Towards 'languages for all' in England: the state of the debate

Lesley Hagger-Vaughan

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Lesley Hagger-Vaughan[*]

School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

Whether the study of languages should be a core element of a balanced and broadly based curriculum for all pupils in England's 11–16 state-funded secondary schools is also part of a wider debate concerning how to harness England's rich linguistic and cultural diversity and improve the quality and range of language skills of the country. While learning a second language throughout compulsory schooling is increasingly the norm across the world, fewer than 50% of 14–16 year olds in state-funded schools in England gained a modern language qualification (General Certification of Secondary Education or GCSE) in 2015. From 2015, recent government education policy has required the majority of pupils commencing secondary school to study a language to GCSE level, suggesting that schools who do not comply will be unable to gain the top inspection grade. This paper reviews the state of the debate examining divergent and contradictory perspectives within education policy and in the literature. It concludes by setting out six conditions for achieving this policy goal for enabling secondary schools to successfully implement a coherent and relevant languages curriculum for all young people, such that they can develop the linguistic and intercultural competencies needed to contribute to and thrive in increasingly diverse local and global communities.

Keywords: modern foreign languages; diversity; multilingualism; intercultural competence; education policy; curriculum

Introduction

Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going back and beginning all over again (André Gide 1891:5).

The Education Act of 2002 requires all English schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. The place of (modern) languages[1] within that curriculum, however, is not secure. This comes amidst the wider debate concerning language skills and language education in our increasingly multilingual world, where speaking more than one language is commonplace (All-Party Parliamentary Group 2014; British Council 2013; CBI 2014; Nuffield 2000). At the heart of this debate is a question of whether learning a language should be a core component of the education of all young people throughout their compulsory schooling (Crystal 2012; DfE 2011a; DfES 2002a; Macaro 2008; Mitchell 2014; Morgan 2015; Pachler 2007). According to Schleicher of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 'diversity is not a problem of a knowledge economy but actually its greatest potential' (Schleicher 2013). The OECD is considering the inclusion of foreign language skills in future tests in the Programme for International Student Assessment

(PISA). Schleicher emphasises the importance of language and inter- cultural skills as key competencies that will enable young people to work globally and live in increasingly heterogeneous communities. This reflects the position articulated by UNESCO (2015: 21) with cultural diversity considered to be 'humanity's greatest source of creativity and wealth' and multilingualism an essential requirement for intercultural dialogue and communication in a globalised world (UNESCO 2013). While learning a second language throughout compulsory education is frequently the norm in high-performing edu- cation systems in Europe and across the world, fewer than 50% of 16-year-old school leavers in state-funded schools in England gained a language General Certification of Secondary Education (GCSE)[2] in 2015 (DfE 2016a). Research indicates that those who do study languages post-14 tend to be educated in the independent school sector or are high attainers from more affluent backgrounds in state-funded schools while many young people's access to language learning is often constrained by curriculum decisions taken at regional and local levels (Royal Society of Arts [RSA] 2015; Sutton Trust 2015).

A dearth of recent research exploring language education policy and its implementation in English secondary schools means that there may be an over reliance by practitioners and policy-makers on small-scale snapshot surveys. Furthermore, relevant research may not reach those tasked with making curriculum decisions in the current period of intense reform. Following recent government reviews, schools will be grappling with more 'rigorous' language GCSEs, the Progress 8[3] performance measure and a new inspection frame- work from Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Schools will be judged on their provision of a broad and balanced curriculum, including an expectation that 'the majority' of pupils will take a GCSE language qualification from 2020 as part of the English Baccalaureate (or EBacc)[4] suite of subjects (DfE 2015b; Morgan 2015). It is therefore important and timely to reinvigorate the debate about the place of languages in the UK's Key Stage 4 (KS4 - ages 14–16) -[5] curriculum.

While perhaps 'everything has been said before' by academics and commentators, the voices of teachers and school leaders tasked with enacting language education policy are less frequently heard. My perspective is that of an education professional involved in some of the studies, policies and reports discussed below, in addition to many years' experience in school language teaching and leadership (Hagger-Vaughan, Souplet, and Dearn 2004). My purpose in writing this paper is to provoke debate in order to work towards a more coherent and productive language education for all young people. The wider socio- political context of this discussion includes the current reconsideration of the UK's position in the European Union, which itself is set against the backdrop of a dominant monolingual discourse in the UK and prevailing negative attitudes towards immigration, in which multi-lingualism and diversity are often portrayed as problematic (Martin-Jones, Blackledge and Creese 2012; Pachler 2007).

This paper reviews the state of the debate amongst educational professionals, policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, employers and the media and examines the divergent and at times contradictory positions adopted in education policy and the literatures. It con- siders the interrelationship between language education policy and practice and its impact on the language learning opportunities afforded to young people in state secondary schools. It concludes by discussing the implications for future policy and practice setting out six key conditions required if the place of language learning within the curriculum for all pupils at KS4 is to be secured. The paper draws on a broad range of sources which illustrate the varied points and angles of view amongst diverse audiences. Blommaert

(2010) argues that globalisation and 'superdiversity' have led to a fluidity in terms of the 'places' in which languages are spoken and encountered. The term 'foreign' language is therefore problematic in a context in which 'globalisation is understood as blurring distinctions between the international and the domestic, the global and the local' (Ozga and Lingard 2007: 65). The 'F' needs to be removed from 'modern foreign languages (MFL)', the acronym mostly commonly used in the UK. This better reflects an interconnected global world where many different languages and cultures are encountered both locally and virtually, in addition to when travelling to 'foreign' countries, leading, in Lo Bianco's (2014) words, to the 'domesticating of the foreign'.

Setting the scene

The historical development of language education policy since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 will be explored in the next section but, first, I consider five key aspects which underpin the debate on the place of languages in the KS4 curriculum.

The English context

The past decade has seen a significant decline in the proportion of young people learning languages post-14 in the UK and concerns about low levels of language proficiency (European Commission 2012). Fewer than 50% of 14–16 year olds in state-funded schools in England gained a modern language qualification (GCSE) in 2015 although it has been mandatory for most European children to learn at least one foreign language during their compulsory education (Eurostat 2014). Furthermore, according to Eurostat (2014) while over half of upper secondary students across the EU-28 member states studied two or more foreign languages (FL), only 5% of pupils in the UK studied two or more FL in this phase. The European Survey of Language Competence found that young people in England had the weakest foreign language skills amongst the participating countries, unsurprising given the limited amounted of time allocated to language study in England (OECD 2014). The poor outcomes of the survey 'jar with the linguistically diverse demographics of the UK, where 17.5% of primary and 12.9% of secondary school pupils speak languages other than English' (Lanvers and Coleman 2013: 2). This paradox of multilingualism and monolingualism within the UK (Lanvers 2011) is frequently raised in relation to the UK's language capability and a failure to capitalise on England's linguistic and cultural diversity and to value the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al. 1992) of bi-lingual pupils.

According to the current National Curriculum, learning a foreign language 'is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures' and should enable pupils 'to communicate in the target language and equip them to learn other languages' (DfE 2013: 1). The teaching of languages is currently mandatory in 'maintained'[6] schools in England at KS2 and KS3 and an 'entitlement'[7] at KS4 with French, Spanish and German the most commonly taught languages. Although academies and free schools are not required to follow the National Curriculum, they are required to offer a curriculum which is 'balanced and broadly based', that 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils' and 'prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life' (Education Act 2002: Section 78). It is for schools to define a balanced and broadly based curriculum in their local context and to determine the place of languages in that curriculum. Both the Ofsted inspection framework and accountability measures play a significant role in framing expectations and decisions

(Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). A policy announcement in June 2015 that 'all pupils' should study the 'core academic subjects' at GCSE (including a language) as part of the EBacc has brought renewed focus to the debate about the place of languages in the KS4 curriculum.

The European context

In the context of recurrent debates about the UK's membership of the European Union (EU), and the recent referendum decision to withdraw from the EU, it is perhaps unsurprising that language education policy in England falls short of the recommendations of European policy, which has a particular focus on working with member governments to support linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe and promote pluralingualism. Furthermore, English Language Education professionals are also missing out on the benefits of collaboration and the professional development opportunities offered by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), since English funding was withdrawn in 2012. The Council of Europe encourages the learning and use of languages 'as a means to support intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and democratic citizenship, and as an important economic asset in a modern knowledge-based society' (Council of Europe 2005: 1). A key European Commission (2008) document, 'Multilingualism – an asset for Europe and a shared commitment', outlines a strategic framework which places particular emphasis on improving the language skills of school leavers and promotes the learning of two languages in addition to the mother tongue.

'English is not enough'

An important aspect of the debate which brings particular challenges and opportunities is the place of English as a global language of international communication (Crystal 2012; Guilherme 2007). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) note that while the rest of the world is becoming multilingual, there has been a decline in second language learning in English-speaking countries. Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009: 8) refer to 'an anglophonic reluctance to becoming bilingual' while Lanvers (2011: 63) points to a 'tacit assumption that English is enough' suggesting that this has had a major influence on language education policies and practices in the UK. Mitchell (2014) highlights the disadvantages of being a monolingual English speaker in a fluctuating, hierarchical 'global language system' which is seeing the rise of other 'super central languages' (de Swaan 2001) alongside English. Graddol (2007) warns that as increasingly, millions of students globally are able to speak English and at least one other language, the career prospects of monolingual young people in England are potentially diminished. While there is strong support for the proposition that 'English is not enough' amongst language education professionals (All-Party Parliamentary Group 2014; Nuffield 2000), this is not universally accepted as the following debates illustrate.

Languages – caught in the academic/vocational debate

Rose (2004) suggests that one of the most influential dichotomies in the lives of young people is the distinction between 'academic' and 'vocational' and how this influences the school curriculum, qualifications and pathways that they follow.

The contradictions and consequences of this distinction affects the place of languages at KS4, with languages typically framed as an 'academic' subject. This is further complicated by a lack of clear definitions in education policy of 'vocational' and 'academic' learning.

The Wolf Review (2011) suggests that vocational learning is suited to 'those whose aptitudes and talents are practical' and vocational qualifications, known as technical awards are described as qualifications 'which equip students with applied knowledge and associated practical skills' while academic GCSEs include Mathematics, English, Science, History, Geography and a Modern Language (DfE 2016b: 4). This notion of languages as an 'academic' activity was implicit in the removal of languages from the compulsory subjects to be studied at KS4 in 2002 (Sewell 2004), as explored later in the paper and is explicit within current educational policy (DfE 2010; Gibb 2015). King (2004) questions the assumption that language learning is an 'academic pursuit', when millions of people across the world of all backgrounds, ages and abilities learn a second language and the use of more than one language is common practice in daily life. This framing of languages as an 'academic' subject rather than one which also equips students with applied knowledge and associated skills highlights the contradictions of a vocational/academic divide and also perhaps shapes the perceptions and decisions of curriculum leaders as regards the contribution of languages to a balanced and broadly based curriculum, effective modern language pedagogy and appropriate resourcing and staffing.

A fundamental aim of modern language teaching is to enable young people to communicate in the target language (Pachler et al. 2014). Drawing on Byram's notion of 'intercultural communicative competence' (Byram, Holmes and Savvides 2013: 251) I would suggest that a meaningful languages curriculum combines the development of both linguistic and intercultural competence. It integrates the ability to understand and manipulate linguistic structures and apply them in meaningful contexts (Lightbown and Spada 2013) in order to communicate effectively, with the development of 'a greater critical awareness of ourselves and others' and 'thereby becoming more adequately educated for an inter- national world' (Byram 2008: 18).

Languages perceived as a 'difficult' and 'challenging' subject

Another perception featuring prominently in the debate surrounding the place of languages in the KS4 curriculum is that learning a language is 'difficult'. Several studies have researched English young people's attitudes towards learning languages (Evans and Fisher 2009; Filmer-Sankey and Marshall 2010; Graham 2004). An ongoing concern is that gaining a 'good' GCSE in a language is a greater challenge than in some other subjects due to perceived 'severe grading' of languages (ASCL 2014; Myers 2006; QCA 2008).

According to the RSA's Open Public Services Network, the pressure on schools to perform well in league tables of examination results is having a direct impact on the opportunities afforded to young people to learn languages at KS4. Their report found that 'the curriculum a pupil will be taught varies according to whether they live in a wealthy or poor neighbourhood' (RSA 2015: 8). Pupils in wealthy Kensington, for example, were four times

more likely to be enrolled for a language GCSE than pupils in poorer Middlesbrough where, on average, only one child in every four takes a language GCSE (RSA 2015: 8). However, there are a number of local education authorities in the lowest deprivation quintile where more pupils are taking languages. The report suggests that this may be due to the linguistic diversity of these areas (RSA 2015: 26). The RSA Director of Public Services criticised school leaders for 'dumbing down' the curriculum, arguing that they should be aiming to improve the standard of their teaching rather than narrowing the curriculum in order to achieve better grades. Findings from the Sutton Trust (2015) also suggest that highly able pupils eligible for 'pupil premium' grant funding aimed at raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, do not perform well in languages.

Having set out these five key issues that frame the debate, the following section takes a historical look at language education policy in England from the introduction of the National Curriculum to the present with a particular focus on the place of languages in the KS4 curriculum.

Language education policy at KS4: languages for all, for some, for the majority?

An analysis of the history of languages in the secondary curriculum over the past 25 years reveals numerous policy twists and turns (Pachler et al. 2014). Contradictions and short-termism in language education policy have resulted in confusion surrounding national requirements and expectations. Successive administrations have commissioned reviews and appointed 'experts' to provide language education policy advice (Dearing and King 2007; DES 1985; DfE 2010; DfES 2002a; Nuffield 2000) but participation in languages at KS4 in 2015 remains similar to pre-National Curriculum figures.

Languages for all in the National Curriculum

Prior to the introduction of a National Curriculum in 1988, gaining a language qualification at 16 was largely the preserve of pupils in the independent sector or the 'more able' in state schools (Hawkins 1981). Her Majesty's Inspectors in their Curriculum Matters series suggested that the study of languages should be located within a 'linguistic and literary area of experience' combining all aspects of language learning (DES 1985: 7) to provide an 'apprenticeship' in the skills of foreign language learning, enabling pupils to develop the transferable skills necessary to learn other languages (DES 1987: 4). This thinking informed the introduction of languages as part of a National Curriculum for all pupils between the ages of 11–16 at KS3 (1992) and KS4 (1995) with the majority of pupils entered for the 'new' language GCSE or an equivalent between 1996 and 2002 (Nuffield 2000). The National Curriculum emphasised not only the economic and employment benefits of language learning in a global society but also highlighted the intellectual and cognitive benefits of developing meta- linguistic skills, broader communication skills and the contribution of learning languages to intercultural competence and global understanding (DES 1990).

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Languages for some at Key Stage 4

A shift in education policy, outlined in the government's Green Paper 14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards (2002) and predicated on the notion of 'increased choice and flexibility' in the 14–19 curriculum, saw the introduction of a range of 'high quality' vocational qualifications (DfES 2003: 7) and led to the removal of languages from the compulsory core curriculum at KS4 in 2004. The Green Paper argued that there should be a core of compulsory subjects 'essential for progression or for personal development' (DfES 2002a: 22). Languages were not deemed to be 'essential'. The then Minister for Education explained that '15 year-olds studying languages at the expense of something else is something I am more than happy to leave to schools' (The Guardian 2006). This change, contested by many, led to a rapid decline in the number of young people studying languages at KS4 in English state schools. This was not only strategically incoherent but was also in direct contradiction to the recommendations of the Nuffield Inquiry which recommended that all pupils should learn a language throughout compulsory schooling, to enable them 'to function rewardingly and responsibly as citizens of a multilingual community both in the UK and the wider world' (Nuffield 2000: 30).

The policy change was also in contradiction to the newly published national languages strategy – Languages for All: Languages for Life – which claimed that, 'language competence and intercultural understanding are not optional extras, they are an essential part of being a citizen' (DfES 2002b: 5). Pachler (2002: 5) asserts that both the Green Paper and the Languages Strategy were 'problematic in relation to equal opportunities' and marked a complete break with policy which hitherto had supported the notion of language study for all from 11 to 16. Pachler also challenges the notion of 'choice', foregrounded in the Green Paper, suggesting that the political decision to remove languages from the core at 14+ was a reaction to the shortage of qualified language teachers and concerns surrounding the lack of motivation amongst pupils to study languages in the context of 'societal and political insularity' and 'a disdain for linguistic otherness' (Pachler 2007: 4).

Paradoxically, a new policy focus was placed on the teaching of languages in primary schools (Morris 2002), with little consideration given to the workforce implications of removing languages from the core at KS4. Evans (2007) reflects that the introduction of primary languages was unlikely to improve competence and take up of languages at KS4 without structural change post-14. Macaro, however, supporting the notion of 'choice', argued that 'we are not going to be able to increase our national language competence by forcing reluctant learners to learn a language at the age of 14' (2008: 106) favouring the development of appropriate and engaging pedagogies at KS3, which would enable young people to succeed, and impact on their decisions at KS4.

Languages for 50% at Key Stage 4

Taking office in 2010, the Coalition government made no change to the statutory position of languages in the KS4 curriculum in spite of the views of respondents to the National Curriculum Consultation Call for Evidence (DfE 2011b) and members of the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review.[8] The majority of respondents to the Call stated that a

modern language should be part of a broad and balanced National Curriculum at KS4 but that GCSE should not be the sole assessment available, while the Expert Panel recommended that languages should be a core subject for all throughout compulsory secondary education (DfE 2011a). In spite of the wealth of international empirical evidence underpinning the report, ministers chose to disregard the views of the Expert Panel and consultation respondents, arguing that the newly introduced EBacc had led to a significant increase in the take-up of languages at Key Stage 4 (DfE 2012). While there has been an increase in participation at KS4, fewer than 50% of young people in state-funded schools gained a language GCSE in 2015. Panel members expressed concern over the perceived legitimacy of the National Curriculum Review, claiming that stakeholder consultation responses had been treated lightly (TES 2012).

Languages for the 'majority' at Key Stage 4?

Following the 2015 general election, the implications of the Conservative government's education reforms on the place of languages in the 14–16 curriculum are beginning to manifest themselves. The EBacc remains the government's key strategy to improve participation in languages. A recent policy announcement (BBC 2015; DfE 2015a; Morgan 2015) requires all pupils to take GCSEs in all EBacc subjects, including a language from 2020 with Ofsted unable to award its highest ratings to schools that do not comply (Conservative Party Manifesto 2015: 34). While this proposal appears to promote languages for all within a broad and balanced KS4 curriculum, it disregards a key recommendation from the Expert Panel, namely that not all pupils should follow GCSE courses in all subjects and that a range of appropriate qualifications should be available (DfE 2011a:27). The narrowing of the range of approved language qualifications in the wake of the Wolf Report (2011) is seen as contributing to the lower take-up of languages at KS4 and has led to a reduction of the number of 'lesser-taught' language qualifications available. For example, the Asset Language[9] qualification, accrediting a wide range of languages, has been withdrawn and awarding organisations have also announced the withdrawal of a number of qualifications for 'lesser-taught' languages. This highlights the lack of a coherent strategy to encourage and maintain the teaching of a range of world languages within state schools and to acknowledge and accredit the skills of many bilingual pupils. Meanwhile, the reform of language GCSEs, with an emphasis on greater 'rigour' has the potential to limit the number of young people with access to an appropriate language qualification.

The consultation on implementing the EBacc includes a modified goal of the 'vast majority' taking EBacc subjects (DfE 2015b), perhaps in response to the backlash from some headteachers following the initial policy announcement. Perhaps also due to the fact that of the five subject 'pillars' which make up the Ebacc (English, maths, science, languages, humanities) data shows that the language 'pillar' is the principal barrier to entry and achievement of the EBacc. For example, in 2015, 27% of pupils entered for four EBacc pillars, which meant that they were only one pillar away from entering the full EBacc. For many of these pupils the missing 'pillar' was a language. Sixty seven percent of pupils who were entered for four 'pillars' did not enter the full EBacc because they did not take a language GCSE (DfE 2015b: 18).

This highlights that changes in curriculum structure, pedagogy, assessment and resourcing are needed if young people are to be offered a coherent, relevant and successful language

learning journey to age 16 and beyond. Research also indicates a shortfall in the number of language teachers with the necessary subject knowledge needed to teach pupils to GCSE level (Education Datalab 2015). This foregrounds the need for a coherent, long-term language education policy with a focus on the recruitment, retention and professional development of language teachers.

Lack of a coherent, long-term languages education policy

This overview illustrates the short-termism of UK language education policy when ministers' 'personal taste or instincts' (Smith 2013: 2) result in policy which is fragmented and incoherent. This in turn creates challenges for schools in enacting a meaningful and appropriate language learning experience for all young people at KS4. Evans (2007) criticises the lack of an analysis of the fundamental issues underlying foreign language provision in England and suggests that the lack of clear policy is holding back the development of a coherent approach to language provision in English schools. Mitchell (2010) also takes the view that language education policy in England is insufficiently informed by educational research resulting in a situation where the place of languages within the curriculum is vulnerable to political agendas. She contends that the stress on achieving pre-determined learning outcomes and the pressure of accountability measures has made it hard 'to devise a viable foreign language curriculum for an anglophone environment' (Mitchell 2011: 1).

Stakeholders' views and perspectives

This section considers some of the perceptions articulated by education practitioners and stakeholders tasked with enacting language education policy as captured in the various literatures and empirical research, and the view of languages as portrayed in the media.

Language practitioners' views

Language practitioners' views of the place of languages within the secondary curriculum are frequently captured through discussions at network level, in school-based action research inquiries or through government consultations (DfE 2011b). Perhaps the most rigorous recent study, providing evidence of practitioners' views, is an empirical longitudinal study commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The study found that from the practitioners' perspective a key focus at KS3 was on making language learning successful in order to encourage take-up at KS4. The participants articulated a tension between supporting 'languages for all' and the notion of choice at 14+, in particular in a societal context in which they find themselves 'battling against years of an attitude that languages is [sic] totally irrelevant' (Evans and Fisher 2009: 90). A National Foundation for Educational Research evaluation found that heads of languages perceived 'structural' issues to be the main barrier to participation at KS4.These included the compulsory or optional status of languages in the school and the structure of the options system. Other barriers identified were lack of support from senior leaders, a perception that languages were a hard option and insufficient time-allocation (Filmer-Sankey and Marshall 2010: 34). The 2015 Language Trends Survey (Tinsley and Board 2015), providing a snapshot of practitioners' perspectives, found that the impact of performance measures and qualification reforms were major concerns for the language teachers participating in the survey.

School leaders' perspectives

The limited research on school leaders' views suggests that they are less convinced of the value of languages for all pupils from 11 to 16 and in particular at 14+. However, a lack of qualitative data makes it difficult to understand the underlying reasons for this. Understanding the perceptions and assumptions of school leaders is important in an educational land- scape characterised by a relentless focus on 'raising standards' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). In the Evans and Fisher study mentioned above, head teachers offered a different perspective to language practitioners, claiming that factors which led them to make languages optional at KS4 were the importance of choice and the belief that learners should enjoy what they were studying. The majority of head teachers were resistant to the idea that GCSE results influenced their decision-making (Evans and Fisher 2009: 93). This is surprising given the aforementioned and longstanding concerns about the grading and perceived difficulty of GCSE languages and the fact that even prior to languages becoming an entitlement at KS4, schools were removing languages from the core curriculum amid concerns that poor GCSE outcomes could impact negatively on their league table performance (Lanvers 2011). The recent policy announcement that all pupils will be expected to take GCSEs in EBacc subjects including a language has prompted some emotive responses from school leaders:

> We cannot get good language teachers in our area. They don't exist. So what will I do? If we're forced to teach every pupil a language, our results will be so terrible our Ofsted rating will be bad, and if I choose to ignore the policy, the government will ensure our Ofsted rating is bad. (The Guardian 2015)

> Our school historically made it a requirement for all pupils to take an MFL option at KS4 and we breathed a huge sigh of relief when it was removed from the compulsory GCSE option blocking system. Parents were delighted, pupils felt empowered, and staff relieved. (Watkin 2015: 6)

Such comments highlight the need for further empirical research and a broader professional dialogue in order to understand the concerns of school leaders and also misconceptions relating to 'languages for all' at KS4.

Lack of language skills is bad for UK PLC

There appears to be a serious mismatch between language education policy and the needs of business and industry. Concerns are repeatedly expressed about the decline in language learning which is seen as impacting on the employability and mobility of young people and holding back 'UK PLC' (CBI 2013, 2014; Foreman-Peck 2014; Mann, Brassell and Bevan 2011). In the 2014 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey, 65% of employers indicated a need for employees with language skills and found that although English is seen as the international language of business, ability to speak in another language is regarded as beneficial particularly as the UK market becomes more export-orientated (CBI 2014: 53). Employees are needed who can communicate competently in an increasingly diverse range of languages and operate effectively across cultures, in French 50%; German 49%; Spanish 44%; Mandarin 31%; Arabic 23%; Polish 19%; Russian 18%; Cantonese 16%; Japanese 15%; Portuguese 11% (CBI 2014). This strengthens the case for a long-term languages policy that would result in competence in a more diverse range of languages amongst the population. Furthermore, speaking skills and communicative competence are repeatedly cited as generic areas of weakness amongst school leavers (CBI 2014; Mourshed, Patel and Suder 2014; UKESS 2014). Language learning – with its explicit focus on active listening and

speaking skills – has an important and unique contribution to make to the development of young people's communication skills.

Languages in the media

In their analysis of the media coverage of the 'UK language learning crisis', Lanvers and Coleman (2013) argue that the media also perpetuate the 'English is enough' fallacy. Coleman argues that while the reasons for the declining take-up of languages are linked to policy and pedagogy, the negativity of public opinion, itself echoed and shaped by the media and by Government, is stronger than the positivity of those within Government and education who seek to promote international openness and the practical and personal benefits of competence in languages other than English. (Coleman 2009: 112)

Multilingualism is often linked to immigration and is frequently constructed as a problem or a threat to national unity in public discourse (Martin-Jones, Blackledge and Creese 2012). For example: 'So many settlers have arrived in Boston, Lincolnshire, that 65 languages are spoken in a market town of only 70,000 inhabitants' (Daily Mail 23/4/08 cited in Coleman 2009: 120). Coleman suggests that language professionals have failed to get across to government, to public opinion or to the media that bilingualism is a resource not a problem, an asset not a deficit, and that bilingualism raises both cognitive standards and literacy (Coleman 2009: 122).

Rethinking languages education – implications for future policy and practice

This paper has mapped out the current state of the debate on languages for all at KS4 in England and the historical origins of this position over the last quarter of a century, a period characterised by short-termism and strategic incoherence. In addition to the policy perspective, some of the challenges facing language practitioners and school leaders when implementing language policy have been discussed. This concluding section considers the implications for future language policy and practice and in particular the implementation of languages for 'the majority' of 14–16-year-olds and sets out six conditions for securing this policy trajectory.

The views of policy-makers, practitioners and researchers regarding the place of languages within a balanced and broadly based secondary curriculum are divergent and contradictory. Moreover, discussions often take place within 'silos' which can result in polarisation and disconnection from broader educational and societal concerns. Where views diverge most strongly is in relation to the upper secondary curriculum around this fundamental question of whether learning a language should be a core element of the KS4 curriculum for all pupils. Since the Butler Education Act of 1944 the study of ML throughout secondary education has largely remained the preserve of the more affluent or most able, apart from a short 10-year period between 1995 and 2004 when languages was a core subject for all. Research suggests that the exclusion of languages from the core curriculum at KS4 in many schools is perpetuating educational inequality (Sutton Trust 2015). Reduced access to a broad and balanced curriculum (DfE 2011b: 31) places pupils in English state secondary schools at a disadvantage compared to other young people globally who develop the linguistic skills, and intercultural competences needed in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world, characterised by ever increasing human mobility (UNESCO 2015). Furthermore, the literature points to a failure to acknowledge and

capitalise on the rich linguistic skills that many young people already possess (Lanvers 2011; Lanvers and Coleman 2013).

Recent education policy announcements, nevertheless, indicate a 'return' of languages for all (or the 'vast majority') at KS4 and an expectation that the majority of pupils will take a language GCSE by 2020. However, an analysis of the debate indicates that 'restoring languages to full health at Key Stage 4' (Swarbrick 2011) requires more than structural policy change through accountability imperatives if schools are to have the capacity to enact this policy appropriately. The debate needs to move on from how to 'increase uptake' to how to secure the necessary conditions for enacting a quality language education policy, leading to an appropriate and successful language learning experience for all. I propose below six key conditions required to support schools and curriculum leaders to move towards establishing a meaningful, viable and relevant languages curriculum for all pupils at KS4 by rethinking language education to respond and adapt to the evolving context of the globalised twenty-first century (UNESCO 2015)

Burst the 'languages bubble'

There is a need for language educators to break out of the 'languages bubble' and to engage more effectively with policy-makers and school/curriculum leaders to articulate persuasively the contribution that learning a language should make to a broad and balanced curriculum. In particular, there is a need to communicate language education research clearly to multiple audiences, including those not currently advocating languages for all to 16. This includes the compelling evidence on how second language learning can encourage open- mindedness and intercultural competence (Byram 2008) and contributes to the development of broader literacy and communication, cognitive skills and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok and Feng 2011; Cummins 2007) thereby equipping young people with the transfer- able language learning skills for life in the global twenty-first century.

Develop strategic, long-term policy

There is a need to develop a long-term national languages policy with a coherent strategy for languages education from ages 0 to 19 and beyond, which draws on language education research. This will be framed by a strategic, inclusive and coherent long-term vision for the development of the nation's language skills that capitalises on the intercultural and linguistic skills of all young people. More imaginative approaches to teacher recruitment need to be considered including the training and recruitment of language teachers from continental Europe and beyond to ensure that we have suitably qualified teachers to support the teaching of languages throughout compulsory schooling. Access to effective and research informed professional development, including opportunities to maintain and develop language skills, will not only equip teachers to support the needs of the broader range of pupils studying languages but will also support the retention of language teachers.

Promote a wider range of language learning

The 'foreign' needs to be removed from the term 'MFL' to reflect the changing nature of language use in global communities. Furthermore, a wider range of world languages should be taught and accredited in schools so as to build the capacity and capability of the country in an era of superdiversity in which many languages are regularly encountered locally,

virtually and overseas. This would encourage an approach which is 'grounded in the realities of how people in communities use languages, rather than allowing languages to be political footballs' (Broady 2006: 5).

Develop a coherent languages curriculum in schools

In order to secure meaningful, relevant and successful language learning experiences at KS4 school leaders will need to provide an integrated five-year languages curriculum, which follows seamlessly from KS2 to ensure a coherent pathway to GCSE or other appropriate qualifications. This curriculum, underpinned by effective language pedagogy, will enable learners to access the reformed GCSE qualifications. Furthermore, a coherent languages curriculum would bring together all teachers of languages (English, languages and English as an additional language) who are often 'barricaded behind walls of professional identity' (Lo Bianco 2014: 312) to evolve a coherent and integrated languages curriculum.

Broaden the range of recognised language qualifications

Policy-makers should consider the development or 'revival' of alternative language qualifications linked to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe n.d.) to meet the needs of a diverse range of language learners and languages and in so doing build on and broaden the country's capability and capacity in a range of languages. This could for example include a re-work of the Languages Ladder[10] (DCSF 2007) to provide an overarching coherent progression framework throughout compulsory schooling and beyond.

Involve school/curriculum leaders in the languages debate

Successful implementation of language learning for all will require school leaders to be closely involved in a professional dialogue about languages education. Cooke and Simpson (2012: 118) emphasise the importance of 'encompassing the beliefs of those who are not language specialists in discussion of debates about linguistic diversity'. At a time when English state secondary schools find themselves in an increasingly results- driven policy context (Ball 2013; Bush 2013) it is important to understand the views of, and challenges faced by, school leaders charged with enacting language education policy and extending languages provision in their own local contexts.

Conclusion

Reinstating language learning as part of the 14–16 curriculum for all (or the vast majority) of pupils is an important step towards moving England from monolingualism towards multilingualism. Such a move needs to capitalise on the existing linguistic richness of the country's diverse, multilingual communities and bridge the gap between formal and informal learning. It would ensure that all young people are afforded the same breadth of language education as other young people around the world for whom multilingualism is becoming the norm. It would help to address concerns of a deficit in language skills and pave the way for other anglophone countries to adopt similar policies and realise the benefits of diversity on our doorstep as well further afield in a global world (UNESCO 2015). However, there are considerable obstacles to be overcome if the languages for 'the vast majority' objectives for 2020 are to be realised. These include ensuring the alignment of educational aims, curricula, pedagogy, assessments, inspections, resources and teacher

education (James 2014). This paper maps out these issues, their historical origins and six key conditions that need to be addressed in order to support schools in affording all young people a relevant and successful language learning experience to enable them to thrive in increasingly diverse local and global communities.

Finally, to return to the words of Gide, I feel it is indeed timely to go back and begin all over again, to re-examine and re-frame the debate about languages at Key Stage 4. If 'languages for all' at Key Stage 4 is to become a meaningful experience for all young people then it is essential that policy-makers and practitioners take a step back and listen to the debates and engage with the research in order to counter the short-termism and incoherence that has characterised language education policy and its enactment.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper the term 'languages' is used to refer to all languages with the exception of English and ancient languages. When referring to specific policy documentation and or literature, the terms ML, MFL or FL may be used.

2. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the main qualification taken by 14–16 year olds in England in a range of subjects.

3. Progress 8/Attainment 8 – performance measures introduced into secondary schools in 2016. According to the DfE, Progress 8 aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4. Attainment 8 will measure the average achievement of pupils across eight qualifications including English (double-weighted if the combined English qualification, or both language and literature are taken), maths (double-weighted), three further qualifications that count in the EBacc and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DfE approved list.

4. The EBacc is a performance measure introduced in 2009/2010 for secondary state schools which includes GCSE passes in core 'academic' subjects including English, mathematics, a science, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanities subject.

5. Education in England is divided into five Key Stages: Key Stage 1 (KS1) ages 5–7, Key Stage 2 (KS2) ages 7–11, Key Stage 3 (KS3) ages 11–14, Key Stage 4 (KS4) ages 14–16 and Key Stage 5 (KS5) ages 16–18.

6. There are currently two main groups of state-funded secondary schools in England – maintained schools and academies (including Free schools). Funding and oversight of maintained schools is through the local authority, while for Academies and Free schools funding and oversight is from central government. Free schools are new state-funded but privately run schools that are set up by groups of parents, teachers, charities, business, voluntary or business groups.

7. All pupils have a statutory entitlement to be able to study a language after the age of 14. In practice, this means that schools are required to offer the opportunity to all pupils to study a language within their curriculum at KS4 but the study of a language is not compulsory.

8. National Curriculum review expert panel members: Professor Mary James, University of Cambridge, Tim Oates (Chair) Cambridge Assessment, Professor Andrew Pollard, University of Bristol and Institute of Education, University of London and Professor Dylan William, Institute of Education, University of London.

9. The Asset Language Scheme was established by the Awarding organisation Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations to provide accreditation in a wide range of lesser-taught languages.

10. The Languages Ladder was a progression framework introduced in 2007 which endorsed achievement in language skills at all levels of competence for all ages in a wide range of languages.
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.educatio n. gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00811–2007.pdf. It was mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe n.d.) http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp.

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