



ROYAL
HOLLOWAY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON



University
of Exeter

Languages For All

Increasing the pipeline of linguists at A-level and degree level.
Lessons from Languages For All Partnership so far.



Vision

A country where learning a modern language is normal, possible, and valued.

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

Over the last two decades, the numbers of students studying A-levels in modern languages have dropped.

2005: 30,047

2025: 24,079

[Language Trends Survey, 2025](#)

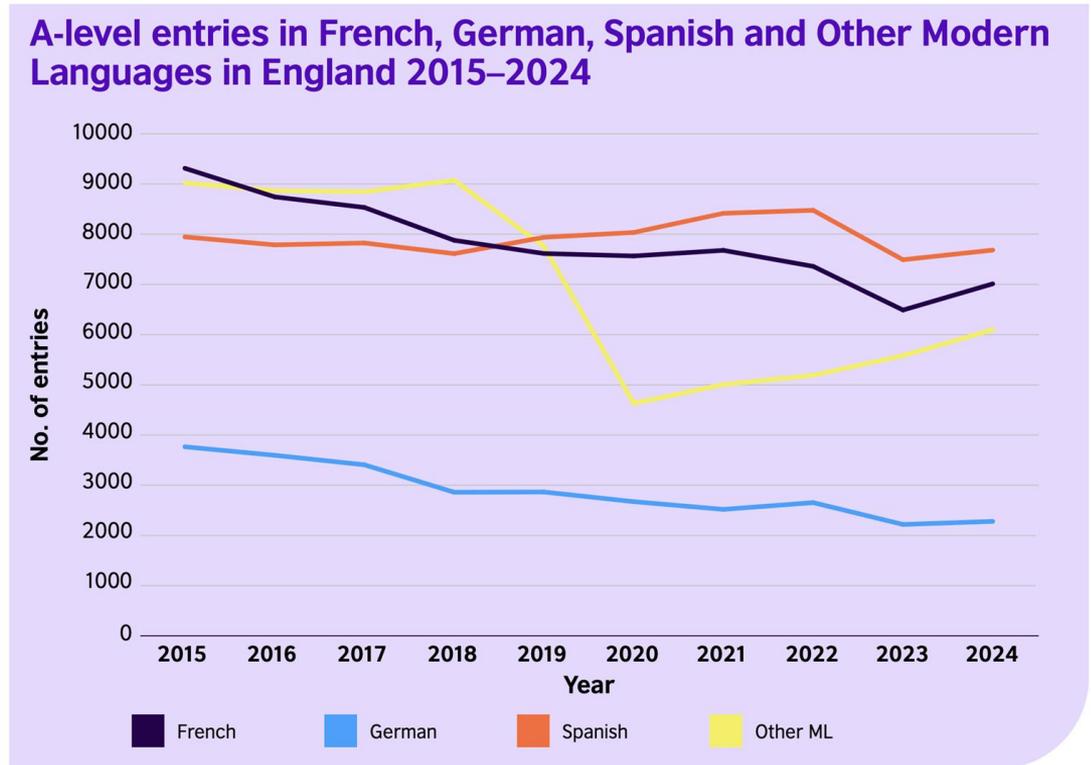


Figure 13: A-level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015–2024

Language study is an access issue

Fewer pupils in less affluent English schools taking languages, survey finds

Less than half taking foreign languages GCSEs compared with 69% in most prosperous state schools

Anna Bawden

Tue 1 Jul 2025 07:00 BST

Share

- Only 2.97% of A-Levels taken in 2024 were for Modern Foreign Languages, Classical Subjects, Welsh (Second Language) and Irish.
- There are now more A-Level entries for Physical Education than for French, German and Classical Languages combined.
- The percentage of Year 11 pupils studying a language for GCSE is 20 percentage points lower in poorer areas than affluent ones (69% versus 46-47%).
- Language teacher recruitment consistently falls well below government targets – in 2024, just 43% of the target was reached.
- Declines in the uptake of degree programmes in languages have continued across all modern language groups each year since 2020 (when a previous HEPI report on the issue was published).
- Since 2014, 17 post-1992 universities have lost their modern languages degrees, bringing the total closures to 28 and leaving modern languages in just 10.

THE TIMES

Home UK World Comment Life & Style Business

Why are pupils abandoning languages in the hundreds of thousands?

Many sixth-forms no longer offer any core modern languages

A third of state sixth-forms in England do not have a single pupil studying French, Spanish or German, according to data from A-level exams last year.

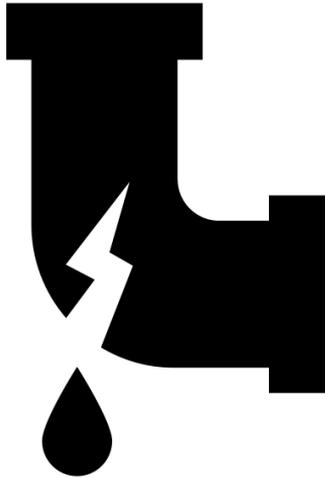
Since the requirement to study a language at GCSE level was scrapped in 2004, there has been a huge drop in the number of teenagers taking the qualification, from about 500,000 to 300,000. French has seen the greatest drop, from 318,000 entries in 2004 to 135,000 last year.

Many sixth-forms, including grammar schools and top-performing comprehensives, no longer offer any core modern languages due to a lack of demand and a shortage of teachers.

This has resulted in black spots across the country, with some teenagers who are keen to study a language forced to travel more than an hour by bus to a school or college that offers French, Spanish or German at A-level.

There is a shortage of modern language teachers in English schools, and the training pipeline is drying up.

Teachers coming through are less diverse.



“Even if every single language graduate were to enter the teaching profession, compared to the current rate of just 6%, there would still be a teacher shortage”

- Koglbauer (2018)



List the reasons why...

...your students who score
Grades 6+ at GCSE **don't**
pick the A-level.

A few reasons of our own:

1. Languages are harder.
2. I want to do STEM.
3. Not sure how help in my career.
4. I already speak another language.
5. I'm not good at it.
6. I find the speaking hard.
7. The [GCSE] course is boring.
8. I'm not sure if I'll need it.
9. My Sixth Form can't guarantee it.

But what are the barriers to students picking modern languages at A-level?

Barrier 1: Attitude

The way students perceive language A-level stops it being an attractive choice. Students who achieve well, still don't choose it.

Barrier 2: Cost

It costs many schools a disproportionate amount to run A-levels in modern languages because the classes are smaller.

But what are the barriers to students picking modern languages at A-level?

Barrier 1: Attitude

The way students perceive language A-level stops it being an attractive choice. Students who achieve well, still don't choose it.

These attitudinal barriers can be addressed through **trips**.

Barrier 2: Cost

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This structural barrier can be addressed through **central tuition** (consortium-style class).

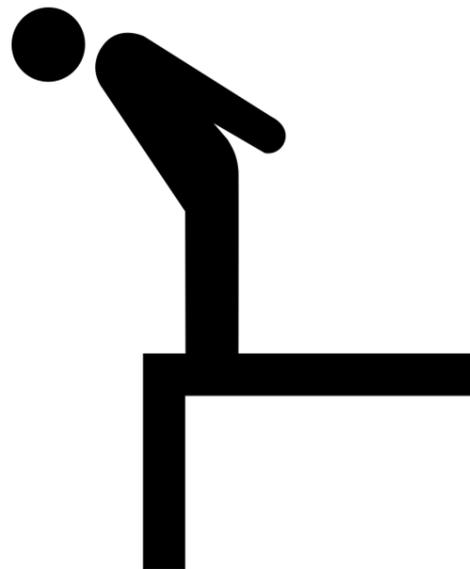
After 16, language study in state schools falls off a cliff.

Case study:

In 2022, in the London borough of Hounslow where we are piloting Languages For All, 1700 out of 3000 16 year olds sat a GCSE in a modern language.

35, progressed to study a language at A-level.

[Statistics from HEP, 2022](#)



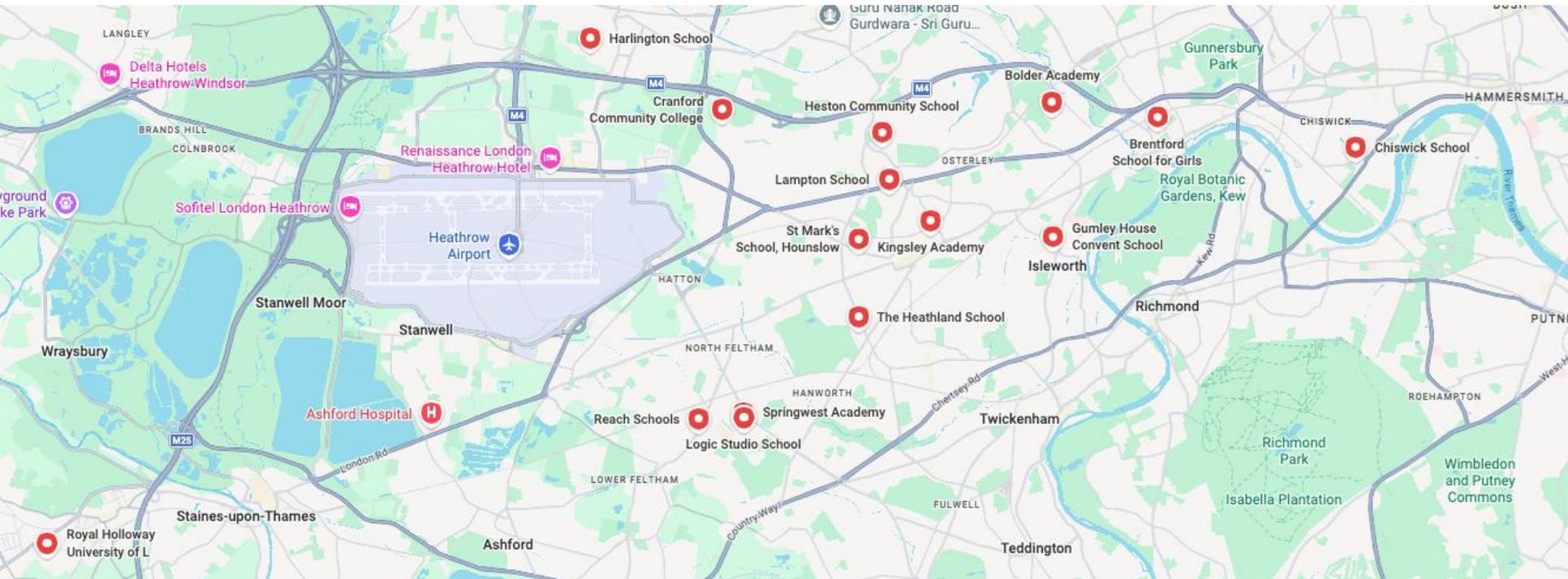
Languages For All sets up

local hubs:

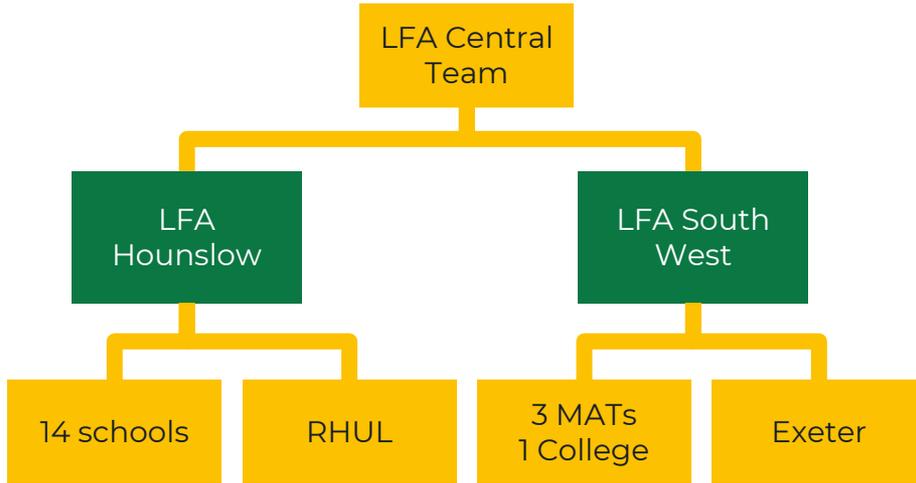
schools and universities
together running:

Trips

Tuition



A hub model



Every hub will include

- Consortium A-level teaching
- University partner
- Employer visits
- Affordable residential in Europe
- Visits to other hub universities
- Multi-year partnership
- Undergraduate student ambassadors deployed to improve language learning

A steering group is responsible for strategy and operations, and running the calendar of activities.

The offer for students

	Enrichment	Academic	Other notes
Year 11	<p>December or January LFA Campus Day, for high potential linguists</p>	GCSE Speaking Exam practice with Student Ambassadors	Each school given 15 places for campus day for its top linguists.
Year 12	<p>Global Languages Ambassador Award: Trips to university, employers and cultural institutions Residential abroad (Year 12)</p>	Exam support (Speaking exam)	All A-level Language students in partners schools are 'LFA Ambassadors)
Year 13	<p>University application support</p>	<p>A-level Tuition Consortium-style shared A-level tuition Organised between schools - may include online tuition.</p>	
University	Languages Mentor for LFA students.		

Activities delivered so far

2023

Year 11 Cohort Recruited (161 students)

- Friday 12th January 2024 - Launch Event at Royal Holloway University
- March - Speaking Exam Masterclasses
- GCSE Results Day Support with A-level choices

2024

A-level Classes launched (81 students)

- 24 students taught in French, Spanish A-level Year 12 Classes offered centrally by LFA.
- Global Languages Ambassador Award launched

2025

First residential

- April, May: first trip abroad for all linguists.
- Summer 2024 - University access support for all A-level linguists.

2026

A-level results Day & start of degrees

- 13th August 2026 - first LFA A-level results
- September - first LFA alumni start language-linked degrees

14 partner schools
1 university
10+ employers sending
volunteers

From Year 11 to Year 13

Evaluation of longer-term outcomes

We have seen strong sustained growth in our longer-term goals of increasing the number of schools offering, and students studying, A-level modern languages.

The number of local state schools able to offer A-level modern languages has **tripled** from 4 in 2022 to 12 in 2025.

Schools offering A-level languages



The number of Year 12 A-level students has **doubled** from 35 in 2022 to 70 in 2025. A recent survey of Year 13 LFA students at partner schools showed that 39% of respondents plan to apply to study languages at university.

Students studying A-level languages



Lessons learned

1. The university brand makes language learning more attractive to school students.
2. Universities care about language numbers as much as schools.
3. “If you build it, they will come.” Building a clear pathway helps recruitment.
4. “Presenting solutions, not problems.” A strategy is more important than an event or initiative.
5. Partnership is relational work: there is no substitute for meeting in person.
6. Nothing can work without headteacher and senior university buy-in.
7. Co-design is essential to define a calendar of activities.
8. Online teaching is challenging...but will get better.

The university brand makes language learning more attractive to school students.



Dear Student,

You have been identified as a High Potential Linguist by the Royal Holloway University of London, and the your school.

This means that your teachers have nominated you for Languages For All, a programme that works with the best language students in the country to help you achieve high grades in your modern language studies, and to support you with A-level languages and careers.

Studying languages brings you benefits throughout your life - it broadens your horizons and improves your career prospects.

Enrolling in Languages For All entitles you to:

- Attendance at a languages careers conference in January 2025 where you and other top languages students will meet people from a wide range of careers who have studied languages.
- A university visit, together with other Year 11 linguists from across the borough, including tours of campus, meeting current undergraduate students, and taster sessions of degree courses that include language learning.
- Language Masterclasses and conversation practice for the GCSE Speaking exam to build your confidence and improve your speaking exam grades.

When you choose to study A-level languages the Languages For All A-level programme will:

- Arrange for you to go on low-cost and free trips abroad to practise your language skills.
- Provide you with language-focused career trips and university applications support.
- Give you one-to-one conversation classes to help you achieve fluency.

How it works

Sixth Form		University			
Year 12 2025	Year 13 2026	Year 1 2027	Year 2 2028	Year 3 2029	Year 4 2030
A-level course	University applications	Language course	Language course	Live abroad to work or study	Final research project
Residential abroad	Speaking NEA 30% of final mark	Culture modules	Culture modules		Final exams
Visits to employers		Other option modules	Other option modules		Apply for jobs

Universities care about language numbers as much as schools

- It is **both** outreach **and** recruitment
- Universities are more likely to support a group of schools than individual schools.
- Student ambassadors energise our students and are a great resource.
- Students don't know about the **year abroad** or about **joint degrees**.
- Without university language departments we won't have our teachers of the future!

“If you build it, they will come.” Building a clear pathway helps recruitment.

Key messaging:

- **Less** ‘sell the GCSE, then sell the A-level’. **More** ‘You’re a linguist and language study is a path to university.’
- Turn language study into university access conversation, and a path to international careers.
- Informing students about the year abroad and joint degrees seems to inspire more to see it as relevant.

“If you build it, they will come.” Building a clear pathway helps recruitment.

Emergent findings from survey of current Year 13 cohort.
At time of presentation, 32 responses out of 74 students surveyed:

Applications to RHUL for Languages / Liberal Arts from our partner schools:

2022-2025

Average of 3 applications from 14 partner schools.

2026

12 applications from 14 partner schools

emerging data suggests a 4x increase from schools taking part in the initiative

“Presenting solutions, not problems.”

A strategy is more important than an event or initiative.

Less

- exciting event
- a trial (“let’s see if it works”)
- generic advocacy for value of languages
- working alone
- “here’s what languages needs”

More

- sustainable pathway
- a pilot (“we win, or we learn.”)
- strategy for sustainability
- working with other schools
- “here’s what the whole-school strategy can benefit from.”

Partnership is relational work: there is no substitute for meeting in person.

Languages For All is not an 'oven ready' deal!

The mechanism for how it works includes:

- steering groups
- visits to schools
- surveys & feedback
- Presenting at headteacher conferences.

"For what matters."
A university of social purpose

Making languages fair and accessible is part of our mission.

Partnering with HEP schools benefits our university community as much as we hope it benefits your schools.

We are your local, high quality university. We build degree programmes that are flexible and appealing.

Languages open doors and open minds.

Professor Ruth Hemus
Head of Department, Languages, Literatures and Cultures
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ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Slide from RHUL presentation to Hounslow headteachers.

Nothing can work without headteacher and senior university buy-in.

School G: dropped out due to lack of headteacher buy-in.

Multi-year partnerships need continuity through staff-turnover.

We need to align LFA's work with the existing university or school strategy.

Professor Giuliana Pieri, Dean of Humanities, Royal Holloway University

“You need vision in a partnership. The best way to secure senior leadership buy-in? Well, the most important bit for me was building those relationships. That’s key—and then there’s a pledge between the university itself and the LFA schools. The relationship was tangible, which is why the university was on board. You have to be prepared to work really closely with each component of the university, which sometimes means reaching out to other subject areas to understand why they do things the way that they are.”

Co-design is essential to define a calendar of activities.

**Universities can't just design outreach solo.
Schools have to decide some collective priorities.**

- 2022 - 23: Listening exercise to identify barriers
- Steering groups: analyse feedback and make amendments
- Inviting languages teachers to
- Teacher input into university taster session design.
- School input into how Student Ambassadors can best help (less assemblies, more speaking practice.)

Online teaching is challenging...but will get better.

A-level Tuition - French and Spanish

(5 hours of guided learning hours) x 38 weeks = 180 hours.

- 2 hours in-person
- 1.5 hours online (live)
- 1.5 hours self-guided learning (listening, vocab learning, grammar practice)

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
French		4-6pm Chiswick	3.30pm - 5pm Online		Summary of the
Spanish	4-6pm Reach Academy Feltham			3.30pm - 5pm Online	

The screenshot shows a digital learning environment. At the top, it indicates the current task: "1.5 - Family - Speaking Card Practice (2022)". Below this, there are instructions and a task description: "Instructions and Speaking Task: La Familia" and "Confirm Readiness Before Submitting...".

The main content area is titled "How to use this tutor for speaking practice:" and includes a list of instructions:

- Read the material below carefully and make sure you understand the questions you'll be asked.
- When you're ready, click the voice (mode button (bottom right)) on the tutor and interact with it in Spanish.
- If you want to start again, you can simply ask the tutor to restart in English, but you will lose your progress.
- Treat the tutor as if it were a human examiner asking you questions; it will respond just as the person running the speaking assessment would.
- When you're finished, you can ask the tutor for feedback and you'll receive improvement and guidance feedback, both general and for each AO (Assessment Objective). You can try again as many times as you like.

Below the instructions is a "Tarjeta" (card) with the following details:

Theme	Aspects of Hispanic society
Sub-theme	Los valores tradicionales y modernos

The card is titled "La importancia de la familia" and features a photograph of a diverse group of people smiling together.

On the right side of the interface, there is a chat window with a tutor. The tutor's message reads: "Of course! Let's go for it. You've got those useful phrases on the whiteboard to help you." Below this, there is a question in Spanish: "Te voy a hacer la pregunta de nuevo: ¿Cómo reaccionas tú ante esta información?" and a response in Spanish: "En mi opinión, desde mi punto de vista, es claro que la familia es muy importante y yo veo que en México vemos que el porcentaje de la población que está satisfecha con su vida familiar es muy alto." There is also a question in English: "Wow, how do I say eighty?" and a response: "No problem! In English, the number '80' is 'ochenta' in Spanish. You're doing great—keep going with your answer!"

Growth

Network to tackle drop in A-level language studies



UNIVERSITY OF EXETER | The University of Exeter will lead the South West region's language studies network

13 December 2025

A campaign has been launched to tackle a decline in the number of young people learning modern languages at A-level in south west state schools.

A network of schools in Devon and Cornwall has joined forces with the University of Exeter to make modern language studies "more accessible".

The university said it would lead the Languages For All programme across the south west following a successful pilot in the south east.

More than 20 schools in Devon and Cornwall have signed up, and more than 250 Year 11 (GCSE) students and teachers will travel to Exeter's Streatham campus for a taster day.



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