Teaching of Arabic in UK schools research report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arabic is recognised as an increasingly important language globally. However, Arabic is only taught in an estimated 5% of UK secondary schools, with provision largely within Islamic faith secondary or supplementary schools.

The British Council and QFI commissioned this research to help build a better picture of Arabic teaching provision and explore the key drivers and barriers that exist to this. The aim of this research is to identify what support may be needed to encourage further uptake.

Research insights were gained through:

- A review of existing literature.
- Interviews with teachers in Arabic-teaching and non-Arabic-teaching schools, learners of Arabic and their parents and key opinion leaders.
- Creation of a database of schools known to teach Arabic in the UK.

FINDINGS

Schools can see a real value in being able to offer Arabic to their students. It is seen as a great way to:

- Promote multiculturalism and pride in student identity.
- Challenge and overcome negative perceptions of Arabic and Arab culture.
- Improve students' career prospects.
- Cater to their student body's needs and existing skills.

However, there are many challenges that are faced in being able to realise this goal of delivering Arabic teaching as part of the curriculum.

- Lack of teachers.
- Timetable pressures.
- Low-level awareness of resources.
- Funding challenges.
- Students' perceived lack of relevance.
- Qualification availability.
- Perceived difficulty of Arabic.

> " *It would be another thing that would make us even more unique as a state school that offers a huge range of languages.* "

> " *We had about 9 students across various years who are very interested in learning Arabic, but it came down to a combination of budget and being able to recruit an appropriate person to teach it.* "

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The British Council and QFI already deliver support in many key challenging areas. There is more to be done in terms of raising awareness of this existing offer, as well as fine-tuning this support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report identifies the following 6 key areas for the British Council and QFI's future offer to focus on:

RAISE AWARENESS OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND QFI

- Especially the resource bank and funding availability.
- Reach out to schools on the Arabic-teaching database, and those in areas known to have large Arabic-speaking communities, outlining the key areas of support that can be offered and showing how other schools have been supported.
- Further research may be needed to explore the best channels for this communication.

RESOURCES

- Raise awareness of the existing teaching materials available on the QFI website.
- Further research may be useful to explore teachers' experiences with the platform and to understand how this can support ongoing resourcing needs.
- Partner with publishers or help to facilitate development of resources that are either exam board endorsed or aligned to GCSE content.

TRAIN AND RETAIN TEACHERS

- Continue to offer grants to teachers for CPD.
- Promote the existence of the Arabic Teacher Councils to Arabic-teaching schools to allow more teachers to share best practice. Perhaps look to set up more of these in other regions and/or create online networks for teachers outside of these locations.
- Work with universities to encourage and increase Arabic-teacher training. Perhaps create partnerships between universities and schools in areas with a high-level community need. These schools are likely to be more open to taking on a newly qualified Arabic teacher.
- Continue to offer long-term funding for schools to hire a teacher and support them in their initial years at the school. This will be important to remove the initial financial burden and allow Arabic to become more embedded in the school.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

QUALIFICATIONS

- Explore the possibility of creating new certification prior to the GCSE level to offer smaller milestones for learners.
- Continue to work with Education Scotland and SCILT to increase teaching of Arabic as an L3 language, building on the success of sessions run in lockdown.
- Explore the possibility of introducing Arabic through a Modern Languages for Life and Work qualification.

CASE STUDIES FOR SCHOOLS

- Create a variety of case studies of schools that have successfully introduced Arabic teaching to help others to see a clearer pathway. These should detail how schools overcame any barriers, the benefits they have seen among students and successes for the school.
- Explore the option of creating an ambassador school programme, perhaps through the Teacher Councils network, to allow schools that are considering introducing the language to speak to another school for advice and guidance.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

- Produce communication pieces to inform students of the benefits of studying Arabic, in terms of both cultural and employment benefits.
- Produce wider information pieces on the Arabic-speaking world and Arab culture, including messaging to combat Islamophobia.
- Continue to offer workshops/ activity days for schools in which Arabic culture is explored and students are given an introduction to the Arabic language.
- Continue to deliver school taster sessions, particularly in primary schools, to help spark an early interest in the language – replicating the successes of recent workshops run with SCILT.
- Potentially increase the online offer of workshops to allow for more drop-in, lower-cost sessions.
- Expand the Arabic Speaking Competition, and explore other competitions and cultural events that the British Council and QFI could coordinate.
- Continue to explore the work from the Confucius Institute in relation to promoting Mandarin and mirror the successes for Arabic promotion.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, working to build connections and intercultural understanding through arts and culture, education and language. They champion language learning for young people in the UK as a way of building these connections, and are well-known for their work and support within language education. Over the last 2 years, they have been working with the Qatar Foundation International (QFI), an educational organisation committed to advancing Arabic language teaching and learning. Together, they have focused on providing support for Arabic language learning in UK schools, as well as working to raise awareness of Arab cultures and opportunities, and supporting intercultural learning.

The British Council and QFI sought research to help build a comprehensive picture of Arabic provision in the UK, and build upon previous research commissioned in 2016 (Soliman et al., 2016). This previous research identified some key drivers and barriers to the teaching and learning of Arabic in the UK, and found that, while it is a growing subject, it is still limited and highly dependent on demand from Muslim parents. The current research aims to build on and update this report, using insights gained through qualitative interviews with teachers and learners of Arabic. Our findings will be used to help steer funding and resourcing for the British Council and QFI Arabic language programme, and provide a detailed picture of Arabic learning in the UK.

This research seeks to build on and update the findings from 2015/16 and identify key areas where the British Council and QFI can provide support. The research objectives were:

1. To build a picture of Arabic-teaching provision in the UK	2. To determine the drivers and barriers to offering Arabic in the UK	3. To determine the drivers and barriers to learning Arabic	4. To determine how the British Council/QFI can encourage future uptake
• Who is learning Arabic at school? • How many schools are teaching Arabic, where are they, and what type of schools are they?	• Why do schools choose to teach Arabic? • What are the barriers and facilitators?	• Why do pupils choose to learn Arabic? What are the facilitators and benefits? • Why do some choose not to learn it? What are the barriers?	• How might more schools be encouraged to teach Arabic? • What can the British Council/QFI deliver to effectively support Arabic learning in schools?

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach for its primary research phase. Interviews were conducted with 10 educators with oversight over modern foreign languages (MFLs), 5 Arabic learners, 5 parents of Arabic learners and 3 individuals identified as key opinion leaders. The research focused on KS3 and KS4 provision in state-funded schools.

A qualitative approach was chosen because this allowed us to generate richer data than would have been possible with a quantitative approach. Interviews allowed for more flexibility to fully explore the experiences of educators and learners, and better understand the contexts within which Arabic was or was not offered or learned. This provided the depth of insight which the British Council and QFI will need to develop recommendations for solutions. A quantitative method also would have been unlikely to generate a large enough sample size to provide robust, generalisable findings, as was the case in the previous research in 2016.

We designed a multi-stage methodology, consisting of the following phases:

Literature review	School database	Educator interviews	Parent and learner interviews	Key opinion leader interviews
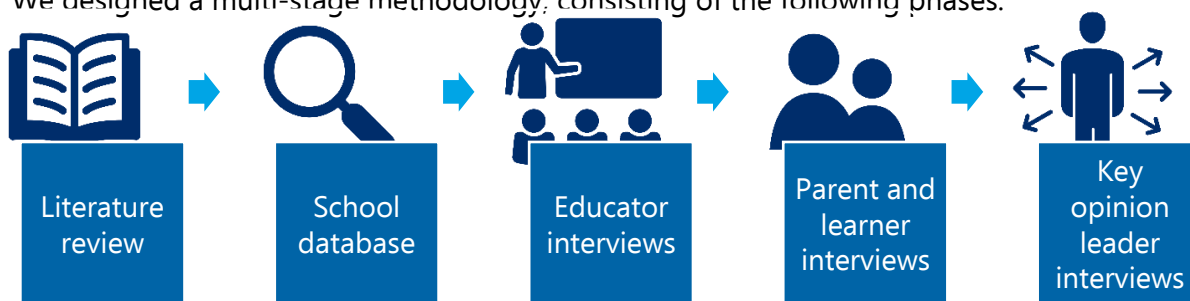
LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this phase was to summarise existing evidence relating to the core research objectives, so as to contextualise and understand what is already known about the drivers and barriers to Arabic provision in the UK. Shift used a blended evidence review, using a mix of academic research, trend reports, policy reports and industry news.

The literature review was used to inform the development of interview guides, and contextualise the interviews themselves for the team. Elements of this review have been included in this report to contextualise the research.

SCHOOL DATABASE

During the previous research, a database was created providing a list of schools and supplementary schools that taught Arabic. Shift updated this using publicly available sources, such as Department for Education lists and school websites, and including schools and educational establishments that are already working with the British Council and QFI. The database has been used in this report to give an indication of the picture of provision, including the types of school currently offering Arabic and their location. It was also used to recruit educators for interviews. It should be noted that this database is not exhaustive as there is no comprehensive data on schools' teaching and language provision in schools is changeable. The scope of the research allowed for a best efforts approach and, as such, this is a working document that can be adapted and added to. For example, some schools known to work with the British Council and QFI in offering Arabic did not have any information regarding this available online. Therefore it is possible that, due to available sources, other schools that teach Arabic have not been included.

EDUCATOR INTERVIEWS

Shift conducted 10 x 40-minute interviews with educators working in state-funded schools that either currently had some Arabic-teaching provision, or had considered it. The aim of this phase was to explore the drivers and barriers to offering Arabic in UK schools. Participants were recruited directly by Shift, using Shift's educator panel and the updated school database. Interviews were conducted one-to-one over Microsoft Teams, Zoom or phone.

Job role
- 6 heads of department for MFLs
- 2 MFL coordinators
- 2 senior leadership team members

Region
- 4 from London
- 3 from the North West
- 1 from the West Midlands
- 1 from the East Midlands
- 1 from South Wales

School type
- 7 from Academy schools
- 2 from state comprehensive schools
- 1 from a free school

Arabic provision
- 3 from schools that taught Arabic
- 7 from schools not currently teaching Arabic, but that had considered it to some extent

PARENT AND LEARNER INTERVIEWS

Shift conducted 20-minute interviews with 5 parents of Arabic learners, and 5 Arabic learners. Learners were studying Arabic in mainstream schools in the UK. The aim of this phase was to hear directly from Arabic learners and their parents what motivated them to learn Arabic, as well as anything that might discourage them from learning. Participants were recruited using a recruitment agency, Acumen. These interviews were conducted one-to-one over Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

Of the parents and learners interviewed, there were 4 parent-child pairs, and one parent and one learner who were not related.

Arabic learning status

- 4 learners were studying Arabic at KS3 level in school
- 1 learner had studied Arabic in school for 3.5 years (starting the GCSE course), before making the decision to drop the subject. This participant provided useful insight, particularly with regards to the barriers they faced when learning Arabic

Region

- 4 from the West Midlands
- 3 from London
- 3 from the North West

Age and year

Of the 5 learners:
- 2 were aged 12 and in year 7
- 2 were aged 12 and in year 8
- 1 was aged 15 and in year 11
- The fifth parent's child was also aged 12 and in year 8

School type

Of the 5 learners:
- 3 attended faith schools
- 1 attended a state comprehensive
- 1 attended a free school
- The fifth parent's child attended an academy

3

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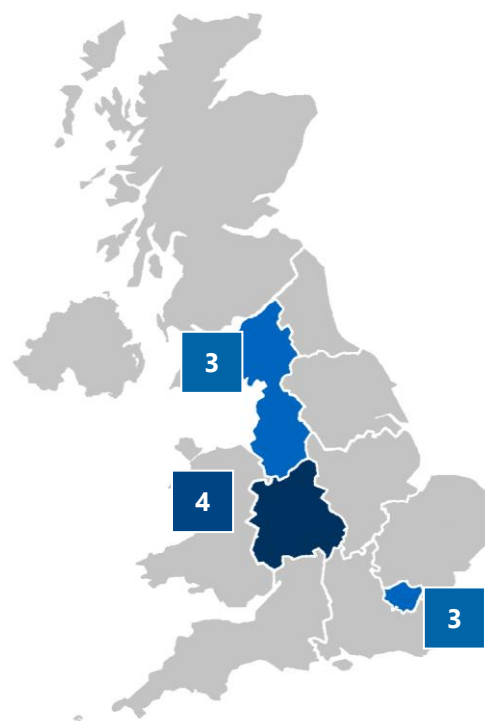
KEY OPINION LEADER INTERVIEWS

Shift conducted 3 x one-hour-long interviews with key opinion leaders working in education contexts. The aim of this phase was to identify wider trends regarding the drivers and barriers to teaching Arabic, and discuss their views on the emerging findings from the educator and learner interviews. Participants were recruited by Shift, using LinkedIn, online datamining and British Council and QFI contacts. Interviews were conducted one-to-one over Microsoft Teams.

Shift interviewed 2 MFL leads from Academy trusts, and a senior leader from Education Scotland.

- Louise Glen: Senior Education Officer for Languages at **Education Scotland**.
- David Shanks: Head of Modern Foreign Languages at **Harris Academy**.
- Ryan Mallett: Lead Practitioner for Modern Foreign Languages at **Ormiston Academies Trust**.

A PICTURE OF PROVISION

SHIFT INSIGHT

A FOCUS ON LANGUAGES:

Modern languages have been a part of the British National Curriculum since 2014, for pupils aged 7-14, with revised content for GCSE, AS and A-Level languages established since September 2016 (Gough & Calderbank, 2019). Although the Government does not promote the teaching of particular languages, most schools teach one or more of French, German and Spanish.

Learning foreign languages is increasingly becoming a skill that is seen to create opportunities for employment and the demand for jobs that require a foreign language is growing globally. Recognising the benefits of speaking multiple languages, the Government and various institutions, including the British Council and QFI, have invested in the teaching of foreign languages in schools (OECD, 2020).

Under government plans for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) to be taken by 75% of year 10 pupils by September 2022, and 90% of pupils by 2025, most pupils will be required to take a GCSE in a modern language (Long et al., 2020). However, the realisation of this goal may not be possible.

UPTAKE IS LOW:

Foreign language teaching and learning in the UK is consistently poor when compared with other countries (Broady, 2020 and Collen, 2020). The European Commission's Flash Barometer Report* showed that, in April 2018, only 32% of UK 15–30-year-olds felt confident reading and writing in 2 or more languages, compared to 79% in France, 91% in Germany and 80% on average across EU member states.

While Ofsted reports have found strengths in language teaching in British schools, significant weaknesses have also been recorded, provoking regular calls from industry and educational bodies for the levels of attainment to be raised (Long et al., 2020).

Uptake for language examinations continues to drop in British schools. Since 2005, GCSE language exam entries have seen a 19% reduction (Tinsley, 2019 and Collen, 2020). Insight from our interviews has shown that language GCSEs in general are considered to be very difficult compared to other subjects.

LESSER-TAUGHT LANGUAGES:

Alongside the decline of European **language teaching is the decline of the lesser-taught languages such as Arabic.**

While Arabic GCSE entries increased by 6% since 2005, the overall uptake is still low (Tinsley, 2019 and Collen, 2020). This issue was raised by the Minister of State for School Standards – Robin Walker – who argued that the teaching of Arabic (and other foreign languages) in British schools should be more reflective of 'modern Britain' and have greater uptake (Hazell, 2021).

In 2015, concerns were raised over the withdrawal of GCSE and A-Level qualifications in languages such as Arabic, Japanese and Polish. However, following discussions between the Government and exam boards, qualifications in many of these languages were retained (Long et al., 2020).

While there are many drivers to teaching and learning Arabic, many barriers still exist (Tinsley, 2019; Soliman et al., 2016; Gough & Calderbank, 2019). These, alongside those gleaned from the interviews, are examined in this report.
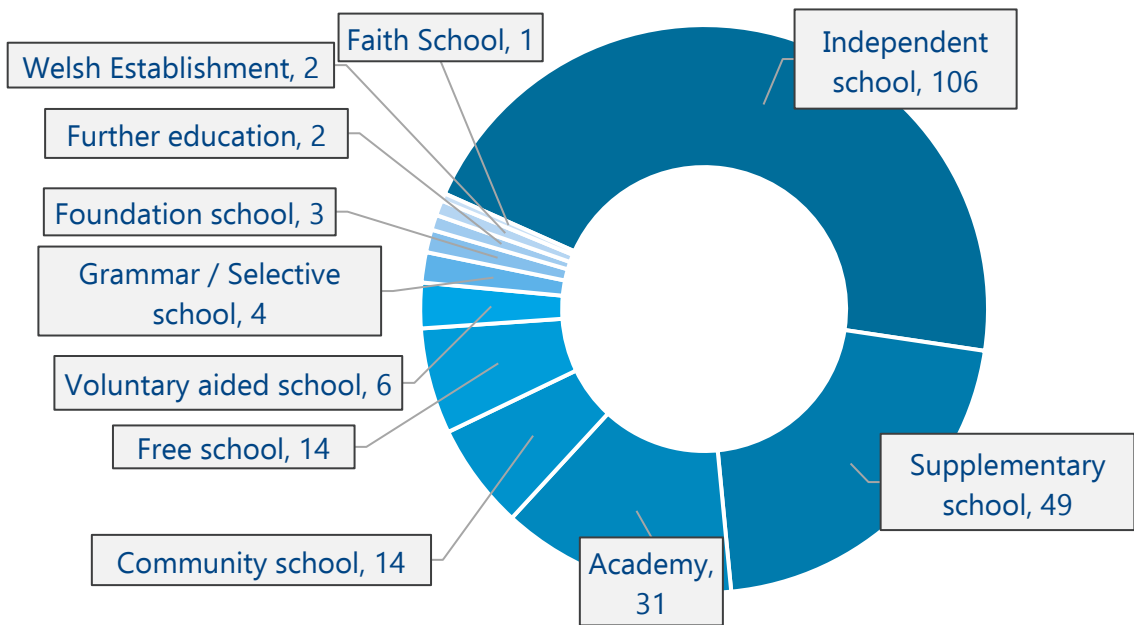
ARABIC TEACHING PROVISION

PROVISION IS LARGELY WITHIN ISLAMIC FAITH SCHOOLS

The British Council and QFI are eager to encourage the learning of Arabic. It has been identified as the fourth most important language for future job opportunities, after Spanish, Mandarin and French. However, **only 5% of schools in England teach Arabic** (SchoolsWeek, 2017). A study by Gough & Calderbank (2019) estimated that, amongst the 256 secondary schools teaching Arabic, **the majority were Muslim faith schools**. In total, 17,139 secondary school pupils were studying Arabic in England, of which the vast majority were of Muslim or Arab heritage backgrounds, with approximately 721 pupils being from non-Muslim faith schools. This indicates that the number of pupils from non-Muslim faith schools studying Arabic is very low and limited to a small number of secondary schools.

Shift Learning found this to be the case when updating the database of Arabic-teaching schools. From available sources, Shift identified just 228 schools that had some Arabic provision, 5 of which had an informal club as opposed to curriculum lessons. Details on this provision were often limited, and some did not provide details of any Arabic provision online, but were known to be working with the British Council and QFI. It is likely that some other schools were offering some level of Arabic provision that was not possible to source online.

Of the 232 schools identified as known to be teaching Arabic, 170 (75%) were Islamic faith schools (including 49 supplementary Arabic schools) and 140 taught at KS3 and KS4 level. Out of all the schools offering Arabic, 106 (almost half) were independent schools, and classified by the government register of schools as 'other independent school'. Of the 61 non-Islamic faith schools offering Arabic, there were 23 academies, 12 independent schools and 12 community schools.

Arabic-teaching schools – School type

Faith School, 1
Welsh Establishment, 2
Further education, 2
Foundation school, 3
Grammar / Selective school, 4
Voluntary aided school, 6
Free school, 14
Community school, 14
Academy, 31
Independent school, 106
Supplementary school, 49

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Most Arabic-teaching schools were identified within London, followed by the North West (41), the West Midlands (24), and Yorkshire and the Humber (18). This corresponds to the regions with the highest Muslim populations in the 2011 UK census (Office for National Statistics, 2012):

- London: 12% Muslim population.
- West Midlands: 7% Muslim population.
- Yorkshire and the Humber: 6% Muslim population.
- North West England: 5% Muslim population.

After London, Birmingham was the city with the most Arabic-teaching schools (20). Within the North West, Manchester, Bolton and Preston had the most schools (14, 8 and 5, respectively). Other noteworthy towns include Leicester (6 schools teaching Arabic), Luton (5 schools) and Bradford (6 schools).
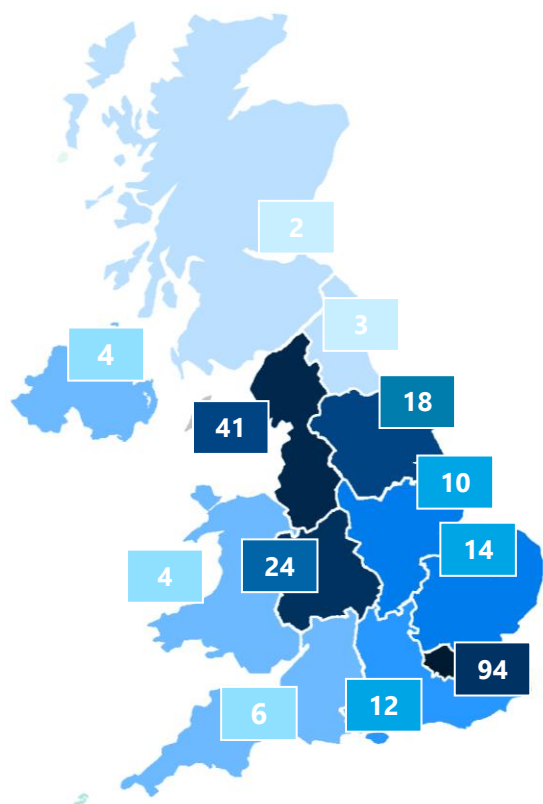
Bradford and Luton were also the towns/local authorities that, according to the 2011 Census, had the largest Muslim populations outside of London (Office for National Statistics, 2012), with Bradford and Birmingham also having larger percentages of their populations identifying as Muslim.

There were four schools in Northern Ireland found to be teaching Arabic (all of which were working with the British Council and QFI), two in Scotland and 4 in Wales. As this phase of the research was not exhaustive, it is possible that there are more Arabic-teaching schools in these regions that were not included.

PROVISION IN ARABIC TEACHING SCHOOLS

Through interviews with educators in schools that taught Arabic, we built up a more detailed picture of their current provision.

One school was offering Arabic as part of the main curriculum for heritage learners from year 8 onwards, and covered most areas of the curriculum. They taught fairly small classes of 4-10 pupils.

On respondent's school had an Arabic extra-curricular club, as well as exam-specific coaching for the speaking and reading GCSE and A-Level exams, which was also done during school time. These were organised by qualification rather than age.

In the third Arabic-teaching school, Arabic was an optional subject taught from year 10 onwards to a mix of beginners, semi-native speakers and native speakers. This school currently had 29 learners in its GCSE class, which was a large cohort compared to the others we interviewed.

POTENTIAL PROVISION IN NON-ARABIC TEACHING SCHOOLS

Anticipated provision varied between schools that had considered teaching Arabic. Some were considering it as part of the main curriculum, although generally only expecting to be able to offer to students with prior knowledge.

Others were considering offering Arabic as extra-curricular after-school provision, either as voluntary after-school lessons, or as a form of coaching for the GCSE.

Whilst not teaching Arabic, these schools did still have a few pupils each year who would sit the Arabic GCSE.

ARABIC LEARNER COHORTS

Arabic provision was mainly aimed at pupils with some prior knowledge of the language; very few schools interviewed felt they would be able to offer Arabic for complete beginners. Participants cited lack of teachers who could teach Arabic from scratch, alongside funding and lack of student interest as challenges.

Although Arabic is considered to be a language that is useful in business and provides opportunities, this was rarely the key motivator for schools in offering or considering offering Arabic. Provision seemed to be highly dependent on the demographic of the school, and demand from the community, for example, a high proportion of students with an Arabic-speaking or Arab heritage background.

Several participants also stated that their schools were generally lower-attaining, in less affluent areas of the UK. They had high numbers of students on pupil premium, high percentages of English as an additional language (EAL), and often very diverse student populations with migrant or refugee backgrounds. Allowing heritage learners to study Arabic would improve their prospects and GCSE results, which would benefit both learners and the school. Most schools would also enter students for minority language GCSEs in languages such as Polish, Turkish and Urdu. Only one school interviewed was not considering Arabic due to community demand. They cited broadening the horizons of their students and promoting a more global outlook as their key motivations.

These drivers and barriers are explored in more depth later in this report.

From the learner's perspective, a few said that they were learning Arabic in school without it being a home language. This tended to come from students attending faith schools, who were learning Arabic primarily for religious reasons. It is possible that these schools are better equipped to teach beginner learners, or those who do not receive additional Arabic support at home.

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL – ACADEMY SCHOOL IN NORTH WEST ENGLAND

School background

- Academy, based in the North West. 1,000-1,250 pupils, with 30-40% eligible for free school meals.

Modern languages provision

- Offering Arabic for over 5 years.
- Also offers Urdu for those with prior knowledge and has ties with the local university, which runs extra-curricular clubs.

How is Arabic taught?

- Arabic is part of the main curriculum, and taught during school hours. KS3 have 2 hours a week, KS4 have 3 hours a week.

Who can learn Arabic?

- Arabic is only offered as an option for students with prior knowledge. The Arabic teacher particularly likes students to have some writing ability before they begin.
- At the end of year 7, students sit a knowledge test, to determine their level of Arabic. Those with sufficient Arabic knowledge can start learning from year 8.

Qualifications available

- They offer GCSE Arabic. Some students sit the GCSE in year 10, and do advanced study in year 11. However, the school does not have a sixth form, so cannot see them through to A-Level.

Student uptake

- Languages generally have good uptake. Arabic usually has 4-10 students per year. Uptake for Urdu is usually higher (which allows for more resources such as native-speaker language assistants).

> *All of our students in year 7 start with a European language – French, German or Spanish. At the end of year 7, if they've got some ability in Arabic or Urdu, they can do a baseline test, and then we would consider moving them over and switching them out of European into Arabic or Urdu. To move into Arabic, they have to be able to speak some Arabic, and it's preferable if they can write some Arabic script to begin with ... for example, if they know the alphabet, if they know how to join letters together, if they can break apart a word into individual letters.*

Main reasons for provision

- Catering to community demand within the school.
- Felt that it raises attainment by playing to the strengths of their students.

Key barriers to provision

- Lack of exam-appropriate, engaging resources.
- Particularly fortunate in that they had an experienced teacher who put in a lot of work creating resources.

Key recommendations for the British Council and QFI

- Exam-specific resources would be very helpful, both to support students and decrease their teacher's workload.
- Resources that are engaging and interactive, such as those available for French, German or Spanish.

> *Our students doing Arabic and Urdu tend to be students who have lived in an Arabic-speaking country, or whose parents send them to Arabic school on a Sunday. We get a lot of girls who come from abroad, who don't have the English and maths skills and generally our girls' attainment is low on arrival compared to other schools around. We have to look at what they can do ... for those that can speak Arabic, it's a natural subject for them to be able to take and excel in ... it does help them in terms of getting the required amount of GCSEs to be able to move forward to college.*

> *There are some amazing textbooks and online software out there that are endorsed by exam boards for French, German and Spanish. And we don't have those kinds of things in Arabic and Urdu, so almost everything that's used in the Arabic and Urdu lessons is prepared by the teachers themselves or through a network of collaboration with other Arabic and Urdu teachers.*

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL –
COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IN
SOUTH WALES

School background

- Comprehensive school based in South Wales. A fairly large school with 1,750-2,000 pupils, 30-40% of whom were eligible for free school meals.

Modern languages provision

- They had been offering Arabic coaching for 25 years, dependent on funding.
- They mainly offer French, and higher-ability pupils can take Spanish and Latin. They have clubs for Arabic, Chinese and Korean.
- Welsh is compulsory until aged 16.

How is it taught?

- Arabic coaching is taught by an external teacher.
- They try to fit it into the school day where possible, depending on pupil timetables.
- Pupils receive one lesson a fortnight over the course of about two years.
- Coaching is divided by qualification rather than age or year group.

Who can learn Arabic?

- Most pupils currently learning Arabic are those who have learned it at home or are native speakers. Many learners also attended supplementary schools.

Qualifications available

- They support students in taking GCSE and A-Level Arabic.

Student uptake

- Uptake for Arabic is usually between 4-15.
- They are currently coaching 21 for GCSE level.

> **It really depends on the pupils' timetables in their other subjects ... We withdraw them from other subjects so we have to be careful that we only withdraw them from non-exam subjects which would be core PE or well-being or something like that.**

> **We set a baseline assessment for them ... We ask them to do a piece of writing for us across three tenses. And then we use that plus a listening GCSE past paper to get an idea of whether they are roughly exam ready. And at that point we filter them into the GCSE coaching groups – whether they are year 8 or year 9.**

Main reasons for provision

- They were mindful of their local community and wanted to facilitate pride, as well as the blending of Welsh culture and students' own heritage.
- They also had demand from parents, due to being known locally as a school that offers Arabic.

Key barriers to provision

- Changing curriculums in Wales were an issue for this school.
- Timetabling logistics were also an issue for them, as they usually tried to coach during the school day, taking pupils out of non-exam subjects to attend Arabic.
- They also struggled more widely with resources, both for GCSE and A-Level.

Key recommendations for the British Council and QFI

- They would like to see resources, particularly quiz-style websites aligned with the exam board, which students could use for independent study.
- Collecting and collating resources from Arabic teachers would help support their teachers.

> *[Our headteacher] was very much pro community and so he wanted to instil a sense of pride. The Welsh identity was bilingual so he wanted children to feel part of the Welsh community, but also bringing their own heritage in amongst that, so it recognised both elements and the language element was part of that … It also helps some of our children to get across the threshold of exam results … it's a skill that they have already. Why not celebrate it?*

> *If there's anything they could do in terms of building resources, that would be amazing … Because I think the biggest issue is the creation of these things, and lots of Arabic teachers are working in isolation … A lot of Arabic teachers are not necessarily MFL trained either, are they? There is a variety of expertise across the country, but it would cut down a lot of the time that people are having to spend reinventing the wheel.*

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL –
ACADEMY SCHOOL IN WEST
MIDLANDS

School background

- Academy, based in the West Midlands. 1,500-1,750 pupils, and 10-20% of students eligible for free school meals.

Modern languages provision

- Currently teaching French, German and Spanish, as well as having voluntary after-school sessions in Mandarin, Portuguese and Italian.
- They support home language GCSEs by finding resources and examiners.
- 3 years ago, they had strongly considered introducing Arabic GCSE, but do not currently offer it on the curriculum.

How would Arabic be taught?

- Considered introducing Arabic as voluntary after-school lessons, the same as their other minority language provision.
- Students would do an hour and a half a week for 3 years.
- It was proposed that students would start in year 9.
- They would offer Arabic with the aim of a GCSE after 3 years.

Who would learn Arabic?

- Anticipated having 9 or 10 students interested in taking Arabic – a mix of heritage learners and complete beginners.
- Interest is expected primarily from those with a cultural or religious background relevant to Arabic.
- Expected some interest from beginners who were simply interested in the language itself, and aimed to facilitate this.

> " It would be a voluntary thing for students to do after school ... they would do an hour and a half a week for 3 years and at the end of the 3 years they'd get a GCSE in Arabic ... We had about 9 students across various years who are very interested in learning Arabic and doing its GCSE, but it came down to a combination of budget and being able to recruit an appropriate person to teach it. "

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Main reasons for potential provision

- They were seeing an increasing number of students coming from Arabic-speaking countries (many of whom were refugees) and felt they had a moral obligation to ensure that these students could communicate, particularly read and write, in their home language.

Key barriers to provision

- Funding was by far the biggest obstacle, in particular, being able to pay a teacher to come in for the lessons.
- Other logistical concerns: when classes would be able to fit in the timetable – hence the offering expected to be after school – could they get a teacher for long enough to do a GCSE and helping pupils get home afterwards.

Key suggestions for the British Council and QFI

- Communicate to schools that they exist and are interested in supporting Arabic learning.
- Support the provision of qualified teachers.
- Support the creation of verified resources.

> " We have an increasing number of students who are often refugees who come from Arabic-speaking countries and there is a moral obligation on us to ensure that they can communicate, speak, write and read in their own language ... we have the student body interest in learning Arabic ... it would be another thing that would make us even more unique as a state school that offers a huge range of languages. "

> " [The main barrier is] budget and then the one after that would be finding a suitable candidate to teach it. If I could be given £3,000 the first thing I do is get an Arabic teacher ... One barrier is communicating to schools that the British Council exist and they're out there and they do it ... If [only] there was some sort of message board where I could go and post an advert and know that the teachers that look at that message board are good quality teachers. "

PROFILE OF A SCHOOL – ACADEMY SCHOOL IN LONDON

School background

- Academy, based in London. They had 1,250-1,500 pupils, and 30-40% were eligible for free school meals.

Modern languages provision

- Currently teaching French, Spanish and had recently introduced Japanese from scratch.
- Support students in taking community language GCSEs.
- Very seriously considered offering Arabic, to the point of finding a teacher, but ultimately it did not work out.

How would it be taught?

- They had decided to offer Arabic after school for two hours, as this would fit in best with their curriculum.

Who would learn Arabic?

- Provision would primarily be aimed at those with some existing level of Arabic.
- They expected uptake from non-heritage learners to be low, if this was a possibility.

> *Previously we made the decision to offer it for two hours after school. We went through an agency and we found a private Arabic tutor who would do it online ... We were able to personally select some of our children of Somali heritage who were interested and we got them all to sign up, almost like a club after school, and we arranged all of that, and then the tutor pulled out .*

> *We were narrowing it down so that only those kids who know some Arabic already would be able to take it, so would we be excluding those children [who] may be interested in learning Arabic? ... Could we only offer it to those children [who] have some already or would we open up to anyone who wants to do it? And then how would we work that out?*

Main reasons for potential provision

- They felt that it would instil a sense of pride in heritage learners, in their culture and language, and in their linguistic abilities.
- Refugee students who weren't currently studying or doing well in languages could use Arabic as part of their English Baccalaureate qualification and improve their attainment, which would in turn benefit the school.
- Demand and interest from parents, pupils and the community was fairly high.

Key barriers to provision

- Their biggest challenge was finding a reliable teacher – they had previously lined up a teacher who later dropped out.
- They also had other logistical concerns, such as working it into the timetable, deciding when learning could begin, whether to only offer it to those with prior knowledge, and staff capacity.
- In terms of getting non-heritage learners interested, they mentioned the lack of cultural capital of Arabic compared to languages like Japanese or Korean.

Key suggestions for the British Council and QFI

- Facilitate a pool or hub of information: both for the recruitment of qualified teachers and for curriculum resources.
- Advertise themselves as 'the place to go' for information or support on teaching Arabic.

> " It really seems like even now we're sitting on a pool of raw, untapped potential where we have a lot of children who know some Arabic, and I don't think it would take much to convert it into [a GCSE]. "

> " It's about having pride in one's own culture ... We have this issue with the community languages when the children are sometimes ashamed to do an Urdu paper or they're ashamed to do a Turkish paper because they want to fit in and be the same as everyone else and offering a more ... formal setting ... It boosts the idea that it's OK to have access to a different language. "

DRIVERS TO TEACHING ARABIC

DRIVERS TO TEACHING AND LEARNING ARABIC

Interviews highlighted many reasons why schools offered, or had considered offering, Arabic as part of their curriculum. Key drivers reported by educators, learners and their parents included:

Drivers for schools	Drivers for learners
• Demand from parents. • Commitment to an ethos of global citizenship and responding to community need.	• Parental influence. • Interest in the language. • Religious motivation. • Career/employability opportunities and university admission.

DRIVERS FOR SCHOOLS

DEMAND FROM PARENTS

One of the main drivers to teaching Arabic found amongst most of the schools interviewed was the demand from parents. Educators reported a large number of **pupils being from Arabic-speaking countries or having some connection to the language**.

Although parents were not often explicitly requesting Arabic provision from schools, **parents were found to influence their children's interest.** Parents would often send their children to supplementary Arabic schools and encourage them to take Arabic in school if this was possible. Some parents would contact the school to ask for support in entering their child for the Arabic GCSE exam.

These findings reflect previous research by Soliman et al. (2016), in which the offering of Arabic in non-Muslim schools was often found to be in response to demand from parents who had some sort of connection to Arabic culture and/or countries.

Interviews with parents themselves highlighted this influence, encouragement and support for their children to learn Arabic in school. They also highlighted the influence of existing connections to Arabic being a motivation for learning in school.

> **We had a discussion as a family. She is always interested to learn different languages and because of this we selected Arabic. When she was younger, she used to go to Arabic classes and the Mosque to learn the Quran. She got a bit of understanding of the language from there and wants to study it more.**
>
> **Parent of child learning Arabic**

COMMITMENT TO AN ETHOS OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Some of the educators interviewed also expressed a commitment to an ethos of global citizenship as one of their drivers for teaching Arabic in their school.

Previous findings from Soliman et al. (2016) also show that many of the schools that offer Arabic do so because they perceive the teaching of the language as an expression of their commitment to an ethos of global citizenship and believe it creates career opportunities for pupils beyond those of standard European languages.

From the educators we interviewed, this can be seen in their commitment to ensuring that they not only met the demand from pupils and parents, but also **the local/wider community needs of the language**. Some educators reported being in areas with large numbers of Arabic migrants and so they liked to be able to offer these students the ability to learn Arabic up to GCSE or A-Level as a commitment to their students, **allowing these learners to improve their prospects**. This was also the case for many other community languages, such as Urdu, Turkish and Polish.

Arabic was suggested to be an interesting subject to promote alongside other MFL subjects, especially in places with a large community of Arabic speakers.

Educators often spoke of a belief that offering Arabic in their schools would help to **create an avenue to promote cultural capital, raise aspirations and broaden the horizons of their pupils**, especially as this may enhance the job prospects for students in sectors and countries where the understanding of Arabic is beneficial.

> **We are a multicultural inner-city school that takes in people who are new to the country and are filtering into the ESOL department. Their English isn't strong. We have been offering this provision for over 15 years. Our head teacher at that time was pro-community and wanted to instil a sense of pride. We wanted the children to bring in their own heritage and the language element was part of that. There is the personal pride and celebrating their heritage that we don't want them to forget. A lot of them are from Arabic communities. Obviously, if you are promoting children's cultural heritage, global ethos has an impact on how you do that.**
>
> **SLT, Arabic-teaching school**

DRIVERS FOR LEARNERS

PARENTAL INFLUENCE

Similar to previous studies (e.g. Ramezanzadeh, 2016 and Soliman et al., 2016), we found the influence/involvement of parents to be a driver for pupils learning Arabic. Parents were involved in discussing their children's subject choices and, if they themselves had a link to the Arabic language, would often encourage this. However, this factor was not perceived, per se, as parental pressure to maintain cultural links and identity as identified by Ramezanzadeh (2016). Rather, pupils were **sometimes influenced by wanting to be able to speak Arabic with friends and family**.

INTEREST IN THE LANGUAGE

Interviews with parents and learners suggested that a general interest in the Arabic language was one of the major motivations for learners studying it in school. With the majority of our interviewees having an existing connection to the language, this interest was often tied into familial links with Arabic and/or religious motivations. However, many students also commented on how they saw the Arabic language **as beautiful and interesting to learn**. Although the perception of difficulty of learning the Arabic language was expressed also by pupils and parents, this was outweighed by the enjoyment of the language and other benefits they saw.

> **" *I like to learn new languages and Arabic is a beautiful and unique language to learn.***
> **Learner of Arabic "**

Pupils' decision to take Arabic in school was often linked to a desire to understand and speak the language for personal benefits, including being able to speak it during holidays to Arabic-speaking countries, connect with Arab culture, and communicate with family and relatives back home or in Arab countries.

RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION

The interest in the language among heritage/native speakers was mostly linked to a religious desire to **engage with and understand the Quran**. This can be seen in the number of families and schools interviewed confirming that most of their pupils often started learning Arabic from an early age in supplementary schools/mosques to help them understand the Quran. Learning Arabic in school felt like a natural progression and allowed them to gain an official qualification in a language they were already familiar with.

It is perhaps no surprise that one of the key drivers amongst our interviewees for learning Arabic was based on a religious desire, as the majority of Arabic provision is currently within Islamic faith schools or supplementary schools.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSION

Some students reported wanting to learn Arabic because they were interested in the opportunities it could open up for them for work in sectors or countries that might require the language.

One student also spoke about the **benefits it could bring for work in the UK**, referencing the usefulness of speaking Arabic if they were to become a doctor.

> " *I like the fact that I can use it if I want to work in an Arabic country or even as a doctor or nurse, so I can speak to Arabic-speaking people who can't speak English.*
>
> **Learner of Arabic** "

Key opinion leaders often spoke of the career benefits that Arabic could bring to students. They drew parallels with recent promotion of Mandarin in schools, which was seen to be heavily influenced by economic drivers and future employment needs. Being able to offer Arabic in school could therefore help to provide students with desirable skills for future employment.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

BARRIERS TO TEACHING AND LEARNING
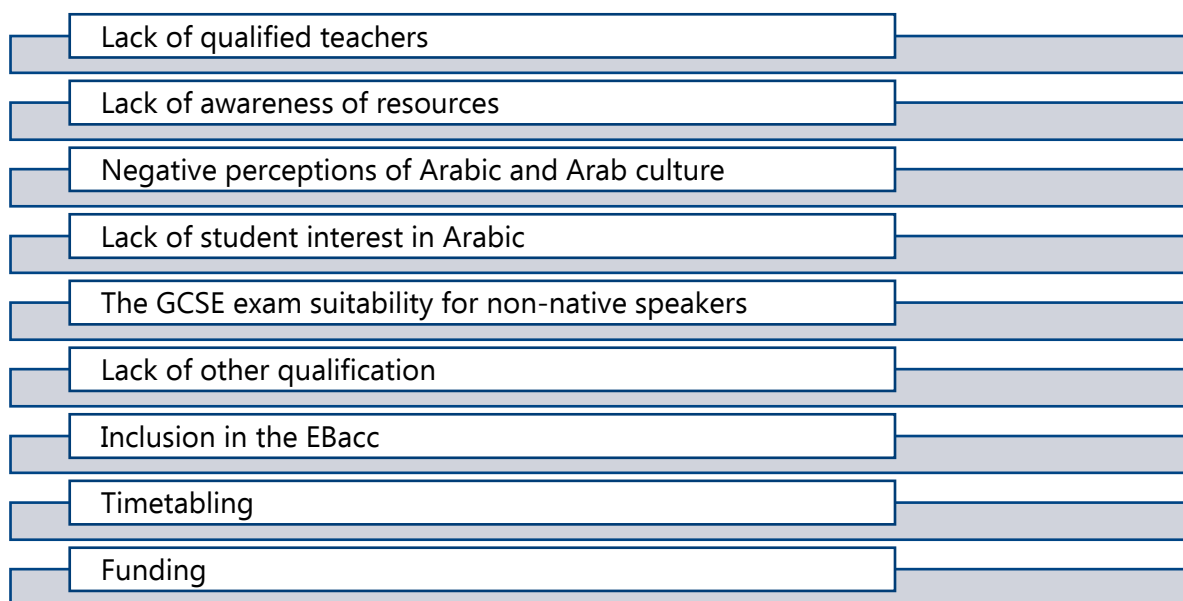
BARRIERS TO SCHOOLS

Whilst educators could see many benefits to teaching Arabic in their schools, they unfortunately faced various, intertwined challenges when considering introducing Arabic into the curriculum. These included:

- Lack of qualified teachers
- Lack of awareness of resources
- Negative perceptions of Arabic and Arab culture
- Lack of student interest in Arabic
- The GCSE exam suitability for non-native speakers
- Lack of other qualification
- Inclusion in the EBacc
- Timetabling
- Funding

LACK OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS

In order for Arabic to be part of the curriculum, this required a qualified teacher. Even if this was not a government-mandated requirement, schools would often insist on this to ensure high-quality teaching for their students.

By far the most common barrier to offering Arabic was the difficulty in being able to find qualified Arabic teachers who met high enough standards across all of the following:

- **Arabic language proficiency.**
- **Pedagogic skills.**
- **Experience of working in the UK school system.**
- **Classroom management.**

For some schools, this was where their decision to offer Arabic came to a standstill as they were **unable to source a suitably high-quality teacher who met all of the above criteria**, particularly in terms of their pedagogic skills and ability to work in a mainstream school environment.
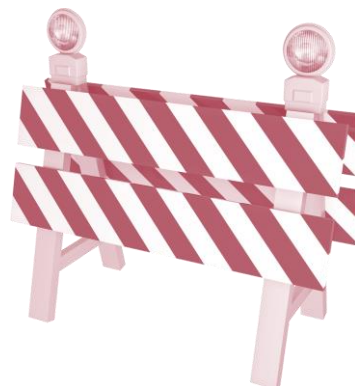
Recruiting teachers was felt to be a challenge across MFLs, but particularly so for Arabic. With Arabic being a **lesser-taught language, there is a smaller pool of candidates to select from**.

There is currently a shortage of formal qualifications in the UK for those seeking to teach Arabic (Alcantara, 2016). This was echoed in interviews, with teachers often **unaware of what qualifications, if any, existed for Arabic teachers** that could be used as a mark of quality when recruiting.

> *I don't know if the Institute of Education offers a PGCE in secondary Arabic teaching. Maybe if they did, we would have a larger pool of trained staff who we knew would be of good quality.*
> **SLT, Non-Arabic-teaching school**

Even amongst schools that taught Arabic and had a trusted teacher in place, educators cited staffing as a continued concern, in terms of the difficulty they would face in trying to replace this staff member should they move on from the school. This was also found to be the case in a study by the British Council (2017), which showed there is usually only one Arabic teacher in a school and, when this teacher leaves, the school finds it almost impossible to replace them.

LACK OF RESOURCES

Although there are increasing numbers of textbooks for learning Arabic, in general, there is a paucity of material aimed at students studying for the GCSE when compared to other GCSE subjects (Ramezanzadeh, 2016). This challenge was shared by interviewees who suggested that resourcing would present one of the next biggest challenges to being able to offer Arabic as part of the school curriculum, after a lack of available teachers.

There was a **general lack of awareness of resources available for Arabic teaching** or knowledge of where to look for such resources. Teachers often assumed that **trusted publishers that they looked to for other languages wouldn't have resources for lesser-taught languages such as Arabic**.

This was then felt to put additional **pressure on the Arabic teacher in schools to self-resource**. Other teachers in the department were limited in their ability to support this teacher due to their own lack of Arabic language skills.

The resources teachers were most in need of were those that were:

- **Linked to the exam specification** – to give trust in a resource and ensure all required GCSE content would be covered. Interviewees were not aware of these resources being available for Arabic. Speaking and listening activities were particularly sought after, with unverified YouTube content being used currently.
- **Engaging for students.** Some used digital resources such as Duolingo or Memrise, which contained provision for Arabic, but felt there was not the same wealth of engaging, digital, curriculum-linked content as there was for other languages. Digital activities were more difficult for teachers to create themselves, meaning teaching activities typically consisted of paper worksheets. This lack of engaging digital resources was felt to **impact on students' engagement** with the subject and interest in learning Arabic if they were aware that teaching would not involve more engaging learning tools.

> **I can load up our interactive software that matches our textbook in French or German and set listening tasks and reading tasks as homework ... I can log in digitally and see how much of it they've completed. It gives me a percentage and shows me what they need to do to improve and [our Arabic teacher] doesn't have any of that at her fingertips.**
>
> **There are very specific activities that match what comes up in the exam and if you look at the specifications from AQA or Edexcel you will see a vocabulary list of prescribed vocab that comes up in the assessment and all of that vocabulary is built up over our 3-5 years through the resources that we've got. Whereas [the Arabic teacher] has to ensure that she's doing that herself, so there's no safety net resource to do that.**
>
> **Head of MFL, Arabic-teaching school**

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF ARABIC AND ARAB CULTURE

Previous research has shown that head teachers were conscious of negative attitudes about Arabic when taking the decision to offer the subject. This included a perception among many British parents that Arabic is a language for Muslims only, alongside negative attitudes towards Arabs and Islam that prevail in many sectors of the community (Soliman et al., 2016).

To some extent, this was seen in this research, with negative perceptions and portrayals of Arab culture in the media felt to impact on the popularity of the language, primarily in terms of **which subjects parents would encourage or support their children learning**. However, many respondents worked in areas that they described as highly multicultural, meaning they felt their students were more accepting of other cultures.

Teachers stated that negative perceptions would not discourage their school from wanting to teach Arabic. Conversely, the existence of negative perceptions was actually more likely to present itself as another reason for the school to consider offering the language, as a moral obligation to try to combat these issues.

Those in schools that taught Arabic felt that **this helped to instil positive perceptions of Arabic and Arab culture.** They spoke of students being proud of their Arabic identity and feeling validated by the ability to learn Arabic in school.

LACK OF PERCEIVED RELEVANCE

Whilst some interest was expected among non-native/heritage Arabic students, there was a belief that the majority of interest would come from those with an existing connection to the language. Many did not expect to see great appeal amongst non-heritage learners due to a **lack of perceived relevance of Arabic among the wider student body**.

Teachers commented on Arabic culture being less present in the media, meaning that Arabic was not immediately seen as exciting to the wider student body, compared with Japanese or Korean, for example. There was less knowledge of what cultural links to draw on for Arabic.

Lack of perceived relevance was a challenge experienced across MFL departments, with schools struggling to convey the value of languages. Teachers who worked in schools in disadvantaged areas spoke of students having very low aspirations and, as such, not seeing the relevance of learning a language if they were unlikely to ever visit the country where it was spoken.

This was felt to be even more of a barrier for Arabic than European languages. Teachers spoke of a general **lack of understanding among students as to the opportunities that learning Arabic could offer them as well as simply not knowing which countries spoke Arabic**. One respondent felt there was a sense among their students that learning Arabic was 'not for children like me' due to a perception of Arab nations being rich and therefore somewhere they were unlikely to ever be able to afford to go. This lack of perceived relevance, coupled with Arabic being seen as a difficult language to learn, meant that teachers expected student interest to be low.

PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY OF ARABIC

Teachers suggested that students often viewed languages as challenging to learn, but that Arabic was thought of as **particularly difficult to learn due to its different alphabet and phonology**. This was felt to put off those who did not already have some prior knowledge, as there was much more to learn. Teachers spoke of students being put off if they would not be able to see themselves making good progress early on, as well as Arabic seeming like it required a lot of work compared to other subjects.

EXAM'S SUITABILITY FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

Research by Ramezanzadeh (2016) showed that there were concerns around the Arabic GCSE exam, its fitness for purpose and its suitability for non-native speakers of the language. The exam was seen as unfairly difficult for non-native speakers of Arabic, which was seen to be demotivating and reinforced preconceptions that Arabic is a difficult language to learn. This observation resulted in calls for an Arabic GCSE for non-native speakers (Gough & Calderbank, 2019).

Within the current research, teachers also reported the **Arabic GCSE exam being challenging for non-native speakers**. Some stated exam difficulty as a challenge across MFLs, with exams requiring a high English reading level, which was additionally challenging for those with special educational needs (SEN) or EAL. One respondent also drew parallels with the German GCSE grading being seen as overly harsh, making it difficult for students to achieve a high grade and thus putting them off selecting it as a GCSE option.

With the Arabic GCSE being viewed as particularly challenging, some felt that students saw this as too high a risk if they were less certain that they would perform well. As such, teachers felt this sometimes contributed to students opting for another language, or different subject altogether.

However, some were unconvinced on the idea of creating separate exams for native and non-native speakers, questioning how a native speaker would be defined as well as questioning the notion that the exam was easy for native speakers. One respondent from an Arabic-teaching school highlighted that, although most of their learners had experience of speaking the language at home, they often were unable to read or write in Arabic or spoke a very different dialect to the Modern Standard Arabic taught as part of the GCSE. This meant that, **although familiar with the language, the exam was still not seen as easy for native speakers and students were not guaranteed to achieve a high grade** as others often assumed would be the case.

> **It's kind of taken for granted in your typical British school that anybody doing Arabic already speaks it as a community language and therefore automatically gets a good grade, but it's not the case.**
>
> **Head of MFL, Arabic-teaching school**

AVAILABLE QUALIFICATIONS

Although teachers in England cited challenges with the specifics of the GCSE, the fact that an official qualification existed was still a driver to Arabic being offered in schools as students could gain a qualification, which provided a strong motivation not only for students, but also for schools to be able to record pupil outcomes.

A different challenge presented itself in Scotland, with **the lack of a Scottish National Qualification (SNQ) in Arabic at present**. When speaking with the Language Lead at Education Scotland, the lack of any recognised qualification presented a challenge to more widespread provision of Arabic in Scottish schools. This was cited as a core reason why Arabic was not able to be offered as an L2 language, as part of the 1+2 language policy (Education Scotland, 2020). Arabic would only currently be able to be considered as an L3 language, alongside other community languages. They noted some existing successes in Arabic being introduced as an L3 language across primary and secondary schools. However, other challenges, such as a shortage of teachers, were still felt to present challenges in being able to roll this out further.

> **The L3 is slightly different and that's probably going to be where the opportunity arises for Arabic, so the L2 is kind of tied down to those 8 languages that are available as national qualifications, so the equivalent of your GCSE.**
>
> **MFL lead, Education Scotland**

INCLUSION IN THE EBacc

A few teachers discussed their school's priority to hit government targets of 75% of students entering the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). This was felt to greatly influence their decision as to which languages the school offered, considering both those that were recognised as well as those that the study body would respond well to in terms of interest as well as attainment. Some respondents were **unsure whether Arabic would be able to be counted within the EBacc languages**; an assumption that it would not meant that one respondent felt it was less likely to be considered by their school.

TIMETABLING

The perceived challenging nature of the Arabic language meant that teachers felt it would **require more teaching hours to get students up to the standard needed for the GCSE compared to European languages**. Many felt that, for it to be viable for complete beginners to take the GCSE, they would need to start teaching in year 7 in order to cover the required content.

However, realistically, Arabic could only be offered from KS4 due to many other things competing for space in the timetable. Respondents stated that MFLs typically received 2-3 timetabled hours a week, meaning that there would be limited time to cover all the required content for Arabic within school hours. For this reason, some schools were having to run Arabic lessons after school, which was felt might put off some students.

> **The school cannot play a lot with the timetable. They had some difficulties this year to add Arabic. Last year Arabic had 3 hours. But this year because of their options and all sorts of things, we have to deliver it at the end of the day.**
>
> **MFL coordinator, Arabic-teaching school**

Research from Tinsley (2019) and Soliman et al. (2016) also showed concerns that teaching hours allocated to languages were insufficient for consolidating language learning and introducing a new language, which made learning very slow. This further ingrained the notion that Arabic would only be **a viable subject for those with at least some existing knowledge so that teaching would not need to start from scratch**.

FUNDING

An undertone of all challenges faced by schools in introducing Arabic as part of the curriculum was the issue of funding. Funding was felt to be a wider issue for MFLs, making it even more challenging for lesser-taught languages such as Arabic to compete for this often limited budget. A high investment would be required in order to:

- **Recruit and train new staff members.**
- **Write the curriculum plan.**
- **Create or purchase resources.**
- **Provide engaging cultural experiences for students, such as trips abroad.**

With no guarantees over the long-term success of teaching the language, this presented a financial risk to schools, which most were not in a position to take. The longevity of investment was a key concern for SLTs.

Educators felt they would need to present a strong case to justify to the senior leadership team (SLT) why Arabic in particular merited funding over other community languages, or above wider priorities that the school might have.

Beyond challenges with their individual school being able to fund Arabic, respondents were also largely unaware of any wider funding initiatives.

Although QFI has already pledged £400,000 in funding for Arabic teaching in the UK, not much has been received from the Government when compared to other MFLs such as Mandarin, which has received £10 million funding from the Government (SchoolsWeek, 2017).

Respondents were often aware of recent investment in Mandarin, in particular, many cited the work of the Confucius Institute. This funding and associated efforts were felt to have a great impact on raising the profile of the language, garnering interest among schools and facilitating experiences that would not have been possible without this funding. Similarly, one respondent recounted the Japan Language Foundation sharing resources and facilitating trips, which helped make the language more appealing to students by showcasing the culture.

In general, teachers were **much less aware of any funding initiatives for Arabic**. A handful of respondents were aware of the British Council and QFI's funding options, with some having applied for funding previously. Those that had accessed this found it to be hugely supportive in enabling them to offer cultural experiences and having the support to be able to kick-start their Arabic teaching.

BARRIERS TO LEARNERS

PERCEIVED DIFFICULTY

Whilst students in our sample were largely all motivated by the challenge of learning Arabic and ultimately felt it was worthwhile to them, they all suggested that the perceived difficulty of the language was the main reason that would discourage other students from learning it. Whilst they enjoyed the language and had wider motivations to learning, they too struggled at times with its complexity.

Students reflected many of the challenges cited by Tinsley (2019) and Soliman et al. (2016), including:

- **Detailed and complicated grammatical rules.**
- **Different alphabet to English/most other MFLs taught in school.**
- **Difficultly with pronunciation.**
- **Different dialects.**

Previous research showed that GCSE students frequently complained about the difficulty of the language, the content of the GCSE and the way the subject was taught, which ultimately made some consider dropping it. **One student in our sample had recently ceased learning Arabic due to finding it too challenging**, opting instead to study French as they felt more able and likely to achieve a better GCSE grade.

Parents also highlighted the difficulty of the language as one of the main challenges their child faced with learning Arabic, often causing their child stress and anxiety. One parent noted that it was difficult for them to be able to support their child due to a lack of support resources.

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF ARABIC AND ARAB CULTURE

Most parents and students were either from an Arab background or had some personal connection to the language. They were all aware of negative perceptions of Arabic, Arab nations and Muslims that exist in wider society and the media. This did not ultimately put students off learning Arabic, but some did state that they, or their friends, **might feel worried about standing out by learning Arabic or that they could experience bullying as a result**.

However, as with teachers, most felt that this was **also something to be proud of** and could help them to feel proud of their identity.

> **They just want to be the same as everybody else, they don't want anything that sets them apart.**
>
> **Having said that, on social media there's also a lot of encouragement of Arab culture as well ... People are less embarrassed by their heritage and they want to be a bit more proud of it. It works both ways really, but for my kids, they are a bit embarrassed by it and it's coming from the outside, the negative perceptions.**
>
> **Parent of Arabic learner**

INTEREST IN THE LANGUAGE

Interviews showed that students being able to see a direct relevance of Arabic to them was important in sparking an interest in the language. Students in our sample all had some existing connection to the Arabic language and therefore had wider motivations for learning. However, teachers anticipated that those without an existing connection would not have the same level of interest.

Previous research (Ramezanzadeh, 2016) showed that only about one-tenth of students exhibited some form of enjoyment or interest in learning Arabic. Other learners indicated frustrations, boredom and overall demotivation towards learning the language. Demotivation towards learning Arabic was found to be possibly connected to the fact that learning Arabic was compulsory in some schools and its mode of teaching failed to consider students' motivations for learning the language as well as their aspirations as young people, especially in secondary schools.

MODE OF TEACHING

As was seen in the teacher interviews, Arabic teaching in mainstream schools was typically only offered to those that passed a baseline knowledge test. This was cited as a challenge by one student respondent who noted that their teacher had assumed a higher level of prior knowledge than they themselves had, meaning they felt behind compared to other learners. This student also felt that teaching was **too heavily focused on building skills to pass the exam as opposed to a deeper understanding of the language** – perhaps due to the large amount of content that needed to be covered in the time.

Parents also highlighted the mode of teaching as a challenge in schools, including issues they had encountered with:

- **Difficulty in schools finding qualified teachers.**
- **The accent of Arabic teachers playing an important role in comprehension when this was different to what a student was used to at home.**
- **Out of school hours teaching being off-putting.**

ENCOURAGING UPTAKE

ENCOURAGING UPTAKE

KEY CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

This research has shown that, whilst schools can often see a real merit in teaching Arabic, they are facing a range of challenges and barriers to being able to embed the subject in the curriculum.

Respondents were asked for suggestions as to what they felt the British Council and QFI could do to support uptake of Arabic in schools and among students. Many **suggestions given by teachers were in areas where the British Council and QFI already have existing provision**.

	Key challenges	**Suggested focus**
SCHOOLS	• Lack of funding: specifically for hiring and training new staff. • Ability to find qualified, high-quality teachers. • Building the curriculum. • Lack of exam-linked, engaging resources.	• Awareness of the British Council and QFI support. • Funding. • Supporting teacher training. • Exam-linked, engaging resources. • Case studies of Arabic provision.
STUDENTS	• Lack of cultural understanding. • Not being able to see the relevance of Arabic to them. • Perceived difficulty of the language.	• Awareness of Arabic culture. • Exchanges and cultural links. • Promoting the benefits of learning Arabic. • Other qualifications/certification.

Whilst this is promising in that it shows **current support is targeting core areas of need**, it also suggests that there is still more work to be done in order to raise awareness of this provision.

Most respondents had at least some awareness of the British Council and/or QFI, although the depth of this knowledge was variable. The British Council was commonly known to be involved in language education generally, although less well known to have a focus on Arabic. Some respondents were aware of QFI through either receiving or applying for funding. Educators from schools not yet offering Arabic were less aware of QFI.

Both organisations were thought of as being well placed to be involved in offering funding and support for Arabic teaching. Teachers were also pleased to learn of the work both organisations were doing and keen to learn more about this.

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE EXISTING SUPPORT OFFER

Awareness of where to look for teachers, resources and general support for Arabic teaching was low. Teachers were pleased to hear that the British Council and QFI offered support in this area and some suggested that the focus should be on promoting this offer and becoming 'the place to go' for support for Arabic. Key areas of support they wanted to see from both organisations included:

- **A resource bank.**
- **A jobs board for Arabic teacher recruitment.**
- **Training and CPD for Arabic teachers.**
- **Detail of funding available to support schools.**

> *Funding will be helpful if we can train teachers and to increase the staffing, because I'm on my own teaching these lessons, yet we want to expand Arabic.*
>
> **MFL coordinator, Arabic-teaching school**

FUNDING

Introducing Arabic into a school's curriculum was noted as a long-term investment and a financial risk. The biggest financial challenge was cited as funding a new teacher's salary.

Many respondents therefore felt that the most valuable support the British Council and QFI could offer would be **funding for an Arabic teacher on a long-term basis**, ideally over 2-3 years to see a GCSE cohort through. This would alleviate the initial financial risk to the school and allow Arabic to establish itself. This would then allow the SLT to assess the success and the longer-term merit in continuing to fund the language.

TEACHER TRAINING

Being able to find qualified, quality teachers was another major challenge faced by schools looking to offer Arabic and, as such, was one of the most commonly suggested areas for support. Respondents were keen for the British Council and QFI to **help in increasing the number of qualified teachers** available.

Respondents felt the British Council and QFI could support by **working with local universities** to increase the number of people training to become Arabic teachers. Some suggested starting in areas where there was a known local demand for Arabic and helping to link these teachers up with local schools for placements and potentially longer term positions.

Additionally, some suggested that the British Council and QFI could **host a job board** for schools looking for Arabic teachers and/or host a **database of Arabic teachers**.

> *Some kind of one-stop shop where you have a pool of staff who are trained, and who you've done some quality control with.*
>
> **SLT, Non-Arabic-teaching school**

RESOURCES

With a current lack of trusted resources for teaching Arabic, many respondents wanted the British Council and QFI to work with exam boards and publishers to help create:

- **Resources that are aligned to the exam specification.**
- **A 5-year curriculum plan in line with GCSE content.**
- **More speaking and listening resources for GCSE level.**
- **Digital resources that are engaging and age appropriate.**
- **Digital tools with teacher platforms (similar to Pearson ActiveLearn).**

The first three were seen as most important and those that would currently take a lot of time for teachers to self create.

One respondent referenced the great work that the British Council had done with Chinese resources and felt the same was needed for Arabic.

> **When British Council and the SSAT took over Chinese the first thing they did is write Chinese resources. It's the best thing they ever did … The Arabic-speaking world is one of the biggest in the world and you've got a black and white textbook.**
>
> **Head of MFL, Non-Arabic-teaching school**

CASE STUDIES

With schools often struggling to see how they would be able to fit Arabic into the timetable, one respondent suggested that the British Council and QFI could present a **variety of case studies of how other schools have effectively integrated Arabic into their curriculum**. This would help in making this seem less abstract a proposition and enable understanding of how other schools have overcome similar challenges.

They suggested these case studies should show:

- **A background of the school's profile.**
- **Initial drivers for the school offering Arabic.**
- **The roadmap to embedding Arabic within the school, showing a timeline.**
- **Detail of the Arabic curriculum plan.**
- **Resources used.**
- **Benefits/outcomes seen by the school.**
- **Benefits/reaction from students.**

They highlighted that these case studies should show a variety of different school types and Arabic-teaching provision in order **to not make this seem like a 'one-size-fits-all' model** and allow SLTs to see similarities with their own school.

START SMALL AND TARGET INITIAL EFFORTS

Some respondents were keen to suggest that the British Council and QFI should **start small, targeting initial efforts on schools in areas with community need**, and build up towards more widespread provision across the UK.

Within these schools with a local need, they assumed provision would start off with primarily native speakers, but that once the subject had become more established in the school curriculum, and had sufficient resources built up, other students would then be able to see Arabic as a viable option.

This was something that had been seen as successful in the Harris Academy, with **interest in Arabic slowly growing among non-native speakers as the language had become more embedded within one of their schools**.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT UPTAKE

RAISING AWARENESS OF ARABIC CULTURE

A key reason many educators felt students were not interested in learning Arabic was due to a general lack of understanding or engagement with Arab culture. Some teachers suggested that a good way to increase engagement was through **workshops and activity days in school**.

One teacher recalled a workshop that had been delivered to promote Mandarin, which had a positive impact on students' engagement and interest in the language.

Within this workshop, teachers from China gave students an introduction to elements of Chinese culture and taught some simple phrases.

> **We know an organisation that comes out and brings Chinese teachers over, the Chinese teachers came to observe English teaching, and then they put a lesson together on Chinese culture. It was absolutely fascinating, and the children loved it. Learning new words, learning about Chinese culture, learning how to do things like Origami, little things like that and the children were fascinated by it.**
>
> **SLT, Non-Arabic-teaching school**

EXCHANGES AND OTHER CULTURAL LINKS

Educators also felt students would be enticed to study a language if there were more **opportunities for trips abroad** or other cultural activities. A barrier here was the expense of visiting an Arabic-speaking country (e.g. compared to visiting mainland Europe), and so funding for these trips was welcomed. One respondent cited having been in touch with QFI to receive such funding previously and had really valued this, feeling that it helped to engage students. Others were currently unaware of such funding options.

Beyond funding school trips, some were keen to see the British Council and QFI help in **creating excitement and interest in Arabic through other cultural links and activities**. For example, connecting UK and Arabic schools to take part in pen-pal programmes, or running competitions to help engage students further.

> **Focus on motivation and those 'wow' moments that stick in their head, remembering the time they did that Arabic fashion show in the Arabic class or remembering the time that they had that music contest where they had to put forward their favourite songs and things.**
>
> **Head of MFL, Arabic-teaching school**

PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING ARABIC

Educators often felt that students weren't clear on the benefits of learning Arabic, personally or career-wise. They felt that this was something the British Council and QFI could help to promote through advertising.

When **explaining the career benefits** this could bring, they felt this should not just focus on the opportunities in Arabic-speaking countries, but also those in the UK, as, for some, the thought of moving abroad would feel too inaccessible.

Educators also suggested that **other benefits, beyond career, should also be advertised, including the cultural interest and travel opportunities** to excite students.

> **Make it more of something for everybody. And show the opportunities that would come as a result of learning this language … these countries offer X, Y and Z if you go and travel there or if you go and work there.**
>
> **Parent of Arabic Learner**

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS OR CERTIFICATION

Some educators suggested the British Council and QFI should advocate for the development of other **qualifications or certification in schools to be able to accredit students' learning prior to the GCSE**. This was felt would give students milestones to work towards and help them overcome the challenge of the GCSE feeling too daunting.

In Scotland, it was felt to require a lot of work to lobby for Arabic to be added as an SNQ and unlikely to be viable until it is seen as a more mainstream language at the L3 level.

Instead, the Education Officer for Languages at Education Scotland suggested that efforts might be better placed in exploring the introduction of Arabic in schools through a **Modern Languages for Life and Work qualification as well as focusing on expanding the L3 provision**.

The Education Officer for Languages at Education Scotland highlighted the success of QFI's work with SCILT, particularly taster sessions run online for schools during lockdown. They noted that these sessions had seen good uptake and helped to pique student interest.

They felt that a continuation of this work in primary schools could be really beneficial to help generate wider intrigue around the language. Starting at primary level would help to spark this interest early, so that children would bring this awareness and interest into secondary schools. It would therefore be more likely to be considered as an L3 option if schools could see more demand from students.

> **What really was the launchpad for Arabic was that SCILT worked with the Qatar Foundation [sic] on the promotion of Arabic and they were able to facilitate the teaching online of Arabic over lockdown. What we saw in terms of the L3 during lockdown was that it flourished a bit more because of the nature of it being a more drop-in experience of language learning.**

Parent of Arabic learner

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Arabic is only taught in an estimated 5% of secondary schools in England, with the majority of this provision still taking place within Islamic faith schools. Provision also appears to be strongly correlated to regions that are known to have a high proportion of Muslim faith residents.

In line with this, interviews showed that schools' current provision, or reason for considering offering Arabic, was **highly driven by the demographics of the student body and demand from the local community**, in terms of community languages spoken.

Students themselves largely had some form of familial or cultural connection to the Arabic language, choosing to study Arabic in order to be able to communicate with friends and family, or for religious reasons.

Beyond this core driver of community need, there also appeared to be a strong desire from schools to promote an ethos of global citizenship. **Promoting MFLs, and Arabic, was seen as a way to raise student aspirations, broaden horizons and promote the benefits that language learning could offer students in their future careers**.

Schools also reported a belief that it was the school's duty to promote multiculturalism, build awareness of other cultures and languages, and nurture a sense of pride in students' identities.

Whilst all were aware of negative perceptions that existed in the media regarding Arabic and Arab culture, this manifested itself as yet another reason for schools wanting to teach the language, as opposed to a barrier against it.

Whilst educators could see a benefit to teaching Arabic, unfortunately there still exist many intertwined challenges to it being offered as part of the curriculum.

Ultimately, **a combination of challenges meant that introducing Arabic felt too high risk, financially and time-wise, for some educators, especially if they did not see a clear interest from their student body**. With many other competing pressures, some simply did not have the resources to embed Arabic teaching and overcome these barriers.

The core barriers related to:

- **A lack of qualified and high-quality Arabic teachers**, or knowledge of how to find such teachers.

- **A lack of verified, exam-linked and engaging resources**, which put pressure on teachers to self-resource. Fewer digital resources also made lessons less engaging for students.

- **Lack of awareness of funding for new staff, resources or cultural experiences**.

- **Timetable pressures** meaning that Arabic often could only be delivered after school, or to those with existing knowledge (typically native speakers) as there was not the time available to cover all content for complete beginners.

- **Students' perceptions of the difficulty and lack of perceived relevance of the language.** Beyond those with a personal connection to Arabic, there was a sense that students lacked general cultural awareness of the Arabic-speaking world and what the benefits were of learning Arabic or its relevance to their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on suggestions from respondents, recommendations of how to address the core challenges are given below. Many of the key challenges are in areas where the British Council and QFI already operate and, as such, are some of the areas in which we recommend continuing investment and focusing efforts.

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND QFI

o It is promising that the British Council and QFI already offer support in many areas that present key barriers and challenges to schools offering Arabic – for example, the teaching resource bank and funding options – however, awareness of this support was low.

o Reaching out to schools on the Arabic teaching database, as well as those in areas known to have large Arabic-speaking communities, may be a good place to start – introducing the British Council and QFI, understanding the school's context, outlining the key areas of support that can be offered and showing how other schools have been supported by this.

o Further research may be needed to explore the best channels for this communication.

RESOURCES

o Raising awareness of the existing classroom materials available on the QFI website.

o Conducting further research may also be useful to explore teachers' experiences with using the platform and better understand how this can support ongoing resourcing needs.

o Partnering with publishers or helping to facilitate development of resources that are either exam board endorsed or aligned to GCSE content.

HELPING TRAIN AND RETAIN TEACHERS

o Continuing to offer grants to teachers for ongoing CPD.

o Promoting to Arabic-teaching schools the existence of the Arabic Teacher Councils, to allow more teachers to share best practice. Perhaps looking to set up more of these in other regions and/or creating online networks for teachers outside of these locations.

o Working with universities to encourage and increase Arabic teacher training. Perhaps helping to create partnerships between universities and local schools in areas with a high-level community need. These local schools are likely to be more open to taking on a newly qualified Arabic teacher. Continuing to offer long-term funding for these schools to hire the teacher and support them in their initial years at the school will be important here to remove the initial financial burden and allow Arabic to become more embedded in the school.

QUALIFICATIONS

o Exploring the possibility of creating new qualifications or certification prior to GCSE to offer smaller milestones for learners.

o Continuing to work with Education Scotland and SCILT to increase teaching of Arabic as an L3 language.

o Exploring the possibility of introducing Arabic through a Modern Languages for Life and Work qualification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CASE STUDIES FOR SCHOOLS

o   Introducing a new language to the curriculum can feel like an insurmountable challenge to some schools. Creating a number of case studies of schools that have successfully introduced Arabic teaching may help others to see a clearer step-by-step process. These should detail how other schools have overcome any barriers, the benefits they have seen among students and successes for the school. There will need to be case studies for a range of school types and delivery modes so as not to present a one-size-fits-all model.

o   Exploring the option of creating an ambassador school programme, perhaps through the Teacher Councils network, to allow schools that are considering introducing the language to speak to another school for advice and guidance.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

o   Producing wider communication pieces aimed at informing students of the benefits of studying Arabic, in terms of both cultural and employment benefits.

o   Producing wider information pieces on the Arabic-speaking world and Arab culture, including messaging to combat Islamophobia.

o   Continuing to offer workshops/ activity days for schools in which Arabic culture is explored and students are given an introduction to the Arabic language.

o   Delivering more school taster sessions, particularly in primary schools, to help spark an early interest in the language. Replicating the successes of recent workshops run with SCILT, perhaps increasing the online offer to allow for more drop-in, lower-cost sessions.

o   Expanding the Arabic Speaking Competition, as well as exploring other competitions and cultural events that the British Council and QFI could coordinate.

o   Continuing to explore the work from the Confucius Institute in relation to promoting Mandarin and mirroring the successes for Arabic promotion.

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