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**A new coalition for language education?
Report on an initial consultation**

Ben Rampton (*King's College London*)

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Ben Rampton

[Hub for Education & Language Diversity](#)

King's College London

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Abstract

This document reports on an informal consultation with 50+ people involved with different subfields of language education in the UK (EAL, ESOL, EAP, EFL, CLs, MFL, Early Years, mainstream English). They were asked what they thought the main problems were, whether there could be a case for a new cross-sectoral coalition, and what its unifying principles might be. A number of areas of concern emerged, together with potential actions. These centred on approaches to linguistic diversity, models of language, teacher education, assessment, and policy making. After elaborating on each of these areas, the document tries to synthesise it all in seven tasks for a new coalition: Identifying collective problems; reinvigorating models of language for education; engaging with linguistic stratification & diversity; probing traditional boundaries; energising language classrooms; taking action on policy; reviving language teachers and enriching teacher education. The text was produced as the prelude to a seminar on 18 November 2023.

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1. Introduction

This document reports on initial responses to the idea of a new coalition for language education. Picking up on quite a widespread sense that language education in the UK is in a difficult state, over 50 people were invited to respond to several questions asking whether a broad cross-sectoral alliance might now be needed and what its potential value, activity and guiding principles might be (see Appendix 1). The majority of respondents work in universities, but all are closely engaged in one or more subfields of languages education:¹ English as an additional language in schools (EAL), English for adult migrants (ESOL), English for academic purposes (EAP), English as a foreign language in the independent sector (EFL), mainstream English, community languages in complementary schools (CLs), modern languages in schools and higher education (MFL), early years education (Primary), and mainstream English. Respondents are located across the UK, in English, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and although they were not asked to make official statements, a number of them are closely involved in language teaching associations (ALL, BALEAP, NALDIC, NATECLA),² learned societies (BAAL, The British Academy),³ or organisations with a national brief in language education (Bell Foundation; Learning Unlimited; National Consortium for Languages Education; Trinity College London) (see Appendix 2).

This has been a ‘testing of the waters’ and definitely not a systematic or comprehensive survey. There are a lot of bodies concerned with language education that we didn’t approach; we didn’t ask about aspects of language education that seem to be working well; and responses varied very considerably in length. But out of over fifty initial invitations sent out, only two provided no reply, and about 80% sent in answers to our questions. As promised, these have now been collated, and the present text draws on respondents’ wording quite extensively, starting to build a picture of who’s where on what. We hope that the responses aren’t misrepresented, and that their reconfiguration in the document doesn’t depart too far from their authors’ original intent.⁴ The document is, though, designed only as an exploratory ‘opener’ in discussion, and there is a lot of leeway for subsequent clarification/contradiction/revision/elaboration in the future.

2. The current state of language education

A number of rather widely shared concerns emerged in responses to our question: ‘What do you currently see as the main obstacles to effective language education?’

¹ The naming of subfields (and associations) shifts across time and space, and is always only a rough approximation to much more complex realities. This was recognised in the pre-circulated document and then re-emphasised by several participants at the seminar itself – one indicated, for example, that instead of being identified as ‘CLs’ in the text below, their field should be ‘Intercultural Communication and Modern Foreign Languages and World languages’. There is, though, a sense in which this process of re-naming is itself one of the major challenges that a new coalition would need to address, and it is better to flag it up as serious business for the future rather than to try to resolve it in a merely preliminary text like this.

² ALL = Association for Language Learning (MFL); BALEAP = British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (EAP); NALDIC = National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (EAL); NATECLA = National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults (ESOL)

³ BAAL = British Association for Applied Linguistics

⁴ Responses were processed with NVivo.

2.1 Problems with the attitudes to linguistic diversity that dominate language education

There was widespread recognition of a general “failure to acknowledge the multilingual nature of the UK and harness this potential in language education” (Forsdick/MFL) – “language education should recognise and value languages other than the historically dominant European languages” (Richardson/MFL-EAL). The “dominance of English removes a motivation/need to learn for many” (Beaumont/ESOL-MFL), and heritage/community languages are generally marginalised, both in mainstream pedagogy⁵ and in funding. Metropolitan and national standard languages generally provide the norms for teaching and examining languages like French, Spanish, Greek and Turkish as well as English, overlooking pluricentric and diasporic varieties,⁶ and in EAP, adult ESOL and EAL at school, people learning English are often seen as linguistically deficient, with little appreciation of their knowledge of other languages.⁷

2.2 Reductive understandings of the nature of language

Academic theories of language are themselves evolving and contested, and in language pedagogy and assessment, priorities vary and shift over time and space.⁸ But a number of problems were identified in the dominant conceptions of language operating in education, particularly in their interpretations of the relationship between language and culture.

Intercultural understanding should be a major aim in language education (Zhu Hua/MFL-CLs), but instead, “language learning is often presented as having a largely extrinsic value and a broader aim of benefitting the UK economy” (Richardson/MFL-EAL). “A narrow concept of ‘skills’” (Peutrell/ESOL) often dominates, along with the “myth that language education is just about language skills” (Zhu Hua/MFL-CLs).⁹

⁵ “While [in my current work] most of the participants are bilingual, some expressing pride in their identities and language heritages, there seems to be a consensus that these ‘out of school’ identities don’t belong in an aspirational classroom where children and teachers share a common goal of ‘achievement’ in a skills based monolingual English curriculum” (Henning/Early Years)

⁶ In HE, “the teaching of languages is often still heavily linked to the Literature in this languages and not decolonised yet, hence taking into account pluricentric varieties of French, Spanish” (Goglia/MFL); heritage language GCSEs and A-Levels often penalise the “non-standardised linguistic varieties [of] pupils born in diasporas (for example, Cypriot Greek and Cypriot Turkish in the exams for the Greek and Turkish GCSEs and A-Levels)” (Karatsareas/CLs); “Standard language and raciolinguistic ideologies are deeply ingrained in educational policy, practice, and resources, and thus are difficult to challenge. Moreover, the move towards increasing standardisation and prescription is justified as part of a social justice agenda. Apparent improvements to pupils’ spoken language are heralded as the key to upward social mobility, and this is a very tempting and persuasive narrative for many (and thus difficult to challenge)” (Snell/mainstream English)

⁷ In adult ESOL, “[m]igrant language education is only ever viewed by policy makers in terms of deficit or lack of English. A broader understanding of repertoire can change this to a focus on all language lives, including for example continuing to develop knowledge and skills in the ‘mother tongue’ or developing awareness of other local languages” (Byrers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL). “In EAL, the greatest obstacles are deficit discourses around EAL learners and the lack of recognition within curricula and assessment mechanisms of the value of languages other than English in children’s learning, often reflecting monolingual and monoglossic ideologies” (Richardson/EAL&MFL); “[t]he languages of our multilingual learners are often ignored and suffer from a language hierarchisation, with European modern languages being the only languages valued in schools” (Ranson/EAL); there is a “lack of understanding around multilingualism and pupils from transnational backgrounds, i.e. the importance of L1 maintenance and the fact that knowledges, languages, histories, geographies, cultures, literacies and experiences ‘move’ with pupils who have experienced mobility” (Foley/EAL). In EAP, there is also a “lack of understanding of multilingualism (international students have to operate in a monolingual context)” (Fitzpatrick/EAP)

⁸ For example, “the recent GCSE reforms privilege a renewed emphasis on meaningful cultural learning” (Forsdick/MFL)

⁹ “In EAP/ESP – a clear understanding of the knowledge base” is also lacking (Fitzpatrick/EAP)

In schools, the study of language “should include but go beyond the study of grammar and lexis” (Mitchell/MFL), but “the teaching of foreign languages is still very much based on a set of tasks, and teachers often complain they cannot make use of cultural content (because of time and syllabus constraints)” (Goglia/MFL). With MFLs in higher education, there is also often “a clear border between language modules and content modules which should be avoided” (Goglia/MFL), and this “unhelpful division between ‘languages’ and ‘cultures’ in academia” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs) has structural correlates/ consequences: “there is a lack of academic paths for language educators and linguists in ‘languages’ in Higher Education in England”, and now there are separate organisations representing “the ‘language teachers/educators’ (Association of University Language Communities) and the academics engaged in ‘Modern Languages’ (University Council of Modern Languages¹⁰)” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs).

At the same time, while the *separation* of language from culture is problematic in MFL, it is language’s total *disappearance* and absorption into culture that is the major source of concern in EAL. Here, ‘mainstreamed’ newcomers to English receive very little linguistic support because it is assumed that they will pick it up through participation in the ordinary culture of the school.¹¹

The scope for addressing these problems of conceptualisation in language education is inhibited by a third concern.

2.3 Limited teacher education

The role of language in learning needs fuller attention across *all* areas of initial teacher training (ITE),¹² but there were also more specific concerns about teacher education in the sub-fields referenced in our responses. In adult ESOL, “very low priority is given to teacher development in the... sector as a whole, including adequate teaching qualifications, CPD and even time for teachers to meet informally to discuss teaching” (Winstanley/ESOL),¹³ and the situation is not markedly different in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.¹⁴ There are doubts about CELTA’s value as a qualification for ESOL teaching, and these extend to EFL as well – with “falling numbers on CELTA and Delta courses internationally,... are these courses still fit for purpose?” (Chinn & Norrington-Davies/EFL). For community languages, teacher training is

¹⁰ This has been recently renamed the University Council For Languages ([UCFL](#)).

¹¹ This is associated with “the long-term rhetorical glide from a policy on equality of formal access to undifferentiated public schooling provision (the *same* English for all) to a claim that equity is achieved” (Leung/EAL)

¹² “Teacher education curricula should incorporate a greater focus on the role of language in learning” (Richardson/MFL-EAL); there is “a lack of focus on linguistic and cultural diversity in teacher education across the sectors (pre- and in-service professional learning programmes)” (Foley/EAL); In primary ITE, “there can be a focus on children’s literature and Spelling, Phonics and Grammar, but broader language and literacy debates have limited space and can be seen as irrelevant (but I haven’t worked in ITE for 3 years now, so things might have changed)” (Henning/Primary).

¹³ There is a “lack of interesting CPD in regard to pedagogy. What little CPD there is tends to focus more on compliance and how to pass an Ofsted inspection” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL)

¹⁴ In Wales, “ESOL teacher education is patchy at best. Most ESOL teachers are armed with a CELTA only (or with a cert in a related discipline but not ESOL specific)” (Chick/ESOL); in Scotland, “CELTA [is] the ‘gold standard’ teaching qualification – but doesn’t actually train you to teach ESOL – so ESOL specific training needed. Our National Awarding Body (SQA) is also under review with ESOL qualifications and its teaching suite not having been updated in a long time – no development in ‘new’ areas – ESOL Literacies, for example” (Blake-Johnston/ESOL); and in Ireland, English language education “within ITE/CPD contexts is marginalised – deemed complementary/supportive rather than centred with mainstream teaching” (Flanagan/ESOL).

one of the main challenges (Silvestri/CLs), and in EAL, there is a “complete absence of initial teacher education” (Leung/EAL). There *is* ITE in MFL, and alongside “the mainstream government-imposed curriculum”, there can be some space to teach “creative pedagogies... frame[d] as an enrichment” (Coffey/MFL). But ITE and “ensuring consistent, high-quality teaching” are still both concerns (Forsdick/MFL; Black & Koglbauer/MFL).¹⁵

Overall, there seem to be serious limits to the scope for improving language teaching through the dialogic reflection that teacher education can provide. In contrast, systems of assessment appear to hold a good deal of (rather unwelcome) power over teaching.¹⁶

2.4 Restrictive assessment

National assessment schemes are a problem across schooling and FE in several ways. In MFLs and CLs, marking can be unrealistically strict,¹⁷ and more generally, negative wash-back effects on pedagogy and curriculum are noted in ESOL,¹⁸ MFL,¹⁹ EFL²⁰ and primary education,²¹ limiting the judgement and agency of teachers and encouraging them to teach-to-the-test. In ESOL and EAP, assessment is often tied into inflexible programmes ill-suited to adult learner needs,²² and in EAL, the publication of results in league tables discourages schools from admitting newcomers to English.²³ Crucially, performance in tests and examinations affects the funding for individual institutions, either through their reputational impact in a marketised schooling system, or directly as in FE ESOL provision, where the system also encourages institutions to screen applicants on their ability to pass rather than their need.²⁴

¹⁵ “Many modern foreign language courses are taught by teachers who do not use an interactive, learner-focused and inclusive pedagogy, i.e. classes are sometimes reported (or perceived) as being dull, not relevant and ineffective” (Beaumont/ESOL-EFL-MFL)

¹⁶ “the administrative and exam burden grinds down teachers and leaves them with little time, appetite or energy for reflecting on and learning about pedagogy” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL)

¹⁷ “Severe grading of GCSEs and A-levels in Languages” (Forsdick/MFL) and “the current exam system including perceived difficulty of national assessment at GCSE and A Level by comparison with other subjects” (Mitchell/MFL) are current obstacles in MFL; heritage language GCSEs and A-Levels often penalise the “non-standardised linguistic varieties [of] pupils born in diasporas (for example, Cypriot Greek and Cypriot Turkish in the exams for the Greek and Turkish GCSEs and A-Levels)” (Karatsareas/CLs).

¹⁸ “ESOL funding from the NI Dept of the Economy is outcomes driven—exams based – This leads to a teach-to-the-test culture – affecting pedagogy, content, and materials.” (Flanagan/ESOL)

¹⁹ “Given the current mismatch between actual teaching time available and exam standards, national assessments in their current format have enormous backwash effects in Key Stage 4. The absence of any continuous assessment greatly limits the type of tasks which can be assessed” (Mitchell/MFL)

²⁰ “A focus on testing and assessment in current English language materials so teachers are teaching towards test results rather than language development or more communicative/interactional outcomes” (Chinn/EFL)

²¹ “Assessment systems in their current form are unhelpful – it takes so much hard work and effort to meet ‘standards’ that opportunities to teach concepts and ideas about language are limited” (Henning/Primary)

²² “I would prioritise getting rid of (or at least offering viable alternatives to) year-long courses with level assessments at the end, since they offer far too little flexibility in what is learned and how; learners should be able to attend more open-ended courses and have the option of taking level tests at any time, if needed for employment etc” (Phelps/ESOL); in EAP, “assessment is often only used as a gatekeeping exercise and does not always prepare/help students – and course teams do not know what it does” (Fitzpatrick/EAP)

²³ “An overly punitive accountability framework in England (OFSTED) which determines a limited curriculum and a reluctance to admit EAL learners to schools for fear of their results affecting ‘league tables’” (Ranson/EAL).

²⁴ “Funding driven curricula for ESOL courses (in state funded provision). Funding based on qualifications only leaves curriculum design and management to exam boards rather than practitioners and pedagogy experts. This also leads to unfair screening processes where students are given places based on ability to pass exams and release ‘funding tokens’ for institutions rather than need. Discriminatory practices are widespread as a result. E.g places denied to pregnant

The issue of funding is, of course, connected to much more than systems of assessment alone.

2.5 Funding, government policy and the political climate

Among other things, funding affects student access and teacher supply and retention, and it is heavily affected by the politics and policies of government.

In EAL, there is a case for saying that “political will and resourcing [have] result[ed] in a decimation of the sector” (Sutton & Layton/EAL-ESOL).²⁵ In state-funded ESOL in England, “pay and conditions in formal sectors are worsening so that planning, CPD and interacting with colleagues time is very limited” (Bryers, Belecova, Blackman/ESOL), and there is uncertainty about funding in Scotland.²⁶ “Teacher Terms & Conditions are not an additional extra but essential to the piece” (Peutrell/ESOL), and language teachers are experiencing “deteriorating employment conditions..., pay, stability and workload. There is no incentive for people to join the profession” (Winstanley/ESOL). In MFL, there are “difficulties of teacher recruitment and retention” (Mitchell/MFL),²⁷ and there are “very few language assistants at secondary level due to financial cutbacks” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL).

Language education doesn’t all depend on state-funding, but this independence often brings increased precarity. Financial sustainability is a central issue in heritage language teaching: “complementary schools have very few secure sources of income and rely on modest tuition fees paid by parents, fundraising, and in-kind contributions.” (Karatsareas/CLs).²⁸ A good deal of adult ESOL teaching is carried out by non-profit charities, and “lack of sustainable funding, especially in the third sector, means there is a rapid turnover of teachers, poor pay and conditions, lack of administrative support, few creches etc” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL).²⁹ Indeed in EFL as well, there are “precarious working situations (low pay, EL teachers and Teacher Educators (TEs) overworked etc)” (Chinn/EFL), and overall, financial insecurity often hands power to “managers and funders not interested in or knowledgeable

women, students with learning difficulties or limited past educational opportunities” (Winstanley/ESOL); “ESOL is delivered with the same funding mechanisms as other adult education subject areas i.e. needing to regularly evidence learning through testing on all courses – so many negative aspects of this. Also, penalising college funding for non-completion of courses (moving – for many reasons – is a feature of life for a large % of refugees and asylum-seekers)” (Chick/ESOL)

²⁵ This is “compounded in the compulsory schooling sector by the lack of explicit focus (or accountability) in school inspection frameworks on the development of EAL learners following the removal of the Lead Inspector role for EAL” (Richardson/EAL-MFL)

²⁶ “The Scottish Government is very clear on its ‘welcoming New Scots’ taglines – however the resources that they claim to want to provide in the New Scots Strategy, aren’t in place, they have just amalgamated the much admired Scottish ESOL Strategy into a new Adult Learning Strategy, where you’d be hard pressed to see ESOL in the document itself, and we cannot get concrete assurances of what the funding will be or what it will look like in the future – in short, the systems in Scotland feels like it’s on its knees” (Blake-Johnston/ESOL)

²⁷ “Language teacher shortage is a real problem” (Li/MFL-CLs)

²⁸ “Financing: There is a lack of interest in funding supplementary schools although this is widely considered as a cost-effective way to develop a multilingual nation” (Liu/CLs); “In some cases, decisions about language education are taken not on pedagogical grounds but with the school’s finances on mind” (Silvestri/CLs).

²⁹ “lack of recognition and government funding given to informal provision such as ours, which offers a distinct but essential type of ESOL” (Phelps/ESOL); “Community provision - sc/grubbing for grants, short-term funding, vulnerable to local factors” (Peutrell/ESOL).

about pedagogy” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL).³⁰ This works its way into the professional consciousness of teachers: “deprofessionalization / reprofessionalisation into a managed professionalism is a cross sectoral issue. New(er) teachers have no memory of FE (good and ill) pre-incorporation/pre-Skills for Life/pre-Ofsted ... or the better terms and conditions in the sector... [There is a] loss of collective memory (control, autonomy, flexibility)” (Peutrell/ESOL). This is replaced, perhaps, by “the collective memory of failed approaches and disjointed approaches in schools, including across transition from primary to secondary. This has led to a reluctance to approach this anew, particularly in an environment of financial hardship, against years of austerity measures” (Ranson/EAL).

More broadly in fields of language education closely associated with migration (EAL, ESOL, CLs), the reduction or absence of support complements central government’s pursuit of a ‘hostile environment for migrants’; immigration policy also precarities migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and international students in a plurality of ways;³¹ and among other things, “a Brexit mentality, espoused by Parliament and the media” (Ranson/EAL) has affected student and teacher recruitment in EFL, EAP and CLs.³²

2.6 Section summary

As emphasised at the outset, we didn’t ask our respondents to provide formal statements backed by evidence,³³ and instead, the account here is better seen as a set of ‘issues for discussion’. Nor is this a systematic comparison of subfields of language education, though it is clear that there is a lot less funding for some – notably CLs and EAL – than others, and there may be some pressing issues specific to particular fields: for example for adult ESOL, creche facilities along with other problems of access;³⁴ for CLs, communication with

³⁰ “In some cases [in complementary schools], decisions about language education are taken not on pedagogical grounds but with the school’s finances on mind” (Silvestri/CLs); “In FE: managerial(ised).. culture [has] implications for teacher (collective) autonomy, professional initiative/confidence/competence; lack of critical debate and dialogue; few opportunities to identify, ‘name’ and discuss issues incl. curriculum-related practices” (Peutrell/ESOL)

³¹ For example: “In my context, working solely with asylum seekers and refugees, I would say the main issues are: (1) long wait times to access formal provision....” (Phelps/ESOL); asylum seekers need “access to AEB funding... from Day 1” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL); “barriers to accessing language education need to be recognised and addressed, supported by adequate funding, e.g. need for language courses, including adult literacy, at lower levels” (Dudley, Kirsch & Sutter/ESOL); “expansion of University numbers has led to residence challenges, making other countries (e.g. Ireland) more popular as they can guarantee a better ‘student experience’.... work rights [are needed] for longer-stay students who are doing an English language course” (Heyns/EAP).

³² “Brexit has made an impact on the students that come to London to study and the prospects for CELTA graduates to teach in Europe” (Chinn/EFL); “Brexit has hit tutor recruitment” (Heyns/EAP); “After Brexit, the number of Greek and Cypriot students studying in UK universities has dropped significantly. These students used to be a major pool from which Greek complementary schools recruited teaching staff. Every year now since 2020, schools struggle to find teachers” (Karatsareas/CLs)

³³ For a research-based overview of language education in England from the 1970s to the 2010s, see e.g. Rampton, B., C. Leung & M. Cooke 2020. Education, England and users of languages other than English. [Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies 275](#).

³⁴ “Lack of childcare leading to unequal access to classes - generally easier for men than women to attend, especially on a full-time basis” (Phelps/ESOL); “Lack of access to on-site creche facilities limits language education for adults with children, particularly women who are the carers in the vast majority of families” (Winstanley/ESOL); there needs to be “a bigger proportion of classes in community locations (outreach) and supported by creches” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL); “barriers to accessing language education need to be recognised and addressed supported by adequate funding, e.g. need for language courses, including adult literacy, at lower levels; parental/carer need for childcare/creche support, course costs; transport issues & costs (Dudley, Kirsch & Sutter/ESOL).

mainstream schools; for MFLs, reduced international visits,³⁵ and the transition between primary and secondary school.³⁶ Nevertheless, it looks as though there is a quite a lot of common ground across subfields of language education in the five problem areas we have covered (even though of course, the complexity of each of them itself creates plenty of scope for differences). We can go further in this exploration of points of contact and divergence if we now turn to the *alternatives* that respondents proposed.

3. Alternatives

Respondents elaborated a range of alternatives in their answers to the questions about obstacles to effective language education and principles that should underpin it, specifying resources, considering curriculum implications and so forth. This was certainly the case with proposals to address problematic attitudes to multilingualism and linguistic diversity.

3.1 Recognising linguistic diversity

The need for a fuller recognition of linguistic diversity actually informs a number of the issues covered in later sections as well, and this recognition starts by looking *beyond* any one specific language in particular to the broader linguistic repertoires of students³⁷ and local communities,³⁸ as well, importantly, as those of institutions and teachers themselves. What are their repertoires, what can these repertoires offer to teaching and learning, how can they be developed, and what adjustments might be needed to make more of them?

Dialogue and discussion around questions like these can be a valuable part of classroom and curriculum learning,³⁹ providing substantial opportunities for students and teachers at a range of levels to bring in their own ingenuity, practical observations and experience. It is important to “focus on language for the sake of linguistic expression/play/art” (Holmes/MFL-CLs), and to look at how “creative interactions such as artworks support language education” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs); “study of the nature of language itself should include but go beyond the study of grammar and lexis, to include investigations of language variation and children’s own multilingualism” (Mitchell/MFL); “language education is well suited to develop independent research skills and approaches to ethnographic thinking, which is useful well beyond education (e.g. in understanding life in a company, neighbourhood,

³⁵ “Reduced international trips which motivated learners, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds whose parents are unable to take them abroad” (Blake & Koglbauer/MFL); “Limitations to staff and student mobility” (Forsdick/MFL)

³⁶ “Ongoing problems of KS2 to KS3 transition- little continuity. The provision at KS2 varies enormously across the country. Some areas have outstanding provision across Y3/4/5/6 and pupils get frustrated when they have to start again from scratch in Y7. Many pupils have to change the language they are learning” (Blake & Koglbauer/MFL); “We are also keen to understand shared principles that might link primary and secondary provision and ensure effective transition between the two” (Forsdick/MFL)

³⁷ “A broader understanding of repertoire can change this [deficit view] to a focus on all language lives, including for example continuing to develop knowledge and skills in the ‘mother tongue’ or developing awareness of other local languages” (Winstanley/ESOL); there needs to be “recognition of linguistic repertoires and how these facilitate and enhance the learning process, and enable the construction of identity and a felt sense of belonging” (Foley/EAL)

³⁸ “languages have communities of speakers and histories (even school subject languages have their historically constituted identity)... so it’s not just about ‘students’” (Coffey/MFL)

³⁹ There is a “need for discursive practices to be woven into the curriculum to enable teachers and students become critically literate around issues associated with language education in its broad form” (Foley/EAL)

etc.)... Basic training in ethnographic methods and guided discovery in linguistic diversity, language contact, language history and convergence/ divergence are key to a comprehensive, all-round intellectual development” (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL).

This dialogue can extend to the historical, social and political dynamics of multilingualism, addressing inequalities and coloniality: “Understanding language in society and studying languages are transformative engagements: they are suitable starting points to highlight power imbalances in global, post-colonial contexts and within Europe; centre and periphery discursive dynamics between urban v. rural, East v. West, North v. South, etc.... Critical thinking about language is well suited for developing a critical stance towards inequity and tricky local and global entanglements generating tenacious problems in our world” (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL); “language education should fight inequality and discrimination including by dismantling linguistic hierarchies and ideas that some languages/varieties are better and more valuable than others.... Language education should foreground the key role that language plays in social life” (Karatsareas/CLs).⁴⁰

Turning more towards teachers and managers, “the development of reflexivity and a critical consciousness... enables us to humbly recognise and understand”, *inter alia*, more of education’s role, drawing on “dialogue that explores long-standing patterns of power that have emerged as a result of colonialism and how these have impacted on the educational experiences and identities of ethnic minority pupils” (Foley/EAL). And this can have implications for institutional organisation.

“Recogni[tion of] the inequalities which are embedded in education provision [should lead to efforts] to support school to develop an ethos, pastoral systems and curriculum to address these inequalities” (Ranson/EAL). “School language learning policies need to be based on a principle of enhancing provision for all through recognising language diversity and by recognising, promoting and valuing community languages including providing curriculum space for them” (Richardson/EAL-MFL). “Knowledges, languages, histories, geographies, cultures, literacies and experiences ‘move’ with pupils who have experienced mobility” (Foley/EAL), and for a significant number, it is important to attend to “pastoral issues,... ensuring learners are valued and feel safe... Many of our... learners (asylum seekers) may be experiencing hardship and precarious living conditions... Effective safeguarding requires positive communication with all learners and their families (this may require an interpreter)” (Ranson/EAL).

Of course, communication with families and communities beyond the school can itself play a vital role in language learning: “opportunities for direct engagement and communication with target language users are well recognized as key motivators and should be an intrinsic part of the curriculum from the beginning, whether face to face or online” (Mitchell/MFL). Indeed, “digital FL activities can and should contribute systematically to the development of children’s wider digital literacy⁴¹ as well as contributing to cultural investigations and engagement” (Mitchell/MFL), inviting “wider debate around new forms of communication,

⁴⁰ “Language education should resist deficit framings of students’ language, families and background” (Snell/mainstream English)

⁴¹ “Language education should explicitly develop students’ digital literacy and critical perspective on online communication in line with 21st century needs (OECD, 2021)” (Mitchell/MFL)

opening our classrooms to diverse ways of learning, and connecting offline and online networks and communities” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs).

With language learning embedded in these broader contexts, the boundaries between traditional subject areas fall open to question: “Languages should be embedded more broadly in a range of subjects across the curriculum” (Forsdick/MFL); “the cultural content of FL programmes and associated activities should relate to children’s own interests and life stage, and should be such as to promote intercultural understanding and citizenship (and be connected to similar strands in other subject areas)... A sociolinguistic ‘language awareness’ strand should be developed in collaboration with subject English (at least)” (Mitchell/MFL). Indeed, there may be a case for “eras[ing] distinctions between different types of language education that have developed into silos” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs), “doing away with the hierarchy of Modern and Community languages, shifting the focus to local cultures and the study of local diversity and not just of remote cultures” (Matras/CLs).⁴²

And there is plenty of scope for universities to participate in this revisioning. “Home-school-community-university partnerships [can play a part] establishing a shared space to enable language maintenance” in complementary schools (Liu/CLs), and universities can “contribute to initiating dialogue across educational sectors to map the needs: for HE to listen to what schools say and where their needs are; within HE to bring together departments in social sciences and the humanities as institutional and research sites where language studies are located” (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL).

So the recognition of multilingualism and linguistic diversity raises a substantial list of possibilities, and with varying degrees of institutionalisation at different places and levels, there are UK precedents – some very large-scale⁴³ – for most if not all of the ideas raised. Dialogue about repertoires in and beyond the classroom, reaching out to communities, history, power and the organisation of education;⁴⁴ a rebalancing in the relationship between languages in the curriculum;⁴⁵ developing linguistically sensitive pastoral systems; capitalising on digital resources and networks;⁴⁶ taking local diversity itself as a central focus;⁴⁷ creating curricular trans-disciplinarity both at school and university; looking to school and community partnership with universities. Obviously, there is a great deal to consider here in terms of practicability and prioritisation, reckoning with a large range of contextual structures and contingencies. And as potential underpinning for this

⁴² <http://projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/cross-language-dynamics/toward-a-language-and-culture-based-locality-studies/>

⁴³ See for example, the Language in the National Curriculum curriculum development project (LINC), which ran in England from 1989-1992, involved 25 coordinators and more than 10,000 teachers in over 400 training courses, supported with £21 million from central government (>£165 million at current values) (Carter 1990:16). It proposed, for example, that “language and its conventions of use are permanently and unavoidably unstable and in flux. Much of the richness, pleasure and creativity of language use inheres in... play with these conventions” (Carter, 1990, p. 17); “[b]eing more explicitly informed about the sources of attitudes to language, about its uses and misuses, about how language is used to manipulate and incapacitate, can empower pupils to see through language to the ways in which messages are mediated and ideologies encoded” (ibid. p. 4); and “many bilingual children operate naturally... switching between languages in speech or writing in response to context and audience” and teachers can “create the conditions which enable children to gain access to the whole curriculum by encouraging them to use, as appropriate, their strongest or preferring language” (Savva, 1990:260,263)

⁴⁴ See e.g. Harris, Schwab & Whitman 1990; Hawkins 1984, 1992; Carter 1990; Cooke, Bryers & Winstanley 2018.

⁴⁵ e.g. Marland 1987; Holmes 2015.

⁴⁶ e.g. Anderson & Chung 2011; Anderson et al 2022.

⁴⁷ e.g. [Multilingual Manchester](#); Matras 2023.

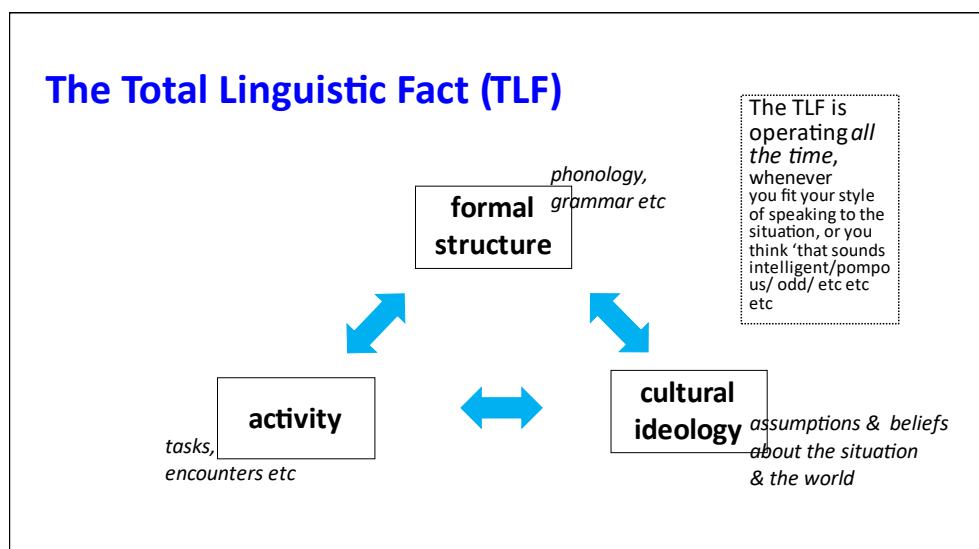
deliberation, it is worth asking whether we can identify “a common language among teachers/educators with which to discuss linguistic and cultural diversity” (Foley/EAL).

At this point, we should turn to consider alternatives to the reductive views of language outlined in §2.2. We will lead with a line that we have been developing at the Hub for Education & Language Diversity (HELD) but link it as closely as we can to issues articulated by respondents.

3.2 A model of language for education?

Prevailing perceptions of the relationship between language and culture were identified as a major problem area, and reductive interpretations (a) fostered the “myth that language education is just about language skills” (Zhu Hua), (b) justified the separation of language and content/culture teaching at A level and in higher education, while, conversely, (c) allowing the forms and functions of language to be neglected in the education of mainstreamed pupils with EAL.

For a succinct, useable but non-reductive view, we have been exploring the purchase provided by an encapsulation of the language/culture relationship that has been hugely influential in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. This is the ‘Total Linguistic Fact’, formulated by Michael Silverstein⁴⁸ as an “irreducibly dialectic, unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualised to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology” (1985:220; Hanks 1996:230; Agha 2007:147-50).⁴⁹ We have diagrammed this as follows:



The diagram makes the point that whenever we speak, write, sign, listen, read etc, we’re not just selecting phonological and grammatical forms (“formal structures”) for the tasks we’re engaged in (“activity”) – we’re also operating with a cultural sense of what’s polite or

⁴⁸ Silverstein has been a central figure in US linguistic anthropology.

⁴⁹ The TLF is broadly compatible with the (Hallidayan) model of language underpinning the LINC project (Carter 1990:9), and there are accessible discussions of the TLF’s educational implications in e.g. Rampton 2020 and Rampton & Holmes (2020).

impolite, a cultural sense of whether and how our words are going to fit the situation, how much weight they ought to carry, the kinds of place where they could resonate etc. Linguistic anthropologists classify all these hopes, assumptions and beliefs about the immediate situation and the world beyond as ‘cultural ideology’, and the point about the diagram’s double-headed arrows is that our cultural models are continuously tested and adjusted to the feedback we get in language and interactional activity. In fact whether we like or not, all of this is going on at the same time whenever we communicate.

As an analytic framework, it looks as though the TLF helps in thinking about “languages beyond language skills,...see[ing] them as different ways of knowing” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs).⁵⁰ For the problems identified in the first paragraph of this section, it also carries the implication that:

- a) language forms and functions may be in the foreground of a ‘skills’ approach to teaching, but this teaching still carries – ineluctably – a great deal of cultural and ideological messaging about language in social world, about student and teacher identities, forms of authority etc etc (cf sociologists on the ‘hidden curriculum’). Are the participants happy to keep quiet about this?
- b) In HE, the separation of cultural content from linguistic form and activity fosters culture’s reification/canonisation, backgrounding the dialectic of small signs and interactional practices that animates (and nuances) it in the linguistic spaces where it first emerged. Is this the intention?
- c) Formal structures of language and discourse are integral to cultural participation, and if educational inclusivity in the mainstream is the goal, they also invite our attention. Why not accept and support this?

More broadly, the TLF also complements a broad consensus in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics⁵¹ that it is misleading to think of named languages like English, French and Bengali as natural objects. Instead, they are reifications constructed in the ‘activity’ of lexicographers, grammarians, teachers and many others who work on or otherwise attend to specific selections of ‘structural form’ and invest them with particular ‘cultural ideologies’ (much of it reflecting the history and politics of nation-states). There can be no doubting the strength of people’s attachment to named languages like English, French and Bengali. But if they are culturally (re)produced rather than naturally given, there is more scope for pedagogy and the curriculum to explore (and rework) the constitution, boundaries and interrelations of named languages (as envisaged in §3.1). In this way, the TLF and its account of named languages potentially contributes to “a vision to embrace ‘translanguaging’” (Matras/CLs).

When the ‘total fact’ of linguistic practice is considered, it is also clear that ‘talking English/French/Bengali’ is actually a rather limited representation of what happens when people interact. Note that Silverstein refers to ‘*sign forms*’ and that it is ‘formal structure’, not ‘*linguistic form*’ at the top of our diagram – this is because communication involves

⁵⁰ It is also one way of “promoting cultural and linguistic awareness, with language learning happening in the mix,... connect[ing] different domains of experience” (Coffey/MFL).

⁵¹ See e.g. Chapter 1 in Horner, K. & J.-J. Weber 2018. *Introducing Multilingualism: A social Approach (2nd Edition)*. London: Routledge, as well as Stroud 1999, 2001; Blommaert (ed) 1999; Kroskrity (ed) 2000; Makoni & Pennycook 2007.

much more than just the verbal,⁵² and interlocutors actually use all sorts of visual and bodily signs (guided, of course, by the particularities of the genre and activity, their background knowledge, their attitudes and expectations of each other). Recognising that “language is embodied practice” (Tarsoly & Calic) like this is also important for language education, providing a warrant for “integrat[ing].. and embrac[ing].. multisensory and multimodal approaches” (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs).⁵³

Lastly, the TLF enriches the idea of a ‘variety’ that often features prominently in discussions of linguistic diversity, where e.g. Scouse, Cockney, Geordie and ‘standard English’ have all been described as ‘varieties of English’. This characterisation and differentiation of varieties is often restricted to accent, grammar and vocabulary, but the TLF insists that ideology and practical activity are also brought into the account: Cockney and standard English are associated with (interpretations of) particular kinds of practice, stance, positioning and persona, and in much of contemporary sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, these features are now built into the conceptualisations of ‘register’ and ‘style’ which are replacing ‘variety’.⁵⁴ This shift carries educational implications as well: demeanour and confidence become integral to learning to speak in a particular register (like standard English, French or Bengali), and to capture these cultural and interactional dimensions, there’s a case for referring to the development of ‘voice’ alongside lexico-grammatical competence and functional proficiency.

Admittedly, we didn’t ask our respondents about the theories that they would advocate in the questions we sent out, and there are sure to be alternatives to the ‘Total Linguistic Fact’. Plus, of course, there are always a lot of ways in which an encapsulation like the TLF can itself be expanded, with each of the terms in our diagram opening into vast academic literatures. Even so at HELD, we have been finding that the TLF can still be useful for teachers who don’t have the time/space to delve into this scholarship, and that it can help as an ‘orientational heuristic’ that reminds them of different angles to consider in deciding how to address a particular problem in language pedagogy, or how to design a particular task.⁵⁵

A discussion of heuristic models that can be useful in language education leads to the question of teacher education.

3.3 Teacher education

As well as requiring fuller attention to language across all teacher training,⁵⁶ “there is a need for teacher education to be supported more fully to enable teachers to feel confident and gain expertise in developing pedagogies that address linguistic and cultural diversity”

⁵² This is especially important in Hanks 1996 (from which our triangular diagram is mostly taken).

⁵³ So at the very least, we should put ‘semiotic’ as well as ‘linguistic form’ in the ‘formal structure’ box in our TLF diagram.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Agha, A. 2004. Registers of language. In A. Duranti (ed) *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Oxford: Blackwell. 23-45; Eckert, P. 2008. Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 12/4:453-76.

⁵⁵ Though they cover different ground, other examples of an ‘orientational heuristic’ are Jim Cummins’ BICS/CALP framework or Christopher Brumfit’s accuracy/fluency distinction.

⁵⁶ “Language education should be embedded with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and curriculum – It must be visible within Teaching Standards criteria” (Flanagan/ESOL-EAL)

(Foley/EAL).⁵⁷ “Language teacher training should focus on leadership for learning which involves a process of understanding students’ language wellbeing (with reference to heritage language children)” (Liu/CLs), and “teachers’ and prospective teachers’ full repertoires should also be valued and considered an important part of their skill-set” (Winstanley/ESOL). There could be more “training to support teachers and materials use/development” (Beaumont/ESOL-EFL-MFL); “a comprehensive ESOL teacher education would contain” a recognition of “the need for more participatory approaches, understanding concepts around multilingual approaches, linguistic repertoire, for example” (Chick/ESOL); and one idea is to “develop and deliver 'sociolinguistics for language teachers' training so that language education better connects to the world outside the classroom” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL).

Teacher educators should themselves have “development opportunities” and “support [to] research into their own practice” (Chinn/EFL), and the reflexive dialogue discussed in §3.1 could also be conducted in “teacher education, critically analys[ing] its inherited structures (often white, western, monolingual),... extend[ing] its knowledges and practices beyond its own ‘safe houses’ and current borders – recognising and actively addressing issues or race, language, culture, literacies” (Foley/EAL).

It is important to consider what the balance between generic/cross-sectoral and specialised language teacher education should be. There should, for example, be “recognised training for teachers who are transitioning from teaching General English (TEFL) to teaching in Higher Education” (Heyns/EAP), and “initial teacher training *specific to ESOL* must be made available, i.e. courses which not only teach pedagogy and language awareness but also focus on the particular needs of people seeking sanctuary - there is currently no course that does this” (Phelps/ESOL).⁵⁸ There is a “need for a structured programme of training and professional development for ESOL practitioners (from volunteers to advanced practitioners) [that] include[s] teaching ESOL literacy learners” (Dudley, Kirsh & Sutter/ESOL).

Teachers also “need to be trained in assessment techniques and an interactive pedagogy to help enable positive impact from formal and informal assessment (i.e. reducing the negative impact of problematic assessment)” (Beaumont/ESOL-EFL-MFL), and this leads into the issue of assessment alternatives.

3.4 Alternatives in assessment

The “disproportionately severe marking of languages exams” is one of the “more easily identifiable problems” in MFL assessment (Coffey/MFL; Forsdick/MFL), and the acceptance of non-standard and diasporic forms would also improve exam experience in community languages (Karatsareas/CLs). But beyond exams, “assessment should support learning and use varied techniques including continuous assessment to assess language skills all-sidedly and reflect broad curriculum goals in a balanced manner” (Mitchell/MFL), and “methods of dynamic assessment and research-based educational projects would make language studies

⁵⁷ “A greater focus should be placed on educating all teachers to work confidently in linguistically diverse settings” (Richardson/MFL-EAL)

⁵⁸ “There needs to be ESOL specific teacher education that includes development of language awareness... and content on the politics of asylum and citizenship” (Chick/ESOL)

an important instrument of emancipatory education and ethical care, based on context and learners' needs" (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL).⁵⁹ In ESOL, institutions should be supported "to develop non-exam... assessment methods" (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman), "getting rid of (or at least offering viable alternatives to) year-long courses with level assessments at the end, since they offer far too little flexibility in what is learned and how; learners should be able to attend more open-ended courses and have the option of taking level tests at any time, if needed for employment etc" (Phelps/ESOL). Which of course leads towards policy...

3.5 Improving policy

"Dialogue between stakeholders (i.e. feedback and improvement based on feedback) is central to any programme of learning at any level" (Beaumont/ESOL-EFL-MFL), and contrary to the deprofessionalisation noted in §2.5, "building professionalism, trusting teachers and avoiding punitive public accountability" is a priority (Ranson/EAL) – "language educators should be regarded as professionals whose expectations include: a role in collective curriculum development, pedagogic autonomy in the classroom, regular networking and opportunity for continuing language-related professional development beyond their own institution, and ongoing direct or indirect engagement with research" (Mitchell/MFL). "ESOL should be supported by a robust research base – including practitioner research, research informed/aware practice (not all teachers are/want to be researchers), teachers shaping research⁶⁰... The aspiration is to have a confident, educated profession able to challenge management impositions (36 week Schemes of Work, all manner of tracking and documentation, specific target setting) confidently and in an informed way" (Peutrell/ESOL).

While "teacher (collective) autonomy... should be at the centre of defining standards and good practice, developing curricula and accreditation schemes,... [this must still] include mechanisms for ensuring high standards of practice and provision" (Peutrell/ESOL). "The removal of Multilingualism/EAL from the Ofsted Inspectorate" (Foley/EAL) – "the lack of explicit focus (or accountability) in school inspection frameworks on the development of EAL learners following the removal of the Lead Inspector role for EAL" (Richardson/EAL-MFL) – needs to be rectified, and in one way or another, "policy makers need to see for real what a complementary school looks like before they can fully understand what support heritage children and schools need, why they need them, and when" (Liu/CLs).

Beyond teacher professionalism and constructive forms of inspection, "children's rights, including their linguistic rights, and an understanding of the relationship between language and identity should be recognised in language policy and planning" (Richardson/EAL-MFL). The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is relevant here, and includes a child's [right to be listened to and taken seriously](#): "The governments of the UK have been directed by UNCRC to incorporate a child's rights impact assessment (CRIA) into their policy development (Scotland is about to incorporate UNCRC into its laws and has also begun to use CRIAs - England have thus far ignored this directive). Key articles within the CRC are related to language and Article 12, which is known as the participatory article, when

⁵⁹ "Practice-based dynamic assessment is empowering to diverse learner groups" (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL)

⁶⁰ There needs to be greater "understanding [of] the needs of learners via extensive research with learners who have English as an additional language" (Ranson/EAL).

unpicked can be directly related to English language learning and/or use of interpreters” (Ranson/EAL).

The rights of migrants and international students need to be extended – “there should be a basic entitlement to access language education for all migrants, i.e. access to courses from arrival, and not being made to wait for 6 months” (Dudly, Kirsh & Sutter/ESOL),⁶¹ as well as “work rights for longer-stay students who are doing an English language course” (Heyns/EAP). The policy landscape beyond England’s officially ‘hostile environment for migrants’ clearly also deserves close attention: the Welsh Government recently commissioned a [Review of English for Speakers of Other Languages \(ESOL\) policy for Wales](#) (Chick/ESOL), and “thanks to the (now defunct) Scottish ESOL Strategy/s and the New Scots Refugee Strategy – the notion of language as an empowering tool that makes our Learners ‘New Scots’ has been a focus in Scotland for years. The notion that the learners are empowered through language learning to become productive citizens in all aspects of Scottish life – family, community, political etc” (Blake-Johnston/ESOL).

Funding obviously has a very substantial role to play. “Barriers to accessing language education need to be recognised and addressed, supported by adequate funding, e.g. need for language courses, including adult literacy, at lower levels; parental/carer need for childcare/creche support;⁶² course costs; transport issues & costs” (Dudley, Kirsh & Sutter/ESOL); “ESOL in Further Education needs state funding to be more flexible, and this should also be available for ESOL provision in the third-sector” (Phelps/ESOL),⁶³ financial support is needed for “international trips which motivated [MFL] learners, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds whose parents are unable to take them abroad” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL); there should be “bursaries for ESOL teacher qualifications” (Winstanley/ESOL); and more generally, “teachers’ pay and conditions fundamental part of good quality language education” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL).

3.5 Section summary

The questions sent to respondents elicited a rich, animated and far-reaching vision of language education, traversing languages/linguacultures, disciplines, communicative media, sectors of education and spheres of society, reconceptualising pedagogic practice, curriculum content and organisation, modes of assessment, and the socialisation and identity of teachers as well as students. Some of the changes wished-for may be more specific to particular sub-fields of language education, while there are others that call for much broader alliances across and beyond education, stretching to a new government. Even so, there are enough shared interests and aspirations to warrant further discussion of the scope and potential purpose(s) and value(s) of a new coalition for language education, and it is to this that we should now turn.

⁶¹ “Language education should be accessible for all” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL)

⁶² “a bigger proportion of classes in community locations (outreach) and supported by creches. Access to AEB funding for asylum seekers from Day 1” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL)

⁶³ “Greater flexibility around how funding is used within ESOL institutions to meet the needs of learners... allowances for more non-accredited courses” (Flanagan/ESOL); “enable more funding to be drawn down for non-accredited provision and support institutions to develop non-exam and less onerous assessment methods” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL); “criteria for funding should not be based on successful exam completion only” (Winstanley/ESOL).

4. A coalition?

4.1 An already crowded field

Coalitions already exist in language education and have been active and effective over a long time. For example, ALL (the Association for Language Learning) was itself “established by a number of subject associations coming together... in 1990”; “in more recent years, a strong collaboration between ALL, ISMLA, UCML, NALA, ASCL and various exam boards contributed to amendments to the GCSE reform”; and it is currently “working with British Council and Schools Travel Forum to present case studies to the APPG Modern Languages on barriers to international visits and exchanges” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL-ALL).⁶⁴ There are also coalitions working towards broader goals: “A number of bodies are already trying to support a re-think in language(s) education policy, e.g. the British Academy and associates (British Academy, 2020); the ‘Linguistics in language teaching’ group (Sheehan et al., 2023); the [Common English Forum](#), the [Committee on Linguistics in Education](#), [BERA Literacy SIG](#) ... [NATE](#) also has published a lot of documents critiquing current policy for subject English and making alternative proposals” (Mitchell/MFL).⁶⁵ Indeed, “there are also some efforts to coordinate these initiatives and to ensure that people talk to each other” (Zhu Hua/MFL-BAAL), and as a result, “a new coalition would have to be aware of the work of these other groups, and would be justified only if it held a distinctive perspective/engaged with underrepresented groups” (Mitchell/MFL).⁶⁶

These points need careful consideration. Certainly, there is at least one subfield of language education that seems underrepresented – Community Languages⁶⁷ – and there are constraints on the kinds of perspective that other groups can promote – for example, “the charitable status of BALEAP makes lobbying a contentious area and the British Council has its own funding and sustainability issues” (Heyns/EAP). In addition, the question in our original invitation about scope for a new coalition⁶⁸ elicited a range of affirmative responses,⁶⁹ and the fact that the present discussion includes a number of participants who

⁶⁴ “Over the years, we have learnt that bringing in non-linguistic focused organisation to support our cause, e.g. ASCL, British Academy, etc. has definitely made our arguments heard more widely” (Black & Koglbauer/ALL)

⁶⁵ “Speaking from my hat as BAAL Chair, there are some good initiatives that try to influence policy makers through UCML and UCGAL and through CLIE (Committee for Linguistics in Education, a joint committee set up by LAGB and BAAL). There are also some initiatives through British Academy and British Council” (Zhu Hua/MFL-BAAL); “The British Academy already works closely with British Council, University Council for Languages, Institute for Languages, Cultures and Societies, National Consortium for Languages Education, etc” (Forsdick/MFL-British Academy)

⁶⁶ “It’s important to understand where people/organisations come from and their perspectives so that efforts could be coordinated better. There are lots of nuances in different organisations’ positions, which is understandable” (Li Wei/MFL-CLs)

⁶⁷ “The former National Resources Centre for Supplementary Education did a lot of great work” (Li Wei/MFL-CLs), but “forming a coalition becomes even more important now for community languages as the NRCSE has changed its status and lost some of the independence and impetus it once had” (Karatsareas/CLs)

⁶⁸ Our original invitation to the discussion asked: “Are the people and organisations most closely involved in language education in a good position to influence change? Or is there now a case for language associations, language educators and linguists to form a broad coalition around fundamental principles, strengthening the authority with which they promote more productive approaches to teaching and learning language?”

⁶⁹ For example, “a broad coalition would help to make a stronger case to policymakers when it comes to advocating for necessary changes in language education policy, especially if the coalition brings together a large number of actors as well as a diverse range of actors who will have come to language education from a variety of starting points and backgrounds” (Karatsareas/CLs); “a unified voice from across the sector could help to push this forward” (Dudley, Kirsh & Sutter/ESOL).

are already closely involved in organisations with policy briefs⁷⁰ is itself an indication that there might still be room for new actors or forms of influence. But to consider taking this forward, we need to ask: Who would participate in this coalition, what could it do, to whom would it speak, with what kind of voice, on what kinds of issue?

Approaching the problem space from different angles, initial ideas for the composition of a coalition covered: MFL, EAL and ELT⁷¹; EAL, ESOL and EAP⁷²; third sector alongside state-funded organisations⁷³; universities alongside schools⁷⁴; and students⁷⁵ as well as academics and teachers.⁷⁶ The membership of a coalition obviously affects its focus and goals (and vice versa), and to begin with, the distinction between policy and pedagogy helps to chart the possibilities.⁷⁷

Taking policy first, there are questions of broad strategic orientation, and *without* necessarily being mutually exclusive, respondents' visions of this differed in emphasis, spanning the provision of expert advice, targeted lobbying, and more grassroots action.

4.1 Expert advice, advocacy and lobbying

The provision of properly evidenced advice strengthened by consensus among experts was one potential role: "It would be excellent to have a source of experienced professionals (i.e. 'wise owls') who could advise on programme initiatives and programme development, thereby to helping avoid policy and strategy 'mis-steps'" (Beaumont/ESOL-EFL-MFL).⁷⁸

⁷⁰ Bell Foundation, British Academy, BAAL, BALEAP, Learning Unlimited, NALDIC, NATECLA, NATECLA (Scotland), NATECLA (Ireland), National Consortium for Languages Education. Only two organisations didn't reply.

⁷¹ "Having worked for a long time in MFL, EAL and ELT (EAP), I see a strong need for those working in language education across sectors, institutions and associations to come together to create a strong, united voice for language education and language in education in all its forms" (Richardson/EAL-MFL)

⁷² "It would also strengthen the case for all strands [(EAL, ESOL & EAP)] under the 'umbrella' English Language Education (ELE) to be recognised as a subject/discipline and the need for curriculum development and accreditation within formal FE and HE institutions that reflect the needs of ELE learners" (Flanagan/ESOL-EAL)

⁷³ "Third sector ESOL tends to be seen as inferior provision and not taken seriously, so providers such as Oasis (where I work) benefit hugely from tangible connections with HE / national institutions" (Phelps/ESOL)

⁷⁴ "There is also quite a strong HE bias in the list, is that necessary/ appropriate? Should the coalition have a top-down or bottom-up orientation as far as institutions are concerned? Is there any way of engaging schools more directly? (are there e.g. academy chains which might be interested?)" (Mitchell/MFL)

⁷⁵ "Lobby from a position of intellectual authority, student experience and practitioner knowledge and expertise" (Winstanley/ESOL); "I see that it is vital to make our learners voices and experiences known to counteract this damaging rhetoric that surrounds our learners which the UK Government and Home Office seem in no hurry to dispel – and we can only do that with strong, articulated respected individuals and institutions working together to create one message" (Blake-Johnston/ESOL)

⁷⁶ "Would this be a coalition of the already well-placed?... What role is envisaged for grassroots teachers – time poor, no term-time off for events, enculturated into a managed professionalism etc?... What are the tensions here?" (Peutrell/ESOL)

⁷⁷ "It is important to distinguish at the beginning of the network's life though whether it is going to focus on pedagogical questions... or whether it is going to focus on policy questions such as funding and availability of ESOL tuition, training of teachers etc, as these are quite different things and will involve different stakeholders and inputs, outputs and outcomes" (Sutton & Layton/EAL-ESOL).

⁷⁸ "It would... be useful to provide a unified voice in engagements with DfE and policymakers in devolved administrations" (Forsdick/MFL); "delineating a shared agenda to influence policy, filtering issues specific to single disciplines and enabling us to put in evidence important shared/core issues" (Silvestri/CLS); "A coalition could help provide valuable data, research and case studies of the positive and deeply transformational impact of flexible and creative programmes across the sector. For example, the flexibility of AMIF funding enabled holistic and creative approaches and programmes which could be tailored to respond to the identified priorities, interests and needs of beneficiaries - including wellbeing and more general support. (Dudley, Kirsh & Sutter/ESOL-adult literacy); "Conduct flagship projects and provide British thought leadership in line with

When necessary, this could also turn towards advocacy: “Bringing together different sectors, organisations and individuals would help by allowing for the combining of voices and the agency of its constituent institutions and associations to create a powerful alliance, which, through its various organs (such as professional journals and other media) and campaigning activities could jointly raise concerns, challenge ill-informed policies and practices, provide informed commentary and seek to provide guidance to policy makers” (Richardson/EAL-MFL).⁷⁹ Broadly focused advocacy could sometimes turn to lobbying on specific issues.

“Lobbying any Government arm or politician requires a collective, articulate voice with undoubted evidence and research to back up claims and offer solutions... I don’t feel that Governments want professions to just complain about what is wrong, but show them how it might be solved and a coalition across Language Learning institutions in the UK could provide just that united voice, that can offer solutions” (Blake Johnston/ESOL).⁸⁰ Policy advocacy “would need to be very concrete, networked into influencing networks and develop concrete proposals” (Sutton & Layton/EAL-ESOL), and one option for this would be to

“come together, listen to each other and identify demands... After we formulate a few demands we might do a power analysis. Why is the policy the way it is? Who has the power to change it? Why would they? Why would they not? If it's a significant change or additional spend what pressure would we need to put on? Who would we need to join our campaign? If it's a national education policy change, how can we get a critical mass of MPs to support the demand? Or actually, is it more about getting the ear of a few influential civil servants / policy people and if so which organisations or people within the coalition are best placed to reach out. Then if we think after our power analysis that the demand is winnable, we commit to it and build a team willing to do the work, drawn from the coalition” (Bryers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL)⁸¹

The policy-makers targeted like this in advocacy and lobbying could vary. Across the UK, “it is vital that we have clear and standalone ESOL policies and strategies in all the nations of the UK – [it would be a considerable] challenge would be to get devolved nations to have the ‘same’ policies as say England, but underpinning any strategy could be this coalition’s single

global education policies” (Liu/CLs); “As a charity ALL is not to lobby Government; therefore we underpin our arguments and conversations with the DfE and other stakeholders with the appropriate factual evidence” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL)
⁷⁹ “the voice of a higher number of experts across sectors is harder to ignore – should politicians ignore it, it can make media noise, and media noise can translate in increased social awareness at civic level which is very important” (Silvestri/CLs); “Involvement in a broad coalition would help determine a single / dominant voice for languages in the UK and provide evidence to support policy interventions and other advocacy work” (Forsdick/MFL); “the coalition could consider and prepare a best practice model of language policy across a range of sectors and use this to audit provision to see what is missing, identifying gaps. These could become proposed action plans and used as a campaigning tool” (Ranson/EAL)

⁸⁰ “My work on and with Greek complementary schools has taught me that collective and well-coordinated efforts are more likely to bring about desired results rather than fragmented and ad hoc organisations. Greek schools do well in the UK partly because there is a co-ordinating body that brings them together – the Cyprus Educational Mission. And when a number of language GCSEs were under threat almost ten years ago, it was through different communities coming together that the initial decision was reversed. Forming a coalition becomes even more important now for community languages as the NRCSE has changed its status and lost some of the independence and impetus it once had” (Karatsareas/CLs); “Agree demands we can make (see ESOL Campaign 2008, AfE 2012, ESOL Strategy for England) - and support these with summary reports and briefings (e.g. the initial briefing for MPs that James Simpson and Mel Cooke mostly drafted ... making the research visible), drafting Parliamentary questions ... finding sympathetic MPs. The top down bit” (Peutrell/ESOL)

⁸¹ “We need to clearly identify the agencies/organisations that we wish to influence. Resources and energy are limited. Only targeted effort will be effective” (Li Wei/MFL-CLs)

voice that lays out desires etc” (Blake Johnston/ESOL-NATECLA Scotland).⁸² Local government could also be targeted: “My current work on heritage language education seeks to create a city-wide support network... in Cambridge. One of the challenges to set up this support network lies in the difficulty of making a strong case to the local government for financial support. I believe that with the ‘brand’ of a national coalition, I can draw upon the expertise and resources within it to make a better case” (Liu/CLs).⁸³ And in efforts to improve language education provision in particular institutions, a coalition might help “to capture the attention of senior University leaders – a strong, cohesive, and experienced group would have an opportunity to compete against other groups and areas who also wish to gain attention and resources” (Heyns/EAP).⁸⁴

Plainly, a power analysis requires flexible thinking across policy at different scales, and of course it also faces the possibility that politicians and power-holders-at-the-top aren’t (yet) interested.

4.2 Going beyond appeals to government

At the UK level, “language education policy is a low priority for political parties and Governments... [we have had] report after report... but we’ve seen no traction and scathing cuts” (Sutton & Layton/EAL-ESOL)⁸⁵ – “I have not seen any evidence in recent years that EAL voluntary/professional associations, e.g. NALDIC and NASSEA, are given any space in policy formation or development. Efforts to make direct contact with officials and ministry have drawn a blank” (Leung/EAL).⁸⁶ “I think there are tensions between DfE’s priorities – improving uptake rate and exam results – and what we think language education should be about e.g. intercultural literacy, critical thinking skills, community cohesion, social inclusion, etc” (Li Wei/MFL-CLs), and it is possible that a General Election in 2024 will bring a different approach at the top. But there is no guarantee: “Currently, languages in the school curriculum are somewhat protected due to the EBacc and a minister strongly believing in languages. Taking into account historical policy decisions but also recent conversations with opposition politicians, some more convincing will be needed in order for languages to be given the same status in the curriculum under a Labour administration” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL-ALL).

In contexts of this kind, “perhaps more can be done to facilitate the bottom-up approach and collaboration” (Zhu Hua/MFL-CLs), and it may be useful to distinguish between “coalitions that work within systems (lobbying... local councillors and MPs etc. around core issues – I can see the practical benefits of this), and coalitions that seek to push the

⁸² “It would also be useful to provide a unified voice in engagements with DfE and policymakers in devolved administrations” (Forsdick/MFL)

⁸³ “By sharing examples from different regions and countries of the UK, it might be able to use examples of effective practice / research to influence decision makers in their areas” (Chick/ESOL)

⁸⁴ “There is no language policy at my university - and I wonder if there is one at other HEIs in England? I have seen some presentations at the recent BALEAP Conference about possible language policies and what these might look like. [A] coalition of language education specialists would be able to propose one so that universities might incorporate one (some form of recognising multilingualism for example)” (Fitzpatrick/EAP)

⁸⁵ “Numerous reports advocate for languages across sectors, and have done for a long time. Unfortunately, I don’t think government policy listens to or is swayed by advocacy reports or collective responses to consultations” (Coffey/MFL)

⁸⁶ “I have been unable to find a parliamentary scrutiny group for language policy (there may be a committee already in existence)” (Ranson/EAL)

boundaries.... Influencing decision makers... *versus* asserting our own needs and identities and a pedagogic ethos that doesn't prescribe ends, claiming space not just trying to nudge the powerful" (Peutrell/ESOL). Indeed, "I think there is scope in the UK to inject a new direction of thinking into the lobbying that has so far been undertaken by such bodies as UCML and the APPG languages. Without taking away from achievements or political value, I believe that both have been working to a considerable extent as lobby organisations for existing provisions, defending their viability, and as such have not been open enough or perhaps free to consider a wider vision for society" (Matras/CLs). Indeed, turning more to the kinds of critique elaborated in §3.1, "maybe the 'why-languages-are-important' type of advocacy is too timid, and doesn't call out the wider structural drivers that negate repeated calls to give teachers greater agency, to allow a more meaningful curriculum and pedagogy, to recognise and practically value multilingual realities. By drivers here I'm referring to the psychological and economic models of neoliberal marketisation, and the regimes of power that are inscribed in patriarchal, object-focused teaching and learning" (Coffey/MFL).⁸⁷ This raises alternative possibilities: starting to "tag our actions to a broader activist agenda of contestation" (Coffey/MFL) and "engag[ing] in counter-narrative work in the form of letters to press, sector leadership e.g. college principals, governors and teacher's unions" (Winstanley/ESOL).

4.3 Activism on the ground

Government policies certainly matter a great deal, but contemporary research on policy, both in language and in education, looks beyond official texts and declarations on their own. Instead, it reconceptualises policy as "a process [that is] diversely and repeatably contested and/or subject to different 'interpretations' as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions and classrooms" – indeed, within "classrooms, schools, families and other social groups" (Ball et al 2012:3; Tollefson & Pérez-Milans 2018:11) Certainly, these enacted interpretations "are limited by the possibilities of discourse" (Ball et al *ibid*), but in Section 3, we talked about stretching/altering the discourse. And if a coalition is "not only... about influencing policy but about contesting who makes policy" (Peutrell/ESOL), it is worth considering how to "create spaces for debate and enquiry to encourage a participatory, grassroots research-practice culture", potentially "putting teachers at the centre of our thinking" (*ibid*). Teacher educators⁸⁸ and other academics also have a significant role to play in this, and "the involvement of such variety of professionals and scholars can effectively multiply dialogues with capacity for a capillary outreach" (Silvestri/CLs), working in a coalition that operates "not as a firmly structured entity but as a broad range of networks and cross-networks" (Matras/CLs), "galvanis[ing] efforts for language education activism e.g. to campaign for change in language education policy or public awareness" (Ros I Solé/MFL-CLs).

⁸⁷ "I often go to events where there is consensus about the value of languages and, to some extent, the problems of under-funding and lack of political support. There are often good case studies presented of individual initiatives. These events are important for morale and community-building, but the political dimension is often not made explicit" (Coffey/MFL).

⁸⁸ "Being part of a broader coalition could potentially help me see how teachers and teacher educators can have a more active role in influencing policy as they learn from and share ideas with those who research or are involved in creating policy. Generating ideas from different areas could then enable a coalition to identify how it can influence policy" (Norrington-Davies/EFL)

With the who and how of policy-making broadened like this, the distinction between policy and pedagogy starts to look less clear.⁸⁹ In Freirean and participatory approaches to language education, power analyses and questions of institutional organisation are part of classroom discourse.⁹⁰ This chimes with the idea of students as coalition partners as well as with the reflexive dialogues about linguistic diversity mentioned in §3.1 and “the need for discursive practices to be woven into the curriculum to enable teachers and students become critically literate around issues associated with language education in its broad form” (Foley/EAL). Of course, in the policy process as a whole, neither the importance of committee rooms nor “the complexity of managing a wider network” (Silvestri/CLs) should be underestimated. But with a blurring of the lines between policy and pedagogy, between decision-takers and practitioners, another role for a coalition emerges: “creating a space to build and reinforce trust and dialogue amongst professionals and scholars as trust and dialogue are essential pre-requisites for effective democratic actions” (Silvestri/CLs).

4.4 A space for de-siloed action-oriented dialogue

From the responses to our questions, it doesn’t sound as though the links between educational sectors (primary/secondary/ further/higher/supplementary/third sector) or subfields of language education (EAL/ESOL/EAP/CLs/MFL) are very robust,⁹¹ and one role for a coalition could be to strengthen the connections.⁹² “There is a lot of research going on in silos, which isn’t brought together. The ‘bringing together’ is of course a delicate and

⁸⁹ “I think the coalition will help to share examples of good practice that are available and possibly engage with pilot activities in schools... The influence could be at micro level with individual schools and later at macro level with the suggestion of a language education policy” (Goglia)

⁹⁰ See Rampton, B., M. Cooke, D. Bryers, B. Winstanley et al (frc) Participatory ESOL: Taking stock. *Working Papers in Urban Languages & Literacies* 319. At www.wpull.org

⁹¹ “Provision remains siloed with no recognition of each other’s similar aims/objectives/barriers” (Flanagan/ESOL-EAL)

⁹² “Actively contributing to improved cross-sectoral understanding regarding underpinning principles & approaches” (Dudley, Kirsh & Sutter/ESOL); “Attending HELD events before, it’s been useful to meet with professionals across different sectors and make links that broaden approaches to research, but also to teaching. It’s very helpful to keep in touch with debates outside early childhood and literacy. It is also a useful networking opportunity” (Henning/Primary); “By providing the space to meet colleagues involved in similar areas of work and thus for potential partnerships / research projects / collaborations etc. to emerge (Already from attending HELD events at KCL I have met great people, become involved in several projects and learnt an awful lot)” (Chick/ESOL); “I think in the ever developing field of ESOL (both in terms of the demographic of our learners, but also the development of language acquisition theories and teaching methodology) having partners, partnerships or coalitions can only be a positive step – we need to learn from each other and share best practice – and we are guilty of not sharing across the nations” (Blake-Johnston/ESOL); “it is always good to know what and how other language teachers are doing in their work and research. This would help inform our own work and also strengthen our roles at the university which is often viewed as simply a service” (Fitzpatrick/EAP); “Picking up ideas from outside the teaching contexts I am familiar with would not only be developmental for me on a personal level but also enable me to incorporate ideas, issues, and discussions from these contexts onto the training course I currently work on” (Norrington-Davies/EFL); “I think it would be useful to help establish a wider community of practice in LE and promote the sharing of ideas. On a personal level it would be interesting to learn about ideas and practices beyond my own context. I think it also affords opportunities for cross-contextual research” (Chinn/EFL); “The emphasis should be placed on dialogue between (language-) education policy makers, schools, academia, and communities across the UK to evaluate the needs and where efforts would be best spent. Building on these dialogues as well as on recent developments in sociolinguistics and intercultural communication the coalition will develop a comprehensive strategy/policy recommendation on how studying English, so-called modern foreign languages, and heritage languages mutually reinforce and complement each other” (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL); “The current Gove-inspired version of the National Curriculum in England is not fit for the 21st century in important respects. Alternative models are on offer in Wales and Scotland; however ready-made alternatives are not very obvious. The suggested coalition of researchers and educators with broad interests in language and an agreed set of principles could provide a constructive forum for debate on a range of issues and development of policy proposals, e.g. for assessment models, for cultural content, for engagement with heritage languages and language variation, for digital literacy” (Mitchell/MFL).

ambitious project as research and professional activities are not only varied by setting and culture but could be underpinned by different views of language and people (different ontological and epistemological stances). So I don't think networking can just be about diffusing work, but educating ourselves through sympathetic dialogue in what the value of our work could look like to different audiences" (Coffey/MFL). Of course mixed audiences can be approached with 'universal' theories abstracted from the contexts where differences are more obvious, and this is often the default in hierarchical communication. But in a properly dialogical forum committed to both recognising and traversing sectoral and subfield identities, sensing that people have a lot to learn from each other regardless of officially attributed status, the conversations need to be much more 'ethnographic', "offer[ing] scope for thinking about how principles can be operationalised in different ways", taking a practice that looks "positive and [seeing] how it can work in different practical contexts, what resources/training/values/dispositions etc are helpful" (Henning/Primary) – exploring "serious and workable alternatives, so that we can move beyond critique to change" (Snell/mainstream English).

In sum, for an arena of this kind, "there are two possible dimensions: (1) knowledge and understanding of the issues and challenges faced by [potentially] like-minded professional bodies and communities, and (2) a sense of alignment and solidarity in developing campaigns and strategies" (Leung/EAL). And, *inter alia* of course, these strategies can extend to funding, "seeking opportunities to lobby for funding and to establish [or apply to] cross-sector funding schemes" (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL).⁹³

4.5 Section summary

There certainly was a wide consensus among respondents that the potential for a coalition deserves further discussion, but there were different suggestions about what it would do. There is a good deal of scope for divergence and uncertainty about expert advice giving, advocacy, lobbying,⁹⁴ activism⁹⁵ and 'de-siloed' dialogue,⁹⁶ as well as about the relationship between these strategies, and the significance of major differences between UK nations as well as between those who do and those who don't receive state-funding requires a lot more consideration. But differences can be complementary, and coalitions can also work at

⁹³ "There are exploratory projects in HE concerning the possibility of cross-sector collaboration with the non-governmental or business sector. One of the goals is to attract external funding to the humanities (and/or to see what the humanities' contribution could be to economic wellbeing and "development"). Without increasing dependencies or further instrumentalising language studies, possibilities could be sought to establish overlaps in interest to attract private funding to initiatives across various sectors of education" (Tarsoly & Calic/MFL)

⁹⁴ "What about the issues we might disagree on: e.g. a difference between the ESOL Manifesto and the ESOL Strategy for England – one a stress on activating teachers, the other about lobbying 'decision makers' – approaches which are not necessarily complementary, or issues that are more divisive e.g. Terms & Conditions of teachers, teacher autonomy vs managerialism" (Peutrell/ESOL)

⁹⁵ "Do ESOL teachers have the collective confidence (and knowledge) and clout to contest sector / college policies?" (Peutrell/ESOL)

⁹⁶ "I have learned over the years that [knowledge and understanding of the issues and challenges faced by [potentially] like-minded professional bodies and communities] doesn't always mean 'friendly' knowledge... And [a sense of alignment and solidarity in developing campaigns and strategies] can be related to alignments and sharing with colleagues working in other national/regional settings, e.g. I have learned from the recent ACTA effort to produce a 'national development plan' for EAL/D (Dialect) in Australia an interesting model" (Leung/EAL).

different levels at the same time,⁹⁷ operating in different combinations on different issues. “The broader the group, the harder it is to focus on clear goals, but there would be common themes”⁹⁸ (Heyns/EAP) or indeed a “single voice that lays out desires etc... underpinning any strategy” (Blake Johnston/ESOL [§4.1 above]). From the responses, it looks as though there is initial impetus for a coalition in the general malaise pervading UK language education (§2), and as outlined in §3, respondents identified a number of common areas to target, each potentially inviting concerted collective thought and effort (perspectives on diversity; understandings of linguaculture; teacher education; assessment; processes of policy-making). So it is worth now turning to consider next steps, starting with the idea of underlying principles to unify a coalition.

5.0 Going forward?

Our message to respondents asked whether they could agree with/add to a tentative initial list of ‘fundamental principles in language education’.⁹⁹ The uptake of this question is reflected in (most of) Section 3, and it looks as though the values presented for consideration struck a chord with a good deal of resonance.¹⁰⁰ But there are at least four reasons for not rushing into the formulation of fundamental principles just at this point in collective discussion.

5.1 Reasons for not rushing to principles

First, there are questions about their potential value in advocacy and lobbying: “We need to be clear what the purpose of these principles is. Whilst we fully endorse the... principles, the practical application may be perceived as unrealistic by political decision makers and

⁹⁷ The coalition could “create a multi-layered support network such as (1) ‘policy makers network’, ‘researchers network’, ‘practitioners network’, ‘activists network’, etc. (2) ‘modern languages network’, ‘EAL network’, ‘community/heritage language network’, ‘ESOL network’, etc. We could also draw upon existing professional organisations to establish this UK-wide support network” (Liu/CLs)

⁹⁸ “visas, prioritization of language learning in curricula at all levels, work rights etc... Greater recognition by UK Gov of the different associations and the role they play in Quality Assurance i.e., the BALEAP Accreditation Scheme” (Heyns/EAP)

⁹⁹ “**Agreement on fundamental principles in language education?**

These principles need to be specific and substantial enough to help us to screen and steer the discussion of government proposals & policies, showing that it is not enough just to carry on as at present. But they also need to be general enough to cover different sectors of language education, and clear and succinct enough to be read by e.g. policy-makers and journalists.

Here are some initial suggestions on principles to steer language education in more productive directions:

- a) language education should aim to develop the linguistic repertoires and voices of its students;
- b) dialogue is an essential ingredient in pedagogy;
- c) space for the agency of both teachers and students needs to be built into the curriculum;
- d) assessment needs to be context-relevant and to enhance learning and awareness;
- e) there needs to be recognition in training and curriculum development that while shared language is vital to social life, linguistic diversity is also central;
- f) g) h)....

What would you add to a list like this? What would you alter? Are some principles more important than others in your sector? Do you have an order of priorities?”

¹⁰⁰ There was also explicit agreement: “We fully agree” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL); “Yes, all make sense to me” (Coffey/MFL); “I totally share the values behind such principles and the order proposed for now” (Silvestri/CLs); “I think all of these elements are equally important” (Chinn/EFL); “Agree with these principles, especially the point about context and assessment” (Fitzpatrick/EAP)

therefore proposals made by the coalition not taken seriously” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL).¹⁰¹ Here, it is vital to distinguish between (general) principles and (specific) demands.¹⁰² So for example, the principle ‘*space for the agency of both teachers and students needs to be built into the curriculum*’ could translate into “scrap restrictive schemes of work and allow more space for planning session to session” (Byers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL), or ‘*language education should aim to develop the linguistic repertoires and voices of its students*’ could become “Develop and deliver ‘sociolinguistics for language teachers’ training so that language education better connects to the world outside the classroom” (*ibid*). Plainly, the relationship between principles and focused demands “would need a LOT more thinking about” (*ibid*), and “it is important that at the discussion phase, this is carefully explored” (Black & Koglbauer/MFL).

Principles have a foundational status, underlying a plurality of different courses of action, but, second, their relationship with charters of fundamental rights like the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child also calls for careful exploration.¹⁰³ Would a coalition’s list of principles style itself as a charter, a scientific consensus, or a manifesto, covering ethical (& quasi-legal?) commitments, basic facts about language and language learning, and/or linguistic, social, cultural and educational aspirations? In what combinations?

Third, the format and wording of a formal list of principles itself raises a range of significant questions and possibilities: “Maybe the principles could be organised around the main aspects of language teaching and learning... Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, materials, teacher training” (Liu/CLs). And in the tentative principles that we circulated, “what does ‘space for agency mean? There is agency even in the most restrictive spaces” (Peutrell/ESOL).¹⁰⁴ Indeed, rather than just a list, is there maybe a case for “a collective advisory report? Something that can be shared with different stakeholders, taken into various stakeholder areas such as teacher training and policy discussions?” (Henning/Primary).¹⁰⁵

Following on from this and in line with §4.1 (‘An already crowded field’), fourth: “Are there principles in [other] documents that we need to consider, too: e.g. The Teaching Schools

¹⁰¹ “I suspect that a list of principles will not really cut through to policy-makers. They would either simply not understand or they would be too far away from their current thinking to be palatable” (Byers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL).

¹⁰² “The audience for these principles is probably us and fellow practitioners. And then from the principles that we agree we could generate demands/suggestions/proposals that we address to policy-makers/journalists” (Byers, Belecova & Blackman/ESOL)

¹⁰³ “I think the coalition could enlist the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its thinking” (Ranson/EAL); “The UN Rights of the Child and GIRFEC framework in Scotland have conceptualised citizenship, not as a subject, but as a key influence in how teachers interpret curricula” (Foley/NALDIC)

¹⁰⁴ “It occurs to me that the list focuses on individuals. As languages also have communities of speakers and histories (even school subject languages have their historically constituted identity), I wonder if there’s a way of wording this to make it obvious, so it’s not just about ‘students’” (Coffey/MFL).

¹⁰⁵ “Although it’s on a different topic ‘[Peace at the Heart](#)’ by Quakers in Britain aimed to draw together the voices of a lot of education professionals and Peace organisations to lay out what they meant by Peace Education and how it could be achieved in UK schools. The resulting report can be used in lots of ways by different groups. Peace at the Heart has been taken to teacher conferences as well as being mentioned in Scottish and Welsh government process, so it’s a useful founding policy document. Something similar to that including case studies from different sectors together with the principles might be a very useful project. It’s a lot of work to produce and promote the report in different areas but it would offer something concrete to build out from” (Henning/Primary).

Council (2016) *Pedagogy Review* or the British Academy's call for a language strategy" (Black & Koglbauer/MFL)?¹⁰⁶

So the formulation of guiding principles will take time. This doesn't invalidate the "need for underpinning key principles which will inform any ideas generated by the coalition and shared more widely" (Ranson/EAL). Nor, crucially, does it detract from the strength of the interest elicited by the very sketchy principles that we first circulated. Indeed, if this initial impetus is to gather momentum, the themes and perspectives articulated across the responses in this document will need some kind of succinct encapsulation, even if only informal, approximate and rooted in the discussion so far. So here is an attempt.

5.2 Tasks calling for collective cross-sectoral/cross-subfield attention

Synthesising the breadth of considerations covered in the previous sections, maybe we can speak of seven broad tasks or challenges:

- a) *Identifying collective problems*: There are serious worries about the state of language education in the UK, which is underfunded, straitjacketed by assessment, and out of kilter with the realities of contemporary language diversity. These concerns reach across sectors and subfields of language education, and call for open and reflexive dialogue between us.
- b) *Reinvigorating models of language for education*: Language education needs models of language that adequately recognise the dynamic interconnections of structure, activity and culture in communication, which itself needs to be understood as both multi-modal and multi-mediated.
- c) *Engaging with linguistic stratification & diversity*: Education needs to address the unequal relationship between languages and styles and their implications for well-being and identity, recognising and developing linguistic repertoires and meta-linguistic understanding right across the board (in students, teachers, curricula, pastoral systems, teacher education, institutions and governments).
- d) *Probing traditional boundaries*: Established institutional boundaries around language learning need to be interrogated, potentially generating new or enhanced links across subject areas, disciplines and sites and levels of education, across education, homes, communities and diasporas, and across language education subfields.
- e) *Energising language classrooms*: Dialogue, creativity and 'connection' across difference have a crucial part to play in classroom communication, with learning and awareness enhanced by context-relevant assessment in a variety of forms.
- f) *Taking action on policy*: Dialogue between stakeholders should be central in any language education programme or policy, and there can be influential 'policy actors' at

¹⁰⁶ For example: "British Academy (2020). [Toward a national languages strategy: Education and skills](#). London: British Academy; OECD (2021). [21st-century readers: Developing literacy skills in a digital world](#). Pisa: OECD Publishing; Sheehan, M., Corr, A., Having, A., Kasstan, J., Schifano, N., & Stollhans, S. (2023). [A manifesto for linguistics in language teaching in the UK context](#); Teaching Schools Council. (2016). [Modern foreign languages pedagogy review](#); Wagner, M., Cardetti, F., & Byram, M. (2019). *Teaching intercultural citizenship across the curriculum*: ACTFL American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages" (Mitchell/MFL); Cooke & Peutrell 2021 [Brokering Britain, educating citizens: Critical ESOL issues and principles](#); "[Call for a Multilingual Cities Movement](#)" (Matras/CLs); "we would be keen to explore ways in which any emerging principles are aligned with or expand the ambitions of Towards a National Languages Strategy, and also complement policy work across the languages pipeline" (Forsdick/MFL); .

many levels. Ineffective or inadequate policies call for ‘power analyses’ and the mobilisation of our expertise, advocacy and/or ground-level organising skills.

- g) *Reviving language teachers and enriching teacher education*: Language development involves many people in different roles throughout the lifespan, but the work of teachers falls across all of the areas above. To engage with these challenges, language professionals are likely to need: much more ITE and CPD tuned to linguistic diversity; regular networking beyond their own institutions; mediated or direct interaction with research; and decent pay and conditions. Universities and independent research organisations can play a very substantial role working with teachers on a lot of this – as well, of course, as themselves learning and contributing in the other thematic areas.

5.3 A big question

Does this formulation of tasks capture issues – wholly or in part – that, in the eyes of respondents, warrant continuing conversation? In our earlier communication, we asked everyone : “would you be interested in playing an active role” “if we agreed on the usefulness and underpinning principles of this coalition”. At that point, the immediate response was very positive, both from individuals and from people closely associated with language teaching associations, learned societies and other organisations prominent in language education. But this document now fleshes out the possibilities more fully, drawing together views from across sectors and subfields, giving it all a sharper focus in the seven challenges above. On 18th November, we will take time to consider the issues raised so far, decide whether to carry on and if we do, discuss the best ways of proceeding.

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Appendix 1: The questions put to respondents

A coalition?

Q1: *How could the existence of a broad coalition of associations, institutions and individuals in language education help you to further your work?*

Q2: *How could it help to influence language education policy?*

It would be very helpful if you could provide concrete examples of what you think the coalition could do and the support and influence it could generate.

Current problems

Q3: *What do you currently see as the main obstacles to effective language education in your field?*

Agreement on fundamental principles in language education?

These principles need to be specific and substantial enough to help us to screen and steer the discussion of government proposals & policies, showing that it is not enough just to carry on as at present. But they also need to be general enough to cover different sectors of language education, and clear and succinct enough to be read by e.g. policy-makers and journalists.

Here are some initial suggestions on principles to steer language education in more productive directions:

- a) language education should aim to develop the linguistic repertoires and voices of its students;
- b) dialogue is an essential ingredient in pedagogy;
- c) space for the agency of both teachers and students needs to be built into the curriculum;
- d) assessment needs to be context-relevant and to enhance learning and awareness;
- e) there needs to be recognition in training and curriculum development that while shared language is vital to social life, linguistic diversity is also central;
- f)
- g)
- h)
- i) ..

Q4: *What would you add to a list like this? What would you alter? Are some principles more important than others in your sector? Do you have an order of priorities?*

Going forward?

Q5: *If we agreed on the usefulness and underpinning principles of this coalition, would you be interested in playing an active role developing it further? Thoughts on how?*

Sharing email addresses

Q6: *Can we share the email address that we have for you with the other participants, or is there another that we can share?*

Appendix 2: Respondents/invitees, affiliations & subfields

(with apologies for any inaccuracies)

Respondent	Email	Affiliation	Subfield
Yvonne Foley (Chair)	y.foley@naldic.org.uk yvonne.foley@ed.ac.uk	NALDIC (National Association for Language Learning in the Curriculum)	EAL
Fiona Ranson	f.ranson@naldic.org.uk f.ranson@northumbria.ac.uk	NALDIC	EAL
Christina Richardson	c.richardson@naldic.org.uk christina.l.richardson@kcl.ac.uk	NALDIC	EAL, MFL
Khawla Badwan	k.badwan@mmu.ac.uk	Manchester Metropolitan University	EAL
Constant Leung	constant.leung@kcl.ac.uk	King's College London	EAL
Anne Keary (President) ACTA Australia	anne.keary@monash.edu	ACTA (Australian Council of TESOL Associations); Monash University	EAL, ESOL
Diana Sutton	Diana.Sutton@bell-foundation.org.uk	The Bell Foundation	EAL, ESOL
Jo Layton	Jo.Layton@bell-foundation.org.uk	The Bell Foundation	EAL, ESOL
Philida Schellekens	philida@schellekens.co.uk	The Bell Foundation	EAL, ESOL
Ben Beaumont (Head of Teacher Education)	ben.beaumont@trinitycollege.com	Trinity College	ESOL, EFL, MFL
Richard Chinn	richard.1.chinn@kcl.ac.uk	International House	EFL
Danny Norrington-Davies	Danny.Norrington-Davies@ihlondon.com	International House	EFL
Conrad Heyns (Chair)	chair@baleap.org	BALEAP	EAP
Damian Fitzpatrick	d.fitzpatrick@arts.ac.uk	University of the Arts	EAP
Liz Black (Co-Chair) †	lizb.alkira@gmail.com	ALL (Association for Language Learning)	MFL
Rene Koglbauer (Co-Chair)	rene.koglbauer@newcastle.ac.uk	ALL	MFL
Ros Mitchell	R.F.Mitchell@soton.ac.uk	University of Southampton	MFL
Jelena Calic	j.calic@ucl.ac.uk	UCL School of Slavonic & Eastern European Studies (SSEES)	MFL
Eszter Tarsoly	e.tarsoly@ucl.ac.uk	UCL SSEES	MFL
Simon Coffey	simon.coffey@kcl.ac.uk	King's College London	MFL
Charles Forsdick	c.forsdick@liverpool.ac.uk	British Academy , Liverpool University	MFL
Li Wei (Director)	li.wei@ucl.ac.uk	UCL Institute of Education	MFL, CLs
Zhu Hua	zhu.hua@ucl.ac.uk	UCL National Consortium for Languages Education British Association for Applied Linguistics	MFL, CLs
Sam Holmes	sam.holmes@causeway.education	Causeway Education	MFL, CLs
Cristina Ros Sole	cristina.ros@gold.ac.uk	Goldsmiths	MFL/CLs
Yongcan Liu	y1258@cam.ac.uk	Cambridge University	CLs, EAL

Jim Anderson	jimandgold@gmail.com	Goldsmiths	CLs
Alessia Cogo	a.cogo@gold.ac.uk	Goldsmiths	CLs
Vally Lytra	v.lytra@gold.ac.uk	Goldsmiths	CLs
Vicky Macleroy	v.macleroy@gold.ac.uk	Goldsmiths	CLs
Judith Rifesser	judith.rifesser@gmail.com	Goldsmiths	CLs
Yaron Matras	y.matras@aston.ac.uk	Multilingual Manchester , City of Languages	CLs
Carmen Silvestri	cs20842@essex.ac.uk	University of Essex	CLs
Petros Karatsareas	P.Karatsareas@westminster.ac.uk	University of Westminster	CLs
Francesco Goglia	F.Goglia@exeter.ac.uk	Exeter University	CLs
Julia Snell	J.Snell@leeds.ac.uk	Leeds University	Mainstream English
Ian Cushing	i.cushing@mmu.ac.uk	Manchester Metropolitan	Mainstream English
Lucy Henning	lucy.henning@open.ac.uk	Open University	Early Years, Primary
Anthony Tomei	atomei@blueyonder.co.uk	King's College London	Maths Education
Karen Dudley	karen.dudley@learningunlimited.co	Learning Unlimited	ESOL/Adult Literacy
Judy Kirsh	judith.kirsh@learningunlimited.co	Learning Unlimited	ESOL/Adult Literacy
John Sutter	john.sutter@learningunlimited.co	Learning Unlimited	ESOL/Adult Literacy
Rachel Öner (Chair)	rachel.oner@btinternet.com rachel@onerconsultancy.co.uk rachelonereqa@gmail.com	NATECLA England (National Association for the Teaching of English & Community Languages)	ESOL
Greg Dugdale (Chair)	greg.dugdale@sccb.ac.uk	NATECLA England	ESOL
Declan Flanagan (Chair)	Flanagandecan6@gmail.com	NATECLA Island of Ireland	ESOL & EAL
Pauline Blake Johnstone (Chair)	paulineblakejohnston@outlook.com	NATECLA Scotland	ESOL
Rob Peutrell	peutrellrob@gmail.com	ESOL Manifesto	ESOL
Mike Chick	mike.chick@southwales.ac.uk	University of South Wales	ESOL
Laura Phelps	laura@oasiscardiff.org	Oasis	ESOL
Dermot Bryers	dermot@efalondon.org	English for Action	ESOL
Adela Belecova	adela@efalondon.org	English for Action	ESOL
Kasia Blackman	kasia@efalondon.org	English for Action	ESOL
Becky Winstanley	beckywinstanley71@gmail.com	English for Action	ESOL
Melanie Cooke	melanie.cooke@kcl.ac.uk	King's College London/English for Action	ESOL
Ben Rampton	ben.rampton@kcl.ac.uk	King's College London/English for Action	ESOL