

## 16-18 languages education in England

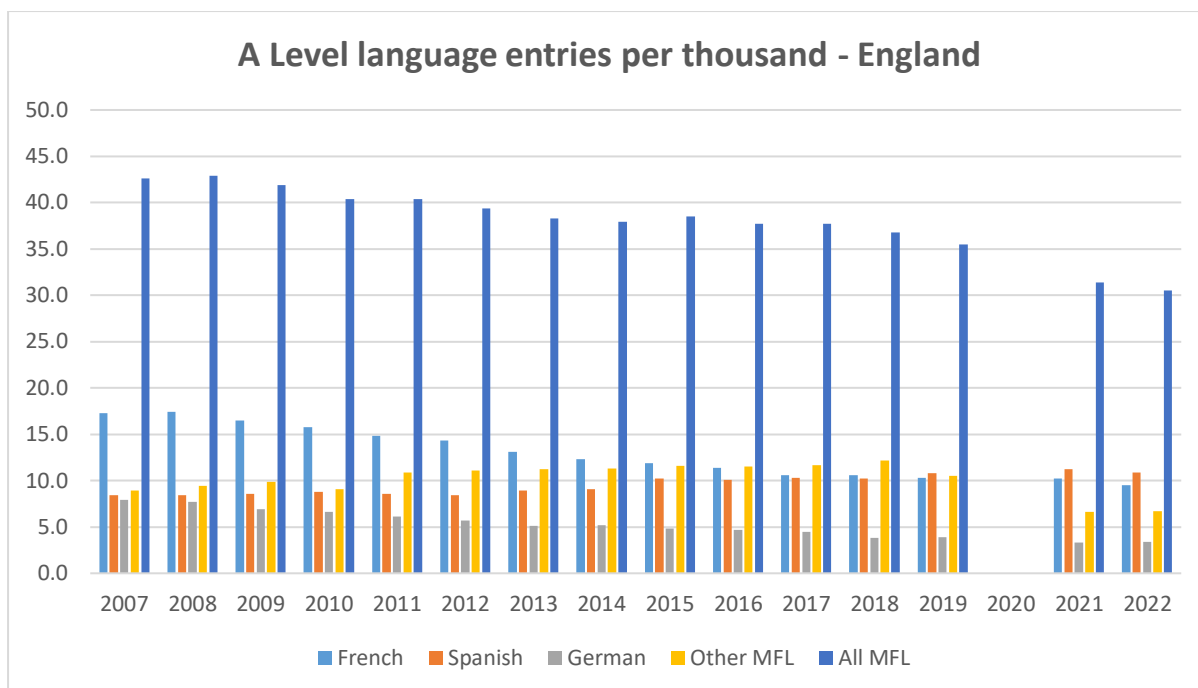
### Summary and recommendations

- There is a strong case for increasing young people's access to language learning at all levels. This has many economic, cultural and educational benefits.
- All 16-18 year olds in England should be able to access to a broad and flexible language offer.
- Language education in England is in decline and highly vulnerable; with low numbers, unviable group sizes and limited teacher supply.
- There are insufficient options for flexible, modular language learning including for students on technical and vocational programmes. The 'Asset' suite of units which did this is no longer available.
- Successful and sustainable language provision requires critical mass of students and skilled staff and some targeted funding to incentivise sufficiency and efficiency.
- There is a need for national strategy backed up by some investment and increased partnership at local, regional and national levels to establish and promote language provision post-16. One option would be to designate a language learning hub in every area – in many cases this could be a college.
- Given the patchiness and vulnerability of languages provision, we would support an area response and colleges as anchor institutions would be well placed to play a part in these.
- This is the kind of approach which might also improve access to visual and performing arts provision, which faces many of the same issues.
- It's notable that STEM programmes which are already have high enrolments attract additional funding through the High Value Course Premium (£131m) and the Advanced Maths Premium (£16m), a fraction of this funding could make a real difference to student access to language provision.

### Provision and trends

#### Overall A Level entries:

There is a historic downward trend in A Level language entries in England, overall language entries have fallen by around 30% as a proportion of total entries over the 15 years from 2007-2022. An entry of roughly 10 per thousand (eg: Spanish and French) is 1% of entries and because students take 3 A Levels on average, this means that an average of 3% of students study each of Spanish and French and fewer study other languages. Demand can also be quite geographically specific, particularly for 'community languages'.



#### Group sizes:

Many A Level language groups are well below the threshold for viability and average group sizes are more than twice as high in colleges as in schools:

2021	schools	colleges
<b>Number of A Level Language entries</b>	13,302	4,618
<b>Average group size</b>	3.8	10.1

(2021 Performance Table data – publicly funded provision)

#### Commentary:

While a number of colleges have no languages provision, this reflects student demand and the local pattern of provision. Languages are most likely to be offered in the largest A Level providers, and in many areas this will be a college. But some colleges do not have an A Level offer and there are limited language qualification alternatives to GCSE or A Level. The language 'cold spots' highlight the problem of safeguarding 'minority' subjects in a competitive market environment where there is no strategic area oversight or co-ordination of the curriculum offer. There are 4 dimensions to an effective local 16-18 system:

- **Sufficiency:** is the full range of provision available to young people within their travel to learn area?
- **Efficiency:** is the provision being offered at a reasonable unit cost? (eg: viable group sizes etc.)
- **Quality:** is the provision successful? (as judged by success rates, progression, inspection etc.)
- **Equality:** is the provision inclusive and accessible to all who might benefit?

Eddie Playfair – Senior Policy Manager AoC. 30/01/23