Department for Education

Language programmes evaluation

Interim report

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Glossary of terms

AEIOU	Activities, Environments, Interactions, Objects and Users
ELA	English Language Assistants
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EPI	Extensive Processing Instruction
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GEM	German Expert Mentor
GPP	German Promotion Project
HHCL	Home Heritage and Community Languages
KS	Key Stage
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
MFLPR	Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review
MLA	Modern Language Assistant
LEO	Language Educators Online
NCLE	National Consortium for Language Education
SLN	Strategic Learning Network
UCL	University College London
UKGC	UK- German Connection
WoLLoW	World of Languages and Languages of the World

Organisations and acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Key findings

This evaluation focuses on a number of initiatives designed to improve the teaching and learning of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in English schools.

The data gathered shows that the following factors are important in strengthening the teaching and learning of languages:

- networking and collaboration between schools to help staff reflect on and revisit their pedagogies and curriculum
- staff access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD) and sources of support and advice from outside the school (e.g. access to the German Expert Mentors (GEMs), specialist German teachers)
- languages need to have sufficient curriculum time
- supportive school senior leadership to strengthen the status of languages in school
- lessons that focus on grammar, phonics and vocabulary, use as much of the target language as possible, are briskly paced and cover a range of activities
- the delivery of activities and events to build and maintain pupil enthusiasm for languages, for example contact with schools abroad, cultural activities
- provision to support Home Heritage and Community Languages (HHCL) including opportunities to take HHCL GCSEs
- opportunities for pupils to work with Language Assistants (native speakers) who can offer small groups support and broaden pupils' cultural knowledge

Background and context

This report presents the interim findings from an evaluation of a number of the Department for Education's (DfE) Language Programmes which support MFL provision in schools in England: the Language Hub programme; the Language Assistants programme run by the British Council; the UK German Connection (UKGC); and the German Promotion Project (GPP).

The evaluation was conducted (and commissioned) in the context of a decrease in the uptake of languages at GCSE level, especially among disadvantaged pupils. The Teaching Schools Council's Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review (MFLPR, 2016) argued that the vast majority of young people should take an MFL at GCSE. The

review recommended a planned and sequenced approach to language learning, focusing on teaching vocabulary, grammar and phonics and ensuring that pupils quickly grasp common words to ensure confident communication.

Evaluation aims

The Language Hub programme and the British Council's Language Assistants programme were the primary focuses of the evaluation. A secondary focus was the work of UKGC and the GPP project led by the Goethe-Institut.

The evaluation's original aim was to understand how well the 4 initiatives (with particular emphasis on the Language Hub and Language Assistants programmes) have been implemented, how well they are running and their impact on teachers, Language Assistants, schools and pupils. This report discusses the evaluation findings at the end of the first year.

It should be acknowledged that in December 2024 the decision was made to discontinue the Language Hubs programme. All data was collected before this decision was made, so reflects the views of Hubs and schools at this point in time. Findings have been presented for transparency with a focus on how this learning can be used for future Language policy.

The Department for Education has had to make difficult decisions in relation to how money has been allocated across the public sector to ensure the government can deliver on its priorities. Funding for NCLE has been reduced which means that the Language Hubs programme is unable to continue in its current form. The Department for Education is continuing to fund NCLE to deliver a new language support programme to replace Language Hubs. The programme will be based on a core online CPD platform with additional wraparound support for teachers and will aim to have national reach. The programme aims to retain the expertise and experience from the Language Hubs but will be able to reach a larger number of teachers and schools.

Evaluation methodology

Findings in this report draw on responses to surveys carried out between April and November 2024 with:

- 85 staff and 4,833 pupils from 9 Lead Hub schools
- 61 staff and 2,468 pupils from 16 partner schools
- 20 staff and 1,138 pupils from 9 Language Assistant host schools
- 17 staff and 504 pupils from 5 other comparator schools

- 465 British Council Language Assistants

The staff and pupil surveys were carried out at 2 time points, April- May 2024 and September- November 2024, as a result of the pause of research during the pre-election period. The Language Assistants survey was carried out in the first time period only. Data were cleaned, merged and analysed to pull out key findings and where appropriate by year group or type of school. Many questions were asked using a Likert attitude scale where mean scores have been presented and significant differences between groups highlighted.

The surveys were complimented by extensive qualitative work which included:

- 25 interviews (often involving more than one teacher) with language teachers from 12 Lead Hub and 9 partner schools
- Interviews with 8 GEMs
- Case study visits to 6 participating Language Hubs, involving teacher and MLA interviews, pupil focus groups and lesson observations

The data were analysed using a framework approach which allows for the systematic identification of patterns and themes.

This summary presents the key findings from these evaluation activities, for each of the 4 programmes, including findings on language teaching in schools today.

Findings

Language Hub programme

Motivations

- Staff in Lead Hubs were highly motivated to establish their school as a recognised centre for language excellence, and to create a local community of language teaching practice.
- Partner school staff were looking to increase pupil engagement, take-up and attainment in languages at GCSE, get support with the new GCSE curricula and assessment, and improve their pedagogy, while being part of a local community of language practice.

Set-up

- There were mixed perceptions of setting up the Language Hubs, with Lead Hub schools experiencing some difficulties in the early stages. Partner schools were generally more positive about the set-up phase.

Collaboration and training

- Lead Hub and partner schools collaborated in a number of activities and events including language promotion events, training, and developing and implementing action plans.
- Lead Hub staff were confident in their ability to support partner schools in their development and delivery of language teaching
- Staff reported strong engagement and positive relationship between Lead Hubs and partners.[1]
- Staff at partner schools were positive about the advice, support and resources they received and found the support of both Lead Hub leads and of being in a network of peers, invaluable, both practically and emotionally.
- Staff at both Lead Hub and partner schools were positive both about NCLE's CPD offer and their input, support and engagement, although some thought elements of the CPD needed to be more accessible.

Perceived impact

- Activities were understood to have had tangible benefits already, in term of improvements in pedagogy (arising from CPD and the implementation of action plans), supportive networks for staff and events promoting languages aiming to increase pupil interest in and take-up of languages.
- Staff perceptions were that the Language Hub programme and its associated activities had positive impacts on pupil enthusiasm for languages and raising the status of languages in their schools.
- Teachers at partner schools could identify clear impacts on their delivery of language teaching that had arisen from their involvement in the Language Hub programme.

The implications for the Language Hub programme

The evaluation found early evidence that the programme was beginning to impact on practice and enabled schools to continue the positive work they have done so far in developing a network of advice, support and collaboration. The cancellation of the programme does not necessarily mean that there will be no future progress, as the will to promote language learning, and wider cultural understanding and appreciation, still exists among staff and within wider school structures.

[1] It should be noted that those who agreed to participate in the qualitative work may be more engaged with the programme.

Language teaching in schools

Transition Key Stage 2 (KS2) to Key Stage 3 (KS3)

- Nine out of ten pupils (89%) had learnt languages at primary school before starting year 7. French was by far the most common language learnt at primary school (81% of those who learnt languages at primary school), followed by Spanish (24%) then German (6%).
- Transition from KS2 was a focus for the Lead Hub leads although they identified various challenges including languages not being a priority subject in primary schools and primary teachers being time-poor with differing levels of skill and knowledge.
- The match between the language taught at primary and secondary was identified by some as an issue, as there was often found to be a disparity. However, given the difficulties of changing the existing situation, the priorities for participating teachers were upskilling primary teachers with short courses and generating pupil enthusiasm for languages in general.

Uptake of languages in secondary school

- There was a marked variety in the organisation of the language offer across the participating schools. This applies to languages offered, pupil choice, organisation of pupils, curriculum time and pedagogies.
- The most common languages offered were French, Spanish and German. Pupils are offered a range of combinations of these languages (and occasionally other languages, such as Mandarin or Italian) at different points in Key Stage 3 (KS3) and Key Stage 4 (KS4), and with varying amounts of choice for pupils.
- Three-fifths of pupils in Lead schools reported that it was mandatory to take a language at KS4 for GCSE, while at partner and comparator schools, the majority of pupils said it was optional.
- The organisation of pupils also varied widely with a mixture of setting, mixed attainment and partial setting (e.g. a ‘top set’ with other mixed attainment classes) operating across the sample. The amount of curriculum time available (from one language lesson a week to one lesson every day), and the pedagogies used also varied.

Pedagogies

- The majority of teachers interviewed followed the recommendations of the MFLPR, placing emphasis on grammar, phonics and vocabulary.
- There was evidence of an increased focus on phonics.

- Different methods and curriculum packages are used to deliver and structure teaching, with Conti (Extensive Processing Instruction (EPI)) being the most frequently mentioned, although many staff spoke of adapting practices and schemes of work to suit their particular context and pupil body.

Pupil attitudes and perceptions

- Pupils had high levels of agreement that their language teachers were knowledgeable about the languages that they taught, that they had confidence in their language ability, and that language lessons covered wider cultural learning.
- Pupils who chose to take a language GCSE were motivated by their enthusiasm for languages and their sense that language qualifications were beneficial.
- Staff felt that pupils generally engage with learning about other cultures and are engaged and interested in languages.
- Staff reported that the majority of pupils were interested in or considering learning languages at GCSE (particularly those who spoke HHCL), however pupils reported similar levels of interest in taking a language GCSE with HHCL speakers no more or less interested than pupils overall.
- Pupils who had decided not to take a language GCSE were more interested in other subjects and thought languages did not fit with their other GCSE choices.
- Some pupils who had decided not to take a language at GCSE perceived they were not good at languages (year 7 pupils had the lowest confidence) and staff echoed this perception (being less likely to agree that most pupils believe they were good at languages).
- Staff and pupils were also in line over language A levels, with both groups less likely to agree that pupils were considering learning languages beyond GCSE or that they could achieve a good grade at A level.
- When discussing pupil attitudes in more depth in interviews, teachers felt that many pupils and their families did not see languages as a core subject. The pupil focus groups of those who had chosen not to pursue languages supported this to some degree, feeling that language qualifications were, as one said, a ‘nice to have’, rather than essential.
- Staff also noted a common perception among pupils that languages are a ‘difficult subject’, especially at GCSE. They commented that their pupils were aware of perceived discrepancies in grading between languages and other subjects.
- Staff identified these more negative attitudes towards language learning, which they felt undercut widespread pupil enthusiasm, as stemming from the low status they felt learning another language held in British society generally. As a result,

they worked to raise the status of languages in their school through, for example, careers and/or HHCL events.

- Pupils in the case study school focus groups, where languages were well-established subjects, spoke with enthusiasm of their language lessons. Trips, quizzes, games, and a variety of activities in lessons were all appreciated.

Home Heritage and Community Languages (HHCL)

- Staff in most of the Lead Hub schools identified improving their HHCL offer as a priority. While some were able to offer lessons for native speakers outside of curriculum time and support them with preparation for exams, others were unable to offer much support.
- Challenges identified included finding teachers to support pupils' exam preparations, finding an appropriate space and examiner and avoiding clashes with other GCSEs. One Lead Hub teacher suggested more collaboration between local schools would improve information-sharing to find the space and staffing.

Teacher recruitment

- Recruitment and retention presented a huge challenge to the teaching of languages. Many participants mentioned instances where their school, or a near-by school, had problems recruiting teachers despite providing incentives. Language teacher trainee recruitment for secondary schools is below the average, in a context where recruitment for all secondary subjects is below target.

Programmes to promote the German language

- Pupils found the idea of exchanges or visits abroad appealing, they were also slightly positive about information days, and courses and learning opportunities. Those who had taken part in these activities found Exchanges or visits abroad were the most enjoyable.
- Networks or competitions involving young people from Germany and working towards the Gimagine awards were least appealing, with the degree of appeal falling as pupils progressed through KS3.
- Staff who taught German were very positive about the Goethe-Institut resources.
- In surveys, pupils studying German felt it was more useful for their personal life than for their future work or career.
- GEMs were overwhelmingly positive about their role and felt the initiative had met and even exceeded their expectations to date. They also felt they had personally benefitted from the role in being able to improve their skills.

- Their motivations for applying to be a GEM were to support their colleagues, interrupt German's decline as a subject, and to access CPD.
- GEMs felt that they were making a real impact in schools with context-specific help and guidance and felt supported to do so by the Goethe-Institut.
- Some challenges were identified, including meeting their responsibilities as GEMs alongside their commitments in their own school.

The implications for German programmes

The evaluation has found that pupils who undertake German and activities related to German are positive about their experiences.

The staff who mentioned GPP activities were also very positive, but this was a minority. As part of GPP, the GEMs initiative is also relatively small scale and so limited in effect. However, the GPP shows useful early signs of impact.

British Council Language Assistants Programme

Placements, activities and experiences

Modern Language Assistants (MLAs) are mainly young adults who come to the UK to help support languages teaching in schools. English Language Assistants (ELAs) are mainly undergraduate students who go abroad to help teach English in schools.

- MLAs mostly speak French, Spanish or German as their first language as these are the most common languages taught in school in the UK.
- Spain was the most common destination for the ELAs, with half the survey sample being placed there.
- A typical placement for MLAs lasted for 9 months, was limited to just one school and involved between 12 and 20 hours per week. MLAs were more likely to than ELAs work in a secondary school (90% compared to 60%).
- Post-Brexit changes in the right to work in the UK/EU was the main challenge respondents had faced in becoming a Language Assistant, with cost of administrative processes and obtaining visa sponsorship also mentioned.
- Staff in half of Lead Hub schools (49%) and 38% of partner schools reported employing a Language Assistant in the academic year 2023 to 2024, largely recruited through the British Council.
- The most common activities for all language Assistants on placement was teaching or support with speaking (89%) followed by small group tuition (80%).

Benefits and challenges

- 92% of Language Assistants rated their experience as positive. The most common reasons for finding the experience positive was learning a lot about their host country and wider culture and enjoying working as a Language Assistant (both 90%). This was supported by the small number of MLAs who were interviewed.
- Language Assistants reported that their experience had improved their cultural, political and societal awareness of their placement country (58%), given them skills in working with young people (58%) and provided them with a range of other benefits to strengthen their CV and future career prospects (50%).
- Language Assistants positively rated the support offered by their host school and mentor (82%), their integration into their host school (80%) and the support they received from the British Council (66%).
- After their placement, the majority of Language Assistants planned to find a job utilising their language skills (89%) and/ or continue learning languages (88%), with ELAs being keener to do this abroad or in an international role. MLAs were more likely to want to pursue a career in teaching.
- However, difficulties identified by MLAs included finding suitable accommodation and the length of time taken obtaining a DBS check (which requires an address). 70% of all Language Assistants reported spending between £3,000 and £7,499 while on placement, and half (51%) said they had spent more than expected.
- 97% of all staff in schools that employed Language Assistants agreed that having MLAs were beneficial to the pupils, as did staff who were interviewed. The main areas of impact were enabling more targeted support in language classes, improving students' cultural awareness of the Language Assistant's home country, and improving students' general language skills and knowledge.
- However, staff did note that there were issues with identifying sufficient funding for MLAs and that the organisation and hiring of placements caused an administrative burden.
- Pupils' views on the impact that Language Assistants had on their ability in listening and speaking, and general language skills and knowledge was positive. Less positive were ratings about the impact on exam grades or the Language Assistant running small groups for practice/learning (a concern given small group work is one of their main activities while on placement). Views on Language Assistants' impacts on reading and writing were markedly lower among year 9 pupils than among those in earlier years.

The implications for the Language Assistants programme

The evaluation has found positive responses to the Language Assistant role from both ELAs and MLAs, and from staff and pupils. However, Language Assistants are in a minority of schools, and funding and administrative concerns may mitigate against the scheme expanding.

Language teaching in schools today: conclusions

This evaluation indicates that the Language Hub programme allowed schools to develop networks of advice, support and collaboration, and through these begin to generate and implement action plans to develop pedagogy in schools, as well as increasing pupil enthusiasm for and uptake of languages. Even without the specific Languages Hub programme, NCLE will still be able to build on the willingness of schools to collaborate and network, whilst delivering CPD and build on the adherence to the MFLPR evident in many schools.

Strengths

The evaluation data indicates that the strengths of languages teaching today are: the enthusiasm of the teaching staff – the willingness of teachers to network and collaborate; and the instances of active learning we saw in classrooms, with fast-paced lessons that include a range of activities, based on clear understandings of the importance of the systematic teaching of grammar, phonics and vocabulary.

Schools in this evaluation with good practice in language teaching had many of the factors identified in the Key Findings above: namely frequently revisiting their practice; access to CPD; sufficient curriculum time for languages; focusing on grammar, phonics, vocabulary, and use of the target language (as recommended by the MFLPR, 2016); briskly-paced lessons with a variety of activities; support for the learning of HHCL; and delivering cultural and ‘real world’ activities (e.g. contact with schools abroad) to maintain pupil enthusiasm and deepen learning.

The GEMs network of one-to-one peer support for German teachers is understood by the GEMs themselves to be working well, enabling them to help develop the teaching of German in schools in their area.

The British Council Language Assistants programme is popular with staff and pupils for bringing pupils into contact with a native speaker who can offer small group support. The Language Assistants themselves find the experience positive and worthwhile. However, there are concerns with funding and accommodation for Language Assistants which may interfere with the scheme’s expansion.

Challenges

- As the Language Hub initiative was a key focus for this evaluation, and as the Lead Hub schools had strong reputations for language teaching, we are unable to say how much the good practice we identified in participating schools is practised in other schools.
- Teacher recruitment in languages remains a key challenge.

Introduction

The Institute of Employment Studies (IES) and The National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR) have been commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to evaluate a number of the Department's Language Programmes which support Modern Foreign Language (MFL) provision in schools in England. The focus was the Language Hubs and the Language Assistants programmes with additional consideration for the German Promotion Project and UK German Connection. This interim report presents findings from survey and qualitative fieldwork carried out in summer and autumn terms in 2024.

Research context

This research is being conducted in a context where the number of languages taken at GCSE level has been steadily decreasing, especially among disadvantaged pupils. Teaching Schools Council's Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review (MFLPR) commented that 'fewer than half of pupils take a language at GCSE' (2016, p.2). The MFLPR argued that the vast majority of young people should take a GCSE in an MFL. It recommended a carefully planned and sequenced approach to language learning focusing (especially in the initial stages) on teaching vocabulary, grammar and phonics and ensuring that pupils quickly grasp common words (including common verbs) to ensure confident communication. Also recommended were stimulating content, enriching pupils' knowledge of culture, history and literature, opportunities for interaction with native speakers, a stronger KS2 to KS3 transition, and teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing as integrated skills.

There are a number of challenges to attaining the goals of more pupils taking GCSEs, attaining good grades, and enjoying and becoming confident in languages. These can include the varied quality of language teaching, the low supply of suitably qualified teachers, perceptions among some school leaders, parents and pupils that being able to speak other languages is not necessary or perception that GCSEs in languages are more demanding than other subjects. There is also a persistent gender gap in the take-up of languages at GCSE and A level, with more girls than boys studying languages, although this is less dramatically the case in relation to German and Mandarin[2] (Mills & Tinsley 2020, Parrish 2023).

Research Aims

The evaluation's original aim to was to understand how well the following 4 initiatives (particularly the Language Hub and Language Assistants programmes) have been

[2] Mandarin being the fourth most frequently taught language behind French, Spanish and German.

implemented, how well they are running and their impact on teachers, Language Assistants, schools and pupils. This report discusses the evaluation findings for 2024.

Language Hubs

In March 2023, the National Consortium for Language Education (NCLE), based at University College London's (UCL) Institute of Education, together with the British Council and the Goethe-Institut, were contracted to deliver a Language Hubs programme to support the spread of high-quality languages teaching in schools. The pedagogical model that NCLE is disseminating is based on the principles and recommendations of the MFLPR identified above.

The Language Hubs programme had a particular focus on increasing languages uptake at GCSE together with increasing pupil confidence and enthusiasm for learning languages, levelling up opportunities for disadvantaged pupils, addressing the performance of boys, supporting the transition from Key Stage 2 (KS2) to Key Stage 3 (KS3) and, recognising and supporting the value of HHCL.

Language Hubs provided a system-led, school to school support model of disseminating best practice for language teaching. 15 schools acted as Language Hubs with a further 4 schools acting as co-leads – 19 schools in total geographically spread across England. They were recruited as they could evidence their commitment to teaching languages, with over 75% language entry at GCSE. These will be referred to as **Lead Hub schools** throughout the report. Lead Hub schools were in place in January 2024, at which point they started recruiting and onboarding partner schools. Each supported between 5 and 7 **partner schools** in their region (though co-led hubs may have more). At least 25% of all partner schools recruited had to be located in an Education Investment Area (EIA), with at least 28% of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding, to address the particularly low rate of languages take up and attainment by disadvantaged pupils. In total,102 partner schools participated in the Language Hubs programme.

It should be acknowledged that in December 2024 the decision was made to discontinue the Language Hubs programme. All data was collected before this decision was made, so reflects the views of Hubs and schools at this point in time. Findings have been presented for transparency with a focus on how this learning can be used for future Language policy.

The Department for Education is continuing to fund NCLE to deliver a new language support programme to replace Language Hubs. The programme will consist of an online CPD platform known as Language Educators Online (LEO), providing professional learning free at source for teachers at any stage of their career, supported by between 10 and 15 Strategic Learning Networks (SLNs) led by an expert teacher who can facilitate the use of online CPD and help groups of teachers contextualise professional learning to meet their individual and local needs. Each SLN will establish at least one National

Priority Project involving between 5 to 10 schools willing to work in-depth on a specific area of interest, focusing on key issues within languages education. SLNs will provide the infrastructure to support the National Priority Projects and evidence from them will be used to inform the development of the online CPD platform, LEO. The programme aims to retain the expertise and experience from the Language Hubs but will be able to reach a larger number of teachers, and schools.

British Council Language Assistants Programme

The Language Assistants Programme delivers on a series of bilateral agreements between the British Council (on behalf of the Department for Education) and Education Ministries in partner destinations worldwide. The programme arranges placements to support the teaching of language and culture and to instil an international aspect to the curriculum in all sectors of education.

The programme arranges:

- placements in overseas schools, colleges and universities for UK residents, who assist with the teaching of English (known as English Language Assistants or ELAs)
- placements in UK schools, colleges and universities, for non-UK residents who assist with the teaching of French, Spanish, Mandarin, German and Italian (known as Modern Language Assistants or MLAs)

The programme is administered by British Council and originally started in 1905.

Additional language promotion programmes

- The German Promotion Project (GPP) is part of the Language Hub programme and seeks to tackle the decline in uptake of German at GCSE. It aims to raise the profile of German and the benefits of studying it and provide relevant resources. This also includes the recruitment and training of German Expert Mentors (GEMs). The GPP is run by the Goethe-Institut

- UK-German Connection (UKGC) aims to build youth exchange and collaboration between the UK and Germany through a variety of programmes e.g. visits, language courses, CPD for teachers. UKGC is a bilateral, not-for-profit government agency

All these programmes have the common aims of being focused on supporting and improving language learning in schools, increasing teacher confidence and pupil

enthusiasm, and thereby increasing language take up at GCSE and beyond to create a pipeline for languages.

Methodology

This report provides key findings from surveys, interviews and case study visits conducted in the summer and autumn terms of 2024. Initial fieldwork was interrupted by the announcement that a General Election would be held on Fourth of July 2024, which meant that the summer data collection was paused and recommenced from September 2024. To ensure consistency across the 2 survey points, some questions in the staff survey were re-framed for the September versions to ensure that respondents were considering the situation in the academic year 2023 to 2024. Furthermore, responses to the pupil survey were analysed by both year group and time point. In some cases, there appeared to be systematic differences due to views or decision points changing between the start and end of the academic year, and these have been highlighted in the findings.

Surveys

Surveys with schools were designed to collect views and experiences of language teaching and learning, including experiences of the various language programmes (where applicable). Surveys were administered from April to May (years 7 to 10) and September to November 2024 (years 7 to 11). The Autumn wave allowed for data collection from the new year 7 cohort and responses from year 11 pupils (the cohort that was year 10 in the April to May surveys). In addition to these surveys being sent to Lead Hub schools and partner schools, a sample of comparator schools were identified for counterfactual analysis. These were selected from schools hosting British Council Language Assistants in the academic year 2023 to 2024 who were outside of the Hub areas as well as non-participating schools within the Hub areas. These were relatively closely matched to the partner schools, based on average GCSE attainment and levels of language uptake. Table 1 shows the groups that were invited to complete surveys with the timeframes for each.

Table 1: Evaluation activities (respondents and dates of activities)

Survey	Number of schools in sample	Usable responses (no. received)	Month of survey (2024)
Hub schools - staff	9	76 (9)	April to May and September to November
Hub school – pupils	9	2,313 (2,520)	April to May and September to November

Survey	Number of schools in sample	Usable responses (no. received)	Month of survey (2024)
Partner school – staff	16	34 (27)	April to May and September to November
Partner school – pupils	16	1,197 (1,271)	April to May and September to November
Language Assistant Host school – staff	8	20	September to November
Language Assistant Host school - pupils	8	1,138	September to November
Other comparator school staff surveys	5	17	September to November
Other comparator school pupil surveys	5	504	September to November
ELAs (N=1,190)	N/A	228	May
MLAs (N=629)	N/A	239	May

Staff surveys

Lead contacts in the Language Hubs, partner and comparator schools were sent a personalised link to an online staff survey[3]. They were asked to complete the survey themselves and distribute to all staff in their school involved in language teaching and/or involved in the set-up of the Lead Hub.

This survey explored approaches to language teaching, views and experiences of DfE language programmes and resources, and student views around language learning. In total, 183 useable survey responses were received across both survey periods, comprising 132 complete responses and 42 partial responses. Analysis included all

[3] The personalised survey links were sent to the school leads who agreed to administer the surveys with staff and pupils. The link allowed multiple responses so the data which could be linked back to the school.

partial responses due to the relatively small sample size and reasonable levels of data received from partial responses.[4] [5]

Pupil surveys

The lead contacts in the same schools were sent a separate link to the online pupil survey. They were asked to share the survey with relevant staff to facilitate completion among pupils. The survey explored levels, views and experiences of language learning, both in and out of school.

A total of 8,943 useable responses were received, defined as pupils who had answered the first question for their year group on whether or not they were learning languages[6], with 3,510 responses from the April to May surveys and 5,433 responses from the Autumn 2024 surveys.

Language Assistant survey

The Language Assistant sample comprised 2 groups, ELAs working abroad and MLAs working in schools in England. Where informative, responses are shown for the 2 types of Language Assistant. The survey of staff also asked some questions on the experience of having MLAs in their school or to understand how Language Assistants are recruited if not through the British Council programme. Qualitative data is also reported where available.

The Language Assistant survey was carried out in May 2024 when most of the 2023/2024 cohort of Language Assistants were coming to the end of their placements. These surveys explored individuals' experiences of participating in the British Council Language Assistants Programme. All Language Assistants were invited to complete the survey, with the sample provided by the British Council via DfE. A total of 467 usable survey responses were received, an overall effective response rate of 26%.[7]

[4] It is not possible to calculate a response rate due to the way surveys were cascaded within schools.
[5] In the staff survey, 2 of the teachers of German were German Expert Mentors (GEMs), another 3 were being supported by a GEM while 7 reported that others in their school were involved with the GEMs. programme. Due to these low numbers, we are unable to present any findings from the staff survey in the report.
[6] All pupils who answered initial questions specific to their year group (q16, q36, q60, q83 or q113) were included. Responses were excluded from a small number of schools that had 3 or fewer responses.
[7] 30 partial responses were excluded as they had not answered up to Q11 'Did you experience any of the following challenges to becoming a Language Assistant?'

Interviews and case studies

Qualitative data was collected to complement survey findings by providing in-depth reflections on how the language programmes have been implemented, how well they are running, and their impacts. The qualitative findings in this report are based on:

- 25 interviews with language teachers (often with more than one teacher present) from 12 Lead Hub schools and 9 partner schools
- 8 Interviews with German Expert Mentors
- 6 case studies of Lead Hub schools that included 15 pupil focus groups (80 pupils in total), lesson observations (at least 2 in each school), and interviews with languages teachers (12) and 3 MLAs (where present).
- In total, and including the case studies, 37 interviews with teachers were conducted, involving 47 staff.

The data was collected from April to May and September to October 2024.

Interviews were conducted online, with the exception of those undertaken as part of the in-person case study visit. Interviews were semi-structured to allow individuals the opportunity to discuss what was important to them. Topics covered the context of the wider locality and institution, issues to do with language teaching in the school (e.g. the pedagogical approach, the languages offered), and experiences of the Language Hub initiative (e.g. activities, relationships between and partner schools).

Interviews with the MLAs, recruited through the British Council, covered their experiences of being a Language Assistant in the school and their tasks, their experience of recruitment, and living in England.

The case study focus groups included KS3 and KS4 pupils. Where relevant and possible, they were split into those who had taken a mandatory language GCSE but then stopped studying languages, and those taking 2 languages at GCSE. The focus groups were invited to discuss their views on the importance of languages, and their experiences of language learning at school.

Lesson observations used semi-structured observation frameworks that incorporate the AEIOU model (focusing on Activities, Environments, Interactions, Objects and Users) that allowed identification of key elements of the lesson, as well as observing how pupils were engaging.

Analysis

Quantitative analysis

After cleaning the survey datasets to eliminate short partial responses and merging of the staff and pupil datasets across the 2 survey points, the data was analysed using SPSS to draw out the key findings for pupils, staff and Language Assistants through ANOVA test, frequencies, chi square.

For some questions in the pupil and staff surveys, results are reported separately for different types of schools, for example, Lead Hub schools compared with all other schools. Where relevant, results regarding Language Assistants are reported based on whether the school employs British Council Language Assistants or not, while findings from the Language Assistant survey are often split between ELAs and MLAs.

Some survey questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale, for example from strongly disagree to strongly agree, or from very unappealing to very appealing. The results for these questions are presented using the mean average score (M=X), to make comparisons across year groups, between school types or between ELAs and MLAs. Where differences in the mean can be analysed according to different groups (depending on samples sizes), significant differences have been highlighted in the text.

Throughout reporting, the phrase “positive” is used to denote a combination of very good/good or strongly agree/agree (depending on the question and responses provided), unless otherwise stated. Statistically significant differences in responses by groups to categorical questions (e.g. yes/no) have also been highlighted.

Qualitative analysis

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and professionally transcribed. A coding frame was developed, based on themes and topics covered with data being coded and input into a single data analysis framework (in Microsoft Excel). Deductive, thematic analysis was undertaken to identify themes, patterns and differences. Observation data was written up and added into the framework.

This approach allowed for effective synthesis and triangulation of data from different sources to ensure consistency alongside flexibility

Throughout the report, teacher quotes have been identified with a number and a letter (either H for Lead Hub or P for partner school). The case study schools have all been given pseudonyms. At some points, identifiers have not been used to fully preserve anonymity.

Some short accounts of practice in the case study schools have been included in this report to illustrate how schools' approach, and work to improve, the teaching and learning of languages.

Language Hubs

Motivation for applying

Lead Hub and partner schools were asked about the reasons for wanting to become part of the Language Hub programme. The main reasons given by Lead Hub staff were school-related, to establish the school as a recognised centre for language teaching excellence (89%) and to create a local community of language teaching practice that will benefit the school and others (82%).

Staff in partner schools highlighted the benefits to students, with over four-fifths wanting to increase pupil engagement and take up of languages at GCSE and beyond and to increase pupil attainment in languages (both 83%). Two-thirds said they wanted to be part of a regional/local community of language teaching practice.

Staff in Lead Hub and partner schools were asked about the reasons for wanting to become part of the Language Hub programme. The main reasons given by Lead Hub staff were school-related, to establish the school as a recognised centre for language teaching excellence (89%) and to create a local community of language teaching practice that will benefit the school and others (82%). One-third said they became a Lead Hub to provide one or more teaching staff with professional development in coaching/mentoring.[8]

Staff in partner schools highlighted the benefits to students, with over four-fifths wanting to increase pupil engagement and take up of languages at GCSE and beyond, and to increase pupil attainment in languages (both 83%). Other reasons for becoming partner schools were that two-thirds wanted to be part of a regional/local community of language teaching practice and 62% wanted to improve their own language teaching practice. One in 6 wanted to receive coaching or mentoring from an experienced teacher and to receive support with language specific knowledge (both 17%).

This rationale was repeated in the interviews where staff in both Lead Hub and partner schools spoke of the chance to develop their pedagogy, access funding and CPD, and collaborate with other schools and experts in language pedagogy. This desire for networking and collaboration was a strong theme across participating Lead Hub and partner schools.

[8] Throughout the report, the number agreeing and strongly agreeing to attitude statements are combined to form a ‘positive’ response and the number disagreeing and strongly disagreeing are combined to form a ‘negative’ response.

> Overall, it has been a really positive experience. We're very proud to be a Language Hub. I think, the proper system-level improvements, those types of peer-to-peer networks are where it's at. You know, how are we going to improve that languages teaching? It's the partner school work. (H11)

> In terms of opportunities I mean, the access to experts in different fields and the people that have contacted us as result of being part of languages hub...I think, yes, as a result of being a part of it [the Hub programme], lots of experts are just very keen to help us, and it's just been a fantastic experience working with people that I never thought I would have worked with before. (H25)

Lead Hub leads were also particularly likely to reference a desire to improve the status of language teaching in the country and encourage more young people to study languages.

Partner school leads referenced benefits to the pupils such as being able to develop the potential of having HHCL and improving teaching through accessing external support networks.

> We thought this was an opportunity to really get involved with something largely to improve where we were […] Given our context what excited me the most was tapping into the Home Community Languages, the level of diversity that we have here of 64 different home languages that are spoken in school […] the external support for me and the networking … was really fundamental to looking and thinking outside the box [..] from a Language Hub point of view, tapping into the home languages, but also looking at the pedagogy within lessons and thinking about, 'How can we improve teaching within lessons?' You know, it's not just about outcomes, it's exposure to languages. (P07)

Application and set-up process

Lead Hub school staff were fairly negative about the process with 48% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that ‘the process of setting up the Language Hub at our school has been straightforward’ while 39% agreed or strongly agreed.

Staff who were interviewed were more positive. Hub leads felt the two-stage application process was demanding and ‘rigorous’ but understood why, given the level of funding available. They reported mostly taking the lead in the process but noted the importance of collaboration with colleagues and in particular the involvement and support of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members. Many in the Lead Hubs said they had been confident that their applications would be successful, as they felt they met most or all the criteria,

were well known in their locality for their languages teaching, and that their language offer was robust.

71% of Lead Hub staff felt it had been ‘straightforward to recruit partner schools’ and 59% thought it had been straightforward to engage with partners schools and make appointments to meet or visit. To identify partner schools, staff in Lead Hubs advertised the partnership opportunity in their region, and some staff proactively approached particular schools. Although they reported some initial confusion as to whether schools with Ofsted grading ‘Requires Improvement’ or ‘Inadequate’ could be included as partner schools, this was resolved as several successful partner schools did have these gradings. Lead Hub leads felt that some potential partners schools had not initially realised the scope of their commitment, may not have involved their headteacher from the start or were hesitant to sign up to specific contract conditions.

Lead Hub schools were also asked for their views on how well the set-up phase prepared them to be a Lead Hub. The vast majority of staff (86%) were positive about their ability to support partner schools with the MFLPR, and 78% felt confident to support partner schools with delivery of the new French, German or Spanish GCSE curricula. However, only 46% felt that the training in the Autumn Term of 2023 had prepared them well for their role delivering support as part of the Lead Hub. Two-thirds felt that they had the right resources available to facilitate students taking a GCSE in a HHCL although 48% felt confident supporting partner schools with encouraging and facilitating students eligible for free school meals (FSM) to study a language.

At the time of surveying, 39% of partner schools were still in the early stages of engaging with their Lead Hub school and familiarising themselves with the support offered. While 44% had had some engagement with their Lead Hub and were familiar with the support, only 17% reported being actively engaged with their Lead Hub and having a good understanding of the support on offer.

Partner school staff were positive about their experience of the set-up phase of Language Hubs with over four-fifths agreeing that staff at their Lead Hub had good expertise in relevant languages and language teaching, 82% agreeing that there was good communication from their Lead Hub and 81% thought it was straightforward to engage with them. Three-quarters found meeting or visiting their Language Hub (75%) and the sign-up process (74%) straightforward and 69% felt supported by their Lead Hub. They added in interviews that the application process was ‘streamlined’, ‘accessible’ and ‘very straightforward’, following clear criteria.

There were some co-lead arrangements among the hubs, mainly as a result of state school-selective school partnerships, or schools in the same area of the country applying. Staff reported that the co-lead arrangements were largely working well, and staff had built strong partnerships, appreciating the opportunity for collaboration.

> [Being a co-lead hub is] absolutely brilliant. It has been fantastic bouncing ideas off [co-lead school name]. They have a very different setting, but it's been fascinating working with them. It's just been brilliant working with people who are just as passionate about languages and about improving language provision for kids... They are generous with their resources and with their time, and they really value what is going on and really place a great deal of emphasis and importance upon it. (H22)

However, some described the geographical distance to partner schools and division of work and responsibilities could be challenging when sharing leadership of a Lead Hub. They often ended up having higher workloads by having to duplicate CPD, as well as having a higher number of feeder primary schools than some other Lead Hubs.

Advice and support

Lead Hub perspective

Staff in Lead Hub schools were asked about the perceived effectiveness of a range of activities they had engaged in with their partner schools.[9] In terms of resources and planning, staff were very positive with at least four-fifths reporting they had been effective in providing advice and support with teaching and language resources (88%), reviewing and responding to needs in their school (83%), and developing a plan for next steps at their school (80%).

Staff in Lead Hubs schools were also very positive about the support they had been able to provide around teaching practice and curricula, with 100% saying that they had been effective in both delivering coaching/mentoring sessions and providing general support. In addition, 93% felt they had been effective in providing advice and support with implementing the MFLPR and 87% in providing advice and support with the new French, German or Spanish GCSE curricula (from September 2024).

Lead Hub school staff were also positive about the support they were able to offer partner schools in supporting and encouraging students to study languages. Over four-fifths of staff felt that they were effective in providing advice and support regarding pupil engagement with language learning and GCSE/A level take up (85%), providing advice and support on encouraging and facilitating students to take a GCSE in HHCL in a local setting (83%), and on providing advice and support on becoming an examination centre for a HHCL (83%). 70% of Lead Hub school staff also felt they were effective in both providing advice and support on supporting and encouraging FSM students with studying

[9] If staff had not delivered the activity they were filtered out.

languages while 60% felt they were able to provide advice and support on supporting the needs of higher/lower attaining students with studying languages.

In terms of the input the received from NCLE at the application and set-up phase, 75% of staff were positive about the frequency of communication, 71% felt supported and, 64% felt the quality of communication was good. Overall, 72% of Lead Hub staff were positive about the support they have received from NCLE and 66% felt that the Language Hub model was effective or very effective for improving language teaching at their partner schools (no-one rated it as ineffective).

The interviews and case studies provided the opportunity to delve deeper into what activities Lead Hubs were running with their partners. All Lead Hub leads reported generating bespoke action plans with their partner schools, which included a focus on:

- CPD, including for the new GCSE specification
- support for motivating pupils
- support for developing pedagogy – the embedding of phonics through the curriculum was one of the most frequently mentioned areas for development
- sharing information about different pedagogies
- setting up networks for shared learning
- supporting transition from KS2 to KS3
- support for HHCL
- support for Key Stage 5 teaching and uptake
- coaching for department staff on leadership

Lead Hub leads had embarked upon delivering bespoke CPD modules to partners (70% of CPD being the compulsory NCLE modules, with the rest tailored by the Lead Hub leads). They all emphasised that they worked collaboratively with partner schools, perceiving these relationships to be delicate, interpersonal interactions. One commented that it ‘can be quite fragile to go into schools’ without pre-existing relationships (H03). Another described themself as ‘an advisor and a friendly ear’ (H06). Several specifically commented on learning from their partner schools, and welcomed the chance to collaborate and network, as they wished to avoid being ‘inward facing’ (H04).

> I think the biggest thing has been getting into other schools, observing people, talking to them genuinely and in a welcoming warm manner about what can we do together? No threat. […] No judgements at all, a real sense of collaboration. (H07)

Lead Hub leads reported that the funding to support their partner schools was used variously with common choices including:

- the cost of hiring MLAs, some of whom worked between a small number of schools to provide support on fluency and exam preparation (further information can be found in the Language Assistants section)
- funding for supporting HHCL, for example covering the cost of entering pupils into a GCSE, and employing HHCL advocates who worked across their school networks to support HHCL teaching and learning
- costs associated with partner school staff attending CPD sessions, such as the cost of cover teachers, as well as for partner school staff to attend paid conferences on language pedagogy developments

In addition to providing direct funding, Lead Hub leads described other ways in which they delivered support to partner schools such as setting up ‘working groups’ to tackle challenges of transition from KS2 – KS3, whereby staff from the Lead Hub, partner schools, feeder schools and schools from their wider networks came together to discuss and trial solutions.

Lead Hub leads also discussed activities they were setting up specifically to promote languages to pupils. These included language competitions, Mother Tongue events, careers events (to illustrate how languages helped with employability), and ‘European day’ which celebrated different European languages and foods. As one said:

> On top of the CPD, we're also trying to deliver some things for the pupils as well. So, we're doing the aspirational year 9 day which we mentioned. Which is looking at giving the pupils concrete reasons why choosing a language for an option at GCSE is a really good decision. We're also running some competitions. So, we're running a spelling bee across all the schools, the final is going to be on the year 9 aspirations day as well. (H22)

A few Lead Hub leads mentioned some challenges they had experienced, which had mostly arisen from the capacity of partner schools. They spoke of the fragility of some partners’ position in the Lead Hub and their limited engagement due to the changing leadership of the department or school, and/or a challenging and unstable institutional context. Some Lead Hub leads felt that the expectations put on partner schools, particularly around attending CPD, had not been made clear to Lead Hub or partner schools from the beginning of the programme, and so these were difficult to fulfil as partner schools struggled to find sufficient time, funding or capacity. As a result, Lead Hub leads emphasized the need to be accommodating and flexible.

> I think, some of the challenges really have been related more to what's going on in those [partner] schools. So, with very small languages teams, just them and a non-specialist. So, asking them to get cover, for example, to come out. They haven't attended every CPD days and really our job we feel is supporting that department as much as we can... I think, the DfE potentially need to be a bit more flexible on the destination, on getting there. For example, is it in that member of staff's interest to beat them over the head with a big stick if they attend this conference, webinar, etc? (H11)

> It [the Language Hub Programme] doesn't set out in simple terms what you're actually signing up to. So, we had to spend time then sharing that with [partner school] headteachers to enable us to get the buy-in from them for them to then release those specialist teachers in those schools to engage with the CPD and other initiatives that we're trying to run. So, that kind of clarification of expectations to partner schools. But also, just an acknowledgement that the nature of some of these schools is that they are in a state of flux and that there is a certain sense of needing to be mindful of that in terms of the expectations (H24)

Several teachers noted that both the engagement of the head of the department and the support of the school leadership were necessary for successful involvement and observed that some partner schools may only have one of those elements.

Some Lead Hubs were also operating with affiliate schools to try and bring the benefits of the Language Hub network to a wider number of schools, including those that had not met the DfE's criteria for partner schools.

Partner school perspective

Staff in partner schools were asked similar questions in the surveys about the advice and support provided by their Lead Hub and they were positive about what they had received.[10] In regard to resources and planning, 80% rated as good the support to develop a plan for the next steps at their school and reviewing and responding to ongoing needs in their school. Half thought the teaching and language resources on offer were good, with 10% finding them poor. Regarding teaching practice and curricula, around three-quarters of staff thought the general support with teaching and receiving coaching or mentoring from a Lead Hub specialist teacher were good (75% and 73% respectively). Seven in ten felt that support implementing the new French, German or Spanish GCSE

[10] Staff who had not received the resources were asked to select not applicable and filtered out of the analysis

curricula (from September 2024) was good and 62% felt that support for implementing the MFLPR was good.

In contrast to Lead Hub staff, partner school staff were more mixed about the support they had received around supporting and encouraging students to study languages. Just over three-fifths thought support was good for providing advice and support regarding pupil engagement with language learning and GCSE/A level take up (compared to 85% of Lead Hub staff), and encouraging and facilitating students to take a GCSE in a HHCL or access exams locally was 60% (compared to 83% of Lead Hub staff). Fewer staff had accessed support with becoming an examination centre for HHCL or supporting and encouraging FSM students with studying languages. Of those who had, around four-fifths rated the support as neither good nor poor (80% and 83% respectively), with the remaining staff rating it as good (20% and 17% respectively).

Just under two-thirds of staff in partner schools rated the support they had received from their Lead Hub as good or very good overall and 74% would recommend the Language Hub programme to other teachers and schools.

One of the key positives for partner school staff was the opportunity to network and having someone who they could discuss challenges and concerns with. The Language Hub network and especially the Lead Hub lead provided useful and practical knowledge with input on language pedagogy, which partner schools described as ‘amazing’ and ‘invaluable’ support.

> I would definitely say that the language hub has been instrumental in picking me up off the floor after our poor results in the summer with regard to the listening and elements of the reading. And also, that transition for our new head of department coming in, to actually realise that they are not in this on their own and that there are several schools across different cities that are experiencing similar barriers to us. (P06)

Partners also commented positively on the specificities of the bespoke action plans for their schools, including the CPD available to staff. One teacher for example reported benefitting from the Lead Hub lead signposting them to a curriculum package.

> [The Lead Hub lead] mentioned the WoLLoW, World of Languages and Languages of the World […] We've created a post holder responsible for WoLLoW, which the Language Hub has supported us with the teaching and learning responsibilities. So, we have a lead for WoLLoW, and we have a set of teachers that are trained in WoLLoW. And we're doing some really pioneering work with the other schools that offer it. (P07)

Views on NCLE resources and support

Staff in Lead Hub and partner schools were asked if they had accessed any of the resources from the NCLE.[11] Those who had were positive about the quality with 66% rating one or more universal CPD modules on the NCLE website and the Specialist Teacher Intensive Training positively, while 61% rated one or more universal CPD webinar positively. The training provided by NCLE was widely agreed to be high quality.

> The CPD in general has been excellent from NCLE. I'm really impressed with that, and I feel really lucky to have received that because you don't normally get CPDs for specific subjects like that, that's led by experts, and we've been really impressed with how they've linked it to research and academic research. (H05)

However, there was concern among some Lead Hub and partner teachers that the training was occasionally rather 'dense' and 'theory-based' and could be difficult to access for teachers whose first language was not English.

> I think that the amount of materials that NCLE have given us are just quite overwhelming. Like, brilliant, interesting stuff, but very academic at times, very dense, and physically a lot. And also, the other thing which I don't think NCLE has taken into account, is that some of our language teachers are not native English speakers. So, wading through quite a dense academic article, is maybe going to take more time than [for] a native speaker […] I think it's very easy to forget the restrictions on people's time and energy. We want to make it manageable, because if it's manageable people are likely to do it... So, we're just looking to target it … to make it possible to do it within the time frame that they [partner schools] will have. (H22)

Lead Hub leads had the most direct contact with NCLE, though partner school relationships were more distant. When asked about their experiences to date of working with NCLE, many Lead Hub staff commented positively on the passion of the NCLE team, saying that they were clearly 'so enthusiastic' about supporting language learning.

> There's a real sense of allyship and understanding that we're in it together and that it is a challenging environment. (H24)

> The [NCLE] staff have been absolutely fabulous and very supportive, very helpful, anything we've needed, they've been able to help out with. (H26)

[11] Staff who had not received the resources were asked to select not applicable and filtered out of the analysis

Some Lead Hub staff mentioned initial challenges with communication from NCLE and managing the flow of information, although they also noted NCLE's receptiveness to feedback.

> We would really benefit from having things in one place that's got clearly written out and concisely, 'This is what we need you to be doing.' I feel like that has got better, but I do feel like there is still more room for improvement around the clarity of communication and what we need to know and when we need to know it. (H11)

Some Lead Hub leads sought to repackage the information when they were disseminating it to their department, partner schools and wider school networks, while one partner school teacher noted they wanted strategies they 'could instantly implement' and felt that more practical applications had been offered in later NCLE CPD sessions.

Early impacts

Staff were also asked if they could identify any impacts from the Language Hub scheme on teaching and learning, and most responded that it was early days, especially given the delay in getting started in Y1. However, partner schools in particular, did talk of a sense of real pedagogical developments. Examples given included unifying KS3 and KS4 schemes of work, and focusing on developing particular areas (often phonics, speaking and listening) with the pupils.

Lead Hub staff felt that these activities such as 'European Day' and other language events had already had an impact on pupils' enthusiasm and engagement with languages.

> I think, when we had this conference and the students went back to their head teacher, kind of, skipping and running down the corridor in excitement to tell that teacher all about it, and these are students from quite a deprived area, who had, kind of, seen the light about languages and were really excited, their GCSE numbers are on the up. They've exceeded their goal for the year, so it is having that impact, and that message is getting out there, which was really pleasing. Because we've not had a long time to be able to do that but, obviously, this is something that we want to keep going... (H10)

> Definitely a tactical feeling of raising the profile of languages, which therefore has a knock-on motivational effect. (H24)

Lead Hub and partner leads felt that there had been tangible benefits for staff so far, due to the CPD and networking opportunities. Some also mentioned that being part of the

Language Hub had helped to raise the profile of languages in their school, which had improved their confidence. One teacher from a partner school remarked:

> We're doing things now for the betterment of our children, in collaboration with the Language Hub. And it's given us the confidence to explore new things, and if it doesn't work it doesn't work, if it does work then great. But we make sure that we're not doing things on a wing and a prayer, everything that we're doing now is research-led, it's evidence-based. The Language Hub is really good for the fact that they will have that evidence, they will have that research for us, so what they're trying to do with us is coming from a really strong place. (P07)

Challenges to the Language Hub programme

Timeline mismatches and alterations

Lead Hub staff gave examples of when timelines for DfE and NCLE targets or announcements did not match up with school timelines, creating considerable challenges for the schools in terms of finding sufficient staff time and, later on, in their interactions with potential partner schools.[12] The main concern here was the announcement of Language Hub status just before the summer holidays in 2023, when timetables had been set for the next academic year. This meant several Lead Hub leads who were teachers had full teaching commitments and struggled to balance those with Language Lead Hub work. The slow start to the initiative and delays around the signing-up of partner schools meant that Lead Hub teachers were trying to set up visits to partner schools over the summer exam period which was extremely difficult. This contributed to several teachers feeling that they were just beginning the work of the Language Hub as they went into the second year.

Another impact of delayed or ‘out of sync’ timelines Lead Hub leads gave, was the announcements and decisions on the criteria for choosing their partner schools. Lead Hub schools said that this had created some strain on their relationships with potential partner schools, as they could not provide clarity on whether they would be selected.

Staff also reported some areas of confusion between stage 1 and 2 of the application process including whether selective schools needed a co-lead and school Ofsted gradings (as mentioned above). The criteria for funding were also mentioned by several staff who felt the clarification over whether funding was only to be spent on human resources came too late (in April 2024) and was too restrictive, as some had wanted to buy teaching resources.

[12] In order to preserve teacher anonymity, identifiers have not always been used in this section.

Concerns around achieving long-term impact

With a view to the longer term, staff spoke first about the short-term nature of the project, commenting that identifying measurable outcomes in 3 years would be difficult as reinvigorating languages required a longer project. Secondly, some participants questioned the reach of the Language Hub model, as it involved a relatively small number of schools.

Language teaching and pedagogy

Pupils' experiences of languages learning

Language learning at primary school

Nine out of ten pupils had learnt languages at primary school. French was by far the most common language learnt at primary school (73%), followed by Spanish (32%), while fewer than 5% reported learning other languages (with German and Mandarin the most common). Pupils who spoke other languages fluently were more likely to learn other languages (aside from French and Spanish) than were pupils who spoke English only.

All the staff interviewed noted the importance of supporting transition between KS2 and KS3 and of starting robust languages teaching in primary school, as happens in other European countries, with several suggesting that this contributed to a higher facility with languages. However, participants identified 2 problems: primary schools were understood to be 'time poor', and languages were not a priority for them.

A variety of views existed on whether symmetry of languages between primary and secondary mattered, with most staff focusing on the status quo of a diversity of languages across their feeder primary schools. Two teachers referred to a planned and co-ordinated focus on Spanish in primary school in the London Borough of Hackney, noting that this required existing relationships and/or some organising authority. Both thought that such co-ordination was (or might be) possible within their Trust feeder primary schools.

Given this situation of pupils often learning one language in primary and starting another in secondary, the more important factors for most of the Lead Hub leads were upskilling generalist primary teachers and encouraging pupil enthusiasm of languages.

> There have been a lot of Primary opportunities sent our way, which I'm very keen, actually, it's the next step of the hub, because we are strengthening our Primary outreach and Primary links […]. The Goethe-Institut has developed this wonderful programme, it's just getting the time to broadcast it, and they are offering upskilling to Primary teachers […] Our aim is to get some kind of taster carousel, so that all of the Primary schools, our feeder Primary schools, and our partner Primary schools, have a chance to offer some aspect of a German experience …. in Key Stage 2. (H09)

One teacher noted the need for a focus on the 'foundations of learning languages' at primary, so that pupils who were studying a different language at primary school still feel

that they can apply their prior knowledge to their new language lessons at secondary school.

Language learning in Key Stage 3

Nearly all pupils (98.6%) in KS3 were learning languages. The few who were not generally stated this was because of their wider learning needs or that they had an Education, Health and Care plan. Among year 9 pupils not learning languages there were also those who had not chosen to do a languages GCSE and so were no longer learning one.

Languages studied

French, German and Spanish were the most commonly learnt languages among KS3 pupils, as shown in Table 2. Just over 1 in 3 year 7 pupils (36%) learnt more than one language, and this proportion was slightly higher among year 8 pupils, at 39%, although was much lower among year 9 pupils (19%). These patterns match the DfE entries data, and the language trends survey, supporting the survey results being representative of the wider pupil population.

Table 2: Languages learnt by year group

Language choice	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	KS3
French only	24.1	21.6	29	24.6
German only	17.8	12.9	18.5	16.4
Spanish only	19.5	22.2	28.5	22.9
Other language only	3.1	4.4	4.7	4
Sub-total – one language only	*64.4*	*61.1*	*80.7*	*67.9*
French & German	16.6	18.3	7.2	14.6
French & Spanish	8.1	10.2	4	7.6
German & Spanish	3.5	3.8	2.2	3.2
French & other	5.2	2.3	2.9	3.6
Other multiple combinations	*2.2*	*4.4*	*3*	*3.1*
Sub-total – multiple languages	**35.6**	**38.9**	**19.3**	**32.1**
N=	**2,805**	**2,304**	**1,974**	**7,083**

Source: Pupils survey

Pupils at Lead Hub schools were more likely than those at other schools to study a wider range of languages, and more than one language. Nearly three-fifths (57%) of year 7 pupils at Lead Hub schools were learning more than one language (with French and German being the most common) compared with only 9% of year 7 pupils at other schools (see Table 3). Common practice at many other non-Lead Hub schools was to learn one language in year 7 but to broaden to 2 languages in year 8, before focusing on one language again in year 9, with the prevalence of German teaching (either on its own or together with French or Spanish) declining after year 7.

Table 3: Languages learnt by year group and type of school

% students learning a language by year group	Hub Year 7	Hub Year 8	Hub Year 9	Compar-ator Year 7	Compar-ator Year 8	Compar-ator Year 9
French only	13.5	21.8	18.5	37.5	21.2	39.8
German only	15.4	17.6	31.9	20.8	6.4	4.7
Spanish only	11.3	12.4	14.6	29.8	35.8	42.9
Other language only	3.1	5.7	6.7	3.1	2.6	2.6
Sub-total – one language only	*43.3*	*57.5*	*71.7*	*91.2*	*66*	*90*
French & German	29.4	24.4	10.8	0.4	9.8	3.6
French & Spanish	10.6	7.2	4.9	4.9	14.2	3.1
German & Spanish	6.1	4.8	4	0.3	2.5	0.3
French & other	8.5	0.6	4.1	1.1	4.6	1.6
Other multiple combina-tions	2.2	5.5	4.6	2.1	2.9	1.3
Sub-total – multiple lan-guages	*56.7*	*42.5*	*28.3*	*8.8*	*34*	*10*
N=	1,570	1,339	1,003	1,235	965	971

Source: Pupils survey

The proportion of year 9 students learning a new language was much lower, as 82% of year 9 students said that they were learning the same languages as in years 7 or 8, and only 15% said they were learning a new language in year 9 (3% did not know). 11% of year 9 pupils reported learning Mandarin as a new language in year 9, although French, German and Spanish were the most commonly reported new languages (68%, 51% and 41% respectively).

Pupils have more choice over which languages to study as they progress through Key Stage 3. In year 7, only 16% of pupils said that they had a choice over which languages they were studying, but this proportion increased to 32% among year 8 pupils and 40% among year 9 pupils. However, the opposite pattern was observed for partner schools where the proportion decreased through KS3.

GCSE choices

The evaluation discovered a range of different models used to teach language GCSE in schools. The traditional (and most common) model is that pupils choose their GCSE options in year 9 (at the end of KS3) and start learning the GCSE curriculum in year 10 (KS4). However, there are a number of variations to this including with some schools starting the GCSE curriculum earlier, for example in year 9 (to give pupils an additional year of study) or in year 8 (so pupils take their GCSE in year 9 and can choose to do another language in KS4). Pine and Birch case studies indicate this variation in language offer.

Pine School Case Study: A Streamlined Language Offer

Pine School is a compact secondary school in a suburban area of a major city and is part of a local Trust. Traditionally serving an affluent, majority white community, the school is increasingly diverse with a growing number of pupils who speak English as an Additional Language each year.

Pine School has a purposefully limited language offer, whereby students are assigned to either French or Spanish in year 7, studying either language until year 9 (in mixed ability sets), at which point they are encouraged, but not obligated, to take a language to GCSE. Despite it not being mandatory, there is a high pupil uptake of GCSE languages. The option to study a second language from year 8 has been phased out, based on the idea that this would increase curriculum time for each language, and subsequently increase attainment.

> [The pupils] benefit from 5 hours of instruction, rather than dividing their attention…what we really want to see in key stage 3 is that really, really solid foundation of phonics, vocab and grammar, so that when they start their GCSE courses, they're able to really excel and to become really sophisticated linguists. (Pine Teacher)

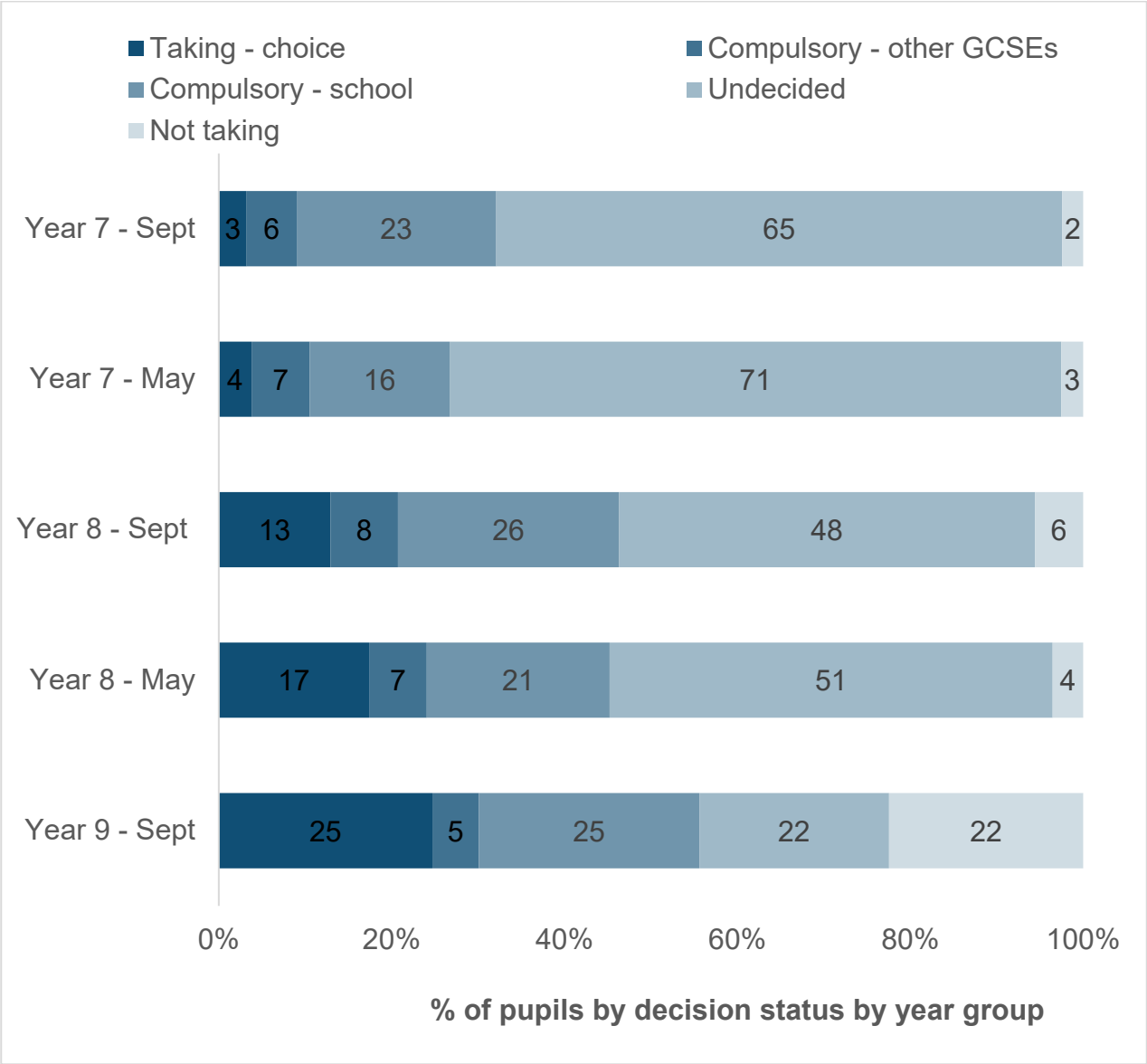
Birch School Case Study: A Broad Language Offer

Birch School is a community school in a small city. It prides itself on representing the ethnic diversity of the local area with 45 different languages spoken across the school. The language department at Birch School is understood by its staff as making an important contribution to the wider school ethos, particularly around encouraging students to be respectful to others who are different to themselves. There was a strong sense across focus groups with both year 7 and year 9 pupils, that language skills were important to show respect for, and broaden knowledge of, different cultures.

Birch school teaches French, German, Spanish and Mandarin from year 7 to GCSE, with the option of Arabic in year 7. All classes are taught in mixed ability sets, apart from Mandarin (funded by the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP)). Pupils are initially taught in a carousel format. They do a half term each of all 5 languages before choosing one in year 8. Starting from year 9, students take 1 language for 3 years to GCSE, with the option to take up 2 languages. Outside of the school's taught languages, staff facilitate GCSEs for HHCLs, with a local Polish and Arabic school allowing Birch to use their space for language teaching during the weekend. Teachers are able to teach across multiple languages, at times supported by Language Assistants, however this wide language offer has, on occasion, presented staffing challenges.

Figure 1 shows pupils' choices regarding GCSEs by year group (although responses will largely be driven by the variations outlined) and by survey period (as pupils may make decisions during their current academic year). While the majority of year 7 pupils (68%) make their GCSE choices in the future, around 30% had already decided to take a language GCSE (because it is compulsory rather than by choice, either within their school, or in combination with their other GCSE choices). 46% of year 8 pupils had already decided to take a language GCSE (as it was compulsory). The findings for year 7 and year 8 are broadly similar across the 2 survey periods. Around 20% of year 9 pupils had decided not to take a language GCSE.

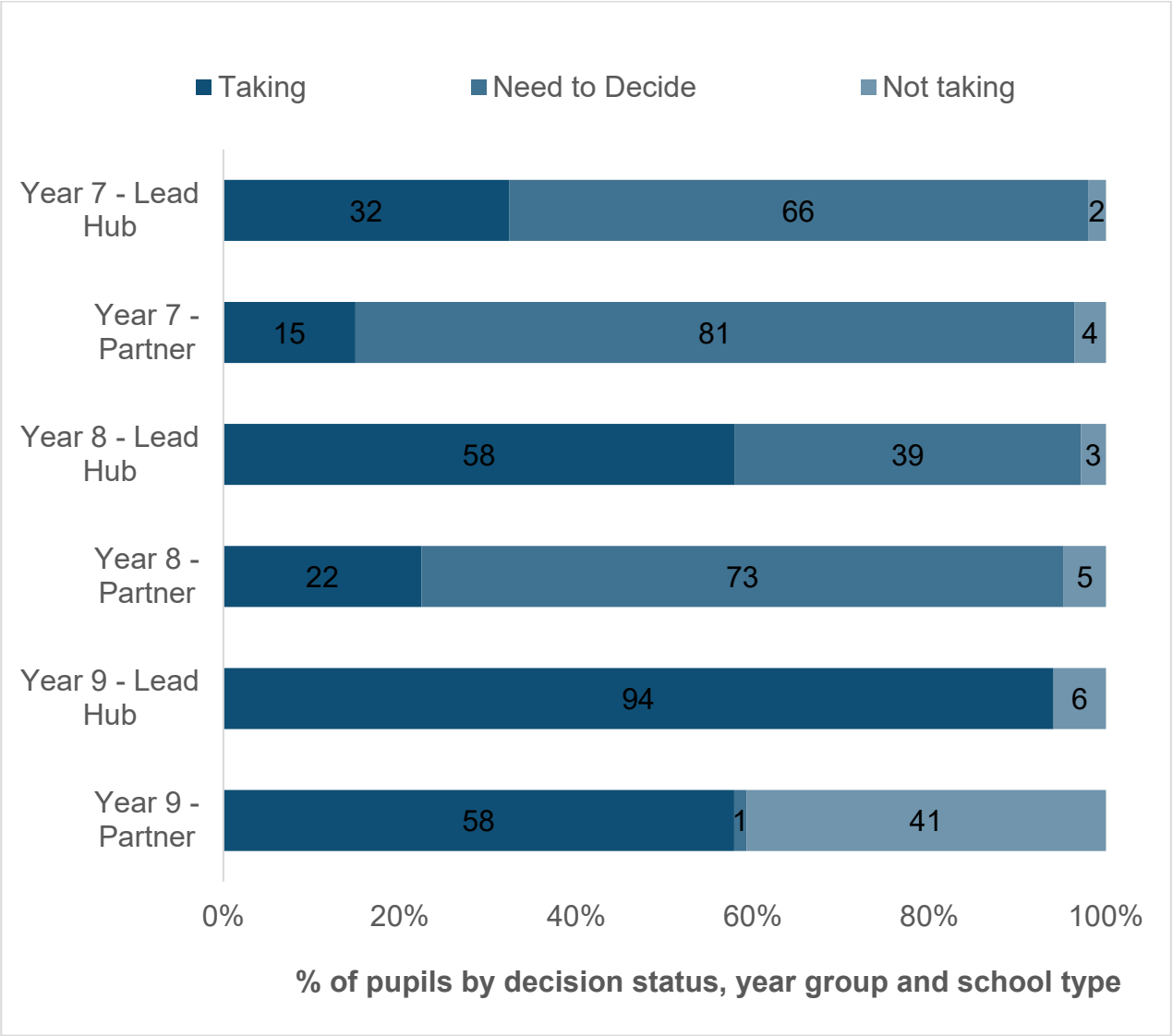
Figure 1: Pupils' decisions about taking language GCSEs



Source: Pupils survey

There was also substantial, and statistically significant, variation between Lead Hub and partner schools in the responses in April to May 2024, with pupils at Lead Hub schools being much more likely to have chosen to take a GCSE (including it being mandatory or necessary with other GCSE choices) than those at partner schools, as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2: Pupils' decisions about taking language GCSEs



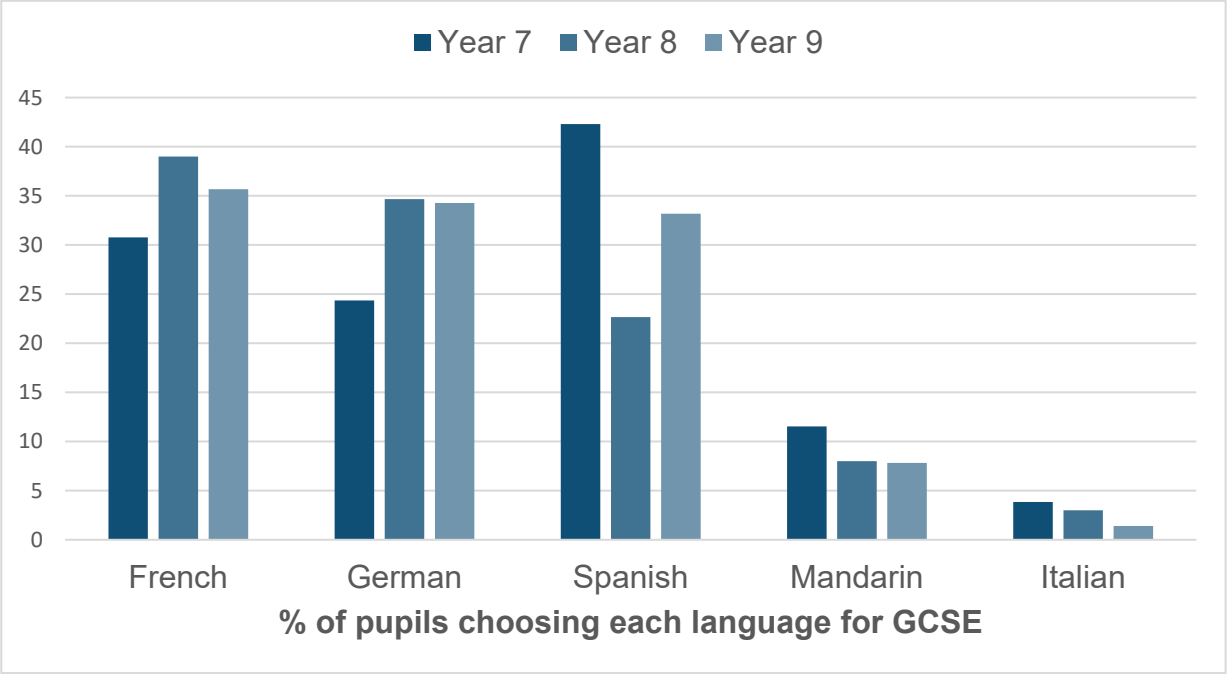
Source: Pupils survey, April-May responses only

The majority of pupils at Lead Hub, and comparator schools said that they could take more than one language GCSE, whereas at partner schools the majority said they could only take one language GCSE. Pupils at comparator schools were most likely to report being able to take multiple languages at GCSE (77%) followed by those at Lead Hub schools (70%) while only 39% of pupils at partner schools said they could take multiple languages at GCSE.

Languages chosen for GCSE

Figure 3 shows the languages chosen by pupils who had already decided to take a language for GCSE.[13]

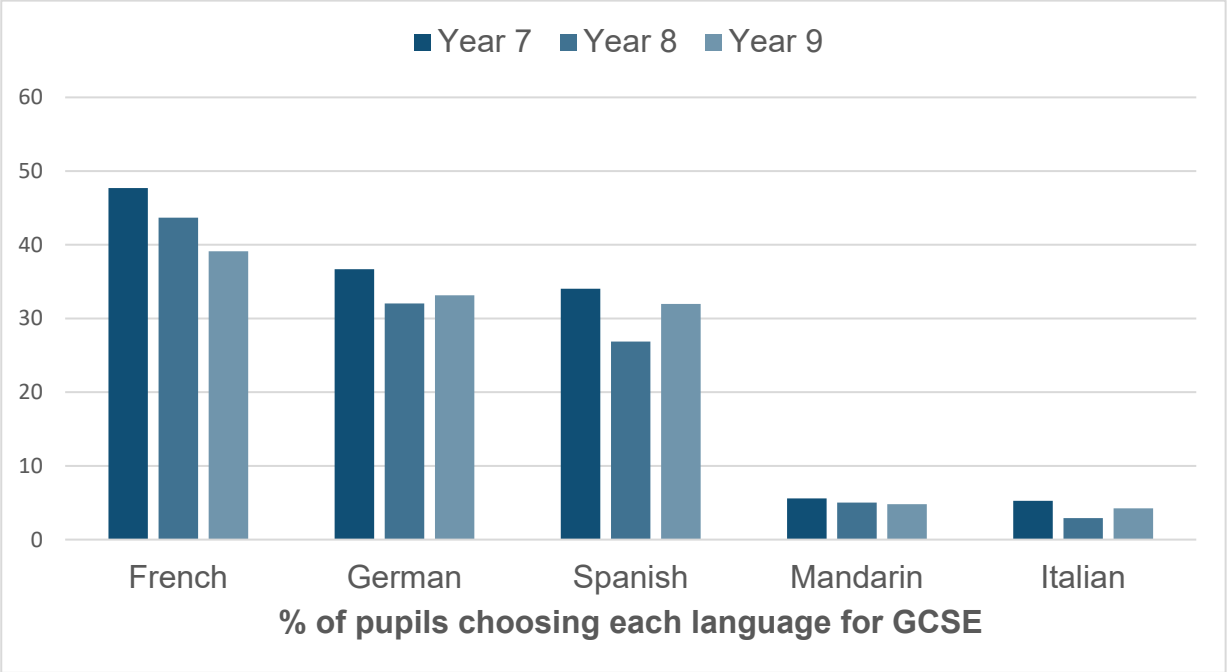
Figure 3: Languages that pupils have chosen to study at GCSE (those who have decided)



Source: Pupils survey

[13] Excluding those who have to take one because it is mandatory at their school or mandatory for their other GCSE choices.

Figure 4: Languages chosen by pupils where it is mandatory to take a language at their school, or they need to because of their GCSE options

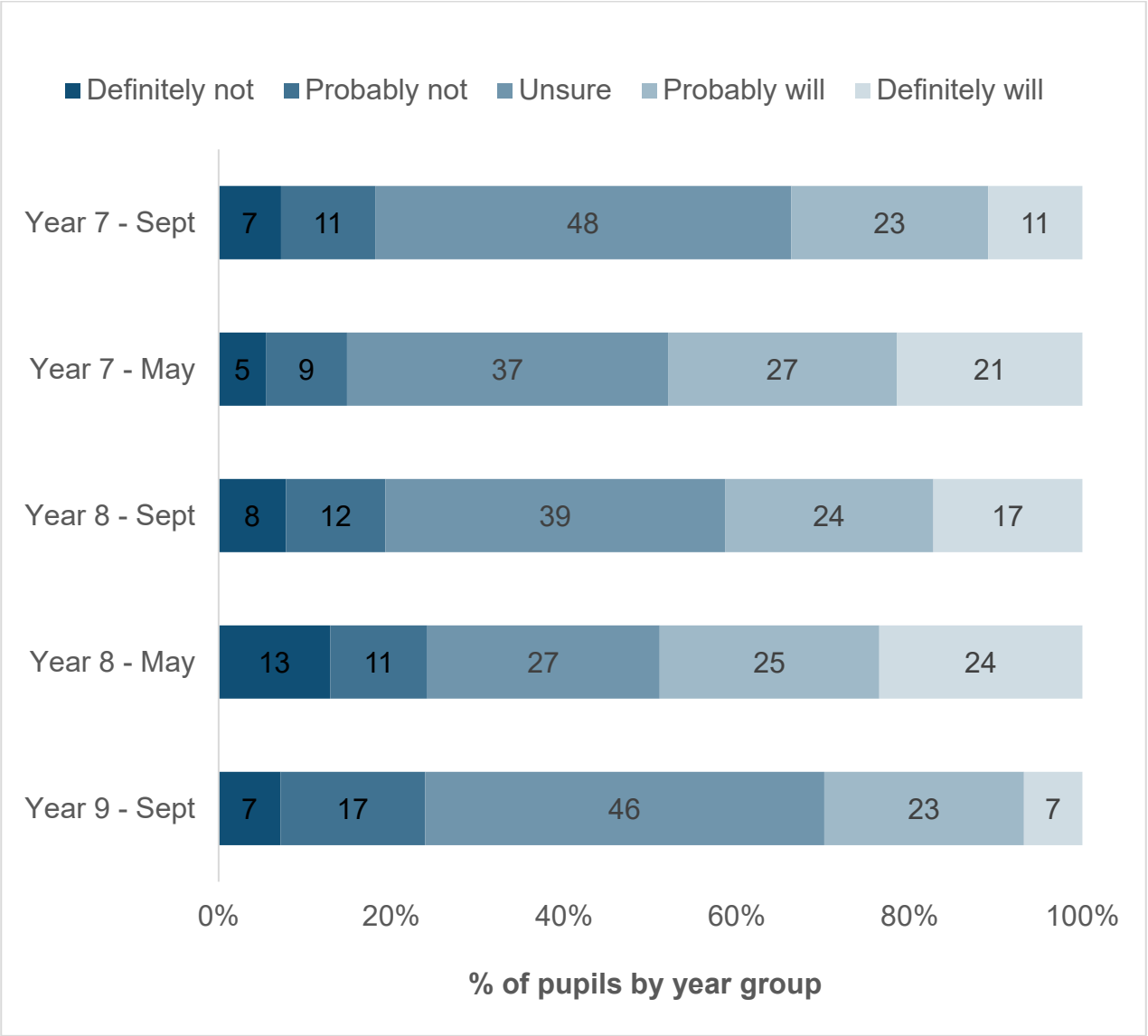


Source: Pupils survey

Pupils' GCSE intentions

Pupils who had yet to make a decision about whether or not to study a language at GCSE were asked their thoughts about taking a language at GCSE. Figure 5 shows that the proportion of pupils who were unsure decreased at the start of year 7 to the end of year 8, before increasing again at the start of year 9. A higher proportion of pupils reported that they would take a language at GCSE than would not, although this difference was smallest among year 9 pupils.

Figure 5: Pupils thoughts about taking a language GCSE (those not decided yet)



Source: Pupils survey

Pupils at Lead Hub schools were the most likely to say that they would[14] take a language at GCSE. Among year 7 and year 9 pupils, those at partner schools were least likely to say they would take a language at GCSE, while among year 8 pupils, those at comparator schools were least likely to say they would take a language GCSE.

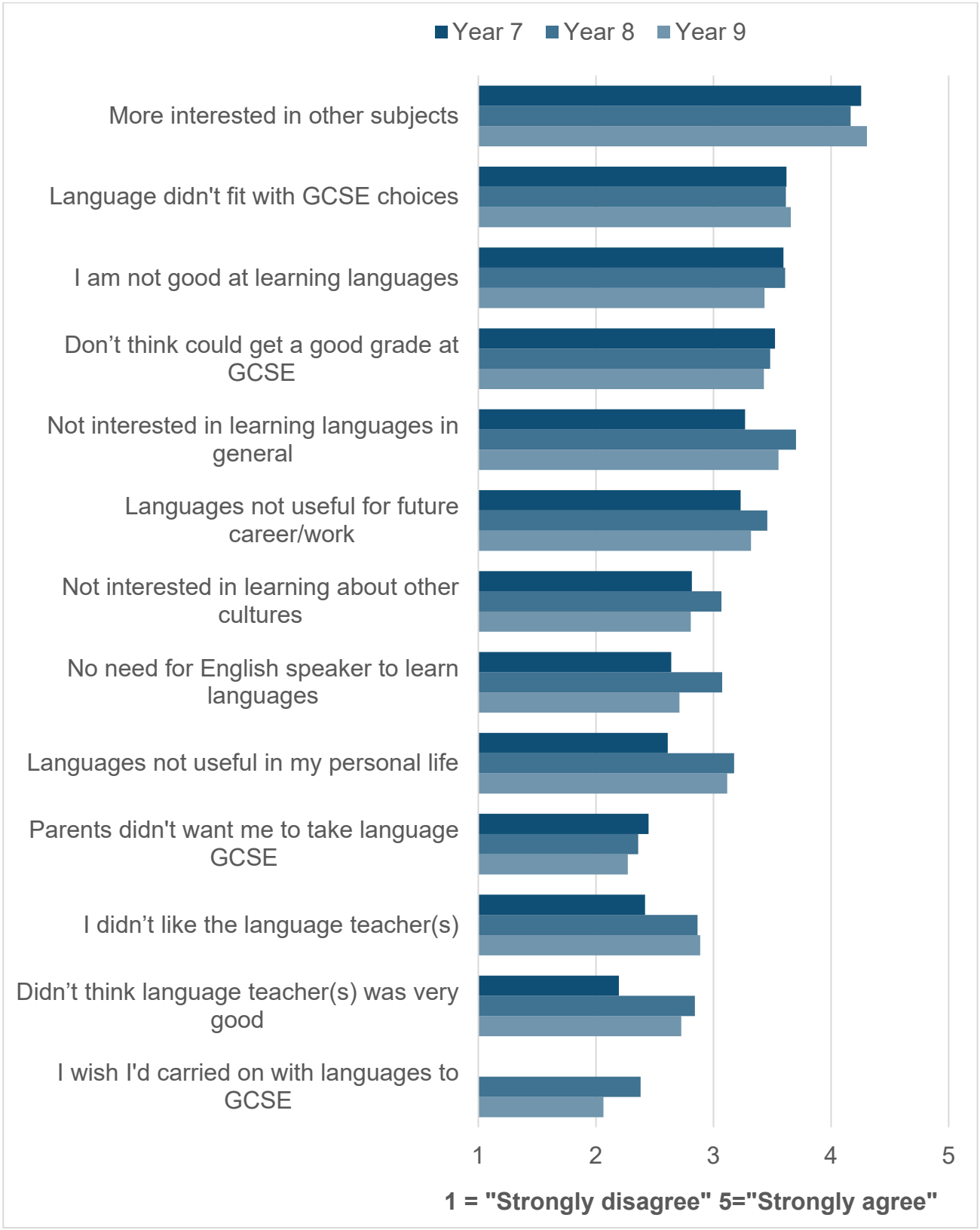
Pupils who said they would take a language at GCSE were asked which language(s) they thought they might choose. French, German and Spanish were by far the most commonly chosen languages (matching patterns of languages studied in KS3), although small proportions mentioned Mandarin, Italian and Japanese.

[14] Proportion saying probably will or definitely will combined.

Pupils who had chosen not to take a language GCSE

Figure 6 shows pupil's reasons for deciding not to take a language GCSE. There was very strong agreement across the year groups that pupils were more interested in other subjects. Year 7 pupils were less likely than older pupils to say they were not interested in learning languages in general but more likely than pupils in year 9 to say they were not good at learning languages. Year 8 and 9 pupils did not seem to regret their decision and disagreed with the statement "*I wish I'd carried on with languages to GCSE*".

Figure 6: Reasons why pupils have decided not to study a language at GCSE

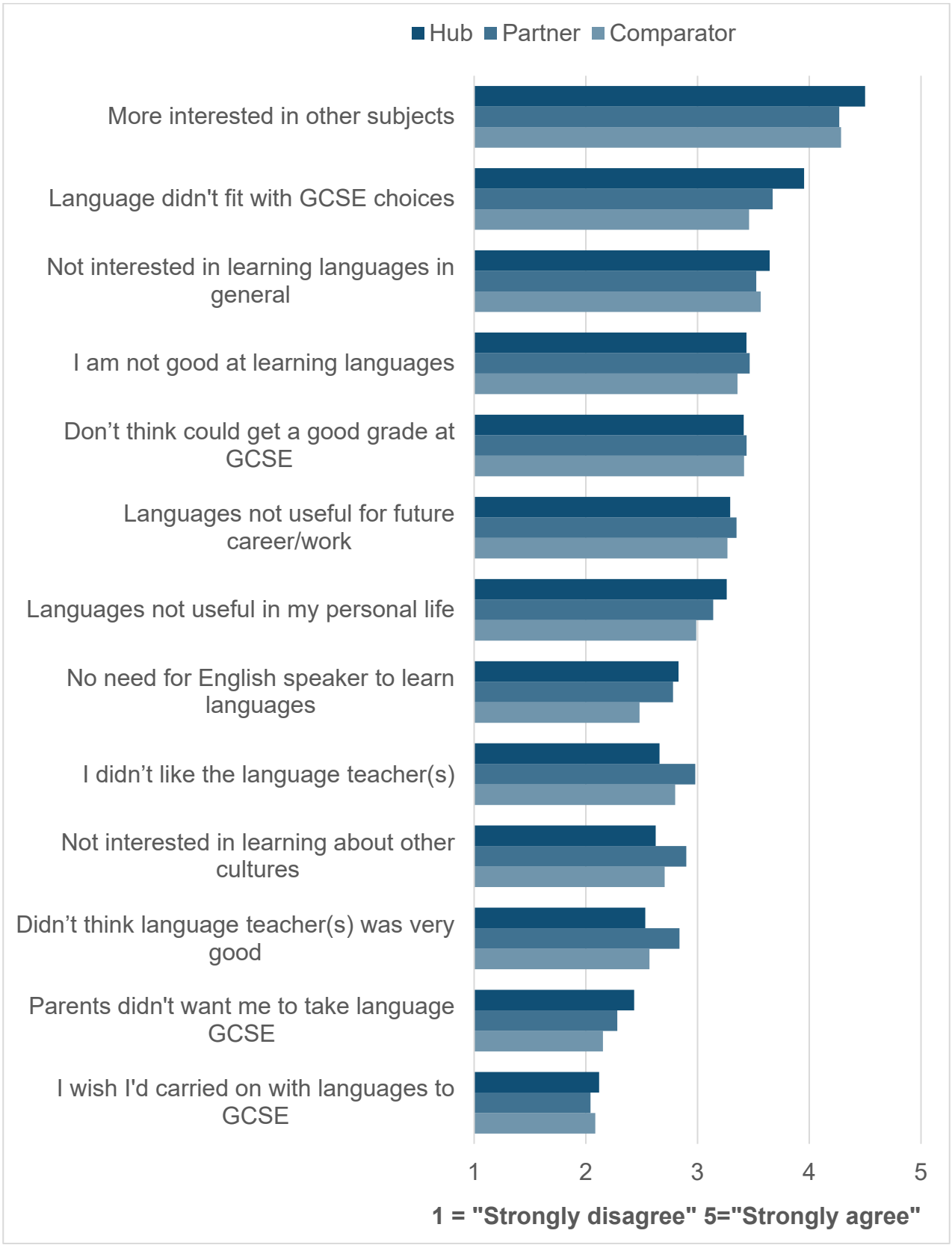


Note: the item "I wish I'd carried on with languages to GCSE" was not asked of year 7 pupils

Source: Pupils survey

Figure 7 shows the variation in views about selected language statements among year 9 pupils who had decided not to take a language at GCSE, by school type. There was very little difference by school type in terms of not being interested in languages in general, feeling they were not good at languages, that they could not get a good grade at GCSE, or that languages were not useful for future career or work. Pupils at Lead Hub schools were more likely than those at other schools to agree that they were more interested in other subjects or that a language did not fit with their GCSE choices, although were less likely than those at other schools to agree that they did not like their language teacher(s) or that they were not interested in learning about other cultures. Pupils at comparator schools were much less likely than pupils at other schools to agree that there was no need for English speakers to learn foreign languages, or that their parents did not want them to take a language GCSE.

Figure 7: Reasons why pupils have decided not to study a language at GCSE, by school type



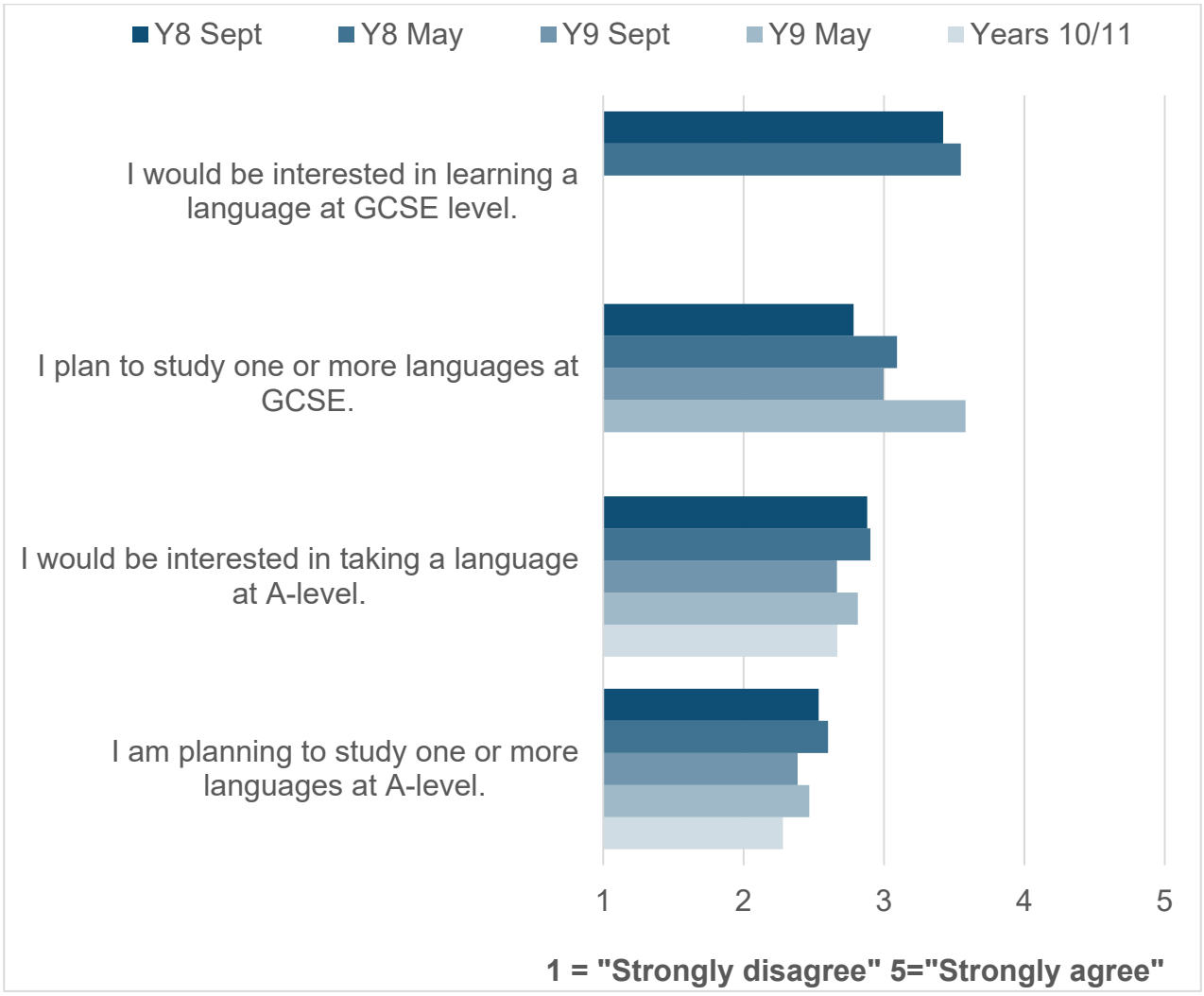
Source: Pupils survey

Future plans about language learning

Pupils in years 8 and 9 were asked their thoughts on future languages study where there was agreement that they were interested in taking a language at GCSE, using a number of attitude scale questions. As shown in Figure 8, intention to take a GCSE increased substantially between the start of year 8 and the end of year 9 (although it should be borne in mind that the April to May survey covered Lead Hub and partner schools only and pupils at Lead Hub schools are more likely to study languages, so the April to May figures may be overstating plans to study languages at GCSE).

However, while there was general interest in taking languages at GCSE, this was not the case for A levels, and overall pupils showed slight disagreement towards being interested in taking a language at A level, although it should be noted that A level decisions are many years away for year 8 pupils.

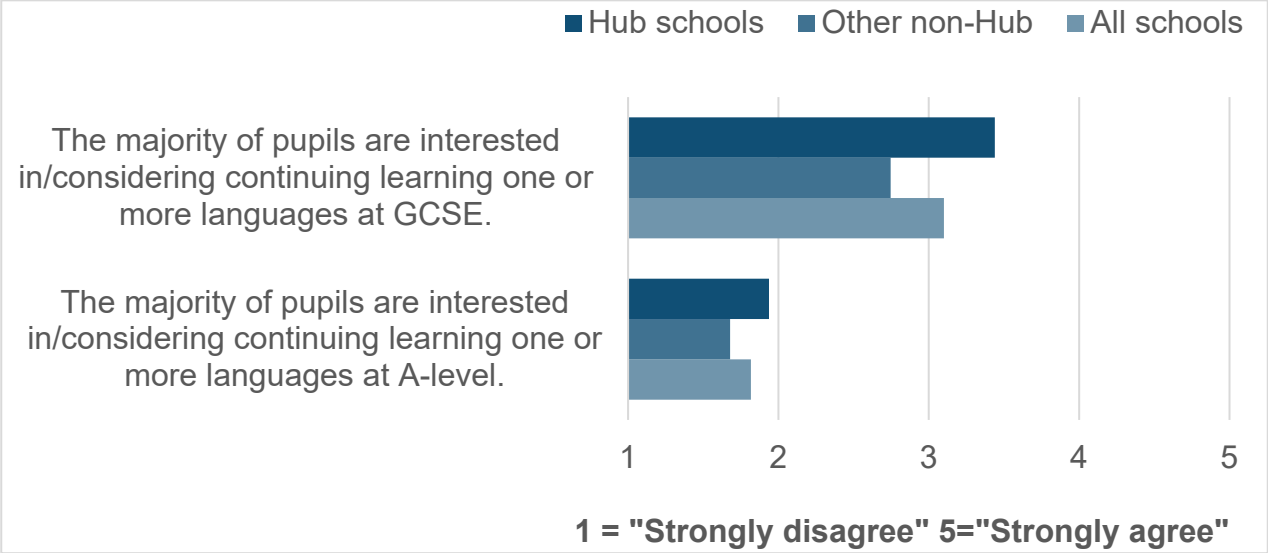
Figure 8: Pupils' plans for learning languages in the future



Source: Pupils survey

Language teachers were also asked about their pupils' plans for taking language qualifications. Figure 9 shows that those at Lead Hub schools generally agreed that their pupils were interested in or considering continuing to learn a language at GCSE, while those at other schools generally disagreed. However, when thinking about pupils' plans, few thought that pupils were considering learning languages at A level.

Figure 9: Staff views of pupil's future plans



Source: Staff survey

Language learning in Key Stage 4

Nearly all year 10 and year 11 pupils who responded to the survey (97%) were studying languages, which is to be expected given the sampling methodology. Those that were not studying languages had generally studied languages up to year 9.

92% of KS4 pupils who were studying languages were studying French, German or Spanish, with German being the least common, while just over 1 in 10 were studying more than one language. The prevalence of French, German and Spanish is to be expected given patterns of languages studied at KS3, and Figures 3 and 4 above show that these 3 languages were the most common chosen by KS3 pupils who had already decided to study a language at GCSE. Around 95% of pupils studying French, German or Spanish in KS4 were taking them for GCSE[15].

Around half (47%) of pupils at partner and comparator schools said they had a choice about studying languages, while 58% of pupils in Lead Hub schools said that it was mandatory at their school and a further 15% said that they had to take a language

[15] The survey did not explore further into those KS4 pupils who were studying a language but not taking it for GCSE.

alongside other GCSEs on their chosen pathway (among partner and comparator schools these proportions were 29% and 21% respectively). Across all types of schools, the majority of pupils had a choice over which language(s) to study in KS4, with pupils at comparator schools being most likely to have a choice – although Lead Hub schools are specialists in languages, it seems from the survey responses that choice over languages is actually greater among other types of schools.

52% of pupils at partner schools said that they could only study one language at GCSE, while among pupils at other types of school the majority could take a GCSE in more than one language, either from learning at school or for a language spoken at home.

KS4 pupils were slightly less positive than those in year 9[16] about being interested in taking a language at A level, and about planning to study one or more languages at A level. KS4 pupils gave a mean score of 2.67 for being interested in taking a language at A level, compared with 2.74 for year 9 pupils, and KS4 pupils gave a mean score of 2.28 to actually planning to study a language at A level, compared with 2.43 for year 9 pupils (see Figure 9 above).

KS4 pupils' attitudes towards languages learning was broadly similar to those of pupils in year 9, with strong agreement that learning a language could be useful in their personal life and that they were interested in learning about other cultures. There was a slightly higher level of agreement that they thought they could get a good grade at GCSE (M=3.78 for KS4 pupils and 3.71 for year 9 pupils).

Attitudes towards language classes were also similar among KS4 pupils to year 9 pupils, with very strong agreement that language teachers are knowledgeable about the languages they teach, while agreement that language lessons at school are engaging and interesting was stronger in KS4 than among younger pupils (M=3.55 and 3.38).

Thoughts about pupils' language learning

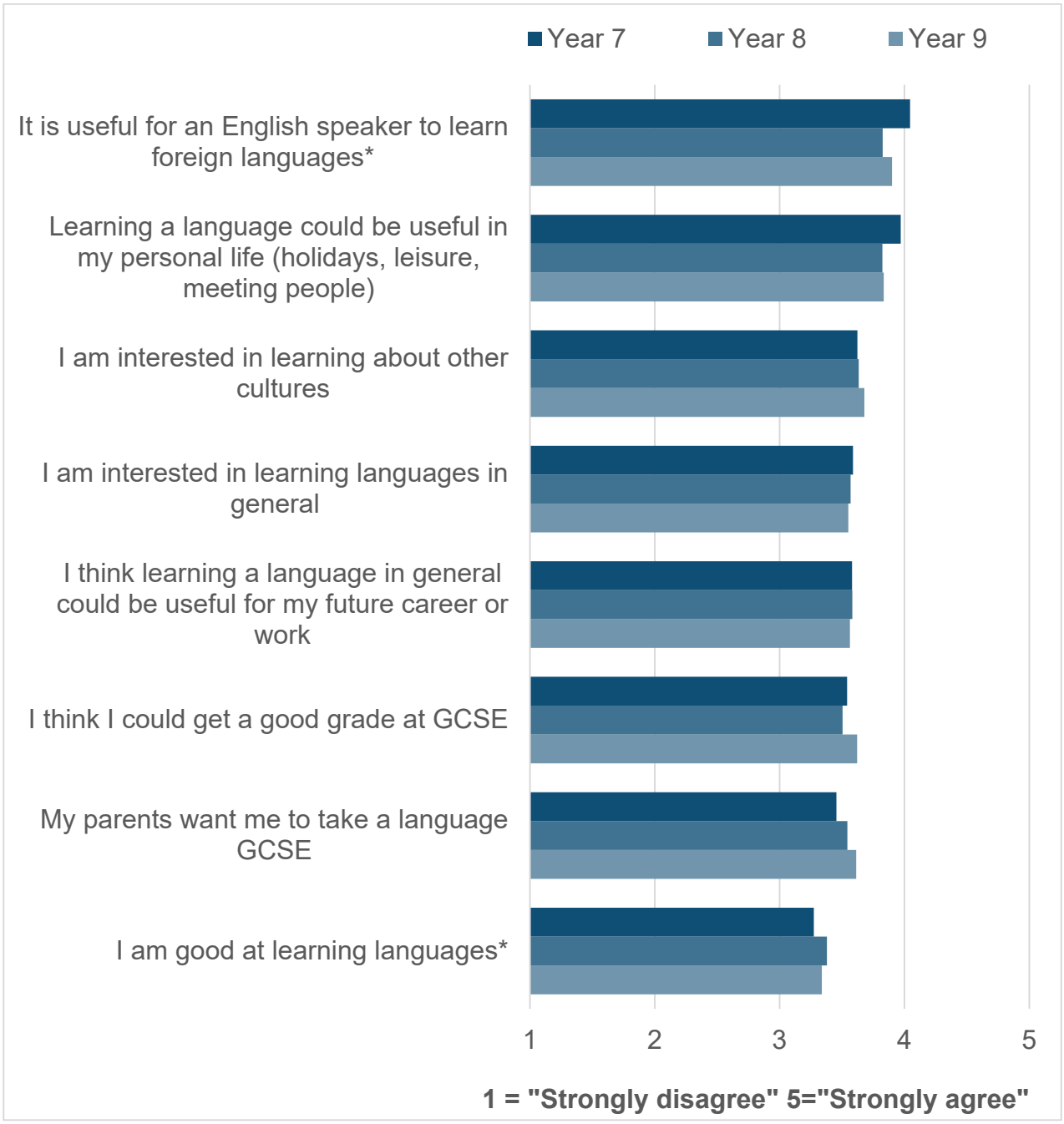
Pupil's thoughts about learning languages

All pupils were asked to give their views on a number of statements about learning languages. Figure 10 shows that pupils were generally positive about learning languages. There was strong agreement that it is useful for English speakers to learn foreign languages, and learning a language could be useful in their personal lives, particularly among year 7 pupils. Agreement was lowest, but still positive, around pupils

[16] In this section comparisons have been made with year 9 pupils only as they are the closest cohort to KS4 pupils, and views about languages evolve during KS3 and so comparisons with year 7 and 8 pupils would be less accurate or reliable.

being good at languages. Agreement that pupils' parents wanted them to take a language GCSE increased steadily through KS3.

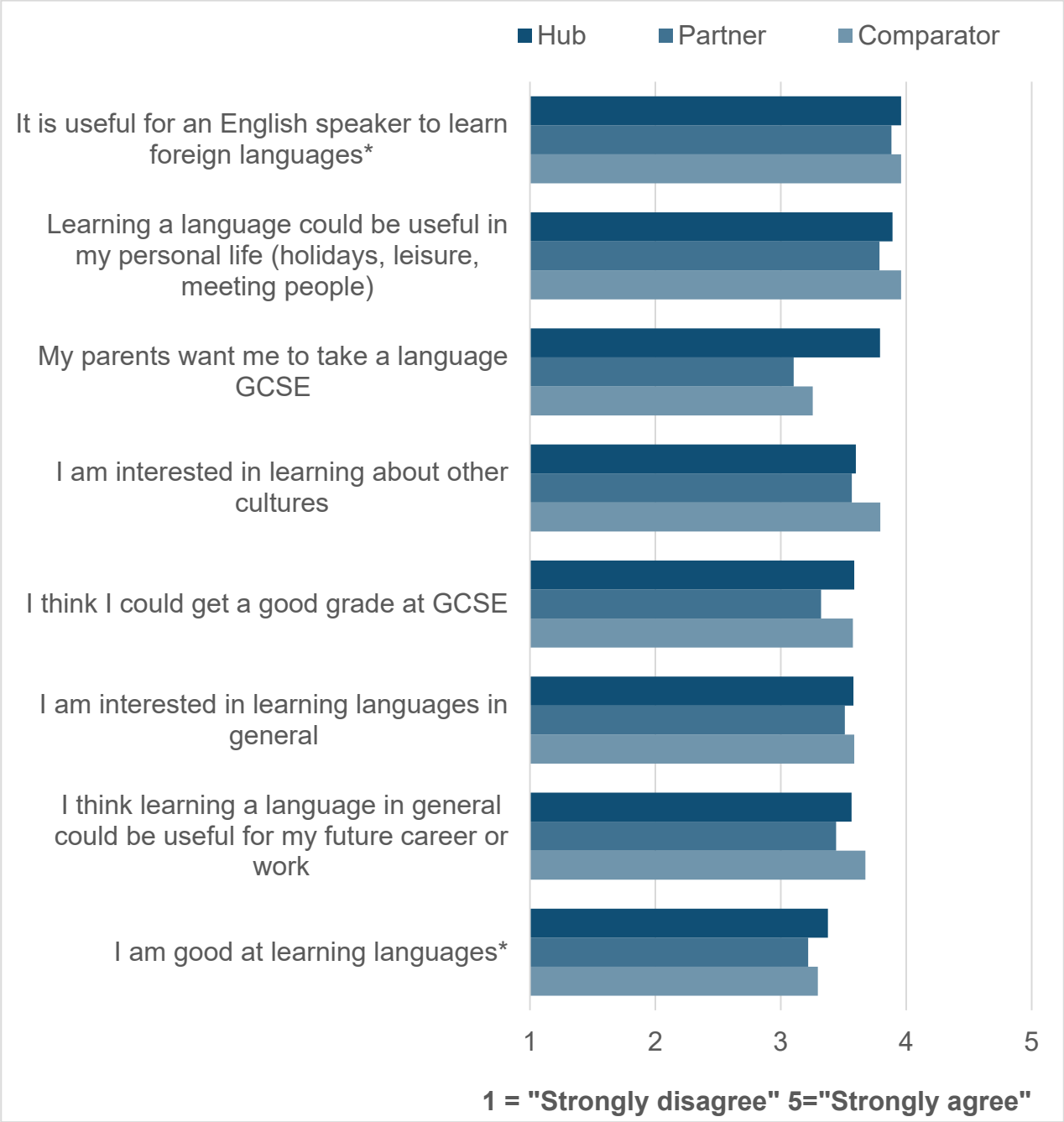
Figure 10: Pupils' thoughts about learning languages (only those taking GCSE)



Source: Pupils survey, responses in September-November only[17]

[17] Statements marked * have been reversed from their original wording of "not good …" and "not useful …" so all statements run from negative to positive

Figure 11: Pupils' thoughts about learning languages (only those taking GCSE) by school type



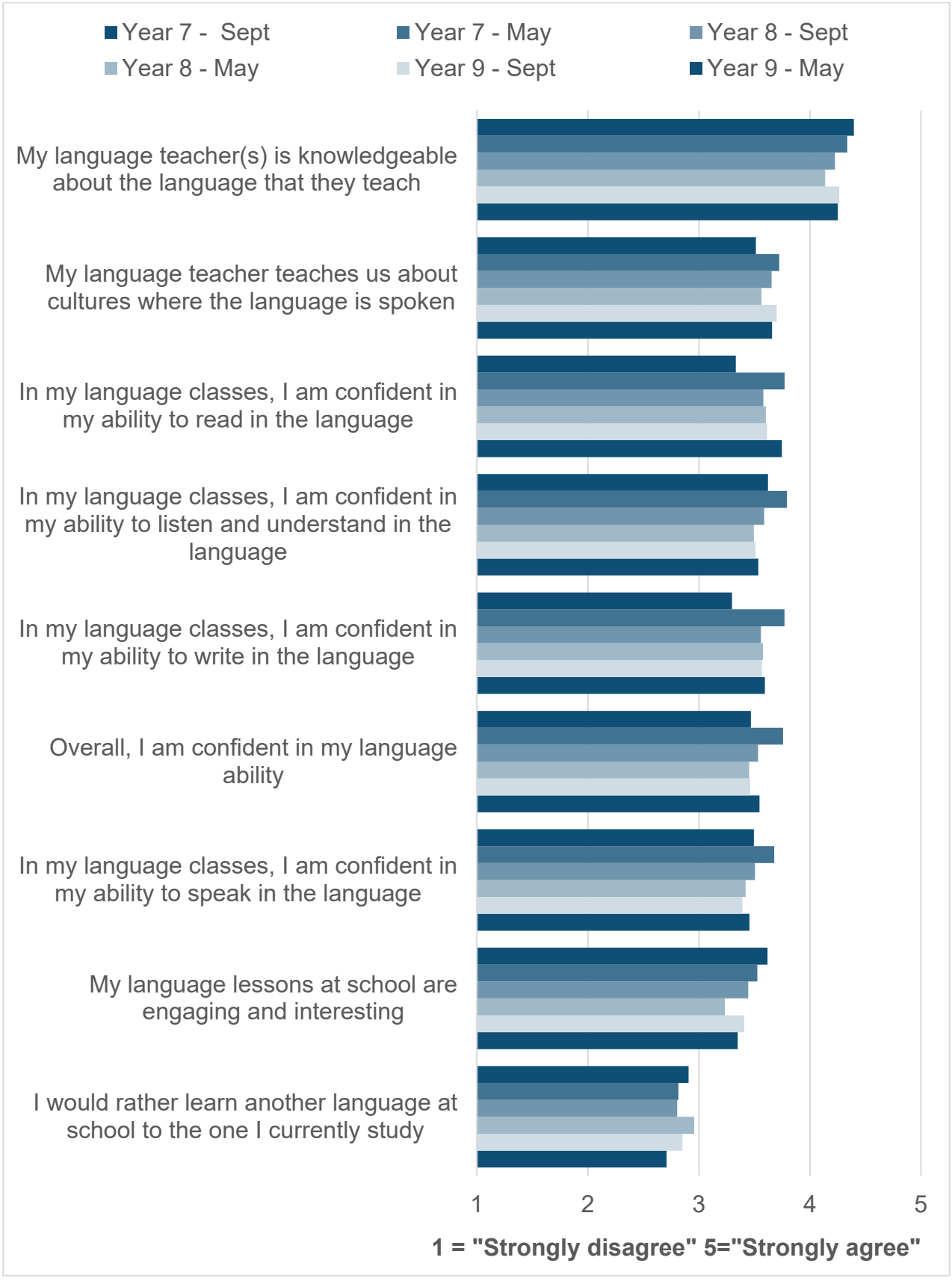
Source: Pupils survey, responses in September only

There was relatively little variation in views by type of school, except for views on parents wanting pupils to take a language GCSE where pupils at Lead Hub schools agreed more strongly than those at other schools.

Language classes and thoughts about learning languages in the future

All pupils who were learning languages were asked about language classes and teaching, and the responses are shown in Figure 12. The highest rated aspects were around their teachers. There were high levels of agreement across most statements, however there were some changes in views as pupils progress through KS3. Pupils at the start of year 7 (year 7 Sept) were least likely to agree that they had confidence in their ability to read and write in the languages they were studying, although this seemed to improve by the end of year 7 (year 7 May). Pupils at the start of year 7 had the highest levels of agreement that language lessons at school were engaging and interesting, but agreement with this statement declined during years 7 and 8 before picking up somewhat in year 9.

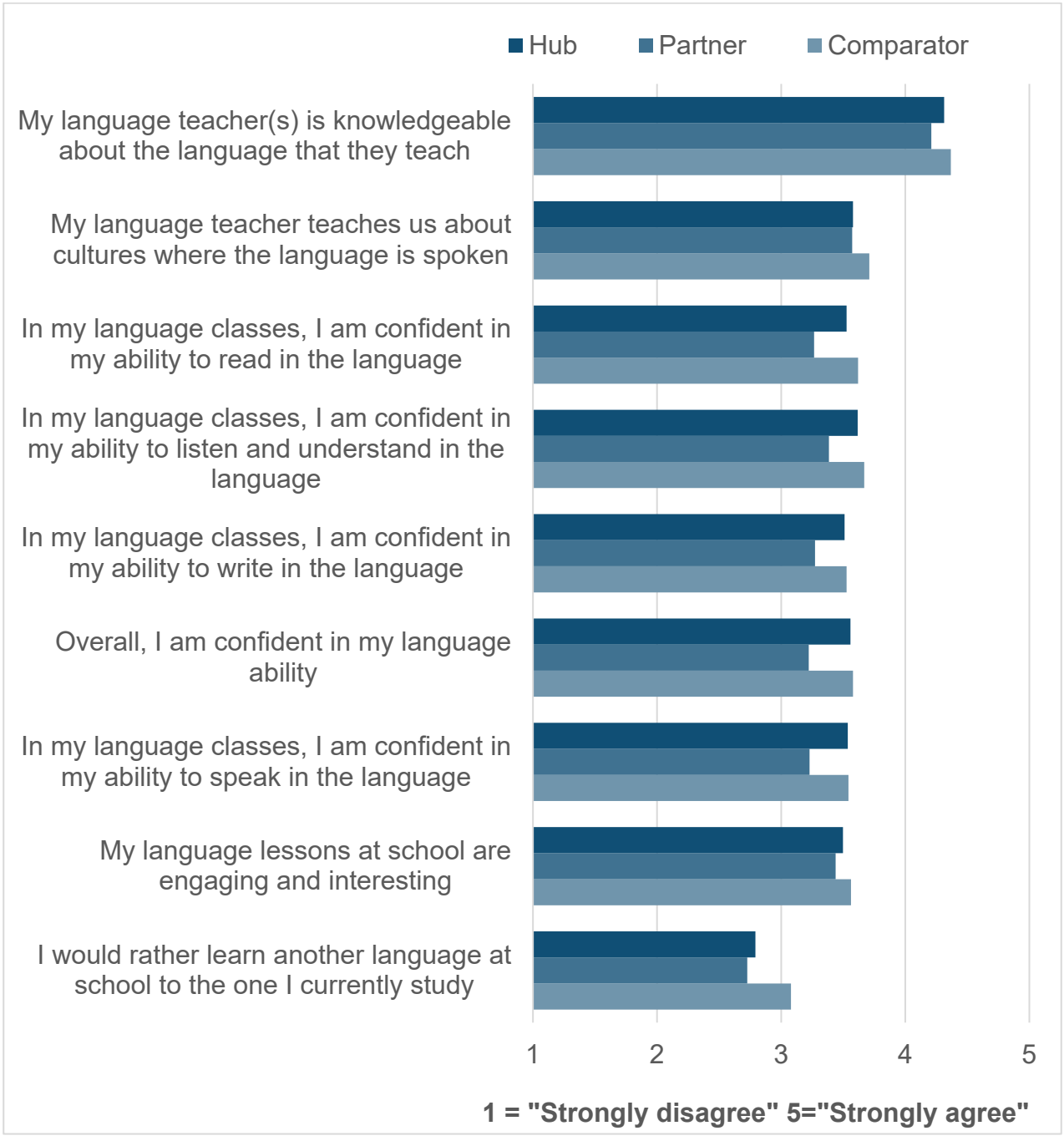
Figure 12: Pupils' thoughts about language classes at school



Source: Pupils survey

Pupils at partner schools generally had lower levels of agreement with statements about language classes than pupils at other types of school, as Figure 13 shows. This was particularly the case for confidence in their ability to speak and read in their language of study and confidence in their overall language ability. However, they also had the lowest level of agreement that they would rather learn another language at school to the one they were currently studying, while pupils at other comparator schools were overall very slightly in agreement with this statement.

Figure 13: Pupils' thoughts about language classes at school, by school type

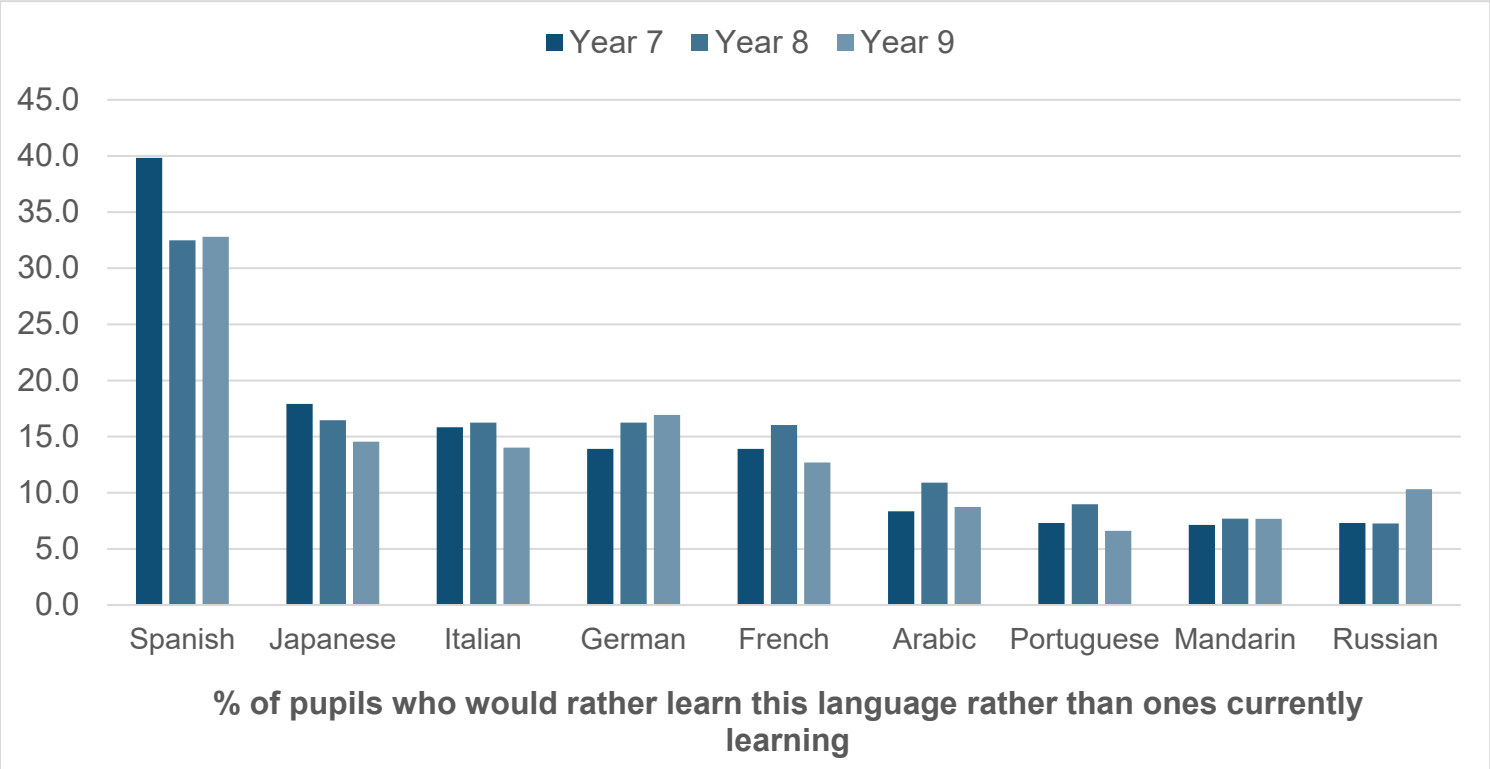


Source: Pupil survey, responses in September only

Languages that pupils would rather learn

Pupils who agreed or strongly agreed that they would rather learn a different language at school were asked which languages they would rather learn. Figure 14 shows that Spanish was by far the most commonly mentioned language (by around one-third of pupils). This was followed by Japanese, German, Italian and French, with each of these languages mentioned by around 1 in 10 pupils, while slightly lower proportions mentioned Arabic, Russian, Portuguese and Mandarin.

Figure 14: Languages pupils would prefer to learn



Source: Pupil survey

Table 4 shows the main reason pupils would rather learn a different language was that they thought they would enjoy it more (70%) and were least likely to say the teacher is better (5%)

Table 4: Reasons why pupils would rather learn a different language

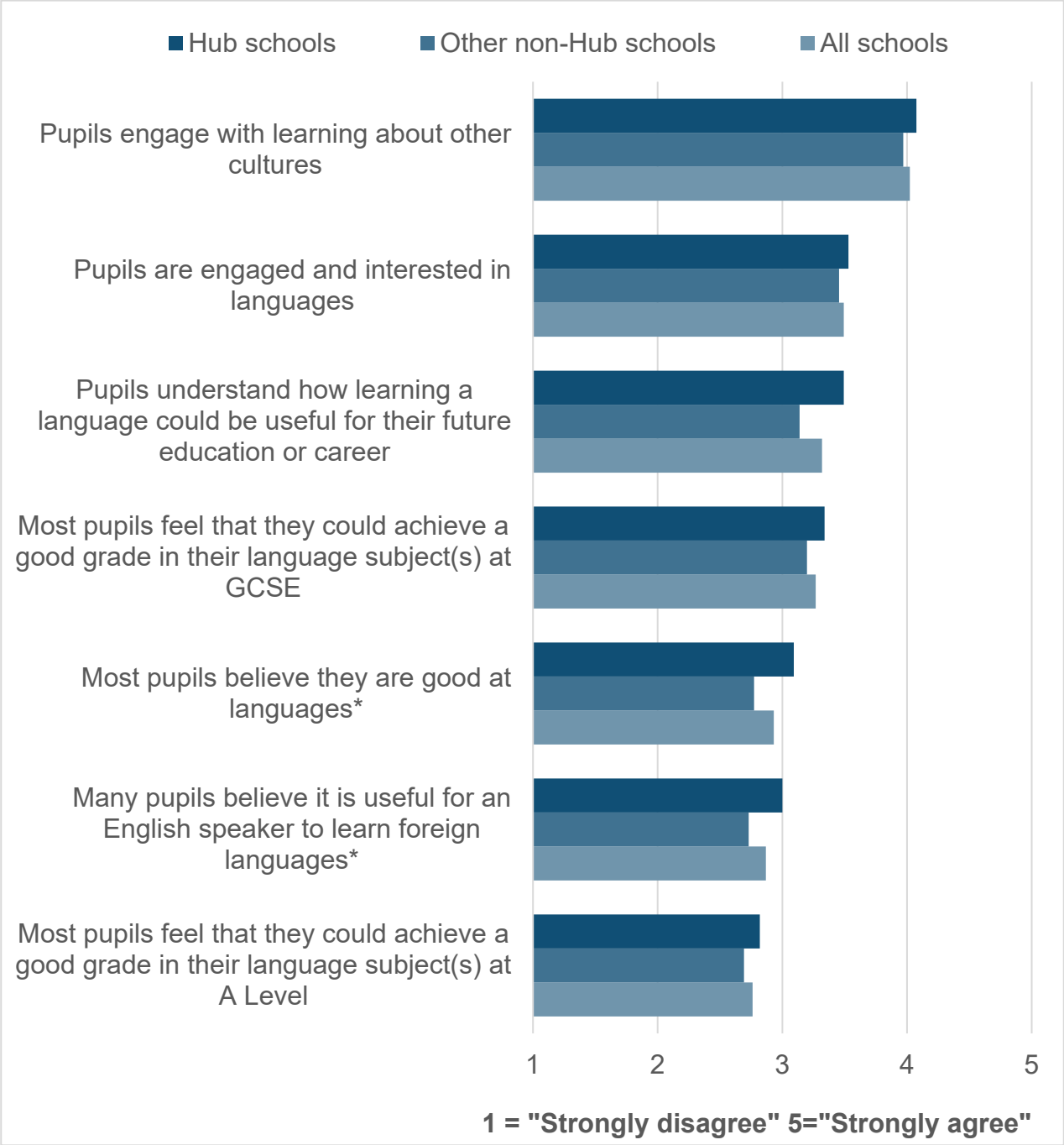
Statement	%
I think I would enjoy it more.	69.9
It would be more useful for my future plans i.e. travel/holidays.	43.2
It would be more useful for my future career/work.	27.6
It would help me to understand music, films, books, tv series, comics, animation or video games that I enjoy in my free time.	25.7
I think it might be easier.	23.7
My friends study this language.	12.8
The teacher is better.	5.3
Other	20.4

Source: Pupil survey

Staff perceptions of pupils' beliefs around language learning

Overall, Figure 15 shows that staff were positive that pupils were engaged with learning about other cultures and interested in languages (M=4.03). However, there were also concerns around pupils' enthusiasm for languages as staff were less likely to agree that most pupils believed they were good at languages or felt that they could achieve a good grade at A level. Teachers at non-Hub schools generally disagreed that pupils believed they were good at languages, or that pupils believed it was useful for English speakers to learn foreign languages, while teachers at Lead Hub schools were more positive about these statements and were broadly neutral about pupils' beliefs in their language ability and the usefulness of learning languages.

Figure 15: Staff perceptions of student's beliefs around language learning by type of school



Source: Staff survey[18]

The interviews provided an opportunity for staff to give more detail about their understandings of pupil perceptions. The majority of teachers across Lead Hub and partner schools noted that languages are perceived as lacking the status of core subjects

[18] Statements marked * have been reversed from their original wording of "not good …" and "not useful …" so that all statements run from negative to positive

such as Maths and English. These are the subjects prioritised by pupils and/or their parents as exams got closer. One teacher spoke of having to ‘market’ languages.

> I think you [as a teacher] feel like you're marketing at the same time as trying to teach and I don't know of many other subjects where you've got to prove why you're actually studying the subject in the first place before you even start planning. So, I do think, not to be too negative, but there is something strange about our subject, where it should be a fait accompli that it's a really good idea for young people's futures. But I'm afraid I don't think it is nationally. And obviously, that's where the hub comes in. (H24)

A view of languages as of marginal importance came, participants suggested, from an undefined, but influential, ‘British culture’ (H01), a ‘British attitude’ (H06), of relying on speaking English when abroad, and not feeling there was a particular need to learn other languages. Several commented that other European countries teach language more effectively across different levels of academic attainment.

> I spent a lot of time in Germany and, you know, they speak English fantastically, and that's across the whole cohort. So, I've got a partner school that we do exchanges with in Germany, and they speak English really well. Our partner school is not a grammar school. Our partner school is a Realschule. So, it's kind of the vocational school, technical school [i.e. not the academic track]. And yes, they all do [speak] really good English, and I know that if you compare the Realschule cohort, those are definitely students who just don't do a language in the UK, or in our [particular school] context do, but we find it a bit more difficult [to teach them successfully]. I am genuinely interested in how we can change the culture towards languages. (H08)

Some staff also noted a ‘pervasive perception that languages are a difficult subject’, and that pupils were aware of discrepancies in grading between languages and other subjects, chiming with their impression that languages in general, and GCSEs in particular, were difficult. Consequently, for some pupils, languages were both ‘challenging and irrelevant’ (H06), and/or something not to prioritise at GCSE level (H01). This was supported to some degree in discussions with pupils in Lead Hub schools where, despite the strong language offering, some pupils still opted to drop languages when they could, feeling that language qualifications were, as one said, a ‘nice to have’. Again, pointing to the perception that languages are not core subjects and/or not for everyone as a teacher in a partner school told us:

> It's interesting, we've done pupil voice surveys, and the majority say that, yes, they think it's important and they can explain why it's important and they think it's important for careers, or for prospects. [...] These surveys come back that actually, no, they don't enjoy it. And they think it's very, very difficult. Disadvantaged pupils are less likely to take it as a subject as well. I guess, they don't see the value in it as much and their parents don't champion it as much. And, their literacy skills are sometimes lower, so therefore they find it more challenging. (P01)

To overcome this, some schools had introduced initiatives in terms of public events or parent-pupil activities to increase the profile of and enthusiasm for languages.

> We will make positive phone calls home every week. We recently had a year 7 parents versus students Duolingo competition, to, you know, really get parents to value languages, and most of them have continued [using Duolingo] past the competition. (H25)

Staff spoke at length about attempts to make language teaching accessible and engaging.

> We do put a lot of effort into making sure we've got games, interactive activities…we do a lot of work on Chromebooks (we are a Chromebook school) so we subscribe to things like Languagenut, we have Quizlet, so we are often doing a 5 minute activity here, then we'll do a game there, now we're going to do a competition on the Chromebooks, now we're going to do this. So, it's a very, very varied sequence of tasks and activities and games in the lessons. (H07)

Positively, focus group pupils all spoke with enthusiasm about their language lessons, although it should be noted that they were in Lead Hub schools which all focused on language learning. They appreciated the variety of activities in lessons including quizzes and games (especially at KS3). Preparation for GCSE was understood as less enjoyable, and learning was perceived as harder work in KS4. The word cloud below contains the adjectives used by pupil focus groups to describe their lessons with the most common adjective being ‘fun’.

Trips, where these took place, particularly ignited pupil enthusiasm as they had a chance to use their knowledge in real world situations. However, the cost and necessary safeguarding requirements deterred some schools from planning trips.

Staff views about language teaching

Pedagogies

Despite it being a requirement of the Language Hub programme that schools teach to the MFLPR, 52% of language teachers in Lead Hub schools and 54% in partner schools had not heard of it. Awareness in Language Assistant host and comparator schools was lower (63% and 73% respectively had not heard of it). In Lead Hub schools, 28% of language teachers were teaching to the MFLPR.

In contrast to the results of the surveys, the majority of teachers interviewed reported that staff broadly followed the MFLPR recommendations (possibly due to the fact that the schools who agreed to take part in the qualitative work had a stronger profile in terms of languages teaching). In line with the MFLPR, these schools placed a stronger emphasis on phonics, grammar and vocabulary although not all staff referred directly to the MFLPR by name (especially in partner schools). Following the principles of the MFLPR, several explained the move away from ‘topic teaching’ towards a core vocabulary, including verbs, that enables communication. They also reported an increased focus on phonics and the use of the target language by the pupils in lessons. One Lead Hub lead who was very familiar with the MFLPR described how they used it as a touchstone to discuss practice in other schools.

> Having that [MFLPR] to lean on as the evidence, as that, 'It's not just working in our school, this is a national recommendation.' That's been really powerful for us to go back to [when talking to other schools] because it's not just us and who are we to tell you how to do something? It's a published, recognized, empirical piece [….] (H03)

> The phonics has been, I think, the biggest change for us. We've had very positive feedback from students. We've found that to be the most positive focus of the programme. I think just that, the difference in confidence in the children, that systematic way that we're approaching it, means that they're understanding that there's a system involved, and that they can learn it, they can master it, and I think that we've really reaped the benefits of that. (H09)

A teacher in a partner school spoke of using the MFLPR to audit their MFL schemes of work.

> We sat and we literally had 2 highlighters, and with that report we did a green for everything that we do and then we did amber for those that we need to employ. (P06)

Classroom practice

As discussed above in relation to raising the status of languages, participating teachers spoke of the importance of having a varied lesson pace, and engaging activities delivered by an enthusiastic teacher. This was supported by researchers' observations in the case study schools. The focus was on grammar, phonics and high frequency 'real world' vocabulary. Consistent delivery features across schools were a mix of activities in each lesson, including competitions, games, and the use of technology (e.g. some teachers also utilised a range of online games and resources such as Blooket).

> For engaging the children, we are very strong on very short and sharp activities. Active learning is a big, big thing that we do. Loads of competitions, loads of hands-on, we use whiteboards all the time, we use loads of games and other techniques and strategies that the kids really love and enjoy.[…] It's very, sort of, boy-orientated way of learning where they love the competitions, they love getting up and doing things as well as learning and doing translation and, we really tend to, you know, be quite boy heavy [as a school]. (P08)

Teachers reported that a wide variety of curriculum packages, approaches and resources were used including Conti EPI, immersion, WoLLoW, and the Rosenshine Principles of Instruction. In some schools, elements of these were combined in adaptive pedagogies,

whereby teachers adapt different methodological practices to their school context and pupils. We offer 3 examples here of Rowan, Beech and Teak Schools, showcasing different approaches.

Rowan School Case Study: An Immersive Approach

Rowan School has a strong academic reputation locally, as well as an established focus on languages that is supported by the school leadership and its Trust. Rowan is in a suburban area, outside a major city.

Pupils are allocated to German, French or Spanish in year 7 and are taught this language, in mixed ability groups, to GCSE, with the option to start a second language in year 10. Rowan School does not set for GCSE, but teachers supplement mixed attainment groups, with an extra support group, or extension group in year 9, as staff deem necessary. This is considered to be especially beneficial to lower-attaining students who are “pulled up” by learning alongside their higher-attaining peers.

The department has a distinctive languages offer, with a pedagogy built on the 3 pillars of phonics, vocabulary and grammar. There is a language lesson every day in years 7 to 9, and a ‘speak first approach’ whereby the initial focus is on speaking and not writing. Lesson observations revealed a distinctive, fast-paced and physical style, whereby no or minimal English is used. Pupils’ understanding of the target vocabulary and grammar for that lesson is supported by repetitions, gestures, images, and games. To support teachers with this approach, the department has established ‘classroom language’ with similarity across classes in the language used by teachers to reduce the load on teachers’ subject knowledge and improve their confidence. Language Assistants work with Key Stage 5 pupils, offering 1-1 conversation, and creating resources about their home country’s culture for younger pupils.

Pupils spoke positively of the immersive approach taken to language learning, as well as the daily scheduling of lessons which made it feel ‘more like a core subject’. (Rowan Pupil)

Beech School: success with sentence builders

Beech school is an 11-16 school, part of a small, local multi-academy trust. It is located in a small city with significant levels of social deprivation. The majority of the children are White British.

The languages department receives strong senior leadership support. It offers French, German and Spanish. Students study both French and German in year 7 and then choose which to continue in year 8 up until GCSE (with the exception of about 20% of pupils annually who receive extra math and English). Spanish is offered as a GCSE option in year 10. The school has introduced 100-minute lesson periods; and offers 3 language lessons per fortnight in KS3 and KS4 (5 hours in total). Teachers argued that mixed attainment groups allow for more enthusiasm about languages and higher self-esteem among those who might otherwise be in 'lower' sets.

The languages department has introduced the Conti approach, (or Extensive Processing Instruction (EPI)), in which sentence builders are central. Now in its third year, teachers are enthusiastic about the approach feeling it encourages consolidation and mastery of key vocabulary and grammar. A KS3 lesson illustrated the sentence builder approach. The children worked on structured sentences divided into phrases that pupils can combine in different ways ('J'habite avec' mon pere/mon frere/ ma mere/ma soeur' etc. 'qui s'appelle'…). This aims to give the children practice and confidence at committing to memory a clear and limited body of content, reducing cognitive overload.

To keep the pupils on track for 100 minutes, the lessons were fast paced and varied. Activities included quizzes, games, and creative tasks (e.g. drawing), as well as writing, speaking and listening. The school uses Chromebooks and through these pupils' access Languagenut (an app offering resources that supports languages teaching in schools) and Quizlet (an app that produces flashcards and games to support learning in various subjects).

Teak School: a whole-school pedagogical approach

Teak school is located in a suburban/rural area and is considered the flagship school within its multi-academy trust. The pupils are mainly White British although younger year groups were increasing in ethnic diversity.

Senior leaders at Teak are described as strong advocates for languages. Pupils are enrolled in French or Spanish in year 7, and study that language through to GCSE. They are taught in sets based on KS2 English and Maths outcomes. Pupils have the option to take up a second language in year 10 for GCSE, with German included as an option. The school also offers the opportunity for pupils to take up some HHCL at GCSE. Staff considered being able to offer French, Spanish and German as a fortunate position to be in and the location of a large local employer has influenced the decision to retain German.

The MFL department incorporates the whole school pedagogical approach based on the Rosenshine principles into their lessons, which have a dual emphasis on revising information from the previous lesson and learning new material thoroughly and in small steps to avoid cognitive overload. Additionally, there is an increased focus on phonics:

> [Pupils] have to read unseen texts, so they have to be able to read in the target language. They have to know the phonics of the language that they're learning, so phonics has to underpin everything. (Teacher)

Another way in which the schools varied was in setting by attainment, with some setting from year 7, others partially setting (at the extremes of the attainment range), and others retaining mixed attainment groups. Partial setting was understood as a compromise designed to prevent ‘lower’ sets losing confidence or motivation in the subject.

> In years 7 and 8 it's totally mixed ability. And then in year 9, …we have a top set, and then mixed ability underneath... Looking at how it worked, whether it [set classes] was in the student's best interest. We did quite a bit of research into it, and then discussed it as a wider school... For languages I've found it [mixed attainment classes] has definitely helped keep hold of more students. Because they're surrounded by positive influence, you're able to stretch them and draw on other people's knowledge. (H10).

Additionally, all participating teachers emphasised the importance of languages for developing an appreciation of cultures and language in other countries, thereby increasing pupils’ open-mindedness (also Woore et al., 2020), and they sought to

develop this in their classroom practice by teaching about the culture of the countries where the target language was spoken.

> I just believe, in terms of who we are as people, our understanding of people, our attitudes to living in a global world, I just think languages feed into all of that, and so I think languages education is incredibly important. (H01)

Birch School, described above, is another example of language departments making an important contribution to the wider school ethos, particularly around encouraging respect for difference.

Curriculum time

Several teachers mentioned the importance of curriculum time in KS3, both for supporting pupils' learning, and also for signalling that languages were a key element of the curriculum. The MFLPR recommends 3–4 classes of 40–60 minutes a week at Key Stages 3–4 (MFLPR, 2016 para 13.2). However, some of the partner schools reported not having enough curriculum time for languages in KS3. One described the school's 2 hours a week as 'pretty minimal' (P04). In contrast, Lead Hub schools were more likely to allocate more curriculum time.

> I think we have lots of support for languages in this school which is amazing. The fact that they have a language lesson every day from year 7 to 9, you know, it's proven that it works and there's lots of research that we engage with which supports that it's like first language acquisition. (H05)

> So, what we have here is we have 4 lessons a week, so 4 hours a week right from the start from year 7 up to year 11 and that definitely helps because it's almost daily. I know a lot of schools will only have 1 or 2 lessons a week and I think that the nature of languages, the kind of practice, production, familiarity, does really benefit from almost daily practice. (H08)

Generous curriculum time also helped in terms of indicating the importance of languages as a subject. Staff spoke of their efforts to raise the status of languages in their schools by for example arranging career days to publicise occupations where language qualifications were an asset, arranging HHCL events to showcase these languages, and/or attempts to integrate target language usage into the everyday, for example through non-language teachers using a few non-English words to greet pupils in the corridor.

The (new) GCSE specification

In contrast to the survey results discussed in the Modern Foreign Languages Review section, all Lead Hub and partner school staff were positive delivering the new GCSE specifications being taught from September 2024 and felt they were, or would be, well prepared.

Preparation for the exam was a key CPD focus with sessions offered by NCLE, the exam boards and the Lead Hub leads, and some of the partner school teachers talked of their reliance on the training they could access through the Lead Hubs as ‘we’re all a little bit lost’. The new syllabus stresses the teaching of particular high-frequency words and although this was originally controversial, some of the Lead Hub leads felt that this was an advantage for their pupils as it decreased reliance on existing, but unevenly distributed, cultural knowledge of places, people, food (also Woore et al., 2020). As one Lead Hub teacher commented:

> I'm quite pleased that it’s been made clear to students, 'These are the words that we will test you on,' I think that's very important. Yes, of course they need the skills to build extra vocabulary, and look up their own personal interests, but they know what the test is, just as they would know that in any other subject. There's a syllabus, and it's doable within the time frame that we have. (H09)

However, language teachers reported that language GCSEs were ‘harshly’ marked and that, on average, pupils attain less well in MFL than other subjects. A point borne out by data from Education Datalab (Education Datalab, 2023b).[19]

> MFL grading is much harsher than a lot of other subjects. (P04)

> I think there could be something in the grading of languages generally [that is off-putting to pupils]. It's more difficult and it's more harshly marked as a subject ...I think the new GCSE that's coming out is supposed to combat the difficulty of it and combat the harsh marking behind it. Because nationally, across all the subjects, pupils do worse in languages because they're harshly marked and assessed. (H03)

[19] Pupils who enter French, German, Spanish and computer science tend to achieve half a grade lower than in English and maths. Despite efforts to bring French and German in line with Spanish, they still seem more severely graded. And Spanish is still more severely graded than other subjects anyway’ (Education Datalab 2023b)

Home Heritage and Community Languages (HHCL)

Speakers of HHCL languages

One in three pupils said that English was their primary language but that they spoke another language fluently or to a high conversational level (28%), and 6% said English was not their primary language.

The survey results showed that pupils who spoke a HHCL saw their language as potentially useful for their future career or work. There was agreement that they were interested in taking a GCSE in their HHCL, although this was similar to the level of interest among all pupils in taking a language at GCSE (i.e. HHCL speakers were no more or less interested in taking a GCSE than pupils overall).

This finding was supported by the results of the staff survey, where language teachers showed strong levels of agreement that speakers of HHCLs were considering studying their HHCL at GCSE:

- Pupils who speak home, heritage or community languages understand how this could be useful outside of their home environment (M=3.64)
- Pupils who speak home, heritage or community languages understand how this could be useful for their future career or work (M=3.55)

In detail, HHCL speaking pupils who had chosen to take a language at GCSE or had yet to decide, had a strong level of agreement across all year groups that “Language(s) I speak outside of school could be useful for my future career or work” and a slightly higher level of agreement than languages overall are useful for future work or careers – so they saw their HHCL as more useful than other foreign languages.

Pupils who spoke a HHCL outside of school and who had chosen not to take a language at GCSE were asked about their usefulness for the future. Year 7 (M=3.20) and year 9 (M=3.07) pupils agreed HHCLs could be useful for future careers while overall across all year 7 and 9 pupils there was disagreement that learning a language in general could be useful for future careers or work (M=2,73 and 2.68 respectively). However, year 8 pupils who spoke a HHCL did not think languages in general, or the language(s) they spoke outside of school, could be useful for their future career (M=2.54 and 2.52 respectively). Thus, even though year 7 and 9 pupils had chosen not to take a language at GCSE they still saw their HHCL as more useful for future work/careers than other languages.

Staff at Lead Hub schools gave more positive responses to these questions than staff at other types of school.

Staff in most of the case study schools discussed wanting to improve not only their HHCL offer but also their support for those pupils. While some were able to offer lessons for

HHCL speakers outside of curriculum time and support them with preparation for exams, others could not offer such provision. Several teachers discussed the challenges around supporting HHCL exams, beyond finding teachers to support pupils' exam preparations. Barriers included finding space for the exams, an appropriate examiner, and avoiding clashes with other GCSEs. One Lead Hub teacher suggested an informal directory for HHCL examiners would be helpful, as well as more collaboration between schools and with supplementary schools to find the space and staffing:

> One of the things we've struggled with is to find examiners so, I'd like a local examiner directory because we could do a lot of, kind of, informal sharing. 'I've got a Portuguese speaker. What have you got?' So doing that kind of trade but actually formalising that would be really helpful. Reaching out to the supplementary schools if we can offer the facilities and say, 'If we base some of the language classes in school, can you give us the teacher?' Can we do it that way? (T11)

Teachers' recruitment and retention

Interviews revealed that recruitment and retention presented a huge challenge to the teaching of languages. Many participants mentioned instances where their school, or a neighbouring one, had problems despite providing incentives. Language teacher trainee recruitment for secondary schools is below the average, in a context where recruitment for all secondary subjects is below target (Long & Danechi, 2024 p.5; Education Committee, 2024). The quotes illustrate the challenges of recruitment and also concern about the quality of candidates.

> Just to put some sort of perspective on it, normally when we advertise for a job we get about 20 applicants because people really would like to come and work here. And we advertised in September, and we knew we'd have to make it a permanent post, and we thought, well, because of the hub it'll be fine. We had 2 applicants. 2!…. [A local school] recently put out a job advert for a head of languages [on the] leadership scale. That's Assistant Headteacher money and that's what schools are having to do to recruit. And even then, they had to extend it because no one applied. (H02)

> We've just been through so many poor teachers and because we're desperate, it gets to July and we still haven't found someone, we just have to offer somebody a job, just, so, that there's a body in the room. Even if in the interview we knew that they weren't going to be strong. (P01)

> Subject knowledge is not good enough and the classroom teaching is not good enough. (H06)

Several of the Lead Hub leads in the most recent recruitment round noted that their status as a Language Hub had helped recruitment. Another teacher discussed how training language teachers in house had helped a lot with their recruitment, as the school took part in School-Centred Initial Teacher Training.

Programmes to promote the German language

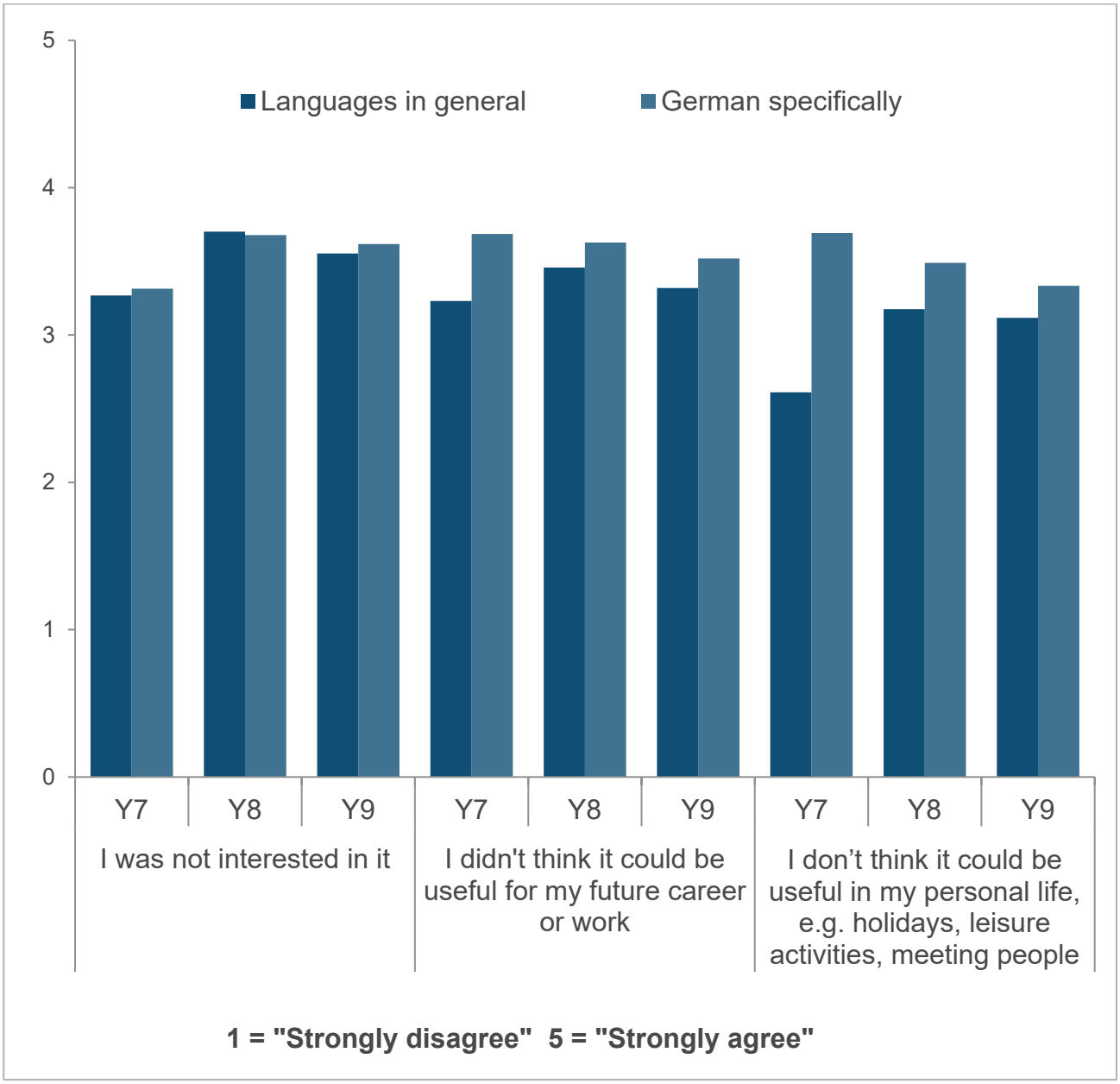
The following section looks at programmes designed to promote the German language. Due to the small number of responses to these questions in the staff surveys, the quantitative data presented are only from findings from the surveys with pupils.

Pupil's views of learning German

Findings in the language teaching and pedagogy section reported that many pupils were learning German at school, although fewer than those who learnt French or Spanish. Pupils at Lead Hub schools were much more likely than those at other schools to be studying German (around half of KS3 pupils at Lead Hub schools were learning German compared with 16% of pupils at other schools; see Table 2). A number of questions in the pupil survey asked specifically about learning German, to provide information in relation to the programmes to promote the German language.

Among pupils that had already chosen not to take a language for GCSE, views about not being interested in or not enjoying German specifically were very similar to views about not being interested in learning languages in general, so there was no evidence to suggest that pupils were turning away from German specifically. However, pupils gave much stronger agreement to the statements that German specifically would not be useful for their future career or in their personal lives than they gave to languages overall not being useful (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Pupils' views on German in comparison with languages in general



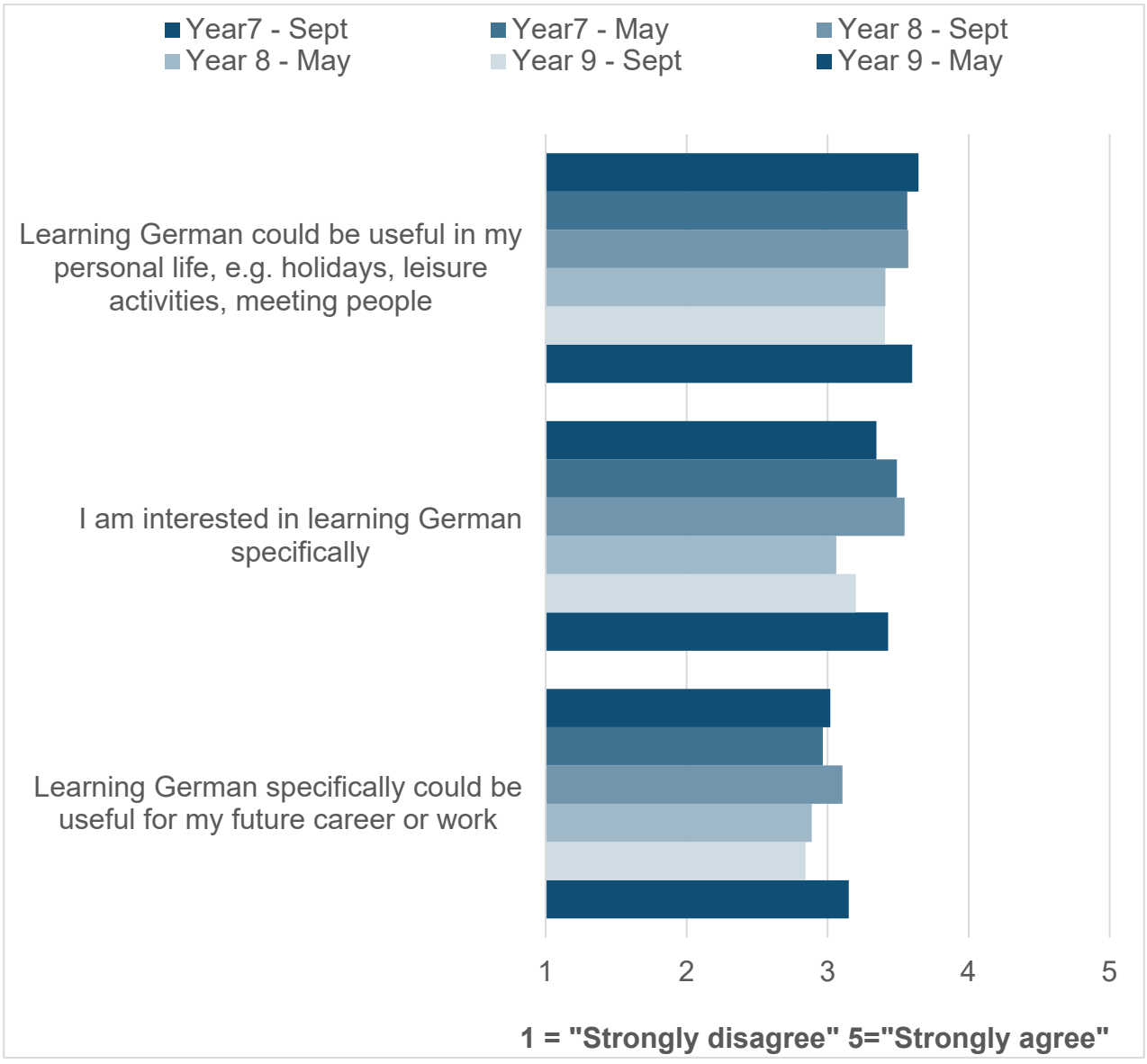
Source: Pupil survey

Pupils agreed they were interested in studying German specifically at GCSE, and this was similar to the level of interest in taking a language generally at GCSE among all pupils. However, interest in taking German at A level among those studying German was slightly less than interest in taking any language at A level among all pupils. Language teachers at Lead Hub schools agreed that pupils who study German at GCSE are interested in taking one or more languages (not necessarily German) at A level, while those at other schools neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

Pupils studying German felt it was more useful for their personal life than for future work or career; they generally agreed that German could be useful for holiday, leisure activities

and meeting people etc., but were neutral about it being useful for their future career or work (shown in Figure 16). Views about being interested in learning German specifically were slightly positive, but varied substantially across year groups in KS3, which suggests many pupils may not have chosen to learn German; this is borne out by comparing results between pupils who had a choice over which languages to study and those who did not have a choice, with pupils who had a choice being much more positive about being interested in learning German specifically than those who did not have a choice over learning German.

Figure 17: Pupils' thoughts about learning German



Source: Pupil survey

Staff views about the benefits of learning German for pupils' future career or work were generally more positive than pupils' own views; there was general agreement among

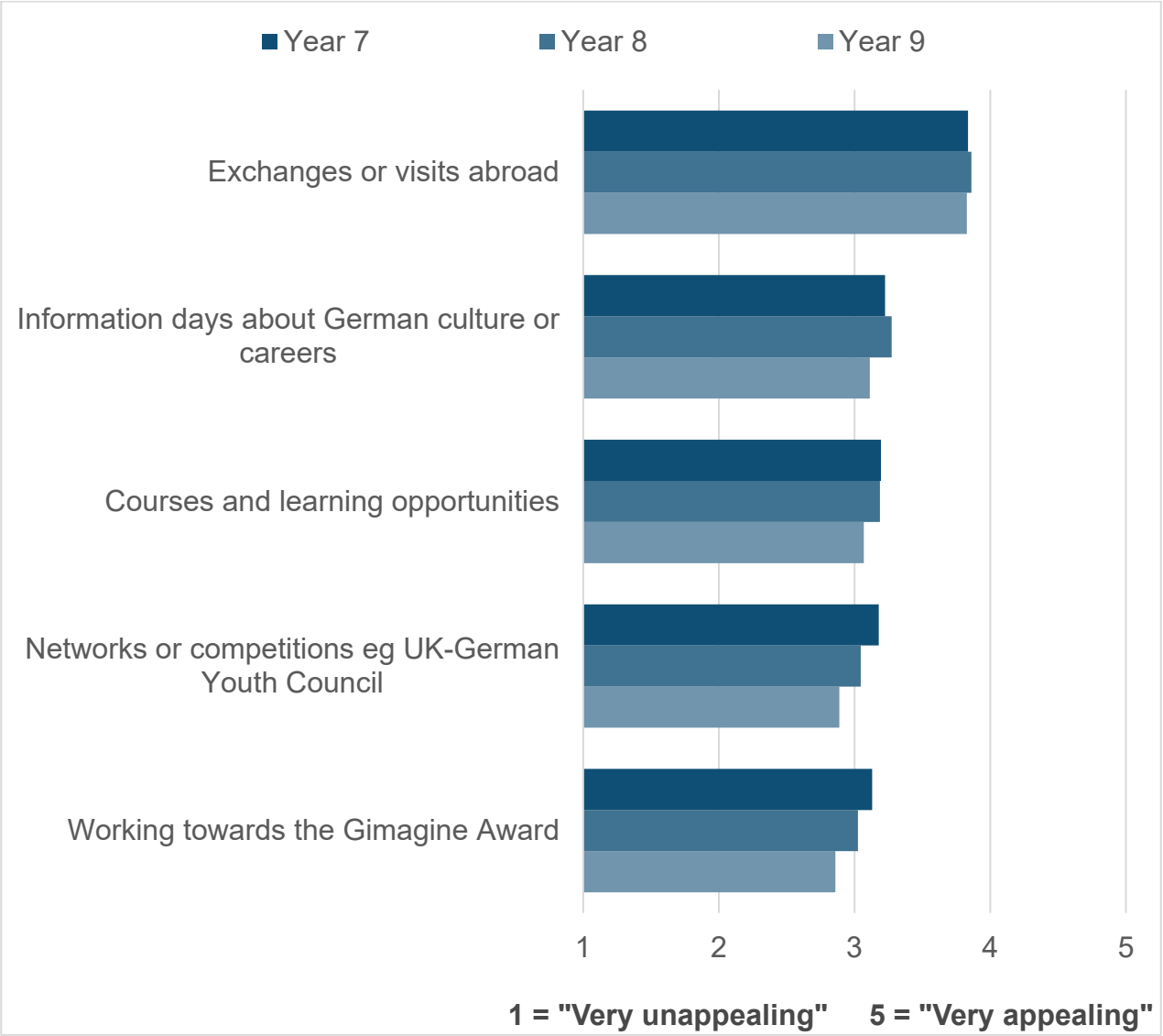
teachers that pupils studying German understood how learning German could be useful for their future education or career (M=3.29), and this was slightly higher among teachers at Lead Hub schools (M=3.35).

Pupil’s views of German activities

Pupils were asked how appealing or unappealing a list of German activities sounded, and if they studied German, how enjoyable they were if they had participated in any. These activities summarised what is offered through UKGC.

Figure 18 shows that among KS3 pupils, exchanges or visits abroad (school exchanges, Exchange2Change or the St Pauli football club camp) were the most appealing activities, with the level of appeal similar between the 3 years. There was little difference in views about the other activities, with the degree of appeal falling as pupils progressed through KS3.

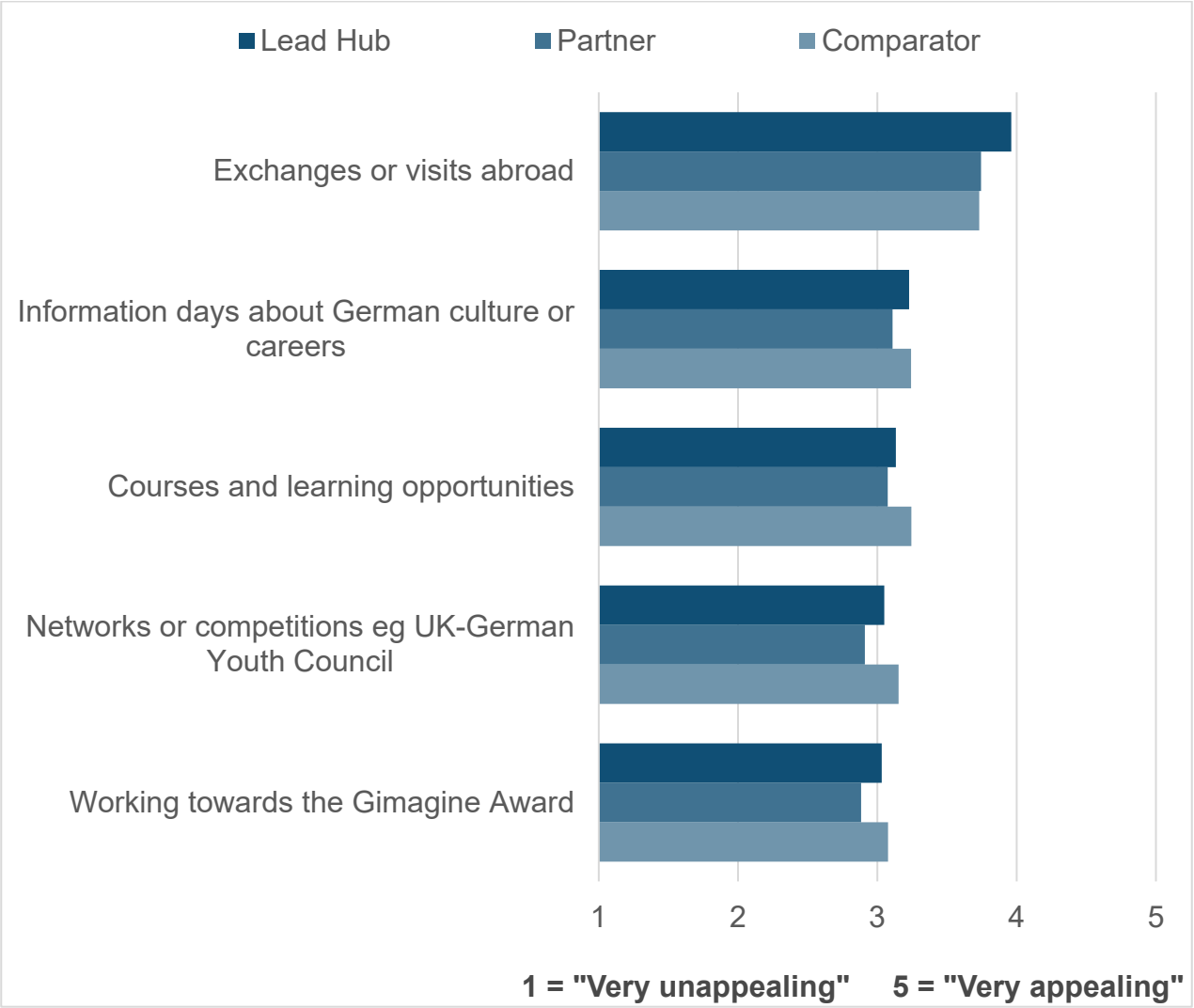
Figure 18: The appeal to pupils of specific German activities (by year group)



Source: Pupil survey, responses to the Sept-Nov surveys

Figure 19 shows the variation in views on the German activities by school type for pupils in KS3. Pupils at Lead Hub schools gave a much higher rating of the appeal of exchanges or visits abroad than pupils at other schools, and while there was less variation for the other activities, pupils at comparator schools generally gave the highest ratings of appeal, while pupils at partner schools generally gave the lowest.

Figure 19: The appeal to pupils of specific German activities (by type of school)

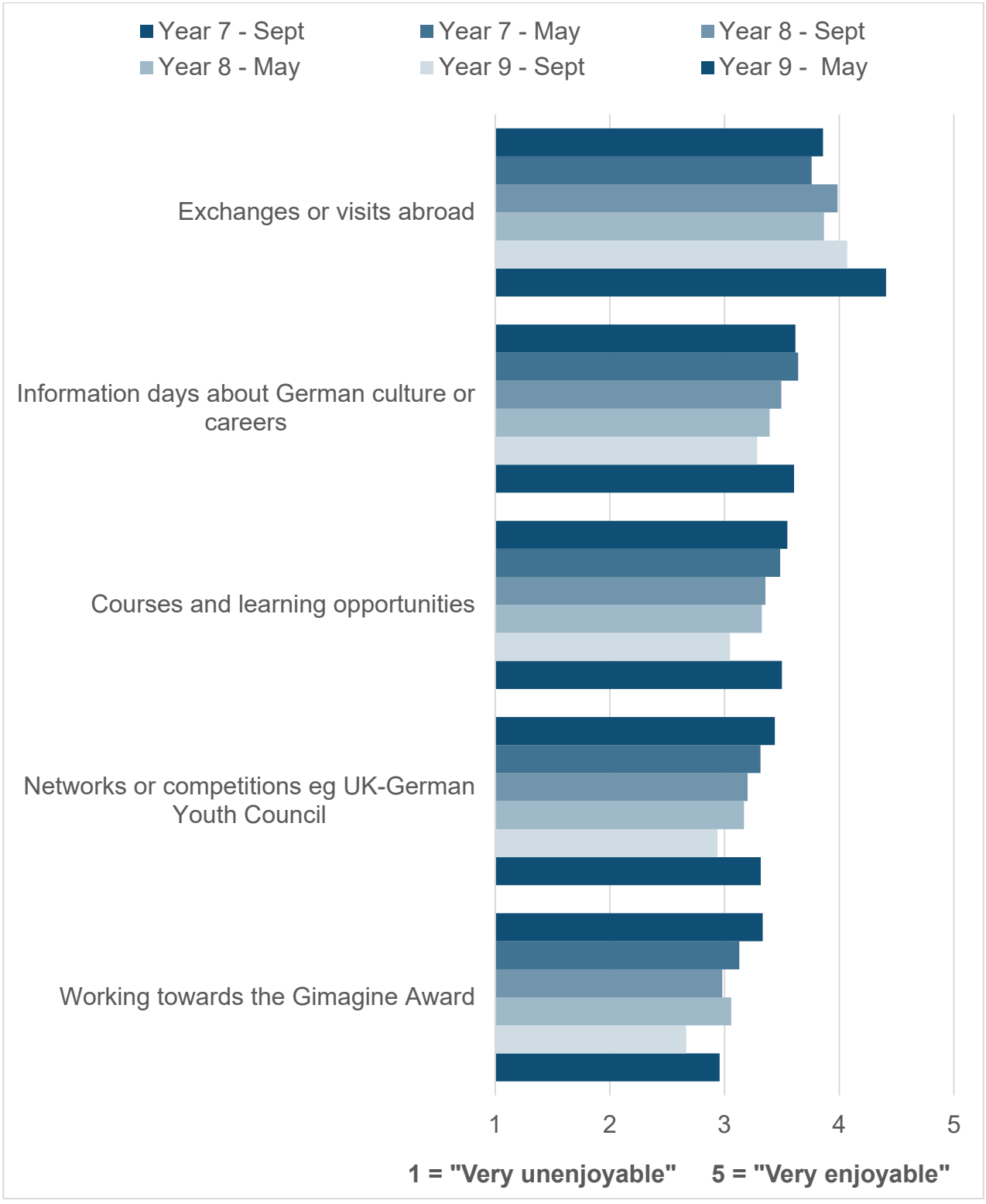


Source: Pupil survey, responses to the Sept-Nov surveys

Pupils who were studying German were asked how enjoyable German activities were, if they had undertaken them. Looking first at the most commonly used activities, among year 7 and 8 pupils, information days were the most commonly undertaken activity followed by courses and learning opportunities. However, for year 9 onwards, exchanges or visits abroad were the most common, with almost half of pupils studying German (46%) saying that they had undertaken them.

In terms of enjoyment, exchanges or visits abroad were the most enjoyable, with the level of enjoyment increasing as pupils progressed through KS3 (see Figure 20). Levels of enjoyment for the other activities tended to decrease between the start of year 7 and the start of year 9, although were markedly higher among pupils at the end of year 9.

Figure 20: How enjoyable specific German specific activities were, by year group



Source: Pupil survey

Staff views on the German Promotion Project

In the schools that taught German, the German promotion initiatives and the possibility of connecting with German schools received highly positive mentions. Teachers appreciated the scope and range of opportunities available for staff and pupils, mentioning contact with native German speakers, careers events, German poetry workshops, and as the 2 teachers below describe, support for teachers.

> I think, everything that comes out of the Goethe-Institut is fantastic.... The are offering opportunities for teachers to go actually to Germany and do some upskilling there. Plenty of online, personally, I was able to use GImagine last year to access additional tuition for my A Level group. And there was a teacher that taught online, like, via Zoom once a week for 10 weeks, my class, and I was able to say, 'These are the topics that I think they need extra revision on.' And he did a bespoke curriculum for them, and that's amazing. So, I'm really thrilled with the GImagine stuff. (H10)

> On our Teams with NCLE, there's a whole sub channel which is just for German teachers and the German expert mentors [GEMs]. I regularly posted on there with questions about things, and they're really good at getting back to you. (H12)

The German Expert Mentor initiative

In summary, GEMs were overwhelmingly positive about the scheme.[20] Their motivations for applying for the role related to their passion for German language teaching, their desire to support pupils and colleagues in the profession, and also to access CPD. They were enthusiastic about the training, the impact their support in schools was having, how the role impacts upon their own teaching practice, and the available support they can access. They see the scheme as helping to preserve and develop German teaching. They noted some challenges to being a GEM and made some suggestions for how the programme could improve further. We discuss these findings in more detail below.

Motivations

GEMs were drawn to the role because of their enthusiasm about their subject and desire to preserve and develop the teaching of German in England, beyond their own educational settings. They also saw it as a valuable opportunity for CPD. The GEMs spoke of their motivation to support other colleagues, in a context where they knew that

[20] In order to preserve the anonymity of GEMs as there are so few of them, identifiers have not always been used.

the subject faced a decline in terms of both pupils choosing German and schools offering it.

> I applied to be a GEM partly because, I mean, we teach German really well in our school. German is growing at our school, which is quite rare, and I just wanted to share any expertise I do have and work with others and coach [others].

Being a GEM was understood to afford opportunities for training, career development, and networking with others who were also working to support the teaching of German. The GEMs observed that their expectations of the scheme have been met – and in many cases exceeded – in practice.

Training

The GEM training was discussed as a highlight of the programme – rewarding, comprehensive, and good preparation for the role.

> Since teacher training, I had never really spent an entire week just training and thinking about teaching, so that was a really exciting opportunity.

> We looked at everything [in training]. We looked at lesson planning, we looked at pedagogy, we looked at the different styles of teaching, we looked at feedback and assessment. We did lesson observation at Goethe-Institut […] We had the cultural immersion as well […]. Then, we had also formal training in terms of meetings. So, when we go to our deployment, okay, so there is a clear structure in terms of paperwork.

In some instances, the GEMs felt that they acted as intermediaries between the Goethe-Institut and schools, tailoring their ‘high-quality’ resources and training in accordance with the needs of the settings they supported.

> We’re kind of, like, the middle people to say [to schools], 'We translate the Goethe ideas and support and resource into what we know is going to work.' So, that's been really awesome.

Impact in schools

When the GEMs reflected upon their impact in the schools in which they were deployed, they were proud of the support that they had provided. They identified a central role in the planning of lessons and devising of schemes of work, especially in the context of the introduction of the new GCSE curriculum and overall aims to improve attainment.

GEMs emphasized that intervention and advice were always context-specific and relevant, as they were dependent on the needs of the school approaching the GEM. This, it seemed, gave the GEMs more scope to make an impact. The 3 areas where impact was most felt were in relation to devising schemes of work, especially with a/the new GCSE in mind; increasing student interest in German; and improving attainment outcomes. All GEMs were extremely positive about the impact that they had been able to make.

> I don't know of another programme like it, that is exciting, and I think can really define the future of language teaching.

> One of my first deployments was to look at the new GCSE and look at what impact that would have on assessment for this particular school. And so, we looked at the [year 9 and year 10] assessments they've got now, and we looked at the new GCSE, and then I suggested some ways that it could be rewritten…. And I actually met with the whole department on Zoom; they had some questions.

> I had a few feedbacks from a couple of the schools saying, 'Oh, this is really working. Our mocks were really good,', or, 'We have better results this year in the skill we are working on, so thank you very much.'

One GEM described helping to 'revamp' a teacher's assembly on the benefits of taking German at GCSE.

> You know, giving suggestions of the kinds of facts and figures that [teacher] could include, resources to include, that kind of thing. And then it moved on to thinking about careers and employability and so I planned, delivered, a careers employability session for all the Key Stage 3 classes.

Impact on GEMs

The GEMs were also keen to stress the ways in which their role had improved their own practice. This was framed by them as both honing their own practice through self-evaluation and access to new ideas and resources; and the opportunity to develop and refine mentoring skills.

> [One school] have quite a strong employment focus so they do activities where the students do projects around employability in German and that was really, really nice and I would like to put that in place in my school as well.

> I have got out of it the experience of coaching and mentoring others and being more kind of conscious of how I do that and how I support others, how I can lead and encourage others. So, it's more kind of, like, leadership stuff if you like.

With regard to both the GEMs and the schools they have worked with, there is a strong sense that the scheme has been mutually beneficial.

Support

The formal organisational support offered to the GEMs was praised unanimously for the quality of the support received and they particularly praised the individual who acts as a point of contact for them when they have queries or need support.

> She listens to anybody rant about anything and tries to sort it out. She's a really good bridge between the Goethe and us because she's been both a primary and secondary school teacher, so she knows the reality of an English classroom, [...]

> Yes, there is support. Anything that we need or some of the questions we have or are unsure, literally just an email away. [The Goethe-Institut] are very good in terms of communicating. And if we say, 'Oh, we need this,' they are really quite keen on developing the resources.

The GEMs also stress that they have themselves formed a supportive community: ‘the ability to have that forum to share ideas and to work together on our deployments is really good’.

Key reasons for the decline of German

The GEMs also identified a number of perceived reasons for the decline in German over the last few years.

- Teacher recruitment in languages is challenging for most schools, as discussed in the Modern Foreign Languages Review – Challenges section which has led to a **scarcity of German teachers**. Bringing in native speakers from abroad has been made more difficult by current visa regulations. These complications have also led to difficulties in planning trips and exchanges.
- GEMs identified German’s reputation as a **difficult language** as an impediment to take-up with widespread perceptions that languages are difficult and harshly marked, and that German is particularly so on both indicators. GEMs suggested that studying languages for communication, rather than to pass exams, would help

involve young people at all levels – 'You know, kids who are doing apprenticeships, why don't they do some languages?'

- Interestingly,2 of the GEMs noted that German could be taught more (i.e. there were German-speaking staff available in schools, not currently teaching German) but some school leaders also perceived it as harder and less attractive to pupils than French or Spanish. They found a **lack of support among for Senior Leadership Teams** (SLT) and were often unwilling or unable to risk running smaller language classes in German. GEMs saw involving SLT in conversations about improving the status of languages in general, and German in particular, as vital.

> We can fight for our language, but we need the people who are making the decisions on our side as well to be supportive.

- One GEM noted the problem of students wanting to take German A level but schools being unable to offer it and wondered if the GImagine programme could offer support in terms of funding or even online teaching.
- **Transition from KS2 to KS3** was also important as German is infrequently offered in primary schools (the pupil survey found only 4% of those who studied languages at primary school had studied German). GEMs were aware of the Language Hubs' focus on transition between these phases and also noted that the Goethe-Institut offers some upskilling courses to primary teachers which could lead to more primary pupils experiencing some German.

Challenges

Whilst the GEMs were positive overall about the role, most notably in regard to the training, its impact and the support they had received, there were some time management issues and related concerns regarding procedural and logistical challenges.

Some GEMs reported that the role is highly time-consuming and can be difficult to manage given both their teaching and/or leadership commitments in their home school, and the unpredictable nature of day-to-day work in schools. They recognised that this was something they had some control over, given that they opt in and can refuse to take on deployments; however, these commitments could be onerous.

> At one point I had 3 deployments, none of them were onerous on their own at all. But when all 3 of them wanted to speak in 1 week, and they can only do particular times, and I've obviously also got my commitments, then that can be a bit stressful. But it's not horrendously challenging, it's only what it means to be in education really. That juggling all the time of the things that you've got.

Some GEMs also felt that particular processes and systems could be either cumbersome and/or slow including the number of platforms with which they were required to engage (e.g. Teams, UCL Extend, Incognito) and the processes for payment for the GEMs (described by one as an ‘absolute headache’ for the schools and the GEMs).

One GEM noted that their distance from London was a disadvantage.

> There are some amazing things happening at the Goethe-Institut in London, you know. Film showings, and talks, and a lot of them are virtual but not all of them […] We're a London-centric country. And if you are in the North, it is more difficult to get to things, just from a cost point of view, and time.

Language Assistants

Views of British Council Language Assistants

Responses were received from 465 Language Assistants, with a roughly even split between ELAs and MLAs (49% and 51% respectively). The majority of MLAs spoke French or Spanish followed by German as their first language and the languages they taught matched those proportions (shown in Table 5).

Table 5: Language Assistant's first language

	MLA (N)	MLA (%)	ELA (N)	ELA (%)
French	94	39.3	1	0.4
Spanish	78	32.6	1	0.4
German	50	20.9	0	0.0
Italian	2	0.8	0	0.0
English	1	0.4	220	96.5
Mandarin Chinese	9	3.8	0	0.0
Other	5	2.1	6	2.6
N=	239	239	228	228

Source: Language Assistant survey

Almost all ELAs spoke English as their first language and 88% were also teaching English. The vast majority of both ELAs and MLAs spoke another language other than their first language although, MLAs were significantly more likely to do so than ELAs (90% compared to 82%).

Nearly all ELAs (97%) were studying at undergraduate level, compared to 19% of MLAs while 53% of the latter were studying at postgraduate level. They studied a range of subjects; the most common were languages (35%) and English (24%), followed by education (13%), and history (4%).

Placements

France, Spain and Germany were the most common home countries for MLAs working in England (37%,25%, and 17% respectively), while Spain was the most common destination for ELAs (50%) followed by France and Germany (both 14%).

A typical placement lasted for 9 months (54%). A placement other than 1 academic year or less than 6 months was the next most reported placement length by 18% of Language Assistants and this was typically either 7 or 8 months. Significantly more MLAs (90%) worked in secondary schools, compared to ELAs (60%). Most were placed in one school (ELAs 70% and MLAs 82%) and worked in the placement between 12 and 20 hours per week (87%).

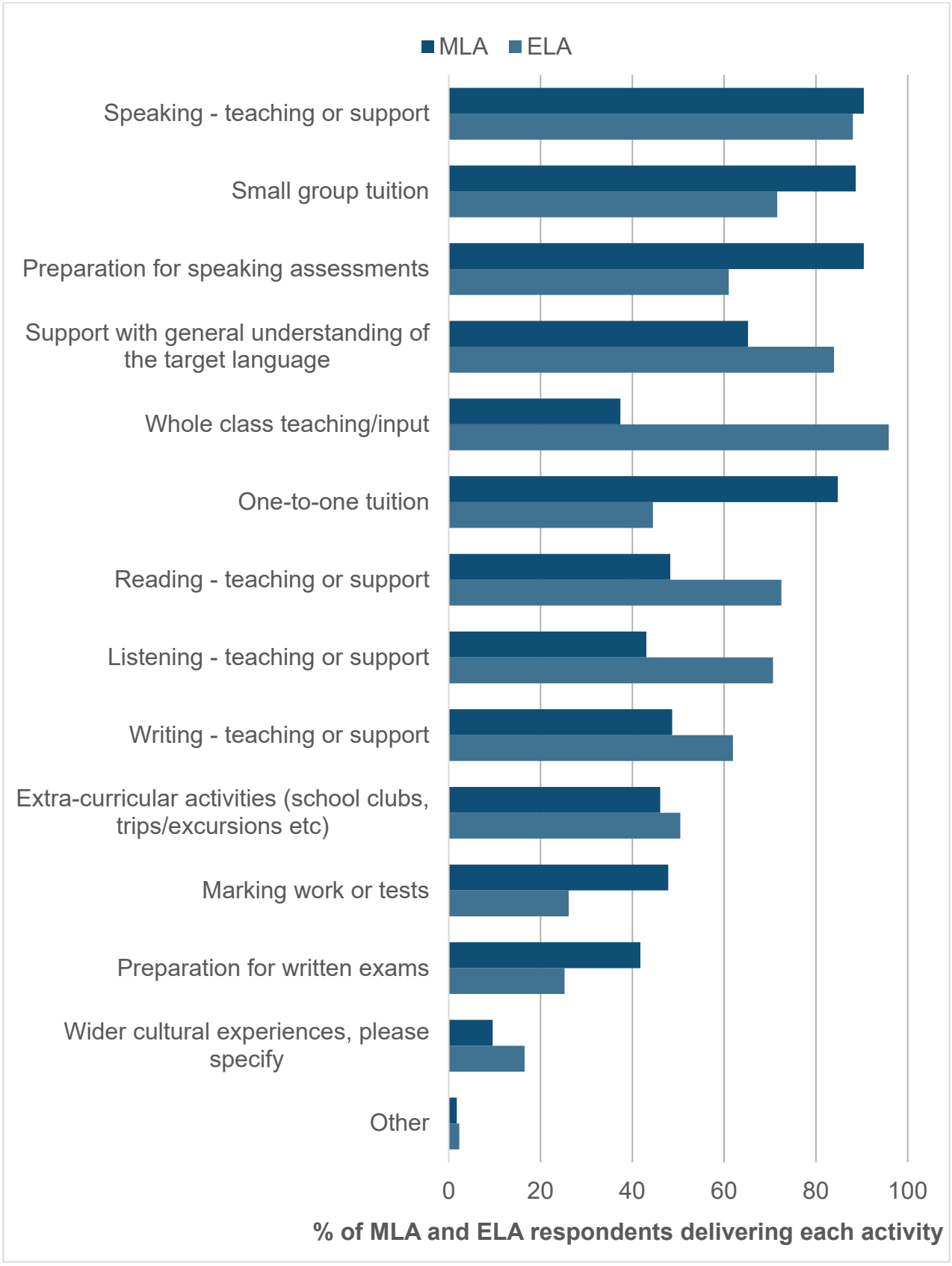
Over four-fifths of Language Assistants did not take up any other form of employment during their school placement. However, 66% of ELAs and 34% of MLAs did take up another job, the main reason given was to earn more money (64% and 49% respectively). During their placement Language Assistants most commonly reported spending between £3,000 and £7,499 (70% of all Language Assistants) while on placement with 51% saying they had spent more than expected and 41% spending in line with their expectations.

Post-Brexit changes in the right to work in the UK/EU were seen as an equally important challenge in becoming a Language Assistant for both ELAs and MLAs (M=4.1 and 3.9 respectively).[21] However, ELAs were significantly more likely to agree that the cost of administrative processes and obtaining visa sponsorship was a challenge (M=3.9 and 2.9). MLAs were significantly more likely to cite the cost of living in the UK as a challenge (M=3.7 compared to ELA 2.8), as well as the amount of income received for working as a Language Assistant (M=3.4 compared to ELA 3.1).

Activities

Language Assistants were asked about the types of activities they delivered in schools as part of their placement. The results in Figure 21 show that the most common activity was speaking, teaching or supporting pupils (89%) while wider cultural experiences were least common (13%). ELAs were significantly more likely than MLAs to report delivering whole class teaching/input (96% compared to 37%) and listening teaching or support (71% compared to 43%). MLAs were significantly more likely to report delivering the one-to-one tuition activities (85% compared to 45% of ELAs) and preparation for speaking assessments as part of their placement activities (90% compared to 61% of ELAs).

Figure 21: Activities delivered by ELAs and MLAs as part of their placements

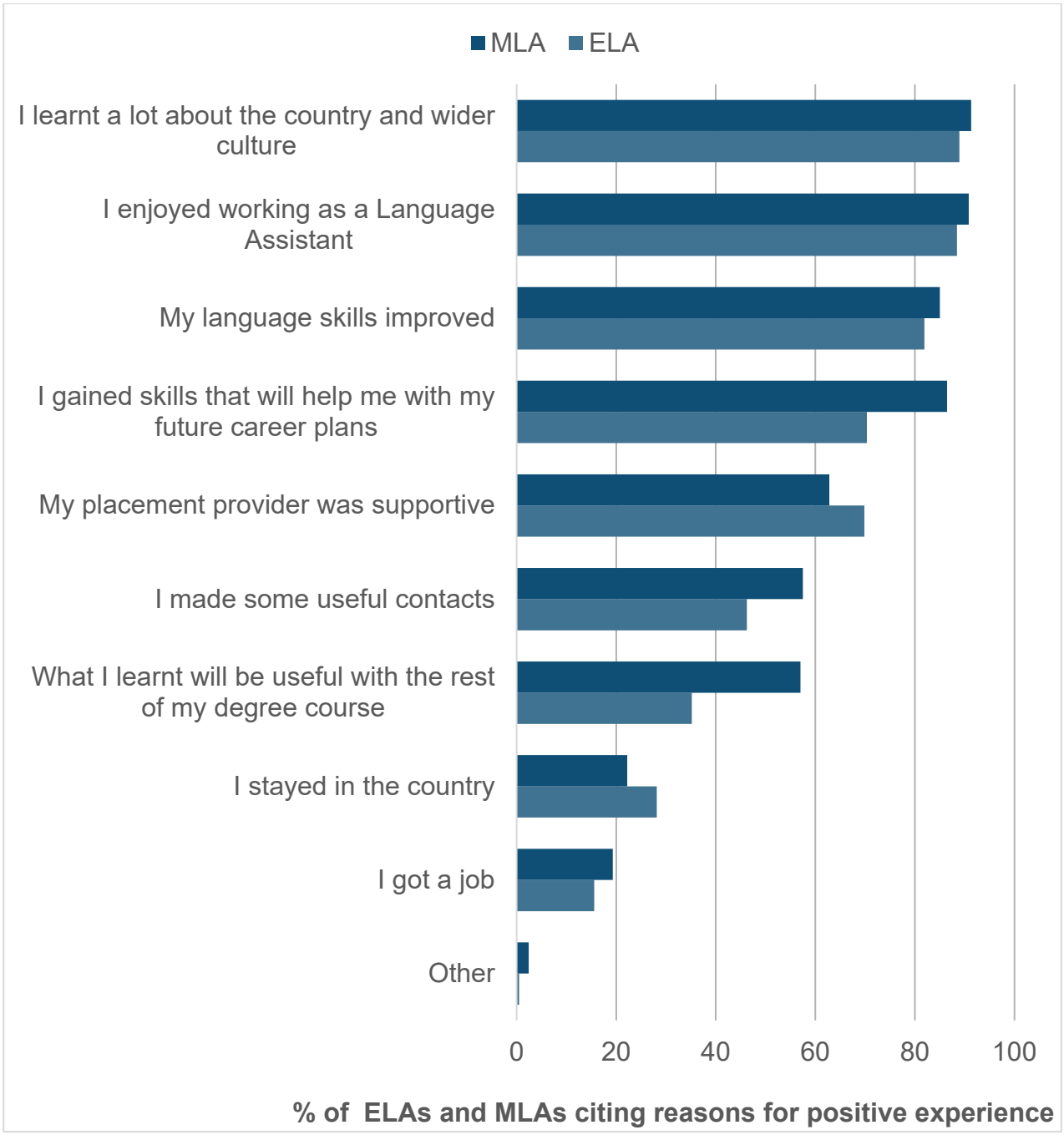


Source: Language Assistants survey

Experience

92% of Language Assistants rated their placement experience positively, with 63% of MLAs and 55% of ELAs rating it as very good. Figure 22 shows that the most common reason for finding the experience positive was learning about their host country and wider culture (90%) while the least common reason was because they got a job (17%).

Figure 22: Reasons why Language Assistants found their experience positive



Source: Language Assistants survey

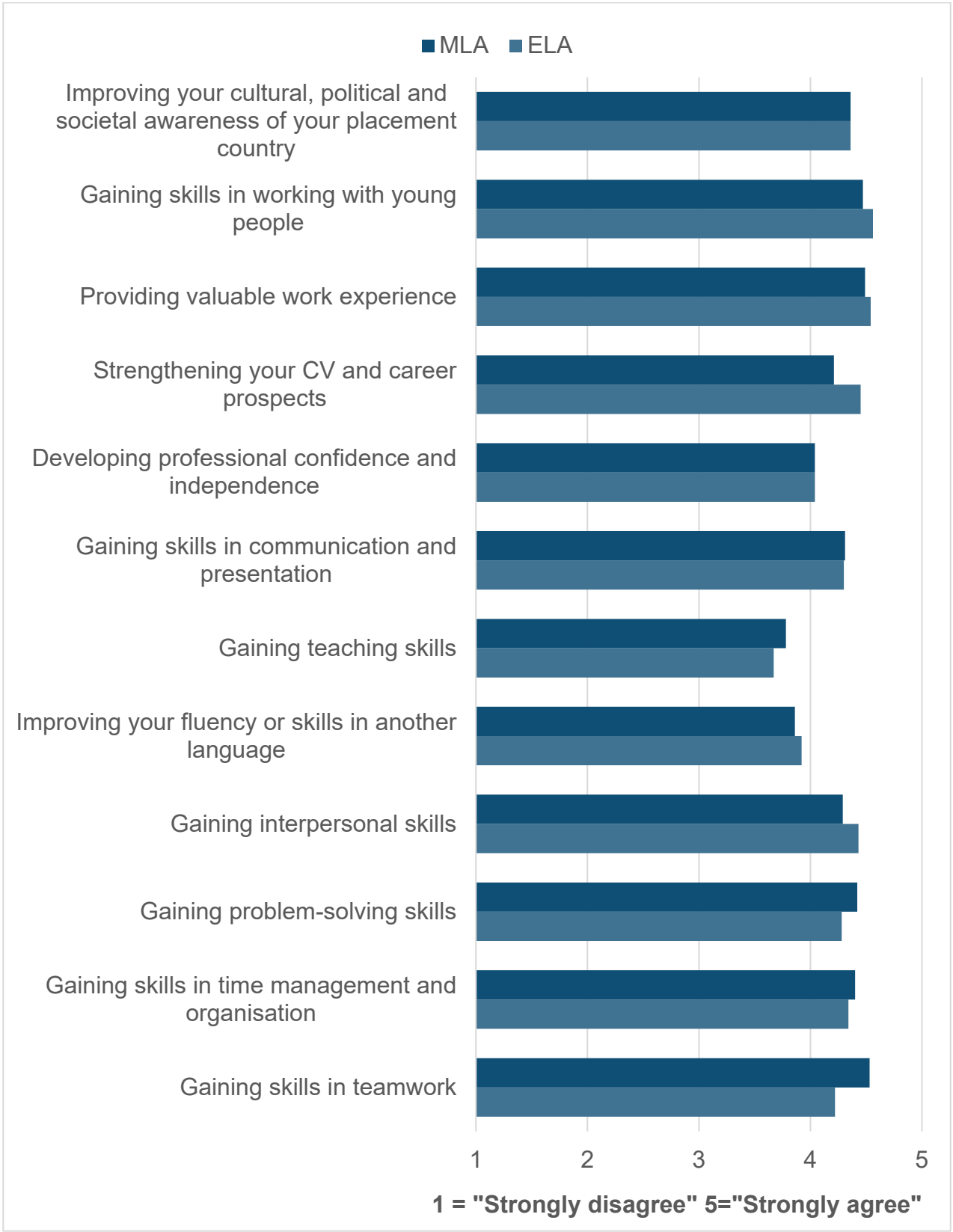
The very small proportion of Language Assistants reporting a negative experience (N=15), either did not enjoy working as a Language Assistant (60%) or found that they did not gain skills to help with future career plans (53%).

A significantly higher number of MLAs reported that what they learnt during their placement will be useful to the rest of their degree course (57% compared to 35% of ELAs). Overall, 88% of Language Assistants would recommend the programme to others; with a slightly higher proportion of MLAs reporting this than ELAs (66% compared to 54%).

Benefits of the programme

Language Assistants were also asked to share their thoughts on the perceived benefits of taking part in the British Council programme and the results are shown in Figure 23. 58% of Language Assistants strongly agreed that their experience had improved their cultural, political and societal awareness of their placement country and had given them skills in working with young people. They were less likely to agree that they gained teaching skills. ELAs were significantly more likely to agree than MLAs that the placement strengthened their CV and future career prospects (M=4.5 and 4.2 respectively).

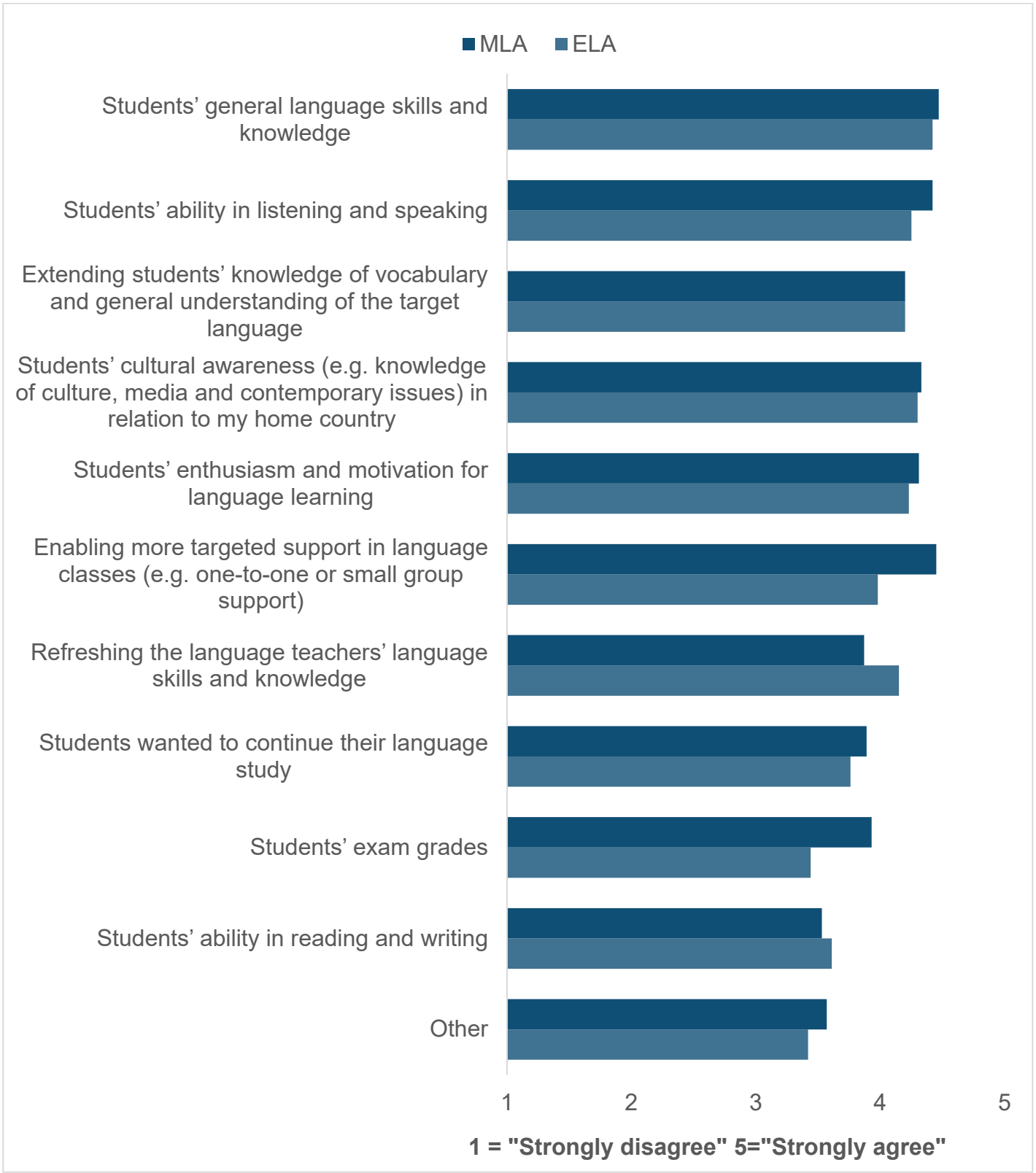
Figure 23: Perceived benefits of participating in a Language Assistant placement



Source: Language Assistants survey

Language Assistants were asked how their placement and role had contributed to improving students' language skills. 50% of Language Assistants strongly agreed that the role had contributed to their students' language skills and knowledge. However, they were least likely to think they had contributed to pupil ability in reading and writing (13% strongly agreeing). MLAs were significantly more likely than ELAs to agree that their placement had enabled more targeted support in language classes (M=4.5 compared to ELA 4.0). MLAs were also significantly more likely to agree that their placement had impacted on students' exam grades than ELAs (M=3.9 compared to ELA 3.4).

Figure 24: How the Language Assistant role has contributed to students' language skills



Source: Language Assistants survey

Support

In terms of the support offered to them by their host school and mentor during their placement, 81% of Language Assistants rated positively the support offered with 53% rating it as very good. Additionally, Language Assistants were positive about integration into their host school (79%), although a significantly higher proportion of MLAs rated this positively compared to ELAs (47% and 26% respectively). Finally, 66% of Language Assistants rated the support they received from the British Council positively, although MLAs were significantly more likely than ELAs to say the support was very good (37% compared to 20%).

The 3 MLAs interviewed as part of the case studies were equally enthusiastic about the role, feeling that they were having positive experiences in their schools, and enjoyed working with teachers and pupils. They gained a sense of achievement from helping pupils, especially with speaking and listening exercises. They commented on the differences between their home-schooling system and the English one, particularly the differences in language teaching and assessment. One said that they had been told in their home country ‘not to expect too high a level’ in terms of pupils’ language acquisition.

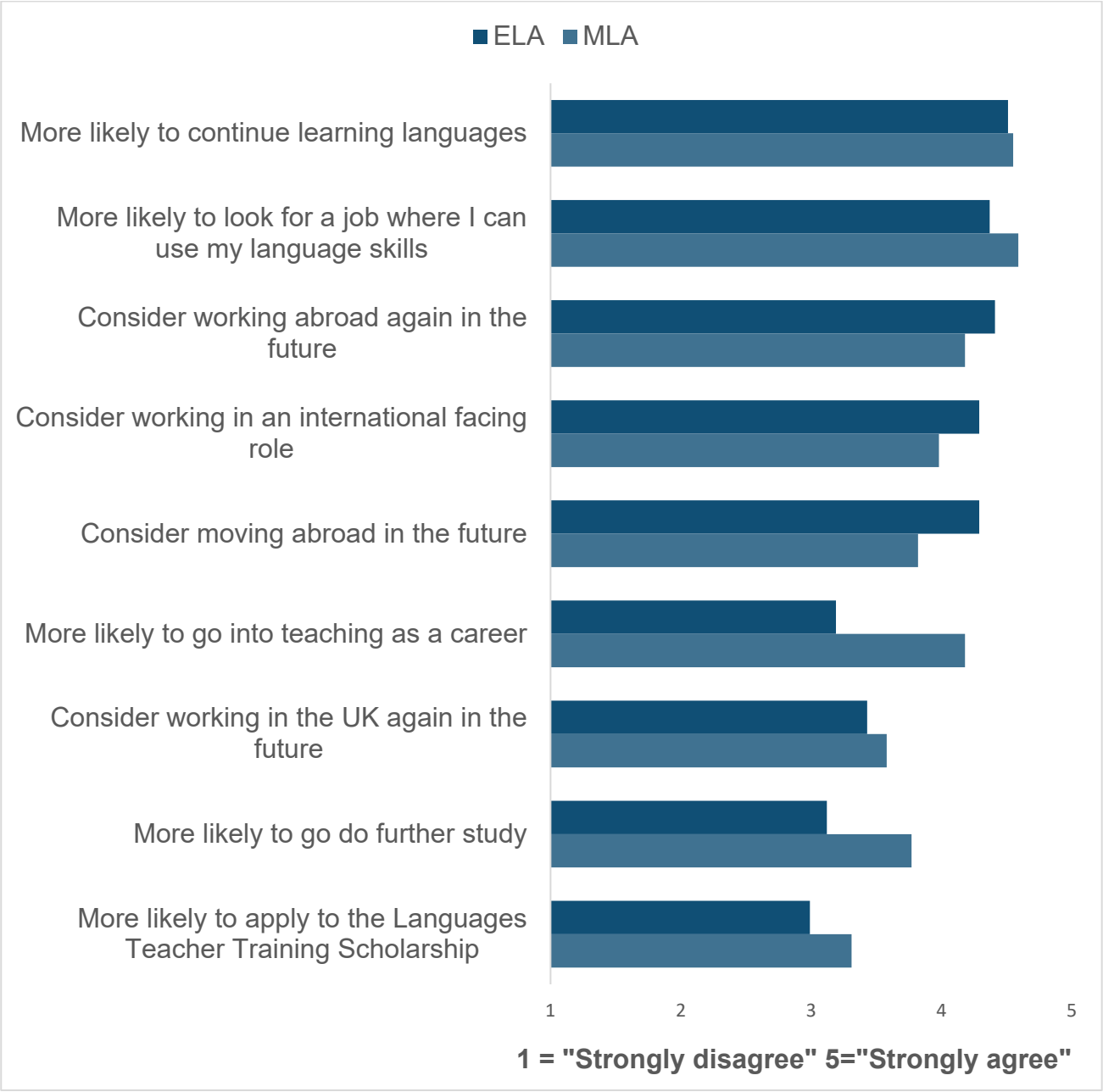
MLAs are generally young adults, and they benefited from the emotional support provided by a network of peers, accessed through a ‘buddy map’, provided by the British Council, showing other nearby MLAs.

Future plans

Language Assistants were asked about how their placement had influenced their thoughts about the future. 88.9% said they were more likely to look for a job where they would use their language skills, and 88.3% said they were likely to continue learning languages as a result. When asked if they would consider working abroad again in the future 85.8% agreed.

Figure 25 shows the differences between the ratings of ELAs and MLAs. Both groups were very positive about continuing to learn languages, with no differences between ELAs and MLAs. They were also positive about working or living abroad in the future or considering working in an international facing role, with ELAs being significantly more positive than MLAs about these options. Whereas MLAs were significantly more positive than ELAs about looking for jobs where they can use their language. MLAs were also significantly more positive about going into teaching as a career (M=4.18) or undertaking further study (M=3.77), while ELAs were broadly neutral about these options (M=3.19 and M=3.12 respectively). This aligns with findings in the case studies where two out of the three MLAs had clear plans to be teachers of English in their home countries so saw their period of time being an MLA as a positive contribution towards their future career. All said that that they would recommend the role to others.

Figure 25: Plans after the Language Assistant Programme



Source: Language Assistants survey

Views of school staff

All staff were asked in the survey if their school had employed a Language Assistant during the academic year 2023 to 2024. Table 6 shows (as expected) all host schools had a Language Assistant, while 49% of Lead Hub schools employed one and 38% of partner schools did.

Table 6: Employment of Language Assistants by type of school

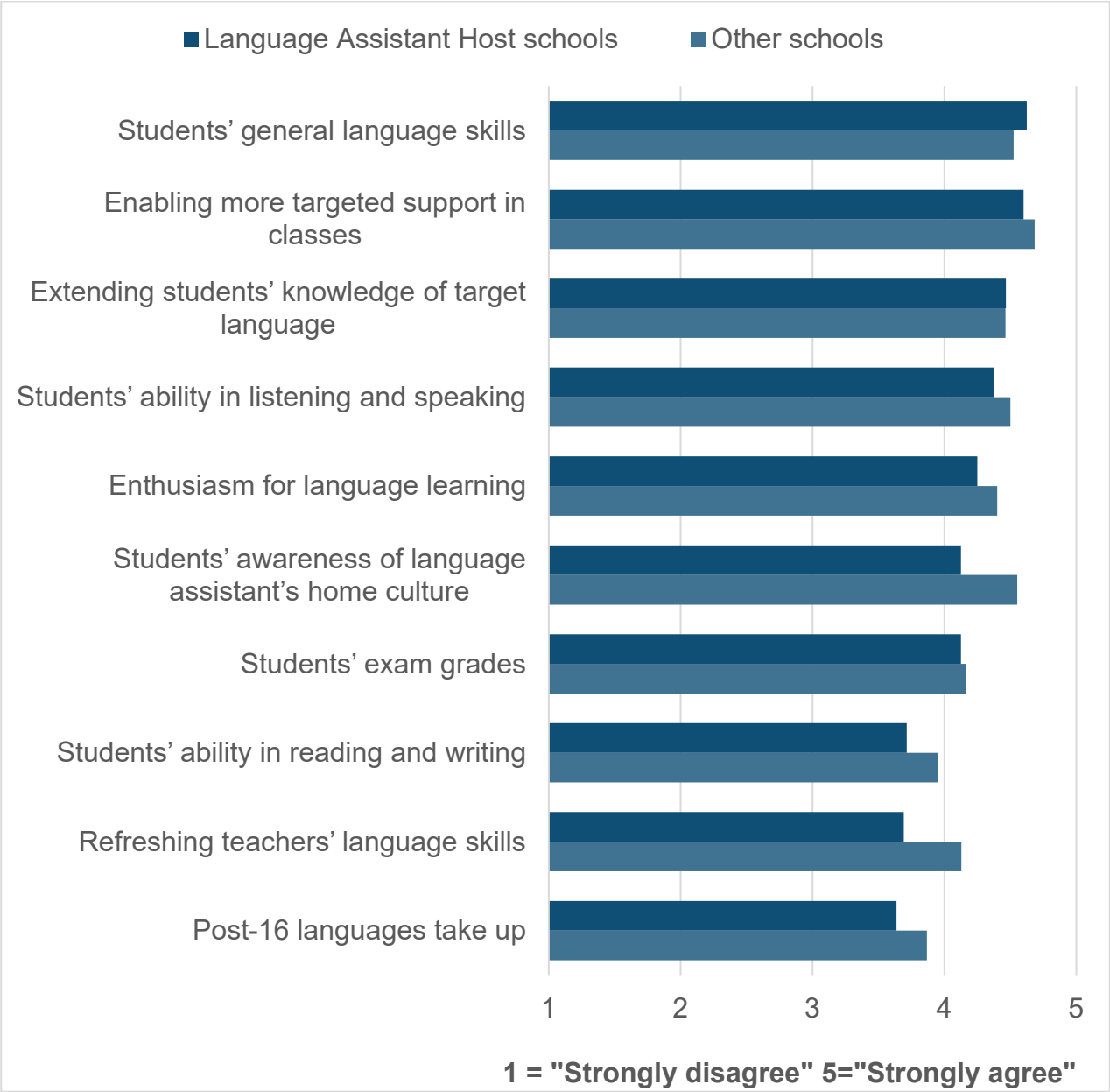
	Lead Hub	Partner	Comparator	Language Assistant Host
Yes	34 (49%)	17 (38%)	1 (7%)	18 (100%)
No	32 (46%)	25 (56%)	13 (93%)	0
Don't know	4 (6%)	3 (7%)	0	0
Total	70	45	14	18

Source: Staff survey

Of these schools, 73% of Language Assistants were supporting with Spanish, 63% with French, 34% with German and 16% with Mandarin. Over half had recruited through the British Council Language Assistants Programme. The remaining 46% reported using a variety of other recruitment process although primarily internal (e.g. staff already worked in or were known to the school, word of mouth or the school advertised using normal recruitment processes). Four had been recruited through the Mandarin Excellence Programme. In the main, a visa application was not required, or the staff were unsure.

Figure 26 shows staff views on the benefits of employing Language Assistants. Results were high across all schools. Staff at Language Assistant host schools were slightly more likely than staff at other schools to agree that employing Language Assistants benefited students' general language skills (M=4.63 and 4.53 respectively), while there was little difference in views about benefits of MLAs in extending students' knowledge of the language or improving students' exam grades. However, staff at other schools gave higher levels of agreement to the other potential benefits, particularly for improving students' awareness of the MLA's home country (M=4.55 compared with 4.13 for staff at Language Assistant host schools) and for refreshing teachers' language skills (M=4.13 compared with 3.69).

Figure 26: Staff views on the benefits of employing Language Assistants



Source: Staff survey

In line with the findings of the staff survey, teachers in the interviews whose school had an MLA were enthusiastic about the role and the MLA's potential to support pupils' engagement, fluency, pronunciation, and broadening of pupils' awareness of other cultures. They perceived the MLA as having had a 'huge impact' because pupils could access a native speaker who was close to their own age and interests.

> If I could have anything within the department, I would have Language Assistants again. (P05)

> Oh, there's a real buzz about having an actual French person…It's the one thing that's really engaged the kids. (H26)

> Having native French and German speakers in the department, as well as our Language Assistants, has a big impact. To see that language is not just classroom based. (H25)

In terms of their tasks, to give Rowan School as an example, the MLAs worked with years 12 and 13, offering one-to-one conversations for 30 minutes which were tailored to students' level and interests. They also fed back to the teachers if there were particular grammatical constructions with which students are struggling, recorded outputs for younger pupils, and helped staff with their languages. At Hazel School below, Language Assistants were a key part of the languages offer.

Also interviewed were teachers who were planning to employ an MLA shared across schools. One noted that the funding supplied by the Language Hub programme had made this possible.

> That's the first time that we've ever had a Language Assistant, and that's only been possible through funding the hub has given us access to. We are going to share the Language Assistant with our partner schools so, it's not just our school that's benefiting from it. I've worked at this school for 13 years now, and we've never had Assistants before. It's only been possible because of the hub funding. (H12)

Hazel School: Language Assistants and trips abroad

Hazel School is a large, rural school, in a single-academy Trust. The majority of pupils are White British.

Hazel School offers French, Spanish and German. Within the department, there is a strong collegiate and supportive atmosphere, with a sharing of resources that keeps lessons consistent across year groups. In addition to the teaching staff, Hazel School directly employs 3 Language Assistants, one for each language offered. Language Assistants are highly valued by teaching staff, with the help they provide with pupils' fluency, pronunciation and cultural awareness. In preparation for GCSE speaking exams, Language Assistants were utilised to give pupils more opportunities for one-to-one interactions, which teachers felt alleviated some of the nervousness around the speaking exam.

In year 7, pupils are placed into either 'upper ability' or 'middle ability' sets based on their year 6 attainment in English and Maths. Pupils in 'upper ability' sets will do 2 languages – Spanish and either German or French – and those in 'middle ability' sets take only Spanish. The same amount of time is assigned to languages across sets, meaning the 'middle ability' set have twice as many Spanish lessons, offering these pupils more time to learn one language.

Hazel school offered language trips, received with excitement by pupils.

> Something I'm looking forward to if I continue with [studying languages] is the trips. Because you can go on language trips and it's really fun to, like, test your language and see how much you know and try and have conversations with people. There's one at the end of year 8, next year. There's one to Barcelona and one to Paris (Pupil)

School future plans and perceived challenges

While 97% of staff would recommend employing an MLA to other schools/teachers, 35% of these said they struggle with the budgeting and 21% reported they would struggle with the recruitment process. A small number of staff (N=4) said they struggle with the length of the placements, finding them too short.

Those allocated a Language Assistant through the British Council were positive, with 90% agreeing to recommend the programme and 80% reporting that the quality of support from the British Council was good. Only 3 indicated they would not be employing a Language Assistant through the British Council in the coming year (2024-2025), due to budget constraints and the fact they would be hiring locally.

Despite enthusiasm for the MLAs, schools with experience of appointing them did report that supporting the role could be resource and time intensive for school staff. The costs of employing an MLA could be a challenge, though one potentially alleviated by Lead Hub funding. Despite this, other Lead Hub leads reported they could not justify the cost of an MLA even with extra funding.

Other challenges raised included difficulties finding accommodation, safeguarding issues, and concerns over English language proficiency. Finding affordable accommodation was a big issue raised by MLAs and staff. Of the 3 MLAs interviewed, only 1 had found accommodation before they arrived (with another MLA), the other 2 took several months after underestimating how difficult it would be. One MLA ended up living with a staff member in the absence of any alternatives.

> The biggest hurdle was finding somewhere for them to live […] They were really proactive in looking for areas to live but…They're now living with one of our specialist teachers. […] I think we felt morally obliged to help, but I don't know how contractually obliged we actually were. (H12)

Another challenge schools found in employing MLAs were delays in DBS checks, as candidates cannot apply without a UK address, yet often struggled to find housing. This meant that, due to schools' safeguarding policies, the MLAs were limited in the support they could provide whilst waiting for a DBS.

> We'd appointed [a Language Assistant] to work across our German partner schools, [but] safeguarding is a massive concern within secondary schools. The practicalities of having a Language Assistant, working across multiple schools, and the safeguarding training that they need to undertake, that is really tricky, and it's not something that's particularly covered by the British Council. The Assistants can't apply for a DBS check until they're here. Their usefulness in school is actually delayed. (H24)

Staff in one partner school reported being committed to the British Council scheme, had been MLAs themselves and had employed MLAs in the previous 2 academic years (with 1 remaining at the school afterwards). However, their current MLA was not successful which they explained was due to their limited English (their certificate of proficiency was 4 years old). They suggested a greater emphasis be placed at recruitment on current language assessments.

Pupils' experiences of Language Assistants

Table 7 shows that 22% of pupils in KS3 (22%) had a Language Assistant in their language classes at their current school. The proportion rose as pupils progressed through KS3 to 32% in KS4.[22]

Table 7: Whether pupils had a Language Assistant

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	KS3	Year 10	Year 11	KS4
Yes	19.8	21.9	24.1	21.7	23.8	47.5	31.5
No	46.4	45.0	45.2	45.6	47.4	31.4	42.1
Not sure	33.8	33.1	30.7	32.7	28.8	21.2	26.3
N=	2,745	2,259	1,994	6,998	1,110	539	1,649

Source: Pupil survey

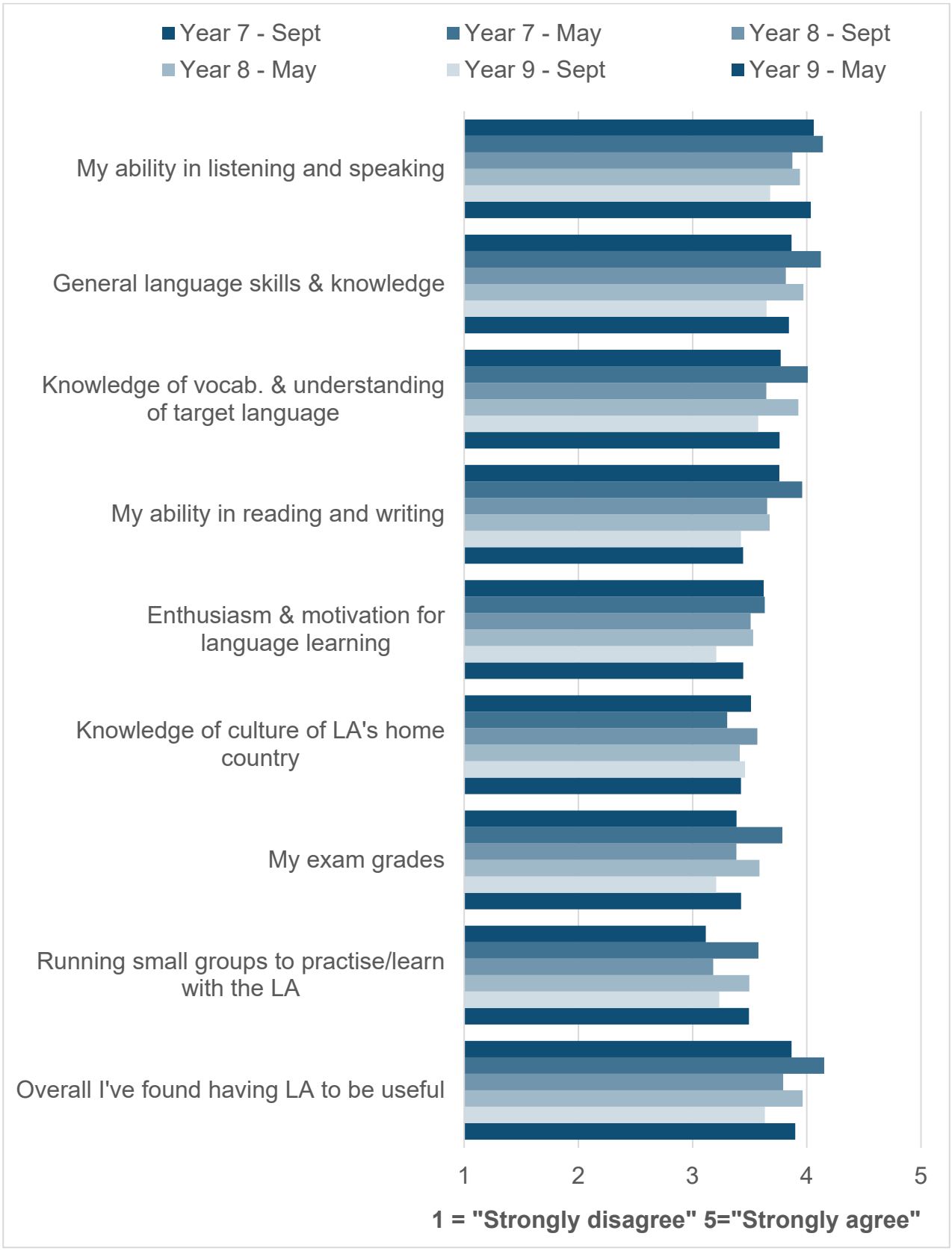
Among KS3 pupils, the proportion of pupils having had a Language Assistant was highest in partner schools (26%) followed by Language Assistant host schools (23%) and Lead Hub schools (21%), with only 12% of pupils at comparator schools having a Language Assistant; the fact that the proportion is not highest among Language Assistant host schools suggests that Language Assistants may not be used for all languages or all classes at these host schools. Among KS4 pupils, nearly half (47%) of those at Language Assistant host schools reported having had a Language Assistant in their classes at their school, compared with 36% of pupils at Lead Hub or partner schools, and 11% of those at comparator schools.

Views on the impact that Language Assistants had on pupils' language learning was positive. Figure 27 shows that pupils were most positive about the impact of Language Assistants on their ability in listening and speaking, on their general language skills and knowledge, on the knowledge of vocabulary and understanding of the target language, and on their ability in reading and writing. However, views on Language Assistants' impacts on reading and writing were markedly lower among year 9 pupils than among those in earlier years. Views were still positive overall but less positive about other impacts of Language Assistants, such as on exam grades or the Language Assistant running small groups for practice/learning, which may be a concern given small group work was reported by Language Assistants to be a large part of their work. Pupils were also asked for their overall view on whether having a Language Assistant was useful, and

[22] Students were asked if they had a Language Assistant, but they would be unable to distinguish between an MLA and a Language Assistant employed through other means,

responses were very positive (M=4.15 for year 7 pupils in May), although they did fall slightly between the year groups within KS3 (low of 3.63 for year 9 pupils in September).

Figure 27: Agreement that Language Assistant has helped pupils' language learning



Source: Pupils survey

Conclusions

Language Hub programme

The Language Hub programme was successful in harnessing the enthusiasm and activity of participating teachers, and early signs of positive impacts for developing pedagogies in schools were identified. It is too early to evidence any changes in pupil perceptions of language learning or of language take up and attainment. However, the findings indicate how such a model might lead to improvements in pupil confidence in their ability to learn about other cultures and languages which could, in turn, lead to increasing language uptake (and attainment).

Lead Hub and partner schools found the support, resources, and CPD offered by NCLE useful and informative, especially coming at an important time when the new GCSE curricula in French, Spanish and German was rolled out. The partner schools were all appreciative of the support that they had received from the Lead Hubs, including action plans, advice, CPD and opportunities to network and share good practice.

Language teaching and pedagogy

The evaluation findings indicate that the strengths of languages teaching today, is the enthusiasm of teaching staff and their willingness to network and collaborate. Instances of active learning was observed in classrooms with fast-paced lessons that include a range of activities, based on clear understandings of the importance of the systematic teaching of grammar, phonics and vocabulary. The schools where language teaching was successful all shared support from senior staff, and languages were given status and curriculum time.

There was a notable variety among the organisation of language offers across schools, comprising the mixture of languages taught (although the primary languages remain French, Spanish and German), the degree of pupil choice, the curriculum time made available, the organisation of the pupils (i.e. setting or mixed attainment teaching), and the pedagogies used. However, the case study observations and interviews with teachers illustrated that languages staff share a focus on grammar, phonics and vocabulary.

Good practice in language teaching by schools in this evaluation included:

- revisiting their pedagogies and curriculum frequently
- accessing CPD for their staff

- offering sufficient curriculum time to languages (the MFLPR recommends 3–4 classes of 40–60 minutes a week at Key Stages 3–4 (MFLPR 2016 para 13.2))
- having a supportive senior leadership
- focusing on grammar, phonics and vocabulary, as recommended in the MFLPR, and planning lessons that use as much of the target language as possible, are briskly paced and cover a range of activities
- delivering activities and events to build and maintain pupil enthusiasm for languages, for example contact with schools abroad, cultural activities, and/or activities to support HHCL

Initiatives to promote German

The small number of German teachers involved in the evaluation, means that it is hard to develop any strong conclusions at this stage. However, the data shows there is enthusiasm and positivity around learning about the country's language, culture and history.

The GEM initiative was seen incredibly positively by those involved, particularly in terms of the training and the mentors' ability to reach schools.

Although it was difficult to disentangle the activities run by the UKGC, particularly because of the small numbers, there does appear an interest in and appetite for such things among teachers and pupils. Some of the most positive findings among pupils were in relation to German exchanges, visits abroad plus information days/competitions and other learning opportunities.

The British Council Language Assistants programme

The British Council's Language Assistants programme is viewed positively by those involved either as Language Assistants or hosting English schools. Findings point to the programme being beneficial to both MLAs and ELAs. Staff and pupils in schools that had Language Assistants were positive about the inputs and impact they made. For this cohort, the programme has been influential in their intentions to continue learning languages and pursuing a career in languages with the potential to be internationally facing or abroad.

A few issues that were raised by some school staff included finding accommodation, the timing of safeguarding checks and language proficiency certificates. From a pupil perspective, less positive ratings around Language Assistants running small groups could be a concern, give this is one of the primary activities they undertake while on

placement. There were some financial issues for ELAs with half of them taking another job (mainly due to money issues) and spending more than expected while on placement.

Areas for consideration/future research

The evaluation identified some useful findings for similar initiatives which propose a 'hub and spoke' model for curriculum development. The clear desire for networking and collaboration across the Lead Hub and partner schools provides a strong basis for the creation of networks to share CPD, encourage language teachers to work together to develop language pedagogies and to break down isolation.

The new language support programme, based on a core online CPD platform with additional wraparound support for teachers, will hopefully build upon this foundation. Its aims, to retain the expertise and experience from the Language Hubs and extend its reach to a larger number of teachers, has the potential to further embed the work started. There is also the potential to evidence how such a model of curriculum development could be used in other subject areas. The plans for how this programme will be assessed are to be confirmed.

This iteration of the Language Hub programme was not in operation long enough to explore the potential involvement and role of primary schools, but the research picked up a strong desire for this to happen among schools. Although secondary school staff admitted a lack of insight into language teaching at KS2, they understood the importance of encouraging early enjoyment and engagement with the subject (and the role a network could play).

Lead Hub schools in the case studies were basing their teaching on the principles set out in the MFLPR, particularly as they started teaching the new GCSE syllabus (which is broadly based on the MFLPR). However, the research also found awareness of the MFLPR among staff was quite low across most schools. Any future CPD may look to widen the influence of the MFLPR, to reinforce its principles.

In terms of further developing languages teaching, there are a number of challenges with language teacher recruitment, a perception by some pupils and schools that languages are not a core subject and issues with the funding for Language Assistants. This has meant in some places languages have been deprioritised or have limited curriculum time.

In the year that the British Council programme celebrates its 120th anniversary, the findings presented here illustrate why the Language Assistants Programme is such an important initiative.

However, there are a few themes that could be further investigated in future research:

- The financial position of Language Assistants (due to findings regarding income and expenditure on placement).
- The experience of Language Assistants and their deployment by schools with themes including:
    - access to practical support when adapting to living in a new country as a young adult (for example problems with landlords)
    - the available/required guidance for schools that have not worked with a language assistant previously
    - whether Language Assistants need increased pedagogical preparation, including in small group work and exam preparation (including pupil voice to explore the reasons why they were less positive about these activities)

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