



Foreign Language Skills: Trends and Developments

Summary

In 2002, 76% of pupils in England were entered for a foreign language GCSE qualification. In 2017, the figure was 47%. A level entries have also declined, as have the number of foreign language teachers in the school workforce. Section 1 of this briefing discusses foreign language skills in England in the context of these statistics. It explores the potential reasons for the decline in the popularity of foreign languages and its potential cost to the UK economy—estimated at 3.5% of GDP. The briefing also summarises the views of the business community concerning the interaction between foreign language skills and the export potential of UK firms, and considers the future language requirements of the UK.

Section 2 considers the potential impact of leaving the EU on language skills in the UK, particularly on attitudes to language learning and the recruitment and retention of foreign language teachers. The briefing provides a summary of EU policies and programmes concerning the promotion of language learning. For example, it discusses Erasmus+, the EU's programme for education, training, youth and sport. It has been estimated that by the end of the Erasmus+ programme's current budget cycle in 2020, €1 billion will have been allocated to the UK and 250,000 people from the UK will have undertaken study or training abroad under the scheme. The UK Government has expressed its aspiration to keep membership of the EU's educational programmes, such as Erasmus+, following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. It is possible the UK may be able to negotiate future membership in the Erasmus+ scheme, as several non-EU countries are current members. Finally, the future status of English as an official language of the EU is considered. Following Brexit, the population of the EU which speaks English as a first language will decline from approximately 13% to 1%. This has provoked speculation about the future influence of English within the institutions of the EU, and whether English will remain an official EU language.

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I. Foreign Language Skills

Data from an EU language survey in 2012 placed the UK joint third on the list of EU member states with a population “least likely” to be able to speak a foreign language. According to the survey, 61% of the UK population could only speak one language.¹ The only EU member states with a higher percentage were Hungary (65%) and Italy (62%).² The number of pupils taking modern foreign language subjects at GCSE and A level in England has declined in recent years, although the introduction of the English baccalaureate in 2010 has slightly reversed the GCSE trend.³ Statistics on foreign language learning are presented in section I.1 of this briefing. Education policy is a devolved matter; therefore, the statistics below relate to England only.

I.1 Foreign Language Teaching in England

In maintained schools in England the learning of either an ancient or modern foreign language is compulsory under the national curriculum during key stage 2 (ages 7 to 11).⁴ Learning a modern foreign language is compulsory at key stage 3 (ages 11 to 14). Learning a foreign language is not compulsory at key stage 4 (ages 14 to 16).⁵ The English baccalaureate (EBacc)—a performance measure of a ‘basket’ of GCSEs which includes a foreign language—was introduced in England in 2010 and has been promoted by subsequent governments. Current government policy is for 90 percent of pupils at GCSE to choose the EBacc combination of subjects by 2025.⁶

Figure 1 shows the proportion of pupils in England sitting a modern foreign language at GCSE between 2002 and 2017. The trend shows a decline from 76% in 2002 to 40% in 2011. Since the introduction of the EBacc the proportion has increased but remains below the level in 2002.

¹ European Commission, [Europeans and their Languages](#), June 2012, p 5.

² *ibid.*

³ British Council, [Language Trends 2018: Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England](#), June 2018, p 2.

⁴ UK Government website, [‘The National Curriculum: Key Stage 1 and 2’](#), accessed 26 October 2018.

⁵ UK Government website, [‘The National Curriculum: Key Stage 3 and 4’](#), accessed 26 October 2018.

⁶ Department for Education, [‘English Baccalaureate \(EBacc\)’](#), 18 December 2017.

Figure 1: Proportion of Pupils Sitting a Modern Foreign Language GCSE, 2002–17⁷

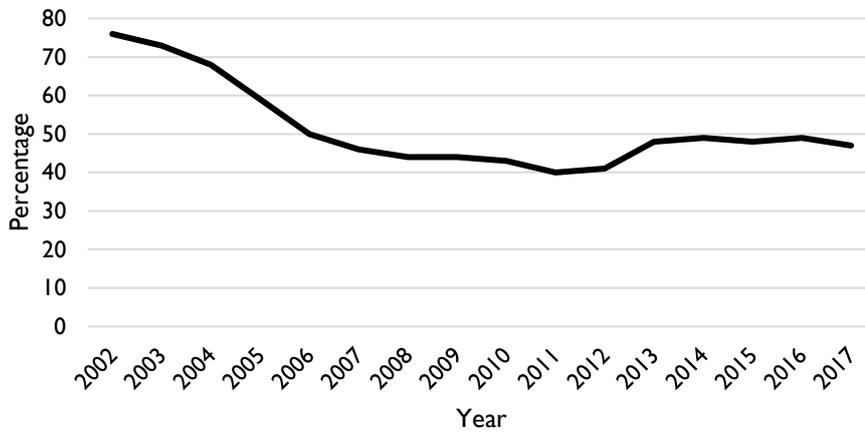


Figure 2 shows the subject of modern language GCSE entries in England between 2010 and 2017. The data show a decline in the number of French and German entries and an increase in Spanish entries over the period. Entries in other smaller-cohort modern languages—eg Mandarin, Arabic, Italian and Polish—have also increased over the period.⁸

Figure 2: GCSE Entries in French, German and Spanish, 2010–17⁹

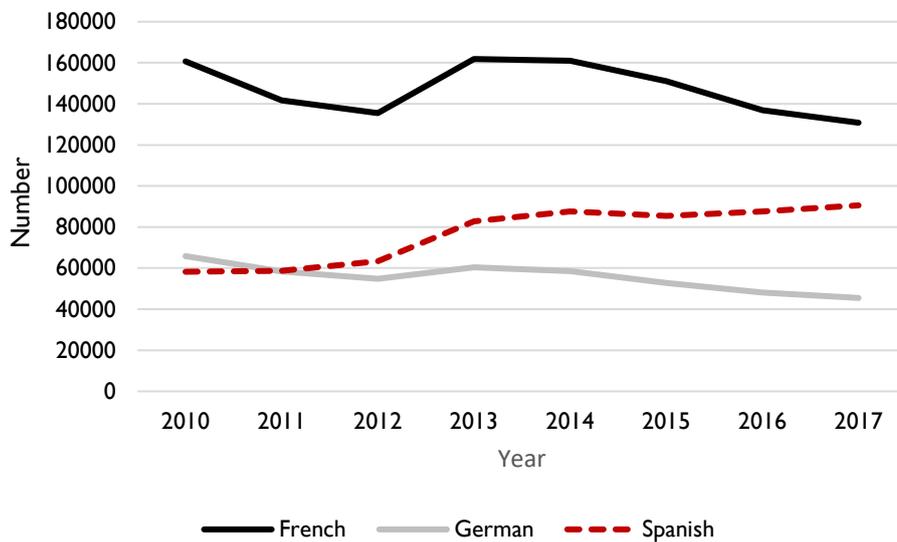
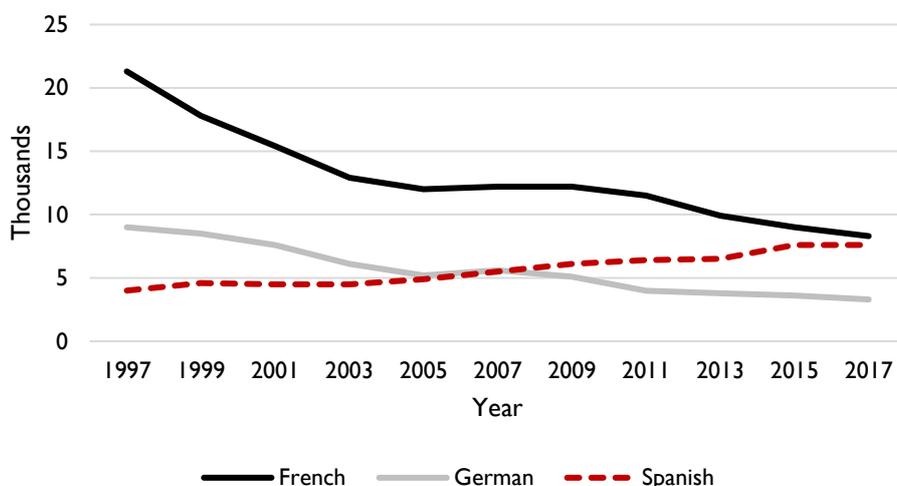


Figure 3 shows a similar trend in A level modern language entries since 1997.

⁷ British Council, [Language Trends 2018: Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England](#), June 2018, p 3.

⁸ *ibid*, p 10.

⁹ *ibid*, p 9.

Figure 3: A Level Entries in French, German and Spanish, 1997–2017¹⁰

The British Council’s 2018 language trends survey report discussed some of the potential reasons for the decline in language learning in recent years. The report claimed an emphasis on the ‘STEM’ subjects of English, maths and science means languages “remain a marginal subject”, which many primary schools “find difficult to deliver alongside many other competing demands”.¹¹ The report argued “more schools are allocating a shorter time to languages”, and that the introduction of new, more rigorous GCSEs and A levels is “depressing take up”.¹² The report found such factors contributed to a polarisation with regard to which students sat foreign language exams:

Both state and independent schools report an increasing concentration of high and middle-attaining pupils in GCSE languages, to the exclusion of those of lower ability or with special educational needs.¹³

The report found that one of the rationales for introducing the EBacc and the more rigorous GCSE—to provide a “better bridge to A level”—had not resulted in increased A level language entries:

Only 6 percent of these schools [which offered the EBacc] report that increases at key stage 4 have improved take up post 16.¹⁴

The survey also reported a “very significant” reduction in the number of courses offered at AS level (Advanced Subsidiary, the first year of A level study).¹⁵ This is significant, according to the report, as students often choose a language as their fourth AS option and the problem was “compounded by

¹⁰ British Council, [Language Trends 2018: Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England](#), June 2018, p 9.

¹¹ *ibid*, p 3.

¹² *ibid*.

¹³ *ibid*.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p 15.

¹⁵ *ibid*.

tight budgets which require minimum numbers for a course to run".¹⁶

In September 2016, Steve McCabe (Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak) asked the Government for its assessment of the decline in A level languages entries and its implications for the study of languages at university level. Answering on behalf of the Government, the Minister of State at the Department for Education, Nick Gibb, stated:

The decline in the study of modern foreign languages started in 2004 when the former Government removed the compulsory study of languages from the key stage 4 curriculum [...] [The English baccalaureate] has increased the pool of students able to progress to study languages at A level [and the Government] is already incentivising the take-up of language A levels in the 16–19 performance tables through the facilitating subject measure.¹⁷

1.2 Views of the Business Community

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Pearson Education publish an annual education and skills survey, which provides information on language skills in the UK workforce. The 2017 survey found:

Only a third (34%) of businesses rate as satisfactory the foreign language skills of school and college leavers entering the jobs market, with the major EU languages of French (51%), German (47%) and Spanish (45%) most commonly mentioned as in demand.¹⁸

However, when asked what the priority areas for action should be for education up to the age of 11, only 4% of respondents cited foreign language skills. Instead, they cited numeracy and literacy (67%), self-management and personal behaviour (41%) and communication skills (34%) as more important.¹⁹ Similarly, when asked the priority areas for the education of pupils aged 11 onwards, 3% of respondents cited foreign language skills.²⁰

In June 2018, the Department for International Trade published the *National Survey of Registered Businesses' Exporting Behaviours, Attitudes and Needs*.²¹ The survey consisted of two data samples: a sample of all registered UK

¹⁶ British Council, [Language Trends 2018: Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England](#), June 2018, p 15.

¹⁷ House of Commons, '[Written Question: Languages: GCE A-Level](#)', 16 September 2016, 45591.

¹⁸ Confederation of British Industry, [Helping The UK Thrive: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey](#), July 2017, p 9.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 31.

²⁰ *ibid*, p 32.

²¹ Department for International Trade, [National Survey of Registered Businesses' Exporting Behaviours, Attitudes and Needs 2017](#), 7 June 2018.

businesses; and a sub-group analysis which over-represented businesses with a turnover of over £500,000 because these firms, according to the report, have the greatest potential to generate a significant value of exports.²² The survey found that, of those businesses which reported knowledge barriers to exporting, 38% of all businesses reported a lack of understanding of clients' language or culture as a barrier.²³ Among the businesses with a turnover of over £500,000 the figure rose to 59%.²⁴

1.3 Estimated Cost to the Economy

In 2013, the report of the House of Lords Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Committee, *Roads to Success: SME Exports*, made the following recommendation concerning the interaction between language skills and the export potential of UK SMEs:

If UKTI [UK Trade and Investment, now the Department for International Trade] is to make inroads into the large number of SMEs not currently exporting, the task of dispelling any misleading perceptions associated with language differences and improving the ability of SMEs to deal with language and cultural differences should be regarded as a priority.²⁵

In response to the recommendation, UKTI commissioned research into the potential effect on the UK economy of poor language skills among the UK workforce. James Forman-Peck and Yi Wang, of Cardiff University Business School, produced the resulting report, *The Costs to the UK of Language Deficiencies as a Barrier to UK Engagement in Exporting: A Report to UK Trade & Investment*, which stated:

A reasonable estimate of the gross effect for the UK is 3.5 percent of GDP. Although there are wide margins of error around this figure, even the lower bound is a substantial proportion of GDP. This implies that there must be some investments in language skills that would yield a high return.²⁶

1.4 Future Language Requirements

In October 2016, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages published *Brexit and Languages: A Checklist for Government Negotiators and*

²² Department for International Trade, [National Survey of Registered Businesses' Exporting Behaviours, Attitudes and Needs 2017](#), 7 June 2018, p 4.

²³ *ibid*, p 59.

²⁴ *ibid*.

²⁵ House of Lords Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Committee, [Roads to Success: SME Exports](#), 8 March 2013, HL Paper 131 of session 2012–13, p 91.

²⁶ James Foreman-Peck and Yi Wang, [The Costs to the UK of Language Deficiencies as a Barrier to UK Engagement in Exporting: A Report to UK Trade & Investment](#), 2013, p 1.

Officials, which made the following recommendations regarding UK language skills post-Brexit:

- Guarantee residency status for EU nationals already living in the UK and safeguard future recruitment of EU citizens to address the shortage of language skills;
- Continue full UK participation in the Erasmus+ programme (noting the examples of Norway and Switzerland); and
- For a post-Brexit plan in education (from primary school to post-graduate research, including apprenticeships), business and the civil service, with specific actions to ensure the UK produces sufficient linguists to meet its future requirements as a leader in global free trade and on the international stage.²⁷

The British Council has undertaken a longer-term analysis of the UK's future language skills requirements in the context of Brexit. It published its findings in the report, *Languages for the Future: The Foreign Languages the United Kingdom Needs to Become a Truly Global Nation* (November 2017). The study ranked the most important languages for the UK's future strategic interests, based on an analysis of the "outlook for the supply and demand for language competence in the years ahead".²⁸ The study used a methodology of scoring the different languages against "a variety of economic, geopolitical, cultural and educational indicators".²⁹ The top five languages for UK citizens to learn, according to the report, were:

- Spanish;
- Mandarin;
- French;
- Arabic; and
- German.

The report concluded that "the vote to leave the EU has given urgency to the UK's quest to be an international trading power beyond Europe"; however, it said that the UK should acknowledge "there is no indication that European languages are becoming less important" to its needs. The report made a number of recommendations, including the maintenance of full membership of Erasmus+ by the UK after Brexit.³⁰ The report also recommended that the UK Government should initiate a "bold new policy" to improve language proficiency by prioritising the learning of the top five languages identified in the report and setting minimum time requirements for

²⁷ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, [Brexit and Languages: A Checklist for Government Negotiators and Officials](#), 17 October 2016.

²⁸ British Council, [Languages for the Future: The Foreign Languages the United Kingdom Needs to Become a Truly Global Nation](#), November 2017, p 4.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid*, p 33.

language teaching in primary and secondary schools.³¹ Finally, the report recommended that the UK Government and devolved administrations should appoint cabinet-level “language champions”, and draw on the “successful practice” of the [Mandarin Excellence Programme](#) in England and Scotland’s [China strategy](#).³²

2. Impact of UK Leaving the European Union

2.1 Attitudes to Language Learning

The British Council’s 2018 language trends survey included questions concerning the impact of Brexit on attitudes to language learning. The report found that a significant minority of schools reported a negative impact:

Just over a third (34 percent) of state secondary schools report that leaving the European Union is having a negative impact on language learning, either through student motivation and/or parental attitudes towards the subject.³³

The survey found that schools reporting a negative shift in attitudes were more likely to have lower attainment and a higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.³⁴ In contrast, 10 percent of survey respondents reported that senior management in their school had become more positive to language learning because of Brexit.³⁵

2.2 Recruitment and Retention of Foreign Language Teachers

In November 2017, there were 12,300 French teachers in publicly-funded schools in England; 3,900 German teachers; 7,700 Spanish teachers; and 2,200 teachers of ‘other’ modern languages.³⁶

Figure 4 shows the number of language teachers in publicly-funded schools (year groups 7 to 13) in England between 2011 and 2017. The trend is similar to that of GCSE and A level entries: a decline in French and German and an increase in Spanish.

³¹ British Council, [Languages for the Future: The Foreign Languages the United Kingdom Needs to Become a Truly Global Nation](#), November 2017, p 33.

³² *ibid.*

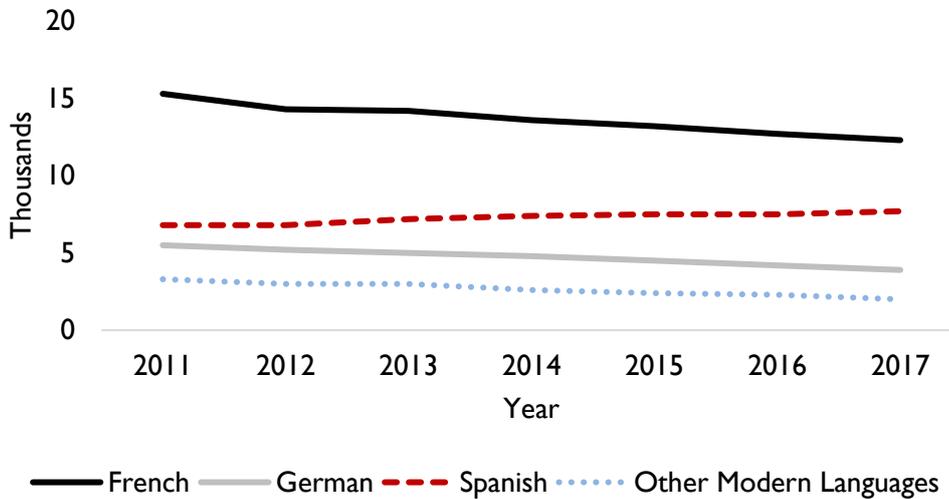
³³ British Council, [Language Trends 2018: Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England](#), June 2018, p 7.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Department for Education, [Tables: School Workforce Census 2017](#), 28 June 2018.

Figure 4: Modern Language Teachers (Thousands) in England, 2011–17³⁷



The British Council’s 2018 language trends survey found that most school language departments employ teachers who are citizens of other EU countries:

67% of state secondaries and 78% of independent schools report having one or more language teachers who are citizens of other EU countries without UK citizenship.³⁸

The report found that the majority of state schools were already finding it difficult to recruit teachers for some languages, and approximately one in five state schools “expressed concern about the impact of Brexit on teacher recruitment and retention”.³⁹ In addition, a number of schools reported that they had “already seen staff leave as a result”.⁴⁰

In September 2018, Jim Cunningham (Labour MP for Coventry South) asked the Government a written question on the impact of leaving the EU on the retention and recruitment of foreign language teachers. Answering on behalf of the Government, Nick Gibb, Minister of State at the Department for Education, stated the Government would take account of the independent advice of the [Migration Advisory Committee](#), commissioned to help develop a future immigration system for the UK.⁴¹

³⁷ Department for Education, ‘[Statistics: School Workforce](#)’, 28 June 2018. Data is total headcounts; therefore, some teachers may be counted in more than one language category.

³⁸ British Council, [Language Trends 2018: Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England](#), June 2018, p 8.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Languages: Teachers](#)’, 10 September 2018, 170688.

Mr Gibb also summarised the Government's other policies on the subject:

The recruitment and retention of modern foreign languages teachers domestically is a priority. The Department offers a £26,000 tax-free bursary or £28,000 tax-free scholarship for language trainees and funds training in language teaching for teachers wishing to change subject specialism. A student loan reimbursement scheme for language teachers in the local authorities most in need is also available.⁴²

Regarding the status of EU citizens in the UK after Brexit, the UK Government has said that it is a matter for the outcome of negotiations with the EU. However, in a speech on the Brexit negotiations on 21 September 2018, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, made a commitment to protect the rights of EU citizens in the UK in the event of a 'no deal':

There are over 3 million EU citizens living in the UK who will be understandably worried about what the outcome of yesterday's summit means for their future. I want to be clear with you that even in the event of no deal your rights will be protected. You are our friends, our neighbours, our colleagues. We want you to stay.⁴³

2.3 EU Policy on Multilingualism

Under the subsidiarity principle, member states of the EU are responsible for language rights and education. However, the EU is empowered to promote language learning and linguistic diversity among its members. Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union states that the EU shall "respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity".⁴⁴ Article 165(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that "Union action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the member states".⁴⁵ In addition, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which entered into force via the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, prohibits discrimination on grounds of language (article 21) and places an obligation on the Union to respect linguistic diversity (article 22).

Following an agreement at the European Council summit in 2002, the EU has adopted an objective for all its citizens to learn at least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue.⁴⁶ The EU has stated that foreign language skills are important for citizens' social cohesion and employability, and for the continent's competitiveness and economic

⁴² House of Commons, '[Written Question: Languages: Teachers](#)', 10 September 2018, 170688.

⁴³ Prime Minister's Office, '[PM Brexit Negotiations Statement](#)', 21 September 2018.

⁴⁴ [Treaty on European Union](#), Article 3.

⁴⁵ [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#), Article 165(2).

⁴⁶ European Commission, '[About Multilingualism Policy](#)', accessed 26 October 2018.

growth.⁴⁷

To achieve its multilingualism objectives, the EU implements a range of policies and programmes. The most significant, in terms of budget and participants, is the Erasmus+ programme. Erasmus+ is considered in more depth in section 2.4 of this briefing. A number of other EU language programmes are summarised below. At the time of writing, there had been no public statement from the UK Government concerning the future status of participation in these programmes following the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

European Centre for Modern Languages and Mercator

The EU supports the [European Centre for Modern Languages \(ECML\)](#), an initiative of the Council of Europe.⁴⁸ The ECML encourages excellence and innovation in language teaching and for the citizens of its member states to learn languages through a range of programmes and research projects. The UK will remain a member state of the Council of Europe following its withdrawal from the EU. However, membership of the ECML is only available to those Council of Europe members that agree to participate and bear its costs.⁴⁹ The UK Government announced the withdrawal of its support for the ECML in 2011, citing an environment of “severe fiscal restraint” in which it “did not judge that the benefits [...] were sufficient to justify such expenditure”.⁵⁰

The European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (also known as ‘Mercator’) is a network of research and documentation centres specialising in the study of the EU’s regional and minority languages.⁵¹

The UK partners in the network include the [Mercator Institute for Media, Languages and Culture](#) at the University of Aberystwyth, Wales, and the [World Languages Institute](#) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.⁵² The research centres in the network are recipients of EU funding to enable research collaboration and promotion of minority languages, such as those in the UK: Welsh; Cornish; Scots Gaelic; and Irish in Northern Ireland. For example, between 2013 and 2016, the Mercator Institute in Aberystwyth was a participant in the EU-funded

⁴⁷ European Commission, ‘[About Multilingualism Policy](#)’, accessed 26 October 2018.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ European Centre for Modern Languages, ‘[ECML in the Council of Europe](#)’, accessed 26 October 2018.

⁵⁰ House of Lords, ‘[Written Question: European Centre for Modern Languages](#)’, 16 November 2011, HL12925.

⁵¹ European Parliament, ‘[Language Policy](#)’, accessed 29 October 2018.

⁵² European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, ‘[Partnerships](#)’, accessed 26 October 2018.

[LEARNMe \(Language and Education Addressed through Research and Networking by Mercator\)](#) project.⁵³ The project produced a set of guidelines and recommendations to assist educationalists in the specific area of minority language teaching.

On 8 October 2018, an inquiry by the Welsh Language Commissioner into the potential implications of Brexit on the Welsh language referred to the Mercator project funding, and reported:

Brexit may prevent Welsh speakers from benefitting from European initiatives that promote linguistic and cultural diversity.⁵⁴

European Master's in Translation

The [European Master's in Translation \(EMT\)](#) is a partnership project between the European Commission and higher education institutions across the EU, providing a quality label for MA university courses in translation.⁵⁵ The EMT aims to improve the quality of translator training and enhance the status of the translation profession in the EU. The European Commission website lists eleven UK universities which are members of the EMT network, providing courses in line with EMT standards.⁵⁶

Machine Translation Service

The European Commission's machine translation service (MT@EC) enables secure online translation of texts and documents from or into the 24 official EU languages.⁵⁷ The service is free of charge to public officials in member states of the EU and Iceland and Norway "until at least the end of 2020".⁵⁸

⁵³ European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, '[LEARNMe—Mercator Network](#)', accessed 29 October 2018.

⁵⁴ Welsh Language Commissioner, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, [Short Inquiry into the Implications of Brexit on Areas Within the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's Remit](#), 8 October 2018, p 6.

⁵⁵ European Commission, '[European Master's in Translation \(EMT\) Explained](#)', accessed 29 October 2018.

⁵⁶ European Commission, '[Universities and Programmes in the EMT Network](#)', accessed 29 October 2018.

⁵⁷ European Commission, '[Machine Translation for Public Administrations—eTranslation](#)', accessed 29 October 2018.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

European Day of Languages

Following the European Year of Languages in 2001, the EU and the Council of Europe started an event which now takes place annually on 26 September.⁵⁹ The day is intended to raise awareness among citizens of the many European languages and to encourage language learning.

2.4 Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus (called ‘Erasmus+’ since 2014) is the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport.⁶⁰ The programme invites applications for funding to provide citizens of participating countries the opportunity to study and train abroad. The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is one of the specific objectives of the programme.⁶¹ The scheme also funds [Online Linguistic Support \(OLS\)](#), a free online language learning platform available to Erasmus+ participants.⁶²

The Erasmus programme is funded from the seven-year EU budget cycle, with the current cycle running from 2014 to 2020. Erasmus+ has a total budget of €14.7 billion, of which approximately two-thirds provide grants for study abroad.⁶³ Almost €1 billion will be allocated to the UK over the 2014–20 funding period.⁶⁴ It is estimated that by the end of the current funding cycle 250,000 people in the UK will have undertaken activities abroad with the programme.⁶⁵ Statistics show the UK was the seventh highest participant in the programme in 2015/16, with the most popular host countries being France (2,388), Spain (2,131), and Germany (1,312).⁶⁶ In the same period almost twice as many students came to the UK under the programme.⁶⁷

The future of the UK’s participation in the Erasmus programme will be determined by the outcome of its negotiations with the EU. It is possible for the UK to remain a participant country in Erasmus+ post-Brexit, as a number of non-EU countries—eg Norway, Turkey, and Switzerland—currently participate in the programme.⁶⁸ The criteria determining participation are set out in [EU Regulation 1288/2013](#). On 2 May 2018, the

⁵⁹ Council of Europe, ‘[European Day of Languages: 26 September](#)’, accessed 29 October 2018.

⁶⁰ Erasmus+ UK National Agency, [Learning Together: An Introduction to Erasmus+ for the UK](#), December 2017, p 2.

⁶¹ European Commission, [Erasmus+: Programme Guide 2019](#), 24 October 2018, p 9.

⁶² Online Linguistic Support, ‘[What Is OLS?](#)’, accessed 2 November 2018.

⁶³ Erasmus+ UK National Agency, [Learning Together: An Introduction to Erasmus+ for the UK](#), December 2017, p 3.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Erasmus+ UK National Agency, ‘[Statistics](#)’, accessed 26 October 2018.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ European Commission, [Erasmus+: Programme Guide 2019](#), 24 October 2018, p 22.

European Commission announced the Erasmus+ programme budget would be doubled under proposals for the 2021–27 EU budget.⁶⁹

UK Government Policy on Erasmus+

Following the UK's EU referendum, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills released a statement confirming that the referendum result did not affect beneficiaries of Erasmus+ funding or those considering applications for future grants while the UK remained a member of the EU.⁷⁰ In August 2016, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, announced the Treasury would underwrite EU funding projects, including Erasmus+ funding, “even when specific projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU” on 29 March 2019.⁷¹

The joint report from the EU and the UK on progress during phase one of the article 50 negotiations, published in December 2017, contained a commitment that UK participation in EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, would continue until the end of the transition period in December 2020:

Following withdrawal from the Union, the UK will continue to participate in the Union programmes financed by the MFF [Multiannual Financial Framework] 2014–2020 until their closure.⁷²

In the speech delivered by the Prime Minister, Theresa May, at Mansion House on 2 March 2018 on the UK's future economic relationship with the EU, the Prime Minister confirmed the Government's aspiration to maintain membership of EU educational programmes after Brexit. The Prime Minister stated:

The UK is also committed to establishing a far-reaching science and innovation pact with the EU, facilitating the exchange of ideas and researchers. This would enable the UK to participate in key programmes alongside our EU partners. And we want to take a similar approach to educational and cultural programmes, to promote our shared values and enhance our intellectual strength in the world—again making an ongoing contribution to cover our fair share of the costs involved.⁷³

⁶⁹ European Commission, [A Modern Budget for a Union that Protects, Empowers and Defends: The Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027](#), 2 May 2018.

⁷⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [‘Statement on Higher Education and Research Following the EU Referendum’](#), 28 June 2016.

⁷¹ HM Treasury, [‘Chancellor Philip Hammond Guarantees EU Funding Beyond Date UK Leaves the EU’](#), 13 August 2016.

⁷² Prime Minister's Office, [‘Joint Report on Progress During Phase I of Negotiations Under Article 50 TEU on The UK's Orderly Withdrawal from the EU’](#), 8 December 2017.

⁷³ Prime Minister's Office, [‘PM Speech on Our Future Economic Partnership with the European Union’](#), 2 March 2018.

The Government's position was reiterated in the white paper, *The Future Relationship Between the United Kingdom and the European Union* (July 2018) which stated:

The UK's and the EU's current education cooperation is centred around Erasmus+. The end of the implementation period coincides with the natural end of the scheme. The UK is open to exploring participation in the successor scheme.⁷⁴

Erasmus+ in the Event of No Deal

On 24 July 2018, HM Treasury announced an extension of its underwrite guarantee for UK organisations which secure funding from EU programmes until the end of 2020, “even in a no deal scenario”.⁷⁵

On 23 August 2018, the Department for Education published the technical notice *Erasmus+ in the UK if There's No Brexit Deal*.⁷⁶ The notice provides guidance to organisations and individuals in the “event the UK leaves the EU in March 2019 with no agreement in place”.⁷⁷ The notice makes reference to the extension to the underwrite guarantee for Erasmus+ funding and confirms the underwrite will apply “for the entire lifetime of projects”, including those in which participants “are only informed of their success, or who sign a grant agreement, after the UK's withdrawal from the EU”.⁷⁸ The notice states that in the event of no deal with the EU, the UK Government “will engage with member states and key institutions to seek to ensure UK participants can continue with their planned activity”.⁷⁹

2.5 English as an Official Language of the EU

English has been an official language of the European Community (EC)/ European Union since 1973, when the UK acceded to the bloc.⁸⁰ All member states nominate one official language, into which all EU legislation and significant documentation must be translated.⁸¹ As some states share a language there are currently fewer official EU languages (24) than member states.⁸² There are three ‘procedural languages’—English, French and

⁷⁴ HM Government, [The Future Relationship Between the United Kingdom and the European Union](#), July 2018, p 79.

⁷⁵ HM Treasury, ‘[Funding from EU Programmes Guaranteed Until the End of 2020](#)’, 24 July 2018.

⁷⁶ Department for Education, [Erasmus+ in the UK if There's No Brexit Deal](#), 23 August 2018.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ European Union, [Speaking for Europe: Languages in the European Union](#), 2008, p 3.

⁸¹ European Commission, ‘[Frequently Asked Questions On Languages In Europe](#)’, 23 September 2013.

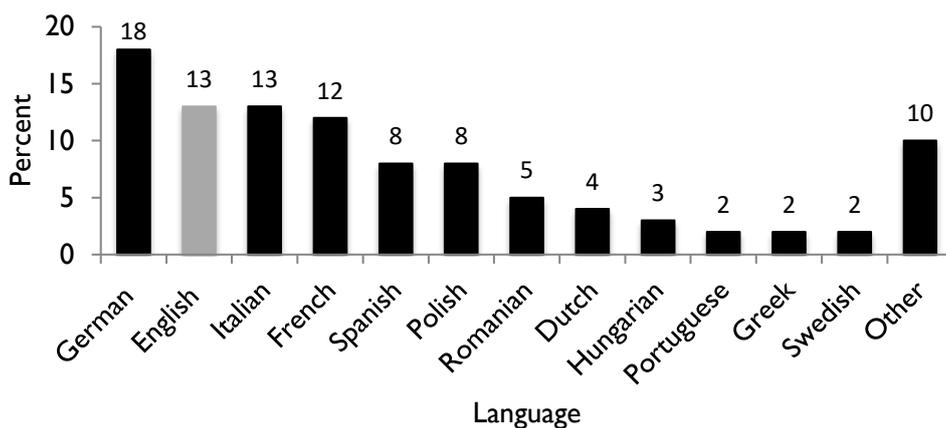
⁸² *ibid.*

German—in which the European Commission conducts the majority of its internal business.⁸³

Only two other EU member states—the Republic of Ireland and Malta—also use English as an official national language. The official national languages of the Republic of Ireland and Malta are English and Irish, and English and Maltese, respectively. When the Republic of Ireland joined the EC, on the same date as the UK in 1973, English was already due to become an official EC language because of the UK’s language nomination. Consequently, the Republic of Ireland nominated Irish as its official language, pursuant to an agreement with the EC which stipulated that the Community would only be obligated to translate primary legislation into the Irish language.⁸⁴ Irish acquired full official EU language status in 2007. However, a number of derogations stipulate that the EU is not obliged to translate all documents into Irish until 2022.⁸⁵ Similarly, when Malta joined the bloc in 2004 it nominated Maltese as its official language. A temporary derogation of the obligation to provide all EU documents in Maltese came to an end in 2007.⁸⁶

The most recent comprehensive survey of languages spoken in the EU was published by the European Commission in 2012.⁸⁷ Figures from this survey show that 13 percent of the EU population speak English as a first language. When the UK leaves the EU, this figure will decrease to approximately 1 percent. The charts below show the percentage of the EU28 population who speak a language as their mother tongue (Figure 5), and corresponding figures for the EU27 following the UK’s withdrawal (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Mother Tongue Languages in the EU, by Speakers as a Percentage of the EU28 Population⁸⁸



⁸³ European Commission, [‘Frequently Asked Questions On Languages In Europe’](#), 23 September 2013.

⁸⁴ European Union, [‘Rules Governing the Languages of the Institutions’](#), accessed 25 October 2018.

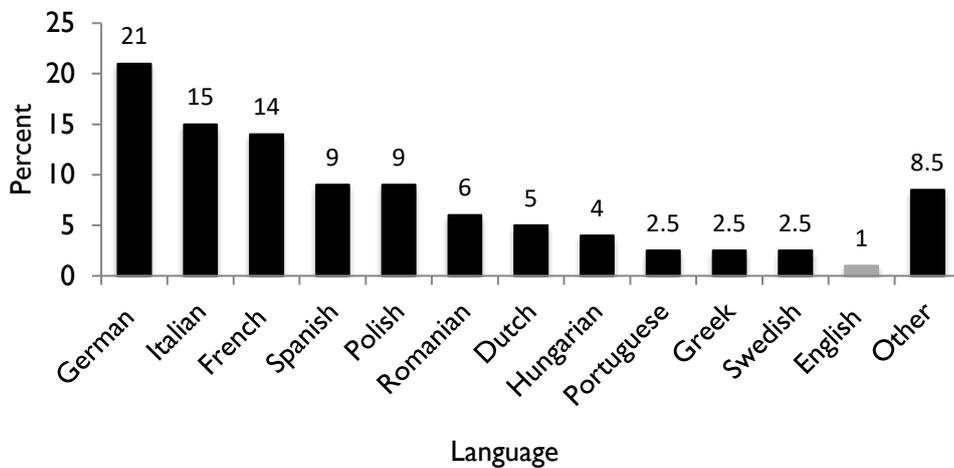
⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ European Commission, [‘Europeans and their Languages’](#), June 2012.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

Figure 6: Mother Tongue Languages in the EU, by Speakers as a Percentage of the EU27 Population Following the UK's Withdrawal⁸⁹



Following the UK's EU referendum on 23 June 2016, reaction from some EU politicians included reports that the status of English as an official EU language could be in question. Danuta Hubner MEP, chair of the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee, stated:

We have a regulation where every EU country has the right to notify one official language. The Irish have notified Gaelic, and the Maltese have notified Maltese, so you have only the UK notifying English. If we don't have the UK, we don't have English.⁹⁰

Due to such speculation, the European Commission representation in Ireland issued the following statement on 27 June 2016:

We note the media reports stating that in the event of a UK withdrawal from the EU, English would cease to be an official language of the EU. This is incorrect. The Council of Ministers, acting unanimously, decide on the rules governing the use of languages by the European institutions. In other words, any change to the EU institutions' language regime is subject to a unanimous vote of the Council, including Ireland.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Calculations based on data in: European Commission, [Europeans and their Languages](#), June 2012.

⁹⁰ Hortense Goulard, '[English Will Not Be An Official EU Language After Brexit, Says Senior MEP](#)', [Politico.eu](#), 27 June 2016.

⁹¹ European Commission, '[EU Languages: Statement on Behalf of the European Commission Representation in Ireland](#)', 27 June 2016.

The relevant EU law is article 342 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (consolidating article 217 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome), which states:

The rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Union shall, without prejudice to the provisions contained in the Statute of the Court of Justice of the European Union, be determined by the Council, acting unanimously by means of regulations.⁹²

However, despite the likelihood of a unanimous vote to remove English as an official EU language being low, this has not prevented speculation that English may decline in significance as the de facto *lingua franca* of the EU following Brexit. Prior to the mid-1990s, French was the dominant language of the European Community.⁹³ Following the accession of Sweden and Finland in 1995, and the subsequent EU enlargements to include eastern European member states, English has become an increasingly dominant procedural language. However, it is possible that in future the French and German languages may become more dominant within the EU institutions. On 5 May 2017, during his address to the European University Institute's 'State of the Union' conference, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, stated: "I have decided to express myself in French, because slowly but surely English is losing its importance in Europe".⁹⁴

Despite these comments, English remains a significant language spoken as a second language among EU citizens. The 2012 European Commission language survey, referred to above, states that English is the dominant second language in the EU, spoken by 38% of the population.⁹⁵ This exceeds the proportion of second language speakers of French (12%), German (11%) and Spanish (7%).⁹⁶ The report states that, when asked which two languages were most important to them, 67% of respondents cited English.⁹⁷ In addition, according to Eurostat figures, 94% of EU secondary school students were learning English as a foreign language in 2016.⁹⁸

In this context, it has been argued that the UK's withdrawal from the EU may actually increase the likelihood of English remaining the *lingua franca* of the Union's institutions. Matteo Bonotti, Lecturer in Political Theory, and

⁹² [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#), Article 342.

⁹³ Peter Tiersma and Lawrence Solan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Law*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p 36.

⁹⁴ Jennifer Rankin, '[Brexit: English Is Losing Its Importance In Europe, Says Juncker](#)', *Guardian*, 5 May 2017.

⁹⁵ European Commission, [Europeans and their Languages](#), June 2012, p 5.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p 7.

⁹⁸ Eurostat, '[Foreign Language Learning Statistics](#)', accessed 29 October 2018. This figure excludes UK and Republic of Ireland citizens.

Diarmait Christ, Professor of Language, both at Cardiff University, have claimed:

Brexit in fact strengthens the case for promoting English as the *lingua franca* of the EU [...] [It] will reduce the English language's Anglo-centric character in the EU and make it a much more neutral language of communication than any other European language. English, in other words, could become a new Esperanto [...] for the EU.⁹⁹

An academic study published in 2016, *Ranking Languages in the European Union: Before and After Brexit*, came to a similar conclusion:

The odds [of English retaining its official language status] are good, as it is one of the important relay languages used by interpreters in the EU Parliament, and probably also by those who translate official documents. Using another relay language would certainly dramatically increase, at least during the transition (which could take years), costs and create disruptions of the entire translation process.¹⁰⁰

In May 2018, the announcement of the proposed EU budget for 2020–27 by the European Commission included confirmation that English will remain the primary language used for the EU's translation and interpretation services after Brexit:

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom will result in a limited reorientation of some functions within the administration, but the scope of activities will not change—and in some new priority areas will be intensified. Translation and interpretation services in the English language will also remain unaffected.¹⁰¹

Despite this confirmation, the authors of the 2016 academic study cited above also argued that Brexit may result in EU citizens forgoing the learning of English in future:

People learn new languages, but may also stop learning languages which become less important *de facto*, or in their minds. It could happen that, in the after-Brexit world, EU citizens may decide to forego speaking or learning English.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Matteo Bonotti and Diarmait Christ, '[English Could Be a More Successful Esperanto In a Post-Brexit EU](#)', The Conversation Blog, 10 May 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Victor Ginsburgh et al, [Ranking Languages in the European Union: Before and After Brexit](#), Pablo de Olavide University, Seville, 29 November 2016, p 18.

¹⁰¹ European Commission, [A Modern Budget for a Union that Protects, Empowers and Defends: The Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027](#), 2 May 2018.

¹⁰² Victor Ginsburgh et al, [Ranking Languages in the European Union: Before and After Brexit](#), Pablo de Olavide University, Seville, 29 November 2016, p 19.

In March 2018, in a House of Lords written question, the UK Government was asked what representations it was making to the EU to ensure English remained an official EU language. Answering on behalf of the Government, Lord Callanan, Minister of State at the Department for Exiting the European Union, stated:

While the UK will maintain an interest, any decision on official languages of the EU after the UK's withdrawal will be one to be taken by the EU institutions and their member states.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ House of Lords. [‘Written Question: European Union: English Language’](#), 1 March 2018, HL5764.