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## In brief

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### Language matters

On 3 June 2009 the British Academy launched its latest policy report, *Language Matters*, which raises concerns that the future of the UK's world class research base might be threatened by a decline in modern language learning.



Attending the launch, the Minister for Higher Education, David Lammy (pictured), said 'A university without modern languages is a university that has lost much of its ability to look outwards. The report highlights the impact of lack of language skills in research. The study shows that language skills are not only culturally enriching and empowering for everyone, but are also practically useful in economic and international contexts. It demonstrates the interconnectedness between language learning at all levels, language research, teacher training, and wider intercultural understanding, and the impact that a monolingual approach has in our research, to our economy, and for UK researchers competing for employment with international ones.'

The launch brought together leading figures from higher education, research, business, and the National Centre for Languages to discuss the impact of the language deficit on humanities and social science research, and to consider how the higher education sector can address the language deficit, and how languages can help the UK to reposition itself at a time of economic downturn.

The report, compiled by a working group chaired by Professor Dame Janet Nelson FBA (King's College, University of London), follows a year-long study into the effect of the fall of modern language learning in research

fields, and is informed by specially commissioned research into the impact this may already be having in UK universities. The report calls for a series of measures by universities and government bodies to address this danger. These include a recommendation for the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to develop a more coherent and co-ordinated approach to the problem; and for universities to consider bringing in a language requirement for university entry, or to ensure that students at least leave with a language qualification.

Further information and the full report can be found at [www.britac.ac.uk/reports/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/reports/)

### Rescuing the housing market

The state of the housing market has dominated reports of economic performance over recent years, and this attention has intensified with the credit crisis. A public discussion held at the Academy on 31 March 2009 debated timely questions such as: Should people hold less of their wealth in their homes? Could shared ownership be the key to sustainable housing futures? Are there other ways of managing housing resources more effectively? Is there any role for financial markets? What should governments do next?

Professor Christine Whitehead (London School of Economics and University of Cambridge), Professor Gavin Wood (RMIT University, Melbourne) and Peter Sceats (Tradition Property) looked beyond the credit crunch towards more imaginative ways of sharing the benefits, and mitigating the risks, of volatile housing markets.



The meeting was convened and chaired by Professor Susan J Smith FBA (pictured); Professor Mark Stephens (University of

Glasgow) acted as discussant. The discussion was featured on BBC Radio 4's *Start the Week* and is available as a podcast via [www.britac.ac.uk/events/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/)

### Civil war and foreign intervention in Spain

On 2 April 2009, the British Academy marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War with a debate chaired by Professor Paul Preston FBA (pictured).



The discussion is available as a podcast via [www.britac.ac.uk/events/](http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/)

Professor Helen Graham (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Professor Ángel Viñas (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) considered three linked issues – the international dimension to the defeat of the Spanish Republic; the international consequences of the Spanish Civil War; and whether the Spanish conflict can legitimately be regarded as the first battle of the Second World War.

From the beginning of the war, western policies so favoured the military rebels and their Axis backers, that the Spanish Republic was forced to seek assistance from the Soviet Union. Despite this aid, the Axis powers, given the policy of appeasement of the western democracies, became so emboldened as to proceed to a massive realignment in the international balance of power. Much scholarship remains doggedly critical of the Soviet role in Spain, despite the fact that the most significant advances in recent research on the Spanish Civil War have been in regard to Russian policy.

The lively discussion that followed the presentations showed that this subject has lost none of its passion.