

# **ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP on MODERN LANGUAGES**



Chair: Nia Griffith MP (Lab); Co-Chair: Baroness Coussins (CB);  
Vice-Chairs: Tonia Antoniazzi MP (Lab); Lord Dykes (CB); Baroness  
Garden of Frognal (LD); Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Con).

**Languages, Covid-19 and Brexit: Never more important, never  
more vulnerable. What MPs and Peers can do to improve  
policy. A focussed briefing on why language policy is  
important everywhere but often forgotten - and specific actions  
MPs and Peers can take to address this.**

**Tuesday, 6 October 2020, 4pm-5pm. Online meeting**

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## **In attendance:**

### **Parliament:**

Nia Griffith MP (Chair)  
Baroness Coussins (Co-Chair) – Chairing this meeting  
Tonia Antoniazzi MP (Vice Chair)  
Baroness Garden of Frognal (Vice Chair)  
Lord Dykes (Vice Chair)  
Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Vice Chair elect)  
Jeffrey Donaldson MP  
Lord Hannay of Chiswick  
Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve  
Victoria Prentis MP

### **Presenters and partners:**

Neil Kenny, British Academy  
Harriet Barnes, British Academy  
Ben Kulka, British Academy  
Hannah Sharpe, British Academy  
Janice Carruthers, Queen's College Belfast (AHRC)  
Suzanne O'Farrell, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)  
Katherine Warren, AHRC

### **DfE:**

Stefano Pozzi  
Matthew Boughen  
Neil Lawson

### **Secretariat:**

Philip Harding-Esch, Secretariat to the APPG MFL  
Vicky Gough, British Council

## Agenda

### 1. Election of Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury as new Conservative Vice Chair of the APPG MFL.

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury was elected unanimously by the parliamentarians present. The Secretariat to ask Parliamentarians to confirm their vote via email.

### 2. Update from Baroness Coussins: Emerging policy areas for languages in 2020, particularly related to Brexit and Covid-19.

- **Health (Covid-19):** Issues with public health messaging in different languages. N.B. Although the government is retrospectively looking at issues with public health messaging, they are still not looking at the specific issue of multilingual public health policy.
- **Health (Covid-19):** Provision of PPE for interpreters in the NHS.
- **Immigration (post-Brexit):** The Migration Advisory Committee has recommended the inclusion of all MFL teachers and interpreters on the Shortage Occupation List.
- **Education (Covid-19):** Supplementary schools and examinations for candidates in 'other languages' who were unable to receive predicted grades from their main schools. Still unclear whether the shortfall will be resolved. Brings to the fore the importance of better working relationships between mainstream schools and supplementary schools.
- **Education (Covid-19).** KS2 curriculum: the government confirmed MFL indeed remained compulsory.
- **Education (Covid-19).** Secondary: the pandemic has ended school exchanges, trips abroad and (for one year only) the oral exams will be replaced with "an endorsement reported on a 3-point scale (pass, merit and distinction) against common assessment criteria - to be assessed by teachers during the course of study"<sup>1</sup>.
- **Higher Education (Covid-19 and Brexit):** In universities, Erasmus+ is at risk due to Brexit. Years abroad are at risk due to the pandemic.

#### Positives:

- **Education:** An increase in ITT applications for MFL, including 153 LTTS scholars this year. (However, shortly after this meeting the government announced the end of the MFL Scholarships scheme, and a reduction in the grant available to trainee MFL teachers).
- **Education:** Grade boundaries at GCSE for French and German were adjusted.
- **International development:** The University of Reading provided briefings to DFID re: multilingual approaches to aid.
- **Languages in the civil service:** Increase in language training in the Army, FCDO and police.

### 3. Update from GCHQ – see *separate file for details*.

Baroness Coussins read out a briefing to the APPG from GCHQ and its leadership in languages in government. Including:

- Recruitment to GCHQ and other agencies/departments.
- Virtual careers fairs.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/conditions-and-requirements-for-the-assessment-of-mfl-gcses-in-2021>

- School and university MFL outreach.
- Use of language technology.
- GCHQ chairs the Cross-Whitehall Language Group and has been taking a lead on increasing the potential for cross-government collaboration in language policy.

**4. Update from the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and Universities UK: Towards a National Language Strategy – see *separate file of this presentation (PDF)*.**

Key messages include:

- Numbers of language students must rise post-16. When Sixth Form provision dies, GCSE provision in turn becomes more threatened.
- There must also be a focus on the skills sector
- A long term strategy is needed:
  - needing both government and all-party support
  - building on existing expertise (e.g. the NCELP) and existing government targets (e.g. Ebacc)
  - nudging the language community to take initiatives
  - identifying clear costings (note: these are not just for the government)
- A new ‘single portal’ online to be launched: LanguagesUK
  - will direct people to different resources
  - will be a vehicle for higher public awareness with high profile language champions
- Creation of two Strategic Committees, for Higher Education and Further Education.

The Strategy’s priority areas of attention:

- Address harsh grading at GCSE and A Level: “the biggest single deterrent” to MFL uptake among students. Ofqual should be persuaded to revisit its review of GCSE and A Level grades.
- Creation of the Advanced Languages Premium for taking up languages at A Level and equivalent; based on the Maths Premium. This would cost £3m per year. As take up increases, the premium could be reduced.
- Ambassador and Mentor schemes.
- A joined-up strategy for teacher recruitment and retention.

**Update on the devolved administrations specifically:**

**Scotland [see slides for details]**

- An established “1+2” strategy, which local authorities work towards to embed long term.
- Schools of education support ITE (addressing supply issues)
- Long term funding for the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching (SCILT)

**Wales [see slides for details]:**

- The Global Futures Strategy 2020-22 has been very positive in Wales
- Potentially positive developments for languages in Wales’s new curriculum

**Northern Ireland [see slides for details]:**

- An Ambassador/Mentor scheme is being funded this year
- A primary languages strategy is urgently needed

**Comments from the DfE team:**

- In 2017, the government committed to the 90% Ebacc “ambition” by 2025 (for the 2027 exams) – which cannot be achieved without MFL.
- Take-up has increased from 40% to 49% in 2019.
- The Ofsted framework includes MFL.

**Comments from the discussion**

- The lack of viability of small A Level groups must be addressed.
- The Progress 8 accountability measure vs Ebacc measure.
- Disparity between take up in comprehensives and private schools
- Impact of the predominance of STEM on language take-up
- Are schools using multilingual computer games to get students to learn MFL?
- NB. The rise of Welsh Medium Education has increased language learning confidence among young Welsh people.