

**University of Oxford &
Human Economics**

**Modern Languages in
UK Higher Education –
Operating Model
Benchmarking Report**

22 May 2026



What can Modern
Languages faculties learn
from each other's
operating models that will
help them to meet current
challenges?



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Report authors:

Antony Hawkerr
Alexandra Campbell-Moffat
Tom Callahan

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For more information, please contact:

Antony Hawkerr
antony@humaneconomics.com
07896 485408

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this benchmarking report by Human Economics. Languages are at the heart of so much of what we teach and research in the Humanities. But studying languages is not simply a matter of linguistic comprehension; it is foundational for social, political, cultural and historical understanding and analysis, and for grasping the world in its full richness and diversity. It is no surprise, as the data gathered in this report indicate, that languages graduates are in such keen demand from employers. Yet, though the case for investment is clear, languages across the UK and beyond face steep structural and sector-wide challenges, both in terms of resourcing and also pipeline. The faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at Oxford is one of the largest units of its kind in the UK, but it is not immune from those pressures. As this report shows, however, we have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and adapt, to advocate for the continuing importance and urgency of language teaching and research. Facing those headwinds confidently and proactively, informed by the strategic findings detailed in this report, will enable Languages to retain their world-leading strengths and reputation. The Humanities Division is committed to working hand-in-hand with our Faculty and with our colleagues across the sector. Our recent move into the Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities gives us a unique platform from which to achieve those goals. Together, we can ensure that future generations of students and researchers will access the same transformational benefits that the study of languages offers, sustaining an unparalleled legacy for many years to come.

Daniel M. Grimley FBA

Head of Humanities, University of Oxford

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Abbreviations

ACA	Academic Cooperation Association
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMES	Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
BA	Bachelor of Arts
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLAM	Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums
HAF	Head of Administration and Finance
HE	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
JRAM	Joint Resource Allocation Method
MA	Master of Arts
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
MML	Medieval and Modern Languages
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MSt	Master of Studies
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
PPE	Philosophy, Politics and Economics
RAND	RAND Corporation
REF	Research Excellence Framework
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UCFL	University Council for Languages
UCL	University College London
UG	Undergraduate
UK	United Kingdom
USP	Unique Selling Point

Executive Summary



1 Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

This report was commissioned by the University of Oxford Humanities Division in December 2025. The original version of the report was to help the Medieval and Modern Languages (MML) faculty to understand what it could learn from other Russell Group Modern Languages faculties, and from other Oxford Humanities Division faculties, to help it futureproof its operating model.

At the point of commissioning, the faculty and division leadership in Oxford agreed that the report should also aim to benefit other modern languages faculties, most immediately those who participated in sharing their own experiences and approaches for this report. As a result, we have prepared this version, for an external audience.

The report focused on understanding what approaches language faculties at Russell Group universities are taking towards the four objectives set out below, and what impact these approaches appear to be having.

1. Increasing undergraduate and graduate intake, including from underrepresented groups.
2. Strengthening student experience and outcomes, and the experience of those teaching courses.
3. Managing the teaching and administrative workload of academic postholders to preserve time for research.
4. Improving financial sustainability at faculty/department level.

Of these four objectives, financial sustainability is an outcome and a major driving factor in each of the first three objectives. So, approaches to financial sustainability are interwoven in discussion of each of the first three.

We are grateful to the fourteen senior academic and teaching postholders from ten other Russell Group institutions who shared their own and their faculty's experiences and approaches for this report.

1.2 Sector context

UK modern languages faculties face well-documented challenges. Undergraduate enrolments have halved between 2003 and 2023, falling from 160,000 to just 80,000. There are many causes for this, of which the 2004 removal of the requirement for young people to study a language as part of their GCSEs is perhaps the most impactful. Other causes include:

- Brexit, which has reduced European study/work opportunities and made the UK a less attractive destination for overseas students to study a modern language.
- The perception that language degrees provide less beneficial workplace skills than STEM or social science subjects, particularly with the advent of AI. This

This report aims to be useful not just for the medieval and modern languages faculty at Oxford, but also for languages faculties across the UK

despite strong evidence that employers value both language skills and other skills gained from a languages degree, and evidence of higher employment rates and starting salary premiums for language and area studies degrees compared to other Humanities and many STEM subjects. This pattern has been shown across university types (Oxford, Russell Group, Pre-1992 and Post-1992) in recent research.¹

The impact of these challenges has been severe. 44 universities have closed language programmes in the 21st Century, leaving 61, a decrease of 42%.²

Adding to the challenge, and at a time of stagnating teaching and research income, language degrees are more expensive to deliver than other humanities subjects. They require a higher staff to student ratio and specialist staffing across multiple languages. And whilst some faculties have sought to shore up enrolment numbers by offering more joint degree programmes and new beginner pathways in more languages, this has had the effect of compounding administrative complexity and workload. Modern languages faculties are having to work ever harder to stay afloat. Amongst those interviewed, there was a collective sense of anxiety for the future of languages study and research in higher education. Several, although not all, termed the current national situation a crisis for modern languages faculties.

There is evidence that policymakers, and the employers who rely on the skills of language graduates, are taking greater heed of these issues. A recent debate in the House of Lords drew cross-party recognition of the decline in language study, the challenges involved in addressing this, and the potential consequences for trade, defence and wider government priorities if issues remain unaddressed.³ These concerns have also been articulated by senior officials. In November 2025, Ian Proud, a former diplomat and Vice-Principal of the FCD0's diplomatic academy, published an article explaining the strategic risks created by declining language capability.⁴ Research by RAND further underlines the economic impact, estimating that the full removal of language barriers with Arabic-, Chinese-, French-, Portuguese and Spanish-speaking countries could increase UK exports by around £19 billion per year.⁵

Our interviews with academic and teaching post-holders at ten peer institutions have revealed some common themes to what faculties are doing to address these challenges, as well as some unique approaches.

Some of the approaches described below are supporting financial sustainability by attracting more fee income. Some are decreasing costs per student e.g., by ensuring that courses run at scale. Some are helping to manage administrative burdens. It is, however, challenging to do all three of these things in the same approach. Many of the approaches that increase applications or enrolments, or student experience, result in higher academic or administrative workload.

Over the last 25 years, over 40% of UK language programmes have closed or been cut significantly

¹ University of Oxford, 2023, The Value of the Humanities: Understanding the career destinations of Oxford Humanities Graduates.

² HESA, 2021. This contraction is particularly severe amongst post-1992 universities, 17 of which have lost their modern languages degrees, leaving only 10 institutions offering them.

³ [Hansard Volume 851, 8 January 2026, Schools and Universities: Language Learning](#)

⁴ [Ian Proud, 2025, The procession of university language closures will trip up UK diplomacy](#)

⁵ [RAND, 2022, The economic value to the UK of speaking other languages](#)

1.3 Key Findings

1.3.1 Increasing undergraduate and graduate intake, including from underrepresented groups

The overall picture is one of substantial decline in applications and enrolments to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Within this, there are pockets of stability and growth. Within the Russell Group, enrolments for undergraduate languages joint-honours degrees are steady. Oxford University, as an example, has steadily increased its state school MML undergraduate intake, even as enrolment has fallen overall. It should also be noted that the size of the UK school-leaver age-group cohort declined by 10% between 2012–21, putting pressure on application and enrolment numbers.⁶

Faculties are trying to reverse decline, with some success (but often with a knock-on effect on increasing workload), by using some of the approaches below:

Degree offering: Many faculties are increasing the routes into language degrees

- Oxford offers the largest choice of modern European languages, from the group of Russell Group universities compared, that can be studied as a component of a degree.
- There are an increasing number of joint-degree combinations with Arts/Humanities and/or Social Sciences subjects. These show relatively stable demand but add administrative complexity.
- There is greater provision for students who have not studied languages at school through increasing the number of ways that students new to languages can study language degrees. E.g.,
 - Making the offer of beginner ‘ab initio’ courses almost universal across languages offered by the faculty.⁷
 - Creating low-risk (for the student) routes to test a language degree, without affecting their final degree mark should they drop the language (e.g. foundation years, option to start a degree with a third subject and then narrow down).
- Evolving post-graduate courses. Recent course introductions reported as finding success, in some cases including building a PhD pipeline, include MAs in: i) translation studies; ii) language and technology; iii) film and screen studies; iv) a multilingual programme focused on migration, diasporic narratives and ethnographic research methods.
- Focusing overseas recruitment efforts more tightly on selected Asian/African countries.

Curriculum: Many faculties are broadening the range of medias being studied, whilst focusing on a narrower range of topics

- Increasing the study of film, and to a lesser extent theatre and digital media, whilst reducing the volume of literature content.
- Increasing coverage of cross-cultural topics such as decolonisation.

⁶ ONS, [Births in England and Wales: summary table](#).

⁷ NB: ‘Beginner courses’, is used throughout this report as terminology for course pathways in which the language is taught from first principles, to students without an A-Level in the language. This is the same as ‘ab initio’, a term often used in the sector.

Applications and admissions are declining across the board – although joint-honours courses are holding steady

- Some faculties are narrowing the cultural scope of degrees to a smaller number of research specialisms and/or periods of history (e.g. 20th Century). Others are using e.g., pre-modern courses to provide a lens on contemporary issues.

Admissions: Although some faculties have lowered grade requirements, many seek to maintain headline requirements whilst offering more students exceptional pathways

- Different faculties face upwards or downwards pressures to maintain headline grade requirements (e.g., to preserve ranking performance, or to increase applications and enrolments).
- Those maintaining headline requirements often seek to offer more flexible paths to high potential applicants who don't meet formal requirements.

Schools outreach: Schools outreach can be a highly effective long-term tool for languages enrolments, with wider societal benefit for multilingualism; but this is beyond what most of the sector can offer

- Schools outreach is viewed as vital for the future of languages at primary and secondary schools, in universities and in society.
- National and regional schools outreach programmes can be effective, if funded, developed in partnership and provided at meaningful scale.
- Schools outreach at present is more typically funded at low levels from faculty or university budgets, and relies heavily on a small, committed group of people, ideally including students and recent graduates.

Marketing: Students and parents increasingly want direct contact with the people who will teach them, and stories of people who have studied the degree recently

- Course marketing is typically centralised, but demand from prospective students and their parents to meet academic staff reduces the efficiency of this.
- Faculties are increasing their use of social media and of student voices in marketing, particularly to promote graduate destinations.

1.3.2 Improving student and teaching experiences – and outcomes

The teaching and administration of languages courses is increasingly demanding.

Some of the changes that faculties are making to courses, curricula and admissions have the effect of broadening and increasing intake but also make courses more complex to administrate. Increasing the number of joint degree combinations and offering parallel post A-Level and beginner routes are two examples of this.

These pressures are also occurring at a point when inflation in the costs of delivering courses is outpacing fee income, expectations to cater for resits and exam postponements are rising, and as generative AI is asking questions about pedagogy and assessment.

Despite this, faculties are finding ways to evolve their teaching to meet the demands of a greater number of student pathways, inspire students through research-led course design and provide a creative range of modular options and assessments for these, within budgetary and institutional constraints. Faculties are doing this through a combination of:

Language teaching: The model for language teaching is becoming increasingly reliant on dedicated language specialists able to offer an effective pedagogical approach with limited contact hours.

- Language specialists do most of the language teaching at most institutions. Typically, some 2nd and 4th year language courses are taught by academic postholders.
- There is increasing regularisation and professionalisation of teaching specialist roles. In recent years, several faculties have introduced parallel teaching and scholarship career tracks with scholarship leave opportunities.
- Beginner and post-A-Level tracks often converge in the 2nd year, and always by the start of 4th year (following the year abroad).
- 3-4 contact hours per week of language tuition (per language).
- Language study class sizes are typically up to 15-17 students per class.

Course structure: Most comparator institutions have fully modular course structures,

- Courses are delivered in a mix of small group classes, seminars, lectures and practice sessions.
- 4-8 hours of contact time per week for cultural courses is typical (varying depending on the number of modules being studied during the term).

Modular Options: Many faculties are seeking to simplify and streamline modular options and the process of deciding these, whilst also using these to explore live and interdisciplinary research themes.

- There is a sector-wide trend towards streamlining and obtaining earlier choices on options to simplify scheduling and reduce modules with <25 students, which cost more per student to deliver. Specialised interests can often be pursued via dissertation.
- Research-led cross-language and interdisciplinary options are increasing in number and are often popular.
- There are moves to bring forward and automate option selection, and to professionalise and streamline academic advisory support.

Assessment: There is typically more formative feedback offered on language learning than cultural courses; assessment programmes across both are intensive)

- Continuous formative feedback is provided on language courses (during class and marked).
- Students commonly receive a small amount of formative feedback on cultural courses. Typically, 1-4 instances per module.
- Teaching typically concludes by around April in 2-semester models. In 3-term models there is a split between 2 terms and 2.5 terms of teaching.
- Most faculties manage their exam and marking timelines to complete by the end of June:
 - In most institutions, double-blind marking is used only for dissertations with high-credit values.
 - Exam boards are typically complete by mid-late June.

Assessment: Faculties are grappling with maintaining the robustness, fairness and deliverability of assessments in the face of AI, and trends in student and employer expectations

- AI and employer demands are forcing changes to modes of assessment.
- Increasing demand for – and expectations of accommodation of – exam resits, and postponements are impacting summer research of many academics. This includes both the organisation of resits, and the pastoral element of supporting students through resits.

Year abroad: There are similarities in the administration and fee model for the year abroad across universities, but a few faculties are entertaining substantial changes.

- There is typically a small, specialist administrative team responsible for year abroad administration, particularly for insurance, health and safety, crisis management. This may be at faculty level, or as part of a central mobility team.
- There is typically a sub-faculty academic administration role responsible for host institution liaison, pre-briefing students, academic visits and troubleshooting. Sometimes this is part of the role of a language group Director of Studies. Sometimes it is separated out to a separate academic administrative post.
- The year abroad is viewed as a major differentiator for languages, but some faculties are entertaining conversations about making this optional (cost, accessibility).
- Russell Group faculties charge reduced fees (about 80% lower) for the year abroad.

1.3.3 Managing the teaching and administrative workload of academic postholders to preserve time for research

Interviewees described academic administrative workloads increasing due to the complexity of course arrangements and a decreasing level of administrative support available. At the same time, research funding is becoming increasingly hard to access, and academic careers ever harder to launch, particularly given cuts to postgraduate research funding.

In the face of increasing pressures, many faculties are implementing systems to track academic workload, protect research time, and offer programmes, support and internal funding, to help early career researchers. These approaches don't solve the underlying issues about work volumes or the paucity of available funding but can somewhat alleviate the worst effects.

Key findings include:

Most faculties use systems and policies to monitor workload and protect research time, but these alone can't solve high underlying workload

- Workload management systems are in use at all institutions and were generally reported to be worth the additional administrative burden to manage them.
- Academic postholders typically have a dedicated percentages of their time reserved for research (32-40%) and administration (20%).
- Most institutions have policies in place to protect research time during term-time, but with varying success.

Most faculties have similar policies regarding the frequency and conditions on research leave.

- Research leave is typically offered one semester out of six (slightly higher/lower frequency depending on institution).
- Research leave is conditional on submitting and delivering on a research plan. Sanctions exist but are rarely employed.

There is an increasing imperative to ensure that research programmes demonstrate societal impact

- Research funding is more available for institutional research priorities, often linked to local impact, and for interdisciplinary research.
- Research support varies by division/institution and is often targeted towards supporting early career researchers.
- Mentoring of early career researchers must balance support and respect for academic freedom with the responsibility to demonstrate impact.

Administration is frequently becoming more centralised, whilst maintaining regular channels for communication and consultative decision-making with faculty members and students

- Administrative support is more centralised, with fewer staff than in the past. This reduces costs but situates more administrative responsibilities with academic postholders.
- Administrative committees typically operate at and above the faculty level, with regular engagement of the whole faculty.
- Staff-student liaison committees are used by most faculties for undergraduate and postgraduate input.
- Faculty academic leadership often makes pragmatic use of governance committees and all-faculty meetings for decision-making and communication.

1.4 Conclusion

No higher education institution in the UK has solved the challenges facing modern languages. Many of the initiatives described in this report work only in particular university contexts, stem the tide without reversing it, and/or alongside introducing additional administration.

The diversity of approaches presented in this report provide options that MML may wish to consider. They may also help the faculty sharpen its strategy for where it aims to be distinctive, what it will do, and what it might stop.

The most successful approaches share points in common:

- **Being willing to change to meet students where they are** – and recognising this ‘place’ may be different depending on the applicants to the institution – whilst maintaining academic quality, authenticity with institutional history, and the research interests of academic postholders.
- **Taking a more structured approach to teaching, assessment, support and workload management** e.g., through defining career pathways for teaching staff, supporting early career researchers, and aiming for equity in workload.

- Working across faculties and language groups to **help students from a range of subject backgrounds, to look at cross-cutting research questions.** The mid-term future of the languages in higher education depends on actions beyond what any one faculty or institution can do alone. There was consensus that Modern Languages faculties need to work closely with their own university administration to bring clarity on the strategic position of languages within their university.

There was also agreement amongst interviewees that Modern Languages faculties need to work together, with schools, employers and with policymakers to change the UK's mindset to see the benefits of multilingualism and the study of humanities through neighbouring cultures. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to renew the approach to languages in the UK's education systems, so that in the future all young people can encounter and learn another language from an early age, and some can go on to benefit from the unique combination of skills and life experience offered by a language degree.

Introduction



2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of this report

This report was commissioned by the Humanities Division at the University of Oxford to support the Medieval and Modern Languages (MML) to understand its operating model in comparison to others in the Russell Group. The report has been developed as two versions:

- A version for the MML faculty at the University of Oxford
- A version to share with academics at other universities who have participated in this report, potentially for wider circulation in the sector, beyond this.

The purpose of this external version of the report is to provide an evidence base on trends in language study and research. The report provides an overview of the approaches that Russell Group language faculties are taking to a range of challenges faced by the sector. The report focuses on four objectives:

1. Increasing undergraduate and graduate intake, including from underrepresented groups.
2. Strengthening student experience and outcomes, and the experience of those teaching courses.
3. Managing the teaching and administrative workload of academic postholders to preserve time for research.
4. Improving financial sustainability at faculty/department level.

A chapter of the report is devoted to each of the first three objectives, in each case examining approaches that Russell Group faculties are taking. Financial sustainability is an outcome and a major driving factor in each of these three objectives. So, approaches to financial sustainability are addressed throughout the report.

Importantly, this report does not make recommendations for what any language faculty should or should not do. Rather, its purpose is to present evidence, analysis, and illustrative approaches that the faculty could draw on to make decisions that address current challenges while remaining aligned with the principles and priorities it chooses to uphold. Comparative information and alternative approaches taken by other UK language faculties are presented, alongside selected examples from other Humanities faculties at Oxford. All data are shared in context where possible, with trade-offs and applicable circumstances highlighted.

2.2 Approach and key sources

This report was commissioned in December 2025. Research, interviews, and drafting were carried out over a six-week period spanning December 2025 and January 2026. The report draws on the following sources:

This report does not make recommendations. It provides evidence, analysis and illustrative approaches to help the MML faculty make decisions appropriate for its situation and identity

- Desk research of publicly available data, focused on understanding: i) undergraduate and graduate course portfolios; ii) application numbers and course sizes; iii) teaching approaches; iv) student-staff ratios; v) student feedback; vi) student outcomes/ destinations. In most cases, we sought comparative data from the Russell Group. Due to limitations on scope and time, where data was less immediate to extract, we focused on 12 Russell Group universities, identified by the MML Faculty Chair, HAF and Strategy Group. These were, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, KCL, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Oxford, UCL, Warwick, York.
- Interviews with 14 academic and teaching specialist postholders from 11 Russell Group universities and the School of Advanced Study (University of London). Compared to the universities that we focused on for the desk research, the universities of interviewees were similar. We did not speak to representatives from Warwick or York but did interview a postholder in Newcastle. Each interview explored a range of themes drawn from an interview guide developed in consultation with MML Faculty postholders. Interviewees were suggested by MML Faculty members. Contributions from interviewees have been anonymised in this report. In general, courses and approaches described are also not attributed to institutions. In a few cases, we have named examples, where interviewees referred to information in the public domain, with the intention of drawing attention to good practice. (e.g., national schools outreach programmes).
- An interview with Neil Kenny at the University of Oxford, who provided perspective from his prior role as Lead Fellow for Languages at the British Academy (2017-23).

The steering group for this report comprised the following MML faculty members: Phillip Rothwell (Chair), Hayley Morris, (HAF), Almut Suerbaum, Andrew Counter and Geraldine Hazbun (Strategy Group). Alex Vincent (Humanities Division Registrar), sponsored the report.

We interviewed eighteen academic and administrative postholders from Russell Group language faculties and other Oxford Humanities faculties to gather insight into approaches used elsewhere

2.3 Report structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 3 provides an overview of the situation faced by language faculties across the UK.
- Chapters 4–6 present comparative data across language faculties, alongside insights from interviews, to examine where approaches and strategies are and are not proving effective across three specific areas:
 - Chapter 4: Attracting undergraduate and postgraduate students to language courses. This section covers themes of curriculum, admissions, schools liaison, and marketing.
 - Chapter 5: Improving student and teaching experience. This section covers themes of teaching, assessment and year abroad.
 - Chapter 6: Supporting academics to protect their time and secure resources for research. This section covers themes relating to workload management, research leave, research grant capture, administration and governance.

- Chapter 7: Concludes by outlining a set of questions that members of the sector may wish to consider further.
- Annexes A and B provide, respectively: the interview guide drawn from in external interviews (and, in adapted form, for internal interviews); the list of people interviewed for this report.

2.4 A note on terminology

Terminology differs across the universities included in this report for how they refer to relevant units of organisation, e.g., for a subject area, or for a group of subject areas that forms a larger unit within the university. Considering both the commissioning client, and the agreement to anonymise individual responses, we have used the following terminology throughout this report:

- 'Sub-faculty' or 'language group' when referring to an individual language grouping or other unit of organisation beneath the language faculty (e.g., French, German, Russian).
- 'Faculty' as the unit of organisation for the language department.
- 'Division' as the collection of faculties that makes up a larger grouping, e.g., of the Arts and Humanities.
- 'Beginner' is used to describe the course pathway offered to students with no prior academic experience in the language studied. (Termed 'ab initio' in many institutions)
- 'Post A-Level' is used to describe the course pathway available to students with an A-Level or other accepted UK or International qualification in their language of study. (e.g., Advanced Higher, International Baccalaureate).
- 'Sole language' is used to describe modern languages courses in which only one language is studied.

The landscape for modern languages



3 The landscape for modern languages

3.1 Overview of the Situation

Language faculties in the UK are facing unprecedented challenges. These are driven by an accumulation of factors that have emerged over the past quarter century.

Since the start of the 21st Century, 44 UK universities have significantly cut their modern language programme or closed their modern languages faculties. 105 universities offered language programmes in 2000, decreasing by 42% to 61 by 2025.⁸ This trend is a sector-wide issue; it affects even the Russell Group and shows no sign of abating. Since 2020, Hull, Aston, Leeds Beckett, Sunderland, Lincoln, Coventry, Goldsmiths, Northumbria, Nottingham, Leicester, Aberdeen, and Glasgow Caledonian have closed some or all their language courses. Languages programmes in Kent and Cardiff have also been threatened but saved after consultation.⁹

There are emerging signs that government and public-sector leaders are beginning to recognise the scale of the problem and the risks that this trend poses to key sources of UK prosperity. A recent debate in the House of Lords drew cross-party recognition of the decline in language study, the challenges involved in addressing this, and the potential consequences for trade, defence and wider government priorities if these issues remain unaddressed.¹⁰ These concerns have also been articulated by senior officials. In November 2025, Ian Proud, a former diplomat and Vice-Principal of the FCDO's diplomatic academy, published a compelling account of the strategic risks created by declining language capability.¹¹ Research by RAND further underlines the economic impact, estimating that the full removal of language barriers with Arabic-, Chinese-, French-, Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries could increase UK exports by around £19 billion per year.¹² More positively, the recent re-introduction of Erasmus+ should help ease constraints around visas and funding for European study and research and strengthen collaboration with European partners.

Despite this increased attention, language degrees remain under serious threat, driven primarily by three interrelated forces, examined in this chapter.

- Significant decrease in undergraduate and post-graduate enrolments in languages degrees.
- High, and rising, costs of delivering language degrees compared to other humanities subjects, which are not met by increases in per-student funding.

⁸ HESA, 2021. This contraction is particularly severe amongst post-1992 universities, 17 of which have lost their modern languages degrees, leaving only 10 institutions offering them.

⁹ The potential loss of language provision at Cardiff would have been particularly damaging, as the university delivers around 60% of all undergraduate Modern Languages, Translation, and Joint-honours provision in Wales.

¹⁰ [Hansard Volume 851, 8 January 2026, Schools and Universities: Language Learning](#)

¹¹ [Ian Proud, 2025, The procession of university language closures will trip up UK diplomacy](#)

¹² [RAND, 2022, The economic value to the UK of speaking other languages](#)

Languages faculties face deep challenges - over 40% of UK programmes have closed or been cut significantly since the start of the 21st Century

The crisis in modern language study needs to be addressed - languages graduates are essential to the UK's economy and national security

- Increasing workload pressures on academics and administrators, combined with more challenging research funding environment, hindering research programmes.

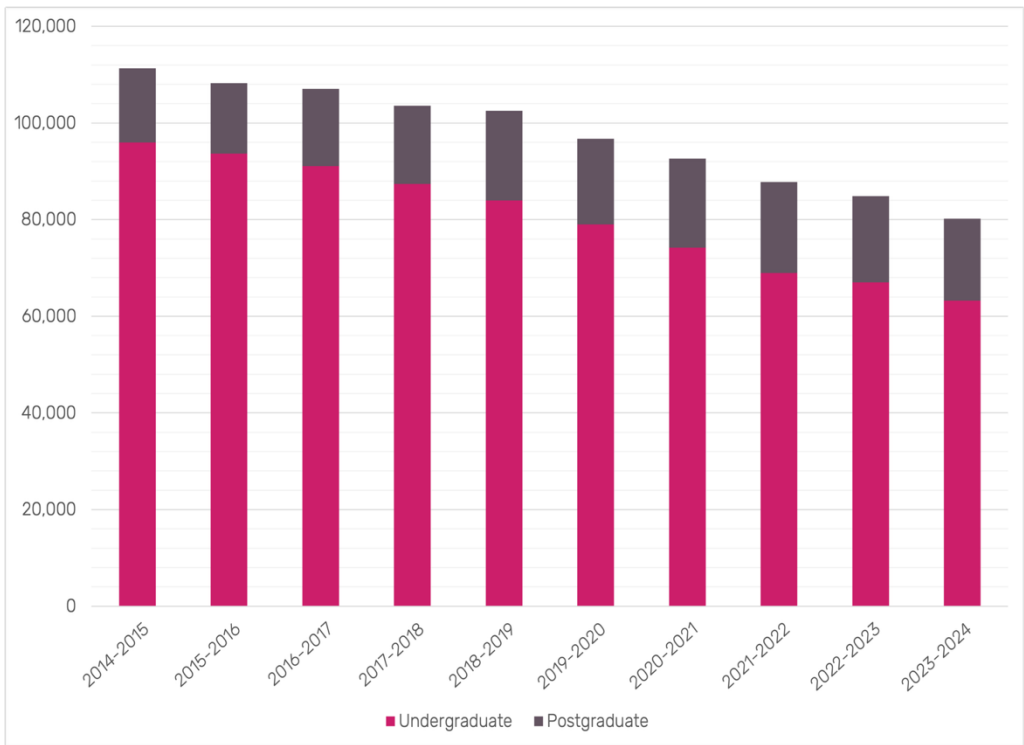
This chapter examines these national trends. The ways in which universities are seeking to respond to—or at least contain—these trends are discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

3.2 National level trends

3.2.1 Decrease in undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments

Higher education enrolments in Language and Area Studies have fallen by 28% across all UK universities between 2014-2015 and 2023-2024.¹³ The decline has been driven primarily by a sharp reduction in undergraduate enrolments (-34%). In contrast, there has been a modest growth in post-graduate enrolments, increasing overall by 10% despite year-to-year fluctuations. Across this period, a consistently high proportion of language-studies enrolments are at undergraduate level (73%), compared to postgraduate level (27%). This means that language courses are disproportionately reliant on undergraduate students, who generate lower tuition-fee income. Figure 1 presents a breakdown of higher education enrolments in Language and Area Studies across all UK Universities between the period of 2014-2015 and 2023-2024.

Figure 1: HE student enrolments in Language and Area Studies (2014/15 to 2023/24)

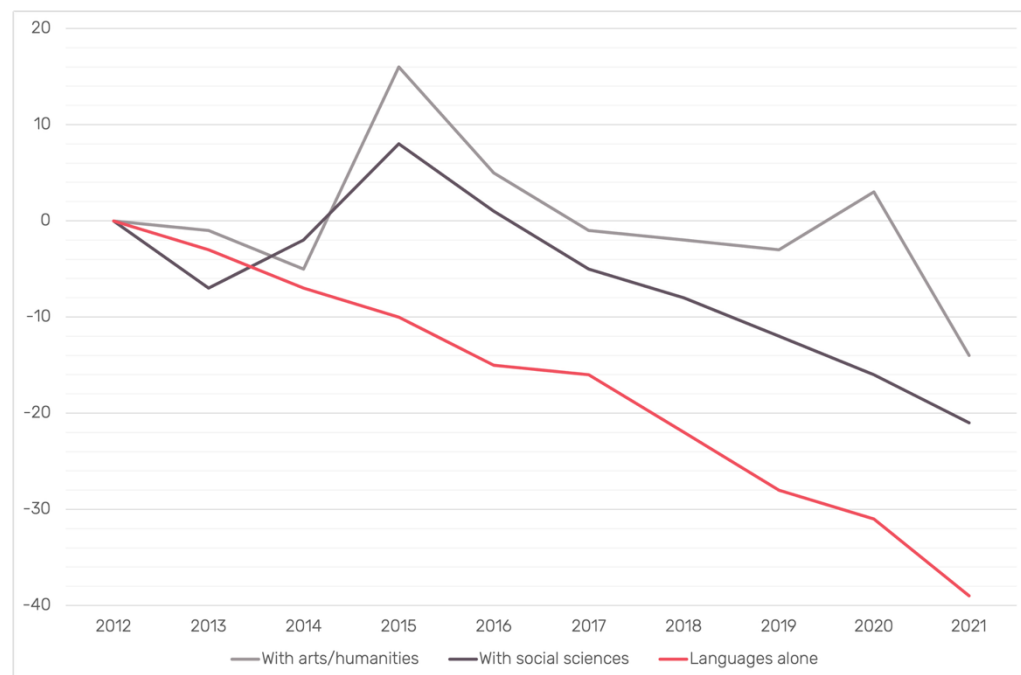


Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, HE student enrolments by subject of study, 2014/15 to 2023/24.

¹³ Area studies is an interdisciplinary field focusing on the comprehensive study of specific geographic, national, or cultural regions (e.g., African, Asian, Middle Eastern studies).

UCAS data shows that applications to study language undergraduate courses remain concentrated in Iberian (Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, Galician), French and Asian studies.

Figure 2: Percentage changes, relative to 2012, in student acceptances to language-only and joint language degree programmes



Source: The British Academy and University Council of Modern Languages, Languages and Learning in Higher Education: Granular Trends, November 2022

Enrolments onto courses where languages (including combinations of languages) are studied on their own have decreased more rapidly compared to joint degrees with a social sciences or arts/humanities subject

Both Russell Group and non-Russell Group universities saw enrolments for language-only degrees fall 40% between 2012-2021, but Russell Group universities did better at offsetting these losses by offering more joint degrees with Social Sciences and Arts / Humanities subjects.

Table 1: Changes in subject combination categories in Russell Group Institutions and the rest of the sector

Change in Enrolments 2012-2021	Russell Group	Non- Russell Group HEI's
Languages alone	-39%	-40%
With Social Sciences	11%	-47%
With arts / humanities	-5%	-40%

Russell Group universities have not been immune from these trends – but have managed to stem losses through joint-degrees

Contributing factors

Several factors have contributed to this decline. The strength and manifestation of these factors differ in part between the UK's four nations. The situation described below relates primarily to England. Key differences in other nations include:

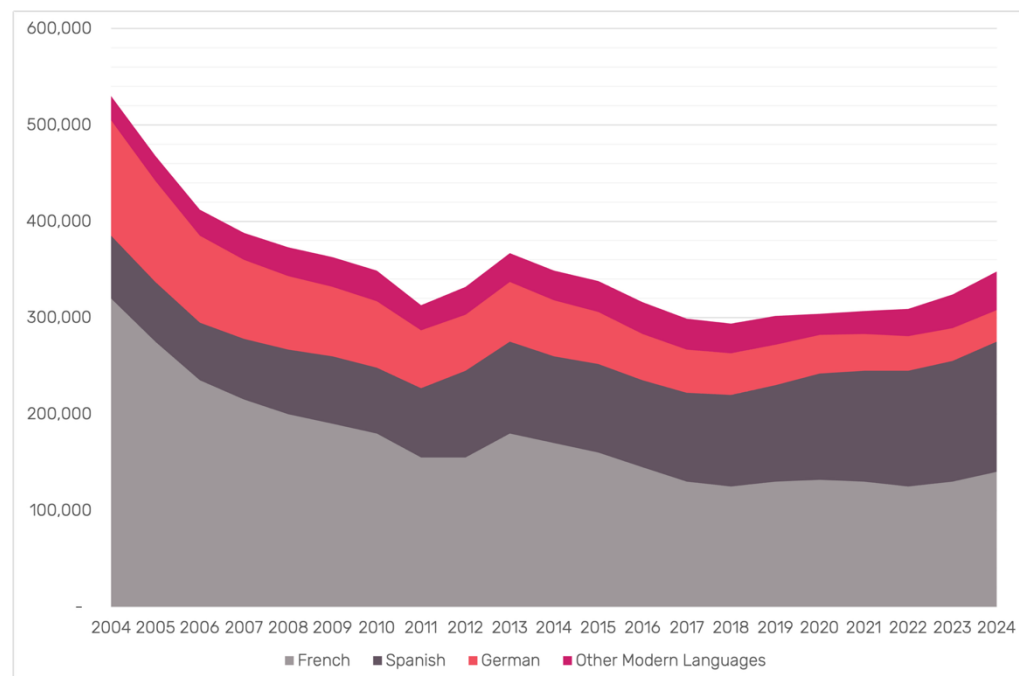
- Scotland has its own system of qualifications
- GCSEs and A-Levels in Northern Ireland and Wales differ from those in England in grading and structure

- Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland offer indigenous languages (Welsh, Irish, Gaelic) respectively within the framework for languages study in schools. This provision is strongest in Wales; Welsh is compulsory for all learners until age 16.
- Welsh-medium, and in lesser numbers, Irish-medium and Gaelic-medium schools exist alongside English-medium schools in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland respectively.

The scrapping in England of the compulsory foreign language GCSE in 2004 (and in Northern Ireland in 2008) precipitated a sharp decline in higher education enrolments (see Figure 2). Removing the requirement to study a language at GCSE created a vicious cycle. Reduced demand at school level resulted in fewer language teachers being trained and employed, resulting in a shrinking pool of language graduates able to enter the profession. This has contributed to the growth of language “cold spots,” where schools are unable to offer tuition in most – or any – major European languages. It has also led to a lack of visible role models for pupils who might otherwise thrive in language study. The barriers to languages study in England at GCSE are compounded by evidence that A-level grading in languages, particularly French, is more severe than in other popular subjects, discouraging uptake. In addition, visa barriers faced by qualified foreign nationals wishing to teach in the UK further constrain supply or at least create a perception of impracticality among schools and prospective teachers. The British Academy has warned that the scrapping of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), announced in 2025, risks accelerating this decline still further by reducing incentives for schools in England to continue offering languages.¹⁴

Source:
Joint Council for Qualifications, CSV
file GCSE results 2004-2024.

Figure 3: GCSEs sat in Modern Languages, 2004-2024



Some interviewees noted that Brexit has reduced the perceived attractiveness of studying European languages by limiting opportunities to study, work, and build careers abroad, as well as by constraining trade with countries where European languages are

¹⁴ [The British Academy, 5 Nov 2025, The British Academy responds to the final report of the curriculum and assessment review](#)

spoken. At the same time, the widespread proficiency in English among non-UK nationals, combined with the growing use of AI-based translation tools, has led many prospective students to question whether learning another language is necessary at all—or, if it is, whether undertaking a full degree represents better value than alternative routes such as apps or short courses.

Languages share a common challenge with other humanities subjects, which are often perceived by policy makers and the media as offering lower returns on investment than STEM degrees in terms of graduate earnings and the skills demanded by employers. Evidence does not support this view. Research showed that language graduates have similar overall employment rates to graduates in other disciplines, with slightly lower representation in managerial, professional, and associate professional occupations (75% vs 79%, 2012–13), and marginally lower median pay (~5% lower, 2012–13).¹⁵ More recent, longer-term analysis by the British Academy demonstrates that arts and humanities graduates experience comparable employment and wage growth to STEM graduates, with average pay differences largely driven by exceptionally high salaries in medicine and dentistry. Figure 4 shows employment rates for language graduates, six months after graduation, by university.¹⁶

Recent research by the University of Oxford, using LEO data from 2017–18 (most recent available on publication) shows that Oxford’s language and area graduates have higher median salaries three years after graduation than their peers across almost all other Humanities subjects (Philosophy, Politics and Economics being an exception). The research also showed that this pattern is repeated across Russell Group, pre-1992 and post-1992 universities.¹⁷

Despite this, the study of languages faces a perception problem. A British Council survey of pupils in their first year of secondary school in 2022/2023, found that 86% of pupils did not think they were likely to use languages in their future careers.¹⁸ Alongside this misperception about demand, there appears to be under recognition of the wider skills that languages students develop—such as cultural awareness, communication, adaptability, and international experience gained through the year abroad.

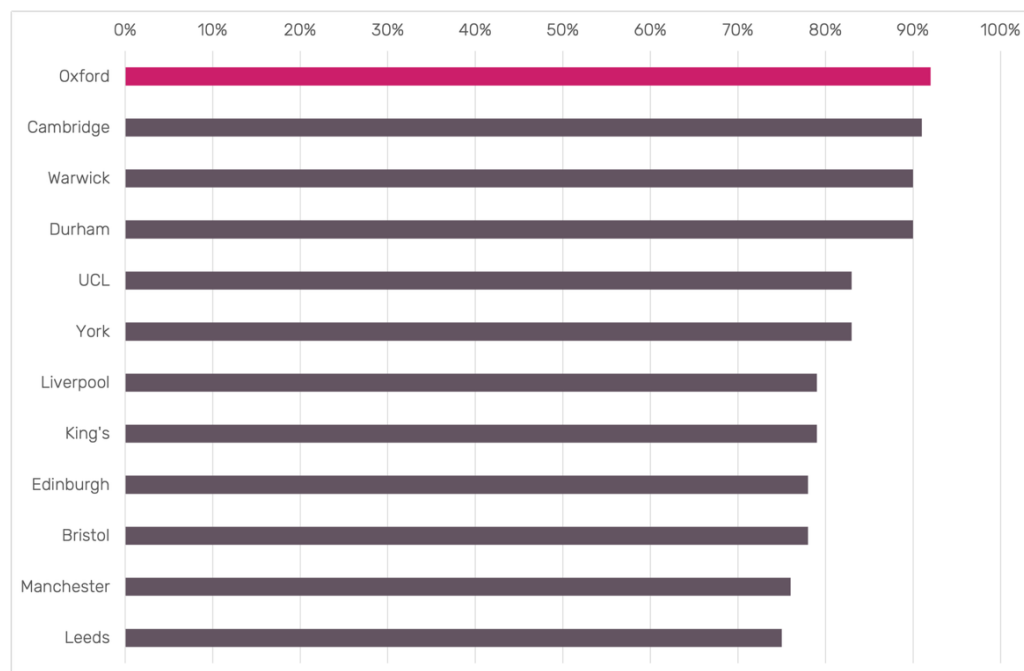
¹⁵ [A Destination of Leavers of Higher Education \(DLHE\) longitudinal survey \(2008–2009\)](#)

¹⁶ [The British Academy, 2020, Understanding SHAPE Graduates – Qualified for the Future](#)

¹⁷ University of Oxford (Robson, Murphy, Nuseibeh, Tawell, Hart, Stewart, Keep, Marginson), 2023, The Value of the Humanities, Understanding the Career Destinations of Oxford Humanities Graduates

¹⁸ British Council, 2023, Pupil Attitudes to Languages

Figure 4: Percentage of graduates employed within 6 months of graduation language students, by university (2022)



Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, Graduate Outcomes 2022/2023.

3.2.2 Cost of delivery

Formal comparative research of this point appears limited (and would merit further exploration to strengthen the funding case for languages). Interviewees for this study identified three main cost drivers: i) small-group teaching for language learning, typically capped at 8–16 students, rather than large lectures; ii) higher contact hours than subjects such as History or English; and iii) specialist staffing requirements, which are fragmented across languages and often include a dedicated teaching and scholarship pathway that is unique.

During the 2000s and early 2010s, rising tuition fees and the low-inflationary environment enabled many Russell Group universities to absorb these costs. However, as fees and student numbers have declined, barriers for international postgraduate students, including tighter restrictions on post-study working visas, have increased, this has become increasingly unsustainable.

As financial pressures across universities have intensified, language faculties have faced growing strain. This reflects not only the direct costs of provision but also institutional efforts to simplify timetabling and reduce costs by rationalising degree portfolios. In some cases, this has led to cuts to popular language programmes or to degree combinations that attract small cohorts individually but are collectively essential to sustaining a viable language offering.

3.2.3 Rising pressures on academic and administrative staff

Approaches to administrative support vary across institutions but the overall trend has been for administrative consolidation and rationalisation. Whilst some academics interviewed recalled a period when larger language areas, such as French, had dedicated sub-faculty administrative support, this generally no longer exists. In some universities, limited support remains at faculty level, while others have pooled administration at

There is strong sector consensus that language degrees are relatively expensive to deliver, particularly at UG level, driven by the need for many contact hours delivered in small-group settings to ensure effective language acquisition.

In interviews for this report, academic post-holders described rising administrative burdens and a more challenging research funding environment

divisional or institutional level, sometimes with partial language-specific provision. This centralisation has often coincided with an overall reduction in support, resulting in postholders taking on significantly more administrative tasks than in the past.

The research funding environment for the humanities, including languages, has also become more constrained. Brexit has reduced access to European funding, collaboration, and mobility. AHRC-funded PhD places are set to fall by 60% in 2026–27.¹⁹ Interviewees also reported a shift towards funding for interdisciplinary projects and those demonstrating direct societal impact. While this benefits some researchers, it disadvantages others whose work does not align as readily with these priorities.

**Modern languages
has a consistently
low proportion of
non-EU
undergraduate
applications**

¹⁹ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/student-led-ahrc-phd-places-fall-least-60-cent>

Student recruitment



4 Student recruitment

4.1 Introduction and Key Findings

This chapter examines how Russell Group universities have responded to national trends by encouraging applications for single and joint-honours undergraduate and postgraduate modern languages courses. It considers:

- Courses offered and curricula of these
- Admissions
- Schools outreach
- Marketing

Key findings regarding student recruitment

Degree offering: Many faculties are increasing routes into language degrees.

- Oxford offers the largest choice of modern European languages, from the group of Russell Group universities compared, that can be studied as a component of a degree.
- There are an increasing number of joint degree combinations with Arts/Humanities and/or Social Sciences subjects.
- These show sustained demand but add administrative complexity.
- There is greater provision for students who have not studied languages at school through an increase in the provision and uptake of beginner pathways.
 - Making the offer of beginner pathways almost universal across languages offered by the faculty
 - Creating low-risk (for the student) routes to test a language degree, without affecting their final degree mark should they drop the language (e.g. foundation years, option to start a degree with a third subject and then narrow down).
- Evolving post-graduate courses e.g. to introduce the study of technology.
- Focusing overseas recruitment efforts tightly on a small number of Asian/African countries.

Curriculum: Many faculties are broadening the range of media studied, whilst focusing on a narrower range of topics.

- Increasing the study of film, and to a lesser extent theatre and digital media and reducing the amount of literature content.
- Increasing coverage of cross-cultural topics such as decolonisation.
- Some faculties are narrowing the cultural scope of degrees to a smaller number of research specialisms and/or periods of history (e.g. 20th Century). Others are using e.g., pre-modern courses to provide a lens on contemporary issues.

Admissions: Although some faculties have lowered grade requirements, many seek to maintain headline requirements whilst offering more students exceptional pathways.

- Different faculties face upwards or downwards pressures to maintain headline grade requirements (e.g., to preserve ranking performance, or to increase applications and enrolments).
- Those maintaining headline requirements often seek to offer more flexible paths to high potential applicants who don't meet formal requirements.

Schools outreach: Schools outreach can be a highly effective long-term tool for languages enrolments, with wider societal benefit for multilingualism; but this is beyond what most of the sector can offer.

- Schools outreach is viewed as vital for the future of languages at schools, in universities and in society.
- National and regional schools outreach programmes can be effective, if funded, developed in partnership and provided at meaningful scale.
- Schools outreach at present is more typically funded from faculty or university budget to a low level, and relies heavily on a small, committed group of people, ideally including students and recent graduates.

Marketing: Students and parents increasingly want direct contact with the people who will teach them, and stories of people who have studied the degree recently.

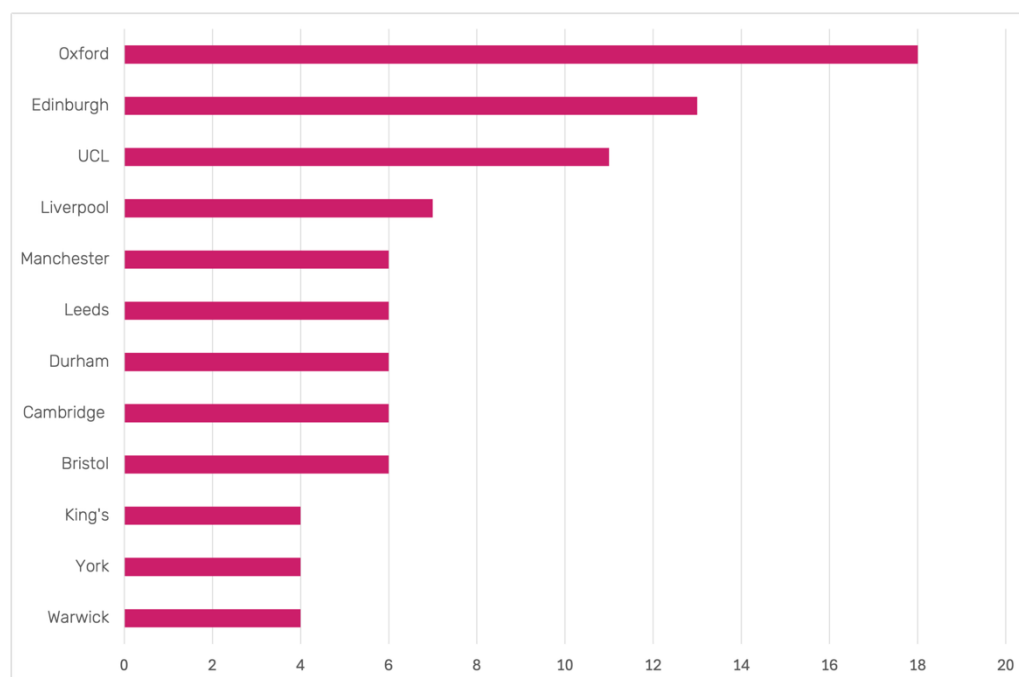
- Course Marketing is typically centralised, but demand from prospective students and their parents to meet academic staff reduces the efficiency of this
- Faculties are increasing their use of social media and of student voices in marketing, particularly to promote graduate destinations.

4.2 Degree offerings

Almost all universities offering language degrees organise their undergraduate programmes under a degree in Modern Languages or similar. Students typically have the flexibility to study 1–3 languages if on a single-honours degree, compared with 1 or sometimes 2 languages if on a joint-honours degree.

The twelve Russell Group universities vary considerably in the number of Modern European languages offered within their main faculties. Some institutions, such as Warwick, York, and King's, concentrate on a narrower range of four major European languages: French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Most universities offer between six and seven languages, often extending provision to include Portuguese, Russian, Basque, and Catalan. In contrast, larger institutions such as UCL, Edinburgh, and Oxford are able to offer a far wider selection—up to eighteen languages—placing particular emphasis on less commonly taught Scandinavian, Slavonic, and Celtic languages. Figure 5 shows the number of modern European Languages offered within the main language faculties.²⁰

Figure 5: Number of modern European languages offered in the main faculty



Source:
Interviews and online data.

The Russell Group universities examined show substantial variation in both the range of modern European languages they offer and whether these languages are housed within the main faculty or delivered externally as part of university wide language programmes or in specialised language centres.

All Russell Group universities offer the major European languages: French, German, Spanish, and Italian. The exception is King's College London, which offers Italian as a credit-bearing course through the King's Language Centre rather than through the department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures.

Portuguese is also widely available across the Russell Group Universities, though it is more frequently delivered outside of the central faculty. Most institutions offer

²⁰ Please note that the number of available languages offered may vary year to year because of changes in demand and faculty availability.

Portuguese within a recognised degree structure. At Warwick and Durham, however, Portuguese is offered as a credit-bearing module at their language centres and York offers Portuguese through its Languages for All Programme.

A similar pattern emerges with Russian: Manchester, Edinburgh, Durham, Leeds, Bristol, York, Cambridge, and Oxford teach Russian within their Modern Languages faculties. UCL offers Russian through the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. Warwick and King's provide Russian as credit-bearing modules delivered by their Language Centres, while Liverpool offers it through its Open Languages Programme.

UCL, Edinburgh, and Oxford offer particularly extensive provision of additional and less commonly studied European languages. Edinburgh and UCL are the only faculties in the UK that offer undergraduate honours programmes in Scandinavian Studies, where students can learn Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and Icelandic. Additionally, Edinburgh is notable for its Celtic and Scottish Studies programmes. Oxford is one of four universities in the UK in which Modern Greek can be studied as a major component of a BA degree. UCL and Oxford also offer less commonly taught Slavonic languages such as Czech, Polish, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovak and Ukrainian. However, while these are taught within the MML faculty at Oxford, UCL has a separate School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies.

It is notable that several Russell Group universities (5) offer Asian and Middle Eastern languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese within a central modern languages faculty. Other institutions such as Warwick, York, and King's offer Arabic but only as credit-bearing modules through their language centres or university-wide open language programmes. Oxford and Cambridge both have distinct faculties for Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

4.2.1 Increasing joint-degree combinations

Across the universities included in this comparison, clear patterns emerge in the types of joint degree programmes most offered alongside languages. The most widespread combinations are History or English with a Modern Language. These combinations are available at most institutions. (UCL does not offer History and Modern Languages; Cambridge offers History and Modern Languages but does not offer other modern language joint degree combinations.)

Closely following this are Politics or International Relations combined with a Language, and Business, Management, or Economics combined with a Language. These pairings are offered by a large proportion of universities and highlight the strategic and vocational value increasingly attached to language study, particularly in relation to international careers, diplomacy, and global business.

More specialised but still significant are combinations with Film/ Theatre and other disciplines such as Philosophy, Linguistics and Classics or Ancient History. Combinations with other social sciences such as Anthropology, Sociology and Geography are less common.

Joint-honours degrees are maintaining levels of uptake, with an increasing proportion of students who study languages doing so as part of a joint-honours degree. Within Russell

Joint degrees with Arts/Humanities and/or Social Sciences subjects show sustained demand, but add administrative complexity

Group Universities, between 2012–21 (during which period there was a ~10% decrease in the size of the age group cohort)²¹, there was a:

- 11% increase in enrolments to study a language and social sciences joint-honours degree.
- 5% decrease in enrolments to study a language and second arts and humanities subject degree.
- 39% drop in the number of applications to language single honours programmes.

Interviewees noted that despite the success of joint-honours courses in maintaining enrolment levels, there are barriers to expanding the number and size of these further due to:

- Timetabling challenges.
- Becoming overly dependent on the strategic direction and fortunes of other faculties and divisions.
- Institution-level drives to streamline the number and minimum intake of degree combinations.

One interviewee noted how a focus on eliminating small intake subject combinations can have a severe impact on languages faculties. The range of languages a typical faculty offers, and the trend away from single-language, single-honours degrees, gives rise to a long tail of combinations each with small enrolment numbers. Faculties increasingly rely on this tail to sum up to an at-scale cohort for each language offered. It is the size of the cohort per language, rather than the combination, that most affects the cost-efficiency of operation and ability to maintain staffing levels. When institutions define minimum numbers for each combination, the cuts that ensue bring cohorts for many languages below the scale that they can operate efficiently.

4.2.2 *Beginner pathways are now almost universal*

Almost all interviewees reported offering beginner pathways for each of their language programmes. A small number discussed exceptions. For example, at Cambridge, French is not currently offered as a beginner pathway, and students cannot start a dual-language degree without an A-Level (or other accepted UK/International qualification) in one of the languages.²² However, Cambridge still provides a route for beginners to study a language degree through its History and Modern Languages joint-honours programme.

All interviewees confirmed that there are also post-A-Level pathways for languages with sufficient enrolment numbers of students who have studied one or more of their degree languages at A-Level, French and Spanish being the most popular.

Overall, an increasing proportion of language students enter via the beginner route.

An Oxford example is provided by its Classics faculty. The faculty launched a major curriculum reform ("New Mods") in October 2025, replacing a streaming system (where students entering without prior language study were visibly labelled as "Course B2" versus "Course A1" for those with prior Latin/Greek) with a more inclusive structure. The reform followed approximately seven years of development and aims to encourage

Provision for students who have not studied languages at school is increasing

²¹ [ONS, Births in England and Wales: summary table.](#)

²² A-Level is used for brevity. In 'post-A-Level' pathways, Cambridge, and other universities typically accept other similar UK and International qualifications e.g., International Baccalaureate, Scottish Higher/Advanced Higher, at an equivalent level.

applications from students who would not previously have considered Oxford Classics due to the historic requirement for prior ancient language study.

Creating low risk routes for students to try a language degree, without affecting the final degree mark.

Some interviewees reported that their faculty or division has developed foundation courses or similar that allow students to try out studying a language degree, and continue if it works for them, but transfer easily if not. Examples of this included:

- Allowing students to start a course with three languages or subjects (joint-honours) but drop one (or two) of these without penalty after the first year. One university noted that single and joint-honours students' study three subjects as standard during first year, with the expectation that they will drop at least one of these by the end of the second year.
- Creating a Humanities foundation year pathway, allowing students to spend a year taking introductory courses from across the Humanities, and then join a chosen degree pathway (single or joint honours) after the first year.
- Introducing a preparatory year before the standard degree for students who have potential but lack the formal qualifications typically expected.

4.2.3 Evolving post graduate courses.

- Single-language postgraduate programmes (e.g., French Studies MA, German Studies MA) have declined significantly and are no longer viable at most institutions. Translation studies programmes have been more successful, with one institution reporting 30–35 students per year with a strong pipeline through to PhD level. However, some interviewees expressed caution about the long-term future of translation studies given advances in AI and machine translation.
- Film and Screen Studies programmes have emerged as a growth area at postgraduate level, reflecting broader student interest in media-focused content. One interviewee described their Film and Screen Studies MPhil as a "success story" attracting good recruitment numbers.
- Some faculties are developing new programmes that integrate technology and contemporary themes. One institution is replacing a TESOL programme with a new Language and Technology MA. Interviewees also identified ethics and AI, and digital humanities, as areas where languages faculties could develop successful postgraduate offerings.
- Newer programme models emphasise interdisciplinary and transnational approaches. One institution has launched a multilingual programme focused on migration, diasporic narratives and ethnographic research methods, which does not require students to enter with a languages background but allows those with language skills to develop intercultural competence rather than linguistic proficiency alone.

4.2.4 Focusing overseas recruitment efforts tightly on a small number of Asian and African Countries.

- One interviewee described how their faculty is targeting specific countries in Asia and Africa for postgraduate recruitment, conducting frequent online

Creating a cross-humanities programme – or year – could be an interesting way of capitalising on the Schwarzman Centre

presentations and direct engagement with prospective students. This proactive approach reflects the significant financial importance of international postgraduate fees to languages faculties.

- The interviewee noted that direct academic involvement in recruitment is increasingly important, as prospective students (particularly from countries such as China) value human contact and reassurance about studying in an unfamiliar cultural and linguistic environment. It is unclear from the research whether this targeted approach is widespread across the sector or represents an emerging practice at individual institutions.

4.3 Curriculum

Interviewees reported that curricula are changing, typically driven by three priorities:

- Making courses more accessible and appealing to the current generation of young people.
- Ensuring that courses provide a wide range of skills demanded by employers in today's economy.
- Focusing resources on a more tightly defined set of faculty and institutional strengths (research areas, historical coverage or modes of study and assessment).

Our interviews surfaced three clear ways in which curricula are changing:

4.3.1 *Increasing the study of film, and to a lesser extent theatre and digital media and reducing the amount of literature content*

- Several interviewees reported many of the current generation of students are interested in studying cultural content through a wider range of media (e.g., film, theatre, digital media, music).
- At the same time, many prospective students show less interest or aptitude for 'traditional' literature-heavy courses.
- Several interviewees noted that this reflects changing patterns in the delivery and consumption of cultural content, which is increasingly multimedia-based and short form.

Many faculties are broadening the range of media studied, whilst focusing on a narrower range of topics

4.3.2 *Increasing coverage of cross-cultural topics such as decolonisation*

- Prospective students are increasingly interested in studying culture from a more global and less Europe-centric viewpoint, and in the historical interaction and impact of European language and culture on non-European cultures.

4.3.3 *Narrowing the cultural scope of degrees to a smaller number of research specialisms and/or periods of history (e.g., 20th Century), or using pre-modern courses to address contemporary issues or media.*

- One interviewee discussed how these trends, combined with their faculty's existing research strengths, has led them to focus more tightly on post-1900 culture, taught and assessed through a wide range of media, and more clearly defining their USP around this.

Better alignment between faculty research specialisms and taught courses can become a USP

- However, addressing trends in student demand does not have to mean focusing solely on more recent periods of history; medievalists described popular options that allow students to look askew at current issues through the lens of medieval culture; and the study of film within courses on medieval culture.

4.4 Admissions

Interviewees described the admissions process being run centrally by a small, dedicated admissions office. Faculty members are typically involved at standard points in the process. For example, open days, (pre and post offer), clearing.

4.4.1 *Faculties face pressures in different directions on maintaining headline grade requirements*

- Interviewees noted the balance between maintaining academic entry standards and widening access, both with respect to meeting enrolment targets and providing opportunity
- Faculties face differing pressures on grade requirements. One observed that “grade requirements have been lowered across many institutions simply to maintain student numbers.” However, another noted that the faculty was prevented by central administration from lowering target grades, due to the impact on the institution’s reputation and ranking in some systems.

4.4.2 *Those maintaining headline requirements often seek to offer more flexible paths to high potential applicants who don’t meet formal requirements*

Most faculties take a more nuanced approach to grade requirements, often through providing flexible admission pathways for prospective students who have faced disadvantage or are arriving through non-traditional routes. Interviewees described several mechanisms to identify these students:

- Using postcode-based indicators to flag applications from disadvantaged areas through centralized university systems.
- Providing additional consideration to students who participated in post-16 access schemes.
- Crediting linguistic competence gained outside of formal education, including heritage language speakers.

Interviewees noted that faculty involvement is important in these pathways. When faculty members can apply judgment gained from experience, students entering through flexible pathways often outperform those with higher A–Level grades and academic experience in a language. However, admitting students on lower grades was considered less successful in the following circumstances:

- **When decisions are made at university- rather than faculty-level:** central admissions are often less able than faculty members to recognise markers that indicate a student with lower academic attainment may thrive in a language degree.
- **Recruiting through clearing is more challenging.** One interviewee noted increasing pressure to fill courses quickly from clearing, with a trend towards accepting lower grades. Another stated that students recruited through clearing

Although some faculties have lowered grade requirements, many seek to maintain headline requirements whilst offering more students exceptional pathways

with lower grades can present retention challenges. These students often arrive with less certainty about their subject choice, and the faculty rarely has the opportunity to understand whether they are likely to thrive on the course.

4.5 Schools outreach

4.5.1 *Schools outreach is viewed as vital for the future of languages at schools, in universities and in society*

Interviewees consistently noted how vital schools outreach programmes are for children across the country. Such programmes:

- Provide pupils in language teaching ‘cold spots’ exposure to languages from an early age.
- Helps older pupils understand the skills and use of a language degree.
- Supports school languages teachers, who are increasingly often isolated in their profession.

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of early engagement (e.g., from Key Stage 1 onwards) as important in shaping children’s attitude to and early aptitude for languages. Interviewees referred to Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Charles Forsdick’s recent work on Languages in UK Education as providing an overview of the landscape and best practices for engagement with young people throughout their primary, secondary and tertiary education.²³

Interviewees also made the point that school outreach should not be thought of solely as a recruitment tool. If the audience is primary school pupils, they may not enter university for a decade. If the audience is sixth form students, many may be inspired, but to another university or humanities degree.

4.5.2 *National and regional schools outreach programmes can be effective, if funded, developed in partnership and provided at meaningful scale*

Multiple interviewees highlighted the impact of national and regional programmes, both current and in the recent past, that have involved partnerships between multiple universities, government and schools.

Interviewees described approaches that worked or are working well, or which show promise:

- **Modern Foreign Languages Mentoring in Wales:** Funded by the Welsh Government, organised by Cardiff University and now involving nine HE institutions and 170 schools in Wales, this programme was highlighted as a sustainable model for collaboration on schools’ engagement. One of the interviewees championing this programme stated that it has been evaluated and has proven impact in increasing uptake of a modern foreign language at GCSE. University students are partnered with 14–16-year-olds to deliver workshops and mentorship that helps young people to see languages as part of their future. Crucial to this programme is that engagement commences before young people select their GCSEs. This allows young people to engage with language study sufficiently early that some apply to study languages at university.

Schools outreach can be a highly effective long-term tool for languages enrolments – and has wider societal benefits – but such programmes are beyond what most of the sector can offer

²³ [Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Charles Forsdick, for Languages Society & Policy, 2024, Languages in UK Education: introduction](#)

- **Routes Into Languages**, was funded between 2006 and 2016 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to promote language learning across England. The Routes into Languages network of universities produced wide-ranging resources and ideas on sustainable and effective university-school engagement. The network continues to operate, without government funding, to engage actively with schools and other organisations across the UK with UCFL providing a governance structure and organisational support for the network's ongoing development.
- **The Languages Gateway**, designed to share information about initiatives and activities across languages and sectors for audiences of teachers, learners and researchers, was also highlighted as a platform that can help young people both find resources to learn and understand the value of languages degrees.

These collaborative programmes, whilst praised by interviewees, also demonstrate the limitations in schools outreach activity compared to the scale of the task, and point to further ways that faculties across universities could work together:

- They engage only a small proportion of schools across the UK.
- The scale at which they can have impact is subject to changes in choices by national government about what to fund.
- Some are at an early stage.
- There is currently no connected digital initiative that argues for the importance of the integrated study of languages and cultures, the rationale for the subject field, and the employment possibilities that it offers. Such an initiative could provide resources and messages that would strengthen outreach initiatives across the subject field.

4.5.3 Limitations of the school outreach model

Faculty-led Schools Outreach activity is limited by resource. Most university language faculties have their own schools outreach programmes. Those described by interviewees shared similar traits:

- The focus of the activity is typically on the town, city or region of the university. (Cambridge University is an exception – each college has a school outreach responsibility for a particular area of the country).
- Programmes are funded from faculty or university outreach budgets. These are typically small.
- Organisation and delivery rely on a small group of highly committed individuals who repeatedly shoulder the responsibility.
- As an example from outside modern languages, The Classics faculty at the University of Oxford runs a Saturday Latin GCSE programme for state school students in the Oxfordshire/ Cotswolds/ Reading area, funded by a Stonehouse grant secured until 2032. The programme partners Year 10–11 students with the faculty over two years, and at least one participant has subsequently enrolled to study Classics at Oxford. The faculty is also developing free teaching materials ("OxLat 2") to help state schoolteachers train themselves to deliver Latin, aiming to build sustainable capacity rather than ongoing dependency on the programme.

School outreach at present is typically funded at low levels from a faculty or university budget, and relies heavily on a small, committed group of people, ideally including students and recent graduates

There were different points of view on how schools outreach activity should be incentivised:

- One interviewee proposed that outreach should be elevated to a required activity alongside teaching, research and administration, and recognised as such in workload management (albeit with a lower level of time allocation expected).
- Another noted that outreach is most effective when delivered by academics, students and graduates who are passionate about it, and works best when delivered by students/graduates with a pre-existing connection to the school.
- Interviewees noted varying levels of success in coordinating and collaborating on school liaison activity with neighbouring HE institutions:

In one region, participants reported success in working together, in part due to the different areas of distinctiveness of their language degrees.

Another respondent noted that administrative challenges had made coordinating activities across universities in the city more problematic than could be sustained. However, they noted success working together with local GLAM institutions to provide young people with a taster of learning about different cultures and cultural media.

4.6 Marketing

4.6.1 *Course marketing is typically centralised – but the demand is elsewhere*

- Most interviewees stated that marketing and communications resource and activities are centralised, and that faculties often have limited resource or allowance to conduct their own marketing activity. However, centralisation is often viewed as a challenge for the language faculties rather than a beneficial reduction of administrative burden.
- Students and parents increasingly want to meet academics before applying. The human connection is seen as vital in converting interest to application. For beginner or less confident students, meeting academics is also a way to break down fear and psychological barriers to selecting to study a language. So, academics are often built back into the process even if it has been centralised
- Some interviewees reported challenges in reporting achievements through centrally administrated university website news pages. Editors of these pages are sometimes too far from the content to understand why a particular story or achievement would be valuable for the university to communicate.
- Two interviewees described marketing challenges for languages faculties in universities where multiple modern languages faculties have responsibilities for different groupings of languages. It was noted by one that where there is a single faculty for Modern Languages, covering both European and non-European languages, it is more straightforward to communicate a unity of purpose. Another interviewee noted that where there are multiple faculties where languages are studied, there are typically barriers to reorganising into a single faculty. In this case, Modern Languages faculties should indicate their focus and restrictions, and how they connect with other parts of the university where other languages are studied. Making these connections explicit reduces the risk that distinctions are implied between Modern and Community languages.

Prospective students and their parents wish to meet academic staff

4.6.2 *Faculties are increasing their use of social media and of student voices in marketing, particularly to promote graduate destinations*

- Current and recent students are seen as important ambassadors. Interviewees felt that student testimonials are seen by prospective students as trustworthy, particularly for prospective students to understand what skills a language degree provides and how these convert to employability.
- Languages faculties are increasingly engaging with social media, albeit in some cases still in an exploratory and a restricted manner because of the need to comply with university approval processes and policies. One interviewee talked about their faculty informally encouraging student ambassadors to be active in talking about the skills they are developing on social media, particularly whilst the institution and faculty determine their approach.

Involving students in marketing, both through in-person events and social media, can be one of the most convincing ways to demonstrate the value and life experience that can be gained through a language degree

Student and teaching experience and outcomes



5 Student and teaching staff experience and outcomes

5.1 Introduction and key findings

This chapter examines what Russell Group institutions are doing to improve the experience of students, and that of those teaching courses. It addresses approaches to:

- Teaching
- Assessment
- Year Abroad

Key findings

Language Teaching: The model for language degrees increasingly relies on dedicated language specialists able to offer an effective pedagogical approach with limited contact hours

- Language specialists do most of the language teaching at most institutions. Typically, some 2nd and 4th year language courses are taught by academic postholders
- There is increasing regularisation and professionalisation of teaching specialist roles, in recent years several faculties have introduced parallel teaching and scholarship career tracks with scholarship leave opportunities.
- Beginner and post-A-Level tracks often converge in 2nd year, and always by the start of 4th year.
- 3-4 contact hours per week of language tuition (per language)
- Language study class sizes are typically up to 15-17 students per class.

Course structure: Most comparator institutions have fully modular course structures

- Courses are delivered in a mix of small group classes, seminars, lectures and practice sessions.
- 4-8 hours of contact time for cultural courses is typical. This varies depending on the number of modules being studied during the term.

Modular options: Many faculties are seeking to simplify and streamline modular options and the process of deciding these, whilst also using these to explore live and interdisciplinary research themes

- There is a sector-wide trend towards streamlining and obtaining earlier choices on options to simplify scheduling and reduce modules with <25 students, which cost more per student to deliver. Specialised interests can often be pursued via dissertation.
- Research-led cross-language and interdisciplinary options are increasing in number and are often popular.
- There are moves to bring forward and automate option selection, and to professionalise and streamline academic advisory support.

Assessment: Languages faculties offer substantial feedback due to the language element; most manage assessment to complete exam boards by the end of June

- Continuous formative feedback is provided on language courses (during class and marked).
- Students commonly receive a lesser amount of formative feedback on cultural courses. Typically, 1-4 instances per module.
- Teaching typically concludes by around April in 2-semester models. In 3-term models there is a split between 2 terms of teaching, and 2.5 terms of teaching.
- Assessment scheduling and marking is typically designed to complete exam boards by the end of June
 - In most institutions, double-blind marking is used only for dissertations with high-credit value.
 - Exam boards are typically complete by mid-late June (latest, mid-July)

Assessment: Faculties are grappling with maintaining robustness, fairness and deliverability of assessment in the face of AI, and trends in student and employer expectations

- AI and employer demand are forcing changes to modes of assessment
- Increasing demand for – and expectations of – exam resits, and postponements is impacting summer research of many academics.

Year abroad: There is similarity in the administration and fee model for the Year Abroad across universities; a few faculties are entertaining substantial changes

- There is typically a small, specialist administrative team responsible for year abroad administration, particularly insurance, health and safety, crisis

management. This may be at faculty level, or as part of a central mobility team.

- There is typically a sub-faculty/language group academic administration role responsible for host institution liaison, pre-briefing students, academic visits and troubleshooting. Sometimes this is part of a language group Director of Studies role.
- The year abroad is viewed as a major differentiator for languages, but some faculties are entertaining conversations of making this optional for socio-economic reasons.
- Russell Group faculties charge reduced fees (about 80% reduction) for the year abroad.

5.2 Teaching

- Language specialists do most of the language teaching at most institutions. Typically, some 2nd and 4th year language courses are taught by academic postholders
- First year language tuition is typically the domain of language specialists. Small cohort languages are sometimes the exception, where research academics may provide tuition. The type of language specialists used vary:
 - Where both non-permanent and permanent teaching staff are used, it is normal for staff on non-permanent contracts to teach the first-year beginner level foundation language course. However, one interviewee noted that their permanent post-holder is teaching this course this year for the first time, and that they will examine the impact of this.
 - Another interviewee described an intentional move to have specialist permanent teaching staff teach beginner level streams, as this offered the opportunity to deliver these using consistent, high standard pedagogy, raising standards.
- There are examples both of language specialists and research academics teaching second- and fourth-year language classes.
- Several interviewees stated that language teaching should be a part of what all academic postholders do.

5.2.1 *There is increasing regularisation and professionalisation of teaching specialist roles*

- Multiple interviews described a shift from non-contracted, hourly-paid roles and 10-month academic year contracts to full-year contracts and permanent positions. However, this is not universal.
- Several institutions described that at least some language teaching roles now have permanent academic status, sometimes including academic ranks, or titles equivalent to these ranks, and opportunities for scholarship leave to focus on pedagogy. The holders of these roles are often PhD holders.

Given an increasing proportion of beginner learners, the model for language degrees increasingly relies on dedicated language specialists able to offer an effective pedagogical approach with limited contact hours

5.2.2 Beginner and post-A-Level tracks often converge in 2nd year, and always by the start of 4th year

- In many institutions the tracks merge after the first year, albeit with supplementary tuition sometimes available in the second year for beginner track students. Some institutions maintain separate streams for the first two years of the course.
- All interviewees stated that by the end of the course, they often couldn't distinguish between exam papers written by students that followed the beginner versus post A-Level track. In some cases, beginner students are advantaged by sharing a class with others who have learned to a consistent pedagogy and thus don't need to unlearn mistakes.
- One interviewee described that students on beginner tracks focus entirely on language during their first year, and don't join literature/culture classes. However, this is in the context of an offering where three (language and non-language) subjects are studied in the first year, limiting the time available for each language.

5.2.3 Language classes typically contain up to around 16 students, and are offered for 2-4 hours per week per language.

- Language classes typically contain up to around 16 students, depending on size of language group cohort and institution.
- Weekly contact time for language teaching varies considerably. Desk research suggests an average of 3.6 contact hours per week for language instruction, a figure broadly mirrored by interview evidence indicating around 3–4 hours per week per student per language.²⁴
- Limited contact time is offset by high expectations for independent study and a substantial ongoing workload for staff, as feedback and marking constitute a significant proportion of language teaching time.
- Across the different comparator organisations:
 - At the lower end of provision, Durham and Liverpool typically offer around two hours of core language teaching per week for standard post-A level streams, usually delivered as two one-hour classes.
 - Manchester, Leeds and Bristol provide approximately three hours of language teaching per week per language, commonly structured as one hour of grammar or lecture-style input alongside two hours of seminar-based or practical language teaching, including conversation.
 - York, Kings, UCL are on the higher end of the spectrum with 3-4 hours of language teaching per week per language in pre-honours language teaching, reducing language contact to around two hours per week at honours level.
 - Oxford provides 3 (post A-Level) to 5 (beginner) hours of language teaching per week per language to first year (pre-honours) students. This reduces to 2 hours for the full cohort in the second year and increases to 3 hours in the fourth year.

²⁴ Human Economics desk research, based on published course information from Russell Group university websites (2025–26) and reviews of student forums and reviews

5.3 Course structure

- Students typically take a 30-credit or 40-credit language module and a suite of 15–20-credit culture modules each year, totalling 120 credits.
- Teaching is delivered through a mix of small-group language classes / seminars, grammar / skills lectures, practice-based sessions (speaking, listening, reading, writing, translation) and regular oral/conversation classes. In addition to this, both Cambridge and Oxford deliver college-based, small-group supervisions.
- For a typical modern language degree elsewhere, lectures make up roughly 20–40% of contact time, while seminars and language classes account for 60–75%. Routine one-to-one teaching is limited (>10%) and mainly associated with final-year projects.
- Culture seminars tend to have slightly larger groups—often 10–20 students—while lectures may be taught to cohorts of 40–100 or more at lower levels.
- Across Russell Group universities, the average weekly contact time for literature and culture teaching is approximately 4–8 hours and varies depending on the number of literature and culture modules taken during each term. At most institutions, modules typically include one 50-minute lecture per week. This means that students taking two to four modules receive around 2–4 hours of lecture-based contact time weekly, with the remaining contact hours usually delivered through seminars.
- Class sizes are usually no larger than 20 and often smaller. Students can expect 3–4 hours of lectures for each subject they take in a typical week. Oxford and Cambridge’s culture and literature teaching differs mainly in the centrality of the tutorial: much of the analytical work is done through weekly or fortnightly essays discussed in small group (2–4) tutorials. Written exams and long essays still play a large role in finals, but the cumulative load of short essays and the volume of personalised discussion is substantially greater than in almost all other institutions.

Most comparator institutions have fully modular course structures, delivered in a mix of small group classes, seminars, lectures, and practice sessions, with an average of 7–8 hours of contact time for cultural courses

5.4 Modular options

Many faculties are seeking to simplify and streamline modular options and the process of students deciding these, whilst also using these to explore live and interdisciplinary research themes

5.4.1 *There is a sector-wide trend towards streamlining and obtaining earlier choices on options to simplify scheduling and reduce modules with <25 students, which cost more per student to deliver. Specialised interests can often be pursued via dissertation*

- Students generally choose two to four optional modules per year on top of compulsory language components.
 - Manchester, Leeds, York and UCL, emphasise wide cross-school choice: students can take modules from a broad pool of Arts and Humanities subjects.
 - Others, such as Durham, Warwick, Bristol and KCL, are more tightly structured.

Many faculties are seeking to simplify and streamline modular options – and the process of students deciding these – whilst also using these options to explore live and interdisciplinary research themes

- Interviewees noted a trend towards streamlining module choices to simplify timetabling, and to increase the cost efficiency of delivering modules, by reducing the number of modules with a small cohort intake – generally seen as having fewer than 25 students.
- Practical systems for managing modules include asking students to select one module from separate, pre-determined lists, thus grouping modules to structure choice more.
- One interviewee noted that their faculty was considering introducing a more formally signalled set of pathways for students who wanted to ‘major’ in e.g., film, literature or translation studies, by providing groups of options that they could take in combination to achieve this. It was noted that this could help both with course marketing, and how students are able to package the skills learned on their degree to stand out to employers.

5.4.2 Research-led cross-language and interdisciplinary options are increasing in number and are often popular

- Several interviewees described a trend towards offering a higher proportion of cultural units at faculty level, rather than specific to the language of study.
- In some cases, faculties are partnering to offer cross-disciplinary courses that could be studied as an option by students of a language degree, the degree of a partner faculty, or in some cases students of other arts and humanities degrees. Example of the latter, described by one interviewee, were courses in Fascism and the Arts, and Italian Renaissance, both of which drew students from history, art history and linguistics, alongside language students.
- These courses are typically developed and taught by teams, often with a course lead bookending the series by introducing the themes of study and closing the series; and seminars led by different academics from across subject areas in between.
- Faculty-wide or multi-faculty courses are generally spoken of positively as allowing academics to come together and design courses built on research interests, promote cross-faculty and interdisciplinary working, and respond to student demand for courses on cross-cutting themes of contemporary relevance. The courses also draw from a wider pool of students and are often well subscribed as a result.
- Two notes of caution were voiced about too high a proportion of cross-faculty and interdisciplinary courses being introduced:
 - Too many faculty or joint-faculty options may deplete uptake of language/sub-faculty level options; with smaller disciplines being particularly vulnerable to this.
 - The additional scheduling burden of coordinating across language groups and faculties risks being overwhelming, particularly in faculties already offering many joint-degree options.

5.4.3 *There are moves to bring forward and automate option selection, and to professionalise and streamline academic advisory support*

- Several institutions described an ‘academic fair’ or ‘options fair’ taking place during Spring, where students can speak to course leads or other academics attached to each course.
- Admissions and module choice are often managed through online enrolment systems, with programme-specific rules enforcing prerequisites and credit limits. The level of automation in module options is fairly high – students select modules electronically – but most departments maintain a role for academic advisers in approving complex combinations (particularly for beginner streams, joint degrees and year abroad planning).
- In many institutions, the level of academic advisory support has reduced in recent years as a cost cutting measure. Nonetheless some institutions are maintaining a personal tutor model, or a Director of Studies role for supporting option selection.
- Some institutions are professionalising student support, changing from a model where all academics are responsible for a small tutee group, to a model where a small, dedicated services team of student advisors provide a touchpoint for all students.
- One interviewee described a recently introduced three-tier professionalised model:
 - A course organiser provides detailed advice on individual courses;
 - A cohort lead brings students together for cohort meetings to build community and group identity; and
 - Professional services student advisors act as an initial contact for personal and general academic issues.

5.5 Assessment

The level of feedback and assessment provided by other language faculties is generally substantial, particularly due to the language learning element.

5.5.1 *Continuous formative feedback for language learning is common – but students elsewhere generally receive less formative feedback on cultural courses*

- Language teaching across all institutions includes a high level of oral feedback. Small-group language classes involve constant spoken interaction, correction and advice. Culture seminars and presentation-based assessments also produce regular informal oral feedback.
- Marking takes up a very high proportion of the time of language specialists, significantly beyond the number of contact hours they have with students.

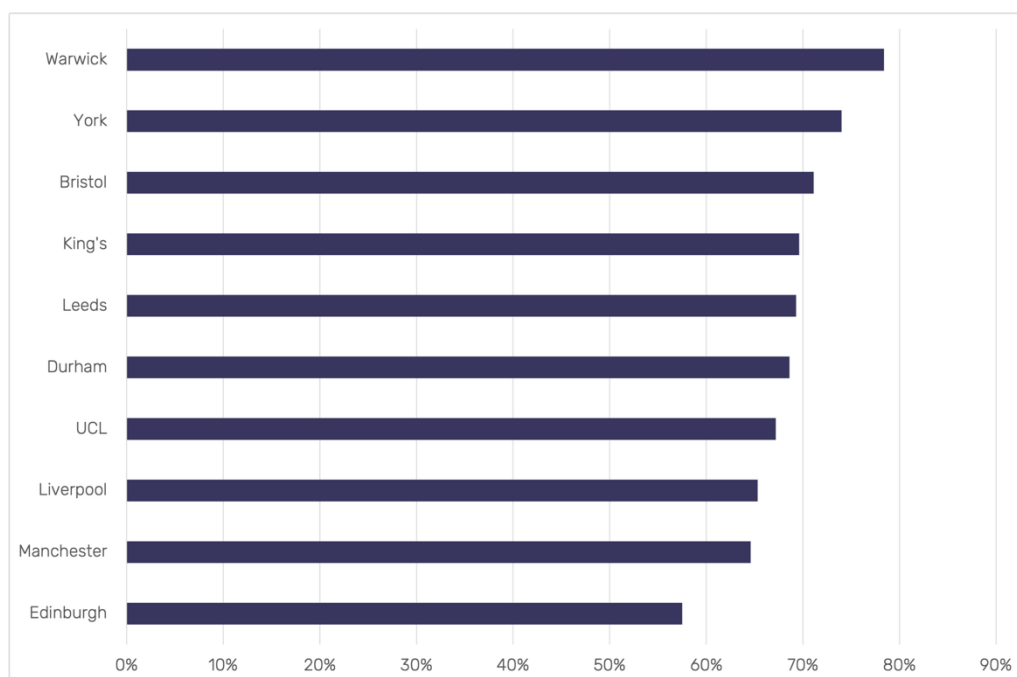
5.5.2 *Students reportedly receive feedback on approximately 1-4 formally assessed written assignments per semester within culture units*

- This is in addition to regular written work undertaken in language classes such as compositions, translations and grammar tests. Students taking 2-4 modules can therefore accumulate 5-10 pieces of written feedback per term.

The level of feedback and assessment is substantial, particularly due to feedback for language learning

- Some interviewees noted recent moves to streamline formative feedback to manage postholder workload.
- Some interviewees described assessments being used as a combination of formative and summative feedback. For example:
 - The first assessment of some courses being a ‘feed-forward’ summative assessment that both counts for a relatively small proportion of the final mark and provides feedback to help the student improve at the final assessment.
 - First year assessments as containing both elements of formative and summative assessment, in the sense that these must be passed, but do not count towards the final degree mark.
- Students have a generally positive impression with the quality of feedback offered on their language degrees. Figure 13 presents the rating for the quality of feedback and assessment given by final year students in the National Student Survey (NSS) 2022. Data for Oxford and Cambridge were not published in this report.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with Feedback Amongst Russell Group Universities



Source: The Guardian, Best Universities for Modern Languages & Linguistics – League Table, 2022.

5.5.3 Teaching typically concludes by around April in 2-semester models. In 3-term models there is a split between 2 terms of teaching, and 2.5 terms of teaching

- Most institutions who discussed academic year cycles run a two-semester model, with an exam period at the end of each semester. Faculties operating a two-semester model described two assessment periods: in January (or in one exception, December) and in April/May or, more frequently, May/June.

- A few run a three-term model of 8–10 weeks per term. In institutions operating these models:
 - One had teaching continue until half-way through the third term, right up to the start of the exam period.
 - In the other, the third term is dedicated to examination, assessment and marking with little or no teaching, which provides more flexibility for research.
- Assessment in culture and literature modules in most institutions is almost based on a mixture of essays (2–3,000 words) or portfolios, exam essays and commentaries, plus, in some modules, assessed presentations or seminar contributions. Some institutions are introducing new forms of assessment to better meet workplace demand or counter use of AI.

5.5.4 Most faculties try to manage assessment to complete exam boards by the end of June

- In most institutions, double-blind marking is used only for dissertations with high credit value.
 - In most faculties, single-blind marking followed by moderation by sampling is used for most assessments.
 - Two faculties described that double-blind marking is used for all final-year assessment. This was described as valuable, albeit highly intensive and requiring extra resource.
- Most faculties complete their exam boards by the middle or third week of June; one other faculty holds their exam boards at the end of June. Another (the latest), completed in mid-July.
- The workload of exam marking is shared throughout the faculty each season, at all faculties where this was discussed.

5.6 Assessment: Responding to change

5.6.1 AI and employer demand are forcing changes modes of assessment.

- Faculties are taking different approaches to how they assess their students in response to high levels of generative AI usage in coursework, and in language assessments, in contravention to university rules. Interviewees recognised there is no perfect way to design-out AI usage in assessment, particularly given the speed of development of generative AI tools, and the need also to consider inclusive practices.
- Approaches to assessment include:
 - Shifting (back) to more exam-based assessment: one interviewee described a move back to 80% examination assessment in the final year, reversing a trend before and during the early 2020s towards coursework.
 - Considering using oral exams and vivas during the degree.
 - Diversifying assessment modes with the aim of making AI less useful and to help students to develop and demonstrate a broader range of employment-relevant skills. Examples of this approach include podcasts, presentations, group projects, creative writing and self-reflection diaries.

Faculties are grappling with maintaining robustness, fairness, and deliverability of assessment in the face of AI, and trends in student and employer expectations

- Introducing a graduated approach to the usage of AI in assessments, with a colour-coded scale for each assessment defining whether and the extent to which use of AI is acceptable in that assessment.
- Discussing with students the dangers and drawbacks of overuse of AI, for example on reducing recall of information, that may hinder them in final assessments and beyond.

5.6.2 *There is increasing demand for – and expectation of – exam resits and postponements. These are impacting the summer research of many academics*

- Resits are an increasing draw on time. Faculties are increasingly reacting to growing expectation that students have a right to re-sit in a range of circumstances. One interviewee described that their faculty and institution is actively working out how resits should be conducted, having not offered these as common practice up until now.

5.7 Year Abroad

5.7.1 *There is typically a small, specialist administrative team responsible for year abroad administration, particularly insurance, health and safety, and crisis management. This may be at faculty level, or as part of a central mobility team*

- Interviewees all described a mixed model of administrative support and academic postholder roles in the year abroad. There has been a move towards greater centralisation and reduction of administrative support, from the individual language/sub-faculty level to a central team, or to a global mobility team who are also responsible for other university members on exchange programmes, beyond the language year abroad.
- Administrative support teams typically manage exchange agreements, insurance, health and safety checks, and crisis responses. This allows a consistent approach as well as dedicated expertise for handling health, safety, and crisis situations. Interviewees gave examples of situations where having an experienced administrative team with clear crisis processes had allowed a fast response that has tracked down and ensured the safety of students. For example: the Berlin Christmas market attack, Iran and the Japan tsunami.

5.7.2 *The language group is typically responsible for host institution liaison, pre-briefing students, academic visits and troubleshooting. Sometimes this is part of a language group Director of Studies role*

- There is typically one dedicated academic postholder administrative position per language offered; sometimes two in the case of larger language cohorts.
- The responsibilities of this role include pre-departure meetings with students, reviewing individual learning agreements, liaising with academics at partner institutions, visits, and can include troubleshooting e.g. where students are facing accommodation issues or are homesick.
- There is often a grey line on responsibility for pastoral issues; these tend to be the responsibility of administrative staff, but academic postholders are drawn in.

Whilst the administration and fee model for the Year Abroad is broadly similar across universities, a few are entertaining substantial changes

5.7.3 *The year abroad is viewed as a major differentiator for language courses, but some faculties are entertaining conversations about making this optional for socio-economic reasons*

- For most language students, the year abroad is the 'jewel in the crown' of the degree. One interviewee described it as "a transformational experience, difficult to capture in institutional metrics."
- There is a sense that the year abroad is differentiating, should be aspirational, and should be a greater selling point of languages degrees: for the skills and independence that students gain from organising their experience, living in another country and engaging with that culture in the language that they are mastering.
- However, with rising costs of living and concerns about student debt, there are access and inclusivity issues. Turing funding has not worked for this, although interviewees thought that rejoining Erasmus+ may improve the visa and funding situation.
- Whilst most interviewees reported that their institution remaining fully committed to the year abroad, one described that some institutions are discussing making it optional for socioeconomic reasons – but that, for their institution, this would be a major step.

5.7.4 *Russell Group faculties charge reduced fees (about 80% reduction) for the year abroad.*

- Most Russell Group universities charge a fee of £1,385. This covers the administration costs incurred by the faculty.
- Birmingham and Edinburgh charge up to £1,850 (highest in Great Britain).

Faculty Non-teaching Workload and research Activity



6 Faculty non-teaching workload and research activity

6.1 Introduction and key findings

This chapter examines what Russell Group institutions are doing to improve the experience of students, and that of those delivering the courses. It addresses approaches to:

- Workload management
- Research leave
- Research grant capture support
- Administration and governance

Key findings

Most faculties use systems and policies to monitor workload and protect research time, but these alone can't solve high underlying workload

- Workload management systems are in use at all institutions.
- Academic postholders have a dedicated percentage of workload reserved for research (32-40%) and administration (20%).
- Most institutions have policies in place to protect research time during term time, but with varying success.

Most faculties have similar policies regarding the frequency and conditions for research leave.

- Research leave is typically offered one semester out of six (slightly higher/lower frequency depending on institution).
- Research leave is conditional on submitting and delivering on a research plan. Sanctions exist but are rarely employed.

There is an increasing imperative to ensure that research programmes demonstrate societal impact

- Research funding is more available for institutional research priorities, often linked to local impact, and for interdisciplinary research.
- Research support varies by division/institution and is often targeted towards supporting early career researchers.

- Mentoring of early career researchers must balance support and respect for academic freedom with the responsibility to demonstrate impact.

Administration is frequently becoming more centralised, whilst maintaining regular channels for communication and consultative decision making with faculty members and students

- Administrative support is more centralised, with fewer staff than in the past. This situates more administrative responsibilities with academic postholders.
- Administrative committees typically operate at and above the faculty level, with regular engagement of the whole faculty.
- Staff-student liaison committees are used by most faculties for undergraduate and postgraduate input.
- Faculty academic leadership often makes pragmatic use of governance committees and all faculty meetings for decision-making and communication.

6.2 Workload management and allocation

6.2.1 *Workload management systems are in use at all institutions, with varying approaches to how they are used in management.*

- Workload management systems have been in operation for ~5-15 years in all faculties where this topic was discussed.
- The systems used vary from instances of more generalised analytical software such as Power BI, to dedicated management software.
- Academic postholders (e.g., Directors of Studies) often have a high time commitment to manage the workload model and work with staff within their language group to use it.
- Directors of Studies/Heads of Department take different approaches to:
 - Transparency of content of the workload management model across the faculty/language group.
 - Using the model as a tool to support conversations with postholders on managing workload (e.g., by helping staff to explore whether there are areas that they are putting more time than expected into).

6.2.2 *Academic postholders have a dedicated percentage of workload reserved for research (32-40%) and administration (20%)*

- Faculties typically allocate between 1,500 to 1,600 hours/units a year of work per member of staff (roughly equivalent to 200 days per year).
- Interviewees stated that the model is intended to function as guidance, and to ensure equity over a period, rather than to capture all work. In some cases, the unit of allocation is defined as a 'point' rather than an 'hour', intended to differentiate the system from a timesheet.

Most faculties use systems and policies to monitor workload and protect research time, but these alone can't solve a high underlying workload

40:40:20 is the typical split between research, teaching, and administration

- Between 32% – 40% of annual hours/units are assigned to research at the faculties interviewed. A 40:40:20 split between research, teaching and administration was described more than once.
- For staff with teaching and scholarship positions, some faculties provide an allocation up to 20% of time for scholarship.
- Teaching allocations are typically more tightly defined than research and administration e.g., a standard number of hours/units may be assigned for tasks like ‘first-time lecture’, or ‘repeat lecture.’
- Some institutions avoid allocating 100% of capacity by building-in a 10% flexibility for unexpected tasks like late dissertation supervisions.
- Multiple interviewees noted that systems depend on “goodwill and flexibility,” with trust that workloads will balance over time as academics rotate through roles.
- When academics hold funded grants, institutions handle research time differently. Some subtract funded research time before calculating institutional allocation to avoid double-counting and potentially creating perverse incentives.

6.2.3 Most institutions have policies in place to protect research time during term time, but with varying success

- Most interviewees stated that postholders are officially able to protect one day a week for research during term, where they are not expected to teach or attend meetings. However, postholders generally cannot expect choice over which day.
- Most interviewees report that protected days are well respected, but this was not universally the case. One respondent noted that research time during teaching terms is increasingly minimal and hard to protect, making conducting research impractical during term-time for postholders with, for example, caring responsibilities outside work.
- Several interviewees acknowledged a realistic picture: “Inevitably you don’t do very much research during semester, but the idea is it’s made up in other parts of the year.” Research often happens during vacations, lighter teaching periods, weekends/evenings, and dedicated research leave.

6.2.4 In practice, the intensity of administration work varies, with a trend to increasing workload due to reduction in administrative support roles

- In all faculties, there is an expectation that each postholder takes on administrative roles, typically equating to 20% of workload.
- Faculties take different approaches as to whether to attempt to make this 20% consistent across years, with postholders expected to be continuously engaged in an administrative role, or to ebb and flow with larger and smaller responsibility-level posts over time.
- There was a recognition amongst interviewees that there are heavier and lighter weight administrative roles. Many faculties make effort to balance allocation of these over time.
- Some faculties take a flexible approach to offering lighter administrative roles, for example to colleagues returning from parental leave.

- Taking administration roles is a key part of promotion applications; holding a significant administration role is typically a part of the pathway to professorship.
- Some interviews stated that administrative burdens for academic postholders have increased over time due to a decline in professional services support. Administrative duties taken on by postholders in many faculties include assessment logistics, year abroad administration.
- Teaching buyout for administrative roles is typically for major roles only. Examples given as attracting buyout in some, but not all, institutions are Head of Faculty, Deputy Heads and REF Leads.

6.3 Research leave

6.3.1 *Research leave is typically offered one semester out of six, but varies by institution*

- Most faculties offer research leave of one semester in duration (particularly institutions operating a two-semester model).
 - One semester in six and one semester in seven are typical frequencies.
 - One interviewee reported a cycle of one full year of research leave every five years.
 - One interviewee noted that carrying out a Head of Faculty role earns extra leave.
- Most interviewees reported some degree of flexibility around the timing of research. For example,
 - Early leave is sometimes granted in special circumstances to complete a major project.
 - Researchers who accrue research leave are sometimes able to combine two consecutive periods.
- There are constraints on research leave:
 - There is often a period of probation before research leave can be taken (3-years described by one interviewee).
 - Postponements are sometimes required by the faculty where it would be left short-staffed for teaching during a semester.
 - Senior administrative postholders will tend to postpone leave until after the post is completed.
 - None of the interviewees reported teaching replacement cover being available for standard research leave.
- Faculties typically staff to a level that recognises that a fraction of the faculty will be on research leave in any given semester.
 - Many utilise team-based delivery so that there are always multiple postholders who can deliver a course.
 - In some cases, options may be switched to a different semester if it is important that the person taking leave is able to teach.
 - Only in situations where external research funding provides for or requires cover, is there teaching buyout.

Most faculties have similar policies regarding the frequency and conditions on research leave

6.3.2 Research leave is conditional on submitting and delivering on a research plan. Sanctions exist but are rarely used

- Postholders are required to apply for research leave and submit a plan for what they will deliver.
- Postholders are also expected to provide a post-leave report that confirms or describes how deliverables were completed.
- It is not expected that research will always or even typically follow the exact plan laid out up-front. However, all interviewees reported that in cases where there is a major discrepancy without good reason, or where research is not delivered at all, a sanction of removal of the next research leave period is possible.
- One interviewee noted that while the approach to sanctions was far from being draconian, there are more incidents of these being implemented now than there were in the past.

6.4 Grant capture and research support

6.4.1 Research funding is more available if aligned to institutional research priorities, often linked to local impact, and interdisciplinary research

- Interviewees from large civic universities noted their institutions' strategic relationships with their city, favouring funding on social benefit themes such as "civic development", "health" and "aging."
- Some institutions are providing a 'carrot' to align research to university priorities by tying internal research funding to these, albeit researchers are not restricted on themes for external grant applications.
- Some interviewees noted that funding for lone researcher literary research is increasingly difficult to fund, whereas interdisciplinary projects are attracting a greater proportion of support.

There is an increasing imperative to ensure that research programmes demonstrate societal impact

6.4.2 Research support varies by division/institution and is often targeted towards supporting early career researchers

- Research support teams are typically situated at 'Division' level and often practical brainstorming, application reading, budgeting and sign-off support.
- Internal small grant awards aimed at the Humanities, often in combination with workshops and mentoring, impact fellowship schemes.

6.4.3 Mentoring of early career researchers must balance support and respect for academic freedom with the responsibility to demonstrate impact

- Many faculties provide a programme of regular research conversations (e.g., twice yearly) to early career researchers.
- These conversations are typically designed as supportive dialogues, not managerial oversight.
- Some interviewees spoke of the responsibility to strike an appropriate level of challenge in these conversations on the likely relevance/impact of research interests, given the significant challenges many faculties are facing and the threats these bring to careers of the current generation or researchers.

6.4.4 Interviewees didn't describe patterns of success with different external research funders in recent years

- As would be expected, many interviewees reported successes with AHRC or Leverhulme funding, providing the benefit of some buyout. One interviewee noted that success with these funders reflects where applications are being submitted rather than differential success rates.
- However, funding for traditional "lone scholar" literary research is becoming increasingly difficult to secure, with funders such as Leverhulme becoming "overwhelmed by applications" as alternative routes narrow. Early and mid-career researchers are increasingly moving towards team-based, interdisciplinary approaches, while more established scholars continue to pursue traditional models with diminishing funding.
- Some faculties are finding success by targeting non-standard funders through interdisciplinary research. E.g., ESRC for applied linguistics and translation/interpreting research, Wellcome Trust for medical humanities projects, and the former Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) for internationally focused work.
- Projects framed around contemporary challenges rather than traditional literary research are more likely to attract funding.
- One interviewee highlighted a significant gap in institutional support for international funding sources. German grants (e.g., Humboldt Foundation fellowships) "just don't count as grants" because they are not fully economically costed, meaning they don't appear in institutional research records and attract no administrative support. Prestigious fellowships requiring unpaid leave are often not supported. This creates a particular disadvantage for modern languages scholars, who are more likely to work internationally and be aware of such funding opportunities.

6.5 Administration and governance

6.5.1 Administrative support is becoming more centralised, with fewer faculty-level staff than in the past. This leaves more administrative responsibilities with academic postholders

- In three of the four interviews where professional services support models were discussed, there had been some centralisation, for example from faculty to division level.
- Structures included a division level administrative cluster. Within the cluster, some roles/staff are dedicated to a single faculty, whereas others are shared across faculty, depending on the size of the need. Research support, assessment processing, and the impact office were examples of roles typically found at division level.
- No interviewees reported administrative support any longer being provided at sub-faculty level, although two described this having existed until recently or within their time at the institution.

Administration is becoming more centralised, with support no longer provided at sub-faculty level

- Individual language groups typically include a small number of academic administrative roles. These groups are typically led by a Director of Studies with responsibilities for
 - Teaching allocation,
 - Year abroad studies (in smaller groups)
 - Coordination with administrative staff supporting e.g. timetabling, assessment administration and professional services.
- In some faculties, particularly for languages with larger student cohorts, individual languages have a separate designated academic staff member acting as a year abroad officer.

6.5.2 Administrative committees typically operate at and above the faculty level, with regular engagement of the whole faculty

- The faculty is typically the lowest level at which there are administration committees.
- Faculties typically have a Steering Committee/Board of Studies, Education, and Research Committees. Some faculties have an EDI committee and/or a grants and impact committee. There are typically deputy/director academic administrative roles to lead each committee.
- No interviewees described administrative committees existing at sub-faculty/ language group level.
- Faculty-wide meetings are typically held twice per semester/term. Division-wide meetings are typically held 2-3 times per year.

6.5.3 Staff-student liaison committees are used by most faculties for undergraduate and postgraduate input

- Liaison committees are typically organised by subject area and normally split between undergraduate and postgraduate course committees.
- Liaison committees typically operate twice per term.
- There are typically two student representatives per committee, who normally self-nominate.
- Feedback from students is typically about course content, curriculum and staff.
- Liaison committees are often supplemented by questionnaires to students, albeit these can skew towards students with complaints.

6.5.4 Faculty academic leadership often makes pragmatic use of governance committees and all faculty meetings for decision-making and communication

- Most interviewees in leadership roles preferred taking a diplomatic approach and stated the importance of transparency through faculty and division committees.
- This needs to be balanced with not overwhelming staff with decisions, and the need to be decisive to get things done.
- Because academic postholders all rotate through administrative roles, everyone has the opportunity over time to participate in how the faculty operates.

Regular channels for communication and consultative decision making with faculty members and students are common and important

Conclusions



7 Conclusions

7.1 Summary of key findings

The purpose of this report has been to shine a light on the approaches that a selection of Russell Group modern languages faculties are taking to the common challenges they face in terms of declining student numbers, increasing staff workload and diminishing financial sustainability.

Several themes and conclusions have emerged from across this work:

- We started from a position of asking ‘what is working?’ However, languages faculties across the UK face a combination of structural, sectoral and societal challenges, such that the approaches highlighted in this report have, at best, been able to stem these key challenges, without any being able to resolve them completely.
- The nature of the structural, sectoral and societal challenges that the sector faces demand a long-term approach can only be solved through collaboration across languages faculties, and in partnership with a faculty’s host institutions, the government and schools.
- It is difficult to solve for student demand and accessibility, whilst also solving for workload. The approaches that have been most effective in increasing enrolment, particularly among young people entering without a language A-Level, demand additional work from academic postholders.
- There are also themes to approaches that are working better: Within their locus of control, faculties are finding most success with approaches that home in on the faculty’s existing research strengths, culture, history and civic position of the institution.
- The themes addressed by language degrees, and the experiences and skills that the degree offers, connect to a lot of young people once introduced. This is shown, for example, by:
 - The success of research-led courses and interdisciplinary courses open to students of multiple language groups and faculties
 - The impact of students or recent graduates engaging with schools
- Approaches to offering a language degree that may have seemed unrealistic a generation ago, whether the widespread offer of beginner courses, the variety of assessment methods or the breadth of options to combine degree pathways, are increasingly mainstream. Faculties that show a capacity for change are more able to navigate challenges.

7.2 Questions on the way forward

There are questions raised in this report that may be useful for members of UK languages faculties, and other interested parties, to examine together ahead:

- What can we share about success stories and tactics, that strengthen the position of all modern languages faculties?
- What are ways that modern languages faculties across the Russell Group and the UK can collaborate further to strengthen the outlook for languages in the UK, and to maintain both a diversity of approaches and regional availability of languages programmes?
- How can languages faculties work most constructively with their university administration to demonstrate the strategic strength of language programmes, and make sure these are supported?
- How can modern languages achieve greater cut-through with government, schools, parents and young people, to communicate the strong case for studying a language degree, particularly given employer demand?

Annexes



Annex A External Benchmarking Interview Guide

NOTE: Minor revisions were made to this guide between December 2025 and January 2026 interviews to facilitate a spread of responses to questions across the full set of interviews. This guide is the version used in the January 2026 interviews.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. We greatly appreciate your time.

Context and Purpose

As you will be aware, Modern Foreign Languages faculties across the UK are navigating significant challenges. These pressures stem from multiple factors, including: school pipeline decline, funding constraints, and the fundamental cost-income mismatch inherent to small-group language teaching.

We are helping the University of Oxford to understand how UK Higher Education institutions language faculties are responding to these challenges and to identify best practices approaches that are working well to improve faculty workload, ensure course sustainability, and enhance student experience. We also want to understand what you have tried that hasn't worked. By learning across the sector, Oxford aim to future-proof their Medieval and Modern Languages provision while maintaining quality and supporting staff wellbeing; and to share learning from this exercise with participating university language faculties, to help the sector.

We are supporting the University's Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages both by gathering publicly available data and through interviews with postholders in peer institutions to gather insights into operational models, governance structures, and innovative approaches that others can learn from.

Collaborative Learning

We want to emphasize that this is intended as a collaborative learning exercise. While the immediate purpose is to inform our client's strategic planning, we aim to share aggregated insights and learnings from this work back to participating institutions. The challenges facing Modern Languages are sector-wide, and we believe that sharing knowledge and approaches can benefit all language faculties.

Interview Format and Permissions

This interview will take 55 minutes. We have organized questions against three overarching questions, each covering multiple themes. We do not expect to cover all

themes or questions in this interview. Rather, we suggest at the start of the interview agreeing:

- One overarching question (group of themes) to explore in depth, on which you have knowledge or experience that will help us to understand innovations or best practices that are working; or shared challenges.
- A second overarching question (group of themes) to touch on, to understand notable elements of your faculty's approach and the impact of these.

OVERARCHING QUESTION 1:

What is your institution doing (at faculty and central level) to encourage applications for single/joint degree undergraduate and graduate modern languages courses? (Themes: Curriculum, Admissions, Schools Liaison, Marketing)

THEME 1.1: COURSE OFFERING AND CURRICULUM

1. What trends in demand for undergraduate and graduate languages degree courses has the faculty / university observed in the last 5-10 years (e.g. joint degrees, curriculum, master's courses) and how has/is the faculty and university responding to this? What has/hasn't worked?
2. What messages and forms of marketing are/aren't working to prospective students in presenting and marketing course offering?
3. How is student demand reflected in the options and approach to assessment that your faculty offers?

THEME 1.2: ADMISSIONS

1. How does your faculty manage undergraduate admissions requirements to both maintain standards of academic achievement on entry and open courses to a wide range of potential applicants (e.g., including non-traditional pathways)?
2. What are the responsibilities on academic staff for admissions (open days through to admissions decisions)? How are these shared; and when are key dates for admissions activities and decisions?

THEME 1.3: SCHOOLS LIAISON AND OUTREACH

1. How are school liaison and outreach funded in your faculty? For example, is it supported philanthropically, through central university allocation, or through other means?
2. What combination of permanent academic staff time, specialist posts, and administrative support is made available for school liaison and outreach?
3. What metrics of effectiveness do you use for outreach activities? How do you evaluate whether your school engagement is achieving its goals?

THEME 1.4: REPUTATION AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

1. How are public-facing communications handled in your faculty? Is there a dedicated role or team, or does this sit elsewhere in the university?
2. What have been your most effective approaches for raising the profile of your Modern Languages provision – whether for student recruitment, research visibility, or sector influence?

OVERARCHING QUESTION 2:

How are undergraduate and graduate courses structured (teaching, assessment, year abroad), and what is/isn't working to improve student experience and to manage teaching, pastoral care and assessment workload? (Themes: Teaching, Assessment, Year Abroad)

THEME 2.1: TEACHING DELIVERY AND STRUCTURE

1. Can you describe how undergraduate language instruction is typically delivered in your faculty? Specifically, is language instruction undertaken by 'specialist' instructors (such as language assistants or lecturers) or primarily given by permanent academic staff?
2. How does undergraduate language teaching delivery vary depending on the entry level of the student – for example, between students commencing learning a language on their course, and those entering with A-Level or equivalent qualifications?
3. How is cultural content (literature, film, history, etc.) taught and assessed in your undergraduate and graduate programmes? What pedagogical approaches do you find most effective?
4. Could you describe how undergraduate and graduate teaching is timetabled over the course of the academic year? Is there undergraduate teaching, or revision classes in the third term or second semester, for example?
5. How are course options managed? Can you walk me through how students choose and manage their module selections?
6. How automated is the process of student option selection in your system? Do students have significant flexibility, or is there a more structured pathway? Does the approach differ for undergraduate and graduate courses?
7. How are students advised academically? What structures or processes do you have in place for academic advising?

THEME 2.2: ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

1. When are the main assessment points during the academic year (undergraduate, graduate), and what modes of assessment are used?
2. How much formative feedback is typically provided to students during a typical course? Can you describe the balance between formative and summative assessment?

3. How is the robustness of assessments maintained in the age of AI? Are you taking specific measures to ensure academic integrity?
4. Is double-blind marking employed in your faculty? If so, for which types of undergraduate/graduate assessments?
5. How is assessment timetabled? When does the assessment process typically end – for example, when are final exam boards held, and how are resits handled?

THEME 2.3: UNDERGRADUATE YEAR ABROAD MANAGEMENT

1. How are year abroad students managed in your faculty? What administrative structures and processes are in place?
2. How is year-abroad risk managed? What frameworks or policies do you use to ensure student safety and wellbeing?
3. What administrative support is in place specifically for year abroad students? How many FTE staff are dedicated to this, if you're able to share that?

OVERARCHING QUESTION 3:

What is your institution doing, at faculty and central level, to support and maintain time for academic postholders to successfully pursue research, e.g., by increasing research income, maximising effectiveness of administration and governance, managing workload, and providing research leave? (Themes: Workload, Research Leave, Research Funding Capture, Administration, Governance)

THEME 3.1: WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

1. How is workload managed in your institution? Do you use a formal workload allocation model, and if so, what does it look like?
2. How is workload distributed across permanent academic staff? Are there particular approaches or principles you use to ensure equitable distribution?
3. Approximately how many hours per week are typically available for research for a full-time member of permanent academic staff? How is this protected or managed?
4. How is work-life balance proactively managed by your institution or faculty? Are there specific policies or practices you've found helpful?
5. What tasks or roles attract a degree of teaching buyout in your faculty? For example, do administrative roles, research grants, or other responsibilities come with reduced teaching loads? How is this financed?

THEME 3.2: RESEARCH LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

1. How are research leave arrangements handled in your faculty or institution? What is the typical cycle for/frequency of research leave?
2. What are the requirements for the award of research leave? Are there specific criteria around research outputs, length of service, or other factors?

3. What teaching replacement arrangements are used during a permanent academic staff member's research leave? How is this funded and organized?

THEME 3.3: RESEARCH SUPPORT AND GRANT CAPTURE

1. How are grant applications supported in your faculty or institution? What professional services or mentoring support is available?
2. Which funding agencies have colleagues in your faculty been most successful with in recent years? Are there particular schemes or programmes that have worked well for Modern Languages?
3. Are there specific strategies or approaches you've used to increase research income in Modern Languages, given the challenges of the discipline?

THEME 3.4: ADMINISTRATION AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES SUPPORT

1. How many committees are permanent academic staff members typically expected to be members of in a year?
2. What committee structures are used in your faculty or school? Are there particular archetypes or models that you follow?
3. How do permanent academic staff members influence faculty decisions? What mechanisms exist for academic staff input into strategic and operational decisions?
4. How are administrative tasks – such as organizing student timetables, processing year abroad arrangements, managing assessment administration – handled? How much of this falls on permanent academic staff versus professional services staff?
5. How much professional administrative support is provided in your faculty? Can you give a sense of the ratio of postholders to professional services staff, or describe the main administrative roles?

THEME 3.5: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

1. How are student voices heard in faculty governance? What structures or processes ensure student input into decision-making?
2. To what extent are committees decision-making structures in your faculty, versus advisory or consultative bodies?
3. Could you describe the balance between centralised (e.g., faculty or school-level) and distributed (e.g., departmental or programme-level) decision-making in your governance model?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

1. Looking across everything we've discussed, are there particular innovations or approaches in your faculty that you feel have been especially successful in addressing the challenges facing Modern Languages?

2. If you could change one thing about how your faculty operates - whether it's structure, resources, processes, or culture - what would have the most positive impact?
3. Is there anything we haven't asked about that you think would be valuable for us to understand about how your faculty operates?
4. Are there particular colleagues at other institutions you'd recommend we speak with, or specific institutions whose approaches you think are worth learning from?

Annex B External and Internal Interviewees

B.1 External Interviewees (Russell Group and School of Advanced Study)

Name	Institution	Role
Francesca Billiani	Manchester	Former Director of CIDRAL (2015–2018)
Sarah Bowden	King's College London	Head of Languages
Laura Bradley	Edinburgh	Dean of Postgraduate Research (CAHSS); Personal Chair in German and Theatre
Charles Burdett	School of Advanced Study, University of London	Director, Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies
Andy Byford	Durham	Professor of Russian
Ángeles Carreres	Cambridge	Professor of Spanish and Translation Studies (Teaching and Scholarship)
Emma Cayley	Leeds	Chair of UCFL; Head of School
Marcela Cazzoli	Durham	Deputy Head of School (SMLC)
Charles Forsdick	Cambridge	Drapers Professor of French; Lead Fellow for Languages (British Academy)
Claire Gorrara	School of Advanced Study, University of London	Pro Vice-Chancellor and Dean, School of Advanced Study (from Sept 2025); Former Dean of Research and Innovation, Cardiff
Nigel Harkness	Newcastle	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
David McCallam	Sheffield	Reader in French Eighteenth-Century Studies; Fellow of British Academy (2024)
Silke Mentchen	Cambridge	Professor of German Studies Deputy Head of the School of Arts and Humanities
Andreas Schonle	Bristol	Head of School of Modern Languages

B.2 Oxford Humanities Division Interviewees

Name	Faculty	Role
Henrietta Harrison	Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES)	Faculty Chair

Name	Faculty	Role
Thomas Hall	Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES)	Head of Administration and Finance
Hayley Merchant	Classics	Head of Administration and Finance
Neil Kenny	MML	Professor of French, Oxford MML Former Lead Fellow for Languages, British Academy (2017-23)

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20 Leaside
High Barnet
EN5 2PG

020 3935 7120
hello@humaneconomics.com
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