UCML-AULC survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2013-2014)

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Contents

1. Introduction

The survey aimed to obtain a picture of the current availability of and demand for Institution-wide Language Provision (IWLP) across the higher education sector in the UK. Also sometimes referred to as 'Languages for All', IWLP typically comprises elective language course units taken for academic credit 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 the courses they study are not a compulsory component of the degree programme for which they are registered. This is the second year in succession that the UCML-AULC survey has been conducted. As there is no other mechanism or agency in a position to compile this data[1], the UCML-AULC survey is of particular importance.

Last year's survey showed that IWLP is an expanding area attracting increasing numbers of students, and this trend in UK HE is a 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 UK HE and note changing trends
- ascertain the proportion of and arrangements for credit and non-credit provision
- determine the numbers of international students taking IWLP languages, and what challenges and opportunities this presence brings;
- elicit respondents' views on accreditation, and standardisation of learning outcomes
- gauge respondents' views on the prospects for IWLP

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 credit-bearing provision to non-specialist language learners; in others, it only encompasses non-credit provision to these students. Activity may be managed from within a university language centre or it might be offered alongside specialist degree programmes and managed from within a language department. In some institutions, provision for external students (members of the public/lifelong learning students) may be incorporated as a part of the IWLP provision. In at least one case, language course units are offered by an external provider. 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.

2.2.   Questionnaire

A simple electronic questionnaire was devised using the Select Survey tool (SelectSurvey.NET). It was sent out in the third week of October 2013 to all AULC institutional representatives in the UK using the AULC contacts list. It was also distributed via the UCML contacts list. In addition, where responses were not forthcoming, individuals who were thought to be in a position to provide the data, or who might be in a position to ask others to provide this, were reminded by email, in some cases telephoned. 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.

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[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.

2.3.   Limitations

As was the case with last year's survey, this survey only collected information on i) students studying a language course as a free choice, or 'elective', credit bearing course option and ii) students studying a not-for-credit language course in addition to and alongside a 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 being offered for each language. It was felt that breaking this information down across the languages would be time-consuming for the respondents and would probably result in a much 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.

Last of all, because respondents were asked to indicate numbers at the end of October/early November, the survey did not capture the number of students who might be registering to study a language course in the second half of the year. Although these additional registrations would have resulted in more comprehensive data, and higher reported numbers, capturing this data would have meant conducting the survey in February and publication would be delayed until May or June, and thus the findings would only be relevant retrospectively in the year of their dissemination. Finally, because the survey elicited a snapshot of numbers near the start of the academic year, it was not able to take into account all of the withdrawals.

3. Results

By the end of the survey period, data had been collected from 64 institutions, 23 of which were Russell Group universities. Three of the institutions included in the total number were not running IWLP programmes at the time of the survey. Another three returned incomplete data. 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 (n = 11) and a small number of responses from programme administrators (n = 7). This latter group responded to the part of the survey which asked for quantitative data, but did not complete the entire questionnaire.

3.1.   Number of students on IWLP-type courses

The number of students reported as being enrolled on IWLP courses in this survey was somewhat higher than the number reported in 2013: 53,971 v 49,637. This increase is undoubtedly partly to do with the fact that a higher number of HEIs responded to this year's survey compared to last year: 64 v 62. Nevertheless, the higher overall number also appears to show a real increase compared to last year since the total number of students reported by the HEIs who were not included in last year's survey does not by itself account for the difference between the two years.

### 3.2.   Proportion of credit and non-credit students

In the current survey, the proportion of students studying an IWLP course for academic credit was around 60% of the total. This figure, which is similar to the figure given last year, is the average (mean) of all the proportions that were given by the respondents in the survey. However, this figure masks a considerable diversity across the sector with several institutions offering their IWLP courses only as a credit option and with several institutions offering IWLP courses only on a non-credit basis. Because these differences are

factored in to the calculation of the mean, it may be misleading to interpret this figure as typical. Having said this, a quick analysis of the data shows that for the majority of institutions, the proportion of students studying for credit was within five points of the 60% figure.

Responses to a related question in the survey showed that in most institutions (55% of those who responded), students studying a language for academic credit study alongside students who are studying on a not-for-credit basis.

3.3.   Languages offered

According to the survey data, the average (mean) number of different languages offered by institutions was nine. Although the actual number of languages offered at each institution ranged from three to 20, around two-thirds of all respondents indicated that their institution offered between six and 11 languages. Figure 1 below shows all those languages whose total reported numbers reached 260 students or more. Where the numbers studying a language did not reach 260, the language has been categorised as 'Other'.
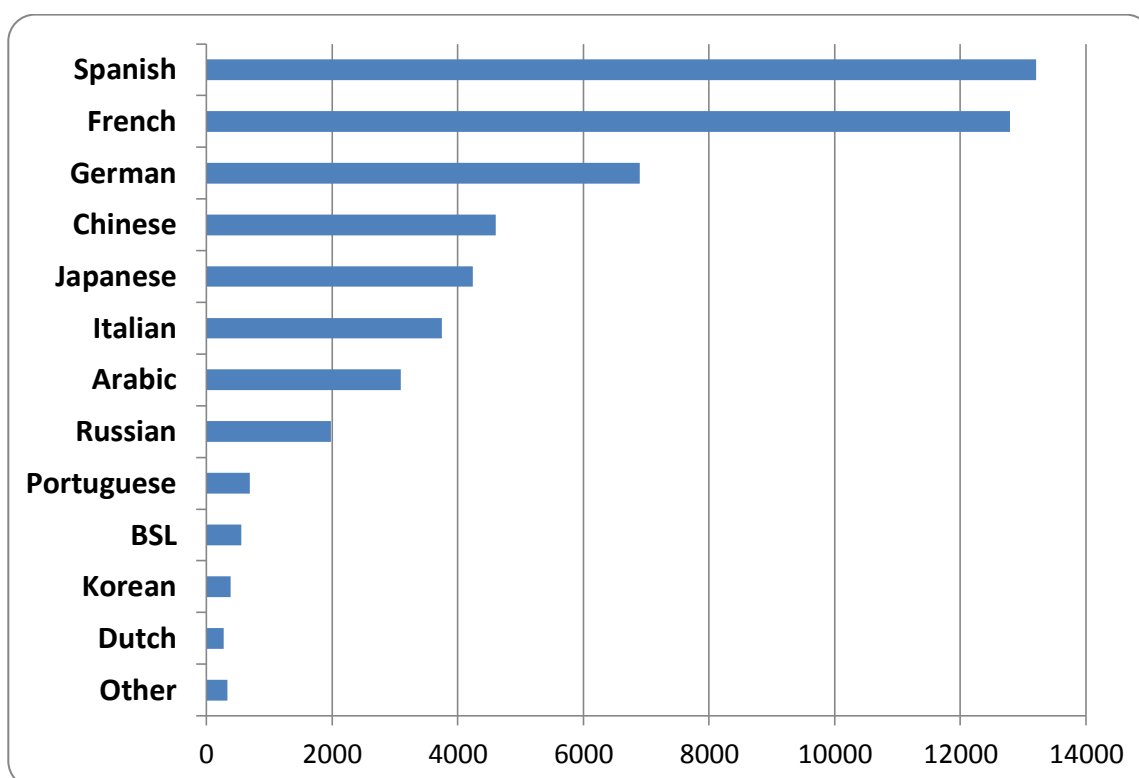
Figure 1. Main languages studied showing student numbers reported

From the chart, it can be seen that by far the greatest demand is for Spanish and French, with German and Chinese following in third and fourth places. Japanese, Italian, Arabic and Russian also appear to be attracting significant numbers of students. In a similar chart for the numbers studying languages in 2012-2013, Italian ranked after German as being the fourth most popular language and Chinese was ranked after Japanese in sixth place. In 2013-2014, this situation has been reversed, with Chinese now appearing as the fourth most popular language. The figures for the numbers learning Chinese are probably an underestimation since the

survey did not collect data of the numbers of UK students learning Chinese on a not-for-credit basis at the Confucius Institutes located on UK university campuses (n = 11). More detailed figures for the numbers and percentages of students taking individual languages and the numbers of institutions offering each language are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Numbers and percentages of students taking individual languages; numbers of institutions offering each language[3]

Language	Number of learners per language	No of learners per language as % of all learners	No of HEIs in the survey offering each language	No of HEIs in the survey offering language as % of all HEIs[4]
Spanish	13206	24.5%	59	95%
French	12792	23.7%	60	97%
German	6895	12.8%	59	95%
Chinese	4605	8.5%	56	90%
Japanese	4237	7.9%	52	84%
Italian	3746	6.9%	51	82%
Arabic	3094	5.7%	45	73%
Russian	1984	3.7%	38	61%
Portuguese	695	1.3%	28	45%
BSL	551	1.0%	13	21%
Korean	385	0.7%	10	16%
Dutch	279	0.5%	13	21%
Polish	244	0.5%	13	21%
Greek	227	0.4%	16	26%
Hindi	115	0.2%	4	6%
Swedish	109	0.2%	7	11%
Turkish	84	0.2%	6	10%
Catalan	72	0.1%	4	6%
Persian	68	0.1%	5	8%
Urdu	64	0.1%	6	10%
Hebrew	62	0.1%	4	6%
Welsh	48	0.1%	2	3%
Norwegian	33	0.1%	1	2%
Other	376	0.7%	-	-

Because of methodological differences and the differing number of responses, comparisons of actual figures for particular languages with those of earlier surveys are problematic. Somewhat more meaningful, however, are comparisons of the proportions of students studying languages with those of previous years. So while French, along with Spanish, is still by far one of the most popular languages, as a proportion of all languages being studied, it seems to be on the decline in relative terms. In Keith Marshall's 2001 UCML survey of the sector, French accounted for 29% of the student numbers. This had declined to slightly over 25% in the UCML-AULC Survey for 2012-2013 and to just under 24% in this year's UCML – AULC Survey. Having said this, the actual numbers reported as studying French are higher this year than in 2013.

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[3] Not included in the table are the low numbers of students reported as studying languages such as Danish, Punjabi, Georgian, Somali, Swahili, and Thai. These have been grouped under 'Other'.
[4] Three institutions with IWLP programmes did not return any figures for the languages being offered so these have been excluded from this % calculation in this table.

It is interesting to note that Chinese is now offered by 56 HEIs (approx. 90% of the responding institutions). In Marshall's 2001 survey, only nine institutions reported that they were offering language courses in Chinese, and in 2013 this figure had grown to 48. The survey data for this year therefore clearly shows a strong and continuing positive trend for this language. Evidence of a continuing positive trend for Arabic has also been revealed with the number of institutions offering the language in 2001 (Marshall) being reported as only two compared to 45 in the current survey (over 70% of the responding institutions). Two languages which were not offered in 2001 but are now offered by a significant number of HEIs are British Sign Language and Korean. The current survey data shows that these are offered by 13 and 10 institutions respectively. Both of these figures represent an increase over the data reported in 2013 with only four institutions reporting that they offered BSL and six reporting that they offered Korean.

3.4. Numbers compared to previous academic year

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the numbers of students recruited onto their IWLP courses in 2013 - 2014 were higher or lower than in the previous academic year. Of the 58 institutions which responded to this question, 30 reported an increase in numbers and 19 reported little or no change. A decrease in numbers was reported by nine institutions.
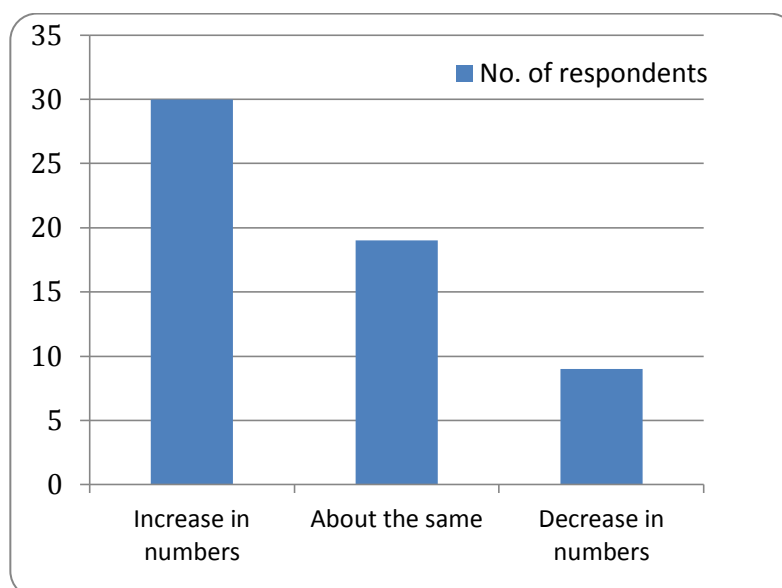
Figure 2. Reported numbers as compared to last year

These figures suggest that, unlike the languages sector in HE as a whole, recruitment onto IWLP courses generally appears to be relatively buoyant. In a small number of cases, the increases were highly significant, evidenced by comments in response to the question: 'Compared to last year, are your overall numbers this year higher or lower?' such as:

- 'Higher - a 40-50% rise in numbers, year on year'
- 'Higher by about 25%'
- 'Higher: Up by 27%'
- 'An overall rise of around 25% on last year. Higher'
- 'Numbers on accredited courses rose by 25%'

On the whole, however, the increases reported were lower than this with increases of between 5% and 10% frequently being cited. Where numbers were reported as being the same as last year, or where a fall was reported, some respondents qualified this information by pointing out that the lack of growth was due to institutional policy factors and not to a lowering of student demand. For example:

- 'About the same, because we cap numbers at around this total. We have waiting lists of about 200 people'
- 'Numbers are lower because of more restrictive availability to students'

3.5.   Changing preferences for languages compared to last year

The figure below shows the five languages most reported as showing an increase in numbers of learners compared to last year. It is notable that, apart from German, three of the other languages in this list can be classed as non-European, whilst Spanish plays a very important role outside Europe.
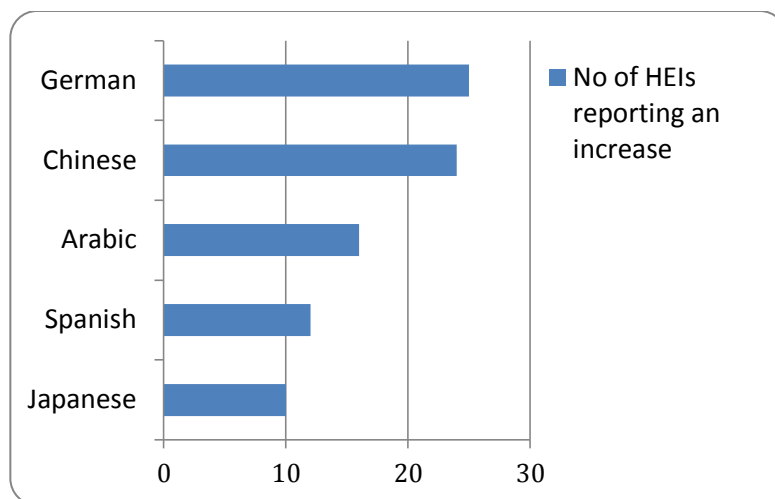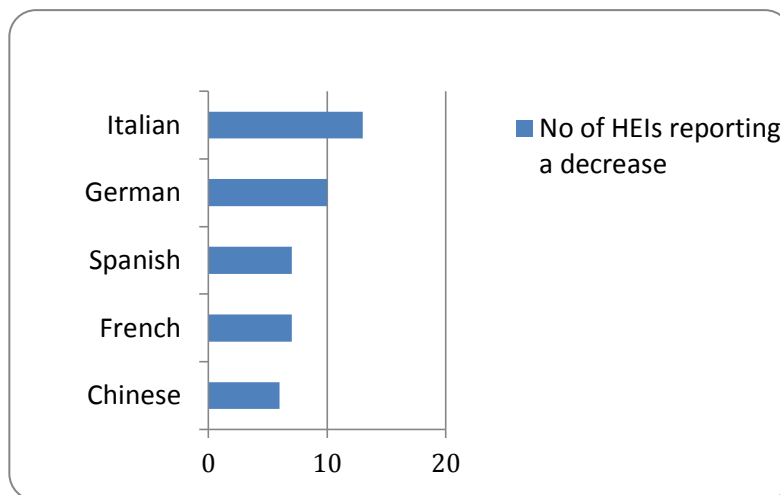

Figure 3. The five languages most reported as showing an increase compared to last year

The position of German at the top of this table is somewhat puzzling. In responding to a question about why German was proving popular, respondents cited the economic importance of Germany, employability reasons, and also the popularity of German with engineering students and with some groups of international students.

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 about half those reported in Figure 3 above. It is also worth noting that three of the languages listed (German, Spanish and Chinese) were also reported as showing an increase by a significant number of institutions. It is most likely therefore that the data for most of the languages in Figure 4 is simply revealing an element of natural variability in recruitment data rather than any kind of overall trend. However, this may not be the case with Italian for two reasons: i) the numbers of institutions reporting a decrease is notably higher than for any other language , and ii) in the 2012-2013 survey, Italian was also most reported as showing a decrease.

Figure 4. The five languages most reported as showing a decrease compared to last year

3.6.   International students and IWLP

One of the areas that was explored in this year's survey was the presence of international students on IWLP courses and what challenges and/or opportunities respondents felt this presented. Analysis of the responses revealed that IWLP appears to attract a high proportion of international students, a term used in the survey to encompass both EU and non-EU students. Respondents were asked to give an approximate indication of the proportion of international students on their institutions IWLP programmes. Although the proportions given ranged between 10% and 80%, the mean of all the percentage figures that were given was around 38%. Interestingly, around two-fifths of the respondents in this survey reported the presence of international students on their IWLP courses as being greater than 50%.

In response to the question: Can you list any opportunities, trends or issues arising from the presence of international students on IWLP courses, a range of responses was elicited. The themes identified in these responses are summarised in Figure 5 below:
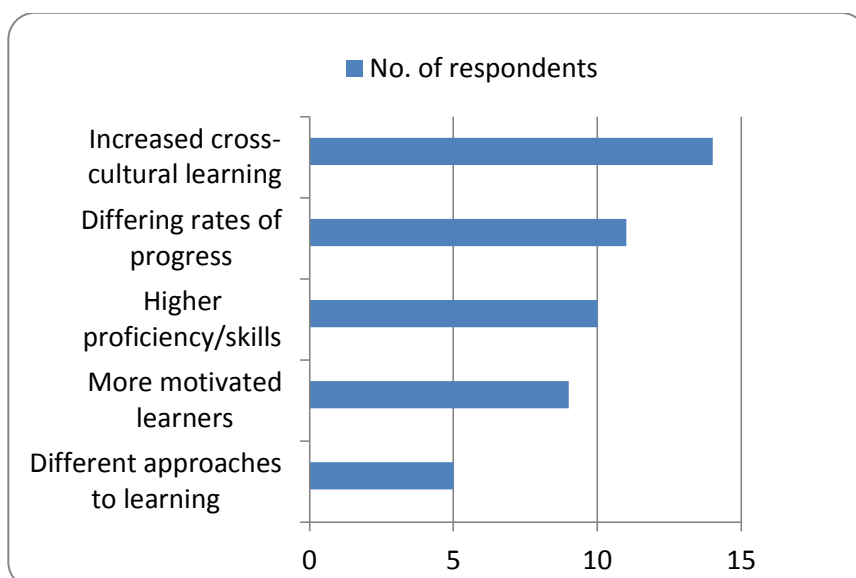
Figure 5. Opportunities and challenges presented by international students

As can be seen in Figure 5, the presence of international students on IWLP courses was considered to be broadly positive by the respondents, with the increased opportunities for cross-cultural learning, higher levels of proficiency, and increased levels of motivation being cited. One commonly reported 'challenge' was the fact that the presence of international students could result in differing levels of progress in the class, though it was not clear from the survey whether international students are more generally associated with faster rates or with slower rates of progress.

3.7. Standardisation and Accreditation

This section of the survey required respondents to give information on whether the learning outcomes of their courses were externally referenced, and it also sought to elicit their views on the desirability of some form of standardised quality assurance mechanism. In the first question respondents were asked whether they make use of a common set of proficiency descriptors for standardising the learning outcomes of the languages taught. The majority of the respondents (85%) indicated that they make reference to the Common European Framework (CEFR). A smaller number indicated that they make reference to an alternative system, and one respondent indicated that their institution does not have a system. The survey did not ask respondents to give their views on how reliable they felt the CEFR external mapping process was.

On the question of accreditation, 64% of respondents felt that some form of standardised self-evaluation scheme would be useful; and only 44% of respondents felt that some form of national accreditation scheme would be useful. Some caution, however, is called for in interpreting these responses as, for both questions, a high number of 'not sure's were returned: 31% and 44% respectively. This could indicate that the respondents did not feel that terms used in these two questions ('standardised self-evaluation scheme' and 'national accreditation scheme') were clearly defined or explained. At the same time, the high number of 'not sure's could also mean that the issue is a complex one and cannot easily be encapsulated in just two restricted response type questions. Nevertheless, the survey results are clear about the fact that the majority felt that some form of standardised self-evaluation scheme would be useful.

The next item in this section of the survey listed a number of elements that might be included in a standardised quality assurance scheme for courses or language centres and respondents were asked to indicate which of these elements they thought should be 'required'. The results are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Required elements of a proposed quality assurance scheme

Element of quality assurance	% of respondents
• there is an internal staff development programme	96%
• there is an initial training/induction programme for new staff	96%
• outcomes are externally referenced against agreed criteria	94%
• staff are assisted to attend external events, e.g. conferences	92%
• courses incorporate elearning	84%
• all teaching staff are regularly observed teaching	84%
• courses are formally evaluated by students	82%
• group sizes are limited to a certain number of students	80%
• the students have access to an open learning resource centre	76%
• all teaching staff have recognised teaching qualifications	71%
• courses are externally examined	61%
• all staff are (at least) Associate Fellows of the HEA or are applying to be	26%

It is interesting to note that the requirement that all 'all teaching staff have recognised teaching qualifications' was considered not essential by around a quarter of the respondents. This may reflect the fact that for less-widely taught languages (e.g. Greek, Persian, Urdu), it can often be very difficult to find properly trained teachers and that, where fully qualified teachers are not available, a form of in-house training may serve as an alternative solution. Indeed, this explanation may partly be reflected in the high % scores for: 'there is an internal staff development programme' and 'there is an initial training/induction programme for new staff'. The low score for 'courses are externally examined' probably reflects the fact that, in many institutions, not-for-credit language courses fall outside the normal quality assurance systems and thus are not required to be externally examined. The very low score for 'all staff are (at least) Associate Fellows of the HEA (Higher Education Academy) or are applying to be' suggests that many in the sector do not see that Associate Fellow status would be particularly helpful.

Respondents were asked to suggest other elements that they thought would be important in a quality assurance scheme. The few responses that were given included: student representatives for languages, standardised contact hours, standardised content, standardised assessments. However, a number of respondents pointed out that any standardised quality assurance system 'should not be too prescriptive' or 'bureaucratic', and would serve better as a 'point of reference' rather than being mandatory. A number of respondents also expressed concern about the potential costs of such a scheme. Overall, these responses should prove useful in the development of some form of quality assurance scheme for IWLP providers.

3.8   IWLP: the institutional dimension

This section of the survey was concerned with the institutional context and with decisions made within institutions affecting IWLP programmes. The first set of questions sought to elicit information on the extent to which providers were experiencing restrictions on the numbers of students who are permitted to study their courses. In fact, 73% of respondents indicated that recruitment of students on to their courses was affected by course unit/module level restrictions determined elsewhere in their institutions. In response to this problem, a large number of respondents commented that they had found ways to work around or challenge these restrictions. Enhancing or 'fast-tracking' beginner's level courses so that they could be coded as level three courses was suggested as one way around this problem by making these courses available to a wider cross-section of students. Other strategies for overcoming institutional constraints included: finding a way for students to study for additional credits on top of their maximum credit load (n = 7); offering courses on a non-credit basis for a fee (n = 6); being flexible with the timetabling and using times slots when other teaching is not allowed (n = 5).

There were 53 responses to the question: 'Does your institution have a strategy and/or policy for institution-wide language learning? If so, could you please provide details?' Some of the responses suggest a rather broad interpretation of 'strategy' or 'policy', making it hard to categorise them as simply 'yes' or 'no'. By adding 'yes but' (which is taken to mean that there is a stated or implicit policy but it might not be very effective) and 'no but' (meaning not officially but there is a *de facto* arrangement that encourages language learning across the board or is under discussion), we can present the following gradient ('no but' seems to be rather more positive than 'yes but'):

Table 3. Strategies and/or policies for institution-wide language learning

Response	Number and (%)
'Yes'	30 (56%)
'No but'	7 (13%)
'Yes but'	2 (4%)
'No'	15 (28%

It would seem, therefore, that a substantial majority of institutions perceive themselves as having a language policy and only a third which can say they definitely have not or are sceptical about it. The strongest positive comments suggest that effective language policies are associated with employability and other strategies, which will automatically have a high institutional profile:

- 'Yes – this is linked to the university's internationalisation and employability strategies, and involves the provision of a free language course for all undergraduates'
- 'the IWLP features as an important element of the University's Internationalisation and Employability strategies and is supported at senior management level'
- 'This is seen as part of our L&T, Employability and Internationalisation strategies'

Among the negative responses, in addition to simply responding 'No', some people added:
'Not that I'm aware of', 'Sadly lacking at the moment', 'Not yet'. Responses classified as 'Yes but' included 'Yes, but doesn't mean much in reality'. The 'No but' answers reflect some of the most promising situations:

- 'We are working on it'
- 'Not specifically but the institution recognises its value and promotes it and has considered its value and visibility in a recent restructuring of its academic model which makes UWLP courses more visible than they used to be.'
- 'Not articulated. The University is looking at ways of re-organizing the delivery of its curriculum and we are hoping we shall be able to ensure that a formal policy is in place as part of the new framework'

3.9   Prospects for Institution-wide Language Provision

In the final part of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt that the prospects for IWLP at their institutions were encouraging, uncertain or poor. The total number of responses for this question was 62 and the numbers for each response are shown in the chart below. It is evident that most respondents felt optimistic about the future.
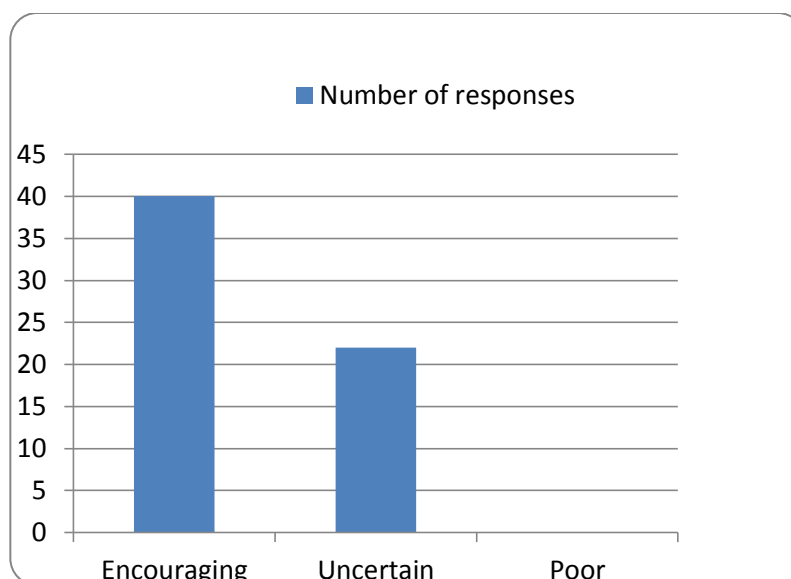

Figure 6. Responses for 'prospects for Institution-wide Language Provision'

Although no respondents felt the prospects are poor, some of the 'uncertain' prospects seem somewhat negative, especially relating to the internal market:

- 'Competition of options on courses (protectionism). Decreasing interest in language learning on the part of UK students'
- 'Cuts, cuts and cuts'
- 'Programmes are increasingly discouraging language study, so as to maximise income from student fees to their own programmes'

The most positive comments mentioned the explicit support from senior management, in some cases the vice-chancellor, in particular:

- 'Our new V-C sees the international agenda of the institution as a high priority. He himself comes from MFL'
- 'Total support from the University Senior Management Group, of which I am a member'
- 'Insatiable demand for language learning, high quality courses with high rates of continuity, support from colleges for flagship programme'
- 'Continuous increase in student numbers, students voting with their feet to join a language class, strong support for languages from the University Executive, internationalisation agenda'

4 Conclusions and recommendations

The overall picture of student recruitment onto IWLP courses is quite varied but broadly positive across the HE sector. The majority of respondents in this survey reported increased numbers compared to last year. Continued growth has been seen in non-European languages, particularly Chinese, although German was reported by the highest number of institutions as registering an increase compared to last year. Other growth areas include: British Sign Language and Korean. International students comprise a large portion of IWLP students and this is mostly considered to be a positive phenomenon.

The survey found that the learning outcomes of most IWLP courses are referenced to the Common European Framework, which is the most widely recognised and used reference for proficiency levels. There was a broad agreement on the need for some kind of quality assurance framework for IWLP activity, though this consensus did not extend to the desirability for a centralised accrediting body.

Though many IWLP providers are facing institutional restrictions, the survey found that there was broad support for IWLP activity within institutions, even though this could be merely aspirational. The internationalisation and employability agendas adopted by many HEIs are of relevance to IWLP activity. There is evidence that, in many institutions, the provision of optional language courses is recognised as playing a vital part in supporting these agendas. Finally, there is evidence that increasing numbers of UK university students, where they are able, are choosing to learn a language in a non-specialist capacity.

5 References

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Marshall, K. (2001) Survey of less specialist language learning in UK universities (1998-99) http://www.llas.ac.uk/resourcedownloads/614/KeithMarshall.pdf (accessed on 7th January 2014)

UCML-AULC (2013) UCML-AULC survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2013-2014) http://www.ucml.ac.uk/languages-education/he-languages (accessed on 7th January 2014)

Appendix: List of participating institutions

Anglia Ruskin, University of
Aston University
Bangor, University of
Bath, University of
Birmingham, University of
Bradford, University of
Bristol, University of
Brunel University
Cambridge, University of
Cardiff University
Central Lancashire, University of
Coventry University
Dundee, University of
Durham University
East Anglia, University of
Edinburgh, University of
Essex, University of
Exeter, University of
Herriot-Watt University
Hertfordshire, University of
Huddersfield, University of
Hull, University of
Glasgow, University of
Imperial College London
Keele University
Kent University
King's College London
Lancaster University
Leeds Metropolitan 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
Oxford, University of
Portsmouth, University of
Plymouth, University of
Queen Mary, University of London
Queen's University Belfast
Reading, University of
Regent's University London
Roehampton, University of

School of Oriental and African Studies,
Sheffield Hallam University
Sheffield, University of
Southampton Solent University
Southampton, University of
Stirling, University of
St Andrews, University of
Sunderland, University of
Surrey, University of
Sussex, University of
Swansea University
Warwick, University of
Westminster, University of
Winchester, University of
Wolverhampton, University of
Worcester, University of
York, University of