

# **Review of Languages at KS4**

## **What will the review do?**

The review will focus on language learning at Key Stage 4, and will consider innovative ways to encourage language take up post-14.

## **Why are we having a review now?**

This year showed a reduction in the number of pupils entering for language GCSE courses for the second year running. We are concerned that, without further action, this decline could continue.

## **What are the terms of reference?**

The review will work with key partners and stakeholders to examine the scope for action in the following areas:

- With secondary schools to support them in making available a wider range of more flexible language courses, so that more young people continue language learning even if they are not doing a full GCSE course;
- Further strengthening the incentives for schools and young people to continue language learning post-14;
- With FE and HE, to examine what more can be done to widen access to and increase interest in language learning among the student population;
- With employer organisations, to consider what more they can do to promote the value of language skills for business and to give stronger market signals to young people about language skills and employability
- What broader communication effort is needed to get across the importance of language skills to all sections of the population

## **What form will the review take?**

The review will consist of a series of 'mini-conferences' with key stakeholders.

## **Who will conduct the review?**

The review will be conducted by Lord Dearing, working with Dr Lid King, the National Director for Languages.

## **When will it start? When will it end?**

The review will start immediately – week commencing 9/10/06. The final report will be presented to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by the end of February, with an interim report completed by Christmas.

### **Who will the review panel speak to?**

We anticipate the review panel will speak to a wide range of stakeholders, including Headteachers, Specialist Language Colleges, parents, subject associations, Trade Unions, QCA, TDA, Ofsted and the CBI.

### **What will you do with the findings?**

Ministers will carefully consider the findings from the review and consider what the next steps should be.

### **Will you publish the findings?**

We are waiting for a steer from the Secretary of State.

### **Is this a return to compulsory languages at KS4?**

We believe that removing compulsory languages from KS4, combined with introducing early language learning into primary schools, was the right decision. However, Lord Dearing will be considering all options that could stimulate language learning for post-14 year olds, and we will consider his recommendations fully.

### **Are you admitting removing compulsory languages from KS4 was a mistake?**

We believe that the decision to make languages an entitlement at KS4 was the right one. The large number of compulsory subjects at KS4 left too little flexibility for other subjects and types of study such as work-related or vocational learning. We wanted to make the curriculum more flexible and responsive to students' individual needs, and motivate them to stay in learning. However, it is right that the government should take account of what has happened to the numbers of students studying languages at KS4, and review policy in light of this experience.

## **Background**

### **Why were compulsory languages removed from the school curriculum?**

The Green Paper *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* suggested that the large number of compulsory subjects at Key Stage 4 left too little flexibility for other subjects and types of study such as work-related or vocational learning. It proposed that subjects should be mandatory at KS4 only if they provided an essential basis for progression in learning or for personal development. On that basis a new statutory entitlement for all young people to study a foreign language was introduced, effective from September 2004. This replaced the previous statutory requirement for all pupils to study a language as part of the curriculum.

## **What is the KS4 entitlement?**

From September 2004 the status of Languages at Key Stage 4 moved from a statutory National Curriculum subject to an 'entitlement' subject. To meet the entitlement requirements, schools must provide access to at least one course in an official working language of the European Union (EU) that leads to an approved qualification (approved under section 96). The official working languages of the EU, for which there are approved qualifications, are: Danish, Dutch, French, German, modern Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish.

## **Which languages can schools teach at KS4?**

Schools must provide access to at least one course in an official working language of the European Union. Additionally, they may provide access to additional courses in other languages leading to approved qualifications, eg world languages such as Arabic and Chinese.

## **How bad is the decline in languages at KS4?**

Significant numbers of pupils have decided not to continue languages post-14. In 2005 the percentage of the year 11 cohort taking a languages GCSE decreased by 10% points, from 68% to 58%. Provisional 2006 results show there has been a further significant decline in the numbers of pupils entered for French and German, and a slight dip in numbers entered for Spanish. However, there has been an increase in the number of pupils following courses in other foreign languages.

Although the number of entries for languages GCSEs are declining, the results are improving. In 2005 overall number of all pupils gaining a good GCSE in a language subject increased by up to 8%. **(DN – 2006 figures to be added after results are published.)**

## **What are you already doing to boost language take-up at KS4?**

We have implemented a number of measures to boost uptake up languages post-14:

- Jacqui Smith (then Minister for Schools and 14-19 Education) wrote to all secondary schools and Chairs of Governors in January 2006 setting out our expectation that schools should set a benchmark of 50-90% of all pupils studying languages leading to a recognised qualification.
- Ofsted have changed the **Self Evaluation Form (SEF)** to include a section for schools to indicate how they are delivering the statutory entitlement to languages, and if they are not meeting the minimum 50% expectation target, how they plan to reach that percentage, and by when.
- Languages will be incorporated into the **specialised diplomas** being

introduced under the 14-19 reforms, bringing together employers, local authorities, universities and schools to tailor courses which teach foreign languages with a focus on their application in the workplace, for example in tourism, health and social care.

- Our newly developed **Languages Ladder** recognition scheme provides alternative and more flexible accreditation routes, and supports language learning at Key Stage 4 within a wide range of learning pathways, including vocational and work-related contexts. (The Languages Ladder can-do descriptors were developed with reference to the National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, encouraging learners to recognise and build upon their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Languages Ladder levels have GCSE equivalence and can be recorded in the Achievement and Attainment Tables.)
- We are continuing the drive to expand the number of secondary schools with a first, second or combined specialism in foreign languages by 2010, enabling them to promote language learning across the system, in particular at GCSE; with each existing and new specialist language school, as well as schools wishing to take a second specialism in languages, receiving an additional £30,000 per year in specialist grant.
- We are piloting new GCSE courses such as Applied French which combines French with business, leisure and tourism or media and communications.
- We are building on a range of pilot projects and initiatives to help schools across the country to develop a more diversified post-14 languages offer.
- We are providing additional training for language teachers working in Key Stage 3 to help them better enthuse and engage learners in foreign languages.
- 'Languages Work' promotional materials have been launched in schools, to inspire and encourage pupils to take up languages when determining their GCSE options and considering future employability.