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Language Trends Scotland 2025/26

Language teaching in primary, secondary and independent schools in Scotland

British Council Scotland research report by Jayne Duff, Helen McKelvey, Aisling O'Boyle and Ian Collen, Queen's University Belfast

www.britishcouncil.org

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Foreword from British Council Scotland

We in the British Council believe that language learning is a critical skill to prepare young people for life in a global interconnected society.

As someone who has lived and worked around the world for much of my life, I know that language skills can build personal and professional connections and open the world up in a wholly unique way. Whether it's using French to chat to cousins as a child, or just enough Arabic to direct a taxi as an adult, it all comes with a sense of pride and genuine connection.

This is at the heart of our cultural relations work here in Scotland. We aim to help the younger generation to learn about other languages and cultures, and support teachers and schools in enabling this.

We are very pleased to share our Language Trends Scotland 2025/26 report. Although there are no doubt current challenges, we note some positive trends, strong commitment from teachers, and an excellent foundation from which to build.

Together with our partners across education and the public sector, we look forward to using these insights to champion language learning and strengthen Scotland's global connections.

Claire de Braekeleer
Director, British Council Scotland

Introduction

British Council Scotland is pleased to present the findings of *Language Trends Scotland 2025/26*.

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. There has been an annual survey in Wales since 2015, a biennial survey in Northern Ireland since 2019, and now annually in Scotland since 2024. An inaugural report from Ireland will be available later this year. All 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 2025/26

- Ninety-nine per cent of responding primary schools are teaching languages in the 2025/26 academic year;
- One fifth of primary schools are embedding languages in their daily routine and curriculum;
- The two biggest challenges for primary languages are teacher confidence in language pedagogy and finding time in the curriculum;
- Sixty-three per cent of responding local authority secondary schools report that all their S1 learners study **more than one language** (up from 52 per cent in 2024/25);
- Over 60 per cent of schools run multi-level classes and 55 per cent run bi-level classes in S4; teachers commented on the challenges of this approach, but many deem it the only way to keep language classes running;
- Learners in local authority secondaries are taking Edinburgh College classes in 38 per cent of schools with Higher and/or Advanced Higher provision;
- Contrary to the UK-wide trend, German continues to be well supported in Scottish Independent schools.

1 Language Trends research series: https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/research-series/language-trends.

Policy context and background

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is Scotland's national curriculum, which outlines the educational rights of all children and young people and is taught to learners aged 3–18 in Scottish schools from nursery to secondary-school level. The CfE takes a learner-centric approach, enabling young people to be 'successful learners', 'confident individuals', 'responsible citizens' and 'effective contributors' throughout and following their educational journey (Education Scotland, 2025a). Integral to a 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, 2025a).

There are six curriculum levels in Scotland, encompassed by a Broad General Education (BGE) during the early, first, second, third and fourth levels, and followed by a Senior Phase (Table 1). Primary education (P1–P7) covers education for 4–12-year-olds and secondary education (S1–S6) spans ages 11–18, with a focus on BGE from primary level until S3, and the Senior Phase in S4–S6.

Languages are listed as one of the eight core curriculum areas, 'including English, Gàidhlig, Gaelic (Learners), modern languages and classical languages' (Education Scotland, 2025a).

Level	Year Groups	Learner age	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 CfE is currently undergoing a systematic review called the Curriculum Improvement Cycle to ensure the curriculum aligns with the current educational context for learners in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2024).

Pupils from S4 upwards are presented for National Qualifications, including in ascending level of difficulty National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher. 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.

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

In 2012, Scottish Government launched a new language learning policy 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, 2025b). The policy, funded with £36.8million from Scottish government in the period 2013–2023, aims to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to learn additional languages up to the end of S3, giving learners a 10-year language learning experience. 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. 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.

Since 2019, Scottish Government has carried out a biennial survey through local authorities of the implementation of the 1+2 approach. The latest survey in 2023 found that nearly all primary and secondary schools now deliver language learning from P1 and through the Broad General Education (Scottish Government, 2024). At the time of writing, we anticipate a new report from the Scottish Government in early 2026 on the implementation of the 1+2 approach.

Gaelic Medium Education (GME) is immersion, where learners receive their education – inside and outside of the classroom – through the medium of Gaelic. These learners 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 learners should have the opportunity to continue this L3, in addition to Gàidhlig and English.

In June 2025, the Scottish Parliament passed a bill to encourage the use of both Gaelic and Scots in schools. The bill, which was passed unanimously by MSPs, established Gaelic and Scots as official languages, introduced educational standards for both languages, and will empower parents to ask for the establishment of a Gaelic school in their area. This bill illustrates the growth of Gaelic and Scots in Scotland and demonstrates the commitment of the Scottish Government to encouraging the use of Scottish languages and to financing initiatives that support these languages and their speakers.[3]

3 For more information on the scope of the new bill, see: https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-languages-bill-passed/; https://www.gov.scot/news/growing-scotlands-languages/ .

Research outline

British Council Scotland commissioned a research team from the Centre for Language Education Research in Queen's University Belfast to conduct the research for this year's iteration of *Language Trends Scotland*. Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All participants in the surveys 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.

Consistent with the research methodology used throughout the wider Language Trends series, schools were surveyed using questionnaires. These questionnaires were developed in early 2025 in consultation with an expert Advisory Panel including Scottish schoolteachers, SCILT, Education Scotland, Scottish Government and representatives of Higher Education. Three bespoke 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 in September and October. 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 (Facebook, X, and Instagram) and Education Newsletter, and the SCILT weekly bulletin.

After data sets had been cleaned and duplicates removed, a total of 169 local authority primary schools responded from 29 of the 32 local authorities; 114 local authority secondary schools responded from 29 local authorities. Twelve 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.

	Base figure (emails delivered)	Number of responses	Response rate
Local authority primary schools	1,659	169	10%
Local authority secondary schools	308	114	37%
Independent secondary schools	67	12	18%

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

Figure 1 and Table 3 show the number of Advanced Higher entries in French, German and Spanish from 2015–2025. German and Spanish entries have continued to increase in 2025, while French has decreased by 15 entries since 2024. Spanish continues to be the most popular language at both Higher and Advanced Higher levels.

Advanced Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

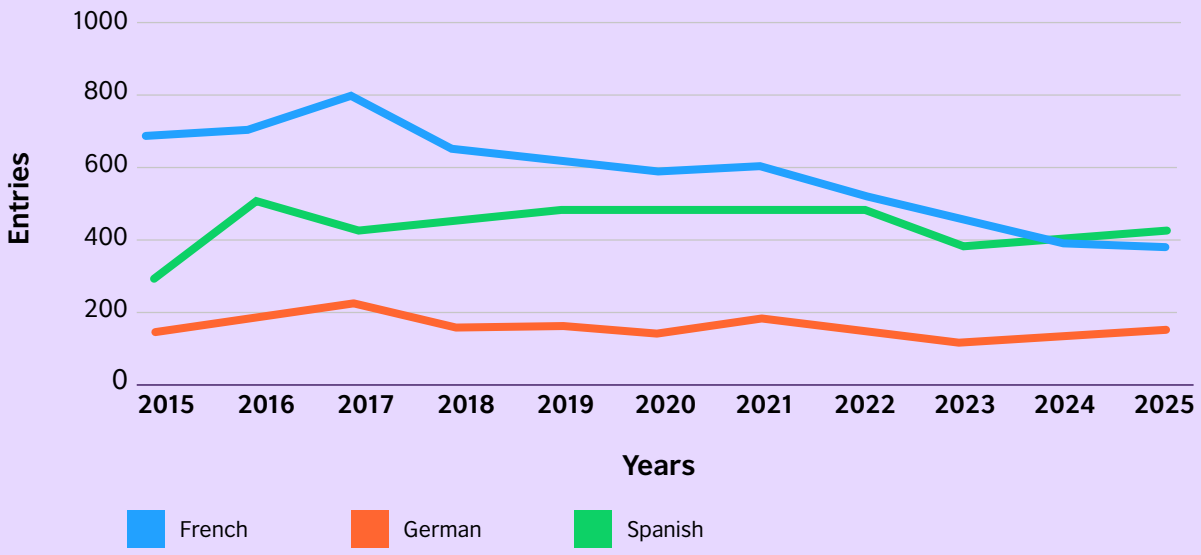

Figure 1: Advanced Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

	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
2025	365	105	425

Table 3: Advanced Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

Gaelic Advanced Higher entries have declined slightly in 2025, while both Italian and Latin have declined by 20 entries in 2025 (see Table 4).

	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
2025	10	25	25	105

Table 4: Advanced Higher Entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin 2019–2025

It is very positive to note that higher entries in French, German and Spanish have continued their upward trajectory in 2025 (see Figure 2 and Table 5 for entry figures from 2015–2025).

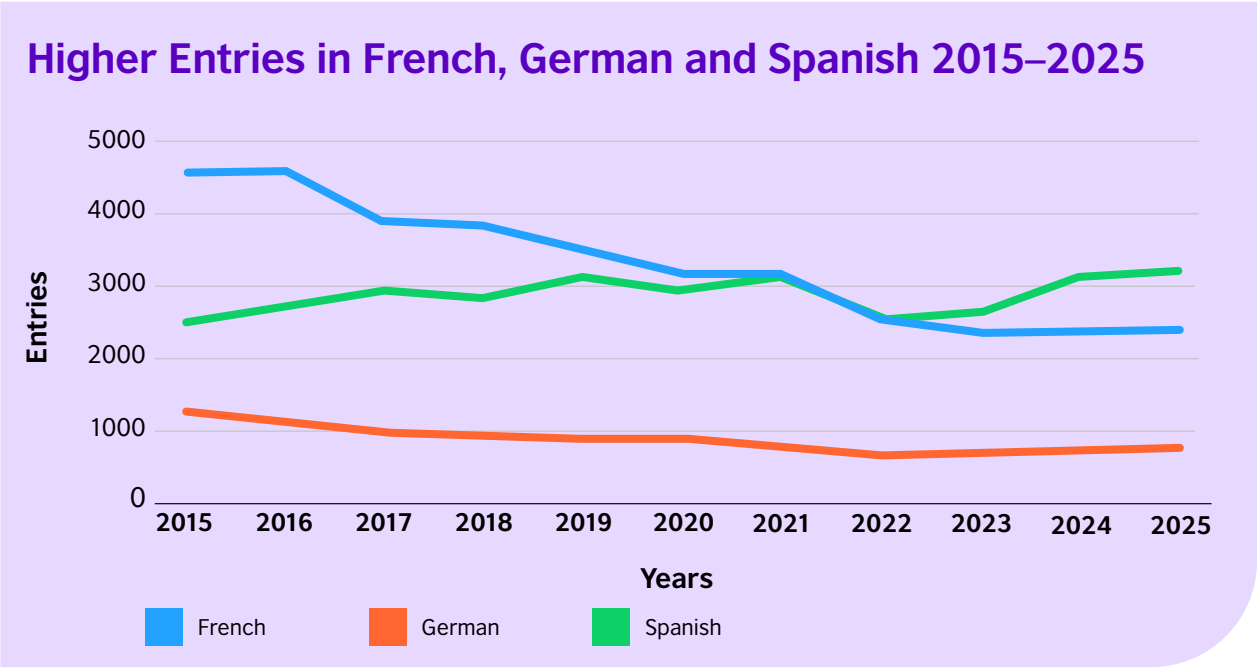

Figure 2: Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

	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
2025	2340	600	3170

Table 5: Higher Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

Higher entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin have also increased in 2025, including a 32 per cent increase in Higher Italian entries (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
2025	60	70	250	160	305	110

Table 6: Higher Entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin 2019–2025

Figure 3 and Table 7 show a moderate increase in French entries and a substantial increase in Spanish entries at Below Higher level. However, Below Higher entries for German have declined in from 2,305 in 2024 to 2,105 in 2025.

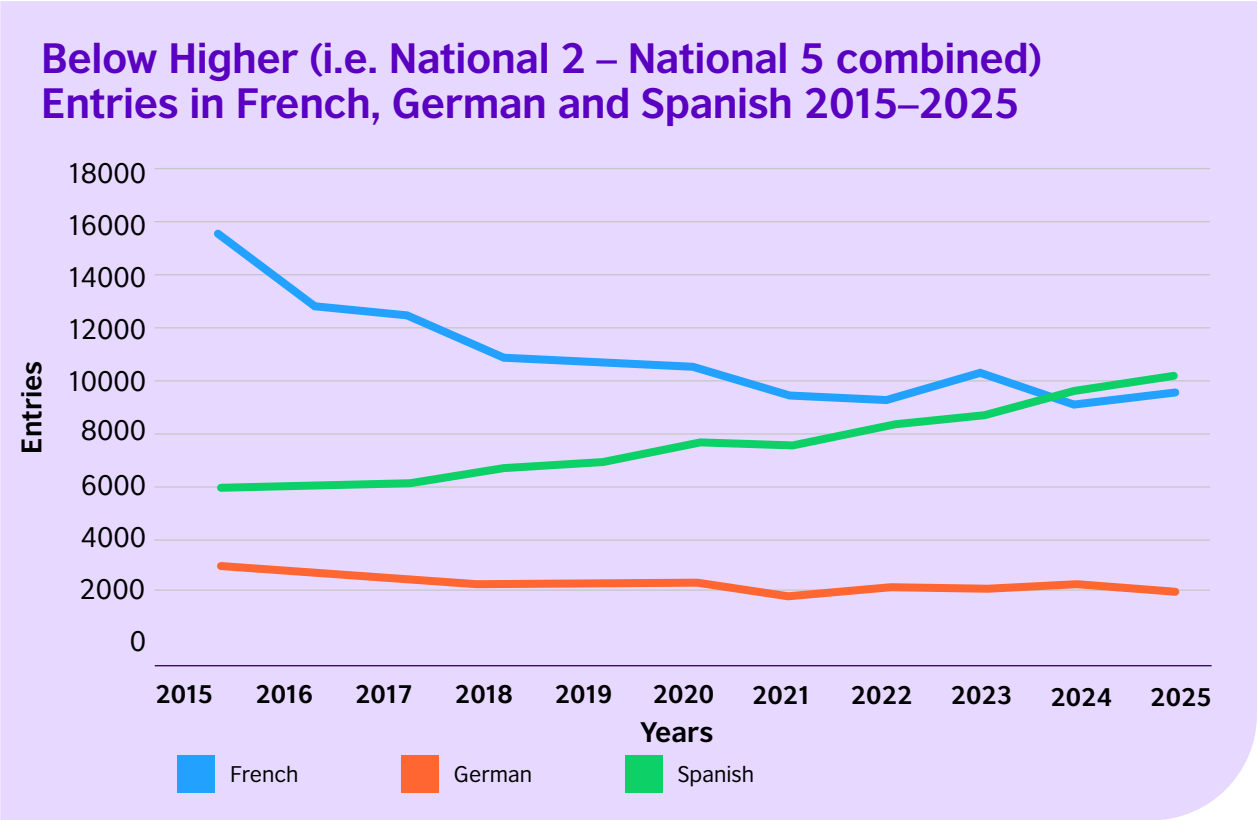

Figure 3: Below Higher (i.e. National 2 – National 5 combined) Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2024

	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
2025	9620	2105	10205

Table 7: Below Higher (i.e. National 2 – National 5 combined) Entries in French, German and Spanish 2015–2025

Below Higher entries in Latin and Mandarin have increased this year, while Italian entries remain the same as in 2024; Table 8 shows a decrease in Below Higher entries for Cantonese, Gaelic and Urdu.

	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
2025	15	240	485	420	470	130

Table 8: Below Higher (i.e. National 2 – National 5 combined) Entries in Other Modern Languages and Latin 2019–2025 [* denotes fewer than 5 entries]

Findings from local authority primary schools

Profile of responding primary schools

According to statistics published by the Scottish Government, there are currently 1,977 publicly funded primary schools in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2024b). 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 1,659 school office accounts, addressed for the attention of the Headteacher. Participants were also invited to participate via British Council Scotland social media channels, making an exact response rate difficult to calculate. In total, 169 local authority primary schools responded to the survey resulting in an approximate response rate of ten per cent.

The survey received responses from schools located in 27 out of the 32 local authorities; Table 9 shows the geographical distribution of primary schools who responded to the survey. Compared to the 2024 survey, a much larger response from Glasgow and Strathclyde, as well as Aberdeen and North East, can be seen, with a significantly reduced response rate from Tayside, Central and Fife and Edinburgh and Lothians.

Region	Areas & Cities within Region	Percentage of responding schools 2024	Percentage of responding schools 2025
Aberdeen and North East	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray	12%	22%
Highland and Islands	Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highland, Orkney, Shetland	9%	7%
Tayside, Central and Fife	Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling	28%	15%
Edinburgh and Lothians	City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian	16%	5%
Glasgow and Strathclyde	East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	22%	42%
Scotland South	Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders	13%	8%

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. While 22 per cent of all responding schools in 2024 taught BSL, only 16 per cent of all responding schools in the 2025 survey taught BSL. Comments from those who responded affirmatively revealed that BSL is often used in assemblies, but in only a small number of responding schools (four per cent) was it embedded in the daily life of the school:

"Some teachers use sign language as part of their curriculum teaching, but it is not consistent across the school."

"We teach signs during assembly but not discrete lessons in class (though some teachers have in the past)."

"BSL is used universally in assembly and in daily interactions where possible. [...] We have a school song that we sing and sign every week in assembly. We also use sign language where possible with varying degrees of confidence. We have strong links with our Deaf Education Team and profoundly deaf parents too."

In the 2025/26 academic year, 99 percent (n=167) of responding schools provided language teaching as part of the curriculum (up one per cent from 2024). As in the 2024/25 academic year, French remains the most taught L2 language, with 71 per cent of responding schools teaching French as L2. Whilst this is a 12 per cent decrease on the 2024 report, this may be due to different schools reporting each year; this is beyond the scope of this research report to investigate. Spanish remains the most popular choice for an L3 language, with over a third of respondents (37 per cent) teaching it as part of the school day. Figure 4 also highlights other languages schools may offer as both L2 and L3 languages, which included BSL and Arabic. Some schools also cited Makaton.

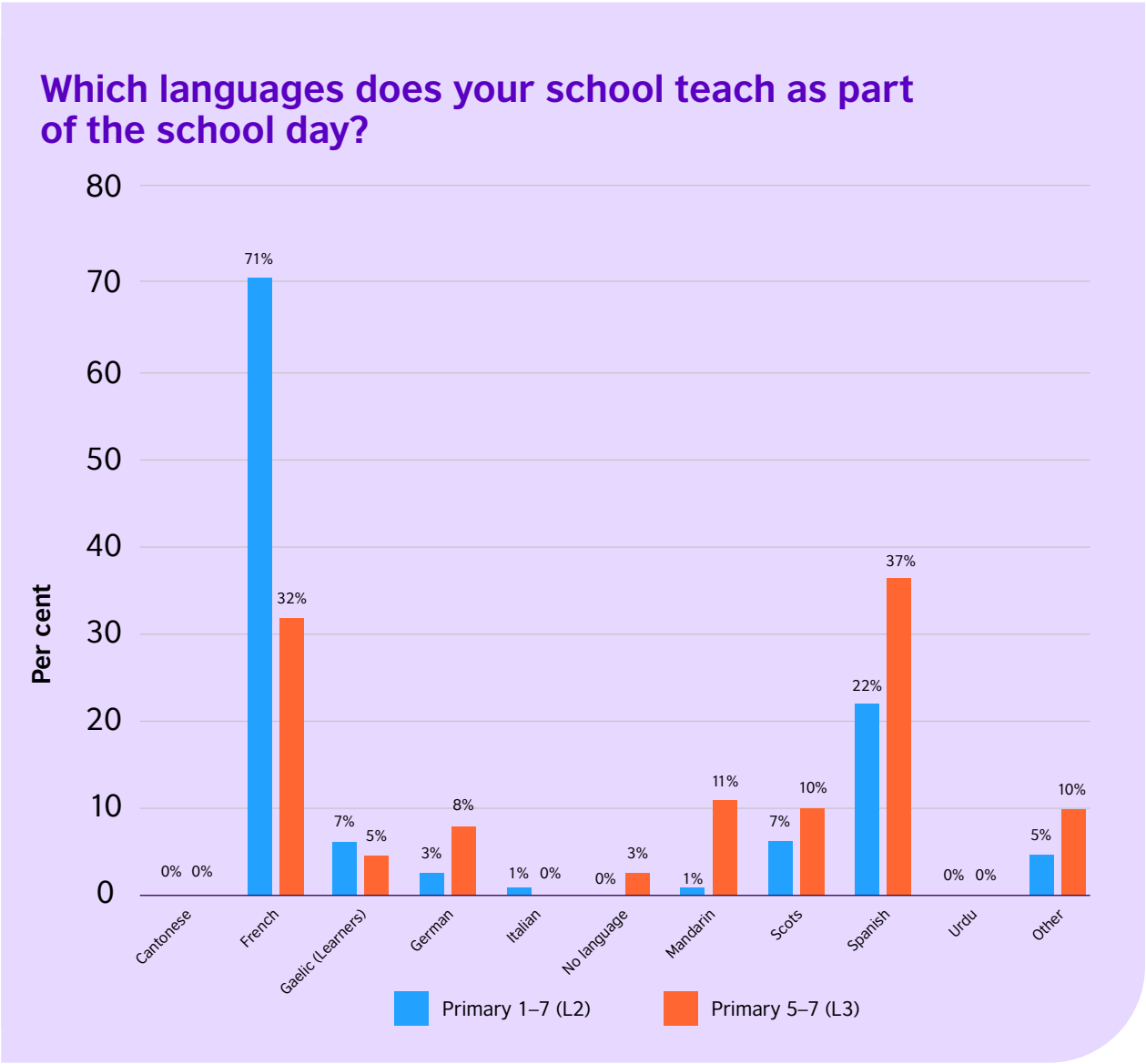

Figure 4: Respondent answers to 'Which languages does your school teach as part of the school day? Please tick all that apply. If you select 'other', please state which language in the box provided.'

Primary schools were asked when they started teaching languages; 84 per cent started teaching an L2 language more than five years ago, and 41 per cent started teaching an L3 language more than five years ago. Eight schools introduced an L3 language this year.

Languages are taught primarily by the classroom teacher (93 per cent of responding schools), with 13 per cent of schools reporting that most of the teaching is done by a specialist language teacher based in the school. For the same number of responding schools (13 per cent), specialist language teachers occasionally provide teaching, and teachers from local secondary schools provide occasional lessons in 11 per cent of primary schools.

Who provides language teaching?	Mainly	Occasionally
Classroom teacher	93%	5%
Specialist language teacher based in the school	13%	13%
Peripatetic specialist language teacher	4%	3%
Teacher provided by a cultural institute	3%	6%
Modern Language Assistant	2%	3%
Teacher(s) from local secondary school	1%	11%
Student teacher	1%	8%
S6 learner	1%	5%
Volunteer parent	1%	8%
Community volunteer groups	1%	2%
Teaching staff from transition visits/projects	1%	8%
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)'

As in the 2024 survey, just over 40 per cent of responding schools recorded that their classroom teachers have no language qualifications of any kind. Comments from the teachers revealed the wide variety of language teacher training and experience in schools:

"A few classroom teachers have languages background; most have none and use local authority courses."

"Not all have a languages qualification, but some have MLPS and some have own school languages certification and some university level certification."

"All classroom teachers have been trained in French. Three teachers received professional recognition from the GTCS, one of whom has a degree in French. Mandarin is taught by a CET supported by CISS."

Time for languages in local authority primary schools

As part of Scotland's 1+2 Approach to language learning, primary schools are encouraged to embed L2 language in the daily routines of the class, but there are no mandated class hours set aside for language learning.[4] The survey asked local authority primary schools to state, for each year group, the total amount of class time per week allocated for language learning. Consistent with *Language Trends Scotland*'s findings in 2024, between 42 per cent and 62 per cent of respondents spend between 30 minutes and one hour on languages each week across the primary years, with only around one fifth of respondents embedding language learning into general class time. In the lower primary years, very few schools reported being able to dedicate more than one hour of class time to languages, although this increased to around a quarter of responding schools in Primary 5 to Primary 7.

Frequency	Primary						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No time	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Less than 30 minutes	37%	33%	30%	14%	7%	5%	5%
30 minutes to 1 hour	42%	49%	54%	62%	59%	56%	57%
More than one hour but less than 90 minutes	1%	1%	2%	10%	21%	24%	23%
90 minutes to two hours	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%
More than two hours	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
We embed languages into the curriculum and general class time	23%	22%	22%	20%	19%	19%	19%
I don't know	5%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	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)'

4 See Curriculum for Excellence: Modern Languages principles and practice: https://education.gov.scot/media/4cufxg3b/modern-languages-pp.pdf

Resources for primary language teaching

Primary schools in Scotland use a wide variety of resources to craft and plan curricular language teaching in their classrooms. Just under half of respondents use their local authority resources, and over half noted the use of various online resources, including BBC Bitesize, Languagenut, Language Angels, Camembear from Headstart Languages, Twinkl, Linguascope, Powerlanguage and YouTube videos. Fourteen per cent of responding schools mentioned that the resources they used were those crafted by teachers in the school, with seven per cent drawing on resources provided by secondary schools. Many schools report using a combination of teaching resources:

> "When planning our curriculum for languages [...], we draw on a combination of national and local guidance as well as classroom-based resources. [...] We also adapt and build on locally shared lesson plans, including those developed collaboratively through cluster schools and the ACC 1+2 Modern Languages Google Classroom, where seasonal resources, L3 ideas, and practical examples are shared. In addition, commercially produced resources and digital platforms are occasionally used to supplement teaching, particularly for interactive speaking, listening and cultural awareness activities."

When asked about the use of apps in the classroom, 47 per cent of respondents reported that they used apps to help learners with language learning. The main applications used include Duolingo, Language Angels and Languagenut. Some of the respondents noted the lack of funding available for online resources such as apps, as well as restrictions from the local authorities and school policies on which apps could be used.

Language Trends Scotland also asked primary schools to choose which of the resources found in Table 12 they had used in their teaching. Over 70 per cent of respondents use resources produced by teachers in their own schools, around half (54 per cent) use commercially produced resources, and half responded that they had used nationally available resources from Education Scotland. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) reported using resources produced in other schools. When asked if they had received funding to develop resources this academic year, 82 per cent of respondents reported they had not received any funding, and 12 per cent did not answer. Only four per cent of respondents had received funding for the school year 2025/26.

Resource	2024/25	2025/26
Resources produced in school	70%	72%
Commercially produced resources	53%	54%
National resources from Education Scotland	49%	50%
Resources signposted from the SCILT website	29%	30%
Resources produced by other schools	19%	24%
Other (please specify)	23%	22%
Cluster secondary school	19%	20%
Drawing on the resources of multilingual learners and parents	12%	14%
Resources provided by cultural institutes	10%	11%
Resources provided by the British Council	12%	7%
Stòrlann	3%	5%

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

Respondents were then asked what sort of resources would be helpful in an ideal world; we received responses from 81 per cent of responding schools. Responses were varied, and included a greater need for specialist language teachers, wider access to resources, and the need for more interactive resources and games. Other comments highlighted the constraints of budget and time that teachers face, calling for more training and more structured resources that are free to access:

"Free and nationally available – clear step by step, week by week plans – it is challenging for teachers who do not speak another language to teach."

"A structured and progressive framework for languages which provides clear guidance and support for teachers. E.g. A clear overview of what to teach and when, supporting PowerPoints and activities (including sound files for pronunciation)"

"A trained and dedicated language teacher whose main focus is teaching languages. It is very challenging to deliver language learning with only 1 trained part time member of staff. Teaching allocation makes it impossible to allocate anyone else to this."

The use of AI technology in the classroom

This year, for the first time, the survey asked primary schools how often they made use of AI technology (such as ChatGPT) in language teaching for lesson preparation, assessment and class activities. Only two per cent of respondents reported using AI every week in class, 43 per cent use it occasionally (in a few lessons per month), and almost half (47 per cent) answered that they never used AI, being unsure of what it can do. Of those who reported that they used AI weekly or occasionally, it appears that AI use is the choice of individual teachers, with comments illustrating the nascent, exploratory nature of its usage:

"We have recently begun dipping our toes in the water with this as we understand the importance that we support our learners develop a sense of understanding of how AI can be used positively to support them. Until our staff are competent and confident in utilising this, we will be unable to support our learners."

"At early stages of use. Currently our specialist teacher is attempting to create lesson plans to create a whole school programme which could be utilised by a non-language specialist."

English as an Additional Language in primary schools

The vast majority of responding primary schools (89 per cent) have learners for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL), with the most common home and heritage languages being Polish, Urdu, Arabic, Spanish, Russian and Ukrainian. The survey asked if learners were encouraged to use their home or heritage languages in school. Around three quarters of schools (77 per cent) responded to this question; their responses demonstrated clearly that, in the majority of schools, home and heritage languages are actively included and celebrated in school life through cultural events and celebrations, language ambassador programs, and the inclusion of multilingual books in the classroom and library, as well as support provided through specialised EAL teachers:

"We use language ambassadors in the school to support pupils who are new to English. Children are also encouraged to share their own home languages, cultures and religions with their individual classes."

"We have started an annual event to celebrate the different cultures in our school. Language Leaders (P4–7) worked with the EAL teacher to create a website which teachers can use to share and celebrate languages in class. We have a 'Language of the Month'."

"We make effective use of our English as an additional language teacher. She often works with individuals and makes suitable suggestions of resources to support their learning of English whilst also celebrating their mother tongue. In the past we have used visual, story books in alternative languages and games."

However, some teachers did note that, for learners from minority groups within the school, it can be a challenge to integrate their home language into school life:

"These learners aren't discouraged although they don't have a large social group who speak these languages in our school, so they more often than not revert to using English at school. These learners will often share some of their home language within the classroom during curricular work – words, phrases etc."

Language learning clusters and primary schools

In Scotland, learning clusters are groups of primary schools that link with their local secondary school, with the goal of supporting planning for continuous improvement (Education Scotland, 2024c). This allows resources, be they budget allocations or learning support materials, to be shared amongst teachers who form part of the 23 learning clusters in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2024c).

The survey asked primary schools if, within their cluster, they had contact with a local authority secondary school in relation to language teaching, and, if so, what sort of contact they had. Over two thirds (69 per cent, n=116) of primary schools responded that they had contact with a secondary school for language learning, and Table 13 illustrates the variety of forms that support from secondary schools takes:

Type of contact	Percentage of primary schools
We exchange information on language teaching informally	46%
We provide information on learner progress in language learning at the point of transfer to S1	42%
We take part in network/cluster meetings	29%
L2 and L3 language classes are taught in our local secondary school	19%
Other (please specify)	14%
A local secondary school provides training for teachers of languages in my school	10%
A local secondary school provides language teaching in my school	9%
A local secondary school provides our scheme of work	7%
We collaborate on planning units of work in languages	4%
We observe each other's lessons	2%
We plan language lessons together	1%

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=116])

From these responses, we can see that for almost half of primary schools who have contact with a local secondary school (46 per cent) there is an informal exchange of language teaching information, and that 42 per cent of primary schools provide information to the secondary school on learners' progression in languages when learners transfer from P7 to S1. Compared with 2024, where 45 per cent of primary schools with contact reported taking part in cluster/network meetings, only 29 per cent of respondents with contact in 2025 took part in such meetings. This may be due to a difference in the schools participating in this year's survey. Other forms of contact with local secondary schools included: transitional support for the move from P7 to S1; ad hoc lessons from secondary teachers; online teaching; and provision of additional training in language teaching for primary school teachers.

International dimension in primary schools

Language Trends Scotland asked primary schools if they had links with any outside organisations to promote language learning. Almost half (49 per cent) of responding schools reported that they had no links with outside organisations. The main connections in relation to language learning identified are with Education Scotland (18 per cent), SCILT (15 per cent) and local secondary schools (14 per cent). As in the 2024 survey, there were very few schools with links to the British Council, local Further Education Colleges, or employers.

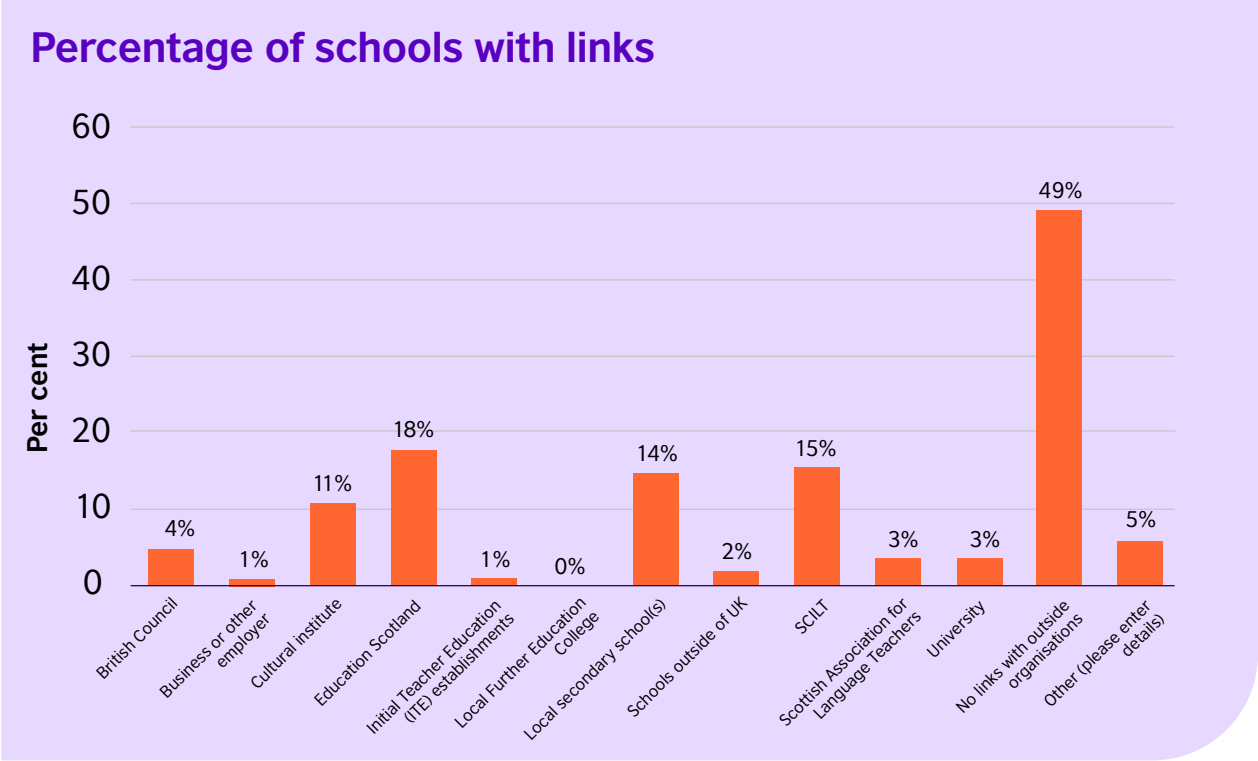

Figure 5: Respondent answers to 'Do you have links with any outside organisations to promote language learning? (tick all that apply)'

Of the primary schools connected to Cultural Institutions, twelve noted links with the Confucious Institute, five with the Institut français and two with the Goethe-Institut. One primary school reported links with the Scottish Sensory Centre, Deaf Action, the British Deaf Association and the National Deaf Children's Society.

The survey also asked primary schools what opportunities were available for international engagement for both learners and teachers; two-thirds of schools reported that there were none. Table 14 shows that 11 per cent of schools engaged with schools outside the UK through online/digital links, and seven per cent have one or more partner school(s) abroad. Eight per cent of responding primary schools host a language assistant (Mandarin, French, German, Italian), although not all were hosting a language assistant in the academic year 2025/26.

International engagement opportunities	Percentage of schools
None	67%
Online/digital links with schools outside of the UK	11%
We host language assistants	8%
The school has one or more partner school(s) abroad	7%
British Council events/ resources	6%
Involvement in international projects	5%
Other (please give details)	4%

Table 14: 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 school respondents were asked to identify significant barriers that they face in language teaching. All but nine of the schools provided a response to this question. Above all, time and confidence were the most important barriers, with teacher confidence being mentioned 67 times, and the lack of time allocated to language teaching mentioned 53 times. Other barriers, mentioned less frequently, include curriculum (38 mentions) and resources (32 mentions):

"We are lucky currently to have a language enthusiast who teaches German throughout the school. The disadvantage is that this model doesn't easily upskill others. Should we need to revert to class teachers delivering German, teacher confidence and time would be the biggest constraints."

"The skill level needed by individual teachers. Some do not know the languages other than being a step ahead of the pupils."

"Time constraints – trying to cover the whole curriculum and languages are often not seen as a priority."

"Lack of teacher skill set with no time to learn a language. Children who are below track and struggle with English. Time not available in an overcrowded curriculum, with targets to meet in literacy and numeracy."

"Lack of knowledge and lack of resources. Many of our infants have speech delay, impediments and struggle to speak English. They have poor phonological awareness and that is our priority."

Other teachers mentioned the lack of training, and budgetary restrictions, as well as wider attitudes towards language learning and its perceived value, which present barriers to effective teaching and learning in primary schools.

"At present, we have few trained staff to promote our chosen language. There had been interest, but the training opportunities were far from the area and staff were unable to commit to long term/long distance training."

"Lack of funding, timetabling pressures, attainment issues which draw focus away from modern languages and towards basic Numeracy and Literacy."

"It is not taken seriously as a subject so less importance is often placed on MFL compared with other areas of the curriculum. Consequently, some learners do not engage as fully as they might."

Subsequently, teachers were asked what additional support they would welcome for the development of language teaching in primary schools. Thirty-three respondents mentioned resources, particularly those that are nationally available and free to use, to reduce the volume of lesson planning required:

"Further resources that teachers can pick up and use to deliver lessons without having to spend time on planning."

"A realistic look at the curriculum to see how and when languages can be fit in effectively. More engaging resources that practitioners could use to help them overcome shyness in speaking in another language."

"Clear learning pathways, a 'menu' of effective resources which have had some level of moderation beyond 'google'. Signpost to support resources for teaching not just learning."

"Free resources which engage all learners from P1 to P7."

"National Framework for language progression at each stage. Bank of suggested resources."

Further training in language teaching was mentioned 32 times, along with 30 mentions of a specialist language teacher, illustrating how the development of these areas could significantly boost the teaching of primary languages. Some of these responses also highlighted the benefits of a language assistant, and called for more support of this kind:

"Staff having the opportunity to study and gain a qualification in L2 or L3 if they do not already have one. This would boost teacher confidence and improve the quality of lesson being delivered."

"Additional money for resources, possible classroom assistant speaking the language to aid teaching, more training and courses to promote confidence."

"Support from language specialists, to increase confidence amongst teaching staff – through team-teaching for example."

"Having a dedicated peripatetic languages teacher in school would be transformational."

"Support from Native Speakers, language assistants etc. Tailored resources to support the delivery of language lessons and more links with local secondary schools."

A final strand of responses highlighted the ways in which language teaching has been marginalised within the curriculum, as well as concern for its longevity, and suggested the need for a shift in the attitude to the teaching of languages in primary schools:

"We have reduced the hours of our French teacher this year. Classes now have 40 minutes each instead of 1 hour. Additional funding for staffing would therefore be welcome to ensure there is a sustainable future for language teaching by a qualified teacher."

"MFL to have a clear place in the curriculum – this was the case a few years ago when 1+2 first came in, but this has now dropped off and I feel it has been superseded by other curricular areas, particularly Technologies. More should be done to raise the profile of MFL and how it can benefit learners across their lives."

Findings from local authority secondary schools

Profile of responding secondary schools

One hundred and fourteen local authority secondary schools responded to this year's *Language Trends Scotland* survey. Email invites addressed for the attention of the Head of Languages to complete the survey were delivered to 308 secondary school inboxes, resulting in a response rate of 37 per cent. Consistent with the previous respondent profile of *Language Trends Scotland 2024/25*, a third of responding schools are in the Glasgow and Strathclyde region (see Table 15).

Region	Local authorities	Percentage of respondents
Aberdeen and North East	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray	17%
Highland and Islands	Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highlands, Orkney Islands, Shetland Island	13%
Tayside, Central and Fife	Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling	18%
Edinburgh and Lothians	City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian	15%
Glasgow and Strathclyde	East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	33%
Scotland South	Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders	5%

Table 15: Geographical profile of responding local authority secondary schools and rounded to nearest percentage

Across the wider *Language Trends* series, free school meal (FSM) data is used to indicate the socio-economic profile of responding schools by arranging schools in five quintiles, from most affluent to most deprived based on national public FSM data. Using the 2024 local authority secondary-level data from the Scottish Government's school census (Scottish Government, 2024), responding schools were arranged into five FSM quintiles. Table 16 shows that there is an overrepresentation of schools in the most affluent quintiles, and it must be borne in mind that the survey findings may depict a more positive picture than the reality in many schools.

Quintile	Range	Number of responding schools	Percentage of schools
1 – most affluent	0.0– 8.8%	25	21.9%
2	8.9–13.1%	34	29.8%
3	13.2–18.6%	19	16.7%
4	18.7–24.8%	16	14.0%
5 – most deprived	24.9% and above	20	17.5%

Table 16: FSM quintiles for local authority secondary schools in Scotland [calculated using 2024 school census data for all local authority secondary schools] and percentage of responding secondary schools in each quintile

Language learning in S1–S3

Local authority secondary schools were asked which languages S1 to S3 learners were studying in the 2025/26 school year. French is the most taught language, with 81 per cent of all S1 learners and 75 per cent of all S2 learners studying the subject; the second most taught language is Spanish, studied by approximately half of all S1 and S2 learners in responding schools. Table 17 reports a variety of languages studied, including Gaelic, German, Italian and Mandarin. Schools in which all learners study German in S1–S3 are mainly quintile 1 and 2 schools (most affluent), but there is evidence of some learners studying the language in a few quintile 4 and 5 schools.

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	81%	16%	75%	18%	27%	64%
Gàidhlig (fluent)	0%	8%	0%	7%	0%	7%
Gaelic (Learners)	4%	7%	2%	9%	0%	9%
German	11%	13%	10%	16%	7%	22%
Italian	0%	0%	1%	4%	0%	7%
Mandarin (Simplified and/or Traditional)	5%	6%	5%	6%	0%	11%
Scots	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Spanish	49%	16%	53%	18%	19%	61%
Urdu	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
No language	1%	4%	0%	4%	4%	5%
Other (please specify)	2%	1%	1%	3%	1%	4%

Table 17: Languages learnt by all or some S1–S3 learners as part of the normal school day in the 2025/26 school year

By S3, the percentage of schools reporting that all learners study a language significantly decreases (see Table 17). Respondents were asked at what stage in schooling young people are able to stop learning languages, if they so wish; just fewer than half of respondents reported this to occur at the end of S2/start of S3, while 46 per cent commented that this occurs at the end of S3/start of S4. Some respondents noted that learners must study a language until the end of S4.

Approximately 60 per cent of responding schools reported that learners spend three periods on language learning per week in S1–S3; between 15 and 20 per cent of schools reported 4 periods of allocated language study per week in S1–S4.

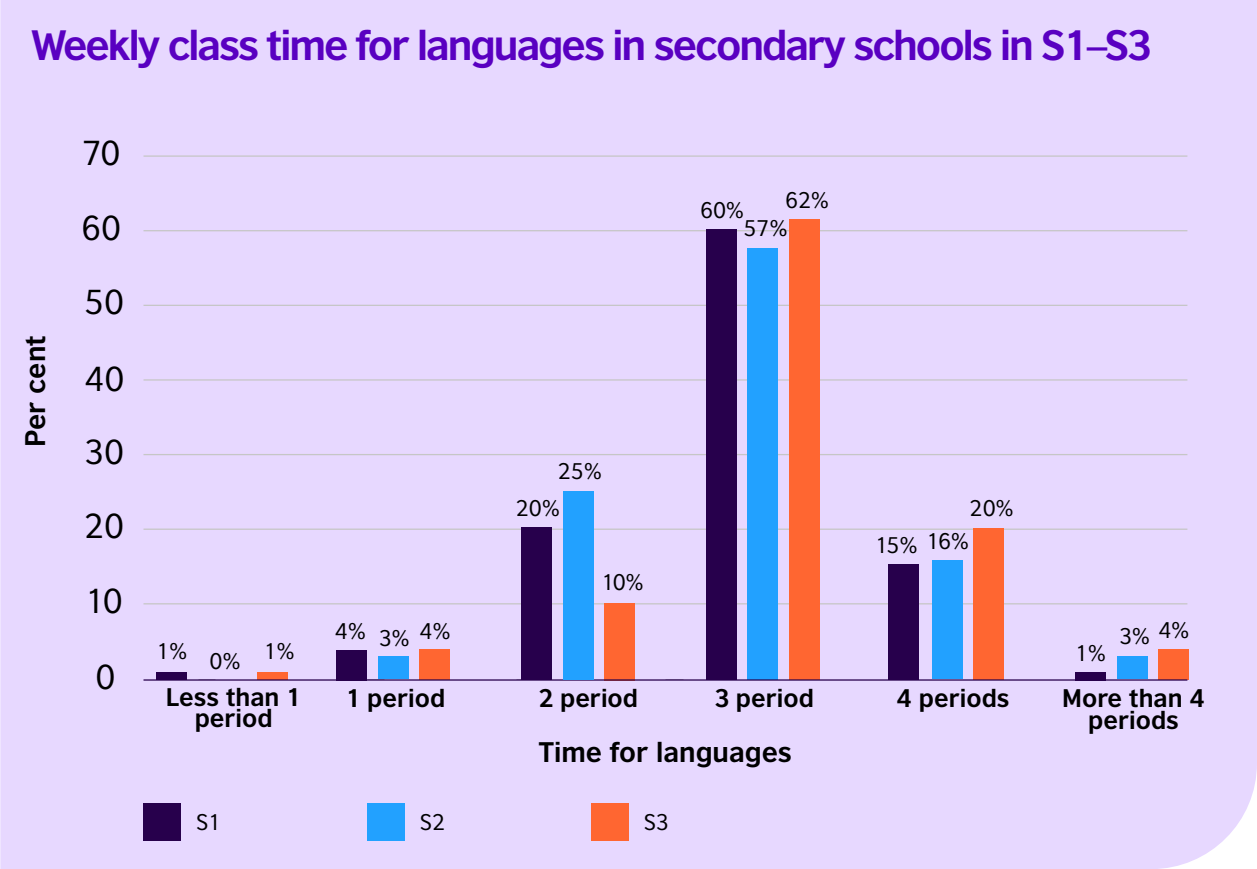

Figure 6: The total amount of class time per week allocated for language learning in S1–S3

Sixty-three per cent of responding schools report that all their S1 learners study more than one language (up from 52 per cent in 2024/25), and 67 per cent of schools report this to be the case for their S2 cohort; however, by S3 only eight per cent of schools report that all learners study more than one language, and zero in S4. This eight per cent is mainly comprised of quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools, with one quintile 5 school.

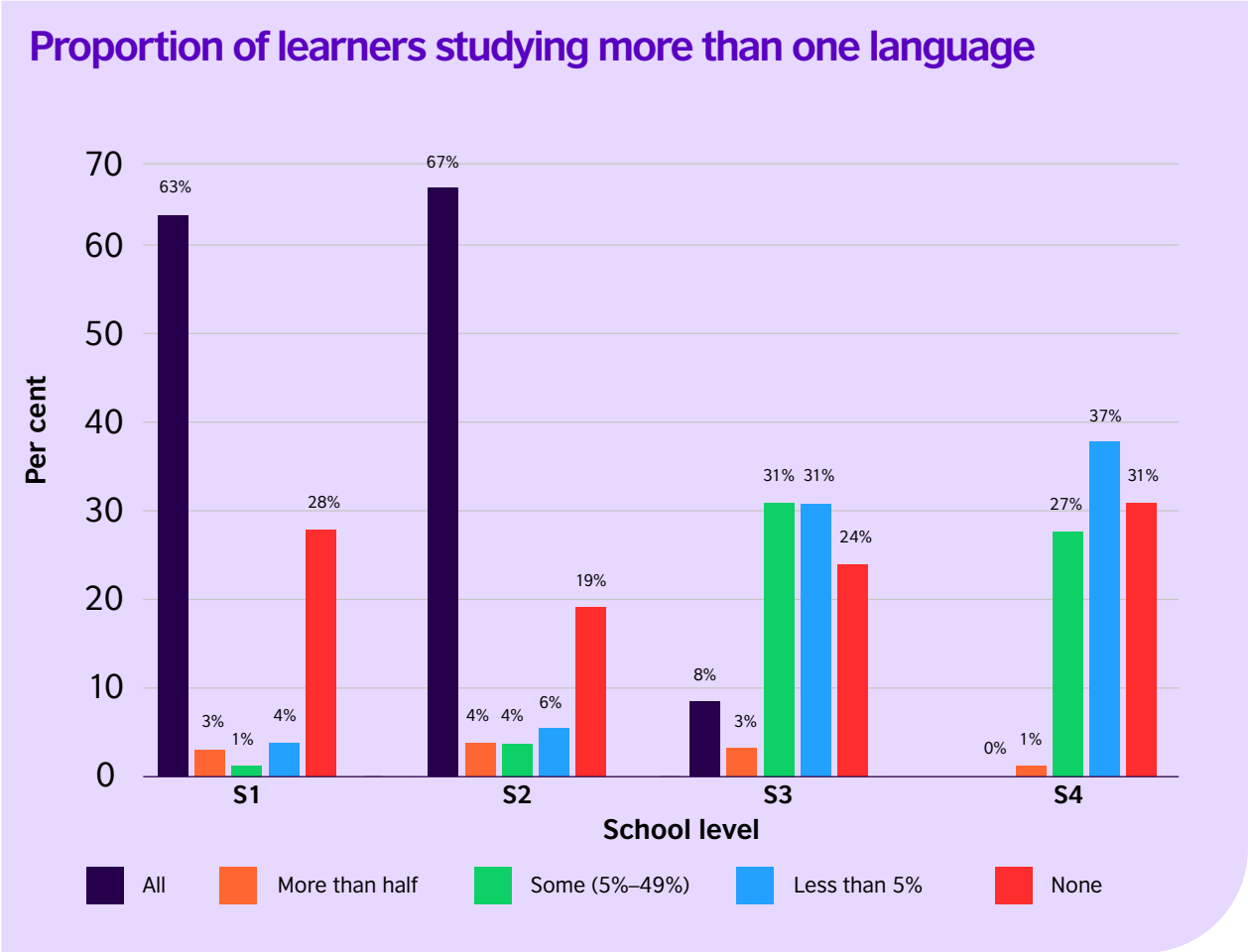

Figure 7: Proportion of S1–S4 learners studying more than one language

Language learning in S4

Responding schools were asked to note the percentage of their current S4 cohort studying a language for a National Qualification or Award; answers ranged from zero to 100 per cent of S4 learners.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the past three years and consider how the proportion of S4 language learners has changed, if at all (Table 18). The findings differ from those reported last year, with just over one fifth of respondents reporting that fewer learners now take a language at S4, compared to over one third of respondents in 2024/25. Approximately one quarter of respondents report similar numbers to before (compared to 18 per cent last year), and an increased percentage of respondents report that there is no clear trend (Table 18). Consistent with last year, very few respondents note the mandatory study of S4 languages, and those who do have more affluent socio-economic profiles in quintiles 1, 2 and 3.

	2024/25	2025/26
Languages are mandatory for all learners at S4	2%	4%
More learners now take a language at S4	22%	19%
Fewer learners now take a language at S4	35%	22%
Similar numbers to before	18%	24%
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	20%	27%
Other (please specify)	3%	4%

Table 18: Teacher perceptions of the changes, if any, in the proportion of S4 language learners over the past three years

Respondents who wished to comment further on the drivers of change in their school noted the following both positive and negative factors:

"Children and adults do not all see the value of learning a language and with the rise of the use of AI, they feel there is no need to engage in the learning of it as technology does it for them." (Quintile 1 school)

"Continued improvements in the department. Strength in relationships with pupils. Increased opportunities for young people such as clubs, trips." (Quintile 2 school)

"A perception that there are fewer professions or Higher Education institutions requiring a modern language. Pupils do not seem to have an incentive to learn a language and do not see the relevance." (Quintile 3 school)

"[Learners] are often opting to study sciences / social subjects instead. We are finding some learners find languages difficult, or do not see the value to them if they do not plan to go abroad." (Quintile 4 school)

"Change of curriculum in S1/2 to include more culture and contextualised language. Inclusion of S3 Languages for Life and Work Award in all languages. Language Leaders within school and opportunities for leadership within the department for pupils." (Quintile 5 school)

Respondents were also asked about their school's approach to uptake for languages in S4 (see Table 19); consistent with last year's findings, over 60 per cent of schools run multi-level classes and 55 per cent run bi-level classes. When asked about their experiences with multi-level modern language classes, teachers noted the following:

"It can be very challenging. Classes here at Senior phase are very varied and can range from pupils who are below National 3 level to pupils who find National 5 easy. Up to thirty pupils in a Senior class." (Quintile 1 school)

"This is very difficult to manage and adds a lot of workload and stress to teachers, however, staff would prefer to do this rather than the classes not running and students not be able to do what they enjoy." (Quintile 2 school)

"We are always pleased to have uptake and to have attracted a diverse range of learners. Multi-level classes do present challenges in terms of workload, planning and behaviour management." (Quintile 3 school)

"They are very difficult to plan and manage and pupils have less contact time with the teacher than a single-level class – pupils often have independent work while the teacher works with another level." (Quintile 4 school)

"It can be very challenging, but better than not running a language class at all due to too low numbers." (Quintile 5 school)

School approaches to uptake	2024/25	2025/26
The school runs multi-level classes	64%	61%
Classes do not run if there are not enough learners	52%	59%
The school runs bi-level classes	55%	55%
Timetabling means that not all learners are able to take a language	55%	54%
Some learners may be advised by guidance teachers not to take a language	46%	39%
Classes run regardless of low learner numbers	26%	26%
The school offers online provision for learning a language through e-Sgoil or other external organisation	4%	18%
Lower than average attaining learners are discouraged from choosing a language	12%	11%
The school strongly recommends that all learners take a language	9%	6%
All learners MUST take a language	3%	4%
Other (please specify)	8%	4%
The school strongly recommends that the most academically able take a language	1%	3%

Table 19: School approaches to uptake for S4 language learning

An increased percentage of schools have reported that classes simply will not run if there are not enough learners (59 per cent of respondents reported this to be the reality in 2025). Figure 8 breaks down the top approaches to S4 uptake and categorises by quintile; over 70 per cent of the schools in quintiles 4 and 5 reported that classes do not run when there are not enough learners, compared to 50 per cent of responding quintile 1 and 2 schools. Schools in quintiles 1 and 2 are more likely to keep language classes running regardless of learner numbers in comparison to schools in quintiles 3, 4 and 5 (see Figure 8).

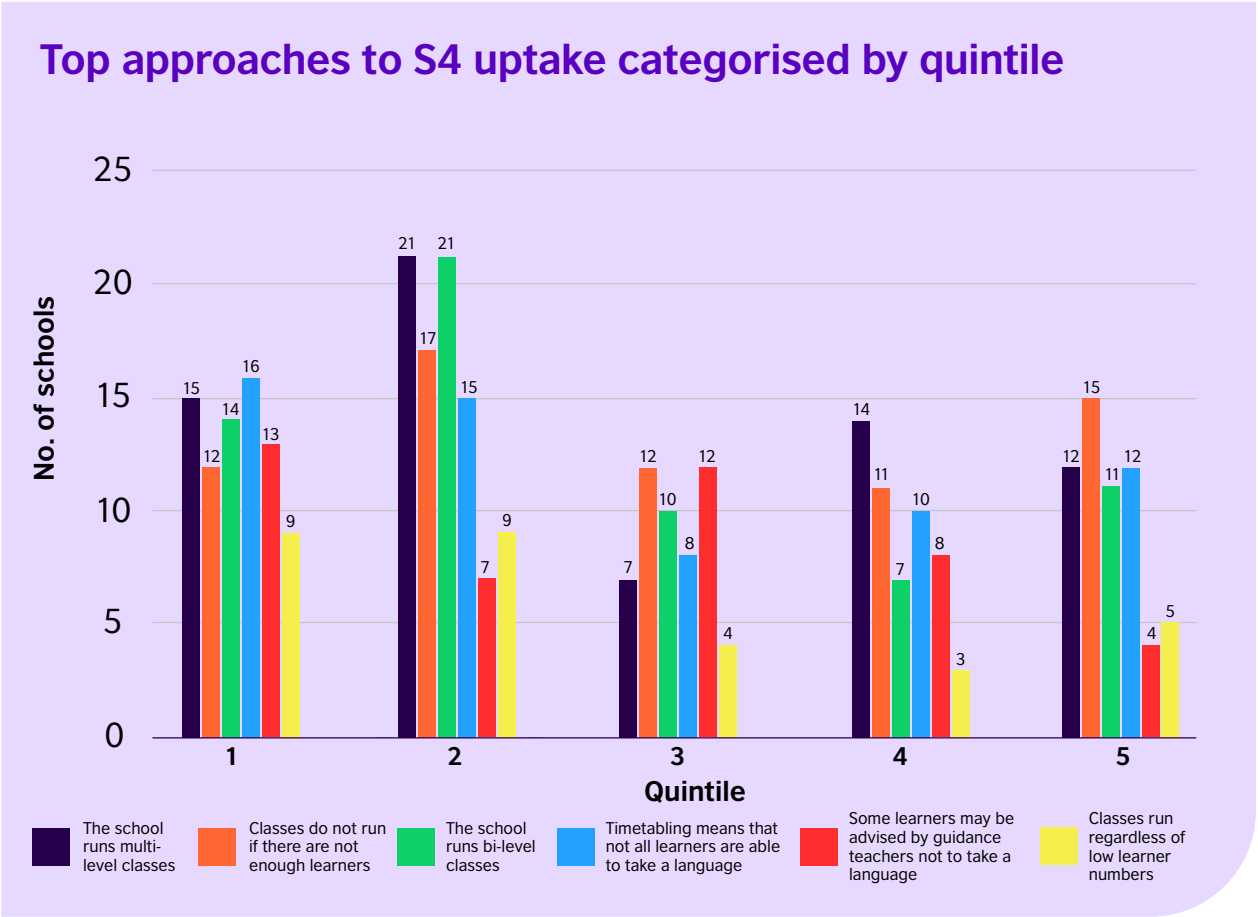

Figure 8: Top approaches to uptake for languages in S4 categorised by quintile

Over 60 per cent of respondents reported that learners spend four periods on language learning per week, and 27 per cent reported more than four periods is spent on language learning.

Language qualifications offered in secondary schools

Responding schools were asked to indicate if they offer the following qualifications for languages in the 2025/26 school year:

	GCSE	National 5	Higher	Advanced Higher
Cantonese	0%	2%	2%	1%
French	0%	85%	77%	33%
Gàidhlig (fluent)	0%	8%	7%	4%
Gaelic (Learners)	0%	9%	9%	4%
German	1%	31%	25%	10%
Italian	1%	7%	7%	1%
Mandarin (Simplified and/or Traditional)	0%	11%	10%	5%
Scots	0%	0%	0%	0%
Spanish	0%	82%	75%	32%
Urdu	0%	1%	2%	0%
Other	2%	1%	1%	2%

Table 20: Percentage of responding local authority secondary schools offering the qualifications for languages listed in the table

Most schools offer National 5 and Higher qualifications for French and Spanish, however this number drops to one third of schools by Advanced Higher for both subjects. 'Other' languages commented by teachers included Arabic, Latin, Polish and Russian. Less than one third of schools offer a National 5 qualification in German, most of whom are quintile 1 and 2 schools with a more affluent socio-economic profile (see below Table 21).

Table 21 shows the three most popular language qualifications on offer in responding schools categorised by quintiles. More schools offer qualifications in French than in Spanish in quintile 1 and 2 schools, while slightly more schools offer qualifications in Spanish than in French in quintile 4 and 5 schools. In general, schools in quintiles 3, 4 and 5 have few Advanced Higher language qualifications available for learners.

	National 5			Higher			Advanced Higher		
Quintile	**French**	**German**	**Spanish**	**French**	**German**	**Spanish**	**French**	**German**	**Spanish**
1	23	10	18	21	8	17	13	5	14
2	34	14	30	33	13	28	12	4	8
3	16	4	16	13	4	14	6	2	5
4	12	4	15	11	2	14	5	0	5
5	12	3	15	10	1	13	2	0	4
Grand total	97	35	94	88	28	86	38	11	36

Table 21: The number of responding schools offering the three most taught curricular languages of French, German and Spanish for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, broken down by quintile and presented as raw data

Very few responding schools offer curricular teaching in British Sign Language (BSL), with around 90 per cent of schools reporting that they do not teach it, while the remaining schools report that it is taught as an enrichment or elective subject.

Opportunities to learn languages as enrichment subjects

Secondary school respondents were asked to indicate whether the following languages were offered as extra-curricular or enrichment subjects:

Extra-curricular language	S1–S3	S4–S6
Arabic	6%	4%
French	5%	5%
German	12%	11%
Italian	8%	11%
Mandarin	9%	11%
Polish	2%	4%
Portuguese	1%	0%
Scots	3%	3%
Sign Language	7%	4%
Spanish	12%	11%
I don't know	20%	22%
Other	7%	10%

Table 22: Percentage of responding secondary schools offering the above-listed languages to learners as extra-curricular or enrichment subjects

Consistent with last year's findings, only a small number of secondary schools offer opportunities for languages to be learnt as enrichment subjects. 'Other' languages noted by respondents included Cantonese, Gaelic, Greek, Korean, Norwegian, Japanese, Russian and Urdu.

Aside from extra-curricular language learning, learners may have the opportunity to undertake the Qualifications Scotland[5] Modern Languages for Life and Work (MLLW) award in S3 to S6 in their school. 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. There is evidence of this award being offered to learners in two-fifths of responding secondary schools for level 3 and level 4, and just less than one third of schools offer it to learners for level 5.

5 As of 2nd December 2025, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) was replaced by Qualifications Scotland, a body established following the passage of the Education (Scotland) Act 2025. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2025/11/introduction/enacted.

Home, heritage and community languages in secondary schools

Using publicly available census data, the research team was able to confirm that all but one responding secondary school have learners who speak home or heritage languages other than English (also referred to as learners who have English as an additional language). Respondents surveyed were asked if they had any such learners in their school; the majority (94 per cent) confirmed this to be the case, but six per cent reported that they did not know or responded 'no' despite this not being the case when correlating their seed code to school census data.

Respondents were also asked to name any known home or heritage languages spoken by learners in their school; approximately one hundred languages or dialects were reported by respondents, the most frequently reported of which included Polish (n=46), Ukrainian (n=28), Arabic (n=27, Russian (n=23) and Urdu (n=22).

Figure 9: Home, heritage and community languages (HHCLs) spoken by learners in responding schools

Language	Count
Polish	46
Ukrainian	28
Arabic	27
Russian	23
Urdu	22
Spanish	19
Mandarin	18
French	14
German	14
Italian	12
Cantonese	10
Portuguese	10
Romanian	10
Turkish	8
Gaelic	7
Hungarian	7
Dutch	6
Latvian	6
Punjabi	6
Igbo	5

Table 23: Top 20 most frequently mentioned HHCLs spoken by learners in responding schools

Respondents were asked if learners are encouraged to use their HHCLs in school. Around two-fifths reported learners use their HHCLs in a school setting, although it is not always promoted at a whole-school level. Comments included the following:

"Yes – with other speakers of that language and also as part of cultural awareness events."
(Quintile 1 school)

"In the BGE there are whole-school cultural events to recognise the heritages of our community. In senior phase learners study for and are presented for awards in Qualifications Scotland Cantonese and Urdu, GCSE Arabic, Polish, Russian [...]" (Quintile 2 school)

"I have created a heritage language programme in Arabic and Mandarin. Nothing at whole school for the learners and no acknowledgment." (Quintile 4 school)

Some respondents noted that they would like to pursue this as an area of development in their school, with some stating that they would welcome guidance on how to support learners with HHCLs.

In comparison to the previous school year, more respondents are reporting that learners have opportunities to take HHCL exams in the 2025/26 school year (see Figure 10).

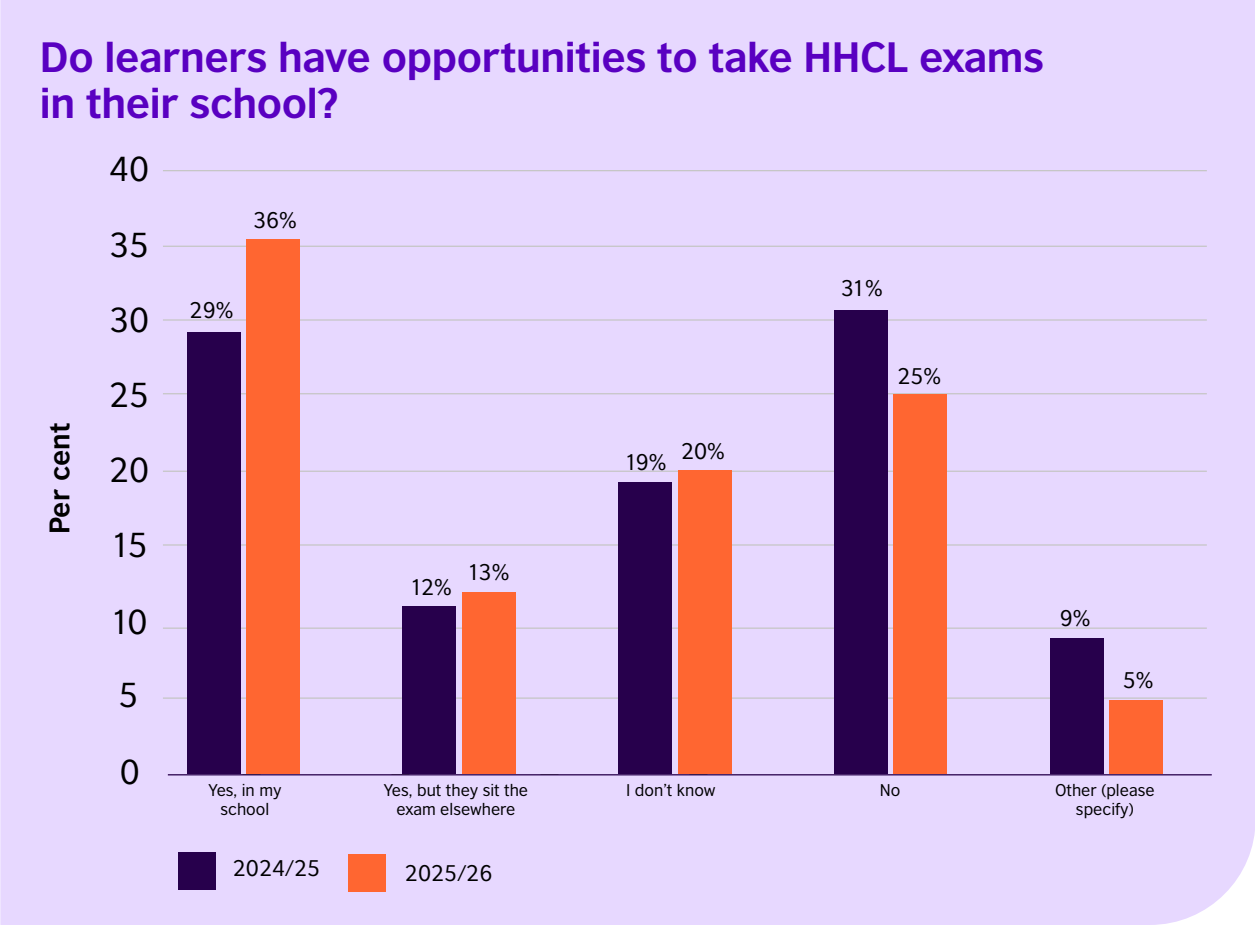

Figure 10: Percentage of responding schools that offer HHCL exams for learners

International engagement opportunities

Consistent with the previous findings of *Language Trends Scotland*, two-thirds of schools organise school trips and over one third engage with cultural institutes to avail of international experience opportunities for learners and teachers. There is a slight increase in the percentage of schools reporting that they have international partner schools, and more schools are reporting engagement with international opportunities in the 2025/26 school year.

Opportunities to gain international experience	2024/25	2025/26
We organise school trips	67%	66%
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g. Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut français, Consejería de Educación, Stòrlann)	36%	37%
The school has one or more international partner schools	23%	28%
None	21%	17%
We participate in exchange programmes	15%	12%
British Council international opportunities and events	3%	9%
Other (please specify)	6%	5%
We employ Language Assistants	4%	4%
Learners participate in Foundation Apprenticeships	3%	4%

Table 24: International engagement opportunities in responding schools for learners and teachers to gain international experience (respondents ticked all that applied)

A very small number of schools employ Language Assistants for French, Mandarin and Spanish. Seventy per cent of respondents reported that they would consider employing a Language Assistant in the future, budget permitting.

Recruitment of qualified language teachers in local authority secondary schools

Fewer schools have reported that the recruitment of qualified languages teachers is a challenge in the 2025/26 school year; however, it remains an issue for over one third of responding secondary schools (see Table 25).

Is recruitment an issue?	2024/25	2025/26
Yes, a major issue	15%	21%
Yes, a minor issue	26%	15%
No, not an issue	50%	53%
I don't know	4%	6%
Other (please specify)	6%	5%

Table 25: Local authority respondent answers to 'Is recruitment of qualified languages teachers an issue for your department?' in 2024/25 and 2025/26

Quintiles 1, 2 and 3 have the highest number of respondents reporting recruitment challenges. Respondents were invited to comment further on why recruitment is an issue and commented the following:

"We recently advertised a post for a one-year maternity cover and had no applicants at all. I was aware that other authorities have language posts unfilled too." (Quintile 1 school)

"As universities stop offering languages, the number of people qualifying to teach is lowered and becomes a vicious cycle. Although Spanish is on the increase, German and French are on the decrease. Universities need to do more to get pupils interested in combined degrees." (Quintile 2 school)

"There are very few people coming out with languages degrees and qualifying as teachers – teaching is not seen to be financially rewarding and is viewed by many young people now as an extremely stressful job." (Quintile 3 school)

"We have had staffing changes for past 3 years and have had to change timetables/language offer depending on ability of the staff we have." (Quintile 5 school)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in the languages classroom

Two-thirds of responding local authority secondary schools reported that they use AI technology in the languages classroom for lesson preparation, assessment and class activities (Figure 11).

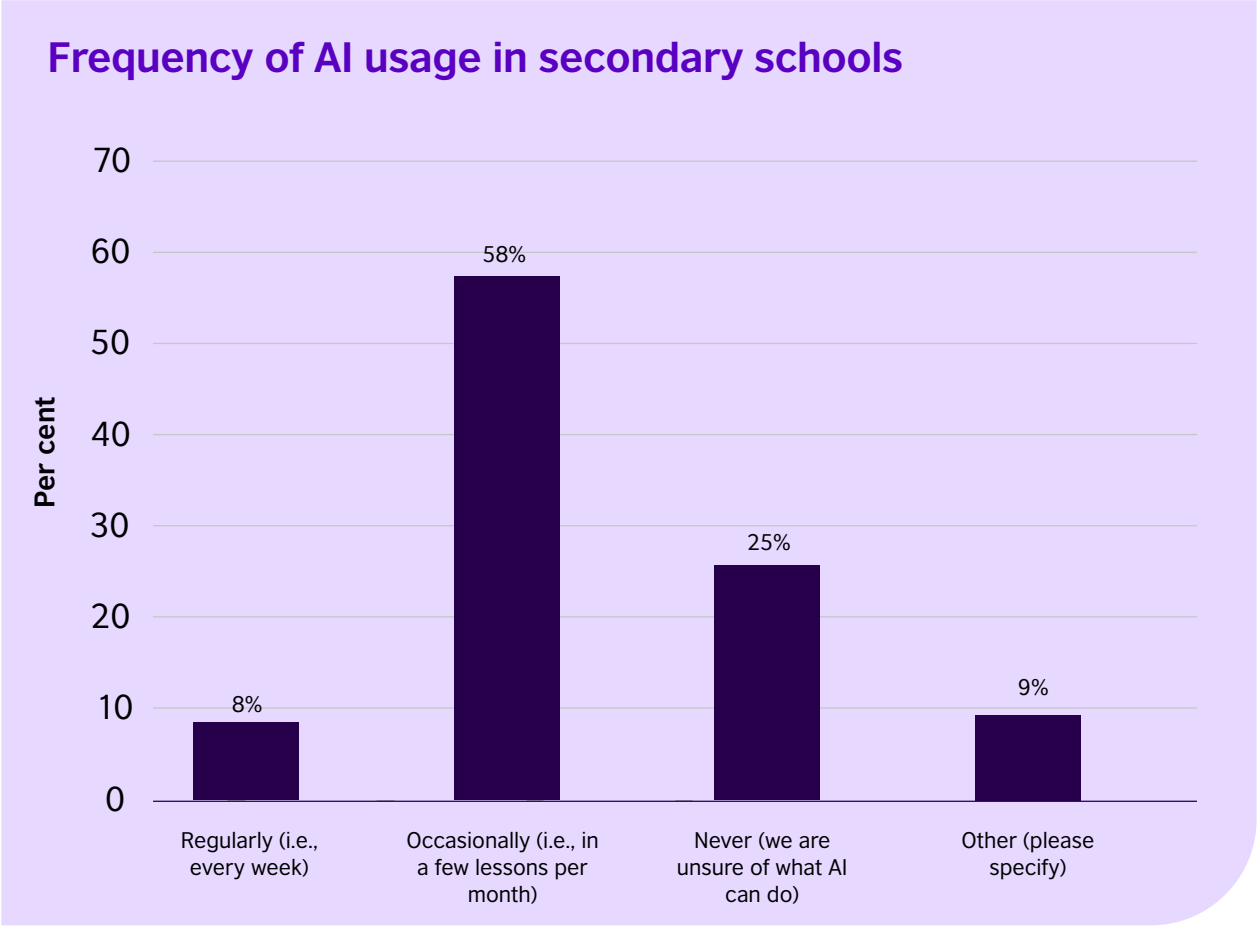

Figure 11: Frequency of AI usage for language teaching in local authority secondary schools

Respondents in secondary schools were invited to comment further on AI usage and noted the following:

"Some staff like to make use of it. Others do not. The local authority did not have a policy on it until recently, so we were not able to make use of resources based on AI." (Quintile 1 school)

"We have started to 'dabble' with the introduction of Gemini in Google classroom, other colleagues have used AI to create texts for H/AH and comprehension questions." (Quintile 2 school)

"I use it to generate example texts for close readings. It always needs checked so it's not any faster." (Quintile 3 school)

"Creating texts and comprehension questions using a list of vocabulary provided and specific language structures." (Quintile 4 school)

"Very little use; a couple of members of the dept are exploring AI this session as part of their CLPL." (Quintile 5 school)

Higher/Advanced Higher languages in focus

Table 26 shows that an increased number of schools are delivering Higher/Advanced Higher education in languages online in the 2025/26 school year, and fewer schools reporting that they deliver languages wholly in their school. Half of the nine per cent of schools reporting no Higher or Advanced Higher provision are quintile 5 schools.

Does your school deliver Higher or Advanced Higher provision in languages?	2024/25	2025/26
Yes, delivered wholly in my school	66%	58%
Yes, delivered between my school and a nearby school	14%	12%
Yes, delivered at another school	3%	4%
Yes, delivered online	1%	8%
No	7%	9%
Other	9%	10%

Table 26: Percentage of responding schools with Higher and/or Advanced Higher provision in languages

There are generally low numbers of learners studying one or more languages at Higher and/or Advanced Higher, with approximately one third of schools reporting that only five or fewer learners study a language at this level. While 17 per cent of schools report that there are more than 20 learners studying a language for Higher in the 2025/26 school year, only one per cent reported this to be the case for Advanced Higher. Two-fifths of schools reported no learners at Advanced Higher (although the figure may be even higher given that eight per cent of respondents did not answer).

Number of learners	Higher	Advanced Higher
5 or fewer	32%	32%
6–10	20%	8%
11–15	13%	2%
15–20	8%	0%
More than 20	17%	1%
Not offered in my school	0%	11%
None	10%	39%
Unanswered	1%	8%

Table 27: Respondent answers to 'How many learners in your school currently study one or more languages?'

When only a few learners wish to study a language for Higher or Advanced Higher, over half of responding schools teach multi-level classes, and over two-fifth teach Higher and Advanced Higher classes together. Learners are taking Edinburgh College classes in 38 per cent of schools, while classes simply do not run in 35 per cent of schools when there are not enough learners wishing to study a language (approximately two-fifths of this percentage comprises quintile 4 and 5 schools). Although 25 per cent of schools reported that there is no minimum number of learners required for classes to run, 35 per cent reported a minimum requirement of 10 learners (25 per cent of schools reported this to be the minimum number in the 2024/25 school year).

Responding schools with Higher and/or Advanced Higher language provision were asked to think about the last three years and reflect on any changes in uptake (see Table 28). There is evidence of Cantonese, French, German, Italian Mandarin, Spanish and Urdu being introduced as a new subject in some of schools. Uptake is stable for Spanish in one third of responding schools, with uptake increasing in 31 per cent of schools. While over one third of schools report stable uptake for French, two-fifths reported that uptake has decreased.

	Introduced as a new subject	Take-up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Subject dis-continued	Not taught in my school	No answer
Cantonese	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	47%	50%
French	2%	14%	35%	40%	5%	1%	6%
Gàidhlig (fluent)	0%	2%	5%	2%	0%	48%	43%
Gaelic (L)	0%	3%	5%	3%	1%	47%	41%
German	4%	10%	10%	11%	9%	32%	27%
Italian	7%	0%	5%	3%	3%	42%	40%
Mandarin	6%	2%	6%	4%	2%	40%	40%
Spanish	8%	31%	33%	19%	2%	3%	10%
Urdu	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	49%	47%
Other language	2%	0%	2%	1%	0%	38%	57%

Table 28: 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?'

Teacher voice: ways to improve language learning and education

Respondents were invited to comment on what is working well in languages education for local authority secondary schools. Positive motivating factors for language learners mentioned by teachers included school trips, communication with parents and carers on the value of languages, a supportive SLT that values languages and a language department that celebrates language learning:

"Very healthy numbers and strong results. Sharing the results with parents and pupils and showing them that they have a higher chance of success by choosing a language. The return of trips abroad is also a good motivator." (Quintile 1 school)

"We do have support from senior management which helps. Language attainment in our school is very high, so they do want pupils to continue with their language." (Quintile 2 school)

"All I can say is that I have a dedicated team of experienced creative educators working for me under often very difficult circumstances – there are few rays of sunshine on the horizon for languages teachers in general." (Quintile 3 school)

"Pupil voice shows S1–S2 pupils are mostly enjoying their experience and an increased focus on pedagogy for speaking tasks is having a positive impact. We have an inclusive presentation policy and work to ensure all S3/S4 learners leave with a qualification whether that is N3/N4/N5." (Quintile 4 school)

"Turing funding has funded 3 years of excursions, a good incentive and motivator for learners to continue studying languages." (Quintile 5 school)

However, despite these positives, challenges and barriers remain that dissuade learners from studying a language. Approximately one third of respondents reported that learners do not see the relevance of languages for their future career as the main challenge to providing high quality language learning experiences for learners, followed by the timetabling of options in S4 (12 per cent of respondents) and they consider languages to be a low priority for senior management (10 per cent of respondents).

In qualitative comments, teachers noted the following recommendations to improve language learning in Scotland:

"Support from SLT to promote languages, consistent staffing to ensure a positive and consistent experience for all learners." (Quintile 1 school)

"Need to make links between MFL and the world of work more clear, pupils have to be able to understand the role of languages within the world and how they can benefit them." (Quintile 2 school)

"Employ another language teacher and offer more than one language. Exams need to change, especially at AH level which is too difficult, even for native speakers." (Quintile 3 school)

"We need resources and equipment to be able to engage our learners in a more realistic and relevant way. For example language labs, laptops, AI tools, and time to develop the resources to meet the needs of our learners and prepare them for their future positive pathways in languages, or with a language." (Quintile 4 school)

"Change of mindset and how languages are viewed. Give pupils the chance at achievement and attainment as a language learner so they see value and celebrate success. Highlight how employers/ Universities etc view language qualifications." (Quintile 5 school)

Findings from independent schools

Independent schools, more commonly referred to as private schools, are educational institutions that act separately from government control. They are funded through tuition fees by their pupils' parents/carers which provides the school with the freedom to build their own educational programmes. Independent Schools do not have to follow the Curriculum for Excellence, though in practice many do. Most schools follow Qualifications Scotland qualifications. Twelve independent schools responded, of which seven are in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Eleven of the twelve schools offer French, ten schools offer German and ten offer Spanish, though Spanish tends to be offered as an optional language from S2. Two schools offer Mandarin and one school offers Latin, in addition to the traditional European languages.

The point at which pupils can opt-out of languages varies from school to school. Six schools allow pupils to stop language learning at the end of S2 (or equivalent), five schools make languages compulsory to the end of S4. British Sign Language is offered as an extra-curricular activity in two responding schools.

Three schools have compulsory languages in S4. In the other schools, the range of S4 pupils taking a language is 50 per cent to 90 per cent. A third of schools told us that they have fewer pupils taking languages now than three years ago.

All responding independent schools have a multilingual population, with one school telling us about the many languages spoken in their classrooms:

"Too many to list – Arabic, Urdu, Tamil, Twi, Zulu, Shona, Mandarin, Cantonese, Thai, Hindi, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Serbian, Russian, Ukrainian, Swedish, Danish, Romanian, Italian, Greek. Somewhere around 40–50 across the whole school."

Despite this linguistic melting pot, and the fact nine responding schools afford learners opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities, our data set reveals very little curricular teaching of languages other than French, German and Spanish. Just two schools offer more than the big three. There may be opportunities to diversify the languages offering in independent schools.

In stark contrast to the state sector, nine schools employ language assistants, six continue with exchange programmes and almost all engage regularly with the cultural institutes. For five schools, recruitment of language teachers is a challenge, particularly in the North of Scotland. All schools are using AI in language teaching, at least on an occasional basis:

"We tend to use it to create material for A-Level more than other classes, but this is occasional rather than routine practice. It sometimes helps with creating quick tests or examples of critical analysis for essays, summaries or translation tasks, but one needs to be very vigilant with its accuracy or relevance."

We gathered lots of success stories from the Independent sector and it is wonderful to see languages thriving in many schools. Here is a snapshot of some positive comments;

"All language teachers are fully qualified and experienced, and have a passion for their subject. We have been able to introduce German and Spanish in S1 for two years now, which helps students make more informed decisions about their language options in S2. The school population is very international and the students are generally comfortable and happy learning one or more languages. They want to learn and develop their skills."

"We've moved to using EPI (Extensive Processing Instruction) entirely for S1–2 in the last year, using the Language Gym Trilogy books. This seems to be increasing motivation, attainment, uptake and pupil self-efficacy in S1–2."

Conclusion

In local authority primary schools, it is evident that the 1+2 approach is fostering language learning across all primary levels, and that teachers and schools are keen to further the inclusion of language in the curriculum. However, whilst a fifth of schools are embedding L2 and L3 in their daily teaching, most schools report the challenge of finding time for languages in a busy curriculum, and there remains much work to do in increasing teachers' confidence in teaching languages, expanding the awareness of and affordability of available resources, and promoting international engagement.

This year's *Language Trends Scotland* shows that for secondary schools across Scotland, there has been an increase in the percentage of schools reporting that all their S1 learners study more than one language. Schools responding to this year's survey report that multi-level and bi-level classes are a feature of their schools, but this is a challenge that many deem the only way to keep language classes in provision. One notable difference between primary and secondary language education identified in the survey responses relates to the use of AI in language teaching. Teachers in secondary schools report some use though this appears to be teachers experimenting with opportunities and professional development in an absence of school or local education authority policy on its use.

The independent sector appears to be further ahead in relation to AI and there may be opportunities for sectors to share good practice. Despite the many success stories in independent schools, it is clear that they are not immune to the challenges of diversifying languages offered and recruiting specialist teachers.

One key area of growth that unites all three sectors in the survey is the use of applications and AI as resources for language teaching. The use of these resources will only increase year on year. This report highlights this growth without necessarily promoting it as best pedagogical practice, and we want to acknowledge the limitations of the media; this is an area that requires carefully considered engagement from teachers and authorities.

All teachers with whom we came into contact have a shared commitment and ambition to continually improve language learning. In comparison to the other UK nations, there is an excellent foundation on which to build; with the right funding and progression pathways, the opportunities for the future are boundless. *Allons-y! Auf geht's! Vamos! Feuch am falbh sinn!*

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