



Baroness Barran

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Baroness Coussins
House of Lords,
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24 May 2024

Dear Jean,

During the debate on the 'Importance of Skills' on Thursday 9 May, you raised several headlines on languages, and I committed to responding to you in writing on these issues. I would like to address the areas you drew to my attention.

Firstly, you requested that the government 'double down on boosting take-up of language GCSEs and A-levels, for example by introducing the advanced language premium as an incentive to schools'. Whilst the government has no plans to introduce a languages premium, we are investing millions into a number of high-profile language programmes, all of which have increasing GCSE language uptake at their core. The department's Language Hubs programme, which has entered its second year of delivery, seeks to do this by improving standards and quality of teaching in schools. Our Mandarin and Latin Excellence Programmes have already had a positive impact on the number of pupils studying those languages at GCSE and we expect to see the effect of this at A level too in the coming years.

Secondly, you requested that the government 'sort out the financial and bureaucratic obstacles to trips and exchanges' and you referred to the previous recent debate on the importance of educational trips and exchanges which took place on 25 April. The Government recognises the difficulties that schools, colleges and universities have faced in recent years when it comes to organising international visits and exchanges. We are taking steps to address this, as we discussed in that debate.

Thirdly, you asked that we 'encourage more local authorities to replicate the Hackney transition system, so that key stage 2 language learning is built on, rather than undermined, when children go to secondary school'. Through the Language Hubs programme, which is delivered by the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE), the programme team and my officials are working closely with Hackney to learn lessons from this local authority. They are in discussions on how the Spanish initiative in Hackney can be replicated elsewhere and in other languages to ensure that the good foundations of language learning at key stage 2 can be built upon by secondary schools.

Fourthly, you requested that the Department 'look at the FE sector' as you noted that the landmark report from the British Academy on Languages Provision in UK Further Education stated that FE colleges were a language learning cold spot.' As part of the Language Hubs programme, NCLE will work to embed and sustain high-quality language provision for the future, working with further education and employers to co-ordinate cross-institution collaboration to secure coherent pathways for languages post-16 and post-18. We recognise, though, that more could be done in this space and will continue to consider ways in which further education can be appropriately accounted for in our wider languages' programmes.

Fifthly, you asked that I 'deal with the haemorrhaging of languages from universities' and outlined that over 60 of them have cut some or all their modern language degrees since 2000. I also recognise the vulnerable position languages are in at the Higher Education level and the government is taking steps to address this through our school system. It is our expectation that through our work in schools, we will build the pipeline of linguists which will encourage universities to reconsider their offers.

Lastly, you asked that we 'do not forget our 2 million bilingual children and make sure they have the chance to gain academic qualifications in their home or heritage languages, many of which are of strategic importance to the UK, whether in business, security or diplomacy.' I am aware of the many benefits of bilingualism and the asset that our home, heritage and community language speakers are to this country. A key aim of the Hubs will be to provide greater accreditation for bilingual children in their home and heritage language. Work on Polish, for example, is already underway, with strong collaboration between NCLE, the Polish Embassy, and the Polish Education Society. A working group has been established with the support of the Polish Embassy to identify Polish heritage speakers within the hubs and across schools in England more widely. This has received endorsement from the Polish Ambassador and aims to increase the uptake of Polish at GCSE and A level.

Thank you again for raising this matter with me. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,



BARONESS BARRAN

MINISTER FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND STUDENT FINANCE