

University Council for Modern Languages

SURVEY OF LESS SPECIALIST LANGUAGE LEARNING IN UK UNIVERSITIES (1998-99)

By Keith Marshall, University of Wales Bangor

Summary of Report

Objectives of survey

To provide a clearer picture of a totally obscure but large and important feature of UK universities: less specialist language learning, in particular

1. Numbers of students involved
2. Numbers of institutions offering courses
3. Levels of teaching and certification of outcomes
4. Proportion of the students' degrees devoted to languages
5. Main degree subjects of less-specialist language students
6. Take-up of courses designed for specific non-language subjects / courses open to all
7. Are the courses compulsory or optional
8. Where they are taught
9. Who the students are

Data

The Report provides data from 58 Higher Education Institutions (HEI's), on 25,801 students, just under 41% of an estimated total 63,000 less specialist learners in UK universities. The paragraph numbering below relates to that of the objectives above.

Findings

1. Numbers of students. 92% of the students are doing European languages, French (29%) and Spanish (23%) the most popular. Very few choose Japanese (3%), Russian (2%), Chinese (0.7%) or Arabic (0.06%).

2. Numbers of institutions. The languages most frequently offered by institutions are French (88%) and Spanish (73%). The range of languages offered by institutions exceeds the current student demand. HEI's offering African, Asian or Middle Eastern languages are not finding a market for their courses.

3. Levels and certification. Over 80% of institutions use in-house scales of assessment rather than standardised national or European scales. These in-house scales were related to GCSE, A-level and post-A-level standards.

The majority of students reached (55%) reach GCSE level; 28% reached A-level; and 16.8% reached post- level standard. The highest levels were achieved in French and German, because more students can study these at school than of other languages, which they came to as beginners, at university.

4. Proportion of students' degrees. These less-specialists are devoting significant proportions of their course to languages. It constituted 11-30% of the course for 65% of them in Year 1; for 71% in Year 2; and for 66% in Year 3. Very few, in any Year, were spending token amounts of their time (5% or less) on a language.

Most less-specialist learners (55%) do languages only in Year 1 of their courses; 26% carry on into Year 2; 9% into Year 3. The concentration on Year 1 and the very limited numbers in Year 3 mean that only a small minority are entering the world of work with a current knowledge of the language studied.

5. Main degree subjects. The great majority of the non-specialist linguists (68%) are doing Arts degrees, only 21% Science degrees. Students of Business Studies are the most common (32%), with Humanities (16%) the next largest group. Where 58% of the HEI's had students in Engineering and Technology doing languages, they are only 1% of less-specialist learners.

6. Courses for specific non-language subjects /open to all. 81% of institutions offered generic courses open to all. Courses designed for specific subjects, on the other hand, are uncommon. While 54% of HEI's provided languages designed for Business/Finance students and 19% for Engineering, there are very few other subject-specific tailored courses. Not surprisingly, the bulk of students (76%) are following generic course open to all.

7. Compulsory or optional. The great majority of the students (74%) are doing their less-specialist languages voluntarily, as options. For 52% there is a formal assessment. Only 26% are obliged to do their language as a compulsory part of their degree.

8. Where taught. There is a close tie-up with specialist languages: the great bulk of the less specialist teaching (67%) is integrated within main Departments of Modern Languages. In 21% of HEI's languages are taught in a Business Studies Department. Placements abroad are rare (11%), reflecting the poor take-up of Socrates exchanges in UK universities.

9. Who the students are. Predictably, most of the learners (69.9%) are first degree full-timers, with Continuing Education providing the next largest group (8.5%). Given that only 18% of the institutions offer CE language courses, this could point to a market opportunity for HEI's out in the community. University staff (656 across 40 institutions) are a small proportion of the total (4%), but given their limited number in absolute terms, this suggests that the courses perform an internal staff development function. The very small proportion of private/public sector employees (3%), given their enormous number, is further proof of the low priority put on languages by UK employers.

Conclusions

- *The provision of less-specialist language learning in UK universities has grown exponentially in the last 10 years.*
- *The survey furnishes, if not absolute numbers, the fullest statistical picture of less-specialist language learning to date.*
- *The courses are a key component of university learning, whose value is demonstrated by the thousands of students who choose to acquire a practical language skill as part of their degree.*
- *It is vital that the general funding crisis in UK universities and the quality agenda of the QAA do not destroy this innovative addition to our higher education.*

1st December 2001

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Report

1. Origins and objectives of survey

1.1 In early summer 2000, UCML, with the help of the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, conducted a survey of language learning in UK universities, focussing particularly on less specialist learners. The objectives were to establish, for 1998-99:

- Numbers of students doing each language
- Numbers of institutions offering each language
- Levels to which each language was being taught and certification of outcomes (National Language Standards, in house scales etc)
- Proportion of students' courses in different years devoted to languages
- Main degree subjects of less specialist language students
- Take-up of courses designed for specific non-language subjects and of generic courses open to all
- Whether the language learning is compulsory, optional etc
- Who the students are (undergrads, postgrads, staff, etc)
- Where the learning happens (Main Language Departments, Language Centres etc)

2. Data collection

2.1 Questionnaires were sent to all the 100+ institutions offering degree programmes including languages, but also to other higher (HE) and further (FE) education institutions offering degree level courses, making just over 250 in all.

By 1st August 2000, we had received returns from 49 institutions. Further efforts have raised that to only 58. All but three were from HEI' s which offer degree programmes including languages.

2.2 The returns from 22 institutions, moreover, included estimates.

2.3 This level of return and the inclusion of estimates do not permit us to report on the total numbers of students doing specialist or less specialist languages.

2.4 According to the HESA modular record, approximately 124,000 students, in 1998-99, studied one or more languages at some level. The more precise HESA core record reveals 61,124 students doing a language as a substantial part of their degree course.

2.5 The difference between these two figures, roughly 63,000, will be, for the most part, the less specialist learners.

2.6 The UCML survey provides information on 25,801 less specialist students, just under 41% of that 63,000.

2.7 The survey data, if not adequate to provide precise numbers, is sufficient to allow us to draw conclusions about the prevalence of particular languages, to give proportionate answers to the objectives listed in para 1 above

3. Student take-up and languages on offer

3.1 Numbers and percentages of students doing individual languages; numbers and percentages of institutions offering each language

<i>Language</i>	<i>No of learners per language</i>	<i>No of learners per language as % of all learners</i>	<i>No of HEI's offering each language</i>	<i>% of HEI's offering each language</i>
French	7520	29%	49	88%
Spanish	5929	23%	41	73%
English (EFL)	4015	16%	20	37%
German	3471	14%	41	73%
Italian	1981	8%	27	48%
Japanese	777	3%	20	37%
Russian	465	2%	17	30%
Dutch	235	1%	10	18%
Chinese	186	0.7%	9	16%
Welsh	61	0.2%	3	5%
Portuguese	51	0.2%	2	3.6%
Polish	36	0.1%	4	7%
Arabic	15	0.06%	2	4%
Turkish	9	0.04%	1	1.7%
Latin	7	0.03%	1	1.7%
Other and unspecified European Languages	88	0.4%	7	13%
Scandinavian Languages	44	0.2%	3	5%
Other Slavonic & East European languages	11	0.04%	2	3.6%
Unidentified languages	900	3%		
Totals	25801	100%		

No of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 56

3.2. Overall, European languages account for 92% of the take-up. As in specialist language degrees, more students choose French than any other language, but not by the same margin. Spanish, closer to French than is the case with the specialist learners, has overtaken German decisively. English, as a foreign language (TEFL), figures prominently in the less specialist area, likewise with a larger number of (overseas) students taking it than the numbers taking German.

3.3 Eastern European languages, including Russian and Scandinavian, at 2.34% of the total, are of interest to very few.

3.4 Although Japanese is the 6th most studied language, it has only 3% of the total student numbers, while Chinese has only 0.7% and Middle Eastern languages attract less than 0.1%

3.5. The heavy take-up of traditional Western languages is no doubt to some extent due to the very unequal distribution of the languages on offer across the HEI's which responded to the survey. More students do the traditional languages, because that what's on offer (French in 88% of institutions, German and Spanish both in 73%). Fewer students do the rest because they are offered in so few places, whether Middle Eastern (Arabic in 4% of institutions, Turkish in 1.7%) or Scandinavian.

3.6 But it would be rash to argue that the numbers of students doing these languages would increase dramatically if the numbers of HEI's where they were taught were increased. The languages in which a significant minority of the HEI's appear to be trying to develop the market are Japanese (37%) and, to a lesser extent, Chinese (16%). As of 1998-99, students just do not seem to have been responding in significant numbers.

3.7 Small class sizes will also have been the norm in Russian (offered at 30% of HEI's, but attracting only 2% of the students) and Italian (in 48% of HEI's, but only 8% of the students).

4. Levels of language attainment

4.1 Hitherto we have known even less about the levels to which students are taking the languages than about the numbers of students.

4.2 In formulating the survey, we expected that few universities would have linked these courses to the emerging national and international curriculum norms and assessment levels. This was confirmed by the survey responses. Only 5 institutions said they used the National Language Standards of the UK Languages National Training Organisation (LNTO); 2 used the Council of Europe assessment system; and a further 2 the Foreign Languages at Work (FLAW) courses and assessment. All the others used in-house scales.

4.3 This obviously posed a problem of comparability. HEI's offered different numbers of course levels in their less specialist languages, some only 2 levels others 12. And how were we to compare levels which had no intrinsic common denominators?

4.4 To solve this problem, we asked colleagues to describe each of their in-house levels of attainment in terms of grade systems with which they would be familiar: GCSE & SSG (Scottish Standard Grade); A-level & Scottish Higher; Years 1, 2 and 3 of HE post-A-level courses. This worked remarkably well. The majority of respondents were able to provide us with information on the entry and outcome levels of their in-house scales in terms, which have made it possible to aggregate their responses.

4.5 Table 4.6 below provides a succinct account, based on these national secondary and HE levels, for 25,801 language learners in 56 of the respondent universities, of the

- Numbers of students doing individual languages
- Numbers and percentages achieving each level in each language
- Overall numbers and percentages doing languages at each level

4.6 Numbers and percentages of learners doing individual languages in terms of GCSE, A-level, approximate Scottish equivalents and post-GCSE university language courses

Language	NUMBERS AND %'S OF LEARNERS DOING COURSES WITH OUTCOMES EQUIVALENT TO NATIONALLY UNDERSTOOD LEVELS										TOT ALS per language
	No specific level	GCSE/SSG			A-level/Higher			HE post-A-level/Higher			
		C/D	B	A*/A	E	C/D	A/B	Yr 1	Yr2	Yr3	
French	1546 20.6%	1052 14%	760 10%	686 9%	782 10.4%	785 10.4%	527 7%	899 12%	440 6%	43 0.6%	7520 100%
Spanish	1321 22 %	1589 27%	879 15%	580 10%	546 9%	315 5%	297 5%	264 4.5%	109 2.0%	29 0.5%	5929 100%
German	758 22%	616 18%	429 12%	299 8.5%	310 9%	281 8%	206 6%	338 10%	205 6%	29 0.5%	3471 100%
Italian	325 16.4%	782 39.5%	317 16%	178 9%	110 5.5%	107 5.4%	97 5%	62 3%	3 0.2%	0	1981 100%
Japanese	154 20%	267 35%	169 21.5%	68 9%	55 7%	45 5%	12 1.5%	3 0.5%	4 0.5%	0	777 100%
Russian	95 20.5%	145 31%	93 20%	38 8.2%	47 10%	20 10%	16 3.5%	11 2.5%	0	0	465 100%
Dutch	16 7%	88 37.5%	40 17%	36 15%	9 4%	4 2%	25 10.5%	17 7%	0	0	235 100%
Chinese	47 25%	59 31.7%	57 31.7%	5 2.7%	9 5%	9 5%	0	0	0	0	186 100%
Unidentified languages	0	0	384 43%	202 22.4%	0	121 13.4%	0	107 11.8%	69 7.7%	17 1.9%	900 100%
All other languages (except English)	100 31%	82 25%	69 21.4%	36 11%	8 2.5%	3 0.9%	17 5.2%	7 2.2%	0	0	322 100%
TOTALS for all languages (excluding 'No specific level')		4780 25.6%	3296 17.7%	2128 11.4%	2273 12.2%	1789 9.6%	1213 6.5%	1810 9.7%	1028 5.5%	296 1.6%	18613 100%
TOTALS for all languages	7188 27.8%	4780 18.5%	3296 12.8%	2128 8.2%	2273 8.8%	1789 7%	1213 4.7%	1810 7%	1028 4%	296 1.2%	25801 100%

Total number of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 56

4.7 The bulk of less specialist language learning in HE is at levels equivalent to GCSE/SSG, excluding the numbers whose course is at no specific level and focussing on those whose course outcomes are measured, 54.7% of the learners reach levels equivalent to GCSE grades C to A*, with those in the C/D bracket the largest single group.

4.8 Those reaching the equivalent of A-level/Higher constitute 28.3% and those reaching post-A-level/Higher HE Years 1, 2, or 3 are 16.8% of the total of learners with measured outcomes.

4.9 The survey defined the specialist learner as one who “reached the full honours achieved at the end of a traditional single or joint honours degree”; the less specialist learners were those who reached any level lower than that. There is therefore a very sharp division between the levels of learning among the less specialist and the specialist learners. Only 1.6% of the less specialist learners get beyond the level reached by the post-A-level specialists in HE Year 2.

4.10 In those individual languages, whose take-up accounts for more than 1% of the total number (25,801) of non-specialists, all have some 20% doing courses with no specific level, except Italian. The spread across the range of levels varies from language to language.

4.11 In the GCSE/SSG attainment category, there is the highest proportion of learners of Japanese (65.5%), Italian (64.5%), somewhat less for Russian (59.2%) and Spanish (52%), and still less for German (38.5%) and French (33%)

4.12 Conversely, in the A-level/Higher attainment category, there is a low proportion of Japanese (14.5%) Italian (15.4%), somewhat more for Spanish (19%) and more still for German (23%) and French (28.5%). The converse relationship is broken by Russian, where the relatively high proportion of 23.5% achieve A-level/Higher levels.

4.13 In the HE attainment category, not surprisingly, French (18.6%) and German (16.5%) have the highest percentage of their learners, descending through Spanish (7%), to Italian (3.2%), Russian (2.5%) and Japanese (1%).

4.14 Of course, these variations in achievement do not indicate more gifted learners or better teaching in some languages than others.

4.15 Rather, it is a function of different levels of attainment prior to arriving at university. More French and German students reach higher levels, because more of them arrive at university after studying these languages at school than is the case with Spanish. Fewer still will have any prior knowledge of Italian and even fewer of Japanese.

4.16 There are relatively large numbers achieving the equivalent of A-level/Higher in Russian less specialist courses. This could indicate more accelerated learning, resulting from less specialist and specialist beginners being taught together, in HEI’s where numbers did not justify separate classes.

5. Proportions of students’ courses devoted to languages

5.1 Differing proportions of course time devoted to languages

Year of course	Numbers and %'s of students spending different proportions (0% to 50%) of course time, in different years, on assessed language learning													
	0% - 5%		6% - 10%		11% -20%		21% -30%		31% -40%		41% -50%			
	No of students in each year	% of students in each year	No of students in each year	% of students in each year	No of students in each year	% of students in each year	No of students in each year	% of students in each year	No of students in each year	% of students in each year	No of students in each year	% of students in each year	Total no of students in each year	% of all students in each year
Year 1	60	1.1%	1485	27.8%	2477	46.4%	1013	19%	264	4.9%	43	0.8%	5342	54.7%
Year 2	64	2.5%	422	16.4%	1213	47.1%	621	24.1%	218	8.5%	35	1.4%	2573	26.4%
Year 3	59	6.5%	135	15%	306	33.9%	290	32.1%	112	12.5%	0		902	9.2%
Year 4	50	5.3%	278	29.4%	177	18.7%	400	42.3%	0		40	4.3%	945	9.7%
Totals Years 1,2,3,4	233	2.4%	2320	23.8%	4173	42.8%	2324	23.8%	594	6.1%	118	1.2%	9762	100%
Year unknown	0		0		481		173		0		0			

No. of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 34

5.2 The big difference already noted in levels of attainment among less specialist and specialist learners is largely because most of the less specialists come in as beginners or with the equivalent of GCSE/SSG.

5.3 It is also because they spend less time studying the languages than the specialists do. We asked HEI's to tell us what proportion of their courses, in different years, the less specialist learners spent on languages. The number of responses to this question was only 34, but the data is sufficient to create a valid picture.

5.4 The majority of less specialist learners (54.7%) are doing their languages in Year 1 only, with a little over a quarter (26.4%) doing them in Year 2 (presumably nearly all as a second year of study).

5.5 A relatively large proportion of the respondent universities offer courses in years 3 and 4. However, the number of students taking up the offer is small in both Years 3 (9.2%) and 4 (9.7%), with the data on that last year nearly all coming from English and not Scottish universities.

5.6 The proportion of time spent on the languages is also, understandably, generally less than among specialist linguists, but the difference is not as large as might have been expected.

5.7 In Year 1, nearly 65.4% of the less specialist learners in the 34 institutions which responded to this question devoted between 11% and 30% of their course to languages, and 24.7% of them devoted over 20% of the course.

5.8 This pattern of serious course time devoted to languages is enhanced in Year 2, 71.2% of the learners giving 11% -30% of their courses and 34% of them giving over 20% to languages.

5.9 In Year 3, the proportion of students giving 11-30% to languages falls back to 66%, but this is more than made up for by the rise to 44.6% of the proportion of them spending more than 20% on languages.

5.10 In Year 4, despite the demands of their main subjects in this final honours year, 61% of them give 11-30% course time to languages and 46.6% of them give over 20%.

5.11 The amount of time given to languages by these less specialist learners is by no means trivial. Very few students in Year 1 or any other year at these particular institutions were doing a token amount (5% or less) of language learning.

5.12 What puts a break on the progress of the majority of them is the fact that most only do one year, and only 18.9% of them take the languages beyond Year 2. In addition to the limited progress made in one year, by the time they graduate two or three years later, what they had learned will have become rusty through lack of use. The majority are not entering the world of work with a current knowledge of the language studied.

6. Combinations of less specialist languages and other subjects

6.1 Numbers of first degree/other undergraduate students who undertook any less specialist language learning (assessed or unassessed), with particular courses in other non-language subjects

<i>Main degree subjects with which students combined less specialist language learning</i>	<i>No of students combining a non-specialist language with each other subject</i>	<i>% of students combining a non-specialist language with each other subject</i>	<i>No of HEI's permitting combination</i>	<i>% of HEI's permitting combination</i>
Business & administrative studies	3251	32.3%	26	72%
Humanities	1623	16.1%	21	58%
Sociology, economics, politics	982	9.7%	24	67%
Physical sciences	743	7.3%	16	44%
Combined subjects	717	7.1%	11	31%
Law	456	4.5%	15	42%
Biological, veterinary sciences	439	4.4%	18	50%
English & linguistics	376	3.7%	15	42%
Creative arts & design	350	3.5%	12	33%
Computer science	298	3.0%	21	58%
Medicine, nursing, dentistry	253	2.5%	8	22%
Maths	151	1.5%	15	42%
Engineering, technology	142	1.4%	21	58%
Architecture, building, planning	107	1.1%	10	28%
Librarianship & information science	99	1.0%	2	6%
Education	91	0.9%	5	14%
Agriculture	0	0%	0	0%
Total all subjects	10078	100%		

Total number of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 36

6.2 In estimating the appeal of less specialist language learning, the main subjects with which the students combine a language is an important issue, on which 36 respondents gave us information

6.3 Not surprisingly, the largest single block of students combined a less specialist language with Business and Administrative Studies (32.3%), with the next most popular, Humanities (16.1%), on half that figure.

6.4 The majority (68.3%) are doing degrees in arts type subjects and only 21.2% science type degrees. There are noticeable disparities between the numbers of HEI's offering different combinations and the actual take-up.

6.5 Whereas Computer Science and languages are taken up in 58% of these HEI's it is by only 3.0% of the students. For Engineering and Technology there is also a take-up in 58% of HEI's, but by only 1.1% of the students. Less striking disparities are present in many other subjects.

7. Specific and generic courses

7.1 Take-up and offer of specific and generic language courses

<i>Less specialist language courses designed for students in other subjects</i>	<i>Nos of students doing non-specialist language courses designed for particular other subjects/ any subject</i>	<i>% of students doing non-specialist language courses designed for particular other subjects/ any subject</i>	<i>Nos of HEI's offering non-specialist language courses designed for particular other subjects/ any subject</i>	<i>% of HEI's offering non-specialist language courses designed for particular other subjects/ any subject</i>
Students who did a language course designed specifically for courses in Business/Finance	2790	15.9%	20	54%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Engineering	416	2.4%	7	19%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses related to Natural/ Physical Sciences	322	1.8%	3	8%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Leisure and Tourism	168	1.0%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Law	143	0.8%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in History	88	0.5%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Nursing/Medicine	62	0.4%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Applied Sciences	60	0.4%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Information Technology	55	0.3%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Art and Design	35	0.2%	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course specifically designed for courses in Art History	12	0.07	1	2.7%
Students who did a language course designed for students from any/all other subjects	13423	76.4%	30	81%
Totals	17574	100%		

No of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 37

7.2 The disparities between the numbers of HEI's offering different combinations and the actual take-up would have serious implications for teaching, if separate language courses for different main subjects were the norm. This is not the case, however.

7.3 While a large percentage of the HEI's who responded to this question (54%) said they offered less specialist courses designed for students of Business and Finance, 19% offered them to Engineering students and 8% to Natural/Physical students, the only other tailored courses mentioned were single cases in individual universities.

7.4 The great majority of HEI's provide less specialist language teaching in generic classes offered to students from any and all other subjects.

7.5 Actual take-up reflects this tendency to generic teaching even more. Courses designed for Business and Finance offered by 54 % of HEI's, accounted for only 15.9% of the students in the 37 respondent institutions. Courses designed for Engineering offered by 19% of HEI's, accounted for only 2.4% of the students. The courses designed for Natural/Physical Sciences, offered by The 8% of HEI's, accounted for a mere 1.4% of the students.

7.6 By contrast, the generic courses offered to students from all subjects in 81% of HEI's, accounted for 76.4% of the students

7.7 The flexibility of generic language courses, which are easier and more economical to provide in multi-subject institutions, seems to be matched by a readiness on the part of students across a wide range of subjects.

7.8 Reasonable numbers of students, in a fairly large number of HEI's, are being attracted to language courses tailored-made for a limited number of subjects (Business and Administrative Studies, Humanities). However only a small number of HEI's are able to attract reasonable numbers of students to such courses in Engineering or the Natural/Physical Sciences.

8. Obligatory/optional, assessed/unassessed parts of courses

8.1 Numbers of first degree/ other undergraduate students who undertook less specialist language learning as (1) part of their degree title, (2) not in their degree title but as obligatory elements of their course or (3) optional extras in 1998-99

	<i>Nos of students doing non-specialist language courses with different option/ assessment elements</i>	<i>% of students doing non-specialist language courses with different option/ assessment elements</i>	<i>Nos of HEI's offering non-specialist language courses with different option/ assessment elements</i>	<i>% of HEI's offering non-specialist language courses with different option/ assessment elements</i>
8.1.1 Number of students whose course title included a specific language or 'languages'	2680	10.5%	18	42%
8.1.2 Number of students for whom a language was an obligatory and assessed part of their course	4008	15.6%	23	53%
8.1.3 Number of students who did a language as an optional assessed part of their course	13484	52.6%	40	93%
8.1.4 Number of students who learned a language as an optional unassessed extra part of their course	5412	21.1%	15	35%
8.1.5 Number of students who learned a language as an optional assessed extra part of their course	60	0.2%	1	2%
Totals	25644	100%		

No of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 43

8.2 The majority (73.9%) of students doing less specialist language courses are doing so voluntarily, as options. Most of them (52.6%) have the incentive of formal assessment within these options.

8.3 A substantial minority of the volunteer learners (21.1%), however, do not have any formal assessment. Just over a quarter (26.1%) are registered for courses in which the language element is obligatory, although only a small number (10.1%) indicate that within the degree title.

9. Where does the less specialist learning take place in institutions?

9.1 Differing locations for language learning

Language Learning Locations	No of HEI's	% of HEI's	Language Learning Locations	No of HEI's	% of HEI's
Integrated within main School /Department of Modern Languages	32	67%	On placement abroad	5	11%
In a Language Centre shared with specialist learners	15	31%	In completely separate School/Department	4	8%
In a Language Centre dedicated to non-specialist learners	13	27%	Outside institution, through internet	3	6%
In Business Studies (or similar) School/Department	10	21%	Outside institution, in premises of private firms/public bodies	3	6%
Through a university wide computer network	6	13%	Outside UK in premises of franchised institutions	2	4%
In separate section of main School/ Department of Modern Languages	6	13%	In Engineering (or similar) School/Department	2	4%

No of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 48

9.2 Respondents were invited to tick as many of the locations suggested as were appropriate, so that the teaching of the courses in one location (e.g. abroad) did not preclude all the others.

9.3 It is interesting that by far the largest part of the teaching takes place in the main school/department of MFL. Only 27% of respondents report a language centre dedicated to non-specialists and, more strikingly, only 8% of these HEI's do the less specialist teaching in a completely separate School/Department.

9.4 The close tie-up between Business Studies and less specialist language learning is indicated by the relatively large proportion of HEI's (21%) where the teaching takes place in a department of that type. The only other departmental location, Engineering, is very rare (4%).

9.5 Off-site teaching in the premises of public bodies / private firms (3%) or through franchise agreements with other institutions (6%) is not widespread.

9.6 Placements abroad do play a part, but only in 11% of the institutions, reflecting the generally poor take-up of Socrates exchanges in non-language UK university departments.

9.7 The use of networked learning, though institutional networks (13%) or the internet (3%) is not yet evident in many HEI's.

10. Who are the less specialist learners?

10.1 Numbers of students/learners in different categories who did any less specialist language learning at any level

	<i>Nos of non-specialist language learners in each category</i>	<i>% of non-specialist language learners in each category</i>	<i>Nos of HEI's with non-specialist language learners in each category</i>	<i>% of HEI's with non-specialist language learners in each category</i>
First degree full-time students (all years)	15477	69.9%	35	88%
Continuing education students	1887	8.5%	7	18%
First degree part-time students (all years)	906	4.1%	12	30%
Postgraduate students	903	4.1%	16	40%
University staff	656	3.0%	19	48%
Students on franchised courses in institutions outside the UK	633	2.9%	3	8%
Private/public sector employees	631	2.9%	10	25%
Students who were doing HND's or other non-degree undergraduate courses	476	2.1%	12	30%
Students who did two or more less specialist language courses	321	1.4%	11	28%
Socrates/overseas/visiting students	234	1.1%	3	8%
Off-campus on-line learners (i.e. distance learners)	19	0.09%	1	3%
Totals	22143	100%		

No of respondent institutions covered in the table above: 40

10.2 Not surprisingly, the great bulk of non-specialist language learners are full-time undergraduates (69.9%).

10.3 Continuing Education is the second largest group, but very much smaller (8.5%). This second place, in terms of participation, is nonetheless remarkable, in that it is confined to just 18% of the 40 institutions. This could mean that there is a market out in the community for university-run less specialist language courses.

10.4 Among the remaining small groups, part-timers and postgraduates appear in equal proportions (both 4.1%).

10.5 Minority student groups - those on franchised courses outside the UK (2.9%), HND and other non-degree undergraduates (2.1%), Socrates/overseas/visiting students (1.1%) - have, naturally, an even smaller take-up.

10.6 University staff constitute a small proportion of the whole (4%), but given their very limited number in absolute terms, their participation, in 48% of these HEI's is, arguably, quite high.

10.7 In contrast, private/public sector employees (2.9%) a cohort representing the whole of the rest of the working population, are, relatively speaking, not at all numerous. If more than 25% of these HEI's catered for this category of language learners, their numbers might be higher. However, their very low participation rate can also be taken as further proof of the low priority put on language learning by UK employers.

10.8 That there are students, spread across 28% of these 40 institutions, doing two or more less specialist languages is remarkable, but the numbers are very low (1.4%). Remarkable too is the vestigial presence of off-campus on-line learners (0.09%), albeit in only one university.

11. Conclusions

11.1 Caveats

11.1.1 The provision of less specialist language learning in UK universities has grown exponentially in the last 10 years.

11.1.2 A dense fog has surrounded this innovation, however. The weight of the bureaucratic burdens imposed on universities and the statistical and technical problems encountered by HESA have prevented, so far, that fog from being lifted.

11.1.3 This survey is intended to provide a statistical dimension to the structural work of the Translang Project, but must be used with caution.

11.1.4 It does not provide full numbers of the learners and a considerable proportion of the figures are estimates.

11.1.5 The description of the levels of language achievement in terms of GCSE/SSG and A-level/Higher is essentially approximate and relied on the judgment of individual respondents in comparing their in-house levels and those of the public exams.

11.2. A vital service in need of defence

11.2.1 In spite of these caveats, the picture painted is clearer than anything possible hitherto.

11.2.2 The picture is one of a vital service to students in practically every subject area across the UK HE system, a service whose value to these students is proved by the large numbers choosing less specialist languages as intrinsic part of their degrees, as options within their degrees and as addition to their degrees.

11.2.3 It is vital that the general funding crisis in UK universities and the quality agenda of the QAA do not destroy this innovative addition to higher education learning.

11.2.4 It is to be hoped that the findings of this survey will provide weapons to help defend it.

12. Thanks

I should like to acknowledge with gratitude

- The patient effort of colleagues, who responded to the survey, in excavating information from the records of their departments and institutions
- The enormous contribution to the preparation of this report made by my colleague in Bangor, Moira Thornton, and her family. Without their help in collating the data, the report simply would not have been written.

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**Institutions which responded to the UCML survey of language learning
in UK universities in session 1998-99**

England

Aston
Bath
Birmingham
Bolton Institute
Brighton
Bristol
Cambridge
Cheltenham and Gloucester (CHE)
Christ Church Canterbury
Durham
East Anglia
European Business School, London
Exeter
Furness College
Harper Adams
Hertfordshire
Huddersfield
Hull
Imperial College
Keele
King's College
Kingston
Leeds Metropolitan
London School of Economics
London Guildhall
Loughborough
Manchester
Manchester Institute of Science and Technology
(UMIST)
North London
Northumbria
Nottingham
Oxford
Oxford Brookes
Queen Mary & Westfield College London
Ripon, York St John

Roehampton, University of Surrey
Salford
Sheffield Hallam
South Bank
Southampton Institution
Surrey
Teesside
Trinity and All Saints, Leeds
University College London
Warwick
West of England (UWE)
Wolverhampton

Northern Ireland

Nil

Scotland

Caledonian
Dundee
Heriot-Watt
Paisley
Robert Gordon's Aberdeen
Stirling

Wales

Bangor
Swansea Institute of HE
University of Wales College, Newport
University of Wales Institute Cardiff

Keith Marshall
2nd December 2001