



Language Trends Scotland 2024/25

Language teaching and learning in local authority and independent primary and secondary schools in Scotland

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www.britishcouncil.org

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Foreword from British Council Scotland

At British Council Scotland, we connect Scotland to the world and the world to Scotland through education and the arts. Our young global citizens and schools are at the heart of our cultural relations work in Scotland and beyond. We aim to support the younger generation to learn about other languages and cultures, and to prepare for life in a global, interconnected society.

As a modern language graduate - and a former British Council Language Assistant myself - and having worked outside the UK for much of my career, I know that having some knowledge of languages other than our own can help to open doors, build personal and professional connections, and broaden our understanding of the world. This helps to build trust between people, and between communities. We in the British Council believe that language learning can give our young people the skills and knowledge to look outwards and to engage globally. Languages can also help people to be more competitive in the employment market. So, it is vital that we provide the opportunity for future generations to enrich their lives and communities through language learning.

We are very pleased to share our inaugural *Language Trends Scotland 2024/25* report. We hope that readers of this report will reflect on its findings and, like us, become even stronger advocates for language learning in Scotland.

Peter Brown

Director, British Council Scotland.

Introduction

British Council Scotland is pleased to present the inaugural findings of *Language Trends Scotland 2024/25*.

Language Trends Scotland is a survey of primary and secondary schools in Scotland, designed in collaboration with an in-country expert panel to gather information about the situation for language teaching and learning in local authority and independent schools. Its aims are: (i) to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to languages; and (ii) to analyse strengths and weaknesses in the Scottish school system based both on quantitative evidence and on views expressed by teachers in relation to language learning.

The report is part of the wider *Language Trends* series, which began in 2002 with *Language Trends England*; ever since, there have been annual surveys of primary, secondary and independent schools in England. Since 2015 there has also been an annual survey in Wales, and since 2019 a biennial survey in Northern Ireland. The reports can be found on the British Council Language Trends website.¹ More widely, the *Language Trends* series shows general shifts in data and seeks to provide a springboard for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers, school learners and the public to consider aspects of language learning more deeply.

On behalf of British Council Scotland and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to thank teachers for participating in our research, without whom this report would not be possible.

Headline findings for 2024/25

- Ninety-eight per cent of responding primary schools have taught languages in the 2024/25 school year;
- Sixty-seven per cent of responding primary schools reported that their school does not currently engage with international opportunities for learners and teachers;
- French is the most taught language at S1 and S2, taught to all learners in over 70 per cent of schools; Spanish is taught to all learners in 46 per cent of schools in S1, and 59 per cent in S2;
- Spanish is now the most popular language at Advanced Higher, Higher and National 2 – National 5 combined;
- There are high reported figures of multi-level classes in local authority secondary schools (64 per cent of schools in S4 and 49 per cent of schools at Higher/Advanced Higher);
- Learners are taking language qualifications in all 16 responding independent secondary schools, and half reported that the majority (over 90 per cent) of their learners in S4 are learning a language for a national qualification.

¹ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/research-series/language-trends>.

Policy context and background

Scotland is one of the four nations of the United Kingdom (UK) of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. ‘Devolution’ is the term used to describe the process of transferring power from the centre (Westminster) to the nations and regions of the UK. Education in the UK is a devolved matter, which means the school system and associated qualifications available to young people vary between each nation.

In Scotland, children start school aged 4 or 5 and they remain at primary school until they are 11 or 12. They can then complete their secondary education from age 11-12 up to 17-18.

The Scottish system divides education into different levels rather than key stages as in other parts of the UK. Primary education (P1-P7) covers education for 4–12-year-olds and secondary education (Secondary 1 (S1)-S6) spans ages 11-18, with a focus on Broad General Education (BGE) from primary through until S3, and the Senior Phase in S4-S6.

Pupils from S4 upwards are presented for National Qualifications, including in ascending level of difficulty National 5s, Highers, and Advanced Highers. Broadly, National 5 courses are taken in secondary schools (S4-S6), Highers are taken in S5 and S6, and Advanced Highers in S6. Entrance to universities often does not require Advanced Highers; Highers direct from S5 can pave the way without the need to sit Advanced Highers. Scotland has more world-class universities than any other country by head of population (Universities Scotland, 2024). Further education (FE) is provided by over 20 FE colleges across Scotland.² Anchored in communities, colleges offer a range of vocational courses and qualifications including routes to apprenticeships and flexible modes of study.

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the curriculum for all learners from ages 3 to 18 and it outlines the educational rights that ‘every child and young person is entitled to experience’ from nursery age to secondary education (Education Scotland, 2024a). The CfE is currently undergoing a systematic review named the Curriculum Improvement Cycle in order to ensure the curriculum aligns with the current educational context for learners in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2024b). Integral to a young learners’ educational journey in Scotland is an understanding of the world, the development of key skills and opportunities to enhance individual capabilities and prospects through an educational programme that is designed to prepare learners for life beyond school (Education Scotland, 2024a). Languages are listed as one of the eight curriculum areas, ‘including English, Gàidhlig, Gaelic (Learners), modern languages and classical languages’ (Education Scotland, 2024).

Level	Year Groups	Ages of pupils	CfE requirement to study a language
Early	Pre-school to P1	3-5	Study a Language 2 (L2) from P1
First	P2-P4	5-9	Study L2
Second	P5-P7	9-12	Study a second additional language (L2 + L3)
Third/Fourth	S1-S3	11-15	Study L2 and/or L3 language (preferably one of the L2 or L3 from primary school)
Senior	S4-S6	15-18	Not required

Table 1: CfE requirements to study a language

The Scottish Government’s policy on language learning in schools since 2012 is called the ‘**1+2 Approach**’, according to which learners start a first additional language (called L2) from P1, as well as a second additional language (called L3) between P5 and P7 (Education Scotland, 2017). The policy, funded with £36.8 million from Scottish Government in the period 2013-2023, ensures that all learners have the opportunity to learn a Modern Language until the end of S3. The languages that are studied are determined by the school and local authority; learners can take national qualifications in Cantonese, French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish and Urdu (Education Scotland, 2017). In the secondary stages of education, it is not expected that all young people study two full timetabled language subjects in S1 to S3, but rather that they study an L2 as a full curricular subject and have the opportunity to study an L3, for example, as an elective course or option (Education Scotland, 2019). In an ideal situation, learners would continue with their primary L2 in secondary education to ensure continuity; however, this is not always possible.

² See: <https://collegesscotland.ac.uk/>.

Since 2019, Scottish Government has carried out a biennial survey through local authorities of the implementation of the 1+2 approach. The latest report found that nearly all primary and secondary schools now deliver language learning from P1 and through the BGE.³

Gaelic Medium Education (GME) is immersion, where pupils receive their education – inside and outside of the classroom – through the medium of Gaelic. These pupils experience the benefits of bilingualism. In the primary phase, teachers have three languages to plan for, as in English Medium Education; children are immersed in Gaelic from P1, begin to address the CfE experiences and outcomes in literacy and English from P3/4, and learn a second additional language, L3, from P5. During S1-S3, which concludes the period of BGE, pupils should have the opportunity to continue this L3, in addition to Gàidhlig and English.

Research outline

British Council Scotland commissioned a team from Queen's University Belfast to conduct research for *Language Trends Scotland 2024/25*. Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All participants in the survey gave their voluntary and informed consent to take part. The project followed the British Education Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, which provide support to researchers to enable them to conduct research to the highest ethical standards.

The main guiding research question of the study was: 'what is the current situation for language teaching and learning in local authority and independent primary and secondary schools in Scotland?'. Conducive with the other reports in the *Language Trends* series, the methodology undertaken involved using questionnaires to survey schools in the different sectors. The questionnaires were developed in early 2024 in consultation with an expert Advisory Panel of Scottish schoolteachers, SCILT, Education Scotland, Scottish Government and representatives of Higher Education. Three questionnaires were developed for distribution:

- i) primary survey for local authority and independent schools,
- ii) local authority secondary survey,
- iii) independent secondary survey.

The survey (using questionnaires and hosted on the survey platform Questback) was conducted from late August to the end of September 2024. Using a database of publicly available email addresses for the attention of Headteachers or Faculty Head of Modern Languages, British Council Scotland invited schools to participate via email. Links to participate were also distributed via British Council social media channels and Education Newsletter, and the SCILT weekly bulletin.

After data sets had been cleaned and duplicates removed, a total of 129 local authority primary schools responded from 29 of the 32 local authorities; 113 local authority secondary schools responded from 30 local authorities. In the independent sector, six independent primary schools and 16 independent secondary schools responded.

Table 2 presents the overall response rates by sector, using the base as the number of schools to which we know our invitation email arrived and rounded to the nearest percentage. Given that the links were also distributed via newsletter and social media, it is difficult to calculate an exact response rate.

³ See: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/12-languages-policy-findings-2023-survey-local-authorities/>.

	Primary (local authority)	Primary (independent)	Local authority secondary	Independent secondary
Base figure (emails delivered)	1,524	79	329	68
Number of responses	129	6	113	16
Response rate	8%	8%	34%	24%

Table 2: Survey response rates

Univariate and some multivariate analyses were performed on the quantitative data to identify overall trends; qualitative comments were analysed by means of thematic analysis using deductive coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Public examination figures

This section presents public examination statistics from open access data from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). For the first time in history, Spanish is now the most popular language at all levels of the Senior Phase (S4-S6).

Figure 1 and table 3 show the raw number of Advanced Higher entries in French, German and Spanish from 2015-2024; notably, German and Spanish entries have increased in 2024, while French has decreased by 70 entries since 2023. In 2024, Spanish was the most popular language at both Higher and Advanced Higher, where it has overtaken French for the first time in history.

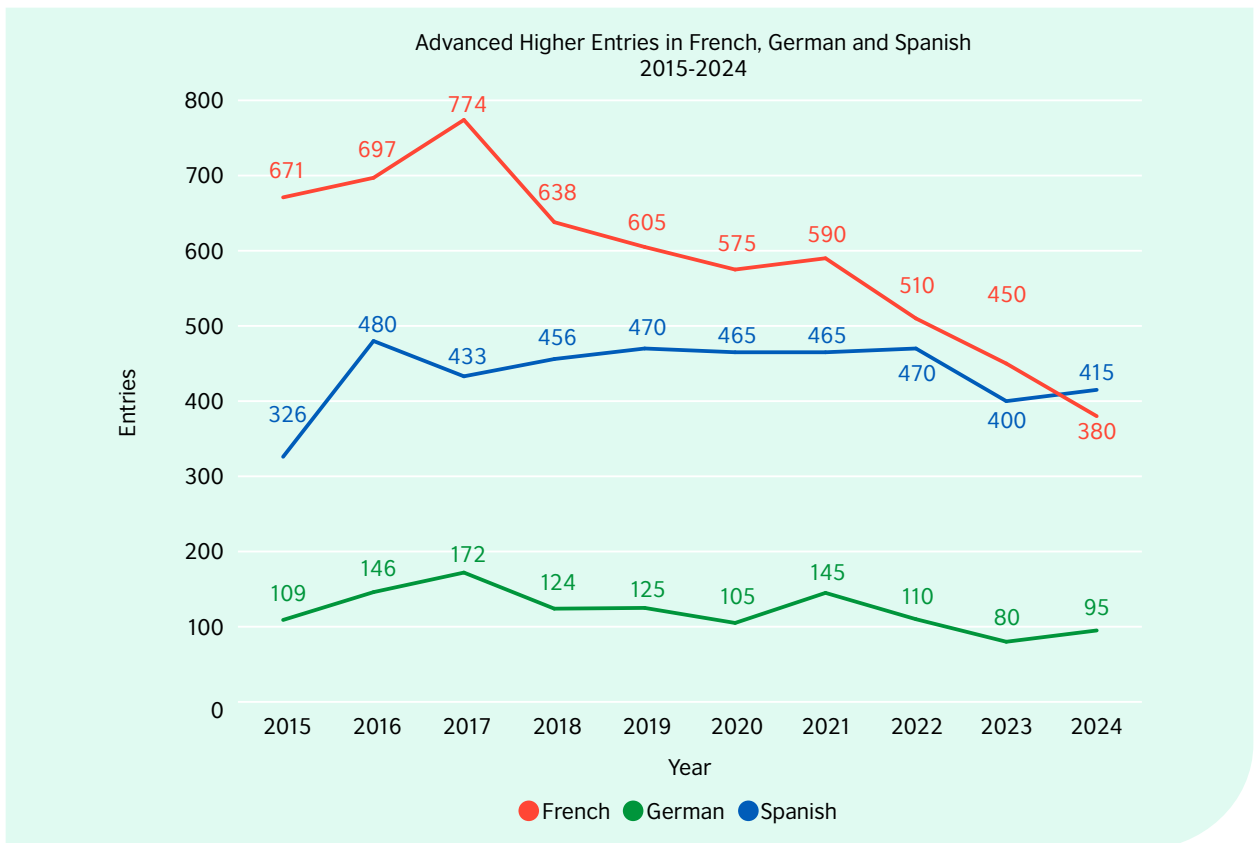


Figure 1: Advanced Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015-2024

	French	German	Spanish
2015	671	109	326
2016	697	146	480
2017	774	172	433
2018	638	124	456
2019	605	125	470
2020	575	105	465
2021	590	145	465
2022	510	110	470
2023	450	80	400
2024	380	95	415

Table 3: Advanced Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015-2024

In table 4, we can see an increase in Advanced Higher entries in Gaelic (L), Italian, Latin and Mandarin (S+T); in particular, Italian entries have more than doubled since 2023.

	Gaelic (L)	Italian	Latin	Mandarin (S+T)
2019	20	25	60	55
2020	10	25	35	55
2021	10	35	35	60
2022	10	35	35	70
2023	10	20	40	85
2024	15	45	45	100

Table 4: Advanced Higher Entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin 2019-2024

Higher entries in French, German and Spanish have increased in 2024; in particular, Spanish entries have risen considerably with an increase of 430 entries since 2023 (see figure 2 and table 5 for raw data).

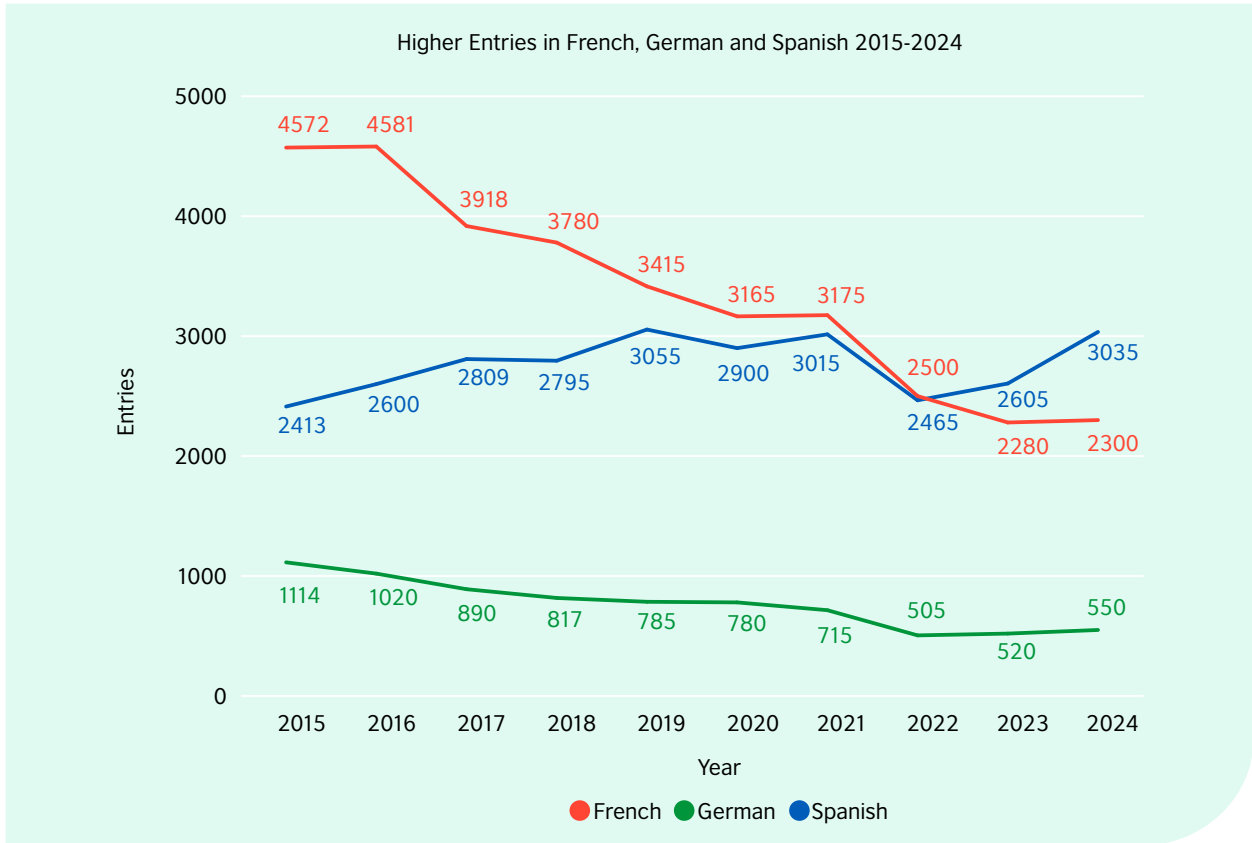


Figure 2: Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015-2024

	French	German	Spanish
2015	4572	1114	2413
2016	4581	1020	2600
2017	3918	890	2809
2018	3780	817	2795
2019	3415	785	3055
2020	3165	780	2900
2021	3175	715	3015
2022	2500	505	2465
2023	2280	520	2605
2024	2300	550	3035

Table 5: Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015-2024

In regard to Other Modern Languages and Latin, we note increases in Higher entries in Cantonese, Mandarin and Urdu. Mandarin entries in 2024 are the highest they have been in the 2019-2024 period (see table 6).

	Cantonese	Gaelic (L)	Italian	Latin	Mandarin (S+T)	Urdu
2019	10	60	220	255	165	90
2020	10	60	240	265	145	120
2021	10	60	180	250	160	95
2022	10	70	170	230	205	90
2023	20	65	215	215	215	80
2024	35	50	190	145	275	100

Table 6: Higher Entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin 2019-2024

Figure 3 and Table 7 show a step decline in Below Higher entries in French since 2023, while Spanish has steadily increased in entries since 2015, and Below Higher German entries are likewise on the rise.

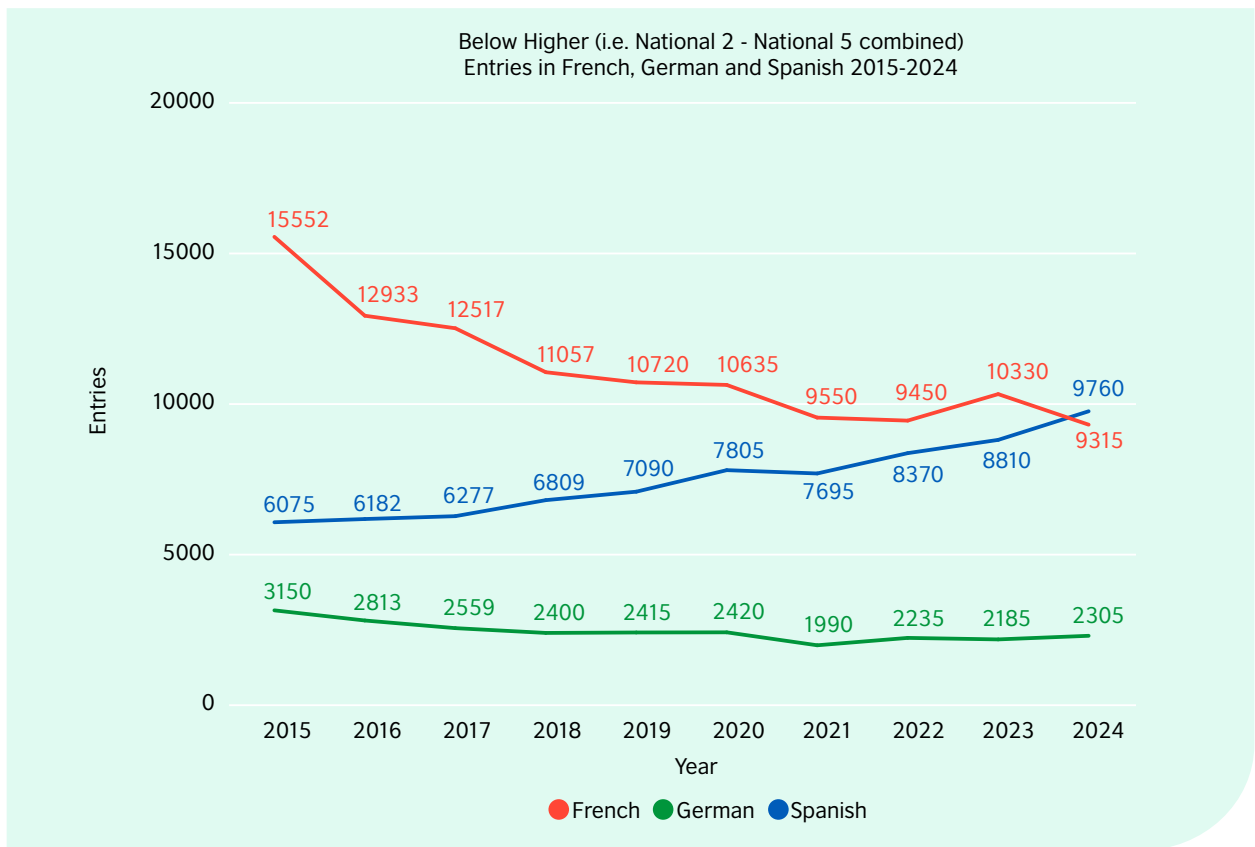


Figure 3: Below Higher (i.e. National 2 – National 5 combined) Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015-2024

	French	German	Spanish
2015	15552	3150	6075
2016	12933	2813	6182
2017	12517	2559	6277
2018	11057	2400	6809
2019	10720	2415	7090
2020	10635	2420	7805
2021	9550	1990	7695
2022	9450	2235	8370
2023	10330	2185	8810
2024	9315	2305	9760

Table 7: Below Higher (i.e. National 2 – National 5 combined) Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015-2024

Echoing the trend for Higher entries in Other Modern Languages, 2024 Below Higher Mandarin entries are the highest recorded for that language within the 2019-2024 period, and there is a significant increase in Mandarin entries between 2023 and 2024. Unlike with Higher entries, we note increases in Below Higher Gaelic (L), Italian and Latin entries; in particular, entries in Italian have increased significantly since 2023.

	Cantonese	Gaelic (L)	Italian	Latin	Mandarin (S+T)	Urdu
2019	*	220	295	375	235	115
2020	5	205	410	405	285	135
2021	5	195	240	360	270	85
2022	*	210	395	425	285	115
2023	10	175	270	345	315	145
2024	25	280	485	385	450	135

Table 8: Below Higher (i.e. National 2 – National 5 combined) Entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin 2019-2024 [* denotes fewer than 5 entries]

Findings from local authority primary schools

Profile of responding primary schools

According to the most up-to-date statistics available published by the Scottish Government, there are 1,988 publicly funded primary schools in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2023). Using the publicly available roll call of Scottish schools, we emailed survey invites to primary schools in late August; the research team calculated that emails arrived in approximately 1,524 school office accounts, addressed for the attention of the Headteacher. Participants were also invited to participate via British Council Scotland social media channels and, in total, 129 local authority primary schools responded to the survey resulting in a response rate of eight per cent.

We received responses from schools located in 29 out of the 32 local authorities; table 9 shows the geographical distribution of primary schools who responded to the survey.

Region	Areas & Cities within Region	% of responding schools
Aberdeen and North East	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray	12%
Highland and Islands	Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highland, Orkney, Shetland	9%
Tayside, Central and Fife	Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling	28%
Edinburgh and Lothians	City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian	16%
Glasgow and Strathclyde	East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	22%
Scotland South	Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders	13%

Table 9: Percentage of responding local authority primary schools by region

Curricular languages in primary schools in Scotland

The survey asked all responding local authority primary schools if they taught British Sign Language (BSL) as part of the curriculum. Twenty-two per cent of all responding schools teach BSL and commented the following:

“Yes, the teacher teaches this as part of the 1 plus 2 pledge. Pupils perform BSL at school shows and around school to support complex needs children.”

“Yes - there are a couple of teachers who have some knowledge of BSL and teach it to P5-7 (this will be done sometime throughout the year but not every week or every term).”

“We have taught it with a variety of classes, but it is not a core part of the curriculum.”

In the 2024/25 school year, 98 per cent (n=127) of responding primary schools told us that their school had provided language teaching as part of the curriculum. French is by far the most taught L2 language, and part and parcel of the school day in 83 per cent of schools with language teaching. Figure 4 shows that Spanish is taught in over a third of primary schools for L3. In ‘other’ comments, respondents also noted the teaching of BSL, Japanese, Polish and Arabic.

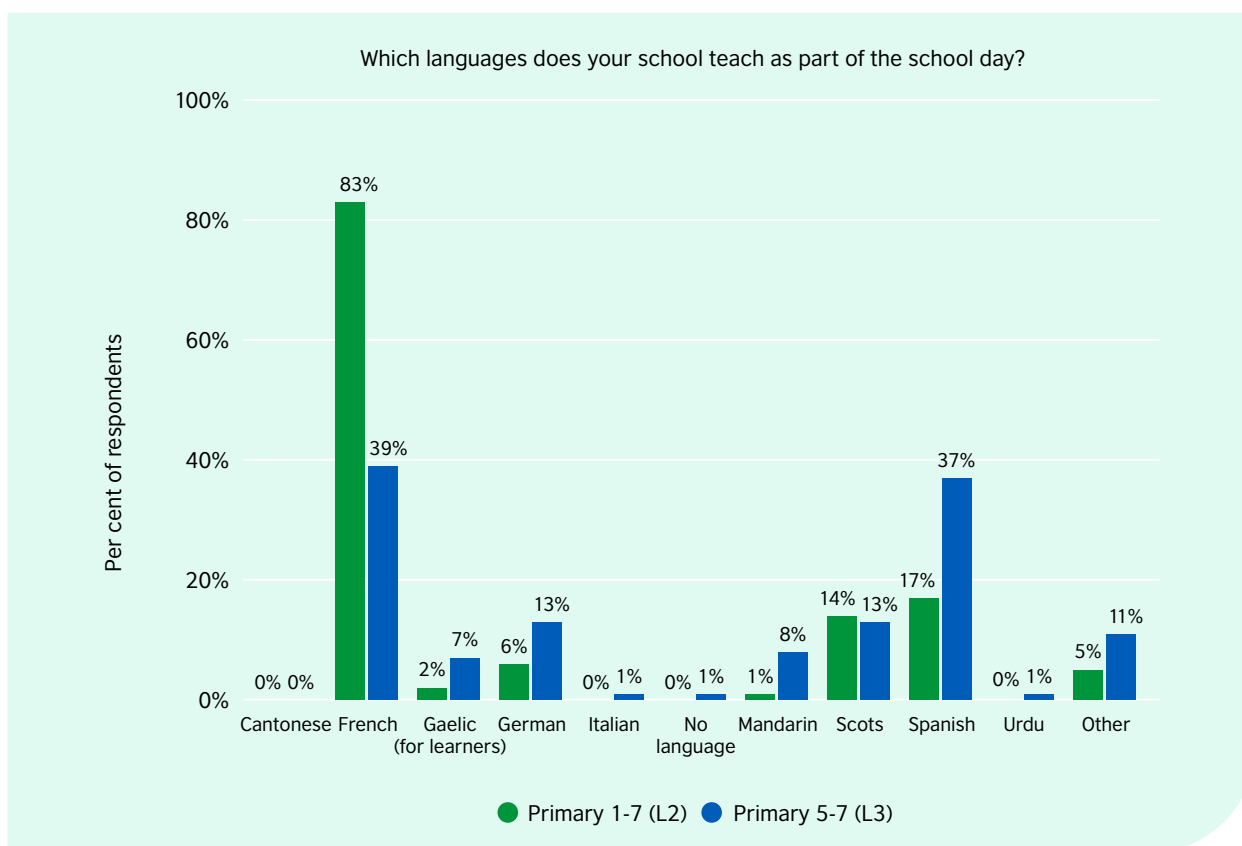


Figure 4: Respondent answers to ‘Which languages does your school teach as part of the school day? Please tick all that apply. If you select ‘other’, please state which language in the box provided.’

Primary schools were asked when they started teaching languages; 77 per cent started teaching a L2 language more than five years ago, while 40 per cent started teaching a L3 language more than five years ago.

In the primary classroom, language lessons are taught mainly by a classroom teacher (94 per cent of responding schools). Teachers from a local secondary school (in 12 per cent of responding schools) or a specialist language teacher (in 11 per cent of responding schools) will occasionally deliver language lessons.

Who provides language teaching?	Mainly	Occasionally
Classroom teacher	94%	5%
Specialist language teacher based in the school	10%	11%
Peripatetic specialist language teacher	2%	9%
Teacher(s) from local secondary school	2%	12%
Teacher provided by a cultural institute	2%	3%
Student teacher	1%	5%
Teaching staff from transition visits/projects	1%	10%
Modern Language Assistant	0%	2%
S6 learner	0%	5%
Volunteer parent	0%	8%
Community volunteer groups	0%	2%
We don't offer language teaching	0%	1%

Table 10: Respondent answers to ‘For curricular languages, who provides language teaching in your school? (tick all that apply)’

Just over forty per cent of schools reported that the classroom teacher did not have a languages qualification of any kind. In comments, respondents noted the following in relation to qualifications and training:

“Some do, but not all. Training has been provided by the local authority. Extra courses offered.”

“All classroom teachers have completed appropriate training to deliver the primary language curriculum in at least one if not two languages.”

“No languages qualification - teacher taught through Primary Teaching Degree.”

Time for languages in local authority primary schools

Through the 1+2 approach in Scotland, primary schools are encouraged to embed language learning into the curriculum but there are no mandated required teaching hours for language learning.⁴ Schools were asked to state, for each year group, the total amount of class time per week allocated for language learning. For around a fifth of schools, languages are embedded into the curriculum and general class time throughout primary level. Few schools dedicate more than one hour to language learning; between 42 per cent and 60 per cent teach languages for 30 minutes to one hour.

	Primary						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No time	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Less than 30 minutes	34%	31%	20%	13%	7%	6%	6%
30 minutes to one hour	42%	46%	56%	60%	57%	54%	54%
More than one hour but less than 90 minutes	4%	4%	6%	11%	16%	17%	18%
90 minutes to two hours	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	9%	8%
More than two hours	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%
We embed languages into the curriculum and general class time	20%	20%	20%	18%	19%	18%	19%
I don't know	3%	3%	4%	3%	2%	3%	2%

Table 11: Respondent answers to ‘Please state, for each year group, the total amount of class time per week allocated for language learning (if learners learn more than one language, please give total)’

Resources for primary language teaching

Primary school respondents told us about the wide variety of resources that they use to craft and plan their programme for curricular language learning. Nearly forty per cent of respondents noted the use of online resources in their comments, including BBC Bitesize, Languagenut, Camembear from Headstart Languages, Twinkl, Linguascope and YouTube videos. Respondents also mentioned using PowerLanguage resources and teaching materials provided by local authorities. Some schools note using a combination of teaching resources:

“We have a bespoke resource Lingobox which we used our 1+2 funding to create. We made our progressive pathways and framework for P1-7 L2 and P5-7 L3 and then created the resource to fit [...]. We also have access to Power Language Schools. In addition, we use resources/ideas from SCILT and other websites/organisations as well as making use of parents and native speakers where possible. We are also supported by S6 language ambassadors from our local high school.”

When asked if they use Apps to help learners with language learning, 42 per cent told us they did. This included Seesaw, specialised ASN apps, Say Hi, Blookit, Linguascope, Languagenut, Duolingo, BBC Languages, Chatterprix and other language education websites.

Survey respondents were also asked if they used any of the resources listed in table 12 for language teaching. Seventy per cent of respondents use resources produced in their school; around fifty per cent use commercially produced resources (53 per cent) and/or national resources from Education Scotland (49 per cent). Just under a third reported using resources signposted by SCILT. In ‘other’ comments,

⁴ See the following guidance for further information: <https://education.gov.scot/resources/a-1plus2-approach-to-modern-languages/>.

respondents noted local authority programmes and resources, as well as online resources.

Resources produced in school	70%
Commercially produced resources	53%
National resources from Education Scotland	49%
Resources signposted from the SCILT website	29%
Other	23%
Cluster secondary school	19%
Resources produced by other schools	19%
Resources provided by the British Council	12%
Drawing on the resources of multilingual learners and parents	12%
Resources provided by cultural institutes	10%
Stòrlann	3%

Table 12: Respondent answers to 'Which resources do you use for language teaching? (tick all that apply)'

When asked if they had received funding in the school year for the development of primary language resources, the majority (81 per cent) reported that they had not; 14 per cent did not know, and five per cent responded yes.

Primary schools were asked what kind of resources would be helpful in an ideal world to teach languages; we received a variety of responses, including a need for specialist language teachers, bilingual books and access to free online resources. Some comments also expressed a desire for one cohesive bank of resources that all primary schools would have access to:

"A box of resources and a programme of learning key vocab P1-7 for ALL primary schools."

"A resource that can be used in composite classes that is consistent all the way through."

"Bank of lessons with audio scripts for class teachers with clear progression from P1-P7."

"Some ready-made 'pick up and go' resource packs for different topic areas. Sound files/recordings of key vocabulary."

English as an Additional Language in primary schools

The majority of responding primary schools (81 per cent) have learners for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). The survey asked whether and how schools integrate learners' home languages into the curriculum. Around 80 per cent of schools responded to this question, with the majority of responses demonstrating an inclusive approach to the linguistic integration of EAL learners within the wider school community. Teachers noted the use of daily greetings, AI technology, celebrations of diversity in assemblies and the translation of resources into home languages:

"We celebrate other languages all throughout the year and during Languages Week [Scotland]. We have language ambassadors who planned for that week. We also integrate and celebrate languages e.g. tuck shop showcasing snacks/food from different countries."

"English is the primary language for the children at our school at home. There are several children who come from bilingual households and we celebrate those languages throughout the year especially during Languages Week Scotland."

"We created an EAL padlet in our school and use that to help the teachers support new pupils. It has EAL resources and ideas. We try to use the language of the pupil where possible eg in greetings, labelling items, digital translation, Languagenut etc."

Some teachers noted the difficulty in integrating all languages into the school community, but how they have made efforts through multilingual signage in the school and learning basic words from other languages:

"Very difficult to do. We have sporadic acknowledgements of other languages (e.g. we made a video with children saying Happy New Year in their home language...). I am working on children writing their names for their pegs in their HL."

Language learning clusters and primary schools

In the Scottish education system, learning clusters are made up of a group of schools based around a local secondary school, with the aim of providing a supportive framework for shared school priorities and improvements (Education Scotland, 2024c). This includes supporting staff by sharing resources, teaching expertise and budget allocations across the 23 learning clusters in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2024c).

Language Trends Scotland asked primary schools if they have contact with a local authority secondary school within their cluster in relation to language learning, and 60 per cent of responding schools reported yes. Table 13 shows the type of contact that those primary schools have with a local secondary school in relation to language learning (percentage calculated out of number of schools with contact [n=77]).

	Raw figure	%
We exchange information on language teaching informally	36	47%
We take part in network/cluster meetings	35	45%
We provide information on learner progress in language learning at the point of transfer to S1	33	43%
L2 and L3 language classes are taught in our local secondary school	15	19%
A local secondary school provides language teaching in my school	11	14%
Other (please specify)	8	10%
A local secondary school provides training for teachers of languages in my school	7	9%
We collaborate on planning units of work in languages	7	9%
A local secondary school provides our scheme of work	4	5%
We plan language lessons together	3	4%
We observe each other's lessons	0	0%

Table 13: Type of contact primary schools have with a local authority secondary school in their cluster (percentage calculated out of number of schools who reported contact [n=77])

From the table, we can see that nearly half of primary schools in contact with secondary schools exchange information on language teaching informally. Forty-five per cent take part in network/cluster meetings, and 43 per cent provide information on learner progress in language learning at the point of transfer to S1. In 'other' comments, respondents noted: i) transition events; ii) asking for advice when needed; iii) visits from specialist teachers; iv) lessons provided by secondary school to P7; and v) they collaborate on student teacher exchanges.

International dimension in primary schools

Primary schools surveyed were asked whether they had links with any outside organisations to promote language learning; over two-fifths of schools reported that they had no links with outside organisations. One fifth of schools have links with Education Scotland, and 17 per cent have links with SCILT, in relation to the promotion of language learning. Very few schools reported links with the British Council, employers and local Further Education Colleges.

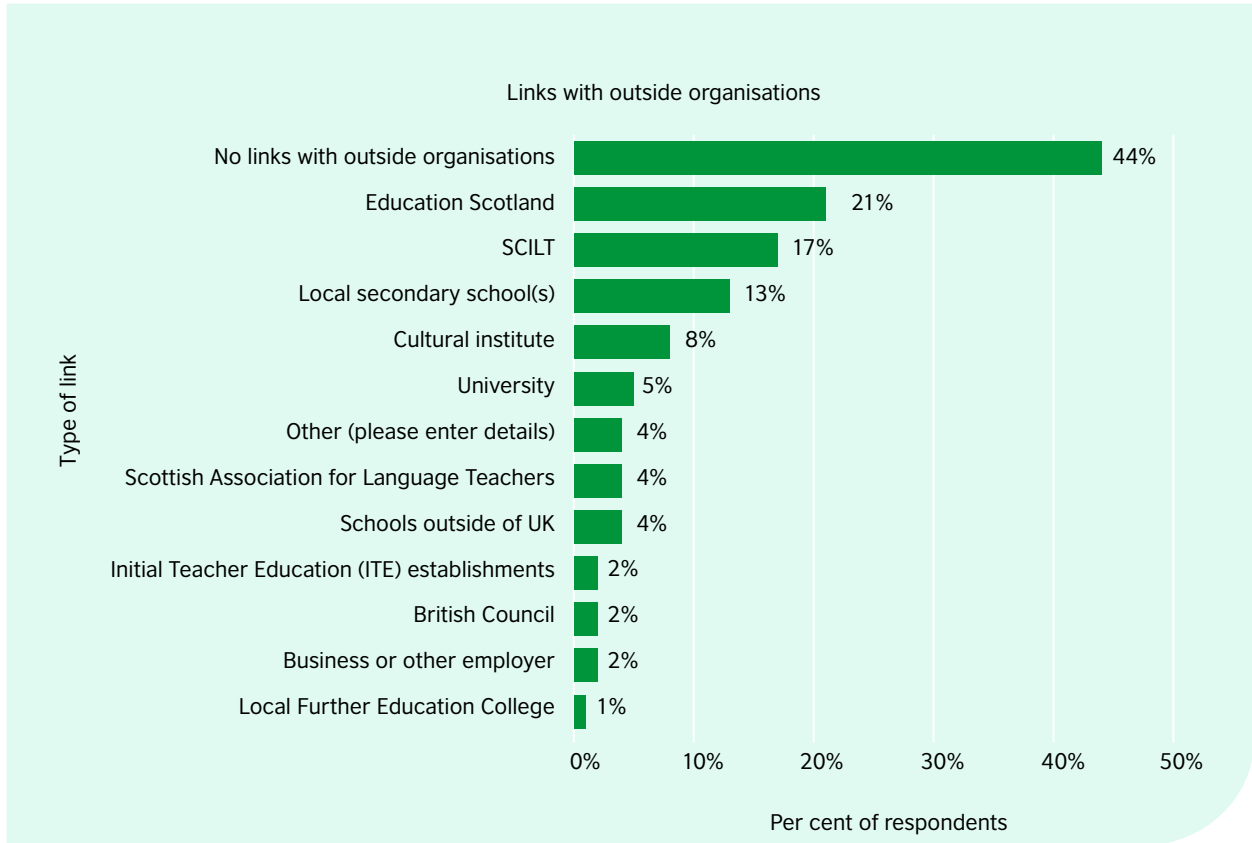


Figure 5: Respondent answers to ‘Do you have links with any outside organisations to promote language learning? (tick all that apply)’

Eight per cent of respondents noted links with the following cultural institutes: Institut français (six schools), Confucius Institute (five schools), Consejería de Educación (three schools), Goethe-Institut (one school) and Alliance Française (one school).

When asked about the opportunities for international engagement for learners and teachers in their schools, two-thirds of respondents reported that there are none (see figure 6). Twelve per cent have online/digital links with schools outside of the UK, while five per cent of respondents are involved in international projects, British Council events/resources and partner schools respectively. Only three per cent of schools reported hosting a language assistant (German, French, Mandarin).

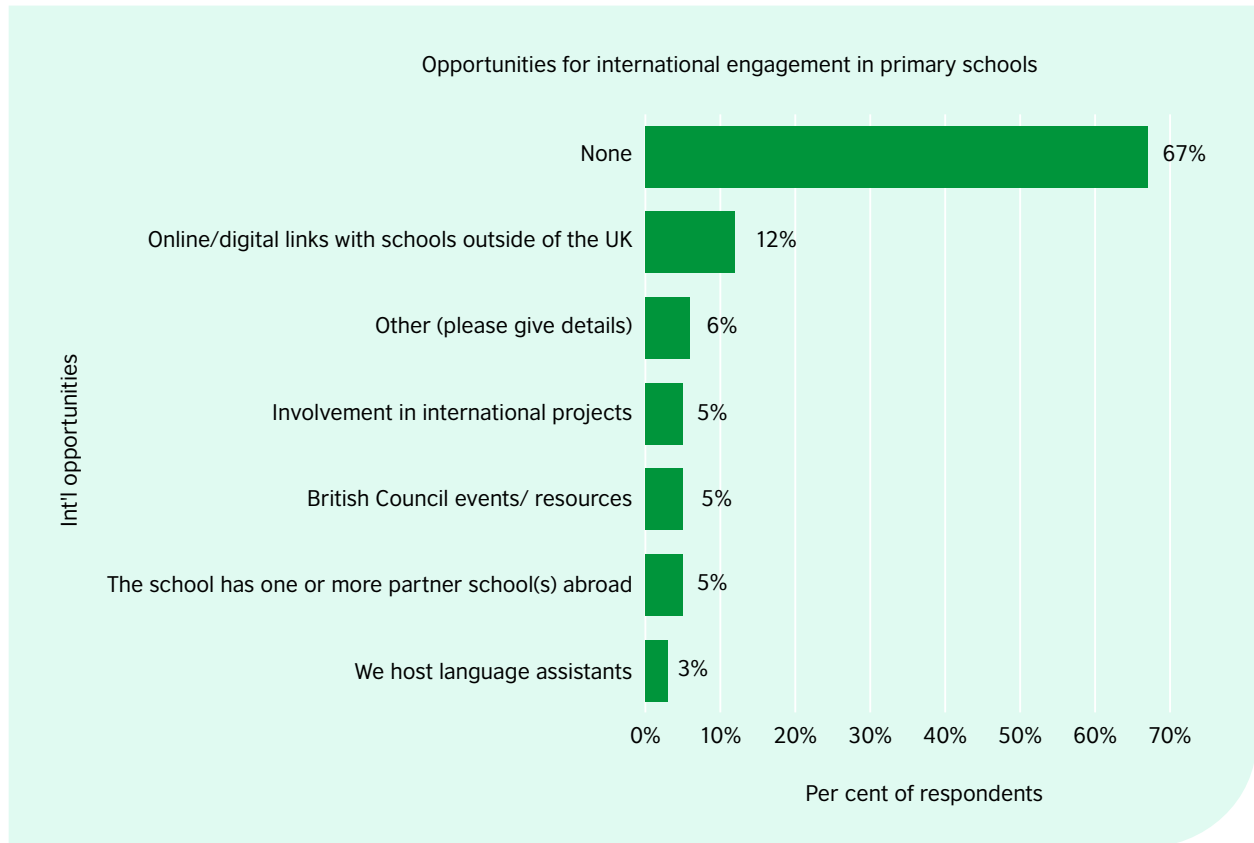


Figure 6: Respondents answers to 'What opportunities are there for international engagement for learners and teachers at your school? (Please tick at least one and all that apply)'

Teacher challenges and recommendations

All primary survey respondents were asked to comment on the most significant barrier(s) that they are facing in delivering language lessons, and all but six respondents answered this question.

A lack of teacher confidence and time in the school week (both to teach a language and to prepare for teaching a language) were the two most frequently occurring responses. Respondents mentioned the word 'confidence' 50 times, and the issue of time was mentioned 48 times:

"Classroom teachers lacking in confidence to teach L2 (French). They may not have any of experience of French themselves up until now and this is a real barrier to build on language learning and progression."

"Confidence and ability of class teacher to deliver quality lessons."

"Confidence of staff and crowded timetable."

"Pressure of time in the curriculum. Lack of qualified staff."

"Time in an already overloaded curriculum. Staff confidence."

"Time in the curriculum and confidence of teachers to deliver engaging and challenging language lessons."

"Time within the curriculum, including lack of time for additional teacher training, lack of confidence in teaching another language."

Other key barriers noted by several respondents included teacher knowledge, with one respondent noting that 'knowledge, experience, pedagogy and confidence', or lack thereof, can impede the delivery of language lessons. Others noted how teacher knowledge of where to find up to date resources could be a challenge, while several noted a lack of teacher knowledge in the language that they teach to be a significant barrier:

"Lack of teacher knowledge. Many of our teachers have no training or previous knowledge in French or BSL and need to spend time learning the vocabulary and prepare/source resources before being able to teach the class."

"Time, resources, lack of staff knowledge/skill in languages."

"I do not have specialist qualifications and no personal knowledge of French, so find it difficult to teach."

Over 20 respondents commented that a lack of resources presented a key barrier to effective language teaching and learning:

“Funding to provide adequate resources to allow more effective teaching.”

“Lack of resources, teacher confidence with teaching languages, no access to specialist teacher.”

“Expense of buying in resources like reading books, comics and magazines in target languages.”

The survey asked respondents what additional support their school would welcome for the development of primary language teaching. Twenty-eight respondents mentioned resources; some noted a need to update the resources currently available, as well as well-funded, comprehensive and accessible resources to support both non-specialist and specialist primary practitioners with teaching languages:

“A fully funded national programme and resources to support the teaching of languages by non-specialists. A French/German/Spanish version of Go Gaelic! would be ideal.”

“Comprehensive language resources with all aspects of listen, talking and reading covered.”

“An up-to-date programme of resources, accessible to children, workable for already very busy teachers with poor language skills (I’m keen and see the use of it but I only have Higher French and a TEFL certificate). Some of the resources I once used to teach English would be fantastic if there were French equivalents.”

“Programme with online resources/links by stage or on a 3 year rolling programme for L3 languages to use at assembly.”

Several respondents noted how specialist language teachers could help develop primary language learning:

“Having a specialist language teacher would be excellent even if it was in blocks of time and support teachers to deliver more confident Modern Language lessons.”

“Language specialists in school modelling good practice/offering CPD.”

“Regular input from specialists, that we don’t have to pay for.”

“Specialist peripatetic staff working alongside school staff. We did have this a few years ago.”

Respondents also mentioned the provision of training opportunities as key to supporting the teaching of primary languages:

“All teachers to be provided with appropriate training to enable them to take over from the current specialist.”

“An engagement from Scottish Government in Erasmus again and a realistic commitment to quality language training for all staff.”

“Fully funding training as it used to be - a 20 week course with intro to the language and how to teach it.”

“More training for staff. Expected to teach French and Spanish but many haven’t even done a basic level on either of these.”

Findings from local authority secondary schools

Profile of responding secondary schools

One hundred and thirteen local authority secondary schools responded to the *Language Trends Scotland 2024/25* survey. According to the latest figures from the Scottish Government, there are 361 local authority secondary schools in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2023). We know email invites arrived in the inboxes of 329 schools, addressed to the Head of Languages. Using the known number of emails delivered as a base figure, the research team calculated a response rate of 34 per cent; this is much healthier than the comparable 21 per cent of state secondary schools responding to the most recent iteration of *Language Trends England*. Table 14 shows the distribution of responding schools by region; over a third of responding schools are in the Glasgow and Strathclyde region, though this is not overly surprising given population density.

Region	Areas & Cities within Region	% of responding schools
Aberdeen and North East	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray	18%
Highland and Islands	Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highland, Orkney, Shetland	14%
Tayside, Central and Fife	Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling	17%
Edinburgh and Lothians	City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian	7%
Glasgow and Strathclyde	East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	37%
Scotland South	Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders	7%

Table 14: Percentage of responding secondary schools by region

The free school meal (FSM) data available indicates the socio-economic profile of a school. In Scotland, all children in P1 to P5 are provided with free school meals. After P5, children are eligible for school meals if they live in a household that receives:

- i) income-related benefits (such as Universal credit);
- ii) Child Tax Credit and household income is less than £19,995;
- iii) both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit and household income of up to £9,552 (Scottish Government, 2024).

Sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds are also eligible if they receive benefits themselves.

Based on the data available from the 2023 school census (Scottish Government, 2023),⁵ the research team calculated the FSM quintiles for local authority secondary schools from least deprived to most deprived. A truly representative sample of local authority secondary schools in Scotland should have 20 per cent of responding schools in each quintile. In table 15, we can see that 50 per cent of respondents are in quintiles 1 and 2 (the least deprived). This may mean that the survey results reflect a more positive picture than the current reality in many schools.

⁵ For the dataset used, see <https://www.gov.scot/collections/school-education-statistics/#summarystatisticsforschoolsinScotland>.

Quintile	Quintile range	Percentage of responding schools in each quintile
1 – least deprived	0.0-8.7%	23%
2	8.8-13.3%	27%
3	13.4-18.6%	18%
4	18.7-24.8%	19%
5 – most deprived	24.9% and above	14%

Table 15: FSM quintiles for local authority secondary schools in Scotland and the percentage of responding secondary schools in each quintile

Language teaching and learners in S1-S4

The *Language Trends Scotland* survey asked local authority secondary schools which languages their learners were studying in S1 to S3 as part of the normal school day. In the majority of responding schools, French is the most taught language in S1 and S2, taught to all learners in over 70 per cent of schools (see table 16). Spanish is the second most taught language, taught to all learners in 46 per cent of schools in S1, and 59 per cent in S2. This is followed by German, taught to all learners in 12 per cent of responding schools in S1 and S2. By S3, there is a significant decrease in the number of schools reporting that all their learners are studying a language as part of the school day. For example, by S3, only 12 per cent of schools reported that all learners study French. In 'other' comments, a small number of respondents also noted the teaching of BSL and Latin.

Language	S1 all learners	S1 some learners	S2 all learners	S2 some learners	S3 all learners	S3 some learners
Cantonese	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
French	75%	18%	72%	21%	12%	74%
Gàidhlig (fluent)	1%	8%	1%	7%	1%	8%
Gaelic (Learners)	4%	6%	3%	7%	0%	9%
German	12%	17%	12%	20%	4%	35%
Italian	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	4%
Mandarin (Simplified and/or Traditional)	2%	4%	2%	5%	0%	4%
Scots	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Spanish	46%	11%	59%	16%	15%	67%
Urdu	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
No language	0%	4%	0%	4%	1%	6%
Other	0%	3%	0%	2%	0%	3%

Table 16: Respondent answers to 'Which language(s) are your learners learning in S1-S3 as part of the normal school day? If you select 'other', please type the language(s) in the space provided.'

Schools were asked if they taught BSL as part of the curriculum; eight schools told us they offer it and commented that i) it is offered as an elective; ii) there is a lunchtime club; iii) Introduction BSL is currently offered as a Meta Skill for a block of 9 weeks in S1 (double period 2x 50 minutes) using the Highland pack; and, iv) it is offered as a taster class. In one school, S3 learners can choose BSL as a timetabled subject. A couple of schools expressed an interest in teaching BSL in the future.

The number of total periods allocated weekly on the timetable in schools for language learning varies by year group amongst respondents. In table 17, we can see that a small number of schools deliver one period of language learning from S1 to S3. In S1, just over 60 per cent of responding schools deliver three periods of language learning per week; in S3, 66 per cent also deliver three periods. None, or very few schools, reported delivering more than four periods of language learning per week in S1-S3. In S4, schools reported that more time is spent on language learning than in earlier levels; for over 80 per cent of schools, learners study languages for either four periods (55 per cent) or more than four periods (28 per cent) in S4.

	Less than 1 period	1 period	2 periods	3 periods	4 periods	More than 4 periods
S1	0%	4%	22%	61%	12%	1%
S2	0%	3%	19%	59%	18%	0%
S3	0%	1%	12%	66%	18%	4%
S4	0%	0%	0%	13%	55%	28%

Table 17: Respondent answers to 'Please state, for each year group, the total amount of class time per week allocated for language learning (if pupils learn more than one language, please give total).'

Under the 1+2 policy, all learners are entitled to learn at least one Modern Language until S3, or the end of their BGE. The survey asked respondents what proportion of the cohort in S1 to S4 were studying more than one language (see figure 7). S1 and S2 have the highest figures of all learners in responding schools studying more than one language (52 per cent of all learners in S1, 64 per cent in S2). However, by S3 this figure drops to three per cent, and zero in S4. Figure 7 shows that there is a significant decrease in the number of learners studying more than one language after S2, with over 60 per cent of schools reporting that none or less than five per cent of the cohort study more than one language in S3 (no learners reported in 34 per cent of schools, less than five per cent of the cohort reported in 31 per cent of schools). By S4, 48 per cent of secondary schools reported that less than five per cent of the cohort study more than one language, and 30 per cent reported none.

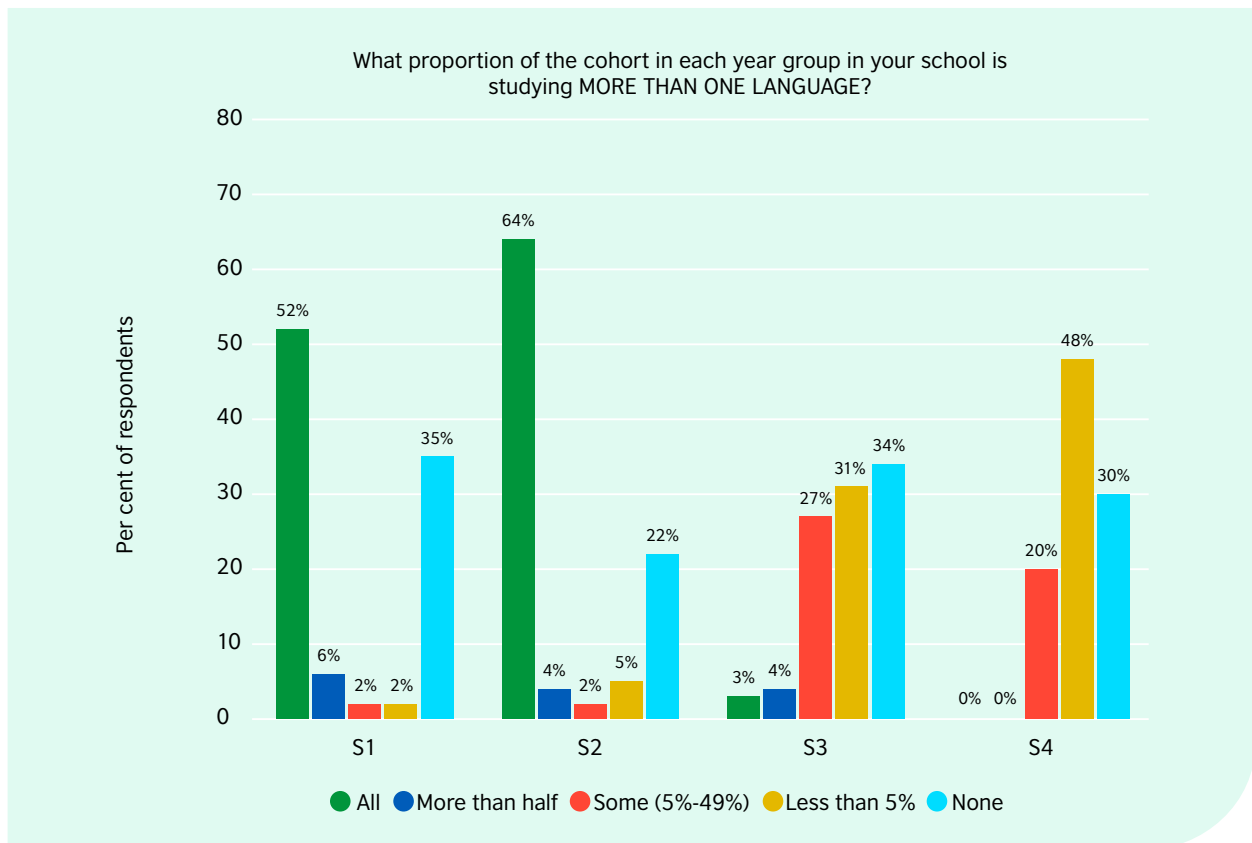


Figure 7: Respondent answers to 'What proportion of the cohort in each year group in your school is studying more than one language?'

Language learning in S4

Responding secondary schools were asked about their approach to uptake in languages in S4. Two-thirds of respondents reported that their school runs multi-level classes, and just over half run bi-level classes in S4. The high number of schools reporting that multi-level classes are run is evidence of a key challenge facing language teachers in Scotland who are expected to cover a range of levels in a classroom of learners with different levels of ability.

Timetabling constraints inhibit all learners from studying a language in 55 per cent of responding schools, and classes do not run in just over half of schools if learner numbers are too low. In a significant majority of responding schools, learners are not required to study a language in S4.

In 'other' comments, respondents noted that i) learners have free choices; ii) the range of levels in multi-level classes from N3 to Advanced Higher make it difficult to teach; and, iii) learners travel to another local school to study French.

The school runs multi-level classes	64%
The school runs bi-level classes	55%
Timetabling means that not all learners are able to take a language	55%
Classes do not run if there are not enough learners	52%
Some learners may be advised by guidance teachers not to take a language	46%
Classes run regardless of low learner numbers	26%
Lower than average attaining learners are discouraged from choosing a language	12%
The school strongly recommends that all learners take a language	9%
Other (please specify)	8%
The school offers online provision for learning a language through e-Sgoil	4%
All learners MUST take a language	3%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able take a language	1%

Table 18: Respondent answers to 'What is your school's approach to take-up for languages in S4? Tick all which apply.'

Respondents were asked to think about the past three years and consider how the proportion of learners studying a language in S4 has changed, if at all. Over a third of respondents reported that fewer learners now take a language at S4, while a fifth consider there to be more language learners at S4. A further fifth of respondents reported that there is no clear trend and numbers fluctuate yearly. In 'other' comments, one respondent commented that they run 'a 2:2:2 model so learners choose qualifications at the end of S2'.

Fewer learners now take a language at S4	35%
More learners now take a language at S4	22%
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	20%
Similar numbers to before	18%
Other (please specify)	3%
Languages are mandatory for all learners at S4	2%

Table 19: Respondent answers to 'Thinking about the past three years, how has the proportion of learners studying a language in S4 changed (if at all)?'

The survey asked respondents to comment further on the drivers of change to S4 language learner numbers; in those schools who reported fewer learners taking a language, respondents noted low importance placed on language learning by senior management, perceived difficulty of languages, concerns about teacher recruitment and retention, competition with other subjects and that learners do not see the relevance of learning a language:

"Pupils do not see the relevance of learning a Modern Language, and how it can benefit them in the future. They also perceive Languages to be a difficult subject."

"There is a perception that languages are too difficult and also that STEM subjects are more useful and important."

“Low importance on languages from senior management. Pupils told during options meetings to pick something easier [...]. Pupils see no value in languages.”

“Competition from other curricular areas, particularly sciences, where there has been a big drive to engage girls in particular, is having an impact on uptake, too.”

“German was previously offered and was for many years equal to French in presentation (50/50) until languages became optional about 15 years ago - because of retirement and non-replacement of German teachers Spanish has replaced German as French staff retrained to deliver Spanish.”

“Staffing issues and covid restrictions have meant a decrease in pupil engagement.”

“It is a disaster. Pupils are not encouraged by SLT and Guidance team to continue to learn a language after S2. Pupils find language learning too demanding/difficult. They opt for easy options.”

Amongst respondents who reported that more learners take a language at S4, comments included developing a positive experience of language learning early on and support from senior management:

“Numbers have increased dramatically in recent years and we believe that the driver for change has come from changes in staffing and course overhauls in the BGE.”

“Increased S4 language learners. Positive experience in S1-3; Good relationships with teachers; High quality teaching and learning; Very strong (and publicised) attainment patterns; Supportive senior leadership; Staff expertise in SQA marking/appointee roles.”

“Our school introduced an additional National Qualification in the course choice forms. This helped increase our numbers in the Senior Phase.”

“Going back to 2/2/2 as a school allows pupils to do 8 N4/5 subjects which has increased numbers. Also having staff who are dual qualified in French and Spanish.”

“A really focused drive by staff to raise the profile of languages, inviting guest speakers, running language events across the school, organising trips abroad. Running an effective Language Ambassador programme with senior school students supporting the younger ones and visiting a local primary school.”

Opportunities to learn languages as enrichment subjects

The survey asked schools if any of their learners were currently learning any languages as extra-curricular or enrichment subjects. A quarter of schools reported that they did not know (27 per cent S1-S3, 25 per cent S4-S6) if learners studied any extra-curricular language subjects. Very small numbers reported some teaching of languages as enrichment subjects, including Arabic, Italian, Mandarin, Polish and Sign Language (see figure 8). In the ‘other’ category, respondents also noted the learning of Japanese, Gaelic, Korean, Latin and Swedish.

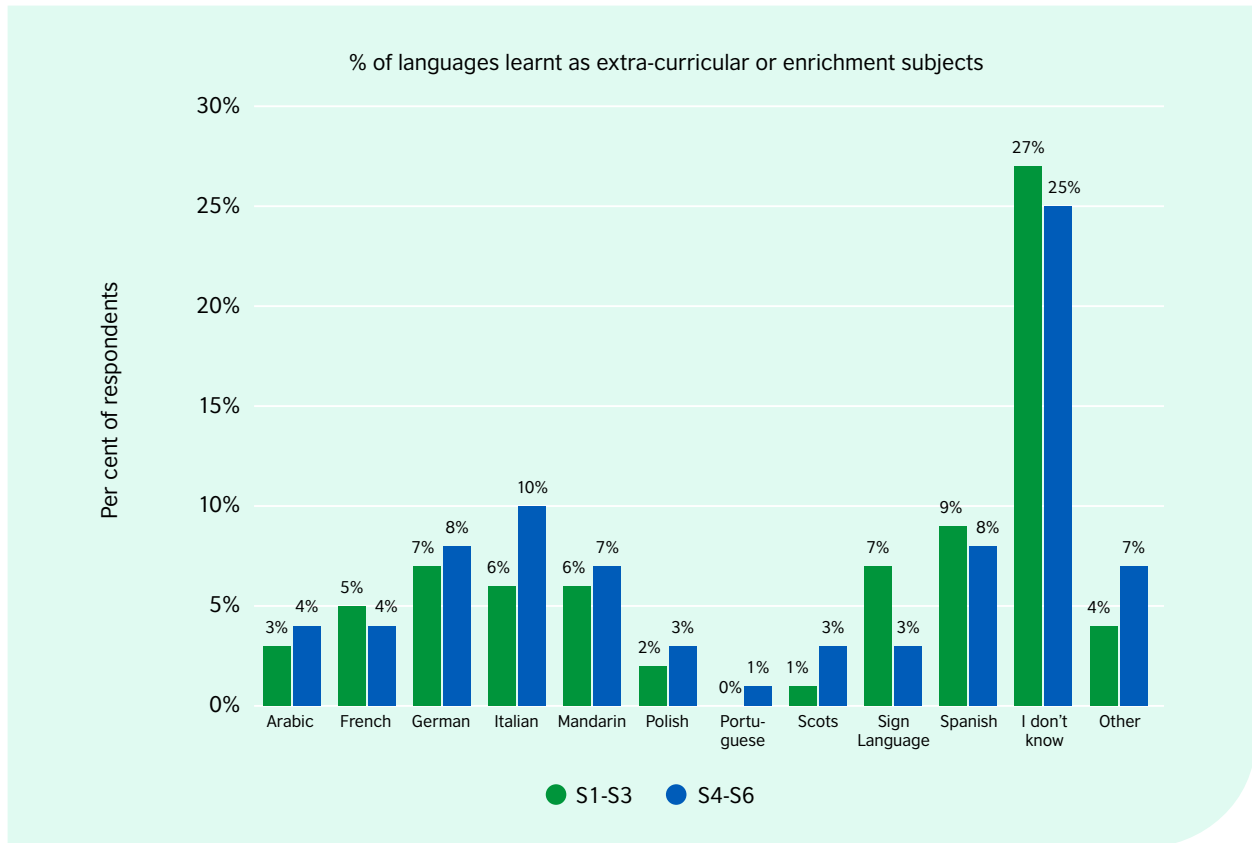


Figure 8: Respondent answers to 'Are any of your learners currently learning any of the following languages as extra-curricular or enrichment subjects?'

The SQA Modern Languages for Life and Work (MLLW) award is for learners in S3 to S6, Further Education (FE) institutes or other vocational centres, and aims to enhance employability and develop language skills in cultural contexts (such as health, technology, travel) in one or two modern languages (SQA, 2017). The award can be taken in Cantonese, French, Gaelic (Learners), German, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Urdu from SCQF level 3 to SCQF level 7 (SQA website).⁶

Nearly half of responding schools (48 per cent) reported that they offer the MLLW award in SCQF level 4, and a quarter offer it at level 5; six per cent reported to offer the award at level 7.

Respondents were asked if they would welcome a means of recognising achievement in languages at the end of the BGE; a third responded yes, and their comments included the following:

"Yes - I think some sort of recognition is important, especially for those who do not continue with a language."

"Yes. In the past we have done N3 units and considered Languages for Life and Work. Showing achievement in the four skills would be good."

"Yes, however it would have to be a record of achievement which did not detract from pupils achieving N5 and be encouraging for the pupils to continue with a language into S4."

Some respondents are on the fence about such recognition of achievements in languages and voiced concerns about the potential effects this would have on the uptake of languages in S4:

"Undecided. It may encourage some pupils to continue with a language if they performed well, it may deter others as they feel they already have a qualification why continue!"

"I don't know! I would need to see what this involved and what value was placed on it by pupils and parents - especially if there was no recognition of any other subject at that stage."

"It could put pupils off choosing a language in S4 if they already have an award in languages. It would depend if it motivated them to continue."

⁶ See <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/57034.html> for further information.

“No - this would be counter-productive to ensuring pupils choose a language at the end of S3. Too many would consider this to be an appropriate exit point and uptake would be hit.”

Home, heritage and community languages

Home, heritage and community languages (HHCL) are languages other than English spoken daily at home, in school, and within communities, as well as languages learned during childhood (ALL, 2022).

Responding secondary schools were asked if any of their learners have opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities (other than those taught in their school). Just less than a third reported that their learners have opportunities to take HHCL exams in their school, and a further 12 per cent reported that learners could sit the exam elsewhere. Thirty-one per cent of responding schools do not have opportunities for learners to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities.

In ‘other’ comments, respondents noted that i) it is something that the school is considering; ii) it depends on the language/school capacity to deliver and support; and, iii) learners may sit the exam using their own provisions.

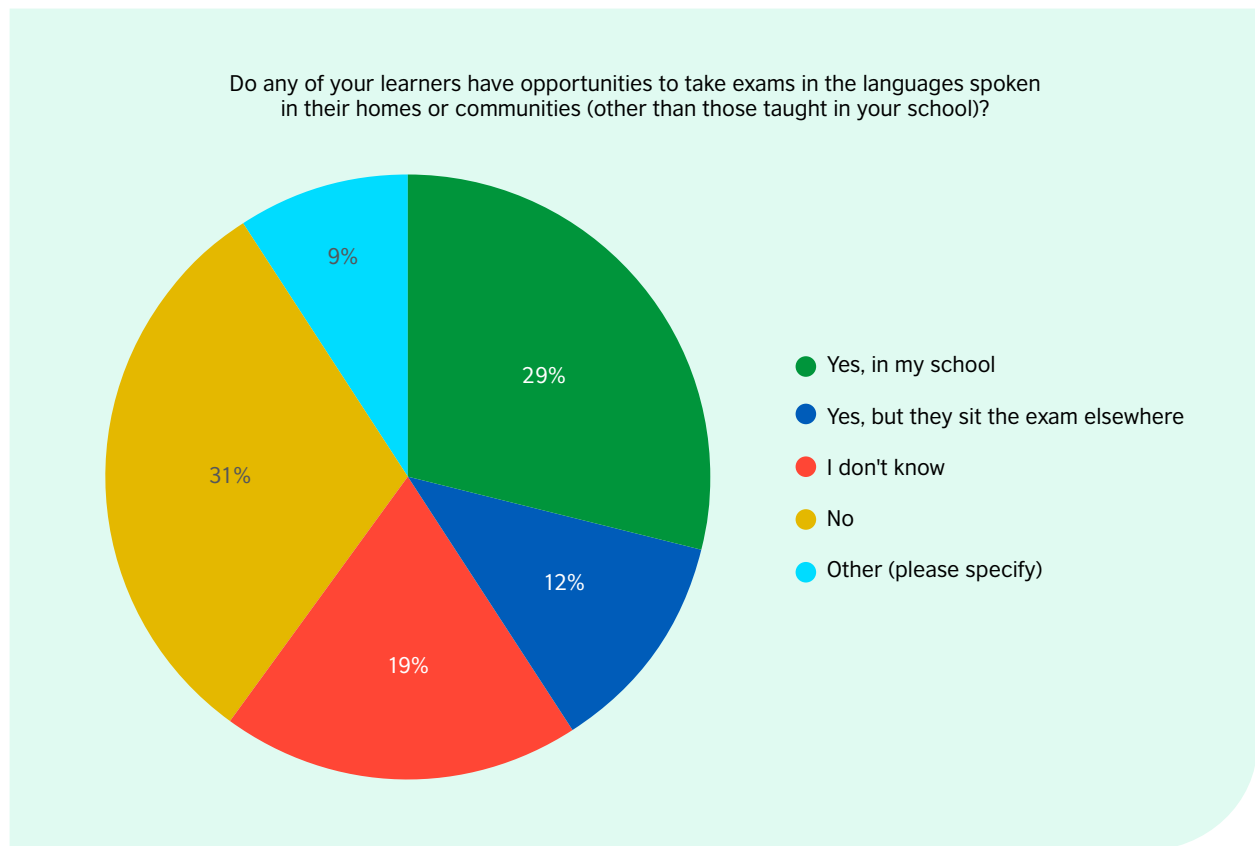


Figure 9: Respondent answers to ‘Do any of your learners have opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities (other than those taught in your school)?’

International dimension in local authority secondary schools

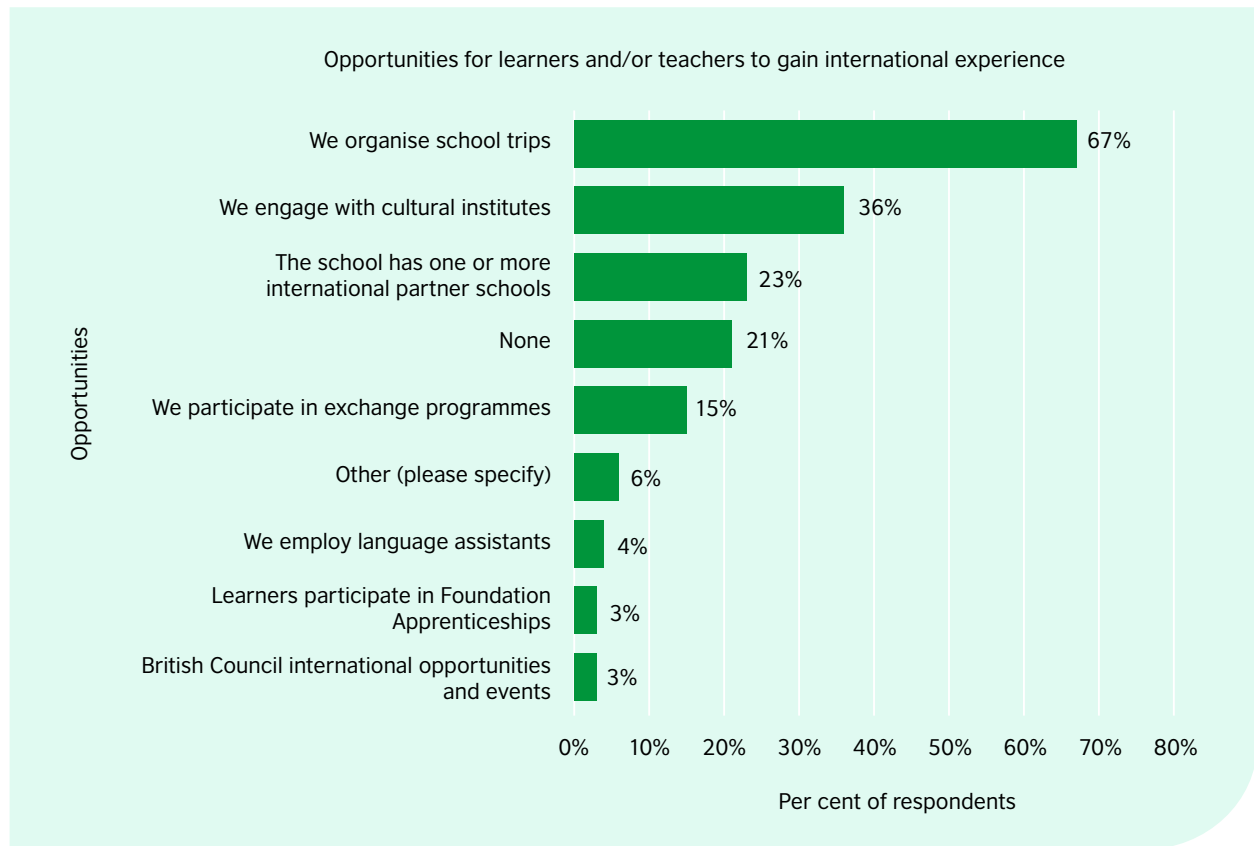


Figure 10: Respondent answers to 'What opportunities are there for learners and/or teachers in your school to gain international experience? (tick all that apply)'

The international dimension of responding local authority schools is relatively healthy, with 67 per cent reporting that they organise school trips, 36 per cent engage with cultural institutes and 23 per cent have one or more international partner schools. However, one fifth of schools reported no opportunities for international engagement in their school, and only four per cent reported that they employ a language assistant, highlighting that very few learners may have the opportunity to engage with a native speaker of the language that they study within their school timetable. In those schools with language assistants, two respondents reported that the assistant teaches Gaelic, while other languages were not specified by respondents. One hundred and ten schools told us that they do not currently employ a language assistant; out of this number, 79 per cent reported that they would consider employing one in the future, budget/resources permitting. In 'other' comments, some respondents noted that the council would not be able to fund an assistantship, and one school reported that they have not had a language assistant for over ten years.

Recruitment of qualified language teachers

In just over 40 per cent of responding local authority secondary schools, the recruitment of qualified languages teachers is an issue (major in 15 per cent of schools, minor in 26 per cent). Fifty per cent reported that recruitment was not an issue; in 'other' comments, respondents noted that i) recruitment has been an issue in the past; ii) there is only one language teacher in the department, and recruitment could become an issue in the future; and, iii) it has been difficult to recruit teachers of German.

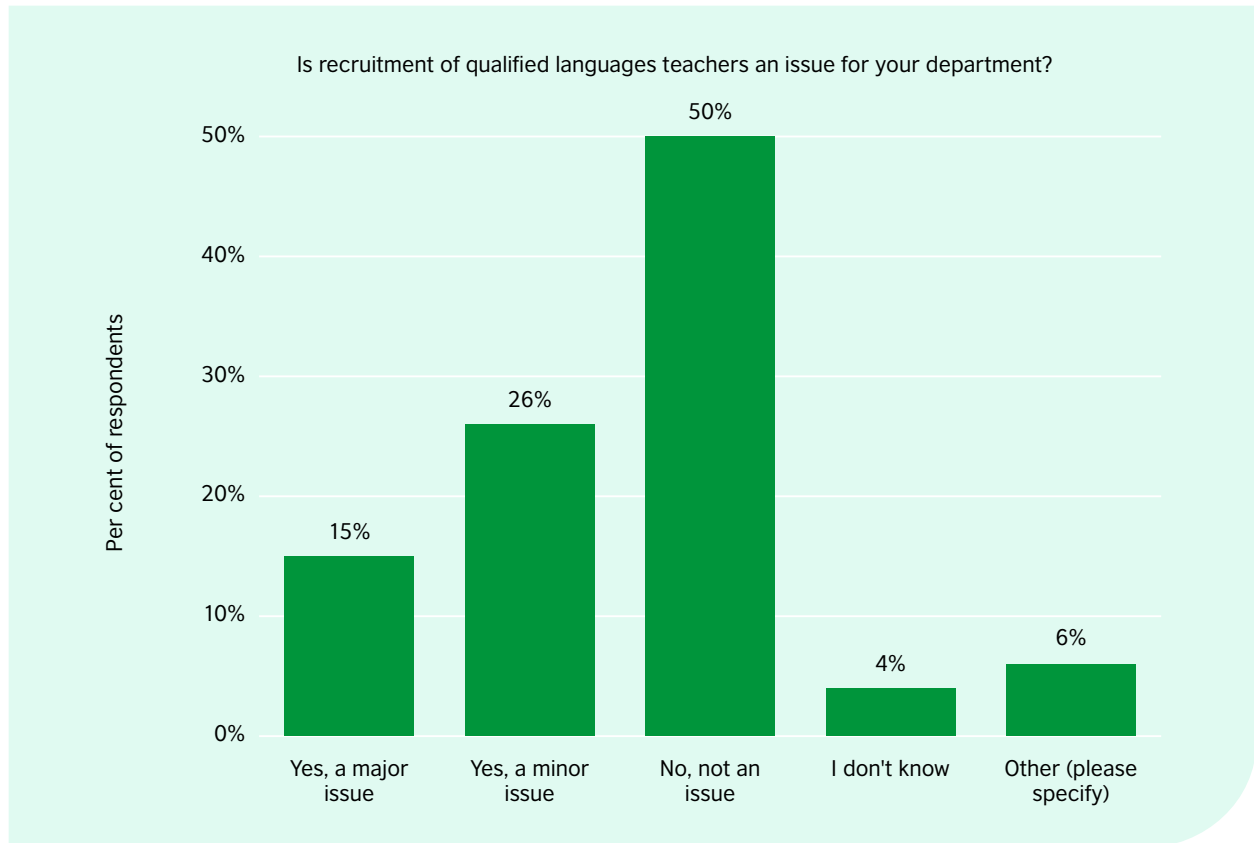


Figure 11: Respondent answers to 'Is recruitment of qualified languages teachers an issue for your department?'

University ambassador schemes and language learning

Schools were asked about their experience of university mentoring schemes, such as the Strathclyde Language Ambassadors Programme or the SCILT Language Ambassadors, through which undergraduate student mentors work online, or in-person, with a small group of pupils to support and promote language learning. Eleven per cent of responding local authority secondary schools have worked with a local university and comments about their experience included the following:

"We work with Stirling University each year and set up video calls with our S2 classes to explain why they are learning a language and to talk about their experiences of working/living abroad."

"Each year we have a visit from Language Ambassadors from Strathclyde University. They speak to S3 classes about their experiences and try to encourage consideration of doing languages in S4."

"This has been useful but it is only for a targeted number of pupils which doesn't always have the biggest impact on uptake in the Senior Phase. Despite this, pupils have enjoyed engaging well with mentors."

"Our pupils have really enjoyed this experience and we are going to continue this in the future. It is too early to tell if this has had an impact on Senior Phase uptake yet though."

"We are involved with the Babble project with University of Edinburgh. Undergraduate students support our Advanced Higher students to produce discursive essays for publication in a university magazine."

Higher and Advanced Higher provision in languages in local authority secondary schools

The majority of responding local authority secondary schools have Higher and/or Advanced Higher provision in language learning (only 7 per cent do not have such provisions).

In those schools with Higher and/or Advanced Higher provision, over a third reported that five or fewer learners currently learn one or more languages. In nearly a fifth of schools, there are more than 20 learners taking Highers in languages; no schools reported this for Advanced Highers. Thirty-two per cent of secondary schools reported no learners taking Advanced Highers in languages.

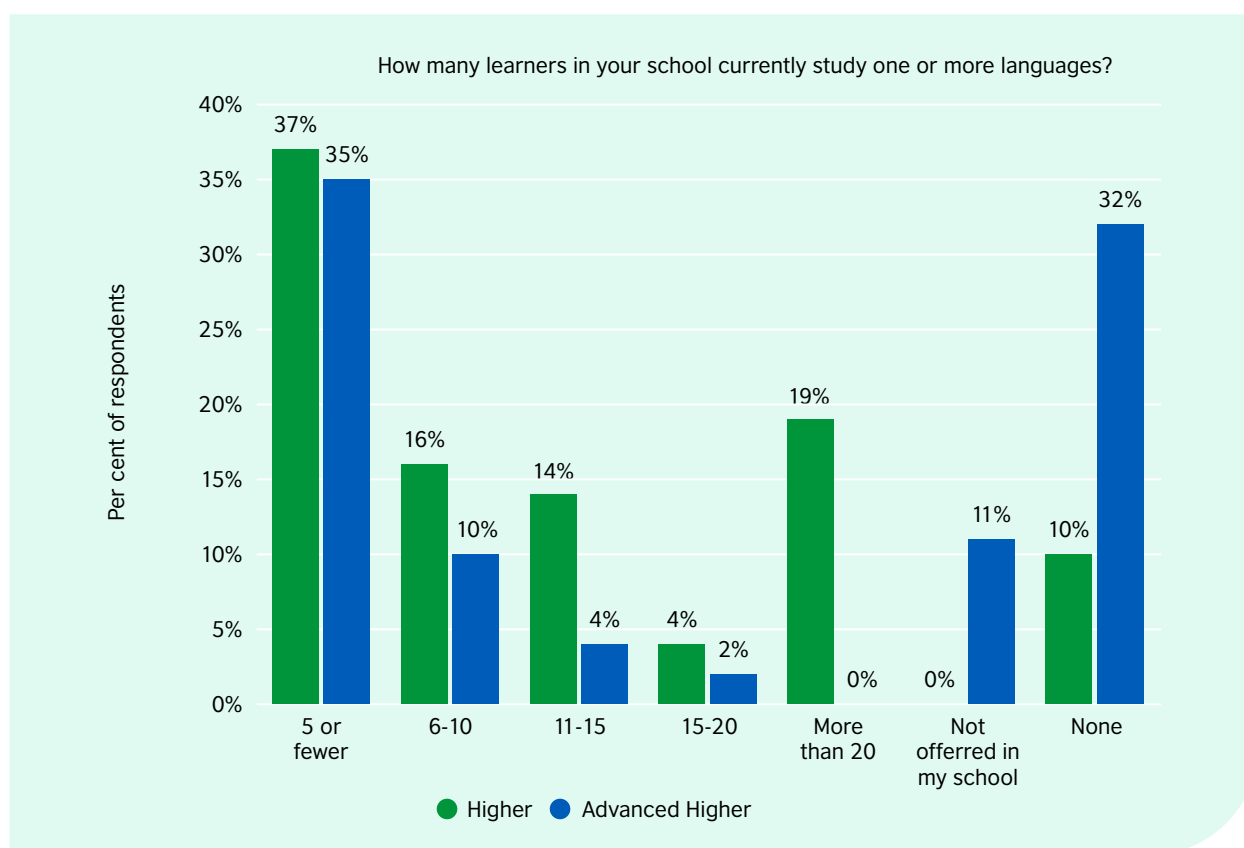


Figure 12: Respondent answers to ‘How many learners in your school currently study one or more languages?’

Local authority secondary schools were asked about the arrangements in place when only a few learners wish to study a language for Higher or Advanced Higher; nearly half of schools reported that multi-level classes are taught, 42 per cent report that Higher and Advanced Higher classes are taught together, and classes do not run in nearly a third of schools.

Multi-Level classes are taught	49%
Higher and Advanced Higher classes are taught together	42%
Bi-Level classes are taught	38%
Classes do not run	31%
Shared arrangements with another school	28%
Classes run at a reduced timetable	25%
Classes run online	24%
Other (please give details)	10%

Table 20: Respondent answers to ‘What arrangements are in place, if any, when only a few learners wish to study a language for Higher or Advanced Higher? Tick all that apply.’

As with language teaching in S4, there is a significant number of responding schools (49 per cent) reporting that multi-level classes are taught; while further research is needed to examine the prevalence of multi-level classes in language teaching, it hints at a high level of teacher commitment to ensure that classes run when faced with the financial costs of running classes with not enough learners and a lack of resources.

Local authority secondary schools were asked if there needs to be a minimum number of learners for language classes to run; just over a quarter of schools reported this figure to be ten, and 23 per cent reported that there is no minimum number required. Other responses noted that it depends on the situation.

Six per cent of schools reported introducing Italian and Spanish respectively as new subjects in S5; although there is a reported 44 per cent decrease in take-up for French, it is pleasing to see that take-up is stable in nearly a third of schools and has increased in 16 per cent of schools. For Spanish, take-up is reported to have increased in 36 per cent of schools and is stable in 30 per cent.

	Introduced as a new subject	Take-up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Subject discontinued	Not taught in my school
Cantonese	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%	59%
French	0%	16%	30%	44%	7%	3%
Gàidhlig (fluent)	0%	1%	5%	0%	0%	55%
Gaelic (L)	1%	0%	5%	1%	1%	52%
German	1%	7%	14%	16%	8%	29%
Italian	6%	5%	2%	2%	2%	50%
Mandarin	4%	0%	3%	3%	2%	54%
Spanish	6%	36%	30%	17%	2%	10%
Urdu	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	57%

Table 21: Respondent answers to 'Thinking about the last three years, what changes have there been, if any, in take-up and provision for languages in S5 and above in your school?' Note: not all schools answered all components of the question.

Teacher reflections on language education

Language Trends Scotland asked respondents to comment on what is working well in language education in their school in the 2024/25 school year. The following comments note that support both within and outside the classroom is key to providing a positive experience of language education:

"We are very well supported by management which allows us to offer languages to all pupils. This in turn leads to good uptake in S5/6, although we'd like to see this slightly higher. We have also managed to maintain strong German numbers, while gradually building up Spanish and Mandarin. We have a roughly 50/50 split between French and German amongst our pupils."

"Uptake in Spanish is high. We have a very successful pupil Language Committee running that promotes a range of languages and cultures across the whole school through events and fundraising."

"Fortunately, we are supported by parents and quite well supported by SLT, so our Spanish numbers increase year on year."

Other comments also noted the challenges that language teachers face:

"We have motivated staff who are prepared to teach multi-level in order to allow all pupils who want to do a language have the opportunity; it can be very challenging at times though."

"Take up is stable despite external issues such as staffing and SLT. S1 & S2 pupils are enthusiastic and potential take-up is high but is capped by staffing constraints."

The survey asked what could be done to improve the situation for language learning, either in the school and/or wider at Scotland level. Respondents voiced the following recommendations and opinions:

“Encourage and promote school exchanges with France, Spain and Germany. Exiting barriers and lack of quick, readily available guidance on what to do to start international partnerships is off-putting. Reduce workload for teachers so that we can commit to extra-curricular activities and programmes which would encourage more pupils to potentially take a language in the Senior Phase.”⁷

“A national curriculum/vocabulary resource would be ideal [...]. There is no set list of vocabulary and this can pose issues when it comes to the exam and pupils are seeing a lot of vocabulary for the first time. There are inherently far more resources for French than for Spanish available too.”

“Smaller class sizes would be a huge help. Essentially we are a practical subject where the pupil requires a significant one to one input in order to thrive. A class size reduced to 20 would be hugely beneficial in helping to manage behaviour and therefore engage learners.”

“Too many pressures on primary teachers so our cluster don't have a consistent approach and pupils don't have a common experience before they come to us. Difficult for ML teachers to collaborate with primary staff past few years. I don't know what else we can do - we are innovative and passionate.”

“The exam needs reviewed - it is not engaging or relevant to pupils. It is also not in line with demands of other national courses in different subjects. The assignment needs reviewed - it has no benefit to pupils or the school. Marking at SQA level should be more consistent. The BGE is a mess with no exemplification of levels.”

⁷ Please see the following British Council resource that provides guidance on school and teacher resources to establish a partnership with schools in other countries:
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/partner>.

Findings from independent primary and secondary schools

Independent Schools in Scotland

According to the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS),⁸ just over four per cent of learners in Scotland attend independent schools. Alongside local authority schools, independent schools were invited to complete the 2024/25 *Language Trends Scotland* survey. With fewer than 100 registered independent schools in Scotland the survey response data from the independent school sector will be presented using raw figures rather than percentages, which are used in the majority of this report. As with the survey responses from local authority schools, the independent school survey responses are reported by primary and secondary level.

Independent Primary

A total of six primary schools across east, west, and central regions of Scotland responded to the survey. All primary schools reported that languages are taught, with French as the most frequently reported. German, Greek, Latin, Spanish and Italian are also reported as being available. No independent primary school responding to the survey currently offers BSL.

In relation to how languages are taught in independent primary schools, the most frequently reported time period spent on language teaching was between 30 minutes to one hour, with all schools reporting that languages are taught by the class teachers. Regarding resources, all six independent primary schools who participated in the survey reported that they use resources which are produced in school to teach languages. Respondents also reported using resources signposted from the SCILT website, and five out of the six schools reported that they use language learning apps.

The survey also asked respondents to provide information on pupils in their school who were learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). Four out of the six independent schools who completed the survey reported that there are EAL learners in their school and that the school integrates pupils' home languages through the curriculum with special day activities and projects, European Day of Languages and Languages Week Scotland taster sessions, and through multilingual school signage.

Sharing some similarities with local authority primary schools, four out of the six independent primary schools who completed the survey do not have contact with a nearby secondary school. Of the two independent primary schools who do report having contact with post-primary schools, information on language teaching across the education levels is only exchanged on an informal basis.

A variety of external connections to support language learning and teaching in and out of school was reported by the responding independent primary schools. These included connections with Goethe-Institut, Institut français, virtual links with schools outside the UK, school partnerships abroad, and involvement with international projects. Increasing the types of connections was reported by independent primary school respondents as something that they would welcome, with opportunities for language immersion programmes, cultural exchanges and more parental and community engagement events that would celebrate different languages and cultures. As one respondent noted:

“This can help reinforce language learning outside of school and foster a supportive environment for students.”

The amount of time devoted to language learning and language practice at primary level was highlighted as a barrier to successful language learning in independent primary schools. Respondents who took the opportunity to add qualitative comments to their survey responses commented:

“Language learning requires consistent reinforcement, and without the opportunity to practice outside of the classroom, students may struggle to retain and apply what they've learned.”

“More time would be brilliant as children need to learn little and often.”

Respondents also considered that improved access to teacher professional development workshop and training would support them with the challenges of adapting to diverse language learning needs.

⁸ See <http://www.scis.org.uk/facts-and-figures/>.

Independent Secondary

Sixteen independent secondary schools across north, south, central, east, and west Scotland responded to the 2024/25 *Language Trends Scotland* survey. All independent secondary schools who responded to the survey reported that languages are taught, with French, German, Spanish, and Mandarin as the most frequently reported (see table 22). Ancient Greek and Latin were also reported as being available. Fifteen out of the 16 independent secondary schools responding to the survey do not offer BSL. One secondary school reported that BSL is on offer in S6, as a special interest course.

Language	S1 (2nd form) all learners	S1 (2nd form) some learners	S2 (3rd form) all learners	S2 (3rd form) some learners	S3 (4th form) all learners	S3 (4th form) some learners
Cantonese	0	0	0	0	0	0
French	14	3	12	5	3	13
Gàidhlig (fluent)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gaelic (Learners)	0	0	0	0	0	0
German	9	4	6	8	4	9
Italian	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mandarin (Simplified and/or Traditional)	5	1	4	3	3	5
Scots	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish	12	5	9	9	5	14
Urdu	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	1	1	0	1	0	1

Table 22: Respondent answers to 'Which language(s) are your learners learning in S1-S3 (2nd to 4th form) as part of the normal school day? If you select 'other', please type the language(s) in the space provided.'

The most frequently reported time period spent on language teaching was between two to three hours per week, with some variation in the number of hours across years of study. All independent secondary schools reported that their learners are taking language qualifications with eight out of the 16 secondary schools reporting that the majority (over 90 per cent) of their pupils in S4 are learning a language for a national qualification. In relation to how this proportion of pupils studying a language in S4 has changed over the last three years, most of the 16 respondents reported that languages remain compulsory subjects in their schools for all learners at S4. However, where not compulsory, three schools report that fewer learners take a language at S4 when compared to previous years. Using the option in the survey to provide qualitative comments on how languages are offered in schools, one respondent noted that:

"Pupils used to be expected to take a language, but now they are 'strongly encouraged'. As a result the number of pupils taking a language at S3 has gone down, but the numbers are still relatively healthy."

In relation to the proportion of learners learning more than one language, independent secondary schools appear to echo the trend in local authority schools where the number of languages being learnt decreases as the year of study increases (see figure 13). However, in some contrast to local authority schools, only two out of the 16 independent schools report that language classes will not be offered if there are low uptake figures.

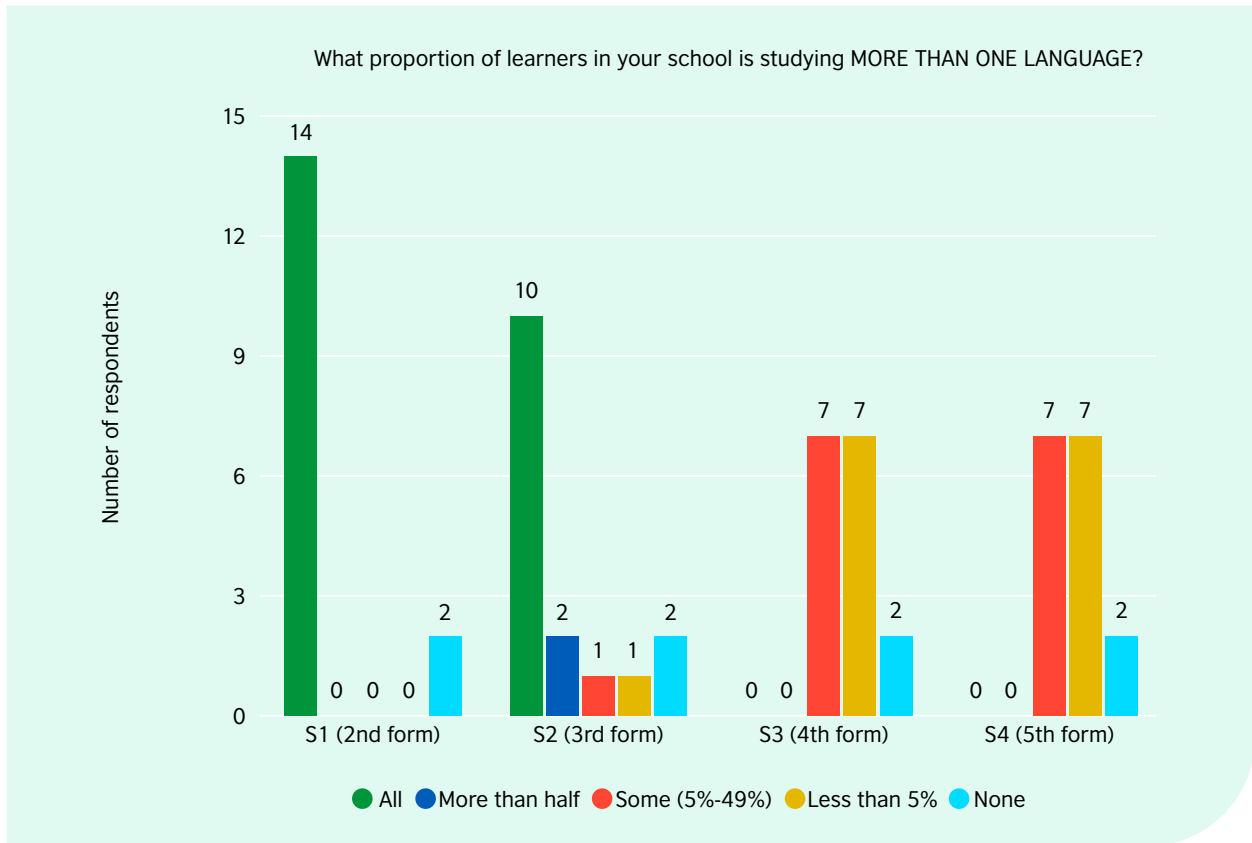


Figure 13: Respondent answers to 'What proportion of learners in your school is studying more than one language?'

With regard to Higher and Advanced Higher languages provision in independent secondary schools, each of the 16 responding schools reported that there were learners in their school who were currently studying languages at these levels.

Learner numbers	Higher	Advanced Higher
5 or fewer	5	10
6-10	1	3
11-15	3	1
15-20	1	1
More than 20	6	1
Not offered in my school	0	0
None	0	0

Table 23: Respondent answers to 'How many learners in your school currently study one or more languages?'

A point of contrast between independent and local authority secondary schools is the opportunity for learners to sit for exams in home and/or community languages in their own school. Eight out of 16 independent secondary schools who responded to the survey reported that their learners do have opportunities to take exams in their home and/or community language/s in their school.

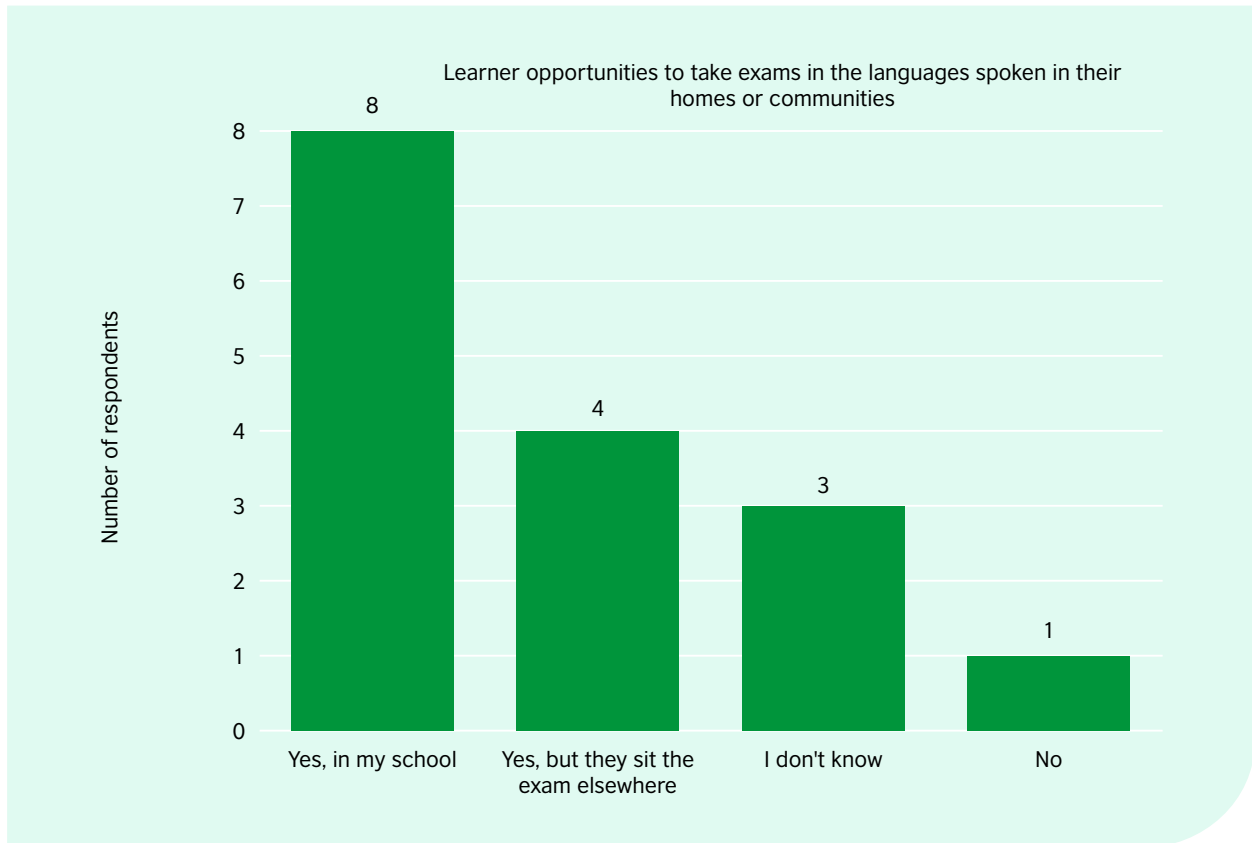


Figure 14: Respondent answers to ‘Do any of your learners have opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities (other than those taught in your school)?’

International partnerships and external connections featured strongly in survey responses from independent secondary schools. Most of the 16 schools who took part in the survey report that they engage with cultural institutes, employ language assistants, participate in exchange programmes, and have one or more international partner schools. When reporting on the sustained impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international activities, over half of those schools who responded to the survey have reintroduced school trips and exchanges. Positive experiences of these exchanges for language learning practice and motivation were noted by two school respondents when considering what was working well for language education in their school:

“The France trip and German exchanges are very motivational. Speaking more target language is also motivational, even from a young age.”

“Good mentality about language learning in general thanks to exchanges and partnerships.”

Other positive aspects of language education in Scottish schools reported by independent secondary school respondents included the implementation of new language learning methods, school-based decisions to make languages compulsory, and greater space for languages on school timetables. This is illustrated in one respondent’s comment:

“We are happy about being made a compulsory subject in S3 this year. The previous years we have always competed with other subjects in column choices, but now all languages are in one column, so pupils choose their favourite language. This has advantages and disadvantages. The spread of abilities is now much wider, and classes are much bigger.”

In contrast to the situation for local authority schools, independent schools do not consider the recruitment of teachers to be an issue. Only one of the 16 responding schools considers this to be a major issue.

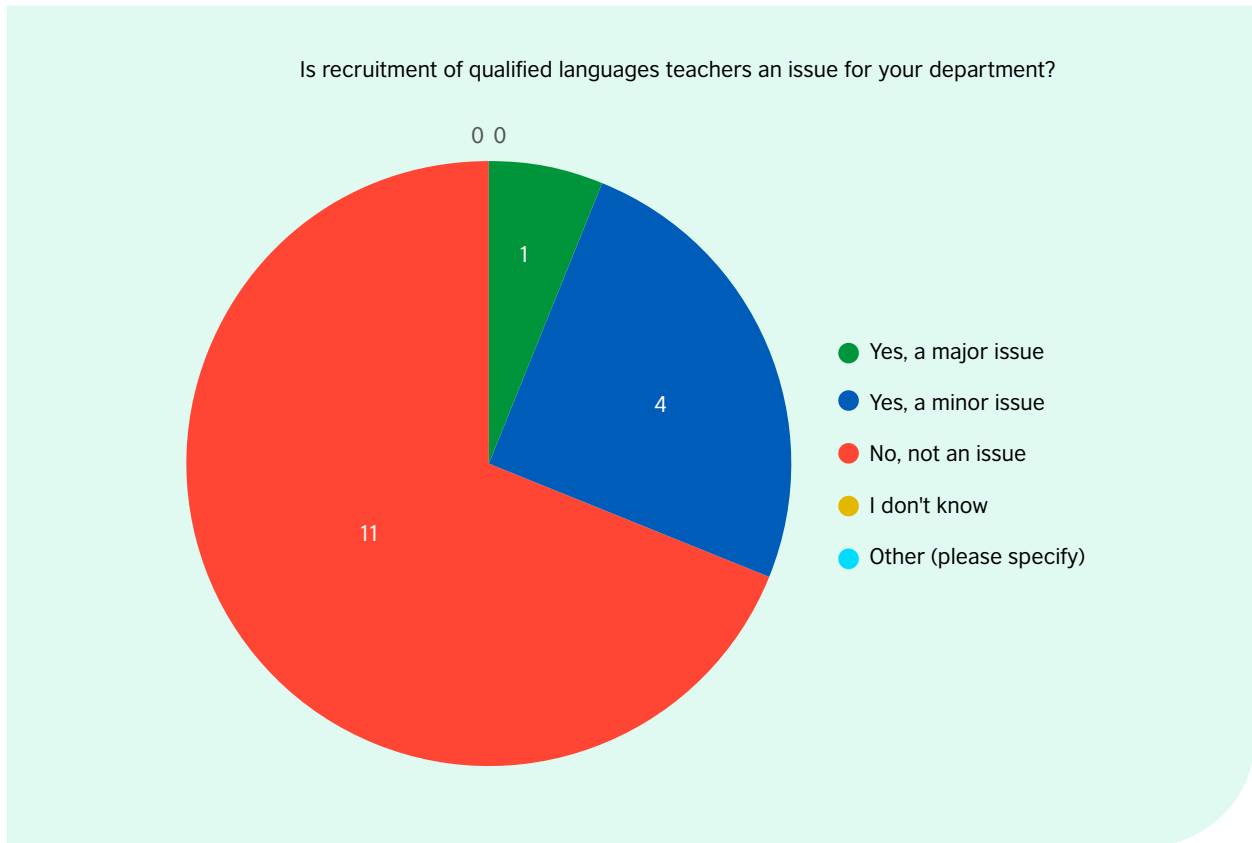


Figure 15: Respondent answers to 'Is recruitment of qualified languages teachers an issue for your department?'

According to the survey respondents working in independent schools, the main challenges in language education in Scottish independent secondary schools are the nature and context of external exams, followed by the perceptions that languages are not seen as relevant for future careers. Considering what improvements could be made to overcome these challenges, independent secondary school respondents who completed the survey suggest: a review of exams and more alternative pathways to studying languages, more representation of languages 'in the real world' in the curriculum accompanied by sufficient language learning time, and greater focus on language pedagogy rather than language assessment.

Conclusion

The first ever *Language Trends Scotland* report demonstrates the current situation for language learning and teaching in Scotland according to responding schools in the local authority and independent sectors.

In local authority primary schools, it is clear that responding primary schools are making time for language teaching and learning in the curriculum, with a fifth of schools reporting that language learning is embedded within daily class time. The responses from local authority primary schools highlight some areas for improvement, including fostering sustainable links with secondary schools and helping primary schools engage with international organisations and resources.

A third of local authority secondary schools in Scotland responded to the survey, and it is very positive to note the high levels of international engagement in these schools, with two thirds reporting that they organise school trips for their learners and just over a third engage with cultural institutes. The data also highlight areas for improvement in international engagement, with the majority of schools reporting that they do not currently employ a language assistant, but many would consider it in the future, budget permitting. Although responses highlight a steep decrease in learner numbers studying more than one language after S2, a fifth of respondents consider there to be more learners studying a language in S4 than before. A variety of languages are learnt throughout the secondary school levels, with French, German and Spanish the most taught languages in responding schools. Responses highlighted a particular area of concern in language teaching and learning, notably that multi-level classes are run for language teaching in S4 in two-thirds of schools, while over half of schools reported that classes will not run if learner numbers are too low.

The inclusion of primary and secondary independent school survey responses in *Language Trends Scotland 2024/25* offers an insight into how issues in language education vary across specific contexts. In relation to the survey data on primary and secondary school contexts, local authority schools appear to offer a greater variety of languages as part of their school day. The results from the survey for the 2024/25 academic year demonstrate the difference in the extent to which independent and local authority schools engage in international activities and external connections. Teacher recruitment is a further point of contrast between independent and local authority schools. Shared concerns across local authority and independent schools include links between primary and secondary levels, and on the perceptions of relevance and careers advice for young people when making informed subject choices.

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