**ENSURING SUPPORT FOR THE SUBJECT AREA – WHAT CAN EACH OF US DO?**

This is a **working document** that has emerged from discussions within UCFL, AMLUK, the BA, ILCS, The Languages Gateway. Discussion of the document will be part of the UCFL plenary on Friday 5 July where a number of speakers will talk to points raised and debate moving towards a strategy based on non-competitiveness. Underlying the document is a conception of the subject area as multifaceted, porous, and inclusive. The initial section (in its final iteration to be written as a brief but powerful statement) that sets out a broad definition of the subject area while subsequent points raise issues and ask questions (highlighted in red) on how the subject area as a whole can ensure collective initiatives are as effective as they need to be.

**Importance of Languages and Cultures**

- The subject area is essential to the cultural, social, economic wellbeing of the UK
- Languages and Cultures play an increasingly key role in HE strategies relating to internationalization and interdisciplinarity. Without the critical, self-reflexive and embodied intercultural knowledge and skills languages and cultures education brings, universities cannot claim to be delivering a world-class, ethically-accountable education to students,
- Languages and Cultures are important as a subject area to Humanities and Social Science strategies, especially relating to challenge-led and sustainable research, is becoming increasingly apparent. The subject area is unique in the way its interdisciplinary methods and ways of working are specifically suited to challenge led research.
- Languages can bridge the SHAPE-STEM divide, as the value of multilingualism in science and for the economy has been highlighted by numerous organisations. Language diversity is not only a reality in our society but also a valuable resource that can enrich scientific research

**Opportunities for the subject area**

- Persistent public curiosity about and appetite for language learning and acquisition of related cultural knowledge
- Growing visibility of multilingual nature of the UK – and acknowledgement this is an opportunity not an impediment; Modern Languages plays a key role in challenging ideas of the UK as insular, exceptional, isolated from other countries and cultures
- Appetite for dialogue about languages across four nations of the UK
- Increasingly integrated infrastructure and government investment, bringing together multiple parts of the sector and discipline (e.g., NCLE, initiatives led by German Ambassador)
- Consistent and effective voice emerging
- All surveys with employers indicate that they value language skills, cultural awareness, curiosity and willingness to be in dialogue with others from different contexts as extremely valuable
- Scientifically proven cognitive benefits to learning more than one language

**Issues facing the subject area**

There are, however, significant challenges facing the subject area, and sector-wide knowledge of and support for the initiatives that are organised to confront these challenges are essential. While the current funding crisis in HE is not the fault of Languages and Cultures departments, it is disproportionately impacting the disciplinary area. Encouraging a co-ordinated approach enhances the initiatives that all Language departments pursue independently and strengthens the subject area as a whole. Here are some actions each member of the disciplinary community can take:

1. **Defining the subject community**

For any connected comms strategy to work, the subject area needs to develop a more powerful narrative around its importance and to ensure that members of the subject area are familiar with this broad understanding of the disciplinary field of Languages, Cultures and Societies; the default position otherwise is simply to stress the importance of language acquisition; it is only with the aid of a coherent and broadly agreed upon narrative strategy that one can more effectively rely on influencers and encourage greater societal support for the work of the subject area; researchers/teachers need increasingly to be advocates for their subject community. There is a need too for the alumni community to support the disciplinary community with case studies to feed back to senior leaders.

The subject benchmark statement provides the core narrative for our discipline:

https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-languages-cultures-and-societies

How can the subject community publicise its importance as effectively as possible?

2. **Promoting greater inclusivity**

Languages increasingly address Global Challenges (such as the urgent societal and health consequences of climate crisis, conflict, digital transformations) and assert their relevance for connectivity and the development of transnational / global / decolonial perspectives. The global dimensions – evident in the increasing emphasis on world languages – are complemented by more domestic considerations. There are connections here, for instance, with the work of Decolonising Primary and Secondary Languages Education SIGs of ALL, and with wider discussions of languages and inclusivity, the risks of the emergence of cold spots in language teaching provision, increasing awareness of links between languages and social justice, and the existence of language hierarchies.

Exchanging ideas and methodologies across subject associations and HEIs.
https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/blog/modern-languages-and-inclusivity-sharing-ideas-and-practices
Decolonising Secondary Languages
https://www.all-languages.org.uk/about/community/special-interest-groups/de-colonising-the-curriculum/
Decolonising Languages: Ways forward for UK HE and beyond
https://www.lspjournal.com/post/decolonising-languages

D'Argenio, Maria Chiara and Elizabeth Chant. 2021. *Decolonising the Curriculum at UCL/SPLAS: Preliminary Report*. Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University College London.

The Palgrave Diversity and Decolonisation series:
https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-95357-7

Blogs summarising work at Newcastle and Durham:
https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/decolonisesml/about/#:~:text=It%20aims%20to%20initiate%20and,with%20a%20learning%2Fteaching%20resource
https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/modern-languages-cultures/research/groups/decolonising-mlac/

Work at Bristol:
https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/decolonising-education-from-theory-to-practice/0/steps/190049

How does the Languages community continue to build on this work?

3. **Emphasising domestic multilingualism – HHC languages – about here not there**

There is an increasing emphasis on the languages spoken in the UK, meaning that ML departments assert their centrality to domestic agendas. Connections between Modern Languages, LBAS, Home, Heritage and Community languages and BSL create new alliances and raise the visibility / awareness of the value of domestic multilingualism. These developments create a particular urgency around engagement with policy to ensure that 1. There is access to GCSEs/ALs, etc. in a broader range of languages 2. There is an accreditation model for languages independent of GCSEs/A Levels, 3. Schools can access further accreditation, e.g. in heritage/community languages, 4. There is a pipeline of students wanting and being prepared to become qualified teachers. Such an approach underlines the need to exploit the opportunity of the linguistic resources already present in a multilingual UK.

How do Languages departments get behind the wider objectives for languages pursued by BA and UCFL?

4. **Acting jointly with teachers and teacher education to address recruitment/pipeline issues**

The question of ensuring numbers of take-up to ensure that departments in the future remain viable creates a commitment to a more strategic relationship between academic departments in Universities with both school learning and teacher education. As a discipline we should provide material and practical support to teacher training carried out in Schools of Education. We should also do more to underpin minimum capacity levels in key languages at A-level where demand and capacity issues exist (e.g. German A-level provision regionally).

Towards a National Languages Strategy
https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills/
What do we want MLs departments to do to support this initiative?

Languages Gateway
https://www.thelanguagesgateway.uk/
Clear need for point of contact in MLs departments to ensure engagement

Routes into Languages
https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/
What can MLs departments do to support Routes?

5. **Build on mentoring programme**

The Languages community needs to build on activity/commitment/enterprise to mentoring programmes, which have become increasingly dynamic and successful. Such initiatives reveal the ways in which the subject area can use its best communicators, namely current and recent students, to publicize the subject area in recruitment/outreach and engage cultural diplomacy.

British Academy – What Works: Languages Mentoring and Ambassador Programmes

https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/what-works-languages-mentoring-and-ambassador-programmes/

https://x.com/MFLMentoring/status/1630961094264250368?s=20

How can MLs departments build on this initiative?

6. **Supporting educational sector as a whole in all four devolved nations**

University Languages departments increasingly develop links with schools as part of a commitment to engaging with a broad range of interlocutors. This activity includes support for decentring the curriculum. Engagement with NCLE permits enhanced dialogue with schools, and universities are increasingly involved as key partners in multilingual city initiatives. HE has the potential to support transition and curriculum development. We also have responsibility to support ITE and the challenges of teacher retention, designing university programmes that provide graduate skills meeting national demand.

As part of this activity, there is a need to ensure that research in HE is accessible at different levels of the education system, taking inspiration from initiatives such as:
https://www.pearson.com/en-gb/schools/subject-resources/modern-languages/why-languages-matter/diversity-and-inclusion/permission-to-speak.html

And Open access resources such as:
*Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook*
https://liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/book/10.3828/9781800348493

How can MLs departments/ subject associations support initiatives of this kind?

Initiatives like NCLE run CPD workshops for teachers, but what can departments do alongside this? How can departments fund places/travel/accommodation for teachers?

7. **Enhancing visibility and understanding of relevance of ML research**

There is a continued need to demonstrate the vital nature of the research that is conducted within the subject area. Central to this is a need to reflect on the translatability of the findings of research into multiple contexts and the challenging of stereotypes concerning the nature of research in Arts and Humanities.

See HEPI report:
https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/03/30/the-humanities-in-the-uk-today-whats-going-on/

Need to demonstrate the importance of REF impact case studies for policymakers, university management, comms departments.
The BA and UCFL, with £14K support from MHRA, currently working on preparing a readily accessible, highly readable version of the work of the subject area.

8. **Engaging with policymakers**

The subject area needs to continue to establish partnerships and collaborations with policymakers to facilitate effective decision-making processes. The work that Wendy Ayres-Bennett and colleagues have pursued in this area is of the utmost importance, see:

*Languages, Society and Policy*
https://www.lspjournal.com/
*Languages and Policy: Building Collaborations between Academics and Policymakers*
https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/institute_modern_languages_research/Language%20policy%20report.pdf
ILCS *Thinking Strategically* series
https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/research-policy-and-training/policy/languages-society-policy

Need to build on this work to ensure that all researchers have the opportunity to engage in policy related work.

9. **Promoting greater societal engagement with the work of the sector**

Languages not only encourage greater understanding and recognition of multilingualism but also reveal the limitations of monolingualism. This work is evident in studies of languages and economic well-being – at home and elsewhere, revealing the role of linguistic and intercultural skills in global economic stability. Languages and cultures are also essential for sharing knowledge and innovations on climate change, including the diverse understandings and potential solutions, informed by local indigenous knowledges and promoting non normative approaches in sciences. In the economic context, engagement with business community is essential, allowing for the development of work placements, strategic engagement of key alumni, and supporting and following through the work of Cities of Languages.

W Ayres-Bennett et al., 'The economic value to the UK of speaking other languages', RAND Corporation (2022).
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1814-1.html

Born Global
https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/born-global/

How does the sector pool its resources and contacts in this area?

10. **Developing greater advocacy for the subject area**

Key to all of the developments above is advocacy and the development of greater public understanding of the value of qualifications in Languages. This requires more co-ordinated responses towards the reporting of languages in the media, the commitment to promoting linguistic sensitivity in a broad range of (policy) contexts, an enthusiasm for translating research findings to wider audiences, and support for initiatives such as the Languages Gateway.

How do we pool the resources of the BA, UCFL, AMLUK and subject associations?

**Resources**

QAA benchmarking
TNLS
APPG documents – manifesto and recovery plan
Nicola McClelland article
Translating Cultures report
OWRI – publications and project websites
Language Gateway
Wendy RAND report
Wendy policy document
HEPI report
Recent THE articles
Durham conference blog