



Subject Centre C2k Supplement

January 2002

Notes, presentations and reports from the Subject Centre workshop
Languages and Curriculum 2000: implications for Higher Education

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"The new advanced level qualifications give students a broader and more flexible education. They can study a wider range of subjects, combine academic and vocational studies and even change routes between the first and second years of their course. The new 16-19 curriculum is often referred to as Curriculum 2000."

Information for students and parents, QCA

Introduction - Alison Dickens (Editor) & Vicky Wright (Languages Co-ordinator)

A quick tour of university websites indicates that there is widespread and general support for the new curriculum and the changes it has brought to post-16 education. Phrases such as 'X University welcomes the broadening of education provided by Curriculum 2000' or 'X University sees Curriculum 2000 as a positive change which presents both the University and all applicants with increased options' abound along with references to the impact it will have on widening participation and future employment.

Briefly, if you missed it, the newness of the curriculum is delivered by the reshaping of the traditional 'A' level. This has been replaced by a six-module 'A2' course which allows for assessment after three modules whereby students can "cash-in" (and exit if they choose) gaining an 'AS' level qualification. The breadth is offered by the greater range and number of AS subjects which can be taken. As Jenny Fitton reports in this supplement the introduction of C2K has not been trouble-free, but the majority of staff in the post-16 sector are *"overwhelmingly enthusiastic about its philosophy and benefits"*. This possibility of trying a new subject at AS, combining academic and vocational courses (C2K also comprises a new vocational A level), gaining a key skills qualification or being able to exit with qualifications after only one year of 'A' levels will be doing much to address the widening participation and employability agenda.

While students and teachers have struggled with the increased workload and timetabling headaches that greater choice involves, universities have had to decide how to restructure their admissions policies to reflect this new state of affairs. And here (as ever) there is a considerable

difference in approach and a range of opinion on the place and value of the new key skills qualifications which, as Dilly Fung and Jenny Fitton point out are possibly the most undervalued and misunderstood aspect of C2K. Throw in the new UCAS tariff - different numbers and more of them - and the job of the admissions tutor, as Jean Watts reports, takes on a new level of challenge.

And what of the impact on languages where the steady decline in student numbers on 'traditional' modern language courses has forced us to take an increased (and long overdue) interest in where our students come from? If, as Keith Marshall reports, higher numbers of students are starting out on AS level language courses but not translating themselves into A2 candidates in their second year, we should perhaps be looking to recruit students with AS qualifications in languages and expanding the range of ab initio and 'fast track' courses we offer. This supplement presents these issues in a collection of reports, statistics and papers, presented at the Subject Centre's Curriculum 2000 Workshop held in October 2001. Clearly, as the event and these papers demonstrate, the outcome for languages of the new curriculum has not been all that was hoped for. It is, however, having the positive effect of making us think hard about what we are currently offering to students, what we can offer in the future and how we can work together across institutions and sectors to make the most of the new skills and opportunities that C2K is offering to both students and education providers.



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“Schools, colleges and universities are all working to develop and understand the new system, and the University welcomes the opportunities that the new curriculum provides in terms of breadth and depth, along with the recognition and development of key skills which will benefit life long learning and will provide a basis for students to succeed at university and move on to a career or further study.”

University of Leicester

LANGUAGES AND CURRICULUM 2000: The Implications for Higher Education Workshop report by Paula Davis

New A level specifications in modern foreign languages (MFL) aim to ‘provide a sufficient basis for the further study of modern foreign languages at degree level or equivalent’ (<http://www.qca.org.uk/nq/subjects/mfl.asp>) but many colleagues in higher education are still unclear about this new post-16 qualification. In October 2002, the first students to have followed the Curriculum 2000 Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) Level MFL specifications (introduced for the first Year 12 students in September 2000), will be entering university and this briefing day aimed to provide both a forum for the dissemination of information and a discussion of the impact of the new curriculum.

The event provided a practical insight into higher education entrance requirements under the new UCAS tariff as well as useful information on new qualifications. In addition, despite hopes to the contrary, we learnt that initial findings indicate that Curriculum 2000 is unlikely to lead to an increase in the number of students wishing to study a foreign language at degree level. However, some useful strategies for addressing this recruitment problem were suggested.

This report summarises the presentations given by the guest speakers:

- Kate Green, Principal Subject Officer, MFL and Classics, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- Carmel O’Hagan, CLT
- Mary Myles, Curriculum and Development Officer, UCAS
- Keith Marshall, University of Wales, Bangor
- Jenny Fitton, Principal, Taunton’s College, Southampton
- Dilly Fung, Arts Faculty Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator, University of Southampton
- Catherine Watts, University of Brighton

An update on the pre- and post-16 modern languages curriculum

Kate Green, Principal Subject Officer, MFL and Classics, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Kate Green placed Curriculum 2000 in context by highlighting changes to the pre-16 national curriculum with particular reference to language teaching and learning. 2002 is the last year of the current GCSE curriculum. Under the revised pre-16 national curriculum, there is more emphasis on pupils’ knowledge about language and

their ability to apply this knowledge. At post-16, revised GCE AS and A levels have been introduced under the banner of “Curriculum 2000” with the aims of encouraging more flexibility, greater curriculum breadth and more modularity. The reaction to Curriculum 2000 has been mixed. Initial findings indicate that Year 12 students (i.e. those in their first year of the sixth-form) now have a broader curriculum, that there have been significant increases in the take-up of certain subjects (at AS level) and that students are spending more time studying. However, there have been problems in administering the scheme, there is concern that courses are purely assessment-driven and the opportunity to study an additional subject often results in students simply studying “more of the same” rather than broadening their studies. The QCA has been monitoring the first year of Curriculum 2000 and is due to produce its final report in December 2001.

Kate went on to explain the “cashing-in” procedure for the new AS level. The 3 units which comprise an AS level can be cashed-in to obtain the AS certification. The decision about whether or not to cash-in the units has to be made in February, prior to sitting the examination. If students have cashed-in their units, the result will appear in section 7a of the UCAS form. Units that are not cashed-in should not be reported in section 7b but may be included in the student’s personal statement.

Finally, Kate talked about the new advanced extension awards (AEA) which are aimed at the most able A level students. These new awards have been trialled and full information will be available shortly. The award (given at merit or distinction level) includes traditional subjects plus a new subject, Critical Thinking. In languages, the AEA will be available in French, German, Irish, Spanish, Welsh and Welsh as a second language.

For further information, visit the QCA web-site www.qca.org.uk

Investment for the future: Developments within the Language Colleges Carmel O’Hagan, CLT

Carmel O’Hagan talked about the role of the specialist language colleges in motivating learners and making modern

languages attractive from an early age. Specialist colleges are funded through central government and business and are required to offer something in return to the community. The aim of the specialist language colleges is to foster a positive attitude to language learning so that it is seen as important and something that everyone can do. It is intended that this will result in an increasing number of more highly motivated students studying modern foreign languages at higher education level. The heart of the programme is to raise standards. Some interesting initiatives are coming out of the colleges including the use of new technology to make language learning more appealing to boys; the opportunity to study two foreign languages (and possibly three) at Key Stage 3; a languages for all policy at post-16 (although not necessarily to AS or A level); and the opportunity for sixth-form students to spend a month abroad on relevant work experience funded by projects such as Dialogue 2000.

For further information on specialist language colleges, refer to www.cilt.org.uk/projects/colleges.htm

Curriculum 2000 from the UCAS perspective Mary Myles, Curriculum and Development Officer, UCAS

Mary Myles reported on the findings of the Curriculum 2000 implementation surveys and looked in some detail at the new UCAS tariff. The survey results confirm that applicants to higher education will be presenting a diverse range of "new" qualifications on their UCAS forms. It is estimated that at least 80% of applicants for 2002 will have AS qualifications on their forms. The expectation is that when students complete their first three modules at sixth-form, they will cash them in and obtain a certificate (AS level). However, some students do not cash-in their modules (some schools have a controversial no cash-in policy) so their grades will not be listed on their UCAS form although they may be listed in the personal statement. Some applicants will have VCE (vocational certificate of education) qualifications - a replacement for the GNVQ. Key skills (application of number; communication and information technology) will also appear on the UCAS forms although wider key skills (working with others, improving one's own learning and performance, and problem solving) are not offered by all institutions. There is also a new advanced extension award (not included in the 2002 entry) and there are new free-standing mathematics units for scientists. We will find that applicants will have widely differing units as the modular programmes are of variable size. As a guide, AS level comprises 3 units and A level comprises 6 units. We may have applicants with 18 units (equivalent to 3 A levels) or 27 units (equivalent to 4.5 A levels). Most will probably have 21 units (equivalent to 3.5 A levels). Under the new UCAS tariff, 120 points = grade A at A level, 100 points = grade B, 80 points = grade C, 60 points = grade D and 40 points = grade E. At AS level, 60 points = grade A, 50 points = grade B, 40 points = grade C, 30 points = grade D and 20 points = grade E. The Scottish system is slightly different to reflect the higher number of subjects taken by students in Scotland. It is not mandatory for higher education to use the tariff although the majority of institutions are doing so. Entry requirements and offers can be made as points or grades and increasingly grade/point hybrids are used, e.g. 280

points with Grade B in French. UCAS figures confirm previous evidence that the number of students applying for and being accepted for foreign language degrees has been in decline since 1996. At present, the number of courses far exceeds student demand.

"Changes to the post-16 Curriculum", a new publication out this year, has been written by UCAS in conjunction with the QCA and is aimed specifically at higher education. For further information and a downloadable pdf version of this document, see www.ucas.ac.uk/higher/post16/right.htm

Information on what schools and colleges are offering and the kinds of programmes students are taking can be found in the UCAS November 2000 survey report at www.ucas.com/getting/schools/cur2001. The July 2001 survey report will be available by the end of the year.

For further information visit the UCAS web-site www.ucas.ac.uk/

So what's happening with AS? Looking at language recruitment Keith Marshall, University of Wales, Bangor (See page 10 for a full summary)

Keith Marshall presented his research findings on AS and A2 level foreign language take-up in UK schools and colleges during the academic years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002. He also reported on language teachers' views of the new AS and A2 level courses, which were mostly a balance between positive and negative.

It had been hoped that Curriculum 2000, with the opportunity it provides for students to study an extra subject in the sixth-form, would encourage an increase in numbers taking languages. Indeed, early signs indicated that more students were studying languages at AS level. However, this has not been translated into an increase in numbers studying a language at A2 level - languages tend to be "dropped" after the first year. Keith's findings (based on a survey undertaken during September/October 2001) indicate that there seems to be no prospect of the new AS level leading to an increase in the number of students studying foreign languages at A2 level in comparison with the old A level. "Regrettably, AS is not on the brink of turning round dramatically the declining fortunes of post-16 language learning in the UK." It is essential that we find a way of reversing the decline in numbers studying foreign languages at UK universities. Strategies include getting across the facts in order to dispel the following myths:

- pupils get better grades in other subjects;
- the only jobs for linguists are in teaching and translating;
- you have better employment prospects if you do vocational subjects.

In reality:

- languages consistently have higher proportions of A and B grades than nearly each other subject at AS and A level;
- language graduates enter a variety of fields of employment (including business services, manufacturing; and banking/finance);
- new language graduates (particularly those in single honours French or German) have a better employment rate than graduates of most other disciplines.



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The message needs to be delivered at an early age as the main fault line in the language learning process is the transition from GCSE to A level, i.e. not enough students are studying language A levels.

Taunton's 6th Form College: a case study Jenny Fitton, Principal, Taunton's College, Southampton

Jenny Fitton presented a personal perspective on the practical impact of Curriculum 2000 on a sixth-form college. Jenny has found that Curriculum 2000 has had significant key benefits for her students by giving them opportunities for greater breadth, to mix academic and vocational options and to develop key skills. On the whole, there has been a positive reaction from students. There have been teething problems but once these have been resolved, Curriculum 2000 will have much to offer. From the higher education perspective, there are several key points we need to consider in relation to Curriculum 2000 and entry requirements. As students are not required to cash in their AS units, we must not make assumptions from the appearance or non-appearance of AS level qualifications on their UCAS forms. If AS levels are not listed as a qualification we need to make further investigations - students who do not cash in their AS units may divulge their grades in their personal statement. The new AS level in Critical Thinking has proved to be a popular subject - the course teaches students how to use and interpret material and seems to have a beneficial impact on other AS grades.

Jenny sounded a warning that if higher education is relying on Curriculum 2000 to fill places on language degrees we will be disappointed. Although more students are now taking languages in Year 12 (i.e. at AS level), this increase is not continuing into the following year (A2 level). This concurs with Keith Marshall's findings above. However, we should view the current debate as an opportunity to see what is happening at AS level and to be more pro-active, e.g. by visiting local schools and colleges and building some bridges in Year 12. Such recruitment drives are particularly important in the local community as the number of A level students progressing to local HE establishments is on the increase (in the case of Taunton's College, 70% of their students who go on to higher education go to a local HE establishment). We also need to bear in mind that "*HE institutions are key players in influencing student choices and attitudes.*" What we say about entry requirements will have a major impact and how we view key skills and AS level grades on this year's UCAS forms will greatly affect future years' students. Finally, we should remember that the current cohort of sixth-formers have been "guinea pigs" for Curriculum 2000 and that, due to the increased assessment load, it has been difficult for them to do the enrichment activities we may normally expect to see on their personal statements.

The key skills component Dilly Fung, Arts Faculty Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator, University of Southampton

Key skills are now appearing on UCAS forms but there seems to be a lack of awareness at higher education level as to what they actually involve. Following the Dearing Report, key skills are now free-standing and are aimed at all students whether they are studying academic or vocational

programmes. The three main key skills are communication, application of number and information technology. The wider key skills (related to employability) are working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving. There are five levels of key skills qualifications but the ones we are most likely to come across on UCAS forms are level 2 (on a par with GCSE) and level 3 (on a par with A level). Key skills, particularly at level 3, should be taken seriously by admissions tutors as this level is very demanding and requires a great deal of independent learning and advanced oral presentation skills. However, an important point to consider is that not all students have been offered the opportunity to study key skills so we should not discriminate against those who do not have a key skills qualification.

For key skills specifications and guidance documents, see www.qca.org.uk.

The three main awarding bodies are:
OCR www.ocr.org.uk
EdExcel www.edexcel.org.uk
AQA www.aqa.org.uk

For information on the numerical value given to key skills under the new UCAS tariff system, see www.ucas.co.uk/new/press/tariff.pdf.

Exploring the decline in the take-up of ML degrees Catherine Watts, University of Brighton

Catherine Watts closed the day by presenting initial findings from her doctorate research into the decline in the take-up of modern languages at degree level. Her research methodology has comprised interviews and questionnaires with selected undergraduates, sixth-formers, heads of modern foreign language departments in schools and modern foreign language programme leaders in universities. Catherine stressed that the initial findings from her qualitative survey may change and that it is not possible to generalise the results. However, sixth form students and first year undergraduates have cited some interesting reasons for not continuing their study of modern foreign languages at degree level. These include a perceived lack of relevance to future careers; absence of a clear idea of career paths following a foreign language degree; and finding competition from native speakers from other EU countries to be demotivating. There seems to be a general climate of negativity that needs to be addressed if we are to increase recruitment levels for modern foreign language degrees. A possible way forward (particularly in response to career concerns) is to ensure that Keith Marshall's positive statistics on language graduate employability reach sixth-form students and their careers advisers at an early stage.



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“We also understand that the range of study opportunities available to students will vary, and we will therefore wish to be flexible in our attitude to the new qualifications to take account of personal circumstances and to be fair to all applicants.”

University of Newcastle

Curriculum 2000 - a cause for confusion

Jean Watts, Departmental Administrator, School of Modern Languages,
University of Southampton

As departmental administrator of the School of Modern Languages, I have always been on the periphery of our Admissions process. However, with the advent of Curriculum 2000 - or the snappy C2k - it was thought prudent that the more people in the department who knew (I refrain from saying understood) about its workings the better. With the lead-in necessary for production of the prospectus and departmental brochures, the University had attempted to get to grips in spring 1999 with C2k. It agreed that it would, as a matter of course, make offers on the basis of students taking 21 units (3A2s and 1 AS) without, however, penalising students from those school/colleges who were taking A2s only.

In October we were discussing with the central Admissions staff whether our printed offer was too high, although it was difficult to compare it with that of other universities who couched their offers on their websites in a variety of ways. Some sites were making offers on the basis of grades at A levels, and it was not clear whether the site had not been updated or that the department/university was intent on proceeding as if C2k did not exist.

We also attended a seminar run by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies in London in mid-October where, among others, speakers from UCAS, and the Principal of a Sixth Form College told us how C2k was actually working. It took us some time to assimilate the jargon of units, of “cashing-in” AS levels, of key skills, and of

thinking in terms of 300 points (3 grade B at A2) instead of the 24 points from the same grades at the old A level.

It has been a rather chicken-and-egg situation now we have started to look at our UCAS application forms. We understand more, but also find there are questions we could have asked at the seminar had we looked closely at the applications beforehand. The advent of C2k has considerably slowed up our dealing with applications. It has taken us some time to work out the offer we make if the student has already “cashed in” an AS level (and the offer then depends on the grade obtained), the offer to students taking both A2 and AS subjects in summer 2002, and those students with no AS levels taking A2s only in June 2002. However, in one single batch we looked at there were nineteen permutations on the A level/AS level/A2 scenario, and this did not include students with IB or US school leaving qualifications! One student will be taking 4AS subjects and 4A2 subjects in June 2002, but the four subjects are not all the same. We now have three people looking at forms. It is very easy to make mistakes in the offer and we need this level of checking to ensure that the offers being made are fair to all students. I am sure we will become accustomed to the jargon, and the variety of permutations may decrease as students with old-style A levels disappear from the UCAS forms in the next year or so. But it has been a steep learning curve for us. C2k may be a snappy title but administering admissions in a university department is proving far from a snappy process.

“On the basis of all the sources we have consulted, it is evident that an overwhelming majority of principals/headteachers and teachers maintain their full support for the main principles of the Curriculum 2000 reforms...It is more difficult to judge opinion among students, but our impression is that a majority supports the principles that underpin the reforms, though they have clear views on some of the adjustments that are needed.”

Review of Curriculum 2000 - QCA's Report on Phase One (July 2001)

C2K - what does it mean for teachers and students?

Jenny Fitton, Principal, Taunton's College, Southampton

Most changes to the curriculum for school and college students are greeted with a fair degree of controversy - remember, for example, the introduction of GCSEs? Nevertheless, the howls of outrage in the press last year

following the introduction of the new advanced level qualifications, known as “Curriculum 2000” or C2k, were quite unprecedented.



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According to the Mail, the Telegraph and others, the first group of seventeen year olds taking the new AS Levels in Summer 2001 were all overworked nervous wrecks, stressed out in the cause of a “dumbed down” qualification that was meaningless anyway.

As Principal of a sixth form college with over 1100 full-time 16 - 18 year olds, most of them following advanced level programmes, I had difficulty in recognising most of this picture. I was also personally outraged by the negative impact this barrage of criticism had on those young people taking examinations whose achievements were so publicly, comprehensively and wrong-headedly rubbished.

So what has Curriculum 2000 meant for teachers and students? First, it is important to state that almost all Principals and teachers in the post-16 college sector - and, I believe, most in the schools - remain overwhelmingly enthusiastic about its philosophy and the benefits it has to offer. Initial problems of implementation, many of which arose directly as a result of the over-zealous haste with which C2K was introduced a year too soon, should not be allowed to detract from this.

These benefits include opportunities for breadth of study, and greater facility in combining subjects from different programme areas or from “academic” and “vocational” options - the new AVCEs or “vocational A Levels”.

Without the prescription of the much lauded International Baccalaureat, C2k allows students to take up programmes of similar range should they wish to do so. AS Levels in, say, English, Maths, French, Biology and Sociology alongside an entitlement programme of careers education, community service, personal development and Key Skills would provide a challenging mix and could lead to full A Levels in three, four or five subjects depending on the student’s ability and ultimate career goals. Equally, it is possible (though not, maybe, desirable) to increase specialisation by choosing, for example, four or five subjects from the same curriculum family - such as Maths, Further Maths, Physics, Electronics and Computing.

In practice, early indications from higher education are that admissions policies are positively encouraging students to take an increased number of subjects (normally four at AS Level with two or three at full A Level), but not many HE establishments seem really interested in genuine breadth. Sixteen and seventeen year olds are intensely pragmatic individuals, and will pick up quickly on these signals when making their subject choices. Commonly, as their “additional” AS Level they are opting for a subject that complements, rather than contrasts with, their primary qualification goals. The main “winners” are subjects which are quite likely to be new to students post-16, and which reflect their interests and concerns: for example, Psychology, Photography, Critical Thinking, Graphic Design, Law, Film/Media Studies, and - of course - Information Technology.

A major advantage of Curriculum 2000 is its increased

flexibility. AS and A2 can be managed effectively as two one-year courses, with a synoptic element at the end. Students electing for three, four or five subjects at sixteen are no longer “locked-in” for two years or doomed to be labelled as “drop-outs” if they decide they’ve had enough at the end of one year. One effect of this has been to increase retention in the first year of post-16 studies: students having doubts or difficulties are more inclined to persevere if their goal is assessment in, say, six months time rather than eighteen months away. The modular structure of the new programme allows them to “cash-in” three modules as an AS Level at the end of year one and have that achievement formally recognised.

This also means, of course, that students can change their minds about what they want to study half-way through an advanced level course. Our experience to date (brief though it is) suggests that not infrequently a fourth or fifth subject choice, taken up almost speculatively at sixteen, has generated an enthusiasm which has led by the summer to a change of heart concerning preferred options for A2.

Of course, this means that the relative popularity of subjects at full A Level may turn out to be different from patterns in previous years. Neither is the number of students taking a particular subject at AS Level necessarily a straightforward indicator of the likely numbers at A2. In September 2000, for example, many colleges like mine experienced a welcome significant increase in demand for modern languages at AS Level; however, there is no indication that this growth in numbers has been sustained into the second year to A2. Perceptions that AS courses in modern languages are grammar-intensive and generally “hard” have deterred students from continuing to the full A Level - and have also deterred some who in previous years might have been tempted to take up a new language for the first time post-16.

So, admissions tutors, what can you expect to see in the young people applying to you from Curriculum 2000 programmes? They are likely to have spent more of their sixth form years in the classroom than their predecessors, perhaps 25% more, and to have worked a great deal harder in the first year of their two-year programme.

This will, perhaps, be reflected in a more organised and serious attitude to study. Ironically, it may also mean that they have had less time to devote to some of the “enrichment” activities that C2k was designed to encourage - sport, drama, music or clubs and societies for instance. The more crowded curriculum and the undoubted overburden of assessment last year certainly made it more difficult for students to strike an effective balance between study and other factors (not least part-time work commitments and a social life!) Nevertheless, most students have appreciated the new curriculum, and I hope you will see many young people who have made the most of the flexibility offered by C2k to go beyond a narrow range of subjects.

Finally, may I put in a plea for you to take careful consideration of the new Key Skills qualifications? These qualifications in Communications, Application of Number and IT are very far from being easy options. Communications at Levels 2 (equivalent to GCSE) or 3 (equivalent to an A Level), for example, develops and tests the very skills of self-organisation and management, clarity of thought and facility of expression that admissions tutors have been crying out for in undergraduates. An applicant with this to offer is bringing valuable additional skills - over and above anything demonstrated by a high grade pass in English GCSE. The same is true in other contexts of AoN and IT Key Skills qualifications.

In some respects, the doom-laden press articles last summer had truth at their heart. In its current form, Curriculum 2000 is over-bureaucratic and over-assessed and there are crucial logistical problems to be sorted out

concerning timetabling and examination schedules. Last year, because of the haste with which the qualifications were introduced and the resulting lack of good quality information and guidance from the accrediting bodies, teachers were unsure of the standards required and there were significant difficulties in securing enough good quality examiners. The structure of the new AVCEs (which currently have no half-way AS stage) urgently needs change. Nevertheless, for many of us who work with students in the 16 to 18 age group, Curriculum 2000 is a reform that we have been advocating for some time which has the potential to raise both quality and attainment levels. Collectively, we need to get the details right, and to send students the right messages about the value of a broad and varied sixth form education. If we can do so, not only students but ultimately employers and the UK economy will be the beneficiaries.

“We welcome the introduction of the Key Skills qualification and recognise its value and relevance to a university degree. We will accept Key Skills units in all our undergraduate offers. Evidence of other skills e.g. working with others and problem solving can be demonstrated in a variety of ways; we encourage applicants to develop these skills and to highlight achievement of them in their application.”

Staffordshire University

Key Skills: eight good reasons for welcoming the new awards

**Dilly Fung, Arts Faculty Learning and Teaching Coordinator,
University of Southampton**

Curriculum 2000 has been a huge, sometimes daunting, adventure for staff and students in the post-16 sector. Changing from the traditional A Level model, even for post-16 colleges already offering General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) alongside A Levels, has been a logistical challenge, despite a high level of agreement across the sector of the educational merit of broadening the curriculum.

The introduction of the new QCA Key Skills Awards (www.qca.org.uk) in Communication, Information Technology and Application of Number has been an additional challenge for the post-16 sector. These new awards, 'decoupled' from the old GNVQs, and adapted to a format which includes external examinations, as well as the assessment of a portfolio of assignments, have been designed for all students, whether they are following predominantly academic courses or vocational programmes. The Key Skills Awards have been delivered in a variety of ways: through personal tutor systems, workshops, even through AS/A Level General Studies programmes, so students' experiences of them will be varied. Not all students entering higher education in Autumn 2002 will even have had the opportunity to take the qualifications.

Why, then, should colleagues in higher education welcome these new awards and recognise them positively on UCAS application forms? I would argue that there are excellent reasons why we should not only take notice of these qualifications on UCAS forms, but also encourage

students to value them, and our partner schools and colleges to promote and deliver them, wholeheartedly.

Why welcome key skills?

- 1 The key skills qualifications are demanding. Students successfully completing the awards will have had to show initiative, effective time management, commitment to improving their own learning, and a significant degree of independent work.
- 2 Post-16 providers have worked extremely hard to promote and deliver these qualifications, and for good educational reasons. They know that students who have advanced skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing, IT and numeracy, do better in their main curriculum subjects, where these skills are frequently applied. In addition, FEFC funding models are such that post-16 colleges cannot usually afford to ignore the qualifications, as they bring in a significant proportion of a college's overall funding. Universities ignoring or belittling key skills when interviewing prospective students will not be finding favour with these colleges.
- 3 Assessment of the new awards is rigorous. External examinations must be passed, so students cannot just present a developed portfolio of 'evidence'; they must also demonstrate a significant range of skills within the constraints of a timed examination.
- 4 The awards involve a high level of skill, especially at

Level 3. For example, a student gaining a Level 3 award (See Figure 1) in Communication will be able to:

- Present in discussion a complicated line of reasoning or argument, listen and respond sensitively, and make openings for others to contribute, for example by inviting others to speak and asking follow-up questions
- Prepare and deliver a presentation to suit purpose, matching language and style to the complexity of the subject, structuring the presentation effectively and using techniques to include the audience, including visual aids
- Use appropriate reference sources to help understand complex lines of reasoning and information about text and images, compare accounts and recognise opinion and possible bias, and synthesise a range of types of information for a specific purpose
- Adopt appropriate forms and styles for written documents, organising material coherently and making meaning clear by writing, proof-reading and re-drafting documents so that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate.

The Information Technology award at Level 3 involves:

- planning and selecting information, including use of database query techniques, Internet search engines, and comparison of the advantages and limitations of different sources of information
- developing information, including creating and using structures and procedures for developing text, images and numbers and evaluating information from different sources
- presenting information, including developing the structure and presentation of a text and ensuring that work suits the needs of the intended audience, and is accurate.

The skills listed above are only a brief selection from the wide-ranging assessment criteria. It's not difficult to see that they are likely to move students towards the kinds of academic skills they will need in higher education, quite apart from their usefulness for future career options.

5 Students who recognise their own skills, and the transferability of them, are likely to be able to deal effectively with unitised programmes in HE, whereby they may be moving quite rapidly from one set of topics and approaches to another. Recognition of the comparability of different skills and approaches, for example analysis, evaluation and synthesis, across different topics and units, will enable students to understand learning as a development of their level of skills and understanding overall, and of their ability to learn, not just acquisition of knowledge. Highlighting the importance of key skills should enable students to make their own connections; as Boulton-Lewis and Dart argue (ed. Gibbs, 1994: 263), 'if deep learning is to occur students must construct their own cognitive links by reflecting on new information and relating that to what they know and believe'.

6 The development of key skills is not, as is sometimes argued, merely a matter of 'training' - that much-maligned, poor cousin of noble 'education'. It is irrational to consider these skills to be inferior to subject-based

learning, since they are an integral part of an individual's ability to learn within a subject-discipline. Take, for example, the ability to write accurately and effectively. How should we value the ability to find the best words, and arrange them in the best order? Or to organise sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into a coherent and articulate argument? Are these skills of a lower order than the cognitive skills described by QAA in the National Qualifications Framework www.qaa.org.uk/nqf? They are not, because the relationship between thought and language is, by any model, intimate: if I cannot express an idea clearly in words, then I cannot think clearly, and vice versa. Likewise, the ability to read closely, to recognise values implicit in a writer's language, to read between the lines of an academic's 'evidence' and its relation to his or her argument: these are not minor concerns, but wholly central to the higher order skills developed in higher education, across all disciplines.

7 The acquisition of advanced key skills has an equal opportunities, and widening Participation dimension. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have not had opportunities (for example) to develop a wide vocabulary, or access to a computer, will be systematically disadvantaged throughout their time in HE. If they cannot read complex materials with understanding, they will struggle. If they cannot access library and other resources because they have little or no experience with computers, they will not even be able to access the same range of materials as their peers. Let's welcome the new key skills awards as one of a number of important ways of ensuring that students have equal access to the best kinds of learning, and to the best degree classifications.

8 In higher education, we are being encouraged to focus explicitly on students' key transferable skills, and to develop ways of supporting their development, for reasons argued above, in a range of 'inclusive' ways (Bennett et al, 2000; Fallows and Steven, 2000). If students coming to us are familiar with the notion of skills which unlock doors, if they are aware of their own strengths and areas for development, and if they are willing to continue to develop those key and academic skills further, we will all be on the right track.

References

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- Fallows, S and Steven, C (2000) *Integrating key skills in higher education: employability, transferable skills and learning for life* Kogan Page, London
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Figure 1: QCA National Key Skills Awards Rough equivalence of 'levels' of awards

QCA Key Skills	Programmes of study	Higher Education 'Levels' (QAA National Qualifications Framework)
Level 5	Postgraduate	Level 4 Masters' level
Level 4	Undergraduate	Level 3 Honours Degree Level 2 Diploma in HE Level 1 Certificate in HE
Level 3	Advanced (GCE/VCE)	
Level 2	GCSE	
Level 1	Pre-GCSE	

“The signs are that the new AS-level is tempting teenagers to stick with a language after GCSE or try a new one. Keith Marshall, of Bangor University, found encouraging results from a sample survey: 74% of schools reported an increase in sixth formers doing a language, with French up 35%, Spanish 31%, and German 15%. All languages together were up 30% and minor languages such as Italian and Russian had increased, though from low baselines. Numbers doing two languages were up by 44%.”

Donald MacLeod Guardian Education (May 18th 2001)

C2K and Languages: the story so far...

Keith Marshall, Department of Modern Languages,
University of Wales, Bangor

Below are the results of a survey conducted in September and October 2001 to map AS and A2 foreign language take-up in UK schools and colleges in 2000-2001 and 2001-2002

1. Background

1.1 Decline in university language learning

- There is a need to find a means of reversing the steep decline in the number of students doing MFL degrees at UK universities
- Fewer students are applying for university language degrees because fewer are pupils have been doing language A-levels
- The passage from GCSE to A-level is the fault line in language learning progress, not the passage from school to university

1.2 Pupil motivation

- An investigation of motivation of 3000 year 12 pupils in 1998 indicated that the norm of doing only 2 to 4 subjects at A-level was a major cause of the decline in A-level language numbers.
- Large numbers of these pupils said, if they could do another subject in the 6th form, it would be a language.
- Curriculum 2000, by encouraging pupils to do an extra subject at AS in year 12, provided them with that opportunity

1.3 Positive initial signs (Survey 1, Table 1)

- Survey of schools undertaken in October 2000 to find out if more pupils were opting for AS languages
- Responses from 112 schools were very positive indeed
- An increase in the new AS, by comparison with old A-level and AS together; in every language, with an overall increase of 30%

1.4 Mixed messages from exam boards and classrooms

- Indications from exam boards re number of entries right up to May 2001 were very encouraging
- But anecdotal evidence from schools and colleges indicated that things were not going so well in all classrooms

1.5 Actual exam results

- AS Exam results published in August 2001 were very good news indeed on level of candidates results
- French, German, Spanish and “all other languages” had higher proportions of A and B grades than virtually any other subject in AS (as they traditionally had at A-level)

1.6 Need for clarification (Survey 2, Table 1)

Survey undertaken (Sept/ Oct 2001) to find out:

- What's going on with AS and A2 languages?
- Whether AS take-up in 2001-2002 is up or down on 2000-2001
- Whether A2 numbers in 2001-2002 are up or down on A-level numbers in 2000-2001
- Language teachers' views of the new AS and A2 courses

Table 1 AS level take-up: Evidence of surveys and UK rates of passes gained and claimed

	French	German	Spanish	Italian	Russian	Other languages	Total all languages	2 languages
Percentage increase in numbers doing AS language courses in Oct 2000 by comparison with numbers doing old A-level and old AS combined in 1999-2000 1 (112 schools, KM Survey No 1)	up 35%	up 15%	up 31%	up 45%	up 58%	up 92%	up 30%	up 44%
Percentage changes in numbers who gained and claimed AS language passes in August 2001 by comparison with numbers doing old A-level and old AS combined in 2000 (Whole UK) 2	down 1.3%	down 3.3%	down 7.0%			(incl Italian and Russian) down 43.3%	down 10.3%	
Percentage increase in numbers doing AS language courses in Oct 2001 by comparison with numbers who gained and claimed AS in 2000-2001 (238 schools, KM Survey No 2) 3	up 9.6%	up 6.6%	up 22%	up 45%	up 60.9%	up 5.5%	up 12.4%	up 16%

2. AS Modern Languages Take-up 2000-2001 and 2001-2002

2.1 Conflicting evidence

Conflicting evidence of surveys and UK rates of passes gained and claimed (cached-in)

2.2 Three incompatible sets of figures

Figures in Table 1 rows 1, 2 and 3 are incompatible

- Row 1: substantial increases reported at the beginning of session 2000-2001 for all languages
- Row 2: significant decreases recorded for all languages in actual numbers gaining and claiming passes in 2000-2001
- Row 3: modest increases reported at beginning of session 2001-2002

2.3 What happened to promising early signs?

What happened between overall increases reported in October 2000 (Table 1, Row 1) and actual decreases in August 2001 (Table 1, Row 2)?

- Candidates dropping out (certain, but unquantified)
- Candidates completing AS language courses, but opting to not claim their awards
- Some 25% of pupils who completed their AS courses, across all subjects in the UK, are estimated to have opted not to claim their awards

3. Numbers of pupils who did Modern Languages A-Levels (2000-2001) and numbers who have started A2 (2001-2002)

(See Table 2)

3.1 Previous trends continue

Trends previously established in languages take-up at A-level appear to be continuing at A2

- Decline in French and German
- Rise in Spanish

- No national records kept of non-claimers
- Individual boards unable, so far, to give figures for non-claimers per subject

2.4 Substantial but unquantified increase

Assuming modern languages had the national average of non-claimers

- Pupil numbers reported in October 2000 Survey (Table 1, Row 1) were not so widely incompatible with actual awards in August 2001 (Table 1, Row 2)
- There was a substantial but unquantified increase in Year 12 language learners in 2000-2001

2.5 AS language take up in 2001-2002?

What are the implications for AS language take-up reported for session 2001-2002 in Survey 2 (Table 1, Row 3)

- Applying 25% "non-claimer" downward adjustment
- Allowing for dropouts

In all probability

- Modest AS increases reported for 2001-2002 are not likely to hold up
- Numbers of pupils gaining and claiming AS languages in August 2002 could well be down on numbers for August 2001

3.2 Lesser studied languages uncertain

Numbers for other languages (including Italian and Russian) in the survey were too small to be reliable

- It is rash to predict a rise in the lesser studied languages
- The decline in entries for "other languages" at AS across the UK (Table 2, Row 2) would suggest the opposite is likely to happen

3.3 No increase on A-level

There is no apparent prospect of AS leading to an increase in numbers doing A2 by comparison with old A-level

Table 2 Comparison of numbers of pupils who did languages at A-level in 2000-2001 and those who have started at A2 in 2001-2002

	Pupils who entered for A-level in 2000-2001	Pupils who have started A2 language courses in 2001-2002	Changes in numbers of pupils doing each language from A-level (2000-2001) to A2 (2001-2002)	
	Numbers per language	Numbers per language	Change in numbers per language	Percentage change per language
French	1634	1542	down 92	down 6.0%
German	715	660	down 55	down 5.6%
Spanish	519	555	up 36	up 6.9%
Italian	35	25	down 10	down 28.6%
Russian	30	17	down 13	down 43.3%
Other languages	28	90	up 62	up 221.4%
TOTAL ALL LANGUAGES	2961	2889	down 72	down 2.4%
Pupils doing 2 languages	263	337	up 74	up 28%

4. Teachers' Views

4.1 Overall and individual views

Teachers were asked to give their views of the impact of AS and A2 on their school or college in terms of:

- Overall impact
- Individual positive and negative effects

4.2 Overall views

Teachers were fairly divided in their overall views:

- The largest single group thought the effects were

equally balanced (32.5%)

- More opted for a positive (28.6%) than a negative (25.6%) overall effect
- Only a relatively small number did not yet know

4.3 Fuller expression of teachers' views

Besides the summary expression of their overall views, teachers were asked to give a more specific expression of their opinions on AS and A2. This they did, some at considerable length, tending to concentrate on the

negative more than the positive. These opinions have been analysed with reference to major aspects of the AS/A2 phenomenon:

- Syllabus/specification
- Exams & assessment
- Teaching and individual languages
- Student attitudes/motivation/abilities
- Student uptake
- Drop-outs in Year 12

- Continuation to A2
- What you now can or can't do
- Administration and timetabling
- Introduction of the new AS

This analysis is presented as an appendix in tabular form on the Subject Centre website at www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/events/langcurriculum2000.html It is a highly revealing picture of the strength and diversity of teachers' views.

Table 3: Survey of views of language teachers on the effects of AS and A2 on their schools and colleges (October 2001)
Summary opinions of teachers regarding effect of AS and A2 on their school or college

	<i>Numbers expressing each opinion</i>	<i>Numbers expressing each opinion as a percentage of all expressions of opinion</i>
Positive	61.5	28.3%
Negative	55.5	25.6%
Equally balanced	70.5	32.5%
Don't know	29.5	13.6%
Total	217	100.0%

5. The Future of Languages at AS, A2 and Beyond?

5.1 Fortunately... larger numbers are almost certainly doing modern languages in year 12 thanks to the introduction of AS levels

5.2 Unfortunately... the black hole of "grades declined" (not cashed-in) makes that increase:

- Unquantifiable
- Uncertificated
- Difficult to build on at university level

Numbers going on to full A2 level are apparently still going down

5.3 However... teething problems of the introduction of AS should disappear; removing the stress of uncertainty due to the 'Guinea Pig' factor.

5.4 Adding in resits may reveal, by about Easter 2002, a fuller, truer picture of AS entries

5.5 Government Review of AS should help reduce pupil and teacher feeling of overload from:

- Too much to cover
- Too much examining

5.6 We need to get across the facts to dispel the myths that

- Pupils get better grades in other subjects
- You have better employment prospects if you do vocational subjects like Business Studies, Psychology, Media Studies

5.7 Would removal of pupils' right to decline their grades (unusual in state exams):

- Prove they have nothing to fear?
- Put them off doing AS languages altogether?

5.8 There is a certain scope to build on certificated AS languages at university level as a

- Minor element of degrees in other subjects
- Platform for pupils who realise in year 13 that they are interested in specialist language skills

5.9 Bottom Line (provisional!) Regrettably, AS does not seem to be on the brink of turning round dramatically the declining fortunes of post-16 language learning in the UK.