

Review of Policy and Accreditation for Arabic Teaching in UK Schools

Strand 3 Research: Review of Policy and Accreditation

Review commissioned by the British Council

May 2017



Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Authors	3
Data Collection Team	3
Advisory Team	3
Introduction	4
Background: language teaching in schools	5
UK Context in relation to the teaching and learning of Arabic in Schools	5
Methodology	8
Data collection	8
Ethical Implications	8
Key questions answered by the review	9
Assessment	9
Teacher education courses	15
Existing and proposed curriculum content at KS4	16
Key findings	17
Assessment	17
Learner pathways	17
Curriculum content and delivery	17
Teacher supply and professional development	18
Recommendations and steps forward	19
Recommendation 1 - Pursue identified ways of engaging with policy makers in order to promote and expand the teaching of Arabic	19
Recommendation 2 - Pursue identified ways of increasing the supply of qualified teachers of Arabic	19
Recommendation 3 – Explore new ways to engage teachers with curriculum development projects that enhance teaching and teaching expertise	19
Recommendation 4 – Identify points for further development in relation to proposed GCSE curriculum changes	20
Steps forward	20
Appendix: Information sheet and interviewer’s consent form	21

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the British Council for commissioning this project. A consortium involving colleagues from Leeds University, Edinburgh University and Goldsmiths, University of London have worked together to collect data and compile this report. We have also been able to work closely with Teresa Tinsley from Alcantara Communications and have benefitted from valuable collaboration between all participating organisations. We are grateful to all who have participated in this research project and would like to thank colleagues in school and respondents to our questionnaire for their contribution.

Authors

Ruba Khamam (University of Leeds) and Emma Snowden (Goldsmiths, University of London), with support from Rasha Soliman (University of Leeds) and James Dickins (University of Leeds)

Data Collection Team

Ruba Khamam, Ahmed Elgindy, Rasha Soliman, Melissa Towler, Jonathan Featherstone, Fatima Khaled, Sawsan Haffar-Saffaf

Advisory Team

University of Leeds

Samar Al-Afendi, James Dickins, Hanem El-Farahaty, Ahmed Elgindy, Sameh Hanna, Ruba Khamam, Mustapha Lahlali, Rasha Soliman, Melissa Towler

University of Edinburgh

Mourad Diouri, Jonathan Featherstone

Goldsmiths, University of London

Emma Snowden, Fatima Khaled

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* (2013, updated in 2015).¹ 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 research into key themes identified in the initial research. These were contracted as separate strands, since they required different types of expertise.

This report will review policy relating to and accreditation of Arabic learning in the UK. The authors reviewed information and considered data relating to four themes. The first looks at assessment and explores tests, examinations and systems of accreditation. The second, learner pathways, considers opportunities for learners to progress and develop their understanding throughout their schooling and into Higher Education. The third theme looks at the content of the Arabic curriculum for learners and finally the fourth considers teachers, teacher supply and their ongoing professional development needs. In particular, the report answers the following questions:

Assessment

- What accreditation systems currently exist for Arabic?
- What tests and examinations can learners take?

Learner Pathways

- How can a learner pathway be established whereby a person can study Arabic in school and if desired go on to study the language at university?
- In what ways does school policy influence decisions that students take about their studies at the end of KS3?

Curriculum Content and Delivery

- How can the project engage with policy makers in order to promote and expand the teaching of Arabic?
- What is the existing and proposed curriculum content at KS4?

Teacher Supply and Professional Development

- How can the supply of qualified teachers of Arabic be increased? What are the main obstacles to this?
- What opportunities are available for Arabic teachers to engage in curriculum development and influence assessment?

The final section of this report outlines recommendations. It suggests ways in which educators, policy makers and other stakeholders might further promote and expand Arabic language teaching in UK schools.

¹ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/arabic_report_2015.pdf

Background: language teaching in schools

There are a variety of education systems within the UK. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the study of a foreign language is compulsory for children at Key Stage 3 (age 11-14). However, there is a continuing decline in students choosing to pursue studying foreign languages (French, Spanish or German).

A revised National Curriculum² in England, introduced in 2014, states that students at Key Stage 2 should be taught a modern or foreign language and make substantial progress in that language. The focus is on practical communication, laying the linguistic foundations for reading comprehension and understanding the classical civilisation in question in the case of ancient languages. The teaching at Key Stage 2 should underpin and promote language learning at Key Stage 3. The National Curriculum emphasizes that teaching at Key Stage 3 should build on the foundations laid in Key Stage 2 regardless of whether students pursue learning the same language or choose a new one. However, at Key Stage 4 pupils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are not required, but they may choose, to continue to learn a language. Teaching should focus on developing pupils' competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing, based on a solid understanding of core grammar and vocabulary. It should enable pupils to understand and communicate personal and factual information that goes beyond their immediate needs and interests and present suitable preparation for further study. In England, the introduction of a language into the Key Stage 2 curriculum (2014) requires all schools to develop a language teaching policy.

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence³ includes one section dedicated to Languages. The Language area includes English, modern languages, classical languages, and Gaelic. In 1990, students at primary schools started learning another language in addition to their mother tongue. In 2011, Scotland introduced a norm for learning languages in schools⁴ based on the European Union 1 + 2 model, intended to create the conditions in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue. The successful implementation of a 1+2 languages strategy aims to produce a substantial increase in the number of school students looking to develop further their languages beyond school, through to further and higher education.

UK Context in relation to the teaching and learning of Arabic in Schools

As noted in the Alcantara report, *The teaching of Arabic Language and Culture in UK schools* (2016):

“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. However, the outcome of the referendum is raising awareness of the need to engage productively with

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study>

³ <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/nationalqualifications/curriculumareas/languages/index.asp>

⁴ (Scottish Government manifesto commitment: 2011 <http://www.gov.scot/resource/0039/00393435.pdf>)

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 [*Alcantara 2013*], 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.

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.

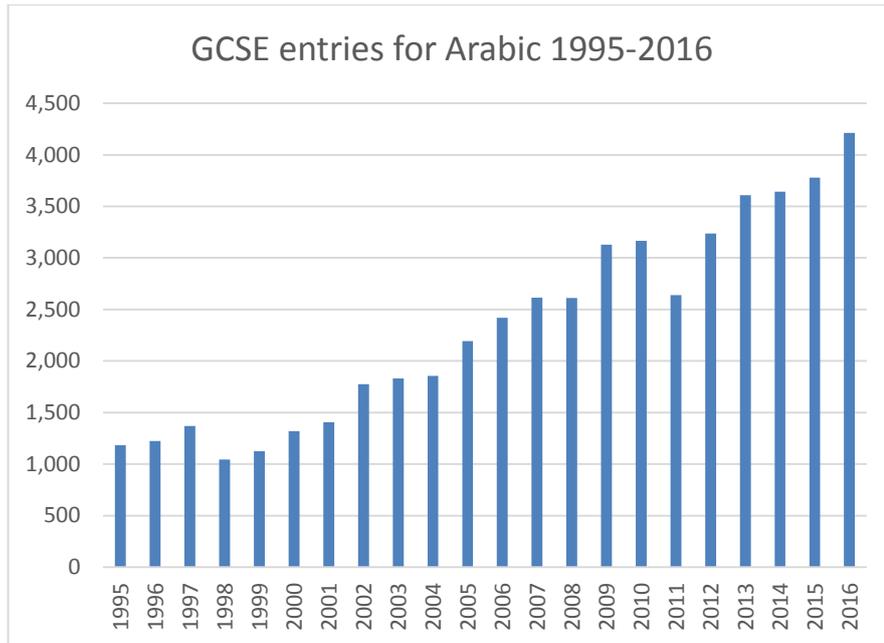


Figure 1. JCQ GCSE data for all institutions, England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

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

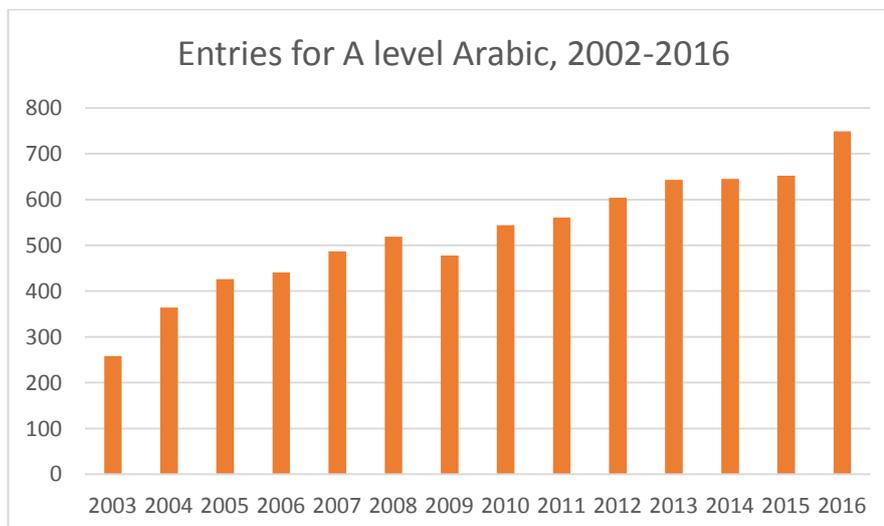


Figure 2. JCQ AL data for all institutions England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

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.”

Methodology

Data collection

Data collection involved a desktop search of the existing published resources on the internet (exam statistics, educational bodies published data) and also drew on information in the Alcantara (2015) report into Arabic teaching.

Data was also collected via interviews with:

- 4 Heads of Languages/Language Managers
- 9 Teachers
- 2 Teacher trainers/language advisors interviews

Interviews took place between June and November 2016. Interviews were carried out by members of the Data Collection Team via Skype or in person. The interviews were intended to provide qualitative information about UK Languages policy as well as accreditation systems with regards to Arabic language teaching. Prior to the interviews the interviewer also shared the research aims and described how this project would inform how an Arabic curriculum might be managed, alongside other school languages.

Ethical Implications

Ethical approval was attained by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee prior to commencing the research. Ethical approval stipulated that individual respondents and participating institutions be anonymised; accordingly, where necessary, pseudonyms will be used. Researchers informed participants (teachers, head teachers and language managers/heads of Languages) that these interviews would be recorded, that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. Each respondent was asked to fill in an informed consent form prior to participating in the research and was provided with an information sheet describing the research project and including researchers' contact details (see Appendix). Data will be kept securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Key questions answered by the review

Assessment

- What accreditation systems currently exist for Arabic?
- What tests and examinations can learners take?

A desk-based search of qualifications and accreditation systems revealed that learners can take the following tests and examinations:

GCSE: offered by EdExcel

EdExcel GCSE Arabic is offered by Pearson. It is an accredited course for learners of Arabic at two levels. It is offered both in the UK and internationally. A new specification was introduced in 2009 in line with recommendations for reviewing language syllabi. It was first assessed in 2014 as exams were expected to be undertaken by the end of 2 years course. The syllabus includes 4 units on listening and understanding, speaking, reading and understanding, and writing. All of these elements are assessed by external examiners. The course has the following pathways: GCSE (Short Course) in Arabic: Spoken Language (3AROS) where students are examined in 2 units (speaking and listening) and GCSE (Short Course) in Arabic: Written Language (3AROW) where students are examined in 2 units (reading and writing).

Unit	Content	Test	Weighting
Listening and understanding	Draws on the following four specified common topic areas ⁵ .	Students are tested on their ability to understand spoken MSA Arabic in various tasks which require a response, written or non-verbal, to demonstrate understanding.	23% of the total GCSE 46% of the total GCSE Short Course
Speaking	Focuses on topic areas (media, travel and culture or sport, leisure and work) chosen by the centre and in consultation with the student	Candidates are expected to maintain a focused, picture-based discussion or presentation and answer follow-up questions relevant to the task. They need to have a general conversation related on the chosen theme	27% of the total GCSE 54% of the total GCSE Short Course
Reading and understanding	Draws on common topic areas specified above.	Students are tested on their ability to understand a number of short texts in both formal and informal language	23% of the total GCSE 46% of the total GCSE Short Course
Writing	Students must produce two pieces of Arabic writing in response to a choice of questions that relate to the prescribed themes ⁶ .	Examination paper consisting of two tasks from a choice of eight.	27% of the total GCSE 54% of the total GCSE Short Course

The GCSE Arabic specification⁷ provides details of the qualification content including knowledge, skills and understanding which candidates are expected to have learnt; assessment including assessment objectives and weighting, assessment procedure and grade descriptions; and resources, support and training including EdExcel online resources, publications, endorsed resources, support services and training.

⁵ Common Topic areas are: out and about; customer service and transactions, personal information; future plans, education and work.

⁶ The prescribed themes are specified to be relevant to: media, travel and culture or sport, leisure and work.

⁷ http://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Arabic/2009/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/GCSE_in_Arabic_Spec_2012.pdf

EdExcel Arabic GCSE is currently under review by Ofqual⁸. Changes will be introduced in 2017 and the first assessment is due to take place from 2019. These changes will apply to all awarding organisations' specifications:

- The old A*-G system will be replaced by the new 9-1 grading system. Assessments will not be controlled, i.e. papers will be set and marked by the awarding organisation.
- Papers will be tiered; each skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) will be given an equal assessment weighting of 25%.

Some teachers interviewed for this report said that the GCSE exams are well structured. Others, however, expressed their concerns that the GCSE has been designed for native/heritage speakers because that is the main market. This makes the exams very challenging for non-native speakers of Arabic and perhaps skews the marking. Teachers made the following comments:

- On the reading papers the font really needs to be bigger so that students are able to read the texts easily.
- The nature of the tasks in GCSE Arabic is more demanding than in other languages like Russian and Chinese. They revolve very much around a pro- and contra- / debate-type format.
- Grade boundaries are high and inconsistent. 50% on the listening paper resulted in a U grade in 2015, 50% on the reading a G, 50% on the speaking an E, but 50% on the writing a C.
- The grade boundaries on the speaking tests in 2015 are much higher in Arabic than in Russian: Arabic 2015 Speaking: A* 45, A 41, B 35, Russian 2015 Speaking: A*43, A 38, B 33.

One Teacher explained that exams are designed by private market-driven companies and as demand is from native Arabic speakers they target this audience. He said that he was lobbying for years to make the GCSE more accessible to non-native speakers but as his efforts came to no avail, his school has now decided to design their own courses. Another teacher recommended more serious engagement with culture, identity and language in the curriculum.

Edexcel Arabic GCSE and the Classical Arabic IGCSE offered by Pearson are the most widely taken Arabic exam at school level in the UK. Despite the decline in entries for GCSE for Modern Foreign Languages such as French, German and Spanish in 2016, Arabic GCSE entries are increasing, reaching their highest ever level (4,211 entries) in 2016.

GCSE: Offered by Cambridge

One interviewee reported that they used the Cambridge GCSE curriculum for students learning Arabic as a foreign language, and they offered IGSE for students who are native speakers of Arabic, i.e. heritage language learners.

IGCSE in Arabic as a Foreign Language and as a First Language: Cambridge International Examinations⁹

Cambridge IGCSEs are designed to be general qualifications that enable learners to progress either directly to employment, or to proceed to further qualifications. Cambridge revised its Arabic IGCSE syllabus in 2015. Candidates are assessed on their ability to:

AO1 Understand and respond to spoken language

AO2 Understand and respond to written language

AO3 Communicate in speech, showing knowledge of a range and variety of vocabulary, and applying the grammar and structures of the target language accurately

⁸ The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about>

⁹ www.cie.org.uk/images/128328-2015-syllabus.pdf

AO4 Communicate in writing, showing knowledge of a range and variety of vocabulary, and applying the grammar and structures of the target language accurately.

An Arabic *Defined Content Booklet* is provided to guide teachers and candidates preparing for the examination, but there is no specific textbook which is recommended for classroom teaching.

The syllabus content is organised around five broad Topic areas which provide contexts for the acquisition of vocabulary and the study of grammar and structures. Through the study of these Topic areas, candidates gain insight into target language countries and communities. The Topic areas are:

- Everyday activities
- Personal and social life
- The world around us
- The world of work
- The international world.

It should be noted that learning often takes place in supplementary or faith-school settings, for those learning Arabic through their communities.

NVQ and other

Research revealed a range of NVQ and entry level qualifications available to learners. These include:

Entry level

OCR

Arabic Entry Level awarded by OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA)

ABC AWARDS

ABC Entry Level Award in Reading and Writing in Arabic (Entry 2 and Entry 3) (QCF)

ABC Entry Level Award in Speaking and Listening in Arabic (Entry 2 and Entry 3) **(QCF)**

ABC Entry Level Certificate in Practical Arabic (Entry 3) (QCF)

Level 1

ABC Awards

ABC Level 1 Award in Reading and Writing in Arabic (QCF)

ABC Level 1 Award in Speaking and Listening in Arabic (QCF)

ABC Level 1 Certificate in Practical Arabic (QCF)

Pearson Education Ltd

Edexcel Level 1 NVQ Award in Reading Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 1 NVQ Award in Speaking Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 1 NVQ Award in Understanding Spoken Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 1 NVQ Award in Writing Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 1 NVQ Certificate in Arabic (QCF)

Pearson Education Ltd

Edexcel Level 1 GCSE in Arabic

Edexcel Level 1 GCSE in Arabic: Spoken Language (Short Course)

Edexcel Level 1 GCSE in Arabic: Written Language (Short Course)

Level 2

ABC Awards

ABC Level 2 Award in Reading and Writing in Arabic (QCF)

ABC Level 2 Award in Speaking and Listening in Arabic (QCF)

ABC Level 2 Certificate in Practical Arabic (QCF)

Pearson Education Ltd

Edexcel Level 2 GCSE in Arabic

Edexcel Level 2 GCSE in Arabic: Spoken Language (Short Course)

Edexcel Level 2 GCSE in Arabic: Written Language (Short Course)

Pearson Education Ltd

Edexcel Level 2 NVQ Award in Reading Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 2 NVQ Award in Speaking Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 2 NVQ Award in Understanding Spoken Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 2 NVQ Award in Writing Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 2 NVQ Certificate in Arabic (QCF)

Level 3

Pearson Education Ltd

Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in Arabic

Edexcel Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Arabic

Edexcel Level 3 NVQ Award in Reading Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 3 NVQ Award in Speaking Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 3 NVQ Award in Understanding Spoken Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 3 NVQ Award in Writing Arabic (QCF)

Edexcel Level 3 NVQ Certificate in Arabic (QCF)

A-Level: EdExcel

AS-Level (Advanced Subsidiary Level) and A-Level (Advanced Level) in Arabic are also offered by Pearson. These inter-linked exams are offered in the UK and in many other countries internationally. They allow students to take AS-level in their first year of Sixth Form and choose to progress to A2-Level in their second year. A new syllabus was introduced in 2008 and first assessed in 2009. Exams for both AS-Level and A2-Level consist of three sections A, B and C, covering reading and comprehension skills, translation, and writing skills respectively. The level of this exam is perceived by interviewed teachers to be much higher than the Arabic GCSE exam. Many teachers recommend more work on Arabic qualifications to bridge the large gap between GCSE and A-Level particularly in relation to the grammar component. The lack of bridging qualifications poses very serious challenges to non-native speakers of Arabic.

Between 2015 and 2016 entries for A-Level Arabic rose by 15%, reaching an all-time high of 749. Nonetheless, the future of the EdExcel Arabic A and AS levels does not seem secure. The Pearson website states that for AS-Level the final examination will be in summer 2017 and for A-Level summer 2018. It is not clear whether this means that Pearson intends to introduce a new Arabic AS- and A-Level syllabus, or whether it intends to stop offering Arabic AS- and A-Level altogether.

Asset Languages

Withdrawn 2013, due to low uptake.

ABC and ASDAN: offered by a few institutions

ABC offer entry level to level 2 award in various aspects of learning Arabic language.

ASDAN is a curriculum development organisation and awarding body, offering programmes and qualifications that explicitly grow skills for learning, skills for employment and skills for life. Developed and managed by practitioners, ASDAN grew out of research work at the University of the West of England in the 1980s and was formally established as an educational charity in 1991.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.asdan.org.uk/about>

‘Bite-size’ qualifications: offered by Arabic Language Trust

The Arabic Language Trust is an organisation set up to help teachers and learners of Arabic. We were not able to locate its website, and do not know whether it is continuing to function or offer ‘bite-size’ qualifications.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

The SQA does not offer any formal accreditation for Arabic language learning. Scottish 1+2 policy introduces lesser taught and community languages. Pilot projects have been developed locally, and evaluation has identified ‘promising’ progress in relation to speaking and listening in each pilot school¹¹.

Learner Pathways

- How can a learner pathway be established whereby a person can study Arabic in school and if desired go on to study the language at university?
- In what ways does school policy influence decisions that students take about their studies at the end of KS3?

All current British university programmes are ab initio. This reflects two facts: i. the only standard and viable alternative to ab initio language teaching at universities is post-A-Level teaching; ii. not enough students taking A-Level Arabic decide to go on to study Arabic at university to make it worthwhile for any university Arabic programme to offer post-A-Level Arabic. It may also be that iii. students who take A-Level Arabic are aware that they cannot go on and do Arabic as a post-A-Level subject at university, and therefore do not decide to apply.

There are two solutions to this problem. The less satisfactory one is to encourage universities to do what at least some of them did before the Credit system (120 Credits per year) locked programmes into very restricted structures. Up to the introduction of the full Credit system, universities such as Durham adopted ad hoc policies to accommodate Arabic students who already had some Arabic – for instance, exempting them from first-year Arabic modules, and requiring them to do relevant alternative modules whether offered by the Arabic department or by other units in the university (e.g. Beginners Persian, Beginners Turkish, Introduction to Politics, Introduction to Anthropology). It is possible still to do this with the current 120-Credits-per-year system, but requires universities to adopt a flexible approach. They should be encouraged to do this.

The second, and more satisfactory, solution is:

- i. to strive to increase the number of students taking A-Level Arabic to the point where enough students want to go on to do Arabic at university to make it worthwhile offering post-A-Level Arabic at least one university;
- ii. to ensure that at least one university takes the step of offering post-A-Level Arabic.

To support post-A-Level university Arabic teaching ways can be sought of providing some financial support for this teaching for at least one university. Post-A-Level Arabic teaching could be rationalised by focusing it on one institution and that institution might, if necessary, be asked to agree to adopt a more flexible approach in terms of A-Level grades for post-A-Level Arabic students than for other students, allowing more post-A-Level Arabic students to take up Arabic at university than would otherwise be the case.

¹¹ <http://www.scilt.org.uk/A12ApproachtoLanguageLearning/tabid/1715/Default.aspx>

Curriculum Content and Delivery

- How can the project engage with policy makers in order to promote and expand the teaching of Arabic?
- What is the existing and proposed curriculum content at KS4?

There was some belief amongst interviewees that schools are reluctant to establish Arabic as a mainstream GCSE subject, because they are not confident that i. sufficient numbers of students will want to take Arabic year on year for Arabic to be sustainable in the long run; and ii. they can retain Arabic teachers. Typically, there is only one Arabic teacher in a school (in almost all cases teaching also another subject). When this teacher leaves, schools find it very difficult, if not impossible, to replace them.

One school, for example, reported that they offered Arabic as a language option. In the first year the module had seven students only. In this second year there were five students in semester 1. This number went down to two students only in semester 2, which led the school to stop offering Arabic. The Arabic teacher's wages were funded by the British council on a two-year scheme. This financial incentive encouraged the school to offer Arabic, but as a result of the lack of interest and end of funds, the language was withdrawn. In two schools, teachers reported that numbers decreased as students came to realise that non-native speakers could not get good grades at GCSEs.

Curriculum Guides

The 2007 Languages Review, prompted by a crisis in the take up of Languages at Key Stage 4, refers to community languages as 'a national asset, to which more thought needs to be given in terms of national policy' (Para 3.44) and recognises the valuable role played by community based complementary schools. In this context the project developed in the Department of Educational Studies at Goldsmiths with support from the Nuffield Foundation, to create Curriculum Guides in Arabic, Mandarin, Panjabi, Tamil and Urdu, could not have been more timely. The curriculum guides published by CiLT¹² are available online and continue to be used by classroom teachers to inform Arabic teaching and learning.¹³ The Curriculum Guides offer a clear and flexible plan for both designing and delivering language courses in mainstream and supplementary schools. They utilise up-to-date policy developments in Language teaching such as the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy and the Languages Ladder and introduces them to teachers using a systematic approach. The guides mainly highlight intercultural awareness, creativity, supporting assessment, grammar, and the development of learner independence as key areas of focus. The Framework charts provide a progressive linguistic path across topics, implementing a range of activities that support oracy and literacy in the target Language.

Critical Connections is a project developed by researchers at Goldsmiths who support the view that language development is a dynamic process strongly influenced by social and political forces and inseparable from culture and identity. The projects created through this two year project (2012-14), funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation examines how a critical approach to digital storytelling across a range of languages (including Arabic, Chinese, English, French and German) can enhance learning in both mainstream and supplementary school contexts.

¹² https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/departments/research-centres-and-units/research-centres/centre-for-language-culture/cg_arabic_web.pdf

¹³ <http://www.gold.ac.uk/clcl/multilingual-learning/criticalconnections>

A Multilingual Digital Storytelling strand of the project provides a vehicle for Languages and English teachers to support secondary students in planning, creating and evaluating their own digital stories in different languages or combinations of languages using a range of software including Photostory, Moviemaker and VoiceThread. A key aim is to encourage learner engagement and to examine how this can be supported most effectively. The inclusion of a student co-researcher dimension extends opportunities for student voice to make itself felt within the project and in participating schools.

The academics involved said: “This work has demonstrated how creating and sharing digital stories in multiple languages can offer a rich context for school students to develop plurilingual, intercultural and digital skills that represent an essential part of 21st century literacy.”

Related to this and to the transformative pedagogy implied are understandings of literacy which are multimodal and cross boundaries imposed by the official curriculum as well as between learning in home, school and community contexts.

Projects are particularly successful where partnerships between a university, schools and other professional bodies are actively nurtured. Opportunity for teachers to develop new expertise, with students, and share what the work produced helps to inform and enrich curriculum content. Teachers involved in such practices feel enabled and confidently speak about their experiences to school leaders, policy makers and the researchers involved in writing this report.

Teacher Supply and Professional Development

- How can the supply of qualified teachers of Arabic be increased? What are the main obstacles to this?
- What opportunities are available for Arabic teachers to engage in curriculum development and influence assessment?

In partnership with the British Council and Qatar Foundation, Goldsmiths offers an Arabic Certificate Course, which is designed to provide the skills to teach Arabic in schools for “teachers working in the UK in mainstream, independent and community based school contexts, teaching classes of primary and secondary school aged children”: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/educational-studies/teacherscentre/arabiccertcourse/>. The Certificate does not provide a recognised qualification for initial teacher training but could be a useful introduction to teacher training for those wishing to pursue a PGCE qualification in the future. The only institution which offers a PGCE for Arabic is Goldsmiths, via its PGCE (Secondary) Modern Languages (full-time and part-time modes). These programmes usually recruit between 1-4 students able to teach Arabic per year. As a result, the supply of newly trained Arabic teachers into schools is limited.

Teacher education courses

- Goldsmiths offers Qualified Teacher Status for secondary level in Arabic, or with French or Teaching English as an Additional Language. There are no courses for primary school teachers. Most qualified language teachers have gained their teaching qualification in French, German or Spanish. Language teachers are encouraged to develop a second or third teaching language such as Arabic.
- Goldsmiths offers a 15 credit Certificate course for Arabic school teachers. It provides a foundation in up-to-date methods for teaching Arabic as a second/foreign language to primary and secondary age learners.
- Madani High School is a partner in the Leicester Teaching School Alliance. Other schools are involved with a DfE-funded programme to develop Teaching School Alliances in languages.

- SOAS offers a one-year full-time (two-years part-time) qualification for teaching Arabic in HE.

Through its successful Arabic Language and Culture programme the British Council sponsors events to promote Arabic teaching. The most prominent event is the annual Arabic Language and Culture Conference, co-sponsored by the Qatar Foundation. The most recent of these conferences was held in March 2015 SOAS.¹⁴ This conference supports existing Arabic teachers, rather than encouraging teachers to take up the teaching of Arabic.

To support school based activities and projects funded through the Arabic Language and Culture Programme the British Council has established a network of Arabic advisors to coach and mentor teachers from schools. This aspect of the programme aims to further develop awareness of Arabic language and culture and to date has engaged in supporting school-based activities in 70 schools across the UK.

The British Council has also provided funding for smaller events to promote Arabic teaching. In March 2016, the University of Leeds organised a British-Council funded Arabic Teacher Training day for Arabic teachers in the Leeds-Bradford-Sheffield area. Again these are aimed at existing Arabic teachers.

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) offers a Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate in Teaching Arabic. While this is designed “to meet the rapidly growing demand in the UK and elsewhere for trained and qualified teachers of Arabic as a foreign language”¹⁵, it does not provide a recognised initial teaching qualification. As such, graduates cannot go directly into school teaching unless they previously have a PGCE.

Some funding for teacher development is also available for University-sector Arabic teaching. In March 2017, for instance, the University of Leeds will organise a University Teachers of Arabic Conference, funded by the Association of University Language Centres. While useful, this is not directly relevant to teaching Arabic in schools.

None of the Arabic teachers interviewed feel they have any opportunities to engage in curriculum development or influence assessment. Interviews with two advisers/consultants of Cambridge and EdExcel confirmed that teachers are not involved in curriculum development at any stage, at the moment at least.

Other institutions offer more ad hoc training for existing Arabic teachers. The University of Edinburgh, under the banner of the Edinburgh-Durham-Manchester Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW) offers training of up to one week for teachers of Arabic in both general teaching techniques and the use of technology for Arabic teaching.¹⁶

Existing and proposed curriculum content at KS4

It proved very difficult to obtain detailed information about existing and proposed curriculum content at KS4. The teaching of Arabic at KS4 is mainly designed for heritage students who have some knowledge of Arabic, rather than for students from non-Arabic speaking backgrounds and whose cultural backgrounds are without any previous exposure to Arabic or Islamic culture.

¹⁴ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/arabic_conference_uk_a4_brochure_web_version.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.soas.ac.uk/languagecentre/languages/arabic/postgraduate-certificate-diploma-in-teaching-arabic.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.casaw.ac.uk/news-events/909/>.

One interviewee noted: “The main barrier for Arabic was that the school qualifications are for native or heritage speakers. Therefore, if you studied Arabic from scratch for two years, three lessons a week, or for three years, three lessons a week, you would not get an A*, even though that same student would get an A* in Spanish or French or indeed Russian or German, after having studied it from scratch for three years, three 40 minute lessons per week. That being the case, clearly the exam was harder. The level of language may have been the same but obviously it takes you longer to get to that level with Arabic, not just the script but also the fact that there are no cognates, etc. So that tells us that the GCSEs and the A-level were designed for native speakers, heritage speakers, because that was the main market. This is because in Britain we have this catastrophic public examination system where exam boards are private companies and therefore they base it on the market. However, one needn’t see that as a barrier.” The interviewee added: “With the Arabic, it would be nice to have more lessons a week and set more homework, but because it’s an additional subject we can’t really set homework.”

Key findings

The key findings of this report are presented in relation to assessment, learner pathways and curriculum content and delivery. Each area has been considered in relation to the UK school context and informed by those working in the sector. The key findings are as follows:

Assessment

Current issues with examinations need to be addressed, and potential future problems pre-empted. Maintenance of coherent GCSE and A-Level structure for Arabic learners is essential.

There is some evidence that A-Level and even GCSE examinations are under threat. It is important to maintain coherent GCSE and A-Level examination provision for learners of Arabic, with at least one board continuing to offer both of these, with retention of coherent provision between GCSE and A-Level.

This review has highlighted a need to develop further examinations and assessments outside the GCSE/A-Level framework, in order to cater for the large number of students whose studies do not fit the current framework. Developing appropriate examinations for students outside the standard GCSE-A-Level system would be beneficial.

Learner pathways

Progression from primary to secondary to further and higher education is poor; investment in Arabic at earlier stages may be wasted. Supplementary schools lack funding, are dispersed, diverse and sometimes teach adapted curriculum content from overseas countries. There is a need to develop a school-to-university pathway, with at least one university offering post-A-Level Arabic. To guarantee a high enough number of post-A-Level Arabic students, more schools have to teach Arabic up to A-Level, and at least one university is likely to need to agree to a somewhat more flexible entry assessment for post-A-Level than for other Arabic students.

Curriculum content and delivery

Teachers do not currently have significant opportunity for input into curriculum development and assessment procedures. They should be given greater opportunity to help develop curricula in line with students’ interests and teachers’ areas of expertise.

Teacher supply and professional development

There is a need to engage with policy makers in two main areas: teacher training and expansion of Arabic teaching in schools. The supply of qualified teachers can be increased by expanding the supply of: i. initial teacher training in Arabic, by increasing the number of institutions which offer a PGCE involving Arabic; ii. teacher development courses to train teachers who are already teaching another subject to also teach Arabic.

Regarding i, given that the only institution which currently offers PGCE Arabic is Goldsmiths, it is essential to try and offer a PGCE involving Arabic in at least one other part of the country which has a significant number of school students learning, or wanting to learn Arabic, such as the Manchester or Leeds-Bradford areas. It will be significantly easier to develop a PGCE involving Arabic (probably an extension of an existing Languages PGCE) at a non-London university if some external funding is available to support the project.

Regarding ii, means should be found a. to increase the number of teacher development courses, allowing existing teachers also to teach Arabic, perhaps extending the sites at which such courses are offered from Goldsmiths and Edinburgh to include Manchester/Leeds-Bradford; and b. to fully accredit such development courses, such that they provide teachers with an official 'licence' to teach Arabic.

With respect to teacher training, more engagement is needed in three areas: initial teacher training, addition of Arabic to an existing teaching portfolio, development of teaching skills for existing Arabic teachers.

Initial teacher training requires more institutions to offer a PGCE involving Arabic than the current one: Goldsmiths. In order to encourage other institutions to offer PGCE Arabic, some financial support from policy makers to establish new PGCE programmes involving Arabic is appropriate. Financial support from policy makers to help institutions run courses which train existing teachers to add Arabic to their teaching portfolio is also important, while it would be at least useful to help existing Arabic teachers develop their Arabic teaching skills.

There are two impediments to increasing the supply of Arabic teachers: i. the relative lack of Arabic teacher training; and ii. the fact that given the small amount of Arabic which is taught in schools, Arabic teachers in practice need to be able to teach at least one other subject in addition to Arabic.

In relation to the effective delivery of Arabic in schools there is a need to increase the supply of teachers, through initial teacher training and the extension of existing teaching subjects to include Arabic. At least one other university needs to offer a PGCE involving Arabic. It would be useful to explore school-centred initial teacher education options for in-post unqualified Arabic teachers.

There is also a need for further in-service training of existing Arabic teachers to actively develop skills for teaching and ensure Arabic teachers remain up to date with policy and curriculum developments. This is likely to require some outside funding.

Recommendations and steps forward

Recommendation 1 - Pursue identified ways of engaging with policy makers in order to promote and expand the teaching of Arabic

The British Association for the Teaching of Arabic (BATA) should provide the most appropriate channel for engaging with policy makers in order to promote and expand the teaching of Arabic. It is intended that BATA should be officially launched at the University Teachers of Arabic Conference in March 2017 at Leeds, and that it should include teachers of Arabic at all levels – school, university and the private and supplementary sectors. Other organisation which should be included for engaging with policy makers are the University Council for Modern Languages (UCML), Association for Language Learning (ALL). It is important that headteacher organisations are included and consulted, as headteachers will be the ones to decide whether or not to include Arabic in the curriculum of their school. It is recommended that a joint Arabic Policy Making Advisory Committee is established to engage with policy makers as appropriate.

Recommendation 2 - Pursue identified ways of increasing the supply of qualified teachers of Arabic

As noted in this review, in order to increase the supply of newly qualified teachers, it will be necessary to expand PGCE provision for Arabic beyond Goldsmiths, encouraging institutions outside of London to offer PGCE Arabic.

The following is an example of how this goal can be pursued, and also some of the difficulties which need to be overcome. At the University of Leeds, James Dickins (Dept. of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies) is currently working with colleagues in the School of Education, University of Leeds, to establish a means of Leeds offering PGCE provision for Arabic. Since Leeds has recently adopted the School-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) route¹⁷ for its PGCEs, this requires the support of a teaching alliance to deliver the classroom training. Unfortunately the Leeds teaching-alliance partner, Red Kite Alliance (<http://www.redkitealliance.co.uk/>), does not offer Arabic as one of its subjects. James Dickins is therefore seeking to work with other teaching alliances in the Leeds-Bradford area which do offer Arabic.

While Leeds is in a good position to pursue the initial training of Arabic teachers, other institutions are in a better position to pursue the training of teachers who already teach another subject to teach Arabic. Obvious examples are Goldsmiths with its Arabic Certificate Course, and SOAS with its Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate in Teaching Arabic. In respect of courses for further training of existing Arabic teachers, Edinburgh already offers in-service training courses for Arabic teachers.

All the programmes and courses described, but particularly PGCE programmes in Arabic, would benefit from further financial support in order to expand the provision of teachers.

Recommendation 3 – Explore new ways to engage teachers with curriculum development projects that enhance teaching and teaching expertise

These should include regular conferences and other events with the focus of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language, Arabic curriculum development and innovative teaching techniques. The British Association for the Teaching of Arabic (BATA) in cooperation with other organisations such as the British Council, Qatar Foundation, and universities and schools that offer Arabic as a foreign

¹⁷ <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/explore-my-options/teacher-training-routes/school-led-training/scitt>

Language could run one large annual conference and a number of teacher training events and workshops.

Recommendation 4 – Identify points for further development in relation to proposed GCSE curriculum changes

The crucial issue is to make exams accessible for students who are not native speakers of Arabic (a point which had been made to the exam boards by a number of teachers). More coherent curricula need to be developed linked to the exams; at the moment, many teachers feel compelled to design their own curricula for the GCSE, while others have stopped putting students in for GCSE exams, because they feel the exam content is not appropriate.

Steps forward

Structures need to be set up which will represent and bring together all relevant groups with an interest in promoting Arabic teaching. For Arabic teachers at both school and university, the proposed British Association for the Teaching of Arabic (BATA) will be an appropriate representative body, particularly if it can coordinate with the Association for Language Learning and the University Council of Modern Languages. Other stakeholder groups, however, also need to be identified for lobbying the government and other bodies in support of Arabic. These stakeholders include wings of the government itself (e.g. the Foreign Office), the British Council, British security services (GCHQ, MoD, etc.), Islamic organisations, embassies and cultural attachés, commercial groups, and NGO's. Ways need to be sought to bring these organisations together to find more funding to support Arabic teaching in British schools.

In order to make Arabic a realistic choice for headteachers to include in the curriculum there needs to be a supply of qualified teachers as well as resources, assessment and progression for learners, that match in terms of suitability, with those already available for the most widely taught languages.

There is also a great need for advocacy of Arabic itself - to enhance appreciation of the wide benefits of knowledge of Arabic language and culture for pupils, parents, teachers, school leaders, local communities and the general public.

Appendix: Information sheet and interviewer's consent form

Information Sheet for Arabic Teachers

TEACHING ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN UK SCHOOLS

You are being invited to take part in a research project reviewing the teaching of Arabic language in UK school. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

We are a group of Arabic specialists and researchers from the University of Leeds, University of Edinburgh, Goldsmiths University of London and Alcantara Communications who have been commissioned by the British Council to gather data from schools that are currently involved in teaching the Arabic language. This research project starts in May 2016 and is due to finish by the end of November 2016.

As part of the research, we are collecting information on the way that Arabic is taught as a foreign language in UK schools. We are therefore conducting classroom observations and interviews with Arabic language teachers. We see this as a first step in a long-term plan to support mainstreaming Arabic as a curriculum subject in a small critical mass of schools which can ensure a place for Arabic alongside other languages being taught. Action will be directed towards making Arabic a realistic choice for head teachers by ensuring that the supply of qualified teachers, training opportunities, resources, assessment systems and progression for learners match in quality and suitability – if not yet in quantity - those available for the most widely-taught languages.

Why have I been chosen?

The participants in this research are Arabic language teachers in schools. If you have been teaching Arabic in school/schools in the UK for any number of years, you are invited to participate in this study.

What do I have to do if I take part?

Your participation in this research will involve any/all of the following. You are free to decide whether to participate in all, any or none of these tasks:

1. Participation in a questionnaire which can be paper-based or online (whichever is convenient). The questionnaire has few demographic questions such as gender and teaching qualifications. It will also have questions on your approaches to teaching Arabic and finally information about the development support you have and your students' needs for learning Arabic. The questionnaire is to be filled in only once and it would take approximately 15 minutes.
2. One interview that would last for approximately 20 minutes and might be a face-to-face interview during the school visit by the researcher or done on the phone/skype if more feasible. In the interview, there will be open questions asking you to give more details on your approaches to Arabic teaching, opportunities and limitations for career development.
3. Be subject of one classroom observation: We ask for a minimum of 20 minutes of an Arabic lesson to be observed. During the lesson observation, you are not asked to do anything different from what you do when teaching normally. The aim of the lesson observation is to note down the methods and techniques that Arabic teachers use and to help in sharing good practice in Arabic teaching after data is analysed.

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will add to our knowledge of how Arabic is taught and the challenges that Arabic teachers face and hoped to suggest ways to overcome these challenges.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time up until the end of this research at the end of November 2016 without having to give a reason and without any penalty. You have 7 days from the date of receiving this information sheet to decide whether you will take part or not.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?/ What will happen to the results of the research project?

We can tell you that your responses may be included in the research; however, your responses will be confidential and nobody could connect your responses with you as an individual or your institution in the research report or presentations. All personal data will be kept secure in line with the Data Protection Act and will be deleted/destroyed once the research project is finished. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee on [date], ethics reference [ref].

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at R.K.Soliman@leeds.ac.uk

Consent for Arabic teachers taking part in the research titled
 “TEACHING ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN UK SCHOOLS”

Add your
 initials next to
 the statement
 if you agree

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated..... explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and that I was given a duration of 7 days to decide whether to take part.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time up until the 30 th of November 2016 without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. In case I wish to withdraw, I was made aware that I can contact Professor James Dickins at J.Dickins@leeds.ac.uk or Dr Rasha Soliman at R.K.Soliman@leeds.ac.uk I understand that following withdrawal, any data collected from me will be deleted or destroyed immediately.	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the University of Leeds intranet drive.	
I understand that other genuine researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of researcher taking consent	
Signature	
Date*	