Modern Languages vs. Social Sciences

A comparison of trends
2009-2012

A comparison of trends of modern languages and social sciences provides us with a useful benchmark because many pupils opt to study a social science instead of a modern language.
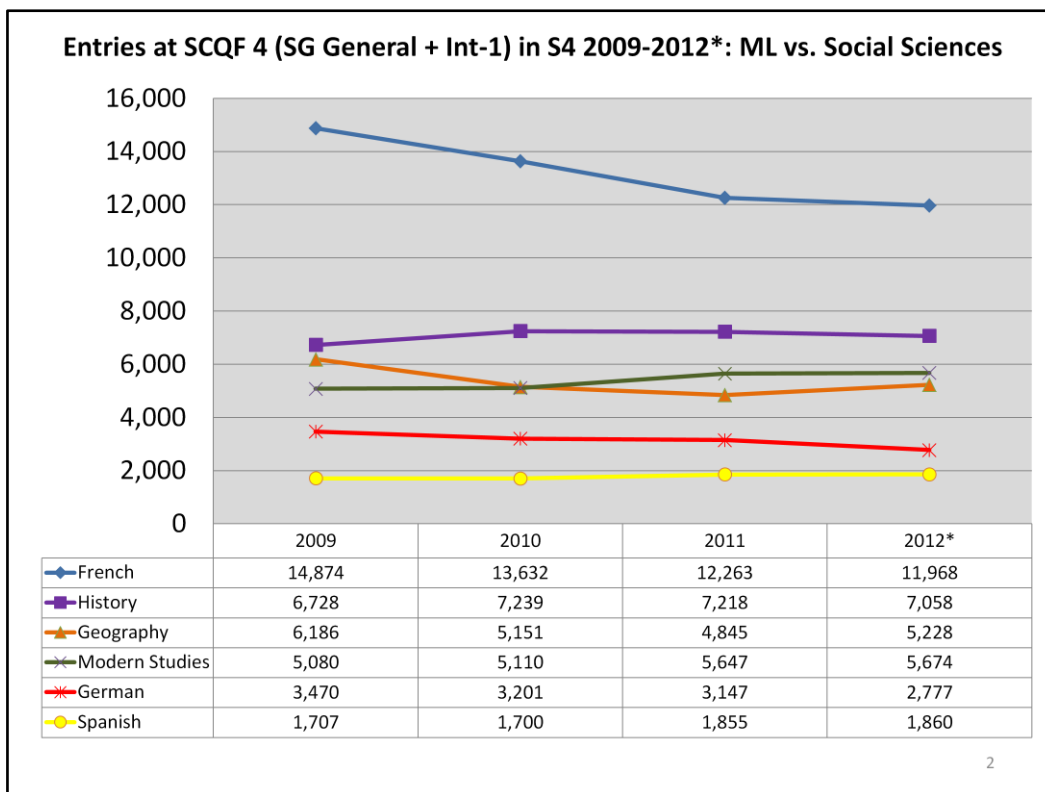
Headline Summary of Findings

French is still the most frequently studied modern language in S4 at SCQF Levels 4-5 (awards at Standard Grade General/Credit Level plus Intermediate 1-2). Uptake of French at those levels is still significantly above that of any social science (+20% compared to History).

German is still the second most frequently studied modern language in S4 at SCQF Levels 4-5, although the difference with **Spanish** appears to be narrowing. However, uptake at those levels is significantly below that of any social science (-58% compared to Modern Studies)

Notional conversion rates for **all three main modern languages** from awards at SCQF Level 5 in S4 (Standard Grade Credit Level plus Intermediate 2 awards) to awards at SCQF Level 6 (SQA Higher) are significantly below those for any of the social sciences.

Attainment levels in both **Spanish** and **French**, particularly with regard to A grade passes, are above those in the social sciences. However, the overall pass rate of **German** has dropped compared to 2011 to fall below that of any of the social sciences in 2012.

Entries at SCQF 4 (SG General + Int-1) in S4 2009-2012*: ML vs. Social Sciences

	2009	2010	2011	2012*
French	14,874	13,632	12,263	11,968
History	6,728	7,239	7,218	7,058
Geography	6,186	5,151	4,845	5,228
Modern Studies	5,080	5,110	5,647	5,674
German	3,470	3,201	3,147	2,777
Spanish	1,707	1,700	1,855	1,860

Notes

*NB: *2012 data are pre-appeal. 2012 awards for Intermediate 1 in S4 have been estimated. Entries in Italian are significantly below those of the other subjects so have been excluded.*
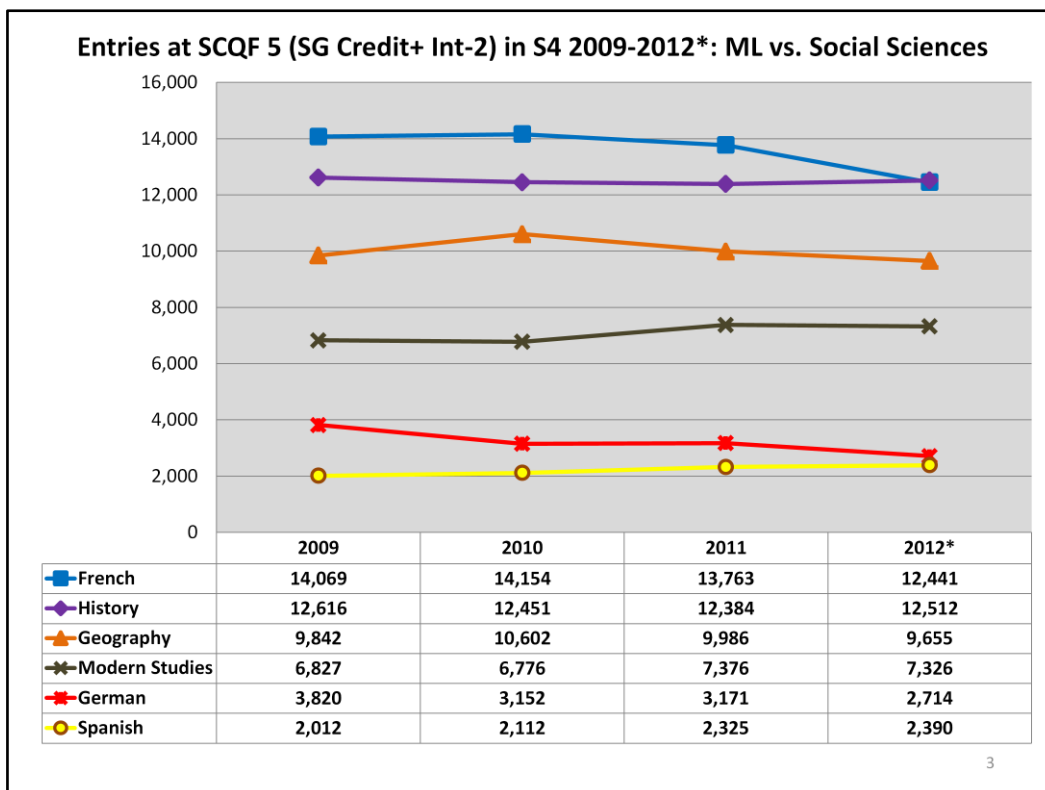
Because a significant number of schools have moved away from Standard Grade, we have added Intermediate 1 awards obtained in S4 to the Standard Grade General level awards to obtain a more accurate level of uptake at SCQF Level 4 in S4.

The data show that entries for French in S4 at SCQF 4 are significantly above any of the social sciences and other languages.

However, the data also suggest a significant decline in uptake for French and German compared to 2009 (-20% for both) and to a lesser decline compared to 2011 (-2% and -12% respectively)

German is still the more widely studied language at this level but the difference in entries with Spanish appears to be narrowing.

The trend of entries for the social sciences seems more positive, and entries for all three social sciences are above those for German or Spanish. The downward trend for Geography in 2010 and 2011 appears to have been reversed in 2012 (pre-appeal), although it is still below 2009 levels (-15%).

Entries at SCQF 5 (SG Credit+ Int-2) in S4 2009-2012*: ML vs. Social Sciences

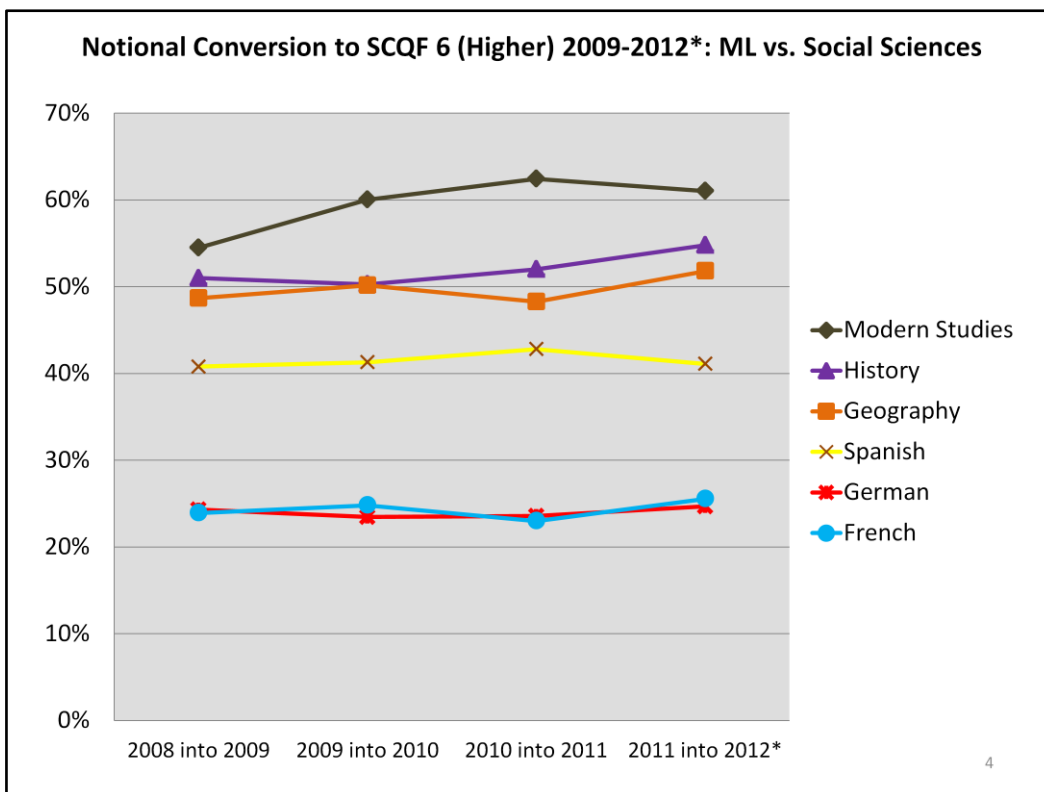|	2009	2010	2011	2012*
French	14,069	14,154	13,763	12,441
History	12,616	12,451	12,384	12,512
Geography	9,842	10,602	9,986	9,655
Modern Studies	6,827	6,776	7,376	7,326
German	3,820	3,152	3,171	2,714
Spanish	2,012	2,112	2,325	2,390

Notes

NB: *2012 data are pre-appeal. 2012 awards for Intermediate 2 in S4 have been estimated. Entries in Italian are significantly below those of the other subjects so have been excluded.

Calculating the number of awards at SCQF Level 5 provides us with a more accurate number of candidates who are likely to study the subject at Higher Grade the following year.

French and History have the highest number of candidates achieving SCQF Level 5, but entries for French are down (-12% compared to 2009, -10% compared to 2011), with History overtaking French in 2012 by a small margin.

Entries for Geography and Modern Studies at SCQF Level 5 are well above those for German or Spanish.

In S4, German still appears to be the most widely studied language after French, but the difference in uptake between German and Spanish at SCQF Levels 4 and 5 seems to be narrowing.
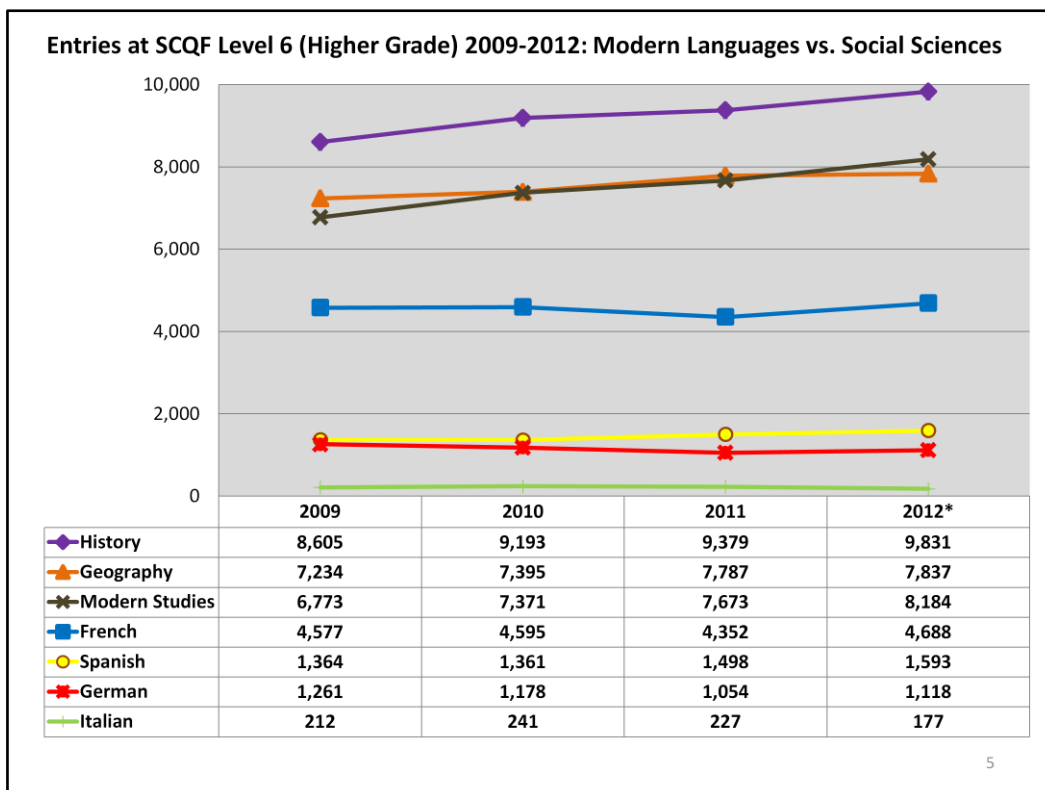
Notional Conversion to SCQF 6 (Higher) 2009-2012*: ML vs. Social Sciences

Notes

*NB: *2012 data are pre-appeal. Conversion rates for 2012 are estimated. Entries in Italian are significantly below those of the other subjects so have been excluded.*

For the above calculation we started with the total number of candidates that achieved either a Standard Grade Credit Level or an Intermediate 2 award in S4 (cf. Slide 3) and compared it to the total number of candidates that achieved a Higher Grade in that subject in S5 of the following year.

The data suggest that notional 'conversion' rates in modern languages from SCQF Level 5 to SCQF Level 6 (Higher Grade) are significantly below those in the social sciences. Spanish has the highest conversion rate of the three languages.

Entries at SCQF Level 6 (Higher Grade) 2009-2012: Modern Languages vs. Social Sciences

	2009	2010	2011	2012*
History	8,605	9,193	9,379	9,831
Geography	7,234	7,395	7,787	7,837
Modern Studies	6,773	7,371	7,673	8,184
French	4,577	4,595	4,352	4,688
Spanish	1,364	1,361	1,498	1,593
German	1,261	1,178	1,054	1,118
Italian	212	241	227	177

Notes

*NB: *2012 data are pre-appeal. The figures represent **ALL** entries at SQA Higher Grade in the given year, i.e. irrespective of whether the award was achieved in S5 or S6.*

Social Science entries at Higher Grade have been on an upward trend both in the short and long term. Noticeably entries in all three main social science subjects are significantly higher than in modern languages.

The trend for the 'big three' European languages has been mixed.

French continues to dominate entries and it has recovered from its dip in entries in 2011, with a modest increase compared to entries in 2009.

Spanish has continued its positive trend, cementing its position as the No2 modern language at Higher Grade, although still significantly below French.

Entries for German increased by 6% compared to last year but are still just below those of 2009.

Uptake for Italian at Higher is well below that of the other three languages and there has been a significant drop in entries both in the short and long term (-22% compared to 2011 and -17% compared to 2009).

Attainment at SCQF Level 6 (Higher Grade): Modern Languages vs. Social Sciences

	A	B	C	Pass Rate 2011	Pass Rate 2012*	D	No award	Entries 2012*
Spanish	49%	19%	17%	85%	85%	5%	10%	1,593
French	43%	21%	19%	84%	82%	7%	11%	4,688
German	32%	21%	23%	83%	76%	9%	16%	1,118
Geography	35%	24%	20%	78%	79%	8%	13%	7,837
History	29%	28%	22%	81%	79%	7%	14%	9,831
Modern Studies	29%	28%	25%	77%	82%	7%	11%	8,184

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Notes
*NB: *2012 data are pre-appeal. Entries in Italian are significantly below those of the other subjects so have been excluded.*

Spanish and French have the highest percentages of A grade passes (49% and 43% respectively), followed by Geography (35%) and German (32%).

Overall pass rates in 2012 (pre-appeal) are highest in Spanish (85%), followed jointly by French and Modern Studies (both 82%).

There has been a significant drop in the overall pass rate in German at Higher compared to 2011 to fall below that of any of the social sciences in 2012.