial power, and in favour of promoting the indigenous languages (Crystal, 1997: 114)
45.	Mobility	<p>Whichever career path young people choose, they will need the skills that make them employable in a world where recruitment is increasingly global, where flexibility and mobility are at a premium. As a nation, we owe it to them to ensure that they do not lose out in the jobs market to better educated and linguistically qualified candidates from other countries (Steering Group of the Nuffield Languages Programme, 2002: 2)</p> <p>Language learning makes travelling easier; more enjoyable, more enlightening (language undergraduate)</p>
46.	Multidisciplinary	<p>Students of languages and related studies typically explore a variety of approaches to cultures, communities and societies by drawing on methodologies shared with other disciplines, notably but not exclusively, literary, cultural, media and film studies, critical theory, gender studies, history, geography, philosophy, politics, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, visual and performing arts, economics, business studies and law. The range potentially covers the full spectrum of the humanities and social sciences, and extends also to other subjects making use of source materials in the foreign language (QAA: 2002: 5)</p> <p>If you do a degree in a language, you get to study the history and politics of the country as well as the language and it all gives you a good background and helps you to understand the nature of the country a lot better (language undergraduate)</p>
47.	Multilingualism	In the knowledge society of the 21st century multilingualism is better. It is better for countries and states whose shared ambitions are for peace, growth and prosperity. It is better for business whose purpose is increased trade, greater competitiveness and greater employability. It is better for communities in their desire for social inclusion, mutual tolerance and an appreciation of their past and present heritages. It is better for individuals - for their sense of self and their openness to the world, for opportunities for economic and personal growth. At this time of great fear and danger in the world, it is better for humanity in its vital quest for peace, stability and enrichment. Only through multilingualism can we really understand and appreciate the stranger (King and Johnstone, 2001)
48.	National Security	<p>Some Middle-Eastern languages are not being taught at all in the UK. The absence of these is potentially a huge threat to national security (Ehteshami, 2002: 1)</p> <p>If you want to work in the Ministry of Defence, a language could help you (sixth former)</p>
49.	Networking	<p>Everyone can gain benefits from learning a language - cultural enrichment, and the ability to communicate and interact confidently with people outside one's own community (Tinsley, 2003: 154)</p> <p>Languages enable you to make friends in other countries (sixth former)</p>
50.	Personal and Social Development	<p>It seems reasonable to expect that exposure to another culture through the medium of its language could lead to various changes in understanding, values, beliefs, attitudes and hence contribute to spiritual development (Smith, 2002: 37-38)</p> <p>Learning languages develops confidence in your ability to stand up in front of others (language undergraduate)</p>

51.	Personal Satisfaction	Language learning can provide enjoyment and enhance confidence (Williams, 2001: 44)
		Language learning is a fun alternative to other degree modules (undergraduate: IWLP)
52.	Practical Skills	Foreign language study is itself unique. While requiring cultural and linguistic knowledge - intellectual mastery of new systems - comparable to other disciplines, the learning outcomes expected of a degree level student also include a sophisticated practical command of the foreign language (Coleman, 2004: 148)
53.	Problem Solving	Learning another language develops your problem-solving skills (language undergraduate)
54.	Qualifications	At A-level, the syllabus is awash with thorny political issues, including social issues; the environment; law and order; politics. The study of such issues provides opportunities for developing two of the three main aspects of citizenship as defined in the National Curriculum, namely 'social and moral responsibility' and 'political literacy' (Starkey, 2002: 236)
		The oral presentations that you do in a language A-level really do give you confidence. The year 13 oral exam makes you confident enough to ask for help if you need it (language undergraduate)
55.	Related Subjects	The study of a modern foreign language can contribute to cross-curricular dimensions and themes, e.g. personal and social education, multicultural perspectives, the European dimension in education, citizenship, careers education and guidance, economic and industrial understanding, environmental education and health education (Department of Education and Science, DES, Welsh Office, 1990)
		A language fits well with other subjects, such as History and English (sixth former)
56.	Residence Abroad	Students who had already undertaken their year abroad {as part of a languages degree programme} did overwhelmingly speak of the experience as 'one of the best things I have ever done' (Bannerman and Stevens, 2003: 163)
		Having spent a compulsory year abroad on a language degree will show that you are more flexible/independent/determined/confident (language undergraduate)
57.	Secondary Sector	Inclusion of languages within the curriculum is often the catalyst for an international ethos across the school or college (Wicksteed, 2004: 12)
58.	Social Cohesion	Languages support communities. Language marks out a community in a unique way and can help bind it together (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 30)
		Languages connect the world and increase peace (language undergraduate)
59.	Study Abroad	For graduates as a whole, there were found to be measurable benefits to be gained from undertaking a substantial period of work experience during higher education (placements, vacation work, other forms of work experience), especially if the graduate had been taking a non-vocational course. Involvement in extra-curricular activities was related to successful employment outcomes ... as was some kind of overseas study or work (Brennan and Shah, 2003: IV)
		A language will help you if you want to study abroad (sixth former)
60.	Sustainability	Linguistic and cultural diversity on the one hand and biodiversity on the other are correlated - where one type is high, the other is usually too and vice versa. New research suggests mounting evidence for the hypothesis that the relation might also be causal (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002: 13)

61.	Teamwork	<p>The multidisciplinary and language-specific nature of programmes in languages and related studies encourages the development of a wide range of key transferable skills, including, interpersonal skills and personal attributes; communication, presentation, interaction; the ability to work creatively and flexibly with others as part of a team; mediating skills, qualities of empathy; self-reliance, initiative, adaptability and flexibility; intercultural competence (QAA, 2002: 7)</p> <p>Language learning develops team-working skills (language undergraduate)</p>
62.	Teaching	<p>The contribution of language teaching to the culture of peace is not limited - far from it - to the building up of linguistic skills enabling individuals to communicate beyond the borders of their own country. There are many ways that language teaching can make a contribution, but perhaps first and foremost, is the fact that it can make learners aware of the relative vision of the world inherent in their own language and society (Candelier, MacDonald-Smith, and Reig-Garganta, 1998: 6)</p>
63.	Technology	<p>Effective use of technology needs linguistic skills - The next generation will need high levels of proficiency both as communicators and in the associated technologies. While computer-aided translation systems will speed up the process of working between languages, it is people with high levels of literacy and the experience of learning and using languages who are most likely to be able to exploit new technologies to the full (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 32)</p>
64.	Translating	<p>There is also demand for legal translators, particularly with the European Commission (King and Thomas, 1999: 88)</p> <p>Languages will be of great benefit if you wish to work abroad as a translator (sixth former)</p>
65.	UK	<p>A world-class education system preparing people for life in the 21st century must reflect the fact that the world we live in is multilingual. The UK cannot afford a system that reduces languages to an elite accomplishment, available principally to those educated in independent schools (Steering Group of the Nuffield Languages Programme, 2002: 2)</p> <p>Language learning improves Britain's world status (sixth former)</p>
66.	UK Community Languages	<p>The relationship between community languages and citizenship in the curriculum is potentially rich and thought-provoking (Anderson and Chaudhuri, 2003; 53)</p> <p>Languages can provide opportunities nowadays here in the UK even if you don't want to go and work abroad because of the multicultural society we live in (language undergraduate)</p>
67.	Understanding	<p>Awareness and proficiency in MFL among a growing number of citizens can help prevent the UK from being isolated in understanding from the rest of the world (Nott, 2003; 119)</p> <p>A language shows a wider understanding and an open mind (sixth former)</p>
68.	Uniqueness	<p>The study of any modern foreign language is unique because of the existence of people who speak it as their mother tongue. Learners have opportunities through contacts with native speakers and especially through visits and exchanges to practise and extend their knowledge in a way which few other subjects can offer (DES, Welsh Office, 1990: 6)</p> <p>Language learning builds skills that cannot be taught any other way (sixth former)</p>
69.	Values	<p>Language learning has the potential for offering alternatives to inward-looking insularity, for addressing a lack of preparedness to engage with the notion of otherness and for tackling negative stereotypes (Pachler, 2000: 72)</p> <p>Languages promote empathy (sixth former)</p>
70.	Work Experience	<p>The year abroad is valuable in broadening work experience, social contacts and employability. It enables students to develop not only their language and cultural skills, but also key life skills of self-reliance and resourcefulness (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 56)</p>

Methodology

This section describes the research design and process, which consisted of an initial literature review followed by a fieldwork phase.

Literature review

A review of academic literature, policy documents (UK and EU) and media articles was carried out. In order to take account of a potentially broad range of different reasons for and benefits of language learning, it was necessary to survey texts covering many different themes. Given that such a diverse field had to be considered within a limited timeframe, it was only possible to survey a limited number of texts on each topic. A full overview of sources consulted during the course of the project can be seen on the Subject Centre website.

The literature survey resulted in a list of several hundred reasons for studying languages. At this stage, the reasons were arranged into an initial set of broad categories, which were then utilised to inform the fieldwork phase.

Fieldwork phase

The process of collecting data on reasons for studying languages from language learners themselves took place in March and April 2004. Learners' perspectives were sought for the following reasons:

- To examine the extent to which the key themes which had emerged in the literature survey were supported by learners;
- To uncover any additional reasons as it was believed that some students might be motivated by highly personal reasons for learning;
- To enable the reasons to be promoted in a way that could potentially appeal to other learners. It was thought that language students themselves might be more likely to articulate their rationales in a way that would resonate with other learners.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments were employed for data gathering purposes. These were a questionnaire (sixth formers and undergraduates) and focus group interviews (undergraduates). A consultation with a higher education advisory group was also held in May 2004 following an initial analysis of questionnaire returns.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were sent to Heads of Modern Languages in twelve 16-19 institutions in Southern England (sixth form colleges, further education colleges and schools) and to language tutors in one higher education institution, a Russell Group university. Reasons for any type of language learning were sought, therefore it was not stipulated that learners should be enrolled on particular courses or be at particular levels. It was expected, however, that 16-19 institutions would return mainly responses from AS and A2 students and that undergraduate respondents were likely to come from a mixture of language degree programmes as well as other disciplines through the Institution-Wide Language Programme.

The questionnaire was designed with two main aims in mind:

- To gauge the extent to which learners identified with the categories of reasons which had emerged in the literature review;
- To pinpoint learners' personal reasons for learning and any other general motives they could provide for language study.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

Section A contained a series of factual questions which were designed to elicit information on respondents' first language, languages being studied and previous experience of language study.

In **Section B** (see Appendix 3), respondents were presented with a set of positive statements and invited to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed on a five-point scale. Rating scales have been described as particularly useful for investigating attitudes (e.g. Youngman, 1984) and were therefore considered appropriate for the purposes of this project. Positive statements were selected on the basis that the project's aim was to highlight positive reasons for language learning, although it is recognised that respondents were more likely to agree with statements than disagree (Youngman, 1984). The statements were sourced by the literature survey and were sequenced into personal, social and political benefits of language learning. The themes were:

- a. Employability;
- b. Skills;
- c. Travel;
- d. Enjoyment;



Languages are an inspiration and it's very interesting to learn about countries other than your own
(sixth former)



- e. Cultural understanding;
- f. Communication;
- g. Language awareness (in the sense of understanding one's own language and ease in learning others);
- h. Challenge;
- i. UK economy;
- j. UK's relationships with other countries;
- k. UK national security;
- l. EU citizenship;
- m. Relevance of language learning for people in English-speaking countries.

The final part of the questionnaire (**Section C**) comprised the following open questions:

- Why are you studying a language?
- How will language learning help with your future career / help to make you more employable?
- Please give any other reasons why you think language learning might be useful

Undergraduates were additionally asked to suggest three skills or qualities they believed themselves to have developed as a result of language study.

These questions set out to discover students' personal rationales and to find out if they could propose any further reasons which might recognise any broader strategic importance of language learning. The specific question on employability was included to test the extent to which students were aware of potential employability advantages brought about by language study. It was hoped that the skills and qualities item for undergraduates might generate some reasons that could be used to promote HE language programmes.

Focus groups

Two undergraduate focus groups were also assembled. The focus group interviews were organised with a view to encouraging a more detailed discussion of rationales and obtaining more qualitative information than had been possible with the questionnaires. Volunteers for focus groups were recruited by means of posters displayed in the participating university, inviting students to come and discuss their reasons for studying languages.

The interview schedule began with factual questions to ascertain which languages were being studied as well as previous experience of language learning. The ensuing discussions were broadly organised around the following questions:

- Why have you chosen to study languages at university?
- What have you enjoyed the most about studying languages? Why?
- Is there anything special about studying languages at university?
- Which skills and qualities do you think language study has helped you to develop?
- Can you identify any reasons why language learning might be important for UK society as a whole?

Each group was facilitated by a researcher, while notes were taken by an observer. The interviews were also recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Higher Education Advisory Panel

After an initial analysis of questionnaire responses, the Subject Centre Advisory Board (HE languages staff) was consulted for advice and feedback. This included a brainstorming session on the social and political reasons why language learning might be important for the UK.

Detailed presentation of findings

Questionnaires

Sixth form questionnaires were returned by seven 16 to 19 institutions (five colleges and two schools: one state, one independent), providing a response rate of 58.3% and a total number of 212 questionnaires.

A total of 62 questionnaires were received from undergraduates in the participating university, representing a response rate of 41.3%. This included 46 students whose programmes of study contained a language component (either single or combined honours or a language combined with another discipline) and 16 students on IWLPs.

Questionnaires were analysed using a statistical software package (Minitab).

Factual questions

Of the 274 respondents, 237 stated that English was their first language (L1). Other first languages included a range of Western European, Eastern European, African, Asian and Middle Eastern languages. Seven students claimed to be bilingual (i.e. English and one other language as L1).

Details of languages being studied across both the 16 to 19 and HE sectors were as follows:

Table 2

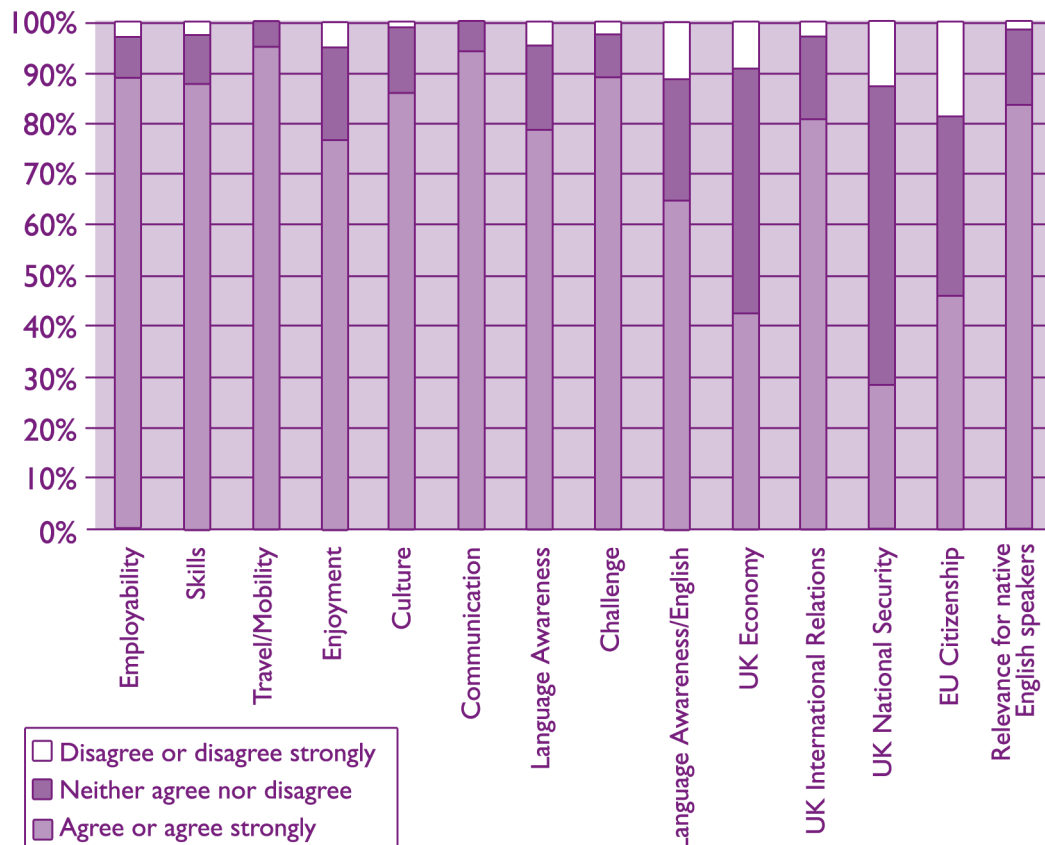
	Currently studying	Studied in past	No longer studying	Average years of study for current learners
French	129	236	107	7.7
German	96	184	88	5.9
Spanish	105	155	50	4.5
Other	29	94	65	2.5

Other languages were Modern Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese and Russian. There were 180 single linguists, 87 dual linguists and seven triple linguists among respondents.

Benefits of language learning for personal and strategic goals (questionnaire Section B, rating scale statements)

Responses to the statements on the key themes (questionnaire items 6-19) were overwhelmingly positive as highlighted in the graph below:

Table 3



A vast majority of students acknowledged the importance of language learning for employability, skills development, travel, enjoyment, cultural understanding, communication, language awareness and the UK's relationships with other countries. The idea that people in English-speaking countries should learn other languages was also strongly supported. Overall, the level of disagreement was very low.

There was a distinction between participants' responses to those reasons which were concerned with the personal gains of language study (all of which received widespread approval) and those reasons associated with the broader importance of languages for the UK and EU. Statements relating to the UK economy and UK national security, as well as the one on EU citizenship generated much higher rates of responses which neither agreed nor disagreed. However, 81% of learners did concur with the statement that people with knowledge of other languages enable the UK to have better relationships with other countries.

Open questions

The data obtained from these questions is mainly pre-



I think it will help me when I start to travel
(sixth former)



sented with a view to highlighting broad themes and attitudes. Differences between the two populations of 16 to 19 year olds and undergraduates are therefore not discussed in detail, although references will be made to such differences where appropriate. The responses to each of the open questions are considered in turn.

Why are you studying a language?

The vast majority of respondents gave multiple personal reasons for studying a language, providing a variety of different rationales. As with the literature review, efforts were made to broadly categorise the answers, which in many cases were found to span two or more of the themes below:

Table 4

Theme	No. of student responses
Personal Satisfaction	166
Employability	88
Personal and Social Development of the Individual	71
Mobility	63
Communication	52
Other reasons	97

The majority of learners (approximately 60%) indicated that they were studying languages for reasons of personal satisfaction. Many of these responses were simply phrased, **because I enjoy it**. Other examples of students' comments include:

Languages are an inspiration and it's very interesting to learn about countries other than your own (sixth former);

I love French and it would not seem right if I didn't learn it (sixth former);

Languages are more stimulating than other subjects. There's always something new to learn (language undergraduate);

It's fun and not too difficult (sixth former);

I enjoy learning German and what their culture is like compared to ours (sixth former).

The second most commonly cited reason for language learning was employability, which was mentioned by about 35% of students. In answer to this question, comments about employability ranged from the very gener-

al, suggesting that a language would be useful and would lead to better job opportunities, to the more specific, stating that a language would help in obtaining a particular job or would provide a mobility advantage. Mobility (including holidays and travel as well as work) was mentioned as a motivating factor by approximately 23% of learners, for example:

I think it will help me when I start to travel (sixth former);

It's a very useful skill for work and travel (sixth former).

Several students referred to their experiences of travel and how this had brought about a recognition of the importance of languages.

The role of languages in general personal and social advancement of different kinds was expressed as a reason for studying by just over one quarter of learners. Languages were variously described as a good, strong qualification or as something that develops the mind and enables a person to become more rounded. A language was also often mentioned as an attribute which is generally useful and adds value to one's life:

Languages are your best asset (sixth former);

A language will help set you up for your later life (language undergraduate);

It will be a huge benefit for many aspects of my life (language undergraduate).

The 19% of learners who gave answers categorised as communication, tended to see it either as a useful skill or as enabling the possibility of contact with other people:

Languages help me to communicate with foreigners (sixth former).

The 'other' category was made up of the following:

- Cultural reasons;
- Skills;
- Previous experience of success and being good at languages;
- Making friends and meeting people;
- Providing a contrast with other subjects;
- Promoting the development of values such as open-mindedness;
- Improving the use of English;
- Future study plans;
- Uniqueness of languages;
- Desire to continue with a language, not wanting to forget it;

- Family reasons;
- Experience of living in the target country.

Some examples are given below:

I think it's important that everyone should learn a language at some point and make an effort to understand other cultures (sixth former);

I think it is a good contrast to my other AS subjects (sixth former);

Speaking a foreign language is a tangible skill (sixth former);

I did well in it at GCSE (sixth former).

There were also a few miscellaneous individual responses. For example, one language undergraduate claimed to be studying languages because of the year abroad. One sixth former stated that, **Spanish is the English of the future**, while another commented, **it is highly encouraged in my sixth form**. Two students said that they did not know why they were studying a language and there was one nil response.

How will a language help with your future career? / help to make you more employable?

Of the 274 respondents, 238 (86%) indicated that they believed a language would help their future employment prospects. Career and employment advantages were, again, frequently expressed in general terms. It was perceived that languages help to provide more opportunities in the workplace, a good career, chances of promotion, a better salary etc. Almost 41% of learners expressed the employability benefits of a language in

terms of mobility. Indeed, students were almost twice as likely to mention mobility as an advantage for employment than as a reason for studying languages, for example:

Languages mean that you can do basically any job that you want anywhere in the world (sixth former).

The communication benefits for employability of possessing a language skill were mentioned by 55 respondents. This can be seen in the following comments:

Being successful at another language shows good communication skills and shows employers you are willing to learn new skills and welcome a challenge (sixth former);

In today's world companies do a lot of business with foreign companies. They need to be able to communicate with them. They need people with languages (undergraduate: IWLP).

With regard to this question of communication, a considerable difference was found to exist between the sixth form and undergraduate populations. Undergraduates were far more likely to stress the importance of communication for employability.

There were also many other employment gains perceived to result from foreign language study. These related, in part, to individual jobs or specific areas of employment where learners stated a language would be essential or desirable. These are highlighted in the tables below (in the learners' own words), along with the number of respondents who mentioned them:

Table 5

Teaching	6	Government Communications Headquarters	1
Air Stewardess	4	Historical Career	1
Translator	4	Ministry of Defence	1
Airline Pilot	2	Mission Work	1
Work for EU	2	Nurse	1
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	2	Speech and Language Therapist	1
Actor	1	Travel Journalist	1
Fashion Industry	1	Work in the Courts	1



It was reported by 13 sixth formers that they needed a language for their proposed future course of study. These students either wanted to study languages or study abroad, for example:

I would like to study History of Art with French and be able to do one year of my course studying in Paris (sixth former).

Alternatively, a language was viewed as a qualification that would be generally beneficial in terms of future educational plans:

Universities respect applicants with foreign languages (sixth former).

Other employment benefits associated with language learning included the idea that a language is a skill which sets a learner apart from others, e.g.

People who know another language have that bit extra more than other students (sixth former);

There are fewer people with language skills in the UK - therefore knowledge of languages is more desirable (sixth former).

Opinions were also expressed indicating that a language qualification shows particular qualities that are likely to be valued by an employer:

Learning another language shows that you are a hard worker (language undergraduate).

The international nature of today's employment market was also stressed:

With multinationals it's essential to be able to communicate across the globe (language undergraduate).

Several language undergraduates expressed the belief that their year abroad would help to make them more employable.

Employability advantages were not acknowledged by all respondents, however. Ten students said that they did not know how a language would help employment, and another four wrote that they were unsure about their future careers. Nine respondents explicitly stated that a language would not provide this type of advantage. There was one nil response.

Please give any other reasons for studying a language

Responses to this item were as follows:

Table 6

	No. of respondents	% of total
Mobility	65	23.7
Personal and Social Development of the Individual	40	14.6
Communication	36	13.1
Employability	25	9.1
Personal Satisfaction	20	7.3
Other	94	34.3

The 'other' category comprised a combination of personal reasons for language learning but also more social and political reasons. Twenty-two students cited cultural rationales; seventeen suggested that languages are relevant for developing values like open-mindedness, tolerance, politeness etc. Sixteen learners said that languages make it possible to meet people and fifteen referred to the role of languages in helping global relations. The importance of native English speakers learning other languages was mentioned by a number of students. Some examples are given below:

Languages help you to be more open-minded towards other cultures (sixth former);

Because it's polite. We shouldn't expect other people to be able to speak English (sixth former);

Languages unite people in this stressful international panorama (language undergraduate).

A few more unusual rationales also appeared in responses to this item, such as to **impress the girls, to translate Santana songs** and **you never know when you may need to use a language**.

It should also be pointed out that this question drew 95 nil responses (almost 35%), indicating that a significant proportion of those surveyed could not think of any more rationales by this stage.

Can you identify three skills or qualities you believe you have developed as a result of studying languages? (undergraduates only)

Language learning was said by the 62 undergraduates to have enabled the development of a range of language learning skills and key skills as well as personal attributes. The most frequently mentioned items were communication and communication skills (18 students), cultural awareness/understanding (11 students), listening (eight students) and confidence (seven students). Details of all responses are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Skills	Qualities	Other
Communication	Cultural understanding/awareness	Better-looking C.V.
Communication skills	Confidence	
Listening	Patience	
Comprehension skills	Eagerness to learn	
Presentation skills	Commitment	
Pronunciation	Self-discipline	
Attention to detail	Tolerance	
Writing skills	Empathy	
Memory	Understanding	
Speaking	Sensitivity	
Team-working skills	Independence	
Proof reading		
Etymology		
Translation skills		
Educated guesswork		
Interpersonal skills		
Language Awareness		

Focus groups

The invitation to attend the focus group attracted 11 language undergraduates, ten females and one male. This is therefore a small sample. Languages being studied were French (seven students), Spanish (five), German (two), Portuguese (two), Italian (one) and Chinese (one). Four of the students were Socrates exchange students from European Union countries and were also studying English. Participants were divided into two groups (one group of five and one of six). The interviews

were facilitated by a researcher; notes were taken by an observer and audio recordings were also made, which were subsequently transcribed. The transcripts yielded descriptive data, which will be given in full where appropriate. As with the open questionnaire items, the interview questions are dealt with in turn.

Why did you choose to study a language at university?

All participants gave multiple reasons for studying languages:

Personal Satisfaction	9
Mobility/Travel	7
Employability	5
Desire to continue language study	4
Communication	3
Previous success	3
Cultural reasons	2
Meet people	2
Read literature	1

In discussing their enjoyment of languages, several students described it as something that had been part of their lives for a long time, something they had always loved, for example:

I always really enjoyed languages when I was younger...I picked it up quite fast when I was little...When I got to secondary school I seemed to be doing really really well at languages and I really enjoyed it;

I just chose to do languages mainly because I like them and I've always liked them...I just can't let them go. I just love languages so that's basically why;

It was the only subject I looked forward to at school.

The enhanced ability to travel was also seen as an important factor in language study and the experience of having travelled surfaced once again:

My parents took me on lots of holidays when I was younger and I've been to lots of different countries and I realised how interesting the world was. I want to live and work abroad and to communicate with people in their own language;

It's also great when you go abroad and you can really apply what you've learned.

What have you enjoyed the most about studying languages?

Five of the interviewees cited the study of related subjects such as history, geography and politics along with the language as the most enjoyable aspect of the course:

“ Languages mean that you can do basically any job that you want anywhere in the world (sixth former) ”

I like the fact that you get to study a bit of history as well and a bit of politics, all that as well as the language component. It's those other bits as well. I enjoy that;

I like the history and also a couple of times, you get to study other aspects of French art or film.

Two students said that they enjoyed the literature most:

It opens up so much more opportunity with regard to literature rather than just English. You can get the literature from Spain, you can get it from France, you can get it from Latin America. It tells you so much of the experience these writers actually had. And to read about that in their own language and for you to understand it. I just really love that, it's just great.

The only other specific aspect to be mentioned was speaking, which was referred to by two students:

Talking to people is the best thing. I love talking the languages that I speak.

Is there anything special about studying languages at university?

This question provoked discussion on values in both focus groups. Several students expressed the view that language learners have more of an open mind:

I do think that you're a bit more open-minded than perhaps other people, the fact that you're actually willing to go out and learn another language ...we had a conversation me and my friends about learning languages and I said about how not many British people tend to learn them and one girl turned round and said, "well why do we need to learn foreign languages, the rest of the countries should speak English", that actually made me laugh and showed me the narrow-mindedness of some people.

The experience of living abroad was also thought to be linked to this openness:

You're a bit more open if you've lived abroad. You really realise that the culture is different and you have to adapt.

The skills and attributes developed on residence abroad were discussed at length in Group 1, which contained two finalists and three Socrates students. These were said to include greater self-confidence in approaching people and communicating with them, the ability to relate to people from a variety of backgrounds, the ability to solve problems and to think on one's feet. This was summed up by one student:

It's not just the fact that we've learned to speak these languages but we've lived in different coun-

tries and picked up different skills just from independent living in a different place.

In Group 2, the particular benefits of a languages degree were dealt with in terms of employment mobility, which was described by one student as **almost like a gift ...an amazing advantage over other graduates** and by another as a process of liberation. The importance of linguistic and cultural understanding of other people for employability was also highlighted.

Do you think that there are any other skills and qualities that language learning helps you to develop?

A plethora of skills were brought up in answer to this question. These included language learning skills such as communication, concentration, accurate listening, an improvement in memory and the perception that learning one language makes it easier to pick up others. Other qualities emphasised by participants included the confidence to ask for help when necessary, IT skills, the ability to be flexible and adaptable and a more sophisticated knowledge of English grammar than other people. It was also stressed that language students are able to look at other points of view and to empathise with others:

It allows you to sympathise with other people when they may be learning English, learning your language. You know when you talk to them you can understand how they're trying to say something that they might not be as direct as an English person and also it makes you more sensitive to other behaviour patterns that people demonstrate in different cultures ...you can fit in better, at least you don't offend people.

Can you identify any reasons why language learning might be important for UK society as a whole?

Both groups considered the importance of languages in promoting equal opportunities and fighting racism. The multicultural nature of UK society was discussed and said to mean that community language skills were required in public service arenas such as schools and the NHS in order to ensure fair access. One student described her experience of working as an interpreter for the NHS. Another student stated that language learning helps in dealing with racism. She believed racist people for the most part are likely to be monolingual. The insular and arrogant nature of the UK (and USA) was also believed to be a problem which could be reduced by language study:

We need to understand other people, not just expect them to understand us.

Finally, the war on terrorism was discussed by Group 1, with one student making the following comment in relation to this:

If we were more interested in other cultures and in learning to accept other cultures and appreciate them, we probably wouldn't have many of the problems that we have today.

Higher Education Advisory Panel

A consultation with an HE advisory panel subsequently took place and focused on the strategic importance of languages for the UK as a whole. Reasons for language learning were generated from this meeting which related to the UK's multicultural image, community cohesion, acute skills shortages in the workforce and overseas inward investment.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to collect rationales rather than to undertake a detailed investigation of learners' attitudes to languages. It is recognised, however, that reasons for learning and attitudes and motivation are likely to be closely linked. This brief discussion offers some tentative comments on issues identified during the fieldwork phase. However, all these areas require further investigation:

- Language learners value the personal benefits of language learning;
- Language learning is enjoyable;
- Language learners acknowledge the possibility of employability gains; but this is not the main reason for studying languages;
- Language learners believe that languages promote better relationships with others (individuals and countries);
- Language learners are uncertain about the strategic benefits of language learning for the UK and EU;
- Language learners are interested in learning about culture;
- Some language learners are motivated because they experience success and find languages easy while others seem attracted by the perceived difficulty of languages.

Language learners value the personal benefits of language learning

The overwhelming majority of learners acknowledged that language learning brings personal benefits. Questionnaire rating scale statements on areas such as communication, travel, employability and enjoyment received strong support from participants. This was further reinforced by the individual responses to the question, 'why are you studying a language?', with the majority of respondents claiming to be motivated by reasons of personal satisfaction and secondly by reasons of employability. The usefulness of languages for work, travel, communication, enhanced cultural knowledge and for providing general opportunities was repeatedly stressed by the students surveyed. The impression created by most of the learners was that they are confident that language learning will make a contribution (possibly a unique contribution) to their future personal and professional lives. This is very encouraging data but it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which language learning is responsible for all this confidence or whether post-compulsory study of languages is attracting a type of student who has had the kind of experiences which enable him/her to face the future confident that life will be full of opportunities.

The evidence collected from these students appears to be very much at odds with the lack of confidence being expressed in the value of language learning by senior management teams in secondary schools up and down the country and by learners themselves at age 14 (see Language trends 2004 survey, CILT, ALL, ISMLA). The message needs to be more effectively communicated to learners in schools that continuing with a language could both make a difference to their future possibilities and also to the way in which they perceive those possibilities.

Language learning is enjoyable

The data seems to indicate that the vast majority of learners who study languages in a post-compulsory setting find them enjoyable (in this study, approximately 75%). Most were also found to be motivated to learn languages because they are satisfying. This replicates other findings which have investigated attitudes among Years 12 and 13 (e.g. Fisher, 2001 and Graham, 2002) but it differs from Coleman's (1998) research into undergraduate reasons for language learning in which employability was revealed as a much more significant factor.

“ In today's world companies do a lot of business with foreign companies. They need to be able to communicate with them. They need people with languages (undergraduate: IWLP). ”

The keyword 'Personal Satisfaction' was defined in line with Dörnyei's (2001: 27) description of intrinsic motivation:

Behaviour performed for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction, such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity.

These findings demonstrate, therefore, the existence of a considerable degree of intrinsic motivation for language learning at this level. Other rationales such as wanting to communicate, meet people and make friends were also apparent and these seem to fit into Gardner and Lambert's (1959) integrative motivational orientation, which relates to the desire to interact with members of the target community. The possibility of obtaining more extrinsic or instrumental rewards would appear to have been of less overall significance for the learners surveyed here.

If language learning is so intrinsically satisfying for students in years 12 and 13, it begs the question however, as to why universities are facing such a crisis of recruitment. The answer to this lies perhaps in Marshall's analysis (2003: 139) that the 'faultline in the language learning landscape' has been at the age of 16, after GCSE. He reported that the percentage of language A-level students who opt for a degree with a language component has, in reality, stood relatively still at 23-24%. The real problem is the fall in the numbers choosing to do A-levels. With languages now optional from age 14, this effectively means that HE outreach activities with schools may have to focus on pupils in Key Stage 3.

Language learners acknowledge the possibility of employability gains but this is not the main reason for studying languages

Whilst the prospect of gaining an employability advantage was less important to participants than personal satisfaction, it was still the second most commonly cited reason for studying languages. Furthermore, 86% of learners, in response to the specific questionnaire item on employability, recorded answers indicating an expectation that a language would be helpful to them in this respect. This shows considerable confidence in, and awareness of, the potential advantages to employability of language study. The views of these students on the vocational usefulness of languages are backed up by evidence presented by Connell (2002) that language skills are required at varying levels of expertise in a diverse

range of languages by UK employers. However, it is reported in the Languages Trends 2004 survey that languages are not regarded as vocationally beneficial in secondary schools. Other research findings (McPake et al, 1999; Graham, 2002) have suggested that it is those students who do not choose to continue with a language beyond 16 who believe languages to be of no significance for future careers. Although marketing the employability benefits of languages probably needs to be undertaken with a certain amount of caution, there is clearly work to be done in raising awareness among the under 16s and also, crucially, among senior management teams and careers services in schools. It is to be hoped that the recent Languages Work initiative (CILT, 2004) will have some impact in this area.

One potentially interesting point concerning employability was the significant difference recorded between 16 to 19s and undergraduates on the question of communication. It is difficult to speculate as to the reasons why communication was so much more frequently emphasised by undergraduates. It is possible that at HE level, students become more appreciative of the employability benefits that the ability to communicate in another language brings. It may be that students in years 12 and 13 need to be better acquainted with this.

Language learners believe that languages promote better relationships with others (individuals and countries)

There was strong support among questionnaire respondents for the view that language proficiency enables the UK to have better relationships with other countries and also that native English speakers in general should make an effort to engage with language learning. Concern about the insularity of English-speaking countries and the role of languages in helping to overcome this also surfaced in the focus group interviews. This demonstrates that learners do appreciate the existence of rationales for language learning which may not necessarily be relevant to them personally. Indeed, a recognition of the more global importance of languages was also apparent in the last questionnaire item on 'other reasons for language learning'. It is, of course, possible that the rating scale statements may have acted as a prompt for some learners with regard to this particular question. Nevertheless, cultural understanding, relationships between people and countries and the development of values such as open-mindedness, tolerance and respect

for others all featured in respondents' answers. In focus group interviews, the issue of relationships between different people in the UK was also brought up, as was the importance of fair access to public services for all UK citizens. Awareness of the poor reputation of native English speakers and underlying concerns about the UK's image were also disclosed. As one sixth former put it, **foreign people will like us more**, a rationale which could be interpreted on either a personal or a broader socio-political level.

These findings may also have significance for the marketing of languages. Overall, learners would seem more likely to be motivated by the possibility of personal gains brought about by language study. However, the importance of languages in building relationships, both personal and political should not necessarily be neglected. It may be that younger learners need to be made more aware that language learning is a means of meeting people and making friends in this country and abroad.

Language learners are uncertain about the strategic benefits of language learning for the UK and EU

The wider strategic importance of language learning for the UK economy, UK national security and EU citizenship was not widely recognised by survey participants as the relevant questionnaire items attracted a considerable degree of uncertainty (although, as has been described, this was not the case with regard to the UK's relationships with other countries). The reasons for this are unclear. It may be that respondents were simply unaware of any particular significance of languages for the economic well being of the UK or alternatively they may have found the statements too ambiguous. While learners are most likely to choose to study languages for personal reasons, this evidence suggests that the vision set out in the National Languages Strategy (DfES, 2002: 4) of transforming England's capability in languages does not really resonate with language learners.

Language learners are interested in learning about culture

Clear interest in learning about other cultures was expressed in questionnaire responses and an awareness of the importance of appreciating other cultures was also present. Additionally, focus group participants stressed how much they enjoyed the study of related subjects such as history, geography and politics along

with the language. A small number of those surveyed highlighted how well languages fit with other humanities subjects, like history. Learning about the culture and history of the target country is an integral part of language programmes post 16 but this has not necessarily been the case at a compulsory level. Previous research in Scotland by McPake et al. (1999) found that learners would have liked a greater emphasis on culture at Standard Grade, i.e. pre 16. If cultural and historical content is motivating to learners then the strand on cultural knowledge and contact in the Key Stage 3 Framework for MFL (DfES, 2003) is to be welcomed.

Some language learners are motivated because they experience success and find languages easy, while others seem attracted by the perceived difficulty of languages

Rationales relating to the previous experience of success, to being good at languages, to ease of learning (which it has not been possible to add to the taxonomy) were a clear factor in a small number of questionnaire responses and emerged in the way focus group participants described their early language learning. If the experience of success is an element in the decision to continue language study post 16, this surely has implications for a subject frequently perceived to be one of the most difficult at GCSE (see Education Guardian, October 5, 2004). If fewer learners experience success in languages than in other subjects, then fewer will opt to continue. Conversely, however, a belief that languages are difficult may serve to inspire another group of learners. The idea that languages are elitist appeared to underpin certain rationales produced by participants. There were students who described a language as a strong qualification, a unique selling point, a skill that stands out on an application form because it is not possessed by many people and demonstrates to others willingness to learn. Added to this are those learners who reported enjoying the challenge of language learning. It could, perhaps, be inferred from all this that some students are motivated by the potential recognition that may come from studying a difficult subject. However, this is unclear and requires further investigation.

Conclusion

“ We need to understand other people, not just expect them to understand us (undergraduate) ”

In summary, this project has resulted in the creation of a list of more than 700 reasons for studying languages collected principally from a combination of academic and policy documents and language learners across two educational sectors. A taxonomy of reasons for language learning has been produced as an online database available via the Subject Centre website at www.llas.ac.uk/700reasons.

It is hoped that this study will make a contribution to the effective promotion of languages; to the design of courses and to facilitating discussion on the reasons why languages are important and should be studied.

Finally, at this critical moment for language learning in the UK, it is perhaps worth remembering that there are students out there who really value languages, who enjoy them sufficiently to choose to study them in a post-compulsory setting and who, for the most part, continue to enjoy them, as was expressed by one sixth former:

It's fun - you feel really good when you can speak many different languages.

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“ You're a bit more open if you've lived abroad.
You really realise that the culture is different
and you have to adapt.
”
(language undergraduate)

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Appendix I

Research Team

The research was carried out at the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies at the University of Southampton. The project was led by Angela Gallagher-Brett. Other team members were Elizabeth Ashurst, John Canning, Alison Dickens, Becky Jennings, Michael Kelly and Vicky Wright.

Appendix 2 Glossary of keywords

Please see notes below for the sources of these definitions

1.	Academic Skills	A range of higher level skills relating to thinking, study, research etc ¹
2.	Accessibility	Arrangements giving people the opportunity to study in an institution, in particular the requirement to offer students from unconventional backgrounds, those with traditional low take-up of HE, those with disabilities, the maximum opportunity to access education courses ²
3.	Aesthetics	A set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty ³
4.	Autonomy	The capacity to take charge of one's own learning ⁴ (see also independent learning, self-directed learning)
5.	Business	The practice of engaging in trade or commerce ³
6.	Careers	Specific occupations ¹
7.	Citizenship	Knowledge, understanding and skills required to play an active part in society as informed and critical citizens ⁵
8.	Communication	The exchange of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium and including communication skills ^{1,3}
9.	Creativity	The attribute of constructive originality, often manifested in the ability to discover new solutions to problems or find new modes of artistic expression ²
10.	Critical Thinking	Logical thinking that draws conclusions from facts, evidence and theoretical understanding; applying one's own knowledge and approaches rather than simply accepting other peoples' information, attitudes and judgments ⁶
11.	Culture	The customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation or people ³
12.	Democracy	The practice or principles of social equality ³
13.	Diversity (linguistic)	A range of different languages or speech communities ¹
14.	Economic, Social and Political Dimension	Language in relation to the economy, society and politics ¹

15.	Education	A body of knowledge acquired while being educated ³
16.	Employability	The capacity to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment ⁶
17.	English Mother Tongue	Relating to English as a first language, concerning native speakers of English ¹
18.	Equality	The same opportunities available to all individuals ⁶
19.	EU	The political and geographical entity known as the European Union ¹
20.	Experiential Learning	Learning through hands-on experience as opposed to traditional classroom learning or formal instruction ^{6,1}
21.	Global English	Relating to the status of English as a global or world language ¹
22.	Globalisation	The increased mobility of goods, services, labour, technology and capital throughout the world and a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions ^{7,8}
23.	Health	Relating to medical services and physical and mental well-being ¹
24.	Higher Education	Programmes of study that take place in universities, higher education colleges and some further education colleges ¹
25.	Historical Dimension	Relating to the history of a society or people and their heritage and ancestry ¹
26.	Identity	The role of language in a person's or peoples' self-perception ¹
27.	Inclusion	Ability to participate and be included within a group or within society ¹
28.	Information Acquisition	Using language to gain access to information or facts ¹

29.	Intercultural Competence	Ability to interact in complex cultural contexts among people who embody more than one cultural identity and language ⁹
30.	International Relations	Political and personal relationships between peoples and states ¹
31.	IT Skills	Literacy in a range of technological media, e.g. computers etc. ¹
32.	Institution Wide Language Programmes	Language programmes or units in higher education for undergraduates from disciplines other than languages - either accredited or non-accredited ¹
33.	Key Skills	Range of essential skills that underpin success in education, employment, lifelong learning and personal development; communication, application of number, information technology, working with others, improving own learning and performance, problem solving ¹⁰
34.	Knowledge	Facts, information and skills acquired through experience or education ³
35.	Language Awareness	The ability to manipulate symbols, to conceptualise language, to become aware of it as a separate structure and to free it from its embeddedness in events ¹¹
36.	Languages for Specific Purposes	Language skills for a particular academic subject or vocation ¹
37.	Law	System of rules which a country or community recognises as regulating the action of its members; the legal profession ³
38.	Learning	The process of acquiring knowledge and understanding or skills from study, instruction or experience ⁶
39.	Learning Strategies	The special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information ¹²
40.	Lifelong Learning	The idea that learning, either actively or passively continues throughout life ¹
41.	Language Learning Skills	The set of skills acquired through language learning, e.g. listening, reading, speaking, writing and others ¹
42.	Linguistics	The systematic study of the structures of language and linguistic behaviour through a range of theoretical and empirical methodologies ¹³

43.	Literature	Written works of fiction, especially those considered of superior or lasting merit ³
44.	Less Widely Used Lesser Taught Languages	All languages other than those commonly used and taught in the UK education system, i.e. not English, French, German and Spanish ¹
45.	Mobility	Ability to live and work abroad as well as to travel for pleasure ¹
46.	Multidisciplinary	Combining or involving several academic disciplines in an approach to a topic ³
47.	Multilingualism	Ability to operate in more than one language ¹
48.	National Security	The state of being free from danger or threat and ability to protect the UK ^{3,1}
49.	Networking	Interacting with other people for the purposes of work or pleasure ¹
50.	Personal and Social Development	Acquisition of attributes and skills that provide opportunities for individual advancement in professional and personal life ¹
51.	Personal Satisfaction	Behaviour performed for its own sake to experience pleasure and satisfaction, such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity (e.g. enjoyment, fun, interest, challenge) ¹⁴
52.	Practical Skills	A set of skills gained through practical exercise and the ability to put those skills into practice ^{6,1}
53.	Problem Solving	Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions ²
54.	Qualifications	Accredited and certificated learning ¹
55.	Related Subjects	Disciplines which are related to language learning or though which languages are sometimes learned, e.g. history, geography, politics ¹
56.	Residence Abroad	Spending part of one's degree at a foreign university or on an overseas work placement ¹⁵

57.	Secondary Sector	Education for students aged 11 to 19 ¹
58.	Social Cohesion	The capacity of a community or society to connect or operate successfully as a unit for the benefit of all participants ¹
59.	Study Abroad	Relating to periods of study spent in countries other than the UK ¹
60.	Sustainability	Conservation of an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of essential resources, including linguistic and natural resources ^{1,3}
61.	Teamwork	Cooperative effort to achieve a common objective ⁶
62.	Teaching	Active facilitation of the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills ^{1,6}
63.	Technology (information)	Hardware and software used for communication and storage of digital information ¹
64.	Translating	The act of converting one language to another in speech or writing ³
65.	UK	The geographical and political entity known as the United Kingdom ¹
66.	UK Community Languages	First languages other than English of different communities in the UK ¹
67.	Understanding	Sympathetic awareness or tolerance, ability to relate to the feelings of others ^{1,3}
68.	Uniqueness	Something which is particularly unusual, very different from anything else of its kind ^{3,1}
69.	Values	A set of principles or standards relating to a person's or a society's attitudes or behaviour, especially towards others ^{3,1}
70.	Work Experience	Planned programme which enables students to gain experience of the working environment ⁶

Notes

Sources of the definitions.

Full details are provided in the References.

1. Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
2. Higher Education Academy (Scoping notes for Humanities Cluster)
3. Pearsall (1998)
4. Benson (2001)
5. QCA
6. Higher Education Academy (Pedagogy and Policy Themes Vocabularies)
7. Government of Canada
8. Held and McGrew
9. Byram, Talkington and Lengel (2003)
10. DfES
11. Donaldson (1978)
12. O'Malley and Chamot (1990)
13. QAA
14. Dörnyei (2001)
15. Coleman (2004)

Appendix 3

Questionnaire Section B

6	Language learning helps you to get a job <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
7	Language learning helps you to develop other skills <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
8	Language learning provides better opportunities to travel abroad <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
9	Language learning is enjoyable <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
10	Language learning helps you to understand other cultures <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
11	Learning other languages helps you to communicate with people from a wider range of different countries <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
12	Learning another language now will make it easier to learn new languages in the future <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
13	Language learning is a challenge <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
14	Learning another language improves your understanding of your own language <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
15	People with knowledge of other languages help the UK economy <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
16	People with knowledge of other languages enable the UK to have better relationships with other countries <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
17	Language learning helps to improve UK national security <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
18	Learning European languages helps people to feel that they are European citizens <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>
19	It is important for people in English-speaking countries to learn other languages <i>Strongly agree a b c d e strongly disagree</i>



**A language gives you confidence
in dealing with other people**

(sixth former)





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