Department for Education – languages policy in schools

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Aims of my presentation

To set out the Government’s perspective on:

- The current picture:
  - Why learning languages is important
  - Policies on language learning in schools
  - New national curriculum
  - Support for schools

- And looking ahead
  - New GCSEs
  - New A-levels
Why school pupils should learn a foreign language

‘Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils’ curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.’
Languages - Purpose of Study, from The National Curriculum in England Framework Document, September 2013

“...primary school children are now required to study a foreign language to help prepare them for life in our globalised economy”
Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Reform, speech to EPC, 20 November 2014

‘Poor language skills are costing the UK £7.3bn a year in trade’
Education and Employers Taskforce report, December 2011
Recent trends

- Sharp decline in GCSE entries 2002-2010

- 2010 - Introduction of the English Baccalaureate – GCSEs at grades A*- C across a core of academic subjects.

- Summer 2013 – first cohort of students whose GCSE choices affected by the EBacc - number of GCSE entries from KS4 pupils in England rose by 20% compared with 2012

- Summer 2014 – further small increase in entries, despite decline in cohort size

- Summer 2015 – decline in GCSE entries from 2014 position, partly caused by iGCSEs

- Proportion of state school cohort entered for a MFL GCSE 49.3% - slight decline from 2014 (50.5%) but up from 40% in 2010.

- MFL A level entries up 3.8% in 2015 (very slight further declines in French and German increases in Spanish and other MFLs).
MFL – Curriculum and Qualifications Reform

- September 2013: publication of the new national curriculum in England framework, for teaching from September 2014:
  - Learning a modern (or ancient) foreign language becomes compulsory at KS2
    - pupils should make substantial progress in one language
  - New programme of study for KS3 includes more focus on spontaneous speaking, grammar, translation and an introduction to literature
- September 2016: first teaching of reformed GCSEs and A levels in French, German and Spanish
- September 2017 (or 2018): new GCSEs and A levels in other MFLs
- We are working with AOs and Ofqual to secure the future of qualifications in lesser taught languages (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/future-of-community-language-qualifications-secured)
- Compulsory EBacc – pupils starting in year 7 from autumn 2015 expected to take the EBacc.
CPD for primary and secondary teachers

• Aim to focus support particularly on new areas of challenge:
  – Key Stage 2: speaking skills, incl. pronunciation and intonation, written skills, use of basic grammar
  – Key Stage 3: more spontaneous speaking, use and manipulation of grammar, extended writing, translation skills both from the target language into English and from English into the target language, reading short literary texts

• Nine projects across the country: four school-led, four university-led consortia of schools, one national organisation

• £1.8m between last autumn and March 2016

New GCSE for first teaching 2016

Key changes:

• provides more opportunities for pupils to speak and write spontaneously in the foreign language
• puts focus on understanding and using language across a range of contexts, including for personal, academic and employment-related use
• provides a clearer focus on grammar
• requires students to translate sentences and short texts into the assessed language
• gives equal weighting in assessment of the four skills
• emphasises that most exam questions should be set in the assessed language, with flexibility for their being set in English where appropriate
New A/AS for first teaching 2016

Key changes:

- new requirement to use spoken and written language spontaneously
- greater emphasis on the importance of linguistic accuracy
- much more explicit requirement to engage with themes directly relevant to social and cultural issues in the relevant country(ies)
- new requirement for students to engage critically with literary works and films
- increased focus on critical and analytical thinking in the language of study
- requirement to carry out independent research and present findings