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The influence of advocacy, infrastructure, policy-making, policy arbiters, and policy disruptors on language learning in English secondary schools since 1945

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Introduction

1 England is one of the many contexts where French is – and indeed has been for centuries – the dominant foreign language in schools. It is both usually the first language introduced and most likely to be continued to a higher level. This article takes languages education policy in England as its case study, and examines the roles of advocacy, of institutional infrastructure, and of policy (including the roles of policy *arbiters* and policy *disruptors*), in shaping the practice of teaching and learning French and other languages. We have tended to focus, in the history of language learning and teaching, on how practice is influenced by changing pedagogical methods and theories (e.g. the perceived benefits of object lessons to young learners around 1900; see McLelland 2015: 112) and by changing understandings of how languages are learned, from applied linguistics. This paper therefore instead concentrates on assessing the influence of other external factors on language teaching and learning: advocacy, institutional infrastructure, and policy-making. These three elements are inter-related and, viewed historically, arguably build on each other. As language teaching became professionalized in the late nineteenth century, it was early individual, sometimes charismatic language advocates, championing particular views on language learning and teaching, who came to together to establish some of the first institutional

infrastructure, in the shape of organizations such as the Modern Language Association. In turn, such organizations undertook advocacy and lobbying a targeted way, and were (and are still) consulted, and to varying degrees listened to, by governments developing policy and by other decision-makers. More recently, however, we shall see that the loss of other kinds of educational infrastructure has had a negative impact. I also argue that one of the most seismic changes, making languages available to all in secondary schooling, was largely the result of a change in policy external to the languages education community --comprehensivization. Turning to the implementation of languages education policy, I then show the role of certain policy *arbiters* (in the sense of Johnson & Johnson 2015), and introduce the notion of policy *disruptors*, actors whose decisions in other policy domains may, often unintentionally, undercut and weaken the effective implementation of languages education policy in practice.

2 My case study is language learning in England, rather than the United Kingdom as a whole. (For a useful overview of similarities and differences compared to the UK's other devolved nations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland in languages education policy, see Ayres-Bennett & Carruthers 2019: Table 2). The facts that I present are largely well known, at least in languages education research in England (Dobson 2018 is a particularly useful point of reference). My purpose here, though, is to re-examine them in order to consider the relative roles of advocacy, infrastructure, and policy, and to consider what lessons can be learned, in particular about the roles of policy arbiters and disruptors.[1]

I The beginnings of languages advocacy and infrastructure, and of government interest in languages education from the late 19th century

3 From modest beginnings among small numbers of languages advocates, the past century has seen ambition and growth both in infrastructure and policy-making intended to influence language teaching and learning. The 1882 publication of Wilhelm Viëtor's anonymously published pamphlet "Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!" ("Language teaching must change") is often used as a convenient marker of the beginnings in Europe of languages advocacy (which I define commonsensically as "activity or speaking up on behalf of an individual or group, aiming to influence decisions") relating to language teaching. Ten years after this piece of individual advocacy, the Modern Language Association was founded in 1892 (its present-day descendant in Britain, after mergers with six other language associations, is the Association for Language Learning). The association and its journal *Modern Language Teaching* provided a new forum for debate and discussion among an emerging community of practice specific to language teaching: in practice, almost always regarding French and German in those early days. From 1884, the College of Preceptors, the first professional body of teachers in the UK, founded in 1849, had as its dean Henry Weston Eve, a teacher of French and German who then became Headmaster at University College School (a Public School, i.e one of a select group of elite fee-paying schools). Its weekly publication, the *Educational Times*, provided another forum for exchange of views, with, for example, regular reports of meetings and discussions and reviews of new textbooks. These, then, are the earliest beginnings of an infrastructure

providing a forum for languages advocates and supporting languages teachers in England.

4 The first signs of any government interest in setting the direction of languages education are found in reports of wider scope, beginning with two reports in the 1860s, one dealing with education in Public Schools, the other with schools for the middle classes. The Clarendon Report (1864) found that every Public School it investigated already offered either French or German (though Eton offered French only as an extra subject out of hours). While still emphasizing that classical studies should remain the main focus in such schools, the report proposed introducing languages more systematically, as part of a "modern studies" pathway for boys likely to progress to the army and other "newer professions" (see Gillard 2018a). It recommended that "every boy who passes through the school should receive instruction in [amongst other subjects] one modern language at least, which should be either French or German [...]" (Clarendon Report 1864: 53, Recommendation IX). The report further recommended (though with one dissenting voice) that "Every boy should be required, before admission to the school [i.e. to a Public School], to pass an entrance examination, and to show himself well grounded for his age in classics and arithmetic, *and in the elements of either French or German*" (*Ibid.*: 54, Recommendation XXIII, my emphasis). This was in effect a spur to so-called "preparatory" schools – the private primary schools that prepared pupils to sit the entrance examinations to major Public Schools at the age of 12 or 13 – to ensure the teaching of a language to their pupils.

5 The Schools Inquiry Commission, chaired by Lord Taunton, was appointed in 1864 to look into education of the middle classes. The Taunton Report (1868) envisaged three kinds of secondary education (Gillard 2018b):

- *first-grade schools* would provide a "liberal education" – including Latin and Greek – to prepare upper and upper-middle class boys for the universities and the older professions (with a leaving age of 18 or 19);
- *second-grade schools* would teach two modern languages besides Latin, to prepare middle-class boys for the army, the newer professions, and departments of the Civil Service (with a leaving age of 16 or 17); and
- *third-grade schools* would teach the elements of French and Latin to lower middle class boys, who (leaving at age 14 or 15) would be expected to become "small tenant farmers, small tradesmen, and superior artisans".

6 The report in effect recommended that "all" in secondary education learn at least one language; "all", though, by definition meant boys of the middle classes – for even elementary education did not become compulsory for all children in England until the Education Act of 1870.

7 A report by Arnold & Waren (1900) seems to have been the very first government-commissioned examination specifically of languages teaching in the UK, looking at preparatory schools. Unsurprisingly, given the Clarendon Report's earlier expectation that pupils entering Public Schools should already know the basics of French or German. Arnold & Waren found that French was taught in all 124 Preparatory Schools responding to their survey (out of 255 approached). German was offered at 73 of the schools, but it was generally taken by a much smaller number of pupils (Arnold & Waren *op. cit.*: 232). Rather than any very clear recommendations, their short report (of some 25 pages or so) presents an overview of the status quo. However, the authors were

clearly keen to encourage the adoption of at least some principles of Reform Movement methods. The report's contents neatly summarize tensions in method between

> the classical method now generally in vogue, which results in a boy of thirteen knowing his French, after devoting three or four hours a week to its study, much as he knows its Latin, and some reformed method design to enable him to speak, read and write with some fluency, and to have read some French writings somewhat as he reads those in his own native tongue (Arnold & Waren *ibid.*: 236).[2]

8 The 1912 *Circular 797. Modern languages* was one of a series of subject reports published by the Board of Education, newly established in 1902. It again cautiously examined some of the newer methods, based on a selection of eight schools (explicitly now also including one school for girls, Leeds High School for Girls). However, whatever its potential for impact, it was, Hawkins (1987: 133-137) suggests, derailed by the outbreak of war in 1914.

9 By far the most ambitious and compendious report on languages of the entire twentieth century was the 1918 Leathes Report, whose remit encompassed the learning and study of languages at all levels from primary age to university, and in all school types (see Bayley 1991; Byram 2014, 2018 and 2021). The Leathes Committee was one of four subcommittees dealing with the modernization of education under a general Reconstruction Committee; education had been blamed, at least in part, for lack of progress in the War. I shall return to the Leathes Report and some of its recommendations in my conclusion.

10 Despite the growing government interest in languages teaching, evidenced in these early government-commissioned reports, there was virtually no state control over school curricula in the early twentieth century. Schools could be variously church-run, private, or state-run.[3] From 1944, the Butler Act explicitly gave control of the school curriculum and resourcing to individual head teachers, in consultation with school governors, and the act said "very little about the curriculum, apart from religious education. Teachers were left to decide what to teach and how to teach it [...] there was no expectation that the national government would ever have control of the curriculum" (Shaw 2011: 6). In practice, it was the syllabi set by the various examination boards that determined the secondary school curriculum.

11 These examination boards, established from the 1850s onwards, were run by universities, natural leaders in this new territory since they already had experience of setting examinations for qualifications: Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, London, Birmingham, Bristol, and – jointly, through the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB, founded in 1902) – Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds, from 1905 also Sheffield and from 1916 Birmingham. (Wales had its own board for Welsh schools). The boards' syllabi were decided by the boards' examiners, largely university academics, and it was up to schools to prepare candidates as best they could. Boards did at least realize the importance of setting literary texts which were readily available in Britain. Publishing companies had an eye to the market, of course, and textbook authors were often experienced teachers of languages (like Otto Siepmann, for example; see McLelland 2012), but this was a loose ecology. For this period, it is difficult to talk about the implementation of any government policy. Policy, if we can speak of policy at all, was essentially *laissez-faire*, and remained thus for decades.

12 Even in this decentralized system, in the absence of a clear power hierarchy or infrastructure to enable change in languages education to be imposed centrally, it is

worth noting that advocates for change did have slow, incremental successes. A good example is the increasing attention paid to oral competence, a concern that first emerged among proponents of the Reform Movement in the late nineteenth century and continued to be promoted in England by advocates such as Walter Rippmann and Otto Siepmann (McLelland 2012). Conversation tests had been tried in short-lived Commercial Certificate examinations run by the University of Cambridge board in the 1880s; Arnold & Waren's (*op. cit.*) report on methods in language teaching also considered the place of speaking; and in 1901, the Cambridge board first introduced optional spoken tests for languages exams. The place of spoken language was considered again in the 1912 *Circular 797*, and continued to provoke discussion through the twentieth century (see McLelland 2017: 146-148). The JMB ran *compulsory* oral examinations for the first time in 1932. The oral test remained optional in the Cambridge examinations for longer, but by 1960, O-level candidates for the Cambridge Board also had to attend an oral examination, and the marks counted towards the final mark awarded. Such changes to assessment requirements, which were largely driven by bottom-up advocacy for change, have an important impact on classroom practice – the so-called "washback" effect (Weir 2013: xvii). The current status quo – that speaking competence makes up 25% of language assessment at GCSE examinations taken at age 16[4] – was reached by 1994, but it happened incrementally, over almost a century, and without a decisive intervention from government or other policy-making body.

13 A second example of incremental success is the growth of Spanish, though again it took the best part of a century. Already the 1918 Leathes Report noted the economic case for Spanish, useful for growing trade with Latin America (Leathes 1918: 24-15), and Spanish was also commended for teaching in a 1930 report as "a language of unusual simplicity and facility", with "clear and easy syntax" (Board of Education 1930: 33-34). Commercial and practical arguments for Spanish continued to be advanced regularly over the decades, notably in the 1965 Parry Report on Latin American studies, which led to the establishment of five specialist university centres for Latin American Studies and funding for postgraduate scholarships in the area (McLelland *op. cit.*: 191-192). University departments gradually became more involved in supporting Spanish in local schools in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1980s, a Department for Education policy of diversifying the range of languages taught in secondary schools benefited Spanish: teachers of French were better placed to upskill in another Romance language than in (say) German;[5] and graduates of Spanish who had previously had to teach mainly French were glad to take on more Spanish teaching. From the late 1980s, teachers of Spanish also benefited from the newly proactive approach of the Spanish Consejería de Educación (London and Manchester) in promoting Spanish, supporting teachers with materials and in-service courses. All of these actions – the work of many different actors – had some effect, but it is difficult to discern any moment at which Spanish "took off" as a result of any one intervention. Rather, there was a gradual growing uptake of Spanish (as can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1, further below, which show entries for French, Spanish and German over time in exams taken at age 16 and 18). In the 1980s, the number of pupils taking Spanish was still only about a quarter of those taking German; but Spanish overtook German in 2001, and it has since then cemented its role as the "second" language while German has declined. (It seems, historically, that there has usually been space for only two "main" languages in mainstream secondary education.) At primary level, while still far behind French, Spanish was in

2015 the second most commonly offered language (Board & Tinsley 2016: 45; see also McLelland *op. cit.*: 14-16). Spanish has seemingly now reached the steady state of a virtuous circle, of the kind that French has long enjoyed, with sufficient students having learned Spanish to ensure a pipeline of teachers who can be (relatively) readily recruited to continue the supply. Perhaps the investment in Latin American Studies after the 1965 Parry Report helped stimulate the supply of qualified teachers; possibly pupils' growing exposure to Spanish through (relatively) affordable family holidays in Spain also had an impact. At any rate, despite repeated advocacy of the advantages of Spanish since at least 1918, this fundamental shift in the languages education ecology over the past hundred years cannot be traced back to any single piece of advocacy or strategic policy intervention.

14 It is worth comparing the case of Spanish to that of Russian. Russian was subject to strategic interventions in the mid-twentieth century too, and had come to be taught to a high standard, albeit briefly, to a relatively large number of adults as part of the post-war Joint Services School of Linguists in the 1950s. The Hayter Report (1961) examined provision in Oriental, Slavonic, East European and African studies; and the 1962 Annan Report on the teaching of Russian (1962) made the case for expanding the teaching of Russian in schools too, "in proportion to the importance of the Soviet Union in the world today" (Annan 1962: 6-7). There was, accordingly, significant investment in developing Russian language teaching materials (alongside French, German and, significantly, also Spanish), through the Nuffield Foundation's Foreign Language Materials Project (McLelland *op. cit.*: 26, 112). However, the ambitious goal of bringing the numbers studying Russian up to those for German (then the second foreign language) was never achieved.[6]

II. The 1960s and beyond: the expansion of languages provision and the expansion of infrastructure supporting languages education

15 The place of speaking in languages teaching, and the growth of Spanish to supplant German as the second language, are examples of important but gradual change. An arguably more dramatic, relatively swift change in languages education was the increase in its availability to learners of all backgrounds. This change to "Languages for all", which took place from the 1960s onwards, was the consequence of a decision made largely outside the field of languages advocates, essentially effected from outside the discipline. The Newsom Report on education for average and lesser ability pupils, *Half Our Future* (1963: 161), argued that pupils of all abilities should have the opportunity to learn a foreign language, for a variety of reasons: to encourage their ability to reflect on their own language; to stimulate those pupils disadvantaged by "disturbed early schooling or adverse environment rather than lack of native wit"; recognizing that other countries manage to give pupils the opportunity; and given the attraction of "acquiring at least a 'tourist' knowledge of another language" (Phillips & Filmer-Sankey 1993: 24, 161). As comprehensive (non-selective, all-ability) schools were established from the late 1950s onwards (and especially after the Labour government introduced legislation for comprehensive schools in 1964), languages could more easily be offered to pupils of all abilities in a single institution.

16 This dramatic change in languages provision was not, as far as I can see, prefaced by long years of campaigning by modern languages advocates. In fact, in the earlier part of the twentieth century, commentators had, if attending at all to the issue, generally been dismissive of the needs of the "non-linguistic pupil", or of the "problem" of the lowest ability groups in grammar schools (McLelland *op. cit.*: 181). Although Hawkins (1987: 27-60) made an important and eloquent case for "languages for all", the evidence suggests that it was not until after the introduction of languages in comprehensive schools that language teaching specialists embraced the challenge and seriously began to reflect on how to meet the needs of "average", "lesser ability" or "mixed ability" language learners, as in CILT (1972); see McLelland *ibid.*).

17 The Annan Report, noted above, was one of a number of voices in the early 1960s calling for "a central body to co-ordinate activities and to promote research and development in the field of modern languages" (CRDML 1968: vi). A Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages (CRDML) was duly constituted by the Secretary of State for Education in England and the Secretary of State for Scotland. Importantly, it also had the backing and sponsorship of other stakeholders: the Nuffield Foundation (the charitable trust supporting educational research that was also sponsoring language teaching materials development, mentioned above for Russian); the University Grants Committee, the body advising the government on the allocation of funds to universities 1919-1989); the British Council (with a mission to promote arts and culture, education and the English language, but also cultural exchange more widely); and the Confederation of British Industry. Significantly, then, the need for research on languages teaching which the Committee fulfilled had the explicit support of a number of organizations beyond the "usual" languages advocates.

18 The CRDML, which convened between 1964 and 1970, produced two reports (CRDML 1968 and 1971). One key outcome was a Centre for Information on Language Teaching (CILT), established in 1966. Until its closure by a new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2011, CILT was a crucial central piece of infrastructure, providing support for languages teaching, promoting and disseminating research, publishing curriculum guides, and serving as a "ready-made platform for teacher and materials development and a unique specialist library resource" (Dobson 2018: 78).[7]

19 There were two other forms of infrastructure in these decades: national and local. Nationally, there was an "explosive growth" of in-service teacher development encouraged by an "outstanding team" of government school inspectors for languages from Her Majesty's Inspectors (Hawkins 1987: 7; HMI has since become part of the non-ministerial government department The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, known as Ofsted). Local Education Authorities (LEA), as part of their role in providing curriculum advisory support to the schools in their area, appointed specialist language advisers to support teachers in their local area. In 1969, the National Association of Language Advisers (NALA) had 40 members; by 1974, there were more than 150 (Hawkins *ibid.*: 8).[8]

20 All in all, then, language teaching in the later 20th century was unprecedentedly well supported in both moral and practical terms; and the later 20th century was overall a success story for languages education. By 1984, already 61% of girls and 43% of boys were studying a modern foreign language to age 16.[9] These figures rose to 82% and 73%, respectively, in 1997. Yet it was not until 1996 that the National Curriculum made a language a compulsory "foundation subject" for pupils up to the age of 16, a stipulation

which remained in place till 2004 (see section III below). Looking at this picture, one might argue *prima facie*, then, that it was less the top-down imposition of a language education policy than a supportive infrastructure that had the most positive effect on language learning. At any rate, there is a correlation.

	Total no. of subject entries*	German	French	Spanish	Total German, French, Spanish
1938	531,445	9,935	72,466	1,338	83,739
1965 GCE O-level CSE Total	2,170,019 + 230,977 2,400,996	32 737 + 986 33,723	163,651 + 8,345 171,996	9,776 + 235 10 011	205,719
1985 GCE O-level CSE Total**	3,066,764 + 3,231,017 6,297,781	42,616 + 31,855 74,471	147,657 + 163,626 311,283	11,749 +6,020 17,769	403,523
1995 GCSE		129,386	350,027		
1997 GCSE		136,000†	338,000†	45,000†	519,000†
2003 GCSE		125,851	331,890	61,490	519,231
2007 GCSE		81,061	216,718	63,978	361,757
2011 GCSE		60,887	154,221	66,021	281,129
2020 GCSE		40,748	124,404	104,280	269,432

Table 1: Entrants for German, French and Spanish at age 16 in 1938, 1965, 1985, 1995, 1997, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2020. First presented in McLelland (2015: 159). The 2020 figures are taken from Collen (2021)

21 *N.B. *not* no. of candidates;

22 **Both the GCE and CSE figures for French in 1985 include candidates entered for the combined GCE/CSE examination, so they are somewhat inflated; from 1988 the combined GCSE replaced separate O-level and CSE examinations. The CSE was a subject-specific examination offered between 1965 and 1987 to a broader range of pupils than the GCE O-level, which was aimed at academically more able pupils[10].

23 †Rounded figures, from Moys (1998: 36); 2003, 2007 and 2011 figures from the Joint Council of Qualifications. Cf. also Canning (2007).

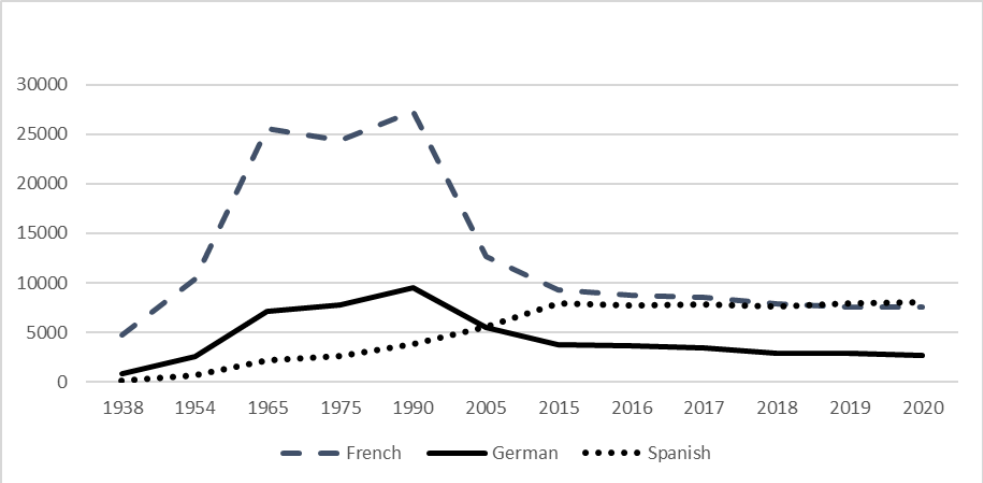

Figure 1: A-level entries in England for 2015-2020, with selected earlier years given as points of comparison (NB *time series not to scale*)

24 Source: Data for 2005 onwards from Collen (2021, Table 15), based on data from JCQ; data for 1938, 1954, 1975 and 1990 from Richard Hudson, "Trends in Language Education in England", data accessed from an online source accessed in 2017, and cited in McLelland (*op. cit.*: 33).

III The late 20th and early 21st century: more policy-making, less infrastructure

25 The twenty years or so from the late twentieth to early 21st century saw increasing policy intervention in languages education, but, paradoxically, decreasing infrastructural support. A *National Curriculum for England* was introduced in 1988, to be taught in all "local-authority-maintained schools" (and in practice followed by many other school types too, though see my comments in Figure 3 further below). Languages became a part of that national curriculum for secondary schools from 1992. Since 2014, the national curriculum for primary schools in England has also required primary schools to offer language teaching to pupils in the last four years of primary education (ages 7-11, known as Key Stage 2):

> Schools may offer any modern or ancient foreign language and should focus on enabling pupils to make substantial progress in one language. The teaching should provide an appropriate balance of spoken and written language and should lay the foundations for further foreign language teaching at key stage 3. (Department for Education 2013a: 2)

26 Despite hopes of language diversification (in particular that schools might choose to teach local community languages), primary schools overwhelmingly offer French (72% according to Collen 2021, vs 29% Spanish, and 5% German). This is an understandable consequence of the inertia in the system, as French is the language most widely learned and studied, and thus the easiest one for which to recruit (more or less suitably qualified) teaching staff for primary schools. One might argue, though, that the embedding of the traditional school languages even earlier in the education system has only reinforced the division – and power differential – between invisibilized community or heritage languages (sidelined to lunch clubs, after-school or weekend supplementary schools) and those languages with the prestige of a place in the

mainstream curriculum. (It should be noted, nevertheless, that community languages in fact receive better recognition and support in the UK than in many other countries; note, for example, their inclusion in the *Asset Languages* scheme, discussed below.)

27 In the first three years of secondary school (ages 11-14, known as Key Stage 3), pupils in England must learn "any modern foreign language", and teaching

> should focus on developing the breadth and depth of pupils' competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing, based on a sound foundation of core grammar and vocabulary. It should enable pupils to understand and communicate personal and factual information that goes beyond their immediate needs and interests, developing and justifying points of view in speech and writing, with increased spontaneity, independence and accuracy. It should provide suitable preparation for further study.
> (Department for Education *ibid.*)

28 As for pupils aged 14-16, leading up to the GCSE examinations (Key Stage 4), currently schools must provide the option of taking a modern foreign language. Legislation passed in 1991 to introduce a statutory *requirement* to take a modern language to age 16 was applied from 1996, after extensive consultation and reflection (see Dobson 2018 for a careful history of this development; the author was for many years an inspector in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools). However, the requirement was dropped from the National Curriculum in 2005, amid fears of the pressure on the curriculum and that some students were disengaged. The impact that this policy change would have on languages was, however, massively underestimated – understandably so, given the good numbers already taking languages to age 16 before a language had even been made compulsory. The numbers taking a language to GCSE dropped between 2005 and 2009 by 32% (Clark 2009, writing in the *Mail online*), and the drop has continued since then, in a vicious cycle or downward spiral: smaller cohorts become increasingly less viable in schools with limited resources. Nevertheless, it is still a requirement of the national curriculum to *offer* a language up to age 16, following government "Subject content statements".[11] For example, students study three themes on which the assessments are based: Identity and culture; Local, national, international and global areas of interest; Current and future study and employment (Ofqual 2017).[12] Specifications also cover the four skills, grammar, communication strategies, vocabulary. Such statements are in turn interpreted by the examining boards which award qualifications. Teachers then create so-called schemes of work to break down the curriculum into shorter units of work, of say, two or three weeks each (often taking responsibility for a particular year, to be shared amongst more than one teacher). Teachers in the classrooms plan their individual lessons based on such schemes of work.

29 I have outlined this contemporary process in such detail in order to make two points: first, the considerable expansion of government intervention and apparent control over language teaching, all of it put in place over the past thirty years or so; and second, the fact that the system still remains a very decentralized one, and any high-level policy decision takes a complicated route to implementation on the ground, with considerable scope left to "arbiters" at various levels (in Johnson & Johnson's 2015 sense), in several different kinds of institutions, who determine how decisions are implemented. I develop this point more fully in Section IV below, but to give just one example here, individual schools can choose between exam boards for GCSE and A-level examinations (taken at age 16 and 18, respectively). There are currently three such

boards for England, two of which offer qualifications in languages, AQA and Edexcel: AQA is run as a charity; Edexcel is run by a private profit-making company, Pearson – the third, OCR, is run by a University agency, Cambridge Assessment, but no longer offers languages examinations. Textbooks increasingly cater specifically to the particular examination board; Pearson publishes its own textbooks for its own exam board, Edexcel; textbooks for AQA GCSE courses are currently published by Oxford University Press.

30 Alongside the increasing regulation of languages education content in schools, there was also a moment of strategy around the new millennium, a seeming cumulative point of the "Languages for all" approach of the later twentieth century. In 2002, *Languages for all, languages for Life. A strategy for England*, was published by the Department of Education and Skills in 2002, adopting various recommendations of the Nuffield Languages Enquiry (Nuffield Foundation 2000), including the appointment of a National Director for Languages (appointed in 2003). In 2005, an *Asset Languages* scheme was set up, intended to provide language learning accreditation at 17 grades, conceived as rungs on a so-called Languages Ladder from beginner level to mastery (DCFS 2007). Grades 4-9 corresponded roughly to GCSE and Grades 10-12 to A-level, but the scheme also provided for both much higher and lower levels of proficiency. It was intended to be maximally inclusive: applicable to community languages not widely taught at school (with 25 languages included at one point), and enabling recognition of relatively low or uneven levels of competence for workplace and vocational qualifications (with its starting point lower than the lowest level in the CEFR). However, when CILT was closed in 2011, the government also discontinued funding both for the Languages Strategy and for the Director's role; and the *Asset Languages* scheme was discontinued in 2012.

31 All this amounted to a radical loss of infrastructural support, paradoxically just after the achievement of apparent maximum strategic direction-setting by the (earlier, Labour) government through the 2002 *Strategy*, and still in a period of maximum intervention through policy on languages provision in schools. Dobson (2018: 78) notes three reasons for the loss of infrastructure: the general impact of economic austerity on public services budgets; a policy preference to give resources to the point of delivery, i.e. in schools directly; and a suspicion among some policy-makers of over-reliance on "experts" (rather than, say, "common sense").

32 The last few years have seen an effort to reintroduce at least some of the lost support, in the shape of a National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP; see NCELP.org). The Centre was established at the University of York in December 2018, with an initial focus on supporting a network of 45 secondary schools, but intended to expand, and with the specific aim of significantly increasing uptake of languages at GCSE, responding to a report by the Teaching Schools Council (Bauckham 2016). The most recent revisions of the GCSE French, German and Spanish curriculum are certainly heavily influenced by NCELP. They are somewhat controversial (not least because they eliminate any specification of required cultural or thematic content), but they are certainly intended to make languages more accessible and more popular, by making success in them at GCSE more achievable and – in the eyes of teachers, learners and parents – more predictable. Whether they will also manage to maintain the interest of more able pupils and prepare them for A-levels and further study remains to be seen.

IV The role of policy arbiters and disruptors in the implementation of languages education policy in England

33 Two decades after the 2002 national languages strategy was published, and then essentially disowned by the succeeding government, the most recent (2020) attempt to express a national strategic vision on languages (this time for the entire UK, rather than just England) is titled only *Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills* (British Academy 2020, my emphasis). Significantly, it is jointly endorsed by five different bodies, whose remits all extend beyond that of languages: the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council, and Universities UK.[13] Unlike the 2002 Strategy, however, the document is not a government strategy, rather a plea for one.

34 As outlined in Section III, the government requires the teaching of languages from age 7 to 14; it requires that a language be available as an option to all learners covered by the National Curriculum to age 16; and it controls subject content. Yet there is still considerable scope both for deviation from, and for disruption of stated government intention. The system leaves many key decisions to local schools, decisions that are typically shaped by pressures (including other government policies) that have little or nothing to do with languages per se. To analyse this more fully, I draw on and develop Johnson & Johnson's (*op. cit.*) notion of the "policy funnel", which builds on Hornberger & Johnson's (2011) proposal for an ethnography of language policy and of the agency of those implementing, and/or adapting and/or resisting it. My approach here is certainly not ethnographic, and my focus is different to that of Johnson & Johnson; but the model of the funnel, and, crucially, the notion of language policy *arbiters,* is useful. Johnson & Johnson (*op. cit.*: 225-6) define an arbiter as

> any policy actor (potentially: teachers, administrators, policymakers, etc.) who wields a disproportionate amount of power in how a policy gets created, interpreted, or appropriated, relative to other individuals in the same level or context [...]; at some point [in the funnel], there is one language policy arbiter who has singular power with regard to how a policy is interpreted and appropriated and all subsequent decisions in the policy process must funnel through them.

35 As an example, Figure 2 shows a simplified version of the "funnel" from national to district level in Washington State Language Policy (adapted from Johnson & Johnson *ibid.*: 227). The differences between Johnson & Johnson's presentation of the Washington State model and the system of setting and implementing policy on language teaching in England, which I summarize in Figure 3, is illuminating. Alongside the complication of many intervening *arbiters* between levels of implementation, I introduce the notion of a *disruptor*, which I understand as *any actor making a decision that, directly or indirectly, positively or negatively interferes with the implementation of a policy, without that necessarily being the main focus or intention of the actor*. One might consider the comprehensivization of schools in the mid-twentieth century, which led in effect to languages for all, a high-level disruptor with a positive impact on languages provision. By contrast, the disruptors identified in Figure 3 are largely local decision-makers in local schools.

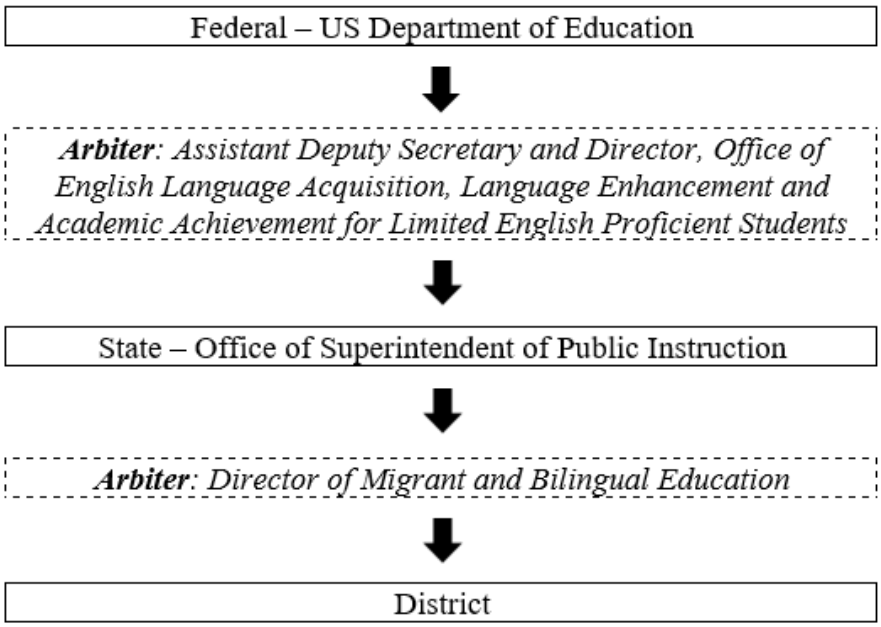

Figure 2: The Washington State language policy funnel (adapted from Johnson & Johnson *ibid.*)

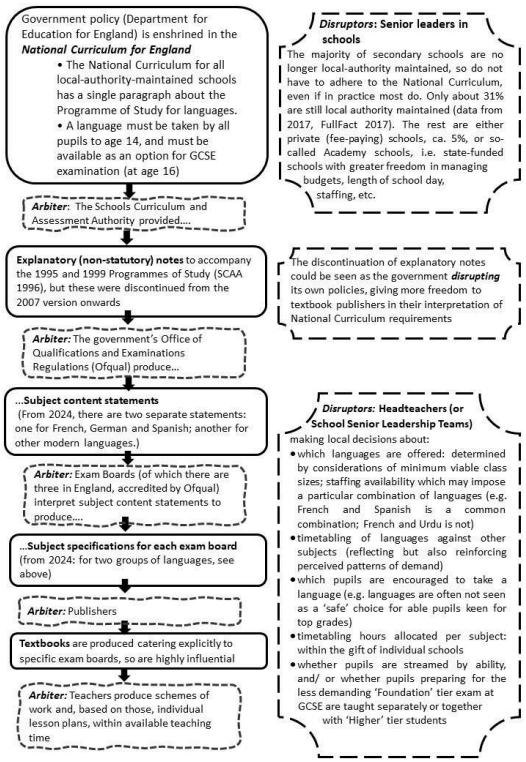

Figure 3: Languages education policy implementation in England, and the role of arbiters and disruptors

36 ***Note to Figure 3:* *which languages are offered** may be determined by considerations of minimum viable class sizes; staffing availability which may impose a particular combination of languages (e.g. French and Spanish is a common combination; French and Urdu is not); **timetabling** of languages is a decision for individual schools, also timetabling against which other subjects (reflecting but also reinforcing perceived

patterns of demand); **which pupils are encouraged to take a language** (e.g. languages are often not seen as a "safe" choice for able pupils keen for top grades); **streaming by ability or not**, and/ or whether pupils preparing for the less demanding "Foundation" tier exam at GCSE are taught separately or together with "Higher" tier students, may depend on student numbers.

37 As my summary in Figure 3 shows, the disruption of well-intentioned policy tends to happen at the hyper-local level, in individual schools, with school leadership teams in schools making key decisions. Those decisions are, however, informed by other, larger-scale pressures that may result from other policy decisions. These include tight constraints on school funding, especially in state schools; and parental pressure, which is also influenced by factors such as the competition between schools, encouraged in the system of Ofsted ratings of schools and other rankings. One such structural factor influencing the decision-making of such local school leadership teams as disruptors is the "English Baccalaureate" introduced in 2010 as a measure of schools' performance, based on pupils' performance in a pool of "core" subjects, which importantly *may* include a language, but not necessarily. Another factor is ideological, the common assumption that all academically able students should take three separate sciences subjects (= three GCSEs) rather than "combined science" (counting as two GCSEs), limiting the scope for arts and humanities options. There is no similar expectation that talented language learners should take two (never mind three!) languages, and often the way option choices are timetabled makes taking more than one language impossible, particularly outside the private sector.[14] The relative unimportance of languages for meeting the targets that schools are set may be reflected in the timetabling time allocated to them, which (as the Leathes Report already noted with concern in 1918) still remains a decision left to local schools. All GCSEs are, from the perspective of the pupil, weighted equally as subjects, but policymakers and parents have recently tended to prioritize mathematics and English, followed by science, and curriculum time is assigned accordingly, rather than evenly across all subjects. Dobson (2018: 74) noted that variations between similar schools in curriculum time for languages of as much as an hour per week had been found; and he further noted that the time allocated in secondary schools for the first foreign language was lower than the European average by an hour per week (Dobson *op. cit.*: 82 citing European Commission 2012: 238).

38 It is difficult to trace and assess the direct effect of decisions made by disruptors I have identified, distributed as they are in individual schools. However, it is clear that languages uptake is still declining, suggesting that, despite the existence of more policy and central direction than at any point in the history of languages education, the policy funnel is not achieving the expected outcomes. It is likely, then, that disruptors are an important factor. The 2020 *Towards a National Languages Strategy* document has attempted to influence some of these disruptors, with proposals for concrete remedial actions, e.g. adjusting grade boundaries for languages at GCSE and A-level; increasing time allocated to languages in primary teacher training; and introducing a languages premium paid to schools for each additional student pursuing an A-level language.

Conclusion

39 It is instructive to return, in concluding, to some of the recommendations made, over a century ago, by the 1918 Leathes Report to strengthen languages provision in Britain. Such a single comprehensive study has never been repeated, and its recommendations are a useful benchmark against which to measure progress in England since then, and especially since concerted policy-making after World War II. In the short term, the 53 recommendations of the Leathes Report, along with others for other subject areas, fell foul of budgetary pressures. However, in the longer term, over the past century, there has been good progress on at least some points, as summarized in Table 2. However, these positive changes over a period of a hundred years make the lack of progress in other areas all the more striking, summarized in Table 3; and the fundamental fact of decreasing numbers taking languages at GCSE, at A-level, and at University remains.

Table 2: Selected Leathes Report recommendations and examples of good progress since then

Leathes Report recommendation (summarized)	Positive change over the period 1918-2021
Spanish, Italian and Russian should be given equal prominence to German; others including non-European languages should not be neglected	Russian and Italian are established in several universities, and offered at least in some schools. Other languages are more widely available too, such as Chinese. Spanish has broken through to become the second language after French (albeit at the expense of German)
Establish more Chairs and staff at Universities, especially French	Despite recent painful contractions in universities' languages provision, the sector is definitely far larger and better established than it was in 1918.
Research funding, sabbaticals for modern languages academics	Sabbaticals and funding are routinely available in higher education (even if not as accessible to all as one might wish)
Oral examinations and speaking to be given due recognition	There has been substantial change, with oral assessment weighted at 25% in English GCSEs
Residence abroad for students, also opportunities for teachers	A Year Abroad is now the norm for language degree students, though Covid-19 and Brexit (resulting in a change from Erasmus funding to the UK's own Turing scheme) may put pressure on the Year Abroad in future.
Improve pay and conditions for British-trained teachers at School and Universities	Yes, comparatively. As I write (spring 2022), many colleagues in UK universities are on strike over pensions, pay and conditions. However, languages teachers in schools and university languages staff are paid on a par with those in other subjects, as a matter of course.

Table 3: Selected Leathes Report recommendations where areas of concern remain

Adequate space and prominence in school timetable	Limited hours per week, and no central mechanism to influence timetabling Languages are not compulsory at GCSE Limited scope at A-level (where pupils usually only take three subjects) In most state schools it is difficult to take more than one language
Examinations need attention	Fear of severe and/or unpredictable grading remains; a review of GCSE grading in Modern Foreign Languages led to grade adjustments in England for GCSE French and German, but not Spanish, from summer 2020 (Ofqual 2019) High achievers and elite are put off Less able pupils (and their teachers) are alarmed by standards expected (another reform of the GCSE is about to be introduced in an effort to address this: Department for Education 2021a, b)
Teacher training – in sufficient numbers, also for primary languages	Variable – there are shortages (Tinsley & Doležal 2018: 8).
Pupil and student numbers	Numbers taking languages at school and University are higher than in 1918 – but lower now than in the 1980s at GCSE (see Table 1) and even than in the 1960s at A-level (Figure 1, see also McLelland 2015: 160). At University, student numbers have been declining since 2000 (British Academy 2018)

40 This study set out to investigate the impact of advocacy, infrastructure and policy-making on practice in the history of language learning and teaching. I have identified instances where advocacy – from within and outside the languages education community – appears to have had incremental effects on languages education: in methods, the increasing prominence of speaking skills in teaching; and perhaps in provision, in the gradual growth of Spanish to take second place to French, supplanting German. I have suggested, though, that the most seismic change, to languages for all in secondary schooling, was the result of a change in policy largely external to the languages education community, comprehensivization. I have also noted a correlation between excellent infrastructural support for languages and strong take-up in the late twentieth century, and noted the poor impact, in the absence of strong infrastructure, of recent policy initiatives intended to reverse the decline of take-up – the possible impact of the new National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy remains to be seen. Finally, I have noted not just the role of policy *arbiters* in implementing policy, but in particular the role of policy *disruptors* (at the level of individual schools but largely responding to pressures that are the result of other higher-level policy decisions), in frustrating the intended outcomes of higher-level languages policy.

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NOTES

1. It is also worth noting that I leave aside parallel developments in languages education in Europe outside the UK, merely noting Dobson's (2018: 80) assessment that "The professionalism of UK experts is respected across Europe and is reflected in their contribution to COE [Council of Europe] projects whose outcomes have, regrettably, not been drawn upon consistently in UK policymaking".

2. At the other end of the languages "pipeline", the 1907 Scottish Education Department's report on the *Examination of candidates for recognition as qualified teachers of modern languages: training of teachers* (Scottish Education Department 1907) is a noteworthy early investigation, with no equivalent in England, of languages teacher training. The report, held only in the National Library of Scotland and in Queen's University Belfast, was unfortunately not accessible to me while preparing this article. However, it seems that in Scotland, the Scottish Education Department had required intending language teachers to spend a year abroad since 1906 (see Leathes 1918: 16).

3. These "Board Schools" were run by local School Boards, set up to meet the 1870 Forster Act's requirement of sufficient effective education for all children; the act made schooling compulsory to the age of 12 (Shaw 2011).

4. GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education.

5. The 1918 Leathes Report had cautiously commended the idea that schools might choose to offer something other than French as the first language, provided they "remain a minority introducing a healthy diversity". The label LOTF - Languages Other Than French – used for a time in the 1980s and 1990s, eloquently sums up the historical dominance of French until such efforts at diversification.

6. The Annan Report seems to have had at least one other far-reaching outcome. On the method of teaching, the Annan Report argued that "The student should hear, speak, read, write – in that order – in mastering new work" (Annan 1962: 38), continuing the gradual increasing attention paid to the living, spoken language. Hawkins (1987: 6) dubbed 1963-1964 an *annus mirabilis* ("wonderful year"), because, amongst other things, it was the year in which one examination board, the Associated Examinations Board, dispensed with prose translation into the foreign language, as advocated by the Annan Committee.

7. Some representative examples include CILT 1972, 1976a, 1976b, Reid 1984, Ainslie *et al.* 1994.

8. The support that NALA was able to provide for schools (combining a national perspective with close local links) was weakened after 2010 when the powers and budgets of LEAs were severely reduced following the change of government. LEAs could no longer afford to employ language advisers; NALA still exists, but its members now have to operate as free-lance consultants, without a local infrastructure to support schools.

9. I use the phrase "modern foreign language" when reporting on subject choice and take-up as that is the term used in government statutory documents. It is not my preferred term.

10. For an overview of changes to German syllabi 1985-1990 in the light of these developments, see Rock (1993).

11. Subject content statements are produced by Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulations "a non-ministerial government department with jurisdiction in England", first established in 2010 (see *About Ofqual*).
12. New GCSE content statements are about to come into force; see below. For an example of how the Subject Statement is translated into a subject specification by an exam board, see AQA (2016).
13. The British Academy is the UK's prestigious national academy for the humanities and social sciences; the Arts and Humanities Research Council is the main research funding body for languages research; Universities UK is the body representing the collective voice of UK universities. The Association of School and College Leaders is the leading professional association and trade union for UK school, college and trust leaders, representing more than 21,500 leaders of primary, secondary and post-16 education. The British Council took over the administration of the Language Assistant Scheme in 1992, and has an increasing role in foreign language advocacy, serving for examples as Secretariat for the All-Parliamentary Group for Languages, established in 2008. As well as annual series of *Language Trends* reports (of which Collen 2021 is the most recent), the British Council has published other fact-finding and languages advocacy reports such as *Languages for the Future. Which languages the UK needs most and why* (British Council 2013).
14. In 2000, over a third of privately educated pupils took more than one foreign language, as well as a quarter of those in grammar schools, i.e. academically and therefore to some extent also socially selective schools; but in comprehensive schools, that figure was 7.5%.

ABSTRACTS

Taking the history of languages education policy in England as its case study, this paper examines how the practice of teaching and learning French and other languages has been shaped, in various ways, by advocacy; by institutional infrastructure; and by policy-makers, policy *arbiters* (in the sense of Johnson & Johnson 2015), and by what I call policy *disruptors*. The paper identifies examples where advocacy – from within and outside the languages education community – appears to have had incremental effects on languages education (the increasing emphasis given to the spoken language; the growth in Spanish teaching provision). However, I argue that the most obviously positive change, making languages available to all in secondary schooling, was largely the result of a change in policy external to the languages education community, that is, the comprehensivization of secondary schools. By contrast, the loss of infrastructure to support languages teaching over the last few decades has had a negative impact. Looking more closely at the delivery of actual languages education policy, I show that certain policy *arbiters* (i.e. actors with an influence on the implementation of policy at different levels) play a key role. I further argue that it is important to attend in particular to the role played by policy *disruptors*, understood here as actors at various levels who may, often unintentionally, interfere with and frustrate the intended outcomes of languages education policy.

Prenant l'histoire de la politique d'enseignement des langues en Angleterre comme étude de cas, cet article examine comment les pratiques de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage des langues – parmi lesquels le français a toujours dominé et domine toujours – ont été façonnées, de diverses manières, par des défenseurs de l'enseignement des langues (*languages advocates*) ; par l'infrastructure institutionnelle ; et par les décideurs politiques, par les *policy arbiters* (« arbitres

politiques », au sens de Johnson & Johnson 2015), et par ceux que j'appelle les *policy disruptors* (« perturbateurs politiques »). L'article identifie des exemples où le plaidoyer pour les langues – soit de la part de la communauté de l'enseignement des langues, soit de la part d'autres voix externes à elle – semble avoir eu des effets incrémentaux sur l'enseignement des langues (par exemple sur l'importance croissante accordée à la langue parlée ; sur la croissance de l'offre d'enseignement de l'espagnol). Cependant, je soutiens que le changement le plus évidemment positif – le fait que l'apprentissage des langues soit devenu accessible à tous dans l'éducation secondaire – est en grande partie le résultat d'un changement de politique externe à la communauté de l'enseignement des langues : la « *comprehensivization* » des écoles secondaires. En revanche, la perte d'infrastructures pour soutenir l'enseignement des langues au cours des dernières décennies a eu un impact négatif. En examinant de plus près la mise en œuvre de la politique actuelle d'enseignement des langues, je montre que certains *policy arbiters*, des acteurs ayant une influence sur la mise en œuvre de la politique à différents niveaux, jouent un rôle clé, et soutiens la nécessité en particulier de considérer le rôle joué par les *policy disruptors*, entendus ici comme des acteurs à différents niveaux qui peuvent, souvent involontairement, interférer avec et/ou contrecarrer les résultats escomptés de la politique linguistique éducative.

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Mots-clés: politique linguistique, apprentissage des langues, histoire de l'éducation, arbitres politiques, perturbateurs politiques, Angleterre
Keywords: language policy, language learning, history of education, policy arbiters, policy disruptors, England

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