



A survey of Modern Foreign Languages in the Cayman Islands

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Executive summary

Background to the survey

The Cayman Islands Education Standards and Assessment Unit commissioned a survey on how effectively modern foreign languages are taught in Cayman schools. The purpose of the survey is to identify what is working well in schools and to make suggestions for improvement in order to contribute to high quality provision in modern foreign languages.

The brief was to

- Conduct a detailed evaluation of the impact of the arrangements for teaching and learning modern foreign languages in schools
- From the evaluation, identify good practice
- Make recommendations for improving the arrangements for teaching modern foreign languages so that students are prepared to succeed as citizens in a global society.

The key questions addressed by the survey

- How well modern foreign languages are taught and the impact of the teaching upon learning
- How well students achieve in the subject
- How effectively the provision for modern foreign languages is led and managed in schools
- The quality of resources and accommodation
- How well prepared government schools are to implement the new national curriculum for modern foreign languages from September 2008
- The quality and appropriateness of the existing curricula for private schools.

Context

The survey was undertaken to ascertain how well schools are preparing students to communicate in different languages in preparation for their lives as future citizens of the Cayman Islands. The Cayman national curriculum for schools states:

“If the Cayman Islands is to participate successfully in trade, technology, tourism, education, diplomacy, environmental issues, cultural exchanges and humanitarian roles and responsibilities, it will need people who are fluent in certain languages. Our education system needs to provide our young people with opportunities for learning more foreign languages.”

The statement was set in the context of the move towards the International Baccalaureate, which expects students to study additional languages. The national curriculum for the Cayman Islands indicates that a foreign language, usually Spanish, will be taught from Years 1 to 9. Students who wish to study at colleges in the United States of America are finding that the colleges expect them to have studied a foreign language. The survey found that principals are aware of these initiatives and are eager to move forward and develop their teaching of languages.

The survey was undertaken by Sandra Tweddell and Garry Bignell under the direction of Mary Bowerman from the Education Standards and Assessment Unit. Both Garry and Sandra have been specialist modern foreign language advisors in local authorities in the UK and have extensive experience of inspecting schools there. Both have also been involved in evaluation of schools in Cayman and Sandra, in supporting the development of evaluation methods in a number of states in the United States of America.

Evidence Base

The survey drew on the following evidence

- Lesson observations in a sample of primary, secondary, government and private schools on Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac, (two government high schools, four government middle schools, two government primary schools, five private all age schools, one private primary school)
- Discussions with senior staff, teachers and students in the sample schools
- Scrutiny of documentation including schemes of work, assessment information and students' work
- Telephone calls to schools that were not part of the sample to find out their arrangements, if any, for teaching modern foreign languages
- Discussion with the head of early childhood services about the languages taught in pre-school settings

Main Findings

Overview

The predominant language taught is Spanish with a small number of schools teaching French. The data from the sample showed that a tiny number of pre-school settings teach some Spanish although a number of them sing in Spanish with their children. Most of the primary schools in the sample teach Spanish or run Spanish clubs, or do both.

Students' achievement and progress

- Standards of achievement are generally what would be expected for elementary students. There is a dip in the middle years but older students achieve well in examinations. However, the number taking examinations is very small and groups are composed mainly of girls as boys tend not to choose the subject.
- Young students, including those in pre-school settings, thoroughly enjoy rhymes and songs, repeating the words with great relish. Their listening skills and their accents are generally good, as teachers, who are often native Spanish speakers, offer good models. Listening skills continue to develop well in the majority of schools and students generally have good accents when repeating words and phrases after their teachers. Students' speaking skills are weak, as apart from in very few schools, they are not given the opportunity to develop them. Many students develop sound skills of writing and reading, although many have limited opportunities to read widely because attractive books are in short supply.
- Students who go on to take public examination courses, such as GCSE and CXC achieve good grades but the numbers taking these examinations are very small. There is a danger that languages are seen as a course for the academically gifted, rather than a necessity for living in a global economy where access to another world language may give more opportunities for international understanding and for work.

The quality of teaching and its impact on learning

- The majority of language teachers are well qualified in the languages they teach. Collectively, they offer the Cayman Islands an excellent source of expertise.
- The quality of teaching and learning across the islands is too variable to make an overall judgment. In the sample of lessons observed, teaching and learning varied from good to unsatisfactory with approximately two thirds of teaching and learning that was satisfactory or better. Common strengths in teaching in all schools are the qualifications of teachers, their relationships with students and the good management of behaviour.
- The best teaching was interactive, involving games, songs and role play with plenty of opportunities for students to experiment with the structures and vocabulary of the foreign language. Students became fluent and confident by hearing the teacher use the language throughout the lesson and, most importantly, were expected to use the language in response. This effective teaching was observed in a small number of schools and was more usually seen in the primary sector.

- In the least effective teaching, students rarely heard the language spoken as all instructions were given in English, too much time was given to talking about grammar rather than using it, and worksheets, often of a poor quality, dominated the lesson.

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Organization and management

- Some high schools appropriately enter native Spanish speakers for public examinations early. A challenge for all schools is to maintain the interest and motivation of students for whom Spanish is their first language and to extend their skills. Too often, these students sit passively in class with their peers, learning basic vocabulary that they already know well.
- Other high schools have appropriately introduced an entry level examination for all students in Years 9 or 10. This recognises the work students have done in the years they have studied a language and also supports their motivation by giving them accreditation. There is however, a danger that sights are set too low for some students.
- In some secondary and high schools, large numbers of students with special educational needs or who are judged to have lower ability do not take a foreign language as they are required to take additional English lessons. These students are therefore deprived of the benefits and enjoyment of speaking a foreign language as well as possible future work opportunities. In the main, primary schools appropriately teach all students.
- Generally, principals support modern foreign language departments well. Some linguists and most principals would welcome languages having a higher profile in the school and Cayman as they feel resources and support are mainly given to English and mathematics.
- The quality of support through monitoring how well the subject is taught is broadly satisfactory but varies across Cayman. The most effective monitoring is when senior managers are involved, using the specialist skills of the teacher responsible for languages teaching. Very few schools give teachers the chance to observe and to learn from one another. Every teacher involved in the survey had an individual skill from which others could learn and adapt.
- Opportunities for professional development are few. The Private Schools' Association has some meetings, although these are not frequent. There have been a few limited opportunities for teachers in government secondary schools to meet. Primary schools tend to work in isolation where languages are concerned. All schools would welcome the opportunity to meet and share ideas with one another.

Assessment

- The quality of assessment is variable. Where schools follow examination courses, the examination syllabus offers good guidance for assessment and is generally followed well. Assessment for students from kindergarten prior to public examinations is often dependent on teachers' own tests, based on the curriculum they are following and may not be reliable as the results are not discussed with, or moderated by, fellow professionals. Few schools analyse students' assessments to see trends in how well the students are doing.

Resources and accommodation

- Across all schools, resources for languages are barely adequate, particularly materials from the countries whose language is being taught, such as magazines and day-to-day objects. Some principals, more usually but not always in the private sector, do not have the financial resources to take on the additional teachers that are needed to give the curriculum time that languages need. Many schools have access to technology, some schools have laptops for students. These are used well by teachers or by students for research and writing. Their use for contacting students from other Spanish speaking countries is rare.

Curriculum

- In some all age schools, the curriculum is not coherent between classes or stages of learning. Where students transfer from one school to another, the transfer of information is often weak. In a number of schools, the curriculum does not balance speaking, listening, reading and writing equally.
- Many schools, both government and private, welcome the Cayman modern foreign languages national curriculum for its benchmarks for assessment and its curriculum guidance. The new curriculum is being introduced by many government schools and is just starting to be used as a reference by a number of private schools, although a small number of schools plan to continue with their curriculum. A few primary schools are unaware of its existence and some do not realize its potential for curriculum planning.
- Most schools arrange visits to Spanish speaking countries such as Costa Rica or Panama to give students a chance to hear and use the language. One school in the sample arranged a visit to a local Spanish restaurant and students had to order their meal in Spanish. Many schools run Spanish clubs where students have the opportunity to use their language skills in a fun way. A number of primary schools make excellent use of their resources of native Spanish speakers to run clubs or to join in teaching.
- The profile of languages in most schools is low as schools do not celebrate the work of the languages department or team.

Recommendations

At a strategic level

- Raise the profile of Spanish as an important and widely spoken language in Cayman, for example a Spanish Day, or letters sent out in both Spanish and English
- Use the considerable resources of the teachers of languages to establish a network across all schools for meeting together for professional development and to share ideas. A Languages' Association for the teachers of the Cayman Islands may be one way of meeting this need. This could be extended by the development of a languages base, which could become a source of expertise with resources drawn from all schools and from international sources. The base could develop links with international language organizations. Principals should support this by allowing time to meet
- Explore ways of the private schools working together to fund additional teachers and for languages teachers to meet more regularly
- Seek resources from the population of Cayman to support the development of Spanish as a second language. Engage businesses or local Spanish residents to talk with students in the language and about the cultures of Spanish speaking countries
- Develop a training programme for local Spanish speakers who wish to volunteer to work in schools to talk with students in small groups in their native tongue
- Explore ways of developing links, using technology, with other schools in Spanish speaking countries. This might include twinning with other schools

At school level

- Seek ways to encourage more students to take languages after the age of 14. Survey students for the reasons why many choose not to take a language after this age
- Ensure that schools have high expectations of the qualifications that students can achieve in foreign languages
- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that teachers who work alone are supported through constructive evaluation of their practices
- Increase the range of resources in all schools, especially materials from Spanish speaking countries
- Encourage consistency in the use of benchmarks to determine how well students are doing, for example by using the Cayman National Curriculum for guidance. Where students transfer between schools, ensure that information about their achievements in foreign languages are known to the school that receives them to avoid students repeating work in which they already have competencies

- Ensure that teachers of languages in all schools encourage students to use the foreign language in the classroom. Extend the frequently good teaching and learning in the elementary school, where students are actively engaged in learning, into the middle years

Commentary

Standards of achievement and progress

- Schools across Cayman use a range of courses and follow different syllabi for modern foreign languages. Where languages are taught to younger children, teachers often devise their own programme and adapt available materials to teach it, or use their own. In middle (junior high) schools, a variety of commercially-produced textbooks are in use, whereas in senior high schools the curriculum is usually determined by the chosen examination specification. This very mixed picture makes it impossible to reach an overall judgement on standards of achievement other than to state that they vary considerably from school to school. However, the survey showed a general picture of standards of achievement in primary schools being at a level expected for the age group, to dip in the middle years and to rise for those taking examinations.
- From a very young age, students enjoy learning another language. They particularly like chanting, reciting and singing using the words they are learning. Many children count at least up to 20 and some up to 100, they greet each other, describe the size and colour of everyday objects and learn about days of the week, food and drink and animals. As they progress, they acquire a more extended vocabulary and begin to use simple structures, ask and answer questions and express likes and dislikes. Their listening skills are well developed and they enjoy repeating words and phrases after their teacher.
- Once students reach the middle years there is a slowing down of progress and a dip in overall standards. This happens for a number of reasons: firstly, some students are not taught languages during the pre-school or elementary years, thus necessitating an *ab initio* start to language learning from Year 7. Secondly, teachers often do not maintain the stimulating, interactive approach used in the earlier years, they do not provide students with sufficient opportunity to speak in the language being taught and there is a paucity of attractive books and authentic materials to encourage reading. Students' writing skills develop steadily, but they receive little guidance through marking or assessment of how to improve their work.
- The range of external examinations includes the General Certificate of Secondary Education, Caribbean Examinations Council at both basic and general levels, Entry Level of the Welsh Joint Examinations Council, Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Level. In the two schools in the sample that offer the latter qualification, the majority of students achieve well. Schools following the American system give credits for the work achieved. This range of qualifications offers accreditation at appropriate levels for all students on the islands and provides a basis for further language study.
- In practice however, too few students are entered for these examinations and a number are entered at lower levels than they might actually achieve. The small number of students that take examinations achieve well and gain good grades.
- Students who are native speakers of languages other than English are given the opportunity in some schools to take an examination early. This is entirely appropriate and serves to recognise and value their home language as well as providing them with a worthwhile qualification. In many schools, the needs of native speakers and other students who are

- academically very able are not being met. They are not given suitably challenging work and often coast along without making the progress of which they are capable. Equally, lower ability students often struggle and do not complete the work as it is too difficult for them
- The survey showed that girls are more likely to continue to study languages than boys. Boys were motivated by interactive lessons and technology, but switched off quickly when faced with a succession of worksheets. Inevitably, this affects their achievement.

The quality of teaching and its impact on learning

- Forty-three lessons were seen during the survey, covering Years or Grades 1 to 13. Sixty-seven per cent of the teaching and learning in this sample was satisfactory or better and 41 per cent was good. The good teaching spanned all ages of students, there was no trend of one age group having better teaching than another or of the reverse.
- A number of strengths were common to all schools. The major one is that the majority of teachers are well qualified in the languages that they teach. Those who have no teaching qualification have other forms of expertise that include being native speakers of the languages that they teach. All therefore have good knowledge of their subject. They also offer good models of the language which is why students' accents, when repeating words and phrases, are good. Collectively, Cayman has an excellent source of expertise for teaching Spanish.
- Across all schools, relationships between students and their teachers are good and often very good. This engenders an atmosphere where students, even though reluctant to use Spanish in the classroom, have the confidence to try. Another aspect of this is that in the majority of classes, students are very well behaved as they respect one another and their teachers.
- In many primary classes, teachers rightly focus upon speaking and listening when they introduce the language. Young children are highly motivated by songs, games and poems and relish trying out the language. In Cayman Prep, students repeated a poem from Mexico about chocolate. They spoke it with good expression, excellent accents and great expression. The youngest children in Cayman International School loved singing in Spanish and dancing to the music.
- In the best lessons, teachers use Spanish or French throughout and more importantly, expect the students to use it themselves. They will not accept answers in English, although are sympathetic to those who struggle and give them good support. In these lessons, students are confident to experiment with their growing knowledge of the language to form their own sentences. A high school teacher was indefatigable in insisting that a lower ability class, containing many boys, answered in Spanish. Their enjoyment was such that most persevered and were successful. Their self-esteem was heightened by this, which supported their good learning. This practice was seen in St Ignatius and some of the teaching in George Hicks High School. The expectation that students will respond in this way was unfortunately rarely seen in the sample of lessons.
- Another good feature in a number of lessons was lively and enthusiastic teaching and a very wide range of approaches such as games, working in pairs or groups and role-play. This maintained the pace of the lesson so that students remained motivated. Their enthusiasm for the subject was kindled by the teachers' passion for it. In these lessons, boys were

highly motivated, especially when technology was used. This approach was more usually observed in younger classes, with a few exceptions.

- In the lessons in which students were not motivated, they completed, without respite, a number of worksheets or exercises on the computer. They listened to the teacher explaining complex rules of grammar without trying the structures of the language for themselves. In some schools, lessons were dominated by the text book. In many such lessons, boys switch off first. In schools in which the text book is used well, teachers refer to it as a guide and supplement the exercises with games and discussion.
- Many schools have technology that, in the best lessons, was used by the students for research and for writing. In George Hicks High School, many students were adept at using a Spanish keyboard. Students rarely use technology to make contact with other students in Spanish speaking countries. Some teachers are rightly concerned about the safety of students, which makes them cautious about using technology in this way. A teacher in John Gray High School made excellent use of a Spanish internet site to provoke a discussion, in Spanish, about the effects of taking drugs.
- Assessment is a weak area in many schools. In the high schools where examinations are taken or in schools that follow the American system of assessment, teachers have benchmarks for assessment that give a reliable indicator of how well students are learning. A small number of schools have been using levels of the English national curriculum and are supplanting this with the Cayman national curriculum. Where there are no such benchmarks, schools rely on the course that they are following, or devise their own systems. These sometimes do not take account of the full range of skills that make up good language learning.
- In a very small number of schools, students are partners in the classroom and critically evaluate their own and others' work. In these classes, students are very clear about what they need to do to improve their work and their learning develops well as a result. Cayman Brac is piloting such an approach.
- Not all schools take account of the advanced skills of their native speakers, especially Spanish. Some high schools enter native Spanish speakers for public examinations early. However, in many high schools, these students often do the same activities as their peers. The survey observed a number of native Spanish speakers idling their time in class, where basic vocabulary and structures of language that they use every day were being taught. In one example, a boy was so bored he misbehaved and was sent out of class.
- Similarly, activities often do not meet the differing needs of students, particularly those at the top and lower ends of the ability range. In an excellent example of a lower ability boy being included in the lesson, the teacher partnered him in a role-play of doing household tasks. He had the confidence to speak the language as he acted alongside his teacher. His learning increased as did his confidence.

Leadership and management

School leadership

- All principals and other senior leaders in the sample are very supportive of language study and have a strong desire to improve the provision further through greater collaboration. A few achieve this through regular monitoring of lessons, sometimes alongside the language

co-ordinator, and ensuring language teachers have access to available resources. However, in many schools, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has a low profile.

- Very few schools provide opportunities for language teachers to observe and learn from each other. This perpetuates the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching observed during the survey. Few schools undertake any analysis of performance data in languages to identify trends over time or any variation in performance by different groups, for example, boys or native speakers. One school will be asking subject departments to do this for the first time this year.
- In all schools, the profile of languages as a subject is low. There are few indicators in communal areas that languages are taught, no signs in Spanish, and events such as trips to Costa Rica, Panama or other Hispanic regions are rarely represented in displays or photographs around the school.

Subject leadership

- The quality of co-ordination and leadership varies considerably from school to school. In some schools, the co-ordinator is the only teacher, which places the responsibility for quality assurance firmly on the school's senior management. In one school, the co-ordinator (and sole teacher) had reportedly not been observed teaching for the past two years.
- The role of the co-ordinator is broadly the same in all schools and includes the allocation of teachers to classes and the management of resources. However, their role does not usually include students' progress as a measure of success. As with other language teachers, co-ordinators find professional development opportunities are few and far between. All wish to see greater collaboration between schools and would welcome any initiative to share ideas and practice.
- Some subject leaders have a clear sense of direction and have set out an agenda for development, including the upgrading of course books and the moderation of standards of achievement. Other co-ordinators are less proactive or innovative, do not monitor the work of their department and make little effort to keep teaching and learning at the heart of the team's agenda.

Accommodation and resources

- The quality of accommodation for languages teaching is generally adequate. Where there are dedicated rooms, these usually have some displays of key words, important verbs and, occasionally, students' work. None have Spanish flags and few have colourful posters or stimulating images of the Spanish-speaking world. In some schools, displays look tired. Areas outside rooms are often bare and unattractive, they do not give students or visitors any clues that they are entering a languages learning environment.
- Resources for languages teaching are poor. Some of the best teaching materials are used with younger students; these are often stimulating and encourage active participation, for example, flashcards, dice and recorded songs. Much of the teaching of older students is based around course books and associated materials, some of which are dated - such as references to *pesetas*. Where these are used selectively and with teachers' professional discretion, they provide the basis for sound learning. Where such materials, particularly worksheets, are used every lesson, they detract from students' enthusiasm for language learning.

- Technology is being used more widely for language learning by teachers and to some extent, by students. Whilst interactive whiteboards are still rare in classrooms, projected images from computers are commonplace and laptops are often available to students for word processing and Internet research. Electronic communication for example, by e-mail between Caymanian students and those from Spanish-speaking countries, is rare.
- Authentic materials from Spanish-speaking countries, newspapers, magazines and other everyday objects that provide topical resources for students and teachers are not readily available in schools as a resource for learning.
- A good proportion of language teachers are Spanish native speakers and represent a valuable asset for students. A number of primary schools use support assistants to take clubs or small groups, with the guidance of teachers. In schools where this is not the case, other members of the teaching and support staff who speak Spanish are not being used creatively to enable students to have that vital contact with native speakers which enhances speaking and listening skills and so promotes higher achievement.

Preparation for the new national curriculum and the quality/appropriateness of existing curricula for private schools

- The Cayman national curriculum has been welcomed by many schools, both government and private, for its guidance and its benchmarks for assessment. A number of government schools are moving towards using it. Professional development has taken place for government high schools on how to use the national curriculum levels for assessment. Teachers say they would welcome more support for this. A small number of private primary schools have been seeking curriculum guidance for teaching languages and see the Cayman national curriculum as good support. Other private schools do not wish to use it as they feel their current scheme is working well.
- A small number of government primary schools are also starting to think about using the new curriculum. One primary school in the sample, Red Bay, has developed a pilot programme that the principal is planning to extend next year. Montessori-by-the-Sea, which already has a well-established and successful programme for teaching French, is getting ready to introduce the national curriculum. Their planning includes staff training. In contrast, a number of government primary schools have not taken account of the new curriculum. One school is aware of it but does not feel ready to adopt it and feels much more in-service training is needed before they can do so. One principal of a primary school stated concern about staffing implications for teaching a foreign language.
- A number of primary schools, both private and government, teach Spanish through clubs. Many use their support assistants who are native Spanish speakers to support the work. These tend to work closely with qualified teachers. This is good use of resources.
- The curriculum used by private schools for the primary and middle years varies from one based on the English, and now the Caymanian national curriculum, to those written by schools. One private high school is planning to introduce the Cayman national curriculum. The curriculum for older students generally relies on that of examination boards.
- The curriculum written by some schools, both private and government, does not balance the four elements necessary to learn languages effectively. The focus is sometimes on too much grammar at the expense of using it or of neglecting the vital component of speaking.

These curricula also neglect benchmarks for assessment. In some of these schemes, continuity of learning between classes or grades is not assured.

- Almost all schools run clubs for students and most take students on visits to Spanish speaking countries. These make a very good contribution to students' command of, and confidence in, Spanish. One school in the sample, Cayman Academy, took students to a local Spanish restaurant where students had to order their own meal. Although shy, no-one went hungry!

Appendix

International developments

- The *Global Gateway* was launched in 2004, enabling schools across the world to work together to develop language teaching and learning. (www.globalgateway.org)
- *European Day of Languages; a Council of Europe Initiative* is held annually on 26 September to celebrate culture and diversity. It was first held in 2001 and is now celebrated in the United Kingdom and 45 countries in Europe.
- *The European Award for Languages* recognises creative ways to improve the quality of language teaching. It is a Europe wide initiative supported by the European Commission and CILT, the UK National Centre for Languages.
- *The European Language Portfolio* is a record of pupils' achievements and progress in languages.
- *International Mother Language Day* has been celebrated on 21 February since 2000. UNESCO proclaimed this as a day on which to stress the importance of linguistic diversity and to promote the use of mother languages. This year, 2008, it marked the start of the International Year of Languages, an initiative led by the United Nations General Assembly and co-ordinated by UNESCO.
- **In Ontario**, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, in recognition of French having parity with English as an official language of Canada, has a number of programmes for its students. A core French programme is offered to all students in every school from grades 1 to 7. Options vary in secondary schools, but a student must earn one credit in French to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. French immersion classes at both primary and secondary schools and bilingual classes are part of the programme.
- **In the United Kingdom**, the government has stated that "languages are crucial for the future of our young people, our society and our economy." In order to support this view, the National Languages Strategy, "*Languages for All; Languages for Life*" was launched in December 2002. The aim is that by 2010, all students from the age of 7 to 11 will be learning a language so they will enter secondary schools with language skills. A national training programme is being established for teachers and other adults, and a network of resource centres established to support language teaching and learning. The Languages Ladder was introduced which recognises and celebrates learners' achievement in a wide range of languages. (www.dfes.gov.uk/languages)
- Since 2002, over 1000 primary schools have been involved in trialling approaches to teaching languages, large numbers of new primary teachers are being trained with additional specialisms in languages teaching and a national advisory centre has been established for primary language learning and to co-ordinate a network of centres to provide advice and support. (www.nacell.org.uk)
- A digital Spanish course has been produced for students from age 7 to 11. Curriculum guidance is available online for French, German and Spanish.

- Another part of the strategy is to fund schools to become specialist language colleges. These secondary schools develop expertise in the teaching of languages and are expected to work closely with schools, including primary schools, in their geographical areas. A small number of primary schools are currently involved in a pilot to become specialist language schools in their own right.
- Career guidance materials for young people highlight why languages can help in gaining employment.
- A pilot programme *Content and Language Integrated Project (CLIP)* has been launched. This aims to introduce bilingual learning into curriculum subjects by studying the subject through the medium of a foreign language.
- Universities and colleges are also involved and employers have been encouraged through sponsorship, to ensure that enough young people become linguists.