

# Europe and the influence of the european union



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The European Union is an economic and political union of countries that was formed in 1993 (Answers n. d.). Since its formation the union has expanded and now comprises twenty seven member states (Britannica n. d.). Within these member states a total number of twenty three official languages are spoken; this number increasing constantly with the growth of the European Union (European Commission 2009). Despite the twenty three languages spoken, there are more than sixty indigenous regional or minority communities throughout the European Union (European Commission 2009). As the amount of immigrants to the continent increases, the languages used in the European Union are continuing to evolve.

The European Union work hard to promote multilingualism, and on 1st January 2007 appointed a 'European Commissioner for Multilingualism'. Due to the fact that the European Union doesn't stipulate a common policy, the influence is there to promote languages within the multiple education systems throughout the EU, encouraging linguistic diversity and all citizens to speak two additional languages to their native language. The work of the EU can be limited due to the member states' responsibility to support these aspirations.

In 2005 before the addition of 3 member states, the EU claimed to have spent €1, 123 million on translating and interpreting fees alone; equating to 1% of the annual general budget of the EU, or €2. 28 per EU citizen (Europa 2007). Despite this figure being 5 years old and representing only 20 member states, this shows the vastness of the EU's languages policies and the finances required in order for the Union to function on a multilingual level.

The European Commission completed research in 2005, publishing their findings in 2006 in an article entitled 'Europeans and their Languages' (Eurobarometer 2006). In this article the European Commission claims that 56% members of EU citizens speak at least one language in addition to their mother tongue, with 28% speaking a minimum of two foreign languages, 11% speaking at least three additional languages and 44% only having the ability to speak in one language (Eurobarometer 2006). It is particularly interesting to note that out of the five most prominent languages in the EU, comma namely English, German, French, Italian and Spanish, 54% of the EU claim to speak English, 32% German, 26% French, 16% Italian, and 15% Spanish (Eurobarometer 2006). Whilst French is the third most spoken language of the EU, it also benefits from having the three cities whereby the European Union is located: colon Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg, in French speaking territories.

However much Spanish has been considered a language of the future during recent years, it is evident that English, French and German are still the leading languages in Europe, with German having the highest amount of native speakers of a language in Europe (Eurobarometer 2006). The European Commission classes English, German and French as its three 'procedural languages' (Europa 2007). These languages therefore, are used for most business conducted internally, while the other 20 languages are only generally used for public information and communication purposes (Europa 2007). The European Parliament is however exempt from this and therefore all 23 languages are constantly in use (Europa 2007).

The number of member states actually exceeds the number of languages spoken, as some languages are spoken in more than one country, such as French in France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, and German which is spoken in Germany, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg. Adversely (is this the correct adverb?), English is considered a co-official language in bi-lingual countries such as Ireland and Malta, with Swedish also being a co-official/bi-lingual language in Finland. These languages are 'co-official' as the countries do still have their own individual languages; Irish, Maltese and Finnish respectively, alongside the secondary language (English/Swedish). This would not necessarily be classed as diglossia, as these languages are completely different, as opposed to being a local language within the country, such as Galician in Spain, or Welsh in the UK. Interestingly, some languages such as Turkish and Luxembourgish are not considered official languages of the EU, despite being official languages in the countries of Cyprus and Luxembourg; both member states of the EU.

The European Commission, on the importance of languages and encouraging linguistic capabilities, offers the following by way of summary:

The European Union recognises that language and identity are closely intertwined, and that language is the most direct expression of culture. Language policies have therefore been developed so that language diversity is respected, multilingualism is promoted and, if necessary, threatened languages are protected (European Commission 2009).

The 'Common European Framework' was introduced by the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1996 as part of a project "Language Learning for

European Citizenship” (Tool 2007). The purpose of the Common European Framework is to provide a common basis between member states of the EU to some extent to standardise the curriculum guidelines and criteria used to learn a Modern Foreign language in order to communicate, and to deliver the knowledge and skills required to learn effectively, whilst also allowing the ‘elaboration of languages syllabuses’ (Council of Europe 2001).

The CEF also puts emphasis on the cultural context to ensure that not just the language but the culture of the language is considered. The framework identifies and defines levels of proficiency in order for the learner’s progress to be measured; this guide is as follows:

A1 Breakthrough Basic

A2 Waystage Speaker

B1 Threshold Independent

B2 Vantage Speaker

C1 Effective Operational Proficiency Proficient

C2 Mastery Speaker

(Council of Europe 2001)

This system is becoming one of the most used systems in Europe now, with the British ‘GCSE’ and ‘Advanced levels’ using the CEF framework as well as the French ‘Brevet’ and ‘Baccalauréat’.

Using the CEF, irrespective of the differences of education styles or backgrounds ensures that all the education systems within all member states of the EU can all work toward the same goals (Council of Europe 2001).

It is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination (Council of Europe 2001).

As a means of fulfilling this main aim, measures have been introduced in order to facilitate and achieve this goal. The primary aim therefore is to ensure that all member countries' populations have access to acquiring the knowledge of other members' languages, also including other communities within their country (such as Galician, Basque and Catalan in Spain, where the main official national language is Castilian) (Council of Europe 2001). The COE also recognise the importance of developing skills that will assist language learning; such as communication and skills that are used in daily environments, such as dealing with day-to-day business in other countries (Council of Europe 2001). The ability to exchange ideas and information with people of different ages and different languages, comma communicating thoughts and feelings across, is strongly linked to the idea that by adding to your language ability, this can offer a 'wider and deeper' understanding of your way of life and understand and develop 'forms of thought' on other people and their cultural heritage (the syntax of this sentence could be improved) (Council of Europe 2001).

The EU is somewhat limited in its ability to impose legislature on the member states. Whilst the Council of Europe can exert a great influence on how language is used and implicated in the EU, it is the responsibility of the individual nations to enforce their own policies and interact within the European Union. The Council of Europe works alongside the European Cultural Convention, (founded in 1954), following their framework to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in education (Council of Europe 2010).

There are a number of organisations worth mentioning that impact on language learning in European countries. Firstly, the 'Language Policy Division' in Strasbourg which is just one department within the Council of Europe, who implement these language policies, with a particular interest in activities and tools that can 'support policy development' (syntax of this sentence needs improving)(Council of Europe n. d.). Secondly, The European Centre for Modern Languages in Austria, yet another department working under the umbrella of the Council of Europe work closely with the Language Policy Division, which concentrates on policy implementation (Council of Europe 2010). Finally, the 'European Centre for Regional or Minority Languages' (ECML), a 'unique Council of Europe convention', is dedicated to the protection and promotion of Regional and Minority languages in everyday life (Council of Europe 2010).

Chapter Two:

Study of English policy.

At present, the compulsory age at which children are to receive an education in England is from 5 years to 16 years old (DirectGov 2008). Children start school in 'Reception' (usually at the beginning of the academic year, however it is not compulsory until the child's 5th birthday). They are then able to leave school after the completion of their GCSEs in year 11, at the age of 16 (DirectGov 2008). The Government recognises that the current scheme is no longer effective, as "only around eight in ten stay on in some form of education or training" (DirectGov 2008). From 2013 the Government will introduce a new act whereby the compulsory age will increase from 16 years, up to 17 years of age (DirectGov 2008). This does not necessarily have to mean continuing studies full-time in secondary school or college but can include apprenticeships, as long as they work or volunteer more than 20 hours per week (DirectGov 2008). After the rise to 17 years in 2013, the Government will increase the compulsory age to 18 years as the second and final stage of the Act. This shall happen in 2015 (DirectGov 2008).

In the English secondary education system there are several different types of educational establishment, notably the comprehensive school, grammar school, specialist school, academy and the independent school. The comprehensive school is without doubt the most common school; all students of all abilities can attend the comprehensive school, whereas the grammar school requires an '11 plus' test in order to meet the entry requirements. By enforcing these tests the school can aim towards providing an education to pupils of a higher ability, theoretically maintaining an elevated (superior) standard over comprehensive schools. Specialist schools receive approved 'specialist' status in certain subject fields; the schools



often focus on these subjects and receive Government funding in order for them to further develop their specialism in the field. Academies are a more recent addition to the education system. Usually replacing failing schools, academies are funded by private companies but still maintain the National Curriculum and operate in a similar fashion to state schools. These state of the art academies also explore more modern teaching methods and can deviate from the average curriculum where necessary. Finally, independent schools are completely private; the parents of the child pay fees for their child's education. These schools work as private businesses effectively, and are exempt from following the National Curriculum. Independent schools are often associated with more prestigious families as the cost of a private education is very steep compared with a state education.

Under the Education Reform Act in 1988, the National Curriculum was formed, along with ' Key Stages' (DCSF 2010). These Key stages denote groups, according to age range, in order for pupils to be assessed more easily and more importantly to standardise and implement a set curriculum, ensuring schools are meeting the national requirements set by the Government. The following table shows the breakdown of the Key Stages within the National Curriculum's education system.

Key Stage (KS)

School Year

Age

School

Qualification

(where necessary)

EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage)

Reception

4-5

Infant School

N/A

KS 1

Y1, Y2

5-7

Primary/ Infant

Y2 - SATs

KS 2

Y3, Y4, Y5, Y6

7-11

Primary/ Junior

Y6 - SATs

KS 3

Y7, Y8, Y9

11-14

Secondary

Y9 - SATs

KS 4

Y10, Y11

14-16

Secondary

GCSEs

Sixth form

Post-16 education

Post-compulsory education

KS 5 (Unofficial)

Y12, Y13

16-18

Sixth form: School/ College

A Levels: Y12 - AS (Advanced Subsidiary)

Y13 - A2 (Advanced)

(DirectGov n. d.)

As mentioned above, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are sometimes separated into Infant and Junior schools, but it is more common to have both Key Stages together as one primary school. Likewise, Year 6, 7 and 8 are sometimes separated from Primary and Secondary schools to form Middle Schools; this however is not representative of the general setup of the Primary and Secondary education system. It is also worth noting that Key Stages are only implemented in 'maintained' schools (DirectGov n. d.). Independent schools need not adhere to the National Curriculum, thus the Key Stages are irrelevant to them (DirectGov n. d.). This again, does not generally represent the majority of the English system, as most pupils attend 'maintained' or 'state' schools as opposed to privately funded independent schools.

Direct. gov. uk is the UK Government's digital service, which provides 'information and practical advice' on all public services (DirectGov n. d.). DirectGov defines the National Curriculum on its site as 'a framework for all maintained schools to use'. This will 'ensure that learning and teaching remains balanced and consistent' across the broad spectrum of schools nationwide (DirectGov n. d.). Whilst schools are given the freedom over the organisation and delivery of the education within their own institution, (adapting this to the particular requirements of their pupils and of the establishment), they are still bound by guidelines regulating the quality and

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content of their teaching (DirectGov n. d.). The guidelines regulate a minimum amount of subjects that schools must teach; these differ slightly according to the different key stages (DirectGov n. d.). The progression and attainment of children in each subject is recorded and monitored by schools, who also receive targets and are monitored themselves on the overall performance of the school, also being compared with other schools nationally by Governmental agencies such as QCDA (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency) (DirectGov n. d.). These targets can help teachers prepare and change materials according to pupils' level of attainment (DirectGov n. d.). The National Curriculum also stipulates the 'knowledge, skills and understanding' that is required to be learned by pupils in every subject studied; again to ensure that the standard of teaching corresponds nationally.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), (now known as the QCDA) first published the current primary curriculum in 1999 (QCDA n. d.). Under this curriculum the teaching of languages is not compulsory in either Key Stage one or two. The Government have now developed a new primary curriculum which shall be implemented from September 2011. Under this new framework, children will experience a new curriculum preparing them for the "opportunities and challenges of life in the twenty-first century" (QCDA n. d.). As a part of this new policy, it will be a statutory requirement for all children aged from seven to eleven to learn at least one Modern Foreign Language in state education (QCDA n. d.). The introduction of this new policy does pose many challenges to primary schools that are now put under pressure to ensure that teaching staff are sufficiently trained to teach

a Modern Foreign Language. For the majority, French shall be the main language taught to Key Stage two pupils nationwide. However many other languages such as Spanish, German and Polish will also be taught, depending on the background of the teaching staff and students of the school. At this moment there have not been any guidelines stating the minimum or maximum duration of teaching time to be spent on languages, so long as it is practised a minimum of once per week.

Many schools have already started to prepare for this transition by introducing languages to their lessons, often from year 3 (KS2). By introducing these lessons earlier than the date of the statutory implementation in 2011, the schools have the opportunity to train teaching staff and introduce language teaching with ease, instead of an 'overnight' introduction. Secondary school language teachers have had a lot of involvement and have assisted greatly in the training of primary staff. The government have not revealed any specific assessment plans for languages in Key Stage two; therefore it is likely that only ongoing classroom assessments will be carried out on primary pupils. The Key Stage two curriculum stipulates pupils should learn basic vocabulary and general conversation such as introductions and simple questions and answers. The QCDA states that languages in primary education will promote an "active involvement in cultural life, society, work and lifelong learning", (QCDA n. d.). Starting language learning four years earlier than the preceding curriculum is undoubtedly going to improve national language learning standards as; when pupils enter Key Stage three, they will no longer need to start at a complete beginner's level. Having four years of experience in the

language already, high schools should notice a considerable jump in ability. This said (rephrase: too colloquial).; whilst the teaching methods could change closer to the introduction of the new curriculum, at the present moment, any language teaching in primary is being based on a simplified format of Key Stage three, therefore Key Stage three may require re-development in the languages field to cater with the shift in capability that will be materialising over the upcoming years.

It is worth noting also, the use of ' SATs' in primary education. The Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), are means of examining Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 pupils, at the end of each Key Stage, being year 2, 6 and 9 respectively (DirectGov n. d., SATs Guide n. d.). SATs used to assess three subjects: English, mathematics and science; however science has now been removed from the assessments after complaints from schools over the amount of stress and pressure these exams put on the teachers and the pupils. The Mirror reported on 17th April 2010 that two teacher unions have confirmed their support of a national boycott of the SATs exams which should be taking place on the 10th May, just four days after the 2010 General Elections (Mirror 2010). The general consensus on SATs exams is that they should be abolished entirely, along with national league tables (Mirror 2010). The Government's online information site ' Direct. gov. uk' already refers to the SATs tests as ' National Curriculum teacher assessments and key stage tests' (DirectGov n. d.). Referring to SATs under different terms certainly implies that they are trying to ' rebrand' the SATs under a different name or that they are refraining from popularising this name any further. The recently introduced ' Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) system may well replace

the SATs at some point in the future, but this system, based on constant monitoring of pupils' work instead of final exams is not likely to be introduced in the near future as the Government have not confirmed any plans, and the future of the SATS tests is still uncertain, despite its unpopularity.

Within secondary education, it is a mandatory requirement for pupils to learn a language at Key Stage 3 level, i. e. between the ages of 11-14, or year 7 to year 9. It is not compulsory to learn a language at any point after this time as pupils enter Key Stage 4; two years whereby they will study the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Whilst it is not compulsory to learn a language after Key Stage 3, some schools may insist that all students continue at least one language at GCSE level, especially if the school has specialist language school status.

The current secondary curriculum for key stages 3 and 4 was published in 2007 by the QCA, and was implemented from September 2008. This is the first time that the secondary curriculum has been designed for England solely (QCDA, n. d.). The QCDA claims that this curriculum was developed to raise standards in schools, ensuring that learners can deal with the challenges presented to them in twenty-first century society (QCDA, n. d.).

Within the programme of study for Key Stage 3 and 4, four 'key concepts' are provided to form a basis on which to develop language skills. 'Linguistic competence' practises the four main skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing, enabling learners to communicate effectively (QCDA, n. d.). 'Knowledge about the language' encourages pupils to develop the skills



necessary in order to comprehend a language, allowing them to identify similarities and differences in which they can manipulate to assist their ability (QCDA, n. d.). The concept of 'Creativity' explores the imagination and expression of the learner, using their current vocabulary as a means of conveying a point specific to a theme or a relevant context (QCDA n. d.). 'Intercultural understanding' meanwhile, addresses and values the existence of other cultures worldwide and the perceptions these may hold (QCDA n. d.).

The languages available to study in secondary school are usually French, Spanish and German, but there has been a huge increase in other languages both being learned and offered in secondary schools (Boyd 2001: 13). Until the introduction of the current curriculum, schools had to offer at least one official working language of the European Union, and any other language could be offered after, whereas the new curriculum relaxes this rule and permits any language to be taught so long as it is supported by the National Curriculum framework (Boyd 2001: 13).

Whilst SATs are completed at the end of Key Stage 3 or year 9, the two most significant exams are the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) for Key Stage 4, and the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A Level) for pupils in post-compulsory education.

GCSEs are the main qualification that the majority of the English population achieve before the end of their compulsory education; a pupil at school full time would expect to study approximately 10 GCSEs over the duration of two academic years. These qualifications are generally a pre-requisite to most

occupations and particularly for the progression on to the A level. Comprised of study, coursework and exams, usually at the end of the 2 year course, many GCSEs subjects are changing the syllabus to replace coursework with 'controlled assessments', in order to reduce the pressure and ensure that plagiarism is better controlled within the education system (DirectGov n. d.)

When choosing to study the A level, pupils can opt to either remain in school in 'sixth form' or attend community college, otherwise known as sixth form college. The A level is divided by the two years it takes to achieve the qualification; the first year is known as the 'Advanced Subsidiary', where students usually study 4 subjects, and the second year being the A2; students usually stop studying one subject to concentrate on three subjects at this point, this second year then completes the A level. Much speculation has prevailed over recent years due to the supposed short future for the A level. The truth in fact is that the A level was originally established in 1951 (Young, M. F 1998: 117), and has therefore become an antiquated qualification that, comma despite having been re-developed in 2000 to incorporate the AS level; qualifying the pass of the first year of A levels (needs rephrasing)(Davis 2001). When the A level was introduced only 3 in every 100 actually chose to complete the A level, compared to the modern day statistics that state that the A level rises each and every year, and that many A levels are effectively deemed useless as many subjects are now considered 'soft' by top UK universities, and therefore students having chosen these subjects are often disregarded from the application process of many universities; a great concern when considering that university is the usual progression route after the A level (Clark 2008). Taking into

consideration that all A level students currently opt to study, as this is not compulsory, it is important that the Government assess the future of this qualification. With the impending introduction of compulsory education until the age of 18, the pressure to develop the A level is becoming more intense. The growth of the International Baccalauréat (an equivalent qualification whereby a particular group of subjects is studied, dependent on the student's chosen path instead of individual subjects this parenthesis is too long) ) in England has suggested that it could influence the English be the future of our education (meaning not clear), but there is no likelihood of this occurring any time soon.

It is worth mentioning some governmental bodies that also play important roles in the English education system.

Firstly, Local Education Authorities (LEAs); although these often go unnoticed due to the National Curriculum and the central control of the education system by the Government, the LEAs do play an extremely significant part, comma particularly in the administrative sense of education. The country is divided into many LEAs, and it is these divisions that control the finance, recruitment and allocation of pupils for each state operated school within its jurisdiction. Local Education Authorities have a lot of involvement with higher education and student funding.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is a ' non-ministerial Governmental department' (Parliament 2007) that was established in 1992 to ' inspect and regulate to achieve excellence', both in child-care, care of young people and more commonly in education environments (Ofsted n. d.).

This regulatory body ensures that all establishments meet the national requirements and have the power to implement strict measures on schools, even the ability to close-down the establishment if absolutely necessary.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is a major Governmental department, created in 2007 from the former DfES; Department for Education and Skills (DCSF n. d.). The DCSF states that for the first time, due to its change from the DfES it now incorporates ' children, young people and their families' together under the same department (DCSF n. d.). The role of the department is to ' lead the whole network of people' whose work relates to children and young people, including all schools in the state education system (DCSF n. d.).

Finally, The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), formerly known as the QCA or the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, develop the curriculum and devise examinations, constantly improving the national teaching framework and keeping the English education system as one of the most prestigious and respected in the world (QCDA 2010)