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Policy Briefing on Community Languages and Social Cohesion

This briefing document provides core information and details of resources on Community Languages for academics, policymakers and practitioners and highlights ways in which policy might support Community Languages. The term 'Community Languages' is used here to refer to the languages of the various immigrant communities in the UK, both longstanding and more recent. The term 'Heritage Languages' is sometimes also used for this purpose.

LANGUAGE POLICY

There is strong government support for teaching English to newcomers, whether as immigrants or refugees. Much policy relating to language(s) in immigrant communities therefore concerns ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) and, in the educational context, EAL (English as an additional language). There is little formal policy in the UK in relation to Community Languages with the exception of Scotland where Community Languages are integrated into the 'mother tongue + 2 other languages' or '1+2' policy.¹ Provision is made in the secondary education system for Urdu and Chinese as either L2 or L3. In practice, a wide range of Community Languages feature as L3 in Scotland. The Scottish Government Languages Working Group report and recommendations are available at:

<http://www.gov.scot/resource/0039/00393435.pdf>

SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

Community Languages are taught mainly through supplementary schools, sometimes known as 'Saturday schools'. These take place outside the mainstream school system and are generally supported through grassroots community organisations, charities or particular religious groupings. Language learning takes a wide variety of forms and often occurs alongside other cultural and/or religious activities. The best source of information on supplementary schools is the website of the National Resource Centre, although this relates almost entirely to England:

<https://www.supplementaryeducation.org.uk/supplementary-education-the-nrc/>

CONCERNS AND POLICY ASKS

Community Languages are relevant both to the **skills agenda** (building both linguistic and intercultural skills) and to **community cohesion** in the UK (since they are central to community identity). Currently supplementary schools are run mainly on a voluntary basis or are funded by charities. In mainstream schools, the ability to speak a Community Language is often not valued or accredited. An audit of the language skills of teachers in the maintained sector would be valuable. It will also be important to monitor the effects of the policies in Wales and Scotland in achieving 'triple literacy'.

Effective policy support could involve:

- Incentivisation for mainstream schools to offer space to supplementary schools, either free of charge or at non-commercial rates.
- Incentivisation for mainstream schools to embed activities that value Community Languages (e.g. workshops for parents, celebrations of linguistic diversity).
- Incentivisation for mainstream schools to recognise and reward language skills obtained outside the school system and to facilitate entry for public examinations such as GCSE.
- Incentivisation for teachers in the maintained sector to partner with those in supplementary schools and those providing ESOL to share best practice and have joint CPD opportunities.
- Full and sustainable accreditation for lesser-taught languages at UCAS level.
- A change in the census questions on language so that accurate data about Community Languages can be captured to help with policy-making.

STATISTICS

England and Wales:

Information on the use of Community Languages in England and Wales is available from the Office for National Statistics:² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/search?q=languages>

Their analysis of the 2011 census statistics is available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/language/articles/languageinenglandandwales/2013-03-04>

By far the most widely-spoken Community Language in England and Wales is Polish, with several languages from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh also widely spoken (Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Gujarati); Arabic, French, Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish also feature.

Scotland:

Information on Scottish Community Languages is available from Scotland's 2011 Census data. Around 150 languages are spoken in Scotland. Data on the languages used at home other than English is available at:

http://scotlandcensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/rel2A_Language_detailed_Scotland.pdf

According to the 2011 census data, the most widely-spoken Community Languages in Scotland are Polish, Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Italian and Russian.

Northern Ireland (NI):

Details on Community Languages in Northern Ireland is available from the NI 2011 Census data:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/2011-census-results-detailed-characteristics-statistics-bulletin-28-june-2013.pdf>

According to the 2011 census, Polish is the most spoken community language in NI, followed by Lithuanian, Portuguese, Slovak, Chinese, Filipino and Latvian.

ACADEMIC PROJECTS ON COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

1. Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS): <http://www.meits.org>
2. Foreign, indigenous and community languages in the devolved regions of the UK: policy and practice for growth: <https://www.modernlanguagesleadershipfellow.com/>
3. Multilingual Manchester: <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk>
4. Family Language Policy: A Multi-Level Investigation of Multilingual Practices in Transnational Families: Website: <https://familylanguagepoli.wixsite.com/familylanguagepolicy>
5. Audit of Complementary Schools in Scotland. <https://www.ceres.education.ed.ac.uk/research-2/research/>
6. Here to Stay? Identity, citizenship and belonging among settled Eastern European migrant children and young people in the UK. <http://www.migrantyouth.org>

¹ Further information on the '1+2' policy, including government agenda, recent developments and partnership organisations, can be obtained from the website of Scotland's National Centre for Language (SCILT) based at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow: <https://www.scilt.org.uk>

² It is important to note that the Census data for England, Wales and Northern Ireland is highly likely to underestimate the number of speakers of Community Languages, as the questions posed relate only to the household's 'main language' and to levels of proficiency in English as well as Welsh, Irish and Ulster Scots where appropriate. Therefore, in a household where one or more Community Languages are spoken but where English is the 'main language', the Census will not capture the Community Language data. In Scotland, data is collected where a language other than English is spoken at home but this too may underestimate the real number of Community Language speakers.