



AULC-UCML survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK (2021-22)

December 2022

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1. Introduction

This survey, carried out by members of the Association of University Language Communities (AULC) amongst members based in the UK, sought to obtain a snapshot of Institution-wide Language Provision (IWLP) activity across the Higher Education sector in the UK in the academic year 2021-22.

Sometimes referred to as ‘Languages for All’, IWLP typically comprises elective language modules/course units taken for academic credit or as minor components of a degree, and extra-curricular language courses studied in addition to and alongside a student’s degree programme, often as part of an evening course programme. Many students taking these courses may 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 was the 10th year that the AULC-UCML survey has been conducted since 2011. As there is no other mechanism or agency in a position to compile this data¹, the AULC-UCML survey is of particular importance for planning and strategic purposes, and to give an indication of trends in language learning via institution-wide language programmes.

The surveys undertaken during the period from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017 showed that IWLP has been an expanding area, attracting increasing numbers of students in UK universities. This trend is the continuation of a pattern originally identified in earlier surveys (Marshall, 2001; Byrne and Abbott, 2007). Data collected from 2018 onwards have been more variable in nature with a generally lower response rate, perhaps reflective of the limited time available to contribute to the surveys as demands on institution wide language programmes have expanded. However, the annual survey is still deemed to be valuable in offering insights into developments across the sector, and to support University wide language learning.

Specific aims of the survey for 2021-22 were to:

- gauge availability and demand for different IWLP languages in UKHE and note changing trends
- for the first time since 2015, gain a sense of registrations by language, not only which languages are offered
- obtain a better understanding of the activities being undertaken under the umbrella of institution wide language programmes
- gain a sense of the opportunities for collaboration between universities where particular challenges exist

2. Method

2.1 Surveying the sector

IWLP activity is rather difficult to survey. In most institutions, it includes accredited provision offered to non-specialist language learners; in others, the provision 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 may be offered alongside degree programmes within a language department, or via a number of other variations of organisational structure. In some institutions, provision for external learners (members of the public/lifelong learning students) is incorporated as a part of the IWLP provision. The sector is

¹ Registrations for IWLP course units are not recorded in UCAS or HESA statistics.

also diverse in terms of the range of languages offered - with some institutions offering only three or four languages and others offering more than twenty - and in the ways these languages are offered to students e.g. length of courses, number of contact hours per course. All these variables may also change from one year to the next, simply due to local factors affecting capacity and demand for teaching and learning.

2.2 Questionnaire

For the 2021-22 survey, an electronic questionnaire was devised using *JISC Online Surveys*. The survey was circulated in April 2022 to all AULC institutional representatives in the UK using the AULC members' list, and to contacts on the UCML members' 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.

2.3 Limitations

As with recent surveys, this 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 number of what might be termed 'non-specialist language students' have not been included in the figures reported here.

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. Students themselves have also not been surveyed.

Not all responding institutions have been able to provide responses to all questions. In particular, whilst 37 respondents provided overall registration data for October 2021, and 38 for March 22, only 29 institutions have been able to provide any information on the numbers of students registered to individual languages. This may either be due to the time required to collate this data, or due to the complexity of how this data is held locally. Responses to this particular question therefore equate to 72% of respondents, and 47% of the overall AULC membership. Several member institutions with larger programmes have not been able to provide this data, so this data should be treated with an element of discretion.

While every effort is made to involve the same institutions in the survey year-on-year, it is not always possible to obtain a response from each university. A degree of caution must therefore be exercised when analysing the results, and especially when comparing the data.

3. Results

By the end of the survey period, data had been collected from 40 institutions (out of 62 AULC UK university members). 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 include qualitative responses. Response rates in 2022 (n=40; 65%) are lower than previous years (peak in 2017 with an 88% response rate). This means that direct comparison with previous years is difficult. The impact of the pandemic on workload for those responding to surveys has inevitably had an impact.

3.1 Number of students on IWLP-type courses

The number of students reported as being enrolled on IWLP courses in this survey continues to fall as the response rate has fallen since 2018. Average enrolments per responding institution remains relatively stable. The total number of enrolments reported for the end of October 2021 was 40,590 (40 HEIs responding). In the table below, the number of enrolments reported is the lowest over the last eight years. It is important to note that year to year comparisons must be treated cautiously because the number of respondents varies from year to year, and the actual institutions which return data in the survey also vary.

| Year | Number | Number of AULC members (UK only) | Number of HEIs reporting (inc. non-AULC members) | Average number of registrations per institution |
|------------|--------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| 2012-2013 | 49,637 | | 61 | 814 |
| 2013-2014 | 53,971 | | 64 | 843 |
| 2014-2015 | 54,975 | | 61 | 901 |
| 2015-2016 | 55,354 | | 61 | 907 |
| 2016-2017 | 62,455 | 54 | 62 | 1 007 |
| 2017-2018 | 53,200 | 61 | 56 | 950 |
| 2018-2019 | 53,772 | 64 | 55 | 978 |
| 2019-2020 | 45,164 | 63 | 46 | 982 |
| 2020-2021* | N/A | 66 | 50 | - |
| 2021-2022 | 40,590 | 65 | 40 | 1,015 |

**Survey in 2020-21 conducted jointly with a UCML survey of degree awarding Departments. No quantitative data collected*

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

It is not possible to directly compare the recorded numbers above, since the survey receives responses from different institutions with differently sized IWLPs. However, after a period of sustained growth, it does appear that the number of students registered to IWLPs in the UK remains largely stable. Furthermore, there is some evidence that provision is expanding in some institutions whilst falling in others, perhaps leading to a concentration of provision in fewer, larger centres. This is something to watch for the future.

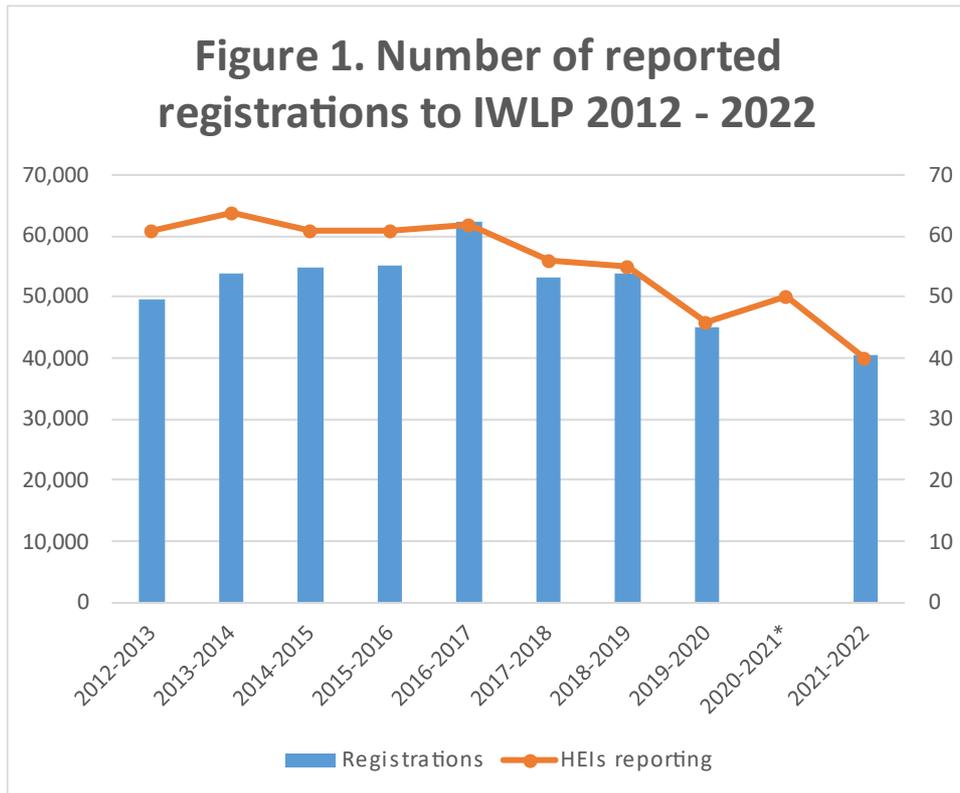


Figure 1. Number of reported registrations to IWLP 2012 - 2022

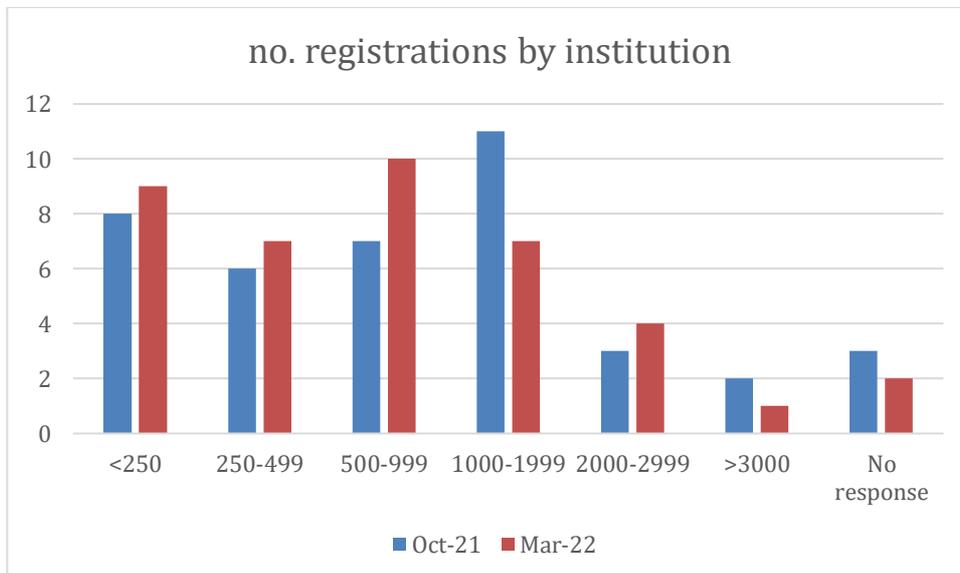


Figure 2. Number of reported registrations per institution (2021-22)

In the years prior to 2017-2018, the figures obtained showed evidence of a gradual overall increase in IWLP enrolments at the national level. The drop in numbers since that date is largely due to fewer respondents returning the questionnaire. As such, trends are becoming increasingly difficult to monitor. However, average numbers of registrations per responding institution are indicative of a positive situation overall.

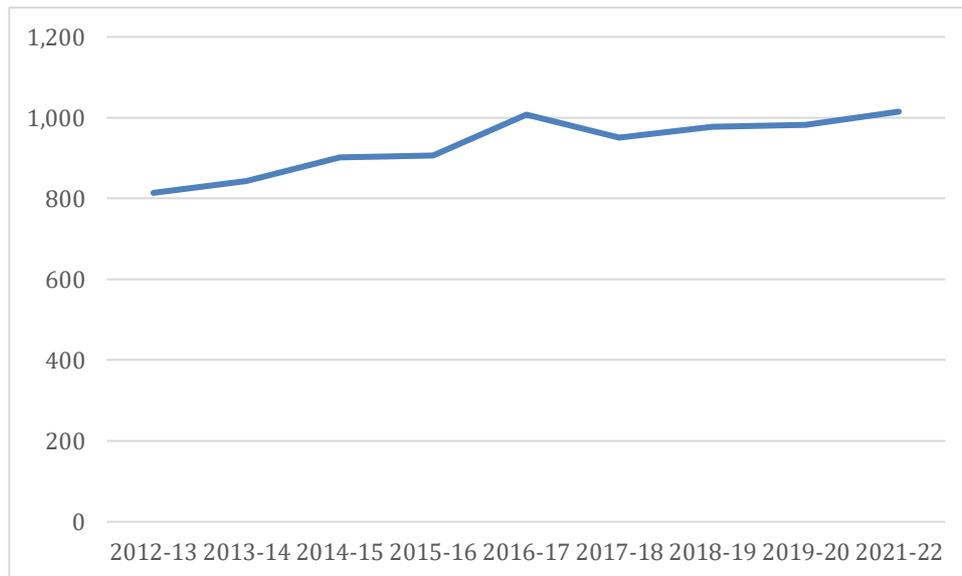


Figure 3. Average number of registrations per responding institution

3.2 Languages offered and breakdown of registrations

Question 13 of the 2021-22 survey asked respondents to indicate which languages their HEI offered, and how many students were registered for courses in each language. Our survey data indicates that, whilst some institutions are only able to offer students three or four languages, more typically an average of nine different languages are available to study. Some of the larger universities are able to offer more than 20 languages. Figure 3 below shows the number of responding institutions offering each language.

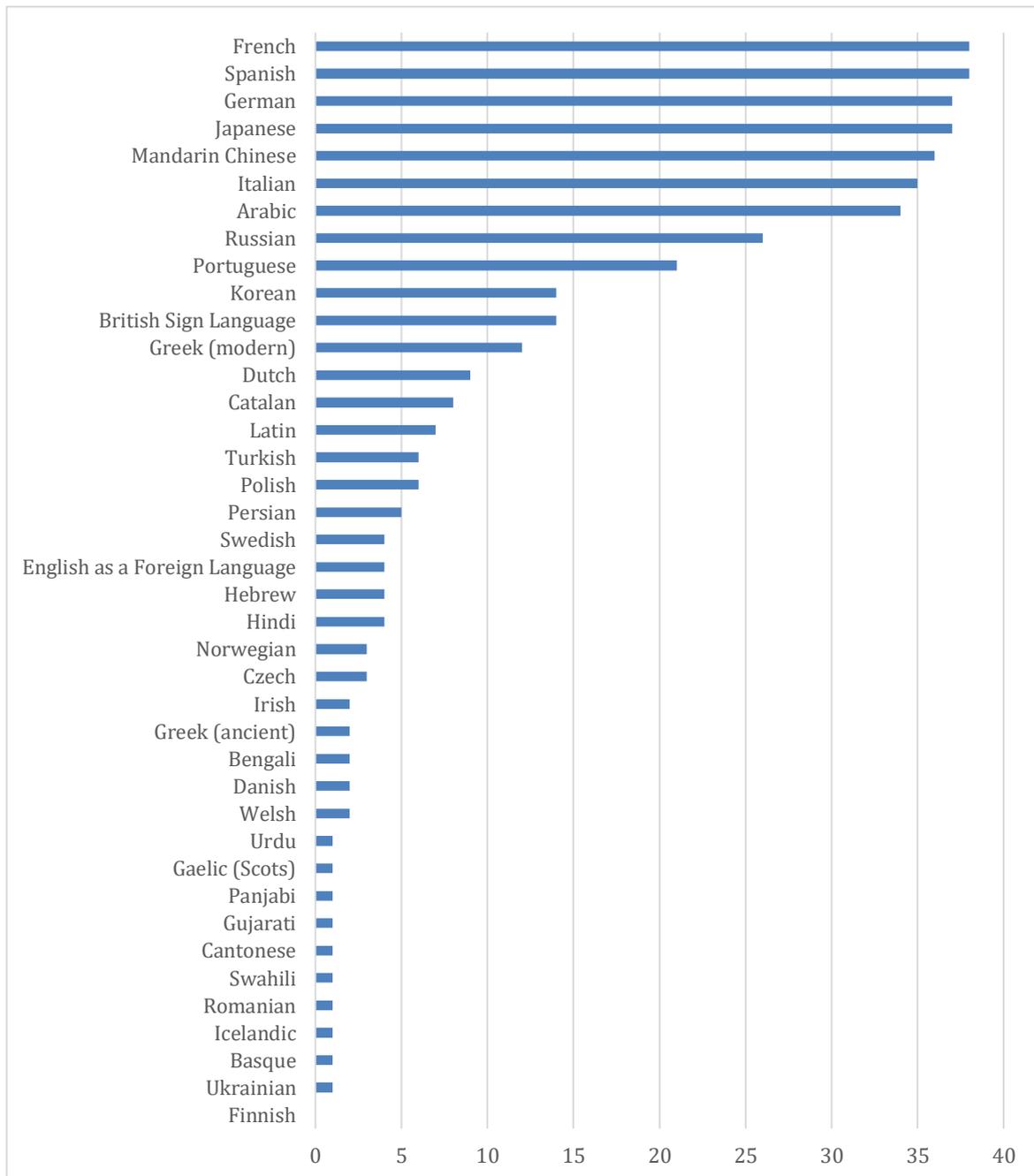


Figure 4. Number of HEIs surveyed offering different languages

The figure shows that provision continues to be dominated by the three main western European languages. However, other widely taught languages including Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Italian, Arabic and Russian are offered by the majority of HEIs, with just under half of those surveyed also offering Portuguese. The data also tell us that around, or just over, 25% of the responding institutions offer classes in English as a Foreign Language, British Sign Language and Korean. This is the first year that EFL has been included in the data returned. Data indicates an appreciation of the importance of a wider choice in terms of the portfolio of languages on offer, albeit limited by availability of teaching resources. Note that there were 0 responses for an offer of Welsh. However 2 of the reporting centres are known to offer Welsh language courses, and these have therefore been included in the reported data.

| language | Centres offering (total) | Centres reporting | Reported enrolments |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| French | 38 | 29 | 7598 |
| Spanish | 38 | 29 | 7397 |
| German | 37 | 28 | 4159 |
| Japanese | 37 | 28 | 3678 |
| Italian | 35 | 26 | 2637 |
| Mandarin Chinese | 36 | 28 | 2039 |
| Arabic | 34 | 27 | 1832 |
| Russian | 26 | 23 | 1074 |
| Korean | 14 | 11 | 1013 |
| British Sign Language | 14 | 10 | 513 |
| Portuguese | 21 | 14 | 492 |
| Dutch | 9 | 8 | 198 |
| Swedish | 4 | 4 | 184 |
| Latin | 7 | 5 | 166 |
| Greek (modern) | 12 | 9 | 147 |
| Norwegian | 3 | 3 | 113 |
| Persian | 5 | 4 | 106 |
| Irish | 2 | 1 | 100 |
| Catalan | 8 | 4 | 95 |
| English (EFL) | 4 | 1 | 89 |
| Urdu | 1 | 1 | 86 |
| Turkish | 6 | 5 | 83 |
| Gaelic (Scots) | 1 | 1 | 83 |
| Panjabi | 1 | 1 | 78 |
| Polish | 6 | 4 | 72 |
| Greek (ancient) | 2 | 2 | 55 |
| Bengali | 2 | 2 | 54 |
| Hebrew | 4 | 2 | 50 |
| Gujarati | 1 | 1 | 48 |
| Hindi | 4 | 2 | 42 |
| Danish | 2 | 2 | 38 |
| Cantonese | 1 | 1 | 25 |
| Swahili | 1 | 1 | 25 |
| Romanian | 1 | 1 | 13 |
| Czech | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| Welsh | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Ukrainian | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Basque | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Finnish | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Icelandic | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Table 2. Number of enrolments by language

The above table indicates the relative popularity of languages by registration. However, only 29 reporting institutions were able to provide this data, so it can only be considered as representative. 2021-22 was the first year AULC has attempted to collect this data since 2014-15. It is interesting

to observe that the top 10 languages by registration are largely unchanged in the previous 7 years. However, proportionately, there have been noted increases in the popularity of Japanese and Korean in particular, but also in less commonly taught languages such as British sign Language, Dutch, Polish and modern Greek. Conversely a disproportionate fall in numbers studying Chinese and Portuguese is observed. The numbers of students registering for Japanese language courses as part of an IWLP is almost on a par with German.

The 2021-22 survey has also for the first time attempted to analyse where courses in a given language may be advertised, but not run. It is observed that all Universities advertising courses in the 9 most popular languages delivered courses in those languages. However, the ability of individual IWLPs to maintain delivery of many less commonly taught languages is more limited. Reasons for this are almost certainly down to demand for individual courses, but teacher availability may also be a factor in some cases.

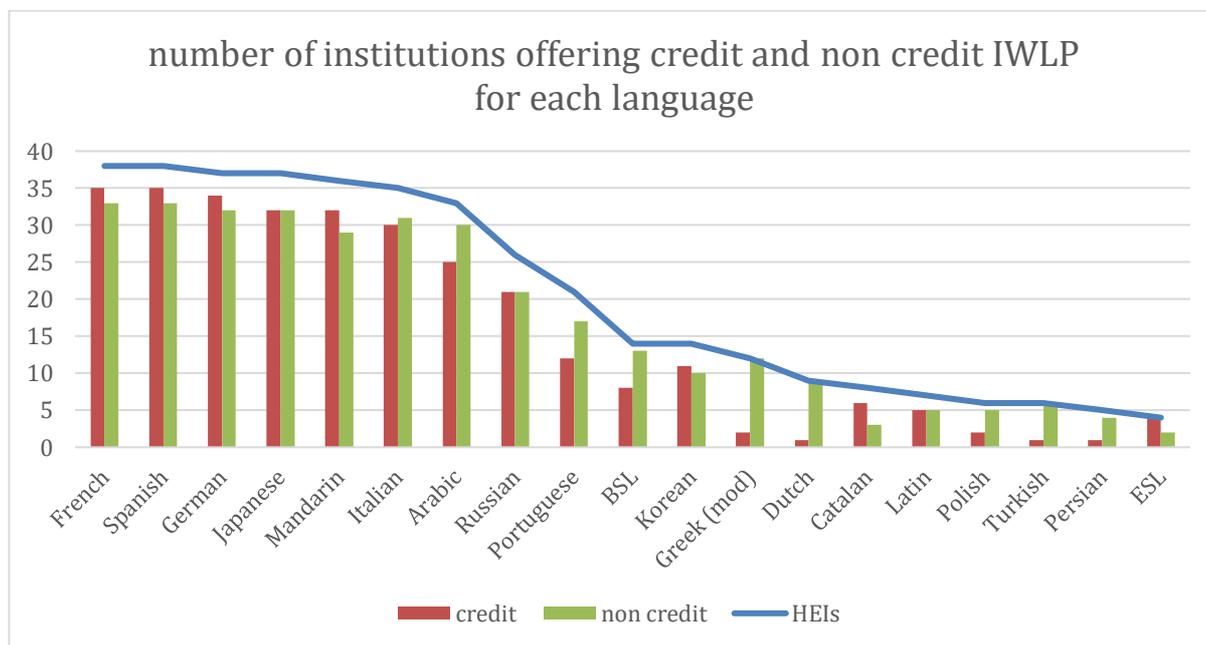


Figure 5. Number of HEIs offering credit and not-for-0credit IWLP by language

3.3 Changing preferences for languages

Considering the changes in registered numbers from 2014-15 to 2021-22, the survey also asked respondents to indicate which languages have experienced an increase in demand and which languages have experienced a decrease in demand at their institutions. Responses were higher to this question (n=36). Figure 4 below shows the five languages most reported as registering an increase in numbers of learners compared to last year. More than half of the respondents reported that there had been an increase in the number of students taking Japanese, continuing a trend reported in the five previous years surveyed. Previous reported increases for Arabic, Chinese and Russian do not appear to have been sustained, with a reported decrease in uptake for each of these languages (Figure 5).

While most respondents reported that it was difficult to know the reason for the changes, reasons included teaching capacity and teacher availability (both positive and negative), changes to organisational structures, and a fall in evening course provision sustained following the start of the pandemic. As is often the case, the survey results show both an increase and a decrease in the same language (e.g. Italian, but also French, Japanese and Spanish). This usually reflects local circumstances in individual institutions.

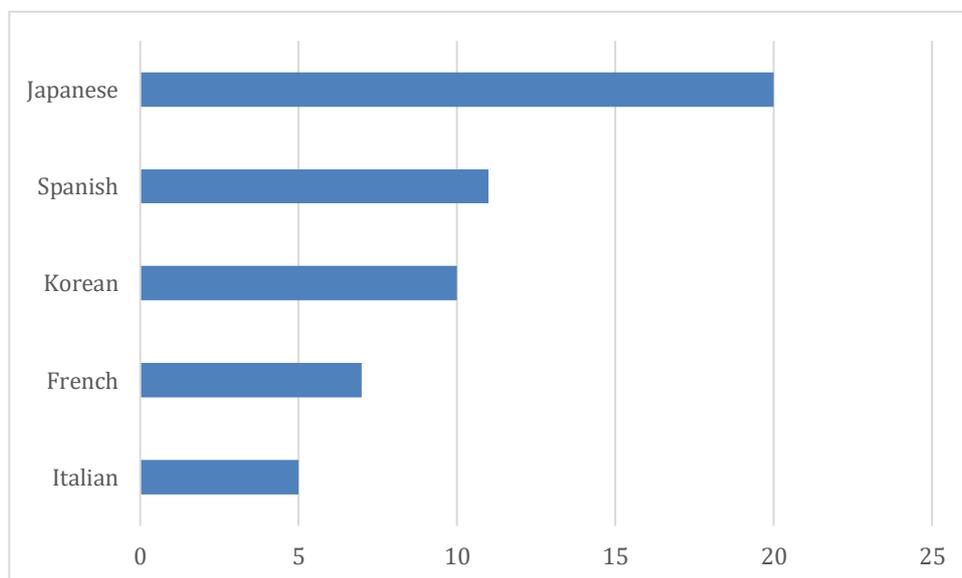


Figure 6. Languages which have shown an increase in student numbers (no. of HEIs reporting)

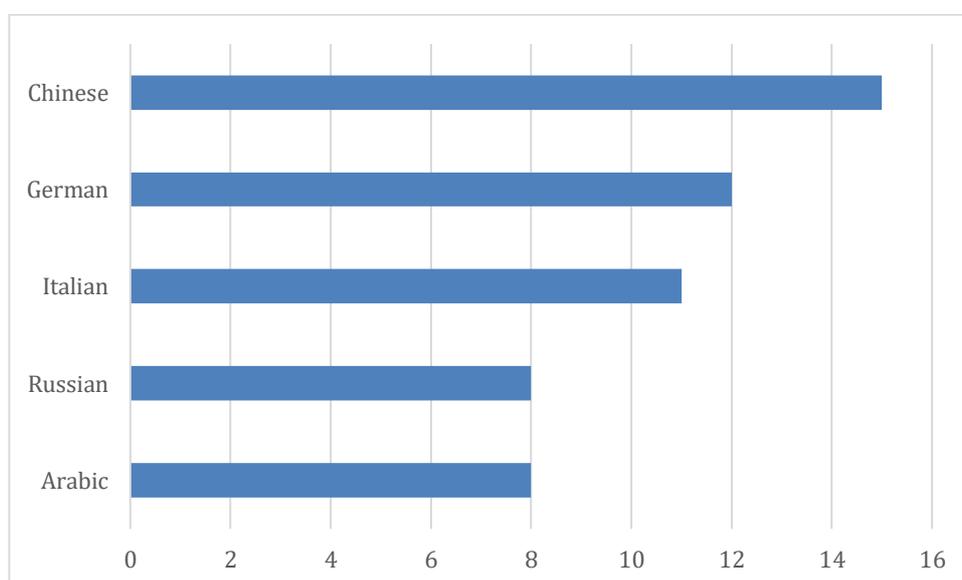


Figure 7. Languages which have shown a decrease in student numbers (no. of HEIs reporting)

3.4 Language course levels available

The majority of language learning on institution wide language programmes takes place at lower levels (e.g. CEFR A1/A2). However, there is little data available to show the extent nationally, of language course availability at both early stages (Beginner and above), and Intermediate/advanced levels (CEFR B1 and above). The survey asked institutions to respond to whether a given language was available only at Beginner level, or also at B1 or above. Responses given are indicated in figures 8 and 9.

Capacity issues obviously determine how many courses can be offered at any institution. However, it is desirable to support learning at higher levels nationally, if IWLPs are to offer meaningful progression for language learners, or access to courses for students arriving at University with prior language ability. A majority of institutions only offer language learning above B1 in 5 languages (Chinese, French, German, Italian and Spanish). Availability of higher-level courses is generally low in other significant and popular languages such as Arabic, Japanese, and Russian, most likely reflecting the fact that the majority of students arrive at University with no prior knowledge of those languages, meaning demand for higher levels is inevitably less.

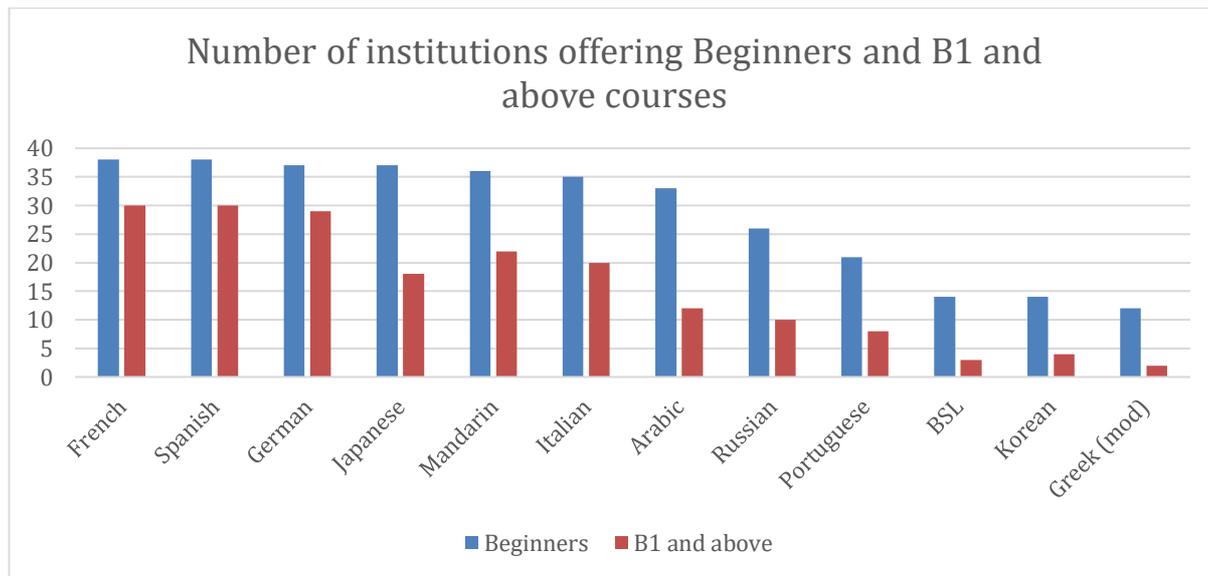


Figure 8. Number of HEIs offering courses at Beginner and CEFR B1 level by language

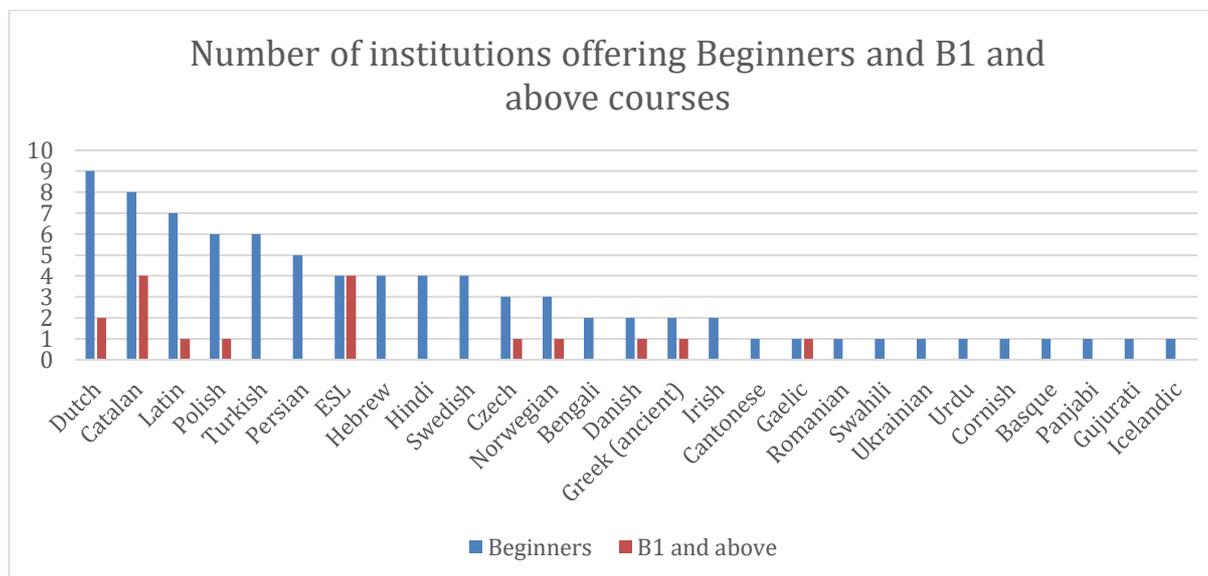


Figure 9. Number of HEIs offering courses at Beginner and CEFR B1 level by language

3.5 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 remains moderately optimistic with 65% (n=26) indicating that prospects were 'positive', 25% (n=10) indicating that prospects were 'uncertain', and 10% (n=4) indicating that prospects were 'poor'. These responses are broadly similar to responses to the same questions in previous years, though it must be noted that it is difficult to draw a direct comparison given the change in the institutions which responded. Institutions in past years reporting their prospects as 'poor' have in some cases closed down, and as a result, we have institutions newly reporting poor prospects each year. Furthermore, several institutions reporting 'uncertain' prospects include several large programmes in Russell Group universities, for whom the uncertainty will be experienced differently to other smaller centres based in non-Russell Group universities. It is difficult therefore to draw any firm conclusions as to a current outlook for the IWLP sector as a whole.

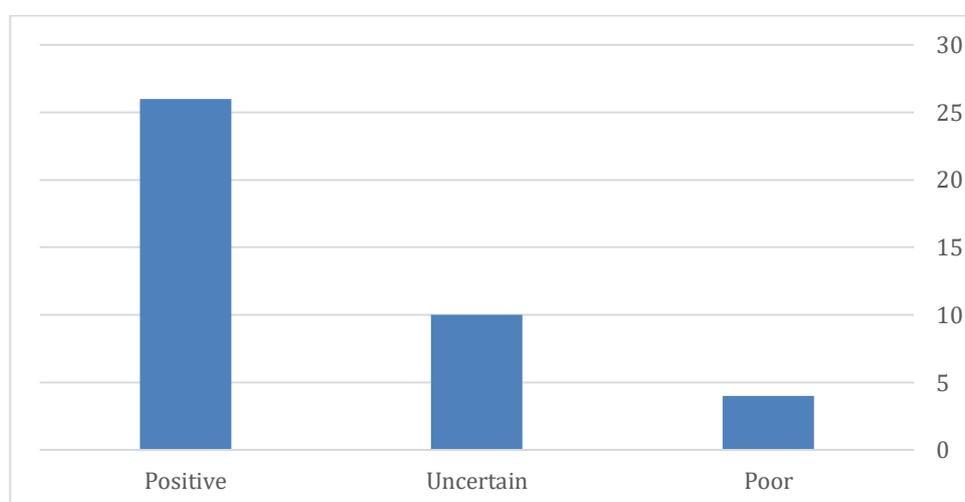


Figure 10. Prospects for IWLP

3.6 Types of activities undertaken within an IWLP

The range of activities undertaken under the umbrella of an IWLP, both actual and potential, is quite broad. For the first time this survey has sought to identify and acknowledge the extent of an IWLP beyond the delivery of language courses.

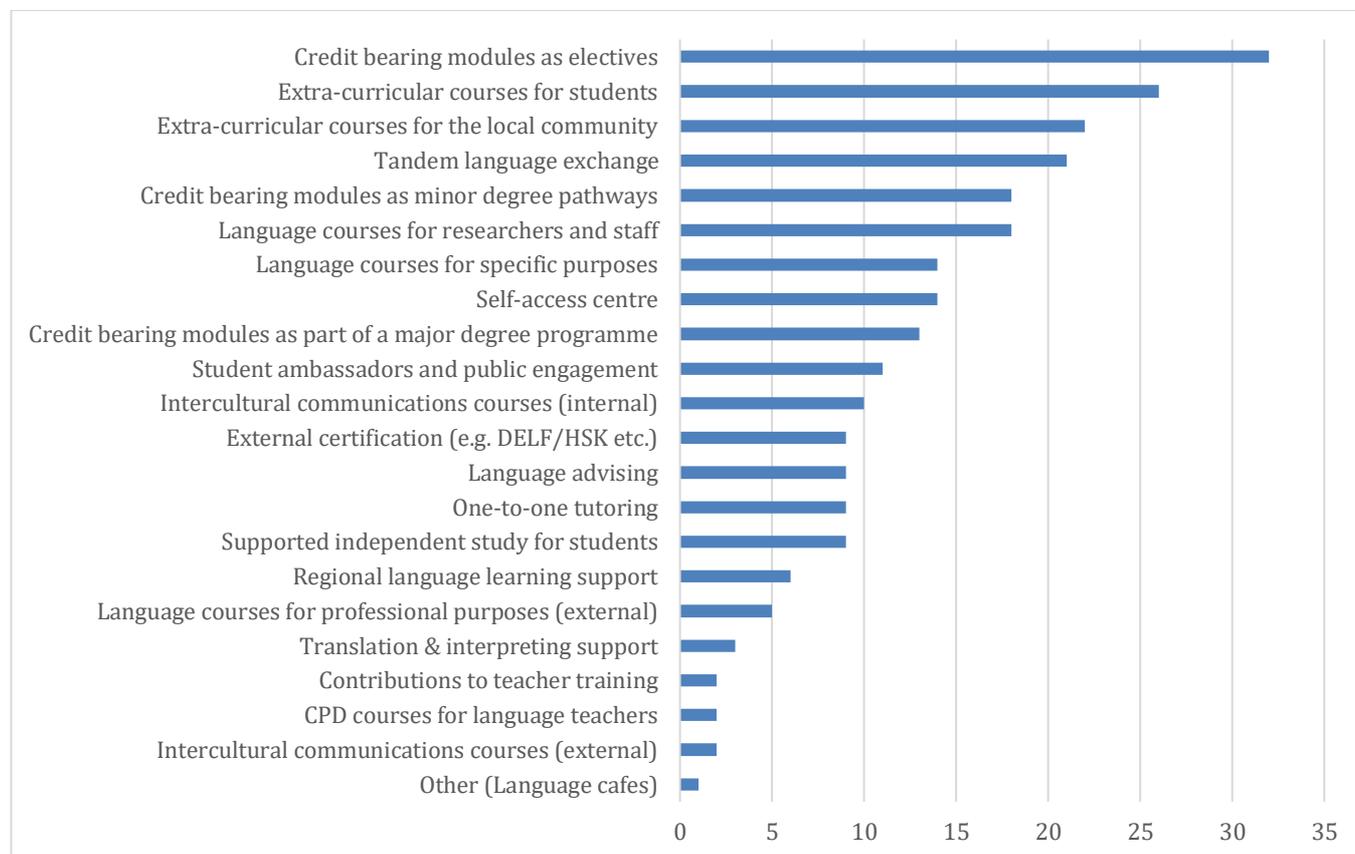


Figure 11. Activities undertaken with an institution wide language programme

Clearly the scope to offer a wider range of services is influenced by many factors, not least the size of the unit, but also the level of institutional support, institutional strategies, and the relationship with other departments. In addition, there are specific choices made in each organisation, with some IWLPs only offering credit bearing elective courses, whilst others only offer extra-curricular courses not for credit. Nevertheless, the numbers of institutions reporting wider activities beyond the delivery of language courses is encouraging.

Of 22 categories of activity identified by the survey, one-third are inevitably related to the delivery of courses in different forms and to different audiences within the institution. However, there are also indications of widespread outreach, including delivery of courses to the local community or for income generating purposes, CPD, language certification, translation services and general language advice. Effectively, this represents a centre of excellence for the delivery of language learning on a wider scale than might otherwise be imagined. The purpose of this question in the survey was to identify such practices, and thereby offer inspiration to other IWLPs across the country in terms of the value that can be offered to our internal and external communities of learners, and across our institutions,

3.7 Organisational structures

Previous AULC surveys have been monitoring trends as to the structures within which IWLPs are being delivered. Recent surveys by the AULC and UCML have demonstrated the range of organisational options for delivery of language learning in UKHE, and how these have been evolving:

| Organisational structure | 2015 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|
| Stand-alone Language Centre | 21 (36%) | 10 (22%) | 11 (28%) |
| Stand alone teaching unit | 4 (7%) | | 3 (7%) |
| autonomous teaching unit within an MFL academic Department | 19 (34%) | 16 (35%) | 8 (20%) |
| delivered by an MFL academic Department | 7 (12%) | 10 (22%) | 9 (22%) |
| Within a lifelong learning unit | - | 4 (9%) | 1 (2%) |
| Language Centre within a PSS unit | 4 (7%) | 3 (7%) | 3 (7%) |
| Within another academic Department | 3 (5%) | 3 (7%) | 5 (12%) |
| Total responses | 58 | 46 | 40 |

Table 3. How are IWLPs organised institutionally

Since 2015, the numbers of institution wide language programmes delivered in language centres has declined, whilst those delivered within academic departments has increased. The driver for this change has largely been financial, reflecting sustainability issues with both degree-level programmes and IWLP. As a result, closer collaboration is inevitable due to the need to increase the sharing of scarce resources between programmes. However, reflecting on the range of services potentially available through an IWLP, it will be important to ensure this is maintained. Anecdotally, it is recognised that the IWLPs that are most at risk are generally operating outside of academic Departments or language centres, although in some cases a move into an academic Department has resulted in a scaling back of IWLP activities, thereby reducing its' overall impact.

3.8 The impact of on-line provision

This was the first full survey since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. In the past 2 years all universities have offered on-line access to language learning, and we have collectively learned much from the experience. The survey asked if institutions were planning to maintain on-line delivery or revert to in-person. Of 40 responding institutions a small majority will not continue with on-line teaching. 19 of 40 will continue with some form of on-line provision.

Reasons for a return to in-person teaching are predominantly related to pedagogical advantages, student demand, and institutional direction. Reasons given for maintaining on-line provision are for flexibility, accessibility, reach to a wider audience and student demand. It is observed, however, that all universities are proposing to return to in-person provision for credit bearing modules, and it is only for delivery of evening courses where on-line provision is being maintained.

AULC can continue to monitor this situation to see how we can collectively take best advantage of lessons learnt.

3.9 Teacher recruitment

Anecdotally, some concerns have been raised regarding challenges with teacher recruitment in certain languages that then has a consequential impact on the ability of an IWLP to deliver certain parts of its programme. In addition, as some languages become more popular there will inevitably be shortages of suitably qualified language teachers in these languages. The survey asked institutions to comment on this challenge.

21 responders (of 39) confirmed problems in recruiting language teaching staff in the previous 3 years (2019-22). The most challenging languages are reported to be German, Japanese and Korean. The most widely cited reasons for recruitment problems are:

- A limited domestic pool of teachers requiring recruitment from outside the UK but with insufficient hours to support a visa application.
- A too small pool of available teachers in less widely taught languages (Korean especially, but also BSL, Dutch, Swedish).
- A reduction in the numbers and quality of applications in more common languages (French, German, Spanish).

The availability of teachers to deliver language courses of course remains essential for the success of IWLPs in the future. AULC will need to monitor the situation more generally and may need to become more involved in training programmes to expand capacity in critical languages for the future.

Furthermore, 29 responding institutions indicated a willingness to collaborate with other AULC members in the future on matters of staff recruitment. This could potentially extend to sharing teachers working between institutions, or even sharing access to courses where institutions may be struggling to find a teacher.

3.10 AULC Special Interest Groups

AULC has established a number of Special Interest Groups over recent years to address specific areas of mutual interest. Activities of these Special interest Groups have lapsed during the pandemic. To gauge demand from across the AULC membership the survey asked institutions to indicate which Special Interest Groups were of most interest to them, the responses from which can be used to prioritise activities as the SIGs resume:



Figure 12. Importance of AULC Special Interest Groups (SIG)

The survey clearly indicates that each of the existing Special Interest Groups adds value to the wider AULC community, and AULC will therefore pursue new activity in each of these areas. It should be noted, of course, that the responses received to this question are only one per institution, and there may be wider interest within each institution. In addition, AULC is to explore the development of a new Special Interest Group in English Language provision, with a focus on organisational structures, and a potential new Special interest Group jointly with UCML to optimise collaboration in language teaching across both IWLP and degree programmes. This mirrors an initiative to support the AULC SIG in Less-widely taught languages to also become a joint SIG with UCML.

3.11 Future collaboration and activities

The final survey question asked member institutions to consider shared collaborative activities that AULC could promote across our membership.

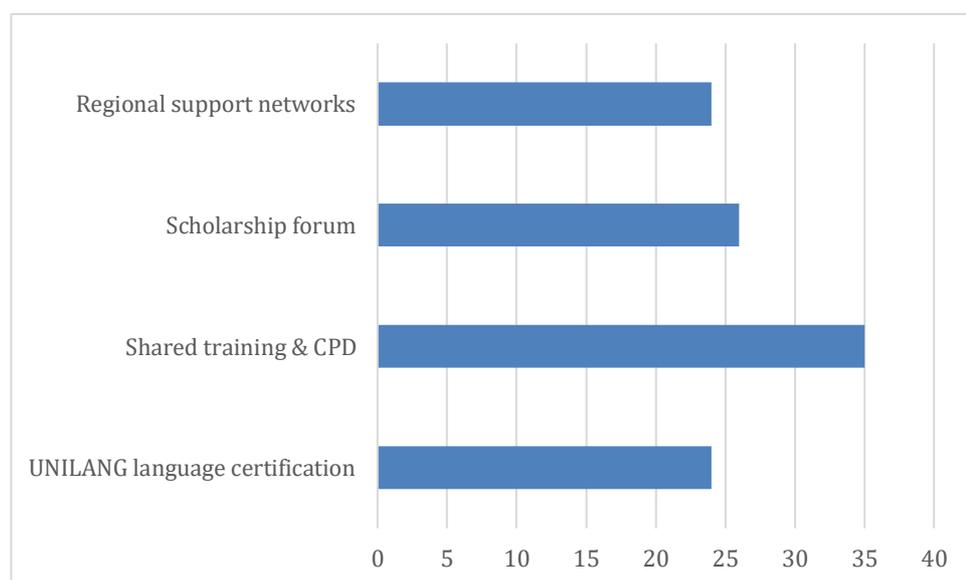


Figure 13. Interest in shared collaborative activities

Members responded positively suggest wide support for an increased level of collaborative activity, coordinated by AULC on behalf of the membership. This mirrors similar collaboratively organised activity in other national associations for language centres across Europe. The AULC Executive Committee will consider how a programme of collaborative activities can be designed and delivered.

4. Conclusion

While the overall picture of IWLP student enrolment continues to be broadly positive across the Higher Education sector, there remains an underlying uncertainty and defensiveness. The data collected this year reflects another fall in the number of responding institutions. AULC has previously reported that 7 HEIs closed IWLP provision in the period 2017-2019. Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 a further 5 IWLPs have closed, with a further 8 known to be under threat of either closure or significant reductions in activity. It is therefore ever more important to gather and share reliable data that can be used to demonstrate the value of institution wide language learning, at a time when more students are requesting access to language courses during their UG and PG degrees as they understand the importance of cultural competency for their personal and professional development. The internal dynamics in each of our member institutions are very different, and the observations we can draw from information on language registrations and from wider activities is inevitably ambiguous. At this time, it is therefore ever more important to share success stories and present our community with information to support ourselves individually and collectively in order to ensure the maintenance of a broad-based programme of institution wide language support across the UK.

This survey was carried out on behalf of the Association of University Language Communities by: Thomas Chaurin, Mark Critchley, and Dr. Ana de Medeiros.

Appendix: List of participating institutions

Aberystwyth University
Anglia Ruskin University
Birmingham, University of
Bristol, University of
Cambridge, University of
Cardiff University
Central Lancashire, University of
Durham University
East Anglia, University of
Edge Hill University
Edinburgh, University of
Essex, University of
Exeter, University of
Goldsmith's, University of London
Glasgow, University of
Hertfordshire, University of
Huddersfield, University of
Imperial College London
King's College London
Lancaster University
Leeds, University of
Liverpool, University of
London School of Economics and Political Science
Manchester Metropolitan University
Newcastle, University of
Nottingham, University of
Nottingham Trent University
Oxford, University of
Queen Mary, University of London
Queen's University Belfast
Reading, University of
Regent's University London
Salford, University of
Sheffield, University of
Southampton, University of
Sussex, University of
Warwick, University of
Westminster, University of
Worcester, University of
York, University of