

# Modern Languages in Scotland: Learner Uptake and Attainment 1996-2014

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**Abstract:** Drawing upon a substantial evidence base and employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, this paper examines the post-war 'rise and fall' cycles of Modern Language (ML) uptake and attainment in Scotland in the context of both political and educational governance of Scottish education at national, local authority and school levels. The paper provides a systematic attempt to gather the available evidence on patterns of ML enrolment and attainment and the causes of these patterns. The findings of the paper suggest a strong link between the fluctuating nature and quality of Scottish politico-educational governance and the periods of growth and decline in Modern Languages. These findings are of particular interest as the current downward trends in ML uptake and attainment are nearing levels only once reached before in the late 1980s. The paper offers some insights into why this may be the case and how these issues might be addressed.

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**Keywords:** language statistics, language policy, language initiatives, governance, Scotland

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## Introduction

There has been repeated (although not sustained) discussion in Scotland, both within educational governance groups and the media, of Modern Languages (MLs) as a declining subject area in schools, resulting in intermittent government action to address ML issues. There has, however, been little research or evaluation of the causes of decline or the extent of the problem since a sequence of papers from the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching (SCILT) in the mid to late 1990s. The most significant of these papers was the so-called FLUSS report, *Foreign Languages in the Upper Secondary School: A Study of the Causes of Decline* (McPake et al, 1999), which provided an in-depth analysis of the then-current ML situation and analysed its causes. FLUSS followed immediately after the last major evaluation report on MLs by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education [HMI, later HMIE]: *Standards and Quality, primary and secondary schools, 1994-98: Modern Languages* (HMI, 1998). The joint impact of the 1998 HMI report and FLUSS caused high-level political action but subsequent HMIE reports (HMIE, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) on MLs have failed to achieve such impact, reflecting further decline in societal interest in MLs and changes in the balance of influence within Scottish educational governance. This impression is further reinforced since no major research has taken place in this curricular area since FLUSS, although SCILT have very lately examined recent ML trends in a sequence of papers (Doughty 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

In an era where accountability has been paramount, it seems unusual that the last three significant research and evaluation documents date from two decades ago. This paper seeks to partially redress this gap, examining how uptake and attainment across MLs have changed since the middle/late 1990s. The paper also provides a context for these changes by examining the patterns of learner involvement and success leading up to 1996 and relating any rise and fall in that earlier period to contemporaneous governance actions designed to improve education in the wider sense and/or MLs in particular. Previous studies related to the topic of this paper have examined societal responses to foreign countries and their languages; the motivations of learners, parents and teachers and aspects of pedagogy and resourcing. This study, however, examines the post-war 'rise and fall' cycles of Modern Language uptake and attainment in the context of both political and educational governance of Scottish education at national, local authority and school levels.

## **Methodology**

This paper is an extension of some aspects of the work carried out for a recent doctoral thesis. As does this paper, the thesis adopted a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach, combining and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data sets through a two-stage process of triangulation. The choice of an MMR approach was made as it supported a combination of qualitative and quantitative research and offered a means of dealing with the need to use both predetermined and emerging methods (Creswell, 2003:17).

This study draws upon a substantial evidence base originally gathered for the thesis, comprising national, local authority and school policies; Scottish Examination Board (SEB)/Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) data from 1965 to 2014 on language availability, course enrolment and attainment statistics; minutes, papers and testimonies of members of national working parties; national agency documentation; Inspectorate reports on individual schools and on Modern Languages as a whole; previous research on Modern Languages in primary and secondary schools; national, local authority and school publications and website pages relating to Modern Languages and, lastly, a set of eighty questionnaires provided to key governance agents (at national, authority and school levels) and forty follow-up interviews with selected key governance agents.

Triangulation of the data and analysis of the subsequent findings have demonstrated that the decline of Modern Languages is not a new phenomenon, although the process has again accelerated, particularly within the last decade. The research has also examined why, how and how effectively governance systems, groups and linkages have functioned, providing a new insight on why Modern Languages policies and initiatives at all governance levels have not consistently generated the intended outcomes in terms of learner/parent/headteacher interest and/or motivation, course enrolments or improved levels of attainment.

## Context

Universal secondary education, a pre-1939 objective, did not come into being in Scotland until the years following the Second World War (Paterson, 2003). Before this post-war growth, MLs in Scotland were the province of ‘a bookish minority’ (SED, 1947: 90) among secondary pupils and were not part of the primary curriculum. Due to a combination of factors including the post-war ‘baby boom’, parental aspirations for a better future (including university entrance) for their children, the decline of Classics, the 1950 replacement of the grouped Leaving Certificate by individual awards and finally the impending arrival of Ordinary Grade qualifications in 1962, that position changed radically during the 1950s, leading to an increasing demand from learners for the new Ordinary Grade ML courses and for ML Highers (Paterson, 2011:110-111; Philip, 1992; SEB, 1947: 78-82; SEB, 1959a: SED, 1959b).

The rise of MLs was not, however, merely a result of rising populations or of a clamour for ‘qualifications for all’ in a system which at that time split young people between senior secondary schools for the most able and junior secondaries where learners were more likely to encounter practical subjects than MLs. By the mid-1960s, governmental statistics (Paterson, 2003, p.133; Philip, 1992, p.110; SEB, 1965, 1966, 1967) confirmed that MLs had experienced significant growth, both in the extent of the curriculum occupied and in the proportion of examination entries attracted, for the last decade. In the mid-1960s, MLs appeared to be one of the main components of the Scottish curriculum (Johnstone, 1999:527) - alongside English and Mathematics, the Sciences and the Social Subjects – for any pupil with a desire to do well, either in tertiary education or the world of employment.

This proved, however, to be the first of two ‘high water marks’ for MLs. As Figures 1-2 demonstrate, the subsequent two decades through to the mid-1980s saw both learner enrolment for ML courses and learner attainment in these courses fall steadily. Both Tables are ‘standardised’ to remove the impacts of rapidly changing learner populations (rising rapidly to the mid-1970s, briefly holding at those levels and then falling away equally rapidly) by calculating the ML enrolment or attainment as a percentage of the overall enrolment or attainment across all subjects at the same Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels. In effect, the two tables show the ‘market share’ of ML enrolment and attainment at Levels 3-5 (O Grade, then S Grade, then ‘old’/‘new’ National Qualifications), Level 6 (Higher) and Level 7 (Certificate of Sixth Year Studies, then Advanced Higher) and follow parallel paths from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, with attainment inevitably somewhat lower than enrolment.

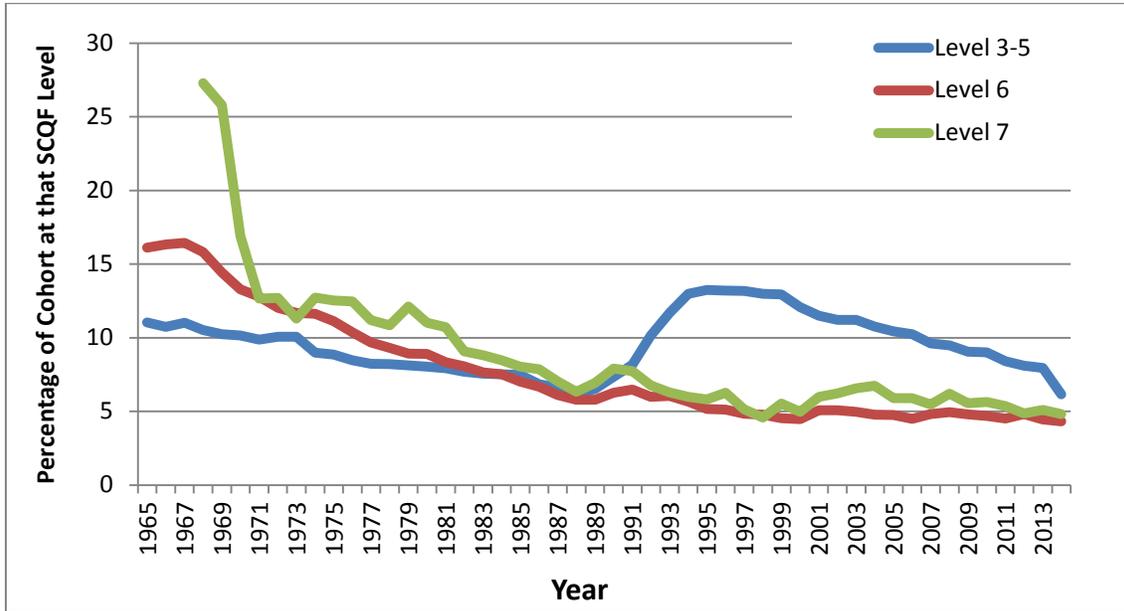


Figure 1: ML Enrolments (1965-2014) at Levels 3-5 combined, and 6-7 as Percentages of Overall Uptake at Those SCQF Levels

NB. Level 7 courses did not commence until the late 1960s: French was one of the first three subjects offered, followed by other subjects in the following year, thus distorting the first few percentages.

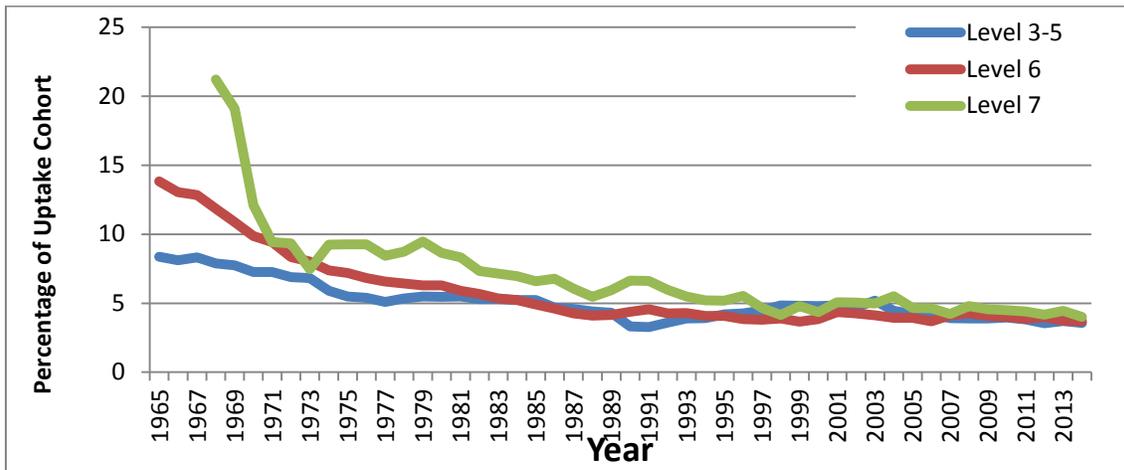


Figure 2: ML Attainment (1965-2014) at Levels 3-5 combined, 6 and 7 as Percentages of Overall Enrolment at Those SCQF Levels

The rise in enrolment and attainment to the mid-1960s has been explained. Why did the subsequent decline occur? Strangely, the two decades until the mid-1980s had seen little research before Scott (2014) and almost none in the ML context. No HMI evaluation of MLs as a subject area was carried out until 1990 and that occurred at a moment when, as will be seen, MLs again appeared to be prospering. Analysis of governmental, SEB, HMI and local authority records and of prior research across all subject areas (as opposed to specific ML research) identified significant influences operating in this period. The first of these, the cross-party move towards the democratisation of education through the second post-war phase of Raising the School Leaving Age (to 16) and the introduction of comprehensive schools, was unfortunately characterised by a lack of coherent policy, planning or

development activity (Paterson, 2003, p.138), failing to provide appropriate accommodation, learning materials or teacher training to cope with a radically changed clientele in many schools (Woodin, McCulloch & Cowan, 2012) – with inevitable consequences for attendance, behaviour, course enrolments and attainment (Paterson, 2003; Watt, 1991). These issues were accompanied by Scottish universities' withdrawal of requirements for an ML Higher as an entrance qualification for many courses, but also by a continuing diversification of available Level 3-5 courses. The effect of these changes was to increase the pressure on able and average learners to consider moving from an 'elitist' subject still taught by methods derived from Classics using materials designed for the most able and derived from discredited educational theories (Johnstone, 1999: 527-529).

A ML champion appeared in the later 1980s in the person of (Lord) Michael Forsyth, the incoming Conservative Minister for Education at the Scottish Office. The views of respondents to this study are remarkably consistent: Lord Forsyth has not generally left a positive mark in their memories, but almost all confessed to admiring his significant success in improving ML enrolment and, to a lesser extent, attainment although a majority expressed concern about his centralist approach. It is worth noting, however, that his ML initiatives had significant support from ML teachers' organisations at the time (Johnstone, 1999: 528). His rationale was that, with EU entry looming, British/Scottish citizens needed to be prepared to capitalise (through becoming a multilingual workforce) on the opportunities to go out into Europe to take up job opportunities.

As **Figures 1-2** demonstrate, the outcome of the Forsythian 'Languages For All' initiative, set out in *Circular 1178: The Teaching of Languages Other Than English in Scottish Schools* (SED, 1989) and implemented through the associated Standard Grade and 5-14 initiatives, was to double the proportion of S3/4 learners involved in an ML course. **Figure 2** must be read carefully for this period as the percentage of Level 5 (Credit) course attainment inevitably declined because of the large number of new learners in ML (and other) courses, many of whom – as a result of "Languages For All" – were pupils of average/lower ability. Attainment in MLs across Levels 3-5 (only Level 5 is shown), however, appeared to mirror enrolment, seeming very promising in the early to mid-1990s. Nevertheless, there were signs of issues to come in the Level 5, 6 and 7 enrolment and attainment Figures for the early/middle 1990s as a brief surge from 1989, built upon the rapid rise from 1988 in S4 enrolment and attainment, gave way within five or six years to a return to decline (although French continued to benefit for several more years). Thus, the position in 1996, the starting point of this study, displayed both positives (sustained growth in S4 enrolment and aspects of attainment, followed by a period of stability) and negatives (a return to decline in S5 and S6).

## Discussion of Findings

This study provides a systematic attempt to gather the available evidence on patterns of ML enrolment and attainment and the causes of these patterns since FLUSS (McPake et al., 1999). The quantitative findings presented here are an extension of those presented in Scott (2014) and, with Figures 1-2, offer a comprehensive analysis of ML enrolment and attainment patterns across the 50 years since examination statistics began to be compiled.

In setting the context, Figures 1-2 looked at MLs en masse to establish the rise and fall and (partial) rise of MLs in relation to other subjects in the period from 1965 (HMI were still responsible for examinations in the first years of O Grade and these results are not available) to 1996. From 1996, individual MLs are considered, both as raw data and as proportions of overall enrolment and attainment, so that their individual progress or decline may be examined. Figures 1-2 have already shown the decline in 'market share' after 1996 but the level of detail is significantly enhanced in the tables of this section.

Before examining the data on enrolment and attainment, it is important to give a brief chronology of key events related to ML development and governance. These are only a summary of the related quantitative findings of Scott (2014) but permit the changes in ML Figures to be considered against wider events, including curricular and qualifications initiatives, the establishment, operation and reports of national working parties, national/local authority political changes (both structural and policy-related) and the issues of key policy and advice papers from government or national agencies.

The curriculum experienced by Scottish learners in the late 20th century derived from a sequence of major curricular initiatives built on (but intermittently contradicting) previous initiatives. Those listed here include the Munn and Dunning, 5-14 and Higher Still initiatives, all of which were in various stages of implementation in 1996, making this one of the most pressurised period for educational development in Scottish history. These were accompanied by major qualifications changes, including the on-going implementation/amendment of Standard Grade throughout the 1990s, the creation of a new qualifications agency in 1997, and the appearance of 'old' National Qualifications in 1999-2000. A significant majority of respondents to this study considered these parallel, but largely educational, changes to be too much for the educational system to sustain and such was the stated view of teaching unions at the time. However, these were also overlaid with further changes. The frequently reviewed curricular agency, the Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (SCCC), was amalgamated with the Scottish Council for Educational Technology to create a larger agency, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), in 2000 and the status of HMI was changed to that of an executive agency slightly later, removing the Inspectorate from their role as one of three components of governmental governance (Scottish ministers, civil servants and inspectors) to become an 'arms-length' national agency (although this was partially reversed in 2011).

Almost all respondents to this study related these agency changes to further changes in national and local governance where UK governmental action led to three further highly significant impacts on the educational governance system. In the first change, the Regional Councils created by the Wheatley Report of 1969 and the Local Government Act of 1973 were replaced by smaller and, as respondents' views almost all suggest, less capable 'unitary' councils in 1996. Academic writers and politicians (e.g. Green, 1999) considering this period have described the difficulties experienced in the two years before the change and the first two years of the new councils. These years also coincided with the end of 18 years of Conservative rule and the arrival of a UK Labour government for whom education and, as it soon became clear, accountability and quality assurance were major foci.

However, this changed again as responsibility for Scottish education passed to the newly created Scottish parliament in 1999.

Thus, the seminal moments for MLs - the publication of the highly critical HMI report in 1998 and the FLUSS findings in 1999 - arrived in the midst of the five major curricular and qualifications initiatives, the major restructuring of curricular, qualifications and inspectorial agencies and, not least, wholesale changes to political structures, personnel and leadership at council and national levels. It might be considered surprising that any coherent action was taken at all during this period, given the unprecedented (before or since) scale of change and the degree of pressure on the system. Then, in August 2000 the SQA failed to issue results to all pupils in the first year of the then newly revised National Qualifications. The findings of the ensuing national enquiry led to significant changes in the structure and leadership team of the SQA as well as to the status and structure of HM Inspectorate. The SQA Crisis of 2000, as I term it, provided the most visible manifestation of the strain upon those attempting to take forward these multiple and complex changes. These enforced agency changes occurred in parallel with a 'development overload' (numerous simultaneous national initiatives including a complete restructuring of local authorities and their education teams). This resulted in a significant short-term diminution of capacity and direction in the Scottish politico-educational governance system, followed by lesser but longer-term impairment of the system.

The future directions of the curriculum in general and of MLs in particular were arguably sealed during a period when seven Ministers (with widely differing agendas) carried responsibility for education in the eight years from 1996. The 1998 HMI Report on MLs had replaced the optimism of the 1990 Report with a starkly negative view of the subject and FLUSS (McPake et al., 1999) had uncovered concerns about the motivations of pupils, parents, ML teachers and headteachers alike.

Despite the turmoil, but perhaps goaded by significant press criticism, Helen Liddell - the third of the seven Ministers - established a Ministerial Action Group (a sign of the increased extent of political control: previous committees had been multi-agency committees of SCCC, SEB and HMI personnel) in 1998. This body produced the Citizens of a Multilingual World (CMW) report (Scottish Executive, 2000), which replaced compulsory P6 to S4 Modern Languages with an 'entitlement' to 500 hours of ML learning (at unspecified stages of the curriculum). Both the CMW report and the funding which underpinned it were endorsed by the then Minister for Education Jack McConnell but left to his successor for subsequent implementation due to McConnell's unforeseen elevation to First Minister. In these changes, the initiative somehow lost its secondary school direction and shrank to become an initiative limited almost entirely to primary schools. Two cogent HMIE reports (HMIE, 2005a, 2005b) identified these issues but were apparently ignored by civil servants and politicians alike.

**Table 1: Key Documents and Events Impacting upon ML Enrolment and Attainment**

Document/Event	Date	Type	Impact on ML provision
Munn Report (on structure of the curriculum in Yrs 3 and 4)	1977	S.E.D./C.C.C. Report	S1/2: Compulsory (para. 4.11) S3/4: Elective (para. 4.11) (but most able 'should be encouraged') S5/6: availability as a multi-level option
Curriculum and Assessment for the 90s	1987	S.E.D. Report	S1-4: Compulsory S5/6: Optional
Circulars 1178 and 1187	1989	S.E.D. Circulars	Pre-P6 and S5-6: optional P6-S4: compulsory
Curriculum Design for the Secondary Stages – Guidelines for HTs	1989	S.C.C.C. Report	S1/2: Compulsory S3/4: Compulsory S5/6: Optional
Higher Still: Opportunity for All	1992	S.O.E.D. Report	S1/2: No comment S3/4: Compulsory S5/6: Optional
Curriculum & Assessment in Scotland: Guidelines: MLs	1993	S.O.E.D. 5-14 Guidelines	P1-P7: Not considered S1-S2: Compulsory
Replacement of Regional Councils	1996	Political Change	Initial difficulties and later decline in capacity due to staffing cuts
Creation of Scottish Qualifications Authority	1997	Agency Change (from SEB and SCOTVEC)	Initial difficulties in implementing new qualifications
Standards & Quality, primary & secondary schools: MLs	1998	HMI Report	Sweeping condemnation of teaching, leadership (at various levels) in MLs
Establishment of Scottish Parliament	1999	Political Change	-
FLUSS	1999	Research report	Evidence on causes of ML issues incl. climate of negativity
Creation of Learning & Teaching Scotland (LTS)	2000	Agency Change (from SCCC and SCET)	-
Introduction of 'old' National Qualifications	2000	Qualifications Change	SQA 'Crisis' of 2000
Citizens of a Multilingual World	2000	Ministerial Action Group report	No compulsion. Individual entitlement to 500 hours' ML learning. Optional beyond this.
Modern Languages: 5-14 National Guidelines	2000	LTS.: Revised 5-14 Guidelines	P1-P5: Not compulsory P6-S2: Compulsory
Ministerial Response to <i>Citizens of a Multilingual World</i>	2001	Scottish Executive	Entitlement for all in S3-S6. ["Local authorities will be provided with financial support to help them ensure that this entitlement is available in schools in their area." (p.8)]
CfE: Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching	2008	Scottish Government	S1-S3: ML compulsory (from Experiences and Outcomes) – but not sustained in all schools S4-S6: optional
Creation of Education Scotland from HMIE and LTS	2011	Agency Change	Reduction in inspection and curricular support staff; removal of subject specialist HMIs.
Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach	2012	Scottish Government: Language Working Group Report	P1-P7: L1= mother tongue. L2 compulsory from P1-S3; L3 to be introduced from P5 at the latest (by 2020) S1-S3: L2 compulsory; L3 required for part of S1-S3

The backdrop against which these ML changes occurred was one in which the incoming coalition Scottish Executive implemented the major national agency changes previously described and resolved the question of 'who speaks for Scottish education' – a role previously claimed by HMI (McPherson & Raab, 1988) – in favour of the Scottish Parliament. Given the five major curricular/qualifications developments already active, it is presumably a facet of individual ministerial priorities that two further major priorities were added. The sixth was the *Curriculum Flexibility* (Scottish Executive, 2003) initiative. However, the seventh, *Curriculum for Excellence* [CfE], effectively removed the sixth but left its two substantive actions, the repeal of the national secondary curriculum guidelines (SCCC, 1999) and the implementation of Circular 3/2001 on local control of the curriculum, in place. With the significant development implications of CfE rapidly coming to dominate Scottish

educational debate, the remnants of Curriculum Flexibility quietly left headteachers with effective control of the curriculum in their schools (although respondents to Scott (2014) indicate this was not consistently the case in all authorities).

Only in 2012 did MLs return to consideration when Dr Alasdair Allan, the junior Education Minister, launched the '1+2' Initiative (Scottish Government, 2012a, 2012b) in an attempt to reinvigorate both Modern Languages in the Primary School (MLPS) and also in the early secondary period. Unfortunately, at the time of publication, this appears to be under threat from the latest in a line of mutually conflicting initiatives (e.g. 10-14 and 5-14; the Howie report and Higher Still; Curriculum Flexibility and Curriculum for Excellence; Citizens of a Multilingual World and Circular 3/2001) as the very positive intent of 1+2 has been prematurely affected by the significant reductions in ML enrolment and (even more so) attainment brought about by some schools' and authorities' implementation of the new National 3-5 courses in S4.

What impacts have these developments had on ML course enrolments and attainment? The effects may be best seen through examining the three major MLs (in terms of uptake and tradition) separately from the set of minor MLs, as the scales of operation vary widely. The three major MLs – now French, Spanish and German in order of size – display the patterns set out in **Figure 3** below. It shows that French and German display similar enrolment patterns wherein both approximately held their positions until the implications of the repeal of the curricular guidelines and the ML aspect of Circular 3/2001 became clear. Thereafter, sustained decline set in, accelerating after 2007 and again in 2014. Spanish has gained at their expense, but the rise of 3000 candidates is not significant against the loss of almost 40,000 French and German candidates since the late 1990s. However, **Figures 1 and 2** show the decline more clearly as the raw figures are slightly clouded by a small 'bulge' passing through the pupil population.

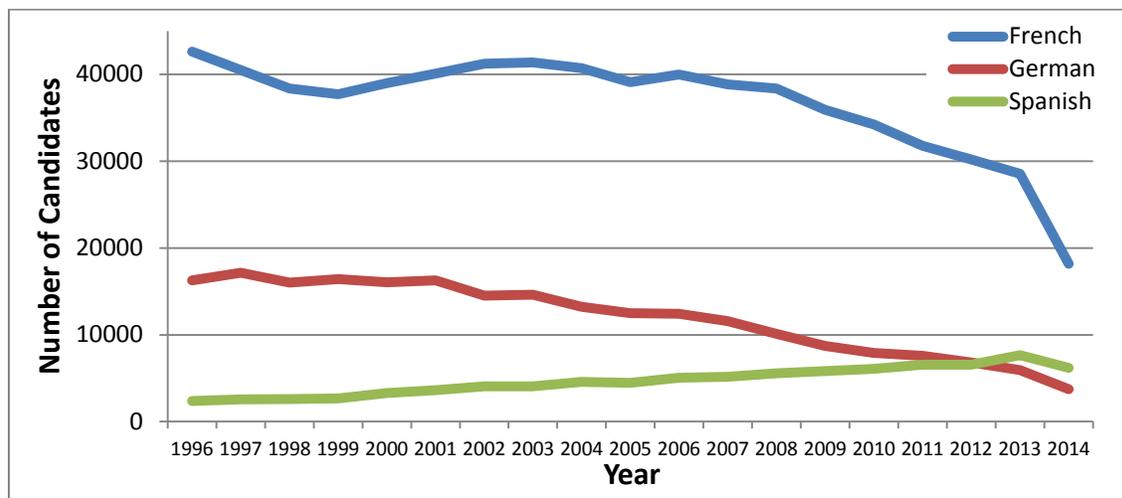
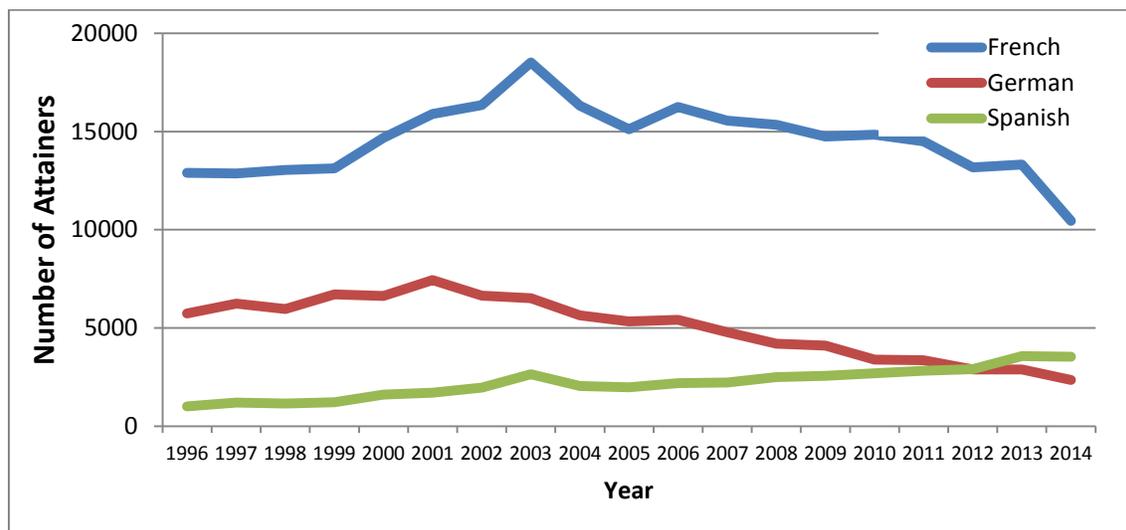


Figure 3: Major Modern Languages: Numbers of candidates at SCQF Levels 3-5 combined, 1996-2014

**Figure 4** displays Level 5 (Credit/Intermediate 2/National 5) attainment; these are the S4 pupils who *may* choose to take a Higher ML in S5 or S6. Despite the motivational concerns of FLUSS in 1999, the Level 5 aspect of *Languages For All* continued to improve until 2001 or just after (in the case of French). This period of growth from 1987 to around 2001 represents the only substantial manifestation of a positive outcome to any politico-educational initiative in MLs since the campaign to introduce Ordinary Grade qualifications in the 1950s.



**Figure 4: Major Modern Languages: Attainment at SCQF Level 5 (Cr./Int.2/Nat.5) only, 1996-2014**

Thereafter, increasing ‘flexibility’ in school curricular structures (i.e. increasing removal of compulsion to take an ML in S4 and, in some schools, S2/3) - possibly combined with the motivational issues identified by (teacher/headteacher respondents to) FLUSS (but not substantiated by many parent/pupil respondents to the report) and with increasing numbers of vocational options - gradually caused a decline in attainment. This decline may be seen to have accelerated from around 2006-07 but there is no evidence to suggest why this has occurred. There are several possible factors, including further societal disdain for foreign matters (European Commission, 2006, 2012), governmental failure to react to the HMI reports (HMIE, 2005a, 2005b) warning that all was not well, the period from 2001 to 2012 when there was little ML policy development or governance activity (except training MLPS teachers), the change of political administration in 2007 (bringing with it changed priorities and a principal focus away from educational matters), or the rapid decline in the capacity of many local authorities’ core education teams brought about by the 2008 fiscal crisis or the Scottish Government – COSLA Concordat’s removal of ‘ring-fenced’ budgets.

A further sharp decline in both enrolment and attainment in 2014 is clearly linked to the latest in a lengthy set of ‘unintended consequences’ in Scottish educational policy. In this case, the move to an extended period of Broad General Education in S1-3 (a later Curriculum Review Group construct, rather than an aspect of the National Debate on Education), had led to a move by around a third of schools to reduce the number of S4

courses from 8 to 6 and somewhat less than a third to move to 7, with the remainder retaining 8 courses despite the temporal constraints. The overall effect of these actions has been to reduce S4 course enrolment by slightly less than 12% (roughly equivalent to the average number of courses taken reducing from less than 8 before CfE to slightly less than 7 in 2014). The worst effects have been seen in '6-course' schools where MLs have often had to compete for learners' interest with all other subjects apart from English, Mathematics, Science and Social Subjects. Since many pupils have taken more than one Science or Social subject, this has left MLs competing for the final curricular slot with all other subjects. Unfortunately, the ML effects of this have been profound with one-year reductions in enrolments of 37% in French, German and Chinese and 20-25% reductions in enrolment in Spanish (previously a consistent growth subject for 20 years), Gaelic (Learners) and Urdu. Only Italian, whose enrolment pattern has been increasingly erratic over the last decade, displayed a slight improvement (after a sharp drop the year before). ML attainment statistics were slightly worse than these, with French, German and Chinese showing S4 attainment drops of over 40% and the others over 20%.

One remaining factor is worth consideration. **Figure 5** shows the percentage of candidates attaining Level 5 and then moving on to Higher. Despite the growth and decline of the major MLs during the period from 1996, the pattern for French and German is remarkably consistent: around 30-40% of those who pass at level 5 continue to study the subject at Higher in the subsequent year.

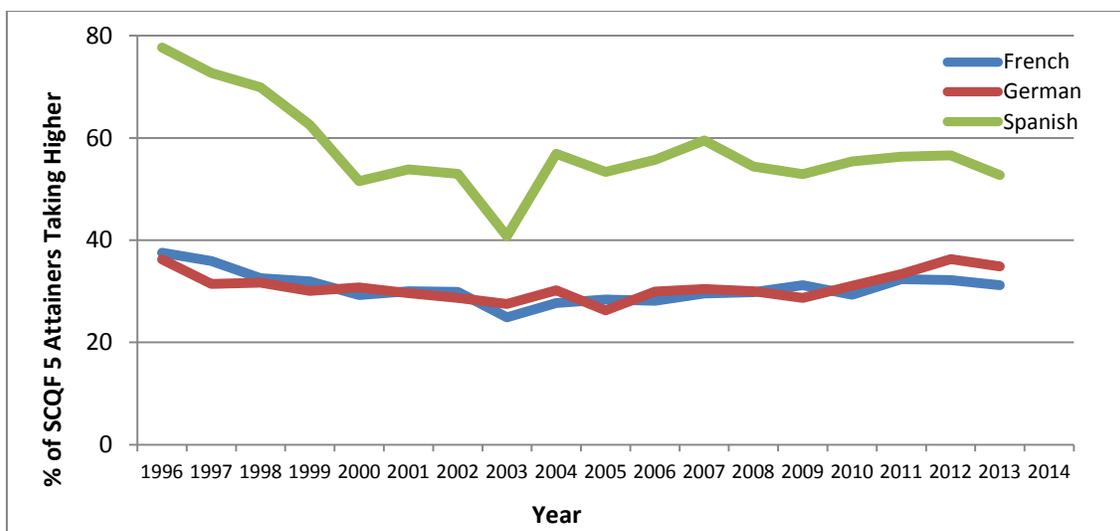
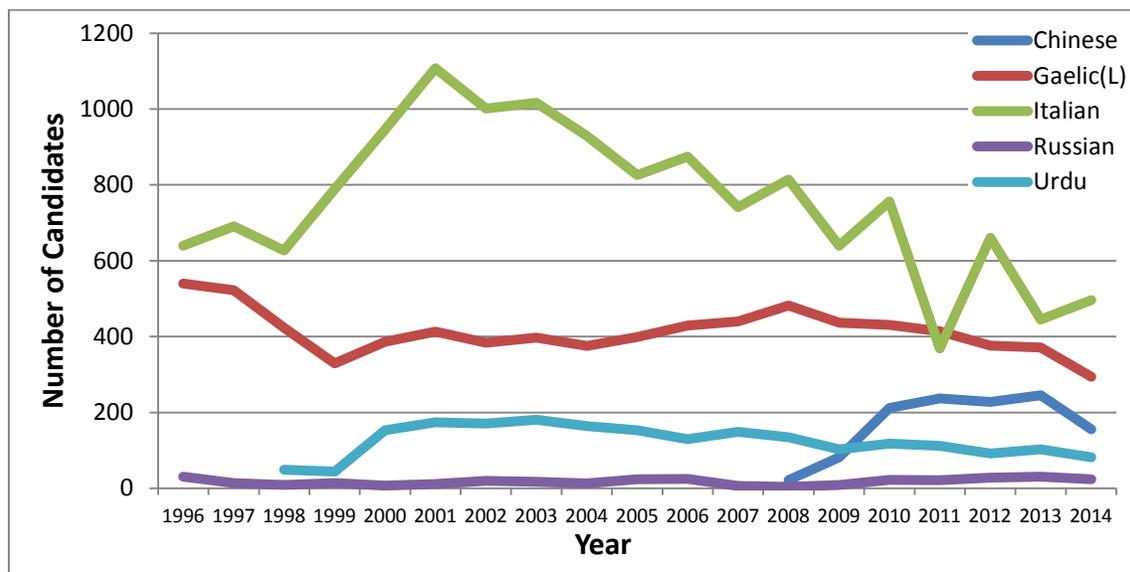


Figure 5: Major MLs: Subsequent Year Higher Uptake as a Percentage of the Stated Year's Level 5 Attainers

Many of the remaining 60-70% are pupils for whom an SCQF5 ML pass represented their terminal achievement as they would proceed down a mathematical, scientific, social science, technological or creative/aesthetic pathway. A smaller number would be pupils who had wished to continue with MLs but whose grade at Level 5 perhaps too low (e.g. a borderline pass) to continue at Higher and a further group would include pupils with

some interest in MLs but stronger grades in other subjects, prompting a re-think of S5/6 pathways. What is intriguing is the consistency of the figure irrespective of pass rates and uptake changes. Respondents to this study had mostly suggested that only those learners with an absolute commitment to MLs were continuing to take an ML at Level 5 and then Higher. That does not seem to be borne out by **Figures 3-5** as, irrespective of the fluctuations in uptake and attainment, the Higher intake rate remains at 30-40%. This requires further investigation.



**Figure 6: Minor Modern Languages: Enrolment at SCQF Levels 3-5 combined, 1996-2014**

The Spanish graph demonstrates the language's original role as a second language for serious linguists: hence the original 77% conversion rate to Higher. That this declined to a *reasonably* steady 50-55% is an indication that it has become the principal ML for a wider group of learners, although there is clearly still a group of linguists in the figures, thus holding it well above the Higher progression level for French and German.

The impact of the educational and political factors noted earlier on the major subjects are also apparent with respect to the minor (by uptake and length of existence) ML subjects although, having much smaller learner populations, they do not fully parallel those seen in the major subjects – as is clear from **Figures 6-7**:

The decline of Russian and Urdu are apparent in **Figure 6**. Concerns also arise from the recent decline in enrolments for Chinese, despite its Scottish Government priority status. Likewise, the decline of Gaelic (Learners) after 2007 is significant, particularly given the political and financial investment made since then by the current government. The greatest concern is for Italian which, after a significant increase to 1100 candidates around 2000, was seemingly on the verge of a breakthrough to more significant status but has since plunged to less than half its peak level, accompanied by significant fluctuations in enrolment.

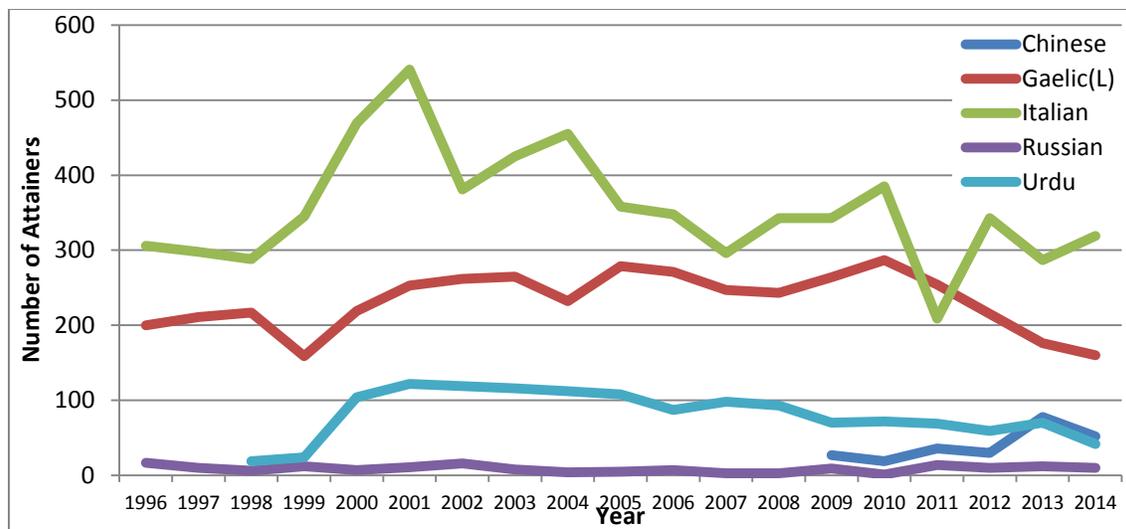


Figure 7: Minor Modern Languages: Attainment at SCQF Level 5 (Cr./Int.2/Nat.5) only

The picture for attainment (**Figure 7**) is of equal concern for Chinese, Urdu and, since 2010, Gaelic (Learners). Over the period, Italian has fluctuated wildly but, uniquely, retains a level of SCQF Level 5 success similar to that in the period of growth. However, this comes from a rapidly shrinking candidate base, again suggesting that Italian may be sustained by ‘second language’ linguists.

## Concluding Thoughts

The ML subjects have sustained multiple impacts on both enrolment and attainment, linked to educational and political initiatives and actions. Some of these impacts have been unintended, often because of the unanticipated (and unplanned for) mutual impacts of multiple national initiatives. Some, however, arguably reflect a long-term view which has appeared in many government documents (SED, 1947, 1959a, 1959b, 1967, 1972; SEED, 2001) that Modern Languages is only for ‘the bookish minority’ (SED, 1947: 21) and is thus optional for the majority from S4-S6, S3-S6 or even from S1 to S6.

Although periods of ML growth (and their causes) may be observed, there have been greater periods of decline, particularly in the era defined by ‘unitary’ councils and devolved government. In the twenty years since 1996 there have only been five years (to 2001) where growth or stability might be claimed. Decline recommenced in 2001, accelerated after 2007 and increased again in 2014. Significant innovation overload, rapidly changing political and educational foci, a period of neglect (both of MLs and of the HMIE evidence (2005a, 2005b) which might have led to improvements) and structural changes to government, national agencies and local authorities alike appear to have significantly impeded progress in MLs.

The recent appearance of the Scottish Government 1+2 initiative (Scottish Government, 2012) provides a welcome reassertion of the need for Modern Languages. As ever, however, the “Law of Unintended Consequences” appears to control the destiny of MLs as this positive step in the earlier part of children’s education is already compromised by the

significant downturn in uptake for "new" National Qualifications ML courses in S4. 1+2 is also dependent upon the willingness and ability of local authorities and their schools to take up the challenge of 1+2 and to see it as an important priority, rather than one priority of the many which must be juggled and somehow supported in a period of financial and staffing difficulties. It must therefore be hoped that the Scottish Government's provision of funding to support 1+2 is assigned by Councils to support the initiative for which it was intended.

The issues summarised in this section and exemplified in the earlier sections of the paper are significant causes for concern. Further research and evaluation would inform renewed planning for improvement.

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