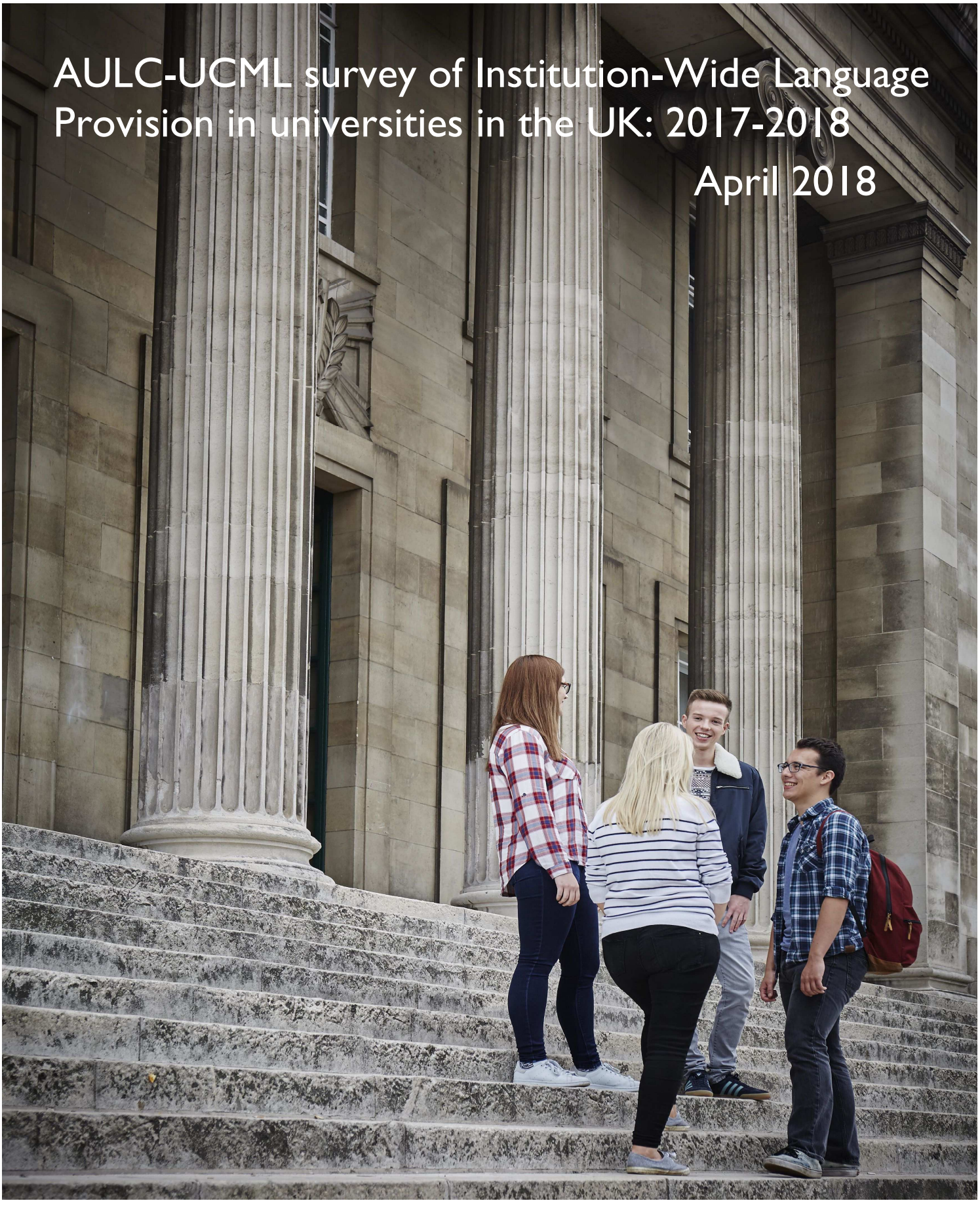
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UCML
University Council of Modern Languages

AULC-UCML survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK: 2017-2018

April 2018



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1. Introduction

This survey, carried out by members of the Association of University Language Centres in the UK (AULC) and the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML), sought to obtain a snapshot of Institution-wide Language Provision (IWLP) activity across the Higher Education sector in the UK in the 2017-2018 academic year.

Sometimes referred to as 'Languages for All', IWLP typically comprises elective language modules/course units taken for academic credit as minor components of a degree, and language courses studied in addition to and alongside a student's degree programme. Students taking these courses have been referred to as 'non-specialist language learners' since they often have little background in foreign language learning, and the courses they study are not a compulsory component of the degree programme for which they are registered.

This is the sixth year in succession that the AULC-UCML survey has been conducted. As there is no other mechanism or agency in a position to compile this data[1], the AULC-UCML survey is of particular importance.

The last five surveys (from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017) showed that IWLP is an expanding area attracting increasing numbers of students, and this trend in UK HE is the continuation of a pattern originally identified in earlier surveys (Marshall, 2001; Byrne and Abbott, 2007[2]).

Specific aims of the present survey were to:

- gauge availability and demand for different IWLP languages in UKHE and note changing trends
- ascertain the proportion of credit and non-credit provision
- determine the extent to which HEIs offer IWLP languages externally
- explore means of further supporting non-Latin script language provision
- explore how HEIs provide spaces for language resources and learning

2. Method

2.1. Surveying the sector

IWLP activity is rather difficult to survey as it is a somewhat diverse phenomenon. In most institutions, it includes accredited provision offered to non-specialist language learners; in others, it may only encompass provision which carries no academic credit. Many institutions offer both forms of provision, in some cases separately, in others in an integrated way. Activity may be managed from within a university language centre or it might be offered alongside degree programmes within a language department, and in others language centres and language departments may be intertwined. In some institutions, provision for external students (members of the public/lifelong learning students) may be incorporated as a part of the IWLP provision. The sector is also diverse in terms of the ranges of languages offered, with some institutions offering only three or four languages and others offering up to twenty, and in the ways these languages are offered to students, e.g. length of courses, number of contact hours per course.

[1] Registrations for IWLP course units are not recorded in UCAS or HESA statistics.
[2] Through its members, AULC conducted surveys of non-specialist language learners in 2003/04 and three subsequent years, obtaining an increasing response rate each year largely as a result of methodological improvements.

2.2. Questionnaire

For this year's survey, a simple electronic questionnaire was devised using the *Google Forms* survey tool. It was sent out in the third week of October 2017 to all AULC institutional representatives in the UK using the AULC members' list. It was also sent to contacts on the UCML contact list. Thus, the survey was sent to institutions with language centres and to those with IWLP activity in modern languages departments, even though in the latter case the activity might not be formally identified as IWLP. The survey sought to obtain data only on students who were taking a language either as a free choice (elective) course unit or on a non-credit basis.

2.3. Limitations

As was the case with last year's survey, the present survey only collected information on: i) students studying a language course as a free choice, or 'elective', accredited course option and ii) students studying a non-accredited language course in addition to and alongside their degree programme. Thus, data was not collected for students who were studying a language which, though comprising a minor part of their degree (less than 50%), was not a 'free-choice option'. As a result, it is likely that a considerable number of what might be termed 'non-specialist language students' have not been included in the figures reported here. This differs from the approach used in the Byrne and Abbot surveys (2007) which were designed to collect figures on the number of students at HE institutions who were taking a language simply as a minor 'assessed part of their degree (under 50%)'.

The survey did not collect information on the range of levels offered for each language. It was felt that breaking this information down across the languages would be time-consuming for the respondents and would result in a lower response rate. Likewise, data was not sought on the numbers progressing in a particular language across the years of study. Unlike in the earlier surveys (e.g. Byrne and Abbot, 2007), students themselves were not surveyed.

3. Results

By the end of the survey period, data had been collected from 56 institutions, 22 of which were Russell Group universities. Most of those who completed and submitted the questionnaire were directors of language centres or coordinators of IWLP programmes. However, there were also some responses from heads of academic departments and a small number of responses from programme administrators. This latter group responded to the part of the survey which asked for quantitative data, but most did not complete the entire questionnaire. The response rate in this survey was somewhat lower than of previous surveys and this means that comparison with the earlier figures is difficult.

3.1. Number of students on IWLP-type courses

The number of students reported as being enrolled on IWLP courses in this survey was lower than the number reported in 2016-2017: the total number of enrolments reported for the end of October/early November period in the 2016-2017 academic year was 62,455 (62 HEIs reporting). The total number of enrolments reported for the end of October/early November period in the 2017-18 academic year was 53,200 (56 HEIs reporting).

Year to year comparisons have to be treated cautiously because not only does the number of respondents vary from year to year, but the actual institutions which report also vary slightly. Nevertheless, up to last year, this survey was showing evidence of an overall increase in IWLP enrolments at the national level. This academic year, we see a decrease in figures reported. However, it should be pointed out that once figures from universities who returned data on numbers last year, but not this year, were added, a figure of 62,200 is obtained, which is almost the same as last year. So, despite the drop in reported figures, we can conclude that the overall numbers appear to be stable.

Table 1. Number of enrolments reported in the AULC-UCML surveys

Year	Number	Number of HEIs reporting
2012-2013	49,637	61
2013-2014	53,971	64
2014-2015	54,975	61
2015-2016	55,354	61
2016-2017	62,455	62
2017-2018	53,200	56

3.2. Languages offered

Question 2 of this year's survey asked respondents to indicate which languages their HEI offered. Our survey data indicates that, whilst some institutions are only able to offer students three or four languages, more typically around nine different languages are available to study. Some of the larger universities are able to offer up to 20 languages. Figure 1 below shows the number of institutions offering each language, where the number of providers is four or greater.

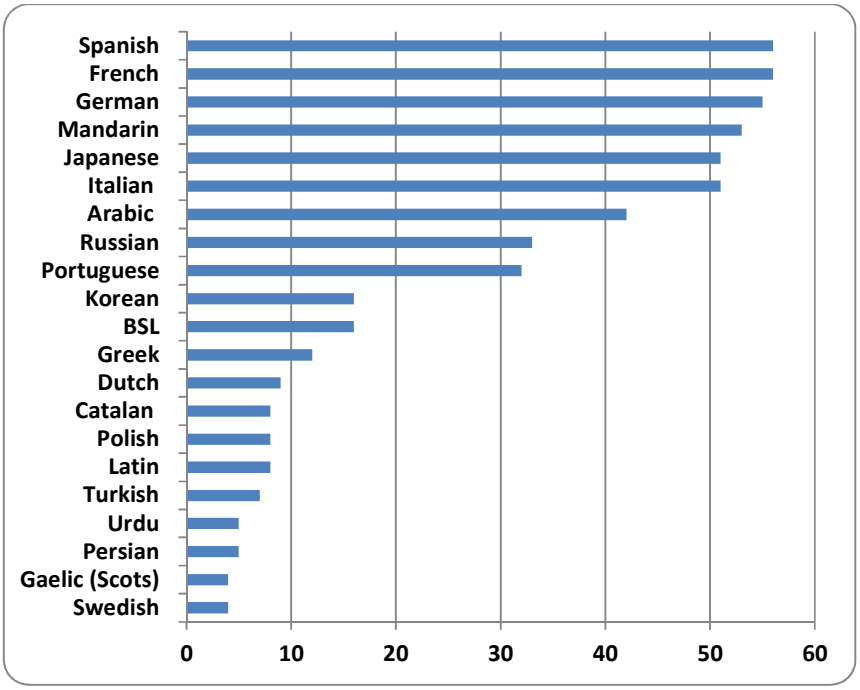


Figure 1. No. of HEIs surveyed offering different languages (n = 56)

The table shows that provision is dominated by the three main western European languages. However, other widely-taught languages including Mandarin Chinese, Italian, Japanese and Arabic, are offered by the majority of HEIs, with more than half also offering Russian and Portuguese. The data also tell us that around just under 30% the responding institutions offer Korean and British Sign Language.

We asked respondents to rank the main languages according to their popularity among learners. The following chart reveals the relative levels of popularity based on an average of their ranked positions:

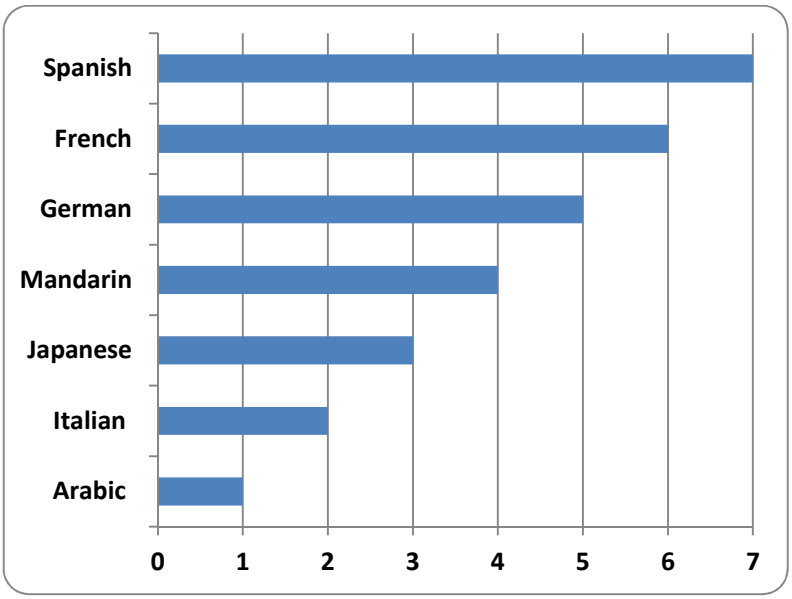


Figure 2. Main languages ranked according to popularity

As in previous surveys the first three rankings are for Spanish, French and German. In contrast to last year, however, Mandarin Chinese is shown to be slightly more popular than Japanese, whilst Italian has slipped down the table to sixth position from fifth. The relative popularity of Mandarin Chinese shown in Figure 2 may be an underestimation since the survey did not collect data of the numbers of UK students learning Mandarin Chinese on a non-accredited basis at the Confucius Institutes located on UK university campuses (n = 11).

3.3. Changing preferences for languages

The survey asked respondents to indicate which languages have experienced an increase in demand and which languages have experienced a decrease in demand at their institutions. Figure 3 below shows the seven languages most reported as showing an increase in numbers of learners compared to last year. About one third of the respondents reported that there had been an increase in the number of students taking Japanese and Spanish, and around one quarter reported an increase in German. It is significant that for both Japanese and German an increased uptake was reported in 2015-2016. In fact, the positive trend for German was also revealed in the 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 surveys. In responding to a question about why German was proving popular, respondents in the 2014-2015 survey cited the economic importance of Germany, employability reasons, and also the popularity of German with Engineering students among some groups of international students.

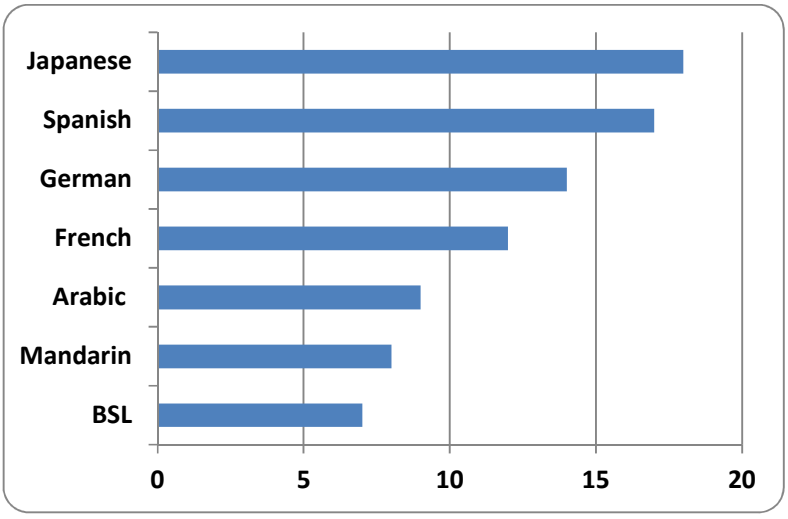


Figure 3. Languages which have shown an increase in student numbers (HEIs reporting)

The figure below shows the five languages most reported as showing a decrease compared to last year. It should be noted that the actual numbers reported in this figure are less than those reported in Figure 3 above. Furthermore, it is likely that, in both figures, below and at around a certain number of reported HEIs (12 in Figure 3 and 8 in Figure 4) we are observing natural variability in enrolment patterns. Nevertheless, it is notable that in each of the previous five surveys (from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017) Italian has been most reported as showing a decrease.

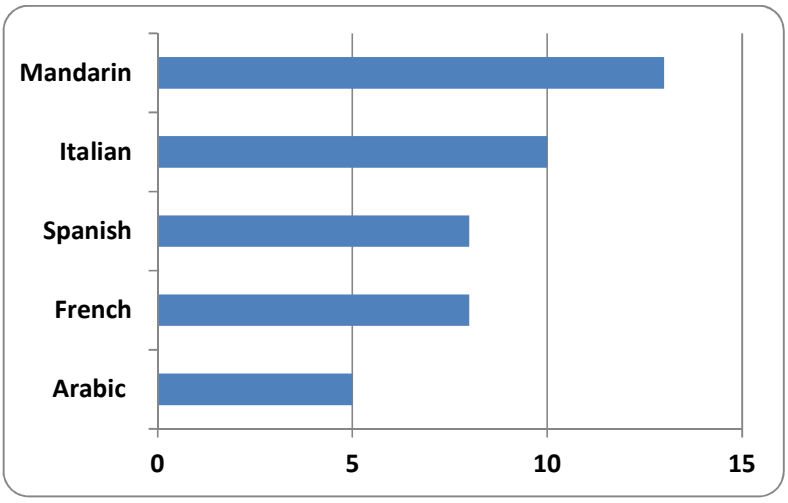


Figure 4. Languages which have shown a decrease in student numbers (HEIs reporting)

3.4. Outlook for IWLP

As in previous surveys, respondents were asked how they felt about the prospects for non-specialist language learning at their institution. The overall pattern of responses gave a fairly optimistic picture with around 70% indicating that prospects were 'encouraging', 25% indicating that prospects were 'uncertain' and only 5% indicating that prospects were 'poor'. The responses to this question were very similar to the responses given in last year's survey.

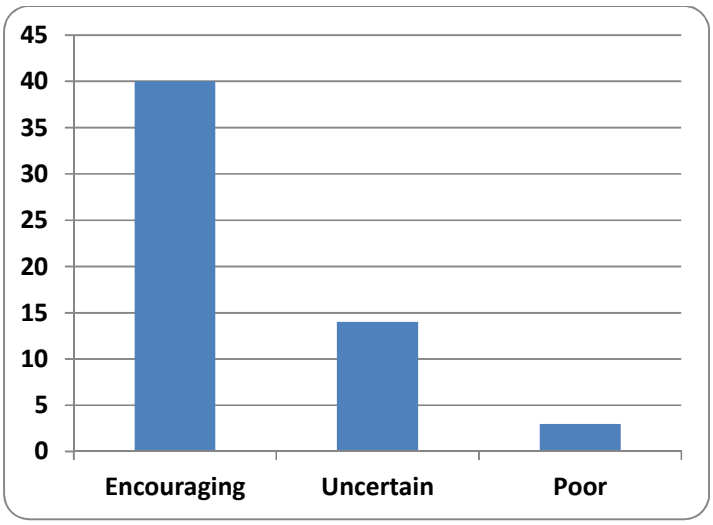


Figure 5. Prospects for IWLP

3.5. Reasons for growth or decline

In an attempt to learn more about the drivers of changing recruitment patterns, the survey included open questions which asked respondents to say why they felt overall numbers had increased or decreased. When grouped thematically, the most commonly-given explanation for an increase in numbers was that there was strong institutional support (x7). Sample comments on this theme from the returned questionnaires are given below:

- A strong global engagement strategy and a very supportive new Head of School with a clear strategy for growth of IWLP.
- Our IWLP was launched at the request of the university in 2013. Our programme is funded via FTEs and is perceived as a strategic asset by our institution.
- Numbers are strong, we have institutional support and the importance of languages for all has been written in the new College strategy and education strategy.

Reasons given for either a lack of growth or a fall in numbers fell into the following categories: capacity issues (x3), academic restrictions (x2) and budget cuts (x2):

- Growth in the programme is leading to capacity issues which are of concern to senior management leading to deferral of investment decisions.

- The Faculties are not allowing students to take a language module because they have to choose from the core modules and electives their faculties offer them.

- There are ongoing reviews and budget cuts, including decreasing administrative support for languages and discussions around cutting the number of languages offered.

3.6. Types of student

In this year's survey, respondents were asked a number of questions about the different kinds of students studying on their institution-wide language courses.

The majority of respondents (48/55 or 87%) in this survey indicated that institution-wide language courses are available to undergraduates for academic credit. Figure 6 below shows that the proportion of students studying a language for credit at each institution appears to vary considerably, with the greatest number of respondents (12 or 22%) indicating that languages are only offered as a credit bearing option. At the other end of the scale, seven respondents in this survey indicated that their IWLP courses are only available as a non-credit option.

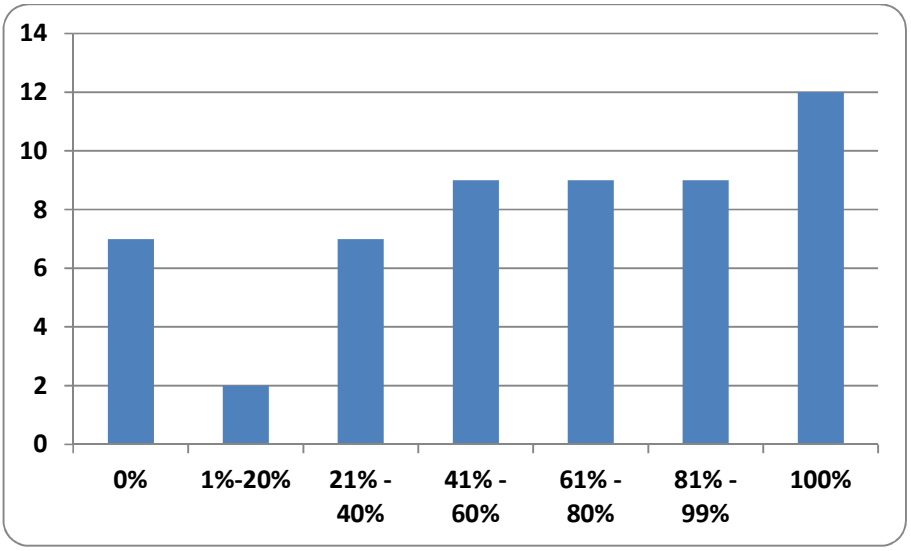


Figure 6. Proportion of UG IWLP studying for academic credit (n = 55)

Regarding the proportion of international students, while not all respondents were able to answer this question, 23 institutions indicated that up to 20% of students were international, 10 institutions indicated that up to 40% were international and 4 reported that up to 50% of students were international.

The majority of respondents also indicated that their courses were open to postgraduate students (74%). In the majority of cases, PG students comprised less than 25% of the total number of IWLP enrolments. Eight institutions, however, reported that postgraduate students comprise more than 25% of their total numbers, and 17 institutions reported that they are able to offer language courses specifically for postgraduate students. Most of these specialised courses appear to have an academic focus:

- We offer French and German for academic purposes on demand
- Postgraduate Training Scheme approved by the University's Postgraduate Office - Postgraduate students can even obtain 20 credits.
- We offer courses in Arabic, French, Italian, German, Latin and Ancient Greek for academic research purposes (enhancing reading and text interpreting skills)
- We offer, German/French for academic purposes and Mandarin for Research

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether their institutions offered courses to members of the public, also termed in the survey as 'external' students. Just over two-thirds of respondents indicated that their courses were open to these kinds of students.

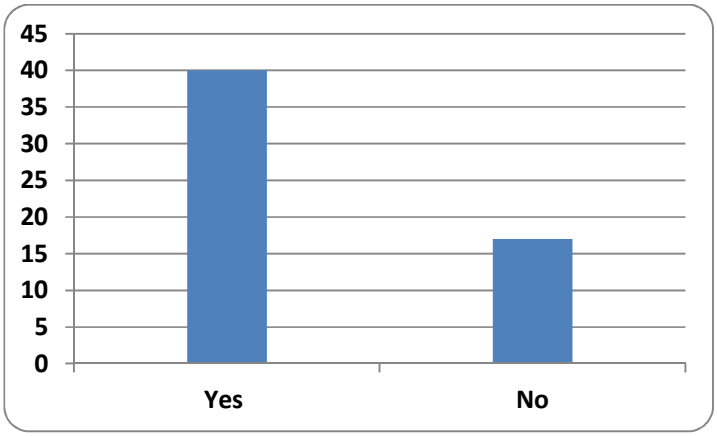


Figure 7. Does your institution offer courses to external students (members of the public)?

When asked to indicate what proportion of the total number of enrolments was made up by this type of student, most respondents indicated between 10% and 20%. However, in five cases members of the public made up over 50% of total numbers, and in eight cases they made up less than 10%. Where members of the public are taught, over 50% of the respondents (25) indicated that these students study the same courses as the undergraduate students.

When asked to list challenges associated with providing for these kinds of students, the following were listed:

- Differing needs (x12)
- Timetabling problems (x9)
- IT support (x6)

When asked to list the benefits arising from the provision of language classes to external students, the following three responses were most common:

- engagement with the wider/local community (x17)
- additional income (x14)
- greater diversity in the language classes (x14)

3.7. Non-Latin script languages: challenges and support

As indicated earlier in Figure 1, the provision of non-Latin script languages (e.g. Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Korean) comprises a significant proportion of IWLP activity. In this year's survey, an open question was asked about the challenges associated with teaching non-Latin script languages. The most common responses were as follows:

- Resources/lack of materials (x17)
- Additional teaching time required (x11)
- Benchmarking learning outcomes (x9)
- Assessment (x8)
- Requiring specialist staff (x6)

A second question asked respondents to suggest three ways in which the AULC could assist providers of non-Latin script languages. The following themes emerged from the suggestions given:

- Set up a SIG, network and/or mailing list of practitioners
- Create a list of possible examiners
- Set up an area for virtual sharing of resources and/or assessments
- Create a database of existing online resources
- Develop arguments for the need for extra teaching time for these languages
- Provide information on benchmarking with the CEFR
- List realistic learning outcomes (can-do list) as a supplement to the CEFR
- Organize CPD Teacher training workshops
- Initiate cross-institution collaboration
- Support subject leads/champions for consultation, advice and guidance

3.8. Spaces for language resources and language learning

The final part of this year's survey asked a number of questions relating to spaces made available for language learning resources and for independent learning. Of the 56 institutions who returned the survey, 41 indicated that they have a special area for language resources (73%). On the question of nomenclature, the word 'centre' seems to be used in the majority of providers to refer to this space: 28/41 (68%) but this may be used in conjunction with a variety of other words, as shown in the three patterns below:

Pattern 1 (x10)

The The *Smith*	Language(s) (Learning)	Centre

Pattern 2 (x9)

The	Language Learning Transnational	Resource(s)	Centre

Pattern 3 (x9)

The The *Smith*	Self-Access Open Access Open Learning Independent Learning Worldwise Learning Modern Language Study Multimedia	Centre

However, a number of alternatives to the word 'centre' were also given and these can be seen below:

Pattern 4 - alternative (x8)

The	Language	Learning Resources Study	Zone Lounge Hub Commons Room Library Area

Respondents were asked to indicate which type of student uses the resource/self-study area or facility by frequency. This question listed five different categories of student, including the 'specialist student'[3] category and students not actually enrolled on a formal language course, against a Likert scale which indicated different degrees of use, ranging from 'frequently use' to 'not at all'. The figure below shows the proportion of respondents, given as a percentage, who indicated 'frequently use' the resource area for each student category. The figure suggests that 'specialist' students are the most frequent users.

[3] Students studying a language as a single or joint degree programme.

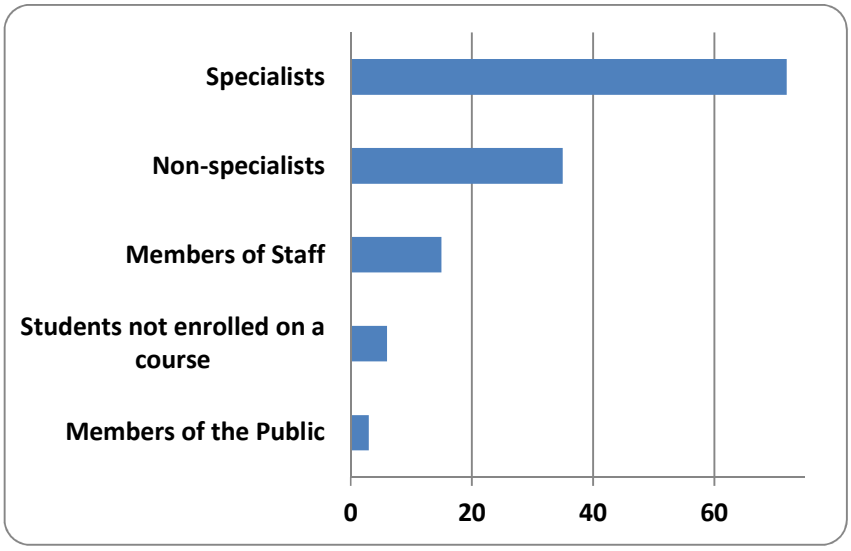


Figure 8. Use of facility: % of respondents indicating 'frequently use' by each student category

The figure below shows the proportion of respondents, given as a percentage, who indicated 'sometimes use' the resource area for each student category. This figure suggests that these facilities are used 'sometimes' by all categories of student in fairly similar proportions.

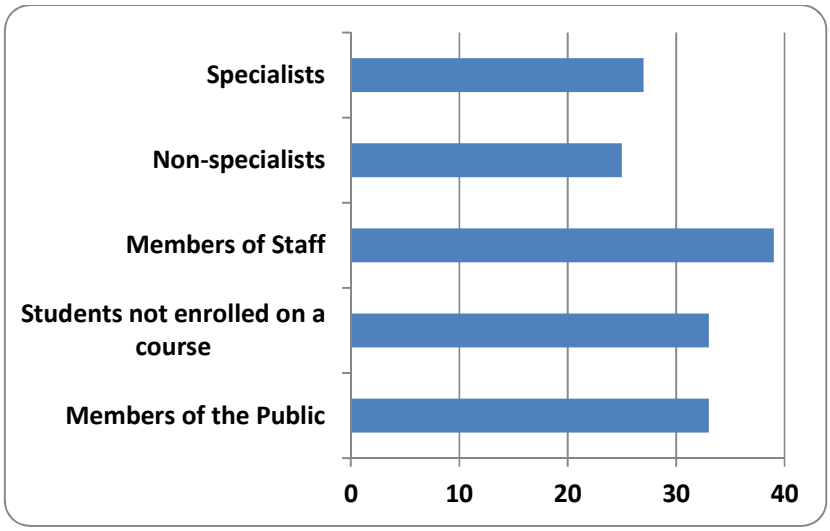


Figure 9. Use of facility: % of respondents indicating 'sometimes use' by each student category

When asked to indicate the degree of frequency that different types of resources were used by students, again using a Likert scaled question, respondents indicated that printed materials were most 'frequently' used (75% of respondents), as shown in the figure below. 'SW' appeared on the question as 'software'.

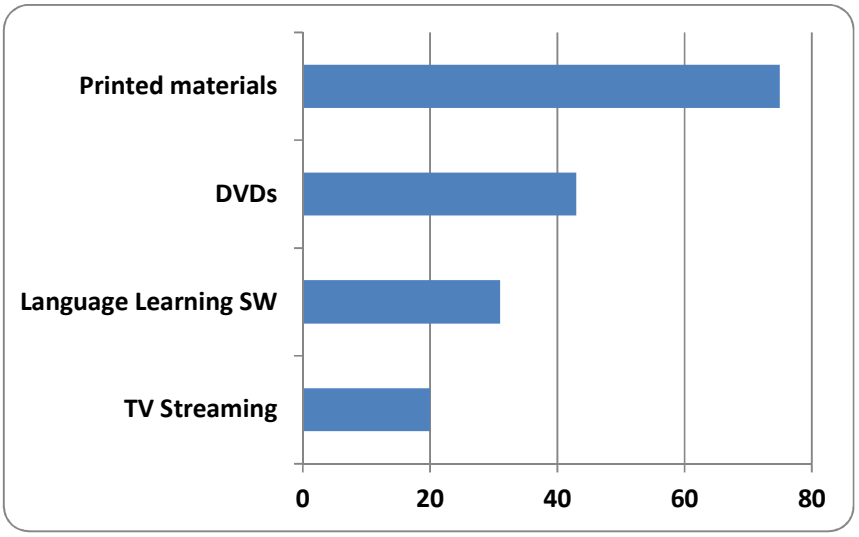


Figure 10. Use of resources: % of respondents indicating 'frequent' use by resource type.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their resource area had space for a range of different activities. The figure below shows the activities that were listed in the question along with the proportion of responses which indicated 'yes' given as a percentage:

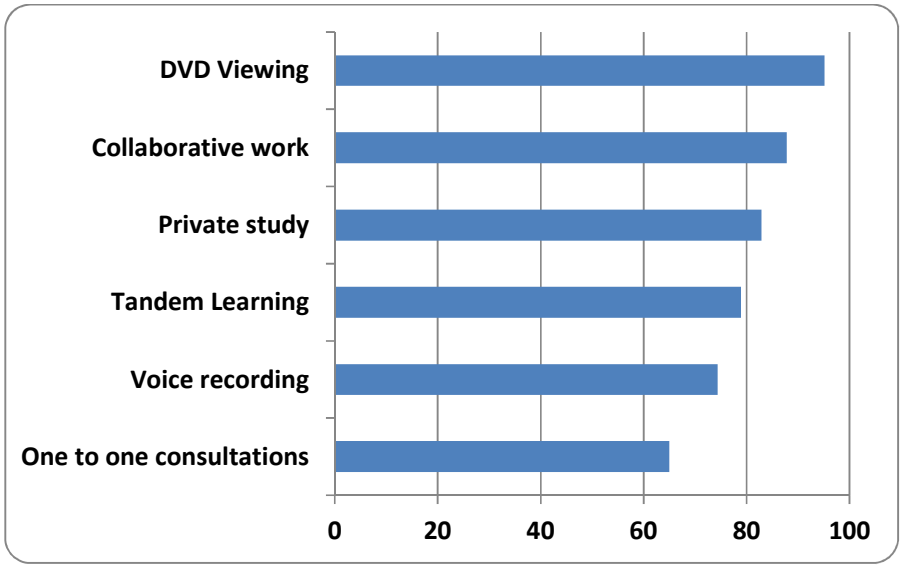


Figure 11. Space available for different activities, 'yes'

The final question in the survey asked respondents to list three things that they felt make a successful university language resource centre. The suggestions, along with the number of responses given for each, are given in the table below:

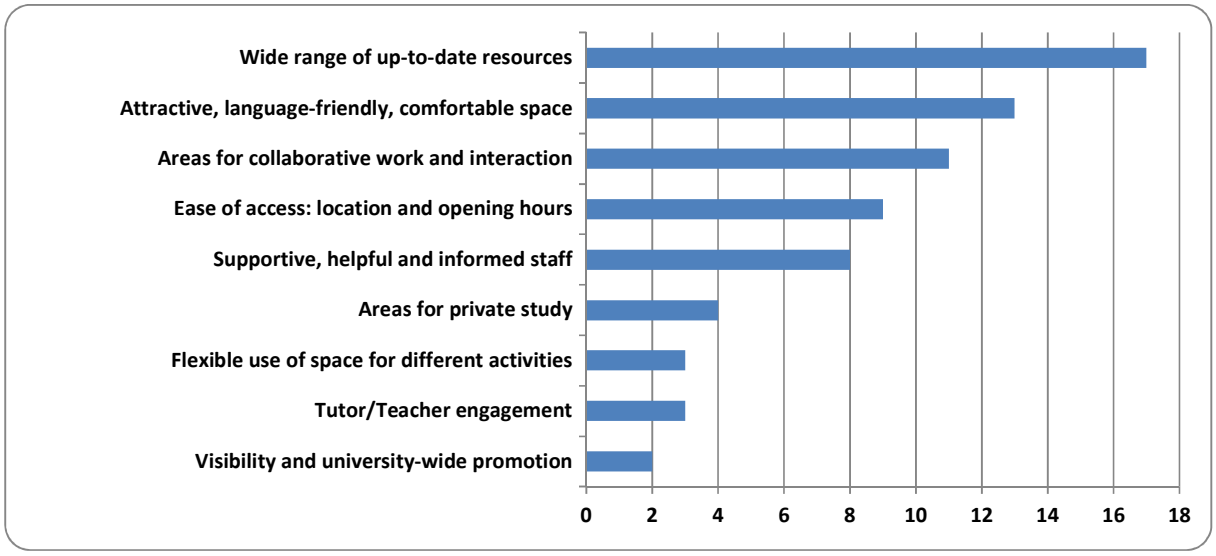


Figure 12. Elements that contribute to a successful resource centre: number of responses

Conclusion

The overall picture of student enrolment continues to be broadly positive across the Higher Education sector and indicates that at least 53 200, and possibly as many as 62 200, students are enrolled on IWLP language courses. It is difficult to make direct comparisons with the data collected in previous years as responses were received from three new respondents while there were no responses from nine who had previously participated. That said, in spite of the lower response rate compared to previous years, the general outlook for the sector remains positive although it is still too early to know the full impact of Brexit.

In terms of provision of languages, the main western European languages continue to be offered by the majority of institutions. In terms of demand, Spanish continues to be the most popular language followed by French and German; Mandarin has jumped two places to fourth compared to last year's survey. German and Japanese continue to show increased enrolment although in spite of this, Japanese has slipped a place. Italian appears to be continuing to decline in popularity.

The data indicate that the majority of students studying on IWLP courses are undergraduates studying for academic credit. However, it also reflects the diverse nature of the student cohort in some institutions and this is probably unusual in Higher Education where activity is often separated according to undergraduate and postgraduate.

The survey has helped to identify ways in which the AULC can provide support to colleagues who teach non-Latin script languages. These will be considered going forward, priorities will be identified and members will be invited to develop these initiatives with the support of the AULC where appropriate.

Since last year's survey a new CPD Special Interest Group (SIG) has been established and a distribution list for members who are interested in being involved has been set up. A meeting was held as part of the AULC annual conference and further meetings are planned.

This survey was carried out on behalf of the Association of University Language Centres and the University Council of Modern Languages by: Caroline Campbell, Ana de Medeiros and John Morley.

References

Byrne, N. and Abbot, J. (2007) Survey on university students choosing a language course as an extra-curricular activity. *Results from the second year of a planned three-year survey conducted by AULC on behalf of the DIUS. November.* Unpublished. Presentation based on this survey is available here: http://www.celelc.org/docs/byrne.new.multisubject.programmes.0.pdf (accessed on 7th January 2014)

UCML-AULC (2016) UCML-AULC survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2015-2016) http://www.ucml.ac.uk/languages-education/he-languages (accessed on 7th March 2018)

6. Appendix: List of participating institutions

Aston University
Bath, University of
Birmingham, University of
Bristol, University of
Brunel University
Cambridge, University of
Cardiff University
Central Lancashire, University of
Coventry University
Durham University
Dundee University
Edge Hill University
Edinburgh, University of
Exeter, University of
Glasgow, University of
Heriot-Watt University
Hertfordshire, University of
Huddersfield, University of
Hull, University of
Imperial College London
Keele University
King's College London
Kingston University London
Lancaster University
Leeds, University of
Leicester, University of
Liverpool, University of
London School of Economics and Political Science
Loughborough University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Manchester, University of
Newcastle, University of
Northumbria, University of
Nottingham Trent University
Nottingham, University of
Oxford, University of
Portsmouth, University of
Queen's University Belfast
Reading, University of
Regent's University London
Roehampton, University of
Salford, University of
Sheffield, University of
Sheffield Hallam University
Southampton Solent University
Southampton, University of
St Andrews, University of
Stirling, University of
Surrey, University of
Sussex, University of
Swansea University
University of the West of Scotland
Warwick, University of
Wolverhampton, University of
Worcester, University of
York, University of