



Curriculum Improvement Cycle

LANGS

Tuesday 24th March 2026

Robbie Kirk



Introducing the ES Languages Team

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MEMBERSHIP OF CIC

1. Collaboration Group

Network of around 130 practitioners from every local authority in Scotland. who represent different sectors and contexts across the system.



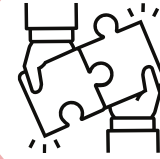
2. Core Group

Smaller team of around 35-40 practitioners from across primary, secondary, higher education, ITE, LANGS, SCILT and SQA.



3. Critical Friends

The team (around 20-25) should conduct a proof of concept, testing the new system.



4. Steering Group

The Steering Group (around 12) brings together senior leaders and representatives from across the system to provide strategic leadership



The Big Ideas in the Languages curriculum

Communicating and understanding in different languages



Understanding people, places and cultures



Thinking like a linguist



Languages - Concepts

March 2026

CONCEPTS

Big Idea: Communicating and understanding in different languages

- Understanding language
- Using language
- Language for Interaction

CONCEPTS

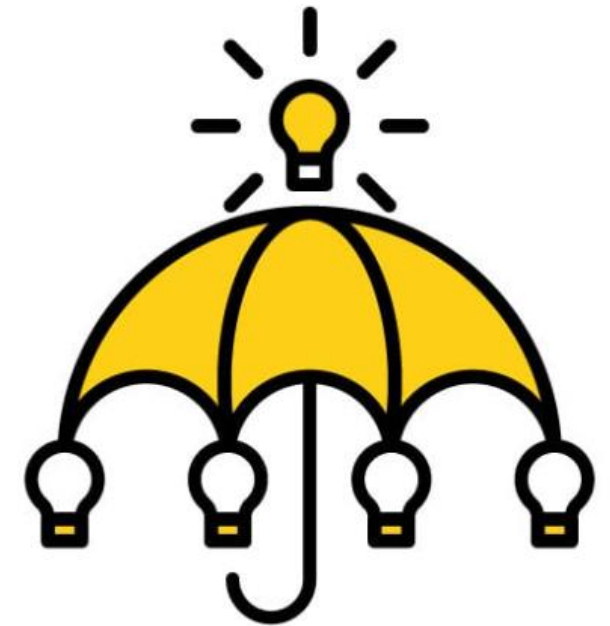
Big Idea: Understanding people, places and cultures

- Identity and Belonging
- Perspectives and Worldviews
- Cultures and Traditions

CONCEPTS

Big Idea: Thinking like a linguist

- Pattern and Structure
- Pronunciation, Signing and Writing Systems
- Language Learning Strategies



Purposes of the concepts (draft)

Concepts

March 2026



How language is interpreted

How meaning is expressed

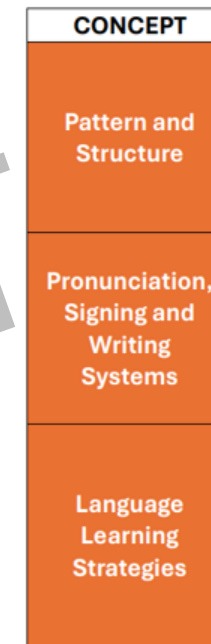
How meaning is constructed with others



Who people are and how they experience inclusion

How people see and interpret the world

How cultures are lived, expressed and changed



How language is organised grammatically

How language is physically and visually represented

How understanding of languages is developed and refined

DRAFT

Communicating and understanding in different languages

Concepts

March 2026

CONCEPT	DESCRIPTOR
Understanding Language	<i>Understanding Language</i> is how meaning in the target language is interpreted. It helps learners to develop their comprehension of the target language through a range of texts. Using context, prior knowledge and to demonstrate the time that support and complex lan
Using Language	<i>Using Language</i> is signing or writing and opinions by audience and pu patterns to new clarity and accur communicators.
Language for Interaction	<i>Language for Interaction</i> is everyday spoken strategies such as interaction, and language and int successful comm accuracy.

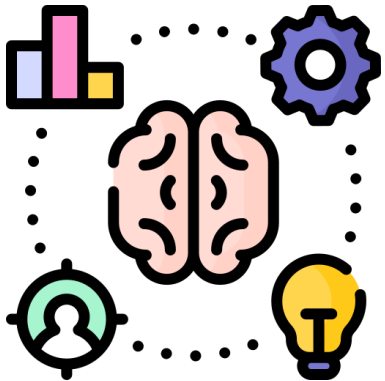
Understanding people, places and cultures

CONCEPT	DESCRIPTOR
Identity and Belonging	<i>Identity and Belonging</i> is about who people are and how they experience shapes id explore h reflects n and repre
Perspectives and Worldviews	<i>Perspectives and Worldviews</i> is about understanding perspectives experience reflects challenge
Cultures and Traditions	<i>Cultures and Traditions</i> is about how cultures and chan express v cultures a cultures a appreciat

Thinking like a linguist

CONCEPT	DESCRIPTOR
Pattern and Structure	<i>Pattern and Structure</i> is about understanding how languages are organised to create meaning. By exploring and comparing language systems, learners recognise how grammar and structure shape understanding. They learn how clear organisation supports communication and how familiar patterns can be adapted and applied flexibly in new or unfamiliar contexts.
Pronunciation, Signing and Writing Systems	<i>Pronunciation, Signing and Writing Systems</i> is about building understand of how language is physically and visually represented through sound, visual, sign and written form. By recognising patterns across these systems, learners develop the ability to interpret and produce language with clarity. This supports accurate communication in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts.
Language Learning Strategies	<i>Language Learning Strategies</i> is about developing a range of techniques to build understanding when learning new languages. By selecting, adapting and combining approaches, learners make sense of new language, cope with uncertainty and test ideas. They draw on prior knowledge, use tools and metalanguage, and reflect on progress to become more independent and effective language learners.

Conceptual Knowledge in the evolving technical framework



Receptive/productive skills

Language Progression Descriptor – DRAFT

In languages, progression reflects how learners' ability to understand and use language **develops over time** across the **full breadth of learning**. Progression in language development is characterised by **increasing length and coherence of responses**, a **gradual reduction in support**, and **greater spontaneity** in communication. As learners progress through the levels, they draw on an **increasingly wide range of vocabulary and language structures to express and develop ideas**, **applying familiar language in new and less predictable contexts**. Judgements about progression consider the **totality of the curriculum** and are informed by evidence gathered over time from a **range of learning experiences and assessment approaches**, rather than from single tasks or one-off performances.

Conceptual Understanding

Layer 2 focuses on the development of conceptual understanding. It provides the key components of what is required to **develop deeper conceptual understanding** as opposed to surface memorisation or procedural fluency.

These components are **what we want learners to know conceptually about each concept** and **how we want learners to apply their knowledge** (the practices, strategies and skills that comprise the do element).

These are the two fundamental features of developing understanding. Without either aspect it is not possible to develop understanding at a conceptual level.

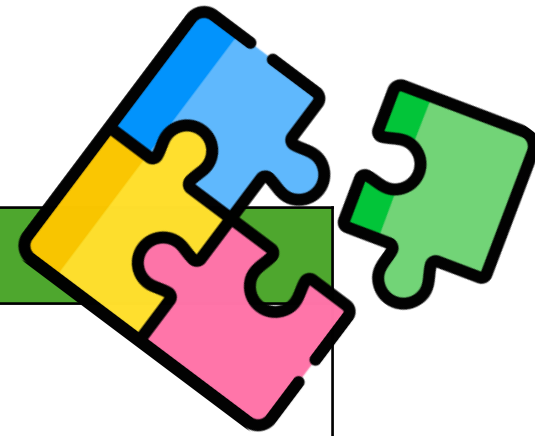


Layering conceptual knowledge and skills

There may be some **concepts that will span all levels**; some may be more ‘foundational’ in that they may appear at earlier levels; or some may only appear at later levels.

The Languages concepts are designed to span all levels and languages and provide clarity about what learners should conceptually understand at each stage of their learning.

The Layers and their Functions



Layer 2 – Understanding and Thinking	
Conceptual Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets out what learners understand about language, culture and communication.• Focuses on key ideas that apply across all the languages, such as how meaning is constructed, how language reflects identity, how patterns shape communication• About building shared understanding, not completing tasks.
Disciplinary Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describes how learners think and make sense of language• Reflects what it means to be a linguist and intercultural communicator.
Layer 3 – Knowledge and Application	
Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defines knowledge learners can recall and use.• Includes things like vocabulary, grammatical features, conventions, and key facts.
Procedures, Practices and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describes what learners can do with the language/knowledge• Shows how learners use their knowledge in real communication

Languages – Communicating and understanding in different languages

Conceptual knowledge – all levels

March 2026

Communicating and understanding in different languages

		Thinking like a Linguist			
		What do we want learners to understand?			
		Pattern and Structure	Pronunciation, Signing and Writing Systems	Language Learning Strategies	
Lang attitu	Identity and Be	<p><i>Identities are shaped by experie languages, beliefs and traditio</i></p>	<p><i>Languages are organised in patterns. Words, sounds, and sentence structures follow systems that help create meaning. Changes in form, such as word order or verb endings, can change meaning.</i></p>	<p><i>Different languages use different sound, signing, and writing systems. They may use letters, characters, symbols, or other visual forms to represent meaning.</i></p>	<p><i>Learning a language involves using a range of approaches to understand, remember, and use new words, sounds, and structures.</i></p>
Texts a con tone, facial	Prior unde	<p><i>People can hold more than one can change over time. People n national and transnational cult</i></p>	<p><i>Languages use different patterns and structures, which can be compared to notice similarities and differences between languages.</i></p>	<p><i>Knowledge of sounds, signs, and writing systems helps people recognise, understand, and use language in new or unfamiliar contexts.</i></p>	<p><i>Language learning often involves partial understanding and uncertainty. Making informed guesses and testing ideas supports progress.</i></p>
Topic influe	Mean listen	<p><i>Clear structure helps spoken, signed, and written language to be understood, including how ideas connect across sentences.</i></p>			<p><i>Metalanguage is used to talk about language, recognise patterns, and understand how languages work.</i></p>
Understanding t					

Layering conceptual knowledge and skills

The Languages concepts are designed to span all levels and languages and provide clarity about what learners should **conceptually understand at each stage of their learning.**

Understanding Language

Language can communicate information, opinions, attitudes, and viewpoints.

Texts have meaning which is supported and shaped by a combination of words, structures, sounds, images, tone, and non-verbal features such as gesture and facial expression.

Topic, situation, audience, purpose, and culture influence how language is understood.

Prior knowledge and context can be used to understand texts with unfamiliar language.

Meaning can be explicit or implicit, and readers and listeners may need to infer ideas.

DRAFT



Communicating and Understanding in Different Languages	
Concept: Understanding Language	
Conceptual Knowledge	
Early	<p>Language can share simple messages through words, sounds, pictures and actions.</p> <p>Meaning can be understood without knowing every word.</p> <p>Facial expression, gesture and tone help to show meaning.</p> <p><i>Language enables people to communicate simple messages through words, sounds, images and actions. Understanding does not depend on knowing every word, as meaning can often be inferred from context. Facial expression, gesture and tone of voice all contribute to how messages are interpreted and understood.</i></p>
First	<p>Understanding involves selecting meaning from language using clues and patterns.</p> <p>Meaning in language comes from words, sounds and simple patterns working together.</p> <p>Visual clues, context and prior knowledge help people understand what they hear or read.</p> <p>The same message can be expressed in different ways.</p> <p><i>Understanding language involves actively determining meaning by using clues and recognising patterns. Meaning is created through the way language structures work together. Visual cues, context and prior knowledge support comprehension of what is communicated. The same message can be communicated in different ways.</i></p>
Second	<p>Meaning is constructed through vocabulary, structure and context working together.</p> <p>Meaning is built from vocabulary and simple sentence structure.</p> <p>Word order and grammatical markers affect meaning.</p>
	<p>Context and topic help readers and listeners understand unfamiliar language.</p> <p>Texts may include both information and simple opinions.</p> <p><i>Meaning is constructed through vocabulary, structure and context working together. It is built from words and simple sentence patterns, where word order and basic grammatical markers shape how a message is understood. Context and topic provide important support, helping readers and listeners make sense of unfamiliar language. Texts can convey both information and simple opinions, and recognising this supports fuller comprehension.</i></p>
Third	<p>Meaning is constructed through relationships within sentences. not individual words alone.</p> <p>Time reference, conjunctions and pronouns shape how ideas are understood.</p> <p>Texts reflect viewpoint and purpose.</p> <p>Understanding requires interpreting how ideas connect across sentences.</p> <p><i>Meaning is constructed through the relationships between words and phrases within and across sentences. Time reference, conjunctions and pronouns shape how ideas are sequenced and understood. Texts reflect a particular viewpoint and purpose, and effective understanding involves interpreting how ideas connect and develop across sentences.</i></p>
Fourth	<p>Meaning comes from the interaction of vocabulary, structure and viewpoint within context.</p> <p>Texts are organised to develop ideas and express perspective.</p> <p>Audience and purpose influence how language is shaped and interpreted.</p> <p>Meaning may be implicit as well as explicit.</p> <p><i>Meaning comes from the interaction of vocabulary, grammar and context. Texts are organised to develop ideas and express perspective, with language shaped by audience and purpose. Understanding involves recognising not only what is stated explicitly, but also what is implied.</i></p>

Progression

	Understanding Language	Using Language	Language for Interaction
Early/ First	Learners recognise key words and familiar patterns, using context, visuals and prior knowledge to understand the overall message.	Learners reproduce and adapt familiar words and short phrases in predictable contexts.	Learners take turns and respond using gesture, facial expressions or words and phrases in modelled language with support.
Second	Learners create meaning using vocabulary and emerging knowledge of structure, identifying main ideas and key detail.	Learners build simple sentences, combining ideas and maintaining short communication, using words and extended phrases.	Learners initiate and maintain short dialogues, asking questions and providing short answers using familiar and predictable language.
Third	Learners interpret how meaning develops across sentences, including time reference, linking and viewpoint.	Learners produce connected language, express in basic language and organise ideas logically.	Learners extend interaction with follow-up questions and responding with basic language using learned material.
Fourth	Learners interpret how vocabulary, structure and context interact to shape explicit and implicit meaning.	Learners communicate with increasing control, adapting simple language for audience, purpose and context.	Learners maintain discussion, respond to viewpoints and adapt language to manage interaction.

Communicating and understanding in different languages – conceptual knowledge by level

Understanding language

Communicating and Understanding in Different Languages			
Concept: Understanding Language			
	Conceptual Knowledge	Skills	Language Resource
Early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language communicates meaning through sounds, signs, words, images and actions. People can often understand the message without recognising every word or sign. Visual and auditory cues such as gesture, facial expression, movement and tone support understanding. Repetition in songs, stories and routines helps learners recognise meaning. 	<p>Recognition and supported comprehension. Awareness and recognition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice that language is being used to communicate meaning. Recognise familiar words, signs, sounds or patterns in context. Make simple connections between language and actions, objects or visuals. Respond to meaning through observation and imitation. Notice key features such as repetition, gesture or tone. 	<p>Single words and short familiar phrases.</p>
First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaning is created when words, sounds or signs combine in simple patterns. Understanding involves using clues from context, images and prior knowledge. People often understand the overall message even when some language is unfamiliar. The same idea or message can be 	<p>Selecting meaning from familiar language with support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key words, signs or elements that carry meaning in a message. Use context, visuals and prior knowledge to make sense of language. Recognise familiar patterns in 	<p>Familiar words and short phrases in basic contexts.</p>

Communicating and understanding in different languages

Know/Do (layer 3)

Understanding Language



Level	KNOW	Practices, Procedures and Skills
		Learners are able to:
Early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words, sounds or signs, characters or symbols can represent objects, actions or ideas. People use language to communicate messages. Gesture, facial expression, tone or movement can support understanding. Songs, stories and rhymes often repeat the same words, signs or patterns. Meaning can be supported by context, such as actions, images of familiar routines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond physically to familiar words or phrases. Follow simple one-step instructions supported by gesture, images or objects. Recognise familiar greetings and routine expressions. Match spoken or signed words to pictures or objects. Join in with repeated words or phrases in songs, rhymes or stories. Show understanding through pointing, selecting or acting. Recognise when language relates to a familiar classroom routine. Respond to simple questions through gesture, single words or repetition.
First	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some words or signs in a message carry the main meaning. Understanding does not always require recognising every word, sign or character. Context such as pictures, topic, situation or prior knowledge can help identify meaning. Intonation, gesture or expression, movement or tone can influence meaning. In some languages, tone or pitch can change meaning. Questions, instructions and statements often follow recognizable patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand familiar words and short phrases in clear speech. Follow basic classroom instructions with visual support. Identify the main idea in a short spoken or written message. Pick out specific information such as names, numbers or colours. Use pictures and prior knowledge to support understanding. Recognise repeated words or patterns in short texts. Recognise simple questions and instructions.

Understanding people, places and cultures – conceptual knowledge by level

Cultures and Traditions

Understanding People, Places and Cultures			
Concept: Cultures and Traditions			
	Conceptual Knowledge	Skills	Language Resource
Early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People take part in different celebrations, routines and traditions. • Cultural experiences can include food, clothing, music, stories, games and events. • People may celebrate or do things in different ways in different places. • Language is part of songs, stories and celebrations. • Learning about different traditions helps us understand others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice different celebrations, routines and cultural experiences. • Recognise familiar cultural items or activities. • Show curiosity about different traditions. • Respond to cultural experiences through play, stories or interaction. • Make simple connections to their own experiences. 	<p>At Early Level, learners are introduced to people, places and cultures through play, stories, songs and visuals. The focus is on recognising and responding to simple words, sounds, signs and symbols such as greetings, colours or flags. Target language is used in small, meaningful chunks, while the language of instruction supports understanding. Learners mainly respond through actions, matching or selecting, with very limited production such as repeating a word or joining in. They <u>begin to notice</u> that people and places can be different.</p>

Understanding people, places and cultures

Know/Do (layer 3)

Cultures and Traditions

Level	KNOW	DO
Early	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celebrations exist in different countries or places.• Food, clothing, music and festivals can be part of culture.• Daily routines may be different in different places.• Flags, landmarks or symbols can represent places.• Simple words or phrases are used in greetings or routines.• People may do things in different ways.	<p>Learners are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognise familiar cultural items in visual or spoken texts.• Identify a celebration or tradition when named.• Use single words or short phrases to name a cultural feature.• Respond appropriately in simple cultural routines, for example greetings.• Take part in simple cultural activities.• Recognise simple symbols, landmarks or features linked to places.
First	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Festivals and celebrations may be linked to a country or region.• Cultural practices may differ from their own experience.• Symbols such as flags, food or clothing can represent culture and place.• Familiar vocabulary can describe celebrations and activities.• Language can be used in songs, stories and simple cultural events.• Similarities and differences can be described.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand short descriptions of simple traditions with support.• Identify key features of a celebration or event.• Produce short phrases describing a cultural practice.• Ask and answer simple questions about celebrations.• Compare two traditions using simple statements.
Second	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyday routines may follow cultural patterns.• Traditions may differ within a country or place.• Cultural identity can be expressed through food,	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand short phrases describing daily life in another place.• Identify similarities and differences between

Current thinking re: NPF

(Early-2nd level)

More guidance re:
contexts for learning /
topics / language
coverage

A 'base' level /
'universals' BUT
opportunities for greater
depth

- Concept-led progression framework
- Four skills (RLTW) to assess/evidence progress; not as organisers of curriculum (like in Es and Os)
- Exemplification of language early-7th level to support professional judgement
- Language-specific productive grammar progression grids to complement curriculum
- Gaelic (Learners) with separate technical framework
- BSL & Scots (Learners) part of Languages family

(3rd-7th level)

More autonomy to reflect
subject-specific
expertise and different
school contexts

Contexts for learning /
suggested topic
development?



CIC Languages: learner survey



Tell us what you think about learning languages

We want to hear your views about learning languages at school.

This short questionnaire is part of a national piece of work to help improve the school curriculum in Scotland.

Your answers will help the team designing the curriculum understand what is working well and what could be better.

There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your honest opinions and experiences.

Thank you for taking the time to share your voice.

Education Scotland - Languages
Pupil Feedback 2026



Responses

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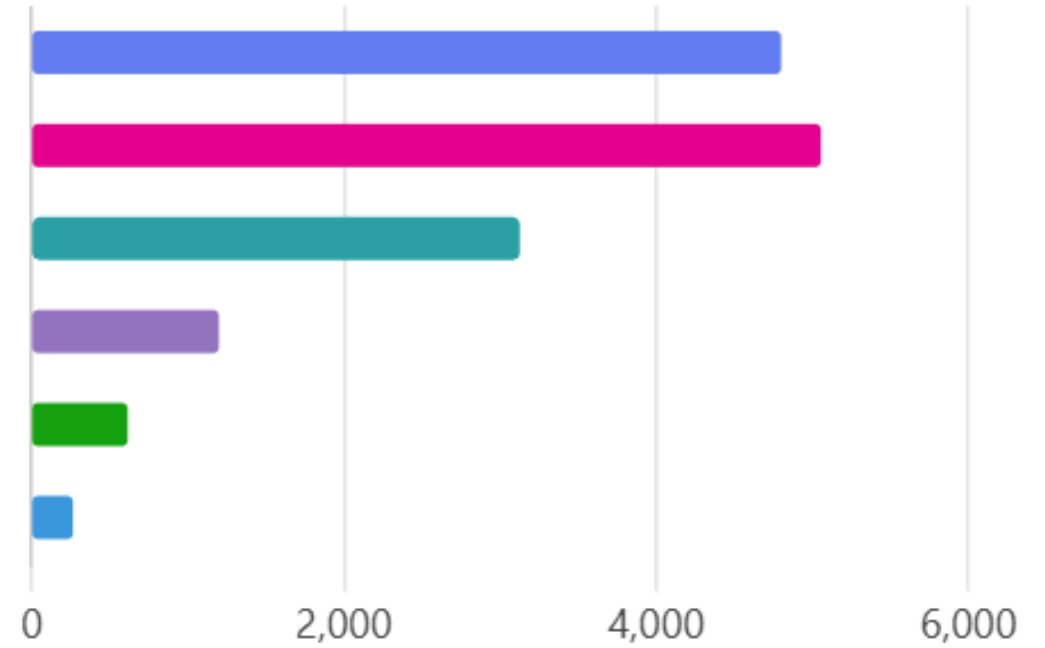
Participation by Local Authority

Aberdeen City Council	206	Glasgow City Council	1606		
Aberdeenshire Council	864	Highland Council	918		
Angus Council	239	Inverclyde Council	330		
Argyll and Bute Council	461	Midlothian Council	203		
Edinburgh City Council	847	Moray Council	153	South Lanarkshire Council	194
Clackmannanshire Council	29	North Ayrshire Council	689	Stirling Council	101
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	307	North Lanarkshire Council	1277	West Dunbartonshire Council	376
Dumfries and Galloway Council	210	Orkney Islands Council	67	West Lothian Council	212
Dundee City Council	155	Perth and Kinross Council	155	Other	66
East Ayrshire Council	266	Renfrewshire Council	734		
East Dunbartonshire Council	500	Scottish Borders Council	642		
East Lothian Council	104	Shetland Islands Council	230		
East Renfrewshire Council	629	South Ayrshire Council	549		
Falkirk Council	1146				
Fife Council	434				

Participation by Year Group

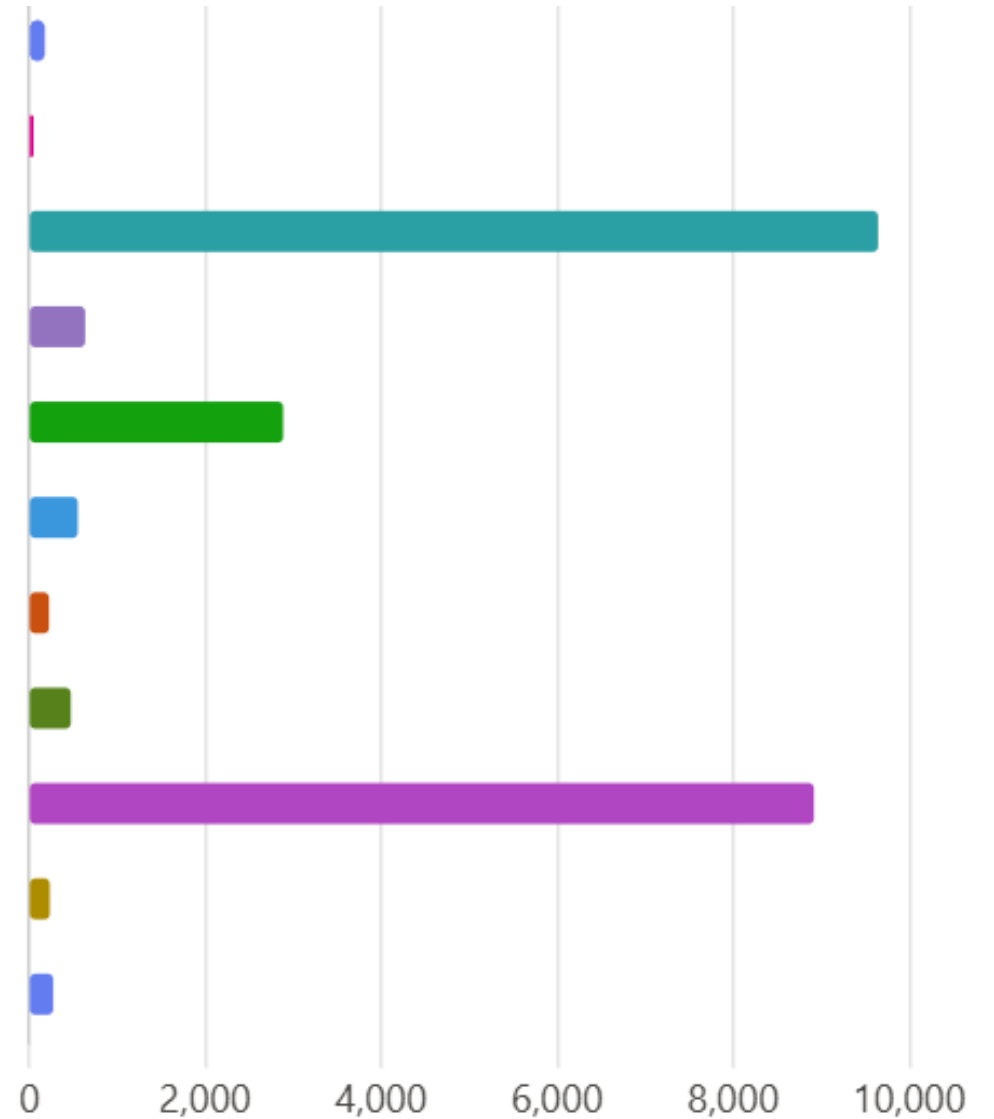
2. What year group are you in?

● S1	4792
● S2	5047
● S3	3120
● S4	1192
● S5	608
● S6	257



Participation by Language

British Sign Language	165
Cantonese	36
French	9634
Gaelic (Learners)	623
German	2873
Italian	539
Latin	212
Mandarin	460
Spanish	8905
Urdu	221
Other	260

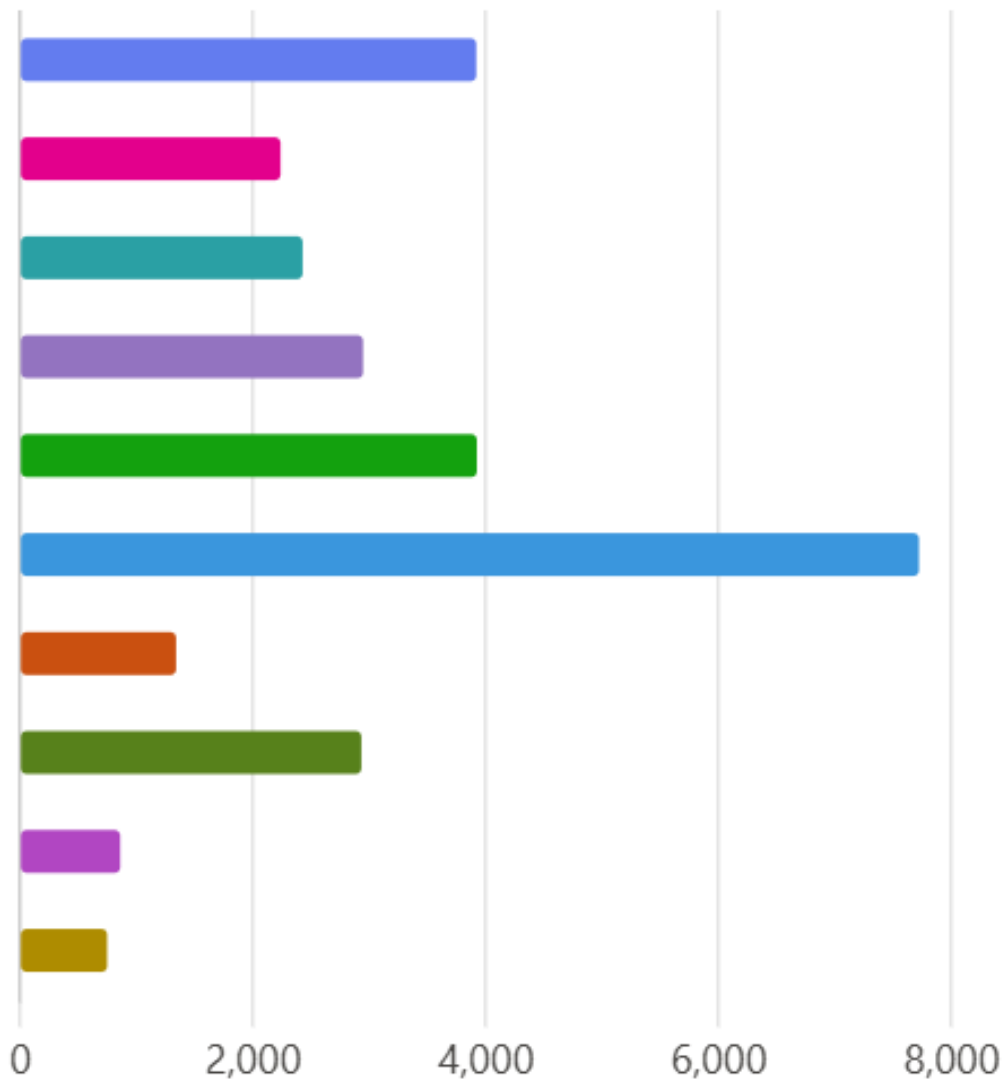


Overall, how much do you enjoy learning languages at school?



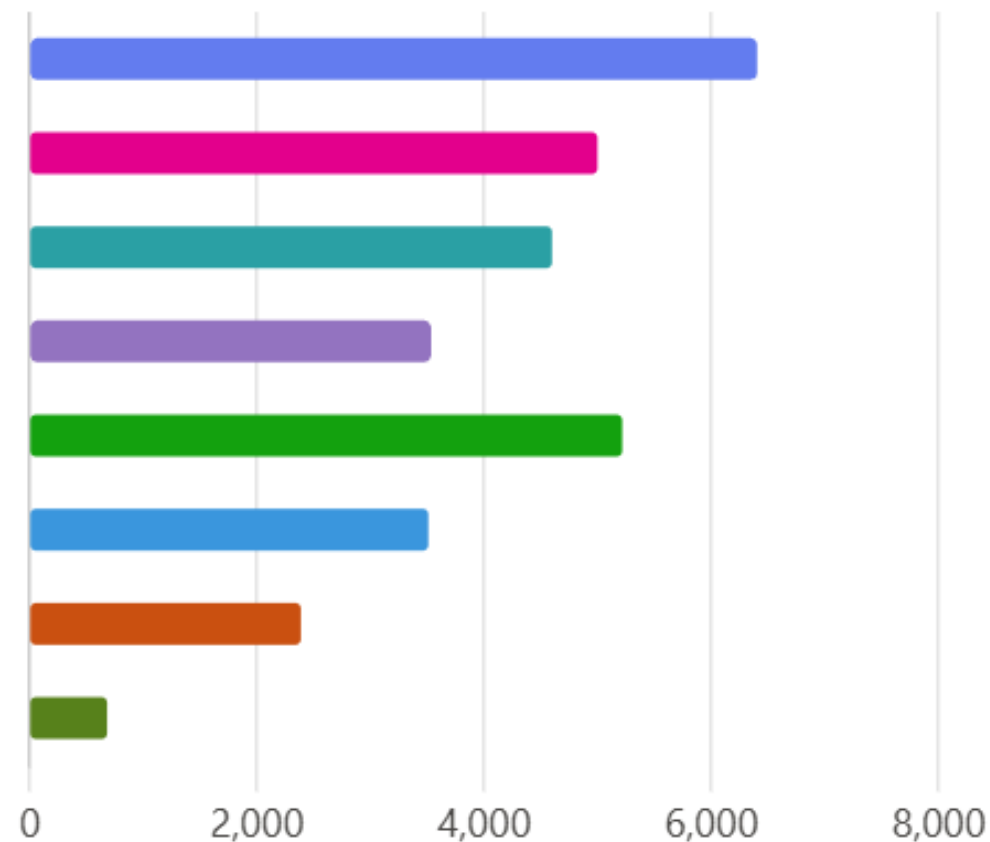
Which parts of language learning do you enjoy most?

Talking and conversations	★	3906
Listening activities		2225
Reading activities		2415
Writing activities		2934
Learning about other cultures	★	3911
Games and interactive activities	★	7708
Grammar and how language works		1328
Using digital tools		2919
Prefer not to say		848
Other		736

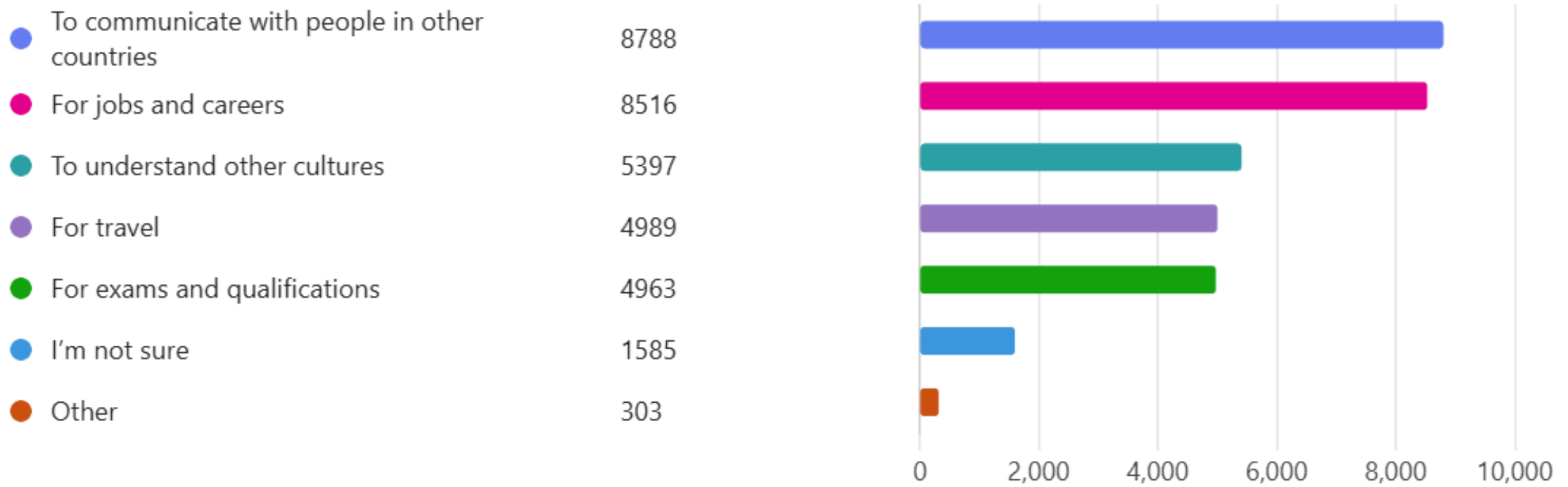


Which parts do you find most challenging?

Remembering vocabulary	6392
Pronunciation	4986
Grammar	4586
Listening	3521
Talking in the language	5204
Writing in the language	3498
Reading	2376
Other	671



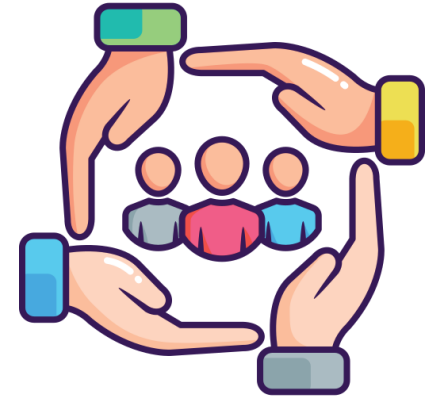
Why do you think schools want young people to learn languages?



What matters most to you when learning a language?



Focus Groups and engagement



- 20 primary schools, 36 focus groups 378 learners
- 1 focus group, ELC/P1
- 2 secondary schools, 73 learners
- 1 GME school, 16 learners
- Wider engagement, 11 local authorities, including West Lothian, East Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire, Glasgow City, Falkirk, Edinburgh City, West Dunbartonshire, Moray, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.
- LANGS, British Council Event, SALT, Spotlight Week in May, IFE, BnG, Goethe Institut, Cultural Institutes.

Next steps

- More primary focus groups
- Focus groups with primary practitioners
- Wider engagement with local authorities, planned activities with Argyll and Bute, Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, NLC, SLC, the 3 Ayrshires, Shetland and Orkney.



What's next?

Critical Friends group (25th March)
Reviewing the work of the core & collab groups

Core group (28th/29th March) –
language-specific grammar guidance/frameworks/resources

Core/collaboration group
2 core days (27th/28th April)
2 core days (19th/20th May)
1 collaboration group (28th May)

Publication of Background and Evidence Paper
Detailed analysis of pupil survey results and focus groups
Exemplification of levels and commentaries
Working with Qualifications Scotland
Social media campaign – shorts, blog for LinkedIn
Publication of curriculum materials June 2026



Any questions or feedback?

Get in touch with us:

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