

Modern Languages Excellence Group Report Summary

The hallmarks of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) - *skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work; interdisciplinary learning; global citizenship; literacy across the curriculum* – together with the emphasis on learning experiences which ensure active engagement, motivation and depth of learning, are giving Scotland a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create the kind of learning environment where Modern Languages can really flourish and thereby reverse the decreasing uptake of Modern languages in our schools.

It is an opportunity that Scotland, for the sake of its future wellbeing, simply cannot afford to miss. As Baroness Coussins warned following the publication of the Worton Review (2009)¹:

“Unless the decline in modern language learning is reversed, Anglophone Britons will become one of the most monolingual peoples in the world, with severe consequences for our economy, for business competitiveness, for international reputation and mobility and for community cohesion at home.”

The Modern Languages Excellence Report provides all those involved in Modern Languages education with a blueprint which outlines why and how this should be done. Excellent pedagogy alone will not reverse the trend. Excellence in leadership is also required so that together practitioners and decision-makers can inspire Scotland’s young people to engage more fully with their language learning and continue into the Senior Phase.

This summary highlights the benefits of language learning, dispels the myths and presents the key messages for decision-makers.

Demonstrable Cognitive Benefits

- Enhanced mental flexibility
- Improved literacy and reading skills
- Enhanced interpersonal and intercultural skills
- Enhanced problem-solving ability
- Enhanced learning capacity
- Improved overall academic achievement

Economic Benefits

“Language skills are increasingly important in a globalised economy. Staff who can communicate at least conversationally in another language – particularly where this is coupled with an understanding of overseas business culture – can be a great asset. Linguistic proficiency helps firms to consolidate their relationships with existing overseas trading partners and develop contacts in new markets.”
(CBI, 2010)

Societal Benefits

“Language learning is a powerful tool for building tolerant, peaceful and inclusive multicultural societies. The experience of learning a new language helps to develop openness to other cultures and acceptance of different ways of life and beliefs. It raises awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and promotes tolerance of people with a different lifestyle.”
(Terry Davis, former Secretary General of the Council of Europe)

Dispelling the Myths

Myth 1: Everybody speaks English.

Reality: Only 6% of the world’s population speak English as a first language. 75% of the world’s population don’t speak any English.

Myth 2: Learning languages is particularly difficult.

Reality: Appropriate pedagogy, differentiated to meet individual learning needs, can ensure success in foreign language learning even for those with additional support needs.

Myth 3: You have to be fluent for languages to be of any use.

Reality: Language teachers must encourage young people to see the study of a language as a useful experience and help to manage their expectations: proficiency does require years of study but a little language goes a long way, with most employers looking for conversational ability in the foreign language.

Key Messages

MODERN LANGUAGES IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL (MLPS)

Decision-makers in Local Authorities and in schools have a responsibility to ensure that there is training for MLPS, that MLPS features in Improvement Plans of both primary and secondary schools on a cyclical basis, and that there are regular, structured opportunities for Modern Languages practitioners in primary and secondary to meet and plan together.

A BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION WHICH INCLUDES MODERN LANGUAGES

Schools have to ensure that Modern Languages remain part of the broad general education, through supportive timetabling which allows all pupils to have the opportunity to experience the Modern Languages Experiences and Outcomes at the third level. To do this, most learners will need a solid base and appropriate gradient of progression from P6 (at the latest) to the end of S3.

Entitlement trumps choice!

INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING/INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION/LITERACY

Modern Languages lend themselves naturally to cross-curricular activities and have a unique contribution to make to both International Education and to Literacy.

PARTNERSHIPS

External partnerships both at home and abroad greatly enhance the relevance and enjoyment of Modern Languages.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/excellence/ModernLanguages>

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¹<http://bit.ly/60lt5y>