Language Matters More and More, a Position Statement by the British Academy

Transcript of the launch event: 9 February 2011

Welcome and Introduction

Dr Robin Jackson, Chief Executive and Secretary, British Academy

The Academy is committed to the proposition that languages matter at all levels of education from primary to postgraduate and also matter in research, in business and society as a whole. Today, we launch Language Matters More and More, which is a follow-up to our Language Matters report of 2009, which pointed out how a decline in language skills was hampering the UK research effort. UK research is world leading; it is second only to the USA in reputation and in influence.

More widely, this Academy has had longstanding concerns about the decline in foreign language learning in the UK and we have sought to draw attention to the risk that impoverishment in foreign language skills – what one might call creeping or perhaps rather galloping monoglottism – poses for the UK in what is a global world. Today’s Position Statement is a further call to action to ensure that this challenge is effectively addressed. We hope that today’s event will shed light on how the higher education sector in particular can help students improve or acquire the language skills that they are increasingly going to need and also demonstrate the value of these skills to schools, to pupils and their parents.

Position Statement: Language Matters More and More

Professor Nigel Vincent, Vice-President, Research and Higher Education Policy, British Academy

Let me begin with an anecdote. This morning when I checked out of my hotel the receptionist’s name badge had a name I did not recognise so I asked her where she was from. She said Lithuania. Bearing in mind today’s event I asked her what languages she spoke, and she said Lithuanian, Russian of course (and I think the ‘of course’ here is significant), a bit of Estonian and Finnish and some Turkish. The first four were not surprising given the regional context, but I was surprised by the Turkish so I asked if she had any family connections there. She said ‘no’ - it had just seemed like an interesting and useful option to take up at university. It is exactly that kind of reasoning and choice that we are here to promote today and which we need to see much more of in this country.

Internationalisation

It is part of a general agenda, which is what this report talks about, of internationalisation and by ‘internationalisation’ we mean internationalisation along a number of different dimensions:
- Internationalisation of the experience of students and their opportunities to study wider ranges of things in an international context.

- Internationalisation as it applies in the world of business and employment, where increasingly jobs are to be had and held outside the boundaries of the country that you happened accidentally to be born and brought up in

- Internationalisation of research, the networks of research in all disciplines move around the world; and there are interesting statistics emerging from Thomson Reuters, for example, about the rate of rise of publication and citation of papers written by Chinese and Japanese authors.

- Internationalisation via not just movement of international students into the UK but movement of British students away from the UK as part of a study programme.

An important point that is stressed in this document when we talk about languages mattering more and more is it not just languages in the sense of taking a simple course in a language centre, but developing that knowledge in understanding the culture, the literature, the religion, the history for which the language in question is the vehicle.

**A Monoglot Nation?**

I was interviewed on some regional radio stations this morning about this statement and the one question that was constant across the four different places that interviewed me was, ‘Doesn’t everybody speak English, so what is the point?’ Part of the answer, of course, is they do use English – everybody knows English is the international language of science and business – but they use it in a different way, because they are multilingual or polyglots and we are monoglots. Therefore, one of the dangers that faces Britain is that it becomes a nation of monoglots, the only nation in the world to speak just one language. Again, there are different dimensions of that, in that there is multilingualism in the sense that in many countries of the world it is normal to speak several languages just as a matter of being born and brought up in that country. There is also the kind of multilingualism that develops via second language acquisition, which is one of the principal foci of this report.

**Languages at All Levels of Education**

We are concerned about languages at all levels. This is not just a matter of what university programmes are about, although that is the prime target of the report, but languages in primary schools, languages in secondary schools. I say of all kinds because of some of the worrying statistics that are emerging about the limitation of language provision in our schools, particularly state schools; undergraduate language; postgraduate, again at both levels of postgraduate research and postgraduate taught; and, indeed, at the postdoctoral level, which we will come on to later.

**Languages for a Deeper Understanding**

Languages not just in their own right as things to be learnt and studied in the way that I have spent my career learning and studying languages, but languages in the way that they
relate to and interact with scientific disciplines, social sciences, humanities, business studies, area studies. Area studies is perhaps something to make a specific point about in this context. There has been a successful programme funded by the Higher Education Funding Council in conjunction with ESRC and AHRC on language-based area studies. That represents, I think, an important aspect of what we are trying to get at, that you need the language in order to be able to gain a deeper understanding the political debates, the economic circumstances, the business culture and to develop that kind of knowledge. We hope that the new programme I will mention at the end of my presentation will address some of those issues, again in conjunction with the ESRC and the AHRC.

Slight Increase in Numbers of Students

One of the points that has also been raised is that recent developments seem to suggest that maybe the problem is going away, because the number of students taking languages has slightly increased in the last couple of years. It is true that the number of language students has shown a slight recent rise, but – and this is the concerning thing – there is no particular evidence that that is fuelled by increased UK recruitment as opposed to recruitment from international students who come and then add to their already impressive language portfolios. In addition, it is very patchy across different languages, so which languages are on the rise varies and nobody knows whether the statistics show anything that is a consistent development; one suspects not.

‘Strategically Important’ Languages

There is also an issue, which is raised in the Browne review, about so-called ‘strategically important’ subjects and languages get a specific mention, though of course the languages that it may be strategically important for the nation to know or have knowledge of within the nation are not necessarily the ones that would survive in a simple economic model of university funding.

Languages and the Internet

A little bit of an obsession of mine is languages and the internet and figures such as that within 20 years most web pages will be in Chinese, that there are already more blogs in Japanese than in English and, interestingly, as I discovered at a recent presentation, a growing number of companies involved in the business of web translation.

Languages and Quantitative Skills Programme

In the Spending Review the Academy was fortunate in being, with the exception of the MRC, the only national body whose budget has been increased over the next four years. The reason for that increase is we have been given an extra £5 million to develop programmes in the area of languages and quantitative skills. I hasten to add some people think this means only languages and quantitative skills together. What it means is both languages and quantitative skills, so you can do them separately, though there are interesting domains where they converge.
What you can see on the screen is the description of the project as it was defined in the allocation that we received from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It means that over the next four years we are going to be developing a programme in which we will want to foster not just research projects but also activities such as workshops, conferences, policy studies. These are various things that will allow us to explore in much greater depth the issues that are dealt with and brought into focus in our Position Statement today.

A National Recovery Programme for Languages

Baroness Jean Coussins, Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group for Modern Languages

I would like to explain why I called on the Government in a Lords’ debate last October to launch a national languages recovery programme. I make no apology for using such strong terms, because only a programme which deals systematically with all education sectors from primary schools through to postgraduate research and with employment and training, not to mention our national attitudes will, I think, rescue us from the cultural and economic monolingual cul de sac that we are in.

Symptoms of the Sickness

What is the nature of this condition that needs repairing? What are its presenting symptoms? Here are few examples:

- Over 70% of UK employers say they are not happy with the foreign language skills either of school leavers or of graduates and that they are being forced increasingly to recruit from overseas to meet their needs. This seems to be true for businesses in all sectors.

- A particular example was reported in the *Times* only two days ago and this one is not just about the employability of individuals, it is also about our national reputation and influence. It turns out that only seven of the 308 successful candidates in this year’s competitive recruitment drive for EU jobs in Brussels were British graduates. Seven out of 308. Apparently, only 1.5% of the 51,000 applicants were British and it is clear that one of the reasons, possibly the most significant, is that they simply do not possess the required working knowledge of a second language.

- I am also told that meetings in Brussels as well as at the United Nations frequently have to be cancelled because of a shortage of English native speakers in the interpreting service.

- Even in *Private Eye* at the moment there is a running story going on about the negative impact on the administration of justice because police forces cannot get access to competent public service interpreters in certain languages. They are not just talking about obscure minority languages where you might expect some degree of a hold up; they are also talking about French.
Another symptom of our languages sickness is the inconsistency that we see over the value and broader role of language skills and intercultural understanding. The Foreign Secretary says we need to engage more with the wider world outside the familiar boundaries of the EU, yet he also sanctioned the cuts in the BBC World Service, which will see five whole language services disappear and an end to radio broadcasting in China and Russia.

Lord Browne’s University Funding Review says, as we have just heard, languages should be a strategic priority for public investment, yet the Government’s response has been to change the funding system in a way which further threatens the survival of modern languages degrees.

The final symptom I would cite is the widespread pattern of redundancies we are now seeing amongst local education authority primary language advisers now that languages are no longer to be made part of the statutory primary curriculum.

**Seriousness of the Sickness**

So much for the symptoms, but just how serious is this sickness? The latest Language Trends Survey for 2010 and published just last week by CILT showed yet a further decline in the numbers of pupils studying a language after the age of 14. Furthermore, that downward trend looks set to become even worse, if that is possible, because the figures show that the take up in Year 10 is significantly lower than in Year 11. Even the rate of the rise in Spanish has fallen.

A new factor that has been measured for the first time in this year’s Survey is the extent to which Key Stage 3, where languages are still compulsory, has been shrunk. One in five state schools now take only two years instead of three to do Key Stage 3, which means that thousands of children, who are still only 13, will no longer being doing any modern language at all.

All in all, one-third of state schools have reduced their languages timetable in the past year. An OECD survey published last September showed that secondary school pupils in the UK spend less time studying languages than anywhere else in the developed world. Only 7% of the lesson time of 12-14 year olds is allocated to languages, which is about half the time they spend on science. This puts England joint bottom of a league table of 39 countries, alongside Ireland and Estonia and behind Indonesia and Mexico.

One critical aspect of our languages sickness is the fact that the decline is located almost exclusively in the state sector. The Coalition Government has gone on record as saying it wants to close what it calls ‘the vast gulf between state and independent schools’ – good idea, and languages would be one good place to start if they are serious. As it is, nearly one-quarter of acceptances for language degree courses are from independent school students compared to only 9% across all subjects.

**Treatment of the Sickness**

Those are the symptoms; what about the treatment? I shall not go into this in too much detail because that is what the other speakers will do, but I would just like to flag up a few
headings of the recovery programme that I think are essential and I do think the timing is right and the door is open for a potentially decent recovery.

The national curriculum is under review and we must not lose the opportunity to put right the most disastrous of strategic decisions: to allow languages to become optional after the age of 14. From my point of view, it is very important to say that that is not the same thing as making it compulsory for everyone to do a language GCSE, but I certainly do think that everyone should be studying a foreign language until at least the end of Key Stage 4 at a level appropriate for them. The Languages Ladder provides a good framework for this and should, I think, be revisited and resourced. The more pupils who do a GCSE, the more successful the new English baccalaureate will be, although I do think that alternative forms of language accreditation could also be taken into account.

As for primary schools, I think it would be a crying shame to waste the investment and the effort that has gone into languages over the past few years in preparation for what we all expected to become a statutory duty this year. The Government should definitely revert to plan A on this one, although personally I would put restoring mandatory languages at Key Stage 4 at the very top of the priority list, because I think that without that primary languages will wither away anyway.

Universities need to be very busy too and if they are to be guided by enlightened self-interest I think they should get involved in the debates on what happens in schools just as much as they will pay attention to putting their own house in order. I am sure Professor Worton will be going into much more detail and I only wish that more universities would follow the example set by UCL and a handful of others and introduce a language requirement for matriculation irrespective of degree subject, because that would have a very powerful influence on how pupils at school are advised on their GCSE option choices and on the structure of their school timetables.

I think universities should also take a close interest in the content of GCSE syllabuses. They are not going to see an increase in applications for language degrees if teenagers have been so put off by the tedium of GCSE that they cannot entertain the idea of continuing the subject at A Level. A recent Ofsted report suggested that there is too much teaching to the exam and not enough opportunity for pupils to use the language; all the more reason, I say, to get stuck in as early as possible before they get to secondary school and get all stroppy and self-conscious.

Universities have a vested interest in getting the challenges of assessment and accountability right at school level. The assessment issue seems to be double-edged. On the one hand, we have people saying that languages are too severely graded and that this puts pupils, teachers and parents off. On the other hand, there is said to be such a big gap between the expected standards at GCSE and A Level and then again between A Level and degree level that there is some extent of built in failure and disappointment. I think the input of universities here will be important in unravelling and resolving all that.
That is also linked to the issue of accountability. I think it is important that school performance and outcomes in languages are judged much more rigorously in terms of the quality and the purpose of language teaching and learning, not just the process of so-called ‘delivery’.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that although I seem to have presented something of a catalogue of failure I am a glass-half-full person and I do believe that this is a very propitious time to be promoting modern languages. There is a door genuinely open in government and positive things have been said and acknowledged about the importance of languages. I think we need to make sure that they are reflected in the conclusions and the practical outcomes of the curriculum review.

Another positive is that I think the rest of the world outside the specialist languages community represented here is also waking up to the issue. Last summer when the A-Level and GCSE results were published and it emerged that French had dropped out of the top 10 GCSEs for the first time ever, it triggered a great deal of serious and thoughtful media coverage and some very good analysis by several journalists and I hope this interest will continue.

English is, of course, very important, vital even to citizens of the 21st century, but remembering that only 6% of the world’s population are native English speakers and that 75% speak no English at all we can be sure that English certainly is not enough if we want to be culturally and politically engaged as individuals and as a country. A comprehensive national languages recovery programme would, I believe, strengthen our ability to compete, to influence and to enjoy a much richer educational experience at all levels.

The Value to Business of Language Learning

David Docherty, Chief Executive, Council for Industry and Higher Education

Talent Gaps

A very senior business leader said to me recently that languages were the new STEM. For those of you who do not know what STEM is, it stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates. It also stands for a very unhelpful and in a digital age anachronistic way of categorising the kind of imaginative minds a modern economy needs. The idea that people who can understand Wittgenstein can design a virtual world or translate classical Chinese poetry have a reduced economic value is cognitive reductionism of the very worst kind.

There are clearly significant talent gaps in the UK and, in general, the economy does need more engineers. Furthermore, businesses by and large require highly numerate and logical graduates to become the managers and entrepreneurs of the future, although these do not necessarily stem from STEM. However, just as vitally, businesses need talented people who
can understand and be culturally attuned to the other countries and cultures in which that company does business. Learning languages is central to such global citizenship and to business leadership.

The Value of Languages in Business

Language is, after all, the soul of a nation or a people, not just its negotiating tool. The use of metaphor tells us as much about the ways in which individuals orient themselves to one another and to the world around them as the noughts on the end of a contract. The subtleties of language tell us what is really going on in a deal and, crucially, how the long-term relationships will work, and in an era when much of the value in, say, manufacturing will come from technically advanced after-sales services where the business in effect rents the product from a service provider, relationship management, i.e. languages and understanding, become a factor of production. I have been in deals where the other side suddenly breaks into Japanese or Arabic, confident that none of the Brits in the room will be any the wiser. It was quite hard for us to retaliate when they all spoke perfect English – apart from the Americans, of course.

My PhD was on French and German hermeneutic traditions and philosophy and this movement began with the interpretation of biblical texts finally shorn of papal authority and therefore needing to be translated. This is when language learning became the focus of understanding the mind of God and over the next 300 years it became the foundation of something like Max Weber’s Sociology of Meaning. Language leads to understanding in the broadest sense and understanding leads to good business in the broadest sense.

Research Project

My organisation, the Council for Industry and Higher Education, is launching a research project on global graduates, because it is clear that not only blue chip businesses but any business that uses the internet to deliver its goods and services require employees who are globally mobile, comfortable in another tongue, culturally sensitive and business oriented. We are looking in particular at whether UK universities deliver such folk. Early conclusions suggest that they do, but we must ensure that enough of them are British citizens if we are to retain the loyalty of global companies in the UK. I hope by this time next year I will be much clearer about the value, in a narrower sense, of languages, because one of the ways to value languages is to work out whether there are recruitment, retention and rewards that go with it.

University Response to Business Challenge

Already universities are responding to this challenge posed by business. Some are starting global citizenship programmes, like UCL. Some are starting global graduate programmes, like Surrey. A few are insisting on two modern languages at GCSE as part of their entry requirements. However, these first drips must become a stream or a river if our graduates are to respond to the needs of a globalised business world.

A Blessing and a Curse
English is our blessing and our curse. A blessing because it has evolved and continues to evolve as a powerfully expressive tool full of surprise and joy, exuberant in its transformations but rooted in an extraordinary past. It is a curse because it has become the business *lingua franca*. It is the Martini of languages – anytime, anywhere, anyplace. This form of business English is a dangerous limitation on understanding of culture. It lends a false optimism that you understand the deal or the business or the sales that you are in. Anyone who has tried to do business outside the UK knows that even the most halting of attempts to speak in a colleague’s language or to negotiate a deal in another’s tongue is met by approval and toasts. How much more so if the British dealmaker or negotiator spoke the language fluently?

**Moving the Debate Forward**

I spoke earlier about STEM. STEM has accumulated significant government funding and support over the past 10 years because it became identified as a strategic problem for the country and led to clear economic challenges. I think if we are to move the language debate forward we have to root it in the economic challenge of the future and that economic challenge is one of global businesses.

Every business and university should and, I believe, will applaud this initiative about languages and I would say in closing that we should be wary of nostalgia. When I asked the leading businessman who said that languages were the new STEM whether he would lead an investigation into the need for languages in business he had to confess to being monolingual, as did I. We are part of the problem and I believe that this initiative is part of the solution.

**The Contribution from Universities and Higher Education**

**Professor Michael Worton, Vice-Provost, University College London**

I think it is very important that we remember the full financial context within which we are working, because it is a pretty difficult time where we are at the moment.

**Decline in Student Demand**

First of all, we have the persistent decline in student demand both in secondary schools and at university and we have to recognise that this is a significant part of the problem, but it is not the only problem.

**Reduction in Departments**

Secondly, the closure of departments, the reduction of departments and the number of languages that are being offered in a whole variety of institutions is a cause for anxiety. However, we also need to ask why these decisions are being made by senior management teams and I think we have to stop talking about what vice-chancellors do, because we all know that vice-chancellors do not make these decisions on their own. If a department is
going to be closed, it is closed because the entire senior management team is buying into that and we need to recognise, therefore, that there is a sharing of responsibility and thus a sharing of opportunity for us to try to make sure that the right kind of decisions are made with regard to the departments about which we care most.

T-resource is to be removed from non-STEM subjects, although there will be some support for strategically important subjects and, as has already been said, we do not know which are the strategically important languages, i.e. how important is Pashto going to be as compared with Arabic or Mandarin? It is that kind of debate. It is not how strategically important is French, whatever the French Government might like us to think, or the strategic importance of Italian.

*Tuition Fees*

Also, the real challenge for us in a world without any support for non-laboratory-based subjects is that of tuition fees of between £6,000 and £9,000 for home/EU students. This is going to pose enormous challenges for institutions. All of us are currently involved in enormously complex modelling trying to work out what exactly it is going to mean for us. Already people are saying can we be driven by the market? No, we cannot be driven by the market, but on the other hand the ‘gift’ of the higher fee is, if you like, the only thing the Government is giving us to make up for the slash in the funding for teaching. Thus, we have to make this work financially as well as ideologically, as well as pedagogically, as well as culturally.

*Comprehensive Spending Review*

In addition, I think that we forget all too often how well the previous government served us in terms of research funding. We also had cause for rejoicing when there was the last minute decision on the evening of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) to give relative protection to the ‘science budget’. There will effectively be a cut in research funding of c.10% by 2014-15, once inflation is taken into account – which is a good settlement, given the current financial situation. In a European way we still talk about the ‘science budget’ when we really mean the ‘research budget’. I am very happy to talk about Wissenschaft or whatever, but I do wish that in the humanities we would use the word ‘research’ in English, because it does look as if we are, if you like, being obliterated or marginalised from that. Hence there is an issue here of the way in which we even use our own language, which we perhaps need to address. However, while there is a 10% cut, more or less, over the period up to 2014-2015, there is also a virtually total cut in capital. I have heard colleagues in the humanities say, ‘That is not a big deal for us, because we do not need big kit, we do not need big equipment, we do not need big machines’, but we do need a great deal of infra-structure and increasingly need to have capital spent on us. Thus the research outcome was a little less good than it was perceived initially.

*Funding Issues*

The ‘context’ slide is about numbers and funding, but it is also about diversity and linguistic diversity in particular. Over the past few years the UK has had a wonderfully successful
time in terms of our increasing recruitment of both EU and high fee-paying overseas students. Last year there was a rise of 7% in EU students, so a significant increase, and these are people who bring with them intercultural competence and an assumption of intercultural competence, which in itself is changing the culture of our institutions. The highest percentage of students following language centre course or institution-wide language courses are the overseas students. They have a higher percentage rate of such engagement than the native Brits, and there are all kinds of reasons why it is very important that we keep this diversity – for financial reasons, for intercultural reasons and also for leadership reasons – because of the way in which our overseas students are so committed, almost innately, to the importance of languages.

However, anecdotal evidence over the last six months suggests that the number of EU undergraduates is going to fall slightly. I do not have time to go into the issue of debt, but since 2008 the amount of EU student debt has quadrupled to over £165 million per year. Will this Government allow that to go on? There are real issues to do with the possibilities of recovering the debt; if EU students continue to come, how will we recoup that money over time without the Government putting in place further restrictive constraints, as they are doing with immigration.

The new visa system caused a lot of difficulties in certain markets, which led to a drop in recruitment from certain countries, which may well be systemic, rather than simply a blip.

In addition, the Government is proposing to take out the post-study route whereby students who have graduated from a UK university can stay here for two years seeking work and so on. If that is taken out at a time when the US has moved from having one-year post-study to having two years and five months and when Canada is allowing students to stay for the entire length of their programme again looking at work, we are really going to be in a very different market situation. This is a position whereby, Government decisions are challenging the ways in which we can bring in the income that we need and also the cultural diversity that we need.

Just to reiterate something that Jean referred to: in 2002 we had the removal of languages from the national curriculum at Key Stage 4 and now we have the Coalition Government’s decision to take out languages as a statutory requirement in the new primary curriculum. Thus, both the Labour Government and the Coalition Government have dealt language education serious blows, so what can we do? First of all, lobby government, funding councils and research councils. We spend our lives doing that, but we must go on doing that.

We should all also support Jean’s call for a national languages recovery programme, but there is a great deal that we can do ourselves and we forget this. The universities, the MFL departments and many people in this room know that this is one of my mantras and I keep coming back to it: we have a great deal of power. We assume that we have no power, that everything is determined by HMG or by the funding councils or the research councils. That simply is not true. The Government cannot, interfere in curricula or interfere in admissions, so we have two enormously powerful levers that we can use. We also have decisions that we make about the kind of university that we want to be.
I will now race through possible institutional, then departmental actions, and will then give a case study at the end.

**Institution-Level Actions**

We can all include language learning in our teaching and learning strategies. That is our decision; it is not Government’s decision. If we cannot persuade our colleagues of the importance of language learning in our own universities, how can we possibly expect other people to take us seriously? We cannot persuade Government if we cannot even persuade our own local community.

All of us should think seriously about including a language requirement in a variety of different forms. I would not say that the UCL model is the only one. It is a model that we think can work and we managed to persuade everyone at UCL that they should go with it, but there are very different ways in which it can be included, like using the variety of different kinds of language learning frameworks – the Languages Ladder, Asset and so on.

And this is a no-brainer: we should align our international strategies, which we are creating all the time (this decade’s major strategic fetish is to have your international strategy up to date) with language learning and have language learning explicitly within it.

Also, we assume that our research strategies are essentially about taking forward big science, but why not include within our research strategies what David was referring to, intercultural competencies, i.e. what we would like all of our PhD students and, indeed, I would argue, many of our Masters students to have when they go out into the world of work. The CBI in its two reports a year ago talked about skills and inevitably hymned the wondrous beauty and power of STEM subjects, but also included language skills, pointing out that it is very important to have language skills even at the level of the ice-breaker in the first meeting. You may never say anything else in Arabic, for example, but in that very first meeting you know to articulate a salutation, you indicate that you are aware of a cultural difference between the various people in the room, and that is a very powerful way of starting negotiation.

We need to encourage more study abroad. At the moment, 25% of our students at UCL study abroad and we are still pushing it. It is an institutional priority that we want to get more and more students going overseas, but we do need to put in some funding and some cultural support before they go.

We need to encourage our students to engage in language-based volunteering. They have enormous skills. It is often said that the UK is becoming a monoglot country, but that is true only if we are talking about those Brits who have been native Brits for generations. We have vast numbers of Brits who speak two or three languages. Many of our students have skills they can use in their local communities where they can take part, let us say, in translating for asylum seekers, working in the community, translating in courts, in Citizens Advice Bureaux – ways in which we can try to establish the use of language skills as a norm in all
our activities. To do that, we have to look at everything that we do and ask ‘what is the place of language learning and language communication in what I am doing?’

Department-Level Actions

At the departmental level, we can create more interdisciplinary programmes. There are many ways in which instead thinking only of ‘language and/in Business’ courses, we look at where there are desirabilities with colleagues from very different non-cognate subjects. Computer science is increasingly looking at how its language-based systems map onto and how they do not map onto human language. Engineers are increasingly saying that they cannot function in ways which do not include the dimension of intercultural and of interlinguistic functioning.

Public engagement is one of the great new agendas of UK HE and it is a wonderful opportunity for us to seize and to engage the community not simply in benefiting from our thinking about language research, literature research, cultural research, but also by seeing how we can involve the various language communities in helping to formulate the kind of research questions that we are doing. In other words, taking public engagement very seriously and saying it must be about involving hard to reach communities in the research questions that we ourselves pose and then helping them to engage in and co-determine the research that we do, rather than simply being the grateful recipients of some patriarchal gesture of generosity when we finish our research.

We also need to be more Pro-active in proposing collaborative research projects, notably with subject areas which have access to greater funding and also more obvious direct public impact. For instance, one can consider working more closely with epidemiologists or health care professionals on issues around attitudes towards sexual health in immigrant communities in the UK. We as inter-linguistic and inter-cultural specialists can bring to survey work important and special skills, or working with colleagues in Architecture who are building the new eco-cities in China or creating clean water in African or Indian cities, and say to them: ‘there are ways in which we can help you which you do not yet realise’, rather than simply seeing our mission as being to preserve what we have at the moment.

Establish within the UK a series of hub and spoke partnerships in research, teaching, enterprise, knowledge transfer, moving beyond our obsession with the vertical hierarchy of rankings and considering a horizontal landscape of difference – and recognising that being a hub does not mean more power or more money for the host institution, but means greater benefit for everyone. We are going to have to work together much more and try to break down a tradition of siloism that is all too prevalent within universities and between universities in the UK. The globalised world of today is wonderfully exciting, but it is challenging and we need to ensure our programmes are fit for purpose, are taught in the right way, and that our students are learning enough outside of the classroom, outside of formal teaching, and so on.

Faculty-Level Actions
At the faculty level I would argue for more experiential learning, more learning outside of the classroom. We need to sell languages much more aggressively. All of our outreach programmes should have language learning at their heart, as should our wider participation programme, our recruitment activities - and we should assume that there is a low level of interest and a low level of knowledge. We cannot assume knowledge about what a language is, how it functions, what its importance is for personal, social and career development.

We should establish (or, at the very least, insist on participating in) partnerships established by other groups in our universities with big international resource companies, like infrastructure companies and pharmaceutical companies, who are working across the world, who are enormously committed to the cultural and ethical issues involved in exploitation, discovery and so on. We have a role to play there which no one else has.

**UCL Actions**

Just to think of what we can do, we put in place a language GCSE requirement for admissions to all programmes. We have also indicated if someone cannot come in with a language they have to take one during their programme. In addition, we have said that we want more students going abroad. We have made this a commitment by UCL whereby we have targets that we, happily, are meeting every year, so we keep pushing them up every year. We are funding study abroad since there is an issue about the cost of it and the cultural training that goes with it. We are creating a new degree, a kind of liberal arts degree where students will have to have a qualification in both science and humanities, beginning in 2012, and every student will have to take a language throughout their course.

There are many universities represented here who are involved in setting up Academies. Ours is opening in 2012. It is a science and maths specialist school, but languages are at the very heart of the curriculum and we have said that every child will study a language up to age 16, whatever their level of competence. The point is that all must understand the intercultural issues and the interlinguistic issues in learning a language.

Within our research agenda we decided we were going to cluster all of our research activity in four big Grand Challenges. It was assumed it would be dominated by science and biomedicine, but we have established the research Grand Challenge of intercultural understanding and this has been bought into by everyone in the institution.

**Conclusion**

At UCL there was initially resistance to our emphasis on foreign languages. Now, however, the entire institution recognises the value of foreign languages and sees it as a key USP (unique selling point) of UCL.

UCL is only one university. It is merely a question of each of us believing that we can persuade our colleagues to work with us and understand the importance of our own languages agenda.
Government View on Language Learning

Rt Hon David Willetts MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science

I am here to support the launch of your Position Statement, *Language Matters More and More*. It is an excellent and very useful document with some very valuable recommendations about what we should be doing and let me very briefly set out our view in the Coalition.

**Language Study Is Worthwhile In Its Own Right**

The first point, which it is so important to make in all these discussions, is that languages and language study is worthwhile in its own right. Although we can turn to the economics and finance and the importance of the balance of payments and all that, people do not learn German to improve the balance of payments. They learn German because they care about German and that is a perfectly good, understandable motive. I come from Birmingham and it is fantastic, we have a great asset in Birmingham, the Midlands and Warwickshire in the form of the great interest in Shakespeare, and tourists come from around the world. But people do not become students of Shakespeare so as to improve the tourist economy of Warwick. It is a very welcome by-product and, paradoxically, you will have the greatest chance of enjoying the by-product of people coming to the Midlands to study and see Shakespeare’s plays because there are people there who are committed to Shakespeare, because it is worthwhile in its own right. Especially here at the British Academy, we should always remember that that is the starting point.

This is where one starts shading into all those utilitarian arguments. I think one reason why languages are worthwhile in their own right is they give people an alternative window on the world. They see the world in a second way and they see it often through the eyes of a different culture. We know that one of the big paradoxes facing our nation is that in some ways it is such an asset that we have the world’s global language, but at the same time it can also be a liability, because you can go through life in a monocultural way. Just occasionally, I have a niggling envy of the Dutch and the Danes and Swedes, who have the international language – English – which they speak by and large rather better than we do, plus they have their own language, which helps give them their identity and is the language for their personal communications and conversations at home. It is incredibly good for people to have that option of a second window on the world.

For me, personally, and while it is now slightly rusty, I pursued German up to A Level and I did it because of a love of German culture and what it contributed and it does help in a tiny way to give one that opportunity of enjoying the benefit of a second language, so it is all good in itself.

**Mobility of British Students**

It then contributes to the mobility of British students. We are incredibly fortunate that we have so many students from abroad who want to come and study in Britain, but we do not
do quite so well in terms of British students going to study abroad. Indeed, we should remember all those figures for migration are, of course, net figures. Therefore, another way we can tackle the issue is to just encourage rather more British students to study abroad. When I went to India with the Prime Minister last year - and he did a fantastic job of opening up doors for all of us in the Party - one of the things I noticed is that we are now up to about 40,000 Indian students coming to Britain, with only 500 British students going to India. Even with the shared language we are behind Germany and France, and there are many other parts of the world, starting with Europe, where we do not send enough British students to study in their excellent universities, and that is a fantastic opportunity that we are missing. We need to do better and there are some delicate issues about, for example, whether UCAS and other current university structures enable people of whatever age to get information about studying in universities outside the UK. We need to make sure that people have that kind of information about opportunities available to them.

Studying a language can itself be a great driver of people then going to study abroad, learning about a different culture directly by living there. And, again, just to stray into the utilitarian argument, business people say to us that the recruits they look for from university are so much more employable if they have lived in a different country, if they have tried to understand a different culture, learnt a second language. That is one of the things that employers most frequently raise as one of the areas where our higher education system needs to do better.

Research Funding

Now, after years of decline there are just the beginnings of a modest improvement. The statistic I have is that in 2009-2010 there was an increase in overall language learning in higher education for the first time in four years. And we know particularly that postgraduate study is growing, the numbers having increased by 37% over the last eight years. We have there a really important agenda of sustaining the language community through our research funding. Of course, although it is often referred to as the ‘ring-fenced science budget’ what we were able to secure was cash protection for a total science and research budget that includes the AHRC and the ESRC, just as much as it includes research councils doing work in engineering or physics or whatever. If you look at the allocation decisions that I took before Christmas, of course drawing on the advice of the leading academic societies, we are absolutely clear that we have not tried to privilege some area of research activity over another; we have tried to keep the balance of funding.

Conclusion

We have an increase in overall language learning, we have a growth in postgraduate study backed with a good, in the circumstances, research settlement. We have growing flexibility at university with more than 55,000 students taking a language module as part of their degree, which is a very worthwhile thing, and we have some particular languages where demand is growing. Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese are some of the areas where we are seeing a growth in demand. Hence I am an optimist. I think that we can continue to make the case for languages and must do more to ensure that our students have the opportunities
to learn them. I know that people here are committed to their languages, and this excellent Position Statement gives us a route map of what we can do to sustain that great cause.

Questions and Answers Session

Professor Clive Holes, University of Oxford

Before I make a comment, I would like to add a little extra to Nigel’s list of why you should be interested in the internet and language. We are currently witnessing a national revolution which has been virtually entirely conducted over the internet and, interestingly, in a spoken form of the language which has been invented for the purpose.

The main point I wanted to make was what comes out in paragraph three of the document that we have in front of us, which is the whole issue of planning. I think we need to be a little bit careful about this business of not allowing languages to become too thinly spread on the ground. As you will have gathered, I teach a language which is usually called ‘less commonly taught’, although it is one of the ones which is spoken by 50% of the world’s population. Now, these languages are not like French, German, Spanish and so on. They are concentrated in a few institutions and in some cases they are dying there by the day almost. What we need there is probably the opposite of what we might need with the major European languages, which is the proper concentration of resources in a few areas which are strategically important, as was mentioned in the Browne report, but which the Government recognises as strategically important and is happy with concentration in a few –

Professor Worton

I think that the Language-Based Area Studies (LBAS) Initiative, as has been highlighted today, was a very good way forward, but if we just take ourselves seriously and we look at the hub and spoke model, it is a very good way of doing it. The rhetoric of ‘islands of excellence’ is something that betrays a real anxiety in the community and we have to deal with that. It seems to me that if we do look at concentration of resource, but at sharing of that T-resource, the second part is the crucial bit. That it is concentration, but that concentration leads to a greater, constellation of sharing around the country.

Professor Richard Towell, Routes Into Languages

I just wanted to pick up on the notion of collaboration. Routes Into Languages has more than 100 universities working together. They have done so in the area of languages because they recognise a mutual interest. A hub and spoke system will only work if you can similarly create a notion of mutual interest and it is quite difficult to do so on a regional basis, especially when the competitive factors, which you brought out very well, Professor Worton, are coming into play. You need a countervailing force to the competitive forces which are being reintroduced.
Professor Worton

Could I just suggest that the common interest is that we all want to survive financially?

Professor Helen Wallace, London School of Economics

I think everybody in this room is probably persuaded of the arguments and that is why we are here, but I am deeply conscious that we need still to do much more to get the buy-in, whether, as Michael Worton says, in other universities, in other sectors, from employers and so on. I would just like to hear a bit more from the panel about how we take forward an agenda which is not just persuading the convinced, but convincing the unpersuaded.

David Docherty

That is why I kicked off this project: employers, as you all know in this room and probably are very frustrated by, are not very good at saying what they want. Equally, they are not always very good at rewarding what they say they want and I want to get under the skin of this and figure out if someone has done a particular language are they rewarded in the recruitment retention process? I can then pin that down and say yes, there is economic value attached to this as well as promotion, and so we are going to dig into this.

I think the other thing that is beginning to emerge, and I am sure you all picked up on it, is KPMG’s six-year degree programme. I have been talking to a lot of other industrialists about this. It is almost like reinventing the old management training programmes there used to be in the past and if it is true that languages and global graduates are central to that, then you have to think that languages have to be embedded, just as you are, in these new ways of picking up people at 18 or 19 and taking them through to 24 or 25 in businesses. Thus, I have a feeling that this agenda is running into a different way of businesses engaging with universities anyway in the context of the world we are going into with fees.

Baroness O’Neill

Could I ask you whether employers regularly keep a simple record of the languages their employees already have?

David Docherty

I am not sure employers keep a regular record of anything that their employees already have and that is one of the things that will emerge, I think.

Baroness O’Neill

That is astonishing, is it not, that we do not even know when people have these skills?

Professor Mike Kelly, University of Southampton and UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies

We have had a lot of issues and a lot of suggestions. I always am sceptical about the open doors in government, because they tend to be rotating doors quite often and I think we have
had some visible demonstrations of that. Despite very positive rhetoric about languages from both the previous Government and the present Government, real decisions have not helped and have left us in this crisis. Other than in government where can we get purchase on the kinds of changes that the members of the panel are suggesting?

**Baroness O’Neill**

We have lived in a world of many initiatives and few successes. Perhaps each of you should respond with one thought about a door that is a little more open than the others.

**Professor Vincent**

Mine is partly an answer to Helen’s question and it picks up the important point that Mike raised about the paradox that many of the people who come to do languages in universities are monolinguals, but this is a country which is full of multilinguals. My city is Manchester and we have a project called ‘Multilingual Manchester’, studying the take-up of languages amongst communities that are multilingual and work in different ways. Enabling those people to be aware that there are opportunities to be able to use those talents that they have from birth is something that I think would be very valuable and would break down many of the traditional barriers.

**Baroness Coussins**

I would pick up on what David said. I think that employers and businesses generally have to practice what they preach. It is all very well the CBI producing report after report year after year saying that languages are important for the workforce, but if you pick up any paper or look at any website where jobs are being advertised where in the ad, where in the job description, where in the person specification does it say ‘languages would be an essential or a desirable element for the best person for this job’? Let them put their money where their mouth is.

**David Docherty**

I wonder whether the headquarters effect might be a powerful influence going forward. In other words, there is a thesis that businesses are better to employees in countries in which the business is headquartered. Thus, you would not have Pfizer shutting Sandwich down quite so easily if Pfizer was a British company. Therefore, if your headquarters is no longer filled with people, as most of these people round here are, who were born in Britain and have long-term emotional ties to the country, but because of the lack of language skills is filled with other nationals, might that have an impact on the UK as a headquarters, outside the City of London? If I was sitting in government and thinking about my tax take – and in the end governments do think about their tax take – that would be the thing that would be ticking away at the back of my head when it comes to languages.

**Professor Worton**

I will be the cheapskate on the panel. I think we have to create much more effective stories. We have made the arguments. There are very, very good arguments and the civil servants
know them, the Ministers have read briefings on them. What we need to do is to mimic some of the activities of communities like neuroscience. Why is it that UK neuroscience is recognised as being if not the best in the world, the second best in the world? That is the debate: is it number one or number two? That has been achieved not just by the fabulous research that is being done throughout the UK on neuroscience, but by a very carefully planned PR exercise. The same can be said for biomedicine. You can hardly put on the television news without having yet another story about a discovery in biomedicine.

We have lots of anecdotes but we do not share them sufficiently. And these are not just happy-clappy stories, but stories that talk about change and about how our work articulates with the UK’s vision. We need to be opportunistic. The Big Society is going through a very difficult moment in the UK. We can help David Cameron sort that out, but we need to be ready to get in there with really good stories.

Professor Jim Coleman, Open University, Chair of the University Council of Modern Languages

A lot of universities are very concerned about the year abroad. You have mentioned the importance of mobility and I would welcome your views on the possibility of supporting a fee waiver for the year abroad.

David Willetts, Universities and Science Minister

There are a lot of decisions coming down the track. We have said that we will keep the Erasmus fee waiver for the next year. That does not necessarily mean it is going to go after that, but with so many big changes happening in HE we do not yet have everything sorted out for the following years. However, we are keeping it for next year and hope to be able to do so thereafter.

Professor Hugh Williamson, University of Oxford

In the Browne report, and I know you have repeated it since, there is talk about help for strategically important languages. Could you tell us what they are or how we are finding out what they might be and what we should be doing about them?

David Willetts, Universities and Science Minister

This is ‘strategically important and vulnerable subjects’, which is a provision in HEFCE’s funding that has been around for several years now. There are a surprising number of different subjects that have discovered that they are strategically important and vulnerable! In the grant letter to HEFCE there is a crucial paragraph where we have indicated that even though funding has been reduced, we hope that they will be able to maintain their support for strategically important and vulnerable subjects. HEFCE are working out their budgets for next year and will be setting them in the next few weeks, but we have said that we would like that funding stream to carry on. HEFCE rather than ministers decide the exact composition of who falls within that definition.

Ceri James CILT Cymru, National Centre for Languages, Wales
I think your point about encouraging outgoing students is a very important one, Minister, and surely we should be doing more earlier on to raise awareness of these possibilities. Very few young people take advantage of opportunities to go on work experience or study abroad via Leonardo and Erasmus programmes, but I think they are just not informed about them until they get to university. Surely we need to inform them at school level and even at Key Stage 3 that these things lie ahead as possibilities.

David Willetts, Universities and Science Minister

That is a good point and it comes up so often, the whole importance of information, advice and guidance, and we need to try to get more information out for young people in school and college, I agree.

Professor Michael Kelly, University of Southampton, Director of the Subject Centre for Languages and Related Subjects

One of the issues that we are grappling with is the fact that with languages it is *ars longa, vita brevis* really, that languages take a long time to build up expertise and the upstream section in schools is absolutely crucial to what we can do in university whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level. There have been some good examples of collaboration between the schools sector and the university sector and you will be very familiar with the ‘Routes Into Languages’ programme, about which you spoke at an event before Christmas. To what extent would you see increasing or continuing cooperation between the university sector represented by yourself and the schools sector in the DfE?

David Willetts, Universities and Science Minister

It is a good thing that we should have that kind of collaboration. A lot of it is best done locally, such as shared use of facilities between local secondary schools and colleges and universities. I would like to see more of that. Also, in Michael Gove’s measure of GCSEs there is a very interesting piece of ‘nudge’. The so-called ‘English bacc’, that includes your GCSE performance in a modern language, has had a big effect and I think it has been quite a salutary reminder for some secondary schools. I have had this conversation with heads of secondary schools in my own constituency who suddenly realise they are not doing any modern languages. They thought they were running an academically successful school, but on the new measure its performance has plummeted and it has led them to think maybe they should be making more of an effort on foreign languages. Hence that is quite a powerful signal that Michael Gove has sent out.

Professor Tim Connell, Vice-President, Chartered Institute of Linguists

I do wonder whether people at school and higher education level would take languages more seriously if they saw that languages were being more encouraged across the board as far as employers are concerned and my question is about the Government as an employer. There does seem to be a problem with regard to government agencies which have a languages requirement, the obvious ones are GCHQ, MI5, SIS, the armed forces and also of course the police force, especially the Metropolitan Police. What is the Government’s policy
with regard to funding for language training in these areas bearing in mind that the
Foreign Office shut its language centre three years ago?

David Willetts, Universities and Science Minister

I should have quit while I was ahead! I do not know the answer to that question. It is a very
good point and it is not a thought that had occurred to me before, taking some kind of look
across Whitehall at what support they give. I have had some discussions about how the
Foreign Office and the MOD engage in this, because I think there are some MOD facilities
that provide language training for the MOD and I remember discussing with Liam Fox
whether there was more we could do there. That is a fair point though and I will check that
out.

Post-event response

There is no cross-government policy on language learning for employees. It is up to individual
departments to decide their priorities for training and where they have a business need for language
learning, this can be funded by departmental budgets. Foreign language skills are important in
particular parts of government, for example in the FCO and the MoD. The FCO sees language skills
as central to achieving the UK’s foreign policy priorities. As part of an initiative launched recently to
strengthen the core diplomatic skills of its staff, the FCO is working to ensure it has the right
language capabilities to support its work in key strategic areas. For example, there has been an
increase in training to enhance staff skills in a range of languages, including Arabic and Mandarin.
FCO staff receive intensive language training, both in London and in overseas immersion centres,
prior to taking up overseas appointments.

In 2009, Government Skills and the UK Inter-Departmental Standing Committee on Languages
(UKIDSCOL) worked effectively together with relevant universities to address the particular
operational requirements for specialist foreign language skills in some departments. The work ensured
these parts of government have access to the language and associated cultural awareness training
their staff need through relevant postgraduate programmes.

Dr Jackson

I was struck in the Minister’s remarks and the glass half full that Jean Coussins had used as
a metaphor, the sense of green shoots, dare one say, and I would just ask the panel whether
that is a realistic perspective at this point. There is, I believe, a metaphor in Wall Street of
the ‘dead cat bounce’, which is that at certain stages in the cycle you have the appearance of
an upturn but it is misleading and what is happening is that there is a steeper descent ahead.
Do the members of the panel have an observation to make about the Minister’s general
perspective there?

Professor Worton

I do think that the Gove baccalaureate idea is very helpful to us and we need to build on it. I
have all kinds of anxieties about the free schools and so on, in terms of the competence that
is needed to set up a school and whether the idea of a group of parents suddenly setting up
a school is going to be the best way forward. However, I think what has happened is that
there is now a much more interesting approach to what the schools agenda is, and especially the secondary school agenda. It is a time when a lot of questions are being asked that, dare I say it, members of the Big Society are interested in, so I think this is a moment for us to get in there and be part of those discussions, because so many schools are looking at what they can do. The great thing about the academies scheme under the previous Government, the ‘Adonis Academies’, was that they were free from the national curriculum except for English, Maths and ICT. That is enormous freedom. I think also there is an increasingly strong interaction between the independent sector and the state sector. Schools like Rugby which have a value-rich history and ethos, and also which have been pioneers of some radical approaches to learning, are now partnering increasingly with state schools. I think there are places where universities must be in there and not leave it simply to the schools, and I think there is a lot we can do there.

Professor Vincent

I have two answers, one positive and one negative. The positive one is that the project that we mentioned that the Academy has just been funded for is going to develop a stream of activity which will allow us to encourage these kinds of activities at the level of the school and not just at the traditional level that the Academy has worked, the level of advanced research.

On the other hand, a negative anecdote about my daughter, who wanted to do the International Baccalaureate and had a place to do it in the local state school which does it. One of the reasons she wanted to do it was because she wanted to do languages. She is bilingual and she wanted to be able to carry on languages. We had a letter before Christmas that said the International Baccalaureate was being killed in this school because of the financial cuts. When you look at the range of qualifications that people have when they come from other countries where, in general, the school leaving certificate is much more like a baccalaureate in the sense of having the national language, mathematics, another language, science, etc, if that programme, which was beginning to move out of the private sector schools into state schools, is forced back in by economic circumstances, I think that is a very negative concern.

Sarah Cartwright, CILT, National Centre for Languages

I have a question for the panel. Are you aware of the contribution made by complementary or supplementary schools to language learning in the UK? There are over 3,000 schools run by parents and communities on Saturdays and Sundays and sometimes during the week after mainstream school in which language and culture are taught. Indeed, over 70 languages are in our languages database and I wonder if you would like to comment on that resource, which is in danger of disappearance because under the current climate of financial cuts LAs are ceasing their financial support and such schools are disappearing quite quickly at the moment.

Professor Vincent
I think that is a very important initiative. I mentioned earlier on the project on ‘Multilingual Manchester’ and one of the things they have been looking at is exactly the way in which those community schools in the parts of Manchester where people speak Punjabi, Polish, Cantonese, whatever are hugely important both in terms of the way in which they help people to develop an understanding of their own culture, but also the understanding of what it means to be multilingual. That is the sort of resource out of which one might hope to grow other activities. Yes, I am aware of it and I share your view of it.

Professor Worton

I agree with you completely, Sarah, but I think the problem is that we have to be a lot more aggressive with them. We have not been doing enough as a sector with the complementary schools, Saturday schools and so on. These are about building complex community coherence, but it is also about looking at how the complementary schools are fitting in with things like the Languages Ladder and Asset and so on. Rather than just simply sitting back and wondering at them and saying how good they are though, I think we have to be in there and that is where I see really big opportunities for things like our volunteering activities within universities whereby the students should be encouraged into that kind of engagement.

Dr Elisabeth Kendall, Oxford University

I am a former director of the Arabic Language-Based Area Study Centre. I wanted to make a comment which may provoke more questions on the notion of strategically important and vulnerable languages. As you know, HEFCE defined the LBAS centres as promoting those languages which were strategically important and vulnerable. My concern is that this is a very reactive way of operating policy. When, for example, the almost Iranian revolution happened we were suddenly contacted and asked whether we could spread ourselves out to Persian as well, even though we were only Arabic. Then there was a question about Urdu and Pashto and Dari and other incredibly strategically important languages, as others here, such as Clive Holes, will know. The FCO and MOD were coming to universities and asking us if we could help. The problem is that these subjects are not considered vulnerable because they barely exist. We have to think much, much more ahead in order to prepare for potential crises instead of just reacting to crises when they happen.

Professor Worton

Can I just say one thing about SIVS itself, because I think we have to be very careful? The way that Browne used it was not the way that HEFCE uses it and he did not mean it in the HEFCE sense. We are very, very lucky that the Secretary of State in his advice to HEFCE advised HEFCE to take it according to the strategic and vulnerable subjects. However, according to HEFCE, up until now – and they are still thinking – strategically important and vulnerable subjects includes all languages. It is not being driven by the Pashto, Urdu agenda. GCHQ and other departments do have a very important issue, but I think increasing numbers of us are saying that there needs to be a response to that issue of geopolitical intervention, which is separate completely from the educational issue of modern
language learning. They are two different issues and they have been conflated and we need to be very clear that we see that difference.

**Dr Charles Burdett, Society of Italian Studies**

I would like to follow on from what Jim Coleman asked the Minister concerning the year abroad. The year abroad is absolutely central to any modern language department. It was very encouraging to hear David Willetts say that for the next year the HEFCE fee waiver that is essential to the Erasmus scheme will continue and he was hopeful that it would continue afterwards. Do we need to lobby and how should we lobby ministers or HEFCE to ensure that this continues for the future? The Minister made the right noises, but it is nevertheless not a cast iron guarantee and should we be doing something more?

**Professor Richard Hudson, British Academy**

Can I bring another language into the discussion which has not been mentioned yet, but it is really rather important, which is English. The fact is that the majority of our students are native speakers of English and in a healthy educational system the teaching of foreign languages would be based on a healthy teaching of English and so children would already know something about how language works when they start on French or whatever. That is not the case now and I think it is a great shame that this discussion here is happening without any representatives from the English community, including the HE English community who are producing the teachers who teach our students English.

**Professor Vincent**

It is the case that the academic community has had some influence in terms of shaping, as you know, the nature of the national syllabus in English and introducing a little more rigour into the use of grammatical terminology, but yes, absolutely.

**Closing Remarks**

**Sir Adam Roberts, President, British Academy**

When, a couple of years ago, we launched our *Language Matters* report we also had and have had since extensive follow-up activity and discussions about what to do. There is an old saying ‘be careful about what you wish for’. One of the things we wished for was government recognition of the existence of a problem regarding the teaching and understanding of languages in this country. We had begun largely with a concern about the adequacy of language expertise for researchers in this country in the social sciences and humanities. That was the beginning of much of this Academy’s involvement in the issue, but it has since broadened, as this discussion has reflected and involves a wide range of issues not just to do with researchers, but to do with schools, to do with the adequacy of our training of people for public life and so on. It is a very wide-ranging discussion and because we have achieved something of what we wished for in the form of government recognition we have a special obligation on the Academy, along with many partners and we will be
looking to many of those in this room to help us. We have a special obligation to take this issue forward, not just from the phase of identifying the problem, which was the phase we were in two years ago, but in the phase of recommending action. In this report you will see seven proposals towards the end for specific actions that need to be taken and they do not end there. The Academy will be doing much more.

As you know, we have had a significant grant from the Government for advancing both language and quantitative expertise and as a result of that grant we will be, first of all, establishing some fellowships, postdoctoral and other, with a special interest in, among other things, language matters. We will be looking not only for people with expertise in these matters but champions of them, who will be able to advance the cause of, among other things, language studies. There are many other elements that we recognise need to be part of a coordinated programme, including there will be some publications on key aspects of these two issues, language and quantitative studies. We will be involved with a number of campaigning activities and so on so forth.

All I am saying, to conclude this excellent session, is this is not the end of the road, it is the beginning of a new and more challenging road and we recognise the obligation, along with you, I hope, to go forward on that road. Meanwhile, let me thank all those who have taken part in this symposium and particularly the panel for contributing to our sense of direction in this matter.

Thank you.