The teaching of Arabic language and cultures in UK schools

Review commissioned by the British Council

November 2016

The image shown overleaf is a sign which appeared on a Texas building on Valentine's Day 2016, reportedly sparking widespread alarm.[1]

[1] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3449849/Mass-hysteria-small-Texas-city-Arabic-sign-reads-love-mysteriously-appeared-building-Valentine-s-Day.html

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This report was commissioned by the British Council in March 2016 as part of its Arabic Language and Culture programme, which is now in its fourth year. It builds on previous research undertaken by Alcantara Communications and published as *The teaching of Arabic Language and Culture in UK Schools*.[2] As a result of this initial research, the British Council developed and tailored its programme, continued to build its contacts with stakeholders in the field, and commissioned further in-depth research into key themes identified. These were contracted as separate strands, since they required different types of expertise. This report covers Strand 2 of the research: 'Review of the teaching of Arabic language and culture in UK schools'.

Findings of our previous research

Our previous research found that:

- The teaching of Arabic is increasing. It is closely associated with Muslim communities in the UK, where it enjoys strong support.
- Arabic is rarely taught to non-Muslim or non-Arab pupils.
- Where Arabic is taught in non-Muslim schools, Arabic is frequently a marginal subject, taught as 'enrichment' or outside the curriculum for small groups of pupils.
- There is a dearth of opportunities to train as a teacher in Arabic, and this deters schools from offering it as a mainstream subject.[3]
- The '1+2' language teaching policy in Scotland, and the introduction of language learning as a national curriculum subject in English primary schools, offer opportunities to develop the teaching of Arabic.
- The existence of appropriate exams is fundamental to the development of any language at school level.
- There is a growing awareness of the need to diversify language learning opportunities for pupils in the UK, in order to respond to changes in the global economy and cultural outlooks.
- However, there are severe financial pressures on both schools and governments which make it difficult to find the investment needed to develop the teaching of new languages.
- Current learners of Arabic are well-motivated and understand the opportunities that having skills in the language will bring them.
- The teaching of Arabic in schools could contribute to improving the negative attitudes expressed in the media towards immigrants and their languages and towards Islam more generally. At the same time these attitudes constitute a barrier for developing it.
- The promotion of Arabic needs to be addressed in an integrated way, on four levels:

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[2] https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/arabic_report_2015.pdf
[3] By this, we mean as a timetabled language option available to all pupils alongside French, Spanish, etc.
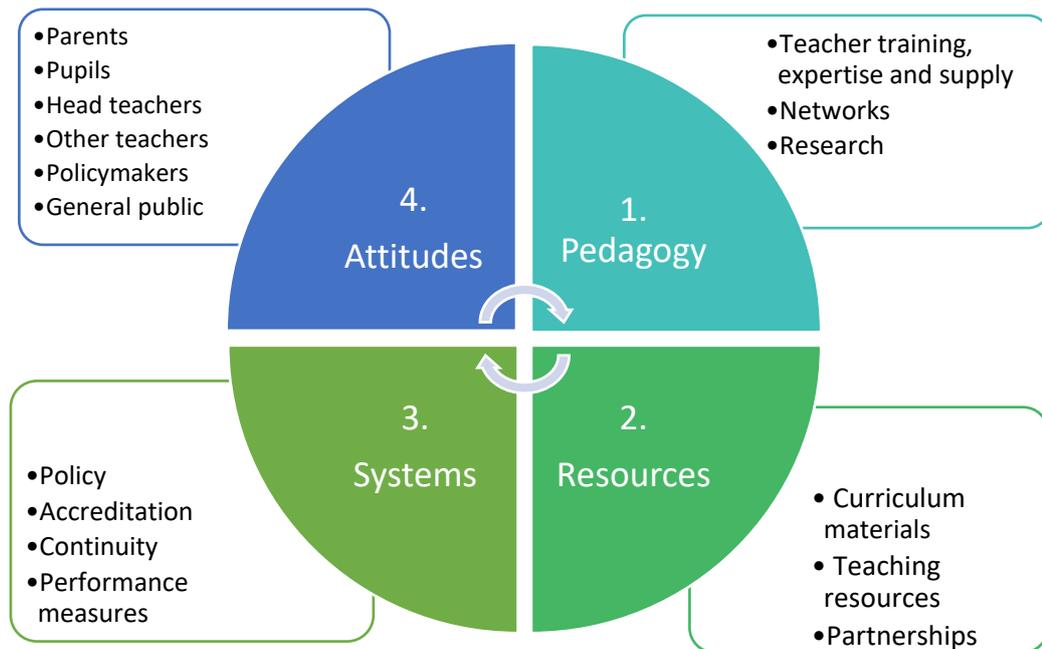
The current research focusses mainly on the issues under 3 and 4 above (Systems and Attitudes), although it does deal with the strategic aspects of teacher supply. It does not cover issues relating to Policy and Accreditation in detail, since these came under Strand 3 of the new research. We examine whether our earlier findings are still valid, what has changed in the external environment, and in what ways the situation for Arabic has improved or worsened since the first research in 2013.

The current research

Building on our previous work, the current research seeks to provide more detail and greater depth in the area of demographics, and in particular to answer the following questions:

- Who is learning Arabic and why?
- Where are they learning Arabic?
- How many students are there, of different types?
- How many teachers are there and are they qualified to teach Arabic?

We were asked to focus on the feasibility of moving the teaching of Arabic into the mainstream and to consider in particular the context and attitudes which prevail in mainstream UK education and in the wider society, addressing the following research questions:

- Why do young people choose to learn Arabic and why do schools choose to teach it? Why might some young people not choose to learn Arabic?
- How might more children from non-Muslim or non-Arabic backgrounds be encouraged to learn Arabic?
- Is it accurate to talk about misconceptions of the Arab world and if so what are these misconceptions and how might they be addressed?
- If there were a greater number teachers of Arabic and with better qualifications, would schools then elect to teach it?

Based on this brief, our research project was developed with the following differences as regards our previous work:

- A more specific focus on existing and potential provision in mainstream secondary schools. It includes some consideration of primary schools, supplementary schools, and provision at the level of Further and Higher Education, but these are not the main focus of the research.
- It does not deal with pedagogy, accreditation or teaching resources for Arabic. These areas are being researched by other British Council partners with Arabic language expertise. We have worked closely with these researchers in gathering, interpreting and presenting the plentiful data that this research has produced.
- The current research has a more in-depth focus on learners and their motivations, including both pupils currently learning Arabic and those who do not, either because they have chosen not to, or they have not had the opportunity to do so.
- It attempts to quantify more accurately the numbers of secondary schools teaching Arabic, and the numbers of learners they cater for.
- It considers the wider context for the teaching of Arabic and the potential for development, through interviews with a number of key stakeholders and a review of opinions expressed in the media.

Changes in the external environment since our previous research

There have been a number of changes in the external environment which impact on the context for developing the teaching of Arabic in the UK.

There has been an intensification of negative images of Arabic countries and Muslims in the news media as a result of terrorist attacks worldwide and the worsening situation in Syria. The EU referendum campaign gave rise to considerable anti-immigrant sentiment, with negativity and suspicion expressed towards the languages and cultures of immigrant communities of all origins in the UK. In the USA, the overtly anti-Muslim sentiments expressed in Donald Trump's election campaign, have been shocking to observers in this country and overseas. Arabic has achieved a special significance and mere use of Arabic is enough to spread alarm, as the image used on the front of this review and the accompanying press story show. We have to ask: would the message have sparked such alarm if it had been written in another language? Would it have been better understood? Would it have been reported in the media if it had been in another language? These factors militate strongly against the development of Arabic teaching, at the same time as revealing an increased need to do so in the interests of greater understanding and tolerance.

However, there are also a number of factors which perhaps create a more favourable context for Arabic than at the time of the earlier research. The outcome of the EU referendum is raising awareness of the need to engage productively with countries outside the EU, and this is may create a more conducive environment for language skills and cultural understanding from beyond Europe. Since our last report, Education Ministers have made strong statements in support of community languages and, as a result of DfE intervention, the future of GCSE and A levels in Arabic and other lesser taught languages which were previously under threat, has now been safeguarded. In England,

the DfE is now reporting on the proportion of pupils who take more than one language qualification at Key Stage 4 and this may give a boost to lesser-taught languages such as Arabic.[4]

Examination statistics show that entries for GCSE Arabic have continued to rise, increasing by 11 per cent between 2015 and 2016, bringing the total number to 4211. This is equivalent to a 74 per cent increase over the last 10 years. Figures 1 and 2 below show the upward trend in entries for GCSE and A level Arabic over the period for which data exist:
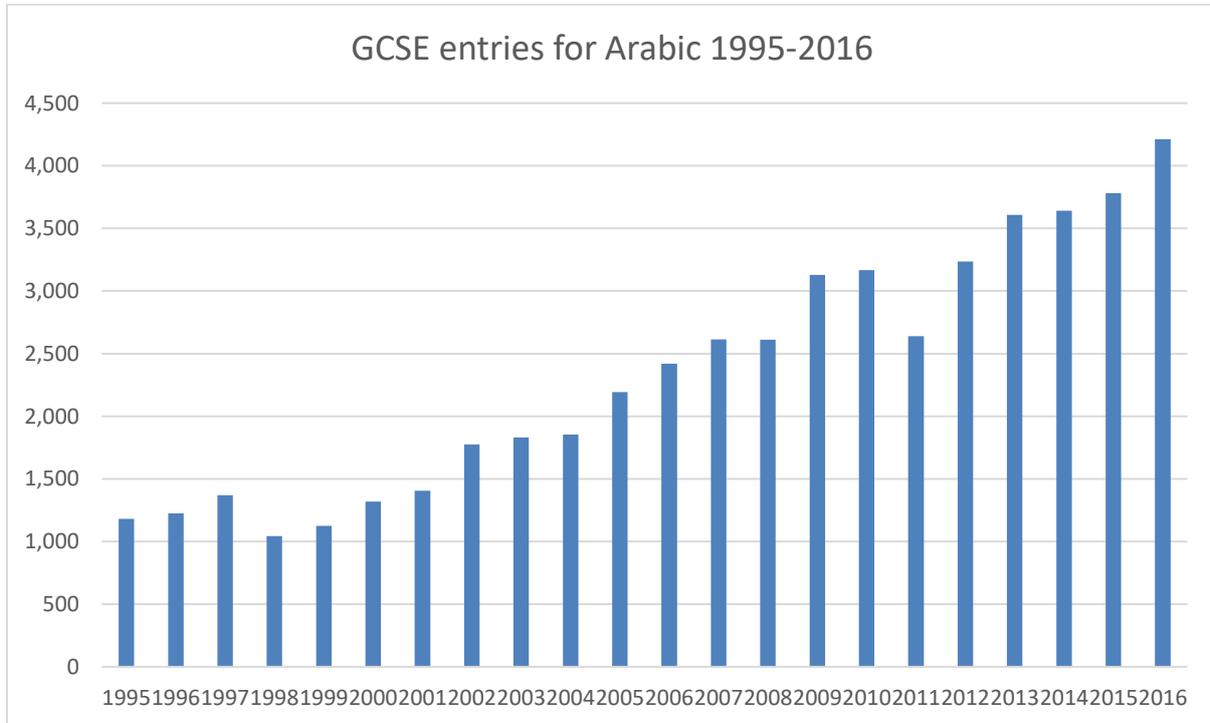

Figure 1. JCQ GCSE data for all institutions, England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Entries for A Level Arabic rose by 15% between 2015 and 2016, reaching an all-time high of 749.

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[4] DfE, *2016 School and College Performance Tables. Statement of Intent*, p. 10: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-performance-tables-2016-statement-of-intent
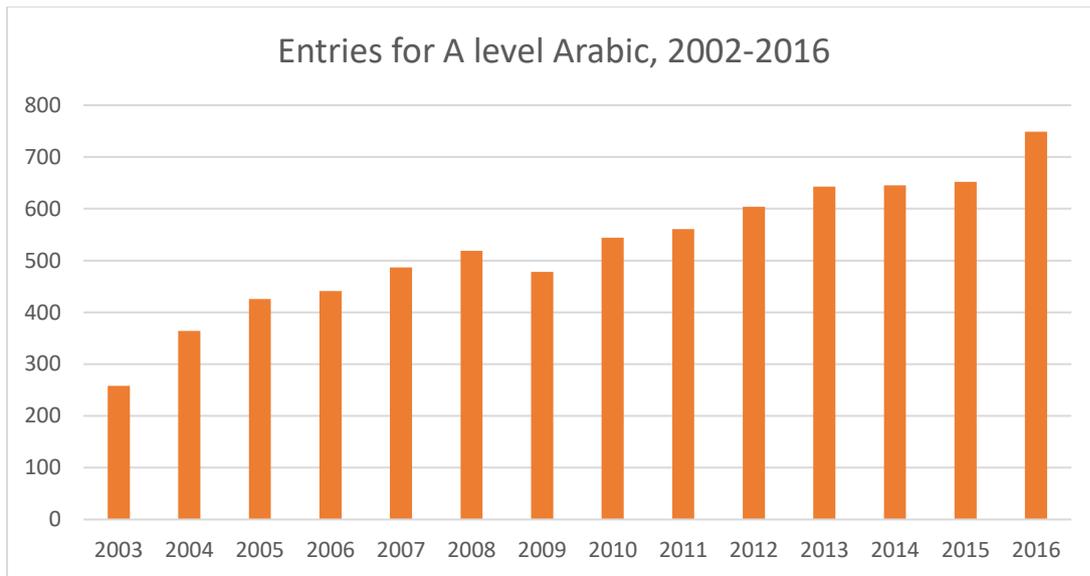
Figure 2. JCQ AL data for all institutions England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Although, in the case of both sets of figures, Arabic represents only a very small proportion of entries for language subjects, it is clear that it is on an upward trend. In order to understand the reasons for the increase, which runs counter to general trends of decline in language entries for GCSE and A level, we must examine the situation for Arabic in schools – see chapter 2.

Methodology

The research questions were challenging to answer and required use of a range of methods to gather and analyse the necessary quantitative and qualitative data. Alcantara Communications worked closely with the providers of the other strands in the British Council research in order to avoid duplication, share expertise and maximise the use of resources. In particular, we sought to avoid overloading schools with requests for information. Data-gathering started in April 2016 and the original aim was to complete this by the end of July 2016. However, the majority of written responses to questionnaires were not available until the autumn of 2016. We are very grateful to the research team based at Leeds University for facilitating the collection of these questionnaires.

The following methods were employed:

Desk research
Alcantara undertook a review of existing data including examination statistics, Language Trends reports and other published reports. Examination data includes the latest figures published in August 2016.

Schools questionnaire
Alcantara's database of schools known or thought to be teaching Arabic, compiled for the previous research, was updated and expanded, using data available from the British Council, intelligence from project partners and online sources.

A simple questionnaire was emailed to schools on the database, asking:

- Whether they (still) teach Arabic

- If so, how many pupils are learning the language and how many Arabic teachers they have.
- If so, can they provide a brief summary of their provision and information on the profile of teachers and learners.
- Whether they would be willing to take part in further research and host a visit from researchers.

The questionnaire was sent as from the whole research team and the responses received and logged by Alcantara. On the basis of responses received, 6 schools were identified for visits and their details shared with the university teams responsible for the other strands of research.

Meanwhile, Alcantara continued to seek data from all the schools listed in the database via further emails and phone calls. Where no responses were forthcoming, DfE published data on pupil numbers in Muslim faith schools was used as a proxy for numbers of Arabic learners.

Pupil questionnaires

Questionnaires were developed for pupils learning Arabic and for pupils not currently learning Arabic. These questionnaires were sent to each school by the team undertaking the visits prior to the visit, together with a series of consent forms and detailed information about the aims of the research. Host Arabic teachers were asked to gather completed questionnaires from one group of Arabic learners in each school, together with a complementary set from a similar group of pupils not learning Arabic.

Wherever possible, the team visiting the school collected the completed questionnaires at the time of their visit. Where this was not possible, the questionnaires were sent at a later stage by post, for analysis by Alcantara. All pupil data, from a total of 211 responses, was transferred to a spreadsheet for the analysis which appears in chapter 3 below.

Head teacher questionnaire

A paper questionnaire was developed for head teachers or heads of languages requesting further information about the numbers and profile of pupils learning Arabic in each school that was visited. This was completed by each school visited in the same way as the pupil questionnaires.

Interviews with stakeholders

Thirteen telephone interviews were undertaken with stakeholders designed to draw on experiences and opinions from a wider range of perspectives, and to discuss future potential for the development of Arabic teaching in UK schools.

The interviewees were selected in to represent the following viewpoints:

- Policy-makers
- Teacher trainers
- Arabic teachers
- Teachers of other languages
- Senior school managers
- Academies
- Researchers
- Employers
- Publishers
- Language experts
- A UK-wide dimension

Analysis of media coverage

An analysis of media coverage and information and discussion about Arabic available online was carried out in September 2016. The original plan was to carry out online discussions about Arabic via social media but this plan was abandoned in the aftermath of the EU referendum vote and related heightened sensitivities. It was thought more productive to use research time to continue to phone and email schools for information on their Arabic provision.

Chapter 2 – current provision in schools

How many schools are teaching Arabic?

This research has focussed on secondary schools with full time provision rather than on primary or supplementary schools. Our previous research identified 207 secondary schools thought to be involved with Arabic teaching. However, further investigation increased this list to 256 schools known or thought to be teaching Arabic. These were approached firstly by email, then by phone, frequently followed by another email to a named individual. Despite a number of approaches, it was not possible to obtain data from 76 schools on whether or not they teach, or have taught Arabic. Of the 180 schools from which it has been possible to gather data, 67 have no pupils learning Arabic. The reasons given for this are as follows:

- At least 11 of these schools do not teach Arabic themselves but make provision for their pupils to sit Arabic GCSEs if they learn/speak Arabic outside school hours.[5] It is likely that there are many more schools in this category nationally with small numbers of Arabic GCSE candidates which fluctuate from year to year. The inclusion of languages GCSEs in school performance measures including the E-Bacc and Progress 8 have provided an incentive for schools to encourage pupils who speak or learn other languages at home to take exams in these subjects.
- A total of 18 schools are either free schools not yet functioning, all-through schools currently functioning only as primary schools, schools which have closed or schools which have changed their names.
- Two schools, one independent and one academy, run 'Middle Eastern clubs' which sometimes offer some coverage of language but do not teach Arabic as such.
- Some 5 schools do not currently teach Arabic but have done so in the past and may do so in the future in response to demand from individual pupils.

We have collected data from 113 schools which are currently teaching Arabic. These comprise:

- 6 schools – from both state and independent sectors - provide niche teaching for individuals or very small numbers of pupils (1-5).
- 4 independent schools (one an independent sixth form college) have small numbers of between 6 and 10 pupils.
- 3 independent schools, one of which is a French school, have Arabic teaching for larger numbers of pupils (from 11 to around 80).
- 4 maintained schools, including one in Wales and one in Northern Ireland, and one independent school, offer Arabic through the British Council programme.[6]
- 2 state-maintained Sixth form colleges located in areas with high Muslim populations, cater for 30 and 48 Arabic learners respectively.
- 3 non-faith based state-maintained schools provide timetabled teaching of Arabic.

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[5] Other schools who said they did not teach Arabic are thought also to be in this category, but we were only able to speak to the school receptionist, who was unable to confirm this.
[6] We only approached lead secondary schools involved in the British Council project, though not all replied!

- 91 schools are Muslim faith schools where Arabic is a core subject for all pupils. The schools vary in size from just 18 pupils to 777 pupils. Most, but by no means all, function independently of state funding and some are all-through schools catering for both primary and secondary pupils.

All schools are located in England except for those which are part of the British Council project in Wales and Northern Ireland plus one small Muslim school in Wales (Cardiff) and one independent secondary school in Scotland (Glasgow).

We have used varied sources of information in an attempt to track down every UK school teaching Arabic at secondary level. However, schools are not obliged to respond and, therefore, the data gathered cannot be regarded as comprehensive. It is, however, the most comprehensive information ever collected about the teaching of Arabic in the UK and is likely to represent around three quarters of all secondary schools which offer the subject.

Models of provision

As a result of the responses received, we have identified the following models of provision for Arabic:

- Niche teaching for individual or very small numbers of pupils
- Independent schools offering Arabic as an optional subject
- State schools offering Arabic as a timetabled option
- State Sixth form colleges offering Arabic GCSE and A level options
- Arabic as a core subject (Muslim faith schools)
- Schools providing an introduction to Arabic language and culture through the British Council's programme
- Extra-curricular cultural clubs
- Support for Arabic language exams

Greater detail of each particular model of provision, including comments from respondents and case studies of particular schools, is provided below.

A. Niche teaching for individual or very small numbers of pupils

This model is found in both the independent and the maintained sectors. In one independent school, for example, Arabic is offered on request, and when there is demand the school advertises for a tutor. One maintained secondary school offers a weekly twilight session for pupils from Arabic background and another, part of the British Council Arabic Programme, tries to match Arabic teaching to individual pupils' needs or interests:

> *We are still running a weekly Arabic enrichment session with our visiting Arabic teacher. We have also shared her expertise with our neighbouring secondary partner. One student at our school has requested that we offer a GCSE in Arabic (he is not a native speaker) and we are trying to organise this from September with 2/3 hours of tuition per week.*

The difficulties of this model of provision which caters for very small numbers of learners with different levels of linguistic competence and different motivations is described by one respondent as follows:

> *We only have Arabic as an extra-curricular activity; it was quite popular when it started, but then dwindled - largely as it has to start over as a beginner class each year and so those who wanted to carry on feel there is no progress despite the teacher's attempts to keep everyone engaged. Currently, we now have only one girl attending, preparing GCSE. We have proposed it as a 4th option for A-level students - but seems unlikely.*

B. Independent schools offering Arabic teaching as an optional subject

A number of (non-Muslim) independent schools are able to run Arabic classes with relatively small numbers. These may be exam classes, or for enrichment, as the following examples show:

> *Currently we have 8 students studying or set to study Arabic next year. Some are beginning ab initio. Several are either heritage speakers (mom or dad is a native) or live in an Arabic speaking country as an English ex pat.*

> *I hour weekly lunchtime sessions open to all pupils. Totally mixed group, some with Arabic/Muslim backgrounds. Some pupils with no Arabic background have got up to GCSE.*

> *3 are taking AS and AL, 1 AS and 2 GCSE, all Arabic native speakers (Sixth Form College)*

> *Arabic is taught to some 6 Lower Sixth students a year, and the course followed is one produced by our Arabic scholar. It is unexamined. It seeks to take over where the now defunct Durham Certificate left off. We have about one student per year who heads off to read Arabic or take Middle Eastern Studies. The course we offer just gives a taster.*

Four non-denominational independent schools were identified which attracted slightly higher numbers to Arabic. These include a highly elite independent school with 37 pupils learning the language. The variety of provision in the other 3 schools can be seen in the following chart:

School	Nos of Pupils	Backgrounds	Exams	Comments
S182	12	Non Arabic/non-Muslim	Ab initio to GCSE in 2 years	Pupils need more than 2 years to achieve GCSE level and, as a result, achieve lower grades than in other subjects.
S87	2 x Y13 classes	Varied	A level	Secular Arabic taught There are plans to promote Arabic further – seen as a logical accompaniment to Spanish
S156	80	Children of binational families – maybe be of Arabic but not necessarily speakers of Arabic.	Not assessed via UK exam system	French school catering for families relocating from Arabic speaking countries. Arabic usually second or third language

Table 1: Arabic provision in three independent schools

C. State schools offering Arabic as a timetabled option

There are a very small number of state-maintained secondary schools which offer Arabic teaching alongside French, Spanish and other languages. Two such schools were identified from our survey. Both cater for large numbers of pupils from Muslim families, although neither are Muslim faith schools:

School S205 is an 11-16 girls' comprehensive in London. It caters for a very diverse student population, of whom 77% have English as an Additional Language. It offers a range of languages in addition to Spanish and French, including Chinese and Bengali as well as Arabic. All pupils in Year 7 take either French or Spanish and continue with this language in Year 8. At the same time, they may choose another language for one hour per week. At the end of Year 8 they choose their GCSE. In 2015/16 there were 60 pupils learning Arabic in Year 8, 40 in Year 9, 50 in Year 10 and 26 in Year 11 (taking their GCSEs in summer 2016), making a total of 176. Pupils who speak Arabic at home are encouraged to sit the GCSE in Year 9 or 10. There are only very small numbers of these.

The profile of pupils learning Arabic in this school is mixed ability. Two thirds are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), almost all from UK backgrounds, Muslim families, born in the UK from non-Arabic speaking homes. They all choose to learn Arabic and are clearly influenced by their parents. The few students from Arabic backgrounds come from Algeria, Iraq and Morocco. There is no provision for supporting their dialects. All those choosing Arabic will have been exposed to/have learnt Qu'ranic Arabic. The teacher reports that their motivations are not religious – they want to travel to or live in Dubai. Many have already visited as a stopover on their way to Asia and have been impressed with the multicultural lifestyle. Non-Muslim pupils need encouragement to take the subject in Year 8 but there is 'no room' for the sort of tasters, links and cultural contacts which would serve this purpose. The teacher sees the main barrier to expanding the teaching of Arabic as the lack of qualified teachers, and concern on the part of the head teacher that provision can be maintained if a teacher leaves. The school has appointed an Arabic Teaching Assistant as a Teach First student from next September.

School S247 is a large 11-18 mixed comprehensive, also located in London. Two thirds of its pupils are eligible for FSM and 86 per cent have English as an Additional Language. The school has an excellent record for languages, with 80 per cent take up at key stage 4, mostly in Spanish, German and French. Languages are also a very important part of key stage 5 study as the school offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) rather than A levels and the study of a language is an integral part of the IB exam. The school offers tuition in Arabic, Bengali, Spanish, French and German. In Year 7 pupils begin with a termly carousel of French, German and Spanish before settling on one of these languages to study in Year 8. They continue with this language in Year 9 but also have the opportunity to study Arabic or Bengali. The school runs three year GCSE courses with pupils making their GCSE option selection at the end of Year 8. The teacher comments:

> *Unfortunately, due to lack of staff and funding we were unable to offer Arabic to Year 8 this year. In Year 9 we have 17 students, in Year 10 we have 24 students, in Year 11 we have two classes with 28 students, in Year 12 two students and Year 13 one student.*

Students are of mixed ability. Many arrive with lower levels of achievement at Key Stage 2, but this does not affect their achievement in Arabic. They tend to be from Arabic national backgrounds and the majority are from Muslim families. There is a very wide mix of immigration statuses, from being

born in the UK to recently arrived. The amount of educational support they receive from their parents varies too but all have chosen to learn Arabic and are enthusiastic about doing so.

D. State Sixth Form Colleges offering Arabic GCSE and A level options

Two such colleges were identified in our research:

School SF135, located in Birmingham, is able to run 5 Arabic groups, although some of these take place at the weekend. There are approximately 45 pupils, 15 students taking GCSE, AS and AL, respectively.

School SF252, in a multicultural area of London, has been teaching Arabic for two decades. It currently has 8 students doing Arabic GCSE, 22 studying for AS and 18 for A2.

E. Arabic as a core subject (Muslim faith schools)

This research confirms previous findings that the vast majority of Arabic teaching takes place in Muslim faith schools, where Arabic is almost always a core subject for all pupils. It is beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed picture of Arabic in the wide range of independent Muslim schools which are a feature of the English education system. The following case studies illustrate the distinct approaches to Arabic in a state-maintained and an independent Muslim school:

School S97 is a comprehensive 11-18 school for Muslim girls with academy status, based in Bradford and focussing on science education. It has been classed as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and achieves above average or well above average results on all educational attainment measures. All Year 7 students have 'taster' lessons in Urdu and Arabic. Half way through the year, students are given the option of choosing one of these languages which they will continue to study in Years 8 and 9. Some students will have the opportunity of being entered for their GCSE and A Level through a fast tracking system. The school has 50 students taking Arabic in Year 7, 55 in Year 8, 55 in Year 9, 20 in Year 10, and 26 in Year 11.

School S153 is a small independent school for Muslim boys aged 11-16, located in London. It teaches both the national curriculum and an Islamic curriculum, with Arabic featuring strongly in both. Pupils may take Arabic or Urdu GCSEs, though with a school population of just over one hundred, only small numbers do so each year. The school boasts a high level of educational attainment overall, and has won a number of awards from the Association of Muslim Schools.

F. Schools providing an introduction to Arabic language and culture through the British Council's Programme

In contrast to the demand-driven provision for Arabic identified in both the independent and state-funded sectors, schools funded to promote Arabic through the British Council Programme are often located in areas with little cultural diversity and focus on achieving a better understanding of Arabic cultures as much as on developing competence in the language. Examples of schools promoting Arabic through the British Council's programme can be seen in the following table:

School	School type	Location	Level of cultural diversity in local area	Prior knowledge of Arabic	Offer	Nos of pupils participating
S99	English-medium secondary	Wales	Varied	Variable – from a little to fluent	8-week Arabic Club (after school) – introduction to Arabic language and culture	12
S186	Comprehensive	Rural	Little diversity	None	Enrichment class e.g. trip to mosque. Also works with local primary schools	Small numbers
S208	Secondary	Rural Northern Ireland	Little diversity	None	Taster sessions, after school classes and works with local primary schools (one school learning Arabic on weekly basis through extra-curricular class). Exhibition on Al-Andalus to reach wider school audience	8 pupils (aged 12 – 14); 7 adults; 25 pupils in nearby primary school

Table 2: Arabic provision through the British Council's Programme

G. Extra-curricular cultural clubs

In addition to the work done by schools working with the British Council's programme to promote Arabic language and culture, our research also identified a small number of schools in both independent and state sectors running 'Middle Eastern clubs' aimed at de-alienating the Arab world. An example is that of an independent school whose club focuses on improving intercultural

understanding and knowledge about the Middle East. The respondent to our survey describes the scope of the club and the variety of pupils attending:

> *I run a very small Middle East and Arabic Society here, normally meeting once a fortnight. I have 4 regular attendees, and up to 10 others who come every now and then. Of the 4 regulars, they are all English citizens:1 has an Iranian father,1 is Palestinian,1 has an Egyptian father. Of the others that come along fairly regularly, 2 are Jewish, the others are English. All are boys – yet we're a co-ed school. A few girls have come along in the past but not as many as I'd like. We mainly discuss events/culture of the Middle East, but in the past I have also done a series of sessions on basic language, and the more-longstanding members of the club have tried to learn the alphabet as well'*

H. Support for Arabic language exams

A number of schools in both the state and independent sectors which do not teach Arabic, do offer support for pupils to gain national qualifications in Arabic. As the following case studies show, the level of support offered to pupils with Arabic as a mother tongue/second language, varies widely from the opportunity to work with qualified language experts to fortnightly coaching sessions with a non-qualified native speaker or support from a qualified teacher of languages who understands the requirements of the exam but who does not speak the language. Schools whose pupils are successful in GCSEs for community languages gain by being awarded additional performance points which contribute to their national ranking.

Three case studies follow showing the different approaches schools take to support pupils wishing to take a qualification in a home language:

School S115 is an 11-16 girls' comprehensive in Birmingham with high proportions of pupils eligible for FSM and with English as an Additional Language. It has been providing support for mother tongue speakers of Arabic for around 4 or 5 years. They have around one candidate per year for GCSE Arabic, (and also provide similar support for speakers of other languages: Russian, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, and especially Chinese, financed through the Pupil Premium grant). Learners tend to be UK born but their families originate from a wide range of countries including Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

Pupils are supported by a specialist linguist who does not speak their languages, but has a good understanding of what is required for GCSE. She assesses suitable candidates in June/July on their speaking, listening and reading. Those that require significant support start to receive this in September. 'Fluent speakers' don't start to prepare for the exam until January. Sessions are held during the school day, at lunchtimes, during 'enrichment sessions' or sometimes during PE. Pupils are well-motivated and work at home. They find it 'simple and enjoyable' (not like normal homework) and it does not generally interfere with other subjects.

Pupils could take the exam as early as the end of Year 7, but this would not count towards the school's performance points. The support teacher says that pupils start to lose their fluency as they move to secondary school and English effectively becomes their first language. The school has good exams results generally. Many pupils taking exams in community languages are of above average ability and results in Arabic and other community languages tend to be A's or A*. There is an Arabic Saturday school locally and younger girls have been referred there; it helps them move on from 'domestic language'. However, those being prepared for GCSE do not usually attend supplementary school as there is no need.

School S139 is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school in an urban area with above average proportions of pupils eligible for FSM and speaking English as an Additional Language. They offer support to heritage speakers to gain an accreditation at GCSE or A Level: in summer 2016 a total of 12 students took GCSE Arabic, one took AS and two took A2 level. The school supports them by offering mock exams in Arabic which are marked by a language expert and students receive feedback; if they are ready they are entered for the exam. Nearer to the time of the exam, study support sessions and individual support are available if required. The school has also been working closely with a nearby school, offering pedagogical support for their Arabic courses which are taught as part of the curriculum. The school hopes to bring Arabic into its own curriculum, initially for heritage speakers. They also teach Arabic as part of an Adult Evening Class Programme and have two classes running this year. The school further provides outreach support for students from across the region to gain a GCSE or A Level qualification in their home language. Last year it supported just over 190 students to get a GCSE or A Level by facilitating mock exams in 17 of the languages available at GCSE and then going on to deliver the speaking exams for these students. Of the 190 students, 63 students took a GSCE Arabic, from 14 different schools.

School S99 – a state secondary in Wales which participates in the British Council Arabic Programme, runs once fortnightly Arabic coaching lessons for native speakers to focus on exam technique in preparation for GCSE and A level. Pupils taking part in these groups are a mixture of all year groups 8 - 13, organised according to ability rather than age. In 2016 there were 30 entries at GCSE, 3 at AS and 2 at A2. The groups receive coaching from an unqualified native speaker who used to be a teaching assistant at the school.

Reasons for teaching Arabic

Given the diversity of provision described above, it is not possible to generalise about the reasons why schools teach Arabic. For Muslim faith schools, the rationale is clear although, as previous research has shown, it is not the case that all motivation, either from parents or pupils, is religious. For many, it is a question of preparation to take part more generally in the global Islamic community.

Non-Muslim schools in both state and independent sectors are responsive to demand from parents of pupils with a connection to Arabic (which may be because they are Muslim, because they have an Arabic-speaking parent, or they have lived in an Arabic-speaking country). As shown above, a number of independent schools go to great lengths to provide tutoring if it is required, sometimes on an individual basis. Our research identified one state school which intended phasing out Arabic, was deterred from doing so because of parental demand. This was in an area with a high Muslim population. Further evidence of the importance of parental views is provided from pupil questionnaires, discussed in the next chapter.

Schools which teach Arabic, both in areas with large Muslim populations as well as those in areas which have seen very little immigration, regard the teaching of Arabic as a means of enabling children to become better global citizens. Our research found evidence of one primary school which had had to make great efforts to explain this to parents who perceived Arabic as a language to be taught to Muslim children only. A school in the British Council Arabic Programme, which has no Muslim families within its school population, felt that it was extremely important to counter-balance anti-Muslim sentiment, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 Paris attacks.

A significant finding from our interviews with schools and stakeholders is the fact that several respondents cited the Hispanic connection as a 'way in' to provision for Arabic. One stated that, as a Hispanist, he was sensitive to Arabic influence in European culture. Highlighting the Muslim heritage of Spain provides a non-threatening and, in the words of another interviewee, a 'logical' entrée to the subject for pupils.

Interviewees put forward a number of reasons why schools across the UK might wish to teach Arabic. These include:

- Community cohesion/inclusion
- International focus/global citizenship
- Academic reputation

In Scotland, one primary school is representative of a small number of others in which the teaching Arabic is part of its inclusion policy. The school is in an area with a rich multicultural population. Pupils at the school come from a variety of backgrounds including Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan and many have already had some exposure to Arabic. Teaching Arabic, therefore, is a good way to unite the school.

In Argyle and Bute, an area in Scotland which is receiving a number of Syrian refugees, some primary schools are considering introducing Arabic as the third language so that the community can be welcoming to the refugees and so that community integration can be assured. Scottish schools are keen to embrace the world beyond Scotland's borders and to teach other languages beyond the 'traditional 6'. The development of an outward looking mindset is given considerable importance at policy level in Scotland.

A number of interviewees express the view that good schools with a strong track record for languages and academic achievement might well want to offer a wide range of languages to their pupils.

Reasons for not teaching Arabic

Schools which have taught Arabic in the past but no longer do so, provide evidence of the fragility of provision where it caters for very small numbers. An Academy in our research had taught Arabic to one student from an Arabic background for the last 2 years but said it would no longer be doing so. Another had provided an annual enrichment session for Gifted and Talented pupils through a visiting professor of Arabic from a local university. However, this was dependent on a family connection with a member of staff who had left the school, leaving the future of the project uncertain. An independent school in Scotland offered Arabic as an after-school enrichment option but this had had very low take up and was not therefore viable.

One primary school which had been teaching Arabic had decided to focus on French instead, citing concerns about long-term sustainability and financial pressures of employing an Arabic teacher. An independent secondary school which stopped teaching Arabic cited a 'non-inspirational teacher' as the reason, though there were also indications that the languages department had not been supportive of the subject.

One school which has never taught Arabic said that 'if there was a big enough Arabic-speaking demographic, we would employ a part-time instructor'. This school has high numbers of pupils with

English as an Additional Language and teaches Polish and Urdu, but is not aware of any demand to learn the language on the part of pupils or parents. It feels that it would 'cause a stir' to find out. It does employ an Arabic speaker who coordinates provision for English as an Additional Language, but says that this person is already fully occupied with this role.

These barriers are discussed further in chapter 5.

Conclusions

- Arabic continues to be a growing subject, and this is linked to the growth in the number and size of Muslim faith schools.
- Mainstream provision is scarce and largely dependent on demand from Muslim parents.
- Opportunities for other pupils to learn Arabic and become acquainted with Arabic cultures are few and far between.
- Valuable work is being done through the British Council's programme in extending these opportunities beyond the independent school sector and throughout the UK.

Chapter 3 – learners

How many pupils are learning Arabic?

Since all Muslim faith schools can be assumed to be teaching Arabic, DfE data on the number of pupils was used to gain data on the number of pupils in these schools. However, we found at least one schools which allows its pupils to drop Arabic after Year 9. The numbers are therefore likely to be somewhat over-estimated.

The research has identified 17,139 pupils learning Arabic. These are mainly secondary pupils but the figures include primary pupils in Muslim all-through schools where primary pupils are aggregated in the data supplied by the DfE. It does not include data from Muslim primary schools, since it was outside the scope of this research to collect this.

The distribution of Arabic learners was as follows:
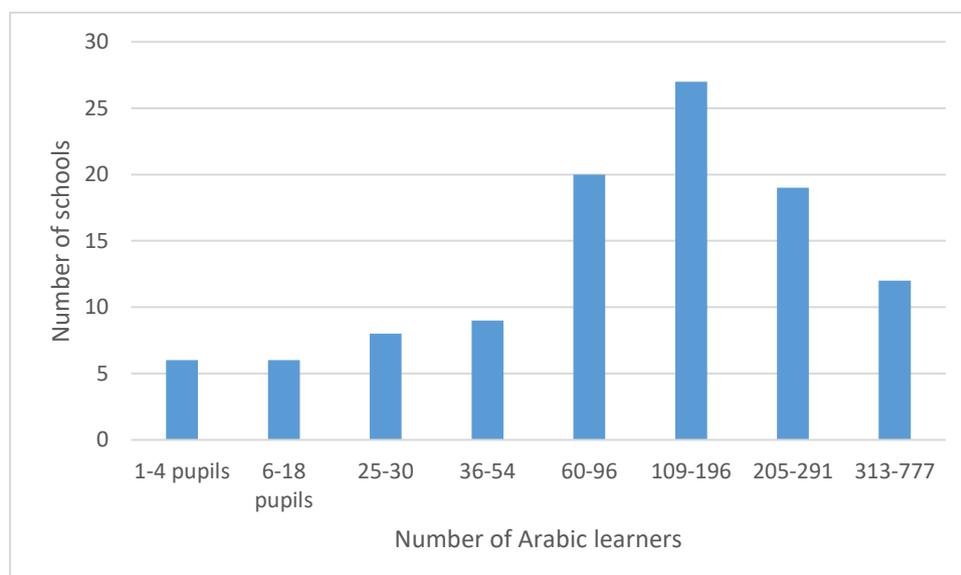
Figure 3: Numbers of Arabic learners in each school

Excluding pupils attending Muslim faith schools where there was an assumption that all pupils learn Arabic, there were 721 learners of Arabic – just over 4% of the total.

Of this 4%, the vast majority attended 6 schools/Sixth Form Colleges in areas with high Muslim populations catering for pupils with Muslim/Arabic backgrounds. Non-Muslim pupils learning Arabic *ab initio* were found in small numbers in two types of school:

a) Independent secondary schools
b) Schools participating in the British Council programme.

Pupil questionnaires

The pupil questionnaires were designed to show the age and gender of pupils and whether they speak Arabic or any other language at home. We asked if they were learning any other language and how good they thought they were at language learning. In the case of pupils studying Arabic, we asked how long they had been doing so, how much they enjoyed the classes, what they liked best and least and how they thought they might use their Arabic in the future. In the case of the pupils who were not learning Arabic, we asked them how much they enjoyed their language classes, whether they had had the opportunity to learn Arabic and if so, why they had not chosen to do so. We also asked if they would like to learn Arabic in future and why/why not. Both sets of questionnaires asked pupils what their parents' views were/would be on them learning Arabic.

We analysed 149 questionnaires from pupils learning Arabic, and 62 from pupils not learning Arabic, from 9 different schools, distributed as follows:[7]

Type of school	Number of schools	Number of questionnaires from pupils learning Arabic	Number of questionnaires from pupils not learning Arabic
State primary schools	2	47	24
State-maintained secondary schools	3	26	2
Independent secondary schools	3	43	17
Sixth form colleges	1	33	19

Table 3: Pupil questionnaires collected and analysed

Because of the relatively small numbers of pupils and the wide variety of circumstances which they represent, the data collected cannot be regarded as statistically valid. However, the findings do show some clear patterns and shed some interesting light on the profiles and motivations of pupils. We have analysed the responses from primary and secondary pupils separately, since there was no element of choice for primary school pupils.

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[7] At an advanced stage in the research, we received a very large number of completed pupil questionnaires from an independent girls' Muslim school. We incorporated a good many, but not all, of these in order not to skew the findings through over-representation of pupils from one type of school.

Primary pupil profiles

The responses of primary pupils are shown in Table 4 below:

	Pupils learning Arabic (n= 47)	Pupils not learning Arabic (n=24)
Age	10-11	8-9
Gender	26 girls 20 boys	16 girls 8 boys
Number who speak Arabic at home	1	0
How long have they been learning Arabic?	24 – less than a year 2 – 1-2 years 18 – 3-4 years 2 – more than 4 years	n/a
Number with home languages in addition to English (and Arabic)	23	12
Number learning other languages in addition to English (and except for Arabic)	35	24
Enjoyment of language lessons	16 – Lots 18 – Quite like 10 – Not much 3 – Not at all	13 – Lots 6 – Quite like 3 – Not much 2 – Not at all
View of own language learning skills	6 – Very good 18 – Quite good 15 – Not very good 7 – Very bad	6 - Very good 7 - Quite good 9 - Not very good 2 - Very bad
Parental views on Arabic	9 – Think it is very important 18 – Pleased 11 –Not bothered 6 – Can't see the point	5 - Think it is very important 6 - Pleased 6 - Not bothered 7 - Can't see the point
Whether they would like to learn Arabic in the future	n/a	7 – no 16 - yes

Table 4: Responses from primary pupil questionnaires

It should be noted that there is a difference in age between the pupils learning Arabic and the pupils not learning Arabic. This is because all the pupils not learning Arabic attend one school, where a particular year group was targeted to complete the questionnaires. Also notable:

- Girls outnumbered boys in both groups.
- There was only one pupil amongst the Arabic learners who said he spoke Arabic at home, and none among the non-Arabic learners.
- However, amongst the group of pupils who completed the 'not learning Arabic' questionnaire, there were 3 pupils who were in fact learning the language. Two of these said

they spoke Bangla at home and the other, a monolingual English girl, said she was learning it in a club. We understand that the school gave them the 'not learning Arabic' questionnaire to complete because they were not learning the language in the mainstream school.

- Exactly half the pupils in each sample speak another language at home besides Arabic and/or English, and several speak more than one. Amongst the group of pupils learning Arabic, the following home languages were mentioned:
  - Albanian
  - Bengali/Bangla (2)
  - French (3)
  - Italian
  - Malayalam
  - Punjabi (5)
  - Urdu (8)
  - Pashto (2)
  - Portuguese
  - Slovak (2)
  - Yoruba
- Amongst those pupils not learning Arabic, the following home languages were mentioned:
  - 'African'
  - Arabic
  - Bengali/Bangla (3)
  - Czech (2)
  - French
  - Hungarian
  - Lithuanian
  - Polish
  - Spanish
- Pupils who were learning Arabic were also learning a wide range of other languages.
- Pupils learning Arabic split into two groups, roughly reflecting the two schools. One group had only recently started learning Arabic.

Motivations of primary pupils

An encouraging number of primary pupils learning Arabic – about one third – said that they enjoyed their lessons 'Lots', and a similar, slightly larger, number said they 'Quite liked' them. Those in the top category for enjoyment said that they liked 'learning new words' or 'learning to write', 'doing calligraphy' and getting to do 'activities'. One boy said that he liked 'that there's a way to speak to males and females', and one Urdu speaker from Saudi Arabia said she liked that 'I can be able to speak more at home and it'll be easier to read and understand the Koran'. This girl was also learning Punjabi at home. Those who 'quite liked' their Arabic classes also liked the 'new words' and the writing, but several also stressed the 'fun' and 'playing games'. One wrote 'The best part is when I go home and teach my family the new words I have learnt'. One pupil who was less enthusiastic about the classes admitted 'It's a new language and I never know when it might come in handy'. Another commented 'I found out new things'. One who did not like the classes at all wrote 'it teaches you how to write differently' – an important lesson in itself.

In answer to the question what they liked least, pupils who said they did not like Arabic at all said that they found it 'confusing' or 'boring' and one commented: 'I don't know why we need to learn Arabic we will probably never use it'. Those who did not like it much said it was hard and boring and one commented 'I don't really like speaking in other languages'. Those who were more enthusiastic said that what they liked least was not being able to understand – one said she was 'lost'. Two said they did not like writing from right to left and others said that they did not like saying or learning new words.

When asked what they might like to do with their Arabic in future, the most common response was that they wanted to 'talk', e.g. 'to be able to speak Arabic fluently like I speak English fluently', 'If I go to Wabiu (?) I can speak to people there'. This was related to the next most common response which was relating to travel: 'Go to an Arabic country and speak Arabic', 'I would like to go to Arab countries and be able to communicate with other people'. Seven pupils also mentioned that they would like to teach Arabic – a surprising number, but perhaps understandable given that their teacher would be the foremost model for them of anyone using Arabic. Two pupils said that they would be able to use Arabic to speak to relatives.

An encouraging proportion of primary school pupils not learning Arabic – two thirds – said that they would like to do so in future. The reasons they gave were as follows:

- Because I don't know it, why not?
- Because I love it!
- Because I want to
- It would be fun/could be fun/I think it will be fun
- Because it's my religion
- It's important to me
- It might be cool
- Because I only know a little bit
- I'm learning it already
- Because I go there on holiday

The minority of pupils who said they would not like to learn the language gave the following reasons:

- Because it's boring
- Because I'm not going there
- Because I don't want to/ just don't want to
- I don't like it
- They hate it[8]
- Because it's hard

A significant number of primary school respondents in both groups said that their parents did not see the point of them learning Arabic. This shows the need for careful communication about the rationale and benefits of teaching the subject.

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[8] It is not clear whether the 'they' refers to the pupils who are learning Arabic, to their own parents or to other people entirely.

Secondary pupil profiles

The data from the questionnaires completed by secondary school pupils is shown on Table 5 below.

Pupils learning Arabic

Around half of secondary pupils surveyed who are learning the language speak some Arabic at home. Among these there is a broad range of varieties spoken or understood at very different levels of competence ranging from 'mother tongue' to scant comprehension. Among those pupils whose families speak Arabic at home, the most common varieties were Egyptian and Yemeni, each with 7 pupils. Other varieties mentioned were Syrian (4), Iraqi (3), Libyan (3), Algerian (2), Lebanese (2), and Moroccan, Saudi, Sudanese and Tunisian (1 pupil in each case).

Around half of the sample of pupils learning Arabic speak another language at home in addition to English and/or Arabic. Only 11 pupils in the sample, just over 10%, speak no other language at home. Twenty-three other languages were mentioned as being spoken at home in addition to Arabic and English. The most common were Urdu (13), Bengali (7) and Somali (6). Other languages mentioned: Albanian, Amazagh, Bosnian, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Farsi, Gujarati, Korean, Kosovan, Kurdish, Memon, Mirpuri, Pashto, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish. Some children (c.10% of our sample) speak more than one other language at home, making them quadrilingual. Among these, there are some unusual combinations of languages including German and Farsi, and Dutch and Somali.

The conclusion that Arabic is being learnt by a hugely multilingual population of learners is given further weight by the data showing what other languages pupils are learning. Nearly half the sample are also learning at least one other language, the most common being Spanish (15), French (13) and Urdu (10). Other languages being learnt alongside Arabic were Dutch, Chinese/Mandarin, Irish, German, Italian, Somali and Turkish. Three pupils were combining the study of Arabic with ancient languages (Latin and/or Greek). All 11 monolingual pupils in the sample were also learning other languages in their schools.

There is generally a high level of enjoyment of Arabic classes. Only 6 out of the 102 reported any sense of negativity towards their experiences learning the language. Of these, 5 were 'heritage' learners, 4 with parents who were very keen for them but who found it hard.[9] The fifth was a native speaker who found it too easy. The one non-heritage learner who was less than enthusiastic wrote:

> *It's very difficult and because of the alphabet if you don't know a word you won't be able to guess. The grammar and the vocab are both very hard to learn. You should properly inform students. Don't shy away from telling them how hard it is. It will mean you get people who like challenge taking the course. Make sure the teachers are experienced and good with kids.*

There is a remarkably high level of parental interest in their children learning Arabic, more than half say their parents think it is 'very important' and almost all the rest are 'pleased'. Only 4 said their parents were 'not really bothered', three of these were non-heritage learners.

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[9] We classified respondents as 'heritage learners' if a) they report Arabic spoken at home or b) they refer to 'my mother tongue' or 'my religion' in their responses or c) they report a language of a Muslim country spoken at home, e.g. Urdu.

	Pupils learning Arabic (n= 102)	Pupils not learning Arabic (n=38)
Age	Age 11– 2 pupils Age 12– 8 pupils Age 13– 6 pupils Age 14– 20 pupils Age 15 – 14 pupils Age 16– 19 pupils Age 17– 23 pupils Age 18 – 10 pupils	Age 15 – 12 pupils Age 16 – 14 pupils Age 17 – 8 pupils Age 18 – 4 pupils
Gender	35 boys 67 girls[10]	9 boys 29 girls
Number who speak Arabic at home[11]	49	5
How long have they been learning Arabic?	19 - less than a year 31 - 1-2 years 19 - 3-4 years 32- more than 4 years	n/a
Number with home languages in addition to English (and Arabic)	50, of whom 9 mentioned more than one	32, of whom 11 mentioned more than one
Number learning other languages in addition to English (and except for Arabic)	46, of whom 15 are learning more than one other language	27, of whom 4 are learning more than one language
Enjoyment of language lessons	37 – Lots 52 – Quite like 6 – Not much 0 – Not at all	13 – Lots 17 – Quite like 0 – Not much 1 – Not at all
View of own language learning skills	18 - Very good 61- Quite good[12] 15 - Not very good 0 - Very bad	4 - Very good 22 - Quite good 11 -Not very good 0 - Very bad
Parental views on Arabic	54 - Think it is very important 35 - Pleased[13] 4 - Not bothered 0 - Can't see the point	6 -Think it is very important 15 - Pleased 7 - Not bothered 9 - Can't see the point
Whether they would like to learn Arabic in the future?	n/a	17 – no 20 - yes

Table 5: Responses from secondary school pupils

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[10] The high proportion of girls was because 2 of the schools providing questionnaires were female-only single sex schools.

[11] This figures includes those who say that one parent only speaks Arabic.

[12] There were also 2 pupils who ticked an intermediate position between 'quite good' and 'not very good'.

[13] In addition there were 2 pupils who ticked an intermediate position between their parents thinking it was 'very important' for them to learn Arabic and merely being 'pleased'.

Pupils not learning Arabic

The secondary-age pupils not learning Arabic who completed questionnaires tended to be older than the sample learning Arabic, and the sample was even more skewed towards girls (see Table 5 above). This was to do with the constraints experienced by Arabic teachers who had to collect data from pupils whom they did not teach, and we are very grateful to them for being able to gather these responses, which must be treated as indicative rather than definitive. We know that some pupils answering the questionnaire, particularly those from the Muslim school, had already learnt Arabic but given it up; however, this question was not specifically asked on the questionnaire so we are unable to give a precise number. Five out of the sample stated that they came from homes where Arabic was spoken.

This sample of pupils was even more multilingual than the sample of those learning Arabic: only 6 pupils came from monolingual backgrounds and between the other 32, 18 different languages were spoken. The most common home language in this group was Urdu (9 pupils), followed by Punjabi (7). Five spoken French and 5 Arabic. There were 2 pupils in each case whose home languages were Spanish, Italian, Gujarati and Somali, with the following languages represented by one pupil in each case: Bengali, Bulgarian, Kimongo, Lingala, Flemish, Albanian, Mongolian, Patwaari, Portuguese and Burmese. There were more polyglot pupils than in the sample of Arabic learners, with 11 pupils having more than one home language besides English. Combinations here included Urdu, Gujarati and Burmese, and French, Kimongo, Lingala and Flemish.

Most were learning another language, including French (16 pupils), Spanish (8), Japanese (5), Italian and Urdu (1 pupil in each case). Four pupils were learning more than one other language. Of the 38, as many as 29 had had the opportunity to learn Arabic, but had chosen not to do so (as noted above, some had learnt it in the Muslim school they attended but had been allowed to give it up after Year 9).

Motivations of secondary pupils

The vast majority of pupils learning Arabic appeared to be 'heritage learners', i.e. they already had some connection with an Arabic or Muslim country. When asked for their motivations for learning Arabic, more than half (56) mentioned reasons which were specifically related to this heritage, including:

- It's my mother tongue
- It's the language of the Qu'ran/my religion
- I've learnt it before
- To be able to speak to/understand family members or friends
- To understand the language more deeply, or for more practical purposes

Some expressed these motivations in quite complex or sophisticated ways:

> *Religion-wise and some of my family roots speak Arabic and I wanted to learn it from a young age*

> *Arabic is a rich language and I want to be able to understand the Qu'ran and be able to communicate in Arabic when I go Arabic countriesI wanted to take advantage of the gift I was fortunate to have (speaking Arabic) and wanted to develop it*

> *It's my mother tongue and I want to learn classical Arabic and study books*

> *Nod to Moroccan heritage as well as refreshing challenge in its difference to the structure of the Romance languages*

> *It's a language I like learning about and have been learning all my life*

Others mentioned reasons not specifically related to their background or heritage, such as:

- Wanting to live/travel to Arabic speaking countries
- Wanting to obtain an extra qualification/UCAS points
- Interest in the language/culture

One comment reflected the importance of Arabic as a means to access other knowledge and understanding: 'It's a nice way to learn new things'

Many heritage learners, including both native and non-native speakers, said that they found it easy. There was a clear sense also that Arabic is associated very positively in Muslim pupils' minds, with these respondents using words like 'nice', 'good', 'beautiful':

> *I like how we learn to write and read and just the sound of Arabic sounds cool (girl attending Muslim school, also learning Urdu and French)*

> *'It's a beautiful language and is very rich; it's much more detailed than English and is the best language in the world. (Libyan heritage girl)*

> *It has strong ties with my religion and culture and I think it's a beautiful language (Bengali heritage girl attending comprehensive school)*

The small number of pupils in the sample who had no Arabic or evidently Muslim background at all, were all from the two independent non-denominational secondary schools. Their responses cannot therefore be taken as representative of the wider pupil population, were the teaching of Arabic more widespread. They mostly cited factors such as Arabic being 'new', 'interesting' or 'different' as reasons why they had chosen to study the language. One mentioned its historical significance, and two thought it would be useful for university entrance or as an addition to their CV. One said it provided a useful complement to other languages being studied. Instrumental motivations for learning the language for use in employment/business were not very prominent.

Likes and dislikes

Respondents were asked to say in their own words which aspects of Arabic learning they appreciated most, and which aspects they liked least.

The factor which appeared as most important was a sense of progression. This was important for both native and non-native speakers, as the quotes below show:

> *Talking with others and understanding what is being said well instead of just listening to a different language actually understanding and being able to write bits of Arabic (non-native speaker with Arabic-speaking father)*

It is my mother tongue I love being taught it to the fullest extent (boy with Egyptian background)

The power it gives me when communicating clearly and maintaining a fluent conversation (girl with Algerian background)

I like widening my vocabulary and being more confident overall (girl with some Arabic spoken at home)

It is interesting and unique. I enjoy learning to read and write properly (boy whose parents speak Arabic)

For mother-tongue speakers, the opportunity to make connections between languages is important:

It helps me improve my English because of the translation I do from Arabic to English

These comments show how important the study of Arabic is and the benefits derived both for those who regard themselves as native speakers and for those little prior competence.

Second in importance is enjoyment of the teaching and classroom activities themselves. This came over very strongly in responses from pupils attending the Sixth Form college:

I like the activities we do and all of the different projects

My teacher is very inspirational. I love the novels

Arabic culture and literature were also greatly appreciated, again by pupils at the Sixth Form college in particular.

The importance of Arabic for understanding the Qu'ran also came high on the list of 'likes':

It's the language of our Holy Book (the Quran). My friends and I do it together, so that's nice

Pupils also like the practical skill of being able to communicate, e.g. this thoughtful comment from an 18 year old:

It's a privilege to be able to communicate in a different language in a foreign country and able to learn and participate in a different culture

They also like the fact it is new and different.

Pupils with prior experience of Arabic like it because they find it easy. One Bengali girl commented:

It is easier compared to other languages, I like the small classes and I like developing my writing to writing in a different language

Comments highlighted a strong integrative motivation, enjoyment and a desire to learn:

I like the fact that everyone is from a different country and we are all learning one beautiful language. I also love how my teachers teach because I have progressed from when I started. I love learning the history of the Arabian empire. Arabic culture and languages is so vast moving and expanding that it is amazing (girl with Somali heritage attending comprehensive school)

I like it coz you get to write it which is sick and speaking it is sick and learning songs is sick (girl attending Muslim school)

Two respondents mentioned 'ownership' as reasons why they liked learning the language. They saw it as 'theirs':

> It's my own language. It helps me to have a better understanding of my language (girl with Arabic background attending comprehensive school)

Only a minority of respondents mentioned anything that they did not like about their Arabic classes, many putting 'nothing' or saying that they liked everything. The aspects least liked among heritage learners were the general difficulty or the difficulty of a particular aspect such as grammar, writing or reading. Among other dislikes, two respondents complained about other students disturbing the lesson, and one said that having mixed abilities in the same class was a problem. One comment highlighted dissatisfaction with the syllabus dominated by exams:

> We don't learn how to speak it and we should learn important stuff not just to pass the test

The contribution of Arabic to general learning and personal development was encapsulated in this comment from a girl with a Punjabi background attending a Muslim school:

> It requires a lot of concentration and revision, however this boosts my organisation skills and I learn how to balance time

The aspects which non-heritage learners most liked were the reading/writing, the novelty, the fact that they were taught in small classes, and the challenge. One mentioned the culture and music, another liked learning about the different varieties of Arabic.

The aspects they liked least were the difficulty of the GCSE course, meaning there was little time to study cultural matters; the difficulty of the grammar/vocabulary/writing, and the fact that reading and writing required very different skills from speaking and listening.

Pupils not learning Arabic

There were 29 pupils in the sample who had had the opportunity to study Arabic but had not chosen to do so. The reasons why they had not chosen Arabic were largely a) because they did not think they were good at it; b) because they thought it was hard; c) because they were not interested in the language, and d) because of timetabling constraints or a preference for other subjects. One girl with Bengali as a home language commented: 'I found it difficult to learn in 2 years'.

Amongst those pupils who had an Arabic background at home, the most common reason for not choosing the language was that they were not able to read or write the language, or at least not well. One student's answer revealed a perception that Arabic was mainly for native speakers, or those with a particular interest in the language:

> I am not a native speaker and am not interested in learning the language either

One Urdu/Punjabi-speaking pupil who was learning French rather than Arabic said that she had found it hard and that she had 'no facilities to travel to Arabic countries'. 'It will not benefit me in the UK', she said. Another from a similar background wrote that she had not chosen the subject 'because I had already done 2 other languages and I find Arabic too difficult. Also, I want to do history instead'.

All pupils not currently learning Arabic were asked if they would like to do so in the future. Of these, 20 said they would and 17 said they would not. The split was almost exactly on 'heritage' lines. Of the 20 who would like to learn Arabic in the future, 15 mentioned reasons connected with their heritage, most of which were religious, e.g.: 'It is the language of the Qu'ran and the prophet spoke it so I'd like to follow his example'. Amongst this group there was a strong awareness of the importance of Arabic as a world language and a desire to communicate with Arabic speakers. This contrasted strongly with the views of those who said they would not like to learn Arabic in future, who said it was of no interest to them, it would not benefit them and they preferred other languages:

> *I don't feel I need it in the future, neither am I ever going to use it*

> *I don't like the language*

> *I prefer Spanish or French*

There was also a big difference between the two groups in parental attitudes towards Arabic: while the parents of 6 of those who would like to learn Arabic in the future were reported as thinking that the language was very important, none of those who did not want to study the language had parents thinking it was very important. However, 9 (more than half) said that their parents did not see the point of studying Arabic. However, parental attitudes were not a determining factor: one boy who had French as a home language wrote that he had not chosen Arabic 'because it seemed daunting and difficult', but he would like to learn it in future, despite his parents being 'not bothered', 'because people all around me speak it'. He classed himself as a 'very good' linguist. Another pupil who was learning Japanese and also classified herself as a 'very good' linguist, and whose parents were similarly 'not bothered' said that she hadn't chosen Arabic because she 'wasn't interested at the time' but would like to learn it in future 'because it is spoken by many people and it would be useful to know'.

Interviewees' perspectives on pupil motivation

The responses gathered from pupils were very much in line with the findings from interviews. Interviewees felt that the time required to master the script is a disincentive for learners with no background. Heritage learners have more access because they have learnt the script from a young age. Although they often don't understand, they can read and write. This is the opposite of the situation with other community languages where pupils often have oral skills but can't read or write their heritage language.

One teacher who had taught both French and Arabic saw a clear difference in the motivations of pupils studying different languages. She said that in French there was not much enthusiasm, and only a few keen linguists. In Arabic, even though some lost interest, the level of respect for the language remained high. There was not sense that it was 'useless' or 'pointless'. This view is absolutely confirmed in the pupil responses, as is the importance of parental influence. In interviews with stakeholders, cultural heritage and parental influence were identified as the most important factors for pupils already studying Arabic. One school commented: 'Out of 8 languages taught in my school, Arabic is the most popular. However, 70% of the pupils are Muslims and learning it for heritage/religious reasons or because of pressure from their parents.' Arabic is valued in Muslim communities and often seen very positively indeed, as previous research has shown.

Interviewees also said that some pupils are enthusiastic because Arabic is different and they feel that they are doing something special or it that would look good on their CV: 'At least 50% see it as an advantage on their CV maybe because of previous exposure of other languages or because they have parents who have worked abroad. Some do it out of curiosity and some for practical reasons.' These reasons are also valid for other lesser-taught languages such as Chinese.

Some pupils will study Arabic to increase their UCAS points and improve their chances of getting into university or to increase their chances to get a place on degree courses such as Medicine where there is a high level of competition.

Interviewees felt that the 'war on terror', islamophobia, and ignorance about the rich cultural history of the Arab world and its influence on Western cultures all militated against young people choosing to study Arabic. These attitudes might come from parents and some parents might have reservations because of the perceived association of Arabic with the oppression of women or with the politics of some Islamic countries. We did not pick up this from pupil questionnaires, although it may be a factor behind the relatively large proportion of parents who reportedly 'do not see the point' of studying Arabic. It may also be behind one pupil's comment that she did not like the language and found it 'annoying'.

One interviewee with experience of teaching Arabic said that she had expected more prejudice against the language than was actually the case and that business opportunities outweighed negative factors. Other reasons put forward not related to entrenched attitudes why pupils might not choose to study Arabic included the following:

- Too different or too far from other languages they are familiar with.
- Complexity/overloading of the school timetable.
- It is difficult to get pupils to learn any languages at all.
- Pupils are not able to visit many Arabic-speaking countries.

Conclusions

- Learners of Arabic are highly multilingual. Arabic occupies a place in the plurilingual repertoires of both 'heritage' learners and enthusiastic linguists.
- 'Heritage' factors provide very strong motivations for learning the language, to the extent that the language is often not seen as relevant for others.
- Heritage learners often express great enthusiasm for learning Arabic and derive deep satisfaction and personal development from doing so. Learning gains go much wider than the merely linguistic.
- So-called 'native-speakers' (including those who may not, in fact, speak or write the language at all well), form an important segment of those taking GCSE and A level exams in Arabic. They benefit greatly from formal learning of Modern Standard Arabic, from learning about Arab cultures and accessing literature. Mainstream provision for them would appear to be extremely important in helping them to develop a secure sense of identity within UK society.

- While those who have had access to written Arabic from a young age often say they find the subject easy, there are many aspects of the language which are challenging for new learners and require sufficient time to absorb.

Chapter 4 - teachers

Qualified teachers

There is no simple, straightforward answer to the question 'how many teachers are there qualified to teach Arabic?'. Individuals involved in or who potentially could be involved in supporting the learning of Arabic currently fall into one of three broad categories:

- Teachers trained in the UK specifically to teach Arabic
- Teachers trained in the UK to teach other languages, with competence in Arabic
- Arabic speakers trained in the UK to teach subjects other than languages
- Arabic speakers teaching Arabic through mosques, madrassas and supplementary or Saturday schools.

Teachers trained in the UK specifically to teach Arabic

There are very few teachers trained in the UK specifically to teach Arabic. Goldsmiths' flexible but now defunct PGCE programme for Community Languages ran for 10 years, attracting between 16 and 25 participants annually of which a small number each year were training to teach Arabic. The university has no data on destinations of their alumni but it is possible to estimate that the course may have provided somewhere in the region of 50 trained teachers of Arabic over the time it ran. However, there is no way of knowing if those teachers are active or even still in the UK. Arabic has now been amalgamated with the PGCE in secondary MFL and caters for one or two Arabic trainees each year. Very few, if any, are non-native speakers of the language who have taken the traditional route of a modern languages degree followed by a PGCE.

There is no teacher training provision for Arabic in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales.

Teachers trained in the UK to teach other languages, with competence in Arabic

We spoke to a (non-native speaker) Arabic graduate who had subsequently done a PGCE in French at Spanish (at another institution) and had been lucky enough to be placed in a school offering Arabic for her teaching practice, though she is not now working as a teacher. She said that on her Arabic degree course there had been no-one interested in progressing to a PGCE and no awareness that this might be an option, though some had gone on to teach English abroad. There may be more teachers like her, with capability in Arabic but qualified in the UK as teachers of the more commonly-taught languages, but it is impossible to specify a figure. It is difficult to see this information could be captured, short of surveying the entire population of qualified language teachers, including those not currently working as such.

Arabic speakers trained in the UK to teach subjects other than languages

There are Arabic speakers who are teachers qualified in the UK in non-language subjects. Two such cases were identified in the course of our research, but neither individual was teaching Arabic or likely to do so in future. This could be a potential source of Arabic teachers but it is not possible to quantify and not clear whether such teachers would be interested in teaching Arabic. Many of those

who contributed to this research point out that a knowledge of Arabic alone is insufficient and that pedagogical skills in the teaching of language are also required.

Arabic speakers teaching Arabic through mosques, madrassas and supplementary or Saturday schools

A plentiful pool of Arabic teachers is to be found in mosques and madrassas which teach Qu'ranic Arabic. However, these often highly qualified individuals do not teach the skills expected in modern language classrooms or use a pedagogy comparable to that prevalent in mainstream schools in the UK. There are also a large number of part-time, often volunteer teachers of Arabic in supplementary or Saturday schools. Many of these, such as, for example, the teachers in Al-Ola supplementary school in Westminster, are committed to a modern linguistic focus and teach communicative skills leading to GCSE qualifications but among the many diverse types of supplementary school there is a wide variety in terms of quality and of approach.[14] If jobs to teach Arabic were available in mainstream schools, some teachers in the supplementary sector might be interested in further training to qualify them for these posts. However, this would involve tackling the current vicious circle whereby schools do not offer Arabic teaching because of concerns about finding good teachers, and no training exists because of a lack of demand from schools.

Training for teachers of Arabic

Courses leading to Qualified Teacher Status

New teacher training policies in England such as Schools Direct place an increased onus on schools to train the teachers they need. While this move has the potential to help resolve the situation of a supply of suitably qualified teachers of Arabic to schools, this has not actually been the outcome. If schools do not already teach the language they cannot provide suitable mentoring and cannot risk offering pupils a chance to learn the language based solely on teaching by trainee teachers. Any programme to expand the teaching of Arabic must address this conundrum.

Following the cessation of Goldsmiths' flexible PGCE in Community Languages, Arabic speakers who wish to train as teachers must find a school or a university willing and able to train them in Arabic alongside another modern language. This implies that they must be trilingual and have either French, German or Spanish in addition to English and Arabic, with a degree in the main subject they are going to teach.

The many routes into teaching can be confusing for potential applicants and with changes year on year it is difficult to promote and target courses, especially for a small cohort. While Goldsmiths works with Schools Direct, the profile of schools they work with is not suitable for Arabic. They are developing part-time programmes which are easier for students to fund but as yet no Arabic teachers are involved. It would perhaps make sense for Arabic trainees to combine their training with subjects other than MFL but this would be resource intensive and complex to arrange. With universities under pressure and no continuity in numbers allocations from year to year, it is difficult for them to find the capacity and drive to develop provision for niche, non-core subjects.

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[14] Al-Ola was highly commended by judges of the 2015 British Academy Schools Language Awards: http://www.britac.ac.uk/british-academy-schools-language-awards-2015-winners-announced

Other training opportunities

Goldsmiths offers an Arabic Certificate course in teaching Arabic as a second/foreign language to primary and secondary age learners. The one-year course is seen as a preparation for PGCE and requires participants to be already working as an Arabic teacher in order to build up a portfolio of evidence and undertake a classroom project.

SOAS runs a well-regarded one-year full-time course in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language which provides a qualification at Certificate and Diploma level. Its focus is adult learners, so it does not lead to Qualified Teacher Status. It aims to train teachers of Arabic in the latest communicative methods that enable learners to use the language effectively from Beginners level.[15] The course has been running for nine years, previously as a part-time course attracting between 8 and 12 participants each year. The course fulfils a need for Arabic teachers in universities and government institutions such as the Foreign Office but is an expensive route into teaching since it involves one year's full time study. However, one graduate of the course has been successful in obtaining a place on a Teach First training course in a school.

This year for the first time, the Qatar Foundation has sponsored a Professional Development programme in teaching Arabic in UK schools, run in partnership with SOAS. This involved a week-long workshop at SOAS (July 2016), followed by a programme of mentoring including classroom observations and meetings via Skype throughout the academic year. There are currently 15 participants on this course.

An annual one-day conference organised by the British Council and by Leeds University, provides scarce CPD for Arabic teachers as well as a chance to network with others and discuss issues relating to their professional work.

Teacher profiles

Who is currently teaching Arabic? In this research we have identified a wide range of training backgrounds among teachers of Arabic in UK schools. The list below provides an illustration of the many diverse and non-formal routes into teaching Arabic, and reveals the innovative ways in which teachers access training. It is worth noting that most Arabic teachers work alone, as few schools have more than one teacher of Arabic.

- A native speaker of Yemeni Arabic with a Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) certificate. This, in conjunction with membership of the society of Education and Training, is recognised in law as equivalent to QTS.[16]
- A trained Maths teacher and Arabic speaker who taught Arabic on an occasional basis but now no longer does so.
- A Lebanese native speaker qualified in teaching French as a Foreign Language in Lebanon.
- A retired Oxbridge Classicist with Arabic skills, working on a part-time basis.
- A non-native speaker working as a private tutor.

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[15] www.soas.ac.uk/languagecentre/languages/arabic/postgraduate-certificate-diploma-in-teaching-arabic-as-a-foreign-language.html
[16] https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/about-us/

- An Iraqi with mother tongue Aramaic (Assyrian), a UK degree in Arabic language and Literature, a Master's degree in Modern Foreign Languages and Literature in secondary education and PGCE in Modern Foreign and community Languages.
- A native speaker of Iraqi Arabic with a PGCE in Arabic and German and a Master's degree in Education.
- A Teach First trainee previously working as a Teaching Assistant (for Arabic).
- A native speaker of Tunisian Arabic trained in the teaching of English, working as an independent consultant.
- A native speaker of Arabic with a degree in French and English as well as a CELTA qualification in teaching English as a foreign or second language.
- A bilingual English/Egyptian qualified to teach ICT and currently employed in his school as Head of Business.
- Teaching Assistants. These are sometimes used to prepare pupils for exams. They usually have informal training on exam content and technique for language teachers provided by the school in which they work.

The above list highlights the widely diverse sources of Arabic teaching expertise and the disparate backgrounds of those who currently provide tuition in Arabic. One question which came up in interviews conducted for this research was the question of whether or not the teaching of Arabic represents an attractive career choice for those who speak the language – with the implication that it currently does not.

Linked to the shortage of Arabic teachers is the difficulty of accessing those that do exist and matching them to suitable posts. The following sources were among those mentioned by potential employers:

- Recruitment agencies
- The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London
- Online fora
- The British Council.

Conclusions

- Arabic teachers currently come from very diverse backgrounds and have pursued diverse and sometimes innovative routes into teaching.
- There is a shortage of ways to train as a teacher of Arabic and none at all outside England. Arabic teaching does not currently offer a clear career opportunity, either for UK Arabic graduates or for those with overseas qualifications.
- The changing face of teacher training in England offers opportunities to remedy this, but concerted effort is needed to overcome the many barriers that exist. This requires a focussed plan with national support and buy in, developed in conjunction with schools and training providers.

Chapter 5 - wider perspectives and potential for development

This chapter is based on interviews with a number of well-informed stakeholders from different parts of the UK and different professional backgrounds to determine the potential for the future development of Arabic teaching and learning.[17] It also draws on a review of media coverage in relation to the teaching of Arabic.

The case for and against the teaching of Arabic

A review of media coverage and online commentary identified a number of reasons being postulated for the learning of Arabic:

1. The number of native speakers of Arabic and its use not only as a first language but as a *lingua franca* between an estimated one billion individuals across the world.
2. The economic importance and value of Arabic. British sources stress the rapidly-growing populations and economies of many Arabic-speaking countries and the gap between the demand for Arabic speakers in western countries and the short supply from UK schools and universities. Arabic skills are seen as a competitive advantage for those who have them.
3. The rich cultural heritage of the Arabic world, its contribution to Western and world civilisation, and the influence of Arabic on other languages.
4. The potential that learning Arabic has to improve intercultural understanding, both within a country and internationally. This was explained as follows on the University of Warwick's website:[18]

   In addition to having limited exposure to real Arabic culture, Westerners are presented with one-dimensional negative stereotypes of Arabic-speaking peoples through the news media, Hollywood films, and other sources. At the same time, events in the Middle East affect our daily lives. Reliance on such false and superficial images can lead to mistrust and miscommunication, to an inability to cooperate, negotiate, and compromise, and perhaps even to military confrontation. Those who learn Arabic gain deeper insights into the cultural, political, and religious values that motivate people in those cultures. People who know Arabic can negotiate the cultural and linguistic gap between nations, assist in solving and avoiding intercultural conflict, and help businesses successfully engage in international trade.

Another source, based in the USA, states that the learning of Arabic would also help to improve understanding at home of both Arabs and Arab-Americans, since learners of Arabic would have a deeper and more nuanced perspective of the Arabic-speaking world than that typically presented in the US mass media.[19] This is just as relevant in the UK where the population currently includes

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[17] See Appendix for list.

[18] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/languagecentre/academic/arabic/whystudyarabic/ accessed 22/10/2016

[19] American Councils for International Education: https://www.americancouncils.org/news/seven-reasons-why-now-time-learn-arabic accessed 21/10/2016

approximately 2 million Muslims. A recent article on the challenges facing the study of Arabic in the UK also make the case for improving intercultural understanding:

> *The British school curriculum could teach a contemporary living Arabic […]. Creating an environment in which Muslim and non-Muslim pupils learn everyday usable Arabic side by side would help to build community cohesion.*[20]

The US source quoted above also suggests that learning Arabic could help enhance opinions of America overseas: 'If you study Arabic abroad or work in the region, you will have daily opportunities to dispel negative misconceptions and promote a positive view of the US and American people.' This angle is also very relevant to the UK as it prepares to leave the European Union.

Many Arabic learners themselves tend to stress the inherent beauty of the language, both written and spoken, the 'buzz' of being able to decipher Arabic calligraphy, the fascination of the culture and their enjoyment of getting to know Arabic people and making friends.[21] The British Council has pointed to the opportunities Arabic skills can open up for individuals as well as the importance of the language to the UK economically, culturally and strategically.[22]

The British Council's call for Arabic to be taught more widely in UK schools has met with some vehement opposition. For example, the British National Party (BNP) published an article on their website suggesting that this might be the beginning of 'Islamic Britain' and asserting that there is no demand for Arabic except from Muslim parents. The BNP states that it will 'fight tooth and nail to make sure the parents of this great country are warned of any attempt to introduce such learning in children's education'.[23] The ignorant and intolerant online comments which the article provoked – e.g. the perception that the only trade between the UK and Arabic-speaking countries is our import of dates for Christmas – highlight the importance of challenging misconceptions and negative stereotypes.

The BNP later reacted in a similarly horrified fashion to a guest editorial in *Die Zeit* which called for Arabic to be made compulsory in German schools. This view, put forward by the president of the private Kühne Logistics University in Hamburg, had said that the learning of Arabic by German citizens would 'grant access to the Arab world' and 'recommend ourselves and our children as business, cultural and political partners'. [24] However, the report clearly shows that the advantages of teaching Arabic are being taken seriously in other Western countries who may be competing with us for trade, investment and influence.

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[20] Dr Elizabeth Kendall, 'The Challenges Facing the Study of Arabic in the UK'
[21] http://www.lindsaydoeslanguages.com/guest-post-5-reasons-choose-arabic-next-language/; https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/why-arabic-should-be-taught-uk-schools both accessed 20/10/2016
[22] British Council, *Languages for the Future*, 2013
[23] https://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/primary-children-be-taught-arabic-ten-uk-schools (accessed 31/10/16)
[24] https://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/arabic-be-made-compulsory-language-german-children (accessed 31/10/16)

Is there support for the proposition that more mainstream secondary schools should be teaching Arabic?

All those interviewed for this research were professionals working in international settings likely to support the general notion of improving national capacity in Arabic. But should this be done at school level? Although not representative of the population at large, all our interviewees support the principle that Arabic should be made more widely available *at school level*. The reasons cited are that Arabic is one of the world's most widely spoken languages and that it is a language of considerable global significance, spoken in a large number of countries and that, despite the size of our Muslim population, formal provision for secular Arabic is negligible. This means that the UK produces very few speakers who can use Arabic skills in the workplace. As well as being a commercially important language, greater numbers of Arabic speakers are needed for diplomacy, security and aid-related work. Learning Arabic provides the same intellectual benefits as any other language and it was suggested that its rarity value is particularly valued by employers. This view is confirmed by recent research into jobs requiring languages advertised online which put Arabic in second place after German in terms of the salaries offered. However, despite the high salaries quoted, there were fewer jobs advertised for Arabic than for other languages, including not only French, German and Spanish but Mandarin, Dutch and Russian.[25]

Interviewees believe that the teaching of Arabic is important for dispelling cultural misperceptions, building understanding between cultures and teaching children to be welcoming and tolerant of others who are different. In the words of one interviewee: 'Teaching Arabic to young people is now more important than ever, not only because of the political context but also because we need to think about what skills and attributes we want young people to develop for their adult/working lives'. Other interviewees comment that the arguments for teaching Arabic are very similar to those that were for teaching Russian in schools during the Cold War.

Policymakers interviewed emphasise the need for us to engage with languages beyond those of Europe, especially now that the UK has voted to leave the EU. In both England and Scotland there have been moves to support the development of Chinese and these could provide useful models for Arabic. Scotland has already seen a positive impact from the introduction of Chinese and Urdu. It is recognised, however, that most schools will continue to focus on French, German and Spanish and that the teaching of Arabic would be likely to involve only a small minority of schools. Interviewees do not think that Arabic is *more* important that European languages but that introducing greater numbers of learners to Arabic language and culture would be an appropriate response to shifting patterns of global power and influence and perhaps also help redress a certain Euro-centricism in our schools.

A counter argument to teaching Arabic at school level that is occasionally postulated is that interested students can pick it up as part of their university studies. However, university-based interviewees believe that beginning the study of the language at school would be beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly, Arabic is a difficult language to learn, and with some skills in the language already under their belt, students would have the opportunity to do Middle Eastern Studies as well as language rather than having to focus exclusively on language skills in order to get them to an acceptable level. Secondly, for those pupils not planning to study Arabic as a subject at degree level,

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[25] Research by the jobs search engine Adzuna, reported by The Independent, 25 September 2016: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/the-top-9-languages-for-the-highest-paid-jobs-in-britain-a7329201.html (accessed 31/10/16)

a basic knowledge of Arabic is nevertheless beneficial in many fields and professions, for example, medicine, human rights or economics. In her article, Dr Elizabeth Kendall makes the point that starting from scratch at university is unlikely to create well-rounded Arabists with the flexible repertoire of dialects and familiarity with classical Arabic texts required to have a deep knowledge of the region's different societies, cultures and religions.[26]

Who should be learning Arabic?

Interviewees contributing to this research project feel strongly that the learning of Arabic should not be the exclusive preserve of pupils of Arabic or Muslim heritage and that adopting such an approach would only serve to exacerbate cultural and community tensions. Community cohesion requires other pupils to also have the opportunity to learn Arabic. At the same time, both Dr Elizabeth Kendall and some of our interviewees point to the need for Muslim pupils to learn secular Arabic as well as understand the Qu'ran, in order to guard against 'radicalisation'. One respondent comments as follows: 'If we are serious about embedding Arabic in mainstream secondary education, it would need to be offered to everyone. Mainstreaming the teaching and learning of Arabic would help to break down stereotypes and misperceptions.'

Views differ on whether or not Arabic is a suitable language to learn for all pupils regardless of ability. Some interviewees express the view that Arabic's different script may present an academic challenge and that schools may, therefore, want to select which pupils learn Arabic or offer it only to those pupils with a flair and passion for languages. English and Scottish policymakers differ on this issue. In Scotland the teaching of Arabic has to fit in with the "1 + 2" policy, a possible third language i.e. after mother tongue plus a major European language. According to the Scottish "1+2" policy, all pupils in a school would learn the language regardless of their academic ability but not all would do a qualification in the language – if one were to be developed – since in the Scottish system there are no examinations until pupils reach the age of 16.

Policymakers in England favour an approach whereby schools are able to decide who studies a language based on pupil aptitude, as is already the case, for example, with the Mandarin Excellence Programme. However, other interviewees suggest that it is a mistake to select pupils according to ability as there are many cases where pupils who seem unlikely to flourish in languages but have had the opportunity to learn Mandarin have excelled where they have struggled with a European language. It is also possible that Arabic might appeal to those pupils who have not engaged well with European languages, in the same way that has happened with Chinese and Japanese. Some pupils may relish the challenge and novelty of Arabic and be motivated by this sufficiently to make progress. However, it is also possible that Chinese and Japanese may hold different connotations for young people than Arabic does. One interviewee who expressed the view that anybody can learn Arabic makes the point that the important factor in successful learning is how the teacher is seen by her/his pupils. He/she is a role model for pupils and conveys implicit messages about the language and culture. Some interviewees were of the opinion that teachers overtly associated with Islam are not likely to enhance the popularity of the language with many pupils in mainstream secondary schools.

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[26] Kendall.

Our interviewees also point out that Arabic as a foreign language is an élite subject in the UK. It is possible to learn Arabic well at some of our top public schools and Oxford University, establishments that are training future Ambassadors and world leaders, but these opportunities are not more generally available.

Some of our interviewees expressed the view that pupils should begin to learn Arabic at primary school so that they have sufficient years of exposure and study to achieve a meaningful level of language skill by the end of statutory education. However, this was not explored further since our focus was on the potential and desirability of introducing Arabic teaching and learning more widely in secondary schools.

How might more children from non-Muslim or non-Arabic backgrounds encouraged to learn Arabic?

There is a consensus amongst stakeholders interviewed for this research that the introduction of Arabic in mainstream schools currently presents greater obstacles than almost any other language. School leadership is seen as key to the successful mainstreaming of Arabic. Any such move would require commitment and dedicated positive promotion over a sustained period of time. Schools would have to be ready to provide clear and detailed explanations of why they had chosen to teach the language. Any move to mainstream Arabic would also require political involvement and planning to overcome the considerable barriers which currently exist. Practical suggestions for encouraging more pupils to study Arabic have been grouped under the following headings:

Suggestions focusing on intrinsic enjoyment and achievement

- Taster lessons showing pupils how interesting and achievable Arabic can be.[27] Some pupils like the challenge and relish the fact that it is not like French or German.
- Visits to countries such as Oman, Jordan and Lebanon can also be motivators for pupils.
- Good teaching, and interesting materials and resources 'devoid of Islam'.

Strategic planning
- Exploit local resources, for example a community which is able to help, with interested parents.
- Grow the language from the primary phase and then push up into secondary. Start early in order to capture children's imagination.
- Appoint a small number of motivated schools to act as 'trailblazers' – ideally those which are good at languages and which have a broad mix of pupils, not just those of Arabic heritage. This facilitates the creation of good role models for others and shows that it can work and that teaching Arabic is not just for religious reasons.
- Access funding in the same way the Han Ban (the national cultural organisation for China) has invested in the teaching of Mandarin in the UK. However, while the funding is appreciated and helps make things happen, it is seen by some as suspicious. The same situation could apply to Arabic. For Arabic there isn't a single body which could provide

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[27] The research found evidence that this indeed has been successful. In one school a cross-curricular day involving Arabic, Maths and Science led to pupil demand for Arabic classes, which are now being implemented.

support, impetus, funding in the way that the Han Ban has for Chinese. However, a good example which might provide a useful model for Arabic is the Japan Foundation. It is a small organisation which punches above its weight and lobbies successfully for its language without a huge amount of funding.

Awareness-raising

- Show pupils how Arabic can enhance career prospects. Emphasise the enhanced work opportunities with business, Government and NGOs so that pupils can see the purpose of learning the language. Many young people have a strong international mindset which the learning of Arabic might well fit into.
- Promote languages in general more vigorously. Careers advice should show the need for languages across the board – not just Arabic. There will be pupils who learn French, German or Spanish at school and may come to Arabic later.
- Make sure Arabic is not linked only to Islam. Raise awareness about the many countries where it is spoken. Focus on changing perceptions of the Arab world – its multiculturalism, the wide variety of historical backgrounds, tourism. Promote Arabic as one of the world's most widely spoken and influential languages with an important cultural history and important for trade.
- Get the media on board (recognising the inherent difficulties of this!) in order to influence parental attitudes.

The responses from our interviewees stress the need to disassociate Arabic from Islam. However, the concept of secular teaching and the emphasis on language over culture gives rise to a contradiction, namely that of promoting Arabic as a language with a rich cultural heritage, but not engaging fully with the integral religious aspects of that heritage – and its potential for intercultural learning. Currently the GCSE exam is designed in a way which makes it possible to avoid cultural content, and it is believed that some teachers deliberately avoid 'difficult' topics concerning war or politics. Others feel strongly that the cultural element should be central and that avoiding it diminishes the potential of Arabic to contribute to critical thinking, historical understanding and collective identity. Cultural content is also important for employment and for social understanding. Any proposal to promote Arabic would need to find a way of dealing with this contradiction and establish clear principles to guide development.

What would be the best way of implementing the mainstreaming of Arabic in UK schools?

Cluster model

Policymakers believe it is essential to identify a small group of schools with a long- or at least medium-term commitment to developing the teaching of Arabic. A cluster approach has been shown to be more successful than schools working in isolation. Centres of excellence act as hubs so that learning, staff and resources can be shared. The DfE's Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) provides an interesting model for this type of approach. The MEP is a four- year programme with a possible extension of two further years. It is currently in Year 1 with 20 schools and there will eventually be 90 schools in the programme. Participating schools have to commit to recruiting

others onto the programme. The cluster does not have to be geographically close – such a grouping can also be created by close collaboration.

In Scotland, clusters would need to be established within local authorities. Scottish policymakers favour the selection of a small number of local authorities to act as pilots and which could be evaluated and the impact measured before any further expansion would be considered.

Planning

In the Scottish system, new languages being taught as L3 would have to start in primary school. This has been the Scottish Government's approach in introducing the teaching of Chinese and it is seen as particularly important for any language which has a different script.

Curriculum development

In England, the Progress 8 performance measure gives credit to more than one language GCSE per pupil and therefore, in theory, could encourage dual linguists and facilitate the teaching of Arabic alongside other languages. However, in reality, fewer pupils are now taking more than one foreign language to GCSE so, for most, the teaching of Arabic would be instead of any other language rather than as well as a European language. It would require strong curriculum development and well-trained, entrepreneurial teachers to carry it through, but there are successful models to follow, for example, the Harris Academy in Bromley which has been developing the teaching of Russian alongside the main European languages for a number of years.

Teacher training

A focussed effort is needed on workforce development and teacher training (and, in Scotland, GTC registration for teachers and qualifications). Schools don't teach Arabic because of an inadequate supply of teachers who can teach secular Arabic in the UK's education systems.

Resources

There would also be needs in the area of resources, particularly secular resources, but it was thought that these could be overcome: 'Saturday' schools were considered to have the best resources at the moment. Universities might be a good place to seek help with the development of resources and the provision of Language Ambassadors. For Mandarin there is now an "Expert Group" which can recommend to schools which resources are best to use. In Scotland, there would be a need to develop national qualifications which is why it would be important to start the teaching of the language as a third language from Primary 5.

Timing

Most commentators are emphatic that introducing Arabic into mainstream secondary schools has to be gradual if it is going to be successful. Although one interviewee is of the view that courses based on the GCSE could be introduced in 2-3 years, most recognise that building up sufficient numbers of

teachers and a regular supply of qualified teachers of a suitable quality will take a long time. A clear long-term strategy and timelines are thought to be essential, with some commentators saying that achieving a shift in the national mindset in favour of Arabic is likely to take a generation. Moving too fast to try to impose Arabic on either schools or pupils is likely to be counterproductive. Scottish commentators point out that it has already been 10 years since the first steps were taken to introduce Chinese and at least another ten years are still needed:

> *The same questions being asked now for Arabic were asked for Chinese and the things that need to be put in place for it to develop take a long time. It is essential to start with primary. In Scotland we are only now beginning to see Scots born teachers of Chinese coming through the system. They are important because they become role models for their pupils in a way that native speaker teachers from other countries cannot. The capacity in Chinese is held back by lack of teachers and lack of resources. Local authorities are not likely to make resources available for a new language when they are struggling to cope with existing demands.*

Partnerships

There is a suggestion that partnerships with supplementary schools would be a good way to develop capacity for Arabic since many supplementary or "Saturday" schools have formalised structures and a long tradition with pupils well prepared by knowledgeable teachers. Both partners would benefit from such a collaboration and it would greatly help with transition from primary to secondary since supplementary schools generally span both phases. Supplementary schools would benefit by getting much needed accreditation for their work with 'home' languages*.*

What might the barriers be and how could these be overcome?

Any plan to increase or expand the teaching of Arabic faces a number of barriers, some of which are unique to Arabic and some of which are the same as for any new subject being introduced into schools.

Teacher education

Teacher education is perhaps the most important barrier. While there is a good number of mosque-based teachers, their approach to teaching reflects a very different culture which would not be easily adaptable for mainstream schools. In the case of Chinese, the Han Ban exchange teachers present a similar challenge, but this is being addressed through the provision of ongoing professional training which supports the native speaker teachers in teaching in an environment which has very different expectations and norms from their own. One commentator suggests that the best teachers are non-native speakers who have learned the language to a very high degree.

Qualifications

Along with the lack of teachers, commentators in Scotland also cite the lack of qualifications as a barrier to the development of Arabic teaching in schools. The drive for Chinese in Scotland came from the Government, responding to external pressures and the resources made available by the Chinese. These two drivers meant that teacher training courses and qualifications were developed alongside each other. There would need to be similar pressure for a strategy for Arabic to be developed.

Politics

Like Chinese, Arabic has 'political' issues. However, Chinese has been able to overcome these because the programme for introducing Chinese in Scotland is being managed by Scottish CILT which is able to provide neutrality as well as quality assurance. There is also overt political endorsement and accompanying policies highlighting the economic and cultural advantages to the country of engaging more fully with China.

Timetabling

Timetabling presents another barrier. In many cases, a teacher offering only Arabic would not be a viable prospect as she or he would need to fill his or her timetable with either another language or another subject. It would be difficult to find suitable teachers who could do this, as is often observed, for example, with teachers of Chinese or other less widely taught languages. Suitable teacher training courses would need to be established to train teachers in Arabic plus another subject or language in order for teachers to be employable. On the other hand, schools intending to introduce Arabic teaching on a rolling basis would need to plan for the teacher capacity to implement year-on-year increases in numbers. Teacher supply, recruitment and retention is likely to be a problem for a long time and to hamper any efforts to embed Arabic in mainstream schools.

Time available for language study

Linked to the above point, is the question of the time available for language study. Interviewees for this research project think that more time is needed to study a language with a different script. In a crowded timetable this might mean that there is really only time for a European language. It has been suggested that three hours per week is needed to make progress in Arabic and that the GCSE guidelines underestimate the number of hours needed to achieve objectives because of the structural and script differences.

Lack of awareness of the significance of Arabic

Lack of awareness of the significance of Arabic (its history, culture, and the reasons to learn it) is seen as a major barrier, due to the domination of European languages in school education in the UK. Commentators express the need for a national media campaign to raise awareness using Head teachers and organisations such as the British Council and Scottish CILT to 'drip feed' to policymakers, parents and children on the importance of Arabic. It is likely that responses to Arabic will vary considerably from area to area with a lot of resistance being met in some places. One

commentator suggests that, for Arabic, the most critical first step to put in place, is an effective communications strategy. However, a change of mindset would be very difficult to achieve at present because positive images of Arabic and the Arabic speaking world are needed in the mass media and that is unlikely to happen in the short to mid-term. A helpful approach might be to show the Arab world as the birthplace of rich culture and science.

Religious/secular dichotomy

The link between Islam and Arabic is seen as a real barrier to mainstreaming Arabic in UK secondary schools. It is difficult to teach culture without touching on religious influences. Some of our interviewees thought that if Arabic were introduced as a secular language, certain sections of the Muslim population might question this and the resulting controversy would only reinforce negative stereotypes. However, it is probably that most members of the Arabic speaking diaspora would be happy to see the language being taught in mainstream schools from a secular perspective.

Which Arabic?

Pupils and their parents will naturally want an Arabic which can be used everywhere in the Arabic speaking world but this is very difficult to achieve. In one interviewee's experience, Levantine Arabic is the variety most likely to provide a solution to this question. The fact that some universities don't offer instruction in a form of spoken language which students can use and enjoy can cause a real problem. It is important to avoid such a situation arising in schools. There is also a need to recognise that, although Arabic is seen as a 'community language', the reality is that it is a foreign language for almost all pupils.

Chapter 6 - conclusions

Key findings

Arabic continues to be a growing subject and this is linked to the growth in number and size of Muslim faith schools. Mainstream provision is scarce and dependent on demand from Muslim parents. Whilst the Islamic connection is crucially important, demand from Muslim parents and pupils is not straightforwardly religious – it is very often as much about cultural and economic ties with the Muslim world and the life and career opportunities emanating from that. Opportunities for other pupils to learn Arabic and become acquainted with Arabic cultures are few and far between, provision is fragile and often limited to the independent sector. Valuable work is being done through the British Council's programme in extending these opportunities to a wider range of schools throughout the UK.

Since our last piece of research, there has been some shrinkage of provision for non-Muslim pupils and this is linked to the unsuitability of the GCSE exam and the difficulty of the subject for those who have not been exposed to the alphabet and script from an early age. While those who have had access to written Arabic from a young age often say they find the subject easy, there are many aspects of the language which are challenging for new learners and require sufficient time to absorb. Our research has not found evidence that anti-Muslim attitudes affect take up or provision for the language, however there is a persistent perception that Arabic is for Muslim pupils and that other languages may be more relevant to non-Muslim pupils. There would be benefits for individuals and for the country at large if Arabic were a realistic option for a wider spectrum of learners.

Learners of Arabic are highly multilingual. Arabic occupies a place in the plurilingual repertoires of both 'heritage' learners and enthusiastic linguists from other backgrounds. 'Heritage' factors provide very strong motivations for learning the language and heritage learners frequently express great enthusiasm for learning Arabic. They often derive deep satisfaction and valuable personal development from the experience and their learning gains go much wider than the purely linguistic. So-called 'native-speakers' (including those who may not, in fact, speak or write the language at all well on starting their course), form an important segment of those taking GCSE and A level exams in Arabic. They benefit greatly from formal learning of Modern Standard Arabic, from learning about Arab cultures and accessing literature. Mainstream provision for them would appear to be extremely important in helping them to develop a secure sense of identity within UK society and the skills necessary to progress to higher education.

The barriers identified in the previous research: lack of teachers and lack of obvious 'demand' for schools to respond to, remain a hindrance to developing Arabic. These barriers are linked, since teacher training is increasingly expected to respond to the supply needs of schools. It is not, therefore, simply a question of producing more teachers, but of working with schools and training providers to promote the language. Arabic teachers currently come from very diverse backgrounds and have pursued diverse and sometimes innovative routes into teaching. There is a shortage of ways to train as a teacher of Arabic and none at all outside England. Arabic teaching does not currently offer a clear career opportunity, either for UK Arabic graduates or for those with overseas qualifications. The changing face of teacher training in England offers opportunities to remedy this, but concerted effort is needed to overcome the many constraints that exist. This requires a focussed plan with central support and buy in, developed in conjunction with schools and training providers.

Arabic teachers often work in isolation from each other. The work of the British Council in bringing them together for professional development is seen as very important, and there are indications that an Arabic-specific professional body for teachers would be welcomed also.

Since our last research, the potential benefits of achieving greater national capacity in Arabic have been thrown into relief: to enhance UK international relations post-Brexit, for security and defence, and as a means of combating radicalisation. At a time of great change and volatility, negative perceptions and stereotypes can all too easily be exploited by unscrupulous populist politicians, which makes the need to overcome them even more pressing. An increase in our capacity in Arabic at a time when we are readjusting our relationships with countries around the world would bring significant benefits. It would counteract superficial or false images of the Arabic and Islamic world which have negative consequences for international engagement, social integration and the way the UK and its citizens are viewed by others. It would also be beneficial for trade – a point which has not escaped the notice of other countries such as Germany. In a world in which anti-Islamic views publicly expressed by high profile politicians are being linked to a potential resurgence of fascism, the British Council might act with like-minded international partners to promote Arabic for trade and international understanding as a bulwark against these tendencies.

This research has identified multiple benefits of learning Arabic for different kinds of learners:

- For so-called native speakers, as a means of accessing literature and higher level understanding about themselves and the place of Arabic culture in the world
- For 'heritage learners', providing personal development and a sense of satisfaction in their educational achievement
- For future linguists of all backgrounds, for whom Arabic can occupy an important place in their repertoires
- For monolingual Britons or speakers of other languages who would otherwise have no exposure to the Arabic or Islamic world.

For all these learners, learning about Arabic cultures is as important, and should be integral to, the acquisition of linguistic competence. Mainstreaming the teaching of Arabic language and culture will be a long-term endeavour. But the vision to underpin it is developing and there are models to follow. In Scotland, it could be a realistic aspiration for Arabic to take its place as an L3, following the model of Chinese. In England, there have been moves to promote the learning of more than one foreign language and to develop the teaching of Chinese.

Arabic in the UK, as in the world at large, is most often found in multilingual settings, taking its place within a rich panoply of languages spoken and understood. It already has a prominent place within the multiplicity of languages spoken and learnt by our young people. The challenge is to extend this to a wider spectrum of learners, drawing 'heritage' and 'non-heritage' learners together. We should not promote 'Arabic for non-Muslims' in isolation from, or at the expense of, existing provision for heritage learners which enjoys their enthusiasm and engagement to an extent which teachers of other languages can only dream of. We should avoid any scenario of separate development which sends groups of pupils down different pathways and promote Arabic in conjunction with other languages, rather than in competition with them.

The British Council might consider how it could work with schools where Arabic is offered but take up is almost exclusively from Muslim pupils. One realistic goal in these schools might be to introduce all pupils who wish to the Arabic script and alphabet.

The British Council might also consider working with Hispanists to promote a more widespread appreciation of Arabic. Because of the Muslim heritage in Spain, Hispanists are sensitive to the contribution of Arabic culture to European civilisation and could provide an important bridge.

Our previous research stressed the need for an integrated approach to promoting Arabic, drawing together Systems, Attitudes, Pedagogy and Resources – see page 5 above. This study has been able to focus in depth on some of these key areas and, together with research being carried out in other strands, will enable this integrated approach to be developed further. The context in the country at large (and indeed beyond) is not, on the face of it, good for promoting the teaching of Arabic but the need to do so, and the gains to be won, are greater than ever.

Appendix

List of individuals interviewed for this research.

1. David Shanks, MFL Consultant, Harris Federation

2. Liz Harris, International Red Cross

3. Petros Samanos, Arabic teacher, William Morris Sixth Form College

4. Luma Hameed, Arabic teacher, Sarah Bonnell School

5. Iam McMillan, Head of German, Simna Integrated College, Northern Ireland

6. Kelly Murphy, PhD Student (Teaching of Arabic culture) Manchester

7. Emma Snowden, Head of Teachers' Centre, Goldsmiths College

8. Ilham Salimane, Arabic specialist, SOAS

9. Sue Taylor, Linguistic support teacher, Hodge Hill School

10. Fhiona Fisher, Director, SCILT, Glasgow

11. Giorgia Ferrari, PhD Student (Arabic teaching and learning) Exeter

12. Mahmood Al-Batel, publisher/author

13. John Hopper, Curriculum Division, DfE